

## **Holy Bones Draft Text**

### **Introduction**

Depending on your luck with the traffic lights at the Vaughan way pedestrian crossings, the study area is probably no more than a 5 to 10 minute walk from east to west – from 21st century retail offer to 21st century waterfront development. But this is one of those great walks that expresses the temporal and spatial rhythms that characterise Leicester's cityscape. With the exception of the Vaughan Way rupture, this is a short walk through an emergent city form that exposes (quite literally in some places) the evolutionary complexity of a cityscape played out over time.

This study explores the overlapping spatial and temporal layers of today's Leicester, and makes these explicit in the design proposals. It emphasises the collective experience of Leicester as a succession of times and spaces rather than as a fixed moment or site in a progressive model of history.

### **The Time of Connecting Past, Present and Future**

*"Time goes, you say? Ah, no! Alas, Time stays, we go."*

*– Austin Dobson 1840-1921*

We are as interested in the time spent waiting for a bus as we are in making the most of the evidence of archaeological time. The passage of time is common to both the individual bus traveller and the character of the Leicester cityscape, and it is how we connect together these different experiences of time that will contribute much to a new sense of place for the future.

In most long established cities, to understand the trajectory of the built environment through time requires an act of remembrance, a sensitive, subtle and individual imagining of the lives and times of previous generations and the crucial roles they played in the formation of cityscape. Leicester is not like this. In Leicester, the evidence of trajectory is visible to even the least interested passer-by.

In the middle of the 17th century, Edward Hunt wrote to the town's authorities about the retention of the Jewry Wall:

"...conceiving that he hath a right unto the Jury wall and hee is very loath for to demolish it for Antiquitye Sake...".

Although Mr Hunt received no consideration or recompense for retaining the Jewry Wall ("It is ordered that the petitioner shall not bee allowed any thing in lieu of his wall at present, and what hee doth therein shall bee at his perill."), the archaeological remains are still in place as important signifiers of the past expressed in the present.

That the Jewry Wall survives because it was, during Saxon times, incorporated into an early church building (itself a forerunner of the 19th century building we see today), is evidence of a cumulative cityscape emerging over time and, with the exception of Vaughan Way, resistant to the chaotic dynamics of territorial, political and social change.

This is important to this design study – how best to work within a cumulative and emergent trajectory to improve connectivity and create better public realm. Part of this is to work well with what's there, to recognise asset value (whether material or symbolic), and frame it appropriately in the new streetscape.

Some 300 or so years after Edward Hunt, the Jewry Wall site was excavated by Dr Kathleen Kenyon, who expected to come down on, and thus confirm, the location of Leicester's Roman Forum. That she revealed the site of the Roman baths of Ratae Coritanorum instead (the probable location of the Forum is now understood to be on St Nicholas' Circle) is a fine demonstration of how possibilities, probabilities and certainties collide in witness to the evolutionary complexity of Leicester's contemporary cityscape.

The multiple functions of the Forum at Ratae Coritanorum – addressing the mix of civic, commercial and community needs and requirements of both Romans and Corieltauvi – is a useful starting point for imagining a new public space in Leicester today. Whether any such new public space is best considered a possibility, a probability or a certainty at this stage is beyond the scope of this study.

Even so, it is useful to imagine such a future space at the threshold of the newly refurbished High Street, and in proximity to both the Roman Forum and the economic heart of the later medieval Leicester, the Wednesday Market that continued to be held until as late as 1884. A future Forum that acts as an

extended gateway into the city centre, and as the fulcrum for improved connectivity and porosity in all directions.

How best to design for a possible or probable future space, against the certainties of existing highway and land use, is one of the key challenges for this study. Part of this is to propose a future opportunity without disrupting current constraints. And more than to simply propose, or make space for, but to allow this future opportunity to inform our design decisions across the wider study area to aid future coherence of resident, visitor and the collective experience of the city.

This study does everything asked of it, it proposes improved connectivity and porosity within enhanced public realm. It provides analysis and evaluation of existing site assets, it understands pedestrian and traffic flows, it specifies colour and material palettes, and details lighting and items of street furniture.

But more than this, this study recognises that in Leicester, time itself is a material to be worked with and a story to be told. Whether this is time as dwelling or duration, pause or movement (i.e. our human passage through time), or time as the common denominator that connects Roman Ratae Coritanorum through medieval and industrial Leicester to the future city vision for 2025 in the most extraordinary way (i.e. the city through time).

## **Design Environments**

*"...there is a universe of totally disparate intentions with everybody going about his or her business in the silence of their own minds with everybody else and the street and the time of day and the architecture and quality of light and nature of the weather as a kind of background or field for the individual and the drama it is making for itself at that moment. If you think about that, that's what happens in the city, and that somehow the city can embrace and accept and accommodate all that disparate intention at one and the same time."*

– E. L. Doctorow

This study recognises the importance of exploiting Leicester's overlapping spatial and temporal layers as four interrelated design environments that connect individual 'small-time' activities to city's 'great-time' trajectory:

### The Social Environment

That the design provides opportunities for people to dwell together or spend a moment in private reflection...etc..

### The Perceptual Environment

That the design looks good, it hangs together and performs well throughout the 24 hour day/four seasons of the year...it looks the part...etc..

### The Indigenous Environment

That the design expresses Leicester in terms of its materials, grain, etc. and that this functions as temporal (from the time of day to the time of the next bus to the time of connecting past, present and future) and spatial layers...etc..

### The Information Environment

That the design aids our experience of being in the city...of where to go, of what we are seeing, and of how we can move on to connecting places...etc..

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