

# 2

## Castle Terrace, Edinburgh: From Parking Space to Public Space

The historical development of Edinburgh began on and around an extinct volcanic plug – the Castle Rock, the central outcrop of several throughout the city, and which was first fortified in Roman times. Surrounded by dramatic rocky cliffs to the south, west and north, the site is naturally defensive, providing stunning panoramic views across Edinburgh and the surrounding countryside. Human habitation on the site dates back to the 9th Century BC. There has been a royal castle on the site since the 12th Century, and the great building programme commenced in the mid 1300's and stretching over two centuries comprised the golden age of the Castle as a fortress and royal residence.

From considerable distances outside the city in all directions, the Castle forms a distinctive and legible skyline feature. Today, Edinburgh Castle is the most visited Ancient Scheduled Monument in Britain, and has become a recognised emblem for Edinburgh and Scotland. The utter improbability of the location, the scale of the built development perched atop the sheer crags and towering over its surroundings and the dramatic presence of the Castle within near and distant views irrespective of direction, all combine to create a defining feature of Edinburgh's townscape, skyline and wider cultural identity.

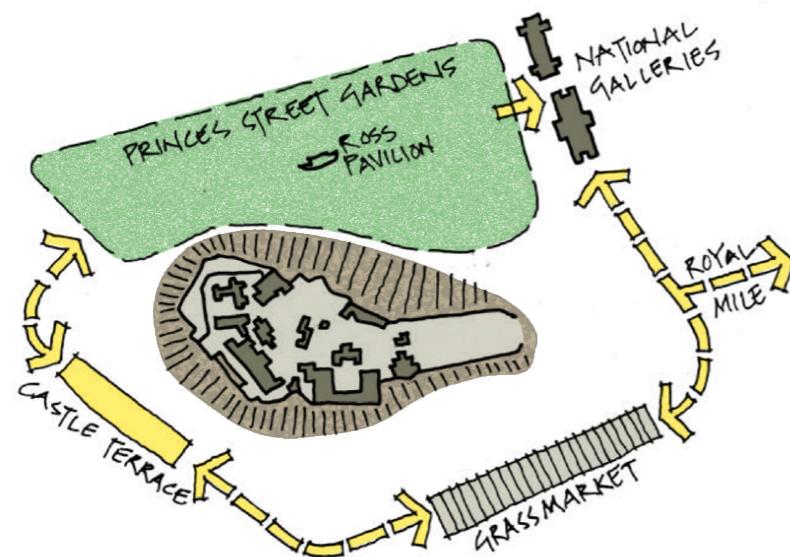
Nowhere in Edinburgh demonstrates more clearly the startling presence of the Castle, the incredibility of its siting, the historically skilful response to topography of those who imagined its conception and the three dimensional composition of the city, than Castle Terrace. With the Castle towering overhead above sheer cliffs, its high stone walls perched on the very edge of the precipice, and the scale of its battlements and barracks, the view almost defies belief.

So we ask ourselves why is one the finest views in Scotland, if not the world, wasted on empty cars parked on the roof of a multi-storey car park? This location has the potential to become one of the finest civic spaces in the city; it has geographic and historic significance; it has a south-westerly orientation; it can form the 'missing link' in a cultural circuit connecting Princes Street Gardens, the Ross Pavilion project, the National Galleries and the Grassmarket.

It is bewildering why such potential has not been recognised and exploited previously. Surely the city is not so reliant on car parking spaces that it cannot sacrifice some in the quest to make the city a better place to live and visit. Indeed, the mere presence of this car park encourages car travel into the very heart of the city, contradicting every civic ambition aimed at making the city a more sustainable, liveable location.

We propose the temporary conversion of the upper deck of the car park to a public realm space during the Edinburgh Festival/Fringe and Edinburgh's Christmas and Hogmanay celebrations. Following the concept of the Paris Plages (Paris Beaches), during the Festival we conceive of an urban beach introduced into the heart of the city, where sand, boardwalks, lawns, parasols, sun loungers, deckchairs, palm trees and cultural and sports activities create a temporary seaside landscape for residents and visitors to enjoy and relax in, all set below the dramatic backdrop of the Castle. Pop-up cafes, stalls and exhibitions can provide further animation of the new public space. During the Christmas and Hogmanay festivities, what better home for the Ice Skating Rink, which is struggling to find a regular location?

To fulfil the greater long term potential of the space, why not hold a competition to design a civic space of international significance? It worked for the Ross Pavilion. The opportunity is surely too great to miss for a city of Edinburgh's character, identity and significance.



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