

Town and Country Planning Act 1990

Acquisition of Land Act 1981

Inquiry into:

**THE ST HELENS BOROUGH COUNCIL (ST HELENS TOWN CENTRE) COMPULSORY PURCHASE ORDER
2022**

St Helens Bus Station

Statement of Evidence

of

Sam Ainsley

14 July 2023

1 Introduction

Qualifications and Experience:

- 1.1 I am Sam Ainsley, an Associate Director with Jon Matthews Architects (“JMA”). I have a Diploma in Architecture and Bachelor of Architecture from the Mackintosh School of Architecture in Glasgow and a Part 3 Diploma in Architecture from the University of Westminster in London. I qualified as an architect in 2005 and am a member of the Architect Registration Board.
- 1.2 I have worked for JMA for the last 4 years in Manchester. Prior to this I worked for 6 months at 5 Plus Architects, Scott Donald Architects in Manchester for a year, Simon Whitehead Architects in London for 4 years, Seymour Harris Architecture for 8 years in London, Keppie Design in Glasgow for 2 years and Edward Cullinan Architects for 1 year in London.
- 1.3 I have over 21 years professional experience working in both public and private sectors, 18 of which I have been a qualified architect. My early career was mainly in education, then moving into private residential before joining JMA where I have been involved in commercial offices, residential and master-planning.

Role within the Project:

- 1.4 I became involved in the plans to regenerate St Helens Town Centre in January 2020 when JMA successfully interviewed for the role of master-planner/architect to prepare a development framework and masterplan for St Helens and Earlestown. The purpose of the St Helens masterplan was to support the positive transformation of the town centre and to ensure that the development is of a high quality, is suitable and has St Helens at its heart. I have managed the JMA team overseen by a director, Jon Matthews, from this point.
- 1.5 In February 2020, JMA completed the first draft of the masterplan following a critical analysis of the brief, core documentation (Town Centre and Place Strategy, Transforming Our Town, Town Centre Health Check Appraisal, 3D Reid Masterplan and Cultural Hub Proposal (RIBA Stage 1) and numerous site visits. I am, therefore, familiar with the site.
- 1.6 During 2021, JMA worked with St Helens Borough Council (“SHBC”) and English Cities Fund (“ECF”) to refine the masterplan proposal and explore the option of a net zero carbon office. This refinement to the masterplan reinforced the challenges faced in improve the arrival experience, by bus and train. There is no space to dwell and orientate yourself, once off the bus you are corralled along narrow pavements contained by a barrier overshadowed by idling busses. Natural wayfinding is poor from the train station and non-existent within the bus station. The brief for the bus station during this period is more clearly set out to achieve a safe fit for purpose bus station to meet future needs. The space take this requires is larger than previously sketch options allowed. This brief had to be balanced against the masterplan objectives the key ones in this area being the creation of public space to dwell and orientate yourself, improved the north south and east west permeability and natural wayfinding of site and the town centre.

- 1.7 Under my management, in January 2021, the JMA team prepared and submitted the draft development framework document and masterplan to SHBC and ECF for approval. In November 2021, following sign off by SHBC, the draft development framework document and masterplan (**CD B6**) went to public consultation.
- 1.8 JMA compiled the final version of the 'Development Framework Document' (**CD B3**) setting out the masterplan alongside the SHBC vision and policy this was adopted by SHBC in February 2022.
- 1.9 At the end of 2021, WSP and Austin Smith Lord Architects were appointed to develop the design of the redeveloped bus station and public realm within the town centre but outside of the masterplan boundary. I, along with the landscape architects, advised on the development of this scheme within the context of the masterplan and hybrid planning application.
- 1.10 In summer 2022, following the adoption of the 'Development Framework Masterplan' (**CD B3**), an application for the hybrid planning permission for the masterplan was submitted to SHBC's planning department for determination. This application covered a wider area than the CPO redline, extending from the north of the bus station Corporation Street down to St Helens Canal. The hybrid application submitted consisted of a Design and Access Statement (**CD B8**) and accompanying architectural drawings by JMA, plus consultant's reports for example transport assessment, parking assessment, heritage assessment. The hybrid planning application went to planning committee on 27th September 2022 (reference P/2022/0212/HYBR – **CD C5**) permission was granted on 31st March 2023 (reference P/2022/0212/HYBR – **CD C1**). Full permission has been granted for demolition in a conservation area and for proposed demolition and site preparation works. Outline permission has been granted for development of a mix of uses, comprising hotel use (Use Class C1); residential units (Use Class C3); commercial, business and service uses (Use Class F1(b-e) and F2(b)); and sui generis uses with associated access, servicing, parking, public realm and landscaping, with all matters (Access, Appearance, Landscaping, Layout and Scale) reserved for future determination (the "Planning Permission").
- 1.11 Since the grant of the hybrid planning permission, JMA have developed phase 1 of the masterplan which consists of a 50,00sqft office, 150 bed hotel, 56 apartments over 2 blocks, 8 town houses and a market hall up to RIBA (Royal Institute of British Architects) Stage 3, Spatial Coordination. JMA have prepared a Design and Access Statement (**CD C8**) and accompanying architectural drawings to support the reserved matters application for phase 1.

Scope of Evidence:

- 1.12 This Statement of Evidence is in support of the St Helens Borough Council (St Helens Town Centre) Compulsory Purchase Order which was made on 9th December 2022 (**CD D1**).
- 1.13 I give evidence for the purpose of the Inquiry on behalf SHBC and its development partner ECF. The evidence contained within this Statement represents my true and professional opinion, in accordance with the guidance of my professional institution.
- 1.14 This evidence should be read alongside the evidence provided by Sean Traynor (SHBC), Andrew Cairns (Merseytravel), Iain Jenkinson (CBRE), Ged Massie (Keppie Massie) and WSP Technical Report.
- 1.15 The remainder of the Statement is structured as follows:

Section 2 - Council Vision and Brief: Summarises the council vision and brief and vision for the town centre.

Section 3 - Existing Town Centre: Commentary on the existing town centre issues.

Section 4 - National Design Guide: Existing town centre comments against the 10 factors to achieving a well design place.

Section 5 - Masterplan Proposal: Overview of the proposed masterplan and the key issues it seeks to address.

Section 6 -Phase 1 Masterplan: Overview of Phase 1.

Section 7 - St Helens Masterplan Timeline.

Section 8 - Summary and Conclusion: Summarises the key masterplan approach.

Section 9 - Statement of Truth.

2 Council Vision and Brief

- 2.1 SHBC had in place a core set of documents which lay out the foundations for the redevelopment of the town centre. These documents informed and shaped JMA's development of the masterplan and included:
- St Helens Town Centre Strategy, 2017 to 2027 (March 2017) **(CD G5)**
 - St Helens Local Plan Core Strategy of 2012 **(CD G8)**
- 2.2 These documents demonstrated the need for transformational change and that the proposals for the redevelopment of the town centre should be ambitious and creative. A key aspiration for the redevelopment of the town centre is to improve the user experience, boost the viability and vitality of the high street, increase dwell-time and footfall. The vision to achieve this was set out in 3 themes, one 'Shrink and Link', two 'Culturally Centre' and three 'An Animated Experience' **(CD G5)**.
- 2.3 Theme 1 'Shrink and Link' is about improving movement within the town so the towns key assets, historic, cultural and retail, are more easily linked. By improving public transport and arrival, improving natural wayfinding, improving key road and rail crossings, new streets, safe streets with active street frontages. Making it easier to get in and out of the town centre as well as navigate the town centre itself. The town centre must become a more attractive offer and for this to work it *should provide an improved leisure offer and diversity of nighttime economy to meet the needs of families, provide modern living environments focusing on high quality, higher density and well-designed transport nodes and improved signage and wayfinding.* **(CD G5, page 12, paragraph 2.4),**

- 2.4 Theme 2 'Culturally Centered' is a key objective of the Town Centre Strategy. Its looking at how the organisation and positive reputation St Helens has can be used as a strong basis for attracting people to the town centre (**CD G5**, page 13, paragraph 2.5)
- 2.5 Theme 3 'Animated Experience' This is about the creation of space to increase visitor dwell, improving the public realm, linking assets and public spaces. Spaces where events can be hosted to create a town centre where people want to spend time. It needs to be safe and clean to attract people, bringing life back to the streets. (**CD G5**, page 13, paragraph 2.5)
- 2.6 This is a clear vision and strategy to build on the town's rich heritage of invention, innovation, connectivity, and strong sense of community. To rejuvenate the town centre into a modern, vibrant, and desirable location. Building upon a hot bed of creativity in the town centre that will then radiate out to the widest parts of the area attracting investment, raising its profile and maximize its assets.

3 Existing Town Centre

- 3.1 The existing town centre has a strong cultural offer, has the loyalty and pride of the residents, and is in an advantageous strategic transport location between Manchester and Liverpool. The centre already has clear zones split into 4 quarters (**Image 1 at Appendix SA1**) Central Retail, Civic and Heritage, Development (Discovery Zone in the proposed masterplan), Education and Entertainment. In each of these quarters are Grade II Listed Buildings and buildings of architectural merit which provide a focal point. These assets currently get lost through poor public realm and disjointed linkages. St Mary's Market Hall is a great example of this (**Image 2 at Appendix SA1**) as the Market Hall turns its back on the town centre. Access from Church Square involves going through St Mary's Shopping Centre arriving at its back door. The main entrance faces away from the town centre overlooking the World of Glass (**Image 3 at Appendix SA1**) which is itself a key asset cut off by a large indoor and dated shopping centre.
- 3.2 The town centre is no longer seen by residents as the main shopping centre due to its poor offer of shops and public realm, with many residents tending to utilise the out of centre retail parks (**Image 4 at Appendix SA1**). St Helens Linkway also serves to disconnect the town centre from the surrounding neighborhoods, creating a barrier to movement to and across the town centre, reducing footfall. A high percentage of the retail on offer in the town centre is below par with a lack of anchor stores and food and beverage outlets. There is a distinct lack of a more mature nighttime economy, suitable for families.
- 3.3 The town centre feels very disjointed, this is due to a poor street pattern that has been created by the locations of 3 large indoor shopping centres, which act as barriers to north-south and east-west movement through the town centre. The location of the indoor shopping centres also impacts negatively on natural wayfinding, blocking vistas and links between key public spaces. This is particularly apparent at key points of arrival, especially by bus and train, where it is not obvious which direction the centre of town is.
- 3.4 A good example how the 3 large shopping centres impact movement played out the first time I visited St Helens to get a feel for the town centre back in December 2019. I tried to follow a route from the train station to the town centre.

3.5 Following a Route.

- 3.6 I deliberately started at St Helens Central Rail Station (**Image 5 at Appendix SA1**) whereupon you step out onto roundabout between two car parks overlooked by (a then) derelict pub; there is no space to dwell and orientate yourself. The eastern end of Bickerstaffe Steet is well planted with good public realm, this draws you naturally towards the bus station, confirmed by the signage totem. The sight of the Gamble Building leads you along Bickerstaffe Street (**Image 6 at Appendix SA1**) to the bus station. The pavement next to the bus station is too narrow, you are sandwiched between the blank shop fronts of the Hardshaw Shopping Centre and the bus station barriers. The bus station itself reads like a cluster of individual bus shelters (**Image 7 at Appendix SA1**). The buses laid over along corporation road overshadowing the pavement obscuring the surrounding buildings. There is no space to welcome you, space to dwell, orientate yourself or clues to the direction of the town centre and the retail quarter. The Hardshaw Shopping Centre is a barrier to the heart of the town, Church Square and the core retail quarter.
- 3.7 The layout of the bus station, plus narrow pavements and lack of public space is a barrier itself to movement, north-south and east-west. There is not space to expand the bus station to accommodate larger buses or the new hydrogen bus route between St Helens and Liverpool.
- 3.8 Continuing to explore the town centre from here, I did not want to enter what looked like a soulless/ dated indoor shopping centre. I continued west, drawn by the historic Gamble and Prudential Buildings, finding myself in Victoria Square outside the beautiful Town Hall - not in the retail quarter but on the edge of the town centre in the civic quarter. The good quality public realm and human scale of Hardshaw Street (**Image 8 at Appendix SA1**), draws you south till you meet Church Street. Its at this point you first catch sight of St Helens Parish Church tower, a key wayfinding marker in many towns, it is the heart of the town and central retail quarter, (**Image 9 at Appendix SA1**).
- 3.9 Arriving from the south by car along Chalon Way West, the rear elevation of Church Square Shopping Centre, service access and a multistorey car park dominate the view (**Image 10 at Appendix SA1**). Chalon Way is over engineered, dedicated to vehicular movement rather than an inviting place for pedestrians. Chalon Way is now only a through-route for buses having been blocked up for general traffic (following the construction of St Helens Linkway) to prevent it being used as a rat-run. To the south, a sea of surface car park (**Image 11 at Appendix SA1**), concealing the first industrial canal in Britain from view and a barrier to reaching it safely. It does not celebrate or enhance the canal as a major amenity within the town centre.
- 3.10 Only Market Street links Chalon Way with Church Square, with St Mary's and Church Square Shopping Centres acting as two large plugs to ease movement through the town centre. Once in Church Square you feel like you are at the heart of the town, with St Helens Parish Church at its centre. Yet it is here that the issues, which the 3 large indoor shopping centres create, are most apparent. A town square is normally a place where all roads converge, i.e. where markets would trade. There are, however, only 3 roads in and out, closing down routes to key assets such as the St Mary's Market Hall, the World of Glass, the canal and routes back to the bus and rail stations. The routes that are available have large areas of inactive street frontage, creating imbalanced streets with reduced activity. This reduces opportunities for passive surveillance making them feel unsafe at times (**Image 12 at Appendix SA1**).

- 3.11 St Mary's Shopping Centre, Market Hall and the multistorey car park conceals the presence of the rail line and Chalon Way East, an over engineered highway which creates a no man's land (**Image 13 at Appendix SA1**). Chalon Way East is a key route taken by spectators from the train station to the Totally Wicked Stadium, which could be the away fans only experience and their lasting memory of St Helens, the back of a shopping centre, unused road and palisade fence.

4 National Design Guide

- 4.1 Having highlighted some of the key issues in the wider town centre its useful to analyse how the existing buildings within Phase 1 of the masterplan stand up against the 10 key factors the National Design Guide sets out for planning Beautiful and Successful Places:

1. Context – Enhances the surroundings.
2. Identity – Attractive and distinctive.
3. Built Form – A coherent pattern of development.
4. Movement – Accessible and easy to move around.
5. Nature – Enhance and optimized.
6. Public Space – Safe, social, and inclusive.
7. Uses – Mixed and integrated.
8. Homes and buildings – Functional, healthy and sustainable.
9. Resources – Efficient and resilient.
10. Lifespan – Made to last.

- 4.2 **Context:** the existing bus station and Hardshaw Shopping Centre do not enhance the surroundings (**Image 14 at Appendix SA1**). The bus station is utilitarian, taking no account of its importance as a gateway to St Helens. The Hardshaw Centre has predominantly blank inactive frontage, making no contribution to the street scene. The space that exists between these buildings does not enhance the local context, its surrounded by beautiful historic buildings such as the Gamble Building, Holy Cross and St Helens Catholic Church and the George Street Quarter.
- 4.3 **Identity:** there is nothing attractive or distinctive about the bus station and its ticket office. The same can be said about the Hardshaw Centre (**Image 15 at Appendix SA1**). The space within and around them do not contribute or have any synergy with the local character and distinctness of St Helens.
- 4.4 **Built form:** the Hardshaw Centre and the other 2 shopping centres are out of scale for the town centre. They are too large, with extensive areas of inactive street frontage, more suited to out-of-town retail parks (**Image 4 at Appendix SA1**).
- 4.5 **Movement:** movement north, south, east and west is impeded by the 3 shopping centres and the bus station which physically block and obscure key desire lines, which, if opened up, would improve natural wayfinding and footfall through the central retail quarter. There is currently a lack of spaces to dwell, linked together by good quality public realm.
- 4.6 **Nature:** there are very few trees in the town centre; the site is dominated by large indoor shopping centres and cramped bus station.
- 4.7 **Public space:** there is no public space to dwell and orientate yourself at either the rail or bus stations. The public realm within Hall Street, which is the one street that links the bus station with the heart of the town (Church Square) is barren and imbalanced. Church Square is of reasonable quality in terms of public realm, but the area feels stark and uninviting. Once the shops close and the shutters come down, people disappear, the streets feel unwelcoming and unsafe.
- 4.8 **Uses:** are limited with a lack of variety and no mature food and beverage offer for families. There is an oversupply low value shops, including charity shops and value brand shops for example.
- 4.9 **Homes and buildings:** there is no critical mass of homes within this area of the town centre, which contributes to the lack of life in the town centre after the shops close. The Hardshaw Centre dominates a large area of the town centre; once closed this area cannot be accessed, creating a barrier to getting across town.
- 4.10 **Resources:** the current bus station does not meet the needs of its current requirements (as addressed in the evidence of Andrew Cairns of Merseytravel) its cramped, unwelcoming and unpleasant, not the gateway to a town centre you would expect and it has no future capacity to adapt. The Hardshaw Centre is an inefficient building of its time, not designed to minimize energy consumption or have the flexibility to easily be repurposed with another use, as buildings should be today.
- 4.11 **Life span:** well-designed places sustain their beauty over the long term, they add to the quality of life of their users. This cannot be said of the current design or user experience of the bus station, Hardshaw Centre or the spaces they create.

- 4.12 This highlights the extent of the issues St Helens town centre faces. To realise the Council's vision, a comprehensive redevelopment is needed; it is not possible to achieve on a site-by-site redevelopment. A strategic, comprehensive, intervention is needed to deliver a beautiful, enduring, and successful place (National Design Guide, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government). This is a once in a generation opportunity to 'mend' the town centre and to create a high-quality sustainable town centre for the future.

5 Masterplan Proposal

- 5.1 The existing town centre, despite the negative aspects, presents some unique opportunities that must be realised to deliver a successful and contextual response that achieves the vision of SHBC (**Image 16 at Appendix SA1**), opening-up desire lines to improve natural wayfinding and movement through the town centre. The new desire lines (streets) will break down the large indoor shopping centre footprints, creating building plots of an appropriate density and scale. Thus linking public spaces and reconnecting cultural and historic buildings such as the World of Glass and the St Helens Canal (England's first of the industrial revolution), bringing these back into the town centre. Replacing blank inactive brick facades and roller shutters with active frontages, this means shop fronts and front doors to homes. This creates interest and brings activity to the streets, improving passive surveillance making the streets feel safer and full of life and activity.
- 5.2 The town centre presents the opportunity to introduce some amazing new public spaces addressing arrival into the town and creating new amenities, at the same time introducing sustainable features such as rain gardens that help reduce the pressure on sewers, trees and seating. A beautiful landscaped arrival plaza outside the rail station welcomes you to the town, creating space to dwell and orientate yourself with seating to wait for friends and trees to provide shade from the sun. This plaza leads you seamlessly to a new public space, Bickerstaffe Square, with a new modern open bus station and canopy. The proximity of these two key modes of transport will create a new multimodal interchange, making using public transport easier and a positive experience. Discovery Park, to be delivered in phase 2, will provide a new positive green edge to the town centre where previously there was a wide over engineered highway behind the failing St Mary's Shopping Centre. This will create an amazing new amenity for residents and visitors, a piece of sustainable green infrastructure, with café, play park for children. Also, a primary route for rugby fans from the train station through to the Totally Wicked Stadium, it will create a lasting positive image of St Helens. New streets lined with homes with front gardens link the park back to Church Square, the heart of the town, giving people easy access to the central retail quarter.
- 5.3 The masterplan (**CD B3**) is underpinned by 2 key moves: (i) improving permeability and (ii) giving everything back to the street. Improving permeability is key to a successful place. A town should have simple, intuitive, wayfinding and permeability (**Image 17 at Appendix SA1**). A key move in our response to SHBC's vision is to restore the historic street grain with a network of interconnecting streets, with shared surfaces addressing the poor north-south and east-west permeability within the town centre. The objective is to ensure pedestrians and cyclists can permeate through the town centre safely and with ease, through beautiful active green streets guided by the towns wayfinding points. Transformed arrival points with space to dwell, that is beautifully landscaped giving you the space to orientate yourself. New and relandscaped street and public realm link through to the retail quarter, increasing footfall linking all the 4 quarters and the towns historic, civic and arts buildings and amenities.
- 5.4 Giving everything back to the street is about creating positive active street frontages (**Image 18 at Appendix SA1**). Replacing the large blank, inactive walls and elevations dominated by service doors with beautifully proportioned

buildings containing leisure, retail and residential to create a balanced and animated streets with a range of amenities (**Image 19 at Appendix SA**). Repopulating the town centre with high quality housing is critical to establishing a sustainable community economically, socially, and environmentally, breathing life back into the town centre.

6 Phase 1 Masterplan

- 6.1 Phase 1 of the masterplan has been carefully chosen to have the most positive impact on the town centre. It is about addressing arrival into the town by public transport, bus and rail, then drawing you into the heart of the town through intuitive natural wayfinding (**Image 20 at Appendix SA1**).
- 6.2 Phase 1 delivers a new bus station (**Image 21 at Appendix SA1**), 50,000sqft of grade A office space, a 120+ bed hotel, new market hall back at the heart of the town, 2 new apartment blocks with retail below plus 8 town houses, creating 56 new homes in total. Plus a wrap to the former M&S Store building, allowing it to be subdivided into smaller retail units appropriate to current market demand in St Helens.
- 6.3 The buildings are carefully positioned to work with and enhance the existing town centre and its quarters. The office is located close to public transport, it creates a new positive edge to the Civic Quarter, a cluster of buildings that includes Town hall, Gamble Building, Wesley House and Century House. The office forms a gateway with the new hotel to the new street leading south to the heart of the town, Church Square. The hotel will bring 24-hour activity and passive surveillance to the new bus station, making it feel safer, the ground floor being totally active animating the street. The town houses along Hall Street draw the more intimate and historic scale of the George Street Quarter across to Phase 1, tying the proposal into the existing fabric of St Helens. The new residential point block turns the corner of the mixed-use block setting up a lovely conversation with the Masonic Hall; these two buildings form a key wayfinding point at the junction with the George Street Quarter along with the market hall and George Public House. A new Market Hall is located back at the heart of the town, close to where it was historically, replacing St Mary Market Hall on the periphery of the town, obscured by an indoor shopping centre. The new market (**Image 22 at Appendix SA1**) is a building in the round, meaning it can be approached from all directions. Its beautiful timber structure expressed giving a warmth to the interior and stained glass creating a beacon at night beckoning you in, just round the corner from the multimodal interchange. The market will be a vibrant hub of activity morning and night offering not just your traditional stalls but street food vendors, coffee kiosks and activity into the evening with the ability to facilitate events.
- 6.4 A new public space is created (**Image 24 at Appendix SA1**), Bickerstaffe Square, a warm handshake that welcomes you to St Helens (**Image 23 at Appendix SA1**). The aspiration is the creation of a square that is not just a bus station, but rather a square that has a bus station in it. To achieve this and deliver the brief from Merseytravel and the SHBC for a future proofed bus station, with associated ticket office and staff welfare facilities. Presented some challenges to the masterplan aspiration but has been achieved by the suitable positioning of buildings to the south of the bus station, pushing the as far south as possible to create space.
- 6.5 Other locations were explored for the bus station within the town centre as part of a separate study (St Helens Town Centre Multi-Modal Interchange, Options Technical Report). Whilst JMA were not directly involved in this,

the conclusion was that the current location is the best place for the bus station close to the centre and next to the rail station, allowing the creation of a multimodal interchange.

- 6.6 It is the combination of several factors that contribute to a positive sense of arrival. A bus station that operates safely and efficiently now, and in the future, requires adequate capacity. This will create a setting for the buildings that form Bickerstaffe Square, being the Gamble, the Theatre Royal, the Holy Cross and St Helens Catholic Church. In addition, the new office and hotel have been deliberately positioned to frame the view of St Helens Church Tower (**Image 24 at Appendix SA1**), creating a gateway into the heart of the town. A positive sense of arrival is also about moving-on from this Bickerstaffe Square intuitively and without any barriers to the rest of the town and beyond.
- 6.7 The layout of the new bus station needs to promote this ease of movement north, south, east and west. Key crossing points have been carefully designed the landscape and street furniture guiding intuitively, whether you are arriving by bus or just passing through. To achieve this, and the operational requirements of the bus station, requires space. To keep the buildings that are between the Gamble Building and Millenium Centre, which includes the Swan Hotel, would not make it possible to achieve all this.

7 St Helens Masterplan Timeline

- 7.1 The purpose of the masterplan is to support the positive transformation of the town centre. To ensure that developments coming forward are of high quality, are suitable and has St Helens at its heart. The masterplan (**CD B3**) was developed over a period of time going through some key milestones for sign of and engagement (**Appendix SA2**).
- 7.2 In February 2020, JMA issued the first draft of the Development Framework Document (Masterplan) for council 'in principle' sign-off. Over the next 21 months JMA along with the design team and SHBC refined the masterplan. Towards the end of 2020 the brief emerged from Merseytravel and SHBC identifying the capacity issues surrounding the bus station and the desire to create a joined-up transport hub.
- 7.3 The masterplan had already identified the bus station as an area needing major improvement, as a key arrival point into St Helens. It is some people's first experience of the town and a day-to-day experience for others. This experience needs to be positive and memorable with space to dwell allowing you to step out of the flow of people orientate yourself.
- 7.4 JMA worked closely with WSP to develop a layout for the bus station that was aligned with the masterplan aspirations whilst meeting the emerging brief for the multimodal interchange. These designs showed that it was not possible to keep any of the buildings between the Gamble Building and the Millenium Centre to deliver a fit for purpose bus station with future capacity. It should be noted that at this early stage the brief for the ancillary accommodation for the bus station was not accounted for e.g. ticket office, welfare facilities, retail kiosks and public toilets. The inclusion of these would put further pressure on the available space.
- 7.5 The draft masterplan (**CD B6**) was signed off by the council and went to public consultation in November 2021 showing the preferred bus station layout. This allowed the preparation of the final Masterplan Development Framework Document to be produced setting out the council vision for the town. This document (**CD B3**) was

formally adopted by SHTC in February 2022. This allowed the Hybrid Planning Application to be submitted for the masterplan, permission for this was granted on 31st March 2023. The application consisted of a full suite of drawings and reports accompanied by the Design and Access Statement (**CD C8**) which carefully takes you through the town centre issues, the design evolution of the masterplan and the final solution. During a similar period, WSP and the architects Austin Smith Lord were developing the design and layout of the bus station in more detail.

- 7.6 JMA have continued to develop Phase 1 of the masterplan and are looking to submit the planning application for reserved matters in August 2023.

8 Conclusion

- 8.1 I have focused my description primarily on the locations of buildings and the spaces they create; streets that link square, historic buildings, creating vistas allowing you to navigate the town centre easily and intuitively. To enhance the experience of using a town centre making it enjoyable and increasing footfall. The quality of the buildings and public realm will celebrate and enhance the town assets and rich history to create a 'beautiful, enduring and successful place' (National Design Guide). The proposed building and public realm needed to satisfy every aspect of the 10 key factors to achieve a well-designed place.
- 8.2 Careful analysis of the town history, scale, massing, materiality, and craftsmanship are woven into the design (Design and Access Statement – **CD C8**). This ensures people of St Helens can be proud of their town centre knowing that it is unique and inspired by its history. Each of the proposed buildings has a story to tell, inspired by key historic buildings or industries that define St Helens, such as Pilkington Glass Works. Taking one example of this is the new hotel design, inspired by the beautiful curves of the 1937 Pilkington Headquarters and use of the blue tiles synonymous with the later 1964 Pilkington Headquarters (**Image 25 at Appendix A**).
- 8.3 It delivers on all the 10 factors the National Design Guide sets out to delivering a 'Beautiful and Successful Place':
1. Context - the proposal enhances the surroundings creating space to enjoy the buildings with new green infrastructure.
 2. Identity - its design is grounded in St Helens, enhancing key assets, its an attractive and unique response.
 3. The built form is coherent and of a scale and massing appropriate to St Helens.
 4. Movement is improved by breaking down the large building blocks linking key assets with natural and intuitive wayfinding.
 5. Nature is enhanced and optimized within the public realm with new trees and rain gardens as part of a wider sustainability strategy.
 6. Public space, to dwell, orientate yourself, space for all ages, linked and safe.
 7. Proposed uses are mixed to create a truly sustainable development.
 8. Uses - homes and buildings are functional, flexible, robustly designed to be enduring and sustainable.
 9. Resources - carefully chosen materials to reduce the environmental impact, locally sourced, robustly detailed, and resilient.
 10. Lifespan - simple elegant design, timeless, inspired by St Helens to create a sense of ownership and joy.
- 8.4 The masterplan has always set out to work with St Helens key buildings and enhance its assets. The Design and Access Statement submitted as part of the hybrid planning application shows the development of the masterplan

(CD C8, P29 to 31). Whilst it is acknowledged that very early designs of the masterplan sought to retain the Swan Pub and extend the block it is situated within, such designs were prior to the appreciation of the scale and footprint needed to adequately redevelop the bus station in accordance with Merseytravel and SHBC's vision and brief. Numerous layouts were tested to achieve the bus station brief whilst realizing the masterplan vision, but the space take required meant that it was not possible to retain the buildings between the Gamble Building and Millennium Centre.

- 8.5 The final masterplan (CD B3) delivers on all aspects of the SHBC's vision and it builds on the town's rich heritage of invention, innovation, connectivity, and strong sense of community. It will rejuvenate the town centre into a modern, vibrant, and desirable location, creating a hot bed of creativity in the town centre that will then radiate out to the widest parts of the area attracting investment, raising its profile and maximize its key assets.

9 Statement of Truth

- 9.1 I confirm that I have made clear which facts and matters referred to in this report are within my own knowledge and which are not. Those that are within my own knowledge I confirm to be true. The opinions I have expressed represent my true and complete professional opinions on the matters to which they refer.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sam Ainsley', is displayed on a light grey rectangular background.

Sam Ainsley

Dated: 14 July 2023