



Town Square Conservation Area Management Plan Supplementary Planning Document



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1 Introduction

“Our built heritage represents the very best of our past. It provides a huge resource that can play an important role in the future of our towns, cities and rural areas in giving the stimulus provided to regeneration and the promotion of sustainable development” - Heritage Works, English Heritage, 2005.

1.1 The Town Square Conservation Area was designated in 1988 and Figure 1 illustrates its boundary. A conservation area is defined by the Planning [Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas] Act 1990 s.69 as being an “area of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance”. English Heritage recognise that Stevenage town centre has national significance as the first realisation of a fully pedestrianised town centre in the country.

1.2 The management plan is the next step after the designation process and preparation of the character statement. The plan provides guidance to enable the effective management of change and secure the preservation and enhancement of the character and appearance of the conservation area. This is in accordance with the Planning [Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas] Act 1990 s.71 and 72; s.71 specifically requires the local planning authority to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of their conservation areas and to submit these proposals for public consideration.

1.3 The character statement provides a comprehensive assessment of the physical character and appearance of the conservation area and defines what elements are of merit, what the key issues are, what opportunities exist for preservation/enhancement and which elements detract from the conservation area.

1.4 Its purpose is to provide a benchmark for assessing the impact of development proposals on the character and/or appearance of the conservation area.

1.5 The management plan is based on the Conservation Area Appraisal⁽¹⁾ and advice from English Heritage⁽²⁾.

1 Town Square Conservation Area Appraisal, Stevenage Borough Council, 2010

2 Guidance on the Management of Conservation Areas, 2006 and Understanding Place: Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management, 2011

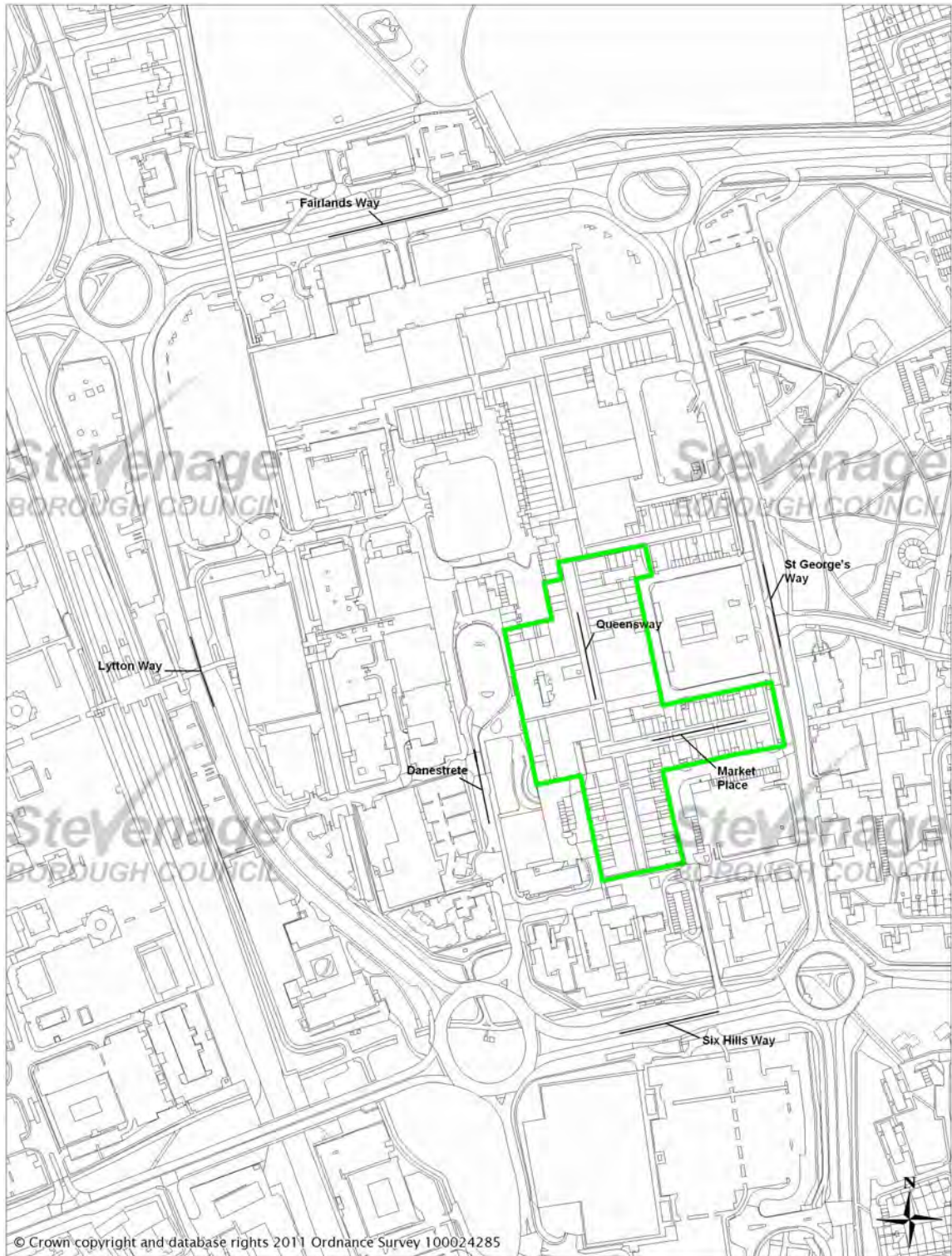


Figure 1 Town Square Conservation Area map (Green line denotes boundary)

2 Conservation areas and planning procedures

2.1 The Council has a duty to only allow developments in a conservation area that preserve or enhance its character or appearance. Demolitions, alterations, extensions and other works affecting the character or appearance of properties in a conservation area will probably require planning permission and/or listed building consent or conservation area consent.

2.2 At the time of writing, two of the buildings within the Town Square Conservation Area are listed (see Appendix 1). You should confirm whether the property is listed prior to consideration of a potential scheme as listed buildings have more stringent management methods.

2.3 The Council generally requires more detail than usual with applications submitted for listed building consent or for planning permission and conservation area consent for buildings within a conservation area.

2.4 The following section provides a brief overview of applications in conservation areas but you should always contact the Council to clarify how your proposals might be affected by conservation area designations.

Building alterations

2.5 In a conservation area you sometimes need planning permission for changes to buildings which would normally be permitted elsewhere. This might include extensions, alterations, dormer windows, satellite dishes or altering the external appearance of a property. You should contact the Council to determine how your proposal might be affected.

Demolition

2.6 For any unlisted building within a conservation area, a planning application to demolish a building is not required, however conservation area consent will be necessary. Conservation area consent is required to totally or substantially demolish most buildings within a conservation area.

2.7 Conservation area consent is also required to totally or substantially demolish a gate, fence, wall or railing over 1m high where it is next to a highway (including a public footpath or bridleway) or public open space; or over 2m high elsewhere.

Works to trees

2.8 The Council requires six weeks notice in writing before felling or cutting back the majority of trees in conservation areas, even if they are not specifically protected by a tree preservation order (TPO). In giving notice it is necessary to specify precisely what works are to be carried out.

2.9 Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) are designed to protect important trees that make a significant contribution to the character and appearance of the area. There are several trees within the Town Square Conservation Area covered by TPOs. Any works to trees covered by a TPO must be approved by the Council.

Advertisements

2.10 Additional planning procedures apply to the display of advertisements within a conservation area. In particular prohibiting the use of advertising hoardings around building sites and the use of captive balloons for advertising.

Enforcement

2.11 The failure to comply with any of the special planning procedures listed above could lead to prosecution by the Council. It is therefore advisable to consult the Council before proceeding with any works, which might affect the character and appearance of a conservation area and/or a listed building.

It is always advisable to discuss any proposals with the Development Management team at Stevenage Borough Council at the earliest opportunity.

Please see our website for further information and direct contact details.

Alternatively you may telephone the Council on 01438 242159.

3 The aims

3.1 The management plan has four objectives:

Objective 1

To establish and define the significance of the conservation area as a whole and of the individual elements which contribute to that significance, building on the character appraisal.

Objective 2

To assess and define the threats and opportunities within the area and how these impact on the significance of the individual elements and of the conservation area as a whole.

Objective 3

To provide a benchmark for assessing and managing change.

Objective 4

To provide guidance to ensure that the character and appearance of the conservation area will be maintained through the effective management of change and that opportunities to enhance the character and appearance are maximised.

4 In context

Planning policy context

4.1 The management plan will support existing planning policy as adopted by Stevenage Borough Council.

Regional Spatial Strategy [RSS] – The East of England Plan

4.2 The management plan complies with policies ENV6 and ENV7 of the RSS as adopted May 2008.

4.3 It should be noted that the regional level of plans (The East of England Plan) is proposed for revocation.

Stevenage District Plan 2nd Review 2004 [SDP]

4.4 The management plan supplements the following saved policies within the SDP:

Policy number	Policy title
Town-wide	
TW1	Sustainable development
TW9	Quality in design
TW11	Planning requirements
Housing	
H8	Density of residential development
Transport	
T6	Design standards
T14	Pedestrians
Town centre and retail developments	
TR1	Town centre
TR3	Retail frontages
TR4	Loss of retail floorspace
TR8	Protection of leisure, social and community uses
TR9	Town centre car parking

Policy number	Policy title
Environment	
EN13	Trees in new developments
EN27	Noise pollution
EN29	Light pollution
EN37	Telecommunications equipment developments
Leisure and recreation	
L1	Major leisure facilities in the town centre inset area

Table 1 - Policies of particular relevance in the Stevenage District Plan (2nd Review)

4.5 This list is not intended to be exhaustive.

Wider planning policy framework

4.6 The following is a list of existing policy and strategy documents which are supported by the management plan:

NPPF - National Planning Policy Framework
A Better Life - The role of culture in the sustainable development of the East of England Plan, 2006
The Biodiversity Action Plan, 2010
The Stevenage Green Space Strategy 2010

Table 2 The wider planning policy framework

4.7 For up to date details of relevant planning policy please refer to our website www.stevenage.gov.uk.

5 A brief history

5.1 The Town Square Conservation Area is located in the town centre, east of the railway station. The main precinct, Queensway, runs north to south, and at its centre point opens out onto a large open square known as Town Square. The conservation area is bounded by the bus station to the west, the square at the junction of Queensway/Market Place to the north and the square at the junction of Queensway/Park Place to the south. The eastern edge is formed by the property boundaries of Queensway.



Figure 2 The Town Square

5.2 Stevenage was designated as the UK's first New Town in 1946. The town centre was planned as part of the product of contemporary thinking on planning and architecture in the 1950s. For these reasons, Stevenage town centre has a unique and distinctive architectural built form, reminiscent of post war town planning.

5.3 The town centre (land within the ring road) occupies an area of approximately 27 hectares. The majority of construction work, undertaken in three phases, was completed by the late 1960s, which presents a continual retail frontage of low rise, three storey buildings arranged in a block form of rectilinear plots.

5.4 The retailing streets within the ring road are maintained as traffic free pedestrianised routes, to create a safe shopping environment.

5.5 Post 1980, mainly during the 1990s, peripheral developments have taken place which have altered the character of some parts of the town centre. Developments such as those at The Plaza, The Forum, and Matalan have introduced an uncoordinated series of buildings finished in varying treatments and materials. These developments do not reflect the New Town architecture of the town centre and appear out of place in the local setting.

5.6 Today, the central retailing area of the town centre has seen little change, other than small public realm improvements along with changes to shop fronts and signage.



Figure 3 Queensway

5.7 For a detailed analysis of the area history please refer to the Town Square Conservation Area Appraisal, available on the Council's website.

5.8 The conservation area is in a fair condition but has not dated well. It has been neglected over the years, suffering from a lack of investment and general repair. However, it has a number of attributes and features which have a positive impact upon the character of the area. These relate to its relatively unaltered layout, the Town Square, views, public art and canopies that provide the area with local distinctiveness. There are, however, some negative issues which could be better controlled through the adoption of a management plan.

5.9 This plan includes an analysis of the area which outlines the area's strengths and acknowledges key issues. The following sections consider how best their strengths can be enhanced and preserved. It also provides guidance on maximising opportunities to prevent erosion of locally distinctive features.

6 An analysis

"The character appraisal should provide the basis for developing management proposals for the conservation area." - Guidance on the Management of Conservation Areas, English Heritage, 2006.

6.1 This section considers the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats associated with the conversation area. This information has been compiled from a number of sources including the conservation area appraisal, site surveys and previous consultation comments.

Strengths

6.2 The Town Square Conservation Area was designated in 1988 and there are a number of strengths which warranted its designation:

- The Town Square - a large open square in the middle of the town centre with a central raised platform. It is fronted by retail outlets and contains some tree / shrub planting around its edges along with the listed structures of the clocktower and surrounding pool, and the Joyride sculpture;
- Queensway - the main spine of the primary retailing area;
- Public art and street furniture which adds to the overall unique New Town design and architecture;
- The composition of low rise, flat roofed buildings generally of three storeys in height, which have a strong co-ordinating element. The buildings are arranged in rectilinear block form throughout the conservation area and present a uniform frontage;
- The three storey buildings front onto pedestrianised precincts. The low rise buildings and wide pedestrianised streets were designed to provide a feeling of security and enclosure but they do not over-shadow and dominate the space;
- Canopies - which run along the building frontages to provide protection along the pedestrianised precincts. Canopies are flat topped and sit above the ground floor windows on plain metal poles with timber fascia;
- Paving - throughout the area is made up of dark coloured concrete slabs, broken up with smaller block paving;
- Buildings are clad with glass or pre-cast panels with metal window casements. Panels are generally grey in colour, where the original coloured panels have been painted over; and
- Important views within, into and around the conservation area.

6.3 This list is not intended to be exhaustive. Figure 4 illustrates some of the key features.



Figure 4 A character analysis of the Town Square Conservation Area

6.4 Along with the historical significance of the town centre, the individual strengths combine to establish an area worthy of its conservation area status. The Town Square Conservation Area has a unified urban character which provides a good example of contemporary urban design from the immediate post-war period.

Weaknesses

6.5 Within the Town Square Conservation Area, the following issues have been highlighted:

- Lack of maintenance of cladding panels which appear on the first and second floors of building frontages;
- The replacement of windows in uPVC and varying materials which affect the overall look of buildings and do not complement the original architecture;
- First and second floor window advertising creates an untidy appearance, with a range of colours and styles being used;
- Ad hoc advertising for stores located in inappropriate locations / positions which break up the uniformity of the precincts;
- Lack of maintenance to canopies, which in some places are rotting, with chipped paint, debris collecting on top, including a build up of moss, and a general state of disrepair;
- Poor coordination of public realm enhancements;
- Lack of locational marker and directional signs throughout the conservation area;
- Uninviting connections and alleyways into the conservation area;
- The bus station is a barrier to access for the Square; and
- Around the edges of the conservation area there are unattractive backs of buildings and service yards.

6.6 Together, these weaknesses impact negatively upon the conservation area. The loss of traditional features, vacant buildings and a general lack of building maintenance all have a negative impact on the area. Unsympathetic repairs detract from those features which make the area special. A continuation of such practices could potentially lead to a reduction in the size of the conservation area, or complete removal of designation. If those special features are lost forever, future reviews of the area would determine that there are no points of special architectural or historic interest which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.

Opportunities

6.7 There are a number of opportunities which may provide solutions to some of the mentioned issues:

- Take advantage of the town centre location.
- Promotion of the historic qualities of the area.
- Strengthening connections to the past.
- Promotion of the use of traditional materials.

- Encouragement to use minimalist advertising on upper floors.
- Support of co-ordinated public realm enhancements.
- Co-operation and positive engagement with urban designers on potential town centre schemes.
- Enforcement of the maintenance and general up-keep of all areas.
- Potential to improve access to the Square through future schemes.
- Enforcement of breaches of planning law and legislation.

6.8 These opportunities present options to promote the area to visitors and improve local knowledge of the historic qualities of the area. Improving the image of an area will encourage sympathetic repairs and development.

6.9 During the lifetime of this management plan these recommendations would significantly enhance the special features of the area. Increasing pedestrian activity through the area, co-ordinated repairs, completing sympathetic restorations and development will ultimately ensure that the conservation area is preserved. The pressure for re-development in this location enables an opportunity for sustainable decisions to be considered at an early stage in the development process.

6.10 A pro-active enforcement process will ensure that conservation is at the forefront of people's minds when considering alterations or improvements.

"The twentieth century is often the most undervalued and vulnerable period of building and landscaping." - Understanding Place, English Heritage, 2011.

Threats

- The cumulative negative effect of the continued loss of architectural features.
- The cumulative negative effect of the continued use of non-traditional materials.
- The demolition of unlisted buildings.
- Re-development of the area could negatively impact on key urban design features.
- Re-development could lead to the removal of key pieces of public art.
- Delays to re-development projects further the spiral of decline within the area as landowners are uncertain of the future for adjacent buildings.
- Economic decline of local businesses.

6.11 These threats are potentially damaging to the conservation area in the long-term. The pressure for development alongside unsympathetic changes to the existing environment could lead to erosion of all the special local features. It will be necessary for various stakeholders to integrate their activities, to work together and ensure that these threats do not impact negatively on the conservation area as a whole.

6.12 Careful management will strike a balance between development and conservation. The replication of existing style is not necessarily appropriate and guidance on architectural style should not confine opportunities for innovative design. This plan will seek to protect and enhance the conservation area whilst recognising that carefully managed change can make a positive contribution to the built environment of the town centre.



Illustrative examples of the analysis: the Town Square is a key strength of the conservation area whereas buildings in disrepair are a weakness. Development plans for the town centre are an opportunity to improve the area. Economic decline increases the number of vacant units which is a threat to the viability of the centre.

7 Development issues

“Re-using buildings and adapting landscapes help reinforce a sense of place.” - Regeneration and the Historic Environment, English Heritage, 2005.

7.1 Re-using existing buildings is a simple way of achieving sustainability. The re-use of buildings can also retain those features which make an area special. Conservation areas such as a historic centre can form the focus for the regeneration of a wider area⁽³⁾. Local planning policy provides the framework through which development proposals will be determined and explores how any redevelopment schemes should pay particular attention to the character and appearance of the Town Square Conservation Area.

7.2 This is of particular importance when considering new planning applications which are within or adjacent to the Town Square Conservation Area. Parts of the town centre are currently subject to a major planning application to redevelop the town centre, with proposed redevelopment being adjacent to the conservation area boundary along the western side of Town Square. The revised planning application covers western parts of the town centre, which includes Danestrete, the bus station, Matalan and its associated car park, along with areas adjacent to Great North Road.

7.3 The area which will have most impact on the conservation area could be development which fronts onto Town Square. This will be required to reflect the existing buildings, which are flat roofed, three storeys high and in block formation. The openness of the Town Square will be considered, along with its function as a focal point and gathering space, crucial to the setting of the town centre.

7.4 Negotiations are also currently underway for the re-development of Park Place, immediately north of the conservation area. The proposal is a mixed use scheme which will bring over 180 residential units into the town centre. The increase of residential units in the town centre is crucial to its vitality as it brings movement through the area throughout the day and night.

3 Guidance on the management of conservation areas, English Heritage, 2006

8 Retail issues

"Shops and retailing form the lifeblood of many historic areas, providing vitality, vibrancy and an essential economic base." - Retail Development in Historic Areas, HELM, 2005.

8.1 In Stevenage, the town centre is at the top of the local retail hierarchy. However, the design and format of the town centre is very much of its age and despite being innovative at the time it is now showing its age, and is in need of investment and refurbishment.

8.2 Analysis⁽⁴⁾ shows that the town centre is well located but the dated buildings and image detract shoppers from using the centre. New, larger units in out-of-centre locations are attracting new businesses but the town centre continues to suffer from increasing numbers of vacant units, with average vacancies higher than the regional and national average.

8.3 Economic decline of a centre can lead to a decline in the stock of buildings as owners/leaseholders are less inclined to invest whilst struggling to attract new business. However, on the reverse side of this approach it is noted that good quality, well maintained local infrastructure is more likely to attract new business. There is a need to invest in the structure of the centre and this will become more of an issue as the proposed regeneration projects begin to attract new stores.



Figure 5 Investment in the fabric of the buildings will attract new businesses

8.4 The conservation area will need to maintain a strong image which enables the Town Square to remain as the focus of the town centre. This can only be achieved by careful management and investment.

4 Stevenage Borough Retail Capacity Assessment, King Sturge, 2010

9 Transport issues

"Many problems in conservation areas can arise from, or be associated with, the measures required for traffic safety, control and calming." - Guidance on the Management of Conservation Areas, English Heritage, 2006.

9.1 The conservation area is well located, central to the town centre, within easy access of the train station and adjacent to the bus station. The bus station provides excellent sustainable transport links for the town centre although it does require pedestrian routes to be diverted around the central section for access to the west. The position of the raised platform and its safety barriers also restricts movement across the square, as shown in Figure 6.

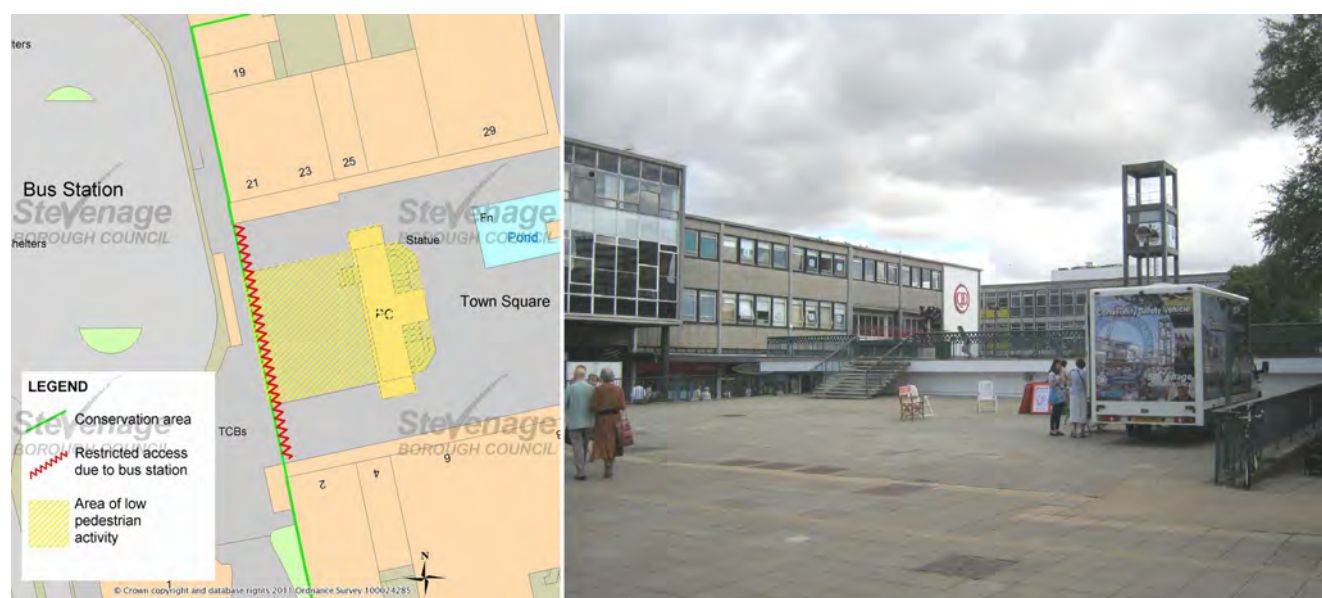


Figure 6 The bus station restricts movement from the west and the platform area suffers from low pedestrian movement as a result (r).

9.2 The town centre regeneration scheme proposes to relocate the bus station to the periphery of the town centre and this would provide an opportunity to improve the square either through extension or enclosure. Partial enclosure of the Town Square with buildings on the western edge would focus views along the main linear pedestrian corridors and improve movement through the space. It would create direct access to the west, onwards to the train station and relocated bus station.



Figure 7 Queensway

9.3 The pedestrianised Town Square Conservation Area provides good onward access to the eastern edge of the town centre. However, links to Bedwell from Market Place could be improved. Analysis⁽⁵⁾ shows that this underpass route is perceived as unsafe, especially after dark. This is partly due to the low number of pedestrians in the area owing to the current limited number of residential properties in the town centre.

9.4 Pedestrian movement through the shopping area is good, and unrestricted. There is a general approach to align street furniture centrally so that pedestrian movement is not affected. This is highlighted by Figure 7.

5 Masterplan for Stevenage Town Centre, tp bennett, 2010

9 The Management Plan

9.1 All development in the conservation area, or which forms part of its setting, should respond to its immediate environment and context, in terms of scale, alignment, form, materials and detailing. This plan sets out a series of design guidelines aimed at ensuring appropriately designed development in the conservation area.

Alterations and extensions

9.2 Alterations and extensions should not dominate an existing building's scale or alter the composition of its main elevations. When assessing new development proposals, the Borough Council will ensure that the mass, scale and design of new buildings and structures relate fully to the buildings that contribute positively to the character of the area.

9.3 The appraisal identifies that buildings located within the Town Square conservation area are three storeys in height throughout the area. Therefore planning permission will not normally be granted for development of over three stories in height within the conservation area unless there are exceptional circumstances where the proposal enhances the character and appearance of the conservation area.



Figure 8 Queensway (l), the Town Square (c) and Market Place (r)

9.4 Development proposals which lie adjacent to the conservation area will need to be mindful of its setting and should not dominate the Town Square, Queensway or Market Place in their massing. Again, a balance must be struck by new developments, to ensure that high quality, high density development is also of a character and design which complements the original.

Layout

9.5 Building footprints provide a reference for how the conservation area has developed over time. For the Town Square Conservation Area the linear layout of the buildings is a fundamental reflection of the post-war urban design principles. Figure 9 illustrates the building layout.

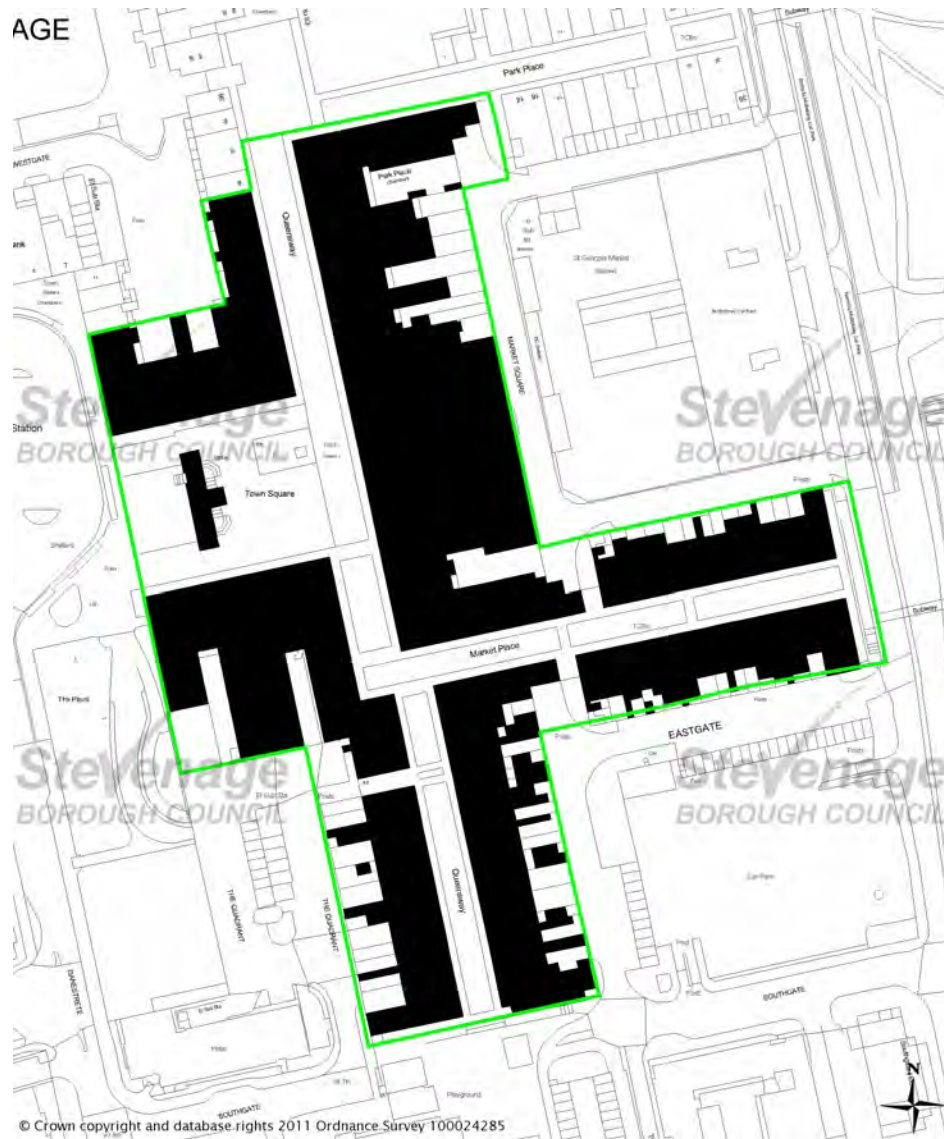


Figure 9 The built form of the Town Square Conservation Area

9.6 When considering development proposals, for new buildings in or immediately adjacent to the conservation area, development should reflect the character of the immediate conservation area, in terms of siting and alignment. This is analysed in the conservation appraisal document, which accompanies this management plan.

9.7 In summary, the majority of buildings have a strong building line that runs along Queensway and Market Place forming the original pedestrianised precincts of the town centre. This then opens out to form Town Square, which is fronted on three sides by buildings of the same style and scale. If the development proposal does not conform to those characteristics highlighted then the proposal is unlikely to make a positive contribution to the area.

9.8 The current position of the bus station does not provide a definitive edge to the space. Enclosure of the Town Square through development would highlight the importance of the area as the central focus for the town centre. It is important that developments which seek to address this issue maintain the key pedestrian corridor views, including views of the clock tower, and reflect the scale and massing of existing adjacent buildings.

9.9 Proposals should acknowledge and retain the following key views and vistas within the conservation area (see also Figure 4):

- Views looking south along Queensway towards the focal point of residential block The Towers;
- Views looking east along Market Place towards the focal point of The Church of St George and St Andrew;
- Views looking north along Queensway;
- Views from the bus station and Danestrete (including Daneshill House) across Town Square;
- Views of the clock tower located in Town Square; and
- Views of the Joyride sculpture located on a raised platform in Town Square.

9.10 The rear of buildings pose a particular issue in terms of layout. These areas are necessary for deliveries, storage and waste collection and are sometimes poorly maintained. In terms of the conservation area this is a particular issue along the eastern edge as the rear of buildings are visible to approaching pedestrians from the car parks and to those accessing the indoor market. We will encourage the maintenance of these areas.

Materials

9.11 The materials which are in use are those which were used as part of the construction of the first phase of the pedestrianised town centre, and therefore should be enhanced as far as possible to ensure that this connection with the New Town is maintained.

9.12 Materials and details which remind us of the New Town heritage include:

- Steel framed windows
- Timber clad first floor canopies
- Steel canopy supports
- Grey concrete fronted buildings
- Primary coloured pre-cast panels
- Grey concrete paving slabs
- Small dark brick block paving
- Modern public art, including sculpture and detailing to bricks / tiles on building frontages
- Flat roofed buildings
- Single-glazed windows
- Stainless steel framed shop fronts

9.13 The introduction of inappropriate materials in the conservation area should be controlled. Over recent years, the unfortunate loss of original materials has become apparent, whereby original window frames have been replaced by uPVC windows for example. As materials are replaced by cheaper and more modern construction techniques which offer quick gains in the short term, it is increasingly difficult to ensure the character of the conservation area is enhanced.



Figure 10 Timber clad canopies with steel supports (l), coloured pre cast panels (c) and block paving (r)

9.14 New development should be responsive to existing architecture and should draw upon the neutral colour palette of existing buildings. Planning permission could be granted for a proposal which does not conform to the existing arrangements of buildings but only where it provides something of an exemplar design, as a landmark feature in the town centre.

Roofs

9.15 The roof is one of the most important parts of a property as it makes the building wind and watertight and can bring harmony to a landscape. The town centre roofscape (the view of the rooftops) is characteristic of the New Town design. Flat roofs dominate the town centre, highlighting the linear rectangular design of the buildings and allowing the maximum amount of natural light to fill the precinct.



Figure 11 Examples of solar panels (l - © Viridian) and green roof options (c - © McLaw and r - © Langley Waterproofing) for flat roofs

9.16 The rooftops also provide an opportunity to improve the sustainability of buildings. The flat roofs ensure that sympathetic designs can be incorporated whilst having a limited visual impact at street level. We will encourage proposals which seek to improve sustainability through thoughtful and well considered schemes. Figure 11 illustrates some options which might be considered in future schemes.

Windows and doors

9.17 Windows and doors are important components of a building and any alteration or replacement can significantly alter its character and appearance. Wherever possible the original windows and doors should be retained and repaired in order to keep the integrity of the original design so preserving the character and proportions of the building. The energy efficiency of windows can be increased through the use of appropriate secondary glazing.

9.18 Imitation replacement window styles and inappropriate replacement window materials are poor alternatives for the original metal frames and uPVC windows generally have thicker, cruder frames. In the town centre, the style of window frames is copied along the length of each street and in some instances there are patterns in the placement of glazing, see Figure 12.



Figure 12 Window patterns in the Town Square Conservation Area

9.19 Unsuitable styles and materials impact on the proportions and overall appearance of a window and a building. The character of the entire street is then changed, which has a detrimental impact on the overall appearance of the conservation area. We will encourage the retention of window design and style along each retail frontage.

9.20 Primary coloured panelling which sits below windows on the upper floors of buildings has been covered over by grey panels in some instances. More regular repainting of these panels should be undertaken to ensure that paint work does not chip and become unsightly. A colour scheme should be considered for a more holistic approach throughout the conservation area, to pick out the brighter colours displayed by tiles in the the Clock Tower pool (as shown in Figure 13).



Figure 13 The colours of the clock tower pool

Canopies

9.21 Along the frontages of the buildings, above the ground floor units, run flat roofed canopies. These are a significant feature throughout the Stevenage Town Centre conservation area. Not only this, but their functionality also provides protection for pedestrians from the elements.

9.22 In some instances canopy coverage which crosses the pedestrian precincts have been removed due to their state of disrepair. Their structural condition ranges considerably and there is a varying degree of maintenance. Canopies which run along the unit frontages of Town Square and Queensway appear to be painted regularly and are generally well maintained. The canopies at Market Place are particularly important, however although the cross canopies have been retained in this area they require a higher duty of care and are not as well maintained along this peripheral route into and out of the town centre.

9.23 Throughout the conservation area, original shop front canopies should be retained as a feature of Stevenage New Town architecture. Retailers and businesses should take responsibility in maintaining their own shop frontages.



Figure 14 Examples of town centre canopies

Public art

9.24 Public art was a prominent feature of post-war design. Statues and sculptures are prominent parts of Stevenage's heritage and some are listed, such as the 'Joyride' statue, see Figure 15 (c). Mural art was given a huge boost by the Festival of Britain in 1951 where around 100 murals were shown at the South Bank exhibition space. This encouraged artists to experiment with different materials such as concrete, ceramic and metals. Over 1000 murals were commissioned during the period 1945 to 1980 and examples survive in Stevenage such as the ceramic mural by Bajio shown in Figure 15 (l). The unlisted pieces of public art are considered to be of local importance, see Appendix 2.

9.25 We will encourage proposals that seek to preserve existing examples of public art and support the development of new pieces. Artwork can also assist people as they move around the town centre by providing points of reference.

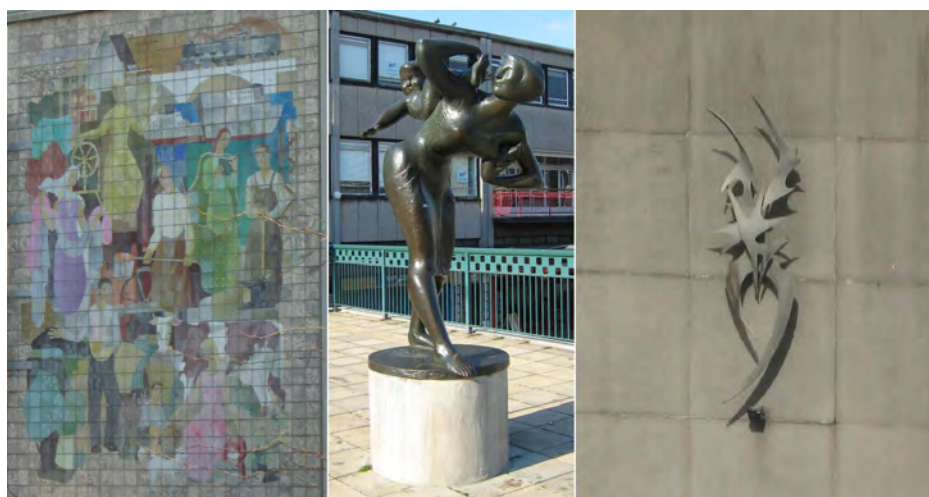


Figure 15 Bajio's ceramic mural (l), Belsky's 'Joyride' statue (c) and Lyon's wall sculpture facing the bus station (r)

Aerials, satellite dishes and alarm boxes

9.26 Aerials, satellite dishes and alarm boxes can have a detrimental impact on the appearance of a building. Where possible they should be situated inside or to the rear of a property or carefully located to minimise the impact on the character of the building.

Landscaping and open space

9.27 The Biodiversity Action Plan (2010) contains policies and action for wildlife species and habitats which must guide management and The Green Space Strategy (2010) contains an action plan with recommendations on how green spaces across the town are maintained and improved.

9.28 Within this urban area there are no green spaces but a number of openings along the pedestrian streets which form urban squares. These squares support some recreational space with trees, planted containers, areas for sitting and children's play equipment. The Green Space Strategy sets a vision and standards for these spaces and the Council will ensure that they are maintained appropriately.



Figure 16 Urban squares and landscaping in the conservation area

9.29 The potential presence of protected species associated with older buildings should be acknowledged. We will support the improvement of existing habitats and encourage the development of new nesting areas for protected species as appropriate.

Street furniture

9.30 Street lighting improves night-time safety for road users and members of the community and can reduce crime and the fear of crime during the hours of darkness. Hertfordshire County Council are moving to a part-night street light operation to reduce carbon emissions and overall costs. There are some exceptions to this programme, particularly where safety is an issue.

9.31 We will continue to support the use of light fittings which are appropriate to their location in terms of material, scale, design and illumination, particularly for listed buildings and conservation areas.

9.32 Within the Town Square Conservation Area lighting columns are also used for hanging baskets so their appearance, during the summer months, is obscured by attractive floral displays. Along Queensway, the buildings are lit above the canopies with changing coloured lights. This provides interest and colour to the street scene which is dramatic in hours of darkness. The canopies are lit underneath for pedestrians. The general approach to lighting is good with limited amounts of street clutter as existing columns and buildings are used.

9.33 Signage in the area is generally well proportioned and, where possible, is attached to existing columns to prevent clutter. Street furniture is centrally located along the shopping streets to prevent obstructions for shoppers. We will continue to encourage this approach. When funding becomes available, it is recommended that signage is removed as it becomes redundant or is replaced to reduce visual clutter.

9.34 Benches provide an opportunity for people to stop, relax and reflect upon their surroundings. There are numerous benches located throughout the conservation area, we will retain and maintain these. The opportunity for people to sit and relax in the open space creates a feeling of safety for other users as they move through the area.

9.35 Generally, the street furniture is in a good condition although there is a lack of coordination between schemes. This can be a positive method for creating an identity for a square or open space. It enhances movement through the town centre as pedestrians are able to identify a particular space. However, a more unified approach to either (or in combination) design, materials or colour palette would create more cohesion through the town centre overall. A Public Realm Enhancement Strategy seeks to guide high quality and coordinated fittings across the whole town centre, including the conservation area. We will encourage schemes which seek to unite the town centre through design and provide the continued maintenance of these facilities.



Figure 17 Floral displays add colour and are attached to lighting columns to reduce clutter (l), lighting is also used to uplift trees in the central walkway of Queensway (c), and signage has been designed to reflect the New Town heritage of the Clock Tower (r)

Advertisements

9.36 For businesses, interesting and eye-catching advertisements play an important role in attracting customers but poorly designed advertisement displays can have a negative effect on the appearance of a building and its surroundings.

9.37 Enhancing the appearance of the street scene and making the best use of the existing historic features creates an attractive, readily identifiable environment and can improve the economic and social vitality of the area.

9.38 All advertisements within the Town Square Conservation Area should be sympathetic to its historic New Town character. New advertisement displays will be strictly controlled. There will be a presumption against internally illuminated projecting fascia signs and advertising above ground floor level. Advertisement hoardings of any description will not be appropriate.

Pedestrian and cycle links

9.39 The entire Town Square Conservation Area is pedestrianised. Cyclists are prohibited to improve safety for pedestrians and provide an attractive shopping environment. Cycle facilities are provided at appropriate locations at the edge of the town centre. We will continue to adopt this approach.

9.40 The area provides onward connections to other sections of the town centre and beyond. Connections to the east have been highlighted as a particular issue and we will encourage the improvement of these links as funding becomes available. We will ensure that these routes remain accessible, secure and legible.

Pre-application discussions

9.41 Any proposed works within a conservation area require special consideration and all applicants are encouraged to seek pre-application advice prior to submission. For extensions, alterations and significant development proposals, applicants are advised to employ the services of an agent or architect with extensive knowledge of working in conservation areas.

9.42 Proposals for development which fall within the conservation area, or which affect its setting, including views into and out of the area, will not be permitted unless they include a detailed assessment which identifies how the proposals will preserve or enhance, or otherwise complement the special character and appearance of the area. We will pay particular regard to the Town Square Conservation Area Appraisal⁽⁶⁾ when considering development proposals in, or adjacent to, the area.

6 Town Square Conservation Area Appraisal, June 2010, Stevenage Borough Council

9.43 Various sources offer guidance when dealing with the maintenance or restoration of period structures. English Heritage provide a great deal of information on heritage protection and understanding your property. See www.english-heritage.org.uk for further details.

9.44 There are a number of magazines and books available on structures which offer specialist advice, assistance and contacts for professional tradesmen. The Twentieth Century Society campaigns for the preservation of Britain's architectural heritage from 1914 onwards. They regularly consult on listed building applications and offer a wealth of expertise on this subject. See www.c20society.org.uk for further details.

Enforcement

9.45 Local planning authorities have a duty to consider taking enforcement action where they believe there to have been a breach of planning control. Key aspects of the enforcement service are to investigate alleged breaches of planning control, listed building control and advertisement control. Wherever possible the Council will seek to resolve breaches without the need to take formal action.

Opportunities for an Article 4 Direction

9.46 Article 4 Directions can be used to withdraw certain permitted development rights under the 1995 Town and Country Planning [General Permitted Development] Order. In order to implement such a Direction it is necessary to prove that works carried out under the Order have a direct and detrimental impact on the character and/or appearance of the conservation area. It is recognised that incremental changes using non-traditional materials have a direct adverse impact on the appearance of the conservation area.

9.47 There are resource implications in dealing with applications, appeals and planning enforcement investigations for Article 4 Directions. It is hoped that by developing a positive relationship with local landowners and leaseholders, combined with a promotion of the benefits of conservation area status, that the need for restrictive planning controls can be avoided. The area will be subject to a review cycle to measure future change and to identify patterns of change on the conservation area. It is recommended that an Article 4 Direction should not be designated at this time.

Summary

9.48 In conclusion, we will seek to strengthen those elements of the built environment which warranted the designation of the area. Proposals to reinstate lost features or repair existing features and/or buildings will be welcomed.

9.49 It is recognised that the economic decline of local businesses can pose a threat to the use of buildings located within the conservation area. The ground floor uses are controlled through local planning policy and it is expected that regeneration proposals for the town centre will also encourage the promotion of other units within the conservation area.

9.50 The success of the conservation area will depend in some part upon the care which individual owners/leaseholders take with the maintenance and repair of their buildings, and their surrounding plots of land, and in any alterations or extensions they make. We will promote the conservation area to ensure that local residents and shop owners are aware of the contribution they are able to make when considering even small alterations.

9.51 Good conservation is founded on appropriate routine management and maintenance, which in the long term should limit the need for larger scale repairs or other interventions which are disruptive and can be costly⁽⁷⁾.

9.52 The area can contribute to local historical knowledge and develop lifelong learning and improved health. The development of links which introduce people to the historic diversity of the town are encouraged. We will continue to ensure that the public realm is maintained appropriately to provide an attractive environment in which to shop, work, live and spend time.

7 PPS5: Planning for the Historic Environment: Historic Environment Planning Practice Guide, March 2010

11 Monitoring measures

"Changes in the appearance of conservation areas ... should be monitored regularly" - Guidance on the management of conservation areas, English Heritage, 2006.

11.1 The management plan will be subject to a five year review, subject to staff resources, commencing from the date of adoption. The conservation area appraisal and this conservation area management plan provide a benchmark for assessing change. This may result in a revision or expansion of the existing appraisal and management plan and will include:

- Recording changes;
- Re-assessing the definition of special interest that warrants designation;
- Identifying new issues affecting the conservation area and revising the management plan accordingly.

11.2 Reviews will link with local planning policies so that development opportunities can be properly considered against the heritage interests of the Town Square Conservation Area.

11.3 The input of stakeholders including local conservation groups in this process, and in the wider management of the historic environment, such as monitoring buildings at risk, will be welcomed.

11.4 Stevenage Borough Council's Historic Environment Champion will take an active role in championing the importance of Stevenage's historic environment. Officers will meet the Historic Environment Champion and local Council Members as issues arise and these meetings will be used to monitor and review the Conservation Area Management Plan.

11.5 Future iterations of the appraisal and management plan will be subject to public consultation with the local community, relevant stakeholders, and others with an interest in the area. They will be made available on the Council's website and hard copies will be placed in local libraries. Adverts will be placed in local press. Comments received will be taken into consideration in the final drafting of these documents.



Appendix 1

Appendix 1

At the time of writing, the following buildings are listed:

Clock Tower and surrounding pool	Grade II
Joy-ride (Mother and Child) Sculpture	Grade II

Table 3

For detailed descriptions of each listing, please refer to the English Heritage website at www.english-heritage.org.uk.



Appendix 2

Appendix 2

Further to the statutory listings as catalogued in Appendix 1, a number of buildings could be considered of local importance to the conservation area:

<p>2, 4, 6, 8, 17, 19, 21, 23, 25, 27, & 29 Town Square</p>	<p>Buildings which front onto Town Square contribute to the setting of the Square as the planned focal point for the town centre, and enclose it on its northern and southern frontages. These buildings are typical of the New Town construction, being three storeys high, with flat roofs and canopies with timber fascias and metal poles running at first floor level along their frontages.</p> <p>The buildings are occupied by a range of retail units at ground floor level, including fast food units, clothing and discount shops. First and second floors are occupied by the ground floor retailers, office or storage space.</p> <p>First and second floor windows are mostly original, steel framed casements, with panelling below. The buildings are clad with glass or pre-cast panels.</p>
<p>41, 43, and 49-55 Queensway</p>	<p>Buildings front onto the Town Square along its eastern frontage, and are part of the primary retail frontage along Queensway. These buildings are typical of the New Town construction, being three storeys high, with flat roofs and canopies running at first floor level along their frontages.</p> <p>The buildings are occupied by retail units at ground floor level (Wilkinsons and Boots).</p> <p>First and second floors are occupied by office or storage space.</p> <p>First and second floor windows are mostly original, steel framed casements, with panelling below.</p>
<p>21 Town Square (McDonalds)</p>	<p>Public art - Peter Lyon's wall sculpture (1964) fronting onto the bus station. A metal wall sculpture which is mounted on the blank facade of the retail unit occupied by McDonalds.</p>
<p>8 Town Square (Primark)</p>	<p>Public art - Bajjo's wall ceramic (circa 1958). A ceramic mural, which symbolises the Co-operative movement. Inappropriate advertising for the shop 'Primark' has already encroached onto this frontage, and detracts from the display of public art.</p>

Table 4

This list is not intended to be exhaustive.

