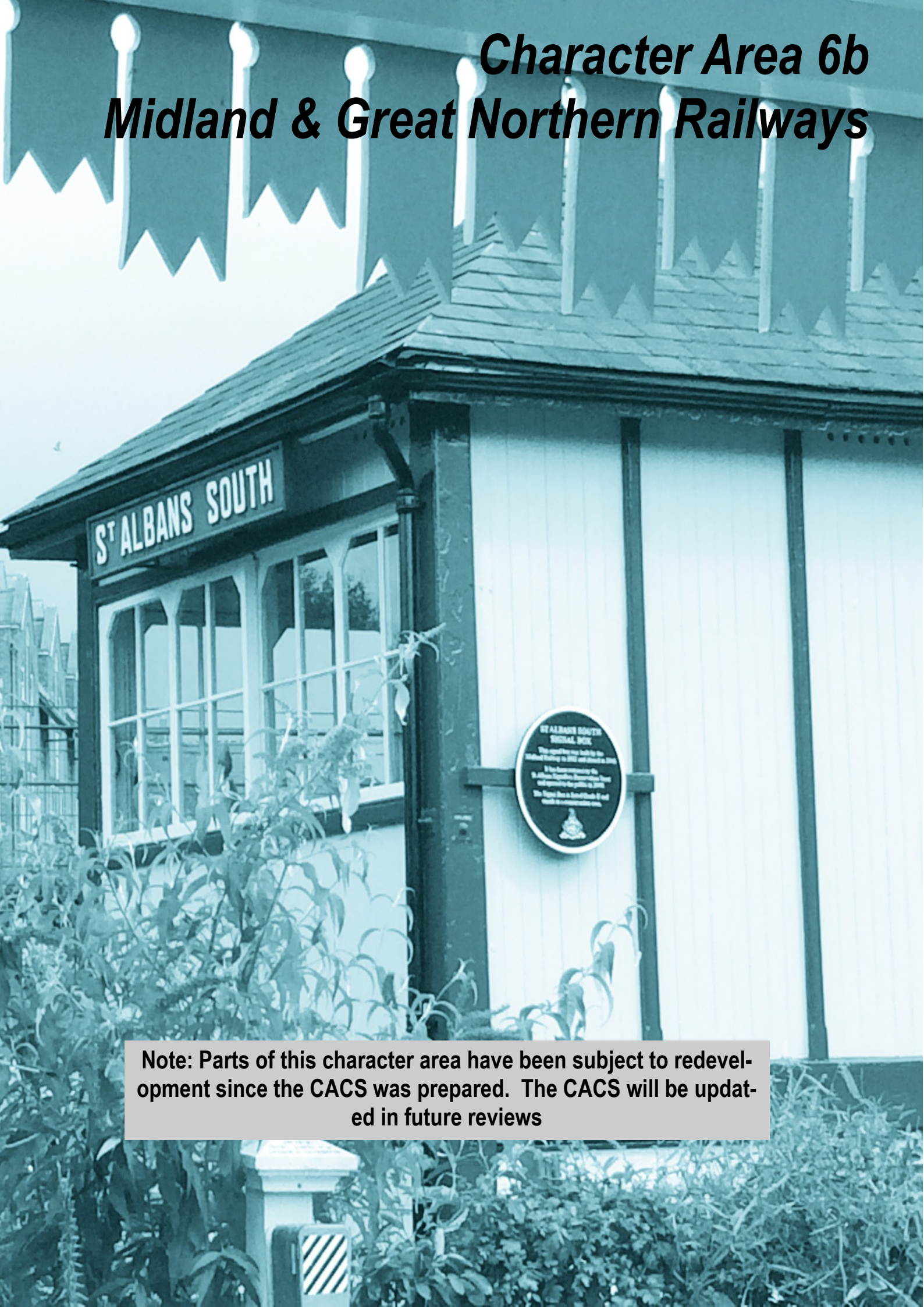
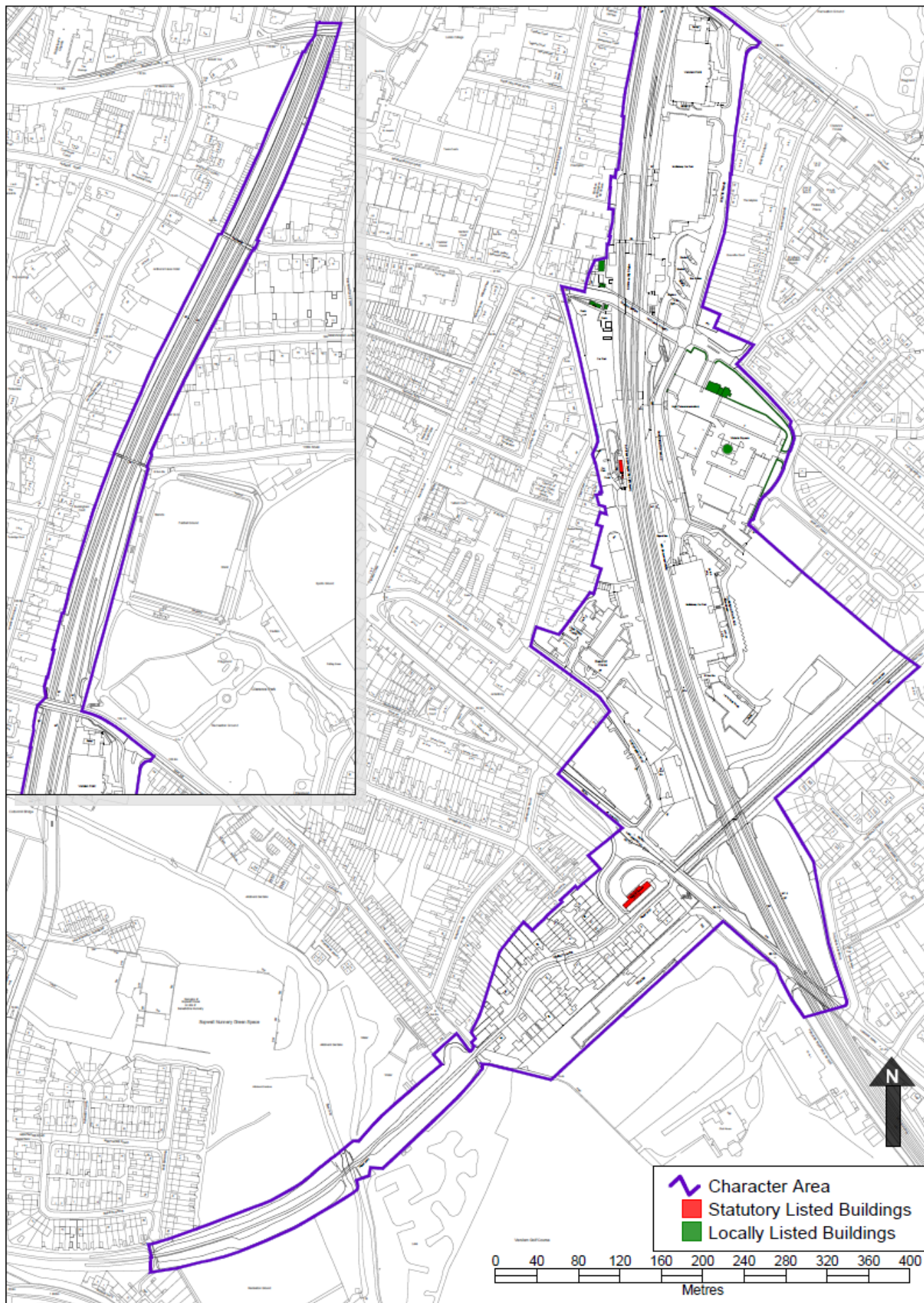


Character Area 6b Midland & Great Northern Railways



Note: Parts of this character area have been subject to redevelopment since the CACS was prepared. The CACS will be updated in future reviews



AREA 6B: MIDLAND AND GNR RAILWAYS

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Area 6b: Midland & Great Northern Railways

Alban Way (part), Charrington Place, Grimston Road (part), Grosvenor Road (part), Hatfield Road (part), London Road (part), Orient Close, Ridgmont Road (part), Station Way, Victoria Street (part), Victoria Square .

Scheduled Monuments

None.

Listed Buildings

Old Station House (former London Road Station), (Grade II).

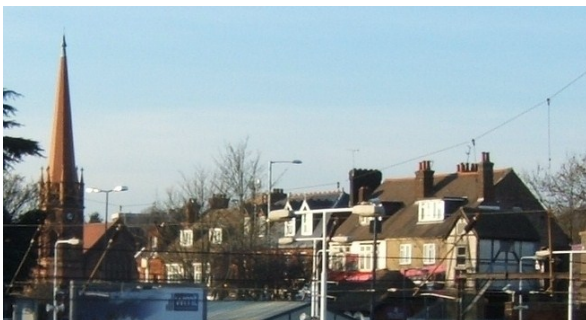
St Albans South Signal Box Ridgmont Road (Grade II).



Former GNR Station & platform (Grade II listed). Behind is the bank up to London Road.



St Albans Signal box after restoration (Grade II listed).



Locally listed buildings in Victoria Street, including the former Coal Office (no.150)

Locally Listed Buildings

Bridges along and over Alban Way

Victoria Street

Evens : 150 (former Midland railway coal office), and 150a Bridge House.

Odds: 161, Station Building on west platform (north of Victoria Street).

Former Prison buildings, (formerly Grimston Road Prison) (includes the buildings, walls and Gilbert Scott drinking fountain (1 Victoria Square).



The gatehouse of the former St Albans Prison (locally listed).



The Gilbert Scott drinking fountain (locally listed).

Area 6b: Midland & Great Northern Railways

Character Summary

Three railways, the Great Northern Railway (later LNER), St Albans-Watford (later LNWR) and Midland Railway, have shaped the form and development of St Albans and substantial sections of these and their three stations are located within the conservation area, all on the eastern side of the city centre.

This character area encompasses two of the lines where they pass through the conservation area and indeed where one crosses over the other:

1) The short section of the former Great Northern Railway (now a path/cycle route called the Alban Way) forming the south eastern boundary of the conservation area which runs from south of Sadleir Road where it is on an embankment to south of Shirley Road where it is in a deep cutting. This includes Orient Close, a 1990s housing development on land surrounding the former London Road station (now converted for a children's nursery and called The Old Station House) and further east a former engineering works.

2) The section of the Midland Railway from its

bridge under Sandpit Lane and in a cutting at the northern boundary of the conservation area, to its high level bridge over London Road at the south east extremity of the conservation area, together with the Midland Station, related land adjoining the station (such as the former goods yards for many years a railway car park, currently being redeveloped for mixed uses predominantly housing in the form of blocks of flats (one being an eight storey elliptical tower), with a multi storey car park and some retail, service uses and offices) and the former prison and its surroundings (redeveloped in the 1980s as an office complex retaining the prison gatehouse within landscaped grounds (Victoria Square)), plus a predominantly commercial area south west of the line off Grosvenor Road.

The scale of buildings in the character area is generally large reflecting their rail-side location and their evolution from the former uses of sites and buildings in the area. There are a number of historic buildings listed and locally listed which reflect the history of the area. The St Albans-Watford line (later LNWR) is covered in Area 6a.



Orient Close with the Ziggurat building in the background.



Large scale buildings on the rail-side.



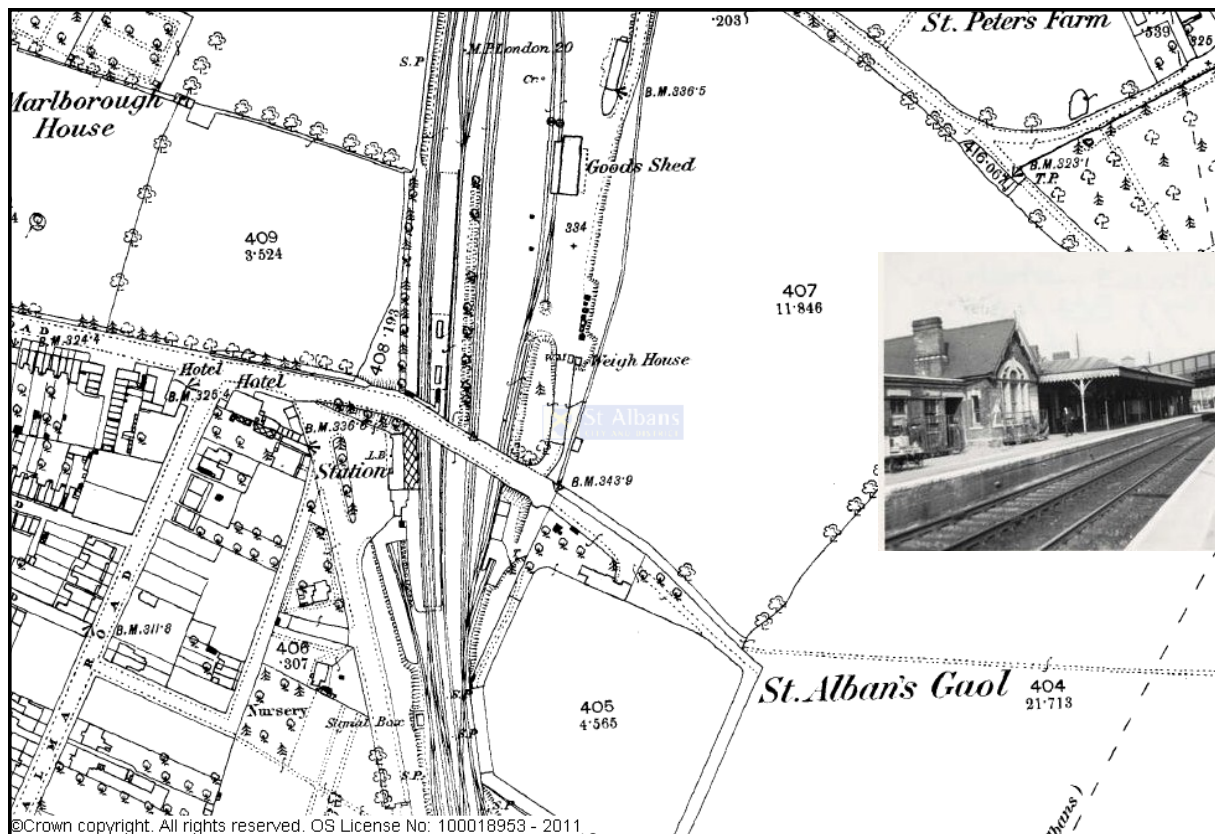
St Albans City Station



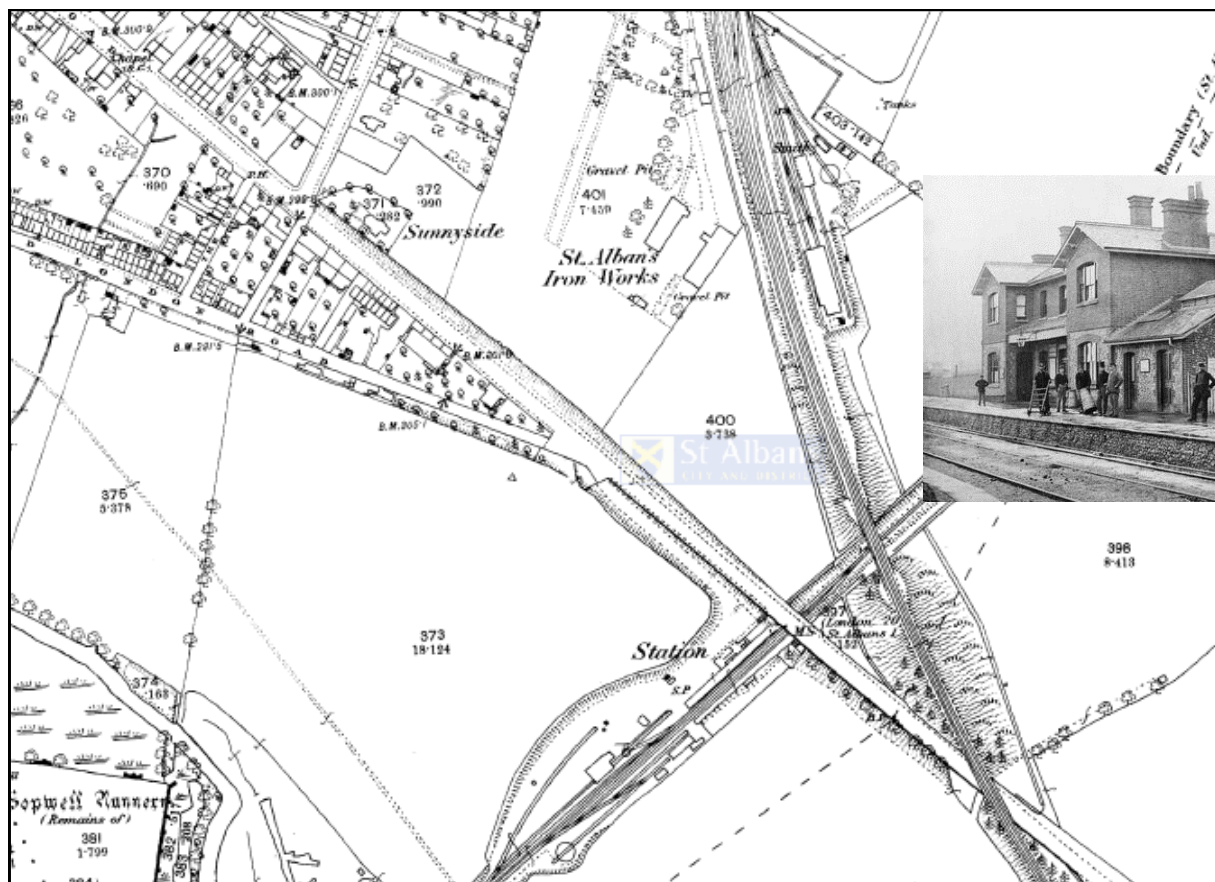
The former route of the GNR, now The Alban Way.

Area 6b: Midland & Great Northern Railways

Historic Maps (c1880)



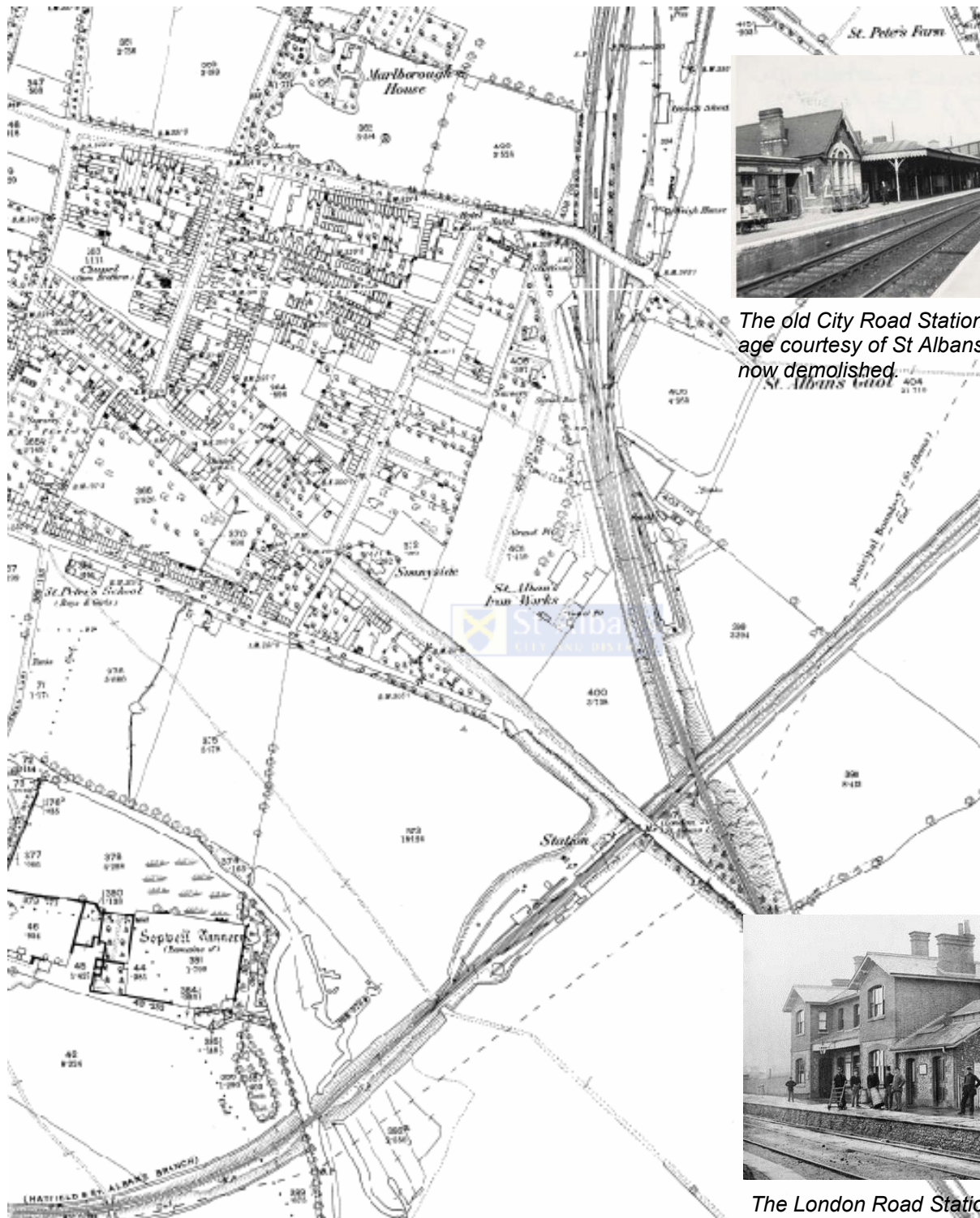
The old City Road Station (inset, image courtesy of St Albans Museums), now demolished.



The London Road Station (inset, image courtesy of St Albans Museums) near the point where the Great Northern and Midland Railways cross.

Area 6b: Midland & Great Northern Railways

Historic Maps (c1880)



The old City Road Station (inset, image courtesy of St Albans Museums), now demolished.

The London Road Station (inset, image courtesy of St Albans Museums), now a feature on The Alban Way.

Area 6b: Midland & Great Northern Railways

History

By the 20th century, there were three railways in St. Albans. The branch line to Watford from the Abbey station (1858) is as described in Area 6a. The Great Northern Railway to Hatfield accessed from a new station below London Road opened in 1865 and was extended a year later to the Abbey station. Finally the Midland main line arrived in 1868. It was the coming of the national Midland line that encouraged the most development because it was on a direct line to London and, still in use today, it continues to have an impact on the land around it.

Great Northern Railway

The Great Northern Railway (GNR) was opened from Hatfield to St Albans in 1865 (as the Hatfield and St. Albans Railway Company). Two buildings in the conservation area are a clear reminder of this.

Built in 1865 for the Great Northern Railway, the London Road station (now called the Old Station House) is an 'H' plan building, with single storey contemporary ranges to left and right, that to the left extended pre-1905. Built of red brick and split flint work, it has a tall ridge and side wall brick chimneys with C20 clay pots, and a Welsh slated roof with deeply-projecting eaves supported on wooden brackets. It has a typical railway station shallow canopy with a match boarded eaves frieze. Formerly the principal station of the Hatfield to St Albans line, and originally designed as a terminus, the station is believed to be the oldest surviving Great Northern station south of York.



The new development of Orient Close surrounds the Grade II listed London Road Station.

A public house called "The Great Northern" at no. 172 London Road, built prior to the 1880 Ordnance Survey, lies 400 metres to the west of the Station along London Road (included in Area 5a).

The GNR line closed in 1964 and was disused for many years. In the 1980s, it was proposed to retain the route for conversion to a road as an eastern bypass for the city centre known as the "Railway Route", but this possibility was scrapped and the disused line was converted for walkers and cyclists linking the Cottonmill area to Hatfield called the Alban Way.

The station which had been let by British Rail as a house pending decisions on the site's future was transferred to Railtrack and subsequently listed (Grade II) in 1994. It was then repaired and converted as offices and together with the adjoining section of platform, retained within a modern housing redevelopment of the remainder of the station and depot site. Although the housing development is of a conventional suburban layout comprising around fifty terraced and semi detached houses in modest gardens, the slightly elevated position of the station on its platform and the open landscaped areas around it plus the maintenance of the line of the track as the Alban Way respects the setting of the listed building quite successfully.



Cyclists on The Alban Way

Area 6b: Midland & Great Northern Railways

Great Northern Railway

To the east of Orient Close at the eastern edge of the conservation area marked by a band of trees, on a narrow site and like the station set down below London Road, lies no. 222 a long narrow building, an early C20 century engineering works and experimental station, used previously by ship builders having included a large flotation tank and now converted for a series of small commercial and light industrial users.

The Alban Way at its southern end is at first well vegetated embankment and lies alongside the allotments close to Sopwell Nunnery Ruins (Area 4e). It both contains the southeast edge of the conservation area at this point and affords the user some of the best public views of the Abbey from the southeast (with the terraces of Riverside Road (Area 7d) in the foreground).

Further north the line levels off to the station site and then passes under London Road through a short tunnel before passing under the Midland Line which is carried on a lofty and massive but wonderfully detailed bridge. At this point the Alban Way is in a deep cutting with vegetation to either bank but there are views of the backs of some of the buildings above the line. The straight nature of the line at this point affords long views along the deep cutting and beyond the boundary of the conservation area.



Views from Orient Close of the long engineering building and the important tree screen beyond.



Views to the rear of Riverside Road from the Alban Way.



A spectacular view of the Abbey from the Alban Way.

Area 6b: Midland & Great Northern Railways

Midland Railway

Victoria Street, originally Sweetbriar Lane, was not largely laid out until the Victorian era, having been renamed Victoria Road in 1876. The Midland main line arrived in 1868 and was a key factor in the expansion of Victoria Street. The original 1860s station building was replaced in the 1960s by the horizontal British Rail station building typical of its date (built using a mechanical brown brick and a flat roof), although one small traditional building remains west of the platforms. Set back from Station Way and below Victoria Street reached by steps, it is separated from the Station Way by a wide forecourt and bus stops, frequently busy with traffic. Fortunately, from Victoria Street the station building is not prominent in any way, hidden from view from the majority of the conservation area.

At the northern edge of the boundary of the conservation area, the railway is in a cutting passing beneath the Sandpit Lane road bridge. It runs southwards in a deep cutting to the station and is crossed in that section by two footbridges from Lemsford Road on the west side to Jennings Road and York Road (and Clarence Park) on the east. The line divides the predominantly residential character areas to the east of the town centre and these footbridges are an important link between character areas. Fortunately, the pylons and gantries associated with the electrification of the line are largely set down in the cutting and are not unduly intrusive.

The line passes below the Hatfield Road bridge before it emerges from the deep cutting just north of the station. Here the area is geared towards the commuter accessing the rail link to London by car and can be devoid of activity except at train arrival or departure time or during the office rush hour. Station Way, a wide road, has little active frontage: on the west side occupying the northern end, Verulam Point, a large, 1980s, heavily glazed, modern office building, is set below a grassy bank south of Hatfield Road and next to it a lower but expansive decked car park lies immediately north of the station. On the east, flatted developments on back gardens behind Granville Road present a very prominent rear elevation onto Station Way with a mix of boundary treatments and little space or greenery to their rear boundaries. What greenery there is on the bank needs to be valued and augmented if possible.



Verulam Point



"Midland" City Station and associated car park



Flats in Granville Road from Station Way

Area 6b: Midland & Great Northern Railways

Midland Railway

At the Victoria Street corner is a typical C20 light industrial style car tyre and exhaust depot, and its related car parking together with a large poster hoarding and bare verge on the return to Station Way detracts from the street scene and would benefit from enhancement.



Victoria Street Bridge over the "Midland" Line with the tyre and exhaust depot.

Providing positive character in the area are the traditional, mock timbered, small shop booths on the bridge which takes Victoria Street over the railway. Also making a positive contribution is the St Albans South signal box c.1863 (listed grade II), a good example of a weather boarded three-bay Midland Railway signal box contemporary with the main line through to St. Pancras, for many years obsolete and at risk, but restored by a local preservation society and now a valuable amenity and landmark.



A small, mock Tudor kiosk at the edge of the bridge.



The signal box before restoration



The signal box after restoration

Around the track south of Victoria Street, the former goods yard, for many years used as a surface car park, is currently being redeveloped for mixed uses. This is predominantly housing at high density in the form of blocks of flats (a central high rise eight storey elliptical tower surrounded by low rise blocks), with a multi storey car park for commuters and some retail, service uses and offices (Charrington Place). This development will be landscaped and provides a pedestrian link to the Alban Way at the southern end. The long and wide vehicular access to the development runs parallel with the pedestrian and cycle access to the station and railway tracks beyond. Each route is separated by railings which has currently resulted in a somewhat harsh environment which it is hoped will benefit from landscaping as that matures. There are some good traditional blue brick walls separating the railway track from the new development and echoing the brick used in the railway bridge. The unattractive telecommunications tower and associated fencing, bollards and service cabin previously within the surface car park is also unduly prominent in its location alongside the new access road. The views westwards to the Abbey tower and the Trinity United Reform Church spire are a positive feature.

Area 6b: Midland & Great Northern Railways

Midland Railway

East of the station and its former goods yard, the character area includes another local landmark and positive feature of the area: the site of the former St Albans gaol and its grounds dating from 1867. Closed in the 1920s and used as a Council Depot during the mid C20, it was redeveloped in the 1980s as an office complex (Victoria Square), retaining the prison walls and converting the gatehouse to an office, (currently the Registry Office), which are locally listed.



The Victoria Street bridge over the "Midland" line.



The view from Charrington Place (note Trinity Church spire and SS Albans & Stephen RC Church tower).



From Charrington Place, former St Albans prison & Victoria Square set in landscaped grounds.

Although taller than the gatehouse, Victoria Square echoes the polychromatic Victorian detailing of that building. Fortunately, the redevelopment incorporated the old walls with sympathetic green railings and landscaped lawns fronting the road including large trees, particularly one closing the vista eastwards (valuable to provide relief to the harsh commercial environment of the area around the station). At the same time, the section of road east of the bridge formerly called Grimston Road was renamed and became part of Victoria Street. The development needed a focal point which provided an opportunity to restore the drinking fountain designed by Gilbert Scott. This originally stood in High Street on the site of the Eleanor Cross but had been removed in the 1930s when the legs and steps were lost. The bowl and top, reportedly rescued by a passer by, had been located in several places and ownerships around the city in the intervening fifty years and were reunited in the centre of Victoria Square on a reproduction plinth and steps and, being Council property, are accessible for public view. This structure is glimpsed from the surrounding footways and has also been locally listed.



The Victoria Square development.



The prison walls; Victoria Square behind.

Area 6b: Midland & Great Northern Railways

Midland Railway

Immediately west of the line and north of the signal box, adjoining Ridgmont Road, a smaller area of surface car parking marks the site of the Victorian station. Here there are several good perimeter trees and some hedging which benefit the environment.

Ridgmont Road joins Grosvenor Road southwest of the railway line and St. Albans Iron Works occupied the area between these roads and the line in the C19. It was replaced during the late C19/early C20 by further manufacturing uses: a brush works, boot factory (those Lee Boot factory employees lost during WWI are commemorated in a memorial plaque on the wall outside the new building), the Priory Press and later a bottling factory. Those buildings were extended and replaced in turn over the later C20 by further commercial uses, predominantly offices often of larger scale and often with flat roofs. Lime Tree Place, two blocks of residential flats, built in the 1980s in red brick with a pitched roof, is the exception to the redevelopment process in this area. The former Heath and Heather warehouse building (formerly Vyse) was replaced by an office building of similar size and appearance which creates a reminder of this former function (it also includes a WWI memorial plaque for the employees of the Vyse factory).

Fronting Grosvenor Road, there are three large office redevelopments, no. 23 (the three storey Beaufort House), and nos. 25 and 45. Most notable is the Ziggurat (no. 25), formerly Schweppes, a multi storey office built in the 1960s and clad in the 1990s with reflective glass. For the most part, this has improved the appearance, albeit that when it reflects the sun that can sometimes make it very noticeable. Its overall bulk and height both detract from the grain of the conservation area and particularly the city skyline.



The car park off Ridgmont Road (the site of the former station) looking towards the former prison.



Lime Tree Place and the Ziggurat on Grosvenor Road.



The Ziggurat

Area 6b: Midland & Great Northern Railways

Midland Railway

To the London Road corner, no. 45, a prominent red brick office, has been redeveloped on the site formerly the Priory Press and then Staples and marks the corner quite successfully. A long terrace of Victorian houses between the factories at nos. 17-35 Grosvenor Road survived beyond the mid C20 before being replaced by offices, whilst opposite, a few detached late Victorian houses in spacious plots were replaced with a large surface car park for the offices. This car park in an elevated sloping position has good views from the highest point towards the old station and to countryside beyond and several good features. The negative aspects of an extensive area of tarmac and parked cars are tempered by trees/shrubs, unfortunately confined to the perimeter but valuable nevertheless. The perimeter wall to Grosvenor Road is stepped and in dark blue brick relating well to the surrounds and there is a fine historic red brick wall which turns the corner into London Road and is worth retaining. An historic lamp column and GR letterbox adjacent also contribute to the street scene.

Between the junction of Grosvenor Road and London Road and the bridges and embankment which takes the Midland line over London Road, is a sliver of left over railway land used for over fifty years as an advertisement hoarding site, and, particularly given the large amount and large scale of the advertising panels, is a negative feature at the entrance to the conservation area and the city. The bank to the east side of the bridge at the entrance to the

conservation area is similarly used as a hoarding site. Trees in these areas are vital to the character of the area and maintaining the green character of this entrance to the city. The arched railway abutments adjoining the pavement to the north side of London Road are particularly attractive features of the street scene together with the painted metal bridge parapets spanning London Road.

The key character of this area is its largely linear nature and its present and former function comprising routes or links and interchanges or nodes and the associated commerce. The Midland railway forms a barrier to east-west movement but not to views and there are five points to cross by road and or foot bridge.

The road and footway network comprises a key aspect. This part of the road network is particularly busy at rush hour owing to its function as access to and from the station, commuter car parks and offices. The station forecourt is clearly an especially well used pedestrian area. Traditional materials have been used to enhance the forecourt area (clay blocks, blue bricks and granite setts) but these are not maintained and have been interspersed with non traditional ones.

In contrast, the Alban Way is a linking feature and a key public realm asset of this character area together with the trees and shrubs which are present along the former railway embankments.



The bridge that takes the Midland line over London Road.



A bridge over the Alban Way (the former GNR).

Area 6b: Midland & Great Northern Railways

Positive and Negative Characteristics and Scope for Change

Positive

- ✓ Views of the City and particularly of the Abbey from the Alban Way and views from Grosvenor Road southwards to countryside.
- ✓ Historic assets, such as listed and locally listed buildings, provide a strong sense of history. The railway lines and two related listed buildings - the Signal Box on the Midland line and the London Road Station on the former Great Northern Line - and the former prison are a particular focus for this.
- ✓ Landscaped frontage of the former prison, historic walls and sympathetic railings.
- ✓ Trees and hedgerows particularly along the Alban Way and along the Midland railway line and the London Road embankments.
- ✓ Alban Way provides a good link for cyclists and pedestrians and a pleasant and peaceful route away from road traffic.
- ✓ Public Access to Victoria Square.
- ✓ Footbridges and good connections need to be maintained and enhanced (could be as part of the green ring within the City Vision).
- ✓ Some historic street furniture, including WWI street memorials unusual to St Albans and an historic post box.



A door into the old prison.



The listed former GNR station and platform.

Neutral

- St Albans City Station being located below the level of Victoria Street limits its visibility from the latter.
- Recent native tree planting on the bank north of the bridge is beginning to provide a better environment.

Area 6b: Midland & Great Northern Railways

Positive and Negative Characteristics and Scope for Change

Negative

- ✖ Paraphernalia associated with the railway line and its electrification and security (fencing/ bollards/barriers) is generally negative and at best, in places, neutral. Yellow paint is a regrettable choice for many of the bollards and barriers and a less garish means to achieve adequate visibility would be welcomed. In other instances, standard issue galvanised steel barriers and handrails create a poor environment.
- ✖ Large buildings, including the multi storey car park and decked car park, are not easily assimilated into the scale and grain of the historic area.
- ✖ Station Way, geared towards the commuter, is a wide road with little live frontage.
- ✖ The area can appear devoid of activity except at train arrival or departure times or in the office rush hour.
- ✖ Car parks or modern offices have replaced old warehouses and factories, for example the former Heath and Heather building on Ridgmont Road was replaced by offices. Large buildings characterise the area around the track south of Victoria Street and north of London Road. These were designed for function rather than form and appearance, and provide very little positive character. Opportunities should be explored to reduce the visual effect of such buildings, to improve their quality and that of the street scene and floorscape.
- ✖ Ugly guard rails that protect pedestrians on the road bridges and the high concrete kerbing on the Hatfield Road bridge.
- ✖ Advertisement hoarding sites on Station Way and London Road.



There are many large buildings that are not easily assimilated into the streetscene and, together with the paraphernalia associated with the railway line, its electrification and security, these have a negative impact on the area's character.

Scope for change

- The City Vision provided an opportunity to look at ways to enhance the character and put forward possible improvements for the City Station and Victoria Street bridge given its status as a key arrival point for the City.
- Many modern buildings in the area would benefit from redevelopment or enhancement.
- Some private car parks and verges would benefit from enhancement through planting and resurfacing.

