



Conservation Area Appraisal

# Victoria Square 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, 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 aim of this management plan is to produce a medium to long-term strategy for the management of the Victoria Square Conservation Area in St Helens town centre, setting objectives for addressing the issues, making recommendations for action arising from the appraisal and identifying any further or more detailed work needed for implementation.

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. Based on the Victoria Square Conservation Area Appraisal, 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 Victoria Square Conservation Area Appraisal and the St Helens Design Guidance SPD, 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 providing 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:

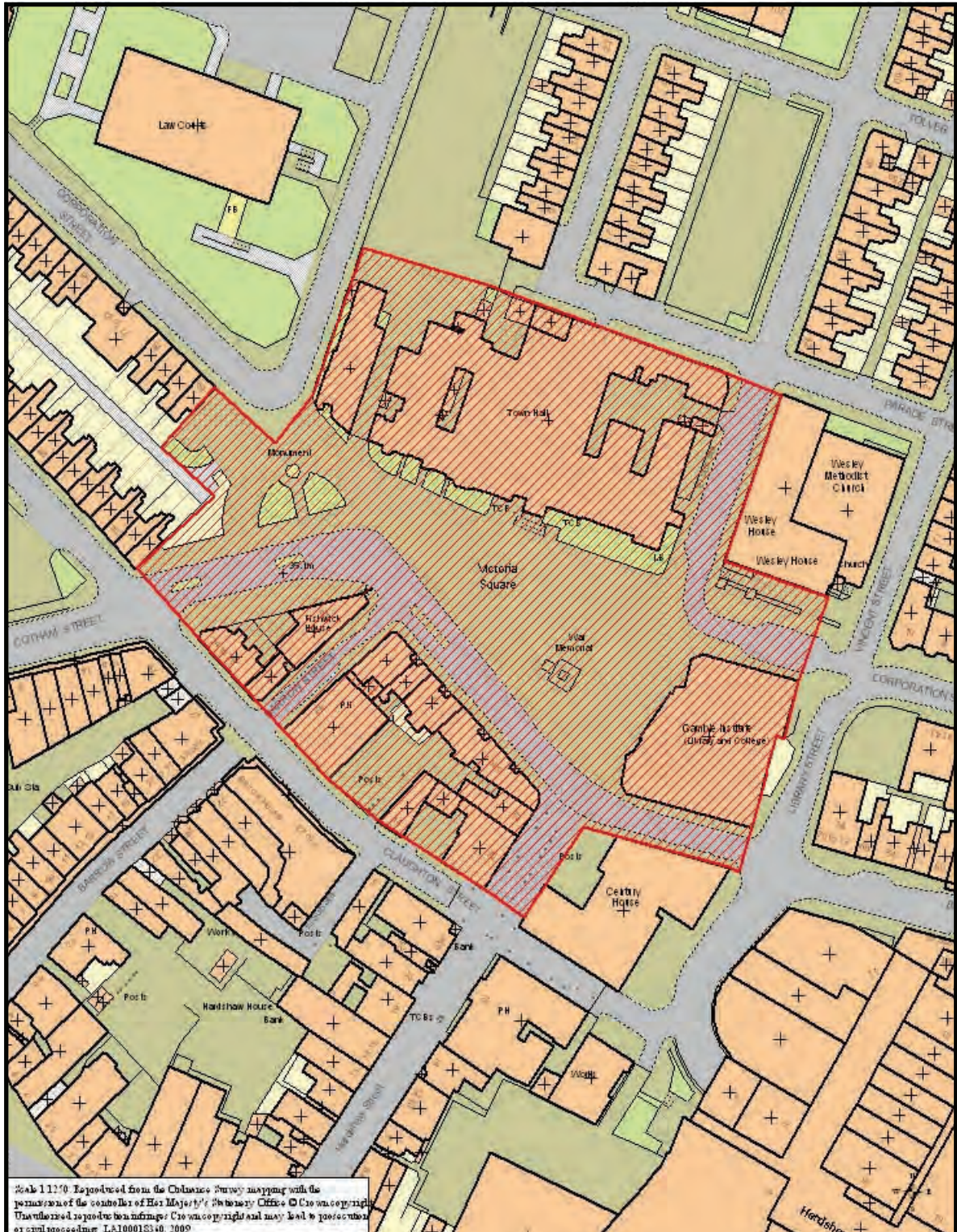
S7	Sustainable development
ENV 23	Archaeology
ENV 24B	Development in conservation areas
ENV 25	Listed buildings
GEN 2	Good environments
GEN 4	Security and crime prevention
GEN 5	Design and layout of new housing
GEN12	Lighting and security apparatus
GEN 14	Backland and tandem developments
RET 6	Alterations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

The Council has prepared 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 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 PDF. 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.



Existing boundary of the Victoria Square Conservation Area.

## 2.0 Proposals deriving from the appraisal

The appraisal of the Victoria Square Conservation Area has identified a number of issues that inform the content of the management proposals set out in this document. In general, the condition of the buildings and the open spaces was found to be good. However, there are some issues which if not addressed might undermine the area's special interest. These include

- Function and use of the square.
- Negative sites and spaces.

### 2.1 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 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, which are appropriate to a conservation area.

**Action 1**  
Any future enhancement scheme of the square should consider using more durable paving materials, appropriate to a conservation area.



An example of the use of inappropriate paving slabs used to repair the square.

### 2.2 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:

**Action 2**  
To consider reinstating the sense of enclosure to the square, through a sensitive infill development at the junction of Corporation Street and Birchley Street.

## 2.0 Proposals deriving from the appraisal

- A suitable building is put in this corner which would help in terminating views from the north and east, providing a gateway to the square.
- That the listed statue of Queen Victoria, gets something to “lean on” as will be a building to its rear to visually protect it.



**The area adjacent to the listed Statue of Queen Victoria in the corner of Victoria Square.**

### 2.3 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 of the conservation area are being recommended.

#### (i) Areas recommended for exclusion in the conservation area

Following the appraisal, it was found out that the conservation area was in an excellent condition with all the buildings and open spaces well maintained. Accordingly, no area is being recommended for exclusion from the conservation area.

#### (ii) Areas recommended for inclusion in the conservation area

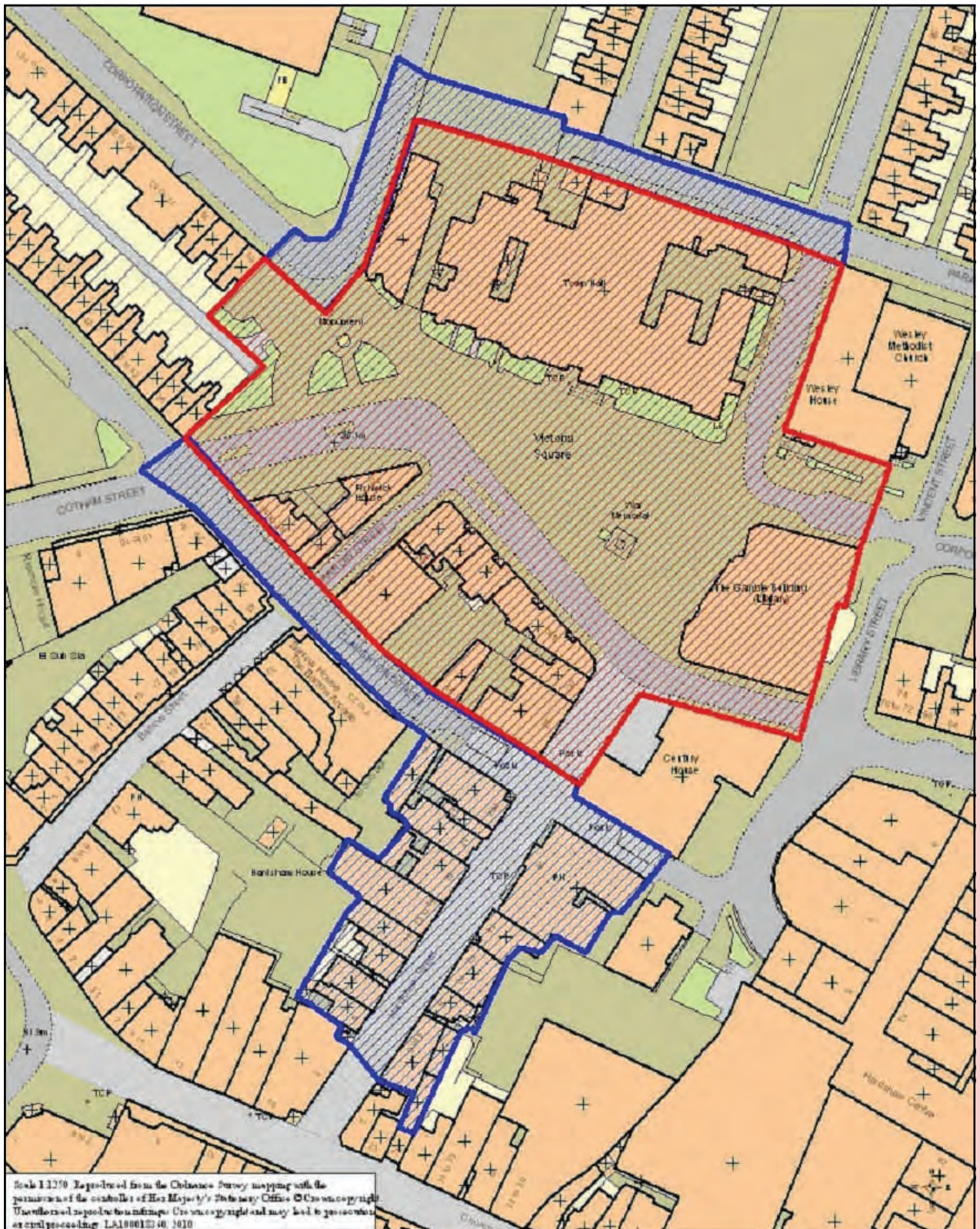
It was proposed in the appraisal that the boundary of the conservation area should be amended to include a section of Hardshaw Street to the south. This area contains a continuous frontage of almost entirely intact mid-Victorian commercial buildings, including a listed former bank building in Venetian Gothic style. The Victorian and urban character of this area therefore make it very similar to the existing conservation area.

**Action 3**  
**Add the section of Hardshaw Street to the south into the conservation area.**

Many of the buildings along Hardshaw Street, which is largely pedestrianised are two-storey high creating an enclosed space. The area was also subject to a recent public realm improvement scheme where high quality materials were used, similar to the existing conservation area. Also, in terms of spatial and architectural qualities, this section of Hardshaw Street reflects that of the existing Victoria Square Conservation Area and its inclusion will enhance it.



## 2.0 Proposals deriving from the appraisal



Map highlighting the proposed boundary extension to the Victoria Square Conservation Area (in blue).

# 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. To provide additional protection to such properties, it is worth considering including them into either the statutory list of buildings of significant national interest or the local list of buildings of historical and architectural interest.

Such buildings/structures include:

- The Town Hall
- The Gamble Institute
- The Prudential Buildings
- The war memorial

All four are recommended for inclusion in the local list, currently being compiled by the Council.

**Action 4**  
Consider including the Town Hall, Gamble Institute, the Prudential Buildings and the war memorial into the St Helens Local List.



**The Town Hall**



**The Gamble Institute**



**The Prudential Buildings**



**The War Memorial**

### 3.2 Guidelines for development proposals and alterations

The sensitive repair of existing features of the buildings should always be the starting point in considering work to properties. If repair is not appropriate then sympathetic replacement should be undertaken seeking to reflect the original detail in terms of style, materials and finish.

Alterations, extensions and repairs to buildings and structures within the conservation area therefore need to be of a high quality design and workmanship so as not to detract but rather to enhance the area.

In all instances, early discussion with the Conservation Officer is advisable to ensure that proposals are well informed and appropriate.

From the appraisal, the Victoria Square Conservation Area derives its special interests from:

- The scale and proportions of the buildings and the way they relate with the open area they enclose.
- The predominantly three-storey buildings have long frontages, which together enclose and dominate the open space though not overwhelming it.
- Views into the square are restricted, opening up fully only when the space is actually entered.
- 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 function as well as an area for relaxation.

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 Victoria Square Conservation Area and to comply with the relevant Development Plan policies.

### 3.0 Guidelines for new development

#### (ii) Demolitions

In line with national planning policy, there is a general presumption against the demolition of listed buildings (including their outbuildings) and buildings of townscape value, which are identified in the Victoria Square Conservation Area Appraisal.

Again, given the relationship between the open space of the square and the surrounding buildings, the demolition or inappropriate alterations of any of these properties would have a negative impact on the character of the conservation area and would therefore generally not be permitted.

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

- The buildings 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) Tree Works

Regular maintenance of trees in the conservation area should be carried out. Any works on trees in the area 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 5**  
**The Council should regularly maintain trees in the conservation area.**

# 4.0 Community Involvement

## 4.1 Community ‘ownership’

For the conservation area to be successful, 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 agree with the objectives and outcomes. Everyone has a responsibility for his or her heritage.

It is therefore proposed that the Council should regularly inform residents in the conservation area of their responsibilities towards their historic built environment.

**Action 6**  
Produce conservation area advice notes and guidance for developers and property owners on the constraints and opportunities associated with the designation.

## 4.2 Consultation and involvement

The Council is committed to meaningful local involvement in the proposals for Victoria Square. 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.

**Action 7**  
Explore mechanisms of engaging local heritage and community groups as part of the decision making 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.

# 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 need to be assessed in the light of the emerging Local Development Framework and Government policy generally.

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 8**  
Consider undertaking a regular review every five years of the conservation area including a photographic sur-

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 9**  
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. 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 Victoria Square Conservation Area, the only funding would be for the general maintenance of the area, no capital funding would be necessary.

It has been noted there is the potential development opportunity on the edge of the square adjacent to the Statue of Queen Victoria. Given the lack of funding, the Council will have to examine availability from other sources to re-develop such void sites. It may be inevitable that private sector funding may be necessary.

**Action 10**  
**Consider other sources of capital funding, including private partnership for development.**

# Appendix 1

	Action Summary	Short Term	Medium Term	Long Term	Implemented	Funding	Notes/Comments
1	Any future enhancement scheme of the square should consider using more durable paving materials appropriate to a conservation area.				St Helens Council (SHC)	N/A	
2	To consider reinstating the sense of enclosure to the square, through a sensitive infill development at the junction of Corporation Street and Birchley Street should be considered.				SHC	N/A	
3	Add a section of Hardshaw Street to the south, into the conservation area.				SHC	N/A	Statutory process to follow.
4	Consider including the Town Hall, Gamble Institute, the Prudential Buildings and the war memorial into the St Helens Local List.				SHC	N/A	As part of the Local List Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).
5	The Council should regularly maintain trees in the conservation area.				SHC	N/A	
6	Produce conservation area advisory notes and guidance for developers and property owners on the constraints and opportunities associated with the designation.				SHC	SHC	To be carried out by the Conservation Team.
7	Explore mechanisms of engaging local heritage and community groups as part of the decision-making process.				SHC	N/A	To be carried out by the Conservation Team.
8	Consider undertaking a regular review every five years of the conservation area including a photographic survey.				SHC	SHC	To be carried out by the Conservation Team.
9	Consider undertaking a regular review of the delivery of the actions outlined in this report.				SHC	N/A	To be carried out by the Conservation Team.
10	Consider other sources of capital funding, including private partnership for development.				SHC	N/A	



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