

Aberdeen City Gardens

Aberdeen, the Granite City, deserves a green heart that is designed not only for the 21st century but for all time. The Aberdeen City Gardens are blessed with a truly rich and diverse context which can provide the setting for a spectacular piece of urban theatre. With one strong move we will double the size of the garden, tie together a crucial piece of city fabric and create a sun-filled natural auditorium and international arts centre. A decorated grass arena, shaped by the natural topography, will play host to a multitude of events and uses; from private picnics to giant public performances, from frisbee games to art biennales. This single concentric space has the capacity to bring all the surrounding elements in to harmony and provide an iconic setting of world class status.

A single strong space offers the absolute maximum in programmatic flexibility. Relative to their area the gardens are expected to host a huge amount and variety of events and activities. Therefore the strategy is to overlay the programmatic demands on and under the singular space. The Public Arts Centre, which comprises both an art institution and conference and event facilities, elevates the western side of the gardens and forms an integral part of the overall space. The landscape of the gardens too is multifunctional and can be inhabited in countless ways. On a summer's day one can drop in to soak up some sun, have a picnic or cuddle up with a loved one. In the same space one can also be part of a 10,000 person strong audience for a gigantic concert.

Even though the gardens are one clear entity there are differentiated character areas within the space. The central open field is framed by a more densely planted upper garden which follows Union Street, Union Terrace and Rosemount Viaduct. The upper garden rises up along Union Terrace as the Public Arts Centre surfaces above street level. Secluded niches and benches are to be found in amongst the tall grass of the upper garden.

On the East boundary one can explore a variety of smaller gardens; play spaces, a water theatre and bar terraces. An exciting new dimension will be added to the properties along Belmont Street; suddenly they will have a new address on the Aberdeen City Gardens. With a perfect orientation

to the South West this is a guaranteed commercial success for bars and restaurants and will ensure that the gardens are filled with life around the clock. For the colder months, especially, there is a sequence of winter gardens. We have taken the liberty of proposing a revival of the Triple Kirks original church structure as a unique botanical garden in the heart of Aberdeen. This frames a beautiful courtyard garden which serves as a prelude to the grand city garden beyond. As the focal point of the natural auditorium the Belmont Square will be the main stage area for large scale events.





SITEPLAN: Aberdeen City Gardens
scale 1:500

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As a natural valley, where the river Den once flowed, the site has long been a place of transition. It tells a story of the evolution of the city; Aberdeen's expansion, industrial progress and, now, its search for a new future. The location is the product of a gradual layering of urban advancement; it is a palimpsest of Aberdeen's proud historical phases. Yet if we review the 1869 plans for the then-called Denburn Gardens we see a vision for a much grander, uncompromised urban park than the one we find now. The challenge we face is how to reconcile, in a meaningful manner, Aberdeen's rich heritage with a determined and brave step forwards.

Today the gardens are surrounded by what can only be described as the ultimate conditions for a glorious city park. The gardens are lined by the perfect spread of activities to 'feed' life in to the park throughout the day, and the seasons; a busy shopping street, a nightlife zone, a university, an art museum, a theatre, a concert hall, a library, a church, hotels, restaurants, offices, residences, a nearby railway station and plentiful public transport. Our task then is to fulfil the latent potential that is on offer.

To unite and bring harmony to a truly rich and diverse context a strong gesture is needed. We believe that the solution lies in the creation of a grand, iconic space. The gardens take the levels of the surrounding streets as their starting point; as such the space naturally descends towards the lower level of Belmont Street. The focus is thus directed towards Belmont Street's iconic historic buildings; they become the dramatic decor for this urban theatre. This auditorium will be unique in the world; it is formed by its very specific and beautiful context. The surrounding buildings become the scenario for an ever changing, ever evolving array of events.

The Flower of Scotland

The bold space of the natural auditorium is decorated by an intricate floral pattern that meanders its way across the gardens, creating a myriad of connections, surprises and intimate moments within the grand setting. The pattern is designed for both moving across and providing places to stay. It is at once a path, a square, a park bench, an amphitheatre, a terrace and a play space. Whilst it provides a decorative identity to the gardens it does not interfere with or fragment the strength of the overall space.

Although a continuous element, the paths will be experienced differently on the two levels. On the open field the pattern will emerge clearly and create a strong graphic effect on the lawn. The pattern

will however take on a more explorative character on the upper level as it meanders, disappears and reappears between the longer grasses of the upper level.

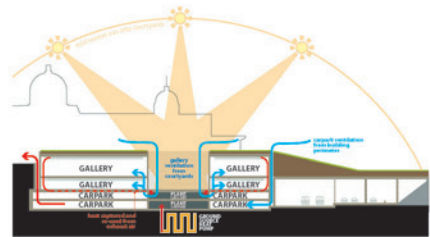
The planting strategy is to provide a lush meadow environment of long grasses, flowers and trees on the upper garden as a frame to the short, amenity grass of the central open field. There is a gradual transition from the trimmed amenity grass to the meadow grass of the roof garden above the Public Arts Centre. The meadow grass is offset and interwoven with cultivated clusters of native flowers and plants to create an intriguing narrative along the slow walking route of the higher ground.



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The green heart of Aberdeen is also its cultural heart. The Gardens are elevated and embraced by the Public Arts Centre; an institution which is destined to become a major cultural magnet within and beyond the city. The building wraps around the North and West section of the gardens, rising above street level to meet His Majesty's Theatre in the North West corner. The raised corner opens itself up to William Wallace Square and serves as a public gateway to the central space of the gardens. The building and the Gardens are designed as a unity; we believe the Public Arts Centre should be as much a part of the city life as the gardens themselves.

Although the Public Arts Centre is camouflaged within the Gardens it is given a visible presence via both a street and garden facade. This allows light to flood in to the building and is the first move in creating a bright, transparent and open interior. A series of patios puncture the roof to produce a sequence of serene enclosed gardens and frame views to the dramatic surrounding skyline. The gardens and the city have a constant visible presence throughout the building.



Passive Exhibition Space Design

The sunken geometry of the proposed building maximises the potential to maintain the internal environment as there are less interfaces with the open surroundings. The material surrounding the building provides a natural stability which can absorb peaks in internal temperature due to changes in occupancy and re-emit the heat if air temperature falls. The internal layout of the building can be developed with this knowledge; placing display item stores towards the back of the plan to capitalise on the natural thermal stability of the ground. Ensuring the reduction of energy consumed in the building is a key driver for the design, the approach for this building will be to take a "fabric first" approach to the design, to minimise the losses, rather than supplementing a high demand with renewable technology. The "fabric first" methodology results in ultra-low energy building that require little energy for space heating or cooling. Passive design is not an attachment or supplement to architectural design, but a design process that is integrated with architectural design.

Tunnel Works

The creation of a new tunnel containing both rail and road route poses a number of challenges. A tunnel, in a highways context, is considered to be a structure longer than 150m long – the section of carriageway passing below the retail site to the south is marginally shorter than this. Decking over the full length of the site will not only create a new 250m long tunnel for rail and road, but will effectively extend the existing structure creating a length of 400m. It is likely, therefore, that additional precautions for ventilation, firefighting etc will need to be retrofitted to the existing structure to the south also.

It is the intention from the onset to develop a passive design strategy to reduce the building's dependency on active mechanical and electrical plant to maintain the internal environmental conditions. The ultimate goal is to offer a low energy solution.

The Public Arts Centre can be entered from both the William Wallace Square and the central open field. A giant lobby welcomes the visitors and passes between two patios, allowing the public a glimpse of the exhibition space below. Flowing from the lobby is the expansive City Foyer; the beating heart of the building. This is a multifunctional gathering space that can host all manner of events or activities; it can be at once a cafe, an auditorium or a party venue. The City Foyer can be opened up to the gardens, extending its potential even further.

Descending from the City Foyer one enters the grand exhibition space. The historic arches are retained to create a striking West wall that will become a characteristic part of the exhibition itself. The patios bring in light, organise and define the gallery space. The patios also play host to the exhibition and each is given a specific landscape design; the passing of the seasons is underlined in the plant and tree choice.

The exhibition space is a spatial experience in itself; breath-taking, lofty spaces open up to the upper level and the city outside. On the exhibition level a large auditorium is situated directly beneath the public lobby. The layout of the Public Arts Centre is designed specifically to allow for multiple users and uses.

Public Arts Centre

The structure of the Public Arts Centre, comprises car park accommodation over 2 levels with learning, exhibition and auditorium occupying the floor immediately above with further exhibition, cafe and shop occupying the uppermost level. The roof to this level is an occupied, green extension to the garden. Dramatic openings take light down into the heart of the building and also assist with the servicing strategy.

The car park has a regular 8m x 8m grid which runs up through the southern part of the building. To the north where the auditorium and exhibition spaces are to be found, the grid opens up to provide column free spaces. In these locations downstand beams are required to break the span of the floor plates but elsewhere simple flat slabs are used. All floor plates act as diaphragms. Retaining walls are used to form the perimeter of the building. These vary in thickness due to differences in the unsupported retained height with double height spaces in some locations and not in others.

Managing Flood Risk

The new development must also not increase flood risk to other properties as a result of infilling flood plains or increasing flows to watercourses.

The lower part of the site is deemed to lie in the functional flood plain according to SEPA mapping, ie having a probability of flooding in an event likely to be exceeded in 200 years

The primary risk to the site lies from the Denburn watercourse. This is a heavily culverted watercourse, and therefore the total flows received by the site will be limited by the size of the upstream pipework. There has been a history of flooding to Upper Denburn Road at the Denburn Multistorey Car Park as shown below, however there is no indication that this impacted on the site.

