

CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER STATEMENT FOR ST ALBANS



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Introduction

The Civic Amenities Act 1967 empowered local planning authorities to make provision for the preservation and enhancement of areas of architectural and historic interest by designating them as conservation areas. St Albans Conservation Area was one of the first conservation areas in the country to be designated in 1969.

The original St Albans Conservation Area boundary of 1969 was drawn tightly around the medieval core of the city, taking in the three parish churches at St Peters, St Michaels and St Stephens and including some of the early C19 residential area west of the city centre and Roman Verulamium. The conservation area boundary has since been extended four times, in 1980, 1981, 1991 and 1996.

The 1980 extension was a minor extension to include a small area on Upper Marlborough Road in response to development pressure. The 1981 extension was the largest extension. At that time there was a review of the type of development that could be considered worthy of inclusion in a conservation area. As a consequence, in addition to medieval development, nineteenth century development, areas of townscape and landscape value, including significant views, were also included. The medieval borough boundary was also re-evaluated, following a report by Dr Roberts, and the conservation area was extended to include areas within this boundary to the north, south and around Chequer Street. The 1991 extension included Boundary Road and the surrounding streets at the north end of the city. The 1996 extension covered the historic part of the City Hospital site located off Normandy Road which was no longer required for hospital use and was to be redeveloped.

There are two Article 4 Directions within the St Albans Conservation Area. The first originally covered only Fishpool Street and was designated in 1975. This was extended and named the Verulam/Fishpool Street Article 4 and came into effect in July 1990 and was confirmed in January 1991. The second is Sopwell/Albert Street Article 4 Direction which was designated in July 1990 and confirmed in January 1991. Leaflets explaining the Article 4 Directions are available on the Council's website.

Following consultation with St Albans Civic Society, a Local List for St Albans Conservation Area, comprising buildings which make a positive contribution to the character or appearance of the conservation area, was drawn up and approved by the Planning Committee on 5 April 2000. Following consultation with owners, it was confirmed with amendments by the Planning Committee on 6 September 2000. Locally listed buildings are identified within the Conservation area character statement. The St Albans Local List is also available to purchase, as a separate document, from the Council Offices.

Statutory Listed Buildings are also identified and referred to. These are those buildings included on the national list of buildings compiled by the Government, which identifies buildings of special architectural or historic interest. The statutory list for St Albans City was last reviewed and published in 1971 and most listings date from that period or before. However, some further buildings have been added since the list was published. The statutory list can be consulted at www.heritage-gateway.org.uk or viewed, by appointment, at the Council Offices. The English Heritage website provides advice and explains the listing process.

Purpose of this document

Conservation should not be thought of solely as a process of preservation and an impediment to change. The designation of a conservation area represents an opportunity to formulate positive policies to improve and enhance its environmental quality and to ensure the successful integration of any development or redevelopment necessary for its continued success as a living and working community. The St. Albans District Local Plan Review (adopted November 1994) sets out the general principles which will be observed when dealing with applications for new development and redevelopment (Policy 85 "Development in Conservation Areas"). However, the Local Plan is soon to be replaced by the Strategic Local Plan and Detailed Local Plan, which are currently being prepared by the Council.

The aims of this character statement are to show the way in which the form of the conservation area has evolved and to assess its present character; to indicate the principles to be adopted in considering planning applications in the area, and to form a framework within which more detailed proposals may be formulated.

The size of the area, its long history, the range of building styles and uses and all the subtle elements that make St Albans unique mean it is impossible to appraise and describe St Albans Conservation Area either as a whole or as layers that appeared in a purely chronological fashion. Instead, the following statement deals with small areas of a more specific character within the much broader classifications of time period so that as well as having its own defined identity, each area can be thought of in relation to the city's overall growth. The view of this wider context should enable the city to be seen as an interrelated whole, while each area is recognised for its individual merits so that informed decisions regarding development can be made.

The dominant role of the built environment make it vitally important to the character of any town, but it is by no means the only aspect of city life that conservation area powers are used to safeguard. Also regarded of importance are trees and landscape, street furniture, road surfaces and uses, which can all significantly affect the character of a space. Conservation area designation recognises that the city character derives from many of these features and that positive aspects all deserve some form of protection.

Origins and Development of the Settlement

St Albans is the most important historic city centre in Hertfordshire and holds special significance as an important Iron Age settlement and the site of the Roman town of Verulamium, one of Roman Britain's foremost towns occupying a key position on Watling Street. The ancient core of the town is located around the abbey which was built on a prominent location, on top of a hill.

The site of the execution of the first British Christian martyr, Alban, on a hill east of Verulamium (Circa AD 209) and the development of a monastery on the site of a Roman shrine following this was perhaps the most significant period in the development of the city we see today. The monastery flourished in the Saxon period and became, after the Conquest, one of the country's most powerful abbeys. From this point, the town prospered with an influx of medieval pilgrims and services consequently developed surrounding the abbey, the plan of which can still be seen today. In the early eighteenth to mid nineteenth centuries, the coaching trade further aided the development of the town, as it was the first major stopping point on the road from London. The late C18 and early C19 saw two new major roads cut to overlay the medieval pattern and Regency villas for a growing middle class were built alongside. In the middle of the C19, the arrival of three railways led to further development of the town with terraces and factories of the industrial Victorians and development and redevelopment with modern industries and housing has continued up to the present day.

Few British cities have a history as long and prosperous as St Albans. St Albans is particularly special in that all of these periods of history are still represented today in the built environment which presents various layers of time and gives a strong sense of history, significance and character to the city. The centre of St Albans is an area richly diverse in both appearance and uses, with a physical environment that reflects hundreds of years of development. St Albans became a city on 28 August 1877.

Going forward, it is important that new development should improve this environmental heritage and enhance the quality of the built environment within the city. The aim must be to introduce imaginative, high quality developments, which will become worthy of conservation in the future but which are not at the expense of the existing character of the city. Master planning and planning briefs have an im-

portant role to play in ensuring that new buildings are sited appropriately, but it is equally important that, architecturally, the standard of new buildings is raised. This may be achieved by the appointment of nationally eminent architects. St Albans will welcome excellent contemporary architecture that celebrates the special character of the city and reflects local distinctiveness. St Albans is a city with a long history, and it deserves the best.

Status of the Document

The draft St Albans Character Statement was produced in 2009/2010 and was put out to public consultation in September 2010. Consultation responses were considered and, where appropriate, were incorporated within the final St Albans Character Statement which was revised in 2014 and published in 2016.

This document should be read together with saved Policy 85 of the St Albans City and District Local Plan Review 1994. It has been produced as part of DPR Project 9: Policy Statements - Conservation Areas.

If further advice or guidance is required please contact the Department of Planning and Building Control, St Albans City and District Council, Council Offices, Civic Centre, St Albans, Herts, AL1 3JE. Tel. St Albans (01727) 866100.

Other Sources of Information

National Planning Policy Framework, 2012, Department for Communities and Local Government

St Albans District Local Plan Review, 1994, St Albans District Council

Understanding Place: Conservation Area designation, appraisal and management, 2011, English Heritage