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Undesignated heritage unveiled: a review of Forth Goods Yard Station's regeneration plan

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ABSTRACT

In contemporary urban landscapes, innovative strategies are increasingly necessary to repurpose post-industrial structures, preserving urban heritage and fostering sustainable environments, yet this transformation demands careful policy considerations involving diverse stakeholders, with choices on unlisted buildings pivotal in shaping landscapes and sustainable development trajectories. Using Newcastle's Forth Goods Yard Station as a case study, this article examines the interplay between intent, development plans, and architectural outcomes, evaluating the 'Forth Yards Development Framework, January 2020' through diverse design concepts to explore reuse scenarios and conservation tactics. Through a research methodology integrating analysis of the development plan, interviews with the Urban Design and Landscape Design groups from Newcastle City Council, and reflections on the plan, including three conceptual design scenarios, insights are sought to validate embedded expectations within the framework, with in-depth interviews and a workshop aiming to assess alignment between intentions, the development plan, and resulting architectural proposals. This project aims to illuminate the complex dynamics in urban regeneration through a comprehensive analysis of Forth Goods Yard Station, advancing understanding of challenges and opportunities associated with the adaptive reuse of unlisted post-industrial railway heritage.

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Introduction

Contemporary urban environments increasingly demand innovative approaches to reclaiming and repurposing structures that no longer align with present-day needs. The reuse of industrial areas, particularly structures incompatible with modern conditions, presents a vital criterion for revitalizing urban memory and fostering a sustainable physical environment. However, the redesign of historic buildings and sites for reuse requires careful consideration of policies, involving various stakeholders whose decisions shape the future of structures and cities alike. While conservation processes for listed or statutorily protected environments are subject to stringent regulations, decisions

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regarding unlisted structures can drastically alter landscapes, potentially deviating from sustainability and conservation objectives.

Ensuring the management and preservation of built heritage so that it can be sustained for future generations is a circular process (Newman and Saginor 2014). Adaptive tax credits, flexible development plans and building codes, and preservationists try to ensure the protection of the built environment (Listokin, Listokin, and Lahr 1998). In the United Kingdom, the process of listing a building, which grants it legal protection based on its architectural or historic significance, is carefully managed and governed by specific procedures. The legislation that guides this process is the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, supported by layers of planning policy and guidance at national and local levels. This framework enables government bodies in England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland to compile and maintain lists of buildings deemed of architectural or historic interest. The decision to list a building traces its roots back to early legislation focused on ancient monuments Creigh-Tyte and Gallimore (1998).

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) in England, along with equivalent departments in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, oversees the listing process. Buildings eligible for listing typically demonstrate exceptional architectural design, historical relevance, associations with significant figures or events, or contribute to important architectural ensembles like squares or terraces (Creigh-Tyte and Gallimore 1998). This categorization results in buildings being designated as Grade I, Grade II*, or Grade II in England and Wales, or Category A, B, or C in Scotland, indicating their relative significance.

Listing protects these structures from alterations or demolition without consent from local planning authorities, with potential appeals to the Secretary of State. While listing ensures careful consideration of a building's future, it does not freeze its development; rather, any changes must respect its character and historical value (Creigh-Tyte and Gallimore 1998).

In practice, the listing process involves expert assessment by bodies like Historic England, Historic Environment Scotland, Cadw, or the Environment and Heritage Service in Northern Ireland, which advise the government on listing decisions. This advisory role ensures that decisions are informed by historical, architectural, and cultural significance rather than factors like repair costs or modern usability (Creigh-Tyte and Gallimore 1998; Historic England n.d.; Historic Environment Scotland n.d.).

With the transition to more flexible and place-oriented conservation planning and management in the last century, more structures have regained their function and an aim of conservation practitioners is to achieve adaptive re-use in a sustainable historic built environment (Newman and Saginor 2014). While the process for statutorily protected heritage assets works in this cycle, it is witnessed that undesignated heritage assets falls out of use and is abandoned or demolished as it is excluded from conservation programmes.

In the case of unlisted buildings which are industrial railway heritage, if a structure is not listed Historic England states that 'It is advisable for local authorities to use their statutory powers if unlisted buildings that contribute positively to the special interest of a conservation area are falling into decay and where use of the powers would be a positive step' (Historic England 2019). The fate of the building is left entirely to the local authority. While this defines a flexible route to prevent demolition by neglect, it can also

accelerate the demolition process for idle structures waiting to be used or re-evaluated. Moshen and Leatherbarrow define destruction by neglect as the destruction of a historic structure or site due to abandonment or lack of maintenance (1993). This process has been identified as being used as a method of avoiding inheritance and maintenance costs in the 1990s and appeared to gain in popularity again from 2007, when the number of demolition applications increased (Wallace and Franchetti 2007).

The Forth Goods Yard station, which we choose as case study for this article, is part of the railway heritage and a remnant of the city's industrial heritage. Today, this structure is heading towards destruction through neglect (Figure 1). Newcastle City Council created a development framework for the site, which seeks to balance redevelopment opportunities with the desire to preserve features of heritage value. The following section of the article introduces a brief background to Forth Goods Yard station and discusses the historic value of Forth Good Yard Station and its contribution to Newcastle city memory as an undesignated heritage. The site has been dormant since it fell into disuse in 1968, and its dormant status can create a potentially lucrative profit area for the developer because, as an unlisted structure, it is excluded from the entire preservation programme, although it remains subject to planning policies and guidance.

This article uses the Forth Goods Yard Station in Newcastle as a case study to assess the correlation between intent, development plans, and architectural outcomes (Figure 2).

Specifically, it evaluates the 'Forth Yards Development Framework, January 2020' by generating diverse design proposals to explore potential reuse scenarios and conservation strategies for Forth Goods Yard Station. Key questions guiding this research include the



Figure 1. Facade of Forth Goods Yard Station, 2022. Source: Author.

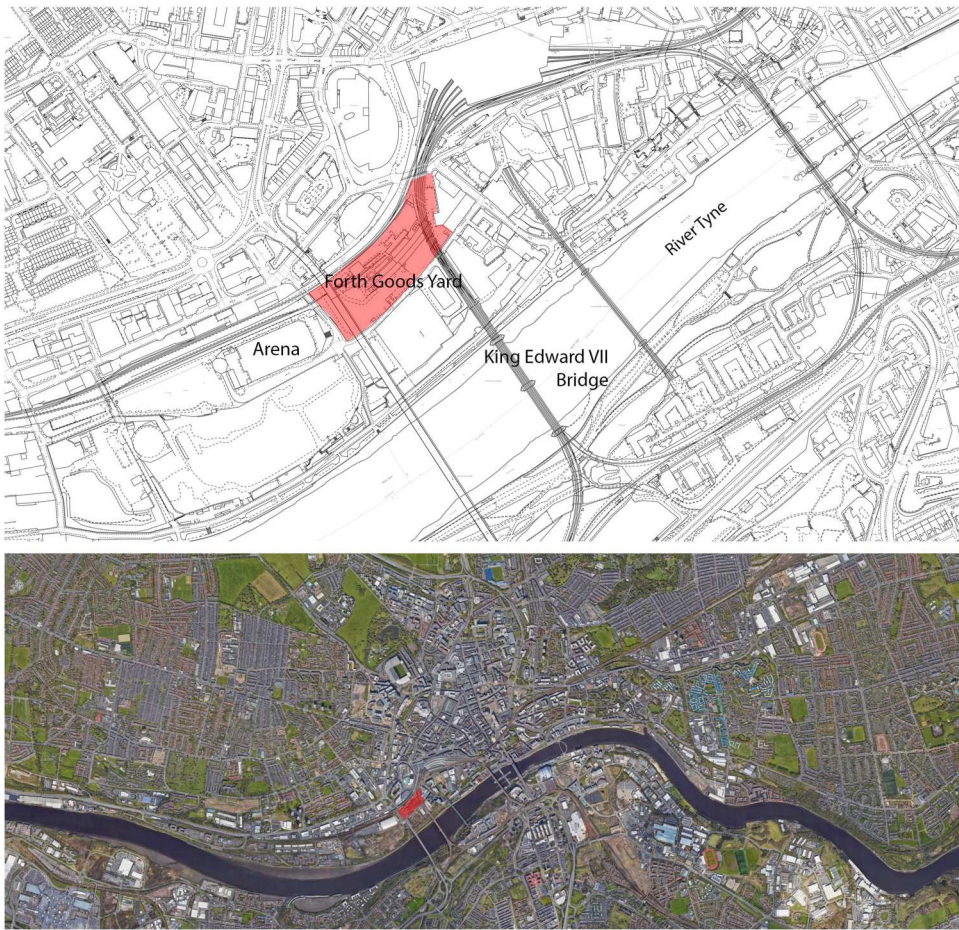


Figure 2. Forth Goods Yard Station, Site plan(top), Location plan (bottom). Source: Author.

depth of knowledge possessed by framework developers regarding the project site, the clarity and adequacy of expectations outlined in the development plan, strategies for conserving unlisted buildings for reuse, and the envisioned future of Forth Goods Yards following the implementation of the development plan.

Brief background to Forth Goods Yards

Areas of Newcastle city centre have been subject to significant regeneration efforts in recent years. The modernization of the rail and metro stations, the transformation of neighbouring Grainger market (González et al. 2021), the development of Ouseburn (Pendlebury, Veldpau, and Garrow 2023), the Bigg Market (Veldpau and Pendlebury 2019) are some examples where the adaptive reuse of heritage assets has been used as a vehicle for development and place making. The difference of Forth Goods Yard station from all these projects is that it is not a major trigger for place making as it is not subject to formal designations such as listing or through inclusion in a conservation area (Figure 3). Therefore, according to a prospective developer, this area is about to

undergo construction of 72,000 square meters. In this section, we would like to discuss the architectural and historical importance of the Forth Goods Yard station.

Forth Goods Station building was one of the major British railway goods depots. In 1900, Railway magazine described it as the second largest; the largest was in London. The original goods shed was built over four tracks which went through it (Figure 4). This building was not particularly big, almost 80 metres long and 25 metres wide. The roof was comprised of seven transverse spans (Fawcett et al. 2016). The triangular shape of the roof structure was concealed at the outside by a series of pediments of classic design, built over the side walls. A pair of cast-iron columns, positioned below the corners of the pediments, carried the iron beams which supported the timber frame of the roofs. In 1866, the railway company decided to develop the whole area for goods traffic. The original building was taken down and re-erected with extensions to the goods station, making it one of the biggest in England (Fawcett 2011; Tyne and Wear Historic Environment Record n.d.).

The undercroft vaults, which were an essential part of the structure and remain today, were in use throughout the construction phases of the Forth Goods station (Fawcett 2011) (Figure 5). The station was built in two stages to ensure it could continue operating as it developed. The first phase, completed in March 1871, covered the southern half of the site. Designed by Thomas Prosser, the station featured a tall transshipment shed perched atop vaulted undercroft spaces (Fawcett 2011). These under crofts were rented out as warehouses to major customers, accessible from Pottery Lane along the southern boundary. Originally used primarily for storing beer barrels from Burton, the undercroft continued to be utilized even after the upper building levels were demolished in 1972 (Fawcett 2011). Today it is derelict and creates an ecological niche for dingy

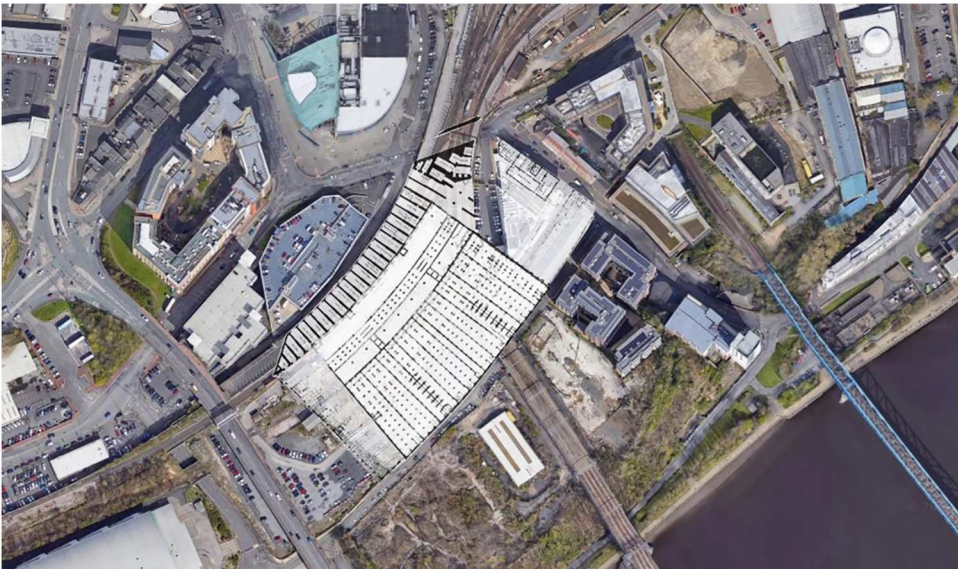


Figure 3. Aerial Photo Showing Forth Goods Yard Station's superposed 1866 foundation plan (Gow 2009) and 1920 drawing of the Forth Banks site with the viaduct, 1904 offices and 1907 warehouse extensions (Gow 2009).



Figure 4. Urban Transformation of the site Forth Goods Yard from 1810s till 2025.

skipper, grayling, small heath butterfly, bats (Forth Yards Development Framework 2020).

The area on which the Goods Station was built was known as the Forth. This land was acquired by the Newcastle and Carlisle Railway company in 1838. Forth Goods Station used to cover a large area through which tracks for goods trains passed. Goods were loaded and unloaded, were taken by horse-drawn carts to their destinations in the city (Minnis and Hickman 2016). There is very little remaining from the station at present but before it was pulled down a detailed archaeological study was commissioned to record original features, structures and building materials that were used (Simpson & Brown n.d.). Several buildings of architectural value were nearby, such as the earlier goods hut, the management offices, and the horses' stables (Fawcett et al. 2016).

Much before the railroad was built, the Forth was, for many decades, like a fair ground where people came together, children played, and lovers secretly met. It was a square shaped green with trees growing parallel to its borders. There were no



Figure 5. The undercroft vaults of Forth Goods Yard Station, 2022, Photographed by Skyz Ma.

restrictive walls, people just walked in and enjoyed the common (Fawcett et al. 2016). In later years a tavern was built nearby, and the council let a part of Forth to be managed as a bowling green. There was a time when businesses, hotels and restaurants used the area to dry their laundry. This activity was also called ‘sunning’ (1st North n.d.).

The decline of the Forth as a recreational ground started with what may be called overuse and neglect. Local military units had started using the Forth as a training site, causing damage to the ground (Fawcett et al. 2016). The trees started dying, they were cut down and not replaced. Decaying Park benches, that stood at the edges of the green, were broken up and taken away by people who probably used the timber for firewood (North East Lore. 2016).

The Forth Goods Yard Station, north of Pottery Lane, was the eastern terminus of the Carlisle to Newcastle Railway when it opened in 1839. The brick viaduct north of Forth Banks Goods Station was constructed in c1847 and formed part of the extended railway to Central Station. The viaduct was later widened on its northern side and is considered a heritage asset. Stone retaining walls and structures associated with the Goods Yard remain, including the ‘drops’ which are accessed from Pottery Lane through stone curved arches (Fawcett et al. 2016). A large area of the former sidings is now occupied by an indoor sports and entertainment arena built in the 1990s, with remnants of stone retaining walls and structures associated with the railway remaining.

We understand from this colourful history of the Forth that it naturally became a public space, an urban common through the activities of people living or working in

the neighbouring area. Although it has since disappeared almost completely, its location next to the main transport hub, the river, and the cultural life in the city centre gives the Forth a unique potential to be developed as an integral part of local urban life in a way that reflects its history both as an urban common and an old industrial site.

Methodology

Through an in-depth examination of the Forth Goods Yard Station case study, this research aims to shed light on the intricate interplay between intentions, planning, and architectural outcomes in urban redevelopment projects in industrial urban settings. By addressing these questions, this study contributes to a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with repurposing historical structures within evolving urban landscapes.

Newcastle's Forth Goods Yard Station which is an unlisted nineteenth-century railway property, is used as a case study. The research methodology combines an analysis of the Forth Goods Yard Development Plan (2022) with design proposals to test its framework, alongside two interviews with Urban Design and Landscape Design focus groups from Newcastle City Council. Following these interviews, a workshop was held with the same groups to gather their reflections through three conceptual design scenarios, further evaluating the plan. To gather insights and validate expectations embedded within the framework, in-depth interviews and a workshop were conducted with two distinct focus groups: the Urban Design Team and the Landscape Design Team responsible for developing the framework. Participants included professionals with expertise in urban planning, landscape architecture, and ecological sustainability. The inclusion criteria focused on individuals directly involved in decision-making processes related to urban development projects within the city. These sessions aimed to elucidate their perspectives on the anticipated outcomes for the future of Forth Goods Yards. Through qualitative analysis of the interviews and workshop outcomes, the study aimed to assess the alignment between the intentions delineated in the development plan, and the resulting architectural proposals for Forth Goods Yard Station.

The interview questions were designed to serve a dual purpose within the methodology: first, to test the robustness and flexibility of the proposed development framework for the Forth Goods Yard; and second, to uncover the intentions, priorities, and values of key stakeholders involved in the planning process. The questions focused on themes such as perceptions of post-industrial heritage, the influence of developers, the origin and legitimacy of the framework, and the role of community consultation. In addition to the interviews, design scenarios were introduced and discussed as part of a workshop, enabling participants to engage with alternative spatial strategies and critically reflect on the framework's adaptability. This combined qualitative approach provided a deeper understanding of the socio-political and design dynamics shaping the site's future, contributing to a more informed and reflective evaluation of the planning process.

Limitations include potential biases in participant responses and the specificity of findings to the context of Newcastle, which may not be generalizable to other urban settings.

Critique of the development plan for Forth Goods Yards station

The Forth Goods Yards area, being labelled as an ‘Opportunity Site’ in Newcastle City Council’s Core Strategy and Urban Core Plan (CSUCP) dated 26 March 2015 implies that the area has significant potential for development and revitalization. An ‘Opportunity Site’ designation means that a particular area has been identified for potential redevelopment and investment due to its strategic importance or unique characteristics. However, the development scenario underplays its unique characteristics as a site of railway heritage since as a result of an absence of statutory designation.

While the development plan for Forth Goods Yards Opportunity Site in Newcastle upon Tyne demonstrates ambitious goals for urban regeneration, several areas warrant critical examination to ensure the plan’s effectiveness and alignment with broader urban development objectives. These objectives include statements around sustainability, adaptive reuse of railway infrastructure for place making, community engagement and green transportation.

While the plan emphasizes the importance of sustaining and enhancing heritage significance, it lacks specific strategies for integrating historical structures into new development schemes such as Forth Goods Yard Station. Furthermore, the plan’s focus on potential commercial and residential developments may inadvertently overshadow efforts to preserve and celebrate the site’s industrial and rail legacy. The Forth Goods Yard Station has the potential to be adaptively re-used. However, the current scenarios are forcing the demolition of at least 90% of the existing structure.

The reliance on the Newcastle City Council Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA) and developer aspirations to inform development scenarios raises concerns about community engagement and inclusivity. The absence of meaningful community input in shaping development proposals may lead to disconnects between residents’ needs and aspirations and the envisioned development outcomes.

While the development plan adheres to policy frameworks emphasizing the importance of respecting heritage assets and enhancing local character, implementation strategies for these policies remain vague. The plan’s focus on maximizing development potential and delivering infrastructure may inadvertently compromise environmental sustainability and biodiversity conservation efforts. Additionally, the plan’s reliance on private developers to drive development aspirations may prioritize profit motives over long-term environmental stewardship.

While the plan outlines transportation improvements to enhance accessibility within the Forth Yards area, there is a lack of clarity regarding sustainable transportation options. The proposed spine road may prioritize vehicular traffic over pedestrian and cycling infrastructure, potentially exacerbating congestion and air pollution. Furthermore, the plan’s emphasis on multistorey car parking provision without adequate consideration of alternative transportation modes may perpetuate car-centric urban planning practices.

In conclusion, while the development plan for Forth Goods Yards Opportunity Site demonstrates aspirations for urban revitalization, it falls short in several key areas. To ensure the plan’s success and alignment with broader urban development objectives, there is a need for greater emphasis on heritage preservation, community engagement, environmental sustainability, and sustainable transportation infrastructure. By

addressing these critiques, the development plan can better serve the needs and aspirations of the community while fostering a more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable urban environment.

Calculations for design proposals

The initial stage of this research involved analyzing the development framework for Forth Goods Yard focusing on Ford Goods Yards Station.

Looking at the development scenario (Development Framework, 2020) we can see that there are deviations from the HELAA 2018. The development proposals for Forth Goods Yard under the HELAA 2018 and the developer's scenario show significant differences in the allocation of land use and the scale of development. The HELAA 2018 proposal emphasizes more commercial office space with 10,000 sq m designated for B1(a) office use, while the developer's scenario reduces this to 5,000 sq m, reflecting a shift towards residential development. This shift is further highlighted by the substantial increase in the number of residential dwellings proposed: 250 units in the HELAA 2018 proposal compared to 500 units in the developer's scenario. Parking provisions also differ markedly, with the developer proposing a larger capacity multi-storey car park (1,000 spaces) compared to the 550 MSCP spaces and 70 surface spaces in the HELAA 2018 plan. These differences suggest a developer's preference for a higher density residential project with reduced commercial space, potentially to meet a higher demand for housing in the area.

The next stage was developing conceptual design sketches for two scenarios to be able to conduct the interviews and to take insights from the UD Team and LD Team. The first proposal was based on the HELAA 2018 design scenario with 10,000 square meters of office space and 250 units of residential dwellings, with 550 multi storey car park spaces and 70 surface parking spaces.

The second proposal was generated based on the developer's desire to create 5000 square meters of office space with 500 units of residential dwellings and 1000 multistorey carpark spaces.

The third proposal aims to explore the adaptive reuse of Forth Goods Yard Station using an additive subtractive conceptual design proposal. It creates courtyards for day light and proposes artist residences, offices, and residential units for reusing Forth Goods Yards station (Table 1).

Data collection and findings

Third stage of the research involved the interviews with Urban Design and Landscape Design Team on Forth Goods Yard Station and development Framework. The interviews were followed by the workshops.

Findings from the interviews

This stage of the research centred on conversations with members of the design teams directly involved in shaping the development framework for the Forth Goods Yard Station. Initial contact was made through Newcastle City Council email correspondence,

Table 1. Comparative table.

Design Element	HELAA 2018 Proposal	Developer's Proposal	Adaptive Reuse Proposal
Site Area (Ha)	2.57	2.57	2.57
Office Space (B1a)	10,000 m ²	5,000 m ²	3,600 m ² (artist studios & office)
Residential Dwellings	250 units	500 units	0 units specified
• 1 + 1 Units (45 m ²)	50 units (2,250 m ²)	100 units (4,500 m ²)	Not specified
• 2 + 1 Units (60 m ²)	100 units (6,000 m ²)	200 units (12,000 m ²)	Not specified
• 3 + 1 Units (80 m ²)	100 units (8,000 m ²)	200 units (16,000 m ²)	Not specified
Residential Area (Total)	21,125 m ²	42,250 m ²	0 m ²
Multi-Storey Car Park (MSCP)	13,750 m ² / 550 spaces	25,000 m ² / 1,000 spaces	Not included
Surface Parking	70 spaces	Not included	30 spaces
Total Built Area	44,875 m ²	72,250 m ²	3,600 m ²
Design Concept	Conventional mixed-use, office-led	High-density residential-led	Adaptive reuse with courtyards and daylight access
Approach to Forth Goods Yard Station	Not specified	Not specified	Adaptive reuse and integration into site
Public Realm / Open Space	Not specified	Likely limited	Courtyards and enhanced open space with a roof garden
Affordable Housing Provision	Not specified	Not clear / possibly limited	Potential inclusion for artists
Heritage / Existing Structure Use	preserving the façade	Likely new-build	Reuse of historic industrial structure
Sustainability Approach	Not specified	Not specified	Passive design, natural light, green roof

and participation was open to those working on the project. In the end, two interviews were carried out with six individuals – three from the Urban Design team and three from the Landscape Design team – followed by a joint focus group session that allowed for deeper discussion and reflection.

The decision to focus solely on these two design teams was intentional. Given that the research aims to explore the making of the development framework itself, it prioritizes those responsible for its conceptual and spatial formation. While it does not include a broader set of stakeholders – such as local councillors, regeneration officers, community groups or residents – this was not an oversight but a methodological choice. The scope was shaped by the need to understand the internal logics, design negotiations, and planning strategies that underpin the project as it exists in its formative stages.

This chapter presents the main themes that emerged from these discussions, highlighting the participants' reflections on working within the constraints of heritage, the pressures of economic viability, and the need for adaptability in large-scale urban design. Quotations from the interviews are included to illustrate how these tensions play out in practice and inform the evolving design narrative of the site.

Historical context and framework evolution

The interviews underscored the historic significance of the railway's masonry structures, dating back to 1847, which present a challenge in integrating these assets into contemporary urban settings while maintaining their historical integrity. The framework has evolved from its earlier versions to accommodate new development pressures and community feedback. One participant noted, 'I think the framework gave a general overview

of like, you know, a balanced view of like, various discipline, transport, just heritage and design, like different things', reflecting the comprehensive nature of the framework.

However, the application of the framework faces challenges in reconciling ambitious design goals with economic realities and evolving project scopes. This is a crucial aspect, as one participant highlighted, 'it's a balance balancing accessing, like, what can be done', emphasizing the need for adaptable frameworks that can respond flexibly to changing project dynamics and stakeholder priorities. The redevelopment of the Forth Banks Goods Station site envisions a new urban community: young professionals drawn to the proximity of the city centre, students and academic staff from nearby universities, creative workers seeking affordable space, older adults looking to downsize, and young families attracted by improved amenities and transport links. However, this projected future raises a critical question common to many urban regeneration schemes: who is consulted when those who will live in the area have not yet arrived? Although the immediate site is largely post-industrial, it lies within walking distance of long-established neighbourhoods such as Elswick, the West End, and the Quayside. These areas are home to residents who often experience the effects of redevelopment – such as rising housing costs, displacement, or changes to the character of place – without having a say in its direction. Cameron (2003) reveals that urban regeneration policies in Newcastle, driven by investment and growth-oriented approaches, have led to gentrification and social exclusion by sidelining the needs of existing communities. Local stakeholders include long-term residents, community and cultural organizations, housing associations, and small businesses. Their voices carry valuable insights into the area's social and historical fabric. Yet consultation processes frequently prioritize the expectations of future investors and users over the lived realities of those nearby (Cameron 2003). In the context of Forth Banks, meaningful participation must begin with acknowledging who already holds a stake in the site and its surroundings, not only who might benefit from its transformation.

Heritage preservation

A significant theme throughout the interview is the importance of heritage preservation. The framework addresses both listed and unlisted heritage assets, recognizing their historical and visual significance. This inclusive approach aims to guide development that respects and incorporates the area's unique historical fabric while meeting contemporary urban planning needs. As one participant observed, 'I think that was one aim was to get rid of it. I think we've moved on from that. And it's now seen as an asset to the area in the site. So we're getting there'.

The historical development considerations within the framework highlighted both challenges and decisions made regarding heritage assets. The initial framework had limitations in updating details on what was protected, particularly around viaducts. The iterative process involved in planning, particularly regarding the disused railway line to the west, posed a dilemma between preserving historical integrity and potentially enhancing urban connectivity. A participant reflected, 'Well, let's try it, you know, it's worth trying to retain that we hadn't had access into the underground drop section. I've seen photos since, and it is an impressive space'.

This emphasis on heritage and infrastructure forms part of a broader conversation about the differing trajectories of urban regeneration across UK cities. Different types

of cities develop distinctive economic roles: global cities like London and Manchester become centres for producer services, while smaller regional centres such as Newcastle and Sheffield focus on consumer services, particularly in the low-budget housing sector (Jeffrey and Pounder 2000). This is evident in significant urban regeneration projects like Salford Quays in Manchester and Millennium Point in Birmingham (Rogerson and Giddings 2021). Due to its low land values and characteristics stemming from its post-industrial past, Newcastle requires regeneration strategies that prioritize public sector involvement, affordable housing, and community engagement to support economic development (Rogerson and Giddings 2021).

Concrete examples of how land value and strategic location shape regeneration can be seen in the Kings Cross renewal project in London and the Victoria North urban regeneration area in Manchester. For example, the arches on Corporation Street in Manchester serve as a vital connection point between the city centre and the Victoria North area, demonstrating how physical infrastructure can link commercial and residential zones to support urban renewal (Derelect Arch Transformation 2024). Similarly, the Kings Cross regeneration in London has transformed an old industrial area into a vibrant mixed-use district by leveraging high land values and accessibility advantages (Delfesc and Ozarisoy 2023). Both projects incorporate conservation strategies related to the railway heritage into their designs. Whereas to more centrally managed schemes, european examples such as the RAW-Gelände in Berlin and the Rovereto station regeneration in Italy reveal how active engagement with local stakeholders can drive long-term success. In Berlin, the RAW-Gelände has evolved through grassroots initiatives and partnerships with artists, entrepreneurs, and community groups, creating a socially inclusive, flexible, and culturally rich urban space (RAW-Gelände Team, n.d.). Similarly, Rovereto's transformation process is structured around collaborative frameworks with citizens and local institutions, aligning the regeneration with broader sustainability and heritage goals (Creatives Unite Newsroom 2024). Even large-scale adaptive reuse projects such as the Musée d'Orsay in Paris benefit from local support and institutional collaboration, ensuring the conservation of cultural identity while responding to contemporary public needs (Zhang, Dai, and Xia 2020). These projects illustrate that stakeholder participation not only strengthens the relevance and resilience of urban regeneration but also fosters a sense of ownership, which is crucial for the long-term viability of such interventions.

In contrast, the Forth Goods Yard station in Newcastle is an example where lower land values and different regeneration priorities resulted in the loss of a historically significant area. The failure to preserve Forth Goods Yard reflects the challenges of balancing heritage conservation with economic development in a city where urban regeneration strategies are still developing. This situation highlights that Newcastle's unique economic context and land value dynamics can lead to different outcomes compared to cities like London or Manchester, underscoring the need for locally adapted regeneration approaches that consider cultural heritage alongside development pressures.

Vagueness and flexibility of the development plan

Policy and implementation challenges are noted, with existing policies often featuring flexible language and lacking specific, enforceable requirements, which at times may undermine ecological objectives due to insufficient clarity. This issue aligns with how

local authorities frequently employ vague language and visuals in development plans, particularly when they are not the primary initiators of the planning process (Buhler, Chesneau, and Richeton 2024). In such cases, ambiguity becomes a strategic tool to avoid firm commitments, especially when plans are externally mandated or tied to conditional funding, allowing authorities to navigate uncertainty while maintaining flexibility without disclosing concrete intentions. Unclear language in planning documents allows public authorities to navigate various uncertainties – ranging from unpredictable long-term budgets and legal risks to technical complexities. Rather than fully disclosing or withholding a plan, especially when planning is mandatory, vagueness offers a middle ground. It becomes a practical way to remain non-committal on sensitive or evolving strategic matters, as also noted in previous research (Buhler 2021).

This ties closely to how planners in large-scale urban projects, such as Amsterdam's Zuidas, cope with ambiguity (Kaza and Hopkins 2012). Ethnographic observations reveal that rather than eliminating uncertainty, planners actively work with it – using flexible language, open-ended dialogue, and adaptive strategies. In both policy and practice, vagueness emerges not as a flaw, but as a tool for managing complexity in dynamic planning environments (Buhler 2021).

There is a disparity between strong policy language and practical implementation, leading to vague commitments that do not translate into meaningful ecological benefits in the development plan for Forth Goods Yard. The historical and structural context of the site, historically a major goods station with structurally sound underground vaults, adds another layer to *development considerations, blending industrial heritage with modern ecological needs*.

The interviewees mentioned the vagueness in the development framework for Fort Goods Yard Station, particularly concerning building heights and massing guidelines. Initial prescriptive measures were met with objections during consultations, leading to a more flexible approach. One participant acknowledged, 'In the earlier draft, we put in something like seven stories or whatever ... But of course, when we consulted on the framework, everybody objected to that'.

This feedback led to a more flexible approach, as another participant explained, 'So we could have said nothing more than seven stories. But then the minute somebody comes in for eight or nine, you know, it's not harmful'. While this flexibility offers room for negotiation and adaptation, it also raises questions about how effectively future developments will align with the framework's original intentions. It invites further reflection on whether clearer, more detailed guidance might help reduce ambiguity without constraining innovation or responsiveness to evolving project needs.

The lack of detailed massing studies and specific limits tested through tools like Virtual Newcastle Gateshead Model (VNG) was another significant issue. One participant pointed out, 'If we wanted to be as prescriptive on building heights, we'd have had to do more work on massing, tested it through VNG ... Because we were relying on the developers to do that work'. This reliance introduces uncertainty in future developments, underscoring the need for more comprehensive data and ongoing dialogue.

A team member from urban design underscored the initial intent of the framework's flexibility, stating, 'I think you can see the framework that we were quite vague. We didn't want to be very prescriptive'. Another team member expanded on the practical implications, emphasizing the tension between prescribed principles and real-world

application: ‘The general principles are there. But it tends to be very challenging when it comes to heights and massing because of the quantum of development they want to put on site’.

The iterative and collaborative nature of the framework’s development emerges as a critical process theme. The involvement of various disciplines, such as urban design, conservation, and transportation, ensures that the framework meets regulatory standards and reflects community aspirations. This collaborative effort is crucial for sustainable development, particularly in historically significant areas.

This feedback led to a more flexible approach, as another participant explained, ‘So we could have said nothing more than seven stories. But then the minute somebody comes in for eight or nine, you know, it’s not harmful’. This reliance on flexibility introduces uncertainty in how future developments will align with the framework’s intentions, highlighting the need for clearer, more detailed guidance to mitigate ambiguity.

The lack of detailed massing studies and specific limits tested through tools like Virtual Newcastle Gateshead Model (VNG) was another significant issue. One participant pointed out, ‘If we wanted to be as prescriptive on building heights, we’d have had to do more work on massing, tested it through VNG. Because we were relying on the developers to do that work’. This reliance introduces uncertainty in future developments, underscoring the need for more comprehensive data and ongoing dialogue.

A team member from urban design underscored the initial intent of the framework’s flexibility, stating, ‘I think you can see the framework that we were quite vague. We didn’t want to be very prescriptive’. Another team member expanded on the practical implications, emphasizing the tension between prescribed principles and real-world application: ‘The general principles are there. But it tends to be very challenging when it comes to heights and massing because of the quantum of development they want to put on site’.

The iterative and collaborative nature of the framework’s development emerges as a critical process theme. The involvement of various disciplines, such as urban design, conservation, and transportation, ensures that the framework meets regulatory standards and reflects community aspirations. This collaborative effort is crucial for sustainable development, particularly in historically significant areas.

Looking ahead: refining the framework

The interview data suggests that the next steps involve refining the framework further. Participants highlighted the need for more detailed guidance or a master plan to provide clearer direction for future developments. This step is crucial in balancing heritage preservation with innovative urban design, as one participant noted, ‘if we could do the framework again, I probably want to do more challenging and tentative quantities ... So it’s getting that judgment, get balance between giving them, you know, keeping the investment interested, while not giving them false hope’.

Balancing ecological sustainability with urban planning

Participants discuss the historical context, current development framework, and the challenges and opportunities in integrating ecological considerations into urban planning.

Concerns are raised about the current framework’s ability to balance urban development with ecological contributions, as it often treats landscape and ecology as secondary

to development objectives. The importance of maintaining and enhancing green links for ecological connectivity is emphasized, with criticism directed at the fragmented approach to green infrastructure. Participants advocate for a comprehensive approach to include both horizontal and vertical connectivity. The tension between development goals and ecological preservation is acknowledged, with high-density development seen as potentially compromising ecological benefits unless balanced with open space preservation and innovative ecological solutions. Proposals such as green roofs and walls are suggested to enhance urban biodiversity even in high-density developments, creating vertical ecological networks that contribute to the city's ecological infrastructure.

Biodiversity net gain, requiring a 10% increase in biodiversity post-development, is highlighted as a mandatory requirement. However, achieving this on-site is challenging, and off-site mitigation may not benefit local ecology. Concerns are raised about the lack of clear metrics and numbers to guide development within ecological constraints, with a call for policies to be updated to ensure that green infrastructure is given equal importance to housing and economic metrics. Notable quotes from participants underscore these points, such as Speaker 6 noting, 'It sort of feels like landscaping ecology is at a disadvantage because it's not measured in the same way ... there's no equivalent for the benefits of biodiversity and potentially for landscape in terms of amenity', and Speaker 4 highlighting, 'Ecology wise, you get the same situation that you get on all brownfield sites, which is, the longer you leave it, the more ecological value it becomes'.

Findings from the workshops

Two workshops were conducted following the interviews with Urban Design Team and Landscape Design Team. Both teams were asked to critique three design proposals based on developer aspirations (Figure 6), HELAA (Figure 7) aspirations, and cultural heritage reuse (Figure 8).

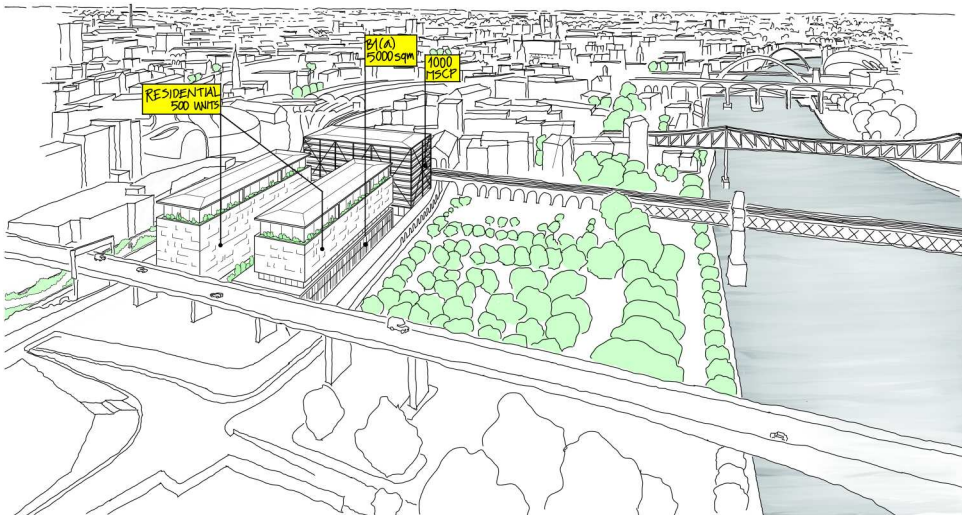


Figure 6. Proposal design based on the developer's scenario presented during the interview. Left: developer's brief with density and programmatic aims. Right: site plan translating these into spatial strategies and layout.

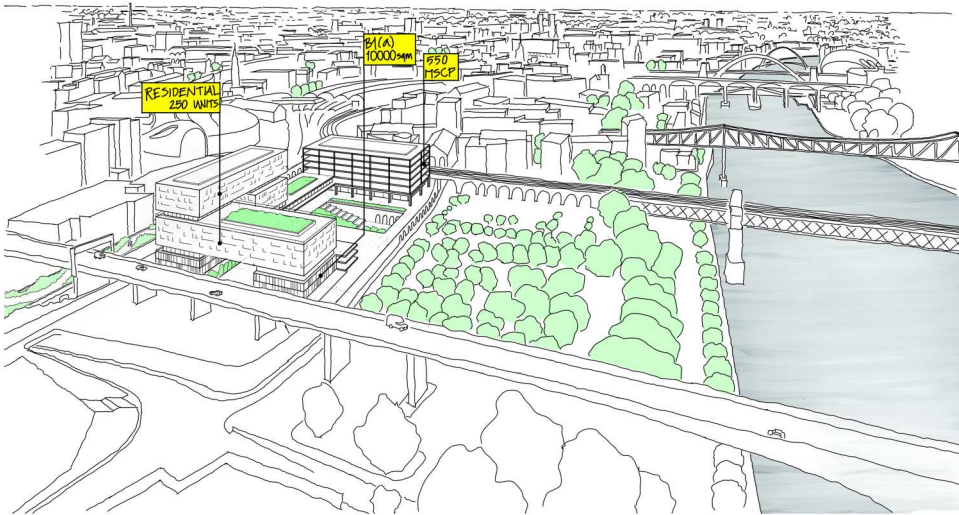


Figure 7. Proposal design based on the HELAA scenario presented during the interview. Left: developer's brief with density and programmatic aims. Right: site plan translating these into spatial strategies and layout.

In the Urban Design Group workshop, the HELAA Proposal (Figure 9) was praised for its balanced approach that aligns with active design principles. It enhances pedestrian and cycle connectivity with north/south and east/west routes, thereby improving accessibility and providing open spaces for occupants and the wider community.

It also incorporates soft and hard landscaping to boost biodiversity, maximizes solar gain, and includes potential district energy connections, which enhance sustainability.



Figure 8. Proposal design for adaptive reuse scenario presented during the interview. Left: axonometric drawing showing artist residences and the proposed density, highlighting the adaptive reuse of the site as a public ground. Right: site plan translating these ideas into spatial strategies within the heritage context.

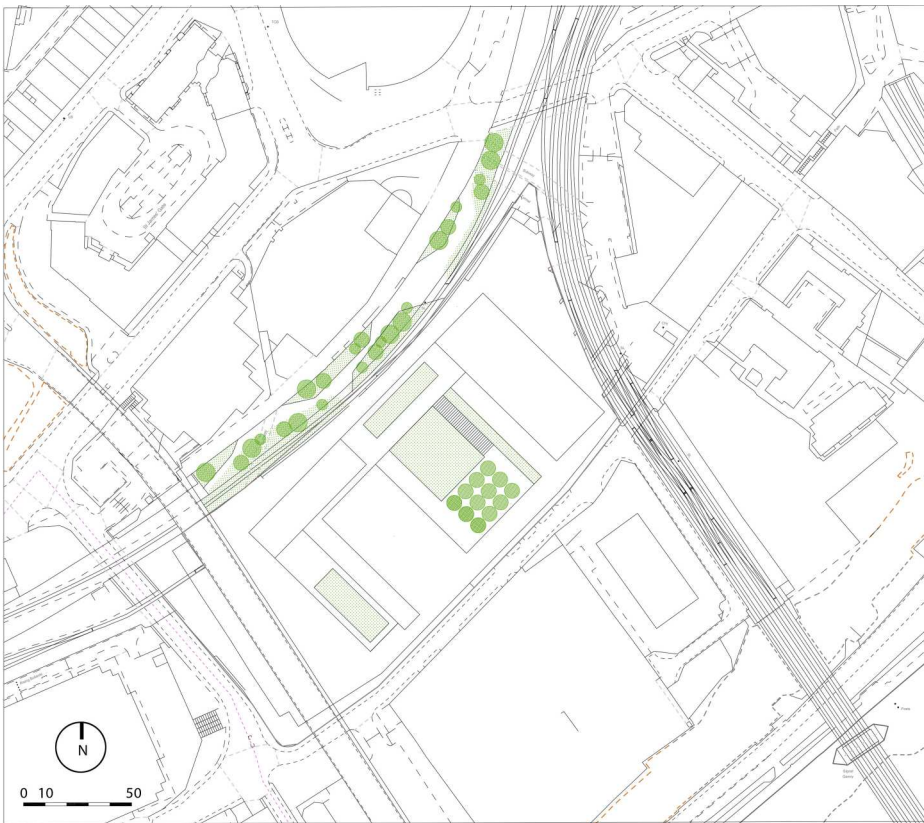


Figure 9. Site plan of HELAA scenario.

The proposal supports a mix of uses, balancing economic development with the preservation of heritage assets. However, it was noted that ‘... it would be nice to have a big open space and it’s like undercroft become like a market of artists to deal with’, indicating a desire for more creative public spaces. Conversely, the Developers Scenario, although prioritizing high development viability and potential economic returns, compromises significantly on infrastructure, environmental sustainability, and socio-cultural aspects. It lacks north/south links and biodiversity gains, leading to concerns about overdevelopment, poor living conditions, and minimal public benefits. This approach may also result in poor microclimatic conditions due to a lack of effective solar gain use, focusing instead on development quantity. The socio-cultural aspects are neglected, failing to use bridges as city routes and contradicting the Tyne Gorge character, resulting in poor external spaces and residential environments. The Adaptive Reuse of Forth Goods Yard Station promotes infrastructure compatible with active design and framework connections, open spaces, and north/south links. It offers an innovative use of the site, retains ecological value, and reduces environmental impact by repurposing structures, though this might limit the implementation of new sustainable technologies. While it has the potential to create interesting and engaging spaces, it raises concerns about economic feasibility, likely requiring state subsidies or intervention. Additionally, limited engagement with the skyline might reduce its impact as part of the city’s image.

In the Landscape Team workshop, the Heritage Preservation Proposal, which is akin to Adaptive Reuse, was favoured for its sense of place, good form, scale, and integration, making the site feel more interesting and pleasant. However, concerns were raised about its economic viability and the need to change the perception of the site as brownfield land (Figure 10).

The HELAA Proposal was seen as a balanced compromise, integrating heritage assets well and offering potential for interesting public spaces if designed appropriately. Nevertheless, it requires improvements in connectivity and has limited north-south green connectivity. Conversely, the Developers Scenario received the most criticism, with significant negative impacts on the landscape, limited space for ecology and public open spaces, and a block form that could alter the city's character. It also lacked connectivity, had poor visual and physical permeability, and was considered the least safe and appealing space to live. The landscape was seen as the most adversely affected in this version, even though it still potentially aligns with guidelines. One of the attendees highlighted the lack of testing for green infrastructure.

Overall, both teams preferred proposals that integrated heritage and landscape elements while enhancing connectivity and public spaces. The HELAA Proposal is seen as a balanced approach by both groups, although it needs improvements in



Figure 10. Site plan of adaptive reuse scenario.

connectivity and green infrastructure. It was, evaluated by both the Landscape Design Team (LDT) and Urban Design Team (UDT), focus on preserving the heritage and creating welcoming public spaces that blend local history with modern design.

The Developers Scenario is criticized across the board for its negative impacts on the landscape, ecology, and socio-cultural aspects, despite its high development viability. They expressed their worry about its potential to harm neighbourhoods, with cramped living conditions, lack of green spaces, and inadequate public areas, which could negatively affect the quality of life (Figure 11).

The Adaptive Reuse option is favoured for its cultural and ecological benefits but raises economic feasibility concerns. The Adaptive Reuse option, while promising in terms of preserving historical sites and creating unique cultural spaces, faces challenges in attracting investments without substantial financial support. The Landscape Team's insights reinforce the need for a holistic approach that values ecological and cultural heritage while ensuring economic sustainability.

Regarding climate awareness and infrastructure, the HELAA plans are praised for incorporating climate-resilient features like green spaces, biodiversity initiatives, and sustainable drainage systems. This aligns with modern sustainability goals and ensures our urban planning considers environmental impacts. Conversely, the Developers Scenario






Figure 11. Site plan of Developers Scenario.

falls short in these areas, lacking green infrastructure and potentially worsening local climate conditions. Adaptive Reuse projects generally fare better environmentally by reusing existing structures and minimizing new construction impacts, although integrating modern sustainability practices with historical contexts remains a challenge (Table 2).

To sum up, while each option brings its own strengths and weaknesses, the HELAA approach stands out for its positive impact on the community and commitment to sustainability. Its focus on preserving heritage, engaging the community, and implementing sustainable infrastructure makes it a preferred choice. The Adaptive Reuse option holds promise but requires careful planning to overcome economic hurdles. In contrast, the Developers Scenario faces significant obstacles across socio-cultural, economic, and

Table 2. Interview data analysis.

Design element	HELAA Proposal	Developer's Proposal	Adaptive Reuse Proposal
Aerial drawings			
Site Area (m ²)	24,200	24,200	24,200
Office Space (B1a)	10,000 m ²	5,000 m ²	3,600 m ² (artist studios & office)
Residential Dwellings/studios	250 units residential	500 units residential	195 units artist studios/shops
• 1 + 1 Units (45 m ²)	50 units (2,250 m ²)	100 units (4,500 m ²)	Not specified
• 2 + 1 Units (60 m ²)	100 units (6,000 m ²)	200 units (12,000 m ²)	Not specified
• 3 + 1 Units (80 m ²)	100 units (8,000 m ²)	200 units (16,000 m ²)	Not specified
Residential Area (Total)	21,125 m ²	42,250 m ²	0 m ²
Multi-Storey Car Park (MSCP)	13,750 m ² / 550 spaces	25,000 m ² / 1,000 spaces	Not included
Surface Parking	70 spaces	Not included	70 spaces
Total Built Area	44,875 m ²	72,250 m ²	3,600 m ²
Design Concept	Conventional mixed-use, office-led	High-density residential-led	Adaptive reuse with courtyards and daylight access
Approach to Forth Goods Yard Station	partial adaptive reuse of the undercroft and façade	re-built	Adaptive reuse and integration into site
Public Realm / Open Space (m ²)	17,000 m ² semi-public terrace and courtyard	8300 m ² semi-public open space	23,100 m ² (5600 m ² semi-public courtyards and 17,500 m ² public terrace)
Affordable Housing Provision	Not specified	Not clear / possibly limited	Potential inclusion for artists
Heritage / Existing Structure Use	preserving the facade	Likely new-build	Reuse of historic industrial structure
Sustainability Approach	Not specified	Not specified	Passive design, natural light, green roof

A comparison of Urban Design Team with Landscape Design team.

environmental aspects, underscoring the need for reconsideration to achieve successful urban development goals.

According to the findings gained from the interviews, Forth Goods Yard station faces the potential of being largely demolished according to both the Developers Scenario and HELAA's proposal in the Forth Goods Yard Development Plan. The primary concern of both the Urban Design Team (UDT) and Landscape Team seems to be to not increase the conditions for preserving the structure to the point of deterring developers. However, the policy is so flexible that the complete disappearance and demolition of Forth Goods Yard seems possible.

Conclusion: not just a building!

In conclusion, the case of Forth Goods Yard illustrates the persistent tension between the preservation of heritage and the demands of contemporary urban development, particularly within a planning context marked by flexible and often ambiguous policy language. While this flexibility allows for adaptive reuse and context-sensitive approaches, it also opens the door to the potential loss of historically significant structures – such as in the scenarios proposed by both developers and HELAA, which suggest substantial demolition.

In contemporary urban settings, it has become increasingly important to develop innovative approaches to repurpose post-industrial sites that no longer serve their original purpose. Revitalising such areas, especially those poorly suited to present-day needs, is essential not only for conserving urban heritage but also for promoting more sustainable and livable environments. Achieving this, however, demands careful policy design and the meaningful involvement of diverse stakeholders in shaping future development. The interview data points to the need for clearer frameworks and more detailed guidance – such as a master plan – to guide long-term decisions. This step is vital to achieving a meaningful balance between conservation and innovation, as several participants stressed.

Without such mechanisms, there is a risk that efficiency and market-driven redevelopment will override efforts to retain a meaningful sense of place. Although statutory protections exist for listed buildings, many heritage structures fall outside formal designations and are subject to inconsistent or discretionary treatment. This regulatory gap can lead to outcomes that diverge from sustainability goals. As the literature highlights, heritage preservation contributes not only to cultural identity but also to reducing environmental impact and carbon emissions (Bullen and Love 2011; Elefante 2007; Wilkinson and Remøy 2017; Yung and Chan 2012). Addressing the future of undesignated heritage thus requires legal frameworks that extend beyond current listing systems. Without this, these sites may become profit-driven redevelopment targets, leading to irreversible loss. Protecting these spaces is a responsibility that speaks not just to heritage and memory, but also to ecological stewardship.

As the interviews revealed, the challenge lies not only in policy content but also in how such policies are framed and communicated. The flexibility observed in planning documents frequently reflects deeper institutional dynamics – where public authorities, operating under financial, legal, or procedural constraints, use ambiguity as a means of delaying or diffusing firm commitments (Buhler 2021; Buhler, Chesneau, and Richeton

2024). In these contexts, vagueness becomes a strategic tool, particularly in externally imposed planning processes or where funding is conditional.

This research methodologically contributes to understanding how such ambiguity plays out on the ground and how targeted stakeholder engagement – through interviews and participatory reflection – can help navigate the space between open-endedness and prescription. By mapping stakeholder concerns, priorities, and expectations, the research introduces a temporal and anticipatory perspective that supports scenario planning and more nuanced urban futures. It suggests that these dialogic, iterative methods are critical for surfacing blind spots in current frameworks and for enabling the co-creation of development pathways that are both contextually sensitive and resilient.

To move forward, regeneration frameworks must combine stronger regulatory protections for unlisted heritage with transparent implementation mechanisms and participatory tools that allow communities to shape their environments meaningfully. Only then can redevelopment support both sustainable urban growth and the preservation of shared cultural landscapes.

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