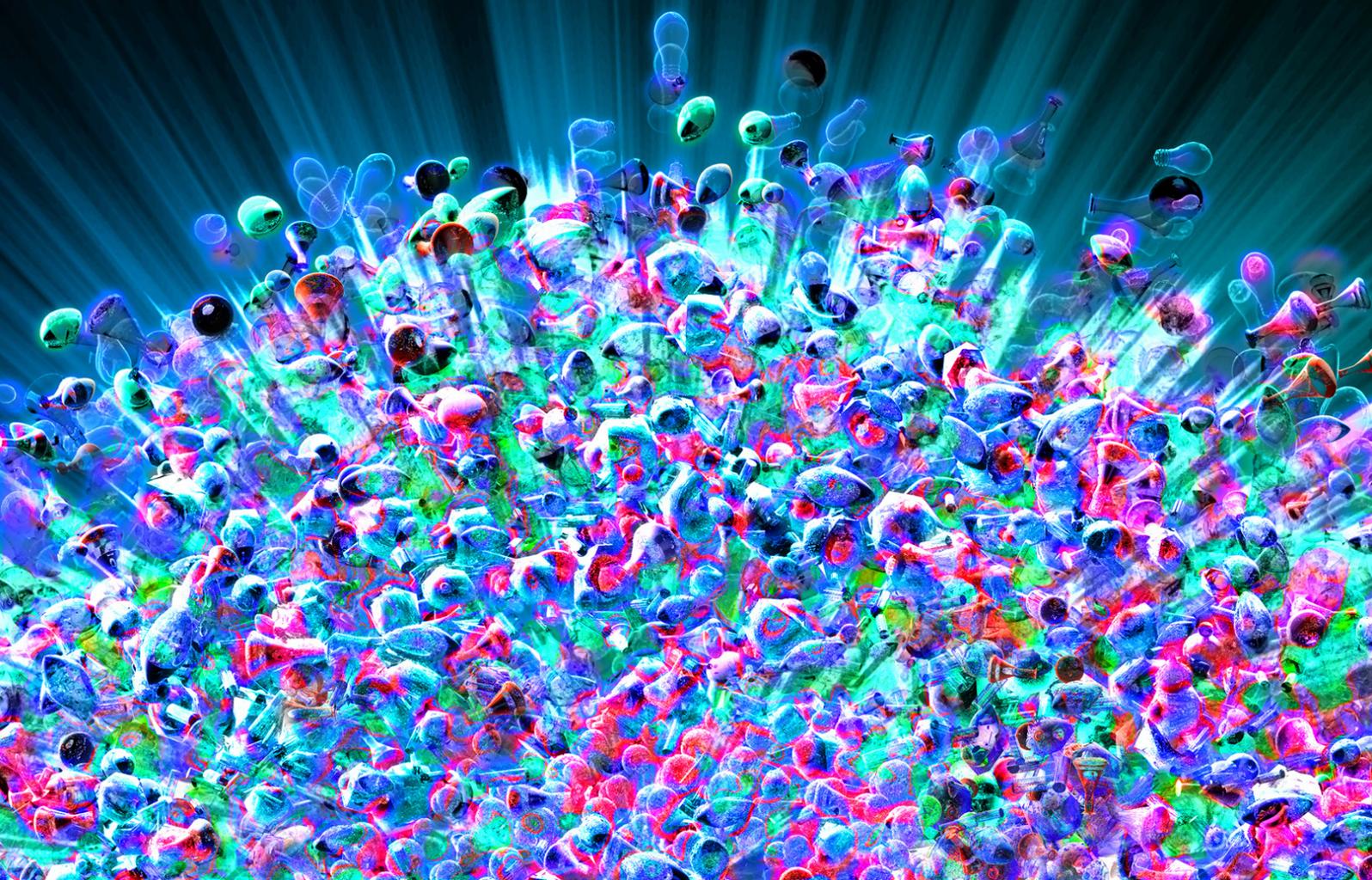


ST HELENS TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY

DRAFT FOR CONSULTATION | SEPTEMBER 2017

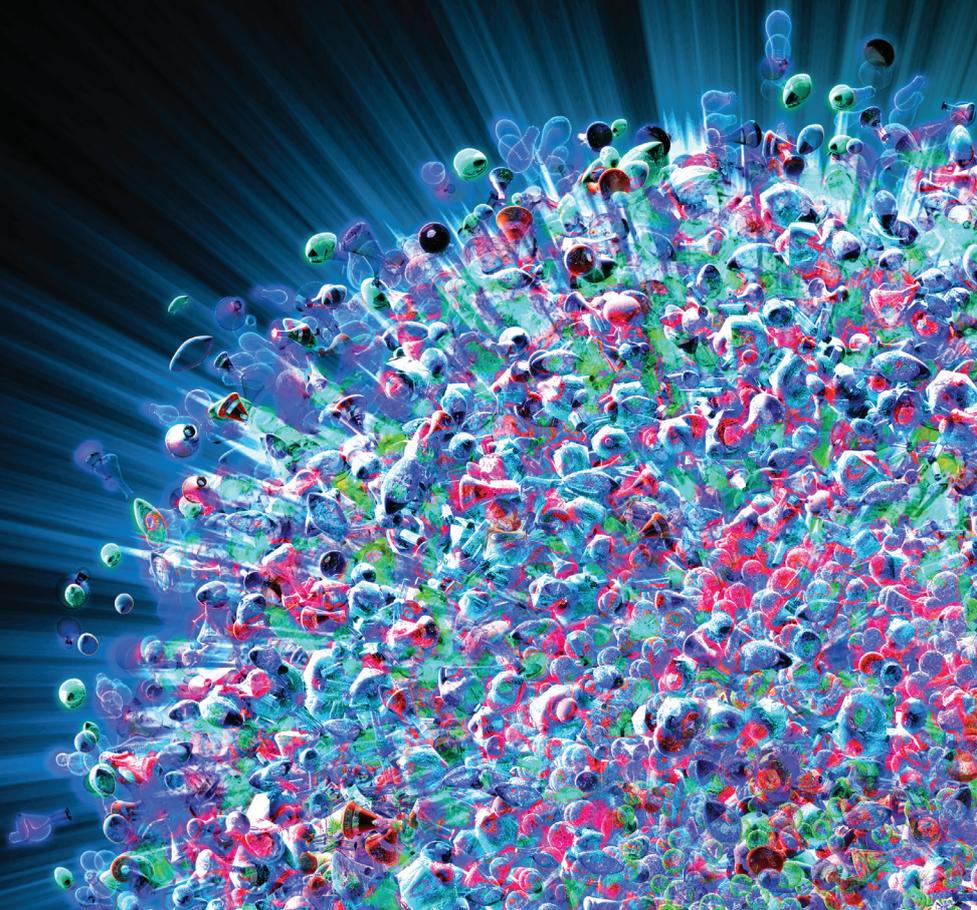




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1.0 INTRODUCTION



INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 St Helens is a large and significant town at the heart of the North West of England, a prime position on the national motorway and rail network, is less than 30 minutes from the Port of Liverpool, 40 minutes from Manchester and has a market of over 35 million people within just a few hours drive. St Helens sits at the heart of the North West, the Atlantic Gateway, and the SuperPort initiative which are all key drivers of growth within the North. More and more big name businesses are appreciating that St Helens really is a fantastic location.
- 1.2 The town is making use of what's in its DNA and what made it special to be at the forefront of its renaissance; enterprise and entrepreneurship. This also drives our approach to culture and the arts and we are creating a 'hotbed' of creativity in the town centre, driven by fresh thinking with the aim of inspiring a new generation. St Helens is a place that nurtures, celebrates and hosts culture in all its forms and we have a substantial foundation to build this upon. Many of the cultural assets within St Helens celebrate the borough's intangible industries, heritage and communities. St Helens will use its legacy alongside a new creative energy to unleash a cultural dynamic that radiates out from the town centre to the widest parts of the area.
- 1.3 St. Helens is a fantastic place to grow a family and live your life. The borough boasts outstanding education provision that extends right through from primary schools to post-16 and University degrees. Our education system is turning out ambitious young people who will provide the ingenuity and energy to power the future St Helens. The area also offers many new housing developments to rural villages, with the potential for professionals to live in the town centre. There is already a tremendous range of things to do, including Super League rugby league in the heart of the town or watching horse racing at Haydock Park.

WHY A TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY

- 1.4 St Helens Town Centre Strategy sets out the direction and vision for the town centre over the course of the next 10 years (2017–2027). St Helens has not had a town centre specific strategic document for a number of years. For the town centre, and indeed the borough to move forward, there needs to be a new and up to date strategy that will give the council, partners, local residents and investors a clear sense of ambition for what St Helens town centre will be in the years ahead.
- 1.5 In addition, St Helens town centre remains a hugely important economic, cultural and social asset to the borough, and this has led to renewed focus over the past year. St Helens has a strong foundation but it needs to be ambitious and act on its many assets and opportunities. Combined with its position at the heart of the North West, these provide the town centre and the borough with the raw materials that can drive a significant transformation for people who live and work in the borough.



- 1.6 St Helens town centre has a strong cultural offer, well located with excellent transport links and is home to St Helens College and University Campus. However the town centre faces considerable structural and physical challenges and is rapidly declining.
- 1.7 For the borough to attract inward investment, seize opportunities, raise its profile and to maximise its assets. Town centres nationwide are having to adapt and change to dramatic changes in retail and many towns in the north-west have future strategies for their town centres, or are underway in preparing one (e.g. Preston, Wigan, Oldham, Warrington).



St Helens Town Centre

ST HELENS CURRENT TOWN CENTRE POSITION

- 1.8 A transformational solution is required to re-position and 'shrink and link' the town centre to become an attractive destination with a varied offer of retail, leisure and culture – particularly for families, to quickly reverse a declining trend and find the basis for a more sustainable future.
- 1.9 St Helens town centre faces a number of challenges:
- **Not seen by residents as their main shopping destination** – Only 48% of St Helens primary catchment area regard St Helens town centre as their main shopping centre, which is considered similar to that of an 'Average Weak Town' based on comparison surveys of similar national retail centres (PROMIS, CBRE 2016). The estimated shopping population of St Helens is 105,000, ranking the town 132 (out of 200) of the PROMIS (Promis centres, are those centres which are reviewed by the company Property Market Analysis), meanwhile Wigan and Warrington rank 85 and 75 respectively. The shopping population is an estimate of the number of people who regard the town as their main shopping centre. St Helens has fallen away notably over recent years
 - **Faces significant competition** – The town centre faces significant competition from at least four major destination shopping centres which are within easy reach; Manchester central and Liverpool (4th and 5th Top retail centres – ranking on comparison spend, Experian) and the Trafford centre (9th retail centre with the strongest market potential in the UK, Experian). St Helens faces above average competition from competing town centres and out of town retail centres and ranks 190 (out of 200) nationally in terms of the competition indicator. The Competition Indicator is a measure of the total retail score of competing towns and cities and out of town shopping centres within given drive times for each centre relative to the retail scope of that centre. The ranking therefore shows a very high level of competition
 - **Low quality and diversity** – The town centre is considered to have a lower than average quality and diversity of retail offer, with in particular, an identified lack of anchor stores and restaurants/cafes (PROMIS, CBRE, 2016)
 - **Dated infrastructure / feel** – The town centre has a fragmented urban fabric and is negatively perceived by residents, businesses and visitors. The retail core of St Helens has not had levels of investment similar to that of adjacent town centres and is regarded less modern, therefore negatively perceived by residents, business and visitors

- **Disjointed / no natural walk way** - The street-plan of the town centre is not easy to navigate and there is no clear main high street and poor connectivity between the different squares such as Victoria Square, Church Square and sites such as the large open space within the St Helens College / University Centre St Helens Campus. There are also no clear linkages between major transport arrival points – such as St Helens Central train station, and the major assets of the town centre
- **Lack of a (diverse) night time economy** - There is a strong focus on 'vertical' drinking catering for a narrow market of users within the town centre. There is a real lack of a family orientated evening offer, particularly from national chain restaurants, and little association between a possible evening economy offer and what is seen as an often strong cultural offer in the town
- **An oversupply of car parking** - There are a number of underused multi-storey car parks in prime locations and a poor parking management strategy overall. The car parks tend to dominate what could be key locations within the town centre without adding to or supporting any wider ambition

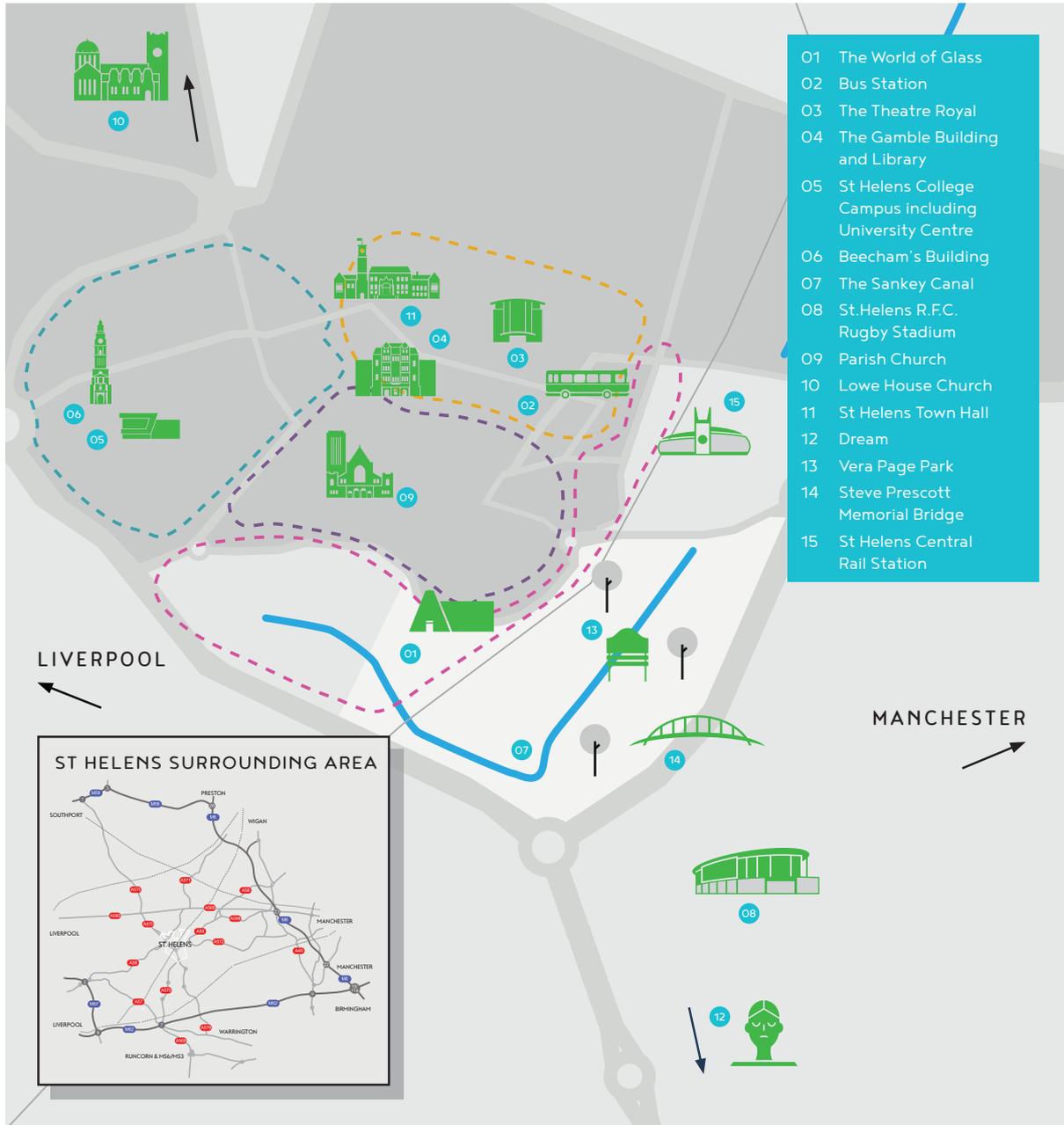
However, St Helens town centre does have a number of assets and strengths that could provide substantial opportunities if brought forward/maximised:

- **Investment opportunities** - Strong regeneration interest from the council, the potential for the council to act as an investor, and a strong political willingness to enable change. The borough has shown it has the capability to pull in inward investment and has strong relationships with private investors. For example, St Helens first public-private partnership, Ravenhead Renaissance, as well as the borough's many housing and infrastructure providers
- **Strong cultural offer** - A number of established arts and cultural organisations offering a range of cultural and visitor activities. The arts and cultural offer of St Helens is receiving national recognition and provides an opportunity for the town to develop an alternative destination offer to retail or to that of other competitor towns
- **Strong 'loyalty' and pride in the town** - St Helens residents remain very proud of the borough and are very loyal in terms of wanting to see the town do well
- **Strong local public transport network** - St Helens Central has a large station for the size of service and provides connections currently to Liverpool and on to Wigan and Preston. From 2018 new franchise arrangements will provide connectivity to additional cities in Scotland and the North of England with St Helens acting as the first station stop out of Liverpool. This increased connectivity is an opportunity to be grasped. St Helens has multi modal access, sufficient car parking good public transport routes via bus
- **Location** - St Helens is well-located in terms of road connections. It has a prime position on the national motorway network and rail network, is less than 30 minutes from the Port of Liverpool, 40 minutes from Manchester and has a market of over 35 million people within just a few hours drive. The borough has a strategic position at the heart of the North West with the M6, M62, M58 and A580 all passing through the borough. Approximately 35 million people live within a 4 hour drive of the town
- **Modern town centre education campus** - St Helens College and University Centre St Helens has a modern campus environment and considerable student numbers right in the centre of the town centre. It's one of the largest further and higher education providers in the North West, with a proven track record of providing quality education since 1896. It provides courses and training to around 8,000 students.

INTRODUCTION TO THE TOWN CENTRE QUARTERS

1.10 The town centre is divided into distinct quarters, defined by their characteristics. Within the town centre boundary the following quarters have been identified:

- Civic and Heritage Quarter
- Shopping Quarter
- Educational Quarter
- Growth Quarter.



Key to show which colour applies to which quarter:

- - - Growth Quarter
- - - Shopping Quarter
- - - Civic & Heritage Quarter
- - - Education Quarter

CIVIC AND HERITAGE QUARTER

- 1.11 This quarter, located in the northern part of the town centre, is structured around the historic civic and council office buildings that serve the borough's community.
- 1.12 The quarter contains historic Grade II listed buildings, locally listed buildings / neighbourhoods, such as George Street Conservation Area, and civic open space to the Town Hall (surrounding the Victoria Memorial).
- 1.13 The quarter contains various buildings that have a cultural or educational purpose/ activity and there are numerous small businesses that trade within this area. The quarter is a mixed-use area, including commercial, retail, restaurant, etc. In general, the quarter consists of a high quality, extensively pedestrianised public realm.
- 1.14 This strategy recognises that the collection of historic buildings, civic function and high-quality public realm within this quarter have a collective identity to form a Civic and Heritage Quarter.

SHOPPING QUARTER

- 1.15 This quarter, located at the core of the town centre, consists of Church Square and Hardshaw Centre (with internalised shopping malls) interspersed alongside one of the historic town centre's main high street, Church Street. These centres are each served by individual multi-storey car parking.
- 1.16 Central to this quarter is St Helens Parish Church, a Grade II listed building with buttresses and a bell tower forming the most significant building to the town centre square.
- 1.17 The public realm is highly fragmented and pedestrian/ shopping legibility poor due to the internal malls, snickets and pedestrianised streets.
- 1.18 The quarter is well served by bus public transport on its periphery and the town centre bus station (which is currently disconnected from the central point of the main retail destination).
- 1.19 This strategy recognises that this area has all the required components in terms of retail / commercial / leisure activity, public transport accessibility, and urban structure to form the Primary Shopping Area.

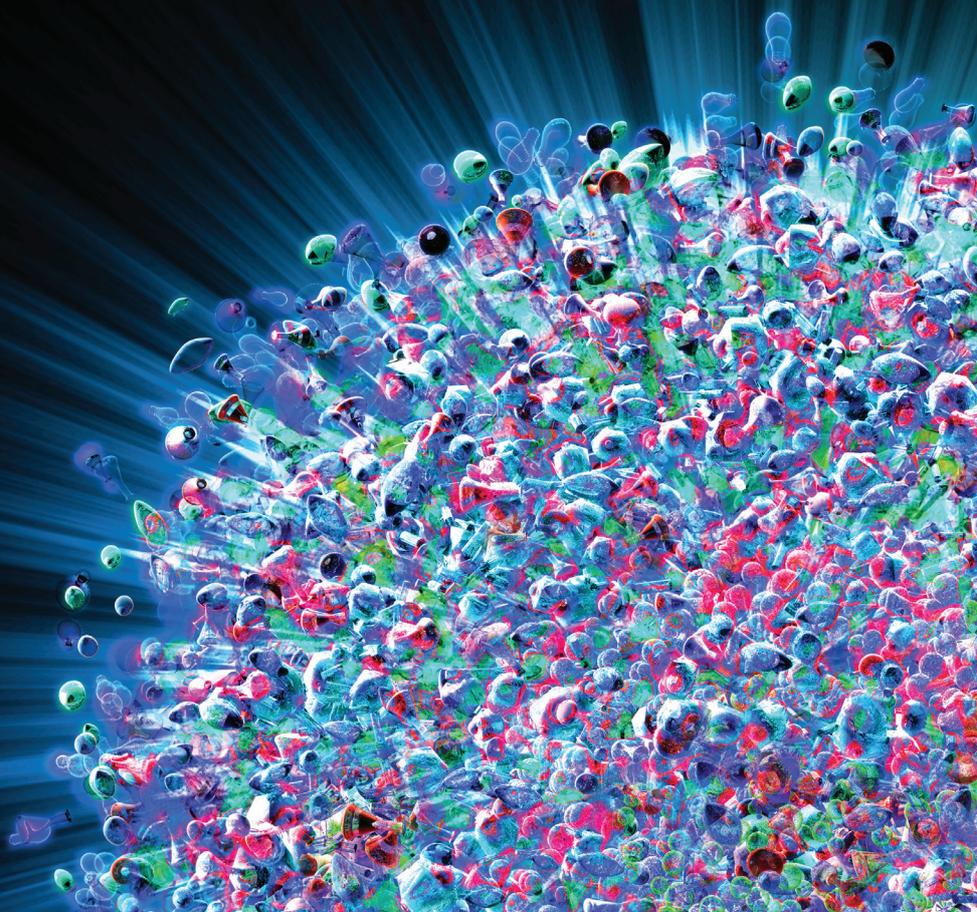
EDUCATIONAL QUARTER

- 1.20 This quarter, located in the west of the town centre, is enclosed to the west and south by the A58 Linkway ring road forming the town centre boundary.
- 1.21 At the centre of the quarter is St Helens College and University Centre St Helens, a modern building with extensive campus-like courtyard, surrounded by a mixed-use environment of building styles and activity. Both Westfield Street and Bridge Street form traditional High Streets well served by public transport.
- 1.22 There are numerous surface car parks abutting the A58 within this quarter that have the potential for development and create a stronger visual 'edge' to the town centre.
- 1.23 The legibility and functionality of the pedestrian public realm/ public open space linking into the adjacent quarters has potential for improvement, while linkages from the Educational and Housing Quarter to Duke Street, (west - towards Asda) are poor.
- 1.24 This strategy recognises much could be made of creating a quarter identity around the college / university built environment to create an enlarge 'campus' feel to this part of the town centre. This quarter is also beginning to see the provision of smaller-scale housing provision, particularly above retail units.

GROWTH QUARTER

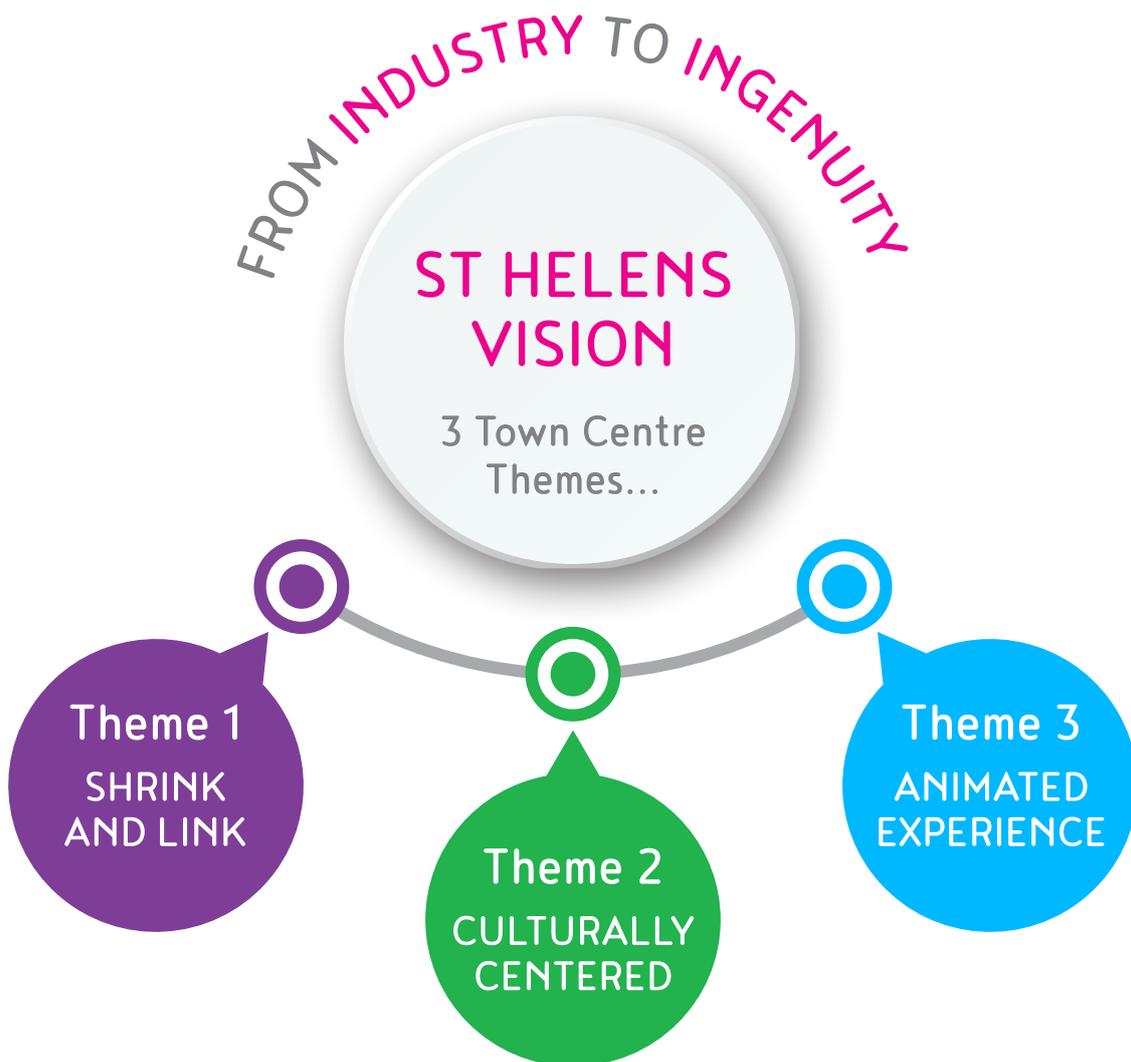
- 1.25 There are two parts of this quarter, one is located to the south of the Primary Shopping Area and is enclosed by the ring road (to the south) and railway line (to the east). The second part of the quarter is the area surrounding the train station.
- 1.26 In general this area comprises large, mono-functional buildings with very limited public realm walkways and floor animation - there are stand-alone buildings surrounded by surface or multi-storey car parking.
- 1.27 Lost within this quarter are the glass museum, the historic canal, and the railway station, all of which could be used to re-structure this quarter into a more pedestrian-legible environment.
- 1.28 The current station area has the potential to create a town centre modal interchange (train, bus and taxi) for St Helens.
- 1.29 This quarter has extensive potential for development / re-development to create a new retail and leisure quarter for St Helens structured around a new public realm hierarchy with links into the Primary Shopping Quarter.

2.0 THE VISION



THE VISION - FROM INDUSTRY TO INGENUITY

- 2.1 The Town Centre Strategy creates a shared vision and action plan so that the wider public, private sector and stakeholder community can all unite and share in order to change perceptions and create a sense of purpose and direction for the town.
- 2.2 In order to improve the area, residents felt the focus of the town centre should be on:
- Public realm and appearance
 - Retail
 - Quality of bars, cafes and restaurants
 - Investment and growth areas
 - Canal regeneration
 - Entertainment
 - Arts and Culture
 - Digital hub
- 2.3 Building on St Helens' unique heritage of invention, innovation, connectivity and its strong sense of community, the Town Centre Strategy proposes to rejuvenate the town centre into a modern, vibrant and desirable location. The strategy recognises that the town's key cultural and heritage assets, digital advancements and connectivity are all key opportunities to be embraced in order to set out a plan for the future, whilst acknowledging St Helens' innovative past. These ingredients, together with an expanding knowledge economy, will help forge the new vision for the town centre.



THEME 1 – SHRINK AND LINK

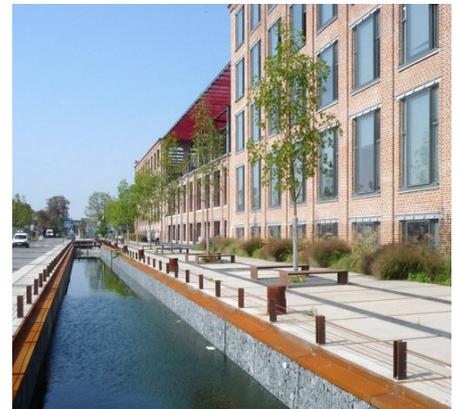
2.4 Earlier sections of the Town Centre Strategy identified that the majority of the key assets within the town centre are currently located on the periphery of the town centre boundary. The strategy strives to capture these key assets and cluster where appropriate to promote St Helens. It is integral that we use assets to celebrate St Helens and link them to other assets to get extra value. Set out below are a number of key objectives associated with this theme:

- Improving the use of existing assets through consolidating retail and cultural activity within the town centre to create quarters, that offer a concentrated, easy and accessible and sustainable offer
- Church Square has the potential to act as a catalyst to drive shoppers back into the town centre and put St Helens town centre on the map. Major development activity will take place within the Shopping Quarter. The Square may require the reconfiguration and / or redevelopment of existing land and premises, subject to securing agreements with landowners
- Using St Helens Central train station as a gateway to the town and locating car parks in strategic locations, creating an accessible and legible town centre
- Improving the leisure offer in the town centre and diversify the night time economy to meet family needs
- Using the canal as a multi-functional asset for the town through providing a corridor of water infrastructure, integrating canal-side developments and improving the canal as a key pedestrian and cycle route for recreation purposes
- Providing modern living environments, focusing on high quality, higher density and well-designed housing around key transport nodes of the town centre
- Use the Growth Quarter as an arc of opportunity to enhance the vitality and viability of St Helens town centre and its role as a sub-regional shopping centre
- Improve signage and wayfinding within the town centre, which will be an essential programme to connect the assets on the periphery of the town centre and improve the navigability into the Growth Quarter.

Best practice examples of canal side developments



Broadway Malyan, 1 Gunwharf Quays, Portsmouth, UK



Atelier des Paysages, Haute Deule River Banks, Lille, France



Chapman Taylor, St Marks Lincoln, Lincoln, UK



Haskoll, The Oracle, Reading, UK



OKRA, Catharina Amalia Park, Apeldoorn, Netherlands

THEME 2 - CULTURALLY CENTERED

2.5 Becoming a town centre recognised for being culturally centered is a key objective of the Town Centre Strategy. Many of the assets and organisations within St Helens celebrate and preserve the town's intangible heritage, industries and communities while also exploring how culture and the arts can make a contribution to creating a new identity for St Helens. However, it is now necessary to re-think how St Helens town centre can re-position itself through using key assets and its cultural organisations to become a culturally centered town. St Helens has developed a strong reputation for arts and cultural practice, which forms a strong basis to attractive people into the town centre. This will be achieved through the following strategic objectives:

- Consolidate the cultural organisations within the town centre in one accessible location to maximise and strengthen St Helens cultural offer through critical mass. This will create a strong leisure and family entertainment offer by the canal
- Identifying areas for displays of art, creativity and innovation via modern delivery, for example through the digital medium
- Strengthening links with Manchester and Liverpool arts venues as well as linking to nearby cultural activities, such as Shakespeare of the North
- Creating a stronger link with DREAM within the town centre
- Showcasing cultural events / shows in the new market.

Best practice examples of cultural centers



Zaha Hadid, Riverside Museum, Glasgow, UK



Daniel Buren, MUDAM, Luxemburg City, Luxemburg



David Chipperfield, River and Rowing Museum, Henley, UK



Rafael Moneo, Museum of Art and Architecture, Stockholm, Sweden

THEME 3 - ANIMATED EXPERIENCE

2.6 Creating an attractive and animated town centre is increasingly important to increase visitor 'dwell' time, attract local residents to the town centre and retain key businesses, as well as attract new investment. Below is a summary of strategic objectives, linking to the cultural and heritage assets, which will animate the town centre:

- Ensure that there is a wide range of regular events taking place over the year within the town centre, bringing in a rich mix of culture, arts and creativity during the day and evening
- Provide a safe, clean, vibrant and desirable place to live, work and visit – bringing life back into the town centre through planned proactive enforcement activity
- Celebrate the town centre's rich heritage and architecture through making better use of the architectural backdrop and encouraging high quality development
- Driving economic prosperity within the town centre through supporting enterprise, start-ups and local businesses within the town centre
- Improve the public realm in order to create an improved place for both residents and visitors to spend time and enjoy
- Improve the flow of pedestrian walk ways and link up key assets within the centre. Within the town centre, attractive and accessible routes must flow into key areas, for example the canal must be easily accessible from the growth quarter:

Best practice examples of street lighting



GCC Boardwalk, Cannes, France



FAY Seafront Light Columns, Hastings, UK



Morpho Logic, Lucky Light, Regensburg, Germany

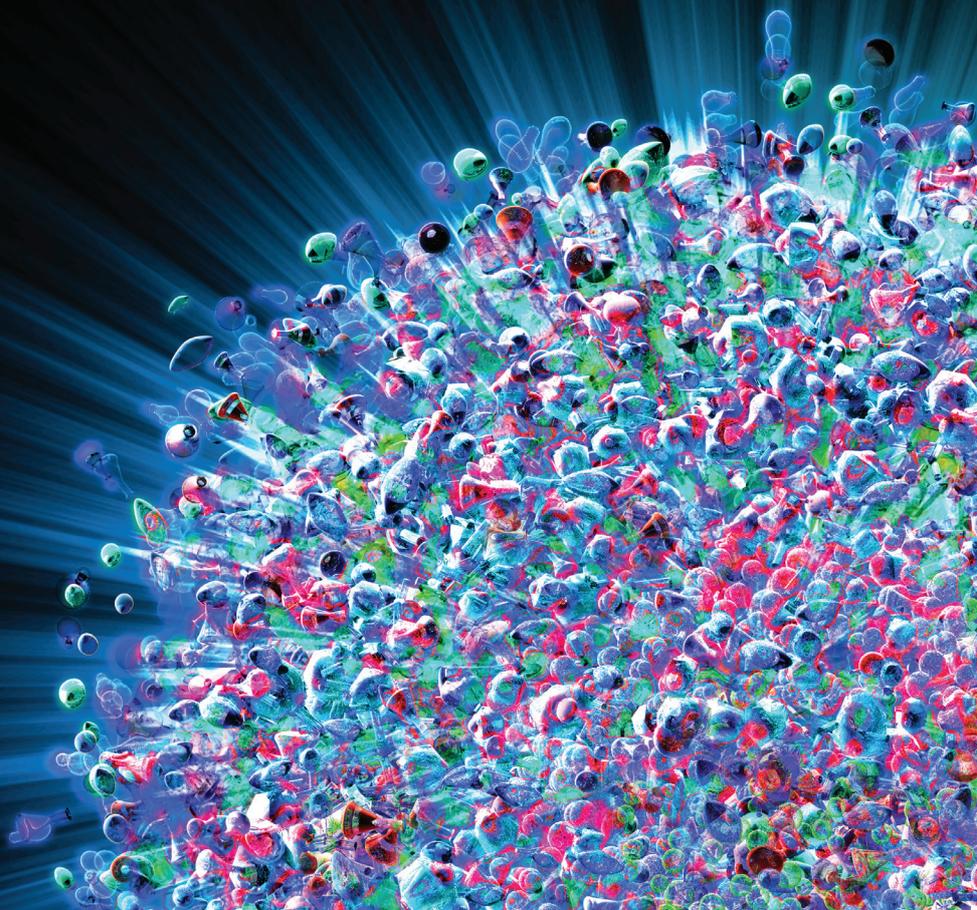


Landwork Studio, Macallen Building, Boston, Massachusetts



SDISF, Landscape Seating, San Francisco, California

3.0 THE PROJECTS



THEME 1: 'SHRINK AND LINK'

NEW URBAN FORM

- 3.1 The redevelopment of Church Square and the Hardshaw centre should be explored to provide a mixed use retail-leisure development to provide a new offer within the town centre. The three anchors proposed are:
- A Retail Anchor
 - A Leisure Anchor and a St Helens Art and Culture Centre
 - An Ambition Centre and Youth Zone
- 3.2 The redevelopment of the Church Square area intends to strengthen the position of St Helens as a retail and visitor destination and reverse the trend in its decline in the retail rankings. The design of any proposed new development must integrate with adjoining land uses and the established retail offer, whilst adding diversity and choice to its current offer. The redevelopment of Church Square should provide and open up pedestrian links to assets on the periphery of the town centre, such as the Stadium and the canal / growth quarter.
- 3.3 The Retail Study (2012) highlights Church Square as a target area for the town centre. The town centre offer is currently missing a higher order representation and therefore proposals should be supportive of larger floor plates (to accommodate the demand of retailers) and an anchor leisure opportunity to attract a strong food and beverage offer. The proposed offer of the town centre and the development of a diverse and vibrant night time economy will attract families back into the town centre.
- 3.4 The town centre strategy also proposes to relocate and consolidate service providers into an Ambition Centre and Youth Zone which will be located at the heart of the town centre.
- 3.5 Linking to the annual events programme, holding participatory artistic performances in Church Square would help create a linkage between the street and the interior of the building. The quality of offer of retail provision will be improved through inward investment and a strong public realm and wayfinding strategy.
- 3.6 The town centre has an excellent canal which is currently underutilised. The canal needs to be opened up, particularly around the 'Growth Quarter' in order to present opportunities and encourage recreational uses along the waterfront. The unique water front could promote the cultural offer of the town centre, building on the location of the World of Glass by the canal.
- 3.7 Transforming St. Mary's Market into a diverse demographic back into the town centre which will add vitality to the town centre. Consultation with the market traders to ensure they are suitably located, including those traders which are currently trading on the high street will be key to the delivery of this project.

Best practice examples of shopfronts



Klein Dytham, Uniqlo Ginza, Tokyo, Japan



Chalmers University of Technology, Campus, Gothenburg, Sweden



GCC, Corstorphine+Wright, Farnham, UK



Leslie Jones, Hereford Old Market, Hereford, UK



Mixed use Retail, St Austell, Cornwall, UK



3dReid, Primark, Newcastle, UK

Best practice examples of markets



Josep M. i Vila, La Boqueria, Barcelona, Spain



Fermin Vazquez, Encants Vells Flea Market, Barcelona, Spain



Snohetta, James Beard Public Market, Portland, Oregon, USA

RESIDENTIAL

- 3.8 There are a number of underused and vacant sites located around the town centre boundary, including Birchley Street car park and land surrounding St Helens Central (train station) which are appropriate for mixed-use-residential development. The One Public Estate funding to masterplan Birchley Street car park will revitalise an underused area of land to the north-west of the town centre. Meanwhile, this strategy strongly supports proposals for residential development along the canal and on land surrounding St Helens Central station. Higher density housing will attract more young professionals and families into the town centre.
- 3.9 These new residents will further increase the footfall in the town centre, creating a need for shops to service and support new leisure and entertainment investment.

TRAIN STATION

- 3.10 St Helens Central station provides another development opportunity for the town centre and with improved rail services, including a direct service to Glasgow, there will be increased use of the station and improved accessibility to the town centre. Currently, to access St Helens town centre from Manchester by rail either involves changing at Wigan or Huyton, or using a rail service from stations in the south of the borough and changing on a bus service. There is scope in the long-term to reopen the disused line between St Helens Town Centre and St Helens Junction to allow direct services towards Warrington, Manchester and beyond as part of wider Transport for the North aspirations. This would improve accessibility to and from St Helens Town Centre by sustainable and environmental transport and increase the economic viability and development potential for not only St Helens Town Centre but other locations along the route

CAR PARKING

- 3.11 There are currently four main car parks that serve the town centre, but they provide a poor first impression, and are largely underused. Some of them occupy key locations where regeneration and fresh development could take place, such as Chalon Way.
- 3.12 A separate review of car parks needs to be undertaken to assess how much will be needed, the right location for them and the requirement for resident parking within the town centre if more housing is developed.

DIGITAL

- 3.13 Digital technology is key for the future knowledge economy and the creation of a 'cluster' of digital and creative companies will create a distinct presence within St Helens. Flexible office space, targeted at encouraging local enterprise and providing necessary grow-on space for local firms should be encouraged near to key transport nodes.

THEME 2: CULTURALLY CENTERED CANAL SIDE

- 3.14 Proposals for the future of the town centre will place the canal as the cultural anchor of the town centre and form part of a new retail and leisure redevelopment anchor project located within the Growth Quarter.
- 3.15 The current cultural and museum offer within St Helens is highly fragmented and its collective visual identity and pedestrian legibility is poor. The various cultural and museum destinations around the town centre should be consolidated into infrastructure by the Canal to create a cultural hub, providing an internationally recognised Centre of Arts and Culture. The Growth Quarter should aspire to become a One Stop visitor information centre located to maximise access and exposure to commercial footfall / arrival.
- 3.16 A review of stronger visual linkages and pedestrian legibility between this proposed cultural hub and St Helens Parish Church, (which is the focus of the Shopping Quarter) and St Helens Central Train Station, should be undertaken.

CIVIC AND HERITAGE BUILDINGS

- 3.17 Potential for Victoria Square to become a venue for regular, private and publicly organised events, festivals, markets, etc. to create a civic heart within the town, linked to retail and leisure facilities within the Shopping Quarter.
- 3.18 Review of possible commercial opportunities for St Helens Town Hall, due to its impressive Victorian interior. Any assessment of the future use of the town hall would be undertaken in conjunction with a review of its long term function and use of surrounding buildings.
- 3.19 A strategy to encourage digital and creative companies to locate in the town, preferably within the George Street area where flexible office space can be accommodated, in an attractive terraced setting close to key transport hubs.
- 3.20 The George Street area is an untapped asset that the town centre possesses. Located by the train centre and in an attractive terraced setting, it offers the perfect environment for the growth of independent business, particularly those in the digital and creative sectors. The investment that the area attracted in the recent past was designed to promote this idea. However, it has not had the focus it once did.

HERITAGE OF GLASS AND INGENUITY

- 3.21 St Helens town centre is surrounded by numerous industrial buildings which have historic, building merit, such as the industrial smoke stacks, canal etc. Furthermore, through the idea of ingenuity, the council should explore how newer or future buildings could be designed or / and used to express this idea and form part of the town's changing story.
- 3.22 St Helens has a proud economic and cultural heritage based on industrial manufacturing, invention and ingenuity. Globally identifiable names such as Beecham's, Gamble, Smurfit and Pilkington's can all trace their origins to the borough.
- 3.23 St Helens glass heritage should be embraced and placed at the core of any re-positioning and place-vision for the town centre. It is something that St Helens has a global renown for and helps define its special identity. It should seek to maximise the identity and commercial opportunities out of its historic role and become a world renowned global centre for glass production, which plays well with the overarching vision of 'industry to ingenuity'. As such, the identity of 'glass' should become an important aspect of the town's identity and living heritage.
- 3.24 The potential for a European festival of glass should be explored, potentially coupled with European towns with a similar unique heritage. This festival should have a central theme, which could then include associated ideas. St Helens could build on twinning with Chalon-Sur-Saone and Stuttgart to deliver glass-themed artworks installation proposals (e.g. exchange of glass art work) in 2018, which should be linked to St Helens 150 years anniversary in 2018.
- 3.25 Glass should be incorporated with the design of the town centre, through innovative glass solutions, wayfinding strategies, specific commissioned art installations, through new innovative approaches to street lighting and the lighting up of key buildings and spaces, or even to new street treatments incorporating glass. Through glass the town centre can be radically transformed.

CULTURAL LINKS

DREAM

- 3.26 The iconic 20-metre high internationally significant artwork by artist Jaume Plensa is a significant statement for St Helens. Despite being a significant piece of iconic artwork, DREAM has never really captured the imagination to the same extent as Angel of the North has, yet it is an asset and much more can be done to promote it as a central feature of the St Helens brand and identity. This would include further commissioned works in the town centre, and even linking into other installations from artists working with glass throughout the world. Through the Dream sculpture, there is an opportunity to build a long term vision for a visitor experience in St Helens by joining up with the town centre.

VACANT GROUND FLOOR UNITS

- 3.27 Vacant units should be brought back into use as part of a celebration of glass and art in St Helens. Efforts should be made to work with landlords, local artists, art colleges, universities and museums in Liverpool and Manchester, through exhibiting works that are archived in Manchester / Liverpool, to showcase art with a St Helens connection.

TOWN CENTRE WRAPS

- 3.28 In an increasingly digital IT world, first impressions are critical and powerful. St Helens needs to announce that it is changing and needs to create a branding and strong identity. Suitable locations for hoardings near to key areas (i.e. graffiti piece / murals / St Helens branding / digital hoardings) should be identified to create an attractive and striking addition to the town centre, adding character and vibrancy.
- 3.29 A bold investment programme demands bold statements of intent being well publicised and promoted throughout the town centre and the redevelopment programme for the town centre. Wraps signalling the plan for the town centre will animate spaces. Meanwhile, greater signage and navigation can help install a greater degree of confidence amongst visitors, shoppers, and residents that major investment is signalled and underway.

THEME 3: ANIMATED EXPERIENCE

SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESS

- 3.30 As part of the approach to develop the experience and promotion of St Helens, it is suggested that businesses are asked to sign up to create a Business Improvement District (BID). This would generate an income stream that could be used to develop, manage and promote the newly defined town centre experience. The income could fund an events programme, festivals, art installations, street theatre etc. as well as management to look after these key events and activities. The BID would also be another important part of engaging more businesses in developing and promoting St Helens and bringing life to the town and borough's new defined narrative. This would also be a natural extension of creating 'place led' governance, leadership and stakeholders in the town centre and beyond whilst generating greater pride in St Helens.
- 3.31 Working within the context of the BID, specifically selected stakeholders will be involved in devising a series of activities and interventions examining innovative and productive options for sustainable uses of unoccupied, under-utilised, buildings and mismanaged spaces / places to provide support for increasing the number of independent businesses that are thriving in the town centre. Design options around selective acquisition, remodelling, creating spaces and places that work for independent businesses will be explored under a development brief for the two areas.

PUBLIC REALM AND WAYFINDING STRATEGY

- 3.32 The town centre's public realm has evolved over time, with the gradual pedestrianisation of streets and introduction of paving and street furniture. The public realm is highly fragmented and the visual / environmental links to all heritage and cultural destinations within the town centre is not evident.
- 3.33 The spaces between buildings are often the most important consideration in the regeneration of town centres. For St Helens, whilst there are several examples of some quality public realm which has been implemented over the years, the new approach to public realm will be focused and targeted on key areas of the town centre ensuring that the look and feel of the town centre makes it look to all as one complete network of interesting and fun connected spaces and places. The choice of materials will be a key difference in terms of what has gone before. In line with the celebration of glass new materials and lighting will come to the fore, replacing the darker, greyer palette of the current town centre.
- 3.34 The Public Realm and Wayfinding Strategy will directly link to the town's heritage and industrial past and align with the vision of the town centre: 'From Industry to Ingenuity'. The number of active frontages around key squares within the town centre should be included in a comprehensive strategy. Architectural signage to help visitors and residents navigate from the assets on the periphery, including the canal is key.

ANNUAL EVENTS PROGRAMME

- 3.35 An annual events programme for public squares and pop-up independent businesses should form the backbone of the town centre animation. Setting up a temporary stage in the square, under a proposed new canopy could help support its use for artistic events like street theatre, comedy, choir performances, public speeches or folk dancing etc. Treasure hunts / orienteering challenges around the historical heritage of the town could also be offered to schools and families. Additionally, St Helens should also build on its links with nearby cultural events through fringe events, such as Shakespeare of the North in Prescot.
- 3.36 Key themes could include historical (i.e. glass and industrial past of St Helen's), artistic (i.e. a musical picture of the town) or political. St Helens town centre should build on the transformation of the borough, including assets such as the new Saints stadium 'Langtree Park', Haydock Park Racecourse, and should tie these into the annual events programme to build on that link.

Best practice examples of public realm



Insitu Architects, Pavement / Seating, Saint Flour, France



T. Andersson, Boras Textile Fashion Centre, Boras, Sweden



Thomas Heatherwick Blue Carpet, Newcastle, UK



Sant en Co, Pavement, Amersfoort, Netherlands



EPA Arch, Town Hall Square, Solingen, Germany



EPA Arch, Town Hall Square, Solingen, Germany

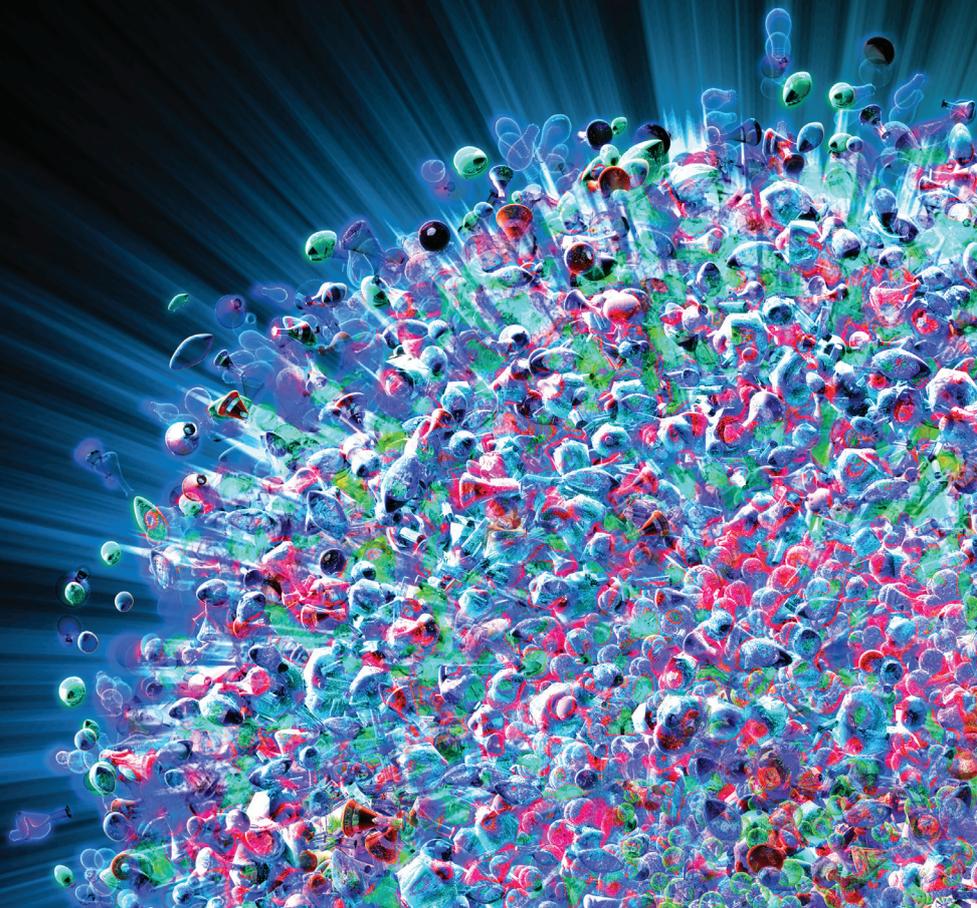


Fermin Vazquez Arch, Plaza del Torico, Teruel, Spain



Bureau B+B, Mariahilferstrasse, Vienna, Austria

4.0 DELIVERY



HOW WE WILL DELIVER

4.1 Key to the success and delivery of the town centre strategy is 'how' we deliver the vision and meet the objectives set out above. This chapter is intended to explain the anticipated programme. The town centre strategy is a 10 year vision, which will deliver a key step change in 2018:

2018

Celebration Programme, Public Realm,
Wayfinding & signage, Victoria Square

2020

St Helens Arts and Culture Centre, BID,
Improved links with DREAM

2022

Shopping Quarter, Canal-side regeneration.
Ambition Centre & Youth Zone

2024

Ongoing development

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