

Town Square Conservation Area Appraisal 2010





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1 Introduction

Background

1.1 Stevenage town centre is said to contain the first fully pedestrianised shopping centre in the UK. As it forms part of the centre of the UK's first post-war New Town, it has a particular value in the country's town planning history. The first step in recognising this value was the designation of the Town Square Conservation Area in 1988.

1.2 A review of the conservation areas in Stevenage was carried out in November 2005 by Beams, to assess the need for alterations to current boundaries⁽¹⁾. This included the Town Square Conservation Area, along with all other conservation areas within Stevenage.

1.3 Since 1988, the Town Square Conservation Area boundary has remained the same, although a review, and changes to the boundary, were proposed by Beams in the 2005 study. It is now the role of this document to appraise the existing conservation area, and to propose changes to its boundary in light of masterplanning and design work recently undertaken for the town centre. This will inform any future development within the town centre.

1.4 The main objectives of this conservation area appraisal are to:

- Define the special interest of Stevenage town centre by analysing its historical development, land uses, views and spaces, along with the architectural and historic qualities of its buildings;
- Identify the problems and pressures land in the town centre faces, along with its capacity for change; and
- Provide recommendations on how the conservation area may be expanded, enhanced and managed.

What is a conservation area?

1.5 Conservation areas were introduced in 1967. The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires us to designate, as conservation areas, any areas that are of special architectural or historic interest, which are desirable to preserve or enhance. Designating conservation areas provides added protection to areas which are deemed historically or architecturally important, and their future can therefore be managed accordingly.

1.6 Conservation areas are usually designated because of the quality of the buildings contained within them; however they can also be designated because of their history, architecture, layout or private spaces, such as gardens, parks, trees, street furniture or public art.

1.7 Those who live, or own property within a designated conservation area are legally required to apply to the Council for conservation area consent when:

1 A Review of Stevenage Conservation Areas, Beams 2005

- Making certain alterations to a building, such as changing the roof profile, or changing the cladding;
- Demolishing a building or parts of it; or
- Felling or lopping a tree which is within a conservation area, whether it is covered by tree preservation order or not.

Planning policy framework

1.8 A conservation area is defined under Chapter 9 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) as an:

1.9 *"....area of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance."*

1.10 Each local planning authority is responsible for the designation of such conservation areas under the Act. Section 71 of the same Act requires local planning authorities to: *"...formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement ..."* of these conservation areas.

1.11 In March 2010, Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment (PPS5) was introduced which has replaced Planning Policy Guidance 15. PPS5 recommends that to deliver sustainable development with regard to the historic environment, we should:

- Recognise that heritage assets are a non-renewable resource;
- Take account of the wider social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits of heritage conservation; and
- Recognise that intelligently managed change may sometimes be necessary if heritage assets are to be maintained for the long term.

1.12 We should be planning to ensure that heritage assets are conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance. Under Policy HE3, of PPS5, it is recommended that a positive and proactive strategy for conservation should take into account the variations in type and historic environment by virtue of:

- Its influence on the character of the environment and an area's sense of place;
- Its potential to be a catalyst for regeneration in an area;
- The stimulus it can provide to inspire new development of imaginative and high quality design;
- The re-use of existing fabric, minimising waste; and
- Its mixed and flexible patterns of land use that are likely to be, and remain, sustainable.

1.13 As a result of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, Local Plans are being replaced by Local Development Frameworks (LDF). The LDF sets out the local planning framework for Stevenage. As part of the Stevenage LDF, we are producing an Area Action Plan for Stevenage town centre, which will guide any future development within the centre and its surroundings to 2026.

1.14 Within the Town Centre Area Action Plan we are proposing:

- 130,000m² of additional retail floorspace;
- 1,300 new residential units;
- 35,000m² of additional employment floorspace which will generate approximately 2,000 new jobs; and
- Public realm improvements along with improvements to the highways network.

1.15 Included within the Town Centre Area Action Plan preferred options document, draft policy TC02 stated:

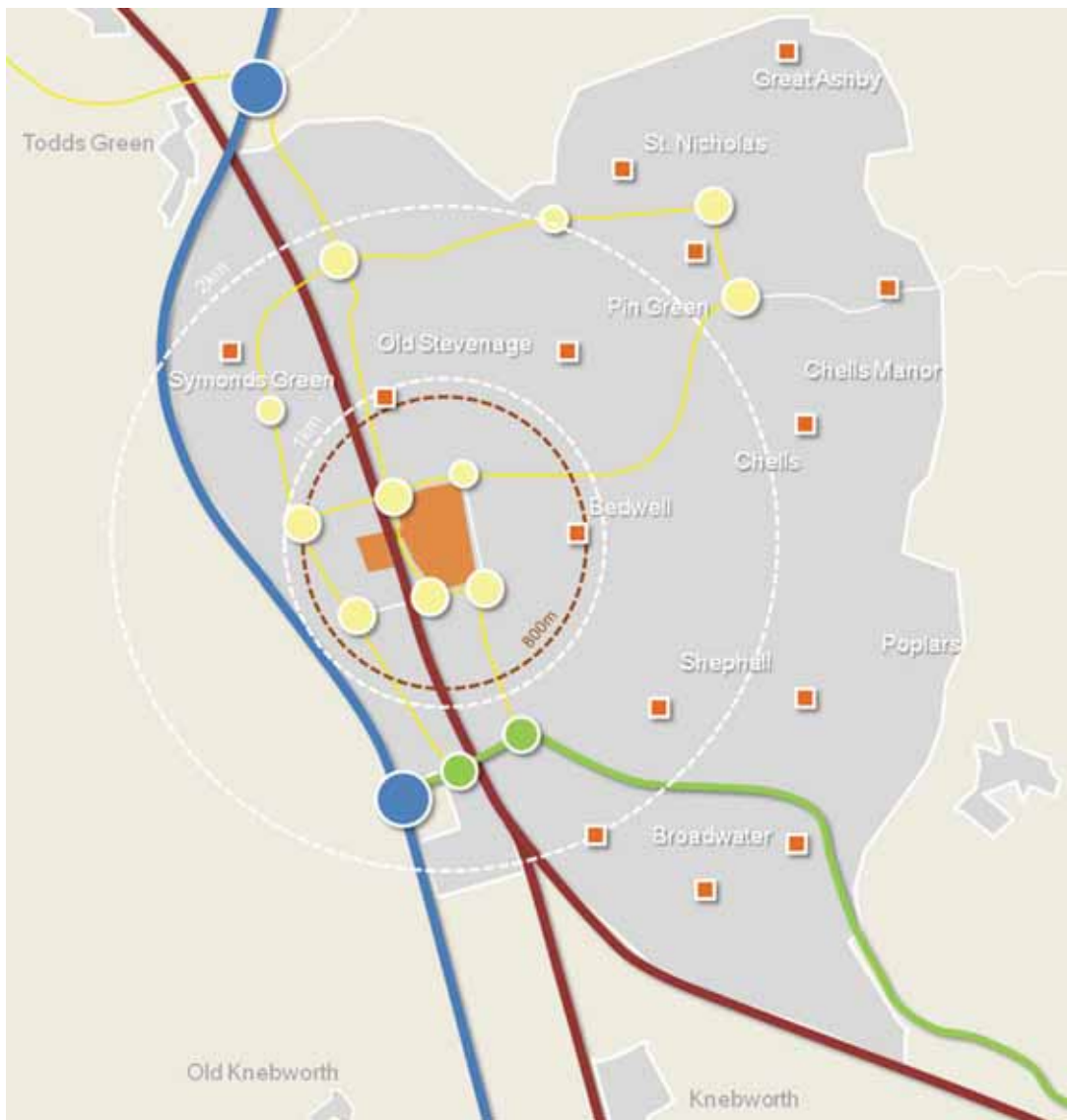
1.16 *“Our preferred option is to protect and enhance a revised town centre conservation area boundary following a review and separate consultation; to include an extension to the setting of Town Square and Queensway.”*

1.17 Legislation requires local planning authorities to periodically review their conservation areas, and to publish proposals for their preservation and enhancement. In response to this, Stevenage Borough Council is reviewing the existing Town Square Conservation Area, and considering the extension of its boundary. This conservation area appraisal will also provide greater guidance for the policies which are to be set out in the Town Centre Area Action Plan.

2 Context

Location and setting

2.1 Stevenage is a large town and Borough in the north of Hertfordshire. It is located between Welwyn Garden City, which lies to the south, and Letchworth to the north, and lies to the east of the A1(M). The total population of the Borough is approximately 80,000, with a large area of new town development to the south of the original old town. The Old Town High Street and the New Town shopping precincts form the main retail centres of Stevenage, along with out of town retail parks and local neighbourhood centres.



Map 1 Plan of Stevenage Borough

The New Town

2.2 Stevenage was designated as the UK's first New Town in 1946. It was the UK's first wholly pedestrianised town centre. The town centre was planned as part of the product of contemporary thinking on planning and architecture in the 1950s. The decisions taken through the series of phases evident in the historic planned development of the town have had long lasting social, economic, political and physical implications for the future.



Stevenage New Town in 1959. Source: Ashby, 2004

2.3 A Development Corporation was formed to assemble land and produce plans for the creation of the New Town. The first masterplan for the town produced the concept of six residential neighbourhoods around a wholly new town centre, separate from the existing main shopping area.

2.4 From the outset, the masterplan intended the creation of a pedestrianised shopping precinct in the centre (1946). However, both the Government and the Board of the Development Corporation had doubts about the deliverability of such a radical new concept. Arguments went on about whether retailers would be prepared to locate in a shopping street where cars could not park outside the front door, for eight years. Only after the Board and its officers visited Rotterdam's main pedestrianised shopping street, the Lijnbaan, in 1954, did the Government finally accept the pedestrian principle for Stevenage.

2.5 Work on phase I of the town centre shopping streets began in June 1956. This comprised 108 shops, including multiple traders and banks. The first shop opened in June 1958 and all of them were open by the end of 1959. After the initial scepticism, once it was constructed the town centre and its pedestrianised precincts proved to be a success with retailers and the public. A second phase, including Park Place and Littlewoods, began in 1962 and northern Queensway (including Marks and Spencer) followed in 1969 as phase III.



Stevenage New Town in 1963. Source: Aerofilms no A222377, HALS collection

2.6 Revisions were made to the 1966 masterplan to include an increased amount of larger retail units to meet demand. These are evident in the northern end of Queensway and Park Place. One of the key aims of the planning of the New Town pedestrianised centre was to have a continuity of facades, as an essential feature of the shopping streets. Rectangular plots were found to be most economical and satisfactory to developers⁽²⁾, thus we see the rectangular pattern of the town centre evident today. The main shopping street - known as Queensway, was laid out to run from north to south, to ensure an equal distribution of sun light. Traffic bearing roads were to be laid out in a manner to discourage through traffic⁽³⁾.

2 Stevenage New Town Report on Planning and Provisional Development Proposals, 31st July 1946, Ministry of Town and Country Planning, London

3 Stevenage New Town Technical Report, Stevenage Development Corporation, July 1949 (Masterplan, 1949)

2.7 Stevenage was a modern, attractive and healthy model town and set an example for others to follow its well planned layout. It was closely studied and the urban design and architecture copied, with many British towns in the 1960s constructing pedestrian precincts, ring roads, subways and multi-storey car parks.

2.8 Post 1980, the development of Stevenage has been more market driven and opportunity based. Indeed, from the 1990s some development in, and adjacent to, the town centre has begun to look more like out of town retail park units, with large retail-style shed units and inactive store fronts – Matalan and The Forum being examples, along with units at the Leisure Park. Such later developments have lost the integrity of proportion and ignore the layout that underpins the original concept for the town centre. They have introduced an uncoordinated series of buildings finished in varying elevational treatments and materials.



Matalan with associated car parking and the view of The Forum, from Queensway.

3 Definition of special interest

Definition of special interest

3.1 Every conservation area, should, by merit of its designation, have a distinctive character which is derived from its topography, historic development, current uses and features such as streets, buildings, monuments, place-names and green spaces.

3.2 The Town Square Conservation Area was originally formed with a focus on the central pedestrianised area of Town Square, and along part of the north south alignment of Queensway (see 'Appendix 2'). The Towers and The Church of St George and St Andrew are focal points at the southern end of Queensway and eastern end of Market Place, respectively. These are important views within the town centre, highlighting its linear forms and rectangular layout.

3.3 Leonard Vincent, the Development Corporation's Chief Architect and Planner from 1954 to 1962, described phase I's importance in a 1960 article as follows:

"It has been erected by one contractor at one time to the design of one architect, and is therefore probably unique in this respect."

"Around the square and central pedestrian way the buildings are constructed with a pre-cast reinforced concrete frame and clad in steel, glass, stone, exposed stone aggregate panels, mosaics, tiles and brick. The structural frame is a dominant feature of the design, but the buildings are deliberately designed to form a backcloth to the three-dimensional spatial conception of the centre and the movement of people going about their daily tasks. The buildings in the minor pedestrian ways are in cross-wall construction, with in-filling panels of steel, glass, brick and other materials.

Connecting all shops near first floor level are continuous canopies and cross canopies, finished in timber to contrast with the hard material of the buildings. These canopies serve to emphasise and unify the architecture in a dramatic manner, so much so that there was no necessity to control shop fronts."

"All the street furniture has been specially designed by the architect: lamp standards and fittings, seats, litter bins, cycle bollards, concrete flower and shrub boxes, name plates, signs and kiosks. And outdoor advertising formed part of a general scheme of civic design and architecture."

3.4 It is from this description that we can begin to define the special interest of the Town Square conservation area, both in its current form and in any proposed revision.

3.5 The principal features of the conservation area are:

Definition of special interest

- Town Square;
- Central Queensway, linking to the entrances of Park Place and Market Place;
- The Grade II listed structures of the Joyride sculpture located on the Town Square platform and the commemorative clock tower and surrounding pool, as seen in the images below;



The clock tower and Joyride statue

- Views looking south along Queensway towards The Towers, and east along Market Place towards the Church of St George and St Andrew, as seen in the images below;



Views along Queensway (south) and Market Place

- Buildings which are three storeys high, flat roofed, with metal framed windows, primary coloured panels and flat roofed above ground floor level canopies;
- Pedestrianised precincts of a consistent width, which are enclosed by three storey high buildings on both sides of the street;
- Subtle public art features and street furniture; and
- Overall unique New Town design and architecture.

Open spaces

3.6 There are no open spaces within the town centre, in the 'green' sense; however, there are a number of important openings of space in the central pedestrianised area. These open spaces are enclosed by overlooking buildings, and include informal planting and seating areas, providing an opportunity for meeting and gathering. These spaces can be defined as:

- Town Square (as shown in the image below);
- Queensway / Market Place Square; and
- Queensway / Park Place Square



Town Square with informal seating around the clock tower pool

Key views and vistas

3.7 Within the Town Square Conservation Area are several important views or vistas which relate to the originally planned masterplan and New Town construction of the pedestrianised central shopping precincts. These include:

- 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.

Public art

3.8 The central pedestrianised area of the town centre also contains some important examples of public art which are subtly placed as interesting features, not always acknowledged by the pedestrian. These are in addition to the two listed structures of the clock tower and Joyride. Notably these are:

- Peter Lyon's wall sculpture on 21 Town Square (McDonalds facade facing onto the bus station);
- Bajio's wall ceramic on 8 Town Square (Primark facade facing onto Town Square, see far left image below);
- Abstract wall sculpture on 58-60 Queensway; and
- 'Pride in our town' mosaic on the pavement opposite 58-60 Queensway.



Examples of public art in the town centre

4 Existing conservation area

4.1 Part of the pedestrianised town centre was originally designated as a conservation area in 1988. A plan of this original Town Square Conservation Area is shown in 'Appendix 2'. This covers the central area of Town Square, which is the focal point for the town centre, and includes the buildings which enclose three sides of the square.

4.2 Through the original conservation area designation, Town Square was considered to be of particular architectural interest for features including the buildings themselves, the built features of the Square, and smaller features such as street furniture and public art. Much of the public art continues to remain in the town centre. However most, if not all of the original street furniture has been removed. This is clear from the image shown below, which shows original street furniture along Queensway looking south towards Town Square.



Original Queensway street furniture. Source: Stevenage Museum Archive.

4.3 The original conservation area also included the central section of Queensway, along with adjoining sections of Park Place and Market Place where they link with the main pedestrian precinct, although it does not extend to their full entirety. The Church of St George and St Andrew and The Towers are the end vistas along the axes of Market Place and southern Queensway, respectively. These were deliberately planned as such with the original design of the New Town and were constructed with the first phase of the town centre development in 1956. The first phase comprised the construction of Town Square, Queensway, part of Park Place adjoining Queensway, Market Place and the bus station adjoining Town Square.

4.4 The second phase of the construction of the town centre comprised an extended shopping area with an additional 42 retail outlets. This formed the remainder of Park Place and the northern section of Queensway, which were additions between 1960 and 1969. These followed the layout, building heights and precinct widths of the first phase, with a concrete block frame of three storeys high. However, some units were of a larger scale, and the design presented a differing style.



Typical building styles

4.5 The adjacent precincts which form the setting of the conservation area are contiguous with what is currently within the conservation area, i.e. the continuing arms of Queensway, Park Place and Market Place carry forward the same themes and design principles.

4.6 Town Square is the planned focal space in the town centre, and indeed the conservation area. It's use of space, along with the dimensions and buildings which enclose it are typical features of early post-war New Town planning. The clock tower and surrounding pool provides a centre piece with commemorative panels and the raised platform on which the Joyride statue stands helps to enclose the space. The pool itself is not in its original form, a raised area having been installed in the centre in the 1980s.



The clock tower & Joyride

4.7 Other significant features in Town Square include the large colourful mosaic by Bajjo on the former Co-op building, now Primark. Mature trees form an important feature on the south side of Town Square, providing it with some important summer shade and a fully developed landscaped setting. These trees pre-date the new town centre and have been left in their original positions, some incorporated within a raised planting bed.

4.8 Town Square remains the focal point of life in the town centre. It provides a place both for informal meetings and street watching, as well as more formal events. Market stalls, fairs, fund raising, civic events and the Christmas lights switch-on all take place in Town Square.



Public realm improvements along Queensway

4.9 Original paving along Queensway and Town Square was replaced in 2005 by dark coloured, smaller block paving and concrete paving slabs, which can prove difficult to keep clean. At the same time the street furniture was replaced by a more modern style, although the original furniture had been removed at an earlier stage.

4.10 In terms of new buildings, there has been no recent development within the boundary of the existing conservation area as designated in 1988, although there have been some changes of use to properties, along with public realm improvements and alterations.

4.11 The setting of the conservation area has, however, been adversely affected by the building of The Plaza to the south west of Town Square, next to the bus station, where the old Post Office buildings formerly stood. Apart from its height, which is consistent with existing buildings within Town Square, The Plaza ignores the original principles which underpin the vision of the town centre. In particular, its curving form, lack of stylistic consistency and busy facade treatment stand in stark contrast to the linear forms and plain facades of Town Square and Queensway. The omission of a canopy along the frontage also marks it out as following a different aesthetic. This is not a model to be followed in future.



The Plaza

5 Architectural and historic qualities

5.1 The design within the town centre is typically of a modernist style, which was cutting edge around the time of its construction. The use of materials and colours strongly reflects the New Town style of its era. Buildings within the Town Square conservation area are three storeys high, flat roofed, clad with glass or pre-cast panels, metal windows, with flat topped, self-supporting canopies with a timber fascia.



5.2 The 1988 original conservation area designation report noted:

5.3 *“There is a strong co-ordinating element in the buildings which has been achieved through the use of simple vertical and horizontal lines. These elements have been emphasised with the use of simply designed windows together with the addition of coloured panels. The height of the buildings throughout the town centre also serve to emphasise the uniformity of the design as they are all kept to three storeys – this only varies in the pedestrian malls further from the Town Square where the height decreases to two storeys.”*

5.4 The existing conservation area still includes most of the original fenestration. The original primary coloured external panelling of some premises, for example, on Queensway, has however been lost (either by being painted over or having panels installed in front of original ones to preserve what lies behind). Nonetheless, the window frames with the panels beneath remain. The complex of buildings around the Square remains intact but their appearance suffers from a general lack of maintenance and upkeep.



5.5 As Vincent identified in 1960, "Around the square and central pedestrian way the buildings are constructed with a pre-cast reinforced concrete frame and clad in steel, glass, stone, exposed stone aggregate panels, mosaics, tiles and brick. The structural frame is a dominant feature of the design... The buildings in the minor pedestrian ways are in cross-wall construction, with in-filling panels of steel, glass, brick and other materials." These original features are important architecturally and historically.

5.6 Again, Vincent identified that "Connecting all shops near first floor level are continuous canopies and cross canopies, finished in timber to contrast with the hard material of the buildings. These canopies serve to emphasise and unify the architecture in a dramatic manner." The canopies, the materials employed in their finish and their appearance ('flying' unsupported over the shop frontages) are all important to the unique quality of the conservation area.

6 Listed buildings

6.1 There are two listed structures within the Town Square Conservation Area, the clock tower and surrounding raised pool, along with the Joyride sculpture which stands on the raised platform of Town Square.

6.2 The sculpture 'Joyride' (Listed in 1998, Grade II. Reference: 3/10006) by F. Belsky was commissioned by the Stevenage Development Corporation in 1958 to produce 'something symbolic' for a recently created New Town. The Corporation was inspired by the use of symbolic sculpture in the rebuilding of bombed Rotterdam.

6.3 The listing text can be quoted as follows:

6.4 *"Sculpture. 1958-9 by Franta Belsky. Bronze mother and child on circular stone plinth, the mother carrying her little boy on her back. The mother figure is remarkable for the integration of her dress and skin as a single, tensile form. Franta Belsky (1921-) came to Britain in 1938 from Bmo, Czechoslovakia, and combined studies at the Royal College of Art with military service. Although today as well known as a portraitist as for his public sculpture, it was with 'Joy-ride' and the slightly earlier 'Lesson' (LB Tower Hamlets, 1956) that he achieved maturity. He was commissioned by Stevenage Development Corporation to produce something symbolic for a recently created New Town, the Corporation having been inspired by the use of symbolic sculpture in the rebuilding of bombed Rotterdam. The figures are thus symbolic of the arrival of a new generation in a New Town. The vertical composition with its high centre of interest is a response to its setting on top of a platform with stairs and railings to either side, and a carefully preserved group of trees below. It is amongst his most distinctive works, specifically designed for a distinguished location⁽⁴⁾".*

6.5 The figures presented by Joyride are symbolic of the arrival of a new generation in a New Town with the mother carrying a toddler on her back representing 'a happy new town riding on the back of the old'⁽⁵⁾.

4 Listed Buildings Online, www.heritagegateway.org.uk

5 Franta Belsky as quoted in Timothy Collings, Stevenage 1946-1986, Images of the First New Town, 1986.



Joyride

6.6 The clock tower and surrounding raised pool (Listed in 1998, Grade II. Reference: 733/3/10009) was designed by architect Leonard Vincent, Chief Architect to Stevenage Development Corporation. The structure rises to four levels above ground, with a reinforced concrete frame, flat roof and black Brazilian granite cladding.

6.7 The listing text can be quoted as follows:

6.8 *"Clock Tower and campanile 19m (60ft) high, 1957-59, Architect Leonard Vincent, Chief Architect to Stevenage Development Corporation. Four levels above ground, reinforced concrete frame, with flat roof, with black Brazilian granite cladding. Open framework with recessed infill panels at first and third (clock chambers) levels. On south face, between first and second levels, a recessed panel clad in green Westmorland slate records the visit of HM Queen Elizabeth II on 20 April 1959, to open the first phase of the town centre and to name Queensway. On the east face is a map in painted ceramic tiles showing Stevenage, and the principal occupations of its residents. On the north face a recessed green Westmorland slate panel commemorates the work of the Stevenage Development Corporation, 1946-1980. On the west face, set in front of white tiled cladding, there is a bronze relief portrait of Lewis Silkin, who as Minister of Town and Country Planning approved the designation of Stevenage as the first New Town in November*

1946. The second level is open with steel mast and rung ladder to clock chamber. Soffit below clock chamber covered with patterned tiles. Third level close in as clock chamber, with clock faces on north, west and south sides in white perspex panel, with grey and red perspex panels in bronze framing, and square windows, originally with louvres. Forth level open, with lightweight steel railing, flagpole on east side, and patterned tiled soffit to roof. The tower stands at the east side of a shallow rectangular pool with raised sides, clad in black Brazilian granite. The pool has recently been modified to include a raised inner pool with a fountain. The Clock Tower and campanile, with its constructivist abstract style represents a monument both to Stevenage as the first NewTown and to the New Towns Programme as a whole. The Town Square lies at the heart of the first extensive pedestrian-only New Town centre in Britain, the layout of which was modelled on the Lijnbaan, Rotterdam⁽⁶⁾".



The clock tower

6.9 Close to the conservation area, and still within the town centre boundary as set out in the Town Centre Area Action Plan, lies the parish church of St George and St Andrew (Listed in 1998, Grade II. Reference: 733/6/10007), located on St George's Way. The church is located at the eastern end of Market Place, and provides a key focal point, terminating the view along

6 Listed Buildings Online, www.heritagegateway.org.uk

Market Place. This symmetrical siting, along with The Towers (not listed) at the southern end of Queensway, was carefully planned as part of the New Town masterplan as important terminations to the pedestrian precincts.



Views of the Church of St George and St Andrew, and The Towers

7 Reviewing the conservation area

7.1 It is important that through any review or extension, the Town Square Conservation Area should as fully as possible represent the planned New Town concept. The uses and types of buildings that the Development Corporation planned into the New Town centre should be recognised and respected, as these are important to the original concept and how the modern day town centre still exists and functions as a primary retail space.

7.2 Through this review of the conservation area, we do not believe it is appropriate to include elements which depart from the characteristics of the original town centre form as it was first planned. It should also be noted that parts of the town centre are identified through our evidence study⁽⁷⁾ as being suitable 'redevelopment opportunity areas'; therefore it would be inappropriate to include such areas, given their lack of architectural or historic quality.

7.3 The scale of redevelopment and retail capacity which has been found to be suitable for accommodation within the town centre is significant. Our evidence⁽⁸⁾ proposes that the town centre is capable of accommodating approximately 130,000m² of net additional comparison shopping floorspace to 2026, to meet the needs of the expansion of population of the town. For such a significant level of redevelopment, it is important for the original town centre elements to be protected and enhanced by reviewing and extending the conservation area to ensure that strong historic linkages are maintained with Stevenage's New Town history.

7.4 The Town Square Conservation Area is currently the area which includes Town Square and the central part of Queensway. Through their review of the area in 2005, Beams suggested that the conservation area be extended to include the entire town centre area within the ring road, and also to include Town Centre Gardens. This is something which we do not believe would be appropriate or beneficial for the future of the town centre, and would mean including newer development areas such as the Matalan site, The Plaza, The Forum, and The Westgate shopping centre. None of these were part of the original town centre masterplan and none are of significant architectural or historic interest to warrant inclusion in the conservation area.

7.5 It is not a viable option to include the entire town centre area, as shown on the plan at 'Appendix 4'. Any extensions to the area should be more carefully considered in terms of historic and architectural quality.

7 Masterplan for Stevenage Town Centre, TP Bennett, January 2010

8 Stevenage Borough Retail Capacity Assessment, King Sturge, 2010

Why are we extending the conservation area?

7.6 Our preferred option for the conservation area boundary is to continue to include most of the land which is currently included within the conservation area. The existing boundary was first designated in 1988 (see appendices 1 & 2), and has not been reviewed or amended since this date. When reviewing the conservation area boundary, it is first important to assess whether the original boundary designated in 1988 is appropriate.

7.7 The image below (which also appears under Chapter 2) shows the construction of the original first phase of the pedestrianised shopping precinct. From this aerial image, it is possible to see the outline of the buildings which were constructed in the first phase, and it is this area which should, for that reason, be included within the conservation area boundary.



Phase 1 of the pedestrianised shopping precinct, Source: Ashby, 2004

7.8 The aerial image shows that the square which today exists as Queensway Chambers, had not been constructed as part of the first phase. Similarly, from the image above, it is clear that only the corner building at Park Place had been constructed (see bottom left hand corner of the image), which therefore means that the northern side of Park Place, along with Queensway Chambers square should be omitted from the conservation area designation, as shown on the plan at 'Appendix 3'.

7.9 It is unclear what the original aim of the 1988 conservation area designation was. However, through our review we can assess the original designation against archived photographic evidence and the original Masterplan which was first produced in 1949. This therefore provides us with the basis upon which to review and extend the conservation area boundary as appropriate.

7.10 As the intent of the designation is to conserve the original pedestrianised shopping streets, making a large extension to encompass areas which have never been (nor were ever designed to be) pedestrianised would lose the focus of the conservation area designation. The southern and central portions of Queensway, Market Place and Town Square were the first areas of the pedestrianised New Town centre to be constructed, and for this reason are considered to be of historical importance.

7.11 As outlined above, this appraisal not only seeks to review the existing conservation area boundary, whereby some changes have been necessary, but the Borough Council also wishes to extend the designation to include the full extent of Market Place and the southern section of Queensway, towards The Towers. Again, from the aerial image shown above, it is evident that southern Queensway and Market Place were both constructed as part of the first phase of the pedestrianised shopping precinct. It is for this reason that these areas should be included as part of the extended conservation area, the boundary of which is shown at Appendix 3.

8 Management proposals

8.1 In the past, the Town Square Conservation Area has not been managed in a holistic, comprehensive manner. The area has therefore suffered in terms of upkeep and maintenance, and some additions have not stood the test of time particularly well. The resultant shabby appearance detracts from the image of a vibrant and successful centre⁽⁹⁾.

8.2 It is therefore the role of this appraisal document to put into place a new management regime which will aim to guide any future development proposals or any smaller scale changes to the public realm, both within and adjacent to the conservation area and its setting.

8.3 Many of the buildings which align the first phase of the pedestrianised precincts, namely Queesway (central and southern) and Market Place are in need of investment in order to smarten and tidy their facades. The town centre has a jaded image, which hides and obscures its potential, which should be addressed through regeneration⁽¹⁰⁾

8.4 Proposed redevelopment opportunities within the conservation area should primarily ensure that any development is integrated with its character, regardless of whether it is located within, adjacent to, or beyond the conservation area boundary. Applicants should provide a description of how their proposals within or close to the conservation area will affect its setting⁽¹¹⁾ and how their proposals will make efforts to ensure appropriate and effective integration through the use of space.

8.5 The conservation area should be respected, with regard to its importance, through the submission of appropriate design techniques.

8.6 These should preserve and enhance the setting of the conservation area and should provide evidence of scale, height, massing, alignment, materials and use. New development should make a positive contribution to the character and local distinctiveness of the historic environment.

8.7 In accordance with national planning policy⁽¹²⁾ particular attention should be paid to areas and / or assets such as buildings, street furniture, public art and open spaces within the conservation area which are at risk of loss or decay. Minor repairs are unlikely to require planning permission (where relevant) and works should be carried out using the same materials and techniques so that they do not affect the significance of the conservation area. 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⁽¹³⁾.

9 Stevenage Town Centre Regeneration Strategy, Final Report. EDAW, 2002

10 Stevenage Town Centre Regeneration Strategy, Final Report. EDAW, 2002.

11 Planning Policy Statement 5, 2010

12 Planning Policy Statement 5, 2010

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

8.8 An enhanced public realm will make the town centre a more pleasant and enjoyable experience for people living, working and visiting Stevenage, to the benefit of businesses in the centre. The public realm should be robust, visually exciting and of a high quality, and should be accessible to people of all ages and abilities. Greater emphasis through appropriate management should be given to the quality of the built environment and sequential pedestrian realms⁽¹⁴⁾.

8.9 The extended conservation area includes many buildings which are in need of maintenance and overall visual improvements. This should not only include buildings, but also public realm elements such as street furniture, canopies, public art, paving and general landscaping. The treatment of facades will show immediate positive results and can include improvements to lighting, security, rendering, minor remodelling and general repairs.

8.10 Canopies within the conservation area have a varying degree of maintenance. Some are painted regularly. However others, for example the cross canopies at Market Place, have suffered neglect. If Market Place is to be included within the extended conservation area, a higher duty of care will be necessary. Maintaining the canopies over the precincts would greatly enhance the protection of the space from the elements and improve the image of the area. Streetscape improvements would then set a precedent for the other malls, secondary squares and streets, both within and adjacent to the conservation area.

14 Stevenage Town Centre Regeneration Strategy, Final Report. EDAW, 2002



Examples of poor maintenance

8.11 In 2005 at the southern end of Queensway, the cross canopy was entirely replaced with a more modern, artistic approach, which although it may not be as effective in terms of shelter from the weather, has proven to be an innovative addition of colour and shape to this area of the town centre. However its curved nature somewhat contradicts the rectilinear forms which are prevalent throughout the conservation area.



Public realm improvements

8.12 It is evident throughout the town centre that replacement windows and casements are not always sympathetic to the architecture of early buildings, which have been replaced in UPVC and do not contribute well to the street scene. Examples of modern additions can be seen in the images below, whereby the modern additions do not complement existing elements.

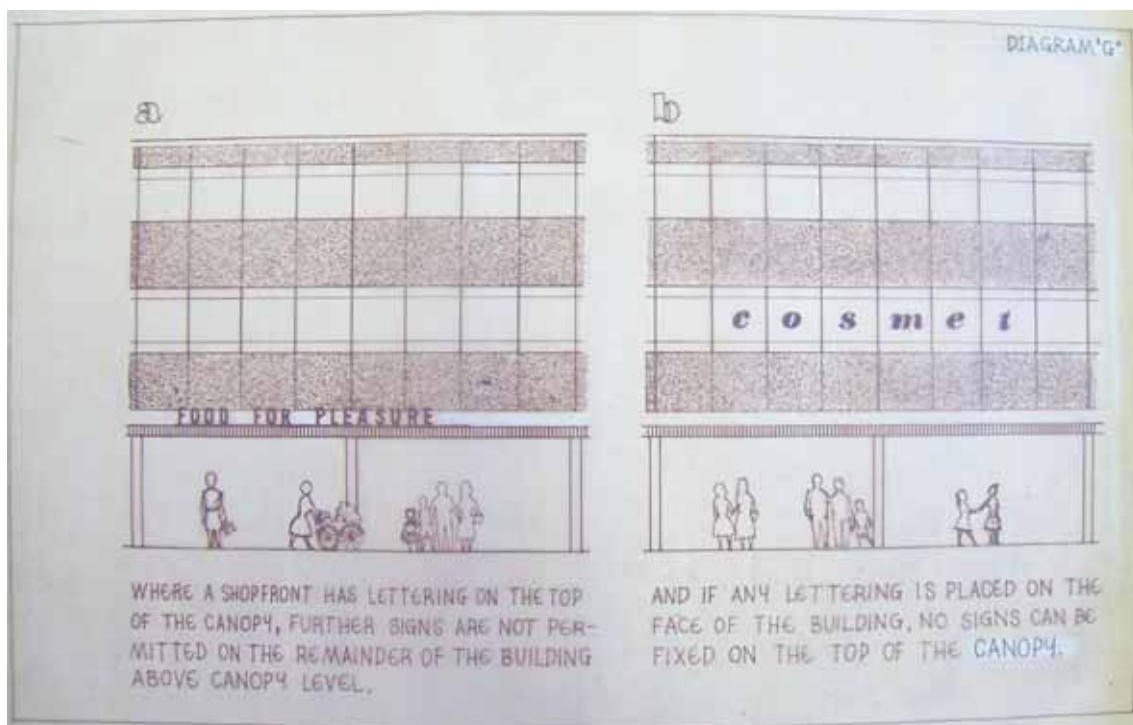
8.13 The owners of properties within the conservation area should, when seeking to replace windows, doors, shop frontages, panels, signage, lighting, canopies, paving and roofing be using the same or similar material, on a like for like basis. This will ensure that the conservation area, and its overall look, remains linked to its New Town heritage, rather than moving towards a varied mix of style, materials and appearance. In places the conservation area now has an untidy image with a lack of continuity.



UPVC window installments set against original windows

Advertising

8.14 Street frontages were originally designed as part of the town centre Masterplan of 1949. Pedestrianised precincts were designed to have a unified appearance and an expected level of continuity, including signage, advertising and overall shop frontages, which can be seen in the images below.



Examples of signage. Stevenage Development Corporation (date unknown) Copyright: Stevenage Museum



Stevenage Development Corporation, Masterplan (date unknown) Copyright: Stevenage Museum

8.15 Today, street frontages are beginning to break down in terms of a unified appearance, with the introduction of varying materials, advertising and colours, thus moving away from the original aims of the 1949 Masterplan, as depicted in the images above. Signage is beginning to appear at varying heights, with a distinct lack of uniformity which detracts from the designation of the conservation area. There is a varied approach also to the maintenance of the buildings which should be controlled through planning policy, which will reinforce the conservation area principles.



Poorly maintained building frontages

8.16 Above ground floor level shop window advertising has become prevalent and has had the effect of creating a multitude of untidy frontages. Advertising should be limited to signage positioned above the shop frontage, but remaining underneath the canopies. This should ensure that a continued visual approach is maintained, whilst still enabling retailers to advertise their premises.

8.17 Recently refurbished premises have not always been sympathetic to their setting, with corporate logos and colours taking precedent. Advertisements and signage of premises need to be seen in the context of their surroundings, and certainly need to be more mindful of their conservation area setting. The image below shows a structure lies within the existing conservation area, and is a prime example of bold advertisement on an otherwise superfluous structure added since the conservation of the pedestrianised shopping streets. If the boundary is revised as suggested, it will lie outside the conservation area.



Queensway entrance to The Westgate shopping centre

8.18 We will work with retailers and business owners within the proposed extended conservation area to ensure that an appropriate balance is struck when considering appropriate levels of advertising. Applications for adverts which adversely affect the setting of the conservation area and its aims may be refused.

Appendices

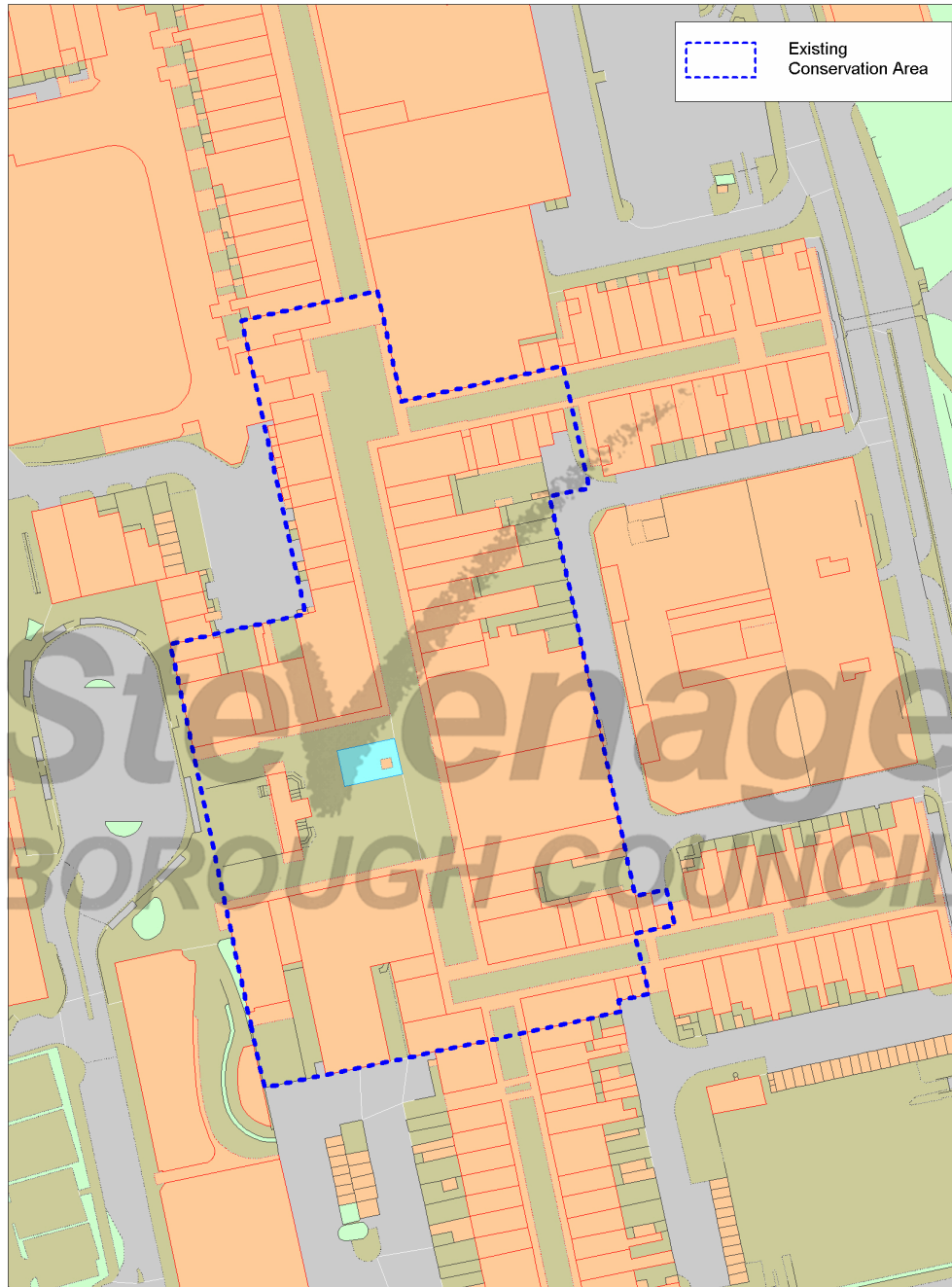
Appendix 1

Original Town Square Conservation Area designation (1998)



Appendix 2

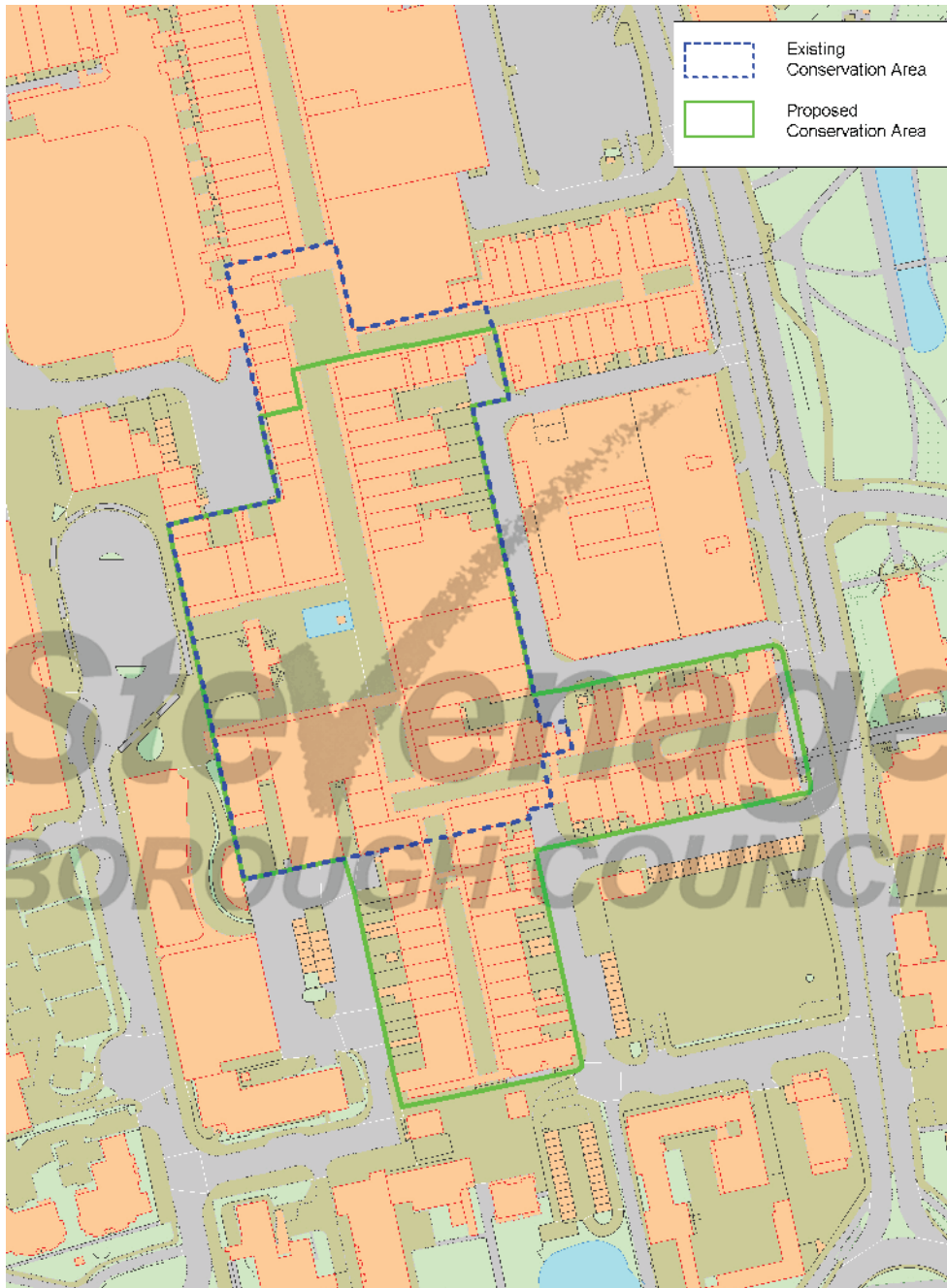
Existing Town Square Conservation Area



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Appendix 3

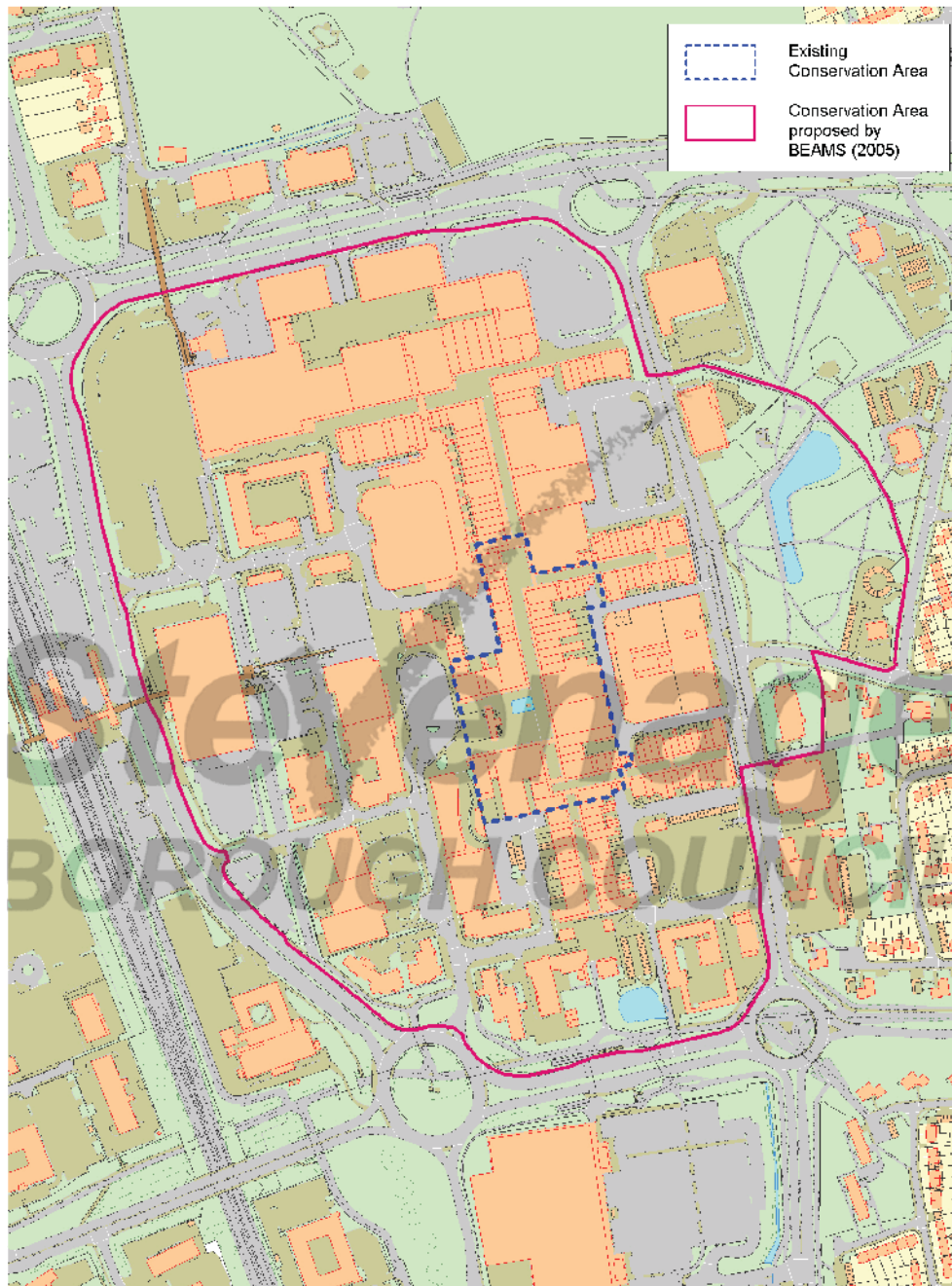
Proposed Town Square Conservation Area boundary



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Appendix 4

Town Square Conservation Area - extended boundary proposed by BEAMS



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