

## 4.4 D. The Castle

### Character Area Assessment

#### Location

The Castle area is located in the south-western corner of the walled city, on strategic high ground directly adjacent to the River. Grosvenor Street is its spine, passing diagonally through the area. The roundabout junction of Nicholas Street / Grosvenor Street acts as a key gateway to the historic city when approaching from Grosvenor Bridge in the south-west.

#### Sub-Areas

The character area is broken down into the following sub-areas:

- **D1. The Castle** – a strong group of neo-classical institutional buildings.
- **D2. County Hall** – the inter-war designed County Hall and its riverside setting.
- **D3. Little Roodee** – the large visitors' car park and coach arrivals building.
- **D4. Grosvenor Street** – an important city centre route with many listed and significant historic buildings.
- **D5. Western Gateway** – the large roundabout and new HQ building.
- **D6. St Mary's** – the church and several smaller listed building buildings lining a winding, steep hillside route.



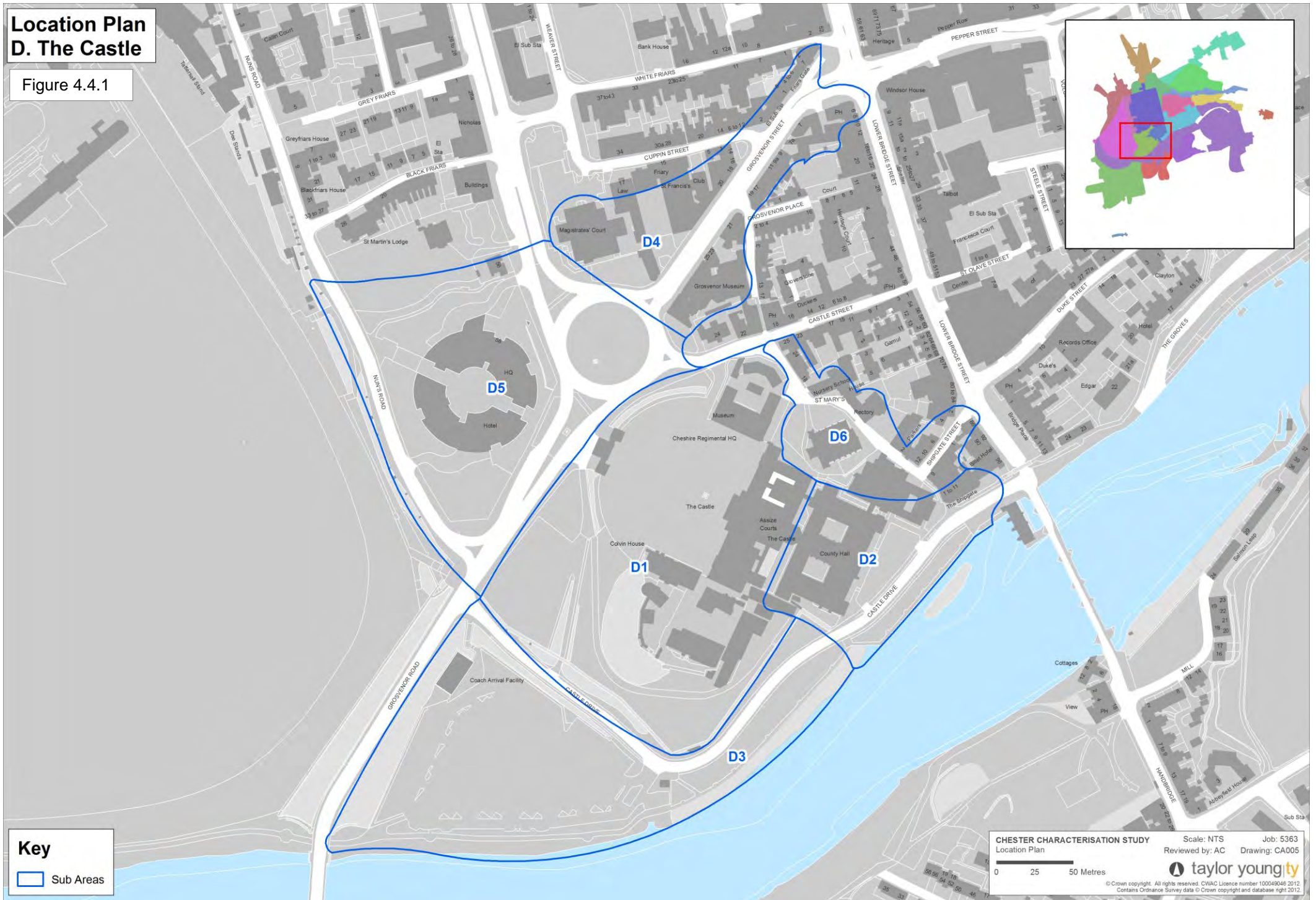
*The Castle (D1)*



*Grosvenor Street (D4)*

# Location Plan D. The Castle

Figure 4.4.1



**Key**  
□ Sub Areas

**CHESTER CHARACTERISATION STUDY**  
Location Plan  
Scale: NTS  
Reviewed by: AC  
Job: 5363  
Drawing: CA005  
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## Historical Development

### The Castle

Chester Castle has very strong historic associations and is a fundamental element to the celebrated history and townscape of Chester. It has direct associations with important aspects of national and local history, from William the Conqueror to the present day. These are reflected in its existing fabric, archaeology and documentary records. The complex forms a rare example of a site continually used and adapted for the exercise of royal, civil, military and judicial authority (functions that it retains today) for 1000 years.

This piece of high ground round which the River Dee sweeps in a gradual curve is likely to have had strategic importance from earliest times. The Romans built villas here of some prestige and vestiges of a creek remain at Nuns Road, reflecting its defensive importance. Around the year 907, the Saxons of Mercia under Aethelfleda re-fortified Chester, as one of their 'burhs' - fortified towns providing a line of defence against the Danes. Chester later became the last city in England to be conquered by the Normans.

The history of the Castle is well documented (see, for example the 2001 Chester Castle Conservation Plan, produced by Donald Insall Associates). The Castle dates from a motte and bailey constructed by the Normans in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. These timber structures were replaced with stone curtain walls and towers in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. Several of these structures survive today (the Agricola, Flag and Half Moon Towers). At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the outer bailey was replaced by a new Shire Hall and military buildings – a central block and two wings with an enclosed parade ground and the grand entrance portico. These were all designed by Thomas Harrison in Greek Revival style and are of international importance in architecture. Harrison's additions included a new 'model prison', following the reforms recommended by John

Howard and then current best practice. The prison was extended with new blocks in 1832 and 1867-70. Later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century other buildings, such as Napier House were added and further repairs and alterations made to the medieval curtain walls. Today the complex houses a military museum and the County Courts.



*The Medieval castle*

### St Mary's

Next to the Castle complex, the church of St. Mary-on-the-Hill has a Norman foundation, was rebuilt in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and restored by Harrison in 1861-2, and again by Seddon in 1891. The original church on the site, dating from the early 12<sup>th</sup> century, was known as St. Mary de Castro ('of the Castle'). The porch of present structure contains stones brought from the nunnery of St. Mary's, which once stood overlooking the Roodee. Many of Chester's greatest citizens were buried here. The church was deconsecrated in 1972 and until the 1990s was used as an

education centre. It is still owned and operated by Cheshire West and Chester Council.

### The Wider Area

This part of the City has always been within the medieval walls and has been of strategic importance. The previous course of the River passed just beyond the walls here until the 1700s. The area to the east of Nicholas Street and the Castle has been developed since medieval times (as is seen on Braun's plan of 1581). The medieval street form and development pattern survives to this day, with the exception of the addition of Grosvenor Street, which cuts diagonally through a pre-existing block. This street was built in 1830 and necessitated a certain amount of redevelopment, although the outer block structure remained.



*The Saddle Inn (later Chester Bells), Grosvenor Street, 1900*

The riverside area can be seen occupied by 'Skinner Lane', lined with buildings, on both sides the 1789 plan. By 1833 these had disappeared and the area became part of Harrison's new Castle complex, with no riverside route. By 1908 Castle Drive can be seen, providing access around the edge of the walls and linking to Nuns Road. This was not

fronted by any buildings until the construction of the County Hall Council offices in the 1930s. This building is now owned by the University of Chester.

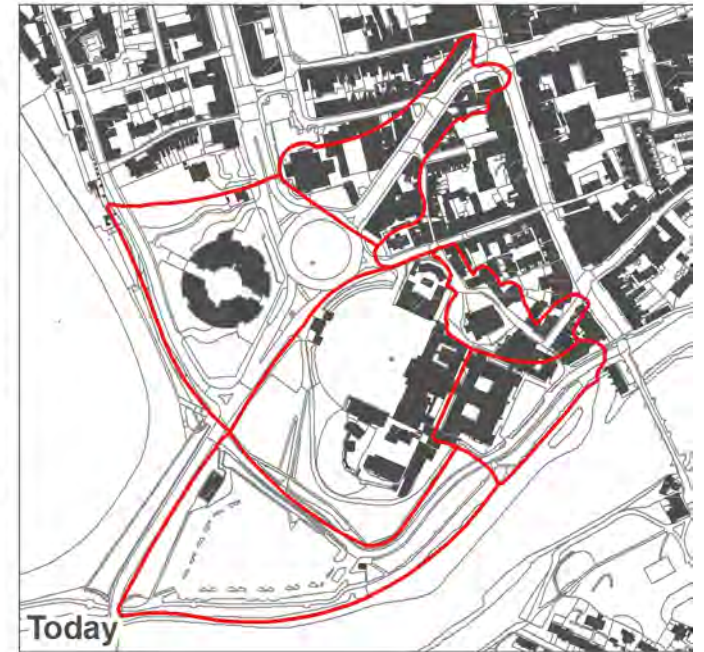
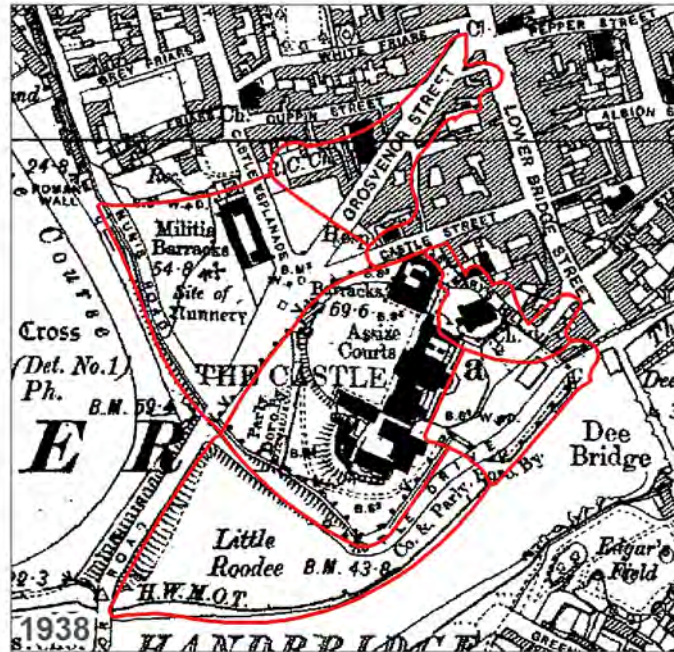
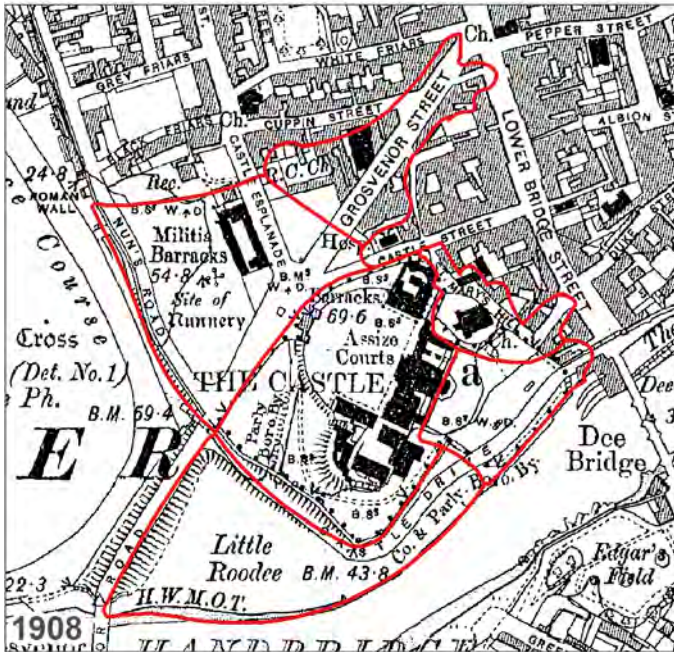
The part of the area to the west of today's Nicholas Street and south of Black Friars was previously the site of the Nunnery of St. Mary's. Other than the nunnery, this area has been mostly open fields until as late as the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, when military barracks were constructed on part of the site. In the 1960s the Police Headquarters were built here in the form of an unloved tower block. This was replaced in 2010 by the new HQ building. This is a contemporary city landmark, with a circular plan form, in shared use as Council offices, a hotel and apartments.



*Former Police HQ Building*

# Historical Development D. The Castle

Figure 4.4.2



## Land-uses

Land-uses in the area differ across the area in three main groups. In the larger, western area (all of sub-areas D1-D4 and the western edges of D4 and D6) are large scale institutional uses: the new HQ building (Council offices, hotel and apartments), the Castle complex, the visitors car park, St Mary's, the Magistrates Court on Nicholas Street. In the north-eastern part of the area are finer grain city centre uses mixed with residential. On Grosvenor Street edge-of-centre uses predominate: offices and professional services, smaller institutional uses, leisure uses. The majority of the St Mary's sub-area (except the former church) is in residential use.

## Urban Form

Urban form varies across the area in a similar pattern to that described for land-uses above. In the larger, western area the form is large buildings, typically three or four storeys (or equivalent) in height, set in their own grounds. This is true of the Castle certainly, and St Mary's, but also of modern building such as County Hall and the Magistrates Courts which have followed this form. The new HQ building has replicated this form in a very deliberate manner (although with somewhat greater height) with a 6-storey circular form set in attractively landscaped grounds. The circular form of the HQ building reflects that of the adjacent roundabout and the Castle.

Grosvenor Street and Grosvenor Bridge were developed as a set-piece to give a grand entrance to the city from the Eaton Hall estate for the later Grosvenors. The street itself is a regular straight street, its form betraying its planned origin. Its diagonal intervention has a profound effect on the grid form of this part of the City. Its development frontages are also straight and regular. These are generally back-of-pavement but relief is provided by off-sets such as at the junction with Cuppin Street and Bunce Street and next to St. Francis Catholic Church.



*The Castle (St Mary's behind)*



*Grosvenor Street looking into Grosvenor Place*

As buildings turn to address these offsets, interest is added to the street frontage. Buildings here are typically four-storey and form terraced groups and individual buildings, with some variety in style between but all, of course, date from after the construction of the road in 1830.

A third character is prevalent on St Mary's Hill. Here the steep topography has necessitated an irregular, winding street fronted at back-of-pavement by groups of buildings and retaining walls at irregular angles. The street itself is cobbled and also includes steps. The combined effect creates its own special charm. The only negative impact to this setting is the rear of the extension to County Hall that fronts the bottom of this street: regular, square grey blocks that appear out-of-context, made all the more visible when viewed from the top of the hill.

Shipgate Street has a more gentle topography and is fronted by back-of-pavement, mostly continuous, frontages on both sides (Georgian to the north, contemporary to the south). This once led to the Shipgate, which was removed when the castle plateaux was remodelled. This remodelling also changed the footprint of the city walls and raised the adjacent Castle Drive almost flush with the walls, with a sheer drop to the River on the far side. Castle Drive varies from finer grain back-of-pavement development behind the wall by the Watergate at its eastern end, to the formal setting of County Hall and a more open character in the west.

The urban form of the area creates several strong views and vistas. The straight, linear Grosvenor Street provides a strong vista at either end: to St Michael's Church in the north-east and the new HQ building in the south-west. The raised ground to the south provides attractive views south across the River and to features such as the Grosvenor Bridge and St Mary's Church in Handbridge (which is clearly visible from Grosvenor Street at the intersection with Nuns Road). The open land of the Roodee also provides attractive views eastward, which the new HQ building capitalised on.




*St. Mary's Hill*

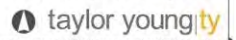
# Urban Form D. The Castle

Figure 4.4.3



## Key

 Sub Areas

CHESTER CHARACTERISATION STUDY  
Figure Ground - D. The Castle  
Scale: NTS Job: 5363  
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*View to St Mary's Church in Handbridge*



*A Block, The Castle (1810)*

## **Townscape Character**

Townscape character varies considerably across the area. Harrison's Castle buildings are ashlar sandstone, with sash windows, Greek columns and parapet roofs. Windows often have lintels and doors have pediments. The HQ building follows some of this character with a similar sandstone-coloured tiling alongside curtain wall glazing.

County Hall is in an inter-war interpretation of the Castle style with a three-storey brick frontage with a stone-covered ground floor and a parapet roof. Windows are vertically proportioned and the main entrance has a square portico.

St Mary's consists of a mix of building ages and styles (Georgian, Victorian and Modern). Materials include brick, stone and roof slate. Roofs are traditional pitch and gable fronted. Buildings are generally three storey. St. Mary's itself is a traditional stone, neo-Gothic re-build with surviving medieval elements.

Grosvenor Street is a mix of late Georgian (Regency) and Victorian buildings, generally three-storey. Materials include brick, stone and traditional Chester timber-facing. Roofs are both traditional pitch and gable-fronted. This sub-area extends to include The Falcon, on the corner with Lower Bridge Street. Originally the townhouse of the Westminster family and later a public house, this is one of the oldest buildings in Chester. On the opposite side of Grosvenor Street there is a modern retail frontage (St. Martin's Gate), this is rather plain with crude black-and-white decoration pasted on and as such it detracts somewhat from the surrounding rich historic environment. The dominant presence of the former Trustee Savings Bank, at the other end of Grosvenor Street serves to mark its location gateway with appropriate presence (neo-Gothic style, sandstone, with a tower).

## Landscape Character

There are several strong, distinct but sometimes linked, landscape environments in this character area. The castle courtyard is a well defined, hard landscaped space that benefits from the excellent setting of the castle buildings. This space is often used for markets and fairs. The space is enclosed and so does not provide a wider benefit to the City at this key gateway, although the strong walls and entrance structure does contribute strongly.



The HQ building has an open setting in attractive grounds, sitting within the wider landscaped area and this makes a strong statement at the city gateway at Nicholas Street/Grosvenor Street. The junction itself, comprising a large roundabout and dual carriageways, is large in scale but does benefit from mature trees and well maintained grass within the roundabout and from the siting of statues in this space, and along Grosvenor Road, which form a strong visual contrast when seen against the HQ building.

The mounded landscaping around the Castle is a positive environment. This is both an attractive green environment that provides amenity when seen from Grosvenor Road and Castle Drive, and is of historic importance itself, dating from the original motte and bailey. It also serves as a strong setting for the listed Castle buildings. The riverside stretch of Castle Drive

is another strong landscape environment. Here regularly planted mature trees create a boulevard feel and the environment is further enhanced by the views southward across the River.

The Little Roodee also plays an important role in landscape character. Although it is hard surfaced and used as a car park its openness allows long views of Grosvenor Bridge and the River, and in the reverse direction, of the Castle and walls from Grosvenor Road.



*Castle Drive, looking south*

St Mary's Hill is another positive environment (as described Urban Form above). This is an urban space but the quality of the old stone paving, cobbles, steps and black iron street furniture creates a strong environment.

Grosvenor Street is an urban environment but it is enlivened with some streets trees and heritage-style street furniture. The junction with Cuppin Street, which opens out has the potential to be an interesting space.

**Setting of the Castle:** Early prints show Chester Castle as a massive fortified medieval structure above the Dee, but today its presence is much reduced by gradual demolition since the 18th century. The most visible part is now the neo-Classical buildings designed by Thomas Harrison, which were built between 1788 and 1813 and which front the busy Grosvenor Road, where the fine entrance portico (see right) faces the new HQ building. The setting of Harrison's complex has often been compromised by a mass of car parking, but when in use for public events the scale and value of this open parade ground area becomes apparent.



*View from Castle Drive*

From the south-east the setting is peaceful and green, with the River Dee to the south-east, the gun sheds at low level and the scale of the Castle above becoming apparent. There is a short break in the City Walls at the former County Hall, and Castle drive is a pleasant, tree-lined route.

At some points around the Castle, the ground formation visibly reflects earlier defensive ditches and the castle mound and there is a green 'moat' allowing views of different aspects of the castle. It is really from the inside that the scale and power of the original Castle is best sensed. However, looking up at the castle from the car park in the angle between Grosvenor Road and Castle Drive, there is a view of the remaining curtain wall, Flag Tower and Half Moon Tower which, sitting atop the green embankment are a strong indication of how important this structure has been both in defensive and townscape terms.



*Poor setting within the Parade Ground*

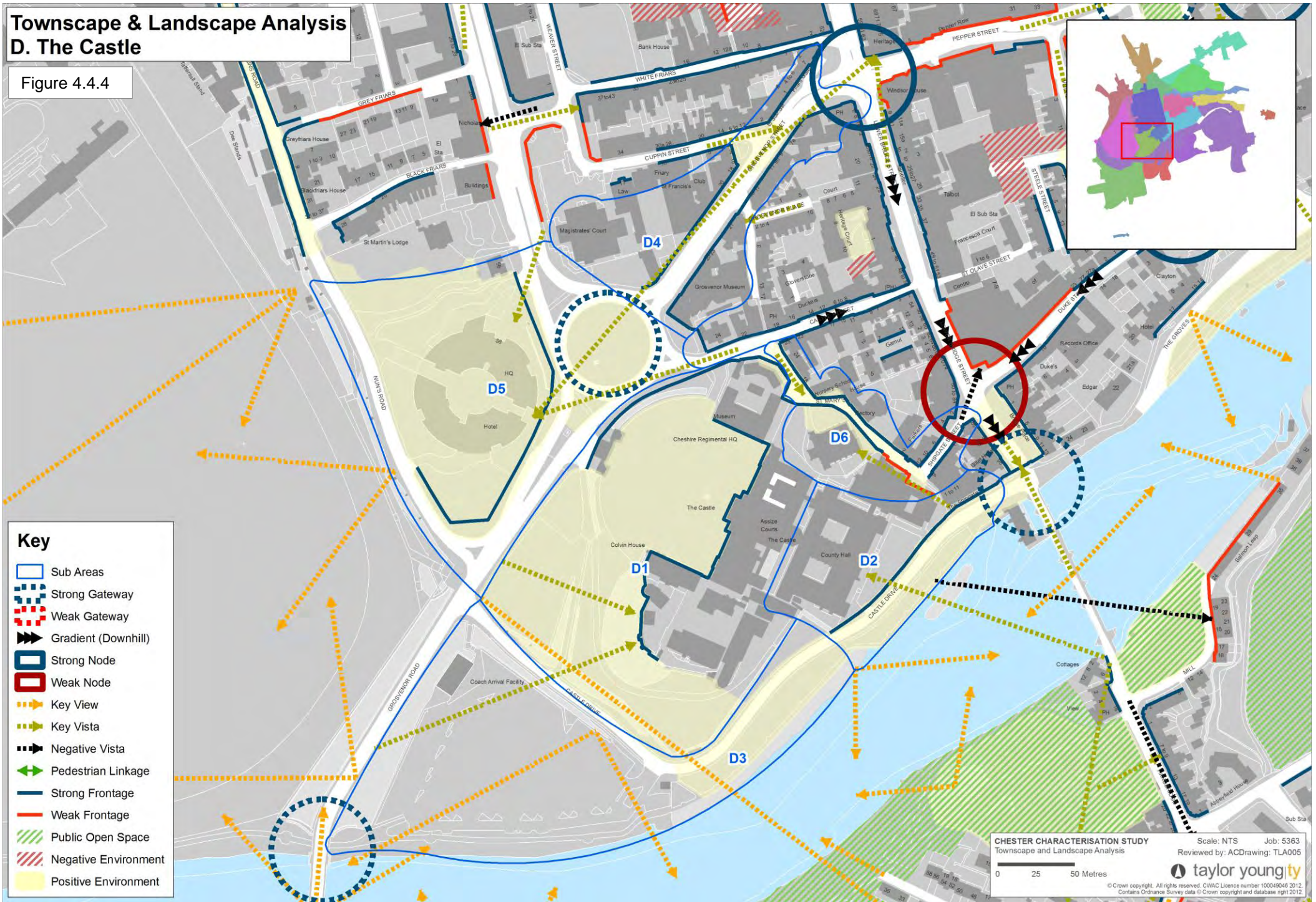
D. The Castle: Typical Materials and Details



# Townscape & Landscape Analysis

## D. The Castle

Figure 4.4.4



## Designated Heritage Assets

All of this area is within the City Centre Conservation Area. There are a large number of listed buildings across the area, including the Castle complex and many buildings on Grosvenor Street and St. Mary's Hill. The Walls Is also a Scheduled Monument, as is the historic Castle site. The most significant listed buildings are:

- The **City Walls** (Grade I)
- **The Castle** complex, mostly Grade I (Medieval/Georgian)
- **St Mary's Church**, Grade I (Medieval/Georgian)
- **The Falcon Inn**, Lower Bridge Street, Grade I (Medieval)
- **Former Trustee Savings Bank**, Grosvenor Street, Grade II\* (1853)



- **Shipgate House**, Shipgate Street, Grade II\*, (mid 18<sup>th</sup>)

There are only two buildings with Article 4 Directions (2 St Mary's Hill and 1 Shipgate Street).

## Buildings and Structures of Townscape Merit

Six un-listed Buildings of Townscape Merit have been identified:

- **D2a. Former County Hall**, Castle Drive – inter-war office building.

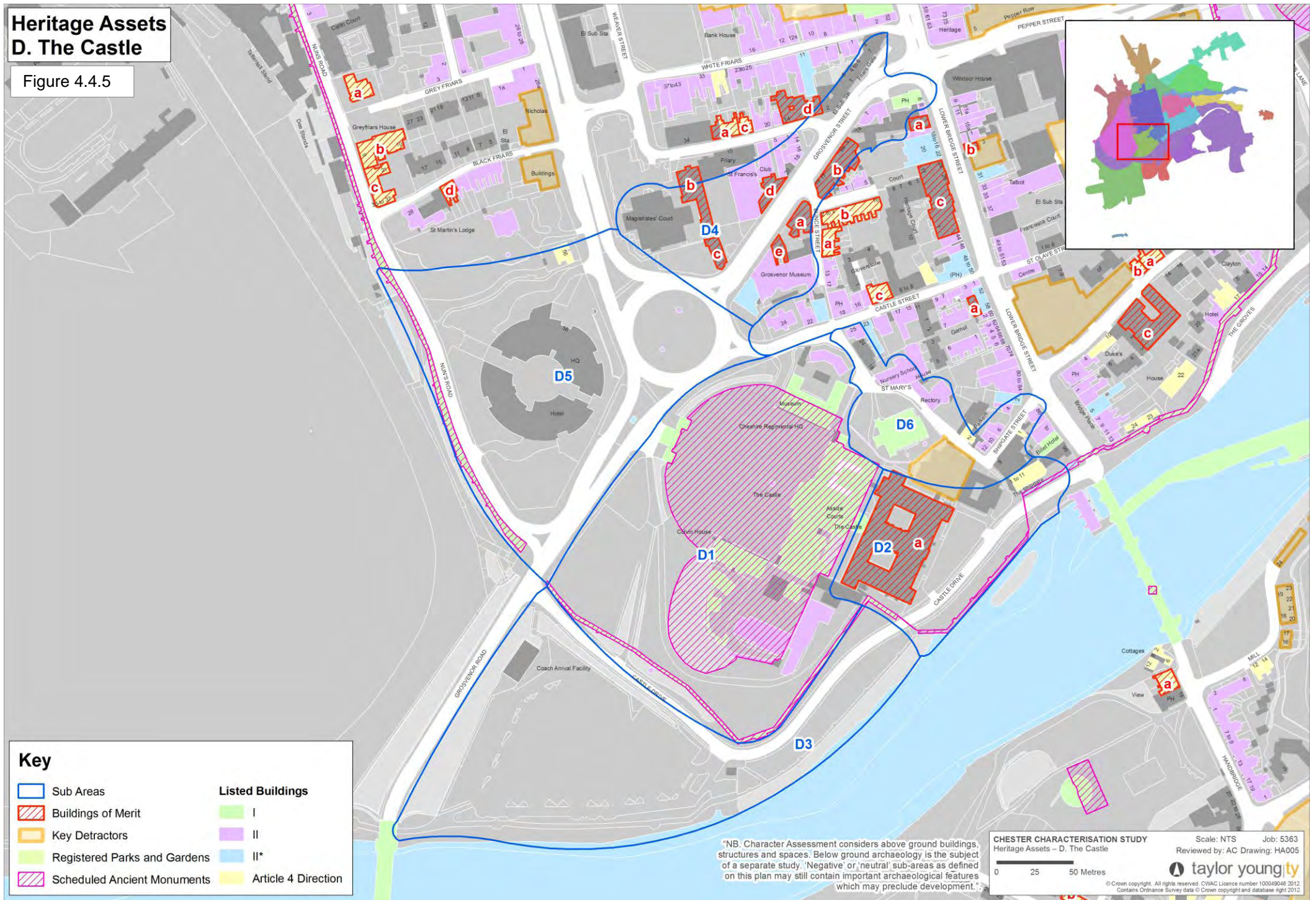


- **D4a. The Chester Bells**, Grosvenor Street – Good example of a 19<sup>th</sup> century public house in Vernacular Revival style.



# Heritage Assets D. The Castle

Figure 4.4.5



**Key**

Sub Areas	<b>Listed Buildings</b>
Buildings of Merit	I
Key Detractors	II
Registered Parks and Gardens	II*
Scheduled Ancient Monuments	Article 4 Direction

\*NB. Character Assessment considers above ground buildings, structures and spaces. Below ground archaeology is the subject of a separate study. 'Negative' or 'neutral' sub-areas as defined on this plan may still contain important archaeological features which may preclude development.

**CHESTER CHARACTERISATION STUDY**  
Heritage Assets – D. The Castle

Scale: NTS Job: 5363  
Reviewed by: AC Drawing: HA005

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- **D4b. Early Victorian commercial terrace, Grosvenor Street** – attractive three storey, neo-Georgian block with good detailing and high consistency.



- **D4c. Parish Hall to St. Bridget's, Grosvenor Street** – interesting neo-Gothic building but with poor repair to eastern elevation.



- **D4d. Former Manse, Grosvenor Street** – former church manse, tall building with very narrow depth – due to being built on site left spare after construction of Grosvenor Street.



- **D4e. Museum Shop, Grosvenor Street** – simple Georgian cottage with original shop-front.





## Key Detractors

The only key detractor identified is the rear of the extension to County Hall. This 3-4 storey 1960s building is visible on St Mary's Hill, especially when looking downhill. It is not a major detractor but does provide an opportunity for redevelopment whilst reinforcing the character of this attractive lane. The front of this extension, on Castle Drive makes a positive attempt to replicate the character of the County Hall elevation and is not a detractor.

## Summary: Character Assessment

The condition of buildings in the area is generally good. One exception is the Parish Hall to St Bridget's, which is currently used as a drugs rehabilitation centre. The eastern elevation has, what appears to be, a temporary render repair. This building should be properly repaired.

In general, the area functions well. The HQ building is a contemporary addition to the city gateway. The County Hall has a positive new user in the University and is currently undergoing refurbishment. The parts of the Castle buildings still in use are generally well maintained. Other parts, that are not in economic use, need careful maintenance to prevent their condition from deteriorating. The former parade space is used intermittently for public events but this could be more formalised and used more regularly and the public realm here could be enhanced, bringing this space more into the life of the city.

In summary the character assessment for the sub-areas is as follows:

- **D1. The Castle: Critical** – crucial buildings in the history of Chester and nationally.
- **D2. County Hall: Positive** – an important local building in an important riverside location.

- **D3. Little Roodee: Positive** – only in use as a car park but with important views, riverside amenity, Grosvenor Bridge and the Walls.
- **D4. Grosvenor Street: Critical** – the street itself is part of the City's history and there are several important buildings here.
- **D5. Western Gateway: Positive** – An impressive gateway to the City, with attractive views and the new HQ building but little historic importance
- **D6. St Mary's: Positive** – St Mary's Church and an attractive lane with strong contribution from topography.



*Castle parade ground in use for events*

## Character Statement



***“This is an important area in the character of the City with several ingredients. The Castle buildings are of national historic and architectural importance. St Mary’s and other buildings are also of architectural importance. Grosvenor Street is a planned intervention in the medieval street form and has a strong Victorian character. Finally, the riverside, City Walls and views outwards provides a very strong amenity. The area represents a strong gateway when entering the historic City from the south-west”***

## Management and Policy Recommendations

The area has accommodated change successfully in recent years, for example at County Hall and the new HQ building, and at St Mary’s church. There are important institutional buildings in the area, and it is important that appropriate new uses are found whenever these become vacant.

The Castle is an important but under-used asset in the City. Its setting should be improved (especially from the parade ground) and it should be better integrated within the City, both physically and functionally.

Current conservation policy has served the area well, with many listed buildings in the area and a Conservation Area covering all of this character area. The only buildings where further protection may be needed is with those identified as Buildings of Townscape Merit. Local listing or Article 4 Directions may be required in these cases.

## Capacity to Accommodate Change

Significant change has been accommodated in the form of the new HQ building and the conversion of County Hall. Future change is likely to be small-scale infill redevelopment of buildings that are unlisted. The rear of the extension to County Hall (previously mentioned as a key detractor) is one potential site with potential for change, in heritage terms, but this will be dependent on the University’s plans for this site.

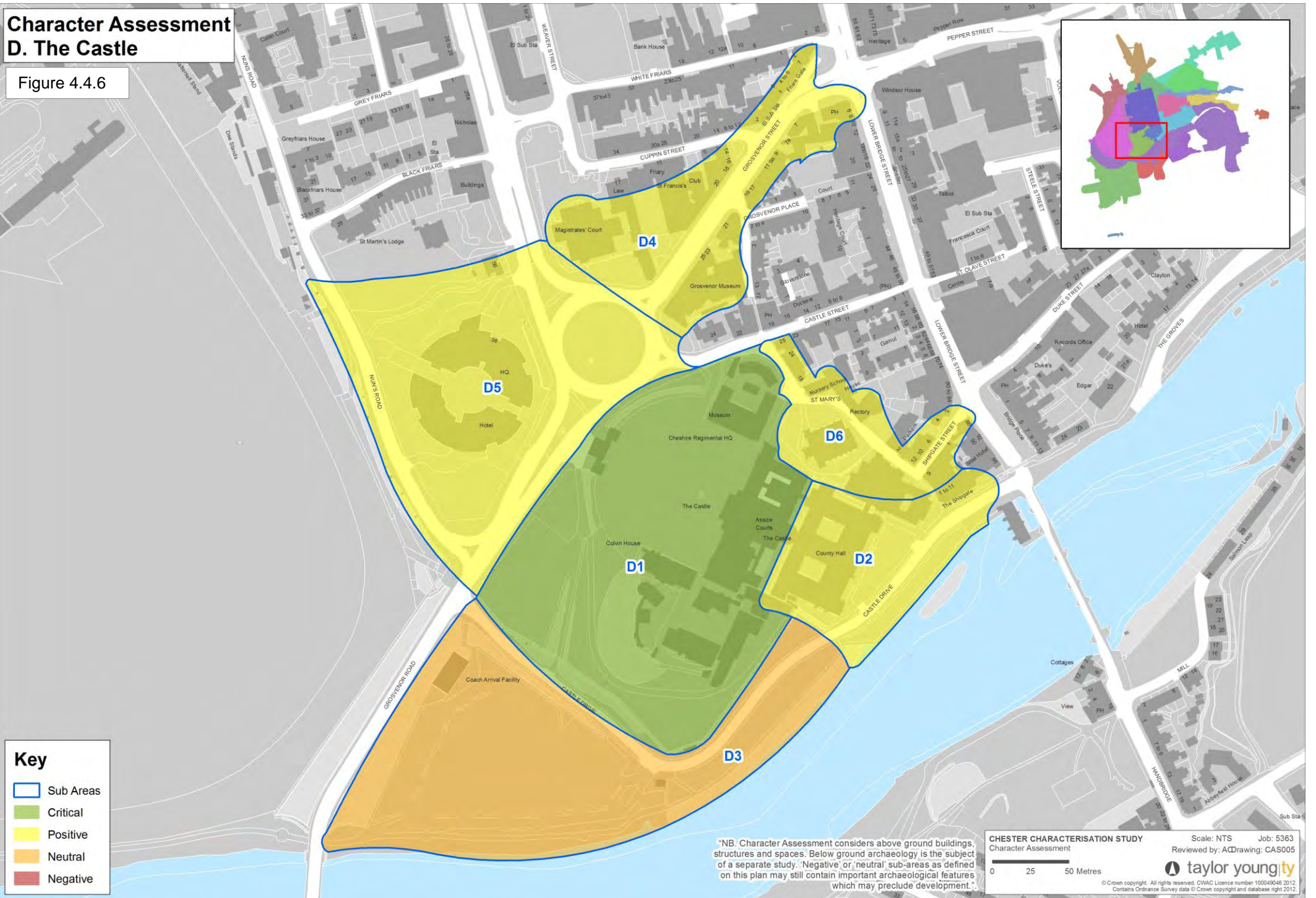
## Design Principles for New Development

Any change in this area will be guided by the fact that new development must pay full consideration to the setting of the important listed buildings that exist throughout the area, the settings of which cannot be compromised.

If the County Hall extension site is redeveloped then it will be important to follow the materials, proportions and colours prevalent on St Mary’s Hill. Regard should be had to the view downward from the top of the hill. This does not mean that height should be overly restricted, but that the roofscape should reflect existing character and wider views. The way that the building addresses St Mary’s Hill is important. This should be back-of-pavement and irregular in plan form.

# Character Assessment D. The Castle

Figure 4.4.6



**Key**

- Sub Areas
- Critical
- Positive
- Neutral
- Negative

\*NB. Character Assessment considers above ground buildings, structures and spaces. Below ground archaeology is the subject of a separate study. 'Negative' or 'neutral' sub-areas as defined on this plan may still contain important archaeological features which may preclude development.\*

**CHESTER CHARACTERISATION STUDY**  
Character Assessment

Scale: NTS Job: 5363  
Reviewed by: ACDrawing: CAS005

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