INTRODUCTION

1. The Castlegate, the historic market place and heart of pre-Union Street Aberdeen, has in more recent years suffered from its relatively peripheral location within the modern City Centre. Though much has been done to restore the fabric of the buildings fronting the Castlegate and though the square itself has been pedestrianised and paved in granite, there has been no corresponding success in attracting people back into the Castlegate. This major civic space, of outstanding historic and townscape character, remains obviously underused. This is the major issue to be addressed by this study.

2. The 1998 Castlegate Report commissioned from Gillespies by the Aberdeen City Centre Partnership sought to “assist with the forward planning and optimum development of the area and identify the best future options.” The area has been looked at more recently as part of Aberdeen’s Urban Realm Strategy. In addition, proposals are currently being developed for a number of key sites and buildings within the Castlegate area. It is the purpose of this study to set out all of the current major development proposals within the area and to highlight the issues for the remaining important sites in order to demonstrate the inter-relationship between the individual sites within the study area. The study is then intended to be used as a means of consulting with the wider community over the regeneration of the Castlegate.

THE STUDY AREA

3. The study area includes the Castlegate itself, the Salvation Army Citadel and the area between the Castlegate and East North Street which has been referred to as North Castlegate. This latter area broadly comprises the former Timmer Market site and the series of wynds leading off the Castlegate. It also includes the two car parks to the north of East North Street.

POLICY BACKGROUND

4. In the draft Finalised Aberdeen City Local Plan the whole study area falls within the designated City Centre. The Castlegate itself and the buildings fronting it, including the Citadel, are within the Central Shopping Zone. The remainder of the study area is zoned for mixed uses. The historic importance of the area is indicated by the conservation area designation and the considerable number of listed buildings: almost every building fronting onto the Castlegate and King Street is listed.

THE TIMMER MARKET SITE

5. In 1998 the City Council agreed that this site should be sold for development as a car-free housing scheme and a design brief was produced. A key element of this brief was that the developer should be chosen by means of a competition to ensure a really outstanding design for this important historic site. Further progress, however, was prevented by the discovery that the Council did not have clear title to the entire site. The necessary
compulsory purchase procedures were subsequently instigated. In June 2001 Grampian Housing Association and the Salvation Army jointly put forward a proposition to the Council offering to buy the site for a development consisting of car-free housing and accommodation for the Salvation Army, chiefly a replacement for the Worship Hall currently contained within the Citadel. A design competition would still be employed. The proposition was viewed favourably by the Council and the site has now been sold to the Housing Association (subject to valid title being obtained by means of a compulsory purchase order currently with the Scottish Executive). It will be necessary to update the approved design brief to accommodate the requirements of the Salvation Army and to reflect the fact that, now there is a known developer and end-user, a pure architectural competition will be more appropriate than an architect/developer competition.

THE CITADEL

6. The most significant building within the Castlegate and by virtue of its position as the terminal feature of Union Street, one of the major landmarks of the City Centre. The Citadel has been placed on the market by the Salvation Army and once they have moved out it would become available for conversion to a new use. Grampian Housing Association, the “preferred bidder” for the building, has proposals for both residential use and for creating a major tourism and arts venue. This would involve a great range of facilities: shops, restaurants, viewing gallery, artists’ studios, printers’ workshops and exhibition galleries. The arts facilities would be run by Peacock Visual Arts. Thus this Aberdeen landmark would help bring visitors, artists and new residents to the Castlegate. Scottish Arts Council funding is being sought for the project.

THE CASTLEGATE WYNDS

7. The series of narrow lanes that lead from pends off the Castlegate are somewhat neglected but have considerable townscape value. Peacock currently occupy the former Cathedral school at the heart of this area. Their removal to the Citadel is an incentive to assess the potential of this part of North Castlegate. St Andrew’s Cathedral is developing proposals for new housing and tourist facilities linked to the Cathedral. In the same way as the Citadel can be used to attract people into the Castlegate this new visitor centre could revive the Castlegate Wynds.

8. The three development proposals described above are closely linked. The Timmer Market site is currently vacant and therefore available for development (once ownership issues are resolved). If the Salvation Army can be accommodated in part of the Timmer Market then Peacock can move into the Citadel. Peacock’s current premises in the Castlegate Wynd’s can then be redeveloped by St Andrew’s Cathedral. The three projects involve a range of uses and attractions while they all include new housing.
THE CASTLEGATE

9. It is necessary to consider how the fabric of the square itself might be improved. As an Urban space the Castlegate has enormous character. Even though for many years now the uses of the buildings around it have not attracted the numbers of people necessary to make such a space work, the Citadel proposals should act as a catalyst in this respect. On the other hand, the existing paving scheme though it looks appropriate enough because of the salvaged granite is not satisfactory from practical considerations. It is not a good surface to walk on. The surface, originally fairly uneven, has become further broken up by delivery vehicles. Improvements are necessary. Should the opportunity be taken to allow vehicular access to the Citadel from Union Street? This would certainly link the Citadel more directly to Union Street and this must be attractive to whoever will be operating the proposed new uses within this building but can this be done without compromising the quality of the square for pedestrians? Furthermore, would such an arrangement be practicable given the configuration of any new junction at the corner of Union Street and King Street. Issues of visibility, road safety and pedestrian/vehicular conflict may be difficult to resolve.

10. At present there is pedestrian access to the Castlegate from Union Street but not vehicular access. Conversely, there is vehicular access into the east end of the Castlegate but the traffic roundabout presents such a daunting barrier to those on foot that there is very little pedestrian movement via the east end. Given the amount of current and likely future development towards the Beach this too is a major issue.

THE EAST NORTH STREET CAR PARKS

11. There are two car parks: one for the public and the other, with a temporary surface, reserved for City Council staff during the day but available to the public in the evening and at weekends. With the development of the Timmer Market site these will be the nearest public car parks to the Castlegate. Adequate car parking has always been a concern of businesses in the area. It may be necessary to restrict the public car park to short stay parking to serve this local need. Any future development proposals on either or both of these sites would have to take this into consideration. At the time of preparing the original design brief for the Timmer Market site it was suggested that a separate brief be prepared for this area north of East North Street.
CASTLEGATE PLANNING STUDY

KEY
- Boundary of Study Area
- Enhanced Pedestrian Routes

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