

# Falkirk's Replacement Town Hall Project

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**Falkirk Council**

Site Appraisal -

Executive Summary

May 2023





## INTRODUCTION

## PURPOSES OF THE STUDY

## FUTURE OF FALKIRK TOWN CENTRE

Falkirk Council are investing in the future civic estate of the town to service the communities of Falkirk as a whole. The investment brings together civic and administrative functions for the Council, merging with arts and cultural facilities.

The Falkirk area has been on a journey of regeneration for several years, with the creation of projects nearby such as The Falkirk Wheel, The Kelpies and Helix Park created to draw investment and tourism to the area.

Falkirk Town Hall was part of the Municipal Buildings Complex, located on the western periphery of the town centre, in a mainly residential area. The building, opened in 1967, was at the end of its useful life and its need for replacement has now been recognised. Falkirk Council accepted that the complex was not fit for purpose - it did little to support the wider town centre - and have agreed to create replacement facilities that will be integrated within the High Street. The ambition is to build confidence for the repurposing of the town centre for the next 50 years.

The Council envisages that a new facility, coupled with a distinct cultural offer, is critical to re-animating the town centre which has seen a recent decline due to wider pressures on traditional retailers, as has been common with many similarly sized town centres.

The Council's requirement for a new facility was restated in the decision taken at their meeting in September 2022, and summarised as:

- A 550 seat theatre and arts centre facility with associated studio and ancillary spaces;
- Relocation of Falkirk Library;
- Relocation of Central Hub;
- New Democratic and Collaboration Space for Public Sector.

Options across 3 sites previously considered (in 2020/2021) were proposed for this combined facility and in early 2023 we revisited the site against the revised requirement to assess land take, outline layouts and to appraise each site to identify a preferred site from:

- Cockburn St/High St;
- Callander Square; and
- The Former Bus Station.



The project is a central element of the 'Revitalising Falkirk Partnership' and 'Town Centre Action Plan'. It is intended to help realise further town centre investment and reverse its economic decline. It is a critical requirement that the preferred solution;

- Is developed within the Falkirk town centre area, around the High Street ;
- Reduces vacant retail floorspace and diversifies the town centre uses
- Provides a catalyst for the sustainable regeneration of Falkirk;
- Demonstrates confidence for other investors that Falkirk is open for business;
- Provides opportunity to increase footfall to the town centre;
- Meets the wider objectives of Falkirk Council;
- Maximises the commercial opportunity from the existing Council headquarters site
- Assists with the repurposing of the town centre to evolve to meet citizen aspirations for the next generation.

**“Create a legible town centre, with vibrancy, relevant to local communities and visitors”**

**“A place that is powerful to draw people away from default choices and other areas across central Scotland”**

**“fits the grain of the town. Create something which helps connect the different quarters of the town centre, their atmospheres and functions. Create places within the place.”**



## INTRODUCTION

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## SITE SELECTION

Three sites were re selected for investigation based on their potential to regenerate and integrate with their wider town centre area. Through analysis, of the following key criteria a preferred site was selected:

**POWER OF ATTRACTION** - A place that is powerful to draw people away from default choices.

**A WELCOMING PLACE** - A place people enjoy going to. It has things that offer interest and excitement.

**HERITAGE AND A SENSE OF PLACE** - A place that tips the hat to heritage, and is forward looking with imaginative design which also tackles climate change.

**SMART TECHNOLOGY** - A place that support the new digital generation with ideas and concepts to engage them.

**WELL CONNECTED** - A place with a sense of arrival, a bit of wow, something special. Help to develop the town centre as a destination and is easy to get into.

**VALUE TO THE WIDER COMMUNITY** - A place that's different from everywhere else and encourages people to stay because of the facilities which meet the multiple, changing and future needs of communities and visitors

**REGENERATION AND INVESTMENT TRIGGER** - A place with a reputation for being vibrant, open for business, a place 1for 21st century innovation

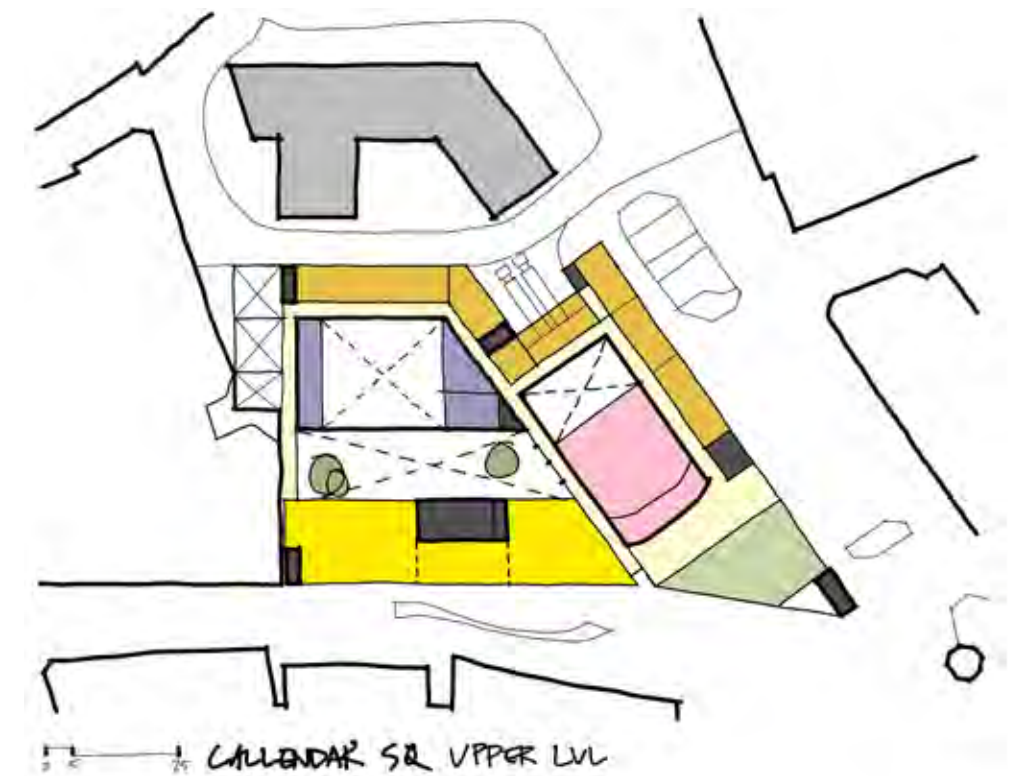
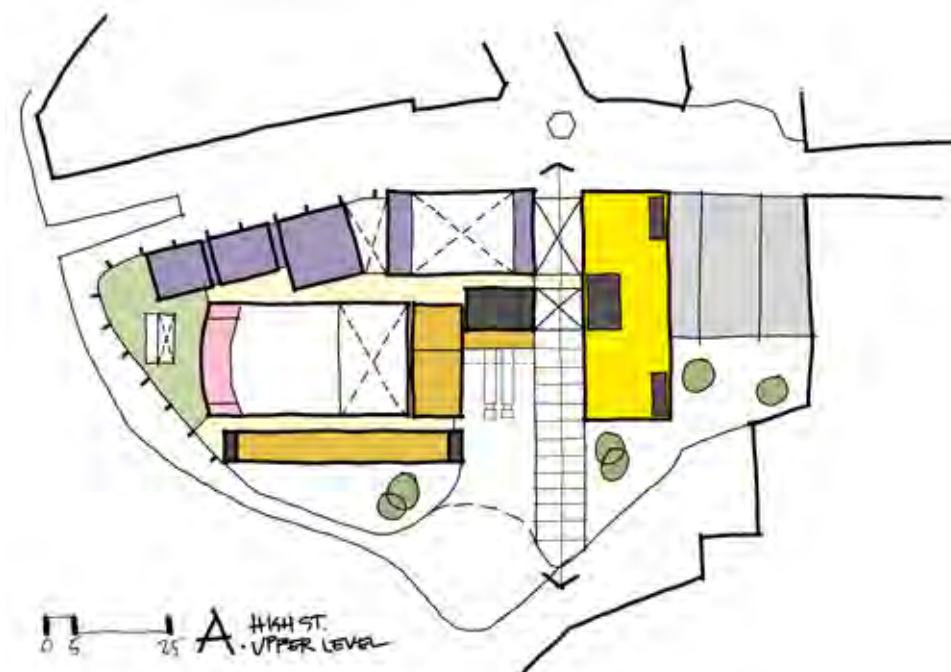
**SITE ASSEMBLY** - A site that can be quickly assembled to meet our timescale requirements

**CONSTRUCTABILITY** - A site that can be constructed easily.

## COCKBURN STREET

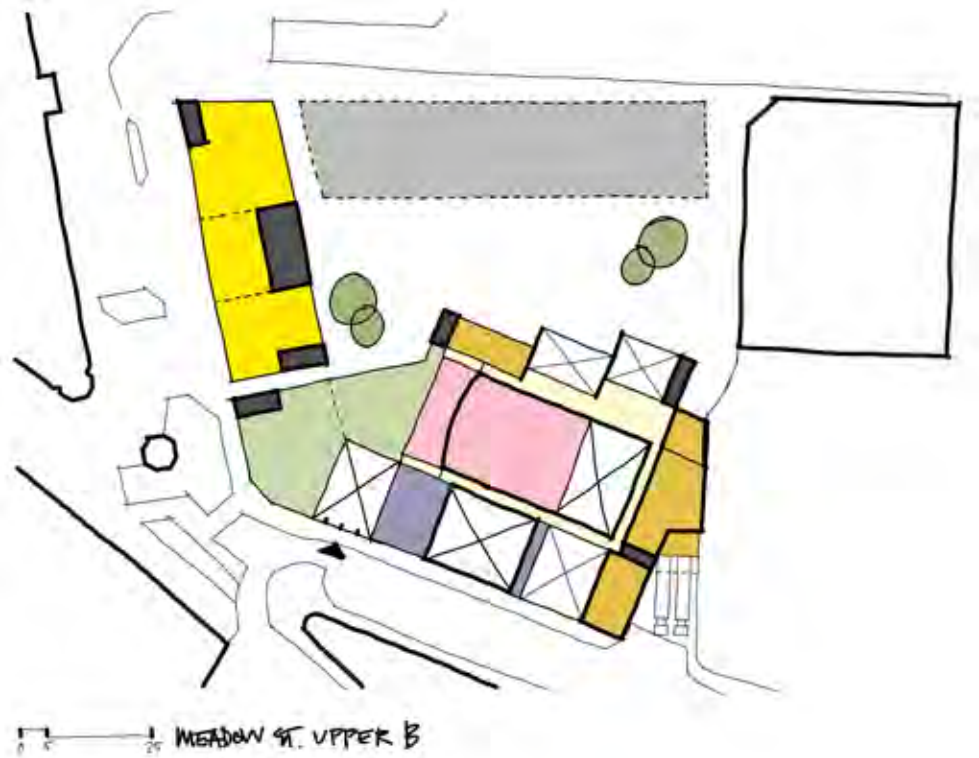


## CALENDAR SQUARE





MEADOW STREET





## THE TOWN CENTRE

## THE TOWN CENTRE



## STREET PATTERN

Falkirk is a product of its topography where the street pattern follows the traditional herringbone pattern of narrow plots, closes and wynds off the central spine of the High Street that rises over the brow of the hill. Although many small lanes and closes have been lost to redevelopment, many still survive around the east end of the High Street.

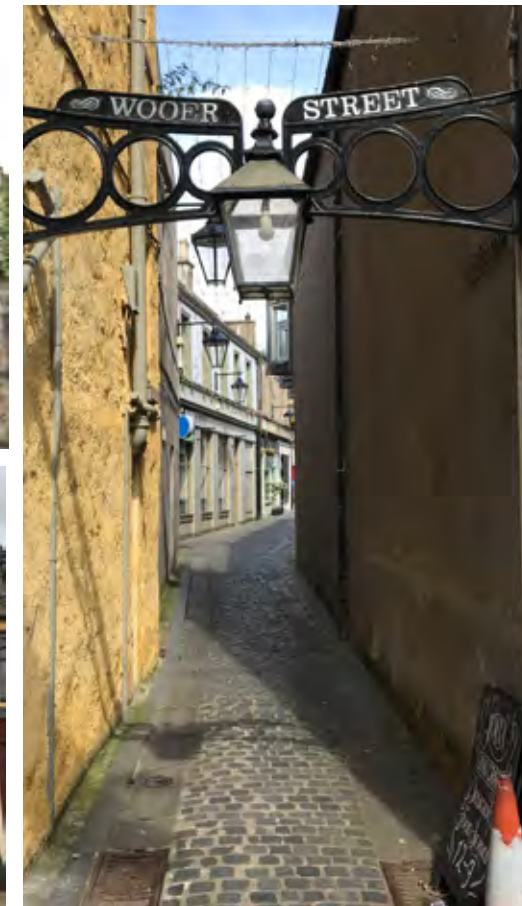
While 19th and 20th century development adhered to the street pattern, for the most part the latter half of the 20th century saw the introduction of wider roads around the periphery. Alongside this, the introduction of Asda to the North West, Howgate to the South and Callendar Square to the East have dramatically changed and removed numerous streets in these areas, compressing the edges of the historic core.

## THE HIGH STREET

The High Street forms the principle route of the pedestrianised centre where the variety of buildings gives a particular rhythm and enclosure to the space.

In terms of the building line there are several instances where this is stepped forward. This is a means of adding character and interest, breaking up the elevations, indicating depth and providing clues about the building's use and occupiers, similar to the effect of bow or oriel windows.

## ORIGINAL TOWNSCAPE



The Parish Church and Town Steeple are the two most significant landmarks and also the most important buildings in terms of their architectural and historical significance.

The many small lanes and closes that do survive around the East End of the High Street, at Wooer St and King's Court offer a pleasant insight into Falkirk's historic past.





GEORGIAN/VICTORIAN/ART DECO ERAS



The rich legacy of the late 19th and early 20th century industrial and commercial boom creates much of the positive urban character of the town centre. This is manifest in terms of the numerous commercial buildings together with the equally imposing remaining civic buildings. The predominant historic building material is beige/ grey sandstone with some red also.

Prestigious buildings, often on corners, often banks or other commercial uses, assert a confident authority over the streetscape.

POST WAR DEVELOPMENT



Much of the post-war development throughout the town centre is of overbearing modernism that bears little relationship to the historic streets and facades alongside. These show little relation to site and context, are of inappropriate scale and massing and often have a cluttered roofscape and ill-considered roofline. Treatment of the space around the building, materials, finishes and openings are other factors which add to the negative effect.

For example 43-49 High Street is a box-like volume that shows little awareness of its surroundings. The street elevation is dull and defensive. No clues are given about the use of upper floors and the windows do not allow any visual link between the occupants and the street. The shops in this building have almost no natural light and the atmosphere for shoppers is gloomy.

Callendar Square shopping centre currently dominates the Eastern portion of the High Street utilising the beige/off-white paint colours of the surrounding historic buildings. The raised podium entry as well as the blank facades to the street with expanses of blanked off windows, offer very little activity to the street and form a barrier to access.



## OVERVIEW OF POTENTIAL SITES

### CHOSEN SITES

Three sites have been reconsidered.

Each site offers potential opportunities and challenges when assessed against outward connections, ownership, buildability, regenerative affects, and cultural value.

Looking from west to east along the High Street the sites are:

- **Cockburn Street / High Street ;**
- **Callendar Square; and**
- **Meadow Street Bus Station.**





OVERVIEW OF POTENTIAL SITES  
01: COCKBURN / HIGH STREET



Located at the western edge of the High Street and curving down and around Cockburn Street the site affords a prominent location at the western entry to the town centre. With direct access to the A803 it is directly accessible from all directions and located close to the Howgate shopping centre offering car parking. In addition it is the closest site to the Upper Newmarket Street bus hub and within easy walking distance to Falkirk Grahamston Train Station.

Development of the new facility would require the acquisition and demolition of various properties within the site. Ownerships of the existing properties are complex with various ownership types - both commercial and residential. However, any development would remove outdated assets and accommodation, offering the potential to attract new investors into the surrounding area.

In addition to the complex ownership the site is split between different levels with complex level arrangements likely to require areas of retention to the High Street side of the site. Access for HGV vehicles servicing the theatre would need to be carefully considered in recognition of the level differences.

The prominent location at the Western flank of the High Street would allow the site to present a new 21st Century gateway into the town centre positively contributing to the emerging cultural regeneration corridor between the Falkirk Wheel and the Kelpies. In turn this could provide a major regenerative effect to the town centre with patrons of the facility more likely to explore and use the other businesses within the town. Any new development would be able to create a dialogue with the historic High Street driving up cultural engagement with the history of the town and engaging visitors and locals alike.



## OVERVIEW OF POTENTIAL SITES

## 02: CALLENDAR SQUARE



Located in the east end of the high street, the site provides a unique opportunity to regenerate a very visible and prominent landmark. The current centre is imposing but offers little integration with the High St, having been designed to be inward facing. By redeveloping, the site, there is the opportunity to reintegrate the site with the town centre. The site is currently occupied by:

**CALLENDAR SQUARE**

Shopping Centre Built in the late 1980's, the 130,000 sqft centre and 465 space multi storey car park were acquired by Cygnet Properties and Leisure PLC in December 2017. In line with many local high streets, the centre has suffered severely from the retail downturn

**ANTONINE HOTEL**

Built in the 60's, as part of the original Callendar Riggs development, the hotel is located to the north of the site abutting the Callendar Square Shopping Centre. The hotel was acquired by Cygnet Properties and Leisure PLC in 2020. It offers poor quality accommodation, is currently closed and does nothing to support tourism for the town

**PUBLIC LAND**

The site is completed by the triangle of public realm to the north of the site at the Corner of Callendar Riggs and Manor Street and in the control of Falkirk Council.

The location benefits from being close to the primary road connections onwards towards the M9 with easy access to the Kelpies. In addition it is within easy walking distance to Falkirk Grahamston Train Station and close to local bus routes.

Being on the eastern edge of the high street the site provides the opportunity to create a landmark building offering a 21st century gateway into the town centre. Additionally there is opportunity to develop a narrative with the various layers of site history creating a strong cultural identity for any new development.

**MULTI STOREY CAR PARK**

Is currently joined to the shopping centre and is owned and operated by Cygnet Properties. The car park was constructed with the shopping centre in the 1980's and is in need of upgrading to modern car parking standards.





03: MEADOW STREET / BUS STATION



Located adjacent to Callendar Square, in the east end, the location benefits from being close to the primary road connections onwards towards the M9, with easy access to the Kelpies. In addition, it is within easy walking distance to Falkirk Grahamston Train Station and close to local bus routes.

Being on the eastern edge of the High Street, the site would provide the opportunity to create a landmark building offering a new 21st century gateway into the town centre. Additionally there is opportunity to develop a narrative with the various layers of site history (Callendar Riggs, the old Quarry) creating a strong cultural identity for any new development.

Bringing more people into the eastern edge of the town centre could provide a major regenerative effect, would enhance the previous Townscape Heritage Initiative works and may lead to regeneration in the immediate area which is currently surrounded by retail sheds and industrial uses.

The site currently comprises a mix of retail, commercial, leisure and residential under the ownership of four different parties. While the retail units facing onto Callendar Riggs are smaller than those found on High St, they are performing well and present a successful active frontage to the street. The former bus station, and frontage onto Callander Road however provide an opportunity for redevelopment and creating more active uses that will support the town centre.

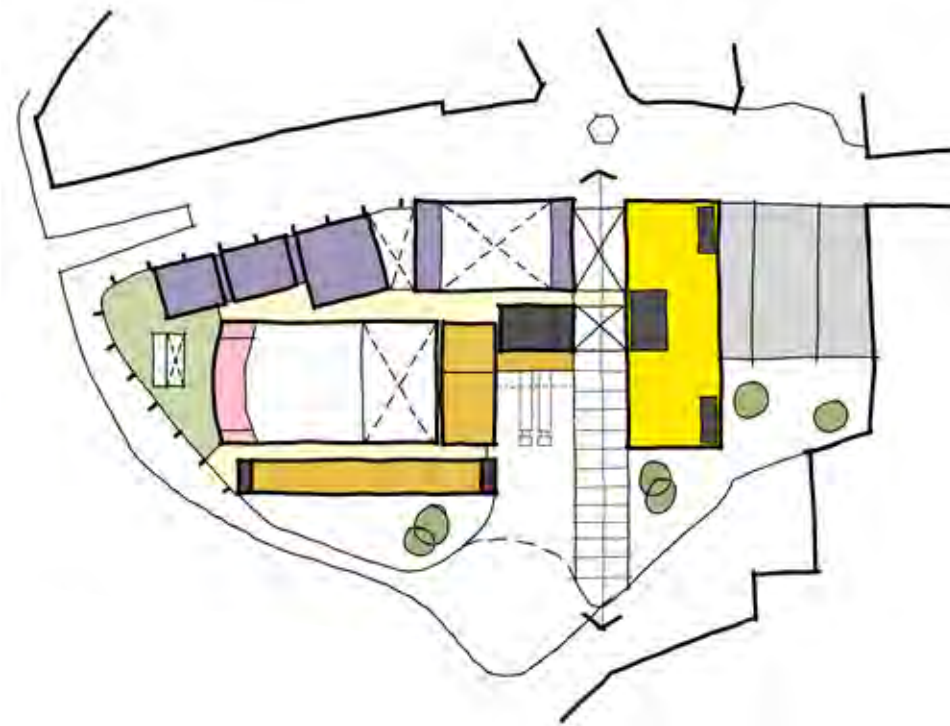
Being adjacent to Callendar Square, the site also benefits from the multi-storey car park, and the adjacent car parking at B&M.



## SUMMARY

## PROS AND CONS FOR EACH SITE

## 01 COCKBURN STREET



## PROS

- Prominent location at entrance to TC & western edge of High St
- Excellent connections to public transport
- Direct Access to pedestrian areas
- Opportunity to create gateway building
- Ability to regenerate town centre
- Strong connections to heritage
- Vehicle Access & car parking nearby
- Changing levels across site work well with auditorium
- Sufficient area, with potential for surplus/residual site for sale

## CONS

- Complex site levels require structural retention
- HGV access for theatre servicing needs careful consideration
- Service lift required to service studios on different levels
- Multiple ownerships/leases of existing plots
- Construction on a High Street may be problematic

OVERALL RATING

43% 50% 7%

## 02 CALLENDAR SQ



## PROS

- Prominent location on High St
- Good connections to public transport
- Direct access to pedestrian areas
- Opportunity to create gateway building
- Strong connections to heritage
- Ability to regenerate town centre
- Good Vehicle Access with car parking adjacent
- Changing levels across site work well with auditorium/servicing
- Sufficient area, with potential for surplus/residual site for sale
- Within a single ownership and owner keen to sell
- Limited Leases to be negotiated
- Construction can be accommodated within site

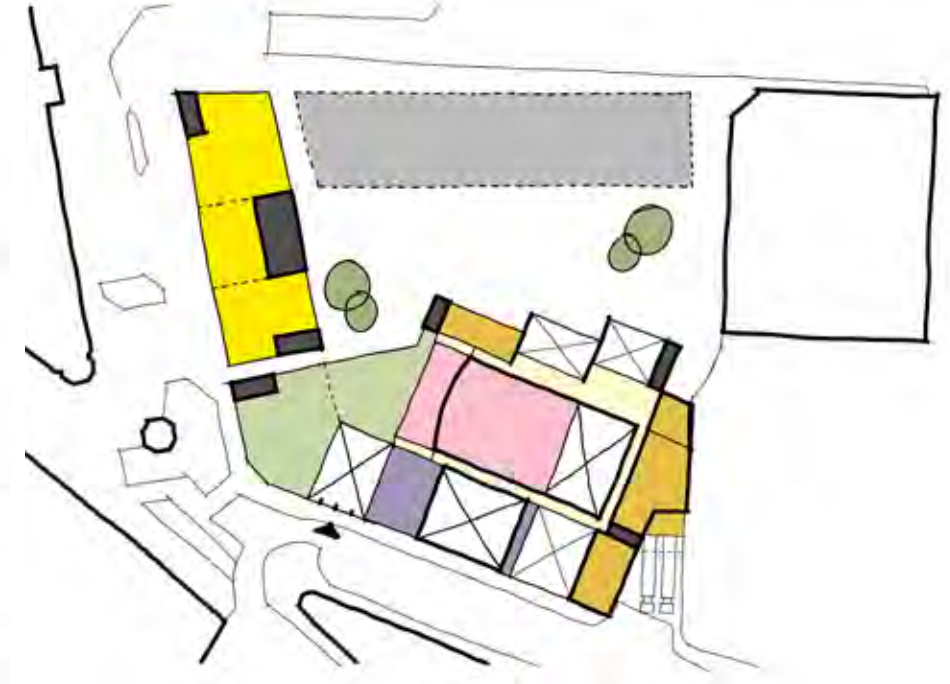
## CONS

- Site levels require structural retention
- HGV access for theatre & studio servicing needs careful consideration
- Service lift required to service studios on different levels

OVERALL RATING

80% 20% 0%

## 03 MEADOW STREET



## PROS

- Prominent location at Eastern end of High St
- Good connections to public transport
- Direct access to pedestrian areas
- Opportunity to create gateway building
- Strong connections to heritage
- Ability to regenerate town centre
- Good Vehicle Access with car parking adjacent
- Levels site works well with auditorium and servicing
- Sufficient area, with potential for surplus/residual site for sale
- Construction can be accommodated within site

## CONS

- Will require separate HGV access for theatre servicing and other uses
- Multiple ownerships/leases of existing plots most trading well

OVERALL RATING

75%+ 17% 0 8%-



## DEVELOPMENT APPROACH

### DEVELOPMENT OPTION 02: CALLENDAR SQUARE

Occupying a prominent location on the corner of Callendar Riggs and the High Street the building can act as a gateway into the historic town centre. An external connection across Callendar Riggs allows access to the existing Callendar Sq Car Park.

The new theatre is located along the eastern edge of the site, allowing it to engage more directly with the High Street. This also allows it to achieve direct level HGV vehicle access from the north.

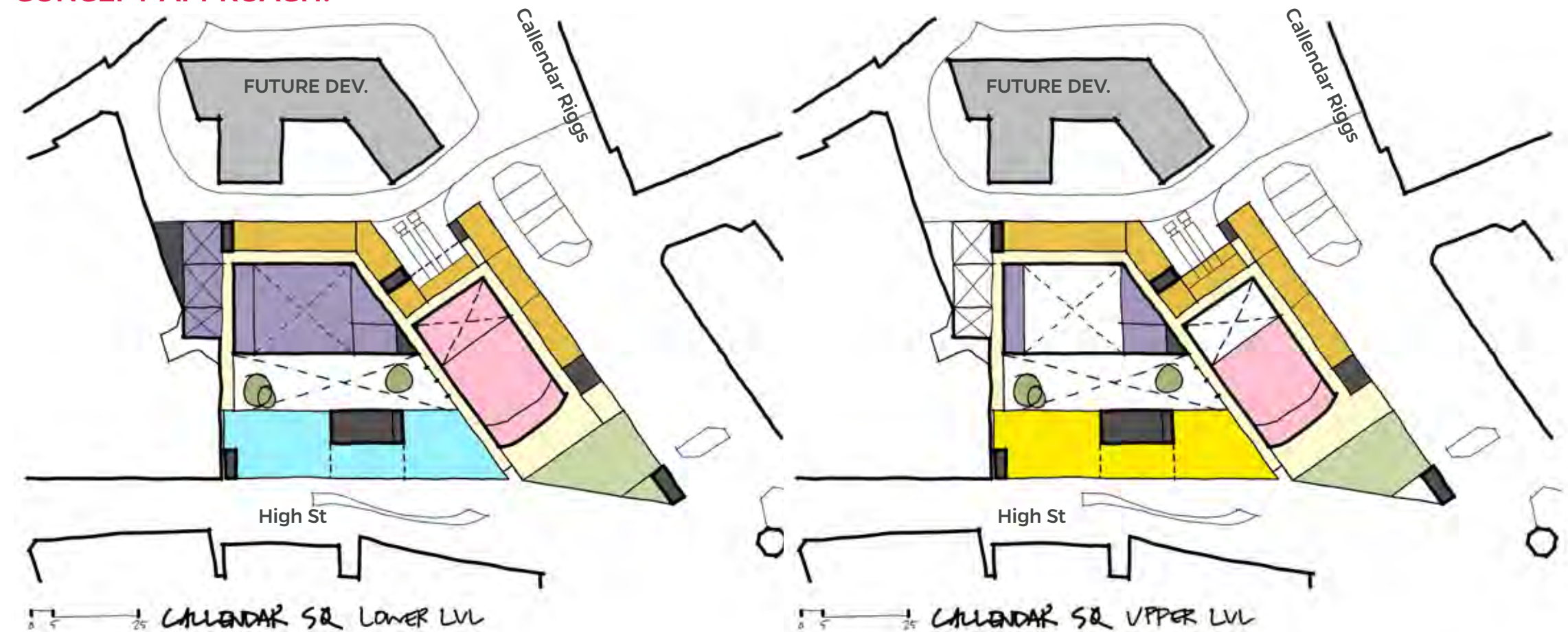
Surrounding the theatre are the ancillary spaces with direct connection to the main circulation routes shared by the library and cafe occupying the prominent street corner. Additional studios are located to the north with views into an internal courtyard. The Hub with Offices over reinforces the main active front to the high street to the southern edge. Future development is indicated to the north opposite Callendar Riggs / Kerse Ln

#### Key

- Theatre - Auditorium
- Theatre - BOH / Service
- Theatre Foyer / Shared Library
- Studio Space
- Hub
- Office Space



#### CONCEPT APPROACH:





## CONCLUSION

The following Selection criteria was used to identify the preferred site for development:

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**SITE ASSEMBLY** - A site that can be quickly assembled to meet our timescale requirements

**CONSTRUCTIBILITY** - A site that can be constructed easily.

Many of the pros for each site are similar as all three are town centre cites. As such we have used the RAG model to differentiate each and identify a preferred site.

It is recommended that any of the town centre sites could work for the new facility. They are likely to have similar development costs until further detailed site appraisal is carried out. On the basis of ease of delivery and the overall RAG model that we recommend that **Callendar Square** is the preferred site.







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