

Historical Context

Overgate was historically the principal western route from Dundee, situated due north of the 15th Century Old Steeple. The importance of the town in Medieval times was indicated by the fact that it was the site for the Scottish Mint. This was founded in 1311 and was located in the Overgate. During the Victorian era in particular, piecemeal redevelopment occurred. By the early 1920s the Overgate area was regarded by the City Council as an overcrowded, unsanitary area of the city. The City Architect of the day, James Thomson, proposed to carefully demolish the 18th century townhouse and rebuild it in the Overgate area. This was to be located on the site currently occupied by Littlewoods. In the end the economic depression of the 1930s and the second world war set aside plans to redevelop the Overgate. The City and Royal Burgh of Dundee commissioned a firm of Planning Consultants, Dobson Chapman, to prepare a plan for Dundee. Their proposal for the Overgate saw most of the historic core being demolished. Prior to its demolition in the early 1960s it comprised a warren of small 18th and 19th century shops and commercial premises.

The Overgate c.1860 (The blue shows the approximate extent of the Overgate)



The Redevelopment of the Overgate

In the immediate post second world war era the political will, both nationally and locally, was to condemn areas such as the Overgate, and to replace them with what was termed Comprehensive Development Areas. Generous central government grants and loans were offered to urban local authorities, such as Dundee, to replace what were seen as slums at the time, into new developments. The future for Overgate was seen as a major retail centre associated with a hotel and office developments. The line of the new Overgate shopping centre did not follow the medieval Overgate. On 9th May 1960 Murrayfield Real Estate Company signed an agreement with Dundee Corporation to redevelop the Overgate. The first of seven compulsory purchase orders to acquire the Overgate from owners who were unwilling to sell was also instigated in 1960. The last compulsory purchase order was served in 1967, the same year as the Centre opened. Servicing of the shops was from the yard north of the Centre.

Layout of the Overgate as it is in 2001.





From this in 1959.....

.....to this in the 1960s



With the changing patterns of retailing and moves to provide indoor shopping centres, the emphasis for Dundee switched to the east end of the city centre when the Wellgate Centre opened in the late 1970s. A further £16 million pound investment was spent on the Wellgate Centre commencing 1993. The impact of this was to leave the Overgate with large numbers of vacant retail units. Little or no reinvestment was forthcoming and increasing levels of anti-social behaviour also occurred. The City Council as ground superior did try to seek refurbishment of the centre, but the then ground lessee, Overgate Centre Limited, was only prepared to refurbish the existing structure and not pursue a major redevelopment of the site (Application D20449 refers). Some work did start, but soon stopped.

The Dundee Local Plan 1998 stated that the "Council will be supportive of any development which will improve the Overgate's attractiveness and support retailing in the city centre as a whole"

Such emphasis was part of the Dundee Partnership strategy to restore Dundee as the regional centre for this part of the East Coast of Scotland.

In January 1998 full planning consent was obtained by Lend Lease Projects Ltd. to redevelop the Overgate Centre (D23080). The proposal was to refurbish the eastern end of the 1960s Overgate, centred on the Littlewoods/C&A Corridor. The western end of the Overgate was demolished and replaced by a new shopping mall. The cost of the new and refurbished Overgate was £150m. Lend Lease, an Australian Development Company who developed the major out of town centre at Bluewater in Kent, were impressed by what they saw as an improving Dundee City Centre. Pedestrianised areas were being introduced, high quality building materials were being used to create amenity areas, and they saw in the Overgate an opportunity to form the western edge of Dundee's city centre. From the initial preapplication discussion between the City Council and Lend Lease, until the opening of the centre in April 2000, only twenty-seven months elapsed.

The Overgate we know in 2001.



In pre-application discussion with the developer a number of key objectives were set to ensure that the redevelopment of the Overgate would be a key feature in revitalising of Dundee City Centre. These were the following:

- 1** The design of the new mall was to take advantage of the architecturally and historically important City Centre site.
- 2** Easy pedestrian access to the Overgate was paramount.
- 3** Car parking facilities for shoppers was integrated into the final design to allow convenience.
- 4** Internal and external security for shoppers and retailers was given a high priority.
- 5** The introduction of specially commissioned public art works.

Expanding on these objectives

- 1** The elevation north of the City Churches was totally glazed, using a glazing system which provides impressive views of the City Churches for those using the centre. Activities within the Centre are seen from the Nethergate, and a degree of reflection allows the City Churches to be seen. This elevation is punctuated by three entrances, also incorporating cafes. The western section utilised the same types of materials used in the refurbished Overgate. Debenhams has its main elevation to the shopping mall and again the materials used are similar to elsewhere in the Overgate. The Marketgait/ Nethergate elevations are of a scale and character appropriate to being adjacent to the inner ring road and a principal point of entry to the city centre. By contrast, the elevation behind the City Churches is simple and understated, a sheer glass wall allowing unimpeded views of the churches from the enclosed mall.

- 2** Pedestrian access to the Overgate is available from all directions, but is particularly strong from the east and north, these being the direction of principal pedestrian flows and car parks respectively. A condition of the planning consent was that the pends remain open between 0730 - 2200, seven days a week.

- 3** As part of the Overgate development the former D C Thomson's printing hall in Bank Street was acquired by Lend Lease and subsequently demolished to be replaced by a 700 car space multi-storey car park of which 4% or 28 spaces provided are for disabled parking. Its design is in keeping with the Overgate Centre. A refurbished car park adjacent to Debenhams accessed from West Marketgait provides a further 285 car parking spaces. Therefore approximately one thousand variable term car parking spaces are available virtually on site to serve the Overgate Centre. In today's market, availability and easy access to car parking is seen by retailers as being very important. Strategically located car parks around the Inner Ring Road provides over 5,600 parking spaces for shoppers, tourists and business people. This level of car parking is seen as a contributory factor in the success of the Overgate.

- 4** Security of both retailers and shoppers was considered by Lend Lease to be particularly important. The internal security system operated by Lend Lease links the individual retail units with the shopping mall, giving 100% closed circuit television coverage. Lend Lease maintain that this level of monitoring of the comings and goings of people within the Centre is essential in maintaining a high level of security for visitors and retailers in the Overgate.

5 The artist who was responsible for the design of the Overgate public art works, David Wilson, comments that

"The new Overgate is just the latest reincarnation of an area historically used to change and renewal due to socio-economic problems. Only being familiar with the previous soulless concrete manifestation, I was unaware of the Overgate's previous character and rich history."

"Chaotic, raucous and anarchic, the Overgate of old was very much a product of different times and values, a result of which life seemed to be filled with more character, texture, spirit and sense of community."

"The works on the façade I see as a testament to those times not with nostalgia, for surely none of us would wish to live in those conditions, but more as a memorial to the spirit of the people who lived, worked and socialised there."

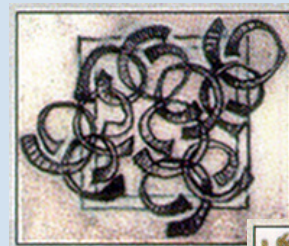
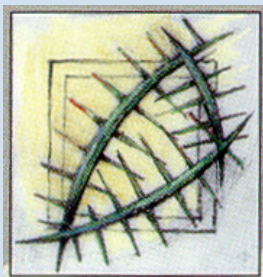
In conclusion, this examination of the Overgate reveals the following:

An area which evolved over hundreds of years and was part of the core of Dundee's City Centre was virtually swept away on the tide of major change in the late 1960s. What was seen at the time as the new Overgate lasted less than thirty years only to see itself demolished and replaced by a new modern Overgate.

It is interesting to contemplate on how long the new Overgate will last. It demonstrates that urban change is a continual process.

Lend Lease have publicly commented that from their initial enquiries regarding the Overgate to the actual opening of the Centre last year, they have enjoyed a good working relationship with Dundee City Council, particularly the Planning and Transportation Department. It is their opinion that this close co-operation allowed the scheme to progress as fast as it did.

25 individual sculptures were commissioned under the auspices of the Dundee Public Art Programme. Below is a representative sample of these.



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