



St Georges Field Development Proposal

Heritage Appraisal

A planned proposal to develop a 4 storey car park on the current site of the Castle Car Park adjacent to The Foss, Ouse, Tower Gardens and the Old Debtor's Prison/York Crown Court Buildings. The proposal for a contemporary structure of such scale and mass creates problems regarding the setting of Historic Assets, both in visual and practical terms.

This appraisal summarises an evaluation of the effect of the proposed development on a specific heritage asset, Skeldergate Bridge and Castle Mills Lock, with mention to the wider setting of York from both a English and World Heritage perspectives.



Figures 2+3: Elevations from the Castle Gateway Masterplan Documents
c/o City of York Council

The Heritage Statement for proposal of the St Georges Field development was first tabled on the 10th September 2019 in a document with a revision in August 2020 (Statement of Heritage Significance, 2020). Referencing subsection 189 of the NPPF (2019) and guidance provided by Historic England, the statement aligns itself with the correct procedure accepted within English heritage planning. The document recognises both the location and setting of the individual heritage assets (Chapters 2, 3), with subsections 3.5.3.6 and 3.7 acknowledging the importance of the wider Conservation Area, NDHA's and Archaeological Importance.

The York Local Plan (2005) specifies the importance of safeguarding the historic character and setting of York (Policy SP3), giving weight to the value of collective assets, including the space and views that lie between structures. Policy HE2: Development in Historic Locations (YLP, 2005) outlines the importance of material, detail and proportion with development affecting heritage assets: this outline requires further consideration for the use of vertical terracotta strips on the exterior of the concrete framework, although well specified and detailed, fails to consider the absence of the material in the surrounding heritage assets. (SoHS, 2.5.5)

Although still in draft, a revised YLP (2018), outlines a policy considering Placemaking (Policy D1). The subsection provides a platform for development to improve existing areas in poor use/condition, which the development provides to some extent, although the importance of the views of the Minster as a reflection of the value of York's heritage gives rise to a question surrounding the effect of a 4-storey car park on views of other important heritage assets, most notably Clifford's Tower. It is also specified that a building proposal will be supported if it 'preserves, enhances, or better reveals' the surrounding listed assets (Policy D5). The St. Georges Field development fails to do so. The desire to develop in an area of historic interest must be met with an evaluation that considers the archaeological importance of the site as it is at the present, and the potential historic and cultural value to be unearthed through excavated findings (15-18, AMAAA, 1979) This consideration on the part of the land-owner determines the plausibility of the developer gaining planning permission, and although York Council are considering a site already developed, further development might further infringe on the archaeological value of the site (sec.2, 35, AMAAA, 1979)

The Proposal is also included in the York Castle Gateway Masterplan, specified as "Celebrating York's Rivers and Creating a Gateway to York" (Subsection 4.5.2) (SoHS, 2020). If so, the Grade II listed assets of Skeldersgate Bridge and Tollhouse, and Castle Mills Lock, will be considered as participating in, and enabling, the enhancement of access to York. The Skeldersgate location is to the NW of the proposed development, with the N and W elevations relevant to the site. The road from Bishopsgate street, along the N of the proposed site, carries cars and pedestrians across the Ouse. A car park with maximum capacity of 372 cars and 25 coaches will impact the bridge built in 1881 (HE, 1997) by making it a stable thoroughfare to the development. The bridge was strengthened in 1939, and whether the bridge can facilitate increased and sustained use should be considered by a structural engineer. The bridge displays many valuable heritage details that enlighten social history of the late 19th century, including a number of heraldic emblems and badges adorning the tollhouse and ironwork on the bridge, than can be seen from the S and N Elevations. It is noted that the Heritage Value of the Bridge and Toll-house is High for Evidential, Historical, Aesthetic and Communal values (SoHS, 6.10), and the architectural details specified on the proposal will affect the view from N on New Walk, therefore consideration should be given to the scale of the structure from the N.

Castle Mills Lock sits to the East of the proposed site, with the E elevation effecting the setting of the asset. At 4 storeys in height, the upper storeys are seen from ground level and rise above buildings of lesser height, even when seen from ground level. The Lock protects the Foss from flooding and allows passage for watercraft navigating the river. It is crucial to consider the effect of altering the Castle Gateway site for its significance as an entrance to an internationally important historic city, therefore impressions are drawn from both road and waterways. The Lock dates from 1889, made of gritstone with concrete protection and repair. The C19th gate mechanism is still active, although there are several C20 adaptations, outbuildings and repair. The Lock is GII Listed, and maintains significance as a remnant of social enterprise from the C19th and C20th. The lock is set within an environment with a multitude of period influences and materials. (HE, 1997).

The heritage impact of the proposal is acknowledged (SoHS, 7.8 and 7.9) to have little effect on both of the assets and is described as 'neutral' for both. For Castle Mills Lock, this is accurate: the mix of period architecture and materials combined with the distance between the two sites allows the proposal to blend with the other structures in the setting without any detrimental effect. The effect on Skeldersgate is greater. The evaluation provides an inadequate photograph of the setting, taken at an angle that emphasises the scale of the asset in its current setting, whilst avoiding addressing the setting at the height of the development. A large emphasis is placed on the height of mature trees surrounding both the bridge and the proposal. The development is considered to sit below the height of the canopy, but ignored is the species of tree. Broadleaf trees line the New Walk and lose their leaves in winter, exposing the full size and scale of the development to a greater extent for half the year. Considerations for soft landscaping will be ineffective in mitigating this problem; if the proposal considers hiding the development from view as the only means of justification, this evaluation is unacceptable.

The framework in which the proposals are developed must be critiqued too, and comparison to approaches in a wider international setting could be considered to aid the integration of developing space with our Heritage Assets. There is a heavy emphasis on an empirical approach to heritage assets within the planning system, their boundaries fixed and their value rooted in their material. This is by no means incorrect but the space in-between structures and the settings they create create abstract problems and intangible values too. The International Cultural Tourism Charter (ICOMOS, 1999) recognises the tension between satisfying the host community with a response to familiar space, whilst developing space to facilitate sustainable tourism. It also notes 'host communities and indigenous people should be involved in planning for conservation and tourism', whilst 'tourism and conservation activities should benefit the host community'. There is an economic element to benefiting the host community, drawing interest and likely money by enhancing the space. Chasing investment through tourism can be achieved in a multitude of ways without any detriment to the Historic Environment, with a clear option for York seeking recognition as a UNESCO World Heritage Site for its Medieval City Centre (which the development would hinder)(UNESCO 2012).

Approaches within South and East Asian conservation organisations are also of interest in engaging with a greater anthropocentric emphasis. INTACH guidelines (INTACH, 2016) place a value on specification that aids retaining visual identity, including processes enabling adaptive reuse. Embodied are approaches to restoration and re-construction, therefore applicable to construction, that place historic techniques as something of greater importance than the maintenance of the historic whole using modern means. It is noted that this approach creates outcomes that are more sympathetic to religious and spiritual approaches to sites that generate an economy using local crafts-people in their reconstruction. This approach to authentic outcomes stems from the Nara Document on Authenticity (UNESCO, 1995), which appreciates and respects that

'all cultures and societies are rooted in the particular forms and means of tangible and intangible expression which constitute their heritage'.

With regard to the current proposal, working within the guidelines of UNESCO World Heritage Sites would enable a blueprint for development with less intrusion into the existing environment. A program tailored to go beyond the visual; for sounds, processes, and sentiments, exploring the changing social context in which historic and heritage assets lie, would form an approach to and with the community that potentially reappraises the value of the surrounding heritage assets.



Figure 4: S facing view from New Walk, S of Skeldergate Bridge



Figure 5: N facing view of Skeldergate Bridge, ignoring the relation of monument and development site.



Figure 6: Castle Mills lock, photograph facing W.



Figure 7: Castle Mill Lock, photograph facing S

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Figures

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