

08 Civic Centre

Context

This character area covers the Civic Centre complex to the north-west of the city centre. The Central Parks (CA7) wrap round the north and east boundaries of the area and the commercial centres of Above Bar and the West Quay and West Quay II are to the south and south-west. Station Heights (CA1) character area including the important station approach is to the west.

The Civic Centre stands on part of the former agricultural land of the town, historically known as West Marlands. The medieval leper hospital may have been located within this area alongside one of the main roads to the town where the lepers would have sought alms from passing travellers.

Grain

This character area largely comprises coarse grain built form in large blocks of development. To the north-east corner a remnant of the fine grain former pre-war street pattern survives. Roads and streets are very broad in this character area (with the exception of the remnant Gibbs Road – a narrow connecting lane between West Marlands Road and Above Bar Street) and building lines are consistent but set back from the road. The scale of built form in proportion to the road width generally provides comfortable enclosure. The townscape does however become very loose to the south side of the Civic Centre particularly the poorly defined junction of Civic Centre Road and Portland Terrace.

Scale

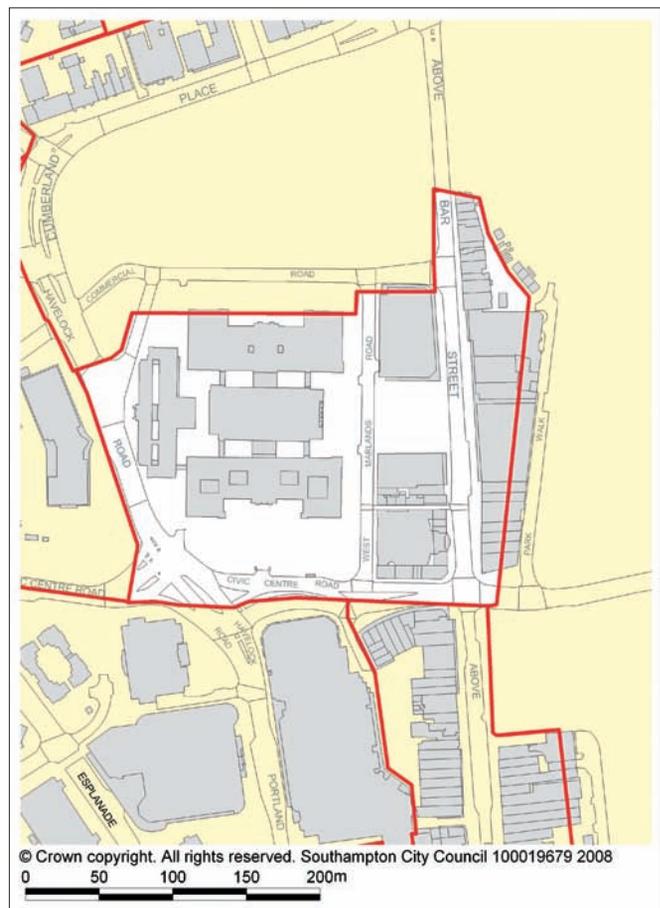
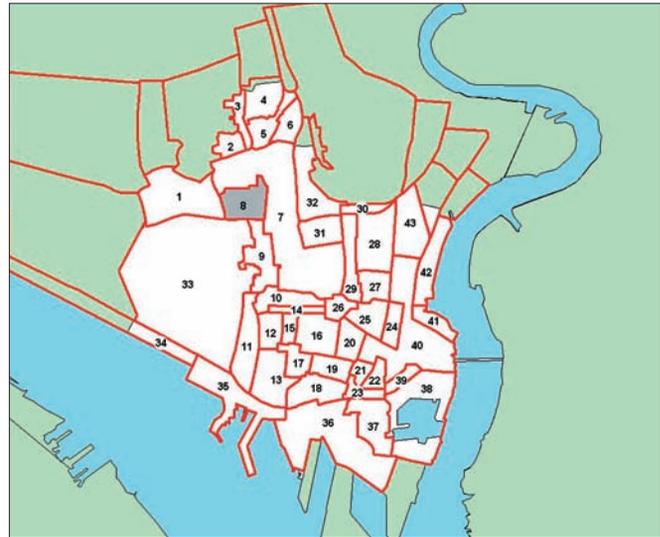
Built form is between two and four storeys, with the larger footprint buildings of the Civic Centre and Guildhall Square at four storeys as well as the former Tyrell and Green store. The older sections of the street scene are more varied with some at a traditional two storey height to parapet.

The dominating feature in the character area is the tall, slender, slowly tapering campanile to the Civic Centre. At fifty four metres it is one of the highest structures in the City and it can be clearly seen on the approach by road, rail and foot from the west and from London Road to the north. It is also glimpsed from the parks.

Uses

Law Courts, City Art Gallery, Public Library and City Council Offices and City Archive are combined in the main Civic Centre. The buildings to the east of the Civic Centre are shops with offices above, a former department store and independent bars and cafes with ancillary accommodation above, some of which is residential. The former theatre has been converted to a bar/nightclub.

The closure of Tyrell and Green department store has



greatly diminished the level of investment and footfall to this part of the commercial core and its character has suffered as a result.

The Civic Centre, the potential redevelopment of the Tyrell and Green site, Mayflower Theatre to the west (CA1) and Solent Universities Millais Gallery to the east (CA32) form the Cultural Quarter which is being actively pursued by the City Council and partners.

Public Realm

The quality of the public realm to the immediate setting of the Civic Centre is high with large areas of granite setts forming the surfacing to access roads and forecourts. The main entrance to the administrative offices on the south side has been badly patched with unsympathetic materials.

Guildhall Square is looking dated and in need of resurfacing.

Connectivity

This area is well connected to adjacent character areas and has a strong relationship with Watts Park to the north and, thanks to the trees to the southern edge of the road that passes the north elevation, feels like an extension to the park, though this could be enhanced further.

Views

Views from the character area are generally of local interest but do include some long-range views to the waterfront to the south-west and views north into the parks. The Civic Centre dominates the character area with each of its carefully composed facades terminating views of the building from short distances. Only the unnervingly slender campanile type tower can be seen over distance and the strategic view from London Road passes across part of the character area and the building.

Building types

Civic buildings and spaces on a suitably grand scale, converted houses with shops to the ground floor and accommodation and other uses above and a purpose-built department store and row of shops with offices above. Former cinema again with ribbon of purpose-built shops now a nightclub.

Architectural qualities

The Grade II* listed Civic Centre, designed by competition-winning E. Berry-Webber and constructed between 1928-39 is a complex civic building and represents the prosperity of Southampton as a port at a time when other places were suffering from under-investment and decline. Its most striking characteristic is the offset slender and tapering tower set centrally on an east-west axis to the western range of the Civic Centre. The



- 01** The imposing eastern portico seen from Guildhall Square
02 Above Bar Street looking south
03 Barry Webber's Grade II* listed Civic Centre – south façade with campanile

building has been described stylistically as Free Classical (Pevsner, *Buildings of England: Hampshire and the Isle of Wight* 1967).

The remaining buildings in the character area are of moderate architectural quality, though the former cinema, Tyrell and Green building and associated shops and office accommodation use some good quality materials and have well articulated facades.

Heritage Assets

The area is considered to possess a high degree of evidential value due the likelihood that the site of the medieval leper hospital of St Mary Magdalen is located within its boundaries. The area lies within a Local Area of Archaeological Importance to reflect this potential to yield significant evidence for past activity in the area.

The Civic Centre is a Grade II* listed building. Its design is of considerable historic and architectural interest and is of high communal value as a symbol of civic pride for the city of Southampton. The setting of this building is closely related to the city parks (CA07: Central Parks) planned layout and this relationship is important to how the building is appreciated within its setting. The campanile is a key part of this relationship and acts as both a city landmark and focal point for civic functions.

No 194 Above Bar Street is a locally listed building of some considerable historic and architectural significance. The former Prudential Assurance building in terracotta and brick is by Alfred Waterhouse. His association with the company produced a group of similar office buildings around the country and for this reason and its survival the building can be considered to have aesthetic as well as historical value.

Materials

Portland stone and copper roofs to the Civic Centre.

Various stone cladding and other curtain walling including slate inset panels and some decorative tiling to facade panels. Concrete frames are painted and expressed on the facades and used to articulate the buildings and divide them into a series of bays rather than one monotonous blank facade.

Older buildings are brick, render and stucco with slate and clay tile roofs.

Condition

Parts of the character area are in poor condition with vacant shops and boarded-up facades. This is in anticipation of the approval of a major scheme of redevelopment (Northern Above Bar) which will see a new art centre located on the site of Tyrell and Green department store and a new civic space linking the parks to the Civic Centre.

Ownership

As well as the Civic Centre, Southampton City Council owns much of the sites to the east including Guildhall Square. The remaining buildings are in multiple ownership.

Intervention

- Consider reinstatement of the landscaped gardens and fountain to the south side of the Civic Centre.
- Consider better integration of the north elevations of the Civic Centre with Watts Park by diminishing the impact of the carriageway – bringing this up to grade and resurfacing with a material similar to that used on the service road approaches to the Civic Centre.

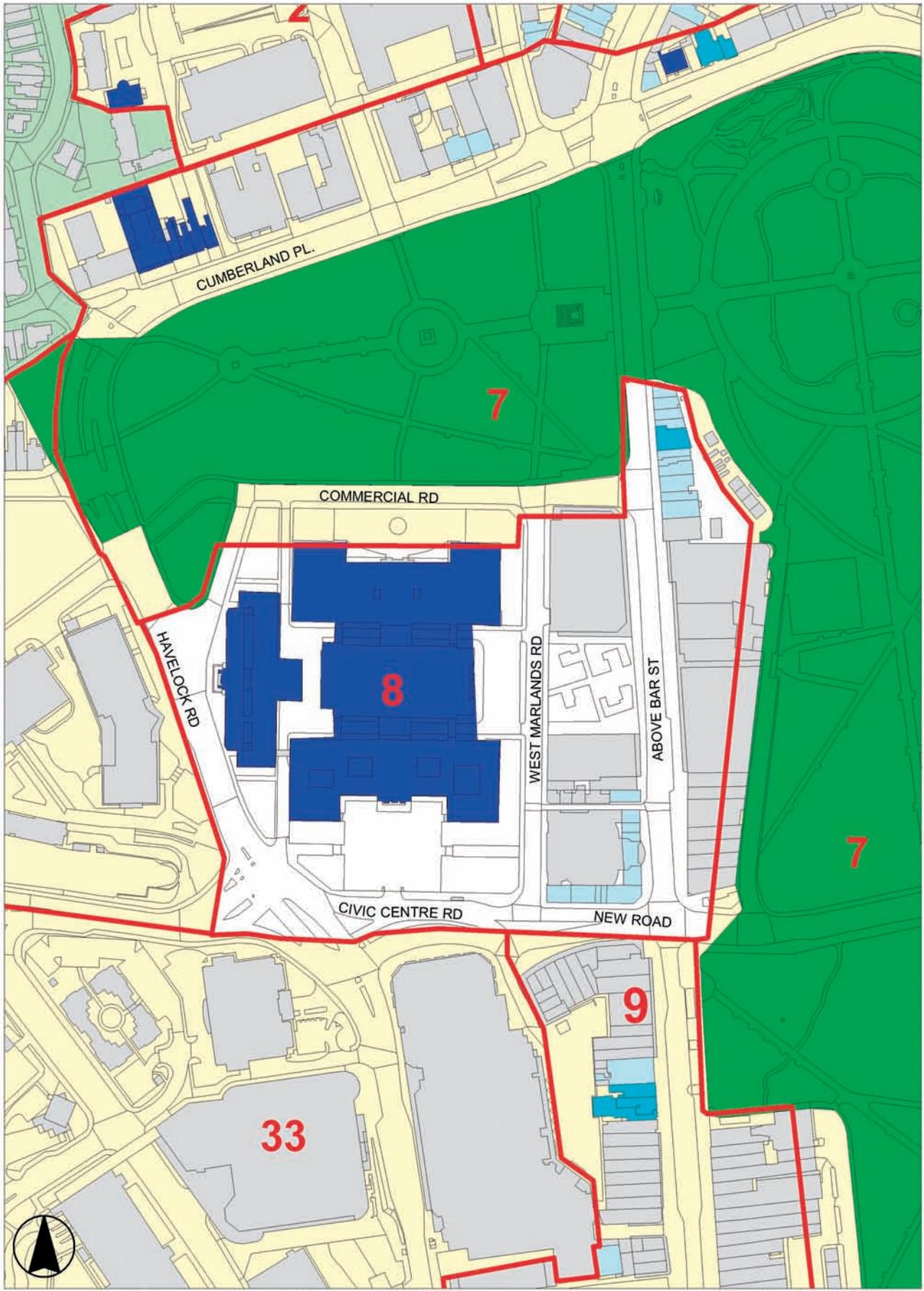
Key design principles

- All proposed development should respect the scale and setting of the Civic Centre and in particular the slender campanile style tower.
- Remove the dominance of the road in relation to the setting of the Civic Centre.



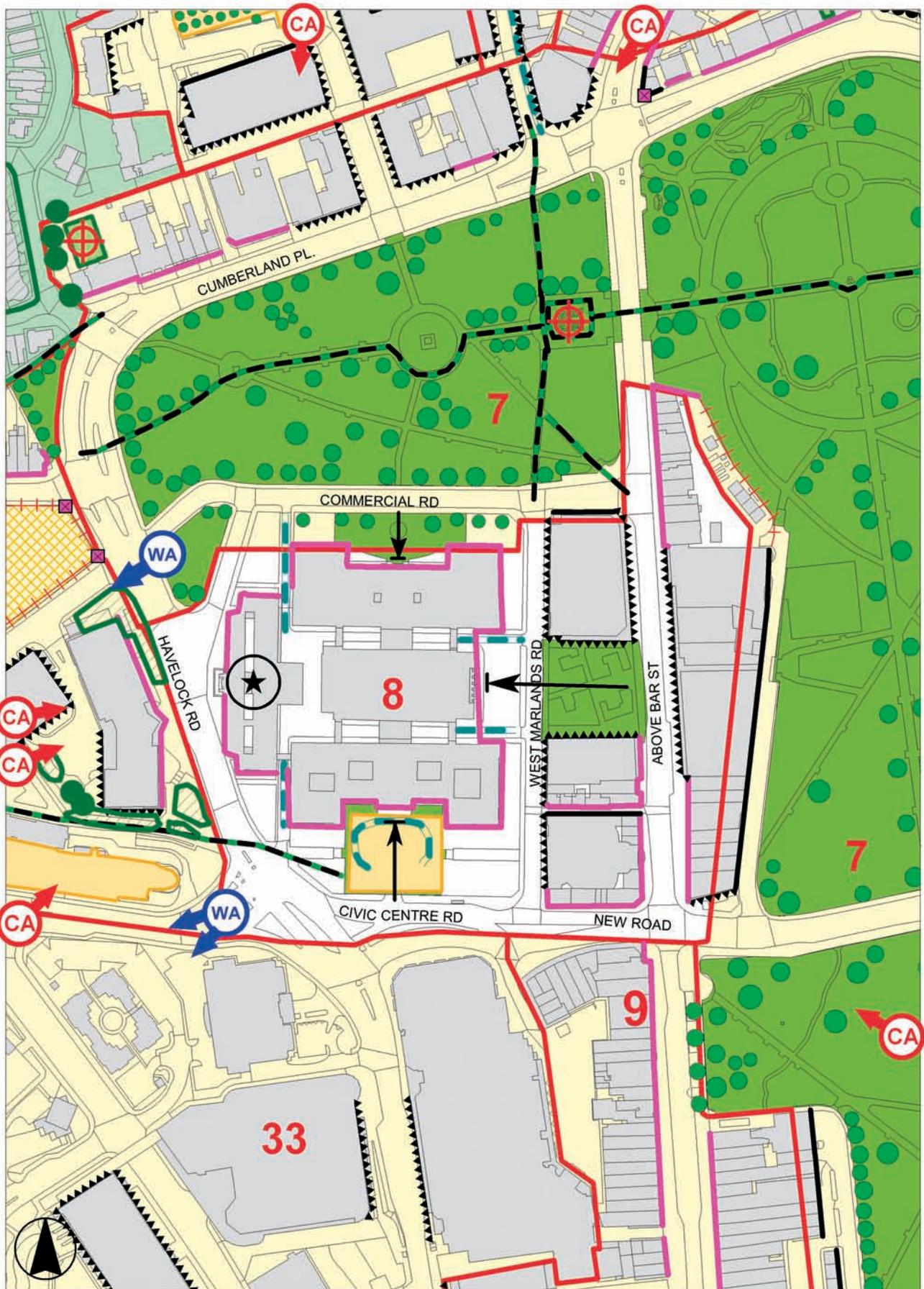
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Townscape

