

# Re-Knitting Urban Fabric, Compacting the City: A Case Study in Glasgow

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## Introduction

Most cities have their difficult, ambiguous and forgotten areas – difficult to promote for development or re-development due to site constraints, location or ownership issues; ambiguous because various (possibly quite different) development options could be acceptable; forgotten because development pressure and activity seems to have been channelled elsewhere leaving vacant and under-used space, holes in the fabric of the city. Such areas may lie between established, stable neighbourhoods, occupying the interface. Sometimes there are important remnants and perhaps listed buildings which could offer a potential framework for integrating new development into the existing city. One senses an opportunity, perhaps even exciting potential, but some time in the future.



This brief paper considers the case of the St Andrew's Cross area in Glasgow, now the subject of considerable development activity after years of decline. It eschews the theoretical debate surrounding compact versus dispersed, instead concentrating on more pragmatic considerations.

## Background

Around 1800 Glasgow was starting to expand south of the River Clyde. Substantial suburbs for professional classes were laid out in the areas north of St Andrew's Cross known today as Tradeston, Laurieston and Hutchesontown, but their development was significantly compromised by railway construction, port expansion and industrial development. In 1839, for example, in nearby Crown Street, William Dixon opened the Govan Iron Works, commonly known as Dixon's Blazes.

In the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century the expansion of the city gathered pace. The Ordnance Survey map of 1860 indicates that what is now known as the St Andrew's Cross area lay on the fringe of the city with residual agricultural activity; already three major rail lines were defining the area, a fourth being added some years later. From the 1860s onwards, to house the rapidly expanding workforce, new (mainly tenemental) suburbs were established at Pollokshields to the west, Strathbungo to the south-west and Govanhill to the south and east. Tenemental housing was also built at St Andrew's Cross itself. In 1878 the City Improvement Trust built a gushet block on the site of the former Muirhouse Turnpike road toll house (hence the area's alternative name of Eglinton Toll). Around 1880 a further corner tenement was built and in 1894-96 a YMCA (latterly Marine Reserve depot). The expanding city consolidated its presence with a school, church, drill hall and hospital in the immediately surrounding area.

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But this interface area, between substantial suburbs, carved up by railways, by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century was mainly attracting industrial uses including a foundry, gas works, saw mills, a Tramway depot (initially with stables for the early horse-drawn system) and a Corporation electricity generating station. By 1931 St Andrew's Cross was such a busy and important road and tram junction that a construction company, as an advertising stunt, erected on the south side of the junction a sample of their four room super bungalows being built at the new outer suburb of Merrylee Park!

Evolutionary change during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century resulted in a variety of new uses being introduced such as garages, offices, warehouses and a ballroom. The tram depot evolved, meeting the needs of electric trams, subsequently becoming the city's Museum of Transport, and finally emerging in 1990 during Glasgow's reign as European City of Culture as an international performance venue and unique display space for contemporary art. But by the latter part of the century the main experience in the area was one of decline. Unoccupied premises deteriorated and demolition resulted in significant sites lying vacant awaiting redevelopment. Despite these changing circumstances, no less than ten buildings in and around the area were of sufficient historic and/or architectural quality to merit statutory listing – including tenements, the YMCA building, Tramway and a church – important townscape elements which could provide a framework for re-establishing local identity and character.

## **Guidelines for Development**

During the drafting of the new City Plan in 2000-01 the St Andrew's Cross area was identified as an area requiring preparation of a development brief "setting out urban design guidelines aimed at improving the townscape and links to surrounding areas". It was one of a number of such studies and not then considered urgent. But the situation changed in 2002 as a series of developers approached the Council with proposals for conversion and new build housing developments. There may be various explanations for this apparent sudden interest: a profitable private housing market in the city and growth in apartment living; policy focus on brownfield development rather than greenfield; relative proximity to the city centre, with good public transport links by bus and train; success of the Crown Street Regeneration Project in nearby Gorbals; overheating of the popular West End housing market leading to renewed interest in south side areas such as nearby Strathbungo; and confirmation of the construction of the final link of the M74 motorway immediately to the north of the area, scheduled to open in 2008. Concerned that piecemeal development proposals could undermine any opportunity to re-establish identity, and that insensitive new projects could dominate the listed buildings, the Council undertook to rapidly prepare Development Guidance, approved in August 2002.

The Guidance was intended to:

- provide all interested parties with a full and consistent impression of the Council's development requirements
- respond to changing development pressure
- identify issues and constraints affecting future development
- promote the area as a distinctive, high quality residential neighbourhood
- recommend development guidance for development control purposes
- encourage good quality urban design.

A number of key issues were addressed in the Guidance, including:

- use for predominantly residential purposes
- the importance of site assembly within logical boundaries, to avoid "left over" areas

which could not sustain future acceptable free-standing development; the Council indicated a willingness to consider using its CPO powers if necessary in appropriate circumstances

- general form and layout – amenity, privacy, security, permeability, minimising traffic impact, streetscape and landscaping
- an expectation of high quality urban design
- parking – encouraging basement or semi-basement parking to minimise large expanses of tarmac
- building density of at least 30 houses/ha and heights respecting the listed buildings and the built character of the area (four-storey Victorian sandstone tenements)
- sustainable and secure building design and the use of high quality and durable materials
- access for people with disabilities
- the importance of adequate mechanisms for future maintenance of open space
- street lighting and floodlighting of prominent buildings
- incorporation of public art to promote the area’s individuality and identity.

### Implementation

The following projects have so far been completed or are under construction:

- *conversion* of the (listed) former YMCA/Royal Marines Reserve building to 12 flats with ground floor retail unit (see figure 1);
- *conversion* of (listed) former drill hall/leisure club to 11 flats with 39 *new build* flats alongside in 3 and 4 storey blocks;
- phased *conversion* of (listed) former Royal Samaritan Hospital for Women to flats (for owner occupation, social rental and supported accommodation) and medical centre;
- *conversion* of former Ordnance Survey office block to 50 flats/penthouses/maisonettes (see figure 2);
- a *new build* project to erect 36 flats in a development of 4, 6 and 7 storeys;
- another *new build* project of 33 flats on a prominent site opposite the (listed) St Ninian’s Episcopal Church;
- creation of the Hidden Gardens – an award-winning *public realm* project which has transformed a derelict and effectively landlocked site behind the Tramway into a sanctuary garden dedicated to peace and a resource for the local multi-cultural community.

**Figure 1: Built in 1894-6 for the YMCA, this prominent ‘B’ Listed building at St Andrew’s Cross has now been converted for residential and ground floor commercial retail use.**



**Figure 2: Imaginative architecture has created a contemporary mix of flats, maisonettes and penthouses – in the process transforming beyond recognition an unattractive office block. This new landmark, in the heart of the area, should act as a catalyst for further redevelopment.**



### **Next Five Years?**

The next few years may see several other projects come forward to development stage. Some have been under discussion with various potential developers in the past; the completion of the early projects listed above may give the confidence and impetus required to proceed. These potential new projects include:

- a major development of some 335 apartments which has been under discussion for several years but delayed due to change in developer
- small corner site redevelopment, again the subject of protracted discussion
- redevelopment of the Plaza ballroom site for new residential apartments
- construction of a Sikh temple and community centre on a site with difficult access sandwiched between the Tramway, Hidden Gardens and railway.

In addition, clearance of redundant gasometers has resulted in a potential future development site. A timber stock-holding company also remains active in the area, immediately adjacent to some of the new apartments; it may remain or alternatively could relocate and realise residential site value.

Finally, the long-awaited southern flank of the city's inner ring road, now in the form of an extension of the M74 motorway to link up with the M8, is planned to run along the rail corridor a short distance to the north of St Andrew's Cross. It is scheduled to open to traffic around 2008.

### **Conclusions**

Like every city, Glasgow is constantly in flux. Changing market pressures, along with commercial factors and physical and socio-economic circumstances, can result in improved fortunes for Cinderella sites such as St Andrew's Cross. The planning authority may need to play catch-up to put specific supplementary guidance in place to control (and indeed promote) new directions of developer interest. Such guidance is important for a number of reasons: in offering consistent advice to various developers; in avoiding piece meal development; in promoting a coherent approach to a whole neighbourhood; in holding the line on principles

and quality during negotiations with developers and their designers; in helping to re-connect sub-areas of the city; and in re-stitching the urban fabric, valuing both the old (retained elements and listed buildings) and the new in re-creating a sense of place, character and identity. It can also provide an important reference point if changes occur in the commercial developer interest or the project architect in the important period following grant of planning consent when detailed design is undertaken and implementation on the ground.

In the context of the broader urban landscape, the redevelopment of brownfield land around St Andrew's Cross with relatively high density residential apartments is part of a compacting process. This re-knitting of the urban fabric connects existing places and neighbourhoods but at the same time introduces new elements of pattern with new uses on vacant or under-used space.

### **Note**

David Horner worked for many years with Glasgow City Council in the Chief Executive's Department and subsequently in Development and Regeneration Services; he had significant involvement in drafting the Development Guidance for St Andrew's Cross/Eglinton Toll. Two years ago he moved to his current position with the Leeds based strategic regeneration organisation *re'new*. The views expressed are the personal views of the author. Illustrations were kindly provided by Glasgow City Council.

### **References**

Glasgow City Council (2003) *Glasgow City Plan*.

Glasgow City Council (Development and Regeneration Services), 2002 *St Andrew's Cross/Eglinton Toll: Development Guidance*.