



Conservation Area Appraisal

George Street Conservation Area Management Plan

February 2011



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1.0 Introduction

1.0 Introduction

There is a statutory duty upon Local Authorities to review conservation areas and to undertake proposals for their subsequent management and enhancement. As a next step after the Conservation Area Appraisal therefore, this management plan is aimed at meeting this broad objective. It has been prepared in accordance with Section 71 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and with guidance from English Heritage and Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment.

Notwithstanding the statutory justification, there is also a strong ‘stewardship’ argument for the preparation of character appraisals and management plans. After all these are our cherished places, which are an intrinsic part of our cultural heritage and therefore we all have a responsibility toward their upkeep. St Helens Council, as the primary local agency for managing its historic built environment, has the authority to lead in this process. However, it requires the efforts of the entire community to ensure that this conservation area remains cherished and well managed. This management plan is an essential tool in that process.

1.1 Aims of the management plan

The role of the management plan is to contribute to and inform the physical regeneration of this part of St Helens town centre at all levels from policy to forward planning and decision-making. The aim of this management plan is therefore to:

- Produce a medium to long-term strategy for the management of the George Street Conservation Area in St Helens town centre.
- Set objectives for addressing the issues.
- Make recommendations for action arising from the appraisal and identifying any further or more detailed work needed for implementation.

Within those broad aims, the management plan has three main long-term objectives:

- To implement recommendations arising from the character appraisal.
- To provide policy guidance to ensure that the significance of the conservation area will be maintained and in any changes that may occur, opportunities for enhancement are maximised rather than features being lost or damaged.
- To establish a framework for future investment decisions and act as a mechanism for applying for additional funding.

In conjunction with the St Helens Design Guidance SPD (2007) and the St Helens Town Centre Urban Design Analysis (2009), the immediate objectives of the management plan are to:

- Make people more aware of the importance of local heritage and to celebrate it for the benefit of the people who live, work, visit and spend time there.
- Provide a robust framework that will be a powerful agent in the consideration and implementation of changes within the area.
- Help provide robust guidance to preserve and enhance the special character of the area as identified in the character appraisal.
- Provide guidance for enhancements to the area, identifying key sites and provide a framework for managing that change.
- Set out the key statutory requirements for considering development in the area and to put in place monitoring and evaluation over the longer term.
- Encourage regeneration through the protection and reuse of buildings and vacant/underused land and by resolving conflict between conservation objectives and inappropriate land use and activities.

1.2 Relationship to the Development Plan

The Council is in the process of preparing the Local Development Framework (LDF). This management plan will, for the foreseeable future, be linked to the saved policies of the St Helens Unitary Development Plan (UDP). The key policies are identified below:

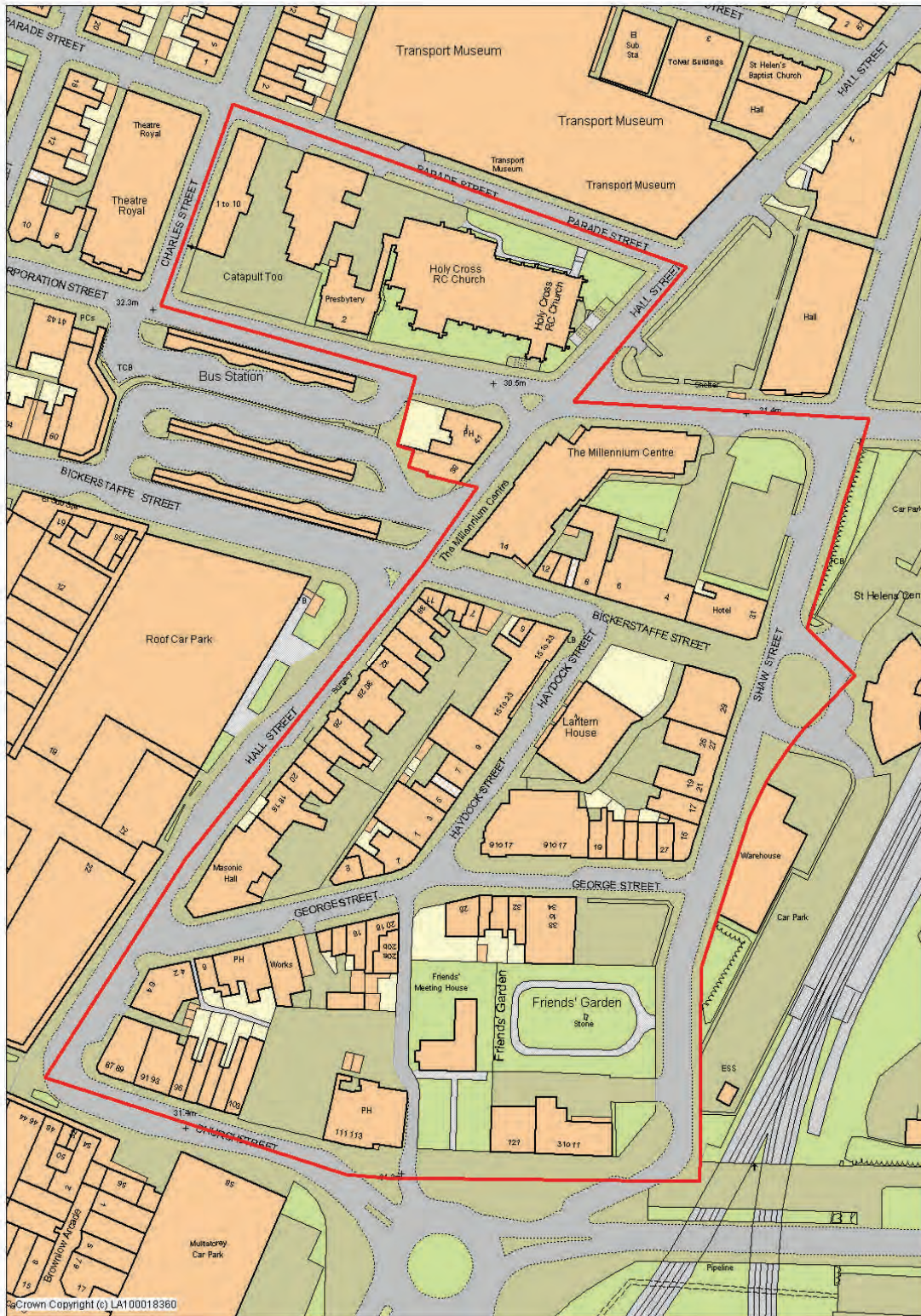
S7	Sustainable development
ENV 23	Archaeology
ENV 24B	Development in conservation areas
ENV 25	Listed buildings
GEN 2	Good environments
GEN 4	Security and crime prevention
GEN 5	Design and layout of new housing
GEN12	Lighting and security apparatus
GEN 14	Backland and tandem developments
RET 6	Alterations and new shopfronts

The Council has adopted a Design Guidance SPD, with the aim of improving the quality of design through promoting a structured approach in securing development, focusing on processes and achieving quality by meeting defined performance criteria. The guide makes reference to the programme of conservation area reviews and the need for character appraisals and management plans. It also provides guidance on a variety of built heritage and conservation issues across the document.

1.3 Status of the management plan

As set out in English Heritage's guidance on conservation areas, there is no intention of adopting either the conservation area appraisal document or this management plan as SPDs. Instead they will form technical guidance to the Design Guidance SPD which in turn is linked to saved policies in the UDP and which eventually, will link to the Core Strategy of the LDF. As such they will be a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

The management plan will also be an important resource-planning tool for St Helens Council and for its partner agencies/organisations. More information on programming and resources is provided in Chapter 5.



The existing boundary of the George Street Conservation Area.

2.0 Proposals deriving from the appraisal

The appraisal of the George Street Conservation Area has identified a number of issues that inform the content of the management proposals set out in this document. These include:

- inappropriate alterations
- shopfronts and inappropriate signs
- satellite dishes and TV antennae
- negative sites and spaces

If not addressed, these issues might undermine the area's special interest.

2.1 Inappropriate alterations

There are a number of issues considered in the appraisal that undermine the character and appearance of the conservation area. These include:

- The use of modern bricks in uncharacteristic colours, sizes, textures and bonding.
- The use of hard cement mortar for re-pointing of brick and stone works.
- The replacement of original features, such as traditional timber windows and doors with aluminium or uPVC.

From a regeneration and enhancement point of view, it will be important to undertake a more rigorous survey relating to the condition of buildings in the conservation area. This could be used to guide future enhancement schemes.

Action 1
Undertake a condition survey of buildings and advise on appropriate remedial measures.

2.2 Shopfronts and inappropriate signs

From the appraisal, it was evident that the conservation area is under intense commercial pressures. Due to its central location in the town centre, the area has evolved from a local shopping area to become an area with many offices and unique retail uses. Subsequently, shopfronts have been heavily affected, with many altered to accommodate these changes. Examples of such inappropriate changes include:

- Replacement of timber shopfronts with aluminium and uPVC.
- Prevalence of inappropriate signs in terms of size and means of illumination.
- Installation of inappropriate roller shutters and blinds.

2.0 Proposals deriving from the appraisal

These inappropriate alterations are considered to detract from the character of the conservation area and therefore similar future proposals will be prevented.

Action 2
Undertake a shopfront and sign audit and explore priorities for enhancement.

Using the Council's Design Guidance and Shopfronts SPD as a basis for a design framework for assessing planning applications, targeted actions for shopfronts and signs should be explored to include:

- Where traditional shopfronts, signs or elements of them survive they should be retained and used as a basis for the reinstatement of the original frontage or incorporated into the design of an appropriate modern shopfront.
- New shopfronts and signs should always be designed for individual buildings, be an integral part of the building and not be a dominant feature in the elevation.
- Modern shopfronts and signs should be in keeping with the area, in terms of design and materials.



2.3 Satellite dishes and TV antennae

It was noted in the appraisal that the conservation area is littered with satellite dishes and TV antennae installed on inappropriate locations. All these features are considered to be visually obtrusive and detrimental to the area's special interest.

2.4 Negative Sites and Spaces

The frontages of buildings and boundaries are important in defining the extent of the public realm and making a positive impact on the special historic character of the area. It was noted in the appraisal that there have been instances where properties were demolished and plots have remained undeveloped. This has broken up the continuity of the frontages, eroding the character of the conservation area. This could also give the impression that the area is in decline.

Action 3
Consider assessing building frontages and boundaries and explore priorities for enhancement.

It is important therefore that this incremental erosion of character is not only stopped but also original frontages in the area are reinstated. A programme of targeted interventions should be explored as a positive means of demonstrating the benefits of conservation to the community.



2.5 Amendment of the boundary

In addition to the above issues, the Council is also obliged to review the boundaries of the conservation area. Following the appraisal therefore, the following boundary amendments are being recommended.

(i) Areas recommended for exclusion in the conservation area

Following the appraisal, there was no reason for removing any of the properties from the conservation area. Accordingly, no area is being recommended for exclusion.

(ii) Areas recommended for inclusion in the conservation area

It was proposed in the appraisal that the boundary of the conservation area should be amended to include the following:

The Hippodrome on Corporation Street:

Its history, interesting Edwardian façade and scale are considered to merit its inclusion into the conservation area.

The block of buildings between Vincent Street and Charles Street along Corporation Street

The area is characterised by two storey-terraced properties in typical Victorian features of slate roofs, red brickwork and articulated window cills and lintels, all are similar to many of the streets in the core of the conservation area. The strong frontage created by the terrace is considered to be important in terms of forming a natural boundary edge to the extended conservation area.

The recently built St Helens Central Station

The design of this modern building was considered to complement and enhance the conservation area and its inclusion would secure the setting of its eastern edge. The vacant site to the south would however not be included in the proposed boundary amendment.

Action 4
Consider including the following into the conservation area:

- Hippodrome on Corporation Street.
- The block of buildings between Vincent and Charles Street along Corporation Street.
- St Helens Central Station

2.0 Proposals deriving from the appraisal



Map showing the proposed boundary changes to the George Street Conservation Area (outlined in blue).

2.0 Proposals deriving from the appraisal

2.6 Planning Controls and Enforcement

The issues that are threatening to undermine the area's special interest could be tackled through:

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

The range of specialist planning controls available to the Council include:

i) Article 4 Direction

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 minor alterations of architectural features, which over time can erode the appearance and character of this unique area. Currently such replacements and minor alterations are not subject to planning controls as they are deemed as permitted developments requiring no planning permission.

Action 5
Consider declaring an Article 4 (1) Direction on all properties in the George Street Conservation Area.

To address this problem it is recommended that an Article 4 Direction be declared in the George Street Conservation Area, making it necessary to apply for planning permission for such works. This allows the potential impact of such works to be assessed and controlled by the Council. With the possibility of enforcement action against any breaches of this Direction, previous experiences show that Article 4 Directions have been successful in protecting the character of conservation areas.

Action 6a
Produce conservation area leaflets to inform developers and property owners of the opportunities and constraints associated with the designation.

Article 4 (1) directions remove development rights for all properties and land within a defined area including both residential and non-residential. Given the predominantly commercial nature of the conservation area therefore, an Article 4 (1) Direction should be considered. Under the Direction, planning permission will be required for works otherwise permitted without the need for planning approval from the Council for not only residential but also commercial properties and flats. The Council should also inform property owners of these measures.

Action 6b
Produce conservation area leaflets to inform property owners of the implications of Article 4 (1) Directions.

ii) Advertisement Controls

Given its commercial nature, advertising is a significant issue in the conservation area. However, as was apparent in the appraisal, the advertisement signs on some

2.0 Proposals deriving from the appraisal

of the buildings are not in keeping with the area.

There are planning powers to discontinue consent for advertisements and to take enforcement action against unauthorised signs. As part of the works to enhance the conservation area, the proposals for shopfronts and advertisements in section 2.5 would go a long way towards meeting this objective. This will be a joint conservation and enforcement project to identify inappropriate signage and then, depending on funding, develop a strategy to address it.

iii) Section 215 Notices

These notices can be served by the Council to require land and property owners to undertake work to tidy/repair land and buildings that are detrimental to public amenity. This power enables the Council to take direct action where owners are unwilling/unable to affect the works themselves.

Action 7
Consider the use of Section 215 powers in relation to untidy sites/properties if negotiations with owners prove unsuccessful.

iv) Enforcement

Enforcement has a key role to play in the protection of the conservation area. A more proactive approach should be considered, possibly including monitoring development activity and ensuring compliance with the requirements of planning permissions. A positive and active approach to enforcement will help to keep contraventions to a minimum and secure the special interest of the area.

2.7 Issues that need to be addressed through statutory action taken by the Local Authority

In general the conservation area is well maintained. Existing statutory planning control measures for conservation areas can include Conservation Area Consent (CAC) on demolition and a Tree Preservation Orders (TPO). Application for CACs and TPOs should not be approved if proposed works are considered to harm the special interest of the conservation area.

3.0 Guidelines for new development

3.1 General Issues

The appraisal identified a number of unlisted buildings which make a positive contribution to the character of the conservation area. These buildings are:

- The Millennium Centre, Corporation Street/Hall Street
- The Masonic Hall, Hall Street/George Street
- 9-17 George Street
- 17-27 Shaw Street
- 29 Shaw Street
- 2-4 George Street/4-6 Hall Street
- Lantern House, Haydock Street/Bickerstaffe Street
- The Catapult, Haydock Street/Bickerstaffe Street

Action 8
Consider including the following buildings into the St Helens Local List:

- Masonic Hall, Hall Street;
- 9-17 George Street;
- 19-27 Shaw Street;
- 29-31 Shaw Street.

To recognise their importance, it is worth considering some of these buildings for inclusion into the local list, which the Council is in the process of preparing.



29-27 Shaw Street



The Masonic Hall

3.2 Guidelines for development proposals and alterations

From the appraisal, the George Street Conservation Area derives its physical character mainly from:

- The collection of 19th Century buildings exhibiting many of the popular domestic styles of the Victorian period.
- A pattern of streets and passages gives the area a core character.
- Groups of two-storey buildings with small to medium footprints in narrow long plots and building frontages on the back of pavement.
- A microcosm of urban activity within a dense and compact layout and an intricate pattern of courtyards and alleyways.

3.0 Guidelines for new development

Any development, extensions, demolitions and other alterations should therefore respond to these general characteristics.

(i) New buildings and extensions

Any proposals for new development will be expected to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the George Street Conservation Area and to comply with the relevant Development Plan policies.

The following design principles could guide any new development and/or extensions, together with the Design Guide SPD, Shopfront SPD and the Unitary Development Plan:

- Whilst new development should not seek to mimic the prevailing Victorian design it should be responsive to the conservation area in terms of scale, massing, materials, proportions and height.
- Redevelopment of vacant sites or sites developed from recently demolished properties should make reference to original building footprints.
- Appropriate external materials and finishes will be required on all new development within or affecting the setting of the conservation area.
- Traditional materials typical of the conservation area will be encouraged to complement the existing buildings.
- Modern materials will only be accepted where they form part of a coherent, high quality design that complements the prevailing character, harmonising with the colours and textures of the built heritage.
- Extensions and alterations to existing buildings will be encouraged to follow the scale, proportions, detailing and materials of the existing property.
- Development should respect/maintain key views into and out of the conservation area.

(ii) Demolitions

In line with national planning policy on the historic built environment, there is a general presumption against the demolition of listed buildings (including their out-buildings) and buildings of townscape value, which are identified in the George Street Conservation Area Appraisal.

3.0 Guidelines for new development

The demolition or inappropriate alteration of any of these properties would have a negative impact on the character of the conservation area and would therefore generally not be permitted. These buildings include:

- The Masonic Hall, 6-8 Hall Street
- 3-5 George Street
- 19-27 Shaw Street
- The Alfred Hotel, 29-31 Shaw Street

The demolition of other buildings in the area should only be approved if:

- The building(s) is/are identified as making either a negative or insignificant contribution to the character or appearance of the area.
- Any replacement building or feature will preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area.
- Any application for a replacement building must be accompanied by a design and access statement, which describes how the new building respects the 'key characteristics' of the area as defined in the conservation area appraisal.
- To avoid unsightly gaps in the conservation area, a condition will be imposed on any grant of Conservation Area Consent, which prevents the demolition of a building from taking place until a contract has been let for the redevelopment of the site.

(iii) Windows and doors

Historically, windows and doors would have been constructed in timber and painted (mainly white). Consequently, uPVC will be discouraged in the conservation area in favour of timber that is from a sustainable managed source. UPVC is considered an inappropriate material as it has a detrimental impact on the area.

The general proportions and design of windows and doors should reflect those of the area. Doors should be constructed in timber and in some instances a fanlight will be appropriate. Whilst uPVC will be discouraged, high quality, contemporary design incorporating modern glazing and minimalist metal frames may be acceptable, for the ground floor of commercial buildings.

(iv) Shop fronts/signage

Traditional Victorian shopfronts would include features such as a stallrisers, pilasters, pediments and cornice, giving depth and robustness. Such elements should inform any new shopfronts within the conservation area and colours should be from a pre-agreed palette. Signage should be of a scale and style appropriate to the building and below the fascia line.

Other signage considerations include the following:

- Illuminated signage will only be appropriate if it is of high quality (internally illuminated box fascia signs and external swan neck lighting will not be appropriate).

3.0 Guidelines for new development

- The size and design of any projecting signage should reflect the design of the shopfront and associated fascia signage.
- Transfer signage on the glazing should be appropriate subject to the extent/design; and,
- Roller shutters should be internal and in lattice form and backlit during the evening.

Reference must be made to the Shopfronts SPD in any proposals put forward.

v) Tree Works

There is a need to carry out regular maintenance of trees in the conservation area. Any works on trees should follow the guidelines laid out in the St Helens Council, Trees and Development SPD (2008), with particular reference to the issue of tree protection in conservation areas.

Action 9
The Council should regularly maintain trees in the conservation area.

4.0 Community Involvement

4.1 Community ‘ownership’

It is generally agreed that everyone has a responsibility for his or her heritage. For the conservation area to be successful, therefore, it is important that all sectors of the community (the public, voluntary and civic groups, businesses, property/landowners and developers) are engaged in the management proposals and are in agreement with the objectives and outcomes.

Accordingly, the Council should consider regularly informing residents in the conservation area of their responsibilities towards their historic built environment.

4.2 Consultation and involvement

The Council is committed to meaningful community involvement in the proposals for the George Street Conservation Area. A comprehensive consultation process has taken place and the views of the community have been sought and taken into account in developing this management plan. The Statement of Community Involvement for the Local Development Framework sets out the consultation considered appropriate in relation to planning for the Borough and this will guide this process.

The Council also aims to form strong partnerships with local civic, heritage and community groups, who will all be an additional outlet for keeping the community informed of progress and involving them in decision making.

Action 10
Explore mechanisms of engaging local heritage and community groups in decision-making process

5.0 Delivery and funding

5.1 Monitoring and Review

As recommended by English Heritage, this document should be reviewed every five years from the date of its formal adoption. It will also need to be assessed in the light of the emerging Local Development Framework and changes to Government policy.

A review should include the following:

- A survey of the conservation area including a full photographic survey to aid possible enforcement action.
- An assessment of whether the various recommendations detailed in this document have been acted upon and how successful this has been.
- The identification of any new issues which need to be addressed, requiring further actions or enhancements.
- The production of a short report detailing the findings of the survey and any necessary action;
- Publicity and advertising.

Action 11
Consider undertaking regular review (every five years) of the conservation area, including a photographic survey.

It is possible that the local community under the guidance of a heritage consultant or the Council could carry out this review. This would enable the local community to become more involved with the process and would raise public consciousness of the issues, including the problems associated with enforcement.

5.2 Delivery plan

A delivery plan has been devised on the actions outlined in this report (see Appendix 1). It is based on the premise that the programme will entail short, medium and long-term projects. Short-term projects would aim to be delivered within 18 months; medium-term within the 5 years and longer-term thereafter. The plan is a notional one at this stage, as commitments in relation to funding have not been secured.

Action 12
Consider undertaking a regular review of the delivery of the actions outlined in this report.

In addition, discussions with landowners and other parties need to be undertaken and agreements reached before definitive timetables can be given.

5.0 Delivery and funding

Therefore, the delivery plan and timetable can only be indicative at present. As the project proceeds the plan will evolve and be firmed up.

5.3 Funding

Proposals for the enhancement and regeneration of the conservation area, as well as the introduction of planning controls could have financial implications for the Council as well as residents. Fortunately, given the excellent condition of the public realm of the George Street Conservation Area, the only funding would be for the general maintenance of the area, no capital funding would be necessary.

Action 13
Consider other sources of capital funding including private partnership, to redevelop void sites identified in the appraisal.

It was noted in the appraisal that there were void sites in the conservation area, which are detracting from its character. Given the lack of funding the Council will have to examine availability from other sources to redevelop such void sites. It may be inevitable that private sector funding may be necessary.

Appendix 1

	Action Summary	Short Term	Medium Term	Long Term	Implemented	Funding	Notes/Comments
1	Undertake a condition survey of buildings and advise on appropriate remedial measures.				St Helens Council (SHC)	N/A	To be carried out by the Conservation Team.
2	Undertake a shop front and sign audit and explore priorities for enhancement.				SHC	N/A	To be carried out by the Conservation Team.
3	Consider assessing building frontages and boundaries and explore priorities for enhancement.				SHC	N/A	Statutory process to be followed.
4	Consider including the following into the conservation area: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hippodrome on Corporations Street. The block of buildings between Vincent Street and Charles Street along Corporation Street. St Helens Central Station. 				SHC	N/A	As part of the Local List Supplementary Planning Document.
5	Consider declaring an Article 4(1) Direction on all properties in the George Street Conservation Area.				SHC	N/A	To be carried out by the Conservation Team.
6a	Produce conservation area leaflets to inform developers and property owners of the opportunities and constraints associated with the designation.				SHC	N/A	To be carried out by the Conservation Team.
6b	Produce conservation area leaflets to inform property owners of the implications of the Article 4(1) Direction.				SHC	SHC	To be carried out by the Conservation Team.
7	Consider the use of Section 215 powers in relation to untidy sites/properties if negotiations with owners prove unsuccessful.				SHC	N/A	
8	Consider including the unlisted buildings in into the St Helens Local List.				SHC	N/A	To be carried out by the Conservation Team.

Appendix 1

	Action summary	Short Term	Medium Term	Long Term	Implemented	Funding	Notes/ Comments
9	The Council should regularly maintain trees in the conservation area.				SHC	SHC	
10	Explore mechanisms of engaging local heritage and community groups as part of the decision-making process.				SHC	SHC	To be carried out by the Conservation Team.
11	Consider undertaking regular review (every five years) of the conservation area including a photographic survey.				SHC	SHC	To be carried out by the Conservation Team.
12	Consider undertaking a regular review of the delivery of the actions outlined in this report.				SHC	SHC	To be carried out by the Conservation Team.
13	Consider other sources of capital funding, including private partnership, to redevelop void sites identified in the appraisal				SHC	SHC	

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Contact Centre

Wesley House, Corporation Street
St.Helens, Merseyside. WA10 1HF

Tel: (01744) 676789

Minicom: (01744) 671671

Fax: (01744) 676895

Email: contactcentre@sthelens.gov.uk

www.sthelens.gov.uk



St.Helens Council

Urban Regeneration & Housing
Development Plans

Town Hall

Victoria Square

St.Helens

Merseyside WA10 1HP

Tel: 01744 676190

Fax: 01744 676194

Minicom: 01744 671671

planningpolicy@sthelens.gov.uk

www.sthelens.gov.uk



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