

3. Character Areas: Issues & Opportunities

3.1 Character Areas & Managing Growth

As stated, in the right place and form, tall development can make positive contributions to the townscape and life within a city. In the right place and form, it can assist with regeneration and stimulate further investment. However, by virtue of their size and prominence, such buildings can also harm the qualities that people value about a place. They can be located and designed with a lack of appreciation or understanding of the context in which they sit. This section outlines the opportunities and constraints for the Character Areas (see pages 4-6) in Leicester when considering tall development.

Much of the needed development activity to enable the economy's restructuring, will occur in the area within and around the City Centre, within the Central Development Area (CDA). Leicester's future economic prosperity will depend on making sure that it has the right appeal to a skilled and mobile workforce as well as being an attractive place to live and work. The quality of life, environment, housing, jobs and the cultural, leisure and retail offer of the city and central area in particular, will play a major role in this.

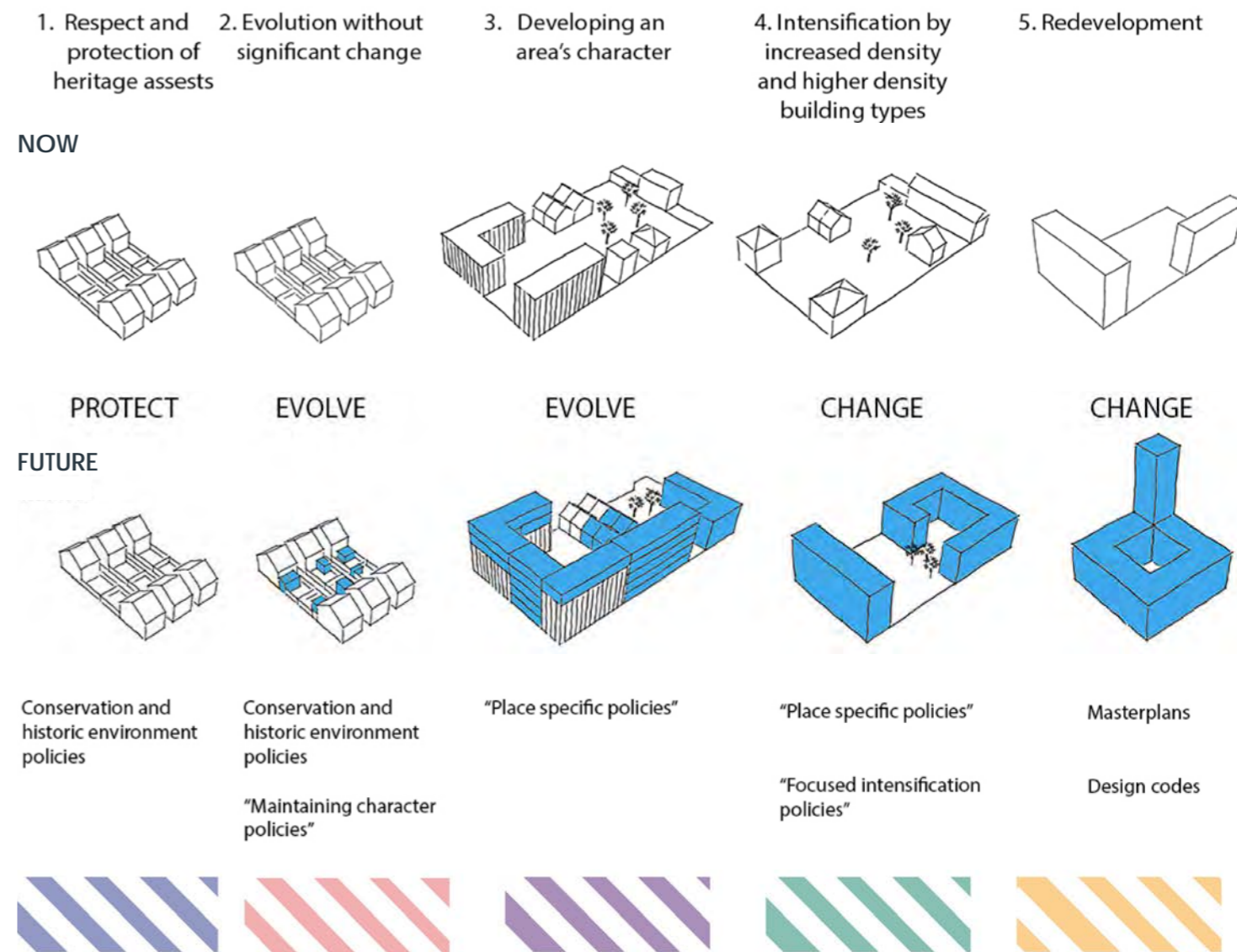
The City Council has divided the Central Development Area (CDA) into 13 distinct areas, including 9 Character Areas and 5 other Regeneration Areas to recognise the individual context of each area and for future policy to be based on an area's defining characteristics.

As outlined in Figures 32 and 33 some Character Areas are identified for protection and will evolve without significant change. Whilst others are identified as areas for redevelopment and intensification, to meet Leicester's needs and will undergo significant change in the plan period. The aim of the Central Development Area is to enable the City Council to direct, optimise and encourage investment, whilst appropriately managing development within a local context, so that they deliver high quality development, which in turn creates certainty and developer confidence.

Further detail can be found in Chapter 9, Central Development Area Policy within the Draft Local Plan and the nine Townscape Analysis and Design Guidance Evidence Documents for each Character Area.

The Council recognises that in some of the Character Areas tall development in the right location and of a high quality can make a positive contribution.

Figure 32. Character Area Townscape Management





3.2 Topography

Figures 35 and 36 show the topography of the Central Development Area (CDA) and wider Leicester. Within the CDA there is very little change in topography with the exception of the south-east area, which rises up towards Welford Road Cemetery and Victoria Park.

This elevated position does provide views of the city centre which could be considered to be significant in the Leicester context. Welford Road Cemetery provides the only true panoramic view of the city centre from a public space, although it covers mostly the west side of the city centre. Given its elevation, it also provides views beyond the city centre to Bradgate Park. In winter when the tree canopy is reduced the Cathedral can be seen.

The views down London Road also capture part of the city centre. Most importantly, however, this elevated position shows the distinct and unique backdrop of the ridge of Bradgate Park in the distance. This topography has often been captured in prospect paintings of Leicester, often taken from the south. These were often illustrated on maps, as can be seen below in the Roberts map of 1741 and also the prospect from the South by Samuel and Nathaniel Buck. This unique topography is also represented in Victorian images of Leicester as seen in the 1907 postcard (Figure 40)

Considering the topography of wider Leicester, the flood plain of the River Soar is clearly identifiable with the land rising up to the east and the west. Unlike many cities Leicester is not surrounded by elevated land and therefore skyline views from elevated positions are limited, although they are still experienced in particular locations.

The skyline views of the city, which are sometimes just glimpses, occur in particular along radial roads and there are limited views from public open spaces. The Council needs to undertake further work to establish their location, the historical precedents for those skyline views, and assess their importance to Leicester. They may need to be considered when proposing tall development given the buildings, spires and landmarks that can be seen in them. In particular, the spire of the Cathedral.



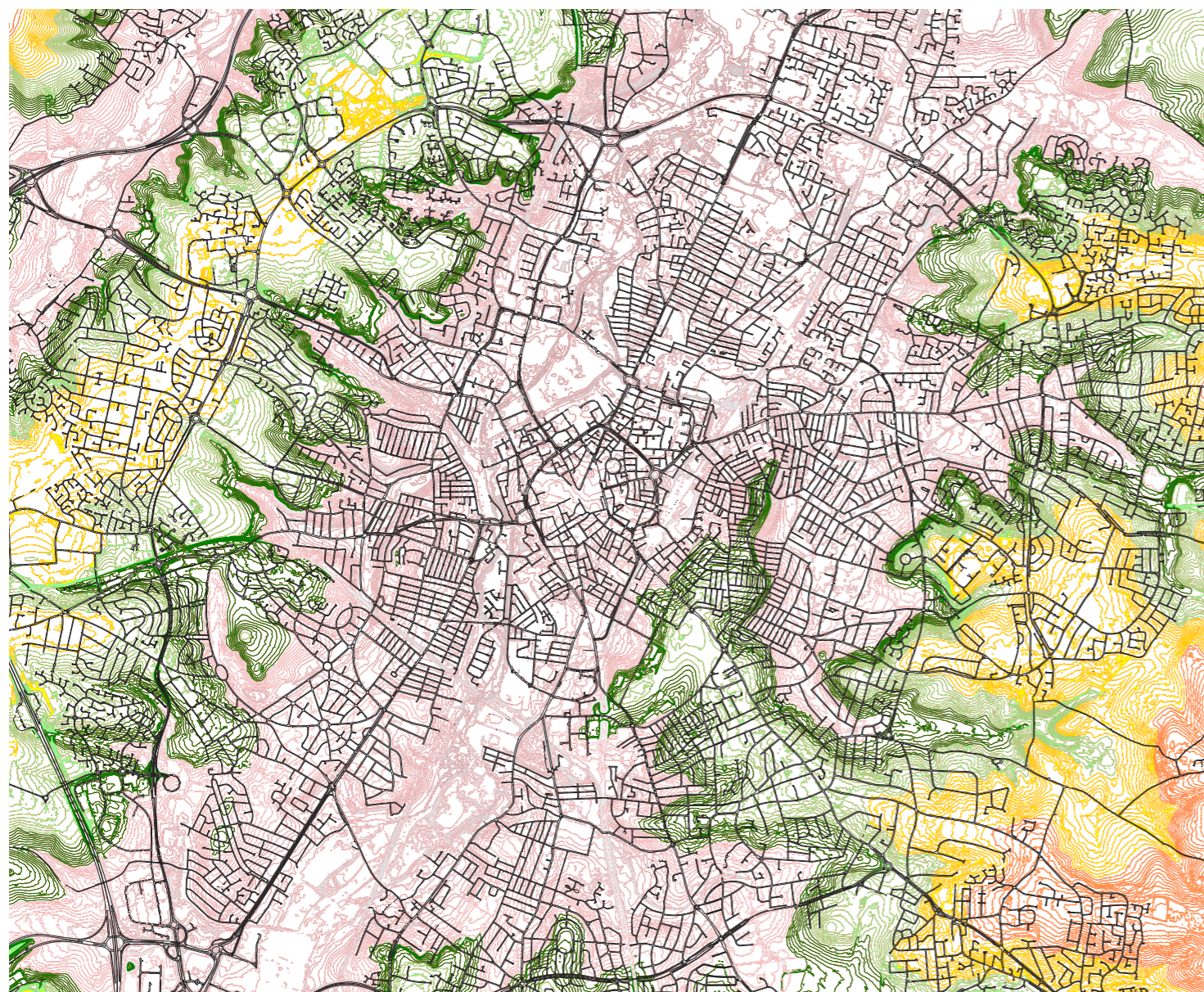


Figure 35. Topography of Leicester (LIDAR Data)

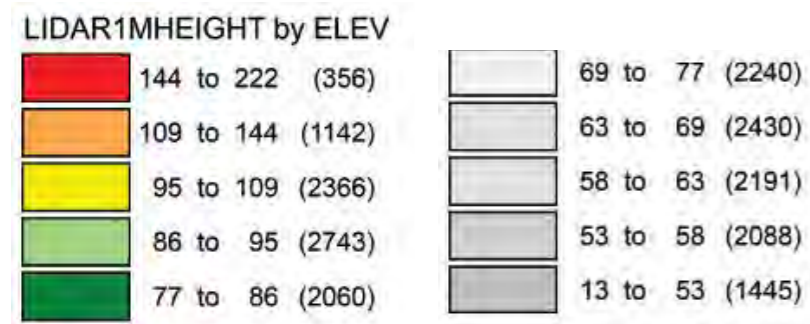


Figure 36. Topography of Leicester Central Development Area

Figure 37. Drawing from 1790 by John Throsby

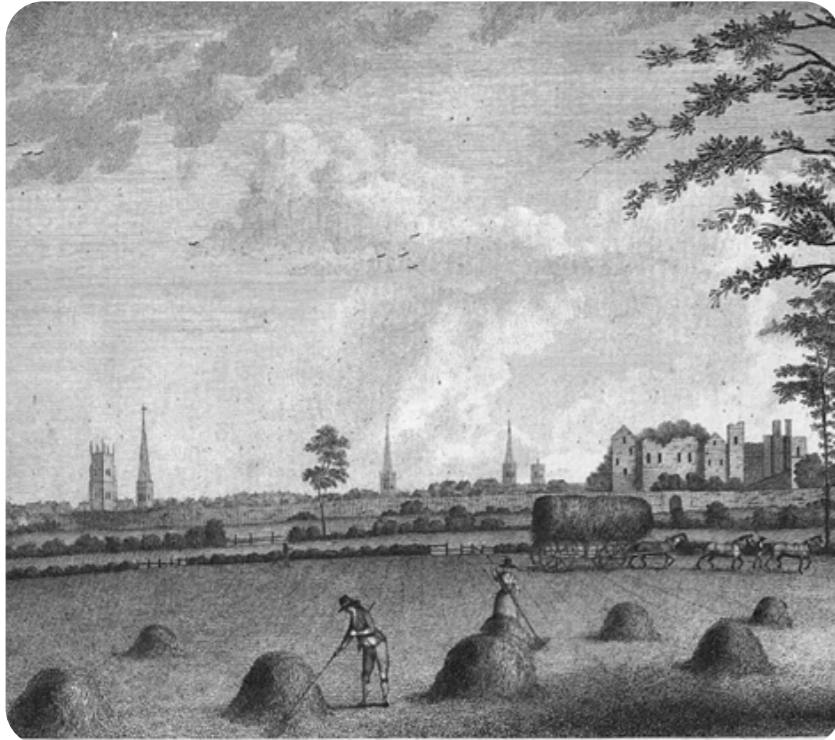


Figure 38. Engraving of the 'Town of Leicester' in 1854 by Thomas Dugdale



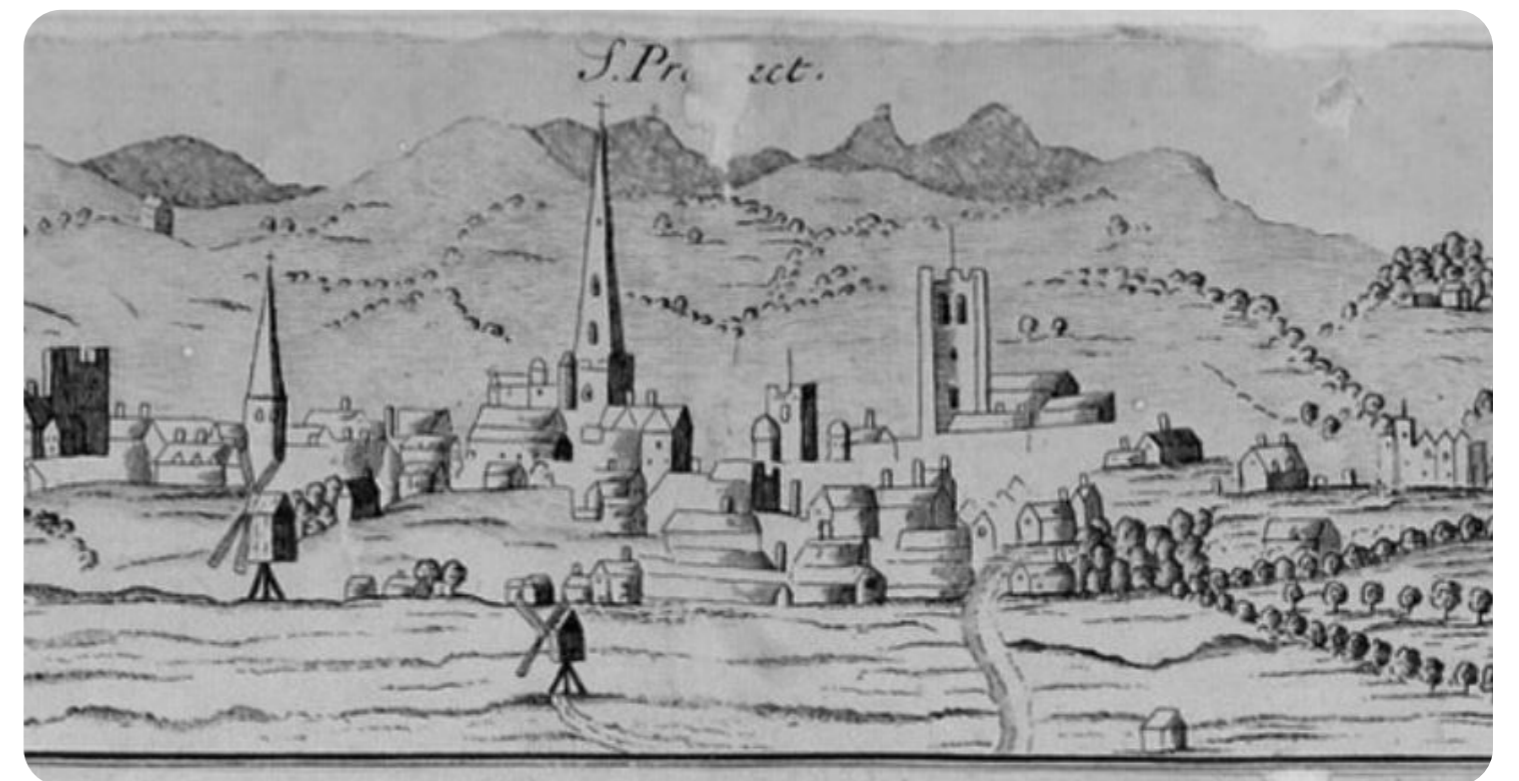
Figure 39. Postcard from 1907 Showing the View Down London Road with Bradgate Park & Old John in the Distance.



Figure 40. Detail from The South Prospect of Leicester, by Samuel and Nathaniel Buck, 1743



Figure 41. Prospect from the South from the Roberts Map of 1741.



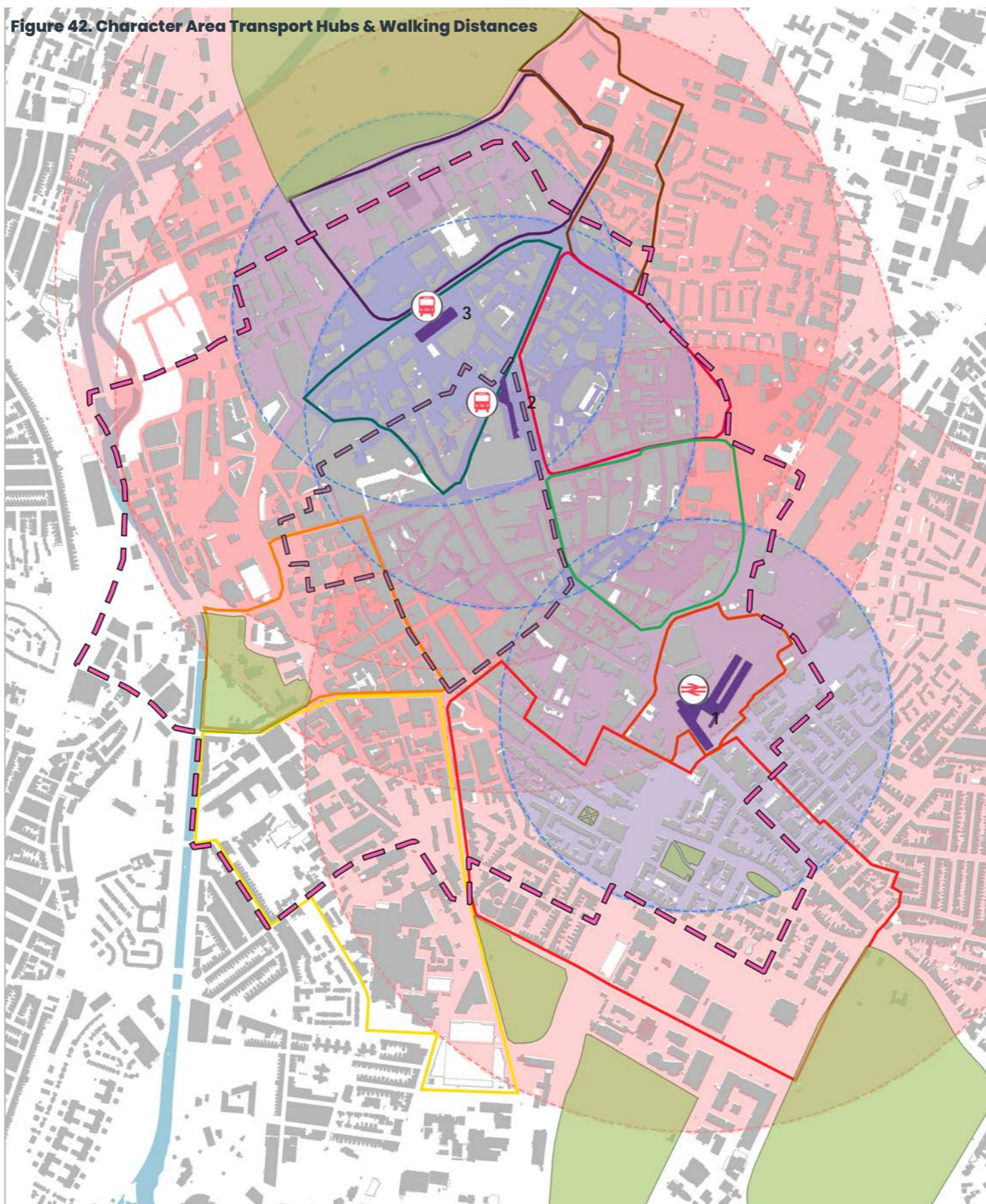
3.3 Transport Hubs

As illustrated in Figure 42 the majority of the Character Areas within the CDA are well-served by public transport and are within a 10 minutes walk of one of Leicester's major public transport hubs; Leicester Railway Station, St. Margaret's Bus Station and Haymarket Bus Station.

Predominantly, the Character Areas on the west side of the CDA, such as Old Town and LRI & DMU, have areas beyond a 10 minutes walking distance. In contrast, Mansfield Street and Wharf Street Character Areas are within a 5 minutes walking distance of the two main bus stations.

The existing central pedestrian zone has been mapped and this will be updated as part of the draft Local Plan. An area of approximately 10 minutes walk beyond this existing central pedestrian zone has been mapped, illustrating how accessible for pedestrians the area is.

More detail on the accessibility to public transport for each Character Area can be found in the Townscape Analysis and Design Guidance Evidence Documents.



- 1 Leicester Railway Station
- 2 Haymarket Bus Station
- 3 St Margaret's Bus Station
- Existing Central Ped Zone (5 mins)
- Approx 10 mins Walk Beyond Existing Central Ped Zone
- Bus Station
- Railway Station
- Approx 10 Minute Walking Radius
- Approx 5 Minute Walking Radius



Figure 43. Leicester Railway Station

3.4 Building Heights

Existing Building Heights

Figure 44 shows the heights of individual buildings within the Character Areas and five main categories can be identified. Firstly buildings/ built structures between 0 and 9 metres (broadly equivalent to up to 3 residential storeys), followed by buildings/ built structures between 9 and 21 metres (broadly equivalent to 3 to 7 residential storeys). These categories represent the majority of the built environment within the Character Areas, reflecting the overall predominant height.

Considering the predominant height within the Character Areas, tall development can be understood as 'a building which is significantly higher than the buildings in the surrounding area'. As a result, the next height category reflects buildings/ built structures higher than the predominant height, but not significantly higher. Buildings/ built structures between 21 and 24 metres (broadly equivalent to 8 residential storeys), although not perceived as tall, fall within a transition zone between what is and is not tall. Such buildings will need to be considered with care.

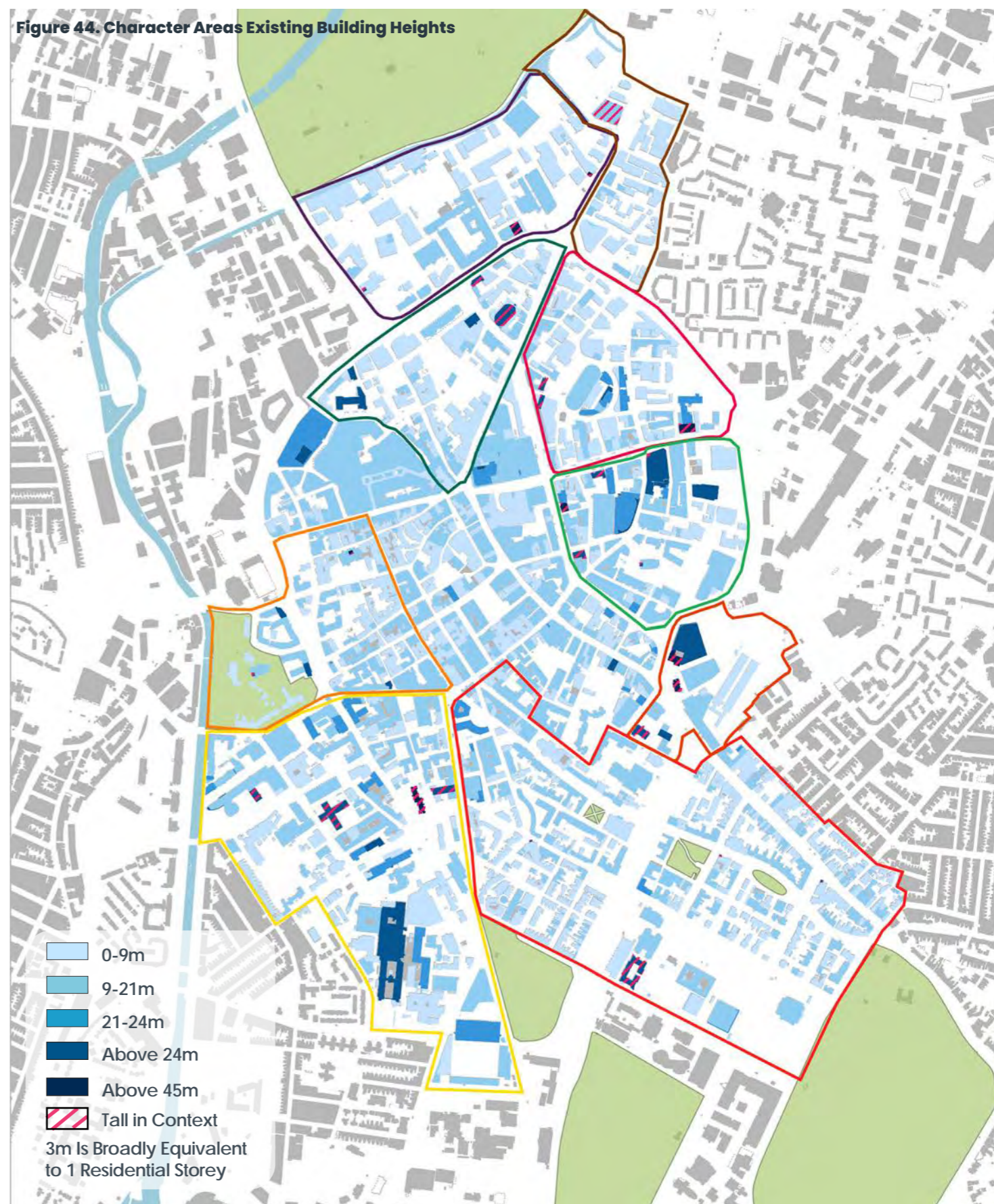
Furthermore, any buildings/ built structures above 24 metres (broadly equivalent to above 8 residential storeys) are considered as 'tall' and any above 45 metres (broadly equivalent to above 15 residential storeys) as 'super tall'. These height categories reflect the draft conclusions of the Regulation 18 Tall Development in Leicester Evidence Document (February 2020).

Another category that has been identified, while evaluating the various, existing building heights, refers to the 'tall in context' buildings/ built structures. This category includes buildings/ built structures of any height that are significantly taller than those within their surroundings.

There are approximately fifty developments (both existing and recently constructed) with elements above 24 metres in the Character Areas. Of those, there are nine that have elements exceeding 45 metres in height (broadly equivalent to above 15 residential storeys) (Figure 44). The general height of developments within the Character Areas are predominantly below 9 metres (3 residential storeys) and between 9 metres and 21 metres (3 to 7 residential storeys).

There are some patterns that can be identified. Whilst there are very few tall developments within the central shopping core of the city centre the amount of development at 9-21 metres is greater than for the Character Areas. As expected, areas which are predominantly employment uses at present with low rise employment and retail uses are characterised by heights of below 9 metres. These areas include Belgrave Gateway, St. Margaret's, Mansfield Street Character Areas. Lower storey heights are also characteristic of areas with a large concentration of heritage assets which contribute significantly to the historic environment of the city, for example New Walk and Old Town Character Areas.

The clusters of tall development above 24 metres near to the station can be clearly identified. A concentration of development at 9-24 metres is also noticeable to the LRI & DMU, St. George's Character Areas and the south of Wharf Street Character Area.



Prevailing / Ambient Building Height

In any given context it is important to consider the scale and character of the surroundings where tall development is being considered. Often the height of the surrounding context is referred to as the 'ambient' or 'prevailing' building height.

Mapped building heights can provide some useful patterns. However, calculating the ambient building height for each Character Area provides additional understanding of height in relation to the unique context of each Character Area and how they vary across the CDA. The ambient height for each Character Area was calculated using the methodology outlined in Appendix 1.

Figure 45 illustrates the calculated ambient height for each character are, supporting the already made observations of the mapped, existing building heights. Ambient heights range from 9.9 metres (approximately 3 residential storeys) to 21.6 metres (approximately 7 residential storeys). The lower ambient building heights are within the Belgrave Gateway and the St. Margaret's Character Areas, whereas the higher ambient building heights are found within the central shopping area and the Railway Station and St. George's Character Areas. The combined ambient height for all the Character Areas (as a whole) is 14.85 metres, which is broadly equivalent to 5 residential storeys.

Street Sections / Streetscape

To consider the townscape in more detail we have selected four streets from three Character Areas to consider heights in relation to their impact on the streetscape. Streets have been selected that have buildings along them which are generally representative of Leicester's ambient height at 14.85 metres, although some buildings are lower and some are taller. They also have development of above 24 metres.

The four streets are;

1. Humberstone Gate (St. Georges Character Area)
2. Charles Street (St. Georges Character Area)
3. Abbey Street (Mansfield Street Character Area)
4. Wharf Street South (Wharf Street Character Area)

The street sections show a line at 14.85 metres (ambient height) and at above 24 metres. In considering the street elevations and accompanying photographs, development at above 24 metres is clearly prominent compared to its surrounding context.

Additionally, development above 24 metres along a street frontage can result in streets lacking consistent enclosure. Within urban centres, expected enclosure, street height to width ratios should generally be 1:2 and 1:1.

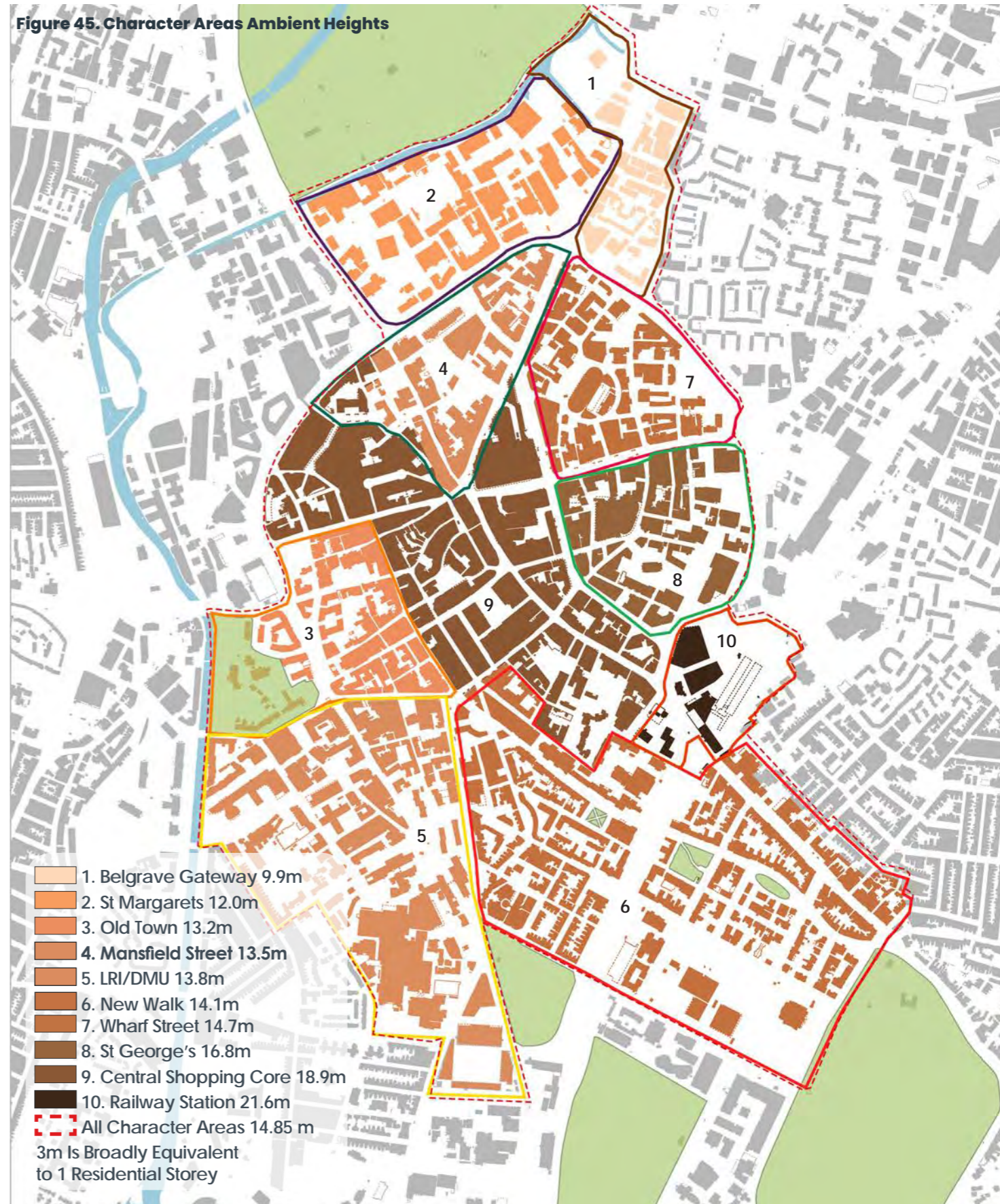


Figure 46. Location of Street Sections

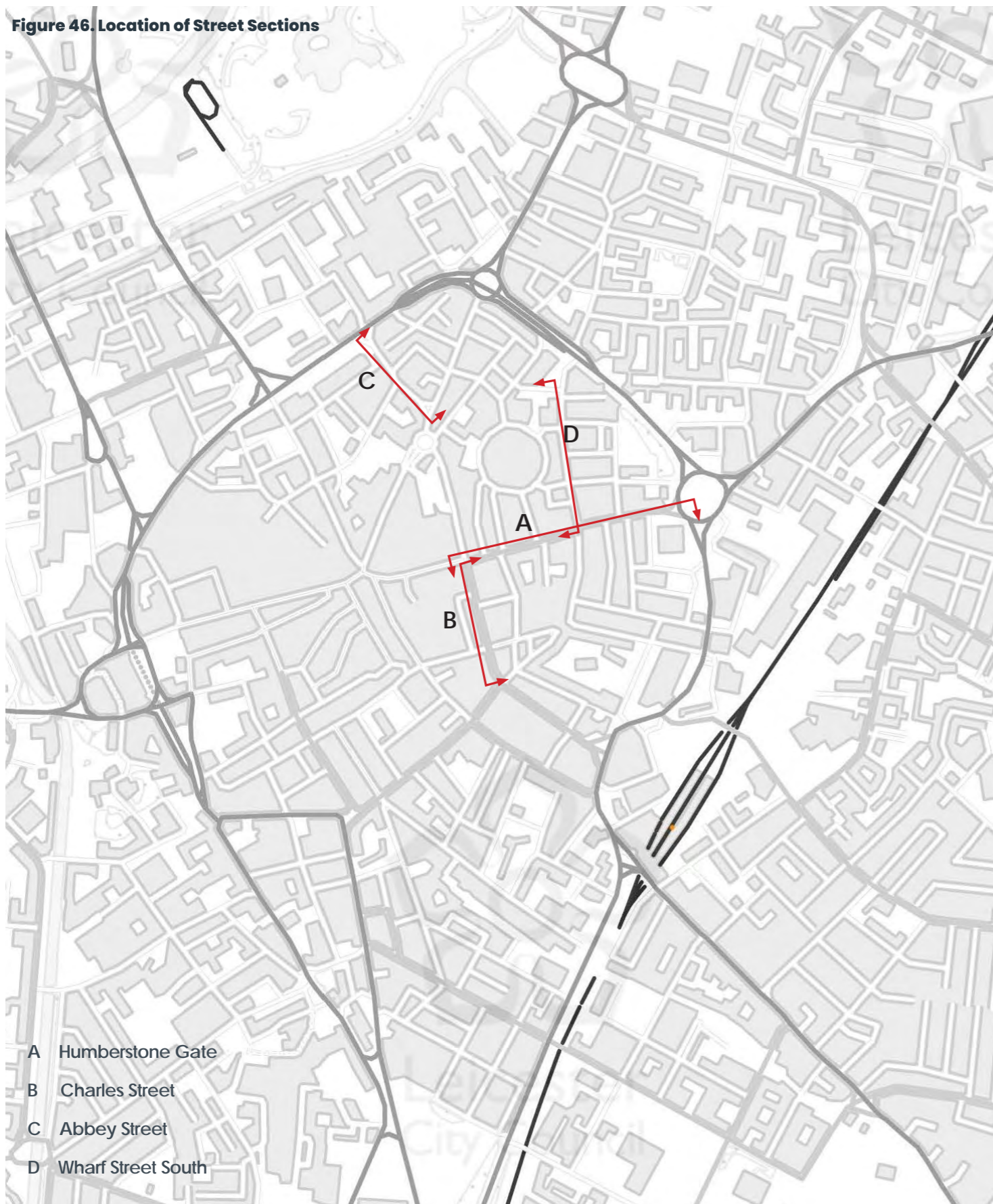


Figure 47. Humberstone Gate (A)



Figure 48. Charles Street (B)



Figure 49. Abbey Street (C)

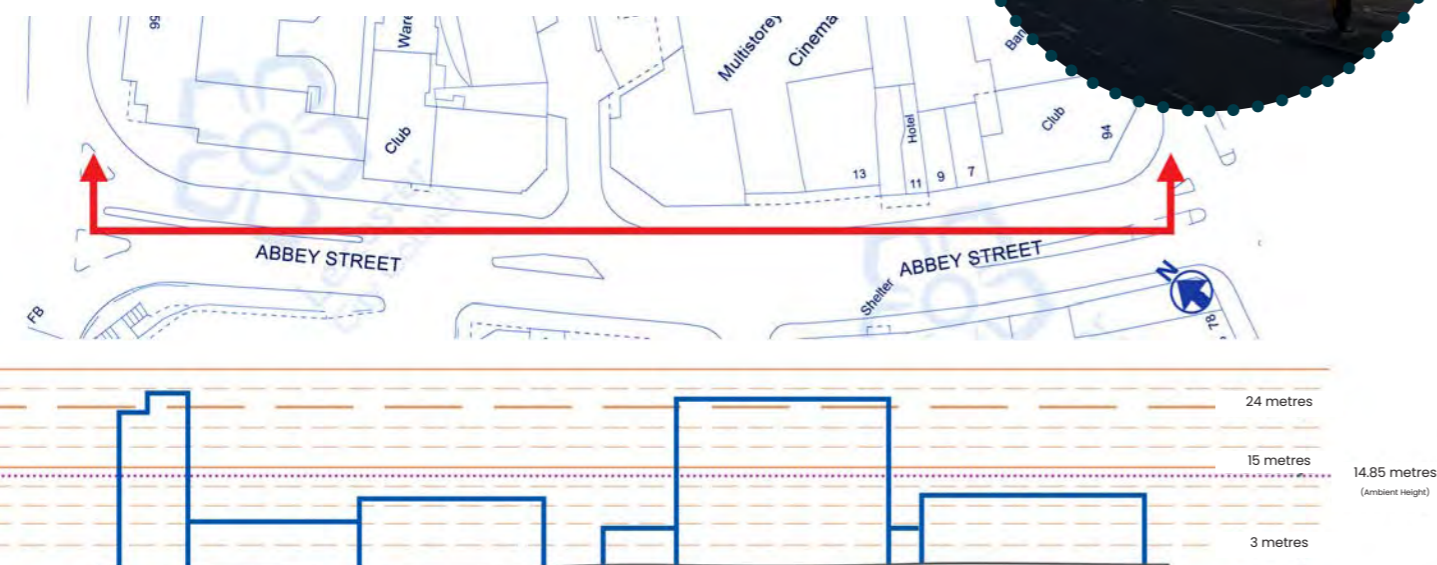


Figure 50. Wharf Street South (D)



Heights of Existing & Approved Tall Development

Figure 51 shows the eleven tallest buildings/developments in Leicester.

1. Cardinal Exchange, Humberstone Road (85m)
2. St. Georges Tower, St. Georges Way (79.1m)
3. The Summit, Walnut Street (67m)
4. St. Martin's Cathedral (61m)
5. Thames Tower, Navigation Street (58m)
6. Attenborough Building, University of Leicester (52m)
7. St. Mark's Church (51m)
8. De Montfort House, Oxford Street (48m)
9. Merlin Wharf, Bath Lane (47m)
10. Elizabeth House, Waterloo Way (46m)
11. Midland House, Charles Street (45m)

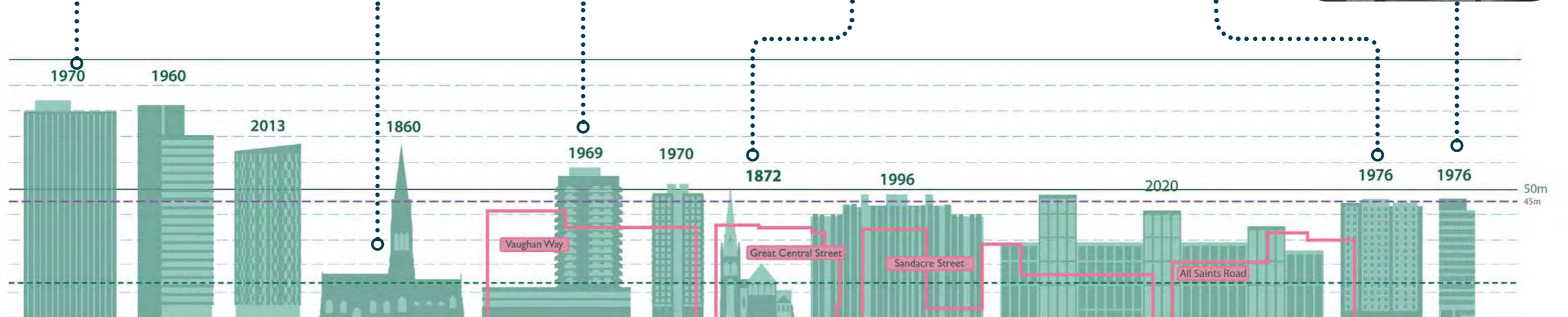
The Cathedral at 61 metres is not the tallest building within Leicester. Three buildings are taller, Cardinal Exchange, St. Georges Tower and the Summit. However, given the topography of Leicester, their location and the limited skyline views these buildings do not adversely affect the setting of the Cathedral. Thus, the Cathedral remains the dominant feature in many long views within the city centre and glimpses of it are often experienced. The views assessment outlined below and in Appendix 5 considers some views of the Cathedral but the Council does need to undertake further work in understanding more fully the locations from where the Cathedral is viewed from and the importance of those locations.

Figure 51 also shows the heights of the tallest recent planning approvals within the CDA (Central Development Area), some of which are now under construction or are completed and occupied.

1. Residential, Vaughan Way (PA No. 20162182) (The Wulcomb)
2. Hotel and Offices, Great Central Street (PA No. 20171085)
3. Residential, Sandacre Street (PA No. 20171254)
4. Residential, All Saints Road (PA No. 20170634) (The Arches)

The recently completed residential development on Bath Lane (PA No. 20162521) is Merlin Wharf.

All but one of these approved schemes are for residential development including student accommodation and the private rental market (PRS). The Great Central Street approval is a mixed-use scheme consisting of the new Novotel hotel, Adagio serviced apartments and an office building.



Cardinal Exchange, St Georges Tower, The Summit, Leicester Cathedral, Thames Tower, Attenborough Building, St. Marks Church, DeMontfort House, Merlin Wharf, Bath Lane, Elizabeth House, Midland House

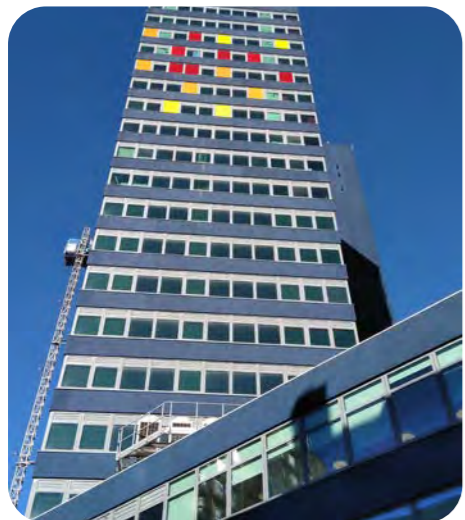


Figure 51. The 11 Tallest Developments in Leicester & the 5 Tallest Recently Approved Developments (in outline).

3.5 Heritage

Figures 52 to 59 below show:

- Key Buildings, Spaces and Setting
- Conservation Areas and Registered Parks and Gardens
- Grade I, II* Listed Buildings, Scheduled Ancient Monuments and locally listed buildings

The city centre includes the highest concentration of heritage assets in Leicester. As the historic core of the city, development has been concentrated in this location over a much longer time span than much of the rest of the current spatial extent of Leicester and the area exhibits significant historic buildings and structures from a wide range of historic periods.

The heritage assets are diverse in terms of their scale and the setting formed by nearby development, much of which is later and of a lower order of heritage significance. Where there are townscapes, demonstrating more contiguous heritage significance, areas are protected by conservation area designations and/or designation as a Registered Park and Garden. Individually significant heritage assets, such as the Clock Tower, are generally designated as nationally listed buildings, although this designation may overlap with the aforementioned broader heritage designations.

Individual heritage assets that are of a lower order of significance are identified as Local Heritage Assets, which are sometimes referred to as locally listed buildings. These heritage assets are still to be considered as a material planning consideration, but they do not overlap with conservation areas or Registered Parks and Gardens.

There are 24 conservation areas in the entire city, whereas 12 of them are located within the CDA. Ten of the later conservation areas are fully, or partly within the nine designated Character Areas. More than half of the nationally listed buildings in

the city are in the city centre, while over a quarter of Local Heritage Assets are also located there. Of the six Registered Parks and Gardens in Leicester, only New Walk is located within the Character Areas, although Abbey Park is a significant asset to St. Margaret's Character Area and the Character Areas to the north. The setting of Victoria Park and Welford Road Cemetery are just on the periphery of the Character Areas but make a significant townscape contribution to them, given their setting, location and views in and out.

Additional information on the special qualities of the conservation areas and listed buildings are provided in dedicated guides. These include individual conservation area character appraisals and dedicated guides to both locally and nationally listed buildings. Policy in the emerging Local Plan and through the National Planning Policy Framework (2010), National Planning Practice Guidance (2019) and Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 detail that the significance of heritage assets should be properly considered in the assessment of development proposals that may impact on them or their setting. Due to their scale, tall development may harm the setting of heritage assets and undermine their significance if the design and siting is not properly considered.

Leicester has a number of 'set pieces' of heritage significance, where both buildings and spaces of significance combine, often framing a view or enclosing a space. These include New Walk, Cathedral Gardens and Town Hall Square. Through the Connecting Leicester programme improvements have been made to the public realm with new spaces created and existing spaces enhanced within the city centre. The improvements have also enhanced the setting of the historic environment, elevating its contribution to Leicester's townscape. These include Orton Square, Jubilee Square and the Market Place. The 'set pieces' are both located within and outside conservation areas, but their importance is recognised in the plans below.



Figure 52. St. Margaret's Churchyard



Figure 53. St. Mark's Church and Foundry Square



Figure 54. Jubilee Square



Figure 55. Cathedral



Figure 56. All Saints Church



Figure 57. Orton Square



Figure 58. Green Dragon Square

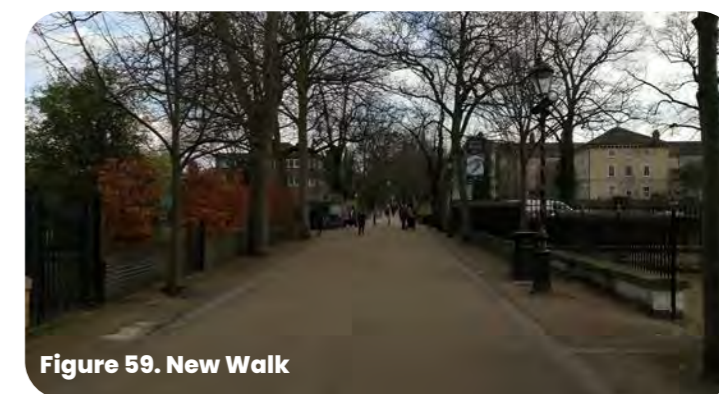
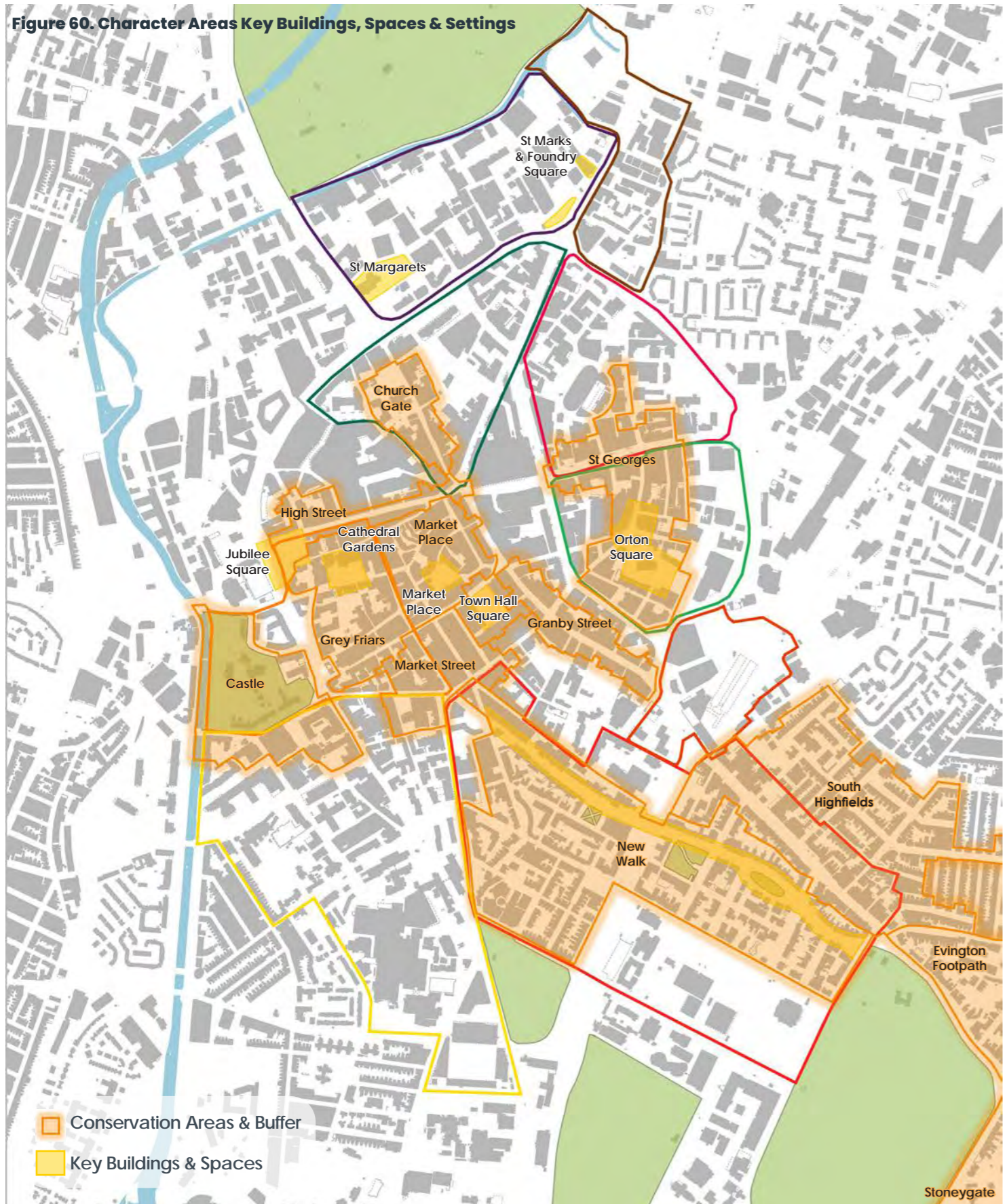
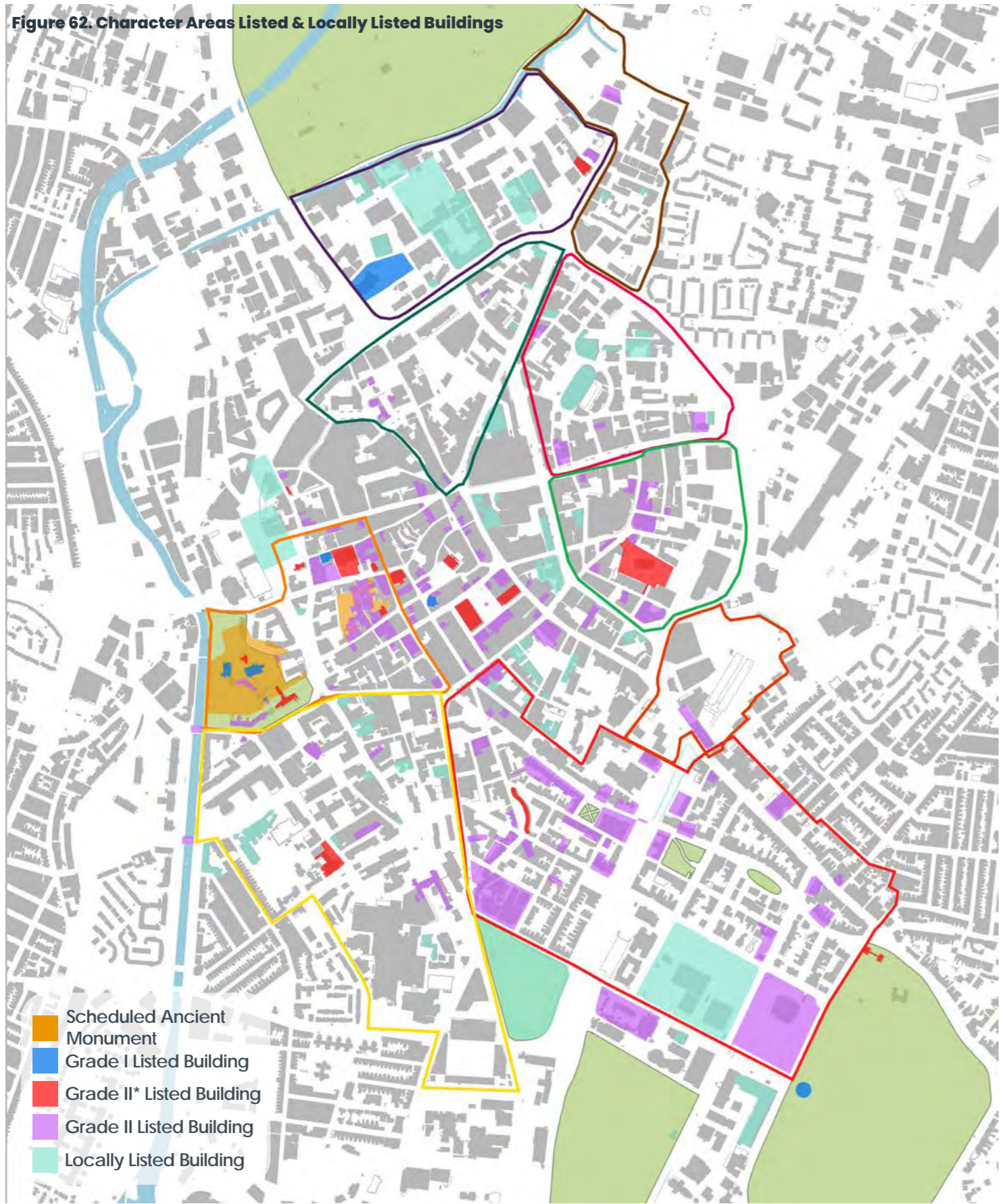


Figure 59. New Walk





3.6 Views

There has not been a policy framework in Leicester that has considered in detail, and in one place, views in Leicester and their importance. This is a vital aspect of establishing a 'Leicester specific' policy framework.

The Council has undertaken consultation on these views and more views have been assessed and added.

Appendix 5 outlines over 100 views, which range in scale from city-wide significant views to local townscape views, within the urban fabric, of local landmarks and buildings. As previously stated, given the potential prominence and impact of tall development in the townscape and the identity of Leicester, this is a major consideration when evaluating tall development.

In assessing views, criteria have been identified that are relevant to Leicester, but aligned with national guidance. They focus, in combination, on the importance of the view and the type of the view. One view can meet a number of criteria for both importance and type.

A. Criteria for assessing the IMPORTANCE of the view

1. Historical importance
2. Cultural importance
3. Maintaining 'sense of place' / legibility'
4. Image of Leicester
5. Skyline and panoramas
6. Views of Cathedral

B. Criteria for assessing the TYPE of views

1. Specific views from special places that provide historic viewpoints of city landmarks and panoramas
2. Linear long, mid and short range views with landmarks as focal points (ie terminating the views) and prominent in the view
3. Sequential, dynamic, views of city landmarks from approach routes, for example, Church Gate
4. Important views within the urban fabric – allowing the appreciation of key buildings and key spaces
5. Townscape panoramas

Figures 65 and 65 show three types of view which have been categorised and assessed;

(1) Views & Vistas of City-Wide Significance

Generally meet a large number of criteria and are significant to the history, identity and place of Leicester (Labelled CW VP 1, CW VP 2 etc.).

For some of these views a number of viewpoints are selected to capture sequential, or dynamic, views, for example the changing views of St. Margaret's Church from Church Gate, and the range of views from Registered Parks and Gardens, such as Abbey Park.

(2) Conservation Area Views

These views are localised to Conservation Areas and meet some of the assessment criteria. They are taken from Conservation Area Appraisals, where identified, and have been recently updated by the Council's Building Conservation Team. There may be some repetition with views and vistas of city-wide significance, for example along Church Gate (Labelled CA CG VP 1, 2 etc.; CA NW VP 1, 2, 3 etc.).

(3) Local Character Area Views

These views are those identified in the Townscape Analysis and Design Guidance Evidence Documents for each Character Area. Some of the views meet the assessment criteria, but not all (Labelled ChA MS VP 1, 2 etc.; ChA NW VP 1, 2, 3 etc.).

It should be noted that some of these views have been identified in the detailed townscape analysis of each Character Areas as significant to the urban fabric and contributing to the distinctiveness of those areas. Therefore, some of those views will not fall within the criteria for this assessment. Furthermore, there are identified views that are to be considered for all new development, not just proposals for tall development. In particular, to areas that are likely to undergo considerable change requiring new landmarks and connections to create legible and well-connected places.

To establish the extent of the area defined as 'Area Constrained by Heritage' in Chapter 5 Policy Position it is mainly the views and vistas of city-wide significance that have been used. The Conservation Area Views are mostly captured within the Conservation Areas and their buffer zones and the details of the Local Character Area views can be found within each individual Character Area Townscape Analysis and Design Guidance Evidence Document.

Views are captured in this document at a moment in time. As development takes place or buildings are removed, views can be opened up and offer a view that could be considered to be of townscape and heritage value. Obviously, the criteria for considering the importance of views tends to be weighted towards historical importance and sense of place established over time. However, constant review needs to be placed on these and consideration given to them when developments are proposed. The Council will look to identify these views.

Designated Heritage Assets

The visual integrity and setting of designated heritage assets will need to be robustly assessed, including the use of agreed verified views, seasonal changes and shadows. Longer views and any additional views will be considered on a case by case basis.

Views of the Cathedral & Skyline Views

As previously stated, the Council needs to undertake further work on skyline views and gain a more comprehensive understanding of the locations where the Cathedral can be viewed from and the importance of those locations.



Figure 64. University of Leicester 's Engineering, Attenborough and Charles Wilson Buildings from Victoria Park

