



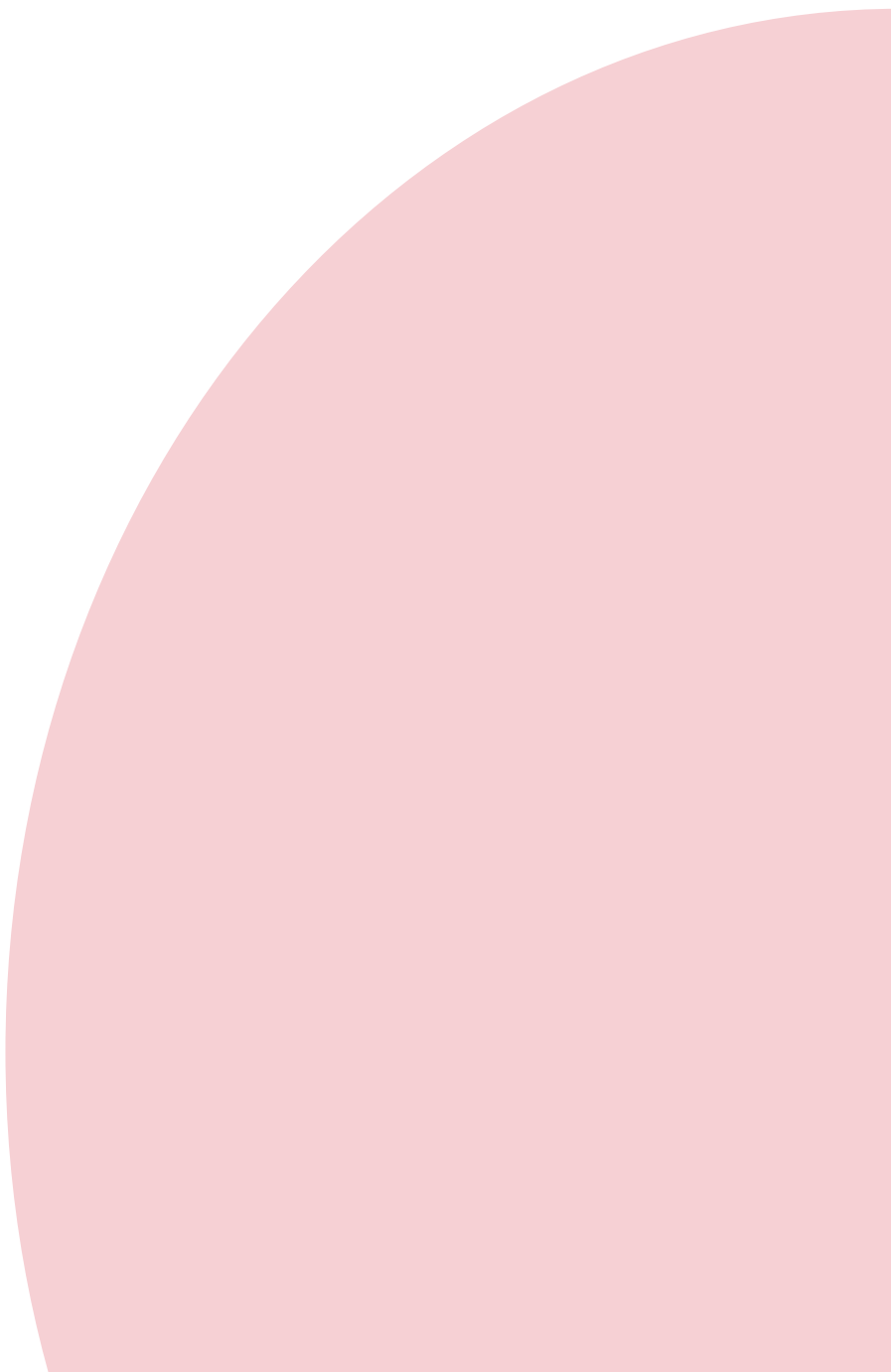
Conservation Area Appraisal  
**George Street**  
2010





# Contents

<b>Page</b>		
<b>1</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>Introduction</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>Planning Policy Context</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>3.0</b>	<b>Location and Setting</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>4.0</b>	<b>Historical Background</b>
<b>14</b>	<b>5.0</b>	<b>Spatial Analysis</b>
<b>20</b>	<b>6.0</b>	<b>Character Area Analysis</b>
<b>34</b>	<b>7.0</b>	<b>Extent of Loss, Intrusion or Damage</b>
<b>37</b>	<b>8.0</b>	<b>Community Involvement</b>
<b>38</b>	<b>9.0</b>	<b>Boundary Changes</b>
<b>43</b>	<b>10.0</b>	<b>Summary of Key Character</b>
<b>46</b>	<b>11.0</b>	<b>Issues</b>
<b>49</b>		<b>References</b>



# 1.0 Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

The George Street Quarter in St Helens covers approximately 6 hectares and consists of in excess of 70 buildings, many of which are of distinctive architectural vernacular and high townscape qualities. The high number of quality buildings within such a small area provide the largest concentration of historic townscape within St Helens Town Centre.

In recognition to the value placed on its special qualities, a large portion of this historic quarter was declared a Conservation Area in 2000. This was with the desire to conserve and enhance its built fabric.

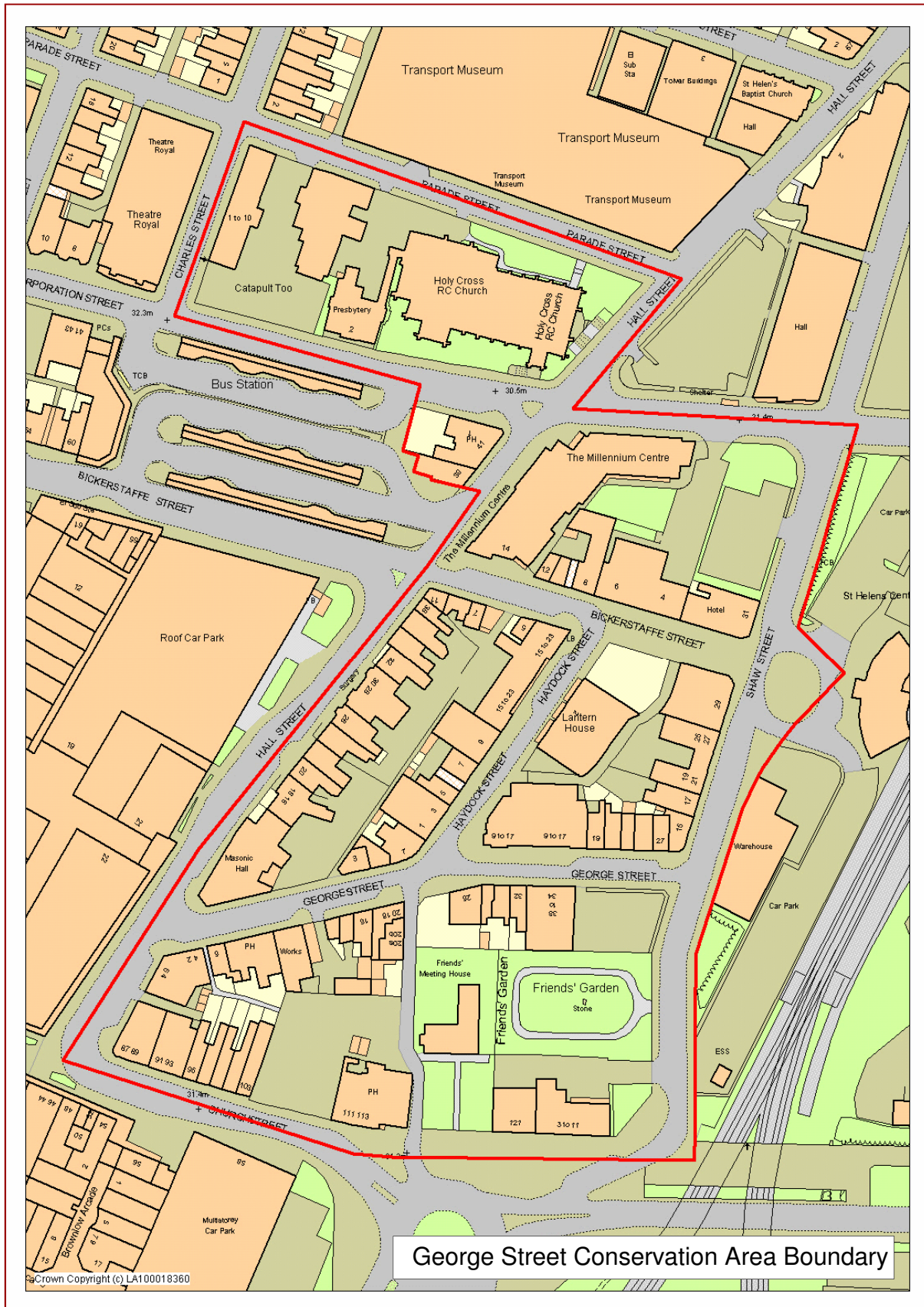
## 1.2 What Does Conservation Area Status Mean?

A conservation area is an area of special architectural or historic interest, which is considered worthy of special attention, protection and improvement (DoE, 1990). Rather than individual buildings, it is a combination of buildings, street pattern, trees, open spaces and other features that give a conservation area its distinct character.

Within the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, the local authority has powers that enable it to control development, which could otherwise damage the area's character and appearance. The purpose of a conservation area designation is however not to prevent change but to manage it in the interests of the existing character of the area.

Designation is not an end in itself. Designation requires that the local authority formulate and publish proposals for their preservation and enhancement. It is recommended that the council along with the other interest groups and residents should be aware of those elements that contribute to a conservation area's uniqueness (EH, 2006). In addition, local residents and property owners also have a major role to play by ensuring that properties are regularly maintained and original features are retained. Further to clarifying the designation of the conservation area, this appraisal is intended to highlight these elements.





George Street Conservation Area Boundary

### 1.3 Purpose of Appraisal

This appraisal is aimed at:

- Identifying, defining and analysing those factors that make the George Street an area of special interest;
- Providing property owners and potential developers with clear guidance on planning matters and the types of development likely to be acceptable within the conservation area; and,
- As a material consideration, providing the Council with the basis for dealing with applications for development, where applicants need to demonstrate how their proposals take account of the essential character of the conservation area.

Beyond their use as planning tools, appraisals have a much wider application. It could also serve as a useful educational and informative document for the local community.

This appraisal has been undertaken in accordance with current English Heritage guidance (2006) and represents a factual and objective analysis of the conservation area. It has involved:

- A thorough survey and visual appraisal of the area within and beyond the existing conservation area boundary.
- A desktop study including reference to previously published studies for the area, archive material, aerial photographs, relevant national and local policies and liaison with relevant organisations.
- An analysis and evaluation of the information gathered, identifying key issues for consultation purposes.

# 2.0 Planning Policy Content

## 2.1 Planning legislation

In general, the process of designation and review of conservation areas in England has been influenced by two Acts:

### i) The Civic Amenities Act 1967

This is the first legislation, providing Local Authorities the power to designate, areas that they considered to be 'special', as conservation areas.

### ii) The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 – “The Act”

'The Act' consolidated the powers provided by the Civic Amenities Act. Areas of 'the Act' concerning the designation and review of conservation areas are covered under sections 69 and 71 respectively:

#### a) Section 69

Under section 69(1), The Act requires every local planning authority to:

- From time to time determine which parts of their area are areas of special architectural or historic interest the character of which is desirable to preserve and enhance; and,
- Designate those areas as conservation areas.

Under Section 69(2), the Act further places a duty on the Local Planning Authority from time to time to review the designated Conservation Areas.

This appraisal is in fulfilment of this further statutory requirement.

#### b) Section 71

Section 71 also places statutory duty on a Local Planning Authority to:

*“From time to time formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of any parts of their areas which are conservation areas.”*

This covers the preparation of management plans for the area which will be undertaken after the appraisal.

### lii) Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004

Under Section 38(6), this Act further requires a determination of planning applications to be made in accordance with provisions of the development plan, unless material consid-



erations indicate otherwise. It is further advised:

*“A clear definition of those elements, which contribute to the special architectural or historic interest of a place, will enable development of a robust policy framework for the future management of that area, against which the application is made”.*

Accordingly, this appraisal will be a material consideration, under the provisions of this Act.

### 2.2 Planning Guidance

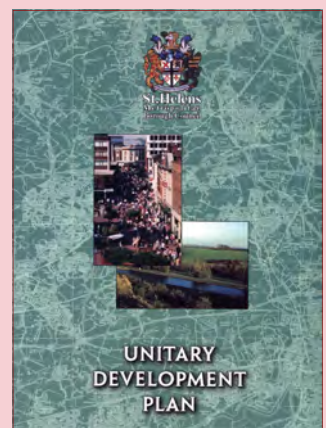
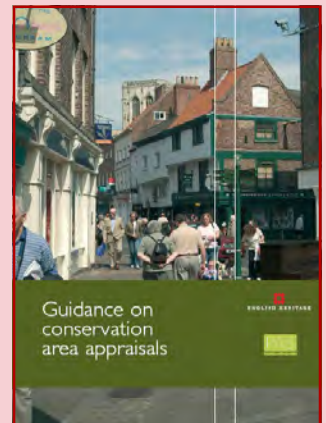
Planning Policy Guidance (PPG 15): *Planning and the Historic Environment* (1994) is the key government guidance on all development affecting historical buildings and conservation areas. Under paragraph 4.4, the PPG15 outlines some of the aspects that will form the basis for a coherent evaluation. Local Planning Authorities are required to define and record the special interest, character and appearance of all conservation areas in its area. This appraisal also follows this planning guidance.

### 2.3 English Heritage Guidance

Besides the above national guidance, English Heritage’s *Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals* (2006) also provide further guidance on conservation area appraisals. It offers a framework for the appraisal as well as suggestions on next steps after the process.

Though not specific, the following also offer a wider policy context on conservation areas:

- Regional Spatial Strategy for the Northwest (September 2008). It identifies the need to ensure active management of the region’s environmental and cultural assets.
- St Helens Unitary Development Plan (1998): Policy 24A (Designation and Review of Conservation Areas).

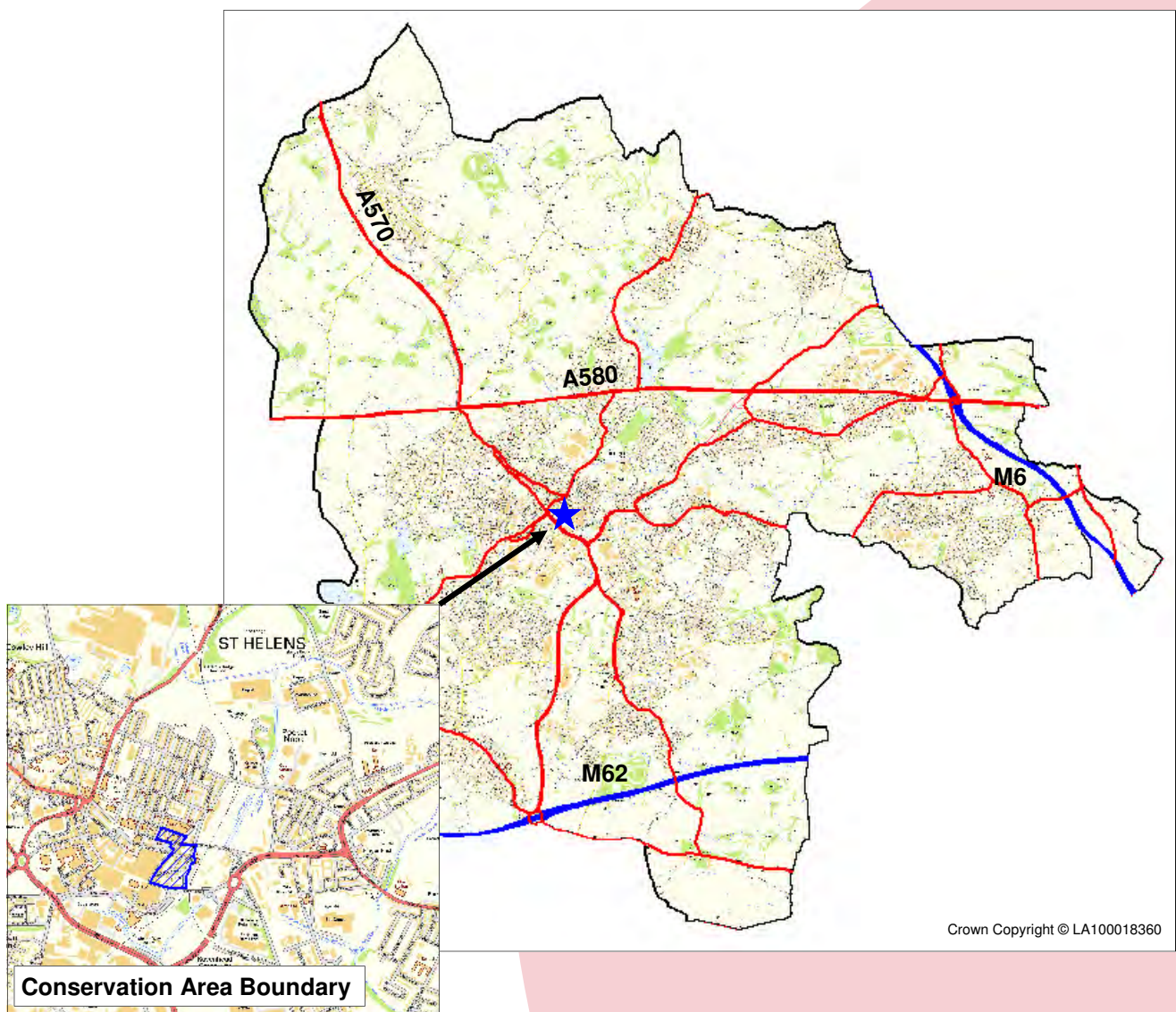


# 3.0 Location and Setting

## 3.1 Location and context

The George Street Conservation Area is on the eastern area of St Helens town centre in North West of England, approximately 12 miles east of Liverpool and 20 miles west of Manchester. To the north is Corporation Street, Hall Street to the west, Church Street to the south and Shaw Street to the east.

The conservation area is also situated between the town centre’s bus and railway stations, immediately next to the central retail spine of the town. This makes it among the first areas of St Helens that outside visitors arrive by public transport. Its link to the two transport interchanges makes it a busy pedestrian transit area.



### 3.2 General character and plan form

Located in the historical part of St Helens, the conservation area has approximately 73 properties within an area of nearly 4 hectares. Many of the properties are in commercial use, such as shops, retail outlets, public offices and offices. The Conservation Area is therefore in a wholly urban location at the traditional part of St Helens Town Centre, retaining a collection of 19th Century buildings in different styles and materials as well as the pattern of streets and passages.



The location of the conservation area within the town, the mixture of build styles and materials with strong historical links to its development, gives the conservation area a compact 'core' character.

In terms of plan form, the layout of the perimeter streets create two main blocks in a built up area.

The first block consists of the Church defined by Charles Street to the west, Parade Street to the north, Hall Street to the east and Corporation Street to the south. This block is more open with detached buildings set within a large plot.

Consisting of nearly 90% of the conservation area, the second block is bounded by the Hall Street to the west, Corporation Street to the north, Shaw Street to the east and Church Street to the south. With most properties either in form of terraces or blocks, this area has a compact plan form.

### 3.3 Landscape setting and geology

#### Landscape setting

St Helens is situated on the Lancashire plain and the Borough stands mainly at 100-150 feet above sea level (Land Use Consultants, 2006). It however rises westwards towards Rainhill and Prescot with a maximum elevation of just over 275 feet.

The town is landlocked with Mill Brook/Windle Brook running through it to Eccleston and connecting with the (disused) St Helens Branch Canal Section of the Sankey Canal in the town centre. This makes the area being on the immediate gentle slopes of broad low lying valley, giving a sense of containment and enclosure to the landscape.

### Geology

The soil is a mixture of clay, shales and marl on sandstone with extensive coal seams and other valuable mineral deposits. The resultant glass and copper industries and coal-fields turned St Helens into an important industrial town in Merseyside.

### **ESSENTIAL CHARACTER**

- **Easily accessible being within easy reach of road and rail networks;**
- **A pedestrian link between the bus station to the west and railway station to the east;**
- **The conservation area is a wholly urban location with a collection of commercial properties;**
- **Predominantly a dense and compact urban character created by the high concentration of commercial properties with a high level of urban active frontages in such a small area;**
- **A fairly flat area of broad lying valley, giving a sense of containment and enclosure to the landscape.**

# 4.0 Historical Background

## 4.1 Origins of St Helens Town Centre

St. Helens takes its name from the chapel dedicated to St. Helen, first mentioned in 1552. Probably of medieval origin, the Chapel of Ease stood at the junction of the Warrington to Ormskirk, and Preston to Ashton roads. Four different buildings have occupied the site, of which the third was dedicated to St. Mary. The present church was consecrated in 1926 and the name reverted back to St. Helen.

Compared with most towns in England, however, St Helens is relatively recent in origin. Prior to the 18th Century it consisted of small dispersed townships around the Chapel, in a sparsely populated area. Windle with Hardshaw in the north and Parr to the east, Sutton to the south east and Eccleston to the south west. These coalesced into St Helens as the area became industrialised.

The industrialisation accelerated in the 18th and 19th century when the area grew as a significant centre for coal mining, and glassmaking. The opening of the Sankey Canal in 1757 also added to this industrial growth. The canal was one of the first fully man made canal in the country.

The 19th Century also saw the arrival of the railways with the construction of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway. The Rainhill Locomotive Trials in 1829, which Stephenson's Rocket won, accelerated the growth of St Helens even further.

Today, St Helens is very much a commercial town. The main industries have since left, become outdated, or have been outsourced leaving the float and patterned rolled glass producer Pilkingtons, a world leader in their industry, as the town's one remaining large industrial employer.

The industrial heritage of the town is however still visible on the immediate south and eastern edges of the town centre with the chimneys of the few chemical industries still dominating the skyline.

## 4.2 Historical development pattern of George Street Conservation Area

The George Street Conservation Area derives its special interest from its location as the focus of the second development phase of the town of St Helens. The first phase was industrial and the town grew up around the head of St Helens at Greenbank and Liverpool Road, following its opening in 1770. In the second phase, the town shifted eastwards following the development of the railways to the eastern side of the town.



## 4.0 Historical Background

- In 1849, a new railway was opened following the acquisition of land close to Raven Street opposite the Raven Arms, roughly the site of the former Lead Mill.
- In 1857, the St Helens Canal and Railway Company acquired more land for a new station and goods yard, increasing coal and passenger traffic.
- In 1864, a bridge was constructed linking Cotham Street (now Corporation Street) with Parr Street. The final link in the railway network was the construction between 1868 and 1871 of the branch to Huyton, providing a faster link to Liverpool.
- The first St Helens Central Station opened in 1871.

The Quakers were also instrumental in shaping the George Street Conservation Area. The Friends Meeting Hall is the oldest building in the area and the whole of St Helens Town Centre and is still used by them today. They also established Naylor's Tenement in the 1770s, in the block bounded by the Church Street, Bridge Street, Market Street and Tontine Street.

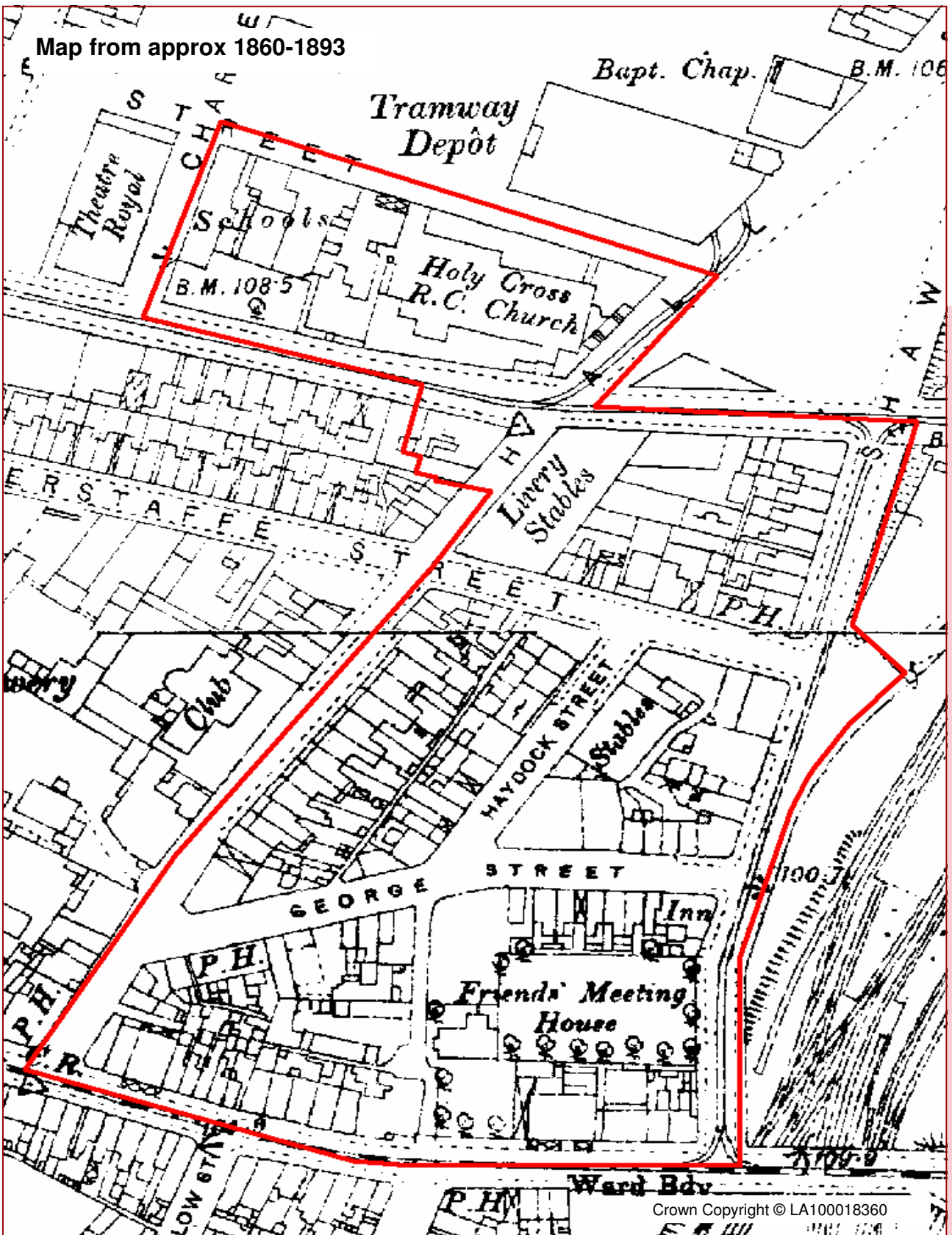
To date, the street names of George Street, Shaw Street (after Mr. George Shaw the original owner of the land) and Bickerstaffe Street still remain. The origin of the naming of Hall Street is unclear, although it pre-dates the building of the Masonic Hall, which lies along the eastern boundary. Haydock Street has two possible origins. One could be related to Mr Roger Haydock, the prominent local Quaker of the time or to the local settlement of Haydock in which direction the street runs.

Also evident in this map is the fact that the remaining two street names in the area have been changed. What is now Church Street was once Raven Street, possibly relating to the Raven Public House, while Sharp Street was renamed Corporation Street around the time of the founding of St Helens Corporation in 1868. Today the basic structure of the town centre is still influenced by the original street pattern, which has not been affected or realigned in the post war era.

The 1849 Ordinance Survey Map of St Helens shows two houses with gardens on Hall Street, a terrace of eight houses on Church Street followed by a collection of buildings forming the Raven Inn, next to the Friends Meeting House and grounds. The remaining land to the north was undeveloped with exception of three shafts and an old mine approximately on the line of the present Corporation Street bridge.

By 1882 the whole of the area, with the exception of three small sites at the Haydock Street/George Street junction and one on Shaw Street, had been developed. The uses

4.0 Historical Background



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included livery stables, iron works, a range of shops, a meeting hall, housing and the railway which had taken up the land to the west of the canal.

### 4.3. Activities and prevailing uses and their influence on the buildings

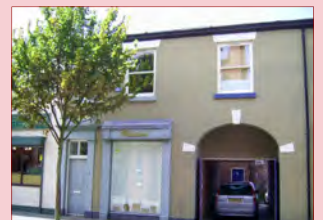
With its close proximity to St Helens Central Rail Station and the St Helens Canal, many buildings in the conservation area have often been used for related transport usage. Some of the buildings which reflect this in their designs include the high arch at nos. 19-27 George Street. This was once used by an animal feed trader and the doorway has been designed in such a manner that the lower section of the door would open to allow a horse drawn cart through. The top section of the door then opened into the first floor of the building, allowing raw materials to be loaded down from their storage space directly onto a waiting cart below.

Other buildings in the area that display evidence of past recreational and entertainment uses include:

- Nos. 5-7 Haydock Street;
- Nos. 15-23 Haydock Street
- No. 29 Shaw Street: Now used as an ironmongers shop, the building frontage still bears the faded lettering of “BILLIARDS”, above the present occupiers company name.

Elsewhere, there is evidence that some buildings have had to adapt for their present usage:

- Wolverhampton House: A grand building in scale and design, it was once used as St Helens main Labour Exchange, now offices/public house;
- The Lantern House: Formerly an ambulatory and fire station with horse ridden carts. The horses were kept on the first floor. It was changed to a car show room before being converted into flats;
- Nos. 18-20 George Street: Formerly a providence hospital site before being converted into mixed use



## 4.0 Historical Background

During the 20<sup>th</sup> Century further development took place and some of the uses changed, most noticeably the iron works in Hall Street. These followed a period where the Rivoli Cinema replaced livery stables. The cinema has since been replaced by the Millennium Centre.

### 4.4 Archaeological Interest

The George Street Conservation Area has no Scheduled Ancient Monument or areas of defined archaeological significance. However, as a previous burial ground, the Friends Garden on Shaw Street represent an area of potential archaeological significance.

Elsewhere within the Conservation area, there may well be plots of land where past historical uses have left behind an archaeological potential. A good example of such possible sites is on the corner of George Street and Shaw Street, which used to house the former Railway pub demolished in the early 1960s. Given the history of the area, further assessment should be undertaken to determine the full extent of its archaeological potential.



### ESSENTIAL CHARACTER

- **St Helens was created by the coalescing of the four townships of Windle, Hardshaw, Sutton and Eccleston;**
- **St Helens developed as an important industrial town as a result of abundance of local mineral resources as well as access to transport, notably the historic Liverpool-Manchester Railway and the Sankey Canal;**
- **The George Street Conservation Area derives its interest from its location as the focus of the second phase of development of the town;**
- **The railway and the Quakers played an important role in the resultant development of the conservation area;**
- **As a previous burial ground, the Friends Garden represents an area of potential archaeological significance.**



# 5.0 Spatial Analysis

## 5.1 An Overview

The George Street Conservation Area is the oldest part of St Helens Town Centre. The 1849 OS map shows that Church Street and Hall Street (then known as Hall Lane) were the only roads in existence and that the Raven Lodge (then Raven Inn), Wolverhampton House and the Friends Meeting House were the only buildings of note. The area was however predominantly developed in the latter half of the 19th Century and by 1882, the structure of the area had nearly completely developed.

The boundary of the George Street conservation area loosely follows this historical development of the town, spreading to the northwest to encompass the Church precinct. The conservation area still retains this collection of 19th Century buildings in different styles and materials as well as the pattern of streets and passages.

In terms of spatial qualities therefore, two character areas can be distinguished:

- The core area bounded by Hall Street, Bickerstaffe Street, Shaw Street and Church Street/ Parr Street, which is dense and compact; and,
- The Church precinct on Corporation Street, which is sparse and open.

## 5.2 The Core Area

### a) The character and relationship of spaces within the area

This area is characterised by fine examples of Victorian development based on an intricate network of alleyways and courtyards. Some of the alleyways still possess their original stone and cobbled paving, linking the area with its historic past and contributing to the special interest of the conservation area.

This has remained unaltered creating a unique atmosphere in the way that certain spaces within the area relate to each other. The “Raven Alley” connecting Church Street and George Street offers a framed view of the Raven Lodge Hotel. Viewed from Church Street in the opposite direction, it provides a “glimpse view”, giving an intimate feel to the space. The existence of courtyards also adds some character to the area. The





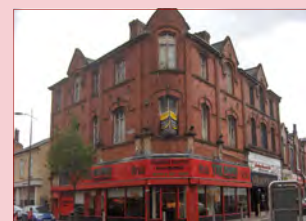
courtyard inside the Spanish Restaurant, off Bickerstaffe Street, is probably the best example.

### b) Prevalent scale, built forms and urban grain

The scale of the area is mostly domestic in the form of terraced properties or blocks of two to four buildings. The buildings have a small to medium sized footprint in narrow long plots with building frontages on the back edge of pavement, reinforcing the general dense and compact urban character of the conservation area. The only notable exception to this theme is the Friends Meeting House, which is in a vernacular scale detached on its own plot.



Within the domestic scale, there is also a recognisable hierarchy of buildings within this character area. Those on the corners of the streets are more elaborate in detail and or are of a greater height than the rest which are mainly modest. Such buildings include:



- The Masonic Hall at the corner of Corporation Street;
- 87 to 93 Church Street;
- The Assembly Rooms in George Street at the corner of Haydock Street;
- 29 Shaw Street at the corner of Hall Street and Bickerstaffe Street.



The most complete and least unaltered street in this area is George Street from which the conservation area derives its name. It contains a mix of intricately detailed historic buildings with little 20th Century infill. Despite most of the ground floor accommodation being in commercial uses, this street, and to some extent the other internal streets of Bickerstaffe and Haydock still retain a more intimate domestic scale.



The sense of enclosure of George Street and resulting vistas are unique in St Helens town centre. Similarly, the comparative grandness of Hall Street as a Victorian terrace is an important link with the town's past.

The area is inward looking and has within it service and parking areas which are accessed via narrow passageways. These are mostly back-

yards and gardens where boundary walls have been removed, or are sites of demolished buildings.

Most of the views within and out of the area are along short streets which are terminated by modern buildings on the opposite side of the road. Most of the area does not link visually to other parts of the town. An exception is Bickerstaffe Street where the views carry through to Century House.

Immediately outside this character area, the built form becomes more fragmented with a number of 20th Century buildings, including large retail outlets, multi-storey car parks and a bus station. Most of these are bland, monolithic and out of scale with the surrounding historic buildings. Here the built form is more fragmented with open spaces than in this character area where it is more cohesive.

### 5.2 The Church Precinct

#### a) The character and relationship of spaces within the area

This character area comprises the Church and associated buildings of the Presbytery and the two remaining buildings of its former school. The buildings are mainly freestanding with medium to larger footprints, set within significant grounds with mature trees. This creates a more open character and a much coarser grain.

Many of the buildings in this character area are set off from the highway behind an open area. The lack of a frontage along the street to form a strong edge means the area is more outward looking.

#### b) Prevalent Built Form

In terms of built form, many of the buildings in this character area are of medium to grand scale with large footprints. The area is more open in character and of a much coarser grain than the dense and compact nature of the other character area.



### 5.3 Open Spaces and their contribution to the character of the area

#### a) Green Spaces, trees and hedges

With its town centre location and developed nature, there is little greenery contained within the conservation area. The areas surrounding the Friends Meeting House and the Church precinct are the exception.

- Grounds of the Friends Meeting House

The Friends Meeting House on Church Street is a development with attractive front gardens with flowery shrubs and young trees. To the south, the front garden is enclosed by sandstone boundary walling with stone coping and railings, and metal gates with stone gate pillars. A high brick wall defines its western boundary while the three storey Wolverhampton House to the east defines its eastern boundary. The garden and the trees provide some much needed soft landscaping and also some setting to this small scaled listed building.



- The Friends Garden

Also part of the grounds of the Meeting House, the Friends Garden on Shaw Street is a historic site that has retained its present usage since the 1930s. It is bounded on three sides by a low brick wall with stone copings and metal railings.



Recently improved, it is well landscaped area with seats and secured with perimeter wall. It stands as the only public green space within the conservation area, providing a quite, reflective space in the busy town centre that people can enjoy. In addition to its recreational value, it opens up views to the adjacent modern St Helens Central Station.



- The yard to the Church of the Holy Cross and St Helens

The area around the Church and the Presbytery is surrounded by a perimeter wall of a sandstone boundary wall metal arcading grill. It is a well landscaped with shrubs and mature trees, scaling down the towering church building and providing a soft landscape to the Church. Again, in addition to providing a setting to the Church, which is also listed, this green space also adds some character of the Conservation Area.

### b) Hard landscaped open areas

While the area lacks many green spaces, there are a number of open spaces in the form of car parks or undeveloped land. There are car parks on:

- The grounds of the Catapult Too on Corporation Street, Lantern House on Haydock Street and at no. 26 George Street;
- Undeveloped land on George Street and the corner with Shaw Street and at the corner of Corporation Street and Shaw Street.



While the former appear to be integrated into the built form of the area and enhance the conservation area, the open areas on the undeveloped lands break up the compact nature of the historic layout of the streets, with adverse impact on its historic plan form and character.

### 5.2 Key views and vistas

As already noted, the Conservation Area is a generally flat area of broad lying plateau. Also immediately outside the area, it is surrounded by relatively large developments such as the shopping centre to the west and south both incorporating multi-storey car parks. To the north is the transport museum and the Hippodrome on Hall Street and Corporation Street respectively. This physical setting means the area has restricted views.



Within these physical restrictions, the only other possible long views would be from the main approaches into and out of the conservation area, the principle ones being:

- The main northern approaches into the conservation area from Hall Street and Shaw Street. This makes the Millennium Centre and the undeveloped site at the corner of Corporation Street and Shaw Street gateway sites in the conservation area
- Views into Bickerstaffe Street out and into Central Station. With the bus station to the west and the railway station to the east this lends Bickerstaffe Street to be a gateway location.



- Parr Street and Corporation Street are the main approaches from the east. This makes the Hippodrome and Wolverhampton House landmark buildings.

Apart from these long views, the compact and dense layout also offers excellent internal views and vistas within the conservation area. The principle ones are:

- George Street from Church Street and Shaw Street;
- Haydock Street from George Street and Bickerstaffe Street;
- Alley from George Street



### ESSENTIAL CHARACTER

The George Street Conservation Area derives its physical character mainly from:

- **A dense and compact character created by a group of two-storey buildings with small to medium footprints in narrow long plots and building frontages on pavements;**
- **An intricate layout of courtyards and alleyways;**
- **Limited open areas with the Friends Garden providing the only green open space for relaxation and contemplation in the town centre;**
- **The physical setting of the conservation area restricts views into and out the area with the Church of the Holy Cross and St Helens, the largest building in the conservation area, being the most visible structure;**



# 6.0 Character Area Analysis

## 6.1 An Overview

The George Street Conservation Area is a microcosm of urban activity with buildings of different types. Although none of these buildings are necessarily outstanding in themselves, grouped together they create a character of high quality.

## 6.2 The qualities of the buildings and their contribution to the area

In terms of styles, most buildings in the conservation area exhibit many of the popular domestic styles of the Victorian period. The change in style throughout the 19th and 20th Century can be traced across the conservation area from the outer to the inner streets. These range from the relatively plain houses in Hall Street and Shaw Street, through to the more exuberant examples of Victorian/Edwardian styles of George Street, creating a character of high quality and great diversity.

Most of the properties are modest two-storey domestic buildings, many of them in the form of terraces with narrow frontages directly onto the street. In addition to a unified appearance, the terraces also create a strong horizontal emphasis to the streetscape.

The buildings on the intersection of the streets tend to break up this general homogeneity. They are slightly larger properties and in most cases more elaborately detailed. The three-storey buildings in Hall Street at the corner with Corporation Street, George Street and Church Street reflect this recognisable hierarchy.

## 6.3 Townscape qualities

Within the conservation area, no single architectural style dominates the streetscape. It is however evident that there are five areas of dominant architectural style which contributes to the quality and interest of the area.

### a) Hall Street

Hall Street is on the western edge of the conservation area with only the eastern side being in the Conservation Area.



## 6.0 Character Area Analysis

Hall Street displays a variety of architectural styles that combine to produce an interesting streetscape. The most unified block of development lies between Bickerstaffe Street and George Street. This two storey block of terraced development incorporates several important features into its traditional brick design.

The terracing creates a horizontal emphasis which is broken up by a series of chimneystacks. Most distinctive is the prominence of several styles of bay windows which project onto the pavement, creating a variety along what is otherwise a uniform building line.

Some of the features that characterise the buildings in this street are:

- Pitched slate roofs, many with chimney stacks and clay pots;
- Dark red brick walls, mostly in Flemish bonding; and,
- Articulated fenestrations in the form of decorative stone and brick lintels and cills as well as timber door cases.

At first floor level, the painted decorative stone and brick lintels provide continuity along the street, whilst also adding to the design detail of individual buildings.

It is also noted that buildings at the corners are taller, have larger front-ages and more variety in their detailing.

These include:

- The Millennium Centre between Corporation Street and Bickerstaffe Street;
- The Masonic Hall and the block of buildings incorporating the Chinese restaurant at the corner with Church Street.

Their location, size and detailing add interest to this part of the conservation area.

Though outside, the “Needle” is an interesting feature, which gives a good setting to the Conservation Area.



## 6.0 Character Area Analysis

### b) Shaw Street

Parallel with Hall Street, Shaw Street runs north-south on the eastern edge of the conservation area. The eastern side is dominated by St Helens Central Station.

On the middle section, between George Street and Bickerstaffe Street, this street is characterised by a mixture of two-storey buildings directly fronting the street. This creates a wide frontage and a strong building line. With its elaborate brick and stone features, the block consisting of nos. 19-27 which dominates the streetscape and with no. 29 which turns the corner nicely onto Bickerstaffe Street.

The Friends Garden to the south and the undeveloped plots at the north eastern tip of the conservation area break up the strong frontage of the middle section of the street.

Though outside the Conservation Area, the new central station is a new building in landmark modern style. It provides a fitting setting on the eastern side.



### c) Church Street

Parallel with Corporation Street, Church Street runs east-west, forming the southern boundary of the conservation area. As in the other perimeter streets, only one side of this street is in the conservation area. Like Corporation Street, this street is one of the main approaches into the town centre from the west and south.

Reflecting typical Victorian design, the building frontages of Church Street, especially the ones on the western section, possess great architectural quality. The building that corners Church Street and Hall Street is a three storey development that shows detail in its arched brick window details. With brick parapet walling and sandstone copping and finials, it has a roofscape that can be viewed from the surrounding area. It also has various types of brickwork mouldings, adding to its townscape qualities.

Along the whole section of the street, there is a variety of gables dominating the streetscape. Unfortunately, the less traditional shop frontages with inappropriate signs detract from these townscape qualities. The



## 6.0 Character Area Analysis

open plot before the Raven Inn also breaks up this interesting frontage and building line with detrimental effects to the streetscene.

### d) Bickerstaffe Street

This is one of the inner streets in the conservation area. It runs east-west, between the railway station and bus station. Like the other inner streets in the conservation area, this street is characterised by a block of two storey buildings directly fronting the street, making them more cosy than the perimeter streets. The car park on the northern side of Lantern House provides some open areas in these otherwise closed up streets.

The modern building in the middle street is the most dominant. It is in red brick with retail use on the ground floor and residential use on the upper floors. The ground floor elevation is glazed with colonnaded recess. Despite this, the proportions of the windows on the upper floors are still domestic in scale. The well proportioned shopfront of Millennium House and the Catapult also add interest to the streetscene.

### e) George Street

George Street from which the conservation area gets its name, is the most complete and least unaltered street in the core area. This street, and to some extent the other internal streets of Bickerstaffe and Haydock still retain a more intimate domestic scale, despite most of the ground floor accommodation being in commercial use.

It is characterised by a mix of intricately detailed two-storey historic buildings with little 20th Century infill. Whilst traditional in their Victorian design, these buildings often display great detail in their facades and originality of their shopfronts. Directly fronting the street, the buildings form a strong building line and together form a continuous frontage on both sides, creating some form of enclosure.

The first floor of many of the developments in George Street are in timber sliding sashes and have decorative stone and brick lintels and mouldings, a reflection of their Victorian origin.

A number of buildings in George Street are of outstanding townscape qualities. These include The George at no. 8 and nos. 3-5 and 9-17. In red brick and sandstone dressing with large timber sash windows, The George has a long frontage on George Street, making a significant





contribution to its townscape qualities.

Some of the features on no. 3-5 includes patterned brickwork, stoned coped gable with finials and intricately detailed timber oriel windows on first floor as well as a cast iron shopfront on the ground floor. Despite their small sizes, these features, amongst others, make it one of the most outstanding buildings in George Street in terms of its contribution to the streetscene and conservation area.

Nos 9-17 George Street lies at the corner of Haydock Street. It is three storeys high, with a large footprint and large windows and doors with decorative stone features. It is one of the few buildings of a relatively larger scale. Its prominent corner location and architectural features make a significant contribution to the area's townscape qualities.

### f) Haydock Street

This is the third of the inner streets in the conservation area. It runs north-south between George Street and Bickerstaffe Street.

It is characterised by on one side two storey buildings, directly fronting the street, some with modern yet well proportioned shopfronts. On the other side is a detached residential block set back from Bickerstaffe Street behind an open area used as a car park.

At the corner with Bickerstaffe Street is the Catapult, which has a unique design. It is set back at first floor level with iron railings enclosing the balcony area. This feature extends itself by the form of an iron banister rail down to the ground floor and directly into the street.

Unfortunately, a number of properties in all these streets have uPVC windows and doors, missing chimney pots, satellite dishes and TV aerials on the fronts. All these minor yet inappropriate features cumulatively tend to erode the special interest of the conservation area.



## 6.4 Key individual buildings

### a) Listed buildings

There are two listed buildings in the George Street Conservation Area, both contributing towards the special character of the area.



## 6.0 Character Area Analysis

These are:

### The Friends Meeting House (Grade II Listed)

It is the oldest surviving building in the conservation area. It was built in Mid-17th century and has a 20th century modern extension to the rear. It is a two-storey building set within substantial grounds, well landscaped with mature trees.



The other main features of this vernacular building include:

- A stone slate roof;
- Double-chamfered mullioned windows. Those to the ground floor are of 5:3:5 lights and those to the first floor of 6 and 3 lights; all with leaded glazing tied back to iron bars;
- Segmental-headed entrance between 2nd and 3rd windows has sundial over, dated 1753;
- Large projecting stack on left return;
- 7-light window with transom and label mould on right return;
- A sun dial above the main entrance



To the east along Shaw Street and within the grounds of the Meeting House is also the Friends Garden . Well landscaped with seats, it is the largest public open space in the conservation area.

### Church of Holy Cross and St Helen (Grade II Listed)

Built in 1860, the Church is set within substantial grounds with mature trees. Its other main features include:

- Rock-faced stone walling with ashlar dressing;
- Slate roof;
- Single vessel nave and chancel with aisles under lean-to roofs;
- Transept and side chapels under lean-to roofs;



## 6.0 Character Area Analysis

- North porch—8-bay nave has 3-light windows with curvilinear tracery, those to clerestory have segmented pointed heads; aisle windows between weathered buttresses;
- West end has 5-light window above small entrance, with spherical triangular window above;
- Transepts have 4-light windows with rose windows above;
- Entrance flanked by arcading on paired marble piers, wrought iron gates, rich reredos;
- Blind arcading with pinnacles to the north and west walls.

The Church is the tallest and single largest building in the conservation area. Its size and height make it visible from many places making it a landmark building. Its public function as a church also make it an important focal point in the conservation area.

### b) Key unlisted buildings of merit

Apart from the two listed buildings, there are a number of unlisted buildings in the conservation area, which contribute positively to its character. Many of these are at the intersection of the main streets and are relatively taller, of a larger footprint and more elaborate in detail. Such buildings include:

- The Millennium Centre—Corporation Street/Hall Street;
- The Masonic Hall—Hall Street/ George Street;
- 9-17 George Street—George Street/Haydock Street;
- 29 Shaw Street—Shaw Street/Bickerstaffe Street;
- 2-4 George Street/4-6 Hall Street;
- Lantern House—Haydock Street/Bickerstaffe Street;
- The catapult—Haydock Street/Bickerstaffe Street;
- 19-27 Shaw Street.

The location of these buildings, their relatively larger size and degree of architectural detailing make many of them local landmarks. With its prominent gables and detailed mouldings, no. 19-27 offer the most attractive façade along Shaw Street.

### 6.5 Prevalent and traditional building materials, texture and colours

#### a) Slate

The majority of the properties in the conservation area have slated pitched roofs. Where the properties are in the form of terraces, there are a series of chimney stacks, breaking up the roofline and providing an interesting roofline. Many of the chimneys also have original clay pots.

#### b) Red brick

Traditional materials which originated from local sources are evident in the older buildings in the conservation area, contributing to its sense of identity.

The conservation area is characterised by a palette of walling materials, however, dark red brick predominates. Mostly in Flemish bonding, this material is well represented in buildings constructed prior to about 1920. There are also examples within the area where brickwork has been constructed in a patchwork style, using lighter and darker shades, creating an interesting effect.

Elsewhere, the combination of brick and stonework has been developed, often in layered patterns. This is evident on the Assembly Rooms on George Street, giving a variety of colours and textures.

Red sandstone, characteristic of north west England, is widely used for certain building materials such as lintels, cills, copings and plinths, all adding to the architectural interest of the conservation area. However, it is rarely used as walling materials except on the Fiends Meeting House, which are largely in stone.

#### c) Timber

Many windows and doors in the conservation area are timber framed with the former being either in casements or traditional sliding sashes. Many of these fenestrations display well articulated decorative features



in the form of stone and brick sills, sill bands, lintels. Some properties in Hall Street also have impressive door cases, adding interest to this part of the conservation area.

The combination of styles, materials and decorative features within such a small area, create an interesting townscape, one of the George Street Conservation Areas most endearing characteristics.

### 6.6 Local Details

There are several details and features which add to George Street's distinctiveness, forming part of the area's special interest. These features include, decorative window features, chimneystacks and most importantly shopfronts.

#### a) Decorative window features

Decorative window features are a characteristic of most of the conservation area. These are in the form of stone and brick window cills, especially on the upper floors of most of the properties. The brick lintels are of various arch forms, making a significant contribution to the area's townscape qualities.

#### b) Chimneystacks

With most buildings pre-dating central heating, many still retain their original chimneystacks and pots. These punctuate the roofline and create a pattern and rhythm in the skyline.

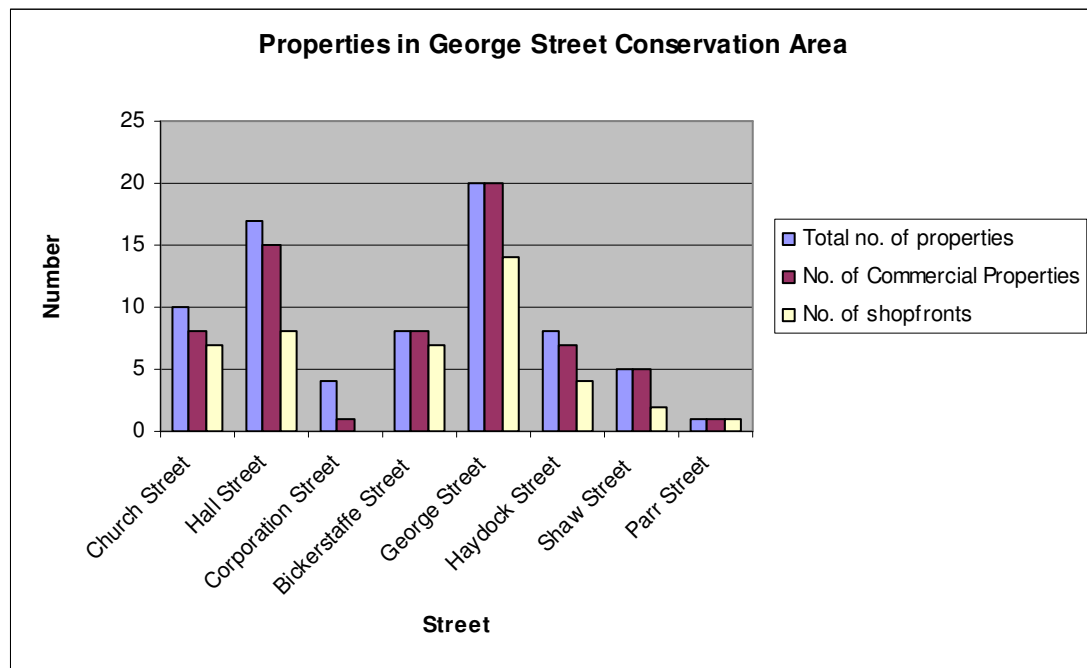
#### c) Shopfronts

The George Street Conservation Area is a thriving commercial centre. Of approximately 73 properties nearly 65 of them are in commercial use. Forty-five of the commercial properties have shopfronts, making it significant architectural feature in the conservation area.

Although commercial properties are on all the streets in the conservation area, George Street appears to have the highest concentration of shopfronts. Some retain their original timber shopfronts and others include well designed modern ones.



## 6.0 Character Area Analysis



### *Traditional shopfronts*

Many of the commercial properties appear to be purpose built as shops or offices and have not evolved over time as in many other areas of the borough. Many of them are at ground floor level with living accommodation on the upper floors. Narrow plot width creates a strong vertical emphasis, which is an important characteristic of the few remaining Victorian and Edwardian shopfronts in the conservation area.

These traditional shopfronts are characterised by the following typical features:

- Ornamental surrounds with a narrow fascia and deep cornice, side pilasters with corbelled brackets
- Panelled or rendered stall riser with deep cill beneath the window consisting of profiled glazing bars
- A recessed entrance door

In general most of the traditional shopfronts have not survived well; however there are still good original shopfronts remaining in the area. Unsurprisingly, most of these are on George Street and include nos. 2-4 (and adjoining 4-6 Church Street) 3-5, 12-14 (Simply Delicious), 23-27 and 28-30.





## 6.0 Character Area Analysis

Some traditional shopfronts in George Street and elsewhere have either been inappropriately altered, have external solid roller shutters or inappropriate signs, eroding the character of the conservation area. These include:

- Many of the shopfronts in Church Street with inappropriate signs and roller shutters
- 20 Hall Street where a traditional timber shopfront has been replaced with aluminium in wrong proportions
- 121 Church Street (Wolverhampton House) - external solid roller shutters and dutch blinds

The loss of most of such historic shopfronts makes the survival of the few remaining so much more important.

### *Modern Shopfronts*

Modern shopfronts emerged in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century following the modernisation of traditional shopfronts to accommodate contemporary changes. Though not in the typical features of the traditional ones, modern shopfronts tend to display similar proportions. Some of the good examples of these modern shopfronts are:

- 95 Church Street—A modern shopfront in aluminium with external roller shutters. However, the shutter is well designed with guidance rails well concealed and shutter box within the fascia;
- 5, 7, 9 and 11 Haydock Street

Some of the main changes in these modern shopfronts are in the form of enlargement and bigger fascia boards to accommodate advertisement signs. Most of these changes are detrimental to the character of the conservation area.

### **6.8. Public realm audit**

The public realm of space is its “public face”. It is the space between and within buildings that are publicly accessible. These include streets, squares, forecourts, parks and open spaces.

The whole of the George Street conservation area has been subject to a comprehensive improvement scheme in 2001. The scheme involved



## 6.0 Character Area Analysis

the upgrading of the historic built environment and the enhancement of the public realm, creating an attractive environment for shoppers and visitors.

The public realm enhancement included:

- Upgrading of pavements using high quality paving and surface materials;
- Improvement of street lighting and furniture;
- Extensive tree planting;
- Upgrade and enhancement of the Friends Park;
- Improvement of circulation of through traffic;
- Reduction of carriage width of internal streets and widening of pavement;
- Full pedestrianisation of some areas;
- Refurbishment of Corporation Street and Church Street / Parr Street bridges, improving the approach to the Conservation Area.

Following the above enhancement, below is the state of the area's public realm.

### a) Surface treatment

The use of high quality paving and surface materials are some of the improvements implemented in the public realm.

Whilst the road surface has remained in black bitmac, different materials have been used for the pavements (which were originally in the same material as the roads). Following the reduction of the carriage-way in the inner streets, some sections reserved for parking are in grey textured granite sets.

In terms of pavements, the “core area” of the conservation area is predominantly in fairly smooth York Stone flags with two courses of textured red bricks kerbed off in grainy machine engineered granite setts.



## 6.0 Character Area Analysis

The mix of materials in different colours and texture create variety and interest in the public realm.

Prior to the improvement scheme, very little historic surface materials appear to have survived in the conservation area. Exceptions to this are the cobbles on some of the alleys in the area, notably, the “Raven Alley” and the alley between 4-6 Hall Street and 87-89 Church Street. Such features provides a link with the areas historic past.

### b) Street furniture

The other improvements made to the public realm was the provision of well detailed modern street furniture. These included:

- Litter bins in black, composite material. Though in a non-traditional material, their quality and colour is considered appropriate in the conservation area;
- Bollards mainly to restrict pavement parking. They are about a metre high and in stainless steel. Whilst they are in a high quality material, there extensive use appear to create clutter, detracting from the character of the conservation area;
- Bicycle stands in similar materials to the bollards; adding some interest in the conservation area;
- Seats in stainless steel and timber mainly in the Friends Garden, affording visitors relaxation and contemplation;
- Combined pedestrian map and sign system, part of a family of coordinated signage, providing not only information about the area and the town in general but also a distinctive “St Helens” brand.
- A series of “spirit rising” art pieces linking various attractions in this part of the town centre;
- Integrated finger post signs; contemporary yet made of high quality materials, further enhancing the area;
- Street lights in stainless steel, further enhancing the conservation area.



All these contemporary yet consistent, simple and low maintenance street furniture add value to the conservation area.

### c) Mature trees

The conservation area does not have many mature trees. The few which were planted during the improvement scheme in 2001, mostly in the inner streets, are still young. Hopefully when they grow, they would offer some necessary soft landscaping, contributing to the overall quality of the conservation area.

### **ESSENTIAL CHARACTER**

- **The George Street Conservation Area is a microcosm of urban activity with buildings of different types;**
- **In terms of style, most of the buildings exhibit many of the popular domestic styles of the Victorian period;**
- **Many properties are modest two-storey terraced buildings in the following features:**
  - **Slate roof;**
  - **Dark red bricks in Fleming bond and decorative brick work features in the form of string and dentile courses;**
  - **Timber sash and casement windows;**
  - **Articulated decorative window features in the form of stone and brick lintels and cills.**
- **There is a clear hierarchy of building types with those on the intersection of streets tending to be taller, larger and more elaborately detailed;**
- **Buildings of high townscape qualities with several streets retaining the characteristics of the period in which they were first built;**
- **With the area predominantly commercial, shopfronts are a significant architectural feature in the conservation area;**
- **The area is endowed with high quality public realm, creating an attractive environment for shoppers and visitors.**

# 7.0 Extent of Loss, Intrusion or Damage

## 7.1 An overview

There are a few issues which if not addressed might undermine the area's special interest. These include:

- Inappropriate alterations
- Shopfronts and inappropriate signs
- Satellite dishes and TV antennae
- Negative sites and spaces

## 7.2 Inappropriate alterations

It is evident from the character analysis that the conservation area contains fine buildings and spaces of significant architectural and historic interest, which together contribute to its special designation. However, there are some cases of inappropriate alterations which are considered to undermine its character and appearance.

The biggest threat appears to be minor, incremental alterations carried out in the area. There are properties in the conservation area which have had part or the whole front elevations repaired using inappropriate materials, including:

- Use of modern bricks, in uncharacteristic colours, sizes, textures and bonding. Nos. 25-27 George Street and no. 17 Shaw Street are some of the examples where modern brick has been used for wall repairs, seriously affecting the overall appearance of the properties;
- Use of hard cement mortars for re-pointing of brick and stone works;
- The replacement of original features, such as traditional timber windows and doors with aluminium or uPVC, otherwise considered inappropriate in conservation areas.

All these have cumulatively eroded the character of the conservation area.





## 7.0 Extent of Loss, Intrusion or Damage

### 7.3 Shopfronts and inappropriate signs

Due to its location in the town centre, the conservation area has been under intense commercial pressures. The area has evolved from a local shopping area to become an area with many retail outlets, offices and service sector uses serving those beyond the town centre. As a result shopfronts have been heavily affected with many of them altered to accommodate these changes. Examples of such changes include:

- Replacement of timber shop fronts with aluminium, losing traditional shopfront details and proportions;
- Oversized and inappropriate signage and illumination;
- Installation of external solid metal roller shutters; which is regarded as an inappropriate and unsympathetic feature in the street scene;
- Inappropriate Dutch blinds; obscuring architectural features on the buildings.

Apart from a few cases in George Street and Hall Street, many of the shopfronts in the conservation area have unfortunately been affected by one or more of the above



### 7.4 Satellite dishes and TV antennae

Throughout the conservation area, there are numerous satellite dishes and TV antennae on chimneys and roofs in locations visible from the highway. All these features are visually obtrusive and are considered to have an adverse impact on the area's special character.

### 7.5 Negative sites and spaces

As late as the 1940s, the OS maps show the core area of the conservation area bounded by Hall Street, Corporation Street, Shaw Street and the Church Street, as a dense and compact area with a continuous frontage. Today, properties on the following plots were demolished, remaining undeveloped:

- Nos. 105-109 (odd) Church Street;

## 7.0 Extent of Loss, Intrusion or Damage

- No. 42 George Street at the corner with Shaw Street;
- Nos. 33-45 (odd) Shaw Street

All these have broken up the continuity of the frontage, eroding the character of the conservation area.

# 8.0 Community Involvement

## 8.1 Community Involvement

It is important that property owners accept their maintenance responsibilities. As they contribute to the conservation area as a whole, the emphasis should be on repair rather than replacement of original features. Alterations or additions should be sympathetic to the original style of the building and be of an appropriate scale.

The Council is committed to meaningful community involvement in the process of reviewing the George Street Conservation Area. A comprehensive consultation will take place during the review and feedback from residents, businesses and the voluntary sector will be taken into account in developing recommendations for the improvement of the areas. The Statement of Community Involvement for the Local Development Framework sets out the consultation considered appropriate in relation to planning for the Borough. That statement will guide this consultation process.

# 9.0 Boundary Changes

## 9.1 Boundary Changes

As part of this character appraisal, the Council is required to review the boundaries of the conservation area. Under Section 69, the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 imposes a duty on the local planning authority from time to time to review the designated Conservation Areas.

*“It shall be the duty of a Local Planning Authority from time to time to review ..... and to determine whether any parts or any further parts of their area should be designated as Conservation Areas; and if they so determine, they shall designate those parts accordingly”*

The conservation area encompasses the historic part of St Helens Town Centre, retaining a collection of 19th Century buildings in different styles and materials as well as a pattern of streets and passages.

The main issue to consider in the boundary review, therefore, is whether the area under consideration has the same “demonstrably special architectural and historic interest” as the main parts of the conservation area, thereby indicating that its character and appearance should be preserved. Also whether there are other adjacent area which could enhance this designated are.



## 9.2 Criteria

The following criteria was considered in making boundary changes in previous appraisals of conservation areas in St Helens:

Criteria		Feature	
a	<b>Boundary</b>	i	Is there a clearly defined edge to the existing boundary with definite change in character and quality?
		ii	Is there an area clearly meeting the defined criteria which lies outside such an edge?
b	<b>Architectural quality and historic significance</b>	i	Is the area of similar demonstrable special architectural or historic interest as the rest of the conservation area? Does the development within the area date from a similar period to substantial parts of the conservation area?
		ii	
		iii	Do the uses within the area reflect prevailing or former uses of substantial parts of the conservation area?
		iv	Is the development the work of the same architect/developer active elsewhere within significant parts of the conservation area?
		v	Is it of similar massing bulk height and scale to a significant portion of the development within the conservation area?
		vi	Is it within the area is of notable architectural and historic interest in its own right necessitating a separate designation?
c	<b>Townscape quality</b>	i	What proportion of the buildings within the area would be defined as positive contributors if located in the conservation area?
		ii	Is there is evidence of significant alteration to the area as a result of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• alterations and extensions?</li> <li>• alterations to roofs?</li> <li>• the loss of original details (doors, windows or chimneys) or re-facing of brickwork?</li> </ul>

Using the above criteria, the following are the proposed boundary amendments.

### 9.3 Proposed amendments

#### a) Areas recommended for exclusion

From the above criteria, no area is being recommended for removal from the conservation area. It is considered that existing boundaries continue to include areas of special architectural and/or historic interest and that most of the properties should be retained within the conservation area.

#### b) Areas recommended for Inclusion

There are some adjacent areas that could be considered to be associated with the conservation area by virtue of their history, architecture and layout. These areas include:

- The Hippodrome on Corporation Street  
In Edwardian Baroque style, this detached building was built in 1902 on the site of the Empire Palace. Earlier known as the Empire Palace Variety Theatre, it changed its use to a cinema and then to a Bingo Hall. Charlie Chaplin appeared on its stage in 1906.

Its history, interesting Edwardian façade and scale merit its inclusion into the conservation area. The inclusion of the open area beside it, currently used for car parking will also maintain the setting of the conservation area.

- The block of buildings between Vincent Street and Charles Street along Corporation Street  
Historical maps show that by 1890, the properties in this block had already been built. This is around the same time when the built fabric and layout of the core of the conservation area was fully established.

Vincent Street is characterised by two-storey terraced properties in typical features of slate roofs, red brickwork and articulated window features of sandstone cills and lintels, all similar to many of the streets in the core of the conservation area. The strong frontage created by the terrace would form a natural boundary edge to the extended conservation area. The property at no 8-10 Corporation Street is slightly larger and more elaborately detailed, making



## 9.0 Boundary Changes

it a robust building of positive character and landmark at the corner with Vincent Street.

The Theatre Royal was recently refurbished and a new landmark frontage installed. Its inclusion will therefore be further enhancement to the Conservation Area.

- The newly built St Helens Central Station off Shaw Street  
This newly built station is a modern and stylish two-storey building with glass façade and iconic copper clad tower. Its design fits well with the conservation area and its inclusion will not only enhance, it will also secure the setting of its eastern edge.



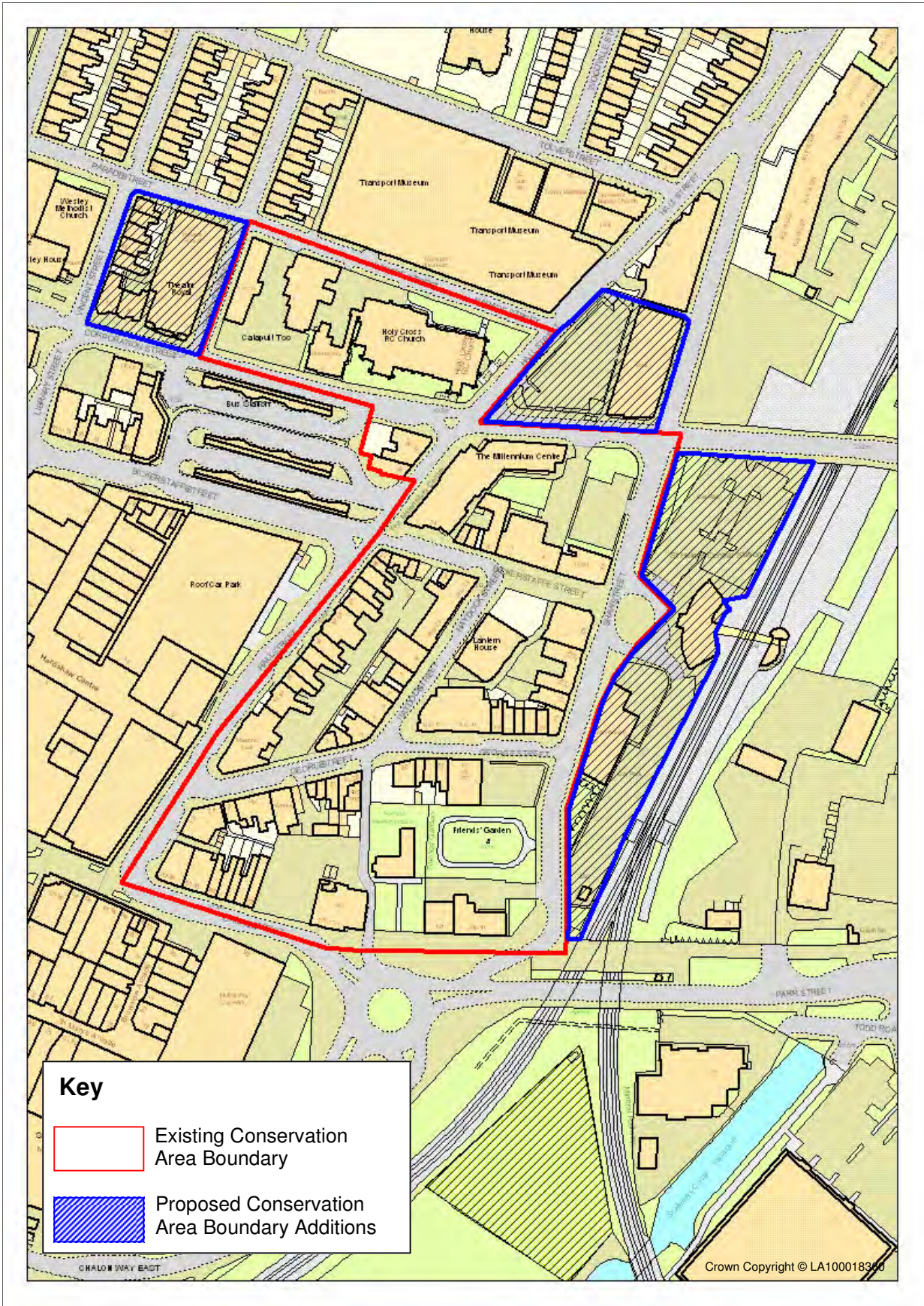
The recommendation inclusion of all these three areas is being made under criteria a (i), b (i), (iii), (v) and c (i).

In addition to the three areas above, there are other areas on the boundary roads which should be considered for inclusion into the conservation area. It is noted that existing boundary of the conservation area is drawn along the central line of the roads. It is recommended that this should be amended and the boundary line be taken to the back edge of the pavement on the opposite side.

This would provide a better protection to the setting of the conservation area and its street scene. This would also ensure interesting art feature like the “Needle”, on the other side of Hall Street, is included in the Conservation Area.









# 10.0 Summary of Key Character

## 10.1 Summary of Key Character

The special architectural and historic interest of the George Street Conservation Area derives from a number of historic and architectural factors including:

### LOCATION AND SETTING

- **A busy pedestrian area being between the bus station to the west and railway station to the east;**
- **The collection of 19th Century buildings in different styles and materials, as well as the pattern of streets and passages give the area a core character;**
- **Located in a wholly urban area;**
- **A fairly flat area of broad lying plateau, giving a sense of containment and enclosure to the landscape;**

### HISTORY AND RESULTANT DEVELOPMENT

- **St Helens was created by the coalescing of the four townships of Windle, Hardshaw, Sutton and Eccleston;**
- **St Helens developed as an important industrial town as a result of an abundance of local mineral resources as well as access to transport, notably the historic Liverpool-Manchester Railway and the Sankey Canal;**
- **The George Street Conservation Area derives its interest from its location as the focus of the second phase of development of the town;**
- **The railway and the Quakers played an important role in the resultant development of the conservation area;**
- **As a previous burial ground, the Friends Garden represents an area of potential archaeological significance.**

### SPATIAL ANALYSIS

- **The George Street Conservation Area derives its physical character mainly from;**
  - **The group of two-storey buildings with small to medium footprints in narrow long plots and building frontages on pavement;**
  - **An intricate layout of courtyards and alleyways**
- **A dense and compact character;**
- **Limited open areas with the Friends Garden providing the only public area for relaxation and contemplation in the busy town centre;**
- **The physical setting of the conservation area restricts views into and out the area with the Church of the Holy Cross and St Helens, the largest building in the conservation area, being the most visible structure;**
- **Being between the railway and bus station, the conservation area is an important pedestrian link.**

### CHARACTER ANALYSIS

- **The George Street Conservation Area is a microcosm of urban activity with buildings of different types;**
- **In terms of style, most buildings of the buildings exhibit many of the popular domestic styles of the Victorian period;**
- **Many properties are modest two-storey terraced buildings in the following features:**
  - **Slate roof;**
  - **Dark red bricks in Fleming bond and decorative brick work features in the form of string and dentile courses;**
  - **Timber sash and casement windows;**
  - **Articulated window features in the form of stone and brick lintels and cills.**
- **There is a clear hierarchy of building types with those on the intersection of streets tending to be taller, larger and more elaborately detailed;**
- **Buildings of high townscape qualities with several streets retaining the characteristics of the period in which they were first built;**

## 10.0 Summary of Key Character

- **With the area predominantly commercial, shopfronts are significant architectural features in the conservation area;**
- **The area is endowed with a high quality public realm, creating an attractive environment for shoppers and visitors.**

These are the key characteristics, which give the George Street Conservation Area its special character. They should be a material consideration when deciding on any development in the area.

# 11.0 Issues

## 11.1 An Overview

From the character analysis, the condition of the built fabric and the open spaces of the conservation area appear to be in satisfactory condition. Some issues were however identified, which if not addressed, threaten to undermine the area's special interest.

These issues are summarised in Chapter 7 as:

- Inappropriate alteration;
- Shopfronts and inappropriate signs;
- Satellite dishes and TV antennae;
- Negative sites and spaces

These could be tackled through:

- Planning control;
- Action by the Local Authority and/or its partner agencies; or,
- Statutory action taken by the Local Authority.

## 11.2 Issues to be Tackled Through Planning Control

Many of the issues identified in the appraisal will hopefully be tackled through the normal Council's planning control measures.

### a) Inappropriate alterations

There are properties in the conservation area which have seen part or the whole front elevations being repaired using inappropriate materials. Examples of such inappropriate alterations are identified as:

- The use of modern bricks, in uncharacteristic colours, sizes, textures and bonding. Nos. 25-27 George Street and no. 17 Shaw Street are some of the examples where modern brick has been used for wall repairs, seriously affecting the overall appearance of the properties;
- The use of hard cement mortars for re-pointing of brick and stone works;

- The replacement of original features, such as traditional timber windows and doors with aluminium or uPVC, otherwise considered inappropriate in conservation areas.

All these, cumulatively, erode the character of the conservation area. Planning controls such as the introduction of Article 4 Directions would address this issue.

### b) Shopfronts and inappropriate signs

Due to its location in the town centre, the conservation area has been under intense commercial pressures. As a consequence, many traditional shopfronts have been heavily affected with many of them altered to accommodate the subsequent changes. Examples of the changes were identified as:

- Replacement of timber shop fronts with aluminium, losing traditional shopfront details and proportions;
- Oversized and inappropriate signage and illumination;
- External solid metal roller shutters, an inappropriate and unsympathetic feature in the street scene;
- Inappropriate Dutch awnings, obscuring architectural features on the buildings.

Existing policy guidance should be adhered to in assessing proposals for shopfront alterations and advertisements in conservation areas.

### c) Satellite dishes and antennae

Roofscapes contribute to the character of the area. Proliferation of satellite dishes and television antennae on chimney stacks and areas of the roof visible from the highway detract from this character.

Under Class G of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Amendment) (England) Order 2008, development is not permitted if an antenna should be installed on a roof with a chimney, the highest part of the antenna would be higher than the highest part of the chimney. The Householder's Planning Guide for the installation of Antennas, including satellite dishes (Communities and Local Government 2008) also requires, amongst other things, that antenna should not be installed on a chimney, wall or roof slope which faces or can be seen from the road or open space. Introduction of Article 4 Directions would also address this issue.



#### d) Negative sites and spaces

There are number of sites and spaces that were identified as not being used to their full potential, compromising the character of the conservation area. In their redevelopment, the impact of the new development on the character of the conservation area should be carefully considered before planning permission is granted.

### **11.3 Issues that need to be addressed through statutory action taken by the Local Authority**

In general the conservation area is well maintained and in excellent condition. Existing statutory planning control measures for conservation areas can include Conservation Area Consent (CAC) on demolition and the Tree Preservation Orders (TPO). However, these measures are not deemed sufficient to safeguard the special character of George Street Conservation Area.

The special character of the conservation area is mainly derived from its historical setting and the architectural quality of terraced buildings, details and features as well as open spaces. Whereas there are planning controls against demolition, there are no controls against small alterations of architectural features, which over time can erode the appearance and character of this unique area. Currently such minor replacements and alterations are not subject to planning controls as they are deemed as permitted developments requiring no planning permission.

To address this problem and given its commercial nature, it is recommended that an Article 4(1) Direction be declared in the George Street Conservation Area. Under the Direction, planning permission will be required for works otherwise permitted without seeking planning permission from the Council for not only residential but also commercial properties and flats.

Article 4 (1) Direction should cover alterations that affect the external appearance of buildings in the George Street Conservation Area.

Despite pressure from property owners and developers, previous experiences have shown that Article 4 Directions have been successful in safeguarding the appearance and character of a conservation area. This is as a result of the possibility of enforcement action against any breaches of this planning control policy.

# References

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# St.Helens Council

Urban Regeneration & Housing

## Development Plans

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Document Reference: GEORGECA5



2003-2004  
*Rethinking Construction*  
2007-2008  
*Healthy Schools*  
2008-2009  
*Improving Accessibility*

2009-2010  
*Homes for the Future*  
2009-2010  
*Raising economic prosperity  
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