



**DUMBARTON TOWN CENTRE  
CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL**



fiona **sinclair** architect

48 Keith Court Glasgow  
G11 6QW

0141-357-3553

firemaster27@btconnect.com

with Nick Wright Planning  
and Benton Scott-Simmons Landscape Architects

April 2023



## CONTENTS

### INTRODUCTION

Location and Designation  
 Definition of a Conservation Area  
 The Implications of Conservation Area Status  
 Purpose of a Conservation Area Appraisal  
 Methodology

### HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Early History  
 Mediaeval History  
 Development in the 18th and 19th Centuries  
 20th Century to the present day

### TOWNSCAPE APPRAISAL

Geology, Topography and Spatial Analysis  
 Street Pattern, Views, Approaches and Landmarks  
 Plot Pattern, Circulation and Permeability  
 Buildings and Townscape Detail  
 Open Space, Landscape and Trees  
 Activities and Uses  
 Architectural Character and Styles  
 Typical Building Materials  
 Public Realm  
 General Condition

### CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

Area Analysis and Assessment  
 Buildings Analysis and Assessment  
 Key Positive Features and Buildings  
 Key Challenges

### CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARY

Assessment of Current Boundary  
 Proposed Boundary Amendments

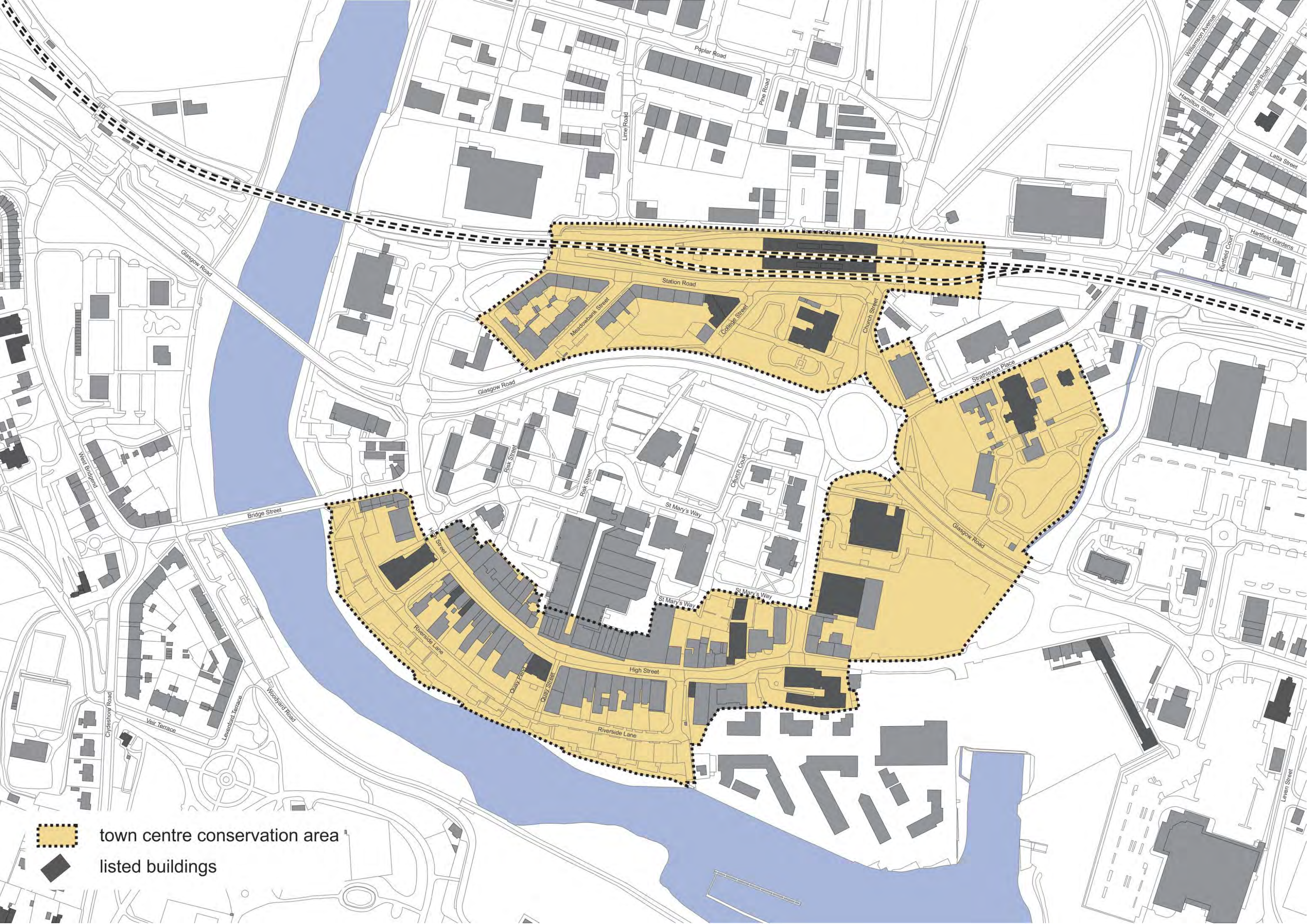
### PRESERVATION AND ENHANCEMENT

Management Planning  
 Opportunities for Preservation and Enhancement

### MONITORING AND REVIEW

### BIBLIOGRAPHY





town centre conservation area



listed buildings

## INTRODUCTION

### LOCATION AND DESIGNATION

Dumbarton is located approximately fifteen miles north-west of Glasgow and occupies a defensible site on the north bank of the River Clyde at its confluence with the River Leven. South and west of the town centre is Kirktonhill and Levensgrove Park, linked across the River Leven by the old Dumbarton Bridge; east is Knoxland and Dumbuck; and to the north is Townend and Silverton. Both Kirktonhill and Knoxland Square have enjoyed Conservation Area status since 1984.

The town centre is located between Dumbarton Central Station to the north, the River Leven to the west and south, and the A814 dual carriageway (linking Glasgow to Arrochar via Helensburgh) to the east. Excluding most of the 1960s re-development area (which at the time delivered housing, retail, community buildings and improved public realm), the Conservation Area takes the form of a reversed 'C', and includes Dumbarton Central Station and the Station Road tenements to the north, the buildings on either side of High Street to the south (stretching east from Dumbarton Bridge along the riverside as far as the 1811 Parish Church), and - to the east and around the Glasgow Road roundabout - a number of principal municipal and historic buildings and their associated plots.

The youngest of West Dunbartonshire Council's six Conservation Areas, the Dumbarton Town Centre Conservation Area was designated on 11 October 2019.

### DEFINITION OF A CONSERVATION AREA

Conservation Areas were first introduced under the Civic Amenities Act of 1967, with Carllops and Skirling in Peeblesshire the earliest in Scotland. The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act of 1997 currently provides the legislative framework for the designation of Conservation Areas.

A Conservation Area is defined in the Act as "an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance". Conservation Areas in Scotland are many and varied in character, including parts of towns and cities, isolated rural settlements, designed landscapes, battlefields, public parks and railways. Writing in the *Journal of the Institute of Historic Building Conservation* in 2017, Kathryn Davies summarised the simplicity of the concept of Conservation Areas by saying, "people understand what it is, not always perfectly nor entirely comprehensively, but they get the notion. It's *local* and it matters."

All planning authorities are required by the Act to determine which parts of their geographic domain merit Conservation Area status under the criteria set out in Section 61 of the Act and are thereafter required to use appropriate controls over development and demolition. Additionally, planning authorities should formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of any Conservation Areas within their local authority region (and present these proposals to a Public Meeting as part of the process).



## THE IMPLICATIONS OF CONSERVATION AREA STATUS

In a Conservation Area it is both the buildings and the spaces between them that are of architectural or historic interest. Planning control is therefore directed at maintaining the integrity of the area in question and taking positive action to enhance its special character by identifying and safeguarding the *sense of place*.

Under current legislation, Conservation Area designation automatically brings the following works under planning control: -

### *Demolition of unlisted buildings and structures –*

Where a building makes a positive contribution to the character of a Conservation Area there is a presumption against demolition. The decision to allow demolition also depends on the intended use of the land afterwards and may require that designs for any new buildings (or other proposals for the site) are prepared and approved before demolition is considered.

### *Removal of (or work to) trees -*

Trees in Conservation Areas have special protection. Proposals to remove branches, fell a tree or carry out work affecting roots must be notified to the local authority to give sufficient time for the impact of the proposed works to be considered. The local authority may decide that a Tree Preservation Order should be placed on the tree or group of trees if it/they make a positive contribution to the character of the Conservation Area. In such circumstances, the extent of the proposed works to the trees may be refused or require amendment.

### *Development involving small house extensions, roof alterations, dormers, stone cleaning or painting of the exterior, installation of satellite dishes, replacement windows or solar panels, and provision of hard surfaces –*

Planning decisions will consider the impact of any such proposals on the appearance of the property; the impact on neighbouring properties; and the effect on the character of the Conservation Area as a whole. Attachments to buildings such as satellite dishes and other equipment have more restrictive controls in Conservation Areas since they have the potential to impact negatively on the character of an area.

Notwithstanding all of the above, places, buildings and communities need to adapt and develop to accommodate modern-day pressures and needs. Accordingly, Conservation Area status does not prohibit new development or change, although care must be taken to ensure that any new development does not harm or diminish the character or appearance of the area.

Legislation is designed not to be prohibitive but to preserve and support local and community identity, so when assessing an application for new development in a Conservation Area, a planning authority must consider how the proposal: -

- Affects the historic street pattern, spaces and building lines;
- Affects the distinctive areas, groups of buildings and trees and other features of interest that are an important facet of the character of the area;
- Relates to the scale, proportions, materials and character of adjacent buildings and other features of the area, and
- Will secure the retention or reinstatement of traditional detailing and architectural features.

Where proposed development will impact on a Conservation Area, current Scottish Planning Policy (dated 2014, paragraph 143) expects such impact to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. Where the demolition of an unlisted building is proposed through Conservation Area Consent, consideration should be given to the contribution the building makes to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. Where a building makes a positive contribution, the presumption should be to retain it.



# DUMBARTON

Artisan Shopping Centre wanted to create an art wall that would bring together local artists and display some amazing pieces of art right here in the centre itself. The Community Art Wall is made up of local landmarks, scenic paintings and creative and inspiring art that showcases the true heart and spirit of Dumbarton.

Artists: Sarah Jayne McGlashan  
Kirsteen Brown • Steven Granger  
Ellen Cunninghame  
Jenn McKenzie • Tony Neeson  
Anne Marshall • Andrew McKenzie  
Barrie McEwan • Kevin Murney





There is also a growing awareness that the materials and construction techniques of historic (existing) buildings contain an embodied energy that should not be disregarded.

Where in the opinion of a planning authority proposed development would affect the character or appearance of a Conservation Area, the application for Planning Permission must be advertised in the local press providing an opportunity for public comment. Views expressed are taken into consideration by the local planning authority when deciding on the application.

The nature of most Conservation Areas, and the importance of communities enjoying a sense of ownership, means that local residents, businesses and property owners have a major role to play in protecting and enhancing the character and appearance of their Conservation Area. There are economic benefits that come from the historic character of an area being preserved and improved, and at its most basic level, this can be achieved by ensuring that properties and spaces are regularly maintained using appropriate knowledge, skills and materials, and that original architectural features are not lost.

Ultimately, successful management of a Conservation Area is best achieved with the support and input of all local stakeholders.

### **PURPOSE OF A CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL**

The Scottish Government's Planning Advice Note (PAN) 71 notes that "when effectively managed, conservation areas can anchor thriving communities, sustain cultural heritage, generate wealth and prosperity and add to quality of life."

Conservation Area designation brings with it ongoing responsibilities, but also opportunities. Once a Conservation Area has been designated, planning authorities have a duty to formulate proposals for the preservation and enhancement of the protected area, albeit there is no published timescale for this process.

Given that planning authorities are required by law to protect Conservation Areas from development that would be detrimental to their character, it is vital that planning authorities, residents and property owners are aware of the key features that create an area's special character and appearance. The purpose, therefore, of a Conservation Area Appraisal is to identify and evaluate the special architectural or historic interest of an area along with those key features that contribute to its character and appearance. It also provides an opportunity to raise awareness amongst communities about the special needs and characteristics of an area and helps developers prepare proposals against an informed backdrop.

Ultimately, a Conservation Area Appraisal is a management tool which helps to identify the special interest and changing needs of an area. An appraisal provides the basis for the development of a programme of action that is compatible with the sensitivities of the historic area (and its occupants) and enables a local authority to fulfil its statutory duty to protect and enhance its Conservation Areas. Appraisals also inform policy and assist development management.

Research and detailed townscape analysis forms part of the evaluation, but so too does public consultation. It is important to understand an area's changing needs and the activities therein as well as its special characteristics. A Conservation Area Appraisal also provides an opportunity to reconsider area boundaries to ensure that they reflect what is of special interest (and are also logical).

Conservation Area Appraisals typically follow Scottish Government guidance as set out in Planning Advice Note (PAN) 71. Further guidance in respect of historic buildings and Conservation Areas is set out within Scottish Planning Policy. Historic Environment Scotland has also published a suite of documents on Managing Change in the Historic Environment. In respect of Dumbarton Town Centre, any evaluation and recommendations should be considered in conjunction with the planning policy framework set out in the West Dunbartonshire Local Plan (adopted 2010) and the proposed West Dunbartonshire Local Development Plan (LDP2).



KINCAID, PAINTER. CO

PHOTOGRAPHY

S. HOTEL

W. HOTEL

W. HOTEL

## METHODOLOGY

This appraisal has been prepared by a team of heritage consultants who carried out a site survey of Dumbarton Town Centre, studying setting, views and vistas, street pattern, historic townscape, trees and landscaping, vehicular and pedestrian movements, building usage, buildings at risk and negative factors. Historic maps and archive film and photography allowed the development of the town centre to be traced. The team also undertook public consultation with local schools and through a survey entitled “Help us preserve and improve what’s best about Dumbarton Town Centre”, hosted by West Dunbartonshire Council on its website during late 2021, which generated useful responses and observations. The team consisted of Fiona Sinclair (Conservation Architect), Nick Wright (Planner), Janet Benton of Benton Scott-Simmons (Landscape Architect) and Ines Triebel (Landscape Architect).

This appraisal could not have been completed without the assistance and enthusiasm of James Hall, Davina Lavery, Alan Williamson and Jo Sherington (Archivist) of West Dunbartonshire Council. Thanks are also due to Craig Jump of Turkey Red Media and Jeremy Watson of Dumbarton Stations Improvement Trust.

Left: Turn of the century High Street in Dumbarton looking south towards the Riverside Parish Church of 1812 (© West Dunbartonshire Libraries).



## HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

### EARLY HISTORY

The twin-headed basalt plug of Dumbarton Rock is the main defining feature of the northern shores of the Firth of Clyde, commanding the confluence with the River Leven and in ancient times controlling passage by water from east to west and also to Loch Lomond and the north. Capital of the ancient and independent British kingdom of Strathclyde, Dumbarton (or *Dun Breatann*) grew rapidly in importance thanks to its strategic location, with political control of the West of Scotland vested in the area during the last century of Roman occupation. During the Dark Ages the rock was occupied as a British stronghold (although it is not clear exactly from when) and was referred to as *Alcluith* (or *Ailecluaithe*), meaning “Clyde Rock”. In 1018, Malcolm II set his grandson Duncan (Macbeth’s predecessor) on the throne of Strathclyde, and in 1034 it was integrated with the Scottish kingdom.

### MEDIAEVAL HISTORY

During the Middle Ages Dumbarton ceased to exercise political power, instead reaping the benefits that came from its position as stronghold and principal port of entry in the west. By charter of Alexander II, the town became a royal burgh in 1222 (so entitled to trading privileges and the right to levy tolls on river traffic) and had a royal castle (or fortress) from 1238. Despite the changing fortunes of the castle (which was frequently attacked, twice by James IV), Dumbarton had importance as a harbour, being used by the King as a shipbuilding and outfitting base for his navy as he sought to pacify the Western Isles. In 1609 James VI conferred on the town the right to hold three annual fairs, establishing it as the

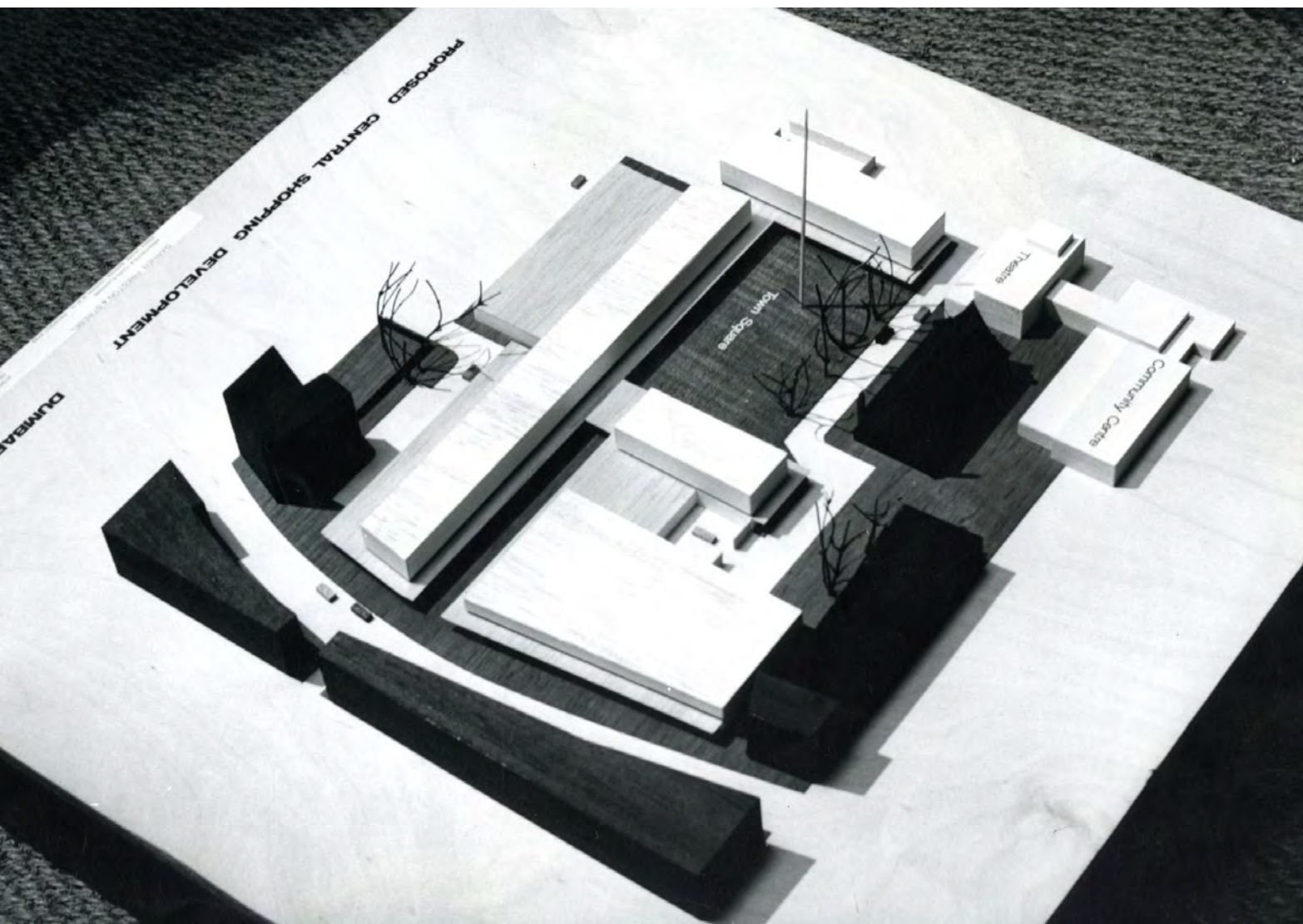
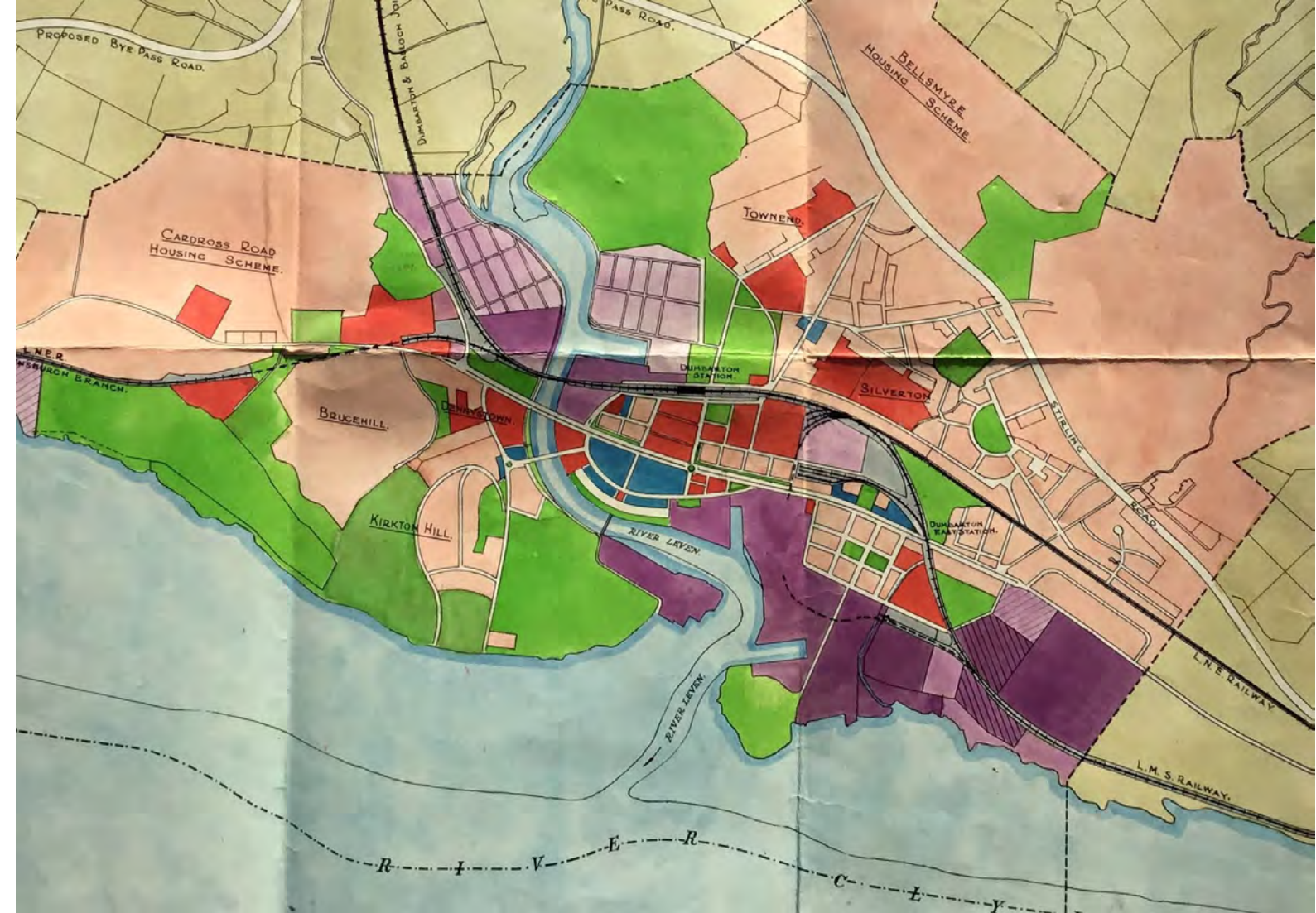
principal market town of north Clyde. The street pattern of the town centre, with narrow burgage strips running to the river’s edge, and the main street following the curve of the shore some distance back, was established during this period, and survives to this day in recognisable form. That said, population growth and development was slow and little in the way of architecturally significant buildings from that time remain, the exception being the College Bow (c1453) which is a remnant from the Collegiate Chapel of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

### DEVELOPMENT IN THE 18TH AND 19TH CENTURIES

Following the Act of Union in 1707 Dumbarton became one of four garrisons in Scotland, leading to improvements to the castle and its fortifications. After years of modest trade in salmon, herring, cloth and hides, the town at last derived prosperity from the production of glass, which began around 1776 with the establishment of the Dumbarton Glassworks. For a period, while producing bottles and then window glass (using kelp ash from the Western Isles), the company’s three tall conical kilns located on the east bank of the River Leven were as much a defining feature of the skyline as the Rock. The operation owned five coal works, four tramways, two wharves, two bottle works, a brewery, farm and seven sailing vessels.

With the tacit support of the Duke of Argyll, a five-arched stone bridge across the Leven was built in 1765, so providing access to land to the immediate west of town that was ripe for residential development. Here would settle the Dixon family, owners of the glassworks until 1832, and here too would live members of the prominent Denny shipbuilding family.

Clockwise from top left: Dumbarton Rock as seen from the south bank of the River Clyde (© author); Dumbarton Castle and the River Clyde (© author’s collection); the College Bow while on Church Street (© author’s collection); Dumbarton Glassworks with the Riverside Parish Church and Dumbarton Rock in the background (© author’s collection).



Chief among these was William Denny, who in 1814 built the *Marjory* as a rival to Henry Bell's *Comet*: she would become the first steamship to cross the English Channel. Three of the patriarch's sons formed William Denny and Brothers in 1844, the company building over 1,500 ships (including the tea-clipper *Cutty Sark*), until closing in 1963. In so doing, they secured for themselves a place in history as the best-remembered of the Dumbarton shipbuilders (of which at one time there were around forty). Famed for the manufacture of iron-hulled ships, boilers and engines, the Denny family would also gift Levensgrove Park to the town in 1885, create a model housing suburb at Knoxland Square (in collaboration with the Dumbarton Building Society), build a shipyard workers' community of two-storey flatted houses at Dennystown (now largely gone), and finance a shipmodel experiment tank at the Leven Shipyard (the first of its type built in Britain). Individually, they commissioned at least five of the most significant houses built on the high ground of Kirktonhill west of the town centre.

## 20TH CENTURY TO THE PRESENT DAY

William Denny and Brothers may have been the best known of the town's shipbuilders, but there were other companies of note, including Archibald McMillan and Son, who began building wooden boats in 1832, moved to iron hulls in 1866, and then steel ships in 1881. Launched in 1890, the company's cargo ship *Swanhilda* was a world record holder, and the firm ultimately built 504 ships at James Lang's Dockyard before closing in 1932. The nine-acre riverside site did not lie empty for long: in 1937 the Canadian firm of Hiram Walker and Sons began construction of what was for a time the largest distillery in Europe. In addition to the grain whisky distillery itself, there was a blending and bottling plant and extensive warehousing, with the facility employing almost 2,000 staff in its heyday. Until its demolition in 2017, the still tower (built of hard red Accrington bricks) rivalled the Rock for dramatic impact from afar.

Distilling aside, Dumbarton's economic fortunes declined during the C20 as shipbuilding and heavy engineering reduced in output. In the 1940s the Royal

Burgh of Dumbarton commissioned a town planning scheme that anticipated the Alexandria Bypass; sizeable municipal housing schemes at Bellsmyre and Castlehill; and a new bridge over the River Leven near Dennystown. This formed the basis of an architectural competition to re-develop the town centre, first considered in 1955, but not formally promoted until 1960 with the assistance of the Royal Institute of British Architects. Won by Garner, Preston and Strebel, the scheme proposed an elevated highway, community buildings, housing, offices, and a pedestrian precinct lined with shops, in the delivery of which the Town Council compulsorily purchased and demolished whole swathes of the central part of Dumbarton. For over fifteen years re-development was pursued with determination, leading to inevitable loss of historic character in the name of progress.

Since the turn of the century, West Dunbartonshire Council has seen the regeneration of the town centre as a priority. Public realm improvements and the re-imagining of the derelict Burgh Hall and Academy building (ultimately as the Council's flagship headquarters) have been delivered, the Artizan Centre at the heart of the 1960s re-development was re-modelled in 2004 (not altogether successfully), and the vacated distillery site has been remediated and re-developed for social housing with an attractive riverside walkway.

Clockwise from top left: Shipbuilding at Dumbarton (© author's collection); 1940s Town Planning Scheme by the Royal Burgh of Dumbarton (© author's collection); Hiram Walker And Sons distillery (© Eddie Mackinnon through Creative Commons); model of Garner, Preston and Strebel's competition-winning scheme for Dumbarton Town Centre (© West Dunbartonshire Council).





## TOWNSCAPE APPRAISAL

### GEOLOGY, TOPOGRAPHY AND SPATIAL ANALYSIS

Dumbarton lies on the alluvial plains of the River Clyde and River Leven, the confluence marked by the volcanic twin peaks of Dumbarton Rock. The area sits on a plateau of carboniferous lava from around 330-340 million years ago, nearby evidence of which can still be seen in the form of the Kilpatrick Hills, Campsie Fells and Renfrewshire Heights. An underlying belt of Old Red Sandstone of the Devonian period stretches across the area, which is south of the Highland Boundary Fault. A large quarry at Dumbuckhill, east of town, produces aggregate but no big building blocks, although there was once a quarry at Dalreoch (and another at Bonhill) from which some of the town's buildings were constructed.

Once surrounded on three sides by the River Leven, the town centre is itself low-lying and relatively flat, elevated sections and underpasses being created by road and rail in the form of Dumbarton Central Station (which is at high level), the approach to the old Dumbarton Bridge (which of necessity rises above river traffic), and short pedestrian walkways that pass beneath the A814 dual carriageway. The 1960 competition-winning elevated section of this main road was not delivered as part of the re-development, and this decision irrevocably split the town in two.

Proximity to the River Leven lends Dumbarton much of its appeal but has also meant that the town centre has long suffered from coastal, fluvial, and surface water flooding, with the greatest risk represented by the combination of coastal and fluvial flooding around the mouth of the river. The town centre has historically suffered damage from flooding during a number of high tide and storm events,

and it is anticipated that more serious flood events could occur. These will require to be addressed in order to eliminate flood risk to the town centre area and unlock regeneration potential.

Courtesy of the re-routed A814 dual carriageway, the centre of town has a peninsular quality, reminiscent of John Wood's 1818 map of Dumbarton which illustrated the town surrounded by water on three sides. From the oval-shaped Glasgow Road roundabout in the east, the historic elements of the central area are reached in three directions: to the north, Dumbarton Central Station and its elevated track acts as a barrier between light industry and the splendidly-restored Municipal Buildings; east is the Public Library (surprisingly un-listed), and the hefty St. Patrick's Church; while south, Church Street, lined by two significant public buildings (formerly four), joins the eastern end of High Street.

Anchored at both ends by tall church spires built fifty years apart, this main shopping street follows a leisurely curve that runs parallel to the riverside, once lined with jetties and now a pleasant promenade. Despite the re-development of the central north side of High Street, there is a charm to the historic route, where buildings in a range of architectural styles jostle for space in their tight mediaeval plots yet co-exist for the most part in harmonious manner. There are standout buildings - more if others were restored - and an unexpectedly good collection of Art Deco frontages. Connections still exist through the occasional vennel or lane to the riverfront, where despite the presentational problems of loading bays and backlands, the walkway is an asset, with ever-improving views downstream and across the water to Levensgrove Park.



There is much of interest in the town centre. Tenements and churches are both varied and of good design, while over the years major banking institutions established branch buildings that were of high architectural quality. The civic buildings are mostly set in landscaped grounds, and the various component parts of the 1960s re-development are not without merit (indeed, are in some instances, classic examples of the period). Dumbarton may not boast the status it once had, but has much to commend it, and the relationship with rock and river has persisted to its benefit. There is significance still in the old town, and support for its regeneration, hence its designation as a Conservation Area in 2019.

### **STREET PATTERN, VIEWS, APPROACHES AND LANDMARKS**

The very dense pattern of buildings and backlands that occupied the space between High Street, the Municipal Buildings and Dumbarton Central Station has long gone. The *Clyde Valley Regional Plan 1946* said of Dumbarton that “the central area of the town will require to be almost completely redeveloped within a comparatively short time” but the authors are unlikely to have imagined the scale on which this would take place. Homes, businesses, and traditions were lost as the competition-winning re-development scheme was delivered, and then further displaced by the A814. Arguably, the road re-alignment was necessary, since, as further observed in the Regional Plan, “one can hardly imagine worse conditions than obtain in passing through the Burgh of Dumbarton”; but just as the Inner Ring Road destroyed large parts of Glasgow, the new road to Cardross, Helensburgh and beyond fractured connections across the historic town.

Notwithstanding the loss of a significant part of the north side of High Street, (along with the major route through town that was Cross Vennel – its axis re-imagined as part of the construction of the 1960s Artizan Centre), the main street has retained its gentle mediaeval curve and on the south side, its long narrow plots. Originally the street was linked to the riverside by a series of vennels (the broadest of which were Quay Street and Boat Vennel); one of these survives beneath Glencairn Greit House, while the current one-way road layout approximates to the location of

others. Church Street (originally Kirk Vennel) was always a principal thoroughfare to the east, terminating at the south at the Parish Church, while at the western end, the main street swung north-east after the old ferry crossing, and continues to follow this line today, with the ferry now replaced by Dumbarton Bridge.

Church Street and High Street both halt to the north at the A814 Glasgow Road. Given the width of the road, the physical and visual interruption is significant. Pedestrian access to the Public Library and Dumbarton Central Station is by way of an underground walkway (so avoiding the roundabout) and although Station Road, College Street and Strathleven Place (all north of the dual carriageway) have their origins in the historic street pattern, the coherence has been lost: the Municipal Buildings feel marooned, and the handsome Station Road tenements isolated. There is an additional underpass at the south end of College Street.

Of the main gateways into the Conservation Area, only Townhead Road to the north creates a sense of arrival, largely because the low height of the railway bridge frames the south view dramatically. From here, the view of the Municipal Buildings impresses, as does the high bartizan-topped railway retaining wall. In the distance, the spike-topped towers of St. Partick’s Church and the former Burgh Hall and Academy can be seen through trees. The same views are seen more easily from the elevated south platforms of the railway, so creating a sense of arrival by rail.

East of the Glasgow Road roundabout, the vehicular approach into town gives little away: the land is flat, and there are few landmarks here for orientation: the redundant gateway to the Municipal Buildings simply confuses. Further south, the junction of Church Street and High Street is another entry point to the Conservation Area, and it is immediately obvious that the nature of the curve reveals High Street incrementally. Two churches – one the Riverside Parish Church, the other St. Augustine’s Episcopal Church – speak of ongoing investment in the town’s historic fabric, but the sight of the former Hiram Walker head office building in its rapidly deteriorating state is unfortunate.

Clockwise from top left: The Artizan Centre originally included a route through that approximated to the old Cross Vennel (© Turkey Red Media); pond below Glencairn Greit House (© author); present day riverside with views of Dumbarton Rock (© author); the Municipal Buildings represent one of the gateways into town (© author).



The least convincing of the approaches into the Conservation Area lies to the west of High Street. Here, the Risk Street Housing by Garner, Preston and Strebel, for all its stepped sections and generously-glazed balconies, ignores the street pattern. The buildings turning onto Bridge Street (including the former Cosy Corner Café on the curve) have all been significantly altered, and even the former High Church (now the Bell Centre) looks tired and unloved. The streetscape generally lacks interest until the western leg of Riverside Lane has been passed.

Lastly, from the waterfront and landscaped car parks, there is a short connection up to High Street by way of Quay Street, which hints at an important crossing, and until recent re-modelling of the Artizan Centre, led through to a modern town square with a pool in which sat the engine of the paddle steamer *Leven*.

The absence of contours across the town centre ensures the dominance of those buildings with steeples – there are four churches in the Conservation Area, three with spires, and the former Burgh Hall has a very fine belfry which, despite the loss of its roof in a fire, still rises above the surrounding buildings. These are all landmark buildings, as is Glencairn Greit House (due to its great age), Dumbarton Central Station and the Municipal Buildings. The flatness of the area also restricts potential for dramatic views and vistas, but High Street has an intimacy and sense of enclosure which is attractive (and reveals its character slowly due to the curve), and the Station Road tenements create good street scenery and sense of place.

Otherwise, too many views are of backlands and outbuildings, serving as a reminder of the scale of 1960s interventions, where new roads, loading bays and car parks were created along with new buildings. There is an especially unresolved area where the western leg of Riverside Lane meets the waterfront (the Leven Embankment) where the space seems to spill out uncontrollably.

Some of the views out of the Conservation Area are on the other hand, attractive: the town centre benefits from its proximity to the river, and from the waterfront there are fine views across to Levensgrove Park and downstream to Dumbarton

Rock. Furthermore, the new housing development on the old distillery site sets up views and vistas to St. Augustine's Church and east to Dumbuckhill.

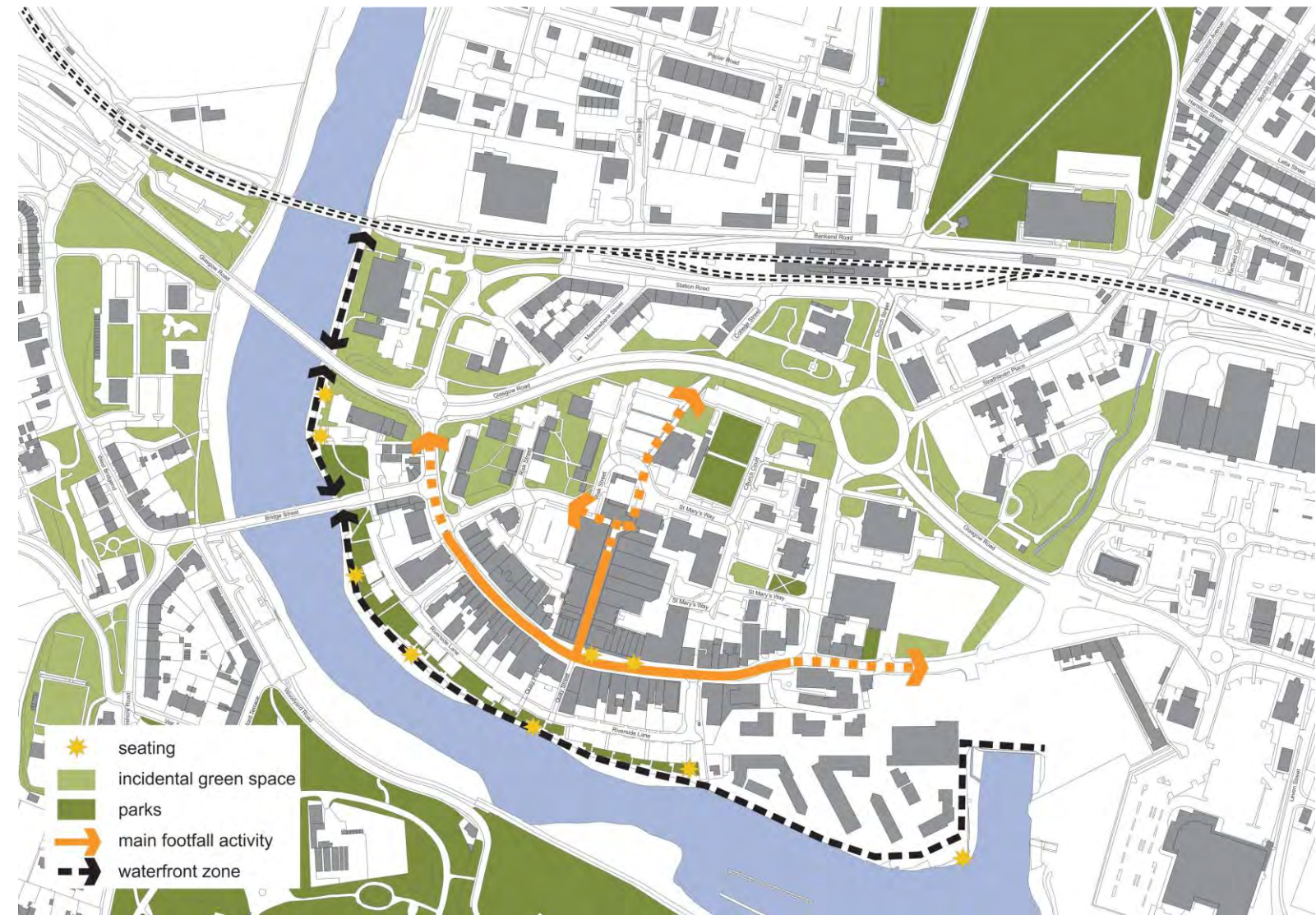
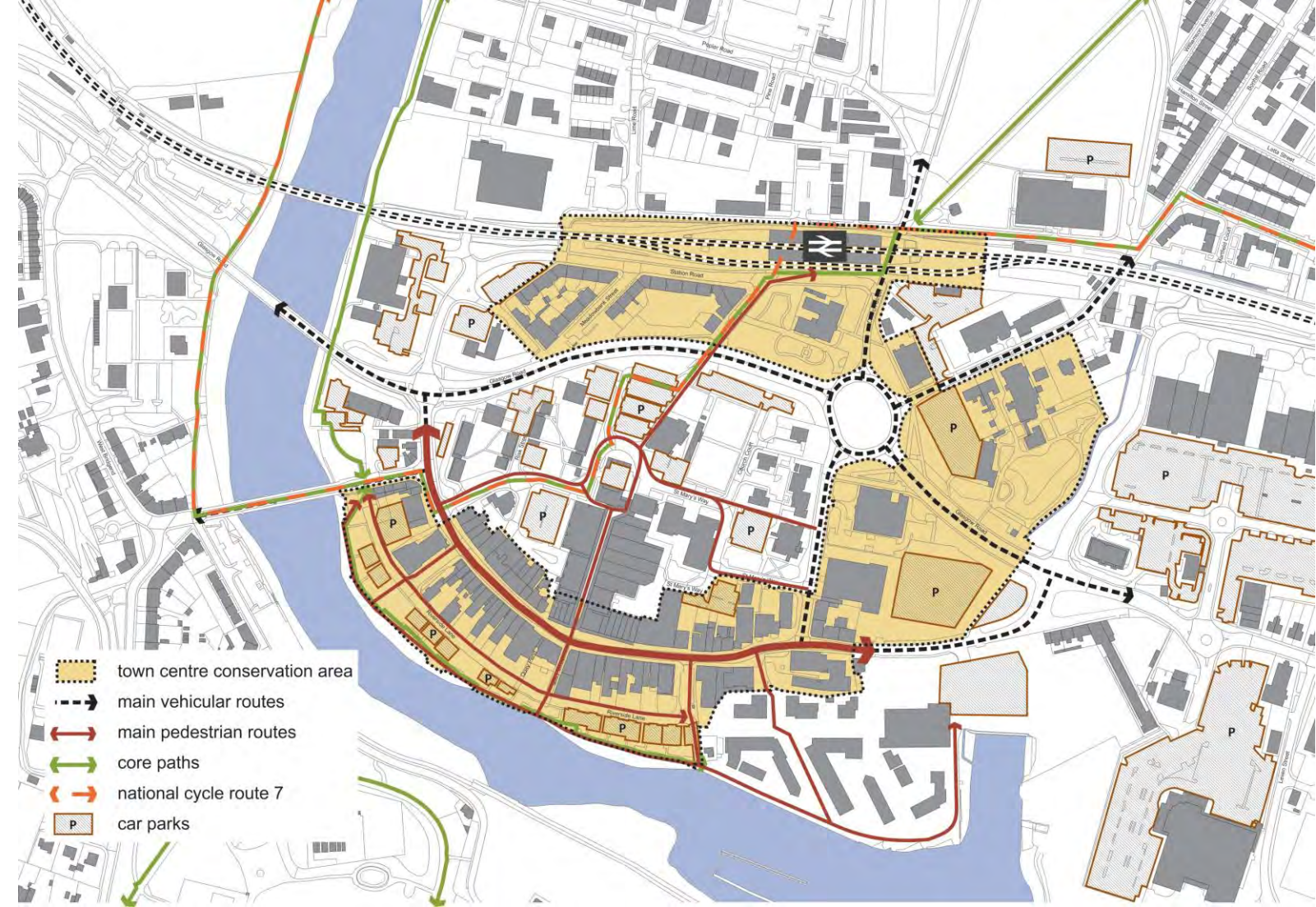
## PLOT PATTERN, CIRCULATION AND PERMEABILITY

The defining plot type in the Conservation Area is the narrow burgage feu. These largely survive on the south side of High Street, albeit they were all reduced in depth as part of the Leven Embankment transformation in the 1960s and 70s. Elsewhere, there is a lack of perceptible pattern to the plot shapes and sizes, albeit a brief recovery of historic street width occurs around the Station Road tenements.

Pedestrian movement in the town centre is closely related to bus routes and car parking. Ease of movement on and south of High Street is good, but the re-modelling (and enlargement) of the Artizan Centre destroyed the 1960s pedestrian route through the town square to the cinema, housing and station beyond. There are a number of wide road crossings that make walking around Dumbarton Town Centre a frustrating experience, and while the underpasses beneath the A814 were intended to enable free movement from High Street to and from the station, they are not universally popular. Furthermore, while the creation of large numbers of car parks controls the impact of stationary cars on the town centre, cars (and buses) in motion have precedence over the pedestrian. Parking is permitted on High Street. There are, however, plans to improve the public realm around Dumbarton Central Station in collaboration with Sustrans and improve National Cycle Network Route 7 to the benefit of walkers and cyclists.

In the town centre, density is low, and the downside of the resulting permeability is that too many buildings are defined by their rear façades rather than by their street frontages. There is insufficient recognition of the importance of the riverside and the need to define and celebrate it by outward-facing activities. Additionally, there are a number of unresolved areas behind and near the Artizan Centre that do not aid orientation.

Clockwise from top left: The former Hiram Walker offices present a poor image of Dumbarton Town Centre - the building is on the Buildings at Risk Register (© author); the Risk Street housing is architecturally adventurous but ignores the old street pattern (© author); the Town Centre (now Artizan) once had a central courtyard that allowed for orientation (© M Anne Dick); new social housing on the old distillery site sets up views to Dumbuck (© author).



It has long been recognised that connectivity between the station and town centre has been compromised twice: first by the construction of the re-aligned A814, and then through the removal of the public square at the heart of the Artizan Centre.

## BUILDINGS AND TOWNSCAPE DETAIL

With the demolition of the seven-storey distillery, a uniform sense of scale has returned to the town centre. High Street retains much of its original form, presents a solid frontage with few gaps, and even where more recently developed has a roofline that is for the most part consistent. Commercial buildings are mostly two or three storeys in height (apart from one remarkably tall exception with half-timbered gable by architect J M Crawford, and a four-storey red sandstone tenement on the north side) while the churches are all relatively similar in size. The former Glasgow Savings Bank is unusually diminutive, and the 1938 shops and offices built for the Dumbarton Equitable Co-operative Society bulkier than most, but the scale of the main street is not dissimilar to that existing at the beginning of the 20th Century. Additionally, on High Street the building line is consistent (the Artizan Centre canopies are not original) and the widening of the street at Glencairn Greit House of historic importance (see *Architectural Character and Styles*, below).

There is even a uniformity of scale in the buildings that were delivered as part of the re-development initiative. The Artizan Centre (then simply referred to as the shopping precinct), the Concord Community Centre, the Denny Civic Theatre (even the Masonic Temple) were all designed to co-exist rather than compete and were carefully height-controlled. The Risk Street Housing by Garner, Preston and Strebel is also only marginally higher than the Station Road tenements of 1898, built tall due to their proximity to the elevated railway track.

The remaining town centre buildings vary in scale, but there are no major disturbances to the urban character: this only occurs outwith the Conservation Area to the west, where there are three 16-storey point blocks alongside the Artizan Bridge. Whatever else it brought to the landscape, the distillery tower at

least acted as a counterpoint to the high-rise housing.

## OPEN SPACE, LANDSCAPE AND TREES

Open space in the town centre comprises largely of car parks and small pockets of grass: Dumbarton is well served by places to park and the majority of these are landscaped with hedge planting and trees (some flowering). Outwith the Conservation Area, but very much in the centre of town, are two bowling greens surrounded by neat walls: the Dumbarton Bowling Club has had its site here since 1859. Similarly, on the outer fringe of the Conservation Area, the stepped-section housing by Garner, Preston and Strebel is attractively contoured, and the same attention to detail has been lavished on the Leven Embankment promenade by the same architects.

Here, the land next the river was once used as a goods transport centre and for storage and workshops: once the land became derelict it was incorporated into the masterplan for the town centre. There are some fine semi-mature trees, grassed areas brought to lawn, cobbled walkways (using original setts) and tamped concrete paving. Changes in level using concrete edging provide occasional seating and there is an attractive cobbled lane (vennel) passing beneath Glencairn Greit House en route to High Street.

The principal buildings almost all sit in landscaped grounds: there is a small graveyard east of the Riverside Parish Church and mature weeping trees grouped at the main entrance. The grassed areas around the Municipal Buildings (College Park) are well maintained and the whalebone-arched College Bow, three historic cannons, and statue of Peter Denny by Sir William Thornycroft add welcome interest (there is little statuary in the Conservation Area). Modern landscaping behind West Dunbartonshire Council's headquarters (the former Burgh Hall and Academy) relates well to the columnar brick façade (while there are some fine railway tracks retained in a nearby car park off Castle Street). There is some recent tree planting at the eastern end of High Street, although the landscaped

Clockwise from top left: High Street looking east at the turn of the century (© West Dunbartonshire Libraries); connectivity diagram (© Ines Triebel); green space and landscape diagram (© Ines Triebel); High Street looking east present day - some historic buildings remain, but there are gap sites (© author).





route from here to the new riverside housing lacks the quality of the High Street pavements. These have been finished in Caithness slab with granite kerbs and small granite blocks at building edges. At Glencairn Greit House there is a good tiled platt at the entrance door (dating from its ownership by the Dumbarton Gas Company) and a recent addition to the landscape is an equally colourful path from College Street to Dumbarton Central Station laid down in thermoplastic floor surface coverings as part of the Dumbarton Active Travel Strategy in 2021.

Strathleven Place is appropriately residential in nature, leafy and with some stretches of good sandstone boundary walling, although the concrete slabbed path that leads past the Public Library to Dumbarton Central Station is being damaged by tree roots and is insufficiently welcoming to encourage frequent use. Nearby, the backcourts behind the Station Road tenements are delightful and well screened from the A814.

The conclusion is that the town is relatively green but the landscape is fragmented and in some locations dated: there is a dearth of good quality and useable hard and soft open space.

## ACTIVITIES AND USES

The Dumbarton Town Centre Conservation Area is a microcosm of a typical town centre, containing residential units (almost entirely flatted in type), a railway station, civic and municipal buildings, churches, recreational and community facilities, some offices and banks, and small-scale retail. Large-scale retail has been located east of town to the St. James Retail Park.

There is noticeable vacancy amongst the retail units on High Street.

## ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTER AND STYLES

The architecture of Dumbarton Town Centre falls into a number of distinct eras

which can be easily identified by the styles and materials employed: this creates interest and relieves potential monotony. The standout examples from every period are typically listed by Historic Environment Scotland. First, there is one building that is mediaeval in origin, then buildings from the Georgian, Victorian and Edwardian periods, then the Art Deco (1930s) phase of development, and then the post-war re-development period. There is relatively little that is properly modern, with the exception of the brick-built riverside housing on the old distillery site, and the re-imagining of the former Burgh Hall and Academy as the headquarters of West Dunbartonshire Council at No. 16 Church Street.

Linking all of these is the use of the Dumbarton Coat of Arms (first granted in 1357) which depicts an elephant carrying a castle on its back. This appears on a number of High Street buildings, including the former British Linen Company Bank at No. 17 (1897-8), the former Dumbarton Equitable Co-operative Society's shop at No. 32 (1936-8), and - combined with elements from Glasgow's Coat of Arms - on the former Clydesdale Bank at No. 53 (1939). There are particularly good depictions on the Public Library (1909), the Station Road tenements (1898), and - unsurprisingly - the Municipal Buildings (1899-1903).

### Mediaeval Period

The sole survivor from the (late) mediaeval period is **Glencairn Greit House**, built in 1623 as the urban residence of the Earls of Glencairn, and later used by the Dukes of Argyll. Built of snecked and coursed rubble (which was originally harled) the main frontage is now carried on three round arches installed during the 1920s by Dumbarton Town Council, but once had a forestair, tall wallhead chimneys and a traditional shop frontage. Surviving from its days of aristocratic status are four eaves dormers with decorative pediments, but little remains of the interior, re-modelled when in use as a Gas Showroom. The fourth arch to the east is, however, original and provides access to the vaulted passage of Quay Pend (although the east side was rebuilt in 1936). The property used to share its setting with the Mercat Cross and had a view up Cross Vennel (later College Street),



creating a meeting place for proclamations and public events that is still reflected in the enhanced width of the pavement. Glencairn Greit House is Listed Category 'B' (and would be Category 'A' were it not for the 1920s alterations).

Also mediaeval, but fragmentary, is the pointed-arch **College Bow** (c1453), salvaged from the Collegiate Chapel of the Blessed Virgin Mary in around 1758 and later relocated to the foot of Kirk Vennel (Church Street) in 1850. Finally, a permanent site was found for it on an axis with the entrance to the Municipal Buildings in 1907. The College Bow is Listed Category 'B'.

### Georgian Period

The Georgian Period is better represented: there are two stone tablets from the 18th Century MacKenzie House (which stood on the north side of High Street), and which have been built into the gable of the Public Library on Strathleven Place. Also from this period are the remains of the **Old Prison** on Maclean Place built by James Gillespie Graham and Robert Scott c1824 as a two-storey cell block serving the County Buildings: some fragments are incorporated into the verges alongside the A814. Survivors from the 1973 demolition include a portico, Coat of Arms, studded door and two cell windows built into a rubble enclosure. The remains are Category 'B' listed.

Some of the High Street tenements east of Glencairn Greit House have a Georgian flavour (although the overall condition is inconsistent) but best are the **Sheriff Court House** on Church Street (1824-26, James Gillespie Graham and Robert Scott), and the **Riverside Parish Church**. The original County Buildings by Graham and Scott are classical in style with a pedimented central bay with coupled Ionic pilasters to which was added balustraded pavilion ends by William Spence in 1865. Despite significant alterations, enlargement and various iterations over the years, the interior retains some of its Georgian delicacy: one of the courtrooms retains an anthemion and palmette frieze. The complex is listed Category 'B'.

The church, by John Brash, was built in 1811 as Dumbarton Parish Church, incorporated materials from an older church on site, and is Category 'A' listed. The broad corniced ashlar pedestrian gatepiers with urns that face down High Street are especially fine, as is the ashlar bell and clock tower rising to a gilded weathervane. The stained glass scheme is significant (including work by W and J J Keir, Stephen Adam, and William Morris and Co.) and behind the building is the Category 'C' listed **Mausoleum** enclosure erected in 1846 as the burying place of the Napier family of Shandon, pioneers of marine engineering whose one-cylinder engine from the paddle steamer *Leven* is on display outside the nearby Scottish Maritime Museum.

### Victorian Period

The only villa in the Conservation Area, the Tudor-Gothic "Drumoyne" on Strathleven Place, was built in 1853 as **Strath Cottage** to designs by J T Rothead. Designer of the National Wallace Monument, the architect's mastery of Scots-Baronial detailing is better represented by Levenford House in the Kirktonhill Conservation Area, but this square, two-storey house was built on a budget from local stone in as picturesque a manner as could be afforded and was featured in Blackie's *Villa and Cottage Architecture* of 1868 as an example of economic design. It is Category 'B' listed.

Diagonally across town, Early English Gothic is represented by the grey ashlar former **High Church** at the west end of High Street, the gabled frontage and tall broached spire purposefully punctuating one of the gateways into the Conservation Area. Currently the Bell Leisure Centre and Arcade, the church was designed by John Honeyman for the Free Kirk in 1863 and has long been a striking feature on a street otherwise lined with low-rise shops and tenements. It is Category 'B' listed. A little east, on the same side of the street, a commercial building at **Nos. 127- 135** has interesting blind Venetian windows centred on its frontage, pedimented first floor windows, a datestone reading 1854, and stair turrets to the rear. Also Category 'B' listed, it may once have had an off-centre pend to the waterside.

Clockwise from top left: Stone tablet from the C18 MacKenzie House, now on extension to the Public Library (© author); the old Dumbarton Parish Church with its handsome gateways (© author); the original County Buildings on Church Street (© author).



The Victorian predilection for ornamentation is better captured by the former **Burgh Hall and Academy** on Church Street, one of the few properly decorative buildings in the Conservation Area. Completed to designs by William Leiper in 1866, the building is French Gothic in style with large plate-traceried windows at first floor, and a high belfry tower open to the street at the base, effectively a porte-cochere. Originally with a slated spire (destroyed by fire in 1882) the Category 'A' listed building has variously housed the Burgh Academy with public halls and committee rooms, a School of Art, primary school, and police station, and is now modern offices following an extensive re-construction by West Dunbartonshire Council. The richly-sculpted and foliated Gothic decoration on the main frontage sets the building apart from others in the area (most of which are classical and rather severe).

South-west, on High Street, more Gothic (this time of the Decorated period) is presented in the form of **St. Augustine's Church**, opened in 1873 to designs by the distinguished Edinburgh architect Robert Rowand Anderson. Category 'A' listed for its interior, the tower that was meant to rise above the street-facing vestry was never built. It was here that Charles Rennie Mackintosh married Margaret MacDonald in 1900.

### Late Victorian/Edwardian Period

Although the railway came to Dumbarton in 1850 as part of the Caledonian and Dumbartonshire Junction Railway from Bowling to Balloch, the present **Station** was not built until 1898 and was largely designed in the Caledonian Railway style under the superintendence of railway engineer Charles de Neuville Forman (of Glasgow Central, and West Highland Railway fame). The elevated track necessitated long, high supporting walls with a principal entrance off Church Street, under cover of the railway bridge overhead. At street level were located the booking hall, porters and refreshment rooms, while at (twin island) platform level were the waiting rooms, toilets and staff accommodation. Presently, public access is from a ramped approach at the west, but hidden are two flights of stairs

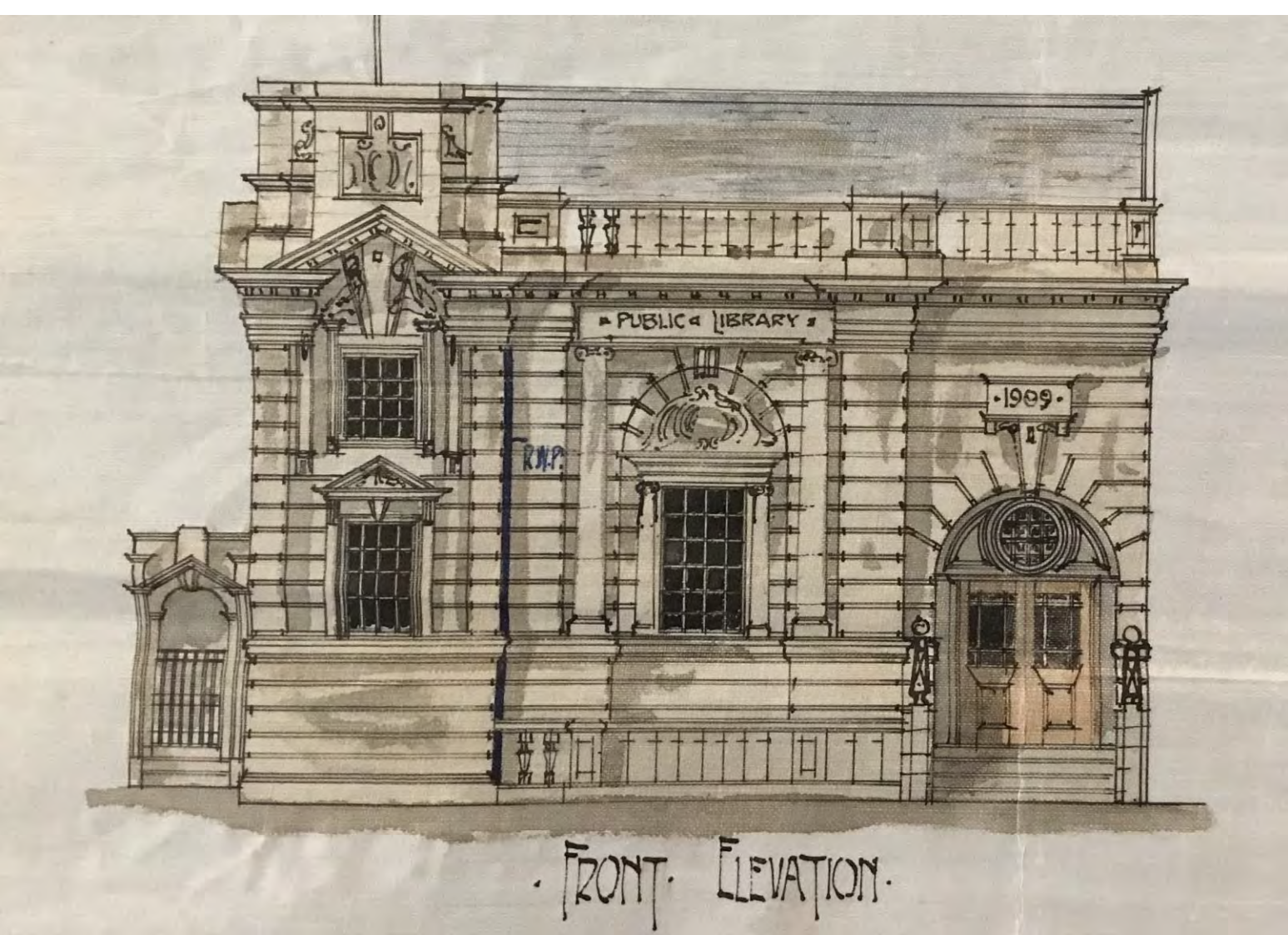
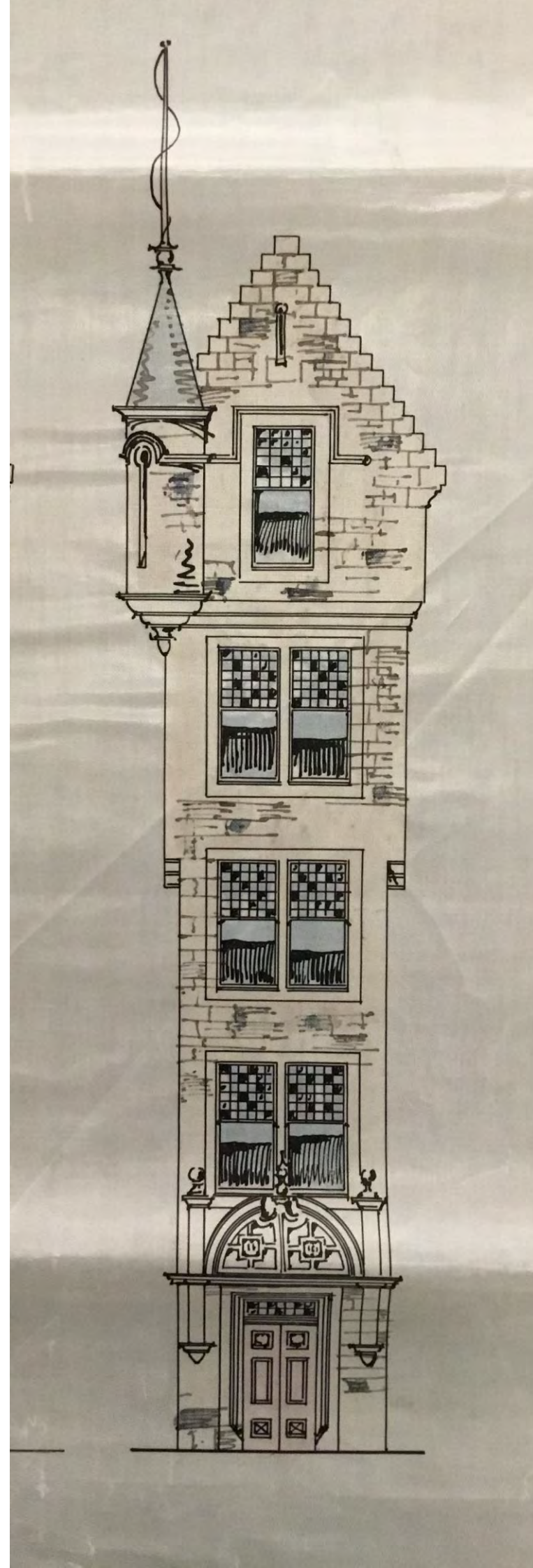
with exceptional tiled wall decoration and a fine ticket office, all to the east. The platform buildings are single storey in sandstone, polychromatic brickwork and timber with Tudor detailing and have wide overhanging lattice-beamed canopies; some good period decoration survives internally including dome-lights at the western ends of both buildings. The embankments are a combination of sandstone, red engineering brick and pinkish render (in simulation of stone), with crenelated parapets, octagonal buttresses, mock cross gun loops, and Tudor-Gothic two-centred arches to window openings. The station is Category 'A' listed.

At around the same time, in 1897, J Dick Peddie and George Washington Browne imported some Edinburgh swagger when designing the Category 'B' listed **British Linen Company Bank** on High Street, also in the Tudor-Gothic style and incorporating some fine naturalistic decoration.

Further north, James Baird Thomson's **Municipal Buildings** of 1899-1900 are instead Baronial. Much uplifted by the choice of red Locharbriggs sandstone, the building is rich in roll mouldings, crowsteps and corbels, with good early 20th Century stained glass by William Meikle and Sons, and Shrigley and Hunt. The fine Westmorland slate roofscape, iron brattishing, tourelles and carving contribute to the Category 'B' listing.

Dumbarton's Victorian tenements are by and large modest: the 1895 red sandstone range at Nos. 84-92 High Street displays architectural ambition (replacing as it did the notorious 17th Century "Holy Land" housing), and there are two good three-storey tenements from around 1885 at the foot of Church Street (one with banded stonework redolent of Alexander "Greek" Thomson, the other called "Hodge's Corner). The real surprise comes with the 1898 **Station Road/College Street** tenements by J M Crawford, a corner block in the Scots-Baronial style designed originally with a large ground floor pub complete with dining rooms and sitting rooms, and a first floor assembly room and supper room. The client was William Young, a local builder and owner of the land, no doubt optimistic that the newly improved station would bring customers to his door. With eaves dormers

Clockwise from top left: The former Burgh Hall and Academy from the west: the spire has long been lost following a fire (© Turkey Red Media); Nos. 127-135 High Street (© West Dunbartonshire Libraries); drawing of a traditional High Street property, classical in style with attic dormers and a generous shop frontage (© West Dunbartonshire Libraries); the Category 'A' listed Dumbarton Central Station (© author); St. Augustine's Church on High Street - the steeple was never built (© West Dunbartonshire Libraries).



inspired by Glencairn Greit House, crow-stepped gables, blind windows and an asymmetrical bartizan, the building stands up well to its high level neighbour. Inside, there is a delightful corner stairwell to the upper floor apartments. It is Category 'C' listed (but deserving of Category 'B').

### Edwardian Period

Completing the Station Road streetscape are further tenements in grey and red sandstone, the latter rotating onto Meadowbank Street by way of conical slated corners. These date to the beginning of the 20th Century, with the freestanding block next to the College Street underpass dated 1906.

In this northern part of the Conservation Area, on Strathleven Place, stands the Andrew Carnegie-funded **Public Library**, 1909 Renaissance built of pale grey Dalreoch sandstone to competition-winning designs by local architect William Reid. Long on plan, with a vaulted interior, the building has an appropriately grand entrance front, with a blind balustrade, deep aediculed main window bearing a huge Coat of Arms, and a corner bay with putti topped by a decorative raised parapet. Surprisingly un-listed, an oversight that should be corrected.

Within sight of the library stands another fine church, this one **St. Patrick's RC** built in 1901 by Dunn and Hansom of Newcastle. Gothic in style, the church was built first in nave-and-aisle format without the tower – this came later (in 1926) and was designed by Pugin and Pugin. Built of Dumfriesshire red bullfaced sandstone, the church is broad-fronted and with handsome boundary walls and railings.

The belfry is all but detached, enhanced by statuary, buttressed at the corners and topped by crocketed finials. It holds a carillon of twenty-three bells (the first of its kind in Scotland). The interior is richly furnished and includes a rainbow-winged St. Michael the Archangel by Eric Gill from 1920. Reported to be the first building in Dumbarton to be lit by electricity, the church is Category 'B' listed.

### Art Deco/Thirties Period

It is easy to forget that Dumbarton was once a shopping destination for Cardross, Helensburgh and the Gareloch, and the Vale of Leven. This is borne out by the number of buildings surviving in the Town Centre from the period of retail expansion in the 1920s and 30s by former household names such as Burtons, Claude Alexander, City Bakeries, Woolworths and - especially - the Co-op, represented in town by the Dumbarton Co-operative Equitable Society. The demand for the goods and products offered by these popular businesses will have made investment in the town attractive (despite the economic downturn of the time).

As a result of this there is a surprisingly large contingent of buildings on Dumbarton's High Street that exhibit Art Deco detailing, albeit some of this is now hidden beneath layers of paint. The crossing of High Street and Quay Street is marked by two buildings clad in white faience - Nos. 77-79 (originally Claude Alexander), and No. 81 (once Burtons, on the site of the old Elephant Hotel) - while west and east of the junction, at Nos. 55-63 (originally a tearoom, restaurant and shops) and Nos. 97-99 (once Woolworths) Thirties streamlining is still (just) in evidence, with zig-zags, chevrons, flagpoles and fins. At No. 32, the Dumbarton Co-op created a fine flattened façade from buff sandstone in 1938, as they did also at Nos. 106-116.

Two banking institutions invested in Dumbarton during the same period – the Glasgow Savings Bank, who opened a branch at No. 12 High Street in 1938, and the Clydesdale Bank at No. 53 one year later. Eric A Sutherland, who had a monopoly on work for the Glasgow Saving Bank, created a typically elegant frontage for his client with granite base, pale buff ashlar walling and steel casement windows (all much altered), while Baird and Thomson of Glasgow designed a stripped-back classical flat-roofed building for the Clydesdale Bank. Five bays wide, the central three with fluted pilasters with armorial crests in the capitals, the building had a quiet dignity now disrupted by painting of the façade and relocation of the entrance.

Clockwise from top left: Scots Baronial tenements on Station Road - they make for an arresting sight from the station platform (© author); J M Crawford's drawing of the narrow corner of the same tenement block - it has an interesting floor plan layout (© West Dunbartonshire Libraries); the Dumfriesshire red sandstone St. Patrick's RC Church (© author); Eric A Sutherland's design for the Dumbarton branch of the Glasgow Savings Bank (© West Dunbartonshire Libraries); William Reid's design for the Public Library (© West Dunbartonshire Libraries).





## Post-War Period

The ambitious re-development of Dumbarton during the 1960s has been polarizing. There was considerable loss of the urban fabric north of High Street and by all accounts a number of good historic buildings were demolished. Time is rarely kind to exposed concrete (of which much was used), but there was a uniformity to the new buildings that attempted invigoration of what was by then a flagging town centre. The competition brief was for housing, retail, a hotel, community buildings, car parking and offices. The two-storey shopping precinct on College Way by Garner, Preston and Strebel, low-rise and with exposed flint wall panels separated by slit windows, was designed to create a new urban aesthetic and until the removal of the town square provided a community space, not to mention connectivity across town to and from the station.

Winner of a Scottish Civic Trust commendation, the buildings have not been well treated, but for aficionados of the period, there is a splendid shuttered concrete external stair on the north-west side.

Elsewhere, and outwith the Conservation Area, the medium-rise Risk Street Housing (winner of a Saltire Society Award) has a bold geometry and thoughtful landscaping. Exposed shuttered concrete, stepped-section glazed balconies, and blue/brown brick ensures architectural interest despite some over-cladding. Additionally, the Masonic Temple (by its very nature inscrutable) is finely massed in dark brown brick, and typical of the cubic minimalist forms popular during the period. This period in Dumbarton's re-invention is not to everybody's taste, but it was delivered with commitment on the part of the local authority and deserves better press than it typically receives.

## TYPICAL BUILDING MATERIALS

Given the various periods of development evident in the Dumbarton Town Centre Conservation Area, there is a wide range of building materials used, not all of

which fall under the category of "traditional". Glencairn Greit House would have been finished in **lime harl**, but this was stripped off in the 1920s. There are no other buildings making use of this material. There are, however, many instances of **cementitious render**, used on exposed gables, on rear elevations, and in the attic gable of Nos. 63-65 High Street. Extensive lengths of the railway embankment walls on Station Road and Bankend Road are finished in render channelled to mimic stone blocks.

**Stone** is used in a range of colours and walling techniques. There were a number of small local quarries yielding grey sandstone, but there are examples of buff, red, and pinkish-red ashlar, some very finely carved. Late Victorian buildings such as the Municipal Buildings use Locharbriggs red sandstone, readily available once the road and rail network from the south improved, but just as likely to have been imported by river. Much of the stonework on High Street has been over-painted, some undoubtedly hiding the carbon deposits (not to mention spirit evaporation) that goes hand-in-hand with industry. There are also a number of areas of rubble stonework in boundary walls, some of which are fragments with real provenance. A particularly good panel of random stonework brought to course has been built into a brick wall behind Glencairn Greit House. **Granite** is not used greatly in the Town Centre and tends to be associated with buildings of the Art Deco/Thirties period, including at No. 22 High Street where it has been used to re-clad the ground floor of an older building (probably for the Bank of Scotland).

**Brick** is widely used and in greater evidence than might be expected: a study of the brickworks used in the development of Dumbarton would make for an interesting project. Both red and ochre bricks appear throughout town: some of these are "commons" and some of an engineering quality (principally on the station buildings). Brick appears on exposed gables (many not designed to be quite so visible) with an attractive gable complete with fireplace surrounds adjacent to the Castle Street car park of West Dunbartonshire Council's headquarters. There are brick turrets and (former) toilet stacks on display behind a range of High Street buildings, and brick used in polychromatic format on Dumbarton Central

Clockwise from top left: Period photograph of the original Clydesdale Bank on High Street - a good example of 1930s architecture (© West Dunbartonshire Libraries); the building has not been well served by alterations and over-painting (© author); brick is used in buildings across town, often now exposed after demolition (© author); the town centre redevelopment during construction (© West Dunbartonshire Libraries).



Station. Outwith the Conservation Area, red and yellow stone is also combined as patterning on the walls of the Ship Model Experiment Tank building.

Dark coloured bricks (blue/brown/purple in hue) were used extensively in the buildings associated with the re-development period, including in the loading bay boundary walls along the Leven Embankment. More recently, a soft buff brick was used to extend the former Burgh Hall building at No. 16 Church Street for West Dunbartonshire Council, and dark red variegated brick used on the Riverside Housing scheme.

Where roofs are not flat and variously covered in membranes old and new, they are finished in **slate** or **concrete tile**. The Westmorland (Lake District) slate used on the Municipal Buildings is especially good. **Terracotta** is used for ridging on the former Burgh Hall, St. Patrick's RC Church, St. Augustine's Church, the former British Linen Company Bank, and with cresting at Dumbarton Central Station. Flashings and weatherings on the majority of pitched-roof buildings are **lead** and **zinc**. There are examples of **metal** (possibly tin) rooftop ventilators on the Public Library, and copper ridge vents to the rear of the former Art Deco tearoom at Nos. 55-63 High Street.

Metalwork is represented by **cast iron** in the form of simple boundary railings to St. Patrick's RC Church and Riverside Parish Church, and in rainwater goods such as the decorative hoppers to the former British Linen Company Bank. The rooftop decoration to the Municipal Buildings is probably **wrought iron**, and there is extensive use of decorative and structural **steel** and iron on Dumbarton Central Station. Nos. 106-116 High Street retain two good (**bronze?**) fanlight infills redolent of the Thirties period. **Timber** is used to decorative effect on the attic gable at Nos. 63-65 High Street, in windows, and in the occasional barge board, but most extensively on Dumbarton Central Station.

**Faience** is employed on four of Dumbarton's High Street buildings, white and cream for the most part, but known to be black, green and orange below layers

of grey paint on Nos. 55-63. There is very little in the way of decorative ceramic/ encaustic **tiling** on show, but it is used to good effect in the entrance platt at Glencairn Greit House and is known to be particularly fine (albeit hidden) on the walls of the east staircases at Dumbarton Central Station. Also worthy of mention (although not included in the Conservation Area) is the tile scheme to the frontage of the British Telecom building on Strathleven Place, and the Dumbarton Underpass Project, which delivered colourful graphics on the tiled walls of the Strathleven Underpass. **Fireclay** is used in chimney pots.

**Concrete** is used in the form of blockwork (to the rear of No. 3 High Street) but more commonly in poured, shuttered form as part of the Artizan Centre (in canopies and stairs in particular). It is also used creatively on the Leven Embankment. **Flint** also occurs in the precast wall panels of the shopping precinct, albeit much of this has been over-painted (and some overclad).

**Glass** is used in modern canopies to the Artizan Centre, and in the occasional conservatory extension (to No. 3 High Street) but has been mostly removed from the overhanging canopies of Dumbarton Central Station. Remaining, however, is a great deal of glass used very effectively above the approach ramp to the station platforms. More modern materials such as large format wall cladding panels and uPVC also appear in the Conservation Area and are uniformly negative in character.

## PUBLIC REALM

Road and pavement surfaces are typically tarmac, but there has been extensive improvement work to Church Street and the High Street corridor using Caithness slab, granite kerbs and paviours. Polished granite blocks have been used for occasional seating on pavements of generous width. Stainless steel is used in bike stands; and bollards, litter bins, signage and bus stops are modern. Finishes are tidy, albeit clinical, with original pillar boxes and the Police "Tardis" that stood outside Glencairn Greit House long since removed. There are few surviving

Clockwise from top left: The Municipal Buildings are a handsome combination of red sandstone and green slate (© author); the tiled platt at the entrance to Glencairn Greit House (© author); faience is used well on the main frontage of the former Burtons on High Street (© author); attractive wrought ironwork at Dumbarton Central Station (© author).



Victorian lamp standards. The Leven Embankment, however, is attractive, using as it does a good combination of tamped concrete and original cobbles. A cobbled path links High Street and the promenade beneath Glencairn Greit House, while cast iron capstans have been used in various locations.

Concrete benches outside No. 16 Church Street form part of the overall aesthetic (although are staining swiftly) and the ramped access to St. Augustine's Church is neatly done. The cast iron lamp standards here are a welcome addition to the streetscape (which, despite the quality of materials and some tree planting is a little sterile). There are nevertheless some good modern barriers/boundary railings adjacent to Dumbarton Central Station (as well as some excellent original gates and railings) and alongside West Dunbartonshire Council's headquarters, where once stood the Denny Institute and the Windsor Buildings.

Boundary wall treatments are typically sand-rubbed or common brick or stone, some topped with railings, while shuttered concrete used in the approaches to the A814 underpasses is not unattractive. Blue heritage plaques appear on a number of historic buildings, the story they tell abbreviated from the information produced in West Dunbartonshire Council's *Dumbarton Heritage Trail*.

Where the public realm works are worst is in the backlands and service bays behind High Street: of necessity these areas contain refuse and recycling bins (as well as car parking), but they currently provide shortcuts to High Street from the north and although excluded from the Conservation Area, are a poor feature of the route from the Station to the Town Centre. Some of the service yards off the Leven Embankment are no better, having lost the controlled enclosure provided in the 1970s through use of walls of consistent height and materials.

In summary, there has been ongoing investment in public realm and the quality of recent projects has been high, but the result is now rather piecemeal. Efforts may need to be directed to secondary spaces and connections to generally provide more cohesion to the public realm.

## GENERAL CONDITION

Buildings in the ownership of the church and local authority are in uniformly good condition, but those in private or mixed ownership are variable. There is a preponderance of buddleia growing from roofs and walls on High Street, and much building fabric in need of attention. There are three buildings on High Street on the *Buildings at Risk Register*, including the former Hiram Walker headquarters at No. 3. Added in September 2021, the entry draws attention to the vacancy, established vegetation growth, spalling render to the rear, delamination of stone, cracking, and failed rainwater goods. At Nos. 119-123 High Street, issues of vacancy and dampness are highlighted (including the poor condition to the rear), and at Nos. 125-133 High Street peeling paint, potential parapet gutter failure and upper floor vacancy are noted. The service yard behind Nos. 119-123 is disused, and a large sycamore has been allowed to grow too close to the brick boundary wall, which is showing signs of movement.

The former Hiram Walker headquarters (originally the McMillan Shipyard offices and more recently the offices of the Procurator Fiscal and then a public house) is in particularly poor condition, with roosting pigeons, distortion in the metal windows, an ugly attic storey, and a redundant conservatory to the west in the gap next to the former British Linen Company Bank. Nor is this second building in a well-maintained state, with failed (cracked) rainwater goods, and extensive vegetation growth (including grass growing from gutters). There is efflorescence and biological growth on the main frontage, both hallmarks of a chemical clean of the stone in the past (or the application of water repellent). Few of the building façades on the south side of High Street have been left unpainted: paint on ashlar conventionally traps moisture (as well as hiding other defects) and peeling paint is evident at a number of locations. At No. 53, the former Clydesdale Bank, the paint is likely to have been particularly damaging (not to mention currently unattractive), and the stepped parapet has extensive plant growth in the joints.

There is stonework deterioration and vegetation at Nos. 63-65 (J M Crawford's

Left: Although there has been investment in the public realm on High Street, and the setting to St. Augustine's Church is good, No. 3 High Street is in especially poor condition and requires intervention (© author).



1895 design for the National Boot Depot), and a veritable (unintentional) roof garden at cornice level on the former Claude Alexander building (now Costa). At the former Burtons, on the corner of Quay Street, there are small ferns growing from the joints in the faience. Further west, there appears to be gutter failure and some cracking at No. 107 (most of the High Street properties have internal rainwater goods, some of which may be blocked), Nos. 119-123 appear to have been vacated, and building repairs at Nos. 125-133 are not quite complete. Next door, at No. 135, crazing on the frontage is suggestive of a failing cement skim on the stonework. The diminutive two-storey public house at No. 139 may have a snapped window lintel since the mutilated eaves cornice droops at the east, while No. 141 has an untidy slate roof (particularly on the rear turnpike stair) and badly finished gable. As the Conservation Area boundary is reached to the west, the former High Church, now Bell Centre, has a range of defects typical of a large building with inaccessible tower, and an especially ugly gable where a tenement once adjoined.

The condition on the north side of High Street is better, although the large red sandstone tenement at Nos. 84-92 is water damaged. Nos. 16-20, once home to the London and Newcastle Tea Company, has deteriorating attic dormers and much damaging cement pointing to the rear (in common with No. 22), while the roof to Nos. 8-10 is uneven (and the plastic rainwater goods to the front an addition). Nos. 2-6 (dated 1880?) have been recently and reasonably well restored, the armorial carvings on the street front worn but still legible. On Castle Street, the attractive three-storey tenements (c1885) turning onto Church Street are exhibiting stonework erosion, and there is a truncated wallhead chimney at No. 2 Church Street. Nos. 3-13 Castle Street are elegant but with loss of stonework detail; the soft red sandstone to the rear elevation has also been patched with cement.

The defects encountered at Dumbarton Central Station have been well documented in the excellent *Conservation Management Plan* produced for the Dumbarton Stations Improvement Trust in 2019. These include high moisture levels in the fill beneath the track beds (typically manifesting itself as efflorescence

on the embankment walls), structural movement in the platform buildings, water management from the bridge across the top of Church Street, and poor brick indenting to the buttresses on Station Road and Bankend Road.

There are defects also apparent on the Station Road tenements, largely relating to erosion of stonework (Nos. 1-5 Meadowbank Street are built of very soft red sandstone), rising damp, rusting rainwater goods and truncated chimneys. On the whole, the grey sandstone of the slightly older corner tenement has weathered better than the red ashlar of the Edwardian houses.

Shop frontages are uniformly unsympathetic, although at No. 117 and No. 139 High Street (both pubs) the aesthetic is better and, if not original, at least in keeping. More modern shopfronts have been installed to the Church Street/Castle Street tenements which, while a little unorthodox, are uniform in design and materials. Many replacement windows (and replacement rainwater goods) have been carried out in uPVC throughout the Conservation Area, including to buildings that are listed. At Glencairn Greit House the rear windows have been replaced in timber although the astragal sub-division is curious (and surely incorrect).

In many instances properties within the Conservation Area require urgent as well as routine maintenance. The physical and visual integrity of High Street, in particular, requires a co-ordinated effort to safeguard the special architectural character and townscape value of the area for the future. There have been a number of inappropriate alterations to buildings of all ages (not just the Victorian properties), and a wholesale improvement in maintenance levels is required (in addition to monitoring of works) to ensure that interventions comply with Planning Policy, and the gradual erosion of the special character of the area is reversed.

Clockwise from top left: The former National Boot Depot on High Street has a great deal of buddleia growth at high level and a poor shopfront (© author); the building (by J M Crawford) not long after construction showing the original shop frontage (© West Dunbartonshire Libraries); the former High Church (now Bell Centre) has an unfortunate exposed gable and is in need of repair (© author); building condition is variable (and in some instances poor) on the south side of High Street (© author).





## CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

### AREA ANALYSIS AND ASSESSMENT

Within the Dumbarton Town Centre Conservation Area there are four distinct Character Areas, being High Street (including the mediaeval core of town and the waterfront), Church Street up to the A814 (which provides a pedestrian and vehicular link north from High Street but also contains a number of important historic buildings), Station Road (which is predominantly late Victorian/Edwardian and pleasingly muscular in character), and Strathleven Place (which is residential, and quieter in nature).

#### High Street

The *Dumbarton Town Centre Conservation Area Proposal* of 2019 noted that the High Street Character Area had retained much of its original form in terms of its solid frontage and retail designation. Many of the listed buildings in the Conservation Area are located on High Street and later additions to the townscape, such as the Artizan Centre, although conforming to a different design aesthetic have recognised and adapted to the scale of the original setting. The waterfront (Leven Embankment) comprises green public spaces, a promenade, and easily-accessed and orderly parking facilities. It offers excellent views to the river, the Category 'B' listed old Dumbarton Bridge and Dumbarton Rock to the south-west. The north side of the waterside lacks frontage due to its location on the back of High Street (it was originally intended that housing would provide a visual barrier) but notwithstanding, the area is of great significance. It has retained its original medieval street pattern with narrow feus and vennels leading from the High Street to the Leven and is historically very significant.

The primary public space is the leafy promenade with its views of the river and beyond. This contributes positively to the character of the area, as does the improved public realm and the solidity of the street frontage. Negatively impacting on the Character Area is the condition of individual buildings, poor shop frontages, vacancy of ground and upper floors, the unkempt condition of some of the loading bays facing the river, and the extent of ground given over to car parking. Exposed gables are uniformly distracting.

#### Church Street

The old Kirk Vennel is more piecemeal, the west side having been lost entirely, but it contains a range of robust tenements on the corner with High Street/Castle Street, two significant public buildings (both of which are listed), a fragment of one that is also listed, and the town's best example of modern architecture in the form of West Dunbartonshire Council's offices. Boundary walling, street furniture, railings (old and new), and hard and soft landscape is also good, and the west side of the street (admittedly outwith the Conservation Area) is attractively planted at the entrance to St. Mary's Way and has a smart example of 1970s minimalism in the shape of the Masonic Hall.

The primary public space is the environs of the former Burgh Hall and Academy: following recent modernisation these contribute positively to the area, telling a tale of historic building rescue and re-invention. Negatively impacting on the Conservation Area is the interruption at the north by the A814, and the uncomfortable relationship (and large gaps) between the different building types, and the extent to which there is no strong street edge.



## Station Road

This Character Area excellently encapsulates Victorian Dumbarton: there are two three-sided blocks of four-storey tenements in mostly red sandstone, some retail, the Category 'A' listed Dumbarton Central Station to the north, and the well-maintained Category 'B' listed Municipal Buildings. There is green space and a sense of activity/community. Despite the disruption of the A814 to the south, this area maintains its street pattern and urban form. The concentration of heritage in this area creates an overall positive character and as advised in the *Dumbarton Town Centre Conservation Area Proposal*, it is an important area to safeguard against unsuitable development. The corner tenement by J M Crawford is both interesting and innovative on plan, and a positive feature of this character area. Indeed, the station buildings and tenements converse animatedly across the fine roofscape of the Municipal Buildings.

The primary public space is the landscaped grounds of the Municipal Buildings: the statuary and overall setting impart civic presence (although the redundant diagonally-set stone gateway is a reminder of the missing street pattern). The Glasgow Road roundabout and A814 is a deeply negative aspect of the character of the area, as is the absence of an attractive, safe link between station and town centre.

## Strathleven Place

This fourth Character Area is largely Edwardian in nature. The northern part features the Public Library and two 20th Century buildings hosting BT services, while the south side includes two 19th Century semi-detached houses, the Category 'B' listed St. Patrick's RC Church, two detached 19th Century houses (one of which, "Drumoyne", is Category 'B' listed) and some late 20th Century residential developments further east. Strathleven Place is consistent with the original street pattern and still retains some of the old masonry walls along the street which are largely intact and in good condition.

There are no primary public spaces in this Character Area – essentially it is more private by nature. The Glasgow Road roundabout and A814 impact negatively on the character of this area, as does the poor eastern setting for the Public Library.

Outwith the four character areas, other parts of the town centre have distinctive features, some of which are positive (such as the bowling greens) and others negative (vacant space, ill-defined routes, poor modern interventions).

## BUILDINGS ANALYSIS AND ASSESSMENT

There are a number of buildings in the Conservation Area that make a valuable contribution to its character and appearance. These include churches, public buildings, and housing, with many of them listed. There are nineteen listed buildings (including one statue and two fragments) in and near the Dumbarton Town Centre Conservation Area, most of which have been described in the section on *Architectural Character and Styles* (the Ship Model Experiment Tank and Old Dumbarton Bridge are excluded from the Conservation Area).

Where buildings are listed, they have already been assessed by Historic Environment Scotland as being of special architectural or historic interest and are included on the Scottish Ministers' statutory list. Listed buildings in poor condition that are repaired appropriately can contribute even more positively to the character of an area, as is evidenced by West Dunbartonshire Council's offices (before restoration, the sight of the façade retention measures was a negative feature of town). Dumbarton Town Centre Conservation Area includes four buildings listed at Category 'A' – St. Augustine's Church, Riverside Parish Church, No. 16 Church Street (the aforementioned former Burgh Hall and Academy), and Dumbarton Central Station.

With the exception of the Station Road tenements designed by J M Crawford (Category 'C'), the remainder are listed at Category 'B'.



Listed buildings contribute positively to the appearance of an area, provide points of interest and enrich an area's special character, as well as having stories to tell about the development of a place and its people: Dumbarton is no exception – its churches and public buildings continue to serve the townsfolk usefully (and provide important orientation points) and its station is one of only thirteen in Scotland listed at Category 'A'. These are positive aspects of the area.

*Consideration should be given to having the listed status of the Scots-Baronial Station Road/College Street tenements upgraded to Category 'B'.*

Unlisted buildings of townscape merit can also make a positive visual contribution to the character and appearance of an area and may be landmark buildings or more modest buildings which help to unify the townscape. A number of High Street buildings fall into this category.

*Serious consideration should be given to having the Public Library and former Hiram Walker Headquarters (No. 3 High Street) listed by Historic Environment Scotland:* currently the only statutory protection afforded these key buildings is their location within the Conservation Area.

*Additional consideration should be given to having No. 22 High Street (former Bank of Scotland), the Church Street/Castle Street tenements, the former Glasgow Savings Bank and the tenements at Nos. 6-8 High Street listed.*

## KEY POSITIVE FEATURES AND BUILDINGS

A detailed assessment of the buildings and spaces within a Conservation Area allows for the identification of the key features that define the special architectural and historic character of the area. There should be a presumption against demolition, disruption, and inappropriate alterations that detract from the character and appearance of such an area.

In the Dumbarton Town Centre Conservation Area, the key features are:

- Survival of the street pattern and burgage plots from the mediieval period.
- The attractive riverside setting and embankment walkway and views therefrom.
- Consistency of building line along High Street, creating a regular (and reassuring) sense of enclosure.
- Unexpected range of architectural styles, including good examples from the Art Deco period, co-existing surprisingly harmoniously on High Street.
- Survival of the Victorian street pattern and urban grain adjacent to Dumbarton Central Station and along Strathleven Place.
- Architectural quality of the prominent buildings.
- Representation of pre-eminent Scottish architects (Brash, Honeyman, Leiper, Gillespie Graham, Rowand Anderson) alongside local practitioners (J M Crawford, William Reid).
- Consistency of post-war development (uniformity of height, aesthetic, and construction materials).
- Well-maintained public spaces.

In the Dumbarton Town Centre Conservation Area, the key buildings are those currently listed by Historic Environment Scotland, *as well as:* -

- Public Library, Strathleven Place
- No. 3 High Street (former Hiram Walker Headquarters/McMillan Shipyard Offices). Un-listed and on *Buildings at Risk Register*.
- No. 53 High Street (former Clydesdale Bank).
- Nos. 63-65 High Street (former National Boot Depot).
- Nos. 81-95 High Street (former Burtons).
- Nos. 97-99 High Street (former Woolworths).
- Nos. 84-92 High Street (good red sandstone tenement).
- No. 22 High Street (former Bank of Scotland).
- No. 12 High Street (former Glasgow Savings Bank).
- Nos. 2-14 Church Street/Nos. 1-17 Castle Street (good grey/buff sandstone tenements).

Clockwise from top left: The Edwardian Public Library is a valuable asset to the town - it should be listed (© author); consideration could be given to listing the former Bank of Scotland at No. 22 High Street (© author); the Church Street tenements adjoining the Council headquarters are worthy of consideration for listing (© author); the Station Road tenements could be upgraded to Category 'B' listing to further protect them (© M Anne Dick).



## KEY CHALLENGES

The key challenges in any Conservation Area are inappropriate elements that detract from the character and appearance of the area. The Dumbarton Town Centre Conservation Area is relatively new, and as a result many changes had previously occurred over which little statutory control was exercised. In the Town Centre, therefore, the key challenges are: -

### Loss of original architectural detail

Original architectural detail makes a defining contribution to the character and appearance of any Conservation Area. Retention and repair are therefore important aspects of the preservation and enhancement of an area. Conversely, inappropriate replacement windows and rainwater goods, inconsistent colour schemes, alterations to doors, roof coverings and boundary treatments, and loss of chimneys and original ironmongery all erode the special character of an area. Reference to historic photographs of Dumbarton illustrate the extent to which this has already taken place: for instance, the large sandstone tenement at Nos. 84-92 High Street has been shorn of its street-facing wallhead chimneys and parapet balustrade, immediately reducing its visual impact.

### Use of inappropriate materials and repair techniques

The use of the correct building materials in any Conservation Area is important to character and appearance. Traditional materials provide a cohesive effect across a Conservation Area and loss of character will result when these are replaced with modern materials or detailing. Traditional materials such as stone, slate, lead and cast iron are long-lasting and age well: they belong in a Conservation Area, but more than that belong in an energy-conscious society. The use of uPVC in replacement windows and rainwater goods is especially damaging to the integrity of a Conservation Area, as is the inappropriate use of timber boarding, or the incorrect colour on doors and windows. Astragal sub-division of windows

is also important since the arrangement of these relates directly to the pane sizes available during a specific period of construction: Georgian buildings typically exhibit smaller panes of glass and more slender astragals than Victorian properties (an important distinction in glass-producing Dumbarton).

Concrete roofing tiles have a far shorter life expectancy than slates and are large in format and thickness, so imparting heaviness to a small building. The striking four-storey tenement at Nos. 63-65 High Street has lost some of its crispness through the use of tile in re-roofing: this is particularly obvious from the rear.

Painting of ashlar frontages can be extremely damaging where the paint used is non-breathable. There has been a tradition of painting the smaller stone-built properties in Dumbarton, but stone needs to breathe, and trapped moisture behind a layer (or more) of paint can lead to long-term decay. Additionally, the use of cement in repairs can accelerate deterioration of stonework, as can be seen in the Station Road/Meadowbank Street tenements where the ashlar was already very soft.

### Inappropriate modern additions to buildings

Satellite dishes, burglar alarm boxes and CCTV cameras all impact negatively on a Conservation Area when their installation is not controlled. More damaging is the impact that can be made through an inappropriate modern intervention. Although not recent, the flat-roofed, cement-covered attic storey to No. 3 High Street creates an ugliness that is undeserved on an historic building. Similarly, extensions to the rear are equally unsympathetic. Adjacent to the same building, a modern timber conservatory installed from the period when the building was in use as a restaurant is a jarring feature of the eastern end of High Street.

In the same vein, the 1960s extension of the Public Library eastwards lacks sensitivity and detracts significantly from what is an otherwise handsome Renaissance building.

Left: Nos. 84-92 High Street have lost much of the original architectural detail (© author); insert shows a datestone over the rear service entrance, salvaged from a far older building (© Jeremy Watson).



wrightdental  
& beauty care  
NHS  
01389 734 854

PRIVATE  
CAR  
PARK

FP62 NH

Down arrow symbol



## Gap Sites

Strong building lines and a sense of enclosure can make positive contributions to the character and appearance of any Conservation Area. The impact of the Riverside Lane one-way through-route on Dumbarton was to create wide gaps on the south side of High Street where none had previously existed. Accordingly, additional gaps detract significantly from the streetscape. The gap between Nos. 3 and 17 High Street (albeit partially occupied by a conservatory and beer garden) is a negative feature of the Conservation Area. Although the site was originally filled by a low-rise building (allowing for windows on the west gable of the former Hiram Walker offices), the building line was at least maintained, and the existing railings across the gap are no substitute. Outwith the Conservation Area, there are significant unfilled/unresolved gaps, particularly on the north rear side of High Street.

## Shop Frontages

The lack of quality in shop frontages and signage is extremely detrimental to the character and townscape of Dumbarton. Many shop fronts and signage displays on High Street are constructed of non-traditional materials, and do not reflect the original proportions of traditional shop fronts. Interestingly, the different periods in architecture over which High Street was developed make possible a range of different treatments at shop level, so not every frontage would be expected to conform to the same set of rules: Victorian shops would have used extensive areas of glass for the purposes of retail display; shop entrances may have been recessed with feature platts; and the principal framing would have been constructed of timber with uniform fascias and often awnings. The Art Deco period saw the same use of glass, but often framed in metal with faux marble and Vitrolite used for decoration. The important factor is authenticity, and this is typically missing from the shop and pub frontages in town, where the proportions and materials impact negatively on the Conservation Area.

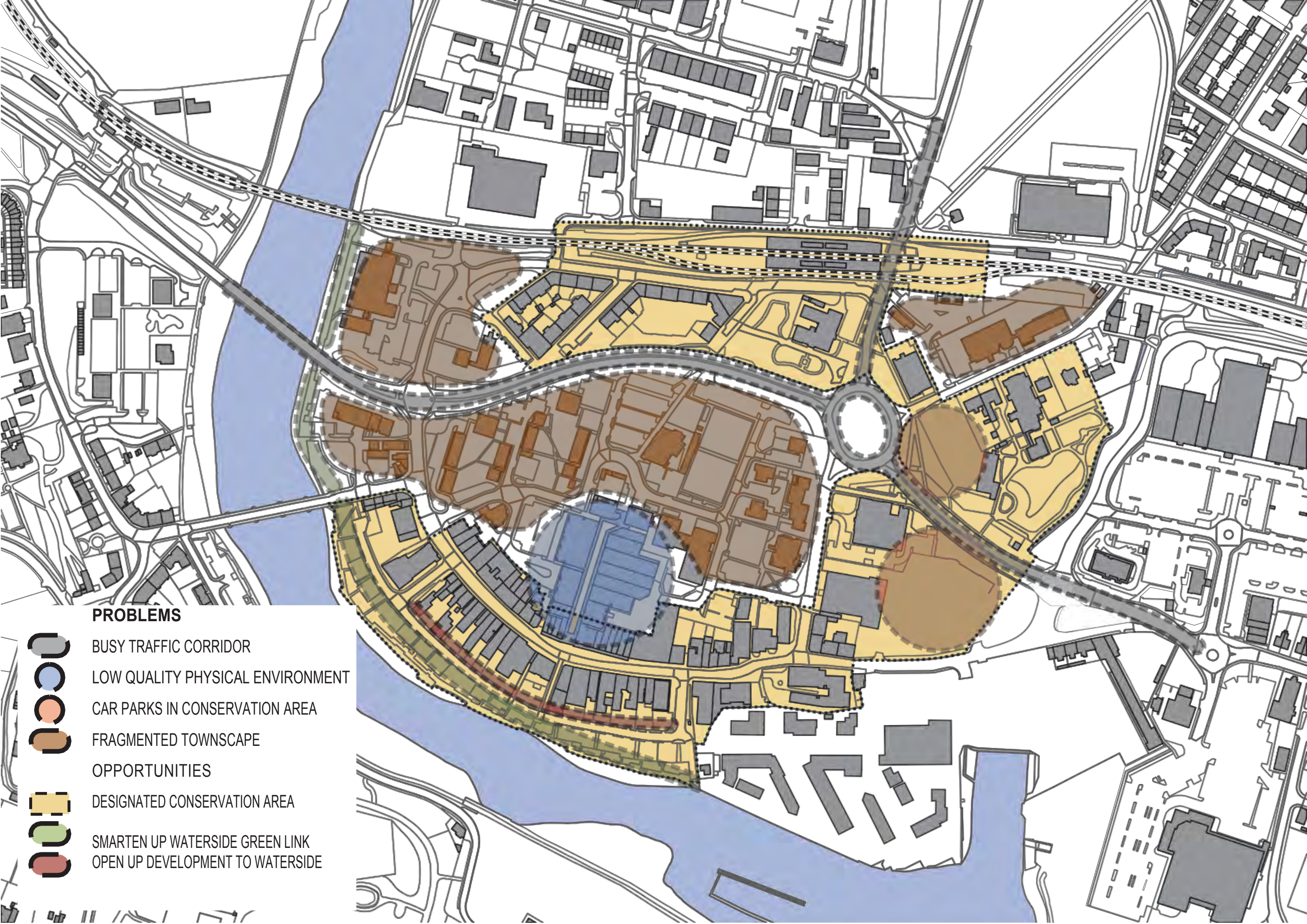
## Exposed gables

Featureless façades rarely complement the character and appearance of a Conservation Area. Particularly where unintended, exposed gables on buildings can impact negatively on an area unless they tell an interesting story. Although it exhibits a range of defects (including cracking) the gable of No. 17 Castle Street has aesthetic and historic value (exposing fireplace surrounds and the outline of a smaller building). Remaining exposed gables across town (of which there are many) are uniformly unattractive, including the rubble walled east gable of the former High Church (Bell Centre) and the 1966 east wall of the Public Library. There is here the opportunity to enhance the Conservation Area through imaginative treatment of these gables, perhaps as took place in Glasgow in 1974 using funding from the Scottish Arts Council (and is a continuing tradition in the city today).

## Exposed and open backlands

The unintended high visibility of rear façades is detrimental to the character and townscape of Dumbarton. The town centre's backlands had a charm and sense of purpose until contraction of industrial activity and subsequent dereliction necessitated large-scale clearance. The buildings of High Street had been largely hidden to the rear, with few designed to be visible in the way that they are today. The 1970s design of the Leven Embankment was carefully considered, creating loading bays and designated parking behind most of the High Street retail units, enclosing these by way of stone and brick walls. At the same time, however, there had always been an ambition that riverfront housing would be provided. Today, some of the loading bays and undeveloped back grounds are unkempt, with an inconsistent quality in the architecture of the outward-facing businesses. There is some residential use of the backlands, but it is small in scale and contributes little to the visual appearance of the riverside. The lack of animation and activity along the embankment is a key problem as it reinforces the feeling that the riverside is a "back", and it feels uncomfortable and unsafe at night.

Left: There is much of interest on the rear facades of many of the High Street buildings, but they were not designed to be seen across large areas of unused backlands as they are at present. Note the use of brick in the stair turret (© author).



**PROBLEMS**



- BUSY TRAFFIC CORRIDOR
- LOW QUALITY PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT
- CAR PARKS IN CONSERVATION AREA
- FRAGMENTED TOWNSCAPE
- OPPORTUNITIES
- DESIGNATED CONSERVATION AREA
- SMARTEN UP WATERSIDE GREEN LINK
- OPEN UP DEVELOPMENT TO WATERSIDE

On the north side of High Street there is also a series of service courts that are effectively private but used by members of public as shortcuts from various car parking areas onto High Street. Routes to and through the Artizan Centre are confusing (more so than when originally designed). Notwithstanding, there are stair towers and raised drying greens behind the High Street properties that are of interest architecturally, but currently of negative impact on the character of the area due to poor maintenance and control.

### Vacancy

Vacant properties and sites have a negative effect on the character of any area. To restore the vitality of High Street it is important that vacant premises including listed buildings and shop units are returned to use. Similarly, the closure of the original entrance to Dumbarton Central Station and vacancy of the spaces associated with it is a negative feature of the northern end of Church Street.

The *Buildings at Risk Register* identifies three buildings on High Street, all of which are important to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

### Connectivity

The re-routing of the A814 has long been detrimental to the character and townscape of Dumbarton (albeit it relieved pressure on Castle Street, High Street and the old Dumbarton Bridge). One of the defining features of pre-war aerial views of Dumbarton Town Centre is the route of College Street (once Cross Vennel) which ran in a straight line from High Street (alongside the red sandstone tenement at Nos. 84-92) as far as the ramped platform access to Dumbarton Central Station. To the east, Church Street (once Kirk Vennel) linked High Street directly to the main passenger entrance to the station. Both of these routes continued north under the railway line, but were in fact historic, pre-dating considerably the arrival of the railway. Originally the old vennels met a natural boundary at the north and

in doing so defined what would become College Park, on which the Municipal Buildings were erected.

During its heyday as a shopping destination and visitor attraction, Dumbarton Central Station enjoyed good visual and physical links to High Street, and while these routes survive in the form of underpasses, they are no longer well defined. As a result, two of the Character Areas within the Conservation Area (Station Road and Strathleven Place) are dependent on the third (Church Street) for a direct connection to the fourth and largest (High Street).

### Financial Constraints

It is recognised that financial constraints across both the public and private sector continue to impact on the resources available for preservation and enhancement of the historic environment. The planning of priorities and identification of funding and other resources to maximise the benefits to the Dumbarton Town Centre Conservation Area is a key recommendation of this appraisal.



RIVER  
LEVEL

## CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARY

### ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT BOUNDARY

The Dumbarton Town Centre Conservation Area was only designated in 2019 and so it may seem premature that its boundary be adjusted. As part of this appraisal, however, the boundary of the Conservation Area was studied, as much to assess what had been excluded in 2019 as had been included. The intentions of the *Dumbarton Town Centre Conservation Area Proposal* were: -

*To ensure more careful and thoughtful future developments, the boundaries of the proposed conservation area aim to include all the historic fabric within Dumbarton Town Centre, as well as adjacent elements that are currently not detrimental in a ratio that keeps the historic aspect of the area relevant. The conservation area will help provide better protection for the fabric contained within it. It will also help enhance the setting around heritage assets, regulate future development and prevent unsympathetic additions to the historic context.*

Excluded from the final Conservation Area was the old Dumbarton Bridge (also excluded from the Kirktonhill Conservation Area) and the Category 'A' listed Ship Model Experiment Tank.

In reviewing the content and boundary of a Conservation Area it is important to establish criteria against which decisions can be assessed. An overarching principle comes from the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997. In defining Conservation Areas and the role planning authorities have in considering development proposals within them, four main themes are identified, being architectural interest, historic interest, character, and appearance.

### PROPOSED BOUNDARY AMENDMENTS

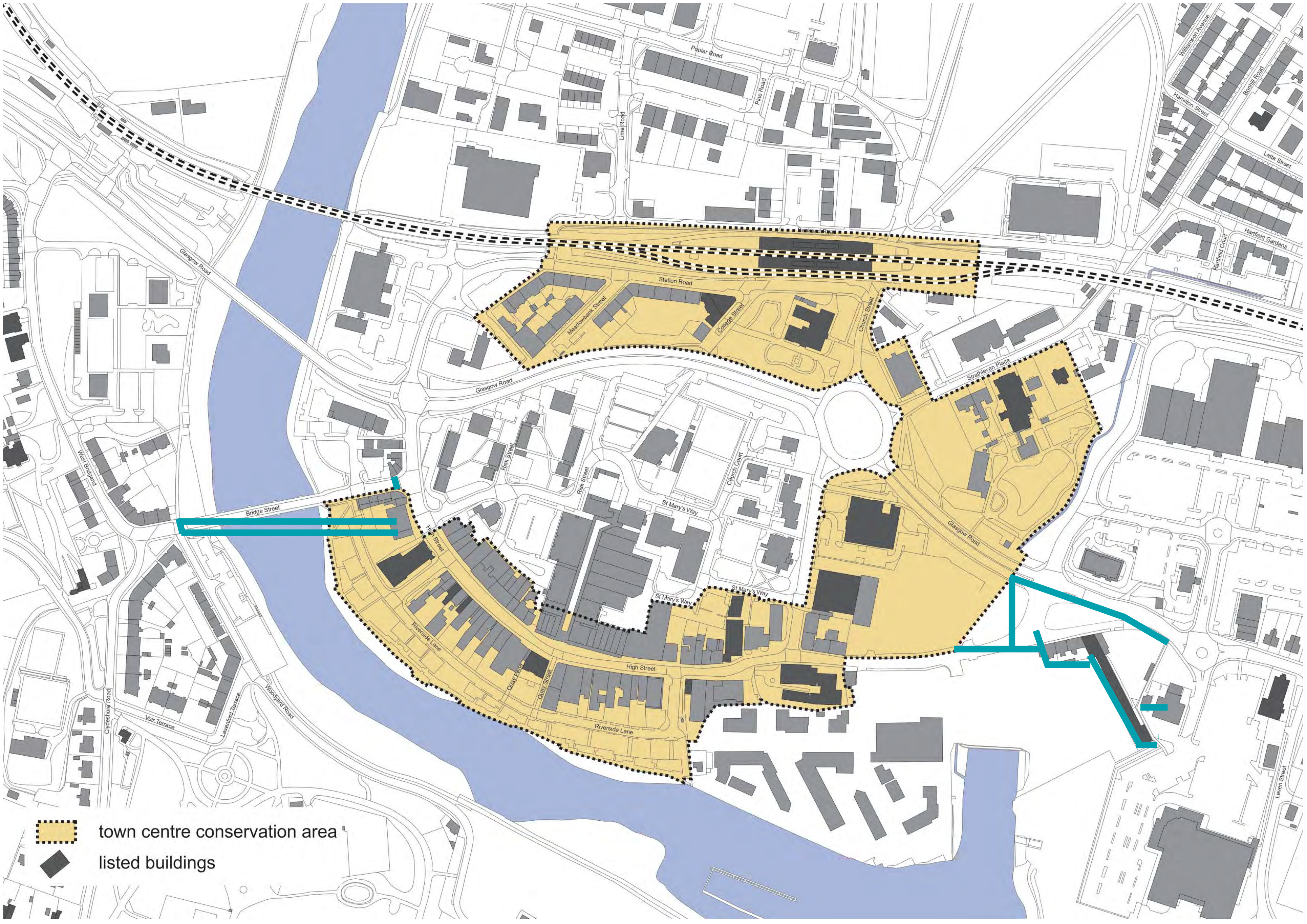
#### The case for Dumbarton Bridge



It seems anomalous that the buildings at the junction of Bridge Street and High Street, which have been significantly altered and are un-listed, are included within the Conservation Area while the old Dumbarton Bridge is not. This is an important architectural and historic feature of Dumbarton (as evidenced by its Category 'B' listing) and while it is afforded statutory protection by its listing, it should be included within the Conservation Area, thereby connecting with the Kirktonhill Conservation Area.

#### The case for the Castle Street Car Park

This is an historically significant site where there was a railway goods station with sidings and weighbridge. From here there were tracks leading to the dockyard of Archibald McMillan and Son and later the Hiram Walker distillery. One of these tracks has been incorporated into a recent landscape improvement scheme for the site (which bounds the car park for West Dunbartonshire Council's offices), continuing across the A814 as an important reminder of the town's industrial past.

To protect it from unsuitable development, as well as in recognition of its historic importance, it should be included within the Conservation Area, along with Castle Terrace and the Ship Model Experiment Tank.



-  town centre conservation area
-  listed buildings

### The case for the Ship Model Experiment Tank

The Denny Ship Model Experiment Tank (more properly the Scottish Maritime Museum) on Castle Terrace was built in 1882 and opened as a museum in 1988. The polychromatic sandstone street frontage commemorates William Froude, heralded on an engraved plaque as “The Greatest of Experimenters and Investigators in Hydrodynamics”. In addition to the pitched-roof shed containing the 100 metre-long hydraulic experimentation tank (designed for William Denny’s Leven Shipyard), workshops and a timber-lined drawing office are preserved. In the grounds stands the Robert Napier-designed engine from the wooden paddle steamer *Leven* (1821) which was relocated from a reflecting pool in Dumbarton Town Centre in 1984 (having been taken there from a site at Dumbarton Rock). The complex is Category ‘A’ listed and is complemented nicely by a truncated row of two-storey terraced houses with slate roofs and restrained detailing. These buildings should be included within the Conservation Area for architectural, historic, archaeological and townscape reasons.

Left: Suggested boundary changes to Dumbarton Town Centre Conservation Area to include Dumbarton Bridge, the Castle Street car park, and the Ship Model Experiment Tank (© Ines Triebel/author).





## PRESERVATION AND ENHANCEMENT

### MANAGEMENT PLANNING

The Dumbarton Town Centre Conservation Area would benefit from an overall management plan to aid in the prioritisation and co-ordination of preservation and enhancement initiatives, as well as the identification of resources. It is accepted that there are present-day financial constraints on heritage management and historic building care and repair, but a management plan will allow for a structured approach to making the best use of available funds.

The management plan should seek to set targets for implementing the following:

- Identifying potential funding streams and other resources.
- Prioritising projects and other actions, for instance concentrating on Buildings at Risk.
- Identifying management issues and any problems with control of works, such as problems of ownership.
- Encouraging different departments within West Dunbartonshire Council as well as other organisations, groups and interested individuals to work together on priorities.
- Ensuring that appropriate information and advice about practical conservation and planning issues is readily available, for instance in the Public Library and online.
- Identifying means of promoting awareness of the importance and key features of the Conservation Area through education, interpretation, activities and events, such as practical demonstrations of traditional skills.

- Targeting tomorrow's stakeholders, building owners and potential heritage professionals by engaging with local schools.
- Ensuring that flood risk and management are at the forefront of discussions over the development of the town centre.

### OPPORTUNITIES FOR PRESERVATION AND ENHANCEMENT

Conservation Area status should be seen as an opportunity, and engagement with the local community is essential to fostering a sense of ownership, responsibility for the historic environment, and pride in the town centre.

The following initiatives represent general opportunities: -

- Where general enhancement projects are being planned (for instance, a co-ordinated approach to improvement of exposed gables), the educational and outreach benefits of the exercise should be maximised through consultation and community involvement.
- Promotion of the key features of the Conservation Area should be implemented through the distribution of information leaflets, and community events.
- Guidance on the economic and aesthetic benefits of good practice in building repair should be circulated/produced.
- The importance of routine building maintenance should be emphasised to building owners and tenants.
- Advice on energy efficiency, and the importance of preserving existing buildings and using sustainable materials should be made available to building owners and tenants.



- Opportunities for local trades in repair and maintenance of the historic built environment, creating economic and cultural opportunities.

The following initiatives represent specific recommendations: -

- There should be a presumption against demolition – the most sustainable building is one that already exists.
- Alterations to un-listed buildings should be controlled through positive engagement with owners. Inappropriate signage, window replacement, roof coverings, chimney alterations, stonework repairs and the installation of modern fittings should be discouraged.
- The removal of three sites in the Dumbarton Town Centre Conservation Area from the *Buildings at Risk Register* through repairs and re-use (significant in the case of the former Hiram Walker offices) should be a priority.
- Improvement of the thresholds (“gateways”) of the Conservation Area should be targeted.
- The creation of definitive, safe and attractive routes for pedestrians and cyclists from the north to the south of the Conservation Area should be a priority.
- All new developments should be of the highest quality, be in harmony with the historic nature of the town, respond to the scale and massing of existing buildings, be built of sustainable and long-lasting materials, and be capable of demonstrably improving the appearance of the Conservation Area.
- Sensitive and imaginative proposals for the re-use of vacant buildings and gap sites should be encouraged.
- Sensitive and imaginative solutions to the backlands should be encouraged. Consideration should be given to creating an active frontage facing the riverside.
- Holistic and comprehensive treatment of exposed gables should be considered as an opportunity to positively enliven (as well as improve) the appearance of the Conservation Area.
- Holistic and comprehensive improvements to shop frontages (using historic

photographs and period-appropriate materials) should be considered as an opportunity to lift the appearance of the Conservation Area, alongside the reinstatement of missing architectural features.

- Where possible, paint should be removed from ashlar building frontages, for instance as part of a wider repair and improvement scheme.
- Protection of trees and existing traditional boundary walls that do much to contribute positively to the Conservation Area should be enforced.
- The results of recent High Street improvements to the public realm should be expanded to include and improve the quality of secondary links, especially on key desire lines.
- Car parks should be reviewed with a view to rationalising some of the greenspace to create more meaningful, useful and sustainable green areas in the town centre.
- The promotion of Dumbarton Town Centre as a heritage destination should be considered, in collaboration with wider stakeholders and owners of significant sites (such as Dumbarton Castle).
- The development of the attractive riverside route from the old Dumbarton Bridge eastwards should be continued as an area-wide benefit.
- The potential for restoring the Artizan Centre to its 1960s award-winning form should not be dismissed without careful consideration of the impact of radical change.

This appraisal should be reviewed every five years from the date of its formal adoption by West Dunbartonshire Council. It should be assessed against any changes in the local development plan, Scottish Government policy and/or guidance issued by Historic Environment Scotland on managing change, and care and repair.



## MONITORING AND REVIEW

Ideally, a review should include:

- A survey of the Conservation Area (including a photographic record) to support any possible enforcement action.
- An assessment of the degree to which key features identified in this appraisal have been protected and/or enhanced.
- An assessment of the degree to which the key challenges identified in this appraisal have been addressed (and the success thereof).
- The identification of any new issues that require to be addressed (including suggested actions).
- The production of a short, illustrated review detailing the findings and setting out recommendations as appropriate.
- Publicity and consultation.

The review should be carried out by heritage consultants or West Dunbartonshire Council in collaboration with local stakeholders and amenity bodies with a vested interest in the protection and enhancement of the Dumbarton Town Centre Conservation Area.

ARTIZAN

CENTREDUMBARTON



ND NAILS & SPA

NAILS CARE FOR LADIES & GENTS

ARTIZAN G82 1PQ | TEL: 07453 455567

Lloyds pharmacy



Heritage Trail  
← Bridge Street (Council Offices)  
← Dumbarton Bridge

Heritage Trail  
→ Church St (Council Offices)  
→ Sheriff & P Court



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

*A Short History of Dunbartonshire*, by I M M MacPhail, pub. SPA Books Ltd, 1984.

*Discovering Dunbarton District*, by Brian D Osborne and Michael C Taylor, pub. Dunbarton District Libraries, 1981.

*Dunbarton Ancient and Modern*, by Donald Macleod, pub. Maclure, Macdonald, 1893.

*Dunbarton Central Station - Conservation Management Plan*, by Lesley Kerr et al (Dunbarton Stations Improvement Trust), 2019.

*Dunbarton Heritage Trail*, pub. West Dunbartonshire Council Libraries and Cultural Services, undated.

*Dunbarton Past and Present – Vol 2*, by Michael C Taylor, pub. Dunbarton District Libraries, 1989.

*Dunbarton Town Centre Conservation Area Proposal*, by Austin-Smith:Lord (for West Dunbartonshire Council), 2019.

*Dunbarton Town Trail*, by James Pye and Anders Christiansen, pub. Mackintosh School of Architecture, undated.

*Kirktonhill Conservation Area Appraisal*, by Scottish Civic Trust (for West

Dunbartonshire Council), 2016.

*North Clyde Estuary – An Illustrated Architectural Guide*, by Frank Arneil Walker with Fiona Sinclair, Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland, 1992.

*Old Dunbarton*, by John Hood, pub. Stenlake Publishing, 1999.

*The Buildings of Scotland – Stirling and Central Scotland*, by John Gifford and Frank Arneil Walker, pub. Yale University Press, 2002.

*The Clyde Valley Regional Plan 1946*, by Sir Patrick Abercrombie and Robert Matthew, pub. HMSO, 1949.



