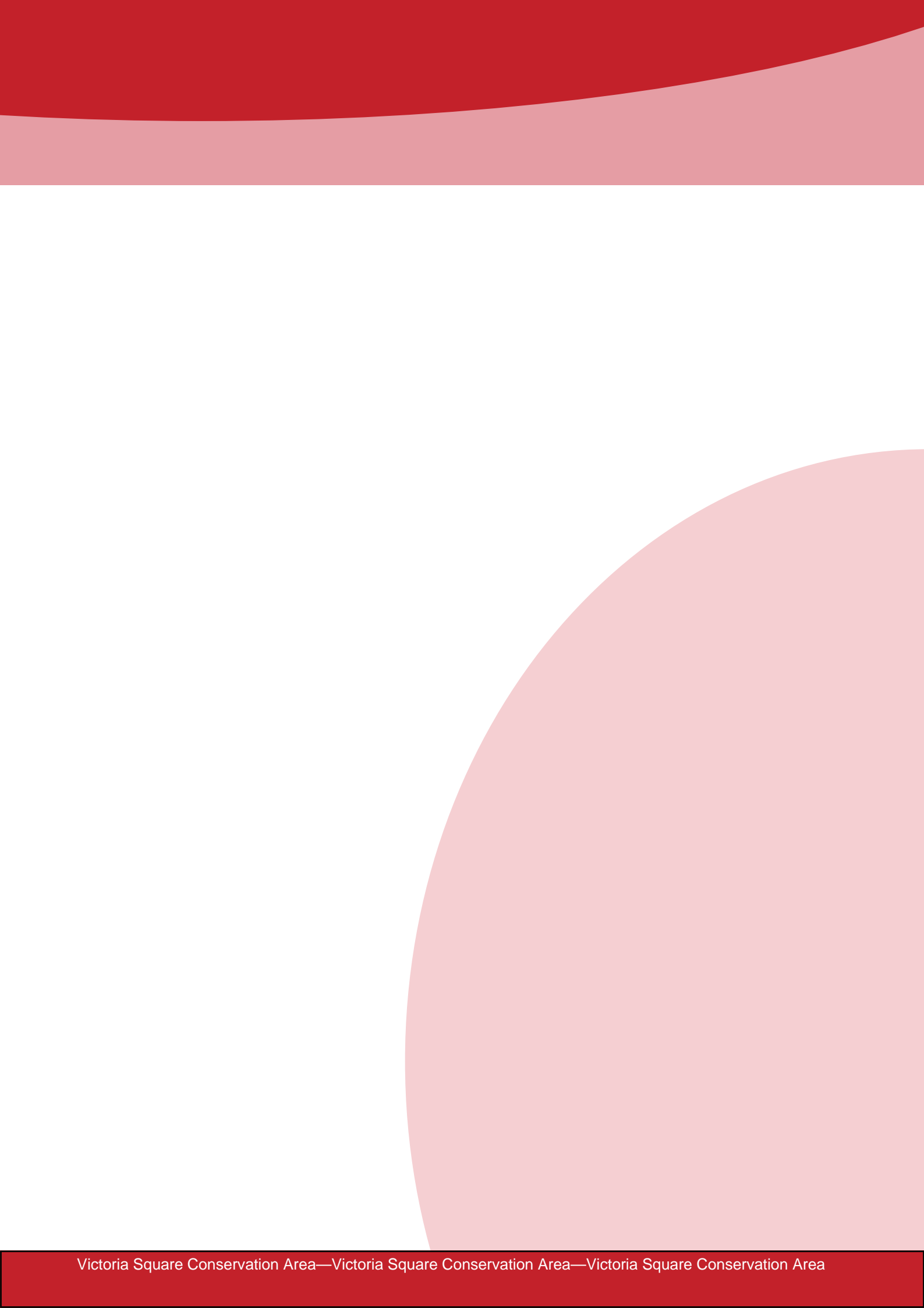




Conservation Area Appraisal **Victoria Square**

2010

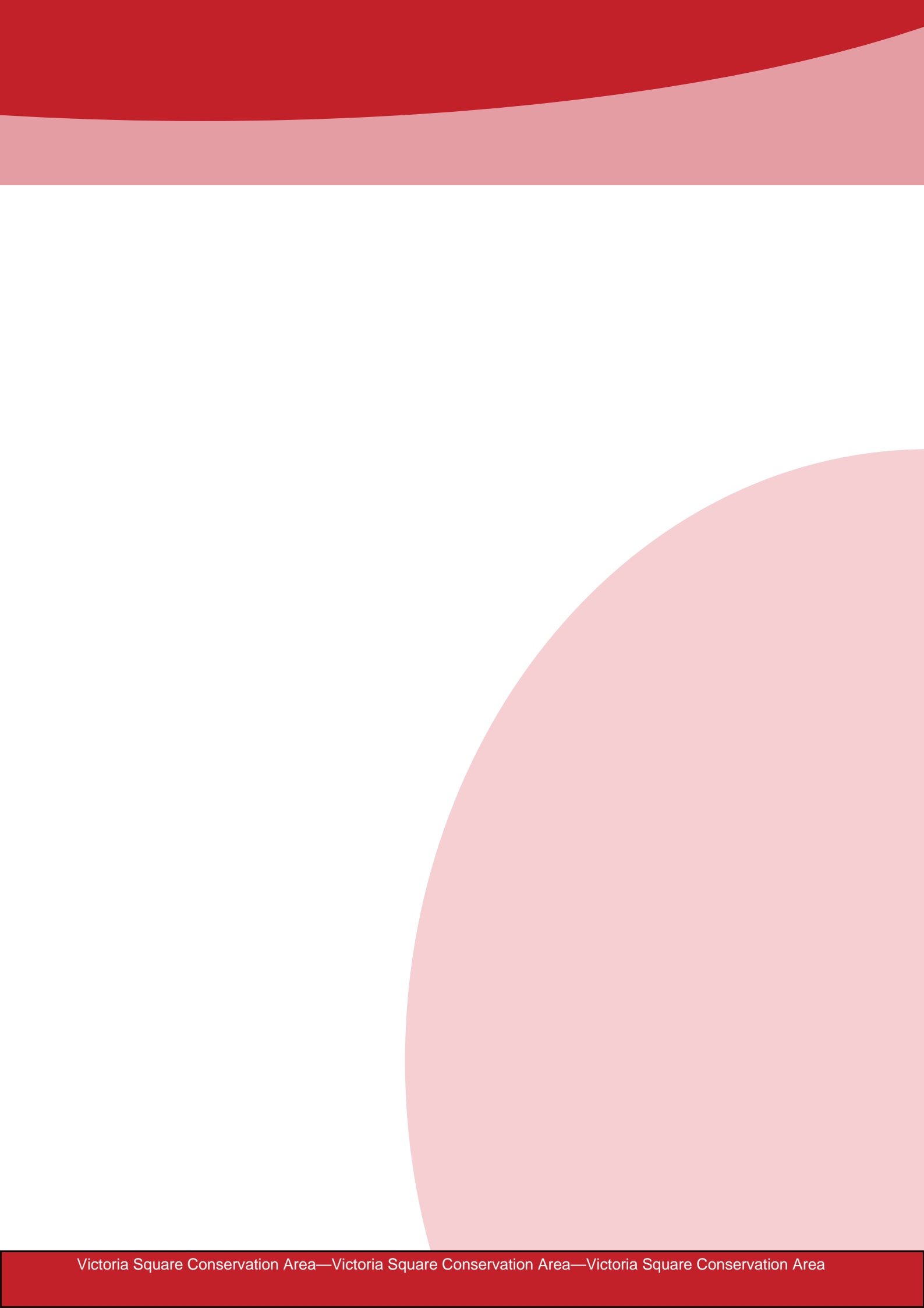




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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Traditionally a town square has two main functions:

- A social purpose where it provides an open space in a town centre where people can relax, meet and talk etc. This is a function previously associated with markets;
- Architectural function where they provide a setting for impressive, often civic, buildings.

In this case of Victoria Square, it caters for both these functions. It is a large public space, providing one of the two usable open spaces in St Helens Town Centre. The other is Church Square located in the main shopping centre.

It accommodates the historical statue of Queen Victoria, the town's war memorial and is a pleasant environment in which to sit. It is also surrounded by three major buildings, the Town Hall, the Gamble Institute and the Prudential Building - all drawing from various Victorian styles.

In recognition to the value placed on its special qualities, the square 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. 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. However, designa-



tion 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. 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.

1.3 Purpose of Appraisal

This appraisal is aimed at:

- Identifying, defining and analysing those factors that make Victoria Square 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 this use as a planning tool, this appraisal has a much wider application. It can 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 of 1967. 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 areas could be considered to be 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 latter 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.

2.0 Planning Policy Content

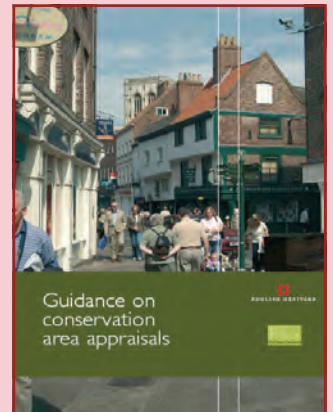
In addition to those two Acts, the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 also provides further advice on the need of robust evidence in decisions on works in Conservation Areas. Under Section 38(6), this Act further requires a determination of planning applications to be made in accordance with provisions of the development plan, unless material considerations 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 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.

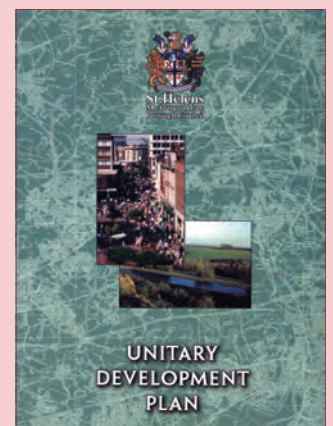


2.3 English Heritage Guidance

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 ENV 24A (Designation and Review of Conservation Areas).



3.0 Location and Setting

3.1 Location and context

The Victoria Square Conservation Area is in the central area of St Helens town centre, in the North West of England, approximately 12 miles east of Liverpool and 20 miles west of Manchester. The other nearby large towns include Wigan to the northeast and Warrington to the south east.

The town is well served by both the road and railway network. It lies in close proximity to the major road and motorway network, including the M6, M62, M57 and A580.

St Helens Central is the town's main railway station, which lies on the Liverpool City Line. The historical Liverpool-Manchester Railway runs east-west through the borough to the south of the town centre with stations at Lea Green and St Helens Junction.



3.2 General character and plan form

The square comprise of three aspects of late Victoria civic character:

- The Town Hall designed to reflect civic pride;
- A magnificent gift by a local industrialist for educational benefit of the town's people in the form of the Gamble Institute; and,
- An office building consciously designed to reflect the status of the location in the form of the Prudential Building.

The Conservation Area could also be said to have an urban character given its wholly urban location.

In terms of plan form, the Conservation Area consists of two spaces loosely juxtaposed together. To the west is the smaller space (A) focused around the listed Queen Victoria Statue. This area is loosely enclosed by Cotham Street and Corporation Street. To the east is the larger 'triangular' space (B) with the War Memorial as the focal point. It is enclosed by the Town Hall, the Gamble Institute and the Prudential Building.



3.3 Landscape setting and geology

Landscape setting

St Helens is situated on the Lancashire Plain and the Borough stands mainly at 30-45m above sea level (Land Use Consultants, 2006). It however rises westwards towards Rainhill and Prescott with a maximum elevation of just over 80m. St Helens is also on the immediate gentle slopes of a broad low lying valley, giving it a sense of containment and enclosure.

Geology

St Helens is built literally in coal with the South Lancashire Coalfield stretching right under its centre. To the north, there are large sand deposits and to the south, the Cheshire salt field.

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 coalfields turned St Helens into an important industrial town in Merseyside.

Essential Character

- **Victoria Square Conservation Area has a Victorian, civic, as well as an urban character.**
- **In terms of plan form, the Conservation Area consists of two loosely juxtaposed triangular shaped spaces focused on the Statue of Queen Victoria and the War Memorial respectively;**
- **The landscape setting provided by the fairly flat area of broad lying plateau, providing a sense of containment and enclosure. This restricts long views out of the Conservation Area.**

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, the third of which was dedicated to St Mary. The present church was consecrated in 1926 and the name reverted back to St Helen.

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 Victoria Square

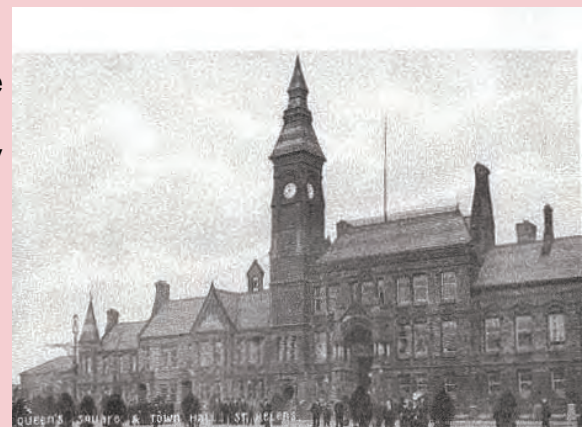
The present Town Hall was built between 1873 and 1876. Before then the civic and business centre as well as the market had been contained in an area bounded by Church Street, Bridge Street and Tontine Street. (Fletcher, 2009). When the Town Hall, on Naylor Street, was burnt down in 1871 land was leased on the north side of Corporation Street from the Trustees of the Walmesley-Cotham Estate, owners of Hardshaw Hall (until recently part of the Providence Hospital) and the present Town Hall was built. Originally Cotham Street and Hardshaw Street extended to Corporation Street so that the Town Hall formed one side of Corporation Street with two storey houses and offices opposite.

In 1892 Col Gamble acquired a building lease from the Trustees of the Walmesley-Cotham Estate and the plans for the library and institute were approved in July 1894. The building was completed in 1896, providing the opportunity for an improvement of the space between it and the Town Hall

In 1901 the Corporation purchased the freehold of all the properties between the Gamble Institute and Cotham Street from the Trustees of the Walmesley-



Old Town Hall



4.0 Historical Background

Cotham Estate to enable it to lay out the Town Hall Square. Part of this acquisition was sold in 1901 for the development of the Prudential Buildings. The square's name was changed with the unveiling of the Statue to Queen Victoria in 1905. Around the same time (1960s Historical Maps) the properties on Cotham Street between Claughton Street and Corporation Street were removed creating an open area around which the statue is currently located.

The relocation of the statue was part of a wider improvement scheme around 2000 which involved the remodelling and pedestrianisation of the square, considerably improving the area. The Square is now a much improved environment with reduced noise and pollution.

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

Since the unveiling of the Statue of Queen Victoria in 1905 and the subsequent change of name, Victoria Square has been at the heart of the St Helens's civic, and to some extent, social and commercial life.

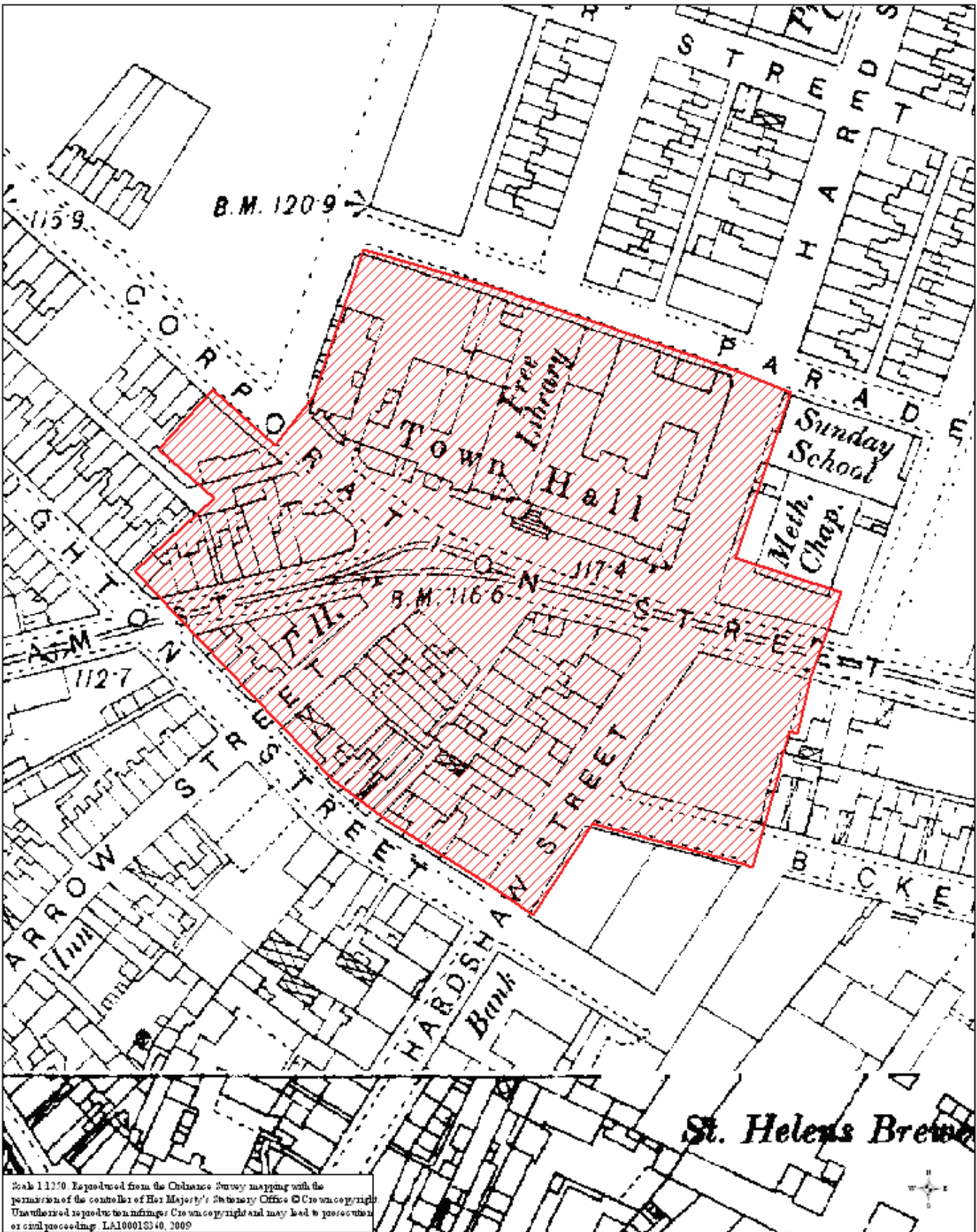
- The Town Hall is the seat of the local government as well as the site of public celebration;
- It is also well used as a highly valued space by the local people, for its role in the town's public and ceremonial activities including the annual Remembrance events;
- The open area and the surrounding buildings have also served as the focus of the city's annual Christmas light display for years;
- The Gamble Institute on the eastern side of the square serves as the St Helens Central Library;
- The Prudential Building to the south houses some of the well-established businesses in St Helens.

However, given its central location, the square has been subject to considerable pressures and conflicts between pedestrian and vehicular traffic. It was consequently remodelled in 1998 and extraneous traffic was removed from around the area;

4.4 Archaeological Interest

There is no known archaeological interest in the Conservation Area.

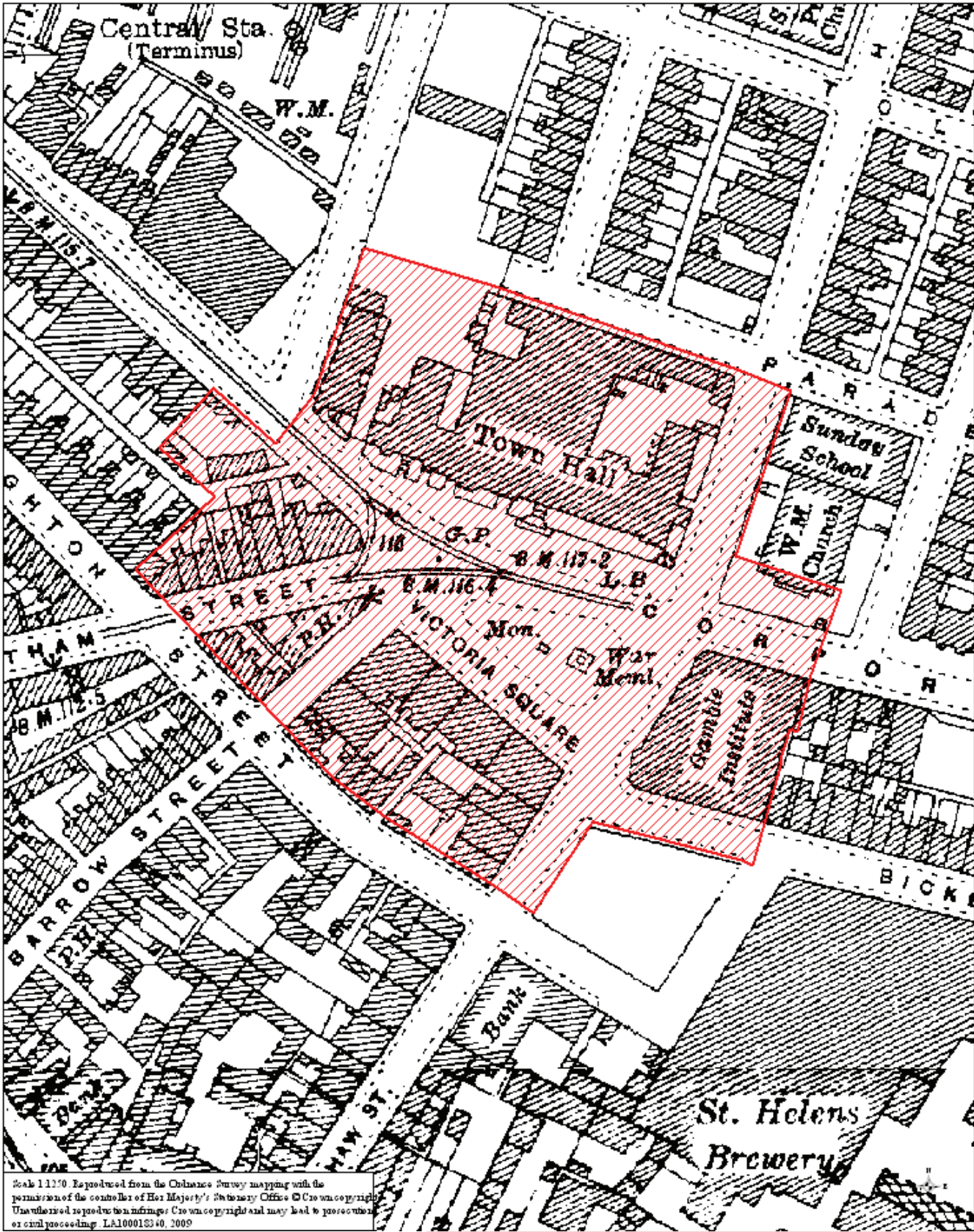
4.0 Historical Background



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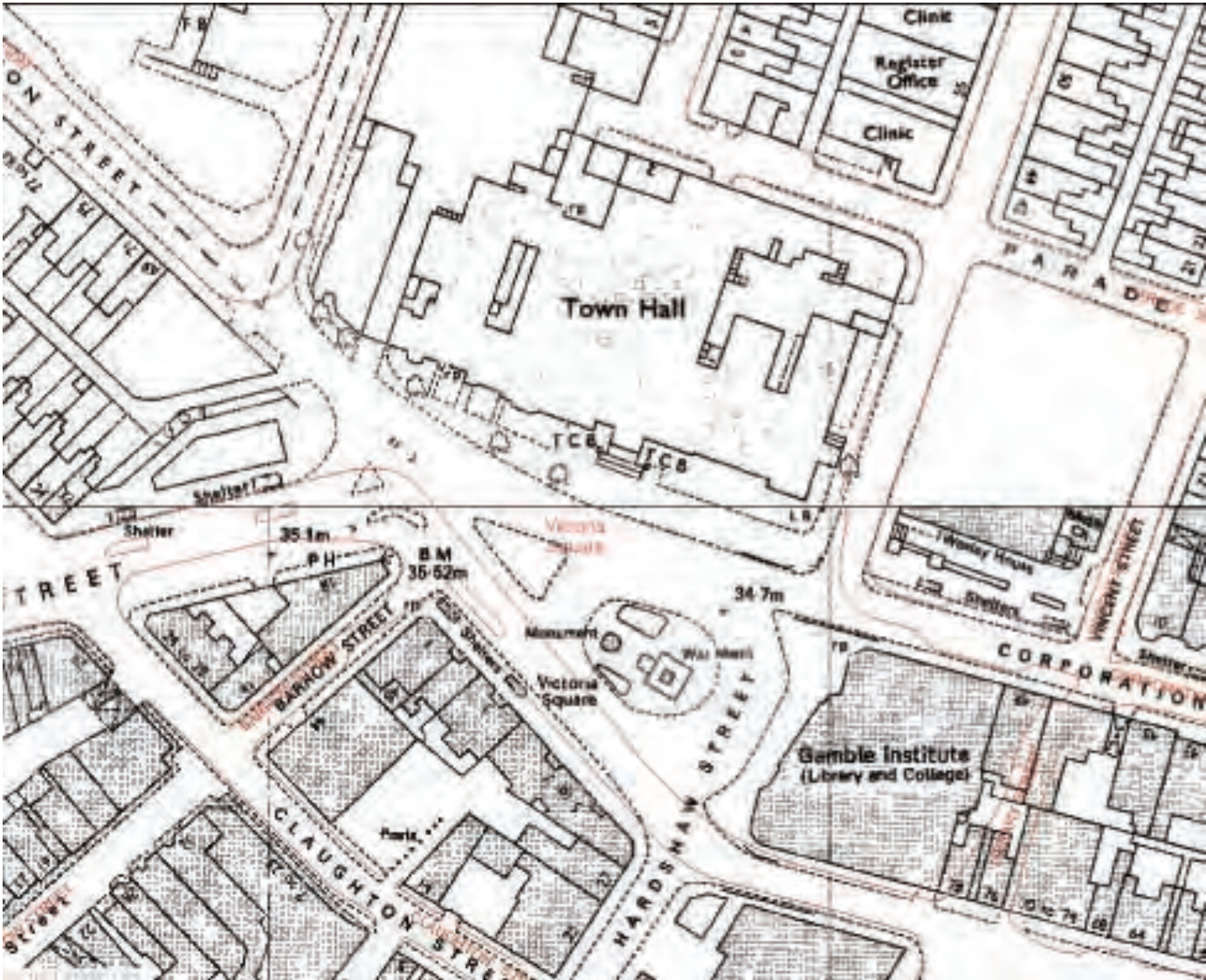
1896 Historical Map

4.0 Historical Background



1907 Historical Map

4.0 Historical Background



1920s Historical Maps



Current

5.0 Spatial Analysis

5.1 The character and relationship of spaces within the area

Victoria Square Conservation Area derives its physical qualities from the grouping of those three buildings around a well remodelled open space. Spatially, there are two distinct character areas as identified in the previous chapter.

To the west is the smaller space which is bounded by two storey terraced properties with small footprints, with the statue of Queen Victoria as its focal point. Compared to the main buildings in the square, the properties on this section are of much lower height and there are many large gaps in the area, making this part of the Conservation Area more open and permeable.



The main character area in the square however is the one to the east surrounded by the Town Hall, the Gamble Institute and the Prudential Buildings. These are large detached two to four storeys high buildings within large footprints, which together enclose and dominate the open space yet they do not overwhelm it. The scale of the built form ranges from civic to institutional.



Standing on the northern side of the Square, the Town Hall is in a civic scale of a well articulated composition of two and three storeys. It has a steep pitched roof, prominent entrance accessed by steps and a bold tower.

On the eastern side of the Square is the similarly free standing Gamble Institute. It is a symmetrical freestyle three and four storeys Victorian building, topped by gables and steep pitched roofs.

Standing on the south western side is the relatively lower two and three storeys Prudential Building completing the ensemble of grand Victorian buildings enclosing the square. Stout chimney-stacks with a variety of pots, balustrade parapets, green lead lined domes and steep pitched roof dominate the skyline.



Though not in the Conservation Area, there is the five storeys Wesley House to the north east and Century House;

5.0 Spatial Analysis

an office block tower to south east. These occupy the gaps between the Town Hall and the Gamble Institute and the Gamble Institute and the Prudential Building respectively. The bulk and height of these buildings on this side of the square make this character area more visually enclosed.

There is only one road in the square, Cotham Street running along the frontage of the Prudential Buildings. It is a narrow street restricted only to buses and taxis. The close relationship of the buildings with the slightly narrower roads and the square, with tight junctions especially between them, adding to the urban character of the area.

5.3 Trees and their contribution to the character of the area

There are also some specimen trees in the Square planted during the improvement scheme in 1998. Together with the floral beds added around the same time along the front elevation of the Town Hall, they further provide some soft landscaping to the predominantly paved Square.

In addition to assisting in defining the central open space, these trees provide an attractive setting for the surrounding buildings and help to give the area a relatively peaceful character in the busy town centre.

5.4 Key views and vistas

The most significant feature of the area's visual appeal is undoubtedly the good sense of enclosure achieved within the square. The height and the large frontages of many of the buildings surrounding the central open area restrict views into the square, only opening up fully when entering it. The close relationship of the buildings to the square also creates contrasting vistas along the frontages and within the central open space.

From Corporation Street, Cotham Street and Barrow Street, the Town Hall clock is a particularly important landmark. Some of the other interesting views and vistas include:

- View of the main elevation of the Gamble Institute;
- View of the main elevation of the Town Hall;
- View of the main elevation of the Prudential buildings

5.0 Spatial Analysis

- View of the main elevation of the Prudential buildings from Bick-erstaffe Street;
- View of the main elevation of the Town Hall from Hardshaw Street;
- View of the main elevation of the Gamble Institute from Hardshaw Street;
- Panoramic view of the square from Corporation Street/Birchley Street.

There are also some significant outwards views from the Conservation Area, the most interesting being that from the square to the south west where the Beecham's Tower dominate the skyline.

ESSENTIAL CHARACTER

- **Victoria Square Conservation Area derives its spatial qualities from:**
 - **The grouping of those three buildings around a well re-modelled open space;**
 - **The predominantly three-storey buildings have long frontages, which together enclose and dominate the open space though do not overwhelm it.**
 - **Most views into the square are restricted, opening up fully only when the space is actually entered.**
- **The scale of the buildings range from civic to institutional and to some extent domestic on the western side;**
- **The close relationship of the buildings to the square also creates contrasting vistas along the frontages and within the central open space;**
- **Trees in the square provide:**
 - **Soft landscaping to the predominantly paved square;**
 - **Setting to the surrounding buildings and help to give the area a relatively peaceful character in the busy town centre.**

6.0 Character Area Analysis

6.1 The qualities of the buildings and their contribution to the area

The Town Hall, the Gamble Institute and the Prudential Building represent some of the few buildings of note in St Helens which date from the Victorian period. Though not listed, their architectural styles, scale, materials and decorative features collectively create a character of high quality.

6.2 Listed buildings

There are two listed buildings in the Conservation Area:

- The Statue of Queen Victoria;
- Pair of K6 Telephone Kiosks flanking the steps to Town Hall

a) The Statue of Queen Victoria

In the English Heritage's listed buildings website, the statue is described as follows:

"Unveiled in 1906 in commemoration of Queen Victoria. It is on a stone plinth with canted angles on similar base. Bronze plaque on base records erection; bronze plaque on plinth reads "VICTORIA/1837-1901". Bronze statue of the seated queen on throne with elaborate Art Nouveau finials. Bracket to rear of throne bears small statue of St George".

Its historical significance and location in the square, makes this listed structure one of the focal points in the Conservation Area.



b) Pair of K6 Telephone Kiosks flanking steps to Town Hall

In the English Heritage's listed buildings website, the telephone kiosks are described as follows.

"These are square kiosks with domed roofs, unperforated crowns to top panels and margin glazing to windows and doors. These are historical kiosks designed 1935 by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott and made in cast iron".

This pair of listed structures enhance the area's historical significance.

6.3 Key unlisted buildings of merit

Though not listed, the Town Hall, the Gamble Institute and the Prudential Buildings also make a significant contribution towards the character of the Conservation Area.

a) The Town Hall

A well articulated composition of two and three storey building with the following main features:

- Dark red brick in Flemish bond with sandstone dressings and a thin asymmetrically placed tower;
- Steeply pitched roof in Welsh slate with clay ridge tiles, stone capped gables and end stacks with flues;
- Gabled central porch, semi-circular arched and flanked by granite columns;
- A truncated clock tower, a landmark sight from the western and southern approaches;
- Bay windows and canted oriel on gable end of last bay;
- Segmental-arched lintels on some first floor window openings;
- Turret with hexagonal roof in Welsh slates with some in fish tail patterns, adding some interest in the roofscape;
- Sandstone stringcourse, creating strong horizontal emphasis;
- A mix of generally long and narrow timber casement and sliding slashes creating a strong vertical emphasis.

This Victorian Gothic style building responds to its civic context in location, size, fenestration and detailing, making it a landmark in the Conservation Area.



6.0 Character Area Analysis

b) The Gamble Institute

A six-bay three storey building with a basement and attic with the following main features:

- Pressed brick in Stretcher bond with terracotta dressing;
- Basement storey (and entrance on the first storey) in stone creating a strong visual base;
- Steeply pitched roof in Welsh slate with tall stacks without flues;
- Symmetrical elevation with two gable centre and two other gable wings;
- Mullioned casement windows on first and second floors; generally long and narrow, creating a vertical emphasis;
- Round-headed transomed 6-light windows on the wing gables;
- Distinctive canted oriels on either corner of the front elevation;
- Ground and first floor bay windows on the two central bays;

The size, scale and the detailing of this late Victorian building offer an appropriate setting to the Victorian Square as the administrative and civic centre of St Helens.

c) The Prudential Chambers

13 bay two storey building with three storey high 5 middle bays. The main features of this building include:

- Typical free style brick with terracotta dressings and motifs;
- Steeply pitched roof in Welsh slate behind ballustrated terracotta parapet walls;



6.0 Character Area Analysis

- Tall prominent chimney stacks with flues;
- Two corner domes with finials;
- Horned gable features on 5th and 9th bays;
- Ariel windows on 5th, 7th and 9th bays; and,
- Terracotta arched timber windows on ground floor 6-light leaded mullioned windows on upper floors.

This Victorian/Edwardian commercial building of free/Art Nouveau style, creates an enclosing frontage to the square on the southern side; completing an ensemble of a scale appropriate to this civic location.

As a group, the high level of decorations on these three buildings introduce a range of contrasting textures into the space. The towering stacks and flues, the clock tower of the Town Hall, the steep roof of both the Town Hall and the Gamble Institute, domes of the Prudential Building, all provide an interesting skyline. The array of decorative features—double storied oriel windows, bay windows, terracotta dressings; sandstone string bands etc, add to the townscape interest in the square.

d) The War Memorial

A granite Cenotaph on a pedestal and base of similar materials. On all four sides there are marble tablets containing rolls honouring those who served and died in the World Wars. On one of the eastern tablets, there is an inscription

“ Our Glorious Dead
To the everlasting memory of the men of this borough who
gave their lives for the King and the country”

It is around this Cenotaph that the annual Remembrance event is centred in St Helens. Its location and its historical significant make it a local landmark and focal point in the Conservation Area.



6.5 Prevalent and traditional building materials and details

The architectural cohesion of the Victoria Square Conservation Area is due, not least, to its restrained palette of materials, notably Welsh slate, red brick, stone and terracotta as well as timber.

a) Slate

All the properties in the conservation area have pitched slate roofs with series of chimney stacks, breaking up the roofline. Many of the chimneys also have original clay pots, adding interest to the roofscape.

b) Brick/terracotta/stone

The conservation area is characterised by a palette of walling materials, however, brick, sandstone and terracotta predominates.

The Town Hall and the commercial properties on the western side of the square have dark red brick sandstone dressings or window lintels and sills.

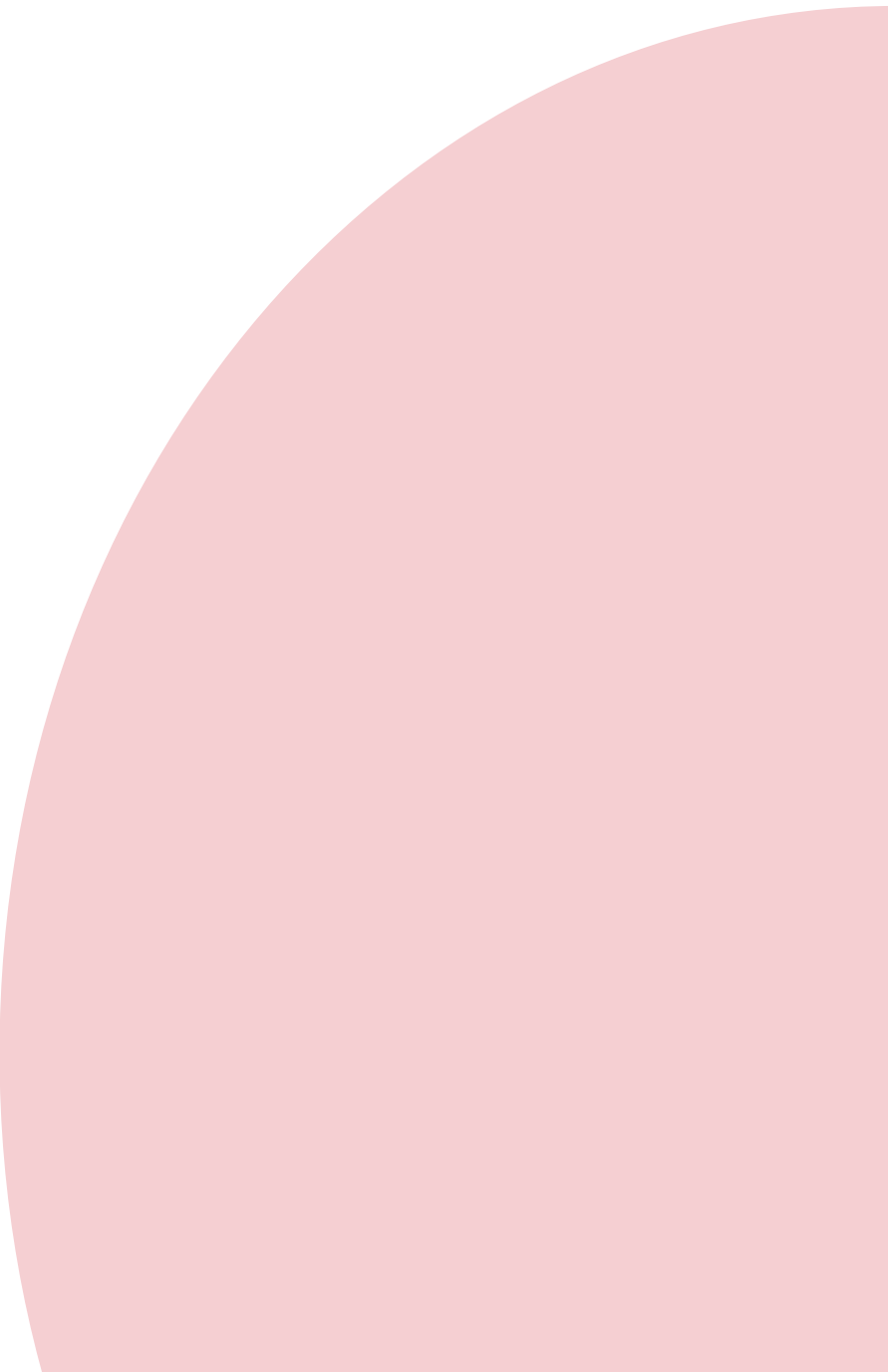
The Gamble Institute and the Prudential Building are in pressed warm red brickwork in terracotta dressing. Both these and the sandstone dressings create richly modelled elevations. Rusticated stonework is also used in the ground floor of the Gamble Institute

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 sandstone and terracotta dressings.

The combination of styles, materials and decorative features within such a small area, create an interesting townscape, one of the Victoria Square Conservation Area's most endearing characteristics.





6.8. Public realm audit

The whole of the Victoria Square Conservation Area has been subject to a comprehensive improvement scheme starting from 1997-98. The scheme involved the remodelling and introduction of traffic restraint measures, creating a more attractive environment for members of the public and visitors.

The public realm enhancement included:

- Relocation of the Queen Victoria Statue to the western end of the square within a formal garden area setting where it could be viewed properly;
- Improvement of circulation of through traffic including an informed vehicular access to the front of the Town Hall, restricted by remote controlled bollard system;
- Full pedestrianisation of most of the square;
- Repaving of the open space with a palette of high quality materials
- Improvement of street lighting and furniture;
- Tree planting and extension of floral beds along the front elevation of the Town Hall;
- Uplifting of the Town Hall front
- Reduction of carriage width of Cotham Street, the only road through the square.

Following the enhancement, below is an audit of the condition of the area's public realm.

a) Surface treatment

The use of high quality paving and surface materials were part 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. The



6.0 Character Area Analysis

open space of the conservation area is predominantly in fairly smooth York Stone flags and textured red paving setts and bricks. The mix of materials in different colours and texture create variety and interest in the public realm.

b) Street furniture

The other improvements made to the public realm were 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 are considered appropriate in the conservation area;
- Bollards mainly to restrict pavement parking. They are about a metre high and in stainless steel;
- Seats in cast iron and timber, in keeping with the Victorian context of the square;
- 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;
- 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.

ESSENTIAL CHARACTER

- There are several factors which, taken together, create the character of Victoria Square Conservation Area:
 - The scale and proportions of the buildings and the way they relate with the open area they enclose;
 - The materials in which those buildings are built, harmonise together to make a creative whole;
 - A mix of various decorative features and details combining to give an architectural interest to the area;
 - Its role in the town's public and ceremonial life as well as its function as an area for relaxation.
- In terms of style, most of the buildings exhibit many of the popular styles of the Victorian period in the following typical features:
 - Slate roof;
 - Dark red bricks in Flemish 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 sills.
- Buildings of high townscape qualities with several streets retaining the characteristics of the period in which they were first built;
- Skyline interest is created by the Town Hall clock tower, the domes of the Prudential Building and the elaborately gabled, triangular, half round and Dutch-style pedimented gables, finials and varied rooflines;
- Townscape interest is created by the array of decorative features—double storied oriel windows, bay windows, terracotta dressings, sandstone string bands;
- 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

As previously noted, Victoria Square consists of several attractive buildings including a Cenotaph as well as a listed Statue and a pair of telephone kiosks. Unfortunately, until very recently, the area was progressively dominated by through traffic resulting in a corresponding deterioration in the streetscape. However, following the substantial improvement in 1997/98, the Square is now in excellent condition.

Whilst the Conservation Area has largely been enhanced and protected from inappropriate developments; there are a few issues which if not addressed might undermine the area's special interest. These include:

- Function and use of the square;
- Traffic and access;
- The listed pair of telephone kiosks flanking the Town Hall entrance;
- Negative sites and spaces.

7.2 Function and use of the square

As one of the few large public open spaces in St Helens Town Centre, Victoria Square is under continual pressure from a variety of functions and uses. Some of these have been accommodated for many years e.g. Christmas tree and lights, lunchtime relaxation and annual Remembrance service, among others. Others are newer and sporadic e.g. promotional events as well as summertime special tourism events, for example, pop music concerts, among others.

Some functions and uses have little physical impact, however others could result in the deterioration of the surface of the square. It is not uncommon to see worn out paving slabs some replaced by ones of a colour and texture not matching the existing surfacing.

7.3 Traffic and Access

As previously noted, the improvement scheme of 1997/98 included the introduction of traffic restraint measures. All through traffic from the square was removed with the exception of buses, cycles and taxis which were confined to a narrower bus lane along the southern edge of the central open area.

However, it has been noted that a number of unauthorised vehicles are still using the restricted road along Prudential Buildings, creating noise and pollution. Similar use of the paved area in front of the Town Hall and the Gamble Institute is also increasing, with a detrimental impact on the appearance and the setting of these landmark buildings. It also creates an unsatisfactory pedestrian environment and damage to paving.

7.4 The listed pair of telephone kiosks

These two structures have been attracting inappropriate usage. Being either side of the front entrance of the Town Hall, this has not created an appropriate setting to the civic and administrative centre of St Helens.

7.5 Negative Sites and Spaces

Before the early 1960s, the section of Cotham Street between Claughton Street consisted of terraces forming a continuous frontage along the street. All these properties were removed creating an open space in that section as well as that of Corporation Street up to the junction with Birchley Street. The Statue of Queen Victoria was relocated to this landscaped area with seating.

While the clearing of those properties created a space for the listed statue, the square lost a sense of enclosure. This is an issue which needs to be addressed.

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 and of appropriate scale.

The Council is committed to meaningful community involvement in the process of reviewing the Victoria Square 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 Act 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 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.

9.2 Criteria

The table shows the criteria which was used in making boundary changes in previous appraisals of Conservation Areas in St Helens. The same criteria will apply in this appraisal.

Criteria		Feature	
a	Boundary	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	Architectural quality and historic significance	i	Is the area of similar demonstrable special architectural or historic interest as the rest of the conservation area?
		ii	Does the development within the area date from a similar period to substantial parts of the conservation area?
		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	Townscape quality	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"> • alterations and extensions? • alterations to roofs? • the loss of original details (doors, windows or chimneys) or re-facing of brickwork?

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

A previous study has proposed Hardshaw Street on the southern section for inclusion (Guise 2009). As pointed out in Guise (2009), the proposed section of Hardshaw Street contains a continuous frontage of almost entirely intact mid Victorian commercial buildings, including the listed former bank building in Venetian Gothic style. The Victorian and urban character of the area therefore make it very similar to the existing Conservation Area.

Many of the buildings along the largely pedestrianised wide street are two storey high creating an enclosed space which to some extent is spatially similar to the square. The area was also subject to a recent public realm improvement scheme where high quality materials were used, similar to the existing Conservation Area. This creates a good environment for the public.

In terms of spatial and architectural qualities, this section of Hardshaw Street reflects that of the Conservation Area and its inclusion will enhance it.

It is noted that some advertisement signs are in materials not in keeping with the area, creating an adverse impact on the area. The designation would therefore help to control such inappropriate minor works. It would also ensure that the public realm enhancements are maintained over time.

This recommendation of inclusion is being made under criteria a (i), b (i), (ii), (iii), and c (i).

9.0 Boundary Changes

10.0 Summary of Key Character

10.1 Summary of Key Characteristics

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

LOCATION AND SETTING

- **Victoria Square Conservation Area has a Victorian, civic, as well as an urban character.**
- **Landscaping setting provided by the fairly flat area of broad lying plateau, giving a sense of containment and enclosure to the landscape.**

SPATIAL CHARACTER

- **Victoria Square Conservation Area derives its spatial qualities from:**
 - **The grouping of those three buildings around a well re-modelled open space;**
 - **The predominantly three-storey buildings have long frontages, which together enclose and dominate the open space though do not overwhelm it.**
 - **Views into the square are restricted, opening up fully only when the space is actually entered.**
- **The three storey buildings with their wide frontages dominate the area without overwhelming it;**
- **The scale of the buildings range from civic to institutional and to some extent domestic on the western side;**
- **Views into the square are generally restricted; opening up fully only when the space is actually entered;**
- **The close relationship of the buildings to the square also creates contrasting vistas along the frontages and within the central open space;**
- **Trees in the square provide:**
 - **Soft landscaping to the predominantly paved square;**
 - **Setting to the surrounding buildings and help to give the area a relatively peaceful character in the busy town centre.**

ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTER

- **There are several factors which, taken together, create the character of Victoria Square Conservation Area:**
 - **The scale and proportions of the buildings and the way they relate with the open area they enclose;**
 - **The materials in which those buildings are built, harmonise together to make a creative whole;**
 - **A mix of various decorative features and details combining to give an architectural interest to the area;**
 - **Its role in the town's public and ceremonial as well as its function as an area for relaxation.**
- **In terms of style, most of the buildings exhibit many of the popular styles of the Victorian period in the following typical features:**
 - **Slate roof;**
 - **Dark red bricks in Flemish 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 sills.**
- **Buildings of high townscape qualities with several streets retaining the characteristics of the period in which they were first built;**
- **Skyline interest is created by the Town Hall clock tower, the domes of the Prudential Building and the elaborately gabled, triangular, half round and Dutch-style pedimented gables, finials and varied rooflines;**
- **Townscape interest is created by the array of decorative features—double storied oriel windows, bay windows, terracotta dressings, sandstone string bands**
- **The area is endowed with high quality public realm, creating an attractive environment for shoppers and visitors.**

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

11.0 Issues

11.1 An overview

In general, the condition of the terraced properties and the open spaces was found to be excellent. However, there are some issues which if not addressed might undermine the area's special interest. These include:

- Function and use of the square;
- Traffic and access;
- The listed pair of telephone kiosks flanking the Town Hall entrance;
- Negative sites and spaces.

The main avenues of tackling these issues is through:

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

It appears that many of these issues could be tackled by the Local Authority and/or its partner agencies.

11.2 Function and use of the square

The main concern is that some functions and uses could potentially result in deterioration of the surface of the square. It is not uncommon to see worn out paving slabs some replaced by inappropriate ones.

In the short term, it is recommended that any replacement paving should be in matching material, colour and texture. In the long term, any future enhancement scheme should include repaving of the area in more durable materials .

11.3 Traffic and Access

As already noted a number of unauthorised vehicles are using the paved area in front of the Town Hall and the Gamble Institute and the restricted road along Prudential Buildings. Traffic regulations need to be enforced by the police.

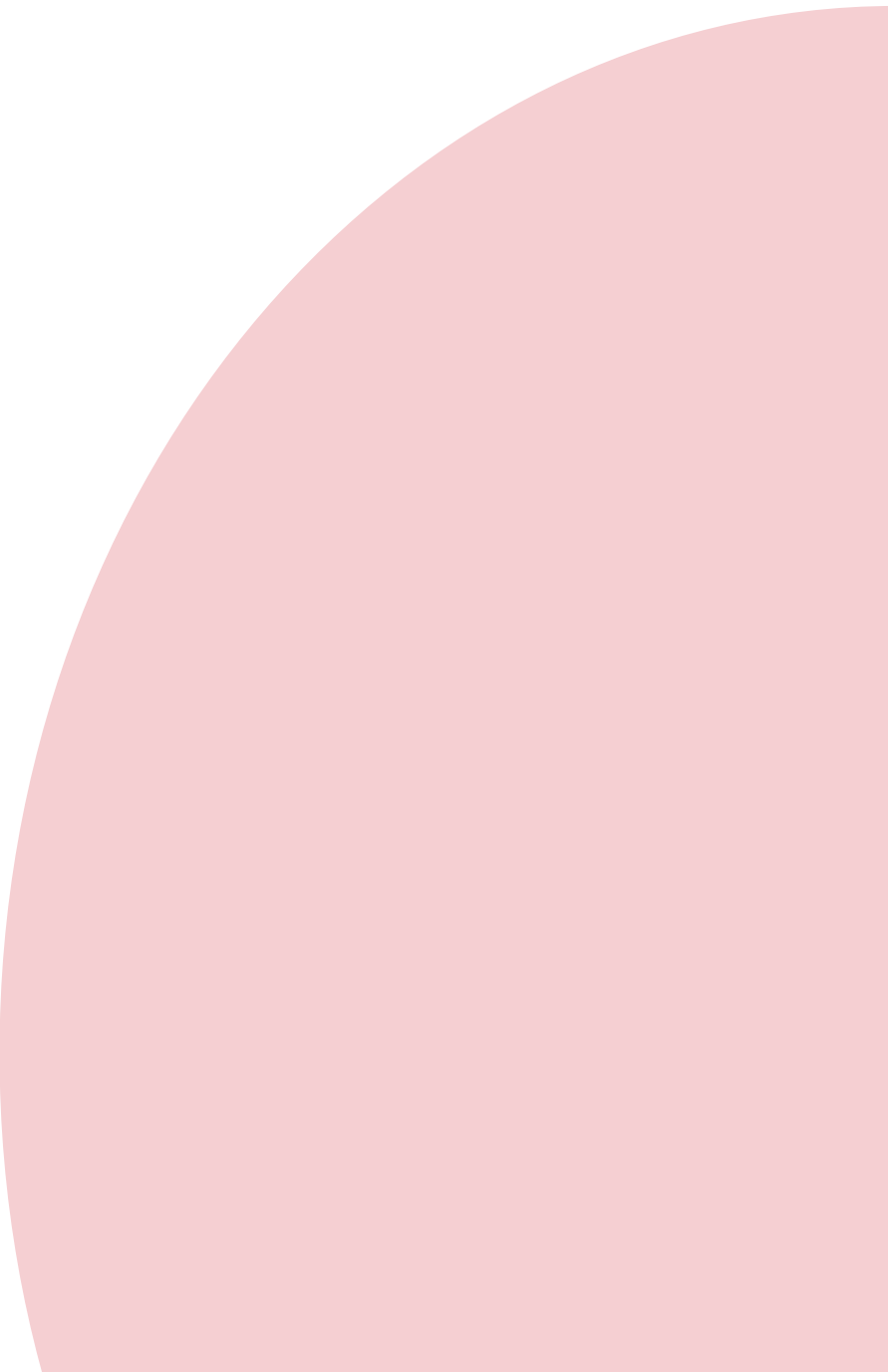
11.4 The listed pair of telephone kiosks

These two structures have been attracting inappropriate usage by some group of people. There have been suggestions to weld shut these telephone kiosks; something which needs to be pursued as the trend is considered to having a negative impact to the Conservation Area.

11.5 Negative Sites and Spaces

As already highlighted, the area on the southern side of the junction of Corporation Street and Birchley Street could benefit from sensitive infill development to reinstate that sense of enclosure. Such a scheme would also ensure:

- A suitable building is put in that corner area which would help in terminating views from the north and east, providing a gateway to the square (see map);
- That the listed Statue gets something to “lean on” as there is building to its rear to visually protect it.



12.0 Next Steps

12.1 Adoption Procedures

Once the consultation has been completed and the appraisal revised to take into account of responses it will need to be adopted formally through the Council's internal procedures.

12.2 Developing Management Proposals

The recommendations in this appraisal will provide the basis for developing and publishing management proposals for the area.

12.3 Monitoring

To deal with any issues, changes in the appearance and condition of the conservation area needs to be monitored regularly and appropriate action taken promptly. A dated photographic record of the area will be produced during the appraisal process, as this will provide an invaluable aid to any later enforcement action.

12.4 Review and Updating

Guidance from English Heritage on Conservation Area Appraisals (2006) requires that such areas are reviewed and updated on a regular basis, ideally every five years. The character and appearance of most conservation areas and the special interest that warrants this designation generally does not change that rapidly, although the related management proposals will need to be reviewed and updated.

Rather than requiring wholesale rewriting, the five yearly reviews might result in an addendum to an existing appraisal, recording what has changed, redefining (or confirming) the special interest that warrants designation and setting out any new recommendations. The updated appraisal then needs to be re-adopted by the Council.

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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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