



Old Town
Conservation Area
Character Appraisal

World Heritage Status

The Old Town Conservation Area forms part of the Old and New Towns of Edinburgh World Heritage Site which was inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage Site list in 1995. This was in recognition of the outstanding architectural, historical and cultural importance of the Old and New Towns of Edinburgh.

Inscription as a World Heritage Site brings no additional statutory powers. However, in terms of UNESCO's criteria, the conservation and protection of the World Heritage Site are paramount issues. Inscription commits all those involved with the development and management of the Site to ensure measures are taken to protect and enhance the area for future generations.

Edinburgh World Heritage was established in 1999 by a merger of the Old Town Renewal Trust and the New Town Conservation Committee. The World Heritage Site is managed, protected and promoted through a partnership comprising Edinburgh World Heritage, Historic Environment Scotland and the City of Edinburgh Council. This Character Appraisal should be read in conjunction with the Management Plan for the World Heritage Site.

The Outstanding Universal Value of the World Heritage Site describes the features which contribute to its international importance.

Old and New Towns of Edinburgh World Heritage Site Management Plan.



Old and New Towns of Edinburgh World Heritage Statement of Outstanding Universal Value



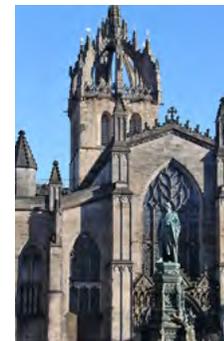
Statement of Significance

The Old Town is the historic heart of Edinburgh and is interwoven with the narrative of Scotland's past. A unique quality of the Old Town is the clarity of its historical plan form against the background of a spectacular landscape. The plan of the Old Town has retained much of its ancient pattern and distinctive character. It is an environment of enclosed streets and dramatic changes of level with numerous framed distant views. The skilful use of land contours, the careful siting and design of individual buildings and groups of buildings, and the use of local stone, combine to create an intricate and varied character.

It is a microcosm of urban development, reflecting a long history from the earliest needs for shelter and protection, though cycles of intensification and expansion, with consequent phases of improvement, conservation or re-development.

The conservation area incorporates Scotland's ancient capital and is characterised by:

- the survival of the little altered medieval 'herringbone' street pattern of narrow closes, wynds and courts leading off the spine formed by the Royal Mile;
- its 16th and 17th century merchants' and nobles' houses;
- important early public buildings such as the Canongate Tolbooth and St Giles Cathedral;
- the quality and massing of stonework; and
- the density and height of its picturesque multi-storey buildings.



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The Conservation Area ranks as one of the most important in the United Kingdom, in terms of both its architectural and historic interest. Its significance is reflected in the extensive number of Statutorily Listed Buildings, the number of tourists that visit the area, and its international recognition as part of the UNESCO designated Edinburgh Old and New Towns World Heritage Site.



Purpose of Character Appraisals

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.

Planning Advice Note PAN 71: Conservation Area Management specifies that:

'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.'



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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.'



How To Use This Document

The analysis of the Old Town's character and appearance focuses on the features which make the area 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. The Management section outlines the policy and legislation relevant to decision-making in the area. Issues specific to the Old Town are discussed in more detail and recommendations or opportunities identified.



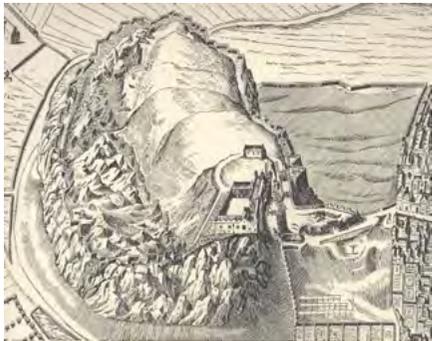
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Historical Origins and Development

A complex interplay of various elements has shaped the character of the Old Town. The Castle Rock is the hard core of a 350 million-year-old volcano, buried and subsequently revealed by the erosion of glaciers in the last Ice Age. The eastward flow of the ice left the characteristic 'crag and tail' of the Castle Rock and the Old Town Ridge, together with parallel valleys to the north and south. The location of the original settlement was strategic and occupation of the naturally defensible site can be traced back as far as the Bronze Age.



The rock of Edinburgh commanded the point where the Roman route from the south reached the firth of Forth. The first literary reference to Edinburgh can be traced to the 6th century Welsh heroic poem *Y Gododdin*, in which it is referred to as *Din Eityn*. The name became *Dunedene* in Gaelic, which is *Edineburg* in English (*Din*, *Dun* and *burg* all having the same meaning of fortress).

A Royal Castle was present on the Castle Rock from at least the 10th century and the first buildings in Edinburgh were hard by the Castle, for protection. The only adjacent site for development was the long ridge spreading eastwards down to Holyrood Abbey, which was founded by David I in 1128. Separate medieval settlements, Edinburgh and the Canongate, grew astride the ridge.

By the 12th century, Edinburgh was granted 'Royal Burgh' status and the Canongate, was a Burgh of Barony under the Canons of Holyrood Abbey. The principal streets of the two burghs, formerly separated by the Netherbow Port (gate), form what has been known since the 16th century as the Royal Mile. The Royal Charters also granted the right to hold markets, an important economic concession.

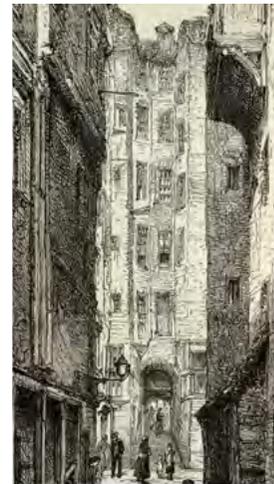


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In the early medieval period, the Old Town was a relatively spacious place with a population of around 2,000 and the houses were of a semi-rural character, perhaps two floors in height with 'Burgess plots' - long narrow strips of land, known as rigs or tofts - running down either side of the ridge. These strips of land were originally cultivated, but by the early 14th century, as the population increased, the houses were rebuilt higher. Further buildings were erected at right angles to the street on the tofts, which were gradually covered until only a narrow access passage, the close, remained.



By 1540, the population had increased to around 10,000. The High Street was continuously built up with markets in its wider stretches, the Canongate had buildings in each toft, and the suburbs of the Grassmarket and Cowgate were in existence. The outlying suburbs were brought within the Burgh during the 16th and 17th centuries by the construction of the Flodden and Telfer Walls. On the accession of the Stewart Kings in the 15th century, Edinburgh became the capital of Scotland. A Royal Court was established at Holyrood, resulting in the development of numerous nobles' town houses in the Canongate.

Until the second half of the 18th century, Edinburgh was constrained by the town walls and confined to the crest and flanks of the sloping ridge linking the Castle with Holyrood. Within that relatively small area were distributed the military, administrative, craft, merchant, market, religious and residential functions of the city. Edinburgh's constricted site meant that as its population increased the original burgess tofts or strips of land were subdivided, with development being forced upwards rather than outwards. The result was



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a dense pattern of tall buildings stretching downhill to the north and south of the High Street, separated by numerous closes. In 1752, it was recorded in a report that 'the houses stand more crowded than any other town in Europe and are built to a height that is almost incredible'.



Ainslie, 1780

Most Old Town buildings featured timber frontages and thatched roofs until the expansive rebuilding programme in the earlier part of the 17th century. A number of controls to improve the quality of construction were also introduced. From at least the 16th century, building control was enforced through the Dean of Guild, and this had an effect on the development of the Old Town. For instance, as a precaution against fire, from 1621, roofing materials had to be either tile or slate, and from 1674, facades had to be of stone. In the same year, regular glazing pattern arrangements and 'piazzas', ground-floor arcades, were recommended.

The population of Edinburgh gradually increased within the restrictive town walls during the 17th and early 18th centuries. This resulted in even greater increases in the height and density of buildings, which strained existing servicing and access arrangements, as the Old Town grew, 'piled deep and massy, close and high'.



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At the midpoint of the 18th century, conditions for the population were very mixed. One estimate shows that 10 per cent of the population lived in houses fronting the main streets, 60 per cent in the densely packed closes, 20 per cent in dugouts or sheds, with the remaining 10 per cent being without regular shelter.

The deteriorating condition of the Old Town resulted in a number of rebuilding initiatives to remove and replace the most squalid and unsafe parts of the building stock. The major innovation of the 17th century was the amalgamation of tofts and their redevelopment as courts surrounded by tenements, following an Act of 1644 which gave the Town Council power of compulsory purchase over derelict property. Parliament Close was rebuilt on these lines after 1675, and the climax was reached with Royal Exchange Square (now the City Chambers) in 1754-7.



The Act of Union of 1707 and the suppression of the Jacobite insurgencies provided a settled political and social climate that allowed Edinburgh to contemplate expansion beyond the City walls. Until the deep contours each side of the Old Town ridge were spanned by a series of monumental bridges, the naturally constrained site of the city posed problems. With the construction of these bridges from 1763, geology no longer dictated how the city would develop, and new roads were cut through the medieval pattern of tofts and closes. The bridges also facilitated the development of the New Town.

During the second half of the 18th century, the conditions in the overcrowded Old Town also contributed to a shift of population to the newly developed New Town, and the Old Town experienced progressively rapid social and commercial decline. The extent of the problem was highlighted by the collapse of a tenement in Paisley Close with multiple loss of life. When Henry Littlejohn, Edinburgh's first Medical Officer of Health, surveyed mid-Victorian Edinburgh, the Old Town emerged as an unhealthy, squalid, overcrowded and insanitary area in desperate need of remedial action. An important strand in the subsequent response by the authorities was the demolition of unfit housing and the implementation of Improvement Schemes.



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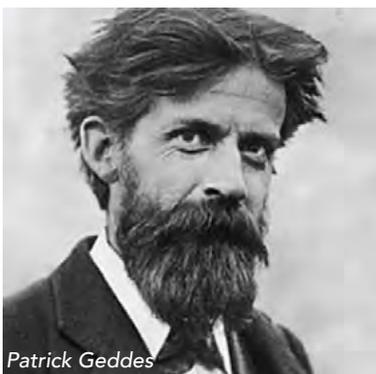
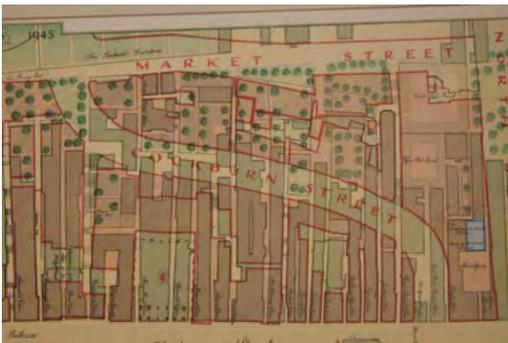
Other significant improvements included: the removal of structures such as the Luckenbooths in the High Street; and the clearing of spaces, such as James Court, behind the main streets, to allow the penetration of air and light and provide higher amenity housing. Several new streets were also constructed, with the specific purpose of locally truncating the dense network of closes and wynds.

These were facilitated by the Improvement Acts of 1790, (South Bridge), 1827 (Victoria Street, George IV Bridge and Johnston Terrace), 1853 (Cockburn Street) and 1867 (Jeffrey Street, Chambers Street and St Mary's Street). All these new streets were lined with new buildings built to strict controls. The motives of social improvement and concern for the historic centre of Scotland proved mutually advantageous during this period with the architects of the 'Edinburgh Improvement Act', David Cousins and John Lessels, adopting a romantic Baronial style. The Improvement Schemes included the construction of a number of institutional buildings, and the net effect was gains in terms of access and environmental conditions but losses in the total, albeit defective, housing stock.

Late in the 19th century, the Old Town was the scene of important experiments in inner city regeneration by Sir Patrick Geddes, a pioneer in sociology and urban planning who proposed re-using older buildings.

Development during the first half of the 20th century continued to follow a tenemental form, similar to that established in the previous 150 years. In some areas, notably the Canongate, residential accommodation was included on the ground floor, while in other areas, for example Ramsay Garden and Tron Square, architects experimented with the reintroduction of 'harled' walls and other picturesque elements.

In the early post-war decades, a major effort was made by Edinburgh Corporation to renovate the residential fabric of the Old Town. This had a significant impact in the Canongate and was achieved through a mix of new building and conservation. Robert Hurd worked on bringing many of the Canongate tenements up to date by restoration or rebuilding, following the pioneering work at 221-229 Canongate by the City Architect, E J MacRae. Hurd's work included Shoemakers' Land, Bible Land and Morocco Land.



Patrick Geddes



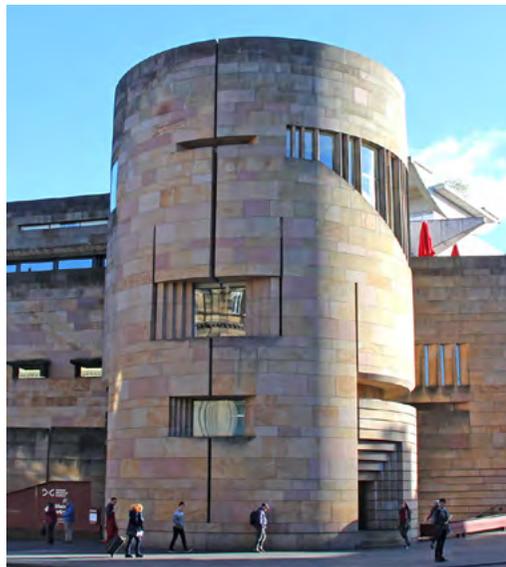
In 1947, the City Architect, EJ MacRae, also published two reports *The Royal Mile* and *The Heritage of Greater Edinburgh*, which were brief, well documented inventories of the city's historic and architectural assets and were intended as a basis for a preservation and protection policy. However, despite these measures and influenced by the wholesale redevelopment envisaged by the 1949 Abercrombie Plan, the Old Town entered a period of decline.

The population of the Old Town reached its lowest point at the time of the 1981 Census, and the environmental problems arising from gap sites and derelict properties pointed to the need for a broader range of investment and innovative renewal approaches. Recognition of this led to an emphasis being placed on a more sympathetic approach to restoration and rehabilitation. The Edinburgh Old Town Renewal Trust was established in 1985, and restoration initiatives by various agencies have preserved properties, substantially improved the visual appearance of the Old Town and recreated a sense of the traditional morphology.

More recent initiatives to restore and rehabilitate the Old Town buildings have been undertaken. One of the most successful, dating from the late 1970s, is at 14-42 High Street where sheltered housing, shops and the Museum of Childhood were skilfully integrated in a mix of new development and restoration, with effective use made of interconnecting closes.



The mid-1990s extension to the National Museum of Scotland on Chambers Street combines ashlar cladding with a bold massing of diagonals and incisions, and a prominent corner round tower intended to reflect the Half Moon Battery of the Castle and refer to early Scottish traditional broch designs. This was followed in 1998 by the flamboyant modernism of the design for the new Scottish Parliament.



A number of small-scale interventions follow patterns established by existing buildings and historical reference. The design of the infill building at 112 Canongate for the Old Town Housing Association is a modern interpretation of what were once common elements of town houses in the Old Town: a colonnaded ground floor to the street, external stairs, horizontally-gal-leried windows and cantilevered upper floors projecting over the street. A limited palette of largely traditional materials is used in a modern and creative way to create interest and incident, and considerable richness of texture.



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Structure

Topography

Edinburgh has one of the most spectacular settings of any European city. The natural processes of volcanic eruptions, land upheaval, erosion and deposition have profoundly influenced the topography of the Old Town. The rock formation that creates the impressive setting of the Castle is the result of the erosion of the remains of a volcano which erupted 350 million years ago and cooled as a plug of very hard dolerite rock. Two million years ago, as glaciers moved eastwards, the softer surrounding sedimentary rock was scoured away, leaving the 'crag' that forms the Castle Rock, the 'tail' which forms the Royal Mile and the parallel valleys to the north and south.

The character of the Old Town owes much to the formation of its topography by these prehistoric volcanic and glacial processes. The historic core respects the topography, sloping down from the Castle Rock to the Abbey and Palace of Holyroodhouse. Its multi-layered townscape of vertical facades builds up to a skyline punctuated by spires, domes, towers and the battlemented walls around the Castle.

A key element in giving Edinburgh its world-wide identity is the perception of the Old Town in approaches to the city. The topography of the Old Town makes it both very visible and provides a wide range of dramatic views. The Castle and the Old Town ridge dominate the Edinburgh skyline, not just from the present day city boundaries, but also in many more distant views and approaches to the city.



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Setting and Edges

The Old Town is visible from many land and sea approaches to the city. Though part of the continuous built-up form of the city in distant views, the Old Town is surrounded to quite a considerable extent by a natural setting.

To the north lies Princes Street Gardens, which curve around the western end of the Castle Rock, and the sides of Calton Hill. The Conservation Area boundary to the south contains the open grounds of Heriot's School and the Greyfriars Kirk graveyard. The section of the Conservation Area adjoining the South Side Conservation Area is built up for a short section, but then it is bounded by the Queens Park and the green space to the east of Holyrood Palace. Arthur's Seat is a major natural feature, bringing today's Green Belt right in to the city, and offers a major viewing point not just for the Old Town but the whole city.



The northern and north-western approaches are via improvement streets: the Mound, Johnston Terrace and King Stables Road. Passing through open stretches of gardens and providing a setting for the Castle before entering the built up area of the Old Town, these also provide a clear sense of arrival. They connect with another major north/south route through the area, George IV Bridge, from which, as at South Bridge, the drama of the changes in topography to the other major east/west route of the Cowgate below are revealed.



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The main entry point to the Conservation Area from the west is the narrow West Port, which opens out dramatically as it enters the Grassmarket before passing on to the Cowgate.

To the south, the historic approaches of the Pleasance, Nicolson Street and Buccleuch Street are still main routes into the Conservation Area. At one time these old



North Bridge, straddling the valley between the Old and New Towns, forms a dramatic approach with buildings at each end forming gateways. Its elevation accentuates the topography and the difference in character between the two major components of the World Heritage Site, whilst providing views to the East Lothian coast in the distance and to Arthur's Seat closer by.

drove roads would have passed through the original medieval suburbs, the extent of which was defined by 16th and 17th town wall extensions on a line from Lauriston Place to Drummond Street. Little now survives, and has largely been replaced by subsequent institutional development. Nicolson Street leads past one of the grandest examples of these, the Old College, before entering the Conservation Area along South Bridge. Designed by Robert Kay in 1785, it takes the form of a grand processional route up to the Royal Mile.

South-eastern and eastern edges of the Conservation Area are formed by approaches through existing inner city areas

of similar architectural character, which now make these edges of the Old Town less well defined.

Vistas and Views

Edinburgh's skyline is an essential part of the character and appearance of the city and is an asset that it is important to protect. The Edinburgh Skyline Study identifies the key views in the city and forms the basis for the non-statutory guidance on the protection of key views.

Skyline Study

The topography of the Old Town makes it both very visible and provides a wide range of dramatic views. The Castle dominates views from all over Edinburgh and the Old Town skyline can be seen from a range of near to distant views from many locations especially to the south, west and north.

Views should be considered from static and sequential points, taking into account oblique angles and levels. Assessments must also be made of the impact of development outside the Conservation Area. Some of the most dramatic views and a key element in giving Edinburgh a world-wide identity, is the perception of the Old Town in approaches to the city.



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The Canongate, due to its closer proximity to the Palace, attracted the town houses of the nobility and courtiers. Although it shared the traditional lang rigg ownership pattern with that of Edinburgh, development took the form of grand houses such as Queensberry, Acheson, Moray and Whitefoord House rather than tenemental flats.



The openness and lower density that this created is still visible today, particularly on the north side of the Canongate - this is reinforced by the Canongate Kirk's graveyard and the 17th century style garden at Dunbar's Close. Though more often now considered as a street name, it is important to recognise the Canongate as a former independent settlement and Royal Burgh.

Linear Settlement and Royal Mile

The Royal Mile is the spine of the Old Town, the main thoroughfare and great processional way of old Edinburgh. It is a sequence of spaces as well as a street, and these variations reveal buildings and views sequentially that are equally impressive in which ever direction they are approached from. The ridge, the volcanic tail on which it sits and the natural constraints of the former loch and river on its long sides, helped to dictate a linear settlement form which is still clearly evident today.

The alignment of the Royal Mile is also subject to the underlying natural topography and is not straight. Its gentle twists reflect the setting, and the work involved in its original creation. It also varies considerably in width, the narrow uppermost stretch along Castlehill



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being more typical of a medieval street, before widening out to the Lawnmarket and High Street sections. The street narrows again at the site of the former Netherbow Port, before opening out again along the Canongate. The spaces created were in part used for markets, and the present day street theatre during the Festival provides an indication of what the medieval scene of street trading must have been like.



Traditional Lang Riggs and Closes

Equally evident in the earliest plans is the impact of the Scottish system of land ownership, the ground on either side of the Royal Mile was divided into 'tofts' in the form of strips down the slopes of the ridge. The closes and wynds that run along the sides of the tofts accentuated this. These still make the Old Town highly permeable, giving pedestrian priority through frequent access and choice of route, whilst retaining a sense of intimacy and potential for surprise. In some areas they have been developed into arcades, covered stair ways linking different levels and roof top walkways such as that round Victoria Street giving magnificent views out across the Grassmarket.



Markets

The Grassmarket, the Fishmarket, the Fleshmarket, the Green Market and the Land Market (now Lawnmarket) were all located within short walking distances. They functioned not only for the trade in their respective commodities, but also as important social spaces. The High Street around St. Giles, the location of the luck-booths, was the scene of considerable street trading. Churches, the Parliament, the City Council, the law courts, offices of the guilds and inns for travellers developed around the markets.



Town Improvements - Tenements and Courts

The 16th Century witnessed a massive rebuilding programme after the sack of Edinburgh in 1544. The forelands along the north side of the Royal Mile were allowed to encroach by 6 metres and extra living space was gained by cantilevering wooden galleries out above the ground floors. This is still evident in John Knox's House and the adjacent Moubray House. Intensification resulted in the sub-division of the original burgess tofts and the evolution of that now traditional and typical Scottish building form, the tenement, in which houses are built on top of each other.



Gladstones Land and Moubray House show that tenement living was still for the prosperous, 'who, by living above ground floor, could avoid the worst of the street



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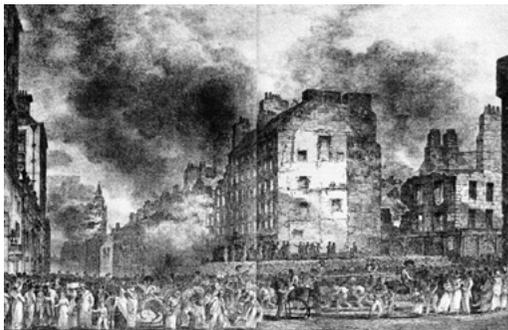


Square, started in 1757, in the adjacent South Side Conservation Area, marks another high point in urban design terms.

In 1786, Hunter Square was developed around the partially demolished Tron Kirk. Initially developed for the parking of carriages and horses, town squares came to represent emerging ideas in design and civic amenity. These ideas were further developed in the Old Town after the fire of 1824 in the transformation of Parliament Close into Parliament Square.

Improvement Streets

As the plans for the New Town were developed and implemented, they in turn influenced later demands for increased accessibility and street improvements in the Old Town. One of the earliest in 1786 was the formation of the South Bridge running between Hunter Square and Chambers Street over the valley of the Cowgate. George IV Bridge, connecting the South Side and the New Town via the Mound, was a product of the Improvement Act of 1827.



Great Fire of Edinburgh 1824



Under the 1827 Improvement Act, further works were undertaken to improve access from the south and west, including Johnston Terrace and Victoria Street. These were followed by the insertion of Cockburn Street (1856) and then St Mary's Street (1867). These not only created new streets but also made dramatic changes to the development pattern of the Old Town, by cutting between houses and the lang rigg pattern to leave truncated close arrangements. They improved the overcrowding, fire risk and insanitary conditions and also incorporated defined aesthetic styles. The 'serpentine curves' of Cockburn Street are given cohesion by the use of the 'Baronial manner', but the individual buildings are 'resourcefully varied'.

Early 20th Century Redevelopment

The value of the pioneering efforts of Patrick Geddes and E.J. Macrae in early restoration and new build housing infill, especially along the Royal Mile, was substantial both in terms of conservation and in maintaining the residential population of the area.



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Rationalisation of building forms and street layouts also coincided with the increasingly larger building forms adopted for institutional uses. These included new local government council chambers and offices, buildings for academic use by the University and Moray House, the central and national libraries, the national museum, new banks, commercial buildings and Waverley Railway Station.



There were also, until very recently, large industrial uses present in the Old Town. At one time there were some sixteen breweries and utilities, such as the former gas works, at the Dynamic Earth site. These uses occupied considerable land areas and would have had a major impact on the character of the area.



Late 20th Century Redevelopment

The redevelopment of the Holyrood North site has provided numerous infill opportunities and the site for the Scottish Parliament building.

The redevelopment represents an imaginative and sensitive reuse of the former brewery providing a mix of uses and institutions. By retaining the best of the original buildings, the Holyrood North area opens up the former close system and reinterprets the lang rigg pattern by inserting new development. Varied developments are linked through a consistent and high quality public realm demonstrating an empathy with the cultural and historic character of the area.

Streets

The durable architectural character of the Old Town is based around the main medieval streets of the Royal Mile - a sequence of five historic streets (Castlehill, Lawnmarket, High Street, Canongate and Abbey Strand). Castlehill is the narrow uppermost section and opens out into the much broader expanse of the Lawnmarket, which ends at the crossroads of George IV Bridge and Bank Street, from which point the Royal Mile becomes the High Street. The street narrows at the point where it was formerly closed by the main gateway into the town, the Netherbow Port. Beyond the Netherbow, the Canongate developed up the ridge from Holyrood. It was always historically more spacious than Edinburgh, with large houses in generous gardens. Abbey Strand links Canongate with the Holyrood Palace complex of buildings.

The original dense medieval urban fabric has been overlain by a series of Georgian and Victorian street improvements: North Bridge, South Bridge, George IV Bridge, Johnston Terrace, Victoria Street, Cockburn Street and Jeffrey Street.

The main streets have a hard urban form with frontages of tall relatively uniform buildings. Building facades are generally laid out in continuous rows along main street frontages, with few gaps, forming a continuous building line directly abutting the footway.



Closes

A series of tightly packed narrow closes branch out in a herringbone pattern from the main spine of the Royal Mile. This historic pattern of closes and courts which closely reflect the topography is a unique quality of the Old Town. Prior to the end of the 18th century, there were no roads running off the High Street west of the Netherbow, with the exception of the steep and narrow West Bow which provided access from the Grassmarket. Access to the rear of the buildings fronting the High Street was by narrow closes



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running down the side of the ridge. In the mid 18th century there were around 400 closes in the Old Town; there are now approximately 100, with a number having been reopened and restored in recent years. Most are marked in gold lettering on black cast iron plates or by lettering on the stone paving at the entrances. They are an integral part of Edinburgh's history and have their own individual character and atmosphere. They are also act as a frame for many important vistas.

Amongst the most evocative of the Edinburgh closes are: the restored re-creation of the 17th century White Horse Close, the picturesque qualities of which compensate for any lack of authenticity; Tweeddale Court, which contains the 16th century Tweeddale House and stone sheds which are believed to be sedan chair stores; Bakehouse Close which is entered through a broad arch beneath Huntly House; Riddle's Court with a fine timber external stairway and McMorran's House which is one of the best-preserved examples of old domestic architecture remaining in Edinburgh. Numerous closes were reinstated in the redevelopment following the devastating fire of 1824 which destroyed all the buildings on the south side of the High Street between St Giles and the Tron. These closes plunge spectacularly down to the Cowgate. Mary King's Close is subterranean and incorporated in the extended City Chambers. A sense of the traditional pattern of closes has been re-created at the Holyrood North site.

The Southern Suburbs

The Grassmarket is the largest open space in the Old Town and an important focal point to the south of the Royal Mile. The first written record of its use as a market dates from 1477, and its long rectangular shape is still immediately recognisable as a market place. It is one of Edinburgh's most dramatic urban spaces, providing a spectacular prospect of the southern cliffs of the Castle Rock. The architecture is principally later Victorian Scottish Baronial, with some older survivors principally on the north side. The best preserved section of the Flodden Wall (1520s-1530s) incorporating the only surviving tower, with gun-loops, stands in the Vennel, south of the Grassmarket.

The Cowgate, the main thoroughfare of the Old Town south of the Royal Mile, enters into the Grassmarket at its south-eastern end, running roughly parallel to the Royal Mile but on much lower ground. It is one of Edinburgh's oldest surviving streets and formerly one of its finest. The construction of the architecturally important South Bridge and George IV Bridge over the Cowgate reduced it to minor status. A limited number of interesting historic fragments remain, including the neo-classical church of St Patrick's, St Cecilia's Hall, unimpressive externally but with an outstanding interior, and the mid 16th century Magdalen Chapel.



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Candlemaker Row rises from the eastern end of the Grassmarket and leads to Greyfriar's Kirk, a mainly 18th century building erected on older foundations and well known for its graveyard which is the oldest in Edinburgh. The Greyfriars Bobby statue is the most famous memorial to a dog to be found anywhere and perhaps the smallest Listed Building in the country.



Victoria Street, contains a small fragment of the old West Bow, complete with five of its old houses, and a fine group of arcaded shop fronts surmounted by a pedestrian terrace.



Spaces

Open spaces within the Conservation Area have a wide variety of different characters. This diversity of character and the irregular distribution results from the historical growth of the city and its natural topography. As Edinburgh developed, open space around important buildings, was enclosed as gardens and for burial grounds. The natural features of the glacial landscape also left some areas of open space that were more difficult to develop. This has resulted in many small areas of green open spaces within the dense urban structure that have a wide diversity of character and an irregular distribution. These now contribute to the overall setting of the buildings and are valuable spaces for wildlife and amenity.

There are a relatively large number of small areas of green open spaces within the densely urban structure of the Old Town. A number of them are of historic value in their own right and they also provide settings for the historic buildings. They frequently take the form of small semi-private spaces with formal elements of planting behind main facades. Examples include Chessel's Court and the garden behind Panmure Close.

The streetscape is principally hard and urban. However, groups of single forest scale and smaller trees are present in selective locations throughout the Conservation Area. Many date from the late 19th century, although some are more recently planted.



These make a significant contribution to the character of the area, as they highlight the scale of the buildings and soften views. They also create local distinctiveness, seasonal variation and alter the local micro-climate. Sculptural features also make a further contribution to the individuality of the area.

The scale of some larger spaces, the relatively large number of smaller spaces and individual trees, make a highly significant contribution to the city's ecology and environment. The presence of wildlife habitats in the Conservation Area is limited due to the irregular and unlinked distribution of the spaces.



Old Town

Conservation Area

Character Appraisal

Castle Rock

The steep western slopes below the Castle Rock wrap around the Rock and create the dramatic setting for the Castle. The area has a naturalistic character of mature trees and ground cover providing a relatively undisturbed wildlife habitat. The area is also designated as part of a composite Site of Special Scientific Interest (Arthur's Seat Volcano SSSI) which includes Arthur's Seat and Calton Hill. The areas are linked by their complex geology and this is reflected in the richness of the plant communities that are present.



Johnston Terrace and Granny's Green

Mature trees characterise the steep bank to the south of Johnston Terrace. This makes a valuable contribution to the screening of the road and the setting of the Castle. The eastern part of this steep bank, known as Granny's Green, was used as a south-facing drying green for the former army barracks. This historical use is represented today by the collection of varied antique clothes poles. It is important to the setting of the Castle, and adds to the character of the area.

Greyfriars Kirkyard

Greyfriars Kirkyard is a significant open space within the Conservation Area. It was originally the garden of a monastery that was transformed into a graveyard in 1562. The kirkyard makes a significant contribution to the setting of the surrounding buildings and creates a peaceful, secluded open space. The character of the space is defined by the large variety of historically important gravestones, monuments and graceful mature trees. The graveyard is significant for its local amenity value and the contribution it makes to the greening of distant views. It is also a valuable resource for urban wildlife, particularly as it links to the open space surrounding George Heriot's School.



Old Town

Conservation Area

Character Appraisal



Sir Patrick Geddes was active in establishing community gardens or pocket parks in the Old Town during the early part of the 20th century. As part of his Civic Survey of Edinburgh in 1909, 75 open spaces in the Old Town were identified as having potential for community gardens. By 1911, nine of the gardens were 'in working order'. They are now represented by: the Patrick Geddes Memorial Garden on the south side of the West Port and the Scottish Wildlife Trust Garden which occupies a prominent position on the south side of Johnston Terrace, adjoining the Patrick Geddes Steps and the former Castlecliff Workshops.

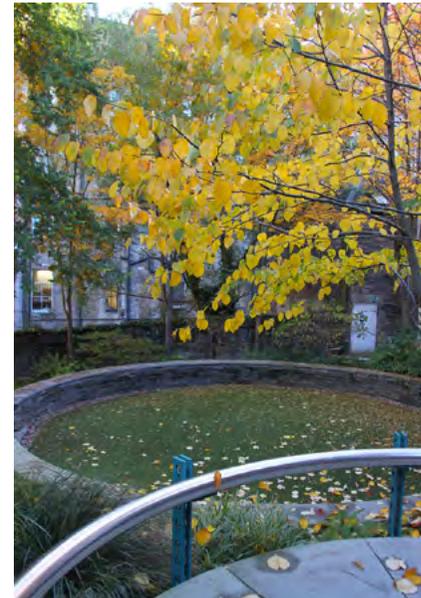


Long elongated formal gardens were a prominent historic feature of the less developed Canongate, and the small garden at Dunbar's Close was restored in 1978 as a reflection of this 17th century tradition. Hidden from view from the Royal Mile, the intricate layout of the garden, using appropriate materials and planting species, provides a quality open space. A variety of different planting environments are created with soft boundaries of hedges and trellis providing the opportunity to display a variety of plant material and forming sheltered spaces for wildlife. There are impressive views towards Calton Hill from the lower part of the garden.



Many other linked small spaces in the densely urban structure of the Old Town create a strong identity and character. They also create a variety of views at unusual angles that are important in appreciating the buildings and the surrounding landscape. Accessed through archways and closes, their charm lies in their secluded location and their variety of scales and styles.

The landscaped garden at Trunks Close is a more recently designed space. The modern design uses good quality materials and a circular seating arrangement. A single forest scale specimen tree, a Roble beech (*Nothofagus obliqua*), complements a bold planting scheme around the seating.



Old Town

Conservation Area

Character Appraisal

The limited number of specimen trees contribute to the local environment and can act as focal points. Examples of forest scale trees include the Lime trees, *Tilia sp*, planted in Hunter Square and adjacent to St Giles. Recently planted, these trees already contribute to the quality of the spaces, providing shade in the summer. Single smaller trees have also been used very successfully in narrow closes. A striking example is at Lady Stair's close where the Flowering Cherry, *Prunus avium 'plena'*, contrasts with the dark stone wall behind and provides a focal point in the view.



Major Buildings

The Conservation Area includes numerous buildings of outstanding architectural and historic importance, and international significance. This is reflected in the large number of buildings within the Conservation Area which are Statutorily Listed for their Architectural or Historic importance, with around 90 being of national importance (Category A). Although these buildings have individual qualities, often exhibiting European or classical influences, they also possess strong elements of the local character that reinforces the distinctiveness of the Conservation Area. The historic varieties of architectural forms successfully integrate with each other through careful attention to scale, design and materials.

The number of buildings of outstanding historic and architectural stature in the Old Town is such that it is not appropriate in the context of the character appraisal to consider in depth every building of importance included within the Conservation Area. A limited number of examples of the most important items will, therefore, be considered. This is not intended to detract from the merit of buildings not mentioned in the Appraisal.

The Castle is the pre-eminent building of historic and architectural importance within the Conservation Area. Its imposing bulk towers dramatically over the centre of Edinburgh from its precipitous location on the massive sheer rock faces of the Castle Rock. With its commanding site, standing 135 metres above sea level and 100 metres above Princes



Old Town

Conservation Area

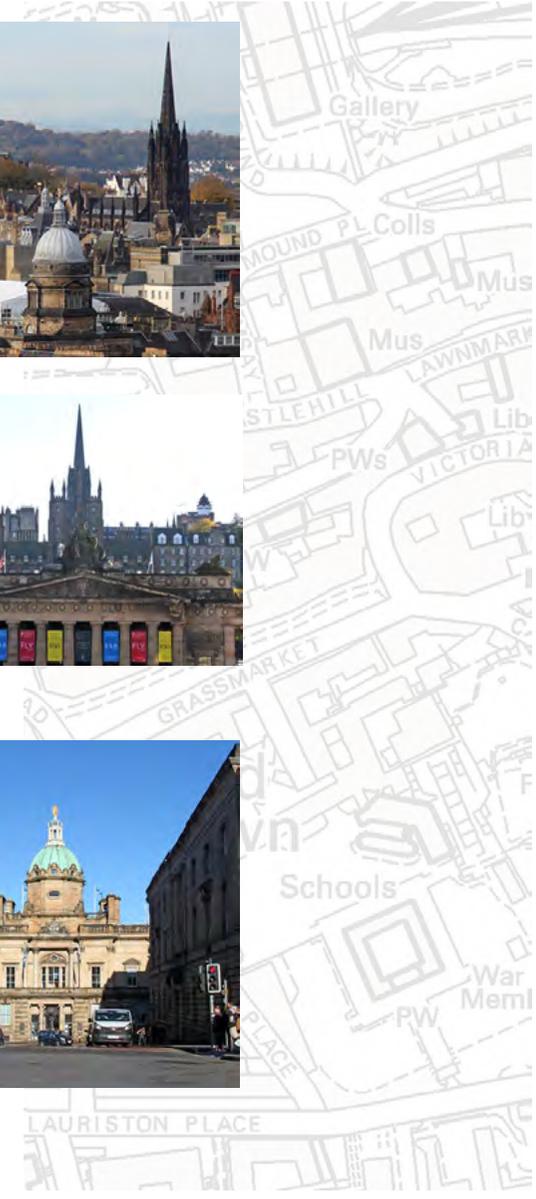
Character Appraisal

Street, the turreted and battlemented complex of buildings dominates the skyline and is an international iconic architectural symbol of Edinburgh and Scotland. The Esplanade forms the entrance to the Castle. It was laid out in the 18th century as a parade ground and completed in its present form, with ornamental walls, in 1816. There is a row of military monuments on its north side and it commands panoramic views to both the north and south.

The architectural character of the northern cliff-like outline of the Old Town is formed by the dominant ridge, between the Castle and the Palace of Holyroodhouse and the major buildings which contribute to its distinctive character - Ramsay Garden, the Tudoresque New College & Assembly Hall, the neo-Jacobean Church of Scotland offices on North Bank Street, the Baroque Bank of Scotland on the Mound, the City Chambers and the turreted gateway entrance to the Old Town formed by the former Scotsman and Carlton Hotel buildings on North Bridge. They reinforce a sense of enclosure, separation and defence associated with medieval towns in a dramatic way.

New College and the Assembly Hall, with its main frontage on the Mound, was originally built as a church and theological college for the Free Church. Its Tudor front and the towers of its gatehouse sited on the axis of Playfair's Royal Scottish Academy below frame the spire of the Tolbooth spire behind. The towers would be a significant contribution on their own, but their location in the middle ground between such significant neighbours demonstrates the wealth of the townscape. These in turn are in alignment with Hanover Street and demonstrate the use of townscape composition to link the Old and New Towns.

To the east of the Assembly Hall and 'standing forward from the Old Town to lord it over the New' is the former Bank of Scotland Head Office. An imposing baroque building with a central copper clad dome, wings extending to either side terminating in towers and later pavilions all sitting on a massive masonry plinth. The power of its presence is softened to some degree by a proliferation of decoration, statues and serried flagstaffs. These elements reinforce a sense of the theatrical, especially when it is seen against the formidable backdrop of multi-storey plain stone tenements behind. The framed views of the main entrance and dome terminating the vista south along the axis of George IV Bridge is perhaps more in keeping with the scale of the Old Town.



Old Town

Conservation Area

Character Appraisal

The City Chambers is constructed on a flank of the Old Town ridge. Its three-sided courtyard, which is open to the street through a rusticated screen, is an uncommon feature of Old Town development. The predominant features are the centrepiece, which has a pediment with urns and fluted Corinthian pilasters. It appears as a three storey building on its High Street frontage, but has no fewer than twelve storeys on the north, to accommodate the sharp drop into Cockburn Street. It is one of the tallest buildings remaining in the Old Town and makes an important contribution to the skyline of the Conservation Area.

The spire of the former Tolbooth St John's Church (now the Festival Hub), 'stunningly sited' at the top of Castlehill, soars above the city. It is the highest built point in Edinburgh at 73 metres and dominates the approach to the Castle.



Between it and the Castle esplanade is Geddes' Outlook Tower with its distinctive dome and his 'ultra-picturesque and colourful' development at Ramsay Gardens. Its mix of Scots Baronial and English cottage styles, towers, conical roof forms, oriel windows and balconies cascade down the north side of the ridge. Combined with its idiosyncratic materials (harl, timber, red sandstone and red tiles), it forms a termination to the Royal Mile before the separating space of the esplanade in front of the castle.

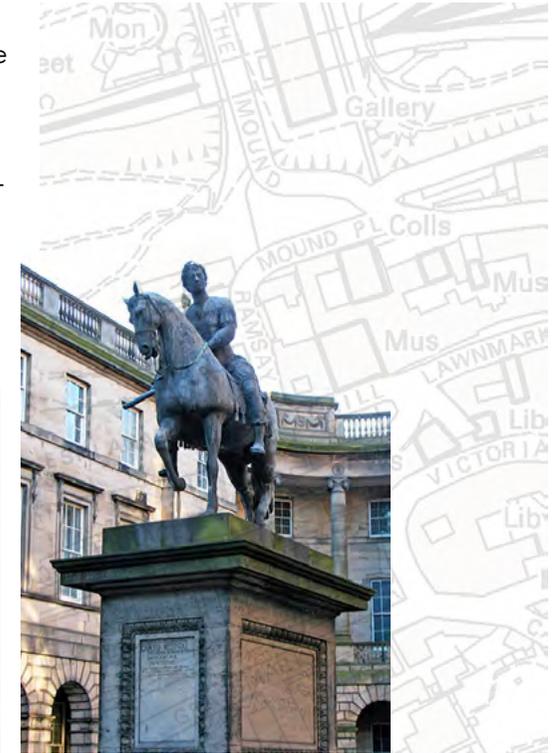
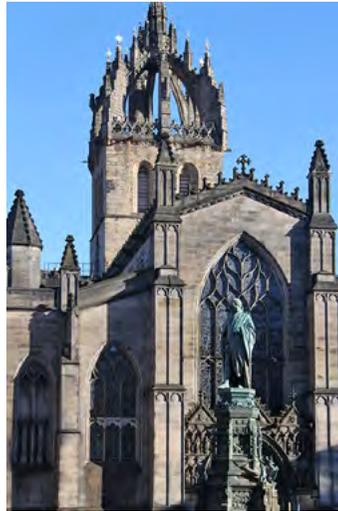


Old Town

Conservation Area

Character Appraisal

Parliament Square is dominated by St Giles, the High Kirk of Edinburgh, and the continuous neo-classical facades of the Law Courts. St Giles has been the central feature of the Old Town for nearly 800 years. Subjected to an over-enthusiastic restoration in the early 19th century, it has lost much of its medieval character. Its distinctive open crown steeple surmounted by a gilded cockerel and supported by eight flying buttresses was the only part of the exterior of the building to survive this restoration. It is also an important landmark in historic skyline views of the Old Town.



The façade of the Law Courts on Parliament Square masks the old hall of the 17th century Parliament House which faces the southern side of St Giles with a life-sized equestrian statue of King Charles II in the garb of a Roman emperor in the intervening space. The Heart of Midlothian marks the location of the old Tolbooth, whose site is also marked on the roadway by blocks outlining its plan, and the repositioned old Mercat Cross stands just to the east of St Giles.

The Old College of the University was begun by Robert Adam in 1763, and was intended as the centrepiece of an ambitious overall plan which was never achieved. The Triumphal Arch façade onto South Bridge is the best and the only part wholly designed by Adam. William Playfair completed the colonnaded quadrangle in 1834, and the landmark dome was added in the 1880s.



Old Town

Conservation Area

Character Appraisal



George Heriot's Hospital (school), which was built in 1624 on the southern edge of the Old Town below the Castle Rock. Heriots is one of the finest 17th century properties in Scotland and was a key building in the Scots architectural renaissance of the 16th and 17th centuries.



The Canongate Tolbooth, built in 1591, is a rare survivor of 16th-century municipal architecture and was the administrative hub of the Canongate when it was an independent burgh. It is a prominent landmark on the Canongate with its turrets and gun-loops to the street, forestair in the angle of the tower and oversized scrolled wrought-iron clock, which is a later addition of 1822. It now functions as 'The People's Story' museum.

The Canongate Kirk, with its striking multi-curved gable and Roman Doric portico, dates from the late 17th century, it stands back from the road in a churchyard with a number of important memorials. The churchyard also provides views towards the Royal High School and the Burns Monument. The ancient and classical funerary monuments in the churchyard of Greyfriars Church makes the main contribution to the character and atmosphere of the area.



The Palace of Holyroodhouse impressively punctuates the eastern end of the Royal Mile. Tall ornate iron gates lead into a spacious forecourt the centrepiece of which is a carved octagonal Gothic fountain. Two massive towers dominate the symmetrical west elevation of the Palace. The picturesque ruins of the 12th century Holyrood Abbey stand adjacent to the palace and provide an indication of how elaborate the structure must have been. Croft-an-igh is an early 17th century villa built into the south east wall of the gardens of Holyroodhouse. It is three storeys high and rubble-built to an L-shaped plan, with corbelled turrets and pepperpot roofs topped by copper balls.

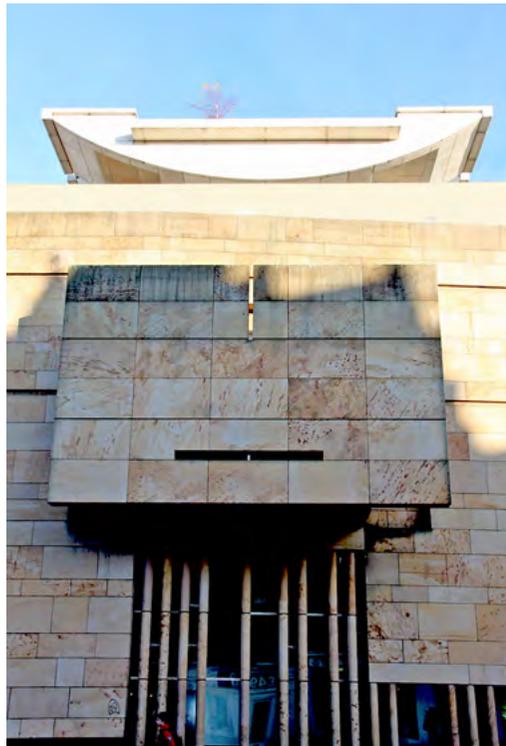


Old Town

Conservation Area

Character Appraisal

Waverley Station lies below North Bridge in the valley to the north of the Old Town. The station was designed to sit below a glass roof canopy to minimise its overall impact, as was the cutting required for the track through Princes Street Gardens which is flanked by high retaining walls and arches of fine ashlar.



More recent developments such as: the Poetry Library, Dance Base, the extension to the National Museum of Scotland, the Holyrood North site development, and the Parliament all contribute to the evolving character of the area.



Domestic Architecture

An important and outstanding collection of high-quality domestic architecture survives forming the background of the Old Town, and the setting for the greater monuments. They are the outward reflection of Edinburgh's history: with their traditional proportions, gables and dormers, crow steps, pends and wynds, and carved inscriptions.



The domestic architecture of the Old Town is still largely dominated by tenements. The tenement as a basic urban form was developed in Edinburgh through a combination of geography and circumstances. The crag and tail site and the presence of the Flodden Wall from the early 1500s constrained the burgh to around 130 acres for more than 250 years. Sustained population growth could only be accommodated by building high, and pressure for space was increased as more people demanded higher standards of accommodation within the fixed boundaries of the city. By the 17th-18th centuries, Edinburgh contained the tallest series of urban domestic buildings of their time, surpassed in scale only with the introduction of tall framed buildings in the 20th century. Necessity, therefore, created the flat tradition in Edinburgh.

The 16th century Riddle's Court and Bailie MacMorran's House represent an early courtyard phase comparable with structures in the Canongate, which was always an area of less dense population and of larger and more substantial houses, courtyards and closes such as Moray House (1628), Acheson House (1618), Whitehorse Close (17th century) and Huntly House (1570).



Mylne's Court is a later surviving example of tenements, incorporating purpose-built mansion-flats, set around wide open squares, which began to appear in the mid 17th century. It is a massive building, opening on to a court-yard and represents an early attempt at urban renewal. The street frontage has a distinctly modern and plain look; while the less visible back facing the Mound remains medieval in appearance. The adjoining James Court separates Mylnes Court from Gladstones Land, and was built in the 1720s, following the same general pattern.



Old Town

Conservation Area

Character Appraisal

Gladstone's Land in the Lawnmarket is one of the finest and most original surviving examples of an early 17th-century tenement. It is a tall narrow six storey building in ashlar with two gables facing the street and a curved forestair. It incorporates a re-constructed luckenbooth type shop front, typifies the height to which the early Edinburgh tenements were built and incorporates the only surviving example of the original arcaded house front, which was once a common feature of Old Town houses.



The picturesque John Knox House, dating from the early 16th century, is the earliest surviving tenement in Edinburgh and a conspicuous building in the Old Town with its projection into the High Street which stops the view southwards. Its jettied timber balconies, forestair and other external detailing constitute a prime example of the earliest domestic architecture in Edinburgh. The building now forms part of the Netherbow Arts Centre, which stands to the east. Immediately to the west of John Knox House is the four-storey Moubray House, dating from c.1630, with an elegant curved forestair springing from first floor level. Outside on the street is one of the wells which provided the water supply for the Old Town.

Much of the Canongate consists of re-modelled, reconstructed or entirely re-built housing blocks constructed to harmonise with the street as a whole, rather than copy those they replaced. Chessel's Court is a group of tenements around an open courtyard reached by an arcaded frontage on the Canongate. It is dominated by the harled three storey mid 18th century Chessel's House which, with its pedimented chimney and well proportioned Georgian windows, resembles a modest country house. Robert Hurd designed the adjoining new blocks in conjunction with the restoration of the historic original buildings. The Chessel's Court group represents an early example of conservation linked with innovative new building.



The series of neo-vernacular tenements at 79-121 Canongate are constructed in rubble, concrete, and harling, with blocks both parallel and horizontal to the main street, forming courtyards behind the Canongate. There is a pattern of large square windows and also horizontal and vertical slits on the façade, and some corner windows have stone mullions. The series of mono pitch roofs form an interesting roofscape.



Old Town

Conservation Area

Character Appraisal

The Scottish Baronial style was a 19th century revival of the architectural forms of the Scottish Renaissance. In its revival form it is typified by the incorporation of architectural features such as crenellations, turreted bartisans, crow stepped gables and oriels. One of the principal motivations behind its development was an interest in the exploration of national identity, and the Scottish Baronial was seen as a romantic expression of Scottish architectural nationalism and tradition.



Station Act, of 1853, which authorised its construction, specified the need to preserve the architectural style and antique character of the locality to secure harmony between the new buildings and those of the Old Town. The variegated Baronial architecture acknowledged the steep gradient of the street, recreated some of the intimacy of an old Edinburgh close and provided a new architectural gateway to the Old Town.

There was a degree of continuity in the use of Baronial forms well into the 20th century exemplified by the picturesque qualities of the infill and restoration work by Patrick Geddes, for example at the theatrical red-roofed and half-timbered Ramsay Garden which was intended to reflect the character of the medieval town. A late example of the influence of the style can also be seen in the adoption of neo-Baronial features for the late 20th century design of the façade at the former Scandic Crown Hotel (1989), with its massive Holyrood-style tower as a corner feature.



Such was the influence of the Scottish Baronial, that it was adapted from its more natural context of large country houses for use in urban settings. From the 1850s, it was used extensively as a treatment for redevelopment schemes in the Old Town in streets such as Jeffrey Street and St Mary's Street. Cockburn Street has thirty Baronial blocks built between 1859 and 1864 along a serpentine curve to provide access to Waverley Station from the Old Town and clear the densely packed backlands of existing closes. The Edinburgh Railway



Activities and Uses

The Old Town has been the site of many of Scotland's most important historical events and is closely associated with some of the world's most celebrated philosophers, writers, scientists, and architects. It is now a varied and vigorous community supporting a wide-ranging mix of uses and activities which make an essential contribution to the area's vitality and character.

The Conservation Area has a thriving resident population of around 11,000 which co-exist with the range of other activities. The strong and continuing presence of a residential community is an essential part of the character of the area. This can be supported and retained by encouraging local community facilities, such as shopping which caters for a residential population.

The Old Town is the primary focus of the City's ceremonial, administrative, cultural, legal and religious functions. Important civic and national institutions include: the Scottish Parliament, the City Chambers, the High Court, the Sheriff Court, the Court of Session, the University and the National Library of Scotland. Artistic and cultural institutions such as the Saltire Society, the Scottish Poetry Library and Dance Base are also established in the area.

The preservation of the many historic buildings, and their settings, in the Conservation Area is a fundamental matter if the tourism function is to be maintained.

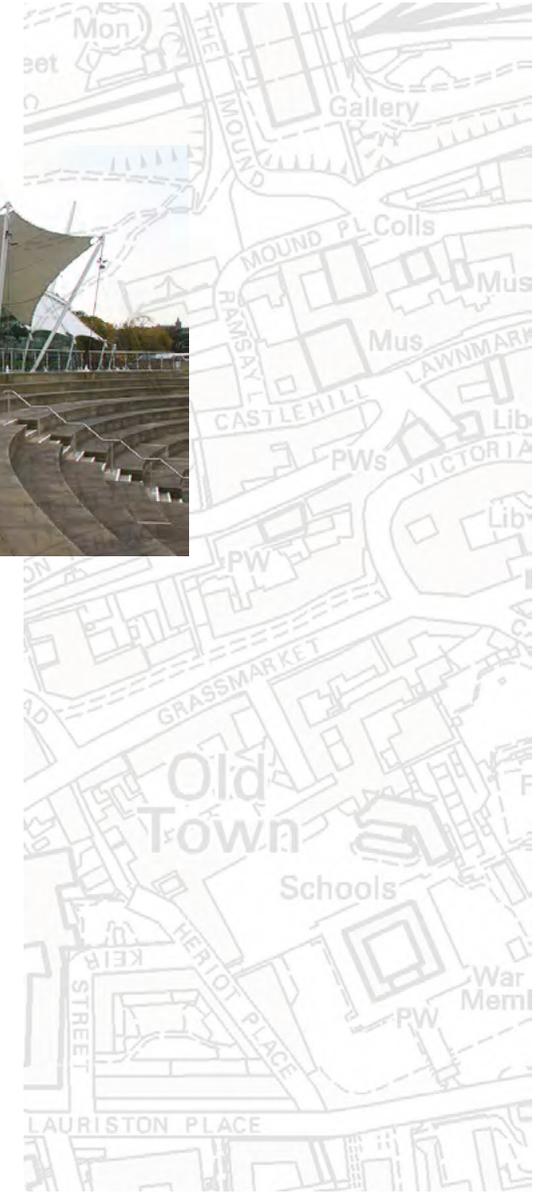
Included amongst the area's attractions are the museum collections that are a significant part of Scotland's cultural heritage.

Edinburgh Castle attracted 1,568,508 visitors in 2015 and is Scotland's most important visitor attraction. It is managed by Historic Environment Scotland. The Old Town accommodates many other tourist venues, is an integral part of the setting of the Castle and is itself a destination for tourists. The Old Town, therefore, has an influence on the tourism economy of Scotland as well as Edinburgh.



The world's largest arts festival, the International Festival and Fringe, is also centred on the Old Town and makes a major contribution to the cultural life and image of the Old Town. The opening of two major visitor attractions, the Museum of Scotland and Dynamic Earth, in the late 1990s consolidated the Old Town's position as one of the most important tourist centres in Scotland. The range and quality

of shopping concentrated in the Old Town also forms an important part of the city centre's attraction for visitors.



The Old Town as a centre of employment is closely associated with public service activities historically linked to the area: national and local government, legal institutions and the universities. There is also a substantial number of small office uses, primarily housed in traditional buildings. The Holyrood area was largely industrial, until the end of the 20th century: breweries and a major gas holder station were located in the area. These former large-scale industries have moved out of the Old Town, leaving major redevelopment sites and the Holyrood area has undergone substantial regeneration since the late 20th century. This has included the construction of the 'Our Dynamic Earth' visitor centre and new offices on the site of the former gas holder, and the development of a complex of buildings at Holyrood North and the Scottish Parliament on the former breweries site.



The hustle and bustle of the main streets provide attractions for a wide range of visitors to institutions and leisure interests. In contrast, peace and quiet can be experienced in the closes and wynds. The kirkyards of Greyfriars and Canongate also offer a sense of tranquillity.



KEY ELEMENTS

Plan Form

The topography creates a dramatic natural setting for the surviving original medieval street pattern of lang riggs and closes running off the spine of the Royal Mile which is overlaid with late 18th and 19th century improvement streets.

There is a clear contrast in density and built form between the original walled city and the relative openness of the Canongate, which is a result of the historic development pattern.

The plan form of the area contributes to the high level of pedestrian routes throughout the Old Town.

Views

The Castle, the spires, towers and domes on the Old Town ridge and Arthur's Seat dominate a distinctive skyline, not just from the city boundaries, but also in many more distant views and approaches to the city.

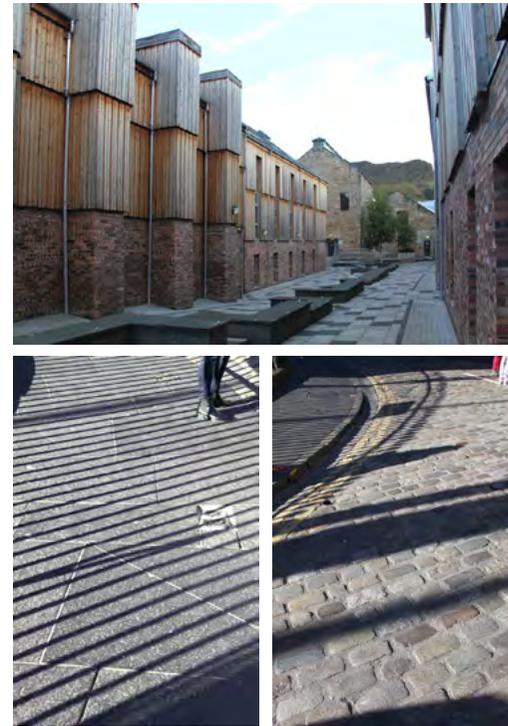
There are many significant views in, out and within the area. It is important to ensure that development outside the Conservation Area does not intrude on specific views.

Streetscape

The provision of consistent and high quality natural materials, street furniture and lighting in the public realm is a critical factor in uniting and complementing the built heritage.

In recent years there has also been considerable recent investment in work to the public realm in the form of improvements to closes and the High Street.

Natural stone paving slabs and stone setts have historically been used for street surfaces for many centuries. The historic paving displays a tradition of high quality workmanship, attention to detail and the use of robust and durable materials. This simple palette of materials is durable and today encourages the slower movement of traffic, creating a more pedestrian friendly environment. In 1996, the Royal Mile was the subject of a programme of environmental improvements which incorporated high quality natural materials. Hunter Square was also redesigned at this time with granite benches and sculptures.



Other street furniture elements, such as traditional lamp standards, red phone boxes and Edinburgh Police boxes make a significant contribution to the architectural character of the Conservation Area.



Old Town

Conservation Area

Character Appraisal

Landmark Buildings

There is a wealth of important landmark buildings, reflecting the Old Town's long role as the location for a complete range of capital city institutions.

The wide range of institutional buildings from different eras set against a backdrop of tenements contribute to the 'close knit' character and cohesive groupings associated with the medieval town.

The many landmark buildings make a significant contribution to the city's historic skyline.



Architectural Detailing

The variety and irregularity of medieval buildings contrasts with the imposed styling of later 'improvement act' architecture.

In early buildings forestairs, small and irregular window arrangements, vestiges of timber construction and cantilevered upper floors help to break up the massing. In later buildings, this is achieved through the retention of narrow feus, the verticality of windows and a variety of decorative elements such as semi-circular corner turrets, domed or conical roofs, statues etc. These features give added interest and help to provide a human scale.

Stepped and angled pitched roofs articulated by narrow dormers, crow step gables, pediments, towers, spires, skews, chimney heads provide architectural interest.

Sash and case windows in various configurations specific to particular buildings are the traditional fenestration pattern.



Old Town

Conservation Area

Character Appraisal

Materials

The quality, robustness and durability of the materials of construction make a significant contribution to the character of the Conservation Area. The limited palette of materials, mainly stone and slate, provide a sense of unity.

Harled rubble was historically the main building material, except for the grandest buildings, and this continued to be used for tenements well into the 19th century. However, stone is the basic building block of Edinburgh in its predominant form of silver grey ashlar, with a more limited amount of red sandstone.

The overwhelming impression is of natural materials: stone walling and detailing, harling with stone dressings, slate roofing, and timber doors and windows and setted streets with stone pavements. This limited range of materials should not disguise the subtle tones and rich character of stone from different sources and with varied texturing.

Roofs are traditionally pitched and covered with dark grey Scots slates. The topography of the city is such that roofs are a dominant feature in many views, and the traditional slate roof coverings make an important contribution to the architectural character of the Old Town. Stone chimneystacks with stoneware pots to individual flues, also contribute to the character of the roofscape.



Shop Fronts

The Old Town contains many fine shop fronts in a variety of traditional and contemporary forms and materials which make a significant contribution to the character of the Conservation Area.



However, there are a number of shop fronts with inappropriate signage and displays which detract from the historic character of the area.

Boundary Treatments

Boundaries are important in maintaining the character and quality of the spaces in the Old Town. They provide enclosure, define many pedestrian links and restrict views out of the spaces. Stone is the predominant material. Harled and brick walls also exist and can be in keeping with the surrounding character.

Statues and Monuments

The Conservation Area includes an outstanding collection of statues, monuments, historic graveyards and national memorials.

Greyfriar's and the Canongate graveyards contain important collections of funerary monuments. The variety and number of statues, carved stones and sculptures add to the individual historic and architectural character of the area.



Old Town

Conservation Area

Character Appraisal

Building Lines

The main streets and spaces have a hard edged form with continuous frontages of tall buildings built directly up to the back pavements.

Building frontages have a proportion and rhythm, determined by the original medieval 'Burgess' plots and later tenement layouts.

Building lines are not set at predetermined grids and angles, but respond to natural features and contours. The consequence of this is that much of the organic character of the Old Town is still retained and building lines sweeping along the contours give a sculptural appearance to many streets as they wind up and down hill. Buildings are largely set right at the heel of the pavement. Respect for building lines and heights are essential in successfully uniting buildings from different periods.



Building Heights

Buildings conform to a generally consistent height and mass, usually four or five storeys high on street frontages, throughout the Conservation Area.

The higher buildings addressing the Waverley Valley, between 8 and 10 storeys, help to reinforce a sense of enclosure, separation and defence associated with medieval towns in a dramatic way. These heights are also found where developments have risen from the Cowgate floor right through to streets above, for example along South Bridge and George IV Bridge.



Old Town

Conservation Area

Character Appraisal

A more usual relationship with the street is between 3 to 5 storeys which respect changes in level. This creates stepped and angled roofscapes which are further articulated by narrow dormers, crow step gables, pediments, towers, spires, skews, chimney heads etc.



Uses

The breadth of facilities and attractions establishes the Old Town as a cultural, leisure, entertainment and tourism centre of national importance. It is essential that a productive balance between the interests of residents, business, institutions and visitors is maintained. It is particularly important that retail uses that serve the needs of local residents are maintained. The continued existence of a creative mix of uses is an essential element in maintaining active streets and a vibrant town centre.

There is a contrast between bustling main streets and quiet pedestrian accessed rear areas emphasised by the street layout and the contrasting built forms of the front and rear areas.

The compactness and fine grained development pattern allows many forms of activity to function in close proximity.



MANAGEMENT

Legislation, policies and guidance

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.
- Some 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 removal of buildings which make a positive contribution to an 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.

Alterations to windows are also controlled in conservation areas in terms of the Council's guidelines.

Listed buildings

A significant number of buildings within the Old Town Conservation Area 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.

Old Town

Conservation Area

Character Appraisal



Planning guidance

More detailed, subject-specific guidance is set out in Planning Guidance documents. Those particularly relevant to the Old Town 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

In addition, a number of statutory tools are available to assist development management within the Conservation Area.

Article 4 Direction Orders

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.

- Class 7 - the erection, construction, maintenance, improvement or alteration of a gate, fence, wall or other means of enclosure.
- Class 38 - water undertakings.
- Class 39 - development by public gas supplier.
- Class 40 - development by electricity statutory undertaker.
- Class 41- development required for the purposes of the carrying on of any tramway or road transport undertaking.

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Trees

Trees within Conservation Areas are covered by the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 as amended by the Planning (etc) Act 2006. 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).

Tree Preservation Orders are made under planning legislation to protect individual and groups of trees considered important for amenity or because of their cultural or historic interest. When assessing 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 Tree Preservation Order. The removal of trees for arboricultural reasons will not imply that the space created by their removal can be used for development.

Trees in the City contains a set of policies with an action plan used to guide the management of the Council's trees and woodlands.

Assessing Development within the Old Town Conservation Area

The richness of the Old Town's natural setting and built heritage is considerable. It is this complexity and diversity which make it attractive, yet make these qualities hard to define. It also has a fragility and human scale which often does not sit easily with the demands of present day development requirements. These are qualities and conflicts that must be resolved if the character of the Old Town is to be sensitively interpreted and enhanced.

General Criteria

General issues to be taken into account in assessing development proposals in the Conservation Area include the appropriateness of the overall massing of development, its scale (the expression of size indicated by the windows, doors, floor heights, and other identifiable units), its proportions and its relationship with its context i.e. whether it sits comfortably. Development should be in harmony with, or complimentary to, its neigh-



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bours having regard to the adjoining architectural styles. The use of materials generally matching those which are historically dominant in the area is important, as is the need for the development not to have a visually disruptive impact on the existing townscape. It should also, as far as possible, fit into the “grain” of the Conservation Area, for example, by respecting historic layout, street patterns or existing land form. It is also important where new uses are proposed that these respect the unique character and general ambience of the Conservation Area, for example certain developments may adversely affect the character of a Conservation Area through noise, nuisance and general disturbance. Proposals outside the boundaries of the Conservation Area should not erode the character and appearance of the Old Town or intrude into views of the Castle.

New Buildings

New development should be of good contemporary design that is sympathetic to the spatial pattern, scale and massing, proportions, building line and design of traditional buildings in the area. Any development within or adjacent to the Conservation Area should restrict itself in scale and mass to the traditionally four/five storey form. New development should also reflect the proportion and scale of the traditional window pattern. The quality of alterations to shop fronts, extensions, dormers and other minor alterations should also be of an appropriately high standard.

The development of new buildings in the Conservation Area should be a stimulus to imaginative, high quality design, and seen as an opportunity to enhance the area. What is important is not that new buildings should directly imitate earlier styles, rather that they should be designed with respect for their context, as part of a larger whole which has a well-established character and appearance of its own. Therefore, while development of a gap site in a traditional terrace may require a very sensitive design approach to maintain the overall integrity of the area; in other cases modern designs sympathetic and complementary to the existing character of the area may be acceptable.

Alterations and Extensions

Proposals for the alteration or extension of properties in the Conservation Area will normally be acceptable where they are sensitive to the existing building, in keeping with the character and appearance of the particular area and do not prejudice the amenities of adjacent properties. Extensions should be subservient to the building, of an appropriate scale, use appropriate materials and should normally be located on the rear elevations of a property. Very careful consideration will be required for alterations and extensions



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affecting the roof of a property, as these may be particularly detrimental to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

Definition of 'Character' and 'Appearance'

Conservation areas are places of special architectural or historic interest, the character and appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.

The character of an area is the combination of features and qualities which contribute to the intrinsic worth of an area and make it distinctive. Special character does not derive only from the quality of buildings. Elements such as the historic layout of roads, paths and boundaries, paving materials, urban grain and more intangible features, such as smells and noises which are unique to the area, may all contribute to the local scene. Conservation area designation is the means of recognising the importance of all these factors and of ensuring that planning decisions address these qualities.

Appearance is more limited and relates to the way individual features within the conservation area look.

Care and attention should be paid in distinguishing between the impact of proposed developments on both the character and appearance of the conservation area.

Archaeology

The Old Town is the most significant archaeological area in Edinburgh. The archaeological interest of the historic burghs of Edinburgh and Canongate was analysed in 1981 as part of the Scottish Burgh Survey. Archaeological excavations have shown that Edinburgh's origins extend into prehistory.

Significant archaeological remains survive within Edinburgh Castle. Archaeology also remains beneath and within historic buildings and streets all along the Royal Mile, and in and around the Holyrood Abbey and Palace complex. At the Tron Kirk, fragments of the foundations of stone-built houses which occupied the site before the kirk was built were uncovered. The range of finds during the excavations on the site of the new Scottish Parliament and Cowgate Fire Site provide examples of the significant archaeological potential of the whole area.

The Conservation Area also contains a number of Scheduled Ancient Monuments comprising Edinburgh Castle, Holyrood Abbey, Holyroodhouse, the Canongate Tolbooth and the historic town walls. Fragments of the town walls remain at Heriot's School, the



Pleasance, Tweeddale Court, the Vennel, Bristo Port and Drummond Street. All surviving elements of the town walls are of considerable historic significance.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

Development opportunities for infill or replacement may arise within the area, and will be considered in terms of the relevant guidance. No sites within the Conservation Area are identified for significant housing or other development through local development plans.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR PLANNING ACTION

From a low point at the time of the 1981 Census, the Old Town is now home to a significant and expanding residential population of about 11,000. The building of new housing on sites such as Holyrood North and the restoration of many historic residential properties throughout the Old Town has provided a firm foundation for a thriving modern community. It is essential that a productive balance between the interests of residents, business and visitors is maintained. The continued existence of a creative mix of uses is essential for the retention of the character and attraction of the Old Town.

Conservation Area Boundaries

The boundaries of the Conservation Area have been examined through the appraisal process. No proposals for boundary changes are proposed.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCEMENT

The character appraisal emphasises the more positive aspects of character in order that the future can build on what is best within the Conservation Area. The quality of urban and architectural design needs to be continuously improved if the character of the Conservation Area is to be enhanced. The retention of good quality buildings (as well as listed buildings) and the sensitive interpretation of traditional spaces in development are of particular importance.

Due to its topography and medieval street pattern, the character of the Old Town is particularly susceptible to the effects of traffic. The scale and intimacy of the Old Town is best suited to pedestrian movement.

The public realm of the Conservation Area offers a wealth of spaces created at various stages during the development of the Old Town. They are generally of a robust urban form in a limited palette of colours which is easily adversely affected by street clutter.

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Any strategy should consider and analyse the existing features and spaces of value, and consider opportunities to improve their quality and nature. The different character of the spaces needs to be clearly defined and guidance developed for the maintenance of planting, hard materials and design of any additional street furniture within that defined character.

Careful consideration needs to be given to floorscape which is an essential part of the overall appreciation of the Old Town's rich townscape heritage. Repair and renewal work to street surfaces should be carefully detailed and carried out to the highest standards using quality natural materials. Setts should be replaced or reinstated where they have been lost. Street furniture should be kept to the minimum required, to avoid clutter.

Whilst there are many fine shop fronts in the Conservation Area, there are also a number which are unsatisfactory and ignore the architectural form of the buildings of which they form part.

Opportunities should also be taken to increase the biodiversity potential of appropriate open spaces through a variety of management practices. This may include the introduction of replacement native shrub planting and diversity of grass cutting regimes.



