



Leith

Conservation Area Character Appraisal

Contents

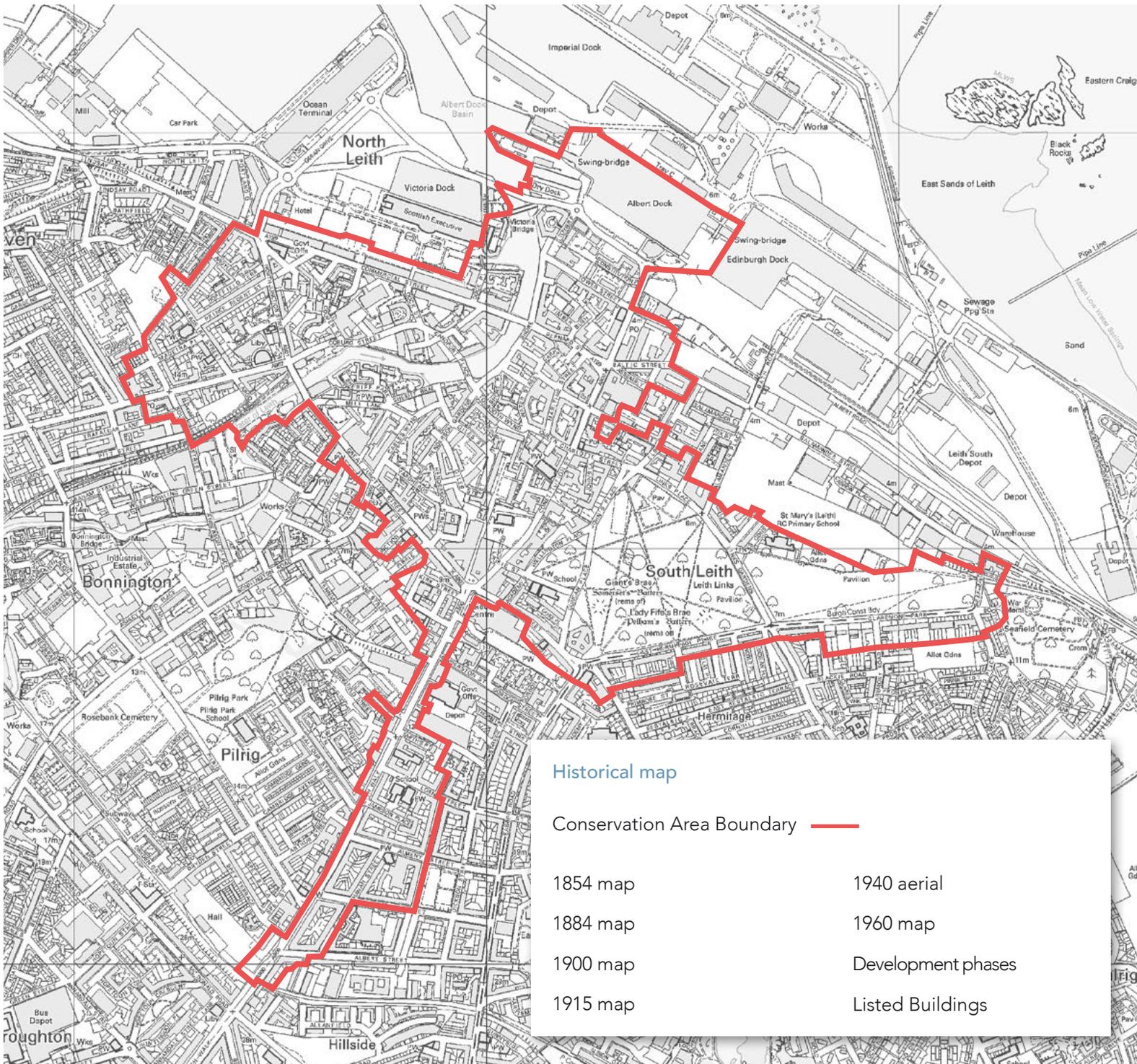
Summary Information	5
Conservation Area Character Appraisals	6
Special Characteristics and Key Elements overall	10
Old Leith and The Shore	12
Madeira - Leith's 'New Town'	21
Leith Links - Leith's Early Suburb	25
Leith Walk - Special Characteristics	30
Management - Legislation, Policies and Guidance	34
Management - Pressures and Sensitivities	37
Management - Opportunities for Planning Action	39
Management - Opportunities for Enhancement	40
Sources	41

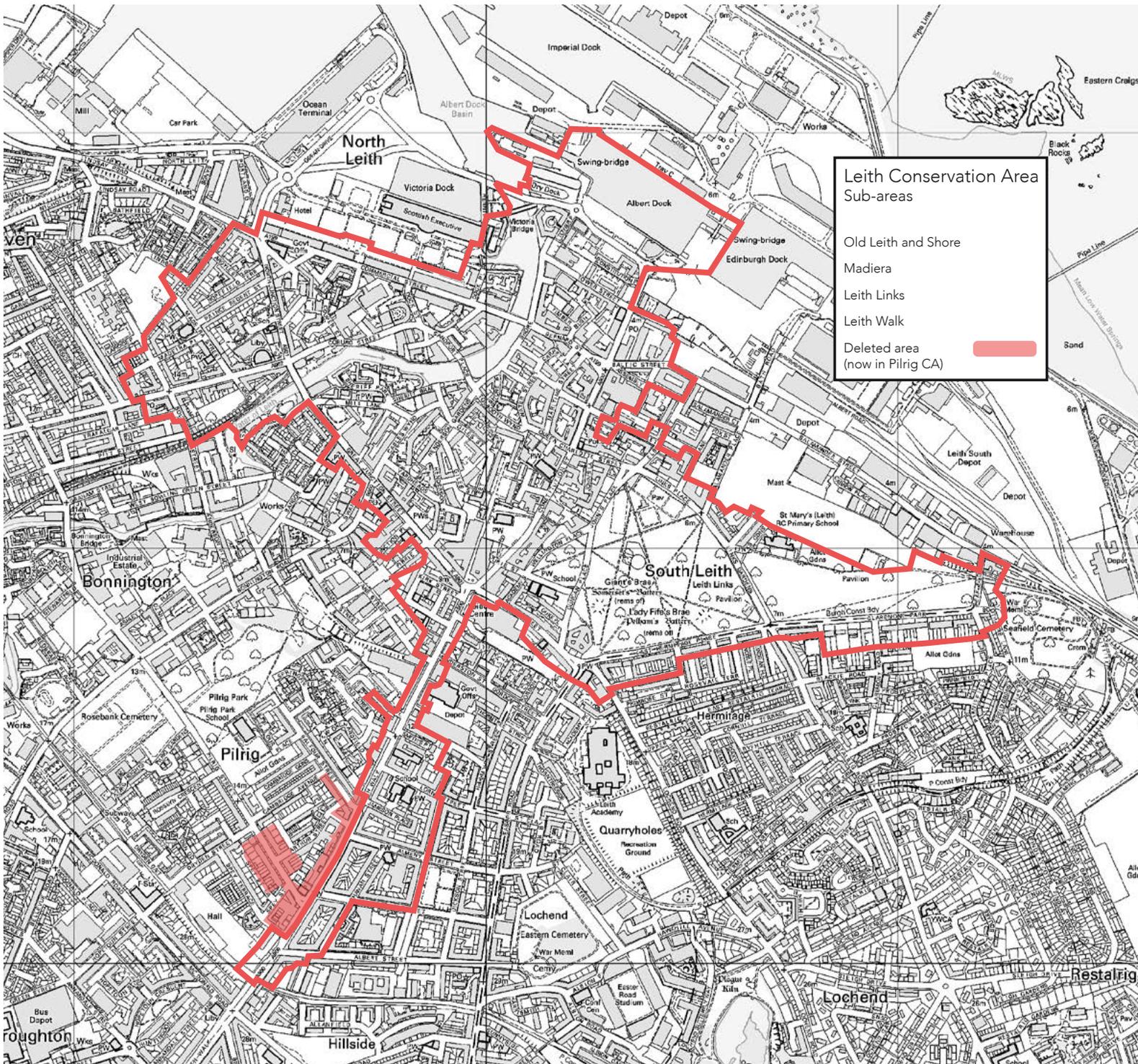
Leith

Conservation Area

Character Appraisal

Leith
Conservation Area
Character Appraisal





Leith
Conservation Area
Character Appraisal

Summary Information

Location and boundaries

Leith lies on the coast, some 1.5 miles north east of the centre of Edinburgh. The Conservation Area covers the extent of the historic town, and includes the Madeira area and Leith Walk, the town's main link with Edinburgh city centre.

The area is included within the Forth, Leith, Leith Walk and Craightinny/Duddingston wards, and is covered by the Leith and Newhaven, Leith Central, and Craightinny/Meadowbank Community Councils. The population of the Leith Conservation Area in 2011 was approximately 13,804 in 7,852 households.

Dates of designation/amendments

The Leith Conservation Area was designated in 1998. It comprises the former Madeira and Old Leith Conservation areas with extensions at Leith Walk, Kirkgate, Albert Dock and the Citadel. The Old Leith Conservation Area was designated in 1977, with a number of subsequent amendments and the Madeira Conservation Area was designated in 1975. The Conservation Area boundary was amended on 30 August 2013 to transfer part of Leith Walk and Pilrig Street to the Pilrig Conservation Area.

Statement of Significance

The character of the Conservation Area derives from Leith's history both as a port and an independent burgh. Several fine Georgian and Victorian warehouses survive, some now converted for residential or office use. A rich mixture of civic buildings and mercantile architecture survives particularly at Bernard Street and The Shore. Significant earlier buildings include Lamb's House and St Ninian's Manse (both early 17th Century). The present street pattern of The Shore area closely follows that of the historic town.

The Inner Harbour of the Water of Leith provides a vibrant focus for the Conservation Area, with buildings along The Shore forming an impressive waterfront townscape. The Conservation Area also covers the older parts of the Port of Leith, containing many early features including listed dock buildings and the Victoria Bridge, a scheduled Ancient Monument.

The Madeira area retains a largely Georgian domestic character, with stone buildings and slate roofs predominating; some of the Georgian buildings retain astragaled windows and doors with fanlights. Many of the roads are setted, the main exception being Prince Regent Street. Stone garden walls are a feature of the area. North Leith Parish church provides a visual focus to this mainly residential area, which also includes major public buildings such as Leith Library and Town Hall.

Leith Walk remains the main artery linking the centre of Edinburgh to the old burgh of Leith. It is characterised mainly by Victorian tenements with shops and pubs at ground floor level. There are a number of Georgian survivals, most notably Smith's Place dating from 1814.

Building types within the Conservation Area vary but are traditionally in stone with slate roofs. Pockets of public housing development from the 1960s and 1970s, of a contemporary character, fall within the expanded Conservation Area. Open space is concentrated at Leith Links, which provides a spacious contrast to the relatively dense settlement pattern of the remainder of the Conservation Area.

Acknowledgements

This document has been produced with the assistance of the Friends of the Water of Leith Basin.

Conservation Area Character Appraisals

Purpose of character appraisals – why do we need them?

Conservation area character appraisals are intended to help manage change. They provide an agreed basis of understanding of what makes an area special. This understanding informs and provides the context in which decisions can be made on proposals which may affect that character. An enhanced level of understanding, combined with appropriate management tools, ensures that change and development sustains and respects the qualities and special characteristics of the area.

“When effectively managed, conservation areas can anchor thriving communities, sustain cultural heritage, generate wealth and prosperity and add to quality of life. To realise this potential many of them need to continue to adapt and develop in response to the modern-day needs and aspirations of living and working communities. This means accommodating physical, social and economic change for the better.

Physical change in conservation areas does not necessarily need to replicate its surroundings. The challenge is to ensure that all new development respects, enhances and has a positive impact on the area. Physical and land use change in conservation areas should always be founded on a detailed understanding of the historic and urban design context.”

From PAN 71, Conservation Area Management. www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2004/12/20450/49052

How to use this document

The analysis of the Leith’s character and appearance focuses on the features which make Leith special and distinctive. This is divided into two sections: Structure, which describes and draws conclusions regarding the overall organisation and macro-scale features of the area; and Key elements, which examines the smaller-scale features and details which fit within the structure.

This document is not intended to give prescriptive instructions on what designs or styles will be acceptable in the area. Instead, it can be used to ensure that the design of an alteration or addition is based on an informed interpretation of context. This context should be considered in conjunction with the relevant Local Development Plan policies and planning guidance.



Leith Conservation Area Character Appraisal

The Management section outlines the policy and legislation relevant to decision-making in the area. Issues specific to Leith are discussed in more detail and recommendations or opportunities identified.

Historical Origins And Development

A review of the historical development of Leith is important in order to understand how the area has evolved in its present form and adopted its essential character.

As the port of Edinburgh and a gateway to Europe, Leith has played a conspicuous part in the history of Scotland. It retains a strong sense of individuality based on its long history as a thriving and independent burgh, and Edinburgh's rise to importance can be attributed in part to the success of Leith as Scotland's primary port for almost five centuries.

From the late 13th Century until 1707, when it was overtaken by Glasgow, Leith was not only Edinburgh's port but it was the gateway to Scotland and its busiest port. Indeed well into the 20th Century Leith ships traded with the Baltic, the Low Countries, France, America and the Mediterranean, carrying coal, grain, fish and hides and returning with spice, cloth, whale oil and wine.

Leith officially became Edinburgh's port in 1329 and has remained a busy cargo destination ever since. Significant improvements and alterations took place during the 19th Century in association with the Port of Leith's marine-industrial functions and many of these remain in the original state, including the harbour basins.

Leith was first established on the banks of the Water of Leith, at the point where the river

entered the Firth of Forth. The tidal mouth of the river would have afforded a haven for ships long before any artificial harbour was constructed. The first historical reference to the settlement dates from 1140, when the harbour and fishing rights were granted to Holyrood Abbey by David I. At this time, it was known by the compound name 'Inverleith' (meaning 'Mouth of the Leith').

Leith constantly features in the power struggles that took place in Scotland throughout the period and the battles, landings and sieges of Leith have had an influence on its physical development. In 1548, the Regent Mary of Guise moved the seat of government to Leith and the town was fortified. The fortifications ran from the west-end of Bernard Street south-east to the junction of the present Maritime and Constitution Street, south to the foot of Leith Walk, returning to the Shore along the line of what is now Great Junction Street. The siege of 1560 resulted in the subsequent partial demolition of its defensive walls. However, Leith continued to develop as a merchant port.

In 1656-7 a large Cromwellian fort, Leith Citadel, was built west of the river; a gateway of which still survives in Dock Street. By the end of the 17th century, Leith had developed from its original nucleus by the Shore to fill the area which had been enclosed by the line of the 1548 fortifications. One of the few developments outside the line of the walls

was a short row of tenements and a windmill, now known as the Signal Tower, built by Robert Mylne in about 1686 at the north end of the Shore

After Edinburgh's North Bridge was completed in 1772, Leith Street and Leith Walk were firmly established as the major route to Leith. Market gardens developed along the length of Leith Walk to meet the needs of the growing population of Edinburgh during the first half of the 18th century. In 1764, Professor John Hope developed 13 acres of land on the west side of Leith Walk at Shrubhill as Botanic Gardens.

The Foot of Leith Walk was still almost entirely rural in 1785 when John Baxter prepared a scheme for development east of the street. Scattered development on both sides of Leith Walk followed in the late 18th century and the first years of the 19th century. James Smith, a merchant, bought the site of Smith's Place in 1800 and by 1814 he had laid out a cul-de-sac and the next year built a large house at its end.

By the mid 19th century, Leith Walk was an important public transport route. Horse drawn trams were introduced in the 1870s, cable cars in 1899, and electric trams a few years later. Expansion of the railways resulted in redevelopment at the Foot of Leith Walk and the formation of large goods yards at Steads Place and Brunswick Road.

Leith Conservation Area Character Appraisal



Historical Origins And Development

The railways provided work for large numbers of people and resulted in major speculative developments that extended along the east side of Leith Walk and the adjacent streets towards the end of the 19th century. These streets form a herringbone pattern meeting Leith Walk at offset junctions.

In the second half of the 18th century, regular streets (Bernard Street and Constitution Street) were formed on the edges of the town, Queen Charlotte Street (then Quality Street) cut through the medieval layout, and Constitution Street was extended south to the foot of Leith Walk. At the same time, villas were built nearby and Leith became a fashionable seaside resort which, as early as 1767, included a golf clubhouse built by the Honourable Company of Edinburgh Golfers at the west end of the Links.

Leith expanded substantially during the 19th century, associated with railway building and the growth of the Port of Leith; port related industries and warehousing also grew rapidly during this period. The following description of some of the activities in Leith during this period is given: "Leith possesses many productive establishments, such as ship-building and sail-cloth manufactories ... manufactories of glass ... a corn-mill ... many warehouses for wines and spirits ... and there are also other manufacturing establishments

besides those for the making of cordage for brewing, distilling, and rectifying spirits, refining sugar, preserving tinned meats, soap and candle manufactories, with several extensive cooperages, iron-foundries, flourmills, tanneries and saw-mills."

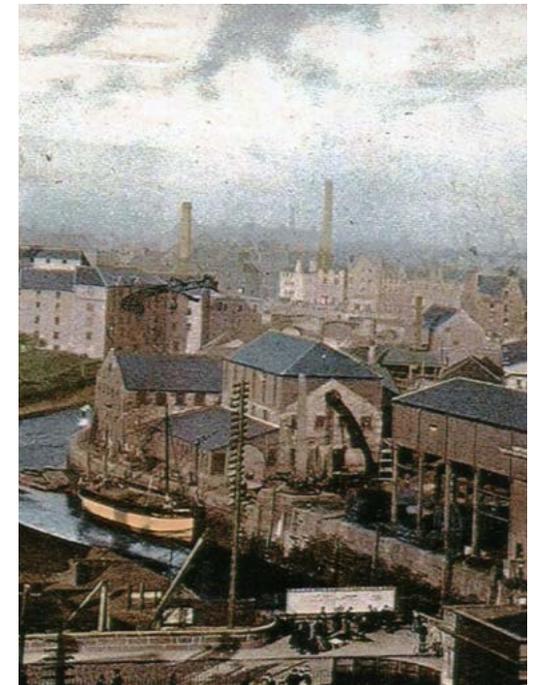
New docks west of the harbour were begun in 1800, and in 1810 Great Junction Street was formed, leading to a new bridge over the Water of Leith, as a road to them from the foot of Leith Walk. The large parklands of the 18th century houses surrounding Leith were laid out for terraces and villas, beginning in 1800 with land south of Leith Links and continuing in 1807 with James Gillespie Graham's plan for a large area north of Ferry Road and Great Junction Street. Robert Burn laid out a scheme for land south of Ferry Road in 1808 and later a feuing plan for Great Junction Street. However, building was sporadic and these ambitious schemes were only completed (in significantly revised form) in the late 19th century.

These first decades of the 19th century also witnessed a period of major civic building reflecting Leith's growing power and wealth. A number of Leith's finest remaining buildings date from this period, including the Leith Bank, the Customs House, the Assembly Rooms, Trinity House, and North Leith Parish Church.

The Madeira area was conceived as a comprehensive design prompted by the success of James Craig's New Town in Edinburgh. Beginning in 1800 with land south of Leith Links it continued in 1807 with James Gillespie Graham's feuing scheme for a large area of north of Ferry Road. The grid pattern of streets was developed sporadically through the 19th century with Georgian buildings set back behind front gardens. By the turn of the century these basic rules were abandoned and Victorian buildings were inserted in the gaps taking their building lines directly from the heel of the pavement. This is most noticeable on Portland Place where a curved Victorian tenement projects forward from its Georgian wings on either side. The most important building in the area is William Burn's North Leith Parish Church (1816).

In 1833, Leith was established as an independent Municipal and Parliamentary Burgh with full powers of local government. Leith's architectural development of the time reflected its new status and a number of substantial buildings - a Town Hall, Burgh Court, Police Office - appropriate to its burgh status were built in the centre of the town throughout the 19th century. Leith expanded as massive warehouses and additional docks were built: the Victoria Dock in 1851, the Albert Dock in 1881; the Imperial Dock in 1903.

Leith Conservation Area Character Appraisal



Historical Origins And Development

After the passing of the Leith Improvement Act in 1880 many of the slums and most of the 16th and 17th century buildings were cleared away and replaced with tall tenements. Henderson Street was also forced through the old pattern of closes and wynds. Concurrent with the improvement schemes were programmes of major tenemental development, most significantly the building of dense tenement blocks over the fields between Leith Walk and Easter Road. Leith Links were part of a larger area of common land which stretched along the coast including part of Seafield. Links is Scots meaning sandy ground with hillocks and dunes, and the present artificial flatness dates from about 1880.

The Links were significantly remodelled at this time and brought, more or less, into their present form. A formal park, enclosed by railings with extensive avenues of trees, replaced the former rolling landscape of grassed dunes. These improvements removed most of the world's oldest golf course, which is mentioned as early as 1456. The Links were an important recreational centre, hosting horse racing and athletic meetings, and still contain bowling greens and cricket pitches that date from the 19th century.

Following the First World War, the number of shipyards was reduced from six or seven to one, and the stream of pre-war trade dwindled significantly. Through the inter-war years Leith had high unemployment. However, the population of Leith was still around 80,000 at the start of the Second World War.

Leith was the focus of slum clearance programmes between the 1950s and 1970s that resulted in the loss of the historic Kirkgate and the construction of a number of large public housing schemes. The demolition of large numbers of sub-standard houses resulted in a housing shortage, and many younger people were forced to move out of Leith to find accommodation. This distorted the community profile, with a bias towards the elderly.

In more recent years the emphasis has moved to urban regeneration, community needs and the conservation of Leith's historic environment. The Leith Project Initiative of 1980-85, incorporated an industrial and environmental programme directed at cleaning up buildings; helping to renovate and convert properties for quality housing, offices and workshops; developing industrial units in disused gap sites; consolidating key industries and encouraging new business to develop in the historic centre. The Vaults, the Cooperage and buildings along the Shore

were converted to housing from redundant industrial buildings with assistance from the Leith Project Initiative. An important factor in Leith's revitalisation was the large stock of solidly built warehouses, usually with plenty of natural daylight making them suitable for conversion. The King's Landing (1985) was a substantial new private housing development on a former gap site.

This more recent approach has resulted in the central shore and basin areas of Leith taking on new identities as important centres for high profile and innovative business, the relocation of the Scottish Government offices, new housing, and high quality restaurants and bars. Leith is also now the permanent home of the former Royal Yacht Britannia and its importance has been further strengthened by the Ocean Terminal development. The Leith Townscape Heritage Initiatives resulted in improvements to the public realm and individual buildings in Leith.

Despite having lost many of the original buildings on the quayside around the Inner Harbour basins and, most of the industries associated with the river and the life on the water, there are enough buildings remaining, enough life and business around the Harbour. The basins all have a different character, all tell a story and all have a beauty of their own.

Leith Conservation Area Character Appraisal



Kirkgate

Special Characteristics and Key Elements overall

Topography & Setting

Leith has a unique and complex architectural character that makes it distinctive and clearly identifiable within the context of Edinburgh. The Conservation Area has at its centre an important historical harbour town with its origins in the 12th Century. The architectural character of the Conservation Area derives from Leith's history, both as a port and an independent burgh, which imbue its individual architectural elements with a deeply rooted significance. Despite having lost most of its medieval buildings, Leith provides an excellent example of a small 19th century provincial town containing architecture which displays a rightness and fitness of scale (grand but not intimidating) and uniformly high quality of materials, detailing and design which have a unique significance in the context of Scottish architectural history. The historical and architectural importance of the Leith Conservation Area is reflected in the concentration of Statutorily Listed Buildings in the area: approximately 400 buildings are included on the Statutory List [32, Category A; 243, Category B and 122, Category C(S)].

Development pattern

Leith was a thriving and expanding commercial and industrial area throughout the 19th century, and much of the town's present urban structure and varied architectural fabric stem from this significant period in its development as an independent burgh and trading port. A combination of the grouping of its buildings, the form of its spaces and the many features of visual interest contribute to Leith's positive identity and distinctive urban character. Much of the architectural character stems from the juxtaposition of large warehouses and well detailed later-Georgian houses and public buildings.

Building Types

Leith retains a broader range of building types from the past than most areas of the city. It has also been the subject of greater foreign architectural influence, which can be seen in a number of buildings in Leith. Although less visible than in its heyday (when Dutch, Nordic and French styles influenced many warehouses and offices), this is still reflected in remnants such as the Norwegian and Ukrainian churches, and replica buildings, such as St Thomas's on Sherrif Brae (copied from a church in Brittany) and South Leith Parish Church (copied from a St. Petersburg design). Street names such as Elbe, Baltic Street, Cadiz, and Madeira also testify to Leith's maritime tradition and extensive trading links.

Each period of Leith's long history has left buildings of major interest. The relatively formal spaces of Bernard Street and Constitution Street, the remnants of the medieval street pattern, the range of neo-classical buildings, the Victorian contribution of boldly detailed Italianate banks, offices and Baronial tenements, with massive warehouses behind, all unified by the common use of stone, combine to produce a town centre which is among the best and most varied in Scotland. A rich mixture of civic buildings and mercantile architecture also survives particularly

Leith

Conservation Area

Character Appraisal



St Ninians

Special Characteristics and Key Elements overall

at Bernard Street and The Shore. The concentration of public buildings within the Conservation Area makes an important contribution to the architectural character and reflects Leith's former civic independence and importance.

Leith's ecclesiastical history is very old, and the area has a considerable number of fine church buildings. The best is possibly the elegant neoclassical 18th century North Leith Parish Church, with its full-height Ionic portico and tall steeple, in Madeira Street. More common are Victorian Gothic buildings such as the South Leith Parish Church (1847-8) by Thomas Hamilton, in the Kirgate and St Mary Star of the Sea (1853-4) by Pugin & Hansom in Constitution Street. St. Thomas's (1840-3) Church at the head of Sheriff Brae is now the Sikh Temple. The graveyard of South

Leith Parish Church contains a number of fine Georgian grave markers.

More modern and brutalist architecture of the 1950s and 60s is represented by Thomas Fraser Court, John Russell Court, Cables Wynd House (known as the 'banana block'), Linksvie House on the line of the old Tolbooth Wynd, and the Newkirkgate Shopping Centre. Other more recent developments such as Citadel Place, Hamburg Place and West Cromwell Street have retained a low-rise human scale.

Materials & Details

Building types within the Conservation Area vary but are traditionally of stone, with slate roofs. Pockets of public housing development from the 1960s and 1970s, of a contemporary character, also fall within the Conservation Area. Warehouses are a prominent element throughout the central area, many of them fine examples of industrial architecture, which act as a backcloth to earlier buildings. Several fine Georgian and Victorian examples survive, many now converted for residential or office use. The large rubble warehouse at 87 Giles Street known as the Vaults is one of the earliest, dating from 1682, and most outstanding.

The Leith Conservation Area is of considerable size covering various historical periods and stages of development that form a variety of character areas and spatial patterns. For this analysis the Character Appraisal is split into four sub areas representing distinctive patterns of growth and development:

Leith

Conservation Area

Character Appraisal



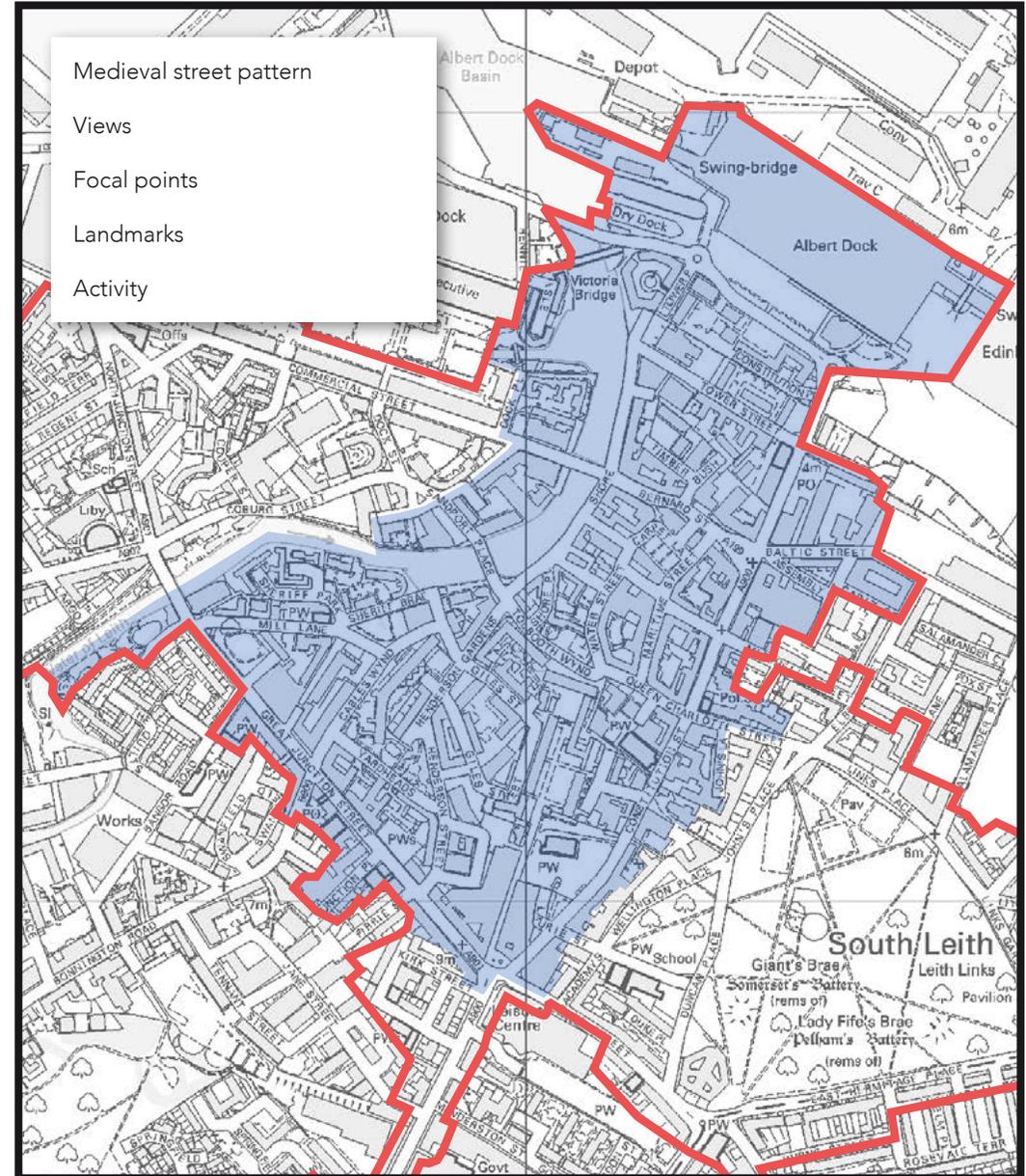
Old Leith and The Shore

Special Characteristics and Key Elements

Topography and Setting	Streets	Building Types
Grain and Density	Development Pattern	Streetscape and Activity
Views	Spaces	Landmarks



Leith Conservation Area Character Appraisal



Old Leith and The Shore

Topography & Setting

The central historic core of the Conservation Area is bounded by the Port of Leith to the north, Great Junction Street to the south, Constitution Street to the east and the Water of Leith to the west. This area more or less coincides with that enclosed by the early defensive walls. Historically it was the centre of the port activities that sustained Leith's growth and gave it an identity separate from Edinburgh.

On its eastern edge this sub-area covers the core of the conservation area along Constitution Street, from Bernard Street and the Port of Leith to the north, to property surrounding the foot of Leith Walk, Great Junction Street and the river estuary to the west.

The Shore area includes both sides of the old harbour waterfront to the west. Distinctive and contrasting edges are provided by Great Junction Street and the Water of Leith. Great Junction Street runs along the path of the old citadel wall retaining a straight and formal edge. The river with its steeply rising banks, flowing in a gently winding pattern to the sea, gives more organic and informal edges, softer and green along the upper reaches - harder and functional along the quays and harbour walls at the river mouth.

Views

As a result of the asymmetric road pattern there are few long views through the area, but rather a strong sense of enclosure and containment. Views are predominantly internal. Longer views to and from the Port of Leith and Nelson Monument on Calton Hill relate Leith to the city and to the sea.

Towers and turrets of a variety of styles and scales mark views down most of the main streets. Examples include the octagonal Art Nouveau tower at the end of Great Junction Street and the Italianate octagonal tower on the Corn Exchange which terminates Constitution Street. Many of these landmark features play a variety of roles.

The spires on the corner buildings with Bernard Street and Coalhill emphasise and turn the corners, and their added interest in the skyline attract and encourage progress further towards the Shore. The streets to either side provide distant views to church spires in the distance, which together with the varied rooflines around the harbour, some of the warehouses still being gable end on, the cranes and ships now visible in the Port of Leith, provide interest and colour to the skyline.



Leith Conservation Area Character Appraisal

Old Leith and The Shore

Development pattern

The spatial structure of this area still reveals the underlying medieval street pattern, with strong radial routes to and from the port. Constitution Street to the east resembles a town main street. The redeveloped Kirkgate runs between the Shore and Constitution Street. It retains the line of the original route in pedestrianised form and some of the original buildings along it, including South Leith Parish Church and Trinity House.

The physical and visual disruption to the spatial structure caused by redevelopment in the 1960s is significant and makes analysis and description of the structure more complex than first impressions convey. The major redevelopment programme of the 1960s was the final part of a continuum stretching back to the development of Great Junction Street in the 18th century and the late 19th century Leith Improvement Programme.

Great Junction Street is strongly linear with its sense of formality strengthened by the location of important institutions along its length, such as the former Leith Hospital, St. Thomas's Church, Dr. Bell's School, and its termination at the east by the clock tower of the former Leith Railway Station. Henderson Street demonstrates the Victorian interest in improving housing conditions; with its model tenements, broader street width, design for light and fresh air, and the

provision of amenity open spaces. The contrast with the later redevelopment of the 1960s is the use of 'traditional' urban design principles in relating buildings to each other, to their surroundings and to the street, and in providing mixed uses with 'active' street frontages.

The form of the Kirkgate Centre incorporates features, such as the separation of pedestrians and cars and the grouping of buildings around a precinct, which are a product of the urban design principles prevalent in British post-war reconstruction and the development of new 'satellite' communities.

Constitution and Maritime Streets echo the traditional street pattern. Although Constitution Street has been widened in parts, many of the narrow individual plot widths reflected in the building frontages and the differing building heights along it are reminders of the earlier street pattern. This traditional spatial structure is still apparent in the network of narrow streets and lanes with their changing widths and curving layouts that lead from the western part of the Shore. The frequent street interconnection, the pends running under buildings, the small scale of the perimeter blocks and the variety of properties within them all reinforce this character.

Maritime Street shows a change to predominantly larger plot sizes occupied by warehouses behind the Shore frontage. Many of these warehouses and bonds are now largely converted to residential use, they stand cheek by jowl just allowing lanes and wynds to squeeze between them, their bulk accentuating the narrowness of the lanes. This pattern of development reflects its functional origins and priorities for the efficient storage of goods, and though a number of warehouses have been lost, this area still retains a robust urban character.

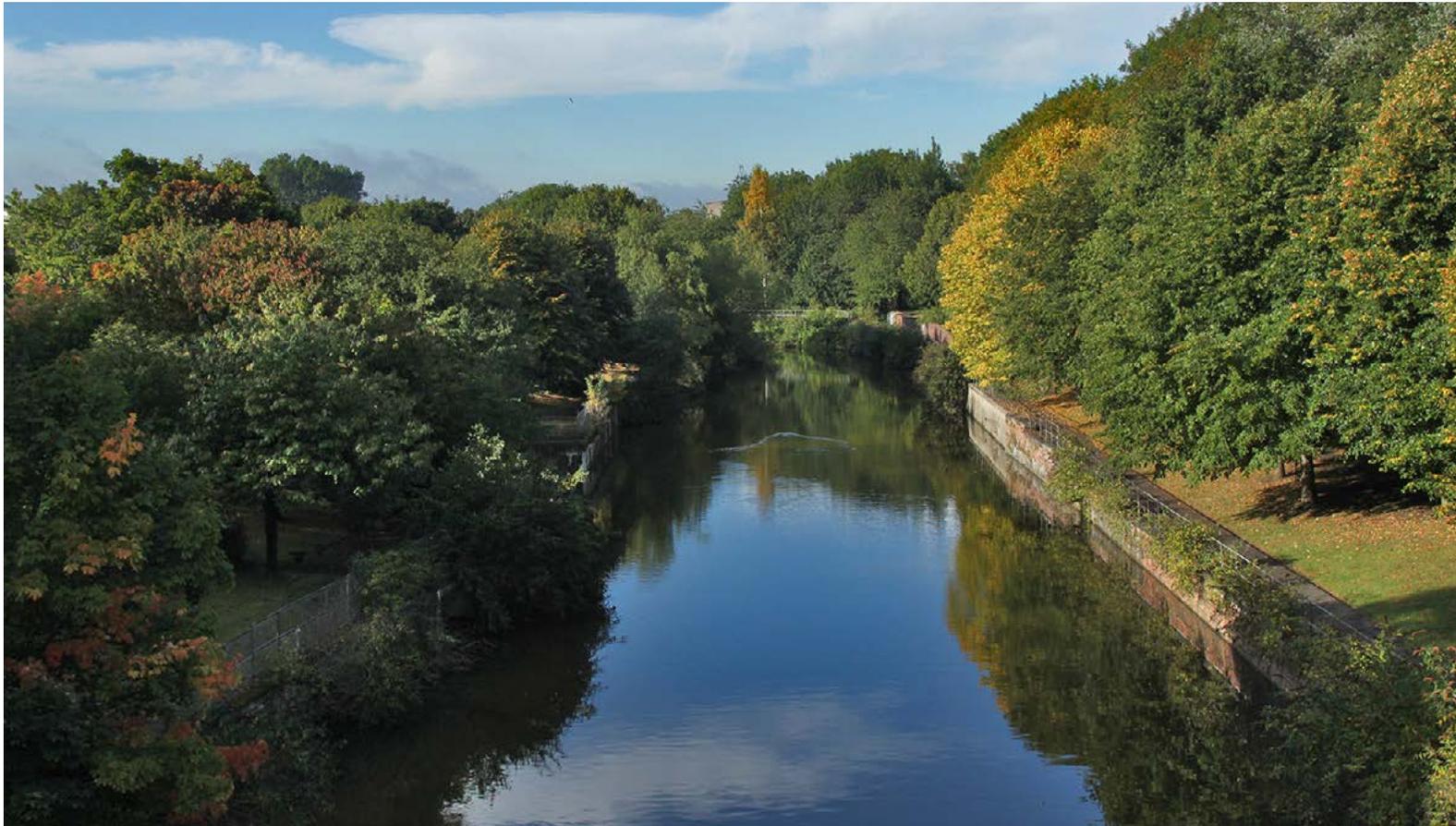


Leith Conservation Area Character Appraisal

Old Leith and The Shore

In the way that ancient road alignments tend to remain whilst the buildings change, the bends in the Water of Leith remains, gently angled by a series of straight edges evidence of early moorings. The bustle of port activity has been replaced by the calmer recreational pursuits of walking and cycling along the riverside walkway. Following the section of river in the Conservation Area there is a progression of moving from the openness of the parks on either side of its banks, to the enclosure of the inner harbour back to the present openness of the Port of Leith and eventually the sea beyond. Views through to the Port of Leith and the sea are being considerably eroded, it is very important that contact with Leith's maritime heritage and the operational port are not lost.

The river has varying combinations of development and space. On the east side of the Shore the continuity of frontages, the building line set to the pavement edge, and the road and quayside, contain the inner harbour. They frame it to give the impression of a long square and a focus for the area, especially to the cafes, bars and restaurants that look out over it. This impression is retained on the west side of the river, although development is more mixed and less tightly knit.



Leith Conservation Area Character Appraisal

Old Leith and The Shore

The north end of Constitution Street is terminated by Bernard Street in which the impression of a square is reinforced by a combination of the street layout, important civic and commercial buildings and their architecture. The Buildings of Edinburgh describes this part of Bernard Street as "Leith's most formal space, a broad triangle with the combined atmosphere of a street and a square narrowing at its west end as it jinks to the left for its exit to the Shore". The sudden turn of the street to the left at the west end means that the space is enclosed by buildings, an impression which is strengthened by exposed gable ends at the 'corners'. The former Leith Exchange with its giant ionic columns terminates the east side of the 'square'. However, the focal point is the former Leith Bank, the smallest building in the square. Only two storeys high, its ionic columns and bow front, the shallow domed roof over the banking hall, and the symmetry of the frontage with matching pilastered bays to each side all combine to give it a presence far greater than its size would suggest. The symmetry is reinforced by the way the tenements on either side step up from it, first to three and then to four storeys towards the corners. The north side, though different in interpretation is of a similar formula.



The buildings range over almost the whole of the 19th century, and although their contribution to creating the space may not have been due to a formal plan, neither was it completely by accident. They demonstrate the continuation of a civic tradition in the design of individual buildings which contribute to the creation of a sense of place, a belief that their combined presence is more important than their individual status.



Leith Conservation Area Character Appraisal

Grain & Density

A dense fabric of closely grouped buildings separated by narrow lanes creates a distinctive character. The main routes through the area are those which define its edges: the Shore along the Water of Leith, Constitution Street and Great Junction Street. The centre of Leith has been identified as an area of archaeological significance.

Streets

Constitution Street was laid out at the end of the 18th century, along the line of one of the old ramparts of the 1560 fortifications. It is characterised by the juxtaposition of buildings of diverse architectural styles, dates and scales. These include Georgian villas, austere 19th century tenements, warehouses, and church buildings (St James', St John's and St Mary's star of the Sea).

Great Junction Street follows the line of one of the ramparts of the Leith defensive walls of 1560. It was laid out in 1818 and is one of the busiest roads in Leith. Its straight linear form contrasts with the narrower winding roads to the north. The street is defined by a long procession of mainly four-storey late 19th century tenements built hard to the heel of the pavement, and it is lined with shops at ground level, above which are a few small businesses but mainly residential properties. The tenement on the Henderson Street corner (Nos. 48-52) dates from 1885, and was the first buildings erected under the Leith Improvement Scheme. The former Leith Hospital forms a major architectural feature standing to the rear of Taylor Gardens. At the west end of the street the former Co-operative building with its distinctive clock tower overlooking Taylor Gardens, forms a major landmark and the view eastwards is terminated by the clock tower on the corner of the former Leith Central Station.



Spaces

The area has a medieval structure at the historic centre which is still reflected in the network of narrow streets and lanes, the frequent street interconnections, the small size of the perimeter blocks and the variety of properties.

The Foot of the Walk is closed visually by tenements at the end of the street. The west side of the street is set back behind large front gardens which opens up the space between building lines and gives a visual impression of Leith Walk terminating in a square overlooked by the statue of Queen Victoria. The location of the former Leith Central Station, the increase in pedestrians, the bus terminals and street junctions all reinforce a sense of arrival.

The Kirkgate was old Leith's main street with a lively and varied streetscape. The intimate urban pattern of winding streets and densely grouped buildings of the Old Kirkgate was lost in the redevelopment of this area during the 1960s. The remaining historic remnants include the 15th century South Leith Parish Church, the earliest building in the area, the Gothic revival style of which forms an interesting contrast to its opposite neighbour, the classically proportioned Trinity House.

Old Leith and The Shore

The New Kirkgate shopping precinct and housing development to the north disregard the distinctive organic structure and scale of the surrounding urban pattern. The Kirkgate is a courtyard of low rise housing with zigzag rendered fronts which is terminated by the multi-storey slab of Linksvie House.

The eastwards approach to the Shore along Commercial Street, with high buildings on both sides giving a strong sense of enclosure and direction, passes the monumental Customs House and opens out dramatically to reveal the Water of Leith, the Inner Harbour and the Shore, a space of historic and visual interest. Bernard Street cuts through the centre of the area and is lined with buildings of great architectural merit which reflect Leith's thriving past, epitomising the mercantile prosperity of the 19th century. It forms the civic centre of the Conservation Area and is Leith's most formal space; a broad triangle in which the effect of enclosure, the irregular form and articulation of the space enclosed, and the relationship of the surrounding buildings create a place of great architectural interest.

The harbour remains a significant open space in which interest is provided by the buildings and activities on either bank. The views in this part of the Conservation Area are mainly internal. At either end there are limited views through the bridge towards the Port of Leith and to distant church spires inland. Longer views down Henderson Street to the Port of Leith and up Constitution Street to Calton Hill and the Nelson Monument are also important.

The contrast between open space and enclosure at the Shore is reinforced by a wall of similar building heights and types set at the heel of pavement along the narrow quayside access road. Warehouses with a higher ratio of wall to window, where the windows are smaller and at wider spacing than tenements, accentuate the enclosure. Tenement and former warehouse development around the harbour is mainly 4 to 5 storeys, of continuous frontages and building lines, given vertical emphasis by gabled frontages and dormers.

The Inner Harbour of the Water of Leith provides a vibrant focus for the Conservation Area, the older parts of the Port of Leith, containing many early features including listed dock buildings. Scheduled Ancient Monuments associated with the Port of Leith consist of: the Victoria Bridge, the dry dock off Sandport Street, the swing bridge and lock at the East Old Dock, and features related to the Albert Dock.

The spatial significance of Bernard Street is best appreciated when entering at the east and wider end where the street gradually narrows and changes direction, masking the western outlet and giving a powerful enclosing effect to the street space. The quality and cohesive grouping of the flanking buildings, the variety of their architectural styles and roof shapes, and such incidental features as the decorative cast iron lamp posts are part of the street's individual character and visual interest.

Early 19th century Georgian buildings line much of the south side of Bernard Street. The centrepiece being the former Leith Bank (1804) an elegant two storey classical structure with an Ionic-columned bow window standing on an island, separated by narrow lanes on either side from the neighbouring three and four-storey blocks and flanked by symmetrical tenements of 1807-15. The north side is more varied with the Italianate former Royal Bank of Scotland (1871-2) at the east end, followed by the Clydesdale Bank (1923), in a modernistic neo-Georgian. Then the early 19th century Nos. 8-14, adjoining a mid-Victorian palazzo, followed by the twin bows of Nos. 22-24. The north side of the final section of Bernard Street is lined with late Georgian buildings. The restrained Georgian grouping is broken by the Baronial detailing of Nos. 50-58.

Leith Conservation Area Character Appraisal

Old Leith and The Shore

Building Types

Warehouse conversions in Maritime and Water, Streets and Timber Bush show how the traditional character can be preserved. Overall their conversion retains the sense of confinement given their robust stone construction, pend entrances, punched windows, and cast iron work detailing. The retention of the original streetscape of setts and stone kerbs, iron rails and cart track stones, heavy cast iron bollards protecting corners and entrances all still convey an image of a busy maritime past.

New developments have shown mixed responses to the traditional character of the area. Sheriff Bank and Park with their suburban layout, frequent changes in scale, miniaturised proportions and orange brick, do not reflect the traditional character. The recent developments in Shore Place and Bowies Close, retain and tie in sympathetically with existing buildings at either end of the street, their frontages replicate narrow plot widths giving a vertical emphasis which is reinforced by changes in material and traditional gablets.



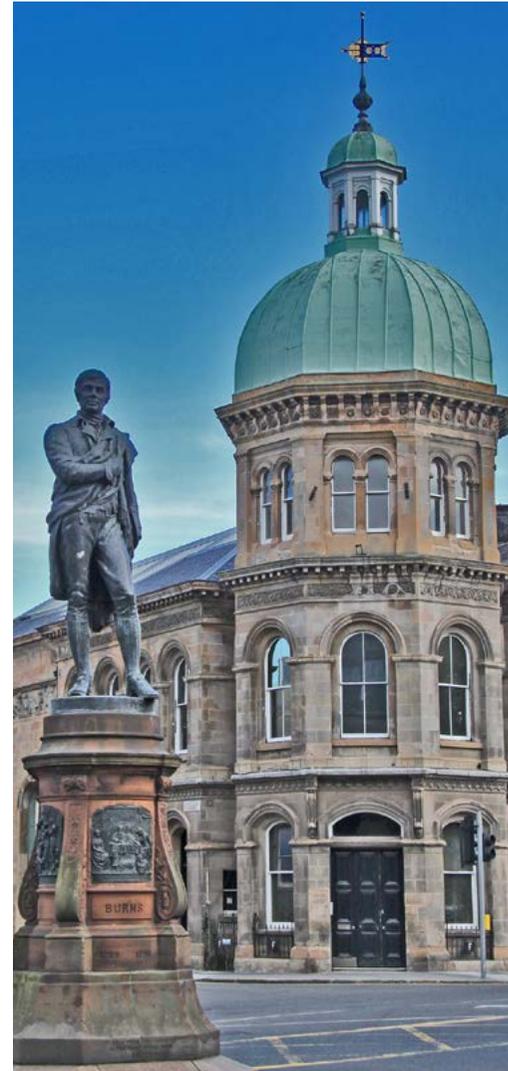
Old Leith and The Shore

Landmarks

The bronze statue of Burns (1898) stands at the junction of Bernard Street and Constitution Street, adjoining the massive five storey Waterloo Buildings (1820) with its setback bowed corner, which is the largest and grandest of Leith's Georgian tenements. Distinguished buildings such as the old Corn Exchange, and the dignified 18th century Exchange Building provide a strong civic character to the junction. The Italianate former Corn Exchange (1860-3) emphasises its prominent corner site with an octagonal domed tower surmounted by a cupola, flanked by two storeys of arcaded windows and incorporates a distinctive carved frieze.

A number of significant early historic buildings are located in the Shore area. These include:

- The circular battlemented Signal Tower, built in 1686 by Robert Mylne as a windmill for making rape-seed oil, which forms an important focal point at the corner of the Shore and Tower Street.
- Lamb's House in Water's Close off Burgess Street is one of the largest and most architecturally important early 17th century merchants' houses in Scotland. It is an impressive four storeys, incorporating traditional architectural features such as harled walls, corbels, asymmetrical gablets, crowsteps, a steep pitched pantiled roof, and windows with fixed leaded upper lights with shutters below. The building was restored and converted into a day centre for the elderly in 1959 by Robert Hurd and has recently been refurbished as a house and office by Groves Raines Architects.
- St Ninian's Church and Manse which dates from circa 1493 with later reconstructions. The building incorporates a distinctive ogee spire, and has been recently restored and converted for residential / commercial.
- The King's Wark at the corner of Bernard Street and The Shore has characteristic Dutch gables and scrolled skewputts in typical early 18th century fashion. It stands on older foundations and was part of a complex of buildings that included a chapel, royal mansion and tennis court.



Old Leith and The Shore

- The Custom House in Commercial Street was designed by Robert Reid in 1812. Its Greek Doric Revival style is typical of the way Leith buildings of the period tended to reflect on a smaller scale those of the neo-classical New Town of Edinburgh.

Notable buildings on Great Junction Street include:

- The former State Cinema at No. 105 dating from 1938 in a Modern Movement style with white geometric walls massing up to a pagoda inspired tower.
- An Edwardian Art Nouveau inspired group at 160-174 which includes the former Leith Provident Cooperative Society building with its imposing domed octagonal corner-tower and a four-storey red sandstone fronted Glasgow style tenement dating from 1905.
- The long Tudor frontage of Dr Bell's School which dates from 1839 with its crowstepped screen walls, octagonal piers and ornately canopied niche containing a statue of Dr Andrew Bell who endowed the school in 1831. It was taken over by the Leith School Board in 1891 (becoming the Great Junction Street School). At the rear of the original building, the Swimming Baths of 1896 reflect the architectural style of the school.
- St Thomas's is a plain late-classical church dating from 1824-5.

Notable buildings on Constitution Street include:

- Leith Assembly Rooms and Exchange (Nos. 37-43), dating from 1809. The Exchange Building was built as a meeting place for merchants, and incorporated the Assembly Rooms which were the centre of old Leith's social scene while the Exchange and Bernard Street were regarded as the commercial centre. The building presents a long three storey frontage to Constitution Street with a central pediment incorporating Ionic columns. It fits in well with the scale of Bernard Street creating a varied but unified composition.
- Leith Town Hall and Police Station is located at the north east corner of Constitution Street and Queen Charlotte Street. A robust monumental neo-classical building which makes excellent use of its corner site.
- 92 Constitution Street was built as a merchant's house in 1793 and with its giant Corinthian pilasters and urns surmounting the pediment is the grandest late 18th century house in Leith.

Leith Conservation Area Character Appraisal



Streetscape & Activity

The robust streetscape enhances the character of the medieval core and the harbour.

Leith is an intensively developed urban area with a multiplicity of land use activities co-existing with the predominant residential use. It contains a full range of social, commercial and community facilities, and performs an important shopping and service role for people working and living in the area. There has been a substantial reduction in Leith's traditional manufacturing industries around which its growth was based. However, industry remains an important land use in Leith, but is now spread across a more diverse base with increasing growth in the service and technology sectors.

The business area is centred on its historic core and contains a variety of commercial activities amidst housing and shops. The office of the Scottish Executive is based at Victoria Quay, and the Port of Leith are an important port with some 2000 jobs based in the dock area. Outside of the historic core residential uses within mainly tenemental property, with retail uses on the ground floors, predominate.

Leith's urban heritage and identity also make it a pleasant and stimulating place to live, work and visit. The range of mixed uses contributes considerable pedestrian movement and an active 'street life', an important feature in the area's character. Its riverside location and the increasing range of restaurants and similar establishments have also made it an attraction for tourists and other visitors.



In the historic core of Leith, the street pattern retains elements of its medieval form and most of the principal roads within the Conservation Area were established in the 19th century. The flow of large commercial vehicles and other traffic detracts from their environmental quality. Redevelopment on the northern fringes of the Conservation Area herald further retail, office and residential development.

The streetscape at the Shore matches the character of the medieval core and the robust surfaces required for the harbour. Most of the streets are setted with stone kerbs intact. The quay side is separated by bollards with chains linking them. Many of the capstans used to tie up boats remain in place. The contemporary design of the new dock gates, the sculptures and tree guards reinforce the prevailing character. Good examples of the reinstatement of original railings and a contemporary gateway supporting a globe can also be found in Dock Place. Throughout the area there are many early 20th century street lighting standards with decorative brackets.

Madeira - Leith's 'New Town'

Leith
Conservation Area
Character Appraisal

Special Characteristics and Key Elements

Topography and Setting

Grain and Density

Views

Streets

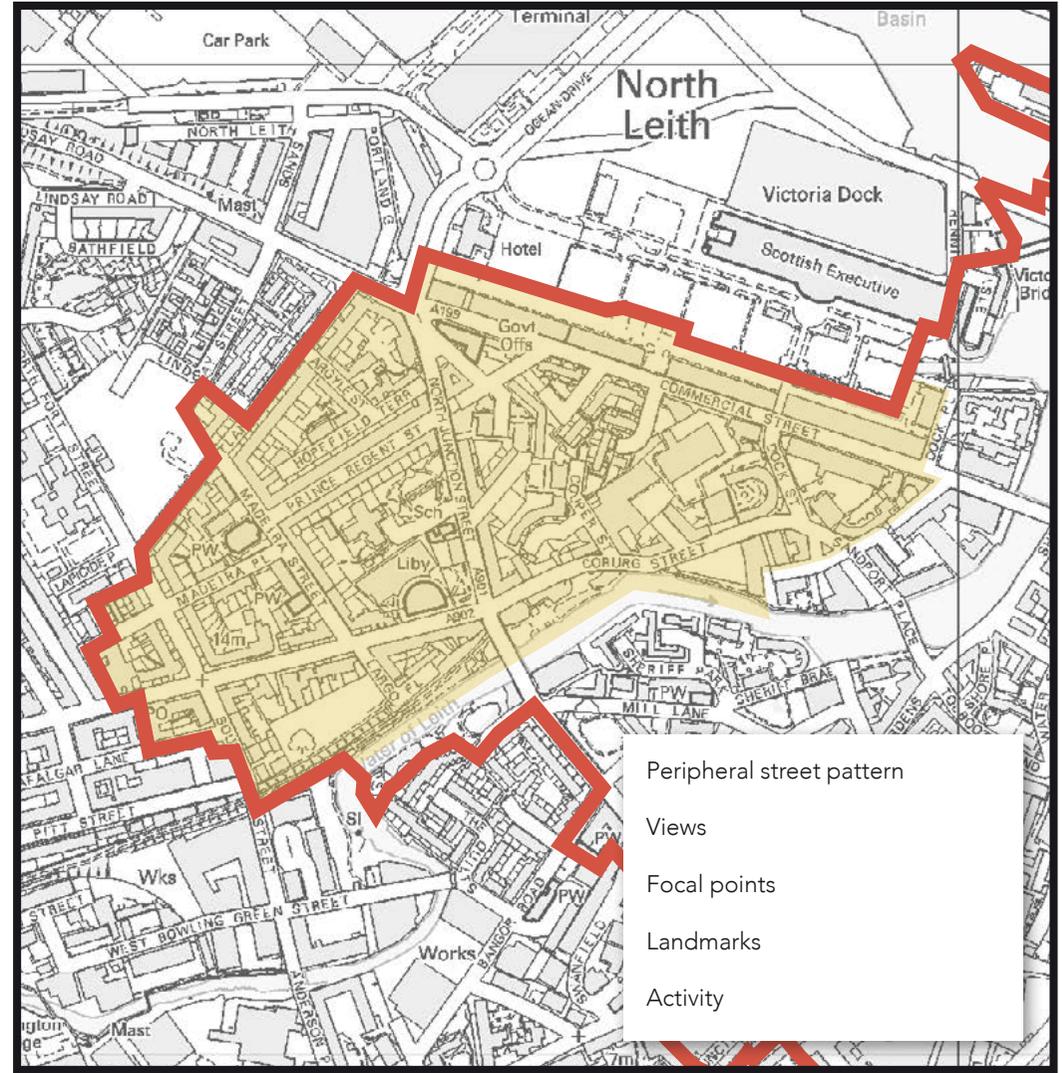
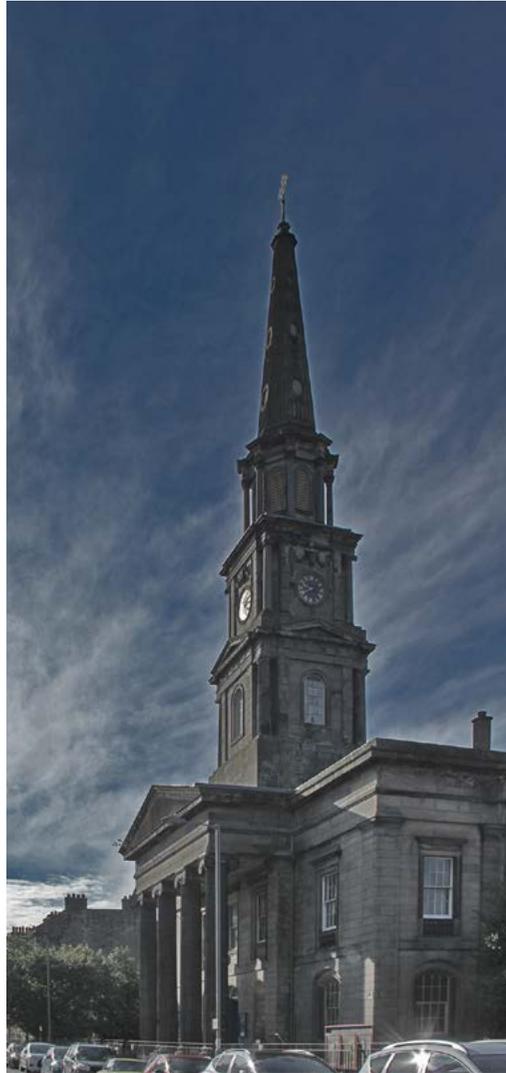
Development Pattern

Building Types

Landmarks

Materials & Details

Streetscape & Activity



Madeira - Leith's 'New Town'

Topography & Setting

Madeira forms a triangular area in the west of the Conservation Area. The north side is bounded by the bonded warehouses which run along the entire length of Commercial Street; the west by the high stone wall of Leith Fort, which runs down one side of Portland Street; and the east by the Water of Leith.

Views

The former Town Hall and main library are located at the start of Ferry Road indicating a historic change of focus for Leith's institutions. The most impressive landmarks are the bonded warehouses along Commercial Street, North Leith Parish Church with its tall and elegant spire which acts as a focal point in views along Prince Regent and most recently the new Scottish Executive Office at Victoria Quay.

Much of the area is introspective with planned or glimpsed views to the spire of North Leith Parish Church, some of these views down lanes, through gates and pends, to the cemetery and the rear of the Library create considerable interest and charm. From the bridge over the Water of Leith, views open out back to the city with Calton Hill and the Castle visible either side of the warehouses along South Fort Street.

Development pattern

Madeira retains the appearance of a planned extension with its focus on North Leith Parish Church. Development, however, was sporadic and took place over much of the 19th century. The formality of the street layout, the apparent symmetry of the Georgian architecture and disposition of key buildings to create focal points and vistas all contribute to the impression of this area as Leith's own version of the New Town.

This formality is best demonstrated today by Madeira Street and Prince Regent Street, terminated by North Leith Parish Church, in a layout which is an example of scaled down classically inspired urban design. The approach uphill from the Port of Leith to the Church is processional, the climb up the hill accentuating the separation from the water's edge. The uniformity and formality of the layout along Prince Regent Street is softened in the surrounding streets by subtle variations in plot size and building design. The mix of plot widths, the variety of architects involved, the differing house types, larger front gardens and an air of faded grandeur all help to reinforce a more informal and relaxed character.

Ferry Road, the main access to Madeira, is at this point more densely developed and provides a more urban environment of tenements with a mix of commercial uses at ground floor. The intersection with Great Junction Street is the setting for the Town Hall and main library built in the 1930s. Relief to this more urban character is provided by the Memorial Gardens along North Junction Street, Keddie Gardens off Largo Place and the gardens with gable wall mural at the corner of Ferry Road and North Junction Street.



Grain & Density

A number of modern developments have not been sympathetic to the spatial structure. The housing along Portland and Commercial Streets is suburban in scale, although its backland location makes it less apparent. The tower block at Cooper Street is set across the middle of the old street line. The west bank of the river as it approaches the Shore becomes an area of transition from the mainly residential character of Madeira. The mix of small industrial estates, infill 'suburban' housing developments and vacant sites, make the spatial structure less intact and distinctive than that on the east of the Shore. Many of the now subsidiary streets appear to have connected with the water, suggesting a previous need for direct access routes convenient for earlier modes of transport. Whilst the bonded warehouses along Commercial Street form a barrier between Madeira and the port, the connections between these routes and the gaps between warehouses are still apparent.

Streets

The majority of routes into the area link it back to the historical core of Leith. From the east, four bridges cross the river and act as gateways into the area. From the west the descent on the coast road, Lindsay Road, to the raised walkway and six storey mass of the bayed tenement at the corner with North Junction Street creates a sense of passing through into a more dense and urban form of development. Junctions are usually associated with a sense of arrival at the centre of a settlement, but in Leith they are also in gateway locations.

The most used approach today is along Ferry Road, where the boundary and development of the Conservation Area is conterminous with that of the Victoria Park Conservation Area. Ferry Road is one of the oldest routes leading to and from Leith and whilst sequences of differing building heights are discernible along it, these appear to relate to the growth of formerly independent settlements rather than an intention to form gateways.

Ferry Road and Great Junction Street are bounded by a continuous building line, usually of four storey tenements with shops on the ground floor set to the heel of the pavement. Residential uses predominate on the side streets. There is a continuity of three storey tenements along Madeira and Prince Regent Streets, but beyond the building sizes are more mixed. They range from single storey cottages, colony type flats, terraced villas to three and four storey tenements, at some corner locations with shops projecting into the front garden space. Despite this mix they are characterised by a terraced form, and a continuous street frontages only rarely broken by mews lanes or pends through to the rear. Their use of standard proportions, sash and case windows, a similar sand stone and slate roofing reinforces a sense of uniformity, even if less formal than the New Town.



Madeira - Leith's 'New Town'

Building Types

The north side of Commercial Street is occupied almost entirely by former bonded warehouses on a continuous building line right to the heel of the pavement. Their blackened stone work, small window openings, lack of access doors to the street, long eaves and ridge lines are only relieved by changes in height and the occasional rotunda providing light and ventilation to the floors below. Property on the other side of the street includes Leith's original railway station and is more mixed in use and in form.

Landmarks

Madeira Place, with a terrace of circa 1825 on its north side, leads to Madeira Street which has North Leith Parish Church as its centrepiece. The church, with its Greek Doric portico and classical steeple, is an important early example of the Greek Revival style by William Burn and provides a visual focus to this mainly residential area, which also includes major public buildings such as Leith Library and Town Hall.



Materials & Details

The Madeira area retains a largely homogeneous Georgian domestic character, with stone buildings and slate roofs predominating; some of the Georgian buildings retain astragal windows and doors with fanlights.

Streetscape & Activity

The main routes in the area foresaw large volumes of traffic and are significantly broader and straighter than those of the early historic core. With tenements and warehouses directly onto the pavement, they have a robust and practical character, sometimes marked by the remains of railway or tram lines lined by the high Fort stone walls; sturdy cast iron bollards, some of which have recently been identified as old canons, with gates and weighbridges at the accesses to the Port of Leith.

Many of the roads are setted, the main exception being Prince Regent Street, and stone garden walls are a feature of the area.

Leith

Conservation Area

Character Appraisal

Special Characteristics and Key Elements

Topography and Setting

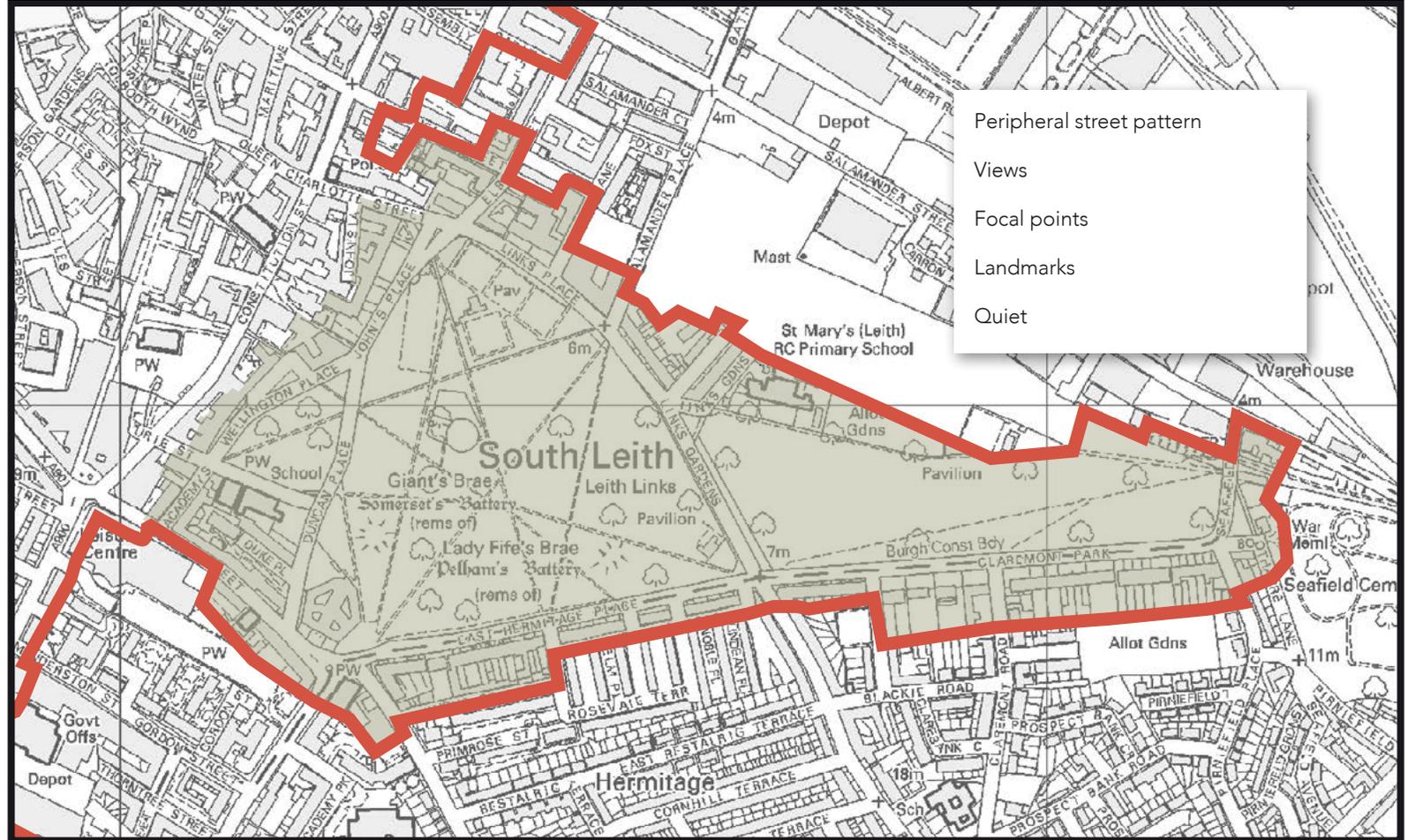
Views

Streets

Scale

Landmarks

Materials & Details



Leith Links - Leith's Early Suburb

Topography & Setting

Leith Links is located to the east of the Conservation Area and is similar in character to those other parks and gardens in Edinburgh, for example the Meadows and Pilrig Park, formed by the draining of former lochs. Development is confined to the outer side of all the roads surrounding it and while the sense of containment by development is greater to the west nearly all the edges are dominated by mature trees. The exception is that part of the north east edge fringed by industrial premises.

Leith Links forms the largest area of open green space in the Conservation Area. The Links once extended as far as Portobello and are intimately associated with the history of Leith. The two visible mounds on the Links, known as the Giant's Brae and Lady Fyfe's Brae, are reputedly old gun emplacements dating back to the siege of Leith in 1560 when the English army bombarded the French held citadel. It was also where the sick were brought during the great plague of 1645. The Links have long provided a recreational facility for Leith being the home of the Leith Races and in the 17th and 18th centuries were recognised as Edinburgh's premier place for golf. It is likely that the golf course was an attraction that resulted in the construction of many fine houses close to the Links.

The present layout of the Links was established in the 1880s as part of the Leith Improvement Scheme. They form the most extensive area of parkland in Leith covering an area of 48 acres (19.44 hectares), and are bordered by John's Place on the west side, Seafield Place on the east and are dissected mid-way by Links Gardens. Their open expanse is in striking contrast to the densely developed parts of Central Leith and areas south of the Links. They form an attractive, large open space with tree-lined avenues and walkways and are used for a whole range of recreational purposes. Facilities include putting and bowling greens, cricket and football pitches and a children's play area. Walkers, joggers and families also extensively use the Links for games and picnics. An allotment area is situated on the north side.

The Links have been designated as a Millennium Park, a status that ensures that it will be protected for the future, and the Artillery Mounds on the Links are Scheduled Ancient Monuments. The park is also recognised as a neighbourhood nature area within the Nature Conservation Strategy.



Views



The focus created where the north ends of Easter and Lochend Roads meet is marked by Leith - St. Andrews Church and the former Leith Academy. Views westwards along Vanburgh Place and through the Links focus on the church spire of Leith St. Andrews and to the bell tower of the former Leith Academy Annex, which terminates the north end of Easter and Lochend Roads. In the distance the spire of St. James Church, once at the heart of the town and still a major landmark, soars above the tree canopy. The tower of Kirkgate House looms up to one side.

The prospect westwards from Hermitage Place has panoramic qualities with the broad expanse of the Links and, in the background, an interesting sequence of contrasting but well-related buildings: Leith Academy, the terraced houses in Wellington Place, massive warehouses with their regular pattern of windows, the Victorian Gothic Church of St James, the unified Georgian terrace in John's Place and the late 18th century detached houses in Queen Charlotte Street.

Duncan Street and John's Place lying behind Constitution Street reflect a more urban character with their mix of institutional and educational uses, churches, warehouses and Georgian tenements. The small triangle of park at Wellington / St Andrew's Place is developed on two sides and could have the appearance of a village green.

Around part of the north side, a harder character is maintained by Victorian tenements. Smaller streets on to Link's Place create permeability. Villa development is located to the south looking over the longest side of the Links and gradually reduces in density as it extends away from the centre.

Leith Links - Leith's Early Suburb

Streets

The openness and greenery of the Links is in contrast to its approaches. From the north east, it is completely obscured by industrial premises and the access is via a sharp turn off from Seafield Road which then passes under a former railway bridge before trees and green are revealed. At the corner of Seafield Road, in the midst of industrial and warehouse sheds, stands the former Seafield Baths, now converted on the ground floor to a public house with flats above. Dating from 1810-13, the building with its projecting doric porticos, linked above by shallow domed roofs forms one of the most graceful buildings turning a street corner in the whole city.

The approach from the west is through the narrow confines of Duke Street. The Links provides a sense of release from Leith's densely tight urban core. The tapering form of the Links accentuates the perspective, making it seem longer and even more spacious. The terraced villas have short front gardens which create a transition in planting from the trees around the Links. There are gate openings for pedestrian access and none of the gardens has been given over to off street car parking. Continuity is given to the varying plot sizes on the south side of the Links by small dwarf walls and railings.

The western side of Leith Links is surrounded by a continuous line of four storey buildings of good architectural quality, which provide a strong edge to the park. The eastern end of the Links tapers to a narrow point, lined on the south by particularly fine two storey Georgian terraces and villas set behind stone boundary walls, and on the north by industrial buildings behind Salamander Street. The sense of containment is enhanced by well-established mature tree planting.

The group of buildings on Claremont Park, designed by Thomas Hamilton from 1827, is of outstanding architectural quality. Designs vary but unity is provided by gatepiers with shallow pyramidal tops and linking screen walls separating the back and front gardens. The terrace on East Hermitage Place, was commenced by the Industrial Co-operative Building Society in 1868, but not completed until 1883. Robert Burn drew up the plan for West Hermitage Place in 1800, and, in 1825, Thomas Bonnar prepared elevations for the unfeued plots. It contains a simple terrace dating from 1805, and later grander houses incorporating rusticated stonework and typical Georgian decoration. Vanburgh Place, a unified terrace, was designed and built by William Lamb from 1825.

Leith Conservation Area Character Appraisal



Leith Links - Leith's Early Suburb

Scale

The earlier villas along Hermitage/Vanburgh Terrace are two storey terraces with the rhythm of their narrow plot widths emphasised by repeating bay windows, original attic dormers and chimney heads giving vitality to their long frontage. These continue down to the entrance to Restalrig Road and are followed by five tenemental four storey blocks. From here to the end of the Links, the villas are two storey semi-detached and detached.

Landmarks

At the east end of the Links are the gates, railings and lodge to Seafield cemetery. Their potential to terminate the view at the end of Claremont Park is partially obscured by mature trees. However, this makes their discovery one of Leith's surprises. Trees also obscure the former St. Andrews Place Church, now the Hindu temple. Its full height pedimented portico and giant ionic columns create a frontage of real presence.

Materials & Details

Unity is given to terraced and detached villas by the continuity of small dwarf walls with railings on the same line along the heel of the pavement. This detail continues along the larger plots of the detached and semi-detached villas where the street becomes Claremont Park. Here entrances are marked by repeating stone gate piers with shallow pyramidal caps and the remains in most cases of cast iron brackets presumably for lights. These provide for vehicular access, and some villas have screen walls separating front and back gardens. 'The Buildings of Edinburgh' cites these villas between the tenements and red sandstone houses at the east end of Claremont Park as " a line of villas whose concentrated architectural quality makes it among the best such group in Edinburgh."

Leith Conservation Area Character Appraisal



Leith Walk - Special Characteristics

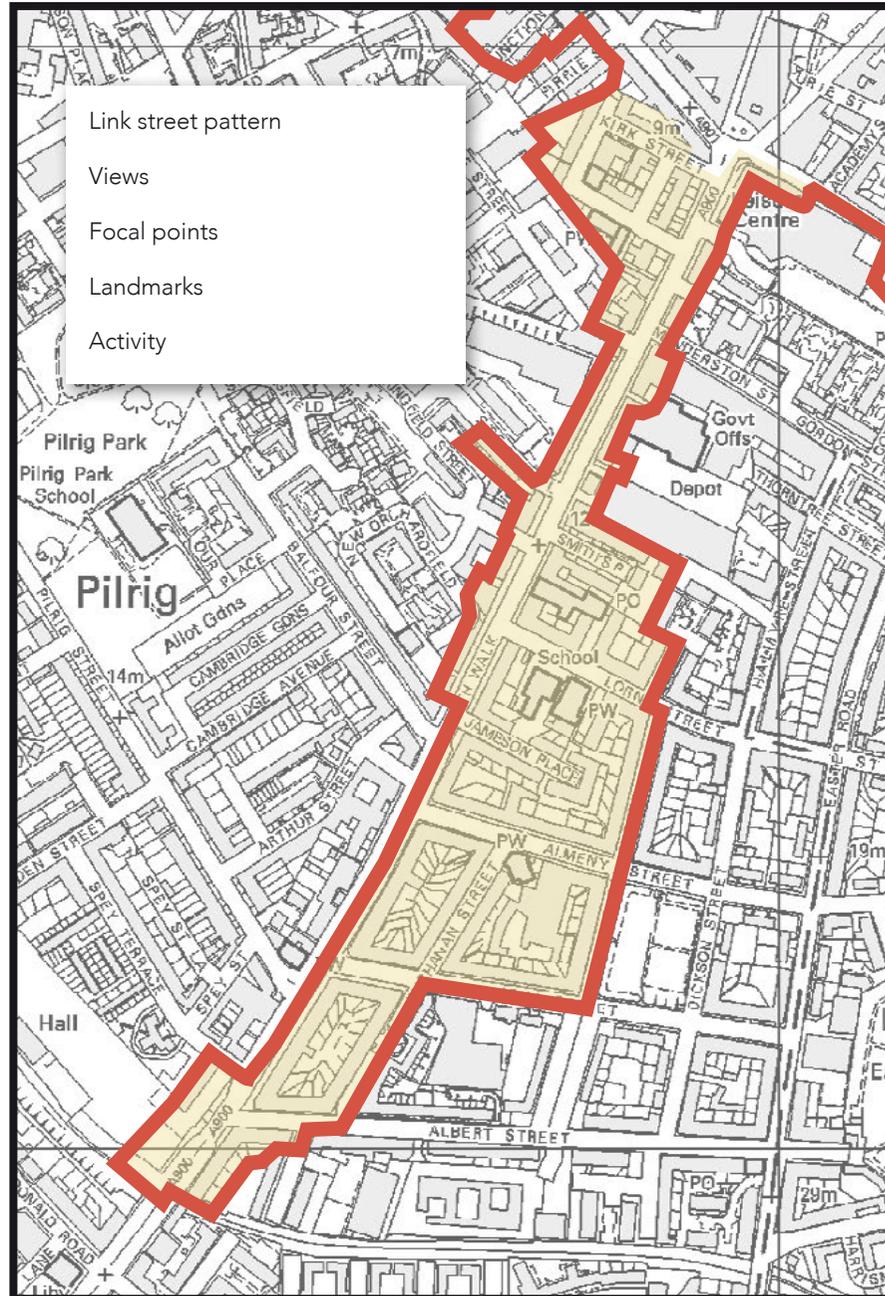
Special Characteristics and Key Elements

Topography and Setting

Grain and Density

Streets

Landmarks



Leith
Conservation Area
Character Appraisal

Leith Walk - Special Characteristics

Topography & Setting

Leith Walk is one of the most important routes in the city. Its continuity as it stretches gradually downhill from the city centre is so prominent that it is clearly visible from many high vantage points around the city. It links the old fortified town of Edinburgh and its sea port, as other European capital cities are linked with their ports.

Grain & Density

Leith Walk is characterised by a mix of buildings of widely varied design, use, quality and relationship to the street. Victorian tenements set to the heel of the pavement predominate, particularly on the east side, with shops and pubs at ground floor level. The west side is less co-ordinated with Georgian development, tenements and industrial buildings. There are number of Georgian survivals, notably Smith's Place, which was laid out as a cul-de-sac by 1814. It consists of a palace fronted block on its north side, later plainer tenements on the south and an architecturally significant two storey villa, with a rusticated basement and Venetian windows, terminating the eastern end of the cul-de-sac. The building at 7 Steads Place is a former small country house dating from around 1750 and is one of the earliest on Leith Walk.

Streets

Leith Walk starts outside the Conservation Area. The steep slope and narrow street width down from the former North British Hotel frames the dramatic view up to its landmark clock tower. To the north, from the Picardy Place roundabout the views are gradually restricted by the changing street width. From the roundabout and clock at the junction with London Road the street seems to pick up momentum for its journey northwards. The slope downhill and the gentle curve draw the traveller along the street in the absence of any one particular focal point, until Kirkgate House becomes visible. Pilrig Church acts as a pivot to this curve helping to add to the momentum. The Foot of the Walk with its set back to the west gives the impression of another elongated square like that at Bernard Street, and provides a sense of arrival. The gently curving form of the street is accentuated by the greenways, heavy white lines and raised central reservation. Many of the side streets retain their setts which reflect the different colours of sandstone in the buildings giving an 'integrity' to the townscape and helping to slow traffic.

Leith Conservation Area Character Appraisal



Leith Walk - Special Characteristics

A hard continuous edge is given to the east by almost uniform and repetitive tenements. These continue to form traditional perimeter blocks around common greens down the side streets. These are given life by the local communities and the variety of goods and services on offer in ground floor premises.

The side streets to the east are mainly residential, but several include churches or a school and just to the edge of the area are completely taken up by a park such as at Iona / Sloan Streets. One exception to this block form is Smith's Place, the focus of which is the splendid decorative and pedimented villa by James Smith.

The development pattern, building types and uses on the west side are more diverse. Tenements are still the predominant form, but they show much greater variety in their design, heights, building lines, roofscapes and ages which in many cases look much earlier than that to the east. In places tenements are interspersed with town houses or smaller tenements well set back with front gardens to the street. Middlefield is a small Georgian mansion which has development in its original front garden and the corner tenement into Pilrig Street is followed by Georgian villas gently stepping down the hill towards Pilrig Park.

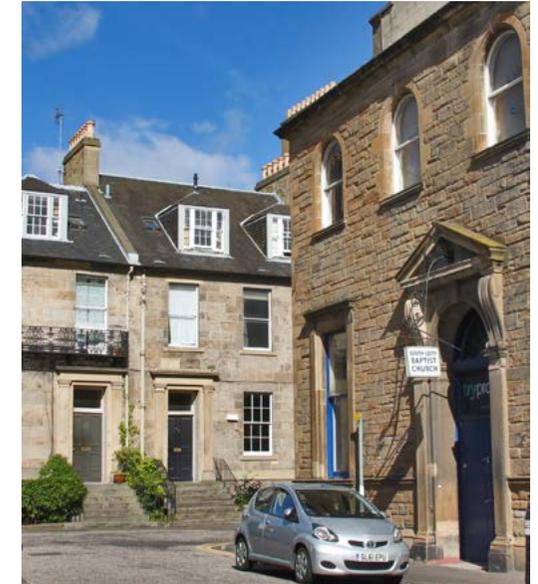
Casselbank Street with its mix of Turkish and gothic inspired architecture is set against more Georgian survivals. This demonstrates the importance of the building line and the perimeter block as organising elements in the development pattern and shows, in contrast to the formal and planned development of Smith's Place, how an informal and almost romantic architecture can also produce significant townscape.



Smith's Place

Leith Walk is a busy urban thoroughfare and the main road linking the centre of Edinburgh to the old burgh of Leith. It has a strongly directional character, rising gently from the Foot of the Walk, with linear vistas. It is terminated to the north by the tower block of the New Kirkgate development which contrasts with the visual scale of the bay fronted Georgian building at the Foot of the Walk which forms the foreground.

Leith Conservation Area Character Appraisal



Casselbank Street

Leith Walk - Special Characteristics

Landmarks

The Foot of Leith Walk, where four roads and a pedestrian route meet, is an important arrival point in the Conservation Area and a lively commercial and social focal point. The bronze statue of Queen Victoria, which stands in a central position in the area of open space with a low bow fronted Georgian block as a backdrop, is one of Leith's principal landmarks.

Kirkgate House, despite its camouflaged outline, towers over the Foot of the Walk making it appear out of context with its surroundings. Pilrig Church with its cascading roofscapes to Pilrig Street and its spire and eastern facade which terminate Iona Street are as good as the set pieces in some of the city's better known locations. Less dominant, but with the reflection of a different culture, the accentuated roofscapes and distantly familiar timber belfry of the Ukrainian Catholic Church gives added interest to Dalmeny Street.

The spiky Gothic spire of Pilrig and Dalmeny Street Church, approximately halfway down Leith Walk, is a conspicuous and important landmark at what was the old boundary between the City of Edinburgh and the former Burgh of Leith. A slight curve in the street line at Pilrig prevents a continuous vista along the full length of the street.



Conservation areas

The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997 states that conservation areas "are areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance". Local authorities have a statutory duty to identify and designate such areas.

Special attention must be paid to the character and appearance of the conservation area when planning controls are being exercised. Conservation area status brings a number of special controls:

- The demolition of unlisted buildings requires conservation area consent.
- Permitted development rights, which allow improvements or alterations to the external appearance of dwellinghouses and flatted dwellings, are removed.
- Works to trees are controlled (see Trees for more detail).

The demolition of unlisted buildings considered to make a positive contribution to the area is only permitted in exceptional circumstances, and where the proposals meet certain criteria relating to condition, conservation deficit, adequacy of efforts to retain the building and the relative public benefit of replacement proposals. Conservation area character appraisals are a material consideration when considering applications for development within conservation areas.

Listed buildings

A significant proportion of buildings within Leith are listed for their special architectural or historic interest and are protected under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997. Listed building consent is required for the demolition of a listed building, or its alteration or extension in any manner which would affect its special character.

National policy

The Scottish Historic Environment Policy (SHEP) is the strategic statement of national policy relating to the historic environment.

The Development Plan

The Edinburgh City Local Plan sets out policies and proposals for the development and use of land in the City. The policies in the Plan are used to determine applications for development.

In broad summary, the key policy areas affecting the Leith Conservation Area are:

- Design of new development DES 1, 3, 5, 11, 12
- Listed buildings ENV 2-4
- Conservation areas ENV 5-6
- Historic gardens and designed landscapes ENV 7
- Archaeology ENV 8-9
- Trees ENV 12
- Natural heritage and nature conservation ENV 10-16

The proposed City of Edinburgh Local Development Plan (LDP) contains broadly similar policies and is a material consideration in current planning decisions.

Planning guidance

More detailed, subject-specific guidance is set out in Planning Guidance documents. Those particularly relevant to the Leith Conservation Area are:

- Guidance for Householders
- Guidance for Businesses
- Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas
- Developer contributions and affordable housing
- Edinburgh Design guidance
- Communications Infrastructure
- Street Design Guidance - draft to be published

In addition, a number of statutory tools are available to assist development management within the conservation area:

GPDO and Article 4 Directions

The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Scotland) Order 1992, amended 2012, (abbreviated to GPDO), restricts the types of development which can be carried out in a conservation area without the need for planning permission. These include most alterations to the external appearance of dwellinghouses and flats. Development is not precluded, but such alterations will require planning permission and special attention will be paid to the potential effect of proposals. See Guidance on Householder Permitted Development Rights 2012.

Under Article 4 of the GPDO the planning authority can seek the approval of the Scottish Ministers for Directions that restrict development rights further. The Directions effectively control the proliferation of relatively minor developments in conservation areas which can cumulatively lead to the erosion of character and appearance. The Leith Conservation Area has Article 4 Directions covering the following classes of development:

- 7 The erection, construction, maintenance, improvement or alteration of a gate, fence, wall or other means of enclosure;
- 23 The extension or alteration of an industrial building or a warehouse;

- 24 Development carried out on industrial land for the purposes of an industrial process;
- 25 The creation of a hard surface within the curtilage of an industrial building or warehouse;
- 35 Development on operational land by statutory undertakers in respect of dock, pier, harbour, water transport, or canal or inland navigation undertakings;
- 38 Development by statutory undertakers for the purpose of water undertakings;
- 39 Development by public gas supplier; and
- 40 Development by electricity statutory undertaker.

Trees

Trees within conservation areas are covered by the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997. This Act applies to the uprooting, felling or lopping of a tree having a diameter exceeding 75mm at a point 1.5m above ground level. The planning authority must be given six weeks notice of the intention to uproot, fell or lop trees. Failure to give notice will render the person liable to the same penalties as for contravention of a Tree Preservation Order (TPO).

TPOs are used to secure the preservation of trees which are of significant stature, in sound condition, and prominently located to be of public amenity value. When assessing contribution to amenity, the importance of trees as wildlife habitats will be taken into consideration. There is a strong presumption against any form of development or change of use of land which is likely to damage or prejudice the future long term existence of trees covered by a TPO. The removal of trees for arboricultural reasons will not imply that the space created by their removal can be used for development.

Landscape and Biodiversity

The Council has an obligation to take account of the impact of development on species protected by legislation and international commitments. The Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 places a duty on all public bodies to further the conservation of biodiversity as far as is consistent with their functions.

Landscape and Scenery

Local Nature Sites and Protected Species

Archaeology (historical map)

Leith's archaeology contains some of Scotland's best urban archaeological deposits and historic buildings. Recent excavations within its historic core have established evidence for a pre-burgh (pre 1128) settlement and for the development of the town and port from 12th century to the present day.

The wealth of archaeological remains and artefacts has aided the understanding of medieval domestic life. Due to Leith's role as a port and its importance in the development of trade, there is a vast legacy of industrial and maritime artefacts still visible including cranes, dry docks and warehouses.



Management - Pressures and Sensitivities

The following pressures are associated with development proposals which conservation area designation, together with the Council's policies and guidance, are designed to manage. The Edinburgh Design Guidance, Guidance for Householders and Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas explain the Council's approach to design in historic contexts.

Townscape

The quality of the townscape is a critical factor in the enhancement of the conservation area. It is essential that the traditional townscape character is preserved and enhanced, and that a high quality, sustainable and vibrant environment is created for present and future communities. Respect for design should be demonstrated in the way new buildings are inserted into the framework of the existing townscape; on the one hand respecting its scale and form while on the other producing contemporary architecture of the highest quality.

Public Realm

The public realm of Leith offers a wealth of streets, squares and spaces, gardens and pedestrian spaces which act as a setting for the historic buildings and make an important contribution to the architectural character of the area. However, many of

these would benefit from improvement. There are also few linkages available to the Port of Leith, and integration is essential between the port and the tenemental heartland.

Public realm improvements should take account of a range of issues including; transport movement, pedestrian flow, street furniture, lighting and landscape quality.

The main objective is to ensure that the public realm is regarded and understood as an historic element of the Leith Conservation Area, and that any alterations to it take the historical and cultural significance of the public realm into consideration.

Architectural Character

Leith's architectural character with both civic and commercial institutions reflects its former independence and maritime history. The historical and architectural importance of Leith is reflected in the concentration of statutorily listed buildings in the area. However, many historic buildings are no longer used for their original purpose, require extensive repairs and are vacant or under utilised.

Generally, a low priority is given to ongoing building maintenance and repair which is exacerbated due to the levels of multiple ownership. More detailed historic building issues include: stone work deterioration,

missing architectural details (such as railings and decorative stone enhancement), poorly executed mortar repairs, leaking rainwater goods and structural movement. The quality of alterations to shop fronts, extensions, dormers and other minor alterations needs to be improved.

Important heritage features, within Leith, range in scale from small streetscape items such as bollards, rail lines and quay walls to larger scale structures. These should be integrated into developments providing a valuable contribution to the identity and quality of the public realm.

Activities and Uses

Leith is an intensively developed urban area with a multiplicity of land use activities co-existing with the predominant residential use. It contains a full range of social, commercial and community facilities, and performs an important shopping and service role for people working and living in the area.

There has been a substantial reduction in Leith's traditional manufacturing and port related industries around which its growth was based. However, industry remains an important land use in Leith, and is now spread across a more diverse base with increasing growth in the service and technology sectors.

Leith

Conservation Area

Character Appraisal

Community

Residential uses, within mainly traditional tenement property and with retail uses on the ground floors, predominate. However, some recent development has seen the erosion of such mixed uses and a creation of single-use zones of shopping, business and housing.

It is important to support the vitality and viability of Leith Walk, the Foot of the Walk and Great Junction St as a retail and commercial centre. Environmental improvements and repairs within and around the shopping area are required to help create a safer and more attractive shopping environment.

High traffic volumes threaten the character of the Conservation Area particularly of Bernard Street, Commercial Street, Great Junction Street and Ferry Road. New development should incorporate safe access by a range of means of transport options. The design of development can assist in altering the relative attractiveness of different transport modes and in encouraging means of access other than by private car. In considering the design of development, priority should be given to providing convenient access for pedestrians and cyclists. The intrusive effect of car parking should also be sensitively controlled.

Community regeneration involves building strong, safe and attractive places. The quality of houses, shops, commercial premises, community facilities, local parks, green spaces, play areas, roads and pavements directly impact on the image and sense of comfort and safety.

Recent, high value new development has attracted people on higher than average incomes whose lifestyles are in contrast to many local residents living in the tenemental heartland. A critical concern for local people and business is about "closing the gap" to ensure that the whole community benefits, from increased investment, in a sustainable and balanced way. In particular, there is evidence through public consultations of the priority need to ensure a continuing sense of place and belonging, one in which old traditions remain alongside the new in a mixed, balanced and sustainable community.

Natural Heritage

The Water of Leith Walkway and Corridor is central to the Conservation Area and important for its natural heritage, open space and recreational value. It is designated as an Urban Wildlife Site and is an important habitat for a wide range of flora and fauna. The Firth of Forth coastline

is recognised for its natural heritage importance, in providing important open space and in the setting of the Conservation Area. The extensive area of open space at Leith Links the local parks and green space within the urban area are also important for their seclusion, historic context, recreational and natural heritage value. The existing tree groups and specimens are particularly important to the character of the Conservation Area.

The Forth coastline is generally recognised for its natural heritage importance and in many parts provides important open space. The Port of Leith separates the Conservation Area from a direct relationship with the estuary. The outer shoreline is protected as both an Urban Wildlife Site in Edinburgh and as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) nationally. Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ramsar status, that give it European/ International importance for its wintering bird populations and wetlands, reinforce the SSSI designation. Under this designation proposals are being drawn up for the creation of a tern colony within the western harbour area.

Port of Leith

Forth Ports is the statutory Harbour Authority for the Firth of Forth and performs a number of functions as prescribed by legislation including overseeing the safety of navigation and licensing of all works between the tidal limits inland and the mouth of the Firth.

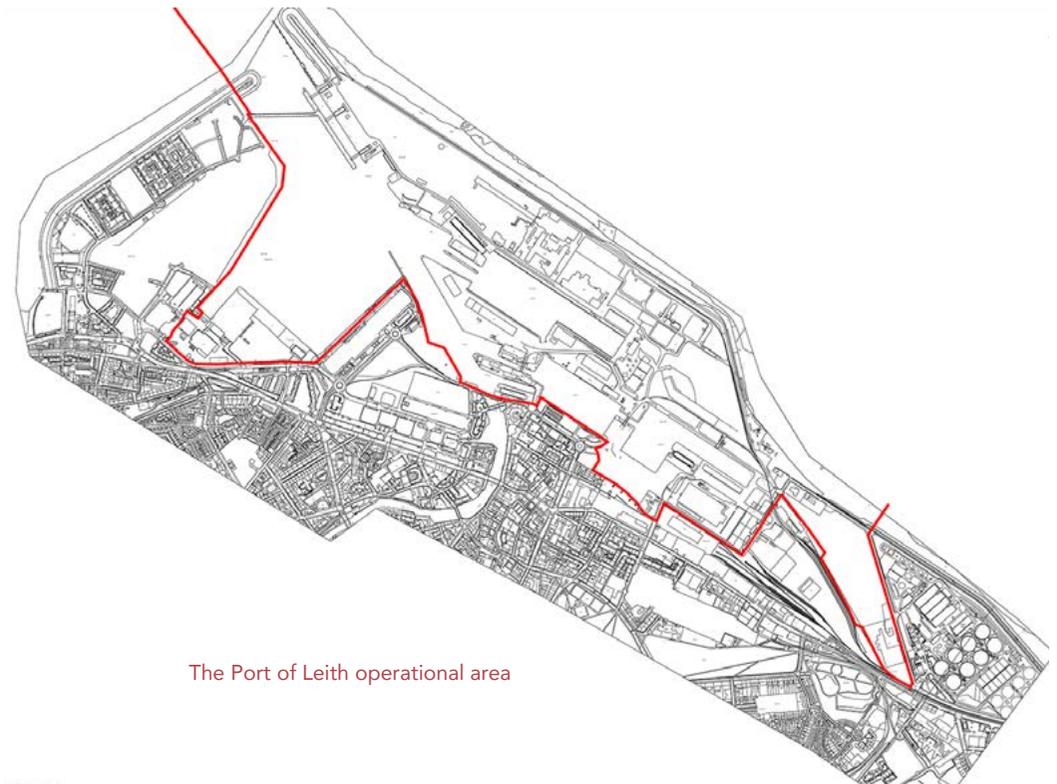
The Port of Leith has been in existence since the 14th Century and Leith has been shaped and grown up around the Port, helping to give it the history and character it has today. The Port has had to adapt over years to the changing economy and has been successful in doing this and making it a key asset for both Edinburgh and Forth Ports.

Forth Ports Limited has a clear strategy to continue as an infrastructure business and has stated its commitment to the continued operation of the Port of Leith as a port infrastructure operation, utilising its operational estate in its entirety for port operational uses. The City of Edinburgh Council and Forth Ports Ltd are committed to working in partnership. This approach will enable the economic benefits to be realised from the Port of Leith's unique assets supporting the local Leith, wider City economies and beyond.

Forth Ports Ltd will continue to function as a port operation infrastructure organisation. The Port requires flexibility to deliver the best service it can for its customers. This relates to both land usage as well as cargo handling services. The port estate is well utilised and despite some perceptions that there are large areas of land lying empty, this is not the case. Land within the Port will continue to be fully utilised for port use. These areas include the main port estate, Britannia Quay and Seafield. All these areas are important to the port operation and will continue to remain in industrial use.

Over recent years the Port of Leith has experienced an increase in activity, with 2014 being recorded as its most successful year in recent times. The Port hosts some 500-600 vessel calls per year and handles around 1 million tonnes of cargo. The Port of Leith is responsible for 533 (full time equivalent) jobs and supports the provision of local goods and services. In addition, the Port of Leith provides 'free' berth to the Royal Yacht Britannia. Through port enabled projects it generates in the region of £133M GVA per annum and 1,556 (full time equivalent) jobs.

The Port of Leith is the largest impounded deepwater port in Scotland of which Imperial Dock is a key infrastructure asset. This allows it to handle vessels which cannot be handled elsewhere within the country and underlines how important the Port is at a national level. It accommodates and can handle a broad range of requirements. A key strength is its flexibility, which allows it to respond to a range of markets.



The Port of Leith operational area

Management - Opportunities for Planning Action

The Council recognises that the Leith Conservation Area is a living environment that will continue to adapt and develop. Conservation area status does not mean a prohibition on development. The Council will carefully manage change to ensure that the character and appearance of conservation areas are safeguarded and enhanced. The following are the main aims within the conservation area:

- To ensure that the historic and architectural character of listed buildings in the Leith Conservation Area is maintained, there is a presumption against demolition. Alterations should not harm the elements that contribute to the special interest of the building and its setting.
- To promote new high quality architecture which is sympathetic to the historic character, reflects and interprets the particular qualities of its surroundings, and responds to and reinforces the distinctive patterns of development, townscape, landscape, scale, materials and quality in the Leith Conservation Area.
- To ensure that historic street patterns, open spaces, associated landscaping and materials are maintained, protected and enhanced, and that any alterations give due consideration to the historical and cultural significance of the public realm.

- To require the highest standards of materials and workmanship for all works associated with the built heritage.
- Materials and techniques should respect traditional practice.



Leith Conservation Area Character Appraisal

The ancient Port of Leith and in particular the Old Inner Harbour, dating from 1143 was the most significant harbour in Scotland for centuries. The original layout of the four Inner Harbour basins remains unchanged, other than the introduction or replacement of bridges and the infilling of associated dry docks, some of which are designated Ancient Monuments. While a number of buildings that faced onto the basins have been demolished a significant number of historically important properties remain, many listed and in good condition.

The regeneration of the area, further enhanced by the recent improvements carried out on the south Shore, has reinforced the Inner Harbour basins as the focus of this part of central Leith.

The Water of Leith is an important corridor for wildlife and supports a rich diversity of flora and fauna. The Inner Harbour basins are home to many water birds and the river otters are regular visitors to the basins.

The closure of the tidal flow of the Water of Leith in 1968 has contributed significantly to silting of the harbour basins with the consequent increased risk of flooding, which has noticeably risen in recent years. Silting and the construction of bridges mean that the basins are no longer navigable - existing barges have been brought in by crane. These, together with the adjacent overgrown trees and uncontrolled parking, block the view of the water and restrict public use of the harbour side along the length of the North Shore, much to the detriment of the many quality restaurants opposite. There are, therefore, concerns that the character and amenity of the area will be adversely affected further by any increase in the number of fixed barges in the Inner Harbour basins or other inappropriate developments.

Sources

Buildings of Scotland: Edinburgh. J. Gifford, C. McWilliam & D. Walker, Penguin, 1984.

Leith Lives-Memories at Work. Photographs and reminiscences collected and published by the Leith Oral History Project, 1985.

Leith Today. Ramsay Head Press, Edinburgh, 1974.

Old Leith at Leisure. J. S. Marshall, Edina Press, Edinburgh, 1976.

Old and New Statistical Accounts of Scotland: Edinburgh and Leith entries, 1791-99 & 1845.

The Life and Times of Leith. J. S. Marshall, John Donald, Edinburgh, 1985.

The Sculptured Stones of Leith. D. H. Robertson, Reid & Sons, Leith, 1851.

The Story of Leith. J. Russell, London, 1925.

The Water of Leith. Ed. S. Jamieson, The Water of Leith Project Group, 1984.

Traditions of Trinity and Leith. J. M. Wallace, John Donald, Edinburgh. 1985

Leith

Conservation Area

Character Appraisal



Leith

Conservation Area Character Appraisal

For further information please contact:

built.heritage@edinburgh.gov.uk

0131 529 4238