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St Albans City + District Council

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ST ALBANS
PUBLIC REALM DELIVERY STRATEGY

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00 INTRODUCTION

THE CITY OF ST. ALBANS

St Albans is a cathedral city that forms the main conurbation within the district of the same name. Although technically a city, its population of around 64,000 people would ordinarily establish St Albans as a large town. It is located 22 miles north of London and has good rail links into the capital, as well as being close to the motorway network. With its historic charm, good housing stock and close proximity to the countryside (to name but a few of its many attributes), St Albans is a popular place to live, particularly for those working in London, and is also a popular destination for tourists and day-trippers.

St Albans is home to the second-largest regular street market in Britain and a retail offer characterised by relatively small-scale, independent stores. Despite the ongoing problems with the economy at large, St Albans appears to be maintaining a bustling centre.

With its historic built fabric, combined with the fact that the city avoided many of the excesses of 1960s and 70s road-building, St Albans has a relatively constrained highway network, missing much of the larger scale infrastructure of neighbouring towns such as Watford. This has meant that, although the streets of St Albans have retained a human scale, the great majortity of relatively local through traffic must pass through the city's centre.

The result is a public realm that is required to deal with conflicts arising from the differing local and strategic ambitions of the people of St Albans. These conflicts are experienced in such forms as traffic congestion, poor air quality, constraints on walking, and a city centre that could in general be a much more attractive place to spend time in.

DELIVERING PUBLIC REALM EXCELLENCE

St Albans' rich history and relative affluence means that the city comprises a number of distinct and compelling areas, each with its own unique character. These include: the Cathedral and its grounds; the main 'high street' shopping area of St Peters Street; the collection of restaurants along Verulam Road; the small, independent shops along George Street and Catherine Street and the civic area around the Council Offices and Law Courts. In many ways, St Albans has all of the basic ingredients that make for a great place, with a centre that is easily walkable in terms of size, distinct areas that make understanding the layout of the city relatively simple, a rich collection of historic architecture, and a street network that is human in scale.

However, it is in the detail, where the hardest decisions often need to be made, where the experience of moving through and spending time in St Albans is often found wanting. The city's public realm often fails to make the most of the potential by failing to do the following: create an environment that strikes the best balance between those in motor vehicles and those on foot; make clear and simple connections between the many character areas; and provide basic facilities that make for a comfortable and enjoyable time, such as seating and trees.

In recognition of these issues, this Public Realm Delivery Strategy proposes a number of measures aimed at creating streets and spaces that each realise their maximum potential and which, together, will make for a much better experience of St Albans. The strategy has been built upon a great deal of the excellent work that has preceded it, most notably the City Vision, but with a stronger focus on providing a programme for the delivery of a public realm befitting St Albans. The process that has been followed in preparing the strategy has been designed in such a way that it can be rolled out in due course to enable the development of similar strategies for the other towns and villages within the district.

This document sets out a series of interventions that will help to create a better public realm for St Albans. That said, it is important to be clear that at no point will the process of improving the city's public realm ever be 'finished'. There is no magic combination of schemes that will provide the perfect answer. Rather, as those towns and cities with the best public realms have shown, it is an ongoing process that requires understanding, commitment and support from all of those responsible for the delivery and use of the public realm – from ideas through to construction and ongoing maintenance and, in due course, renewal.

DOCUMENT LAYOUT

00 INTRODUCTION

The remainder of this section considers how to approach the design of the public realm, starting with why we should bother, then looking at how the problem should be tackled and finally asking what our efforts should achieve.

01 BACKGROUND

This section provides a list of documents that have helped to inform this piece of work and which this work builds upon.

02 VISION + PRINCIPLES

This section establishes an overall Vision and some guiding Principles that should guide and inform all future interventions in the St Albans public realm.

03 CONDITIONS, CHOICES + CATALYSTS

This section considers the main, over-arching issues that currently affect the public realm in St Albans by describing the existing environment, and then suggesting how this influences the everyday choices that people make. For each of these issues, an improved future situation is proposed, which any proposed interventions in the public realm should aim to support.

04 STRATEGY

Taking the catalysts identified in the previous section, specific locations are identified where future interventions in the public realm should be focused to achieve the maximum benefit.

For these locations, recomended interventions are brought forward. These specific proposals are accompanied by more general 'default' considerations for elements of the public realm that are more widely applicable.

05 PRIORITIES + PHASING

This section proposes those projects which are currently considered to offer the greatest potential in helping to achieve the public realm vision, deliver the best all-round value for money, and transform the image and experience of the city, for local people and visitors alike.

06 Going Forward

This section considers how all those responsible for designing, delivering and maintaining the public realm can work together in a more effective way to ensure that the Vision contained within this document is pursued and realised over time. It also identifies those areas where further work may be required to complement this strategy and enable public realm excellence to continue to be delivered over the coming years and decades.


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A STRATEGY FOR THE PUBLIC REALM

WHY?

BECAUSE WE BELIEVE IN THE POWER OF STREETS

The design of our streets and other public spaces have a huge influence on the way that we live our lives. Not only do streets have the potential to connect people and services, important for many reasons including economic growth, they also play a significant role in forming cohesive and tolerant communities, assimilating children into public life, encouraging people to travel by sustainable and healthy modes, reducing crime and the fear of crime and providing equality of opportunity.

Those responsible for our streets must recognise the far reaching influence of their work on the lives of those that use them. We must make the most of this opportunity.

HOW?

BY RECOGNISING THAT STREETS ARE PLACES

The vast majority of people want to be somewhere, and they especially want to be there if that somewhere is nice, whether it's where you live, work or relax. Importantly, hardly anyone wants to be in-between these places, trying to get from one to the other. Its all about 'A' and 'B', and not the 'to' in the middle. Therefore the starting point for the improvement of any street or public space must begin with making a place where people want to be, places that support vital local economies, healthy, safe, active lifestyles and strong communities.

The role of transport is to support these places and, where it can, try to enhance them. With increased mobility will come more choices, more opportunities and more growth. But too much focus on this single objective will eventually be to the detriment of a place. Mobility must always be subservient to creating great places, for no amount of the former will ever compensate for a lack of the latter. And this applies equally to the design of a busy urban traffic junction as it does to a tram stop or a cycle lane.

Too often increased mobility is achieved by degrading the other qualities that make places attractive. The irony is that the demand for travel must increase as people try to get to the ever-dwindling number of successful places that remain. By focusing narrowly on mobility for mobility's sake we have been moving people and goods around more and more and accomplishing less and less.

Streets must be places first. Only then should we consider how mobility can support them.

WHAT?

CONDITIONS + CONSTRAINTS – A STREET ONLY MEANS SOMETHING IN THE CONTEXT OF ITS SURROUNDINGS

Acquiring information is not the same thing as knowledge. Every new piece of information is a potential piece in a bigger jig-saw, but should not be confused with being an end in itself. Bits of information are what we use to build understanding that only starts to tell us something truly meaningful when they contribute to something greater than themselves.

The starting point of any approach to improving streets must begin with an understanding of the component parts that create the setting for public life, and therefore influence it, for those that use it and act upon it. We must deal with a street's uses not in isolation, but in combination. Only from this will we understand the prevailing CONDITIONS.

Alongside these CONDITIONS are a range of CONSTRAINTS. These include physical constraints, policy priorities, strategic necessities and, not least, the availability of funding. The process of enhancing a street must begin with a thorough knowledge of its CONDITIONS and CONSTRAINTS.

CHOICES – THE PREVAILING CONDITIONS + CONSTRAINTS IN A CITY ARE THE MAIN INFLUENCE ON PEOPLE'S CHOICES

Critically, it is a street's CONDITIONS and associated CONSTRAINTS that influence the CHOICES that people make in going about their lives. Streets are places where people choose to trade, shop, eat, meet, relax and otherwise go about their business. It is also a place to, from and through which people want to walk, cycle and drive as well as access buses and trains. People of all sorts – those living and working on the street itself, those from nearby, and others from miles away – want to exercise their CHOICES in ways that can or should affect a street in many different ways, some positive and some negative.

The role of those responsible for improving streets is to understand what these CHOICES are for any given location; which are helping to bring people together and which are acting as barriers. The right CONDITIONS and CONSTRAINTS are no guarantee for success, you cannot force people to use streets and make them great (and make no mistake, it is people that ultimately decide), but without them, a street will never realise its potential.

CATALYSTS – IMPROVEMENTS MUST COME BY SUPPLYING THE RIGHT CONDITIONS FOR ENCOURAGING POSITIVE CHOICES

The purpose of any intervention should be to act as a CATALYST that will promote, support and encourage positive CHOICES by changing the existing CONDITIONS. A CATALYST may be a pedestrian crossing on one street, public seating on another or its inclusion in a wayfinding strategy on a third. There are no 'one-size-fits-all' solutions. In this way we recognise that we are designing for people, and not to achieve a masterplan, an idealised, super-imposed end state or simply a veneer of attractive landscaping and engineering interventions designed to make a place appear prettier. This type of approach shows a lack of understanding and respect.

Each intervention, whatever it consists of, whenever it is delivered and however modest or grand it may be in its own right, should have the potential to incrementally add value to previous interventions and to set the bar and encourage subsequent actions. It should be guided by not just engineering rigour, but also engineering elegance. Critically, a CATALYST is solving a problem greater than the immediate, functional issue – it is bringing people together, providing them with the impetus to change the way they use a street for the better.


Thomas Cook
poundworld
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01 BACKGROUND

The following is a selection of local guidance and other documents that have been used to help inform this Public Realm Delivery Strategy. This has been complemented by appropriate national guidance that includes the Department for Transport's Manual for Streets (1 and 2) and publications from English Heritage and the English Historic Towns Forum.

1. St Albans City Vision Interim Report, December 2008

Vision for the social, cultural and economic development of St Albans over the coming decades. Contains findings from the baseline analysis, consultation feedback and directions of travel.

2. Developing a Public Realm Strategy for the District, February 2009

Defining the public realm, identifying the main elements of a public realm strategy, ensuring better co-ordination between public realm work, links with the City Vision and Streeetscape Manual and proposals for managing the public realm.

3. St Albans Urban Transport Plan, April 2009

A five-year transport plan for the city of St Albans that develops strategies to tackle congestion, accessibility, safety and freight in line with the visions set-out in the Hertfordshire Local Transport Plan and the City and District of St Albans Corporate Plan

4. St Albans Rural Vision, July 2009

Vision for the social, cultural and economic development of rural areas within the District and beyond the City.

5. St Albans City Vision, December 2009

Vision for the social, cultural and economic development of St Albans over the coming decades. Overarching Vision, supporting objectives and themed strategies.

6. St Albans City Vision Markets Study, January 2010

Sets out a vision for the market in St Albans, providing suggestions on potential infrastructure changes to the market, types of market uses as well as management and promotional strategies.

7. Improving Access in St Albans - Report on a Consultation Exercise, February 2010

The findings of a study by Professor Mackett of the University College London into the accessibility of St Albans streets and spaces for those with disabilities.

8. St Albans Streetscape Design Manual, September 2010

Provides principles on ground surfaces, street furniture, traffic management and environmental improvements in the context of St Albans

9. Conservation Area Character Statement for St Albans (Draft), September 2010

Maps, describes and assesses the various character areas of Central St Albans.

10. Roads in Hertfordshire: A Design Guide, January 2011

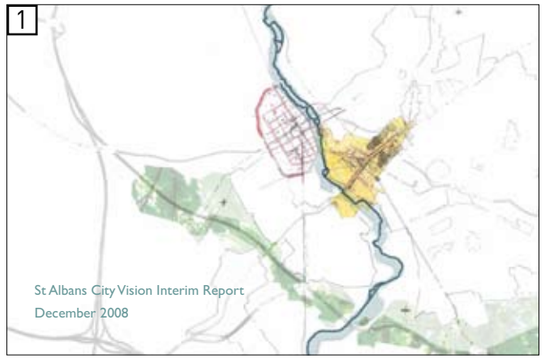
Ensuring quality and consistency in all new highway design and construction across Hertfordshire, supporting the approach described in the Department for Transport's Manual for Streets.

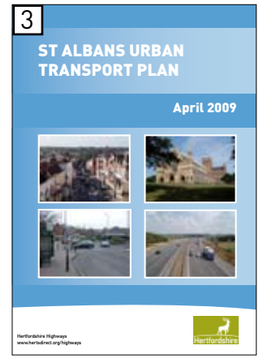
11. Hertfordshire Local Transport Plan 2011-2031, April 2011

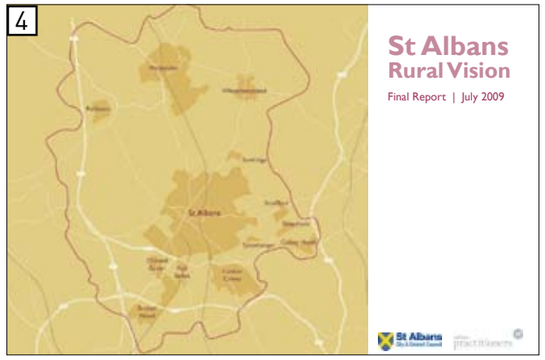
Sets the framework for achieving the vision of a better transport system for Hertfordshire, focusing on delivering the Government's shared priorities of tackling congestion, delivering accessibility, providing safer roads, improving air quality and improving the quality of life for all of Hertfordshire's residents.

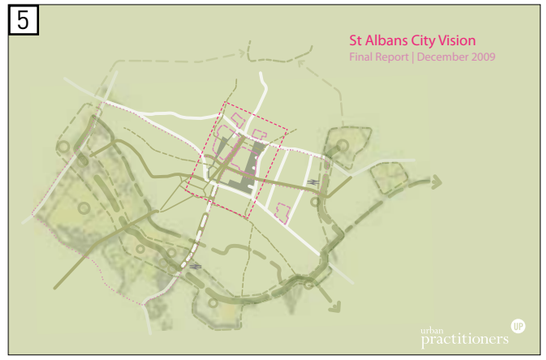
12. Hertfordshire Road Safety Strategy, April 2011

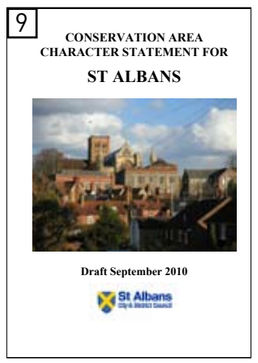
Establishes targets and outlines the strategy for reducing the number of road traffic collisions across the County.

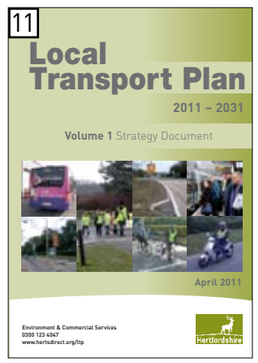


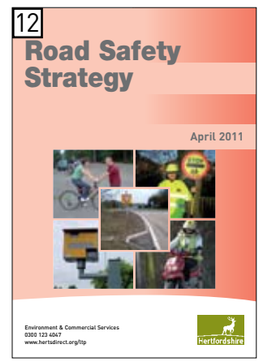












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02 VISION + PRINCIPLES

As a first step in preparing this strategy, a range of key stakeholders were invited to a workshop at which a guiding vision for the strategy and a set of over-arching principles were discussed in some detail. The Public Realm Vision and Principles for St Albans arising from this workshop are presented below and alongside.

"St Albans' streets and spaces will enhance the historic character of this Cathedral City, respond to the needs of the people who use them and be places that inspire and endure."

This vision statement embodies an understanding that the future economic, social and cultural health of St Albans will in large part be dependent on the city becoming more and more a place that people actively *want* to come to and be in, not merely one they *can* come to and be in. Public realm quality will have a huge role to play in achieving this vision.

Previous experience in St Albans, and for that matter in almost every town or city with an under-performing public realm, has shown clearly how the greater good can be badly undermined by decisions made purely on single or hyper-local issues. By contrast, a cohesive approach to public realm delivery and maintenance has been shown to help ensure that the whole is much greater than the sum of its parts. With this in mind, although not strictly part of the public realm, clearly this delivery strategy must recognise and respond to the adjacent context, and specifically the architecture that frames it.

The issue of quality is one that has been raised on a number of occasions throughout the development of this strategy and, although hard to define in absolute terms, it is something that we all have an innate sense of. For this reason it has not been identified as a separate principle, but instead should be imbedded into each of the eight principles that support the vision.

To this end, the public realm vision above, the principles opposite, and this strategy as a whole need to be applied and actively pursued, not just kept on the shelf and referred to from time to time.

Think Green

A place that exploits the many benefits associated with soft landscaping, and especially tree planting, in creating a more attractive, comfortable and sustainable environment. St Albans city centre has very close links, both physically and historically, with its surrounding countryside and this should be reflected in the design of its streets and spaces. Equally, the affects of air and noise pollution should be recognised and addressed.

Think Context

A place that responds to and reinforces local character, thereby inferring to all users of streets and spaces what should constitute appropriate behaviour rather than relying on explicit signage, barriers and cameras. A sound understanding of a place's current and potential uses should be the starting point for the development of any intervention, while there should be no one-size-fits-all solutions.

Think Inclusive

A place that makes people of all ages and abilities, especially children, older people and disabled people, feel welcome, safe and comfortable. The largest number of people should be able to not only use, but enjoy the public realm and want to spend time in it. Streets and spaces should be easy to understand, with intuitive routes through implicit design supported by explicit way-marking where appropriate.

Think Longevity

A place that recognises that the job of improving the public realm has no end point and that there is no definitive plan. Rather it is an organic process that will continue to evolve and requires commitment across years and decades. A place where the design of the public realm is understated, robust and timeless, rather than responding to fads and constantly reinventing itself with new materials and approaches. Equally, the public realm should be built to last, utilising materials and workmanship that focus on long-term durability over short-term gains.

Think Creative

A place that is designed by an organisation that is confident in and focused on the outcomes that it wants to achieve, that does not rely on off-the-shelf interventions and is comfortable challenging long-held assumptions. Streets and spaces should be able to adapt to the many demands of public life that they may be expected to accommodate, while the delivery of large interventions should not preclude the consideration and introduction of quick-wins.

Think Collaboration

A place that is designed through partnership, recognising the limitations of a single person, team or department and actively encouraging comments and input from others, as well as by involving stakeholders early, tackling potential issues head-on and taking advantage of local, specialist knowledge.

Think Vibrant

A place that capitalises on its many potential uses, providing people with choices and opportunities to spend time in the public realm for different reasons, creating streets and spaces that are greater than the sum of their parts. More often than not it is those items that cost very little, or are even free, that can make the biggest difference – vendors, cafe seating, street performers, tree planting, benches and temporary road closures.

Think Simplicity

A place that begins with the premise that you begin with nothing, you only add what is necessary with nothing included by default.


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03 CONDITIONS, CHOICES + CATALYSTS

INTRODUCTION

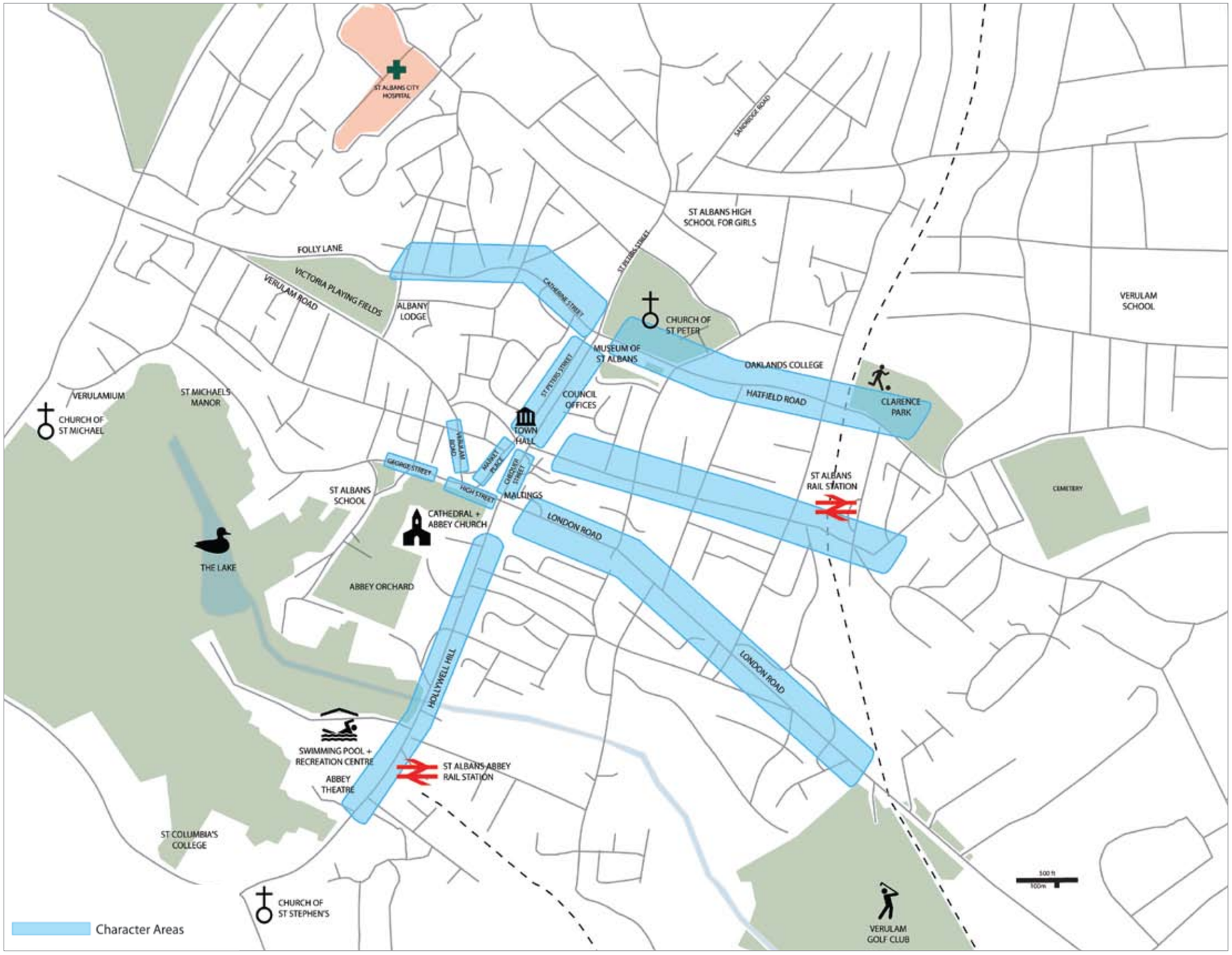
St Albans contains some fantastic 'base ingredients' for making a world class public realm. From the small scale buildings that line the narrow streets, to the rich historic architecture. From the strong contrast between the city's many character areas, to the large number of people living and working in and around the centre. This makes the task of creating an excellent public realm all the more achievable and the potential rewards for investing in it all the more great. Equally, it means that an under-performing public realm is made all the more disappointing given the obvious potential that improvements could realise. The city already contains a number of easily identifiable character areas that need to be enhanced and supported.

This section considers the main, overarching issues affecting the public realm in St Albans and how this Public Realm Delivery Strategy's vision and principles can be achieved. It does this by considering how the existing CONDITIONS influence the CHOICES people currently make, and how changes to these CONDITIONS in the form of CATALYSTS could help to improve public realm. The details of this approach have already been described in 'A Vision For The Public Realm', above, but the essence of this analysis is to get to the heart of the issues currently affecting the public realm in St Albans and to develop a series of catalysts that will directly address them.

This analysis have been divided into the following sub-sections:

- Network Legibility;
- Travel to Work;
- Walking;
- Cycling;
- Getting the Train;
- Getting the Bus;
- Driving; and
- Relaxing.

The findings of this work have then been used in subsequent sections to guide the proposals for specific interventions for St Albans.



St Albans Character Areas

NETWORK LEGIBILITY

The street network in St Albans has clearly developed organically, in-line with the city around it. The long history of St Albans, and the large number of old buildings that it contains, form an important part of its character, but also act as a constraint on the scale of the street network. The result is that street widths are often narrow and governed by adjacent buildings that predate the motorcar. This now means that the main radial streets leading into the centre of St Albans feel relatively narrow and are often indistinguishable from lower order, orbital streets. This affects people's ability to navigate the city intuitively.

At a more detailed level, the materials, tree planting and street furniture on different streets is based more on the prevailing fashions when they were introduced, rather than on a street's status within the wider hierarchy. Again, this hinders rather than supports the inherent legibility of the city.

Four views from the junction of Victoria Street with Lattimore Road, but which way is the city centre?

There is a varied palette and pattern for paving materials used in St Albans main streets.

Lack of Street Hierarchy

CONDITIONS

The street network around the city centre has little sense of a hierarchy in terms of appearance.

CHOICES

This creates problems in terms of legibility for all modes, with radial main streets leading to the city centre often looking very similar to orbital residential streets. People entering the city centre are given few implicit clues about which streets to take through their design.

CATALYSTS

Understand the roles of different streets within the wider hierarchy and design them accordingly. The introduction of street trees could be a relatively cost effective way to initiate this process.

Inherently legible range of street types

Inconsistent approach to materials

CONDITIONS

With nearly every intervention in the public realm over at least the last 20 years it would appear that a new range of materials has been chosen.

CHOICES

In isolation there is often very little wrong with the materials used, but in combination it leads to a public realm that looks disjointed, uncoordinated and unnecessarily cluttered.

CATALYSTS

A range of standard materials should be selected and adopted for the long-term use in the public realm. This is not to say that special areas can't be treated in different ways, but the default option should be clear to all those responsible for making these decisions.

Simple, robust and elegant palette of materials

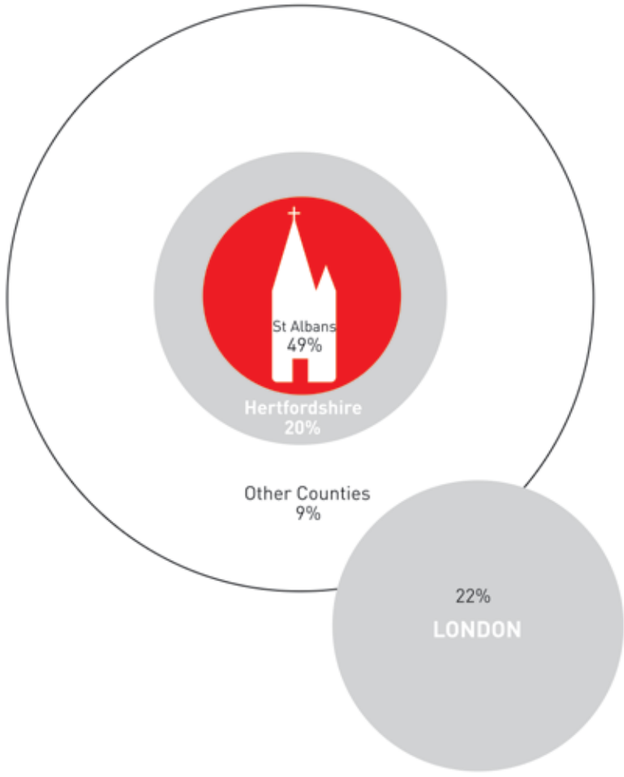
TRAVEL TO WORK

The information used in the following figures has been extracted from the St Albans Urban Transport Plan, produced by Hertfordshire County Council in 2009. This, in turn, was informed by 2001 Census data, covering the 9 central wards in St Albans - St. Peter's; Clarence; Ashley; Cunningham; Sopwell; Verulam; Batchwood; Marshalswick South; and Marshalswick North. As such, the following analysis focuses on the residents living within central St Albans and how they travel to work. This travel to work data can also be used as a proxy for residents travel patterns more generally.

HOW RESIDENTS TRAVEL TO WORK:

The illustration above shows how those living in St Albans currently travel to work. These trips are dominated by car travel, accounting for 63% of the total (it is also worth noting that Hertfordshire as a whole has the 4th highest levels of car ownership in the country). The remaining trips include 19% by rail - a figure that is significantly higher than the national average and confirming the substantial number of those who take the train into London. Walking has the next largest share with 12%, while 4% take the bus and 2%cycle.

WHERE RESIDENTS TRAVEL TO WORK:



The illustration above shows where those living in St Albans currently work. Nearly half of all residents who work, do so within St Albans (49%). A further 20% work within the rest of Hertfordshire County. This leaves 22% of residents who commute to London, while the remaining 9% work in other counties.

HOW RESIDENTS TRAVEL TO WORK LOCALLY:

4% CYCLE

8% TAKE THE BUS

25% WALK

63% DRIVE

Combining the data contained within the two previous illustrations suggests that many of St Albans' current transport issues are, at least partially, self inflicted. It is reasonable to assume that all of the 19% of people that live in St Albans and who commute by train do not work within the city. Furthermore, if we assume that all those who walk, take the bus and cycle must work within St Albans, this still only equates to 37% of the total number of people who both live and work in the city. This leaves some 63% of people who live and work in St Albans who choose to drive. The vast majority of these trips will be under 5 miles, and many under 2 miles. And this does not appear to be just a problem isolated to commuters. Congestion during the day and especially at weekends suggests that residents generally are too reliant on their cars for even short journeys. Encouraging residents to consider other modes of travel is crucial if St Albans is serious about delivering a better public realm.

WALKING

St Albans is an inherently walkable city, with a compact core keeping distances short, numerous land marks that aid legibility and active and fine-grain frontage along a large proportion of streets creating a strong sense of enclosure and natural surveillance. However, the walking environment is let down in a number of fundamental ways.

At key locations throughout the city the walking environment is dominated by vehicular traffic and fails to offer pedestrians the inherent legibility that they require to navigate. This is partly due to the often narrow and twisting nature of the streets, but also because of a lack of a consistent way-finding system.

The city centre, rather incredibly, lacks almost any public art whether in the style of historic statues or more modern pieces, either as one-off installations or integrated into the streetscene such as in the form of bespoke street furniture. This further reduces the area's legibility as well as its cultural interest. Walking should also provide an opportunity for people to interpret and connect with the city's rich local heritage.

One area where the city does succeed is in providing pedestrians with striking and memorable vistas (whether because of the surrounding landscape or distinct architecture), that are not only inspiring to look at, but also help people to orientate themselves and navigate. These key views should be recorded and protected from potential future obscuring.

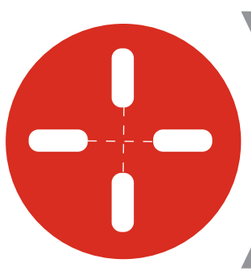
The network for pedestrians within the city centre is relatively comprehensive, even if certain parts of this network may not provide pedestrians with a particularly welcoming environment. A possible exception to this is a number of alleyways that link the major streets. These currently tend to be used for bin-storage and little else, creating unwelcoming walking environments. These alleyways could potentially do much more to not only help to connect various parts of the city but also enhance the city centre's unique character.

Hertfordshire County Council's Walking Strategy (April 2011) and St Albans City and District Council's Walking Strategy (May 2009) provide the framework for improving the pedestrian environment.

The west side of St Peters Street offers a much more comfortable walking environment than the east side.

The latest wayfinding signage is well placed and of an appropriate style for the city, but should be supported by maps of the city

A series of isolated character islands



CONDITIONS

The pedestrian connections between different areas of the city are generally dominated by traffic with poor crossing facilities and a lack of prominence within the street network.

CHOICES

As a result people, and particularly visitors, do not explore many parts of the City Centre because they are either unaware that they exist or find them too unpleasant to reach. St Albans is a town with distinctive character areas that act like 'islands', disconnected from one-another.

CATALYSTS

Generate a prioritised list of schemes aimed at bridging between character areas.

Well connected, legible character areas

Lack of way-finding assistance

CONDITIONS

The historic street patterns twisting and narrow nature can make it difficult to navigatearound the street network, but this is compounded by a lack of co-ordinated pedestrian signage and maps.

CHOICES

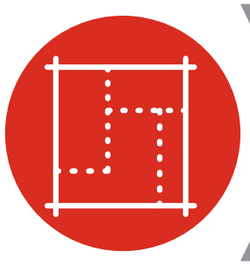
Visitors only tend to visit certain attractions/areas within the city centre simply because they are not aware of what else exists. This is of particular importance given the large number of visitors that St Albans receives.

CATALYSTS

Introduce a comprehensive and co-ordinated way-finding strategy, that builds on the existing signage. This should include new maps that identify key landmarks and character areas within the city, focusing on the many tourist attractions.

A dependable, elegant solution for wayfinding

Undervalued public realm



CONDITIONS

There are a number of alleyways leading to and linking the main character areas. They are poorly lit, used to store refuse and lack active frontages.

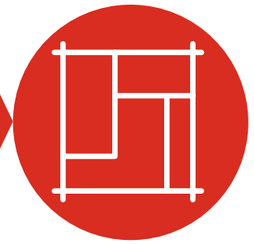
CHOICES

These alleyways have the potential to add character and a different offer to the city centre, but people choose not to explore these alleyways as they currently have little to offer.

CATALYSTS

In the short-term a number of the more important connecting alleyways could receive environmental treatments to make them more attractive as links. Longer-term, many of the city's alleyways could include active frontages, adding to the retail mix.

A public realm exploiting its maximum potential



Limited character

CONDITIONS

There is very little public art or celebrations of the city's past or present within the city centre.

CHOICES

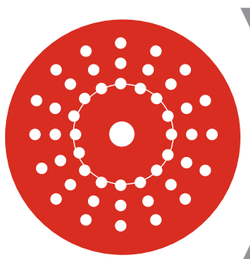
Opportunities for culture and history to be brought into the public realm are missing and much of the city's history is not recognised. This weakens visitors and residents sense of understanding and attachment as well as reducing the area's inherent legibility.

CATALYSTS

Identify locations and commission proposals for public art within the public realm. Refresh / extend local heritage interpretation as a feature of the public realm.

A city full of surprise and delight

Poor connections to surrounding areas



CONDITIONS

Large areas around the city centre are used for car parking and other low intensity uses that create zones of inactivity which are unpleasant to walk through (Drovers Way, Civic Centre, etc.), while the main corridors connecting the centre with adjacent residential areas have poor walking environments.

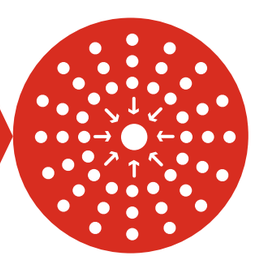
CHOICES

People choose not to walk into the centre from adjacent residential areas due to the poor experience.

CATALYSTS

Improve the relationship between the city centre and its hinterland through short-term improvements and longer term redevelopment. Develop a corridors strategy to improve conditions for those on foot.

Seamless connections with hinterland



CYCLING

Despite the large numbers of people cycling to the City Station, to interchange with predominantly London-bound rail services, the uptake of cycling in St Albans more generally is low. This can be partly explained by the relatively 'hilly' topography of the area, but this is compounded by a lack of facilities for cyclists and the priority already afforded to those arriving by car.

The historic, narrow street network within the city centre means that the introduction of segregated cycle facilities would be difficult, while the main approaches to the city are characterised by high speed, inter-urban roads that are intimidating for people considering getting on their bike. The relative abundance of car parking in the city centre also means that there is little incentive for people to consider modes other than the private car.

Despite this, where opportunities do exist to encourage cycling, such as allowing people to cycle through Verulamium Park, they have not been taken. Equally, the lack of convenient and conspicuous cycle parking in the city centre fails to promote this mode.

Strategies attempting to improve the situation for cyclists in St Albans include the Hertfordshire County Council Cycling Strategy and the St Albans Cycling Strategy. A bikeability Checklist audit, taking place later this year (2011), should help in identifying suitable interventions.

The framework for the delivery of improvements to the cycling environment are set-out in St Albans City and District Council's Cycling Strategy and more generally within Hertfordshire County Council's Local Transport Plan.

Facilities for cyclists are rare in St Albans.

Demand for cycle parking at the City Station out-strips supply.

Missing bicycle network

A city that encourages cycling

CONDITIONS

Approximately 75% of the city centre is within a 5 minute cycle of the centre, while almost 100% is within a 10 minute cycle. However, there is some steep topography and, more importantly, a lack of cycle facilities that would help to prioritise, protect and promote this mode.

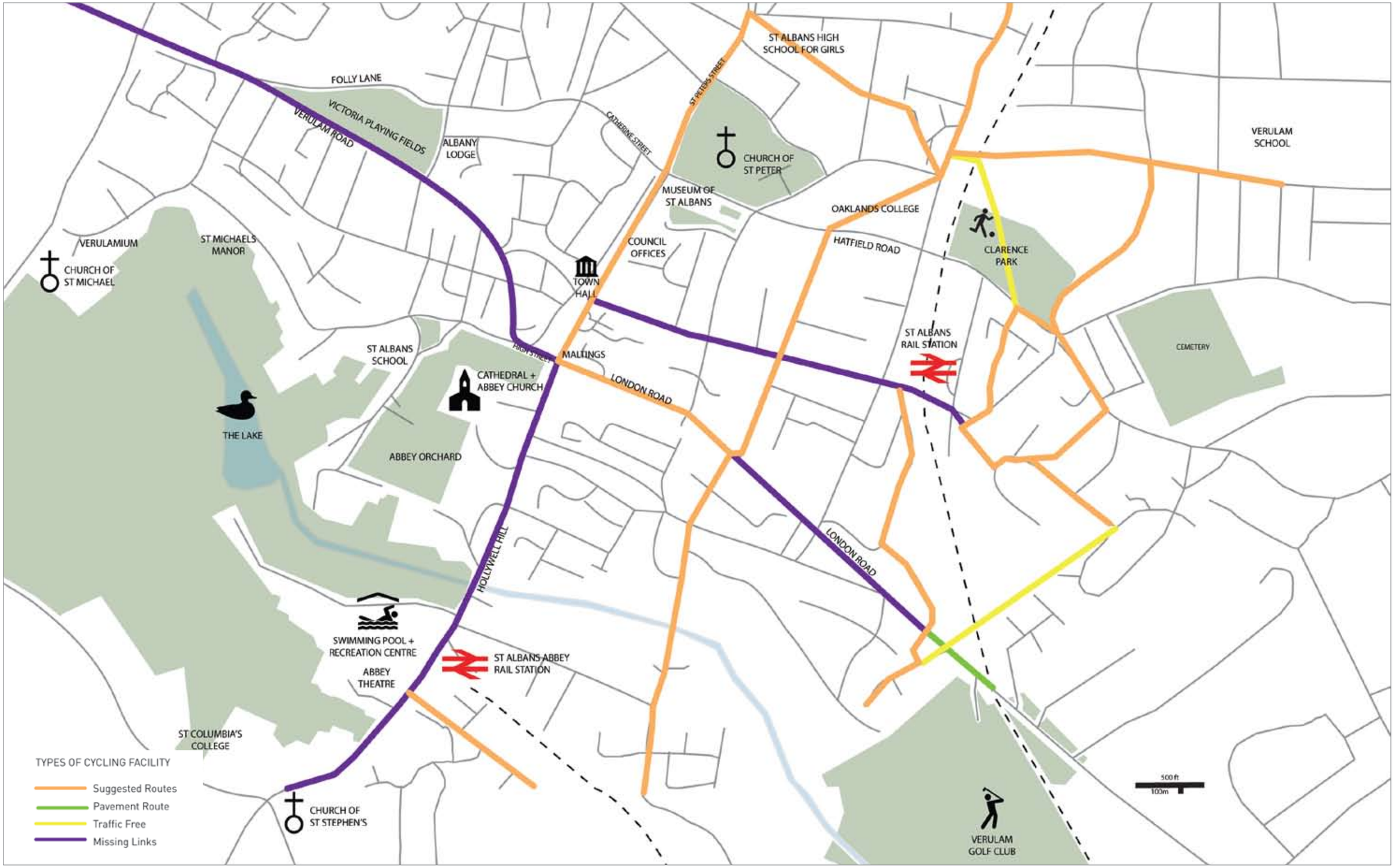
CHOICES

Despite the relatively compact nature of the city centre there is a low uptake of cycling at least partially as a result of the limited facilities.

CATALYSTS

Not withstanding the difficulty in introducing dedicated cycle facilities due to characteristically narrow streets, opportunities to introduce advanced stop lines for cyclists, cycle lanes, routes with limited traffic on them, cycle parking and recognised cycle corridors should be taken wherever possible. Cycling should be allowed along designated routes through Verulamium Park.

THE COUNCIL'S RECOMMENDED CYCLE NETWORK



GETTING THE TRAIN

There are two train stations in St Albans - the City Station and the Abbey Station. Both are located approximately 850 metres from the city centre. The City Station is operated and served by First Capital Connect, with services south into London Kings Cross and north via Luton. The Abbey Station is operated and served by London Midland, operating a shuttle service to Watford.

St Albans rail connections are a key component of its success. The fast and frequent services to London from the City Station, in combination with a high quality of life, make the city highly attractive as a place to live for those working in London - a fact borne out by the area's property prices and demand for parking spaces at the City Station. This creates a large demand for access to and parking at this station during the week. The daily charge to park a car at the station is in excess of £6, while spaces to leave bicycles, motorcycles and mopeds are at a premium.

The arrival experience for those accessing St Albans via the City Station is less than ideal. The main entrance to the station is located on the opposite side of the railway tracks to the city centre, making navigating difficult for those new to the area. Although those passengers travelling from London arrive on the correct side of the station to more easily and directly walk to the city centre, and there is an exit on this side of the station, signage within the station still directs these people to the main entrance.

The eastern station forecourt has recently undergone a number of improvements that have created a bus interchange and dedicated area for kiss-and-ride. However, those on foot have fared less well, with little room for people to wait or orientate themselves. The western forecourt is dominated by parked cars and offers a poor arrival experience.

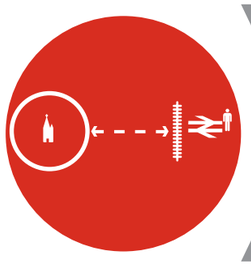
The Abbey Station has a far less strategic role in the wider transport network, providing a shuttle service to Watford. However, the line is about to be converted from an existing heavy-rail service to a light-rail, tram-like service. This will enable a higher frequency service to be operated, making this a far more attractive travel option.

Hertfordshire County Council's Rail Strategy (April 2011) provides the framework for improving the existing rail infrastructure.

The arrival experience at the eastern forecourt is dominated by parked cars...

...while the eastern forecourt appears even less welcoming to pedestrians.

Disconnected train station



CONDITIONS

The arrival experience and connections with the city centre from St Albans City Station are poor. The station entrance is used for parking, the forecourt is dominated by a bus standing area, the station faces away from the city centre and Victoria Street provides few clues as to its importance within the street hierarchy.

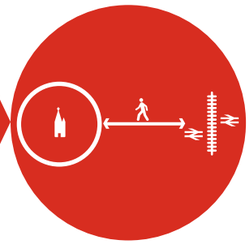
CHOICES

People choose not to travel to or from St Albans by train, by either not making the trip, going elsewhere or choosing an alternative mode.

CATALYSTS

Revise the station forecourt, improve legibility and enhance the streetscape along Victoria street.

A station for the city



Poor rail interchange

CONDITIONS

A very good rail service already exists into London, but there is insufficient parking available to cope with demand, particularly for bicycles, the surrounding walking environment is poor and bus services could be far more attractive.

CHOICES

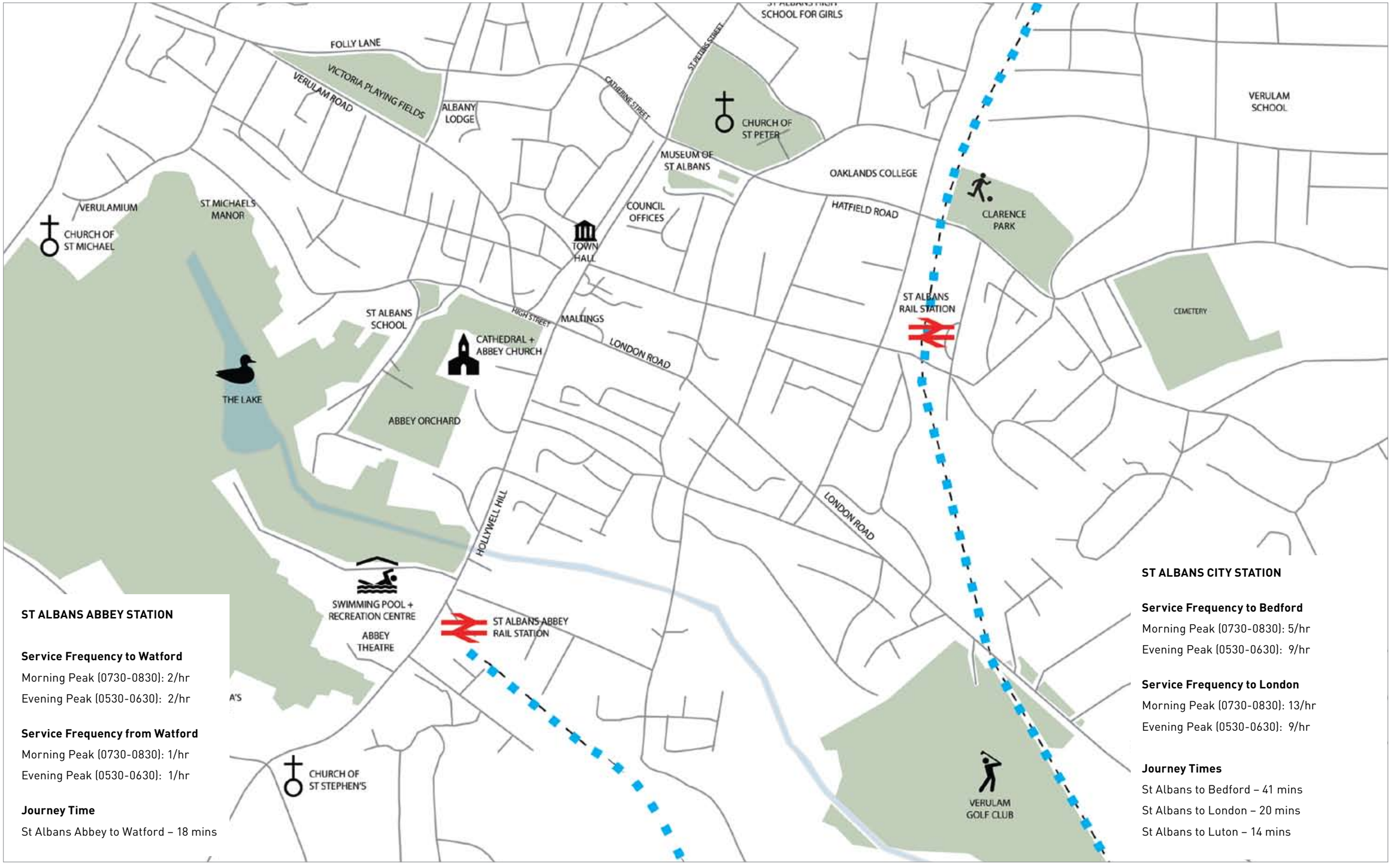
St Albans is a popular choice as a place to live for those working in London, but people are discouraged from choosing more sustainable modes of travel to access the station due to existing poor facilities.

CATALYSTS

Introduce additional cycle parking at the station, improve the pedestrian arrival experience and rationalise, simplify and increase bus frequencies and routing.

Prioritise and expand facilities for interchange

DESTINATIONS, FREQUENCIES AND JOURNEY TIMES BY RAIL



ST ALBANS ABBEY STATION

Service Frequency to Watford
Morning Peak (0730-0830): 2/hr
Evening Peak (0530-0630): 2/hr

Service Frequency from Watford
Morning Peak (0730-0830): 1/hr
Evening Peak (0530-0630): 1/hr

Journey Time
St Albans Abbey to Watford – 18 mins

ST ALBANS CITY STATION

Service Frequency to Bedford
Morning Peak (0730-0830): 5/hr
Evening Peak (0530-0630): 9/hr

Service Frequency to London
Morning Peak (0730-0830): 13/hr
Evening Peak (0530-0630): 9/hr

Journey Times
St Albans to Bedford – 41 mins
St Albans to London – 20 mins
St Albans to Luton – 14 mins

GETTING THE BUS

Bus services in St Albans are privately operated by a number of companies that include UNO, Arriva and Metroline. The bus servicing serving the city centre can be broadly split into two groups - those connecting the centre with areas immediately adjacent to it (generally designated as 'S' services) and longer distances services connecting the centre with adjacent towns and villages (generally numbered in a conventional manner).

St Albans does not have a bus station. Instead, all services serving the city stop on St Peters Street, making this area the major bus terminal where passengers can interchange between services. The large number of buses along St Peters Street, accessing and egressing bus stops, compounds the existing general traffic congestion in this area, resulting in long and unreliable bus journey times through this part of the city.

The bus network coverage is comprehensive, covering all of the key radials into the city centre and serving a large proportion of the surrounding neighbourhoods. This means that for many people living around St Albans there is a bus service that can be accessed within a relatively short distance. However, the frequency of many of these services is relatively low, with only a few services with headways of less than 20 minutes. Furthermore, service frequency tends to reduce substantially at weekends. This means that, despite good coverage, the bus remains a relatively inconvenient choice when compared to the private car.

Infrequent services are compounded by a lack of infrastructure that would help to isolate buses from general traffic delays, such as bus lanes and adaptive signal timings. The historic nature of St Albans means that the often narrow streets will not accommodate such physical interventions.

The existing Quality Network Partenership (QNP) between District and County Councils and the bus operators have already made improvements to the passenger experience, and this collaboration will need to be central to the continued promotion and upgrade of this mode.

Waiting facilities for bus passengers on St Peters Street.

Congestion on St Peters Street can lead to delays and journey time variability.

Bus Bottleneck in the city centre

CONDITIONS

All bus routes pass through the centre of St Albans, with no formal bus station for the city. Bus journey times are long while reliability is poor as the absence of bus priority measures means that they are not isolated from general traffic delays. They also contribute to significant levels of air and noise pollution.

CHOICES

People avoid using local bus services due to their potential unreliability, while the experience for pedestrians on St Peters Street is often noisy and smelly.

CATALYSTS

Investigate removing some bus routes from St Peters Street and/or removing general traffic. Physical bus priority measures are difficult to implement due to the lack of highway space.

Optimised bus service routing

Uncoordinated bus services

CONDITIONS

There is still a relative lack of uniformity, legibility, coordination and integration between the local bus services, run by numerous operators.

CHOICES

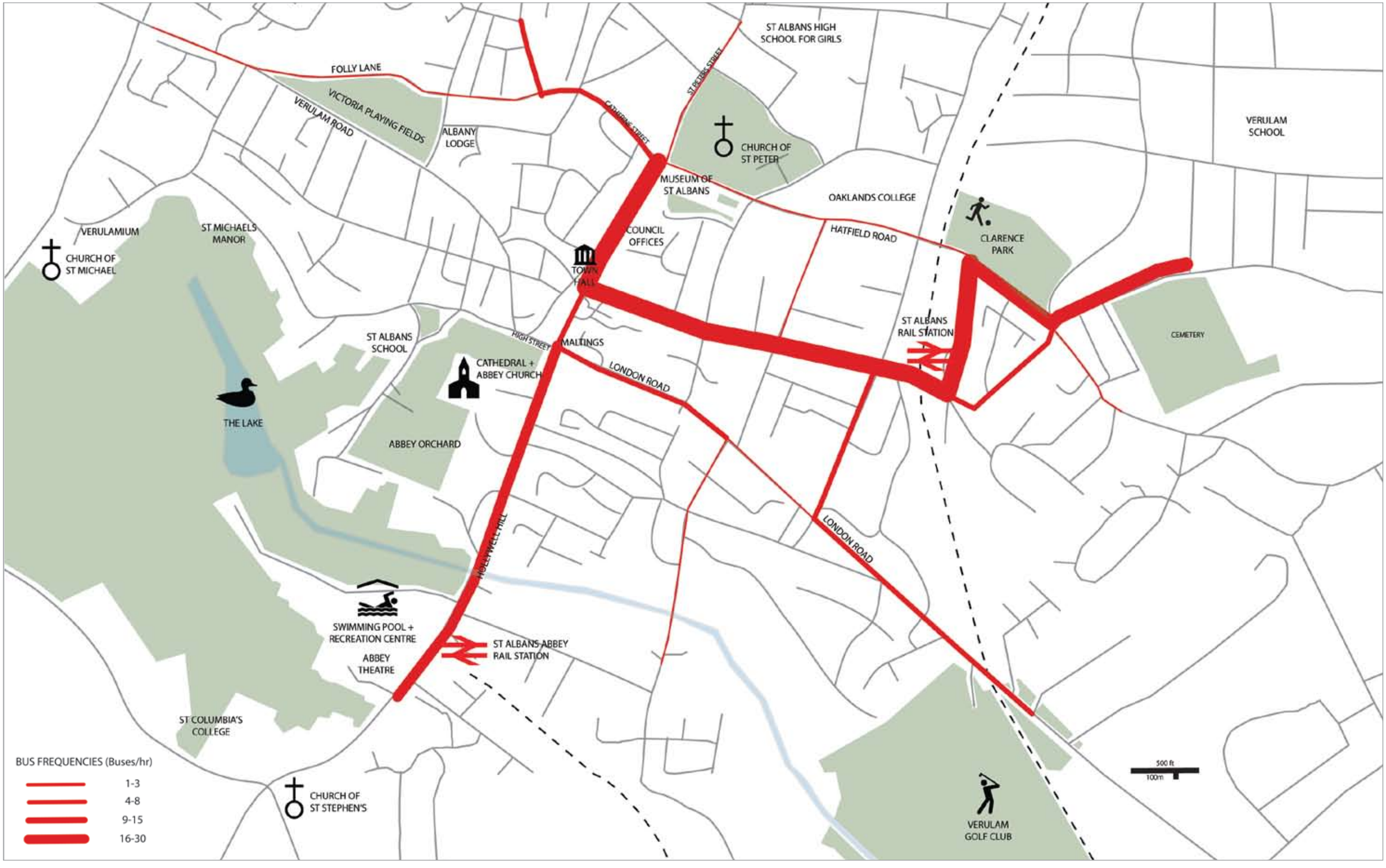
People find it difficult to understand the bus network and therefore avoid using it.

CATALYSTS

The Quality Network Partnership must do more to improve the attractiveness of local bus services and ensure that they can compete with the private car by introducing faster and simpler payment methods, along with through-ticketing across all operators.

A legible bus network

BUS ROUTE ALIGNMENT AND FREQUENCIES



DRIVING

St Albans is located close to a number of motorways and other major roads, such as the M25, M1 and A1(M), which makes the city easily accessible by car at the regional and national scale. Equally, access to areas of North London, Luton and Stevenage are relatively direct and quick.

At this strategic level vehicular accessibility is good. However, at the more local level the picture is less positive. The lack of a dedicated ring-road or by-pass means that all traffic in St Albans is routed through St Peters Street, the city's main shopping area. For drivers this can result in congestion that leads to slow and unreliable journey times. While for those walking and spending time in the city centre the environment is degraded through air and noise pollution as well as the barriers to local movement that this through traffic creates.

The absence of a high capacity vehicular network within the city creates a lack of resilience when other parts of the network are temporarily closed or suffering from reduced capacity. This issue is particularly apparent when incidents occur on the M25, M1 or A1(M).

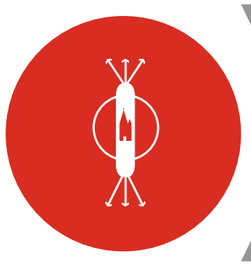
This issue has been partially addressed through the introduction of new signage on the approaches to the city, but the reliance on the car for even local trips means that the network struggles to cope with demand, much to the detriment of the public realm. Hertfordshire County Council's proposed Inter-Urban Route Strategy should help in further addressing this issue.

The Council are currently consulting on an extension of the existing 20 mph zone that would encompass much of the City's core. Although speeding is not considered a significant issue within the city centre, the existing zone helps to set the tone for those driving in the area, and its expansion would help to encourage walking and cycling as well as reduce the amount of stop-start traffic congestion.

Congestion in the city centre is partly a result of strategic trips passing through St Albans.

Junction design that does little to tell drivers that they are approaching a bustling, vibrant city centre.

Strategic trips in the city centre



CONDITIONS

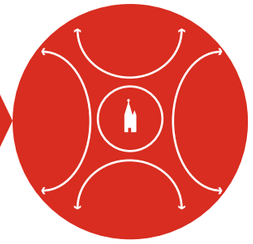
All general traffic travelling through St Albans is signed through the city centre, leading to poor air and noise quality and limited space for other modes.

CHOICES

People choose not to spend time on many streets, either avoiding them or simply moving through them.

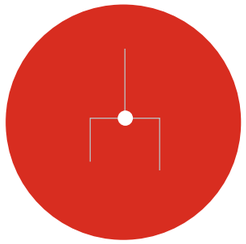
CATALYSTS

Consider alternative routing of through traffic and plant more trees to minimise the negative environmental affects of vehicular traffic. St Albans is currently a town dominated by people trying to get somewhere, not of people savouring the moment and taking their time.



A city putting people first

Little sense of arrival



CONDITIONS

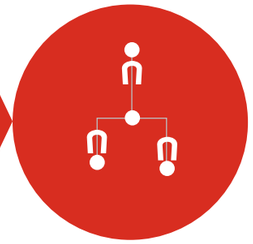
The main radial routes that lead into the city fail to convey the transition from inter-urban highways to urban streets.

CHOICES

Those entering the city by road have little sense of arrival providing a poor sense of the city limits and legibility or the change in context.

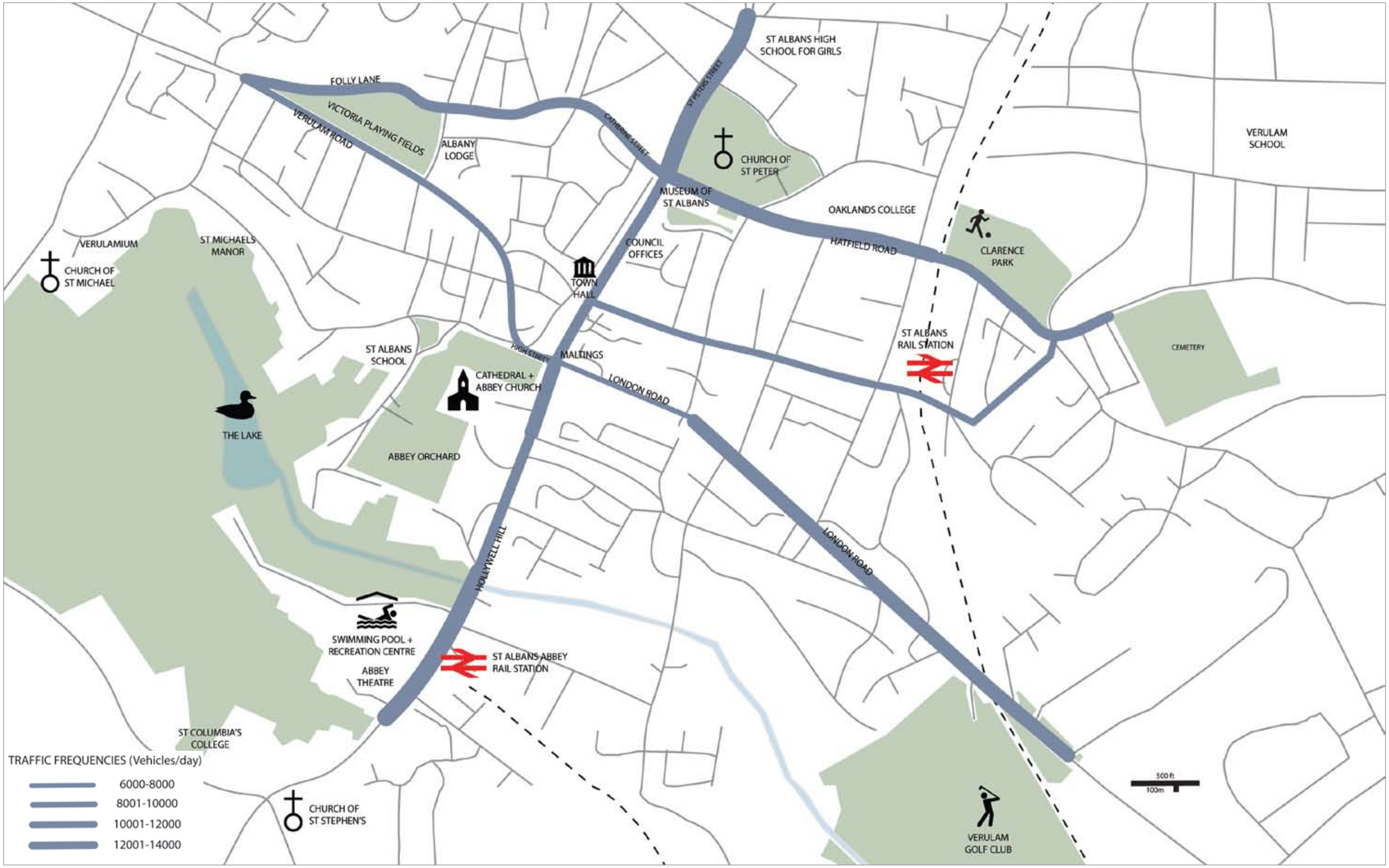
CATALYSTS

The city already has a number of gateway points on key radial routes into the city, but these tend to be very subtle, and can go unnoticed. Points of entry to the city of St Albans should be celebrated to help denote the change in context.



Gateways to the city

PRIMARY VEHICULAR NETWORK AND TRAFFIC FLOWS



DRIVING (CONTINUED)

There are 17 public car parks located within St Albans (illustrated on the plan opposite) with a combined capacity of 4629 spaces. Approximately two thirds of all car parking spaces are located within the city's largest four car parks. All of these car parks charge for their spaces, although these costs can be partially or wholly reimbursed at those car parks associated with stores that customers have shopped in.

Parking on-street is managed through a number of Controlled Parking Zones (CPZ) as well as traditional waiting and loading restrictions. There are also a number of pay-and-display bays located on street, located close to the city centre and used by shoppers.

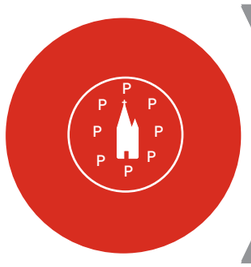
Copious amounts of car parking is often seen as essential to the success of a town or city centre, particularly when they rely on attracting visitors from a relatively rural hinterland. In fact, 'the more the better' is the approach often taken. But think of any successful centre and accommodating parked cars is never central to its offer, particularly in historic locations. From larger cities such as Norwich and Oxford, to market towns such as Horsham, their success has been built primarily on the creation of great places where people want to be, rather than creating places where people can park and then filling in the gaps that remain.

Key to this approach is the need for an overall strategy, because without one it is always easier to just add a few more spaces here or there and assume that this will help. But it is this attrition that slowly chips away at the reason for people wanting to be there in the first place. What is needed is a comprehensive review of parking in St Albans that can inform an overall strategy.

Driving is still the easiest option for many people visiting St Albans, with convenient car parking in the city centre.

Despite the relatively high prices, car parking at the City Station well used by commuters.

Driving is the easy option



CONDITIONS

There are 17 car parks within the city centre with a combined total of 4629 spaces.

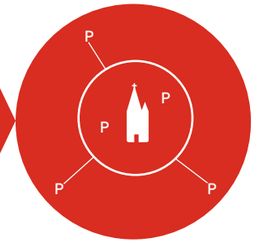
CHOICES

People know that it is relatively easy and inexpensive to find a car parking space. For those that own cars, despite the concerns about congestion, driving into the city centre remains the most convenient, cheapest and fastest option.

CATALYSTS

Develop a car parking strategy for the city with a view to creating a great place first and foremost. The strategy should consider the cost of parking in the city centre, the number of car parking spaces and the current and possible future locations of car parks.

Prioritise sustainable modes



Perceived poor junction coordination

CONDITIONS

There is a perception among some drivers that the poor coordination of traffic light signal timings between subsequent junctions compounds congestion. This leads to unreliable journey times and a poor quality environment. However, this is a result of accommodating pedestrian crossing demand within the city centre, that disrupts these timings.

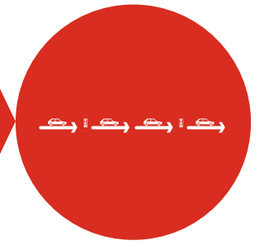
CHOICES

People avoid travelling to or through the city centre by car or bus, while pedestrians are provided with relatively frequent and direct crossing facilities, helping to encourage walking. However, the existing compromise between vehicular capacity and pedestrian permeability is still considered to favour vehicular drivers, especially when compared to other historic centres

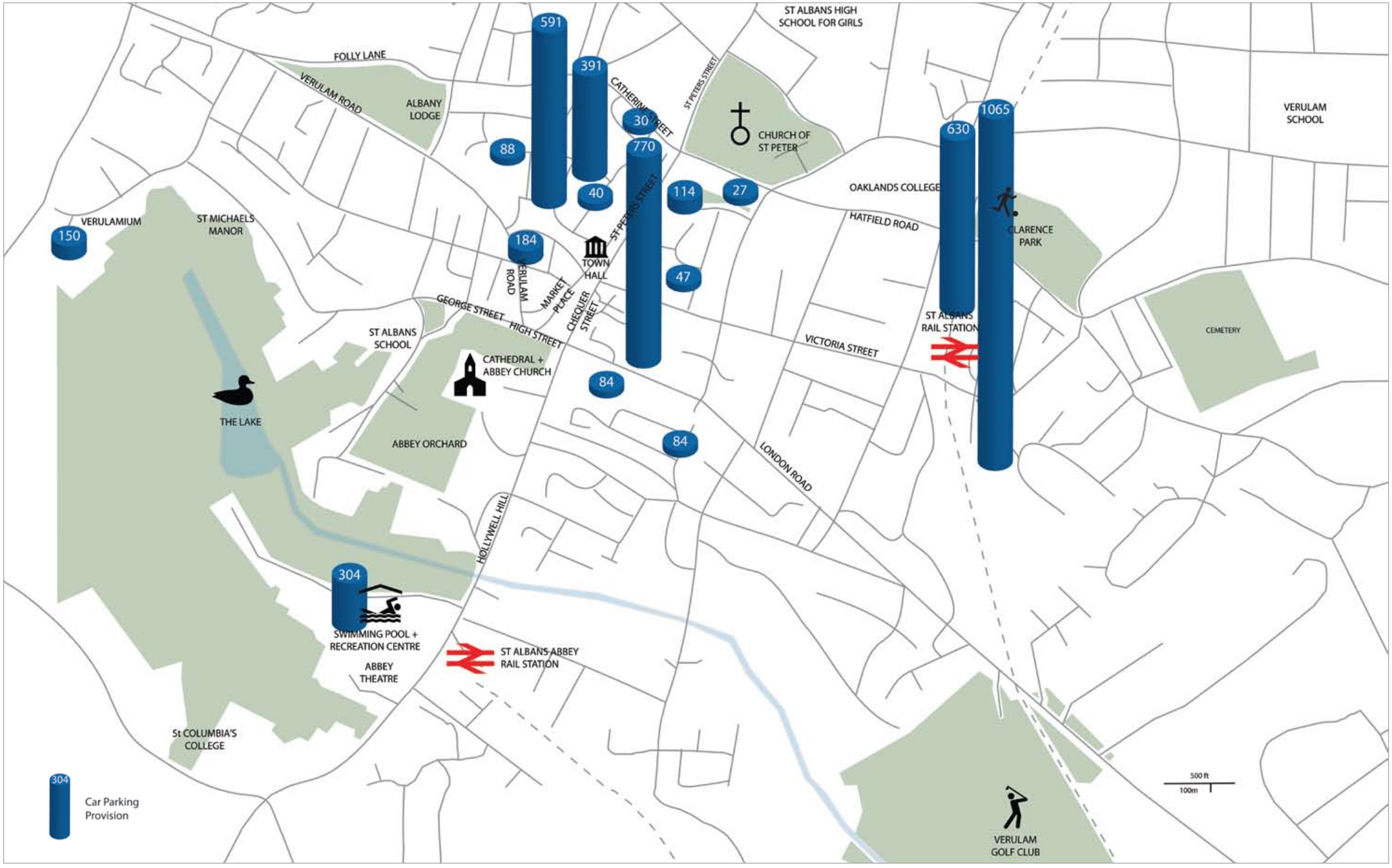
CATALYSTS

The traffic signals in St Albans already operate under SCOOT activation - a computer programme that optimises groups of traffic signals across the network. It is not recommended that further improvements in vehicle journey times should be achieved by reducing pedestrian priority.

An efficient transport network



LOCATIONS OF PUBLIC CAR PARK AND ASSOCIATED CAPACITIES



RELAXING

For many people who live, work or visit St Albans the large open green spaces such as Verulamium Park and Clarence Park are significant attractions, and in this respect the city is well catered for. But while there appears to be no shortage of big, set-piece, open green spaces, St Albans is severely lacking in the many other scales and types of public space.

At the main focus points of the city, from the railway station forecourts to St Peters Street, there is a lack of attractive public seating and inviting areas in which to pause and enjoy St Albans. And opportunities to create smaller, more intimate areas where someone might find a moment's relief from the buzz of the city, or to rest as they move around it are seldom taken.

The range of people who are prepared to spend time in a place is a useful indicator of the public realm's quality. Whereas more able people are happy to perch on a brick wall or set of steps, some people need to rest as part of their journey and require a proper seat with a back and arm rests. Equally, children (as well as their parents) appreciate a public realm that is entertaining, interactive and compelling. If certain demographics are missing from the public realm then this is nearly always a sign that they are not being catered for.

Given the historic nature of much of the street network in St Albans, characterised by narrow streets and limited public spaces, it is important that when opportunities present themselves for the creation of places to pause they are taken. Taking advantage of micro-climates such as south-facing elevations or sheltered alcoves will help to identify locations for new public spaces within the city centre.

St Albans is well provided for when it comes to large, formal parks...

...but is less successful when it comes to smaller and more urban places to relax.

Limited range of public spaces

CONDITIONS

The city lacks intimate and intermediate public spaces within the city centre. There are few places for people to relax and reflect within the city centre other than within large, set-piece parklands. There are a lack of places to enjoy the city, particularly urban squares.

CHOICES

A full range of activities and users are not being catered for by the current range of public spaces in the city centre, limiting people's choices for spending time there.

CATALYSTS

Review the existing public space offer within the city centre with a view to broadening the existing range of spaces, accommodating both formal and informal activities that could include street entertainers.

Spaces for all occasions

A place for moving, not staying

CONDITIONS

There is very limited provision of public seating in the city centre.

CHOICES

People have very few opportunities to comfortably spend time in the city centre.

CATALYSTS

Introduce seating at regular intervals throughout the city centre predominantly for people to rest and organise themselves, as well as groups of seating in more formal public spaces.

A city to savour

No civic space for the city

CONDITIONS

The city centre lacks a well defined civic space that can act as a focus for large events.

CHOICES

Community cohesion, civic pride and a clear sense of identity are weakened.

CATALYSTS

Identify spaces within the city centre that can accommodate a range of formal functions for the city.

Public spaces worthy of an historic city

Limited tree planting

CONDITIONS

Despite the many large parks that surround the city core, the majority of streets and spaces are characterised by hard landscaping, with little in the way of bio-diversity, shade or elegance that tree planting and other soft landscaping could bring.

CHOICES

The city's streets are a far less pleasant place to spend time in than they could be due to a lack of trees and other soft landscaping.

CATALYSTS

Introduce avenues of trees and other soft-landscaping measures. The Civic Society's / Council's 'sponsor a tree' scheme should help to both raise the awareness of the benefits associated with street trees and help to increase their number within the city centre.

A green city

Spaces inaccessible to some

CONDITIONS

Missing dropped kerbs, narrow footways, illegal/ inconsiderate parking, poor street lighting, temporary footway obstructions (A-boards, etc.), steep gradients (even over short distances) and footway treatments that are difficult to move across can make moving around difficult or even impossible for many people.

CHOICES

Some people are essentially excluded from the city centre due to current detailing.

CATALYSTS

Ensure that streets are detailed in a way that makes them easy for people on foot to move through. Introduce seating at regular intervals throughout the city centre, predominantly for people to rest and organise themselves, as well as groups of seating in more formal public spaces.

Spaces for everyone

SUMMARY

NETWORK LEGIBILITY

Lack of street hierarchy	→	Inherently legible range of street types	
Inconsistent approach to materials	→	Simple, robust and elegant palette of materials	

CYCLING

Missing bicycle network	→	A city that encourages cycling	

WALKING

A series of isolated character islands	→	Well connected, legible character areas	
Lack of wayfinding assistance	→	A dependable, elegant solution for wayafinding	
Undervalued public realm	→	A public realm exploiting its maximum potential	
Limited character	→	A city full of surprise and delight	
Poor connections to surrounding areas	→	Seamless connections with hinterland	

GETTING THE TRAIN

Disconnected train station	→	A station for the city	
Poor rail interchange	→	Prioritise and expand facilities for interchange	

GETTING THE BUS

Bus bottleneck in the city centre	→	Optimised bus service routing	
Uncoordinated bus services	→	A legible bus network	

DRIVING

Strategic trips in the city centre	→	A city putting people first	
Little sense of arrival	→	Gateways to the city	
Driving is the easy option	→	Prioritise sustainable modes	
Perceived poor junction coordination	→	An efficient transport network	

RELAXING

Limited range of public spaces	→	Spaces for all occasions	
A place for moving, not staying	→	A city to savour	
No civic space for the city	→	Public spaces worthy of an historic city	
Limited tree planting	→	A green city	
Spaces inaccessible to some	→	Spaces for everyone	


greenline
724
NO ENTRY
Oaklands College

04 STRATEGY

INTRODUCTION

St Albans already has some very identifiable character areas, such as St Peters Street, the Cathedral and its grounds as well as George Street. Nowhere is perfect and, these places can always be improved, but within the context of St Albans City Centre, they are not the 'weak links'. Where the public realm primarily fails is not with its set-piece character areas, but in the way that they are approached, connected to each other and supported by smaller scale spaces.

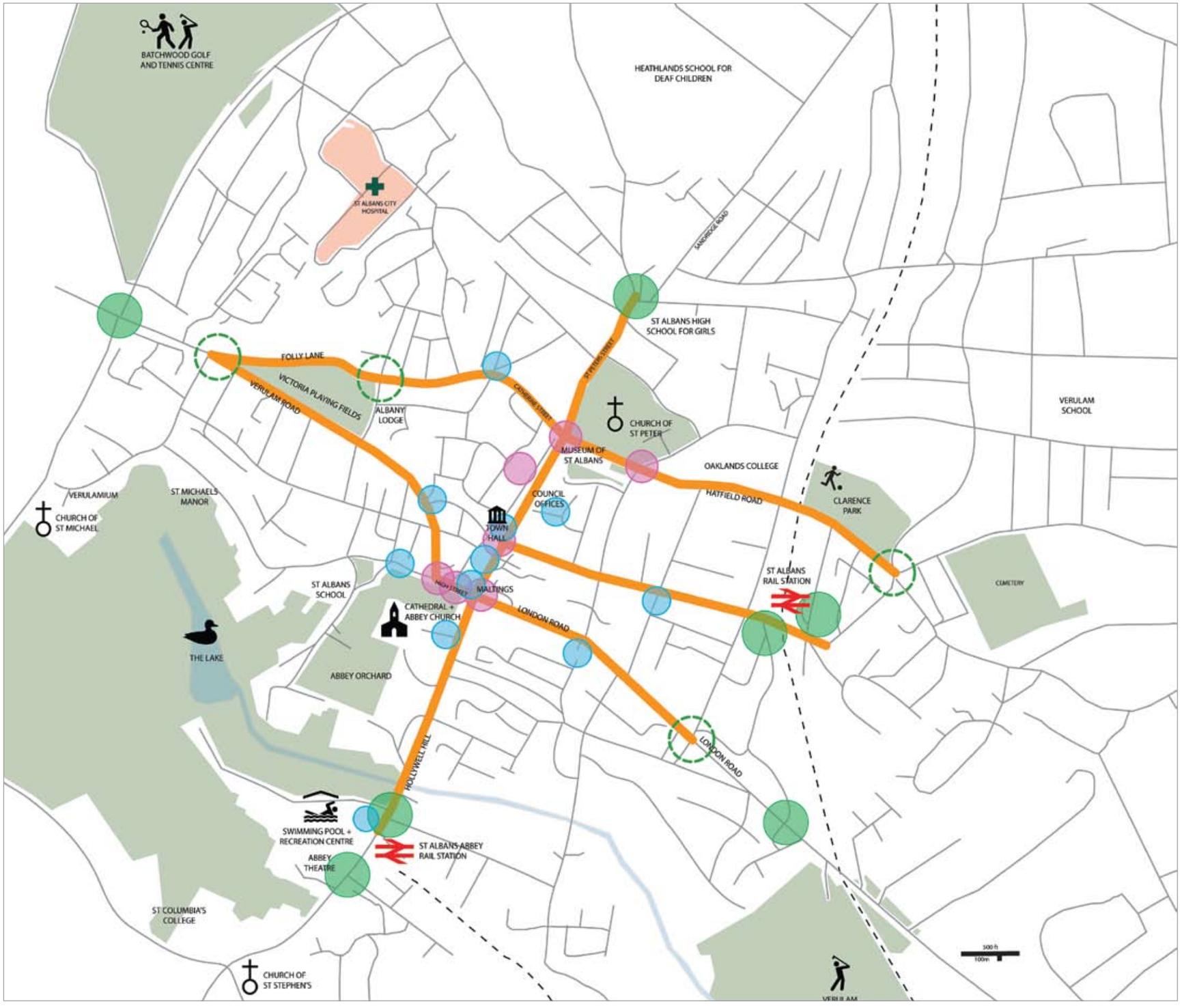
Therefore the Public Realm Programme for St Albans focuses on the following four types of space:

- Corridors: routes through and into the city centre
- Gateways: transition points at the edge of the city centre
- Connections: links between character areas
- Spaces: places in which to spend time in the public realm

Each category has a primary focus on a specific issue, but each individual scheme, whichever category it sits in, will perform, to some extent, all four roles. Together they attempt to realise the vision and principles established at the start of this document, along with the catalytic affects described in the previous section, thereby helping to achieve the overall vision for the public realm in St Albans.

For each category a number of specific schemes have been proposed and then outline costs have been estimated. These have been derived from our experience in the design and delivery of similar projects and have been based on costs per square metre and unit rates for individual street elements.

A final sub section has also been included, that contains a number of 'Defaults'. These are starting points for common elements within the public realm, such as pedestrian crossings and loadings bays. These types of features are often based on a standard arrangement, but too often this standard is not as good as it could be. Therefore the remainder of this section considers how relatively mundane, but no less important parts of the public realm can be improved.



Public Space Focus Areas

CORRIDORS

Corridors form the main thoroughfares into the city, and each should have its own identity and character, while all should be easily distinguishable from the lower-order streets around them. They are essential in serving the city, enabling goods and people to access it by a range of modes, and at the same time they are places in their own right. Lined with retail, office and residential uses, these streets cannot simply be treated as inter-urban highways. In many ways they are the hardest places to get right with the greatest range of competing demands and often the highest levels of compromise. Getting this balance right is difficult.

At the same time, no two corridors are the same, and St Albans is no different. London Road has a different set of demands placed on it compared to Hatfield Road, which is different again to Catherine Street. This also means that the solutions, although they may share common features, must be equally bespoke. And this isn't something that should be done just for functional reasons. The differences between these corridors should be celebrated. This will help to make the street network inherently legible, enabling different corridors to be easily distinguished from one another as well as helping to identify these higher order streets from the lower order streets around them.

For many people, corridors form the framework of the city, helping people to create a 'mental map' of where they are and where they may need to get to. The use of materials, colour coding, tree planting, existing and future vistas as well as the relationships with adjacent buildings all help to distinguish these streets from each other and the rest of the network.

The following corridors have been identified:

1 Victoria Street

2 St Peters Street (north)

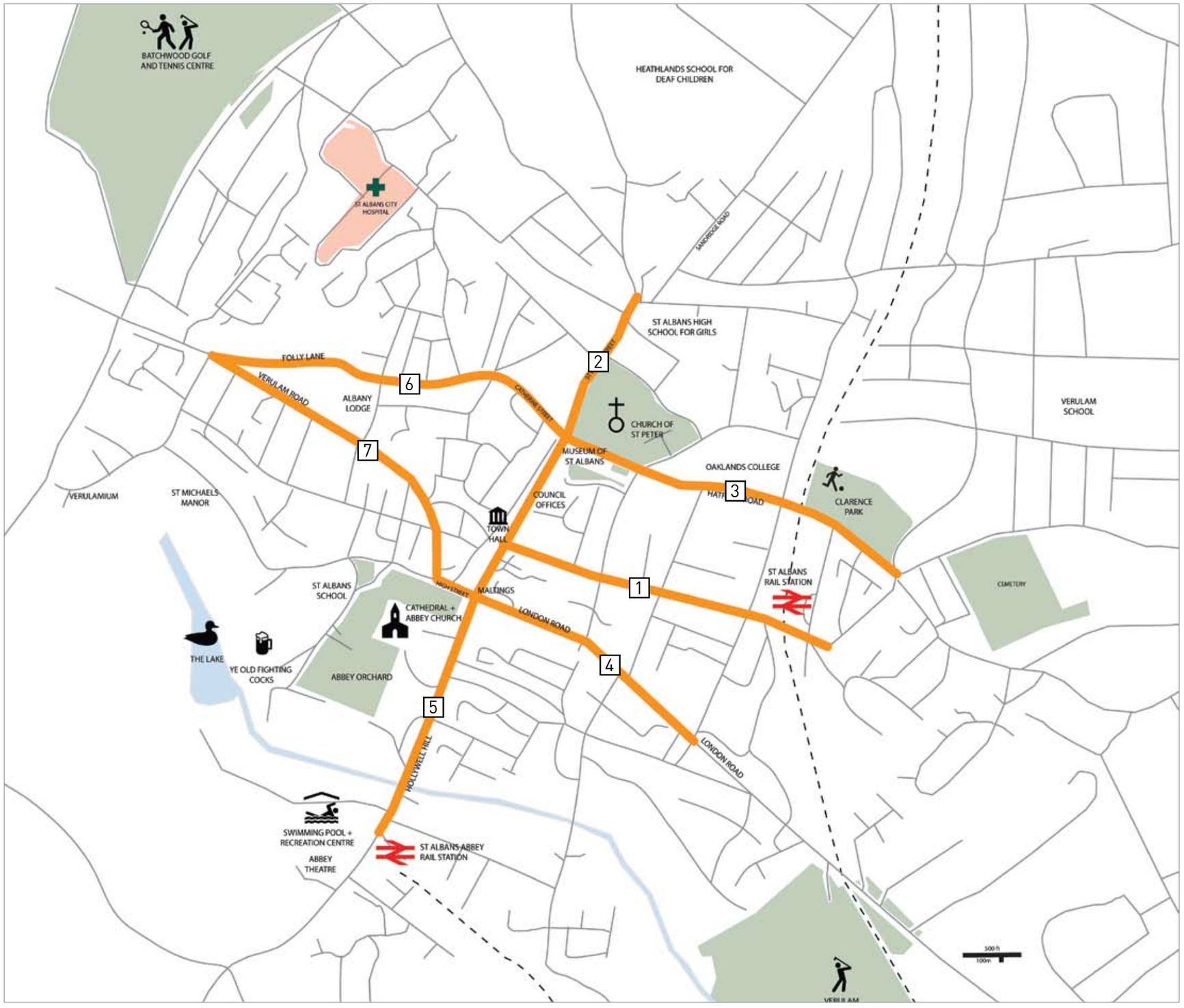
3 Hatfield Road

4 London Road

5 Holywell Hill

6 Catherine Street

7 Verulam Road



Key Corridors

Possible Catalysts

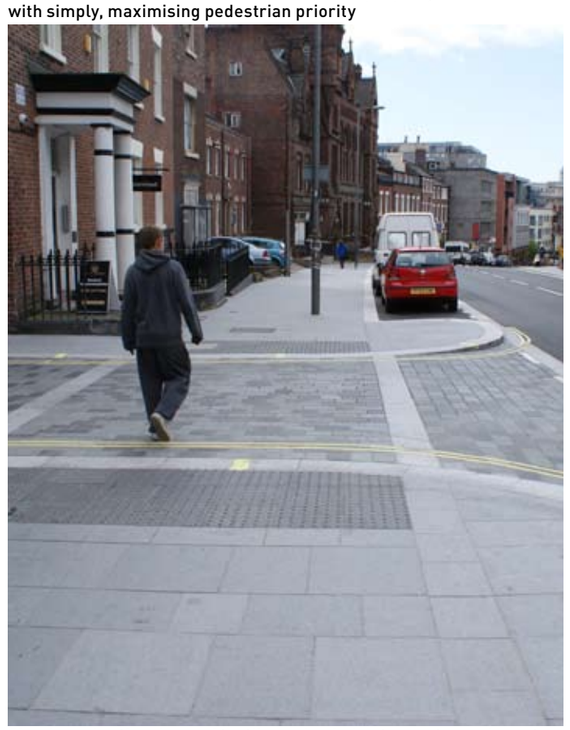
Side road entry treatments offer pedestrians additional priority and comfort

Central medians can be used for additional tree planting, lighting, cycle parking and other street furniture as well as aid crossing

Minimal road markings and changes in carriageway material help to break-up the linearity of a street, reducing vehicle speeds

Vehicle crossovers and accesses to adjacent property should be dealt with simply, maximising pedestrian priority

Avenues of trees have many benefits, that include being visually attractive



Simple and rational use of tactile paving helps to create an elegant public realm

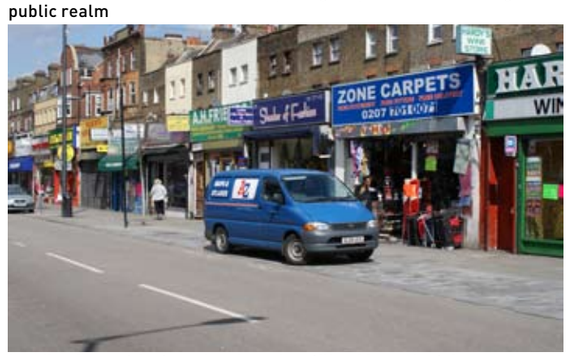
A well defined zone for all street furniture keeps the remaining, 'effective' footway width to a maximum

Raising pedestrian crossings offers additional priority for those who are walking

Combining different items of street furniture helps to reduce 'clutter' and increase room for pedestrians

Low kerb heights can improve pedestrian crossing and help to change the character of a street

Informal crossing points can be a useful addition where formal facilities are not appropriate



Loading bays at footway level can be utilised by pedestrians as additional footway when not in use

VICTORIA STREET

Victoria Street is one of the most important links in St Albans street network, connecting the main train station with the city centre. It is currently an under-whelming thoroughfare that fails to provide users with any inherent clues as to its status or provide a comfortable environment for those walking along it. Its role in the wider traffic network is confused, as it is not an A road but appears to serve an important radial function.

It is proposed that general traffic is diverted away from Victoria Street, allowing it to become a 'green corridor' predominantly for walking, cycling and bus users, creating a strong connection between the city centre and its main train station. This would be reinforced by a narrowed carriageway and an avenue of trees along with specific public realm interventions along the street to break-up its linearity (see Spaces).

Victoria Street has an almost endless quality that makes it unattractive to walk along


There is very little that distinguishes this street from those that cross it

Conditions & Choices

1 Carriageway parking bays create an overly wide carriageway, which encourages drivers to travel faster, in-turn making the street harder for pedestrians to cross informally and less attractive for cyclists.

2 Narrow footways makes the street difficult for pedestrians to navigate, particularly those with physical impediments, whether due to a permanent disability or due to a push chair.

3 The street looks bleak and unloved with a complete absence of street trees, offering a poor arrival experience into the centre and a poor perception of personal security, particularly at night.

4 The street lacks a sense of progression – either of getting closer to the centre, or of any change in character – and so there is a sense that you are not getting any closer to your destination. The street is overly linear, with no places for pedestrians to pause or to shorten drivers sight lines, resulting in a sense of endlessness and high vehicle speeds

5 The street has little to differentiate itself from those that run perpendicular to it. This compounds the sense the street isn't taking you anywhere of particular significance.

6 Pedestrian guardrailing, bollards, signal controller cabinets, other street furniture and A-boards narrow the effective footway width, creating an obstacle course that makes walking along the street an unnecessary chore.

7 Liberal use of road markings (centre lines, yellow boxes, keep clears) create an overly engineered aesthetic that provides all road users with a sense that drivers have unchallenged priority.

8 Even at very minor vehicle crossovers, there is a lack of priority for pedestrians, reinforcing the sense that those walking are secondary to those driving.

9 Inconsistent use of paving materials creates a street environment that looks overly fussy.

10 Infrequent formal opportunities for pedestrians to cross mean that the two sides of the street feel poorly connected to one-another

11 There is an absence of pubic seating despite the hilly topography, which detracts from the potential civility of the street, helping to create a pedestrian environment that feels more like a chore than a joy to move through.

12 Footways adjacent to bus stops are narrow leading to footway congestion and limited facilities, limiting the appeal of this mode.

13 Corner radii at side road junctions are very large, creating long pedestrian crossing distances on desire lines and dropped kerbs that are off the desire line as well as encouraging high vehicle speeds.

14 Pedestrian crossing facilities at junctions are unnecessarily narrow, making the pedestrian environment appear to be an afterthought, with the minimum done to accommodate their needs.

Catalysts

1 Widen footways to incorporate parking bays either wholly or two-wheels-up.

2 Adopt a consistent, narrower carriageway width with correspondingly wider footways to provide additional space for pedestrians, encourage lower vehicle speeds and create a street less dominated by vehicular traffic.

3 Introduce an avenue of trees along the street. Utilities traditionally run along a street's footways - the most common reason for not being able to plant trees is the presence of utilities. If footways are to be widened into the carriageway then there is a good chance that trees can be planted in this zone.

4 Create pocket spaces and highlight junctions to break-up the linearity of the street and provide intermediate points for people to aim for as they travel along it.

5 Create a streetscene worthy of the street's place in the network hierarchy as the most important link to the city centre for people arriving by train.

6 Undertake a full de-cluttering audit and pedestrian guardrail audit with a view to removing, relocating and merging existing items of street furniture.

7 Undertake an audit of all road markings with a view to retaining only those which are absolutely necessary.

8 Wherever possible the footway should form a continuous, level route for pedestrians, providing inferred priority over vehicular traffic at crossovers and side roads.

9 Adopt a unified, consistent palette of materials along the entire street, using the city centre materials palette described below.

10 Provide formal pedestrian crossing facilities at regular intervals along the street.

11 Provide regular opportunities for pedestrians to sit and rest along the street.

12 Provide all bus stops with shelters and ensure that their locations minimise the potential for footway congestion.

13 Reduce corner radii and introduce entry treatments at side road junctions.

14 Provide more than just the minimum standards for pedestrians – wherever possible give them what they want and not just what the standards say that you can get away with.

Estimated Project Cost:

£500k - £1m


Existing street layout

St Peters Street (North)

The A1081 St Peters Street (North)/Harpenden Road is one of the few major radial routes serving St Albans that doesn't quickly connect into a major motorway junction or other part of the strategic highway network. Even close to the city centre this corridor lacks the continuous frontage that is characteristic of many of the others, serving large buildings set back from the street. As you travel further away from the centre the corridor quickly becomes relatively rural in appearance. This corridor also tends to be wider than the other major radial routes into the city centre, allowing the current inclusion of a central ghost island for much of its length.

As is the case with many of St Albans corridors, when space allows the opportunity is normally taken to exploit this with the introduction of further highway engineering features, such as additional signing and lining, segregated right turn lanes or inset bus stops. These features appear to be of limited benefit along this corridor and may even result in higher vehicle speeds and less attentive driving as drivers become more reliant on these highway features. Side road junctions, even very minor ones, are characterised by large radii and wide lane widths, again encouraging higher vehicle speeds as well as creating a more intimidating environment for pedestrians. The balance between modes along this corridor needs to be redressed, with more emphasis put on the promotion and prioritisation of those walking, cycling and using bus services.

Estimated Project Cost:

£500k - £1m

Hatfield Road

The A1057 Hatfield Road is flanked by a far greater proportion of post-war development than the other corridors, containing a number of large footprint, multi-storey structures that house civic and commercial functions. These are often set well back from the street with large gaps between neighbouring buildings. This makes the corridor feel overly long when travelling along it is as it lacks interest and richness, something that most other corridors in St Albans do very well.

Despite the scale of adjacent buildings the street itself is very constrained, particularly at specific pinch points such as the bridge across the railway line. This necessitates narrow carriageway and footway widths, creating a particularly poor environment for cyclists. This narrow widths limits opportunities to improve the corridor, but side road entry treatments and improved cross-overs would make walking along the street more attractive.

Estimated Project Cost:

£200k - £500k

London Road

The A1081 London Road is probably the most urban of all the corridors in St Albans. Close to the city centre it contains a wide range of land uses and an equally wide range of building scales, with nearly all of them facing directly onto the street. This results in a large number of competing demands on the street, from waiting and loading activity, to movement by all modes along the street as well as pedestrian demand for crossing. Much of the design of this section of the corridor has been in an attempt to separate out these various demands, particularly focusing on maintaining an unobstructed route for vehicular traffic. But the resulting interventions are often discrete measures rather than forming a coordinated whole and, again, rely on trunk road engineering solutions that are unsuitable for this type of environment. On-street parking could be raised to footway level to reduce the scale of the carriagway, the need for left-turn lanes and ghost islands should be reviewed and avenues of trees should be planted where possible.

Further away from the city centre the corridor becomes much larger in scale, with a lack of direct frontage and two lane dualling. If a park and ride facility was to be introduced then this part of the corridor may provide an opportunity to provide the means for buses to by-pass general traffic delay and enjoy journey time benefits.

Estimated Project Cost:

£1m - £2m

Holywell Hill

The A1583 Holywell Hill feels like the most authentic approach to St Albans, passing Verulamium Park and the cathedral, as well as a number of historic coaching inns. This rich history is currently not reflected in the street design, reverting to a relatively ordinary public realm relying on standard highway engineering solutions. Footways are relatively narrow with the street feeling dominated by cars (moving and parked). Towards the Abbey Station the carriageway becomes much larger in scale, incorporating a central median that contains mature trees, as well as two lane dualling and right-turn lanes. Despite the large scale of this infrastructure, this part of Holywell Hill does start to suggest the potential grandeur that this corridor could emphasise.

Reducing the amount of on-street parking and placing what remains at footway level (made possible through corresponding footway widening) the dominance of the carriageway on the streetscene will be substantially reduced. An avenue of trees should be introduced along the same alignment as these parking bays, while all side-roads should receive entry treatments that provide pedestrians with level crossing. The key requirement is to create a street that fully reflects the historic importance of the city and provides a more appropriate arrival experience.

Estimated Project Cost:

£500k - £1m

Catherine Street

The A4147 Catherine Street feels more akin to a residential distributor street, rather than a major radial route into the city centre. The street layout is very simple, primarily as a result of its relatively narrow width limiting the scope to do much else, with narrow footways and carriageways combining to create an often unpleasant pedestrian environment, particularly when being passed by large vehicles. On-street waiting is banned for almost its entire length and, when combined with the other features listed above, the street can appear bleak and empty.

There is limited scope for any kind of continuous treatment given the limited width. It is recommended that the use of road centre-line markings is reconsidered, as this will help to focus road users attentions on the local context and slow vehicle speeds. Most junction corner radii are already quite tight, but the inclusion of side road entry treatments would improve pedestrian comfort and priority as well as slow vehicle speeds further. The main interventions are best focused on specific areas, and an example of what this may entail for Catherine Street is discussed in the section on Spaces.

Estimated Project Cost:

£200k - £500k

Verulam Road

The A5183 Verulam Road contains a number of restaurants and bars, particularly as you get closer to the city centre. The street also provides access to the Christopher Place shopping centre and is an important link to George Street and the Romelands area. Despite the street's relative importance within the city centre the street also has to handle relatively large traffic flows. In the short-term this conflict is unlikely to be resolved, but longer-term it is recommended that consideration is given to down-grading Verulamium Road, which would allow footways to be widened, pedestrian crossing will be easier and restaurants will be able to fully utilise their outdoor seating. These changes will help to realise Verulam Road as a new city centre character area, and not just a corridor into the city.

Estimated Project Cost:

£1M - £2M

GATEWAYS

The entry points to towns and cities have always been important locations. Traditionally they were fortified points to protect, but also status symbols and landmarks. Whereas the first description may no longer be of any concern, the same cannot be said of the last two. The gateways into St Albans mark transition points from the generally rural area beyond to the urban area within. They also mark a similar transition in the highway network, where roads designed predominantly to move people as efficiently as possible from A to B are replaced by streets whose primary function (and the function of towns and cities more generally) is to provide access to other people and to goods. This is an important distinction, not just in terms of the way places function, but also in the inherent signals that a highway network sends to drivers about what is appropriate behaviour. In turn this affects road safety and general civility.

Locations have been identified within St Albans where this transition seems most appropriate - on major radial routes into the city at transition points between the urbanity of the city and the rural hinterland beyond. A number of other locations have also been selected where secondary or intermediate gateways should be created. These are generally located at important junctions within the network and help to establish the importance of certain routes and aid network legibility. Importantly, many of the locations identified for gateway treatment do not suffer from the same physical constraints as the rest of St Albans, providing the scope to intervene. In a city characterised by a centre with narrow streets, these are rare opportunities.

The following gateways have been identified:

Gateways: Primary

1 Southern Gateway (Holywell Hill with Griffiths Way)

2 Cricketers Gateway (Harpenden Road with Sandridge Road)

3 Hatfield Gateway (Hatfield Road with Ashley Road)

4 Grosvenor Gateway (London Road with Grosvener Road)

5 Western Gateway (Verulam Road with Bluehouse Hill)

6 City Station Eastern Forecourt

7 City Station Western Forecourt

8 Abbey Station Forecourt

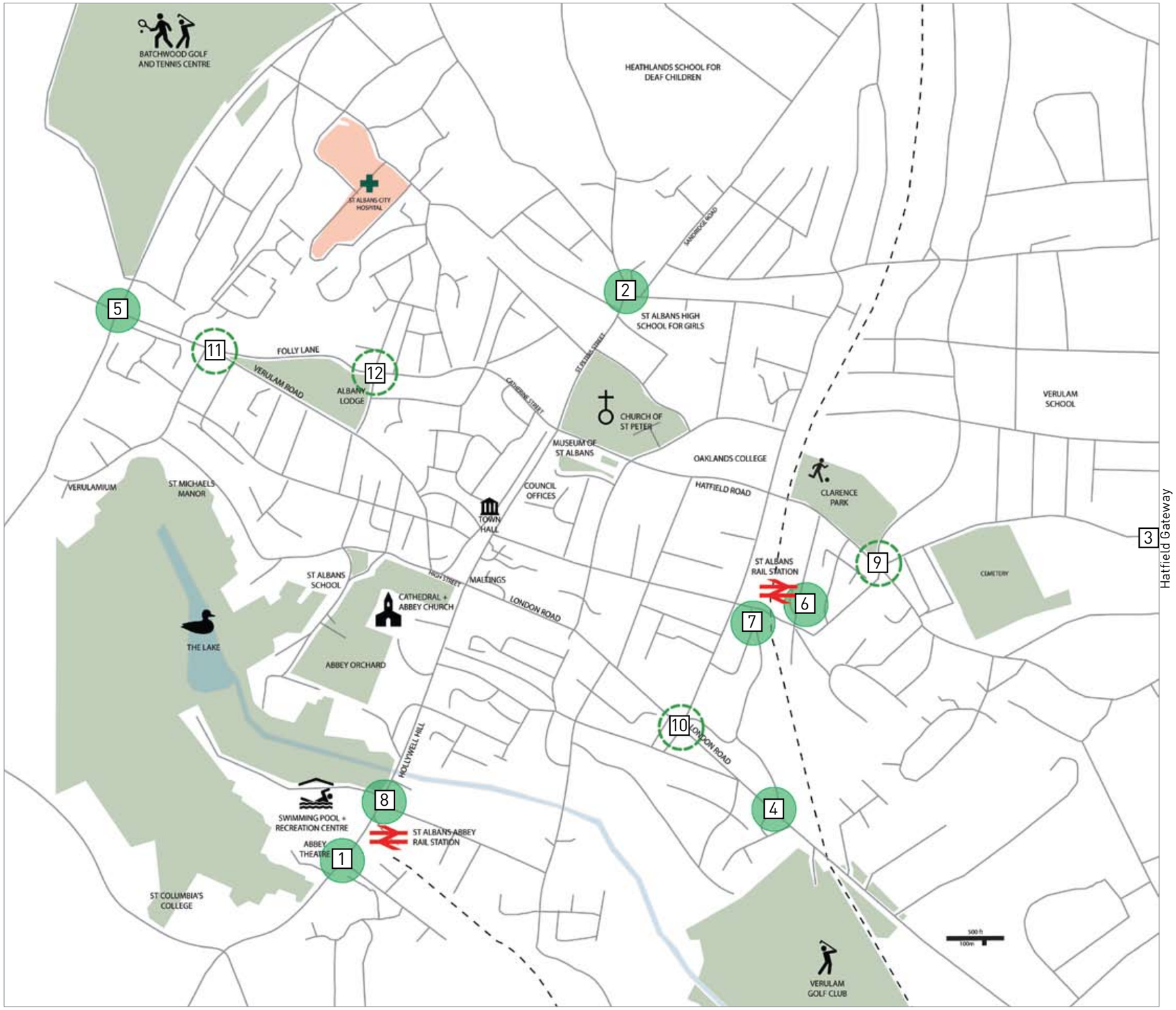
Gateways: Secondary

9 Hatfield Road with Stanhope Road

10 London Road with Alma Road

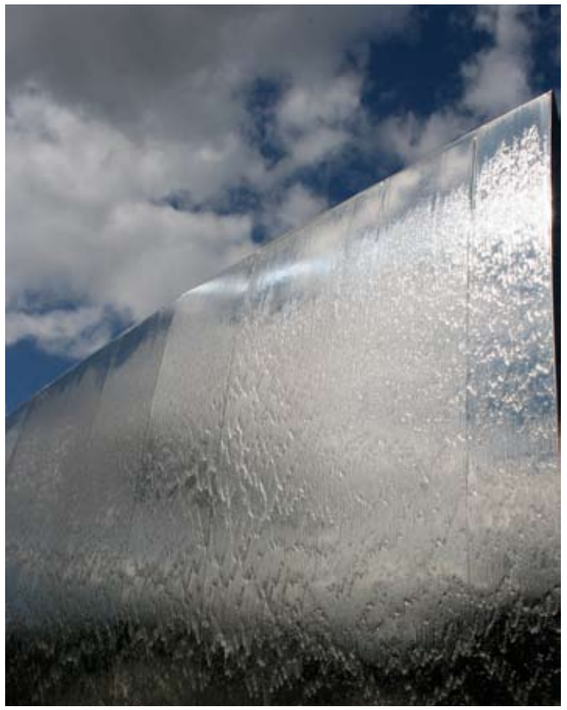
11 Verulam Road with Folly Lane

12 Catherine Street with Normandy Road



Possible Catalysts

Artistic lighting of even very modest buildings can create a dramatic entry point



Water features can be used to highlight important locations

Use of contrasting materials can help to raise the profile of a junction

Keeping the street scene simple allows the adjacent architecture and local context to take centre stage

This fake 'historic' wall is used to screen an unsightly building and helps to provide a more positive image of the area

Gateways are ideal places for pieces of artwork, especially if they have additional uses

Festivals, such as those using outdoor lighting, can help to define spaces and encourage people to explore the city

Public art can come in all shapes and sizes, helping people to create a 'mental map' of a place

Bespoke items of street furniture help to reinforce a place's status within the local network

The use of pedestrian guardrailing should always be questioned and never installed because 'we've always done it that way'

SOUTHERN GATEWAY (HOLYWELL HILL)

Holywell Hill is the most important of all the approaches to the city centre, passing Verulamium Park, historic coaching inns and the cathedral, as well as leading straight to St Peters Street. However, the transition from the rural surroundings to the edge of the city along this approach is currently marked by a trunk road roundabout and modern office buildings. This junction provides an opportunity to welcome people to St Albans, which is currently not being taken.

A large piece of highway infrastructure says little about St Albans

Estimated Project Cost:

£200k - £500k

Conditions & Choices

1. The use of standard highway engineering features, such as signing and lining fails to recognise this location as a transition point between the highway network and the City Centre. This leads to a corresponding absence of change in the way that road users, and particularly drivers, behave.
2. Existing, wide lane widths and large corner radii encourage high vehicle speeds.
3. There is little sense of identity that would suggest to drivers that they are entering St Albans - the surrounding architecture is is generally nondescript and there is little of note.
4. There is an absence of facilities for either pedestrians or cyclists (the existing Zebra crossing on Griffith Way is a long way from the pedestrian desire line). Although current flows for these two modes may be low the environment currently reinforces this situation, inferring to drivers that this is still an area where vehicles dominate.
5. The Griffith Way arm of the junction appears to have the same status within the local network hierarchy as Holywell Hill, making the network inherently unlegible.
6. The function of the lay-by to the west of the junction is unclear and its execution is unsympathetic to the pedestrian environment, given its apparent infrequent use. This makes those walking along the remaining strip of footway feel marginalised.

Catalysts

1. The junction needs to ensure that all road users have a clear understanding of the change in context that this location represents, acting as a transition from the highway network to the south, to the city centre to the north. This could be achieved through a reduction in signing and lining, new street lighting, treatment of the carriageway in a coloured anti-skid or wearing course and/or reduction in the kerb height through the raising of the carriageway.
2. The junction should be designed for a lower speed environment, with smaller corner radii and narrower lanes, possibly adopting a continental style of roundabout with much greater deflection. This could be complimented by a reduction in the size of the central island and corresponding reduction in the overall footprint of the junction.
3. Gateways are generally an ideal location for public art, helping to signify the transition into the town centre, enhance local distinctiveness and identity, and improve legibility.
4. Zebra crossings should be introduced at least on the northern and eastern arms of the junction, located as close as possible to the desire line (reducing the size of the roundabout will also help with this). The crossings could also be incorporated into any raised carriageway section.
5. Holywell Hill has the potential to be a grand avenue leading up to the city centre, lined with formal tree planting, street lighting and banners. The junction with Griffith Way should mark the start of this.
6. The space currently taken up by the junction and adjacent carriageway could be rationalised, providing more room for pedestrians and the possibility of formal, off-carriageway cycle facilities that could link into new facilities within the Verulamium Park and also to Griffith Way.

Existing junction layout

PRIMARY GATEWAYS

Cricketers Gateway (Harpenden Road with Sandridge Road)

The A1081 Harpenden Road and the B651 Sandridge Road currently meet at a priority junction to the north of the city centre, characterised by wide and under-utilised carriageways and a large, grass island. The current facilities for pedestrians and cyclists are poor and the arrangement encourages high vehicle speeds.

Simply by rationalising the existing street layout it would be possible to substantially increase footway widths and reduce vehicle speeds, improving crossing ease for pedestrians and the attractiveness of the route for cyclists. As with a number of potential gateway locations in St Albans, space is not the problem. This provides the opportunity to reconsider how the highway is laid out and divided between the different modes.

Estimated Project Cost:

£200k - £500k

Hatfield Gateway (Hatfield Road with Ashley Road)

The junction of the A1057 Hatfield Road with Ashley Road, Beaumont Avenue and Beechwood Avenue is particularly interesting because it can be approached from five different directions. This creates an important point of convergence within the wider network that most local people will be able to picture in their heads and where those who are new to St Albans will need to make a decision about which route to take. At the moment the junction is arranged as two, closely associated mini-roundabouts. These are particularly difficult for pedestrians to cross due to the number of possible routes that drivers approaching from different directions can take through the junction, while for cyclists the experience can be particularly intimidating. The junction itself also has a large footprint, resulting in narrow footways.

By reconsidering the arrangement and method of control at this junction, possibly through the use of signals, it should be possible to reduce its scale while improving pedestrian permeability and conditions for cyclists. Existing grassed areas to either side of the eastern approach could be utilised for landscaping.

Estimated Project Cost:

£200k - £500k

Grosvenor Gateway (London Road with Grosvener Road)

The scale of the junction of the A1081 London Road with Grosvener Road appears to be at odds with its strategic importance within the wider network. The junction is large while the side roads that it serves would seem to be relatively minor. However, this location is the first point at which London Road starts to become fully urban, with more consistent frontage and higher levels of activity.

Once again, the scale of the existing junction provides the opportunity to increase footway widths and improve pedestrian crossing facilities at the same time as creating an appropriate gateway to the city.

Estimated Project Cost:

£200k - £500k

Western Gateway (Verulam Road with Bluehouse Hill)

The junction of the A5183 Verulam Road with the A4147 Hemel Hempstead Road is the largest and most rural of all the junctions identified as potential gateway locations. Given its location, demand for pedestrian and cycle movements is far lower than in the other gateway locations and so restructuring the junction is less critical. However, the large central island associated with the roundabout does provide an opportunity to introduce an iconic landmark feature.

Estimated Project Cost:

N.A.

City Station Eastern Forecourt

In many ways St Albans station forecourt has many positive features. Firstly, it is relatively large, allowing a range of possible forecourt arrangements to be considered and for the forecourt to contain a number of functions. Secondly, it is not dominated by parking, which should make introducing any changes simpler as the Train Operating Company is not generating a significant revenue stream from this area. However, the main forecourt to St Albans primary station is dominated by bus stopping facilities and kiss-and-ride drop-off. The arrival experience is further hindered as the forecourt itself faces away from the city centre. As an important commuter station for those working in London, parking at the station for all modes is at a premium.

The eastern forecourt has relatively recently undergone significant changes that have substantially improved the operation of buses and the convenience of kiss-and-ride. However, this has been achieved at some expense to the overall arrival experience, especially for those on foot. Introducing measures to increase the amount of space for people to wait and orientate themselves in front of the station would significantly improve the arrival experience. Additional cycle parking is also required and this should be introduced where possible. Longer term the bus stops could be relocated on to Station Way, and the kiss-and-ride facilities could be relocated, providing the room for a larger station forecourt.

Estimated Project Cost:

£1m - £2m

City Station Western Forecourt

At the City Station, the western entrance is the closest to St Albans city centre, and potentially provides the most legible walking route. Within the station this exit (alongside the platform for trains arriving from London) is not signed, which means that the majority of visitors to St Albans actually alight from a train next to this exit, only to be signed up and over the railway lines to the eastern entrance, to then have to cross back over the railway lines again via Victoria Street (that's if they have managed to find out which direction the city centre is). Even if someone has managed to find the western exit the experience is marred by a public realm that is dominated by car and motorcycle parking.

The western forecourt at the City Station presents a great opportunity to increase the legibility of the connection between it and the city centre - one that is currently not being utilised. The forecourt should be redesigned to provide a far better arrival experience, at the same time as new signage within the station that makes the presence and benefits of this exit clear.

Estimated Project Cost:

£200k - £500k

Abbey Station Forecourt

The Abbey Station is far smaller than the City Station, and so it is understandable that the facilities are on a relatively smaller scale. The facilities that are provided are generally modern and in good condition. Where the station could be significantly improved is with its presence from the A5183 Holywell Hill, as well as the environment for pedestrians. The existence of a station in this location is hard to spot from the main road, and much could be done to raise its profile by clearing away much of the 'clutter' that is currently in place. Future plans to introduce a higher frequency, light-rail service to replace the existing trains will only increase the need for a better public realm.

For pedestrians, the existing, large corner radii at the junction should be tightened up, a footway level entry treatment should be introduced along with new signage for the station. A formal pedestrian crossing facility already exists immediately to the north of Prospect Road, serving the Leisure Centre. A second, similar facility at the entrance to the Abbey Station would probably place these too close together, but an informal crossing, utilising the existing central median, would be beneficial.

Estimated Project Cost:

£25k - £50k

SECONDARY GATEWAYS

Hatfield Road with Stanhope Road

Even though the scale of the streets approaching the junction of the A1057 Hatfield Road with the B691 Stanhope Road appear relatively small, the junction itself is very large, dominating the area. For a relatively central location, and in comparison with the rest of St Albans, this junction feels particularly over sized. Despite this scale the pedestrian facilities are good, but the junction does little to help road users understand the local context, including the soon-to-be-reached city centre.

The junction needs to be re-balanced, with the carriageway reduced in size, enabling the footways to be widened. The need for the existing pedestrian guardrail should be reviewed and potential locations for public art should be identified. This remodelling should be possible while still retaining the existing signalling equipment, although its positioning will need to be adjusted.

Estimated Project Cost:

£200k - £500k

London Road with Alma Road

The streetscape associated with the junction of the A1081 London Road with Alma Road appears unloved, in contrast with some of the surrounding architecture. Spaces to either side of Alma Road on the approach to the junction could be used more positively. But one only contains a large number of bollards and the other a couple of tired looking benches. The junction has the potential to offer pedestrians a comfortable and inviting place to pause, while for drivers it could be a memorable location in the network as you approach the city centre.

Estimated Project Cost:

£200k - £500k

Verulam Road with Folly Lane

The existing junction is dominated by road markings, with a wide carriageway and a lack of deflection encouraging high vehicle speeds. Facilities for pedestrians are poor and the environment is intimidating for cyclists. It is proposed that the junction is reduced in size with the possibility of convertion to a traditional priority arrangement, with the western arm of the A5183 Verulam Road and the A4147 Catherine Street becoming the mainline movement. These changes would help to reduce the size of the carriageway, freeing up additional footway space that could also accommodate tree planting and bespoke street lighting. Existing crossovers should be improved to provide better pedestrian priority and lining and signing should be reduced to a minimum.

Estimated Project Cost:

£100k - £200k

Catherine Street with Normandy Road

The signalised junction of the A4147 Catherine Street with Normandy Road is very large and it stands in stark contrast to the other junctions in this part of the network. This is partly because Normandy Road serves St Albans City Hospital, but there is a lack of consistency between the size of the corner radii used that encourages high vehicles speeds and creates long pedestrian crossing distances.

The existing signal control provides pedestrians with good crossing facilities and the existing signalling equipment could be retained. But the kerb alignments should be reviewed to provide increased footway space and help to encourage lower vehicle speeds. The need for pedestrian guardrail should also be reviewed. The large area of footway to the northeast of the junction could be better utilised, accommodating seating and/or artwork.

Estimated Project Cost:

£100k - £200k

CONNECTIONS

Streets are often thought of as elements within towns and cities that connect places together. And to a certain extent they do. But when it comes to a busy compact centre such as St Albans it is often more helpful to start thinking of the streets themselves as the places - destinations where people want to reach for shopping, relaxing and working. St Peters Street, George Street, Verulam Road and Victoria Street are all places and destinations in their own rights. This then places a renewed emphasis on those points in the network where these streets connect together.

St Albans contains a number of very distinct character areas, most commonly defined by streets whose users can easily picture in their minds as different places (St Peters Street, High Street, George Street, etc). Therefore the points in the public realm that connect these areas together become crucial in creating a city that is comfortable and easy to move around. Unfortunately this is an area where the public realm in St Albans does particularly poorly. For example, the roundabout at the northern end of St Peters Street does a poor job of connecting this area with St Peters Church. Equally, the High Street could do much more to strengthen the links between Market Place, the Cathedral and George Street.

The following connection have been identified:

1 The Clock Tower (Market Place, French Row, The Vintry)

2 St Peters Junction (St Peters Street with Hatfield Road)

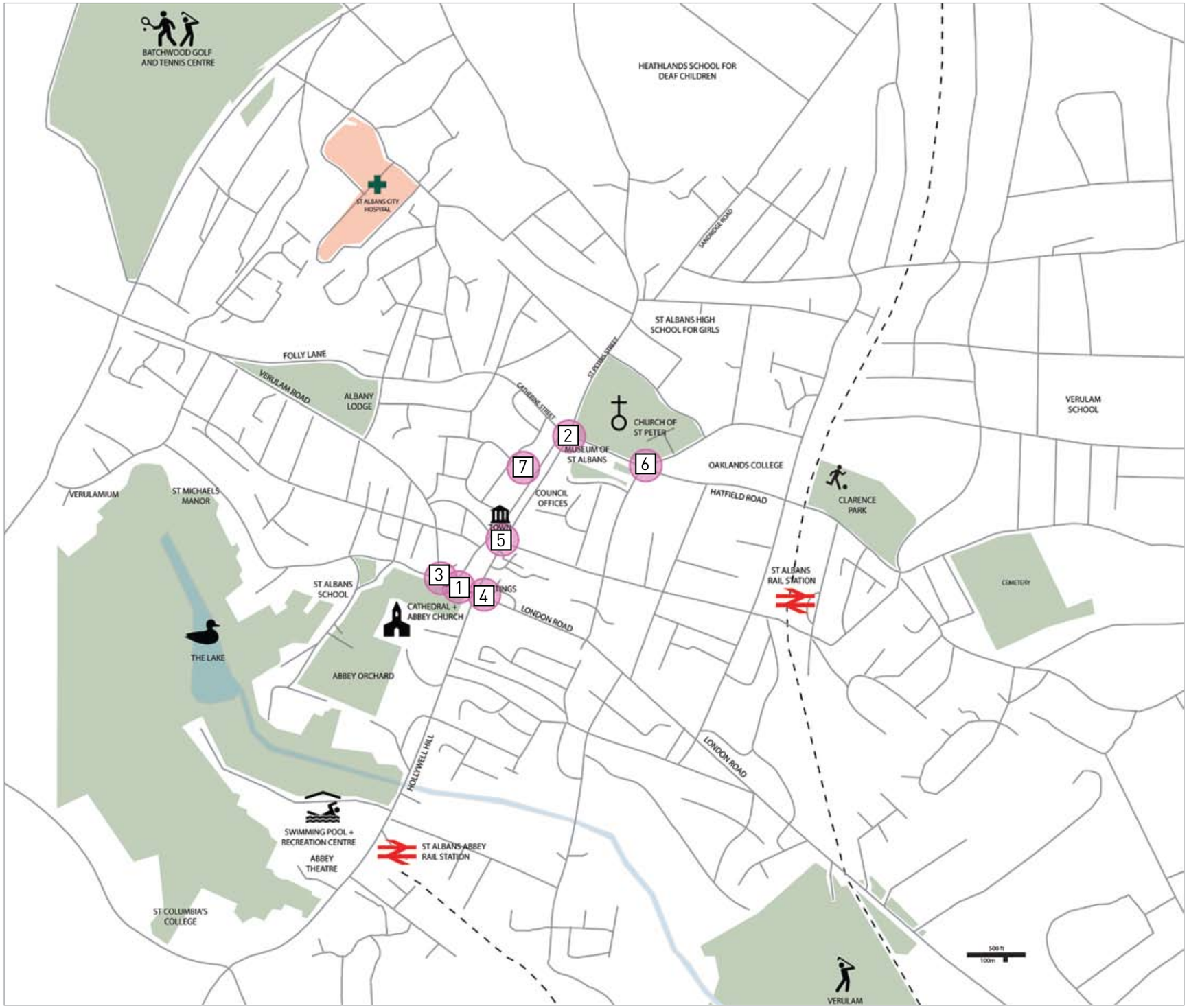
3 George Street Square (George Street with High Street)

4 Peahen Junction (Holywell Hill, London Road, High Street)

5 Victoria Junction (Victoria Street with St Peters Street)

6 Upper Marlborough Junction (Hatfield Road with Upper Marlborough Road)

7 Drovers Alleyway



Key Connections

Possible Catalysts

Connections are often decision points within the network and are therefore ideal locations for wayfinding aids

Clear, uncluttered footways, without A-boards create a comfortable walking environment

Even minor connections should be thought about carefully

Crossing points should be placed as close as possible to pedestrian desire lines

Wherever possible vistas should be used to help people navigate around the city

Connections are often places where people choose to meet with friends, so seating (formal and informal) is a useful addition

Protecting important views along corridors leading away from Connections will further help to create a legible city

Continuing footway materials across the carriageway helps to reinforce pedestrian priority

Minimising the severing affect of traffic on pedestrian movements is key to creating successful connections

Reducing the scale of junctions and maximising footway space helps to create a comfortable environment to walk in

Public art can help to highlight important Connections within the network

THE CLOCK TOWER

This area is probably the most important point for the public realm in all of St. Albans - in many ways it is the centre of the city. It is the point where the shopping area of St. Peters to the north meets the Cathedral grounds to the south, as well as the independent shopping area of George Street to the west, the collection of restaurants along Verulam Road to the north-west and the junction to the east with London Road and Holywell Hill, both key corridors into the city. The success of this relatively small part of the public realm to connect these areas together is central to the wider success of St Albans' public realm in terms of legibility, permeability and comfort. In addition to this the area also acts as one of St Albans few urban public spaces where people can pause and relax.

Estimated Project Cost:

£500k - £1m

The area is already a popular place for people to pause and is one of the few urban public spaces in the city

Existing wide crossing is already successful

A-boards fill the narrow footways

The entrance to the Victorian Arcade is currently easily missed by pedestrians on the street

The street is dominated by space for vehicles

The narrowing of the carriageway and the introduction of trees would help to redress the balance between modes.

Conditions & Choices

1. For such an important space for pedestrians to orientate themselves and pause in the City Centre it is considered a poor compromise that vehicular traffic is allowed to travel through Market Place, past the clock tower - especially given such low flows when compared with pedestrian numbers in the area.
2. The seating, as well as the low wall around the base of the Clock Tower, is well used. However, the existing arrangement is relatively inefficient in terms of the number of people that it can accommodate and observations suggest that further seating would be well used.
3. Waxhouse Gate forms a key part of St Albans historic charm, but on its own fails to create an obvious link between the city centre to the north and Cathedral to the south. Therefore the public realm must help in highlighting this important link. The current crossing is usefully wide and the small element block work used in the carriageway helps to reduce its dominance, but the area fails to be perceived as a single space with a strong north-south unity.
4. To the east of Waxhouse Gate the High Street is dominated by general traffic lanes and a handful of parking spaces. The footways are narrow and their effective width is further reduced by A-boards. This is considered a poor compromise for such an important location, especially given the quality of the adjacent architecture.

Catalysts

1. Vehicles are already banned from Market Place on market days. It is recommended that this is made permanent.
2. Redesign the public space in front of the Clock Tower to provide greater quantities of seating.
3. Redesign the area between the Clock Tower and Waxhouse Gate as a single public space that gives drivers the sense that they are passing through it and which inherently suggests to pedestrians that the north-south link is the dominant one.
4. Reduce the size of the existing parking bay and limit parking to waiting only during the mornings and evenings. Narrow the carriageway and plant trees in the newly widened footways. Ensure stronger policing of A-boards.

Existing street layout

St Peters Junction (St Peters Street with Hatfield Road)

The existing junction is a poor compromise for the city. The existing pedestrian guardrailing and poorly located crossing points effectively create a barrier to walking at the northern end of St Peters Street. The situation for cycling is little better, with the roundabout encouraging high vehicle speeds. The junction also has a very large footprint in a location where land is very much at a premium. The resulting narrow footways are an inappropriate compromise so close to St Albans main retail area. It is acknowledged that the roundabout does perform a valuable role, as it enables a number of buses to do u-turns at the ends of their route. However, it should be possible to find alternative ways to achieve this if a far better public realm can be achieved. Any changes would be subject to discussions with bus operators and the wider Quality Network Partnership.

Replacing the existing roundabout with a signalised crossroads would bring with it a number of significant benefits. Firstly, it should significantly reduce the carriageway footprint, enabling the adjacent footways to be widened. Secondly, it could incorporate a full pedestrian stage that includes diagonal crossings, providing facilities on desire lines. Lastly, it would enable greater control over the priorities afforded to different approaches, providing improved traffic management.

Estimated Project Cost:

£200k - £500k

George Street Corner (George Street with High Street)

The carriageway at this location is very wide and difficult for pedestrians to cross. This point appears to be a complete non-event within the wider street network. And yet it links the High Street with George Street, a unique and enchanting part of St Albans that is actually very difficult to find. The only clue is a couple of 20 mph signs that block the footway.

By narrowing and raising the carriageway, perhaps in a coloured asphalt or with the addition of a coloured anti-skid treatment, it will be possible to widen the footways. Tree planting and seating will help to create a space that helps to link George Street with the High Street and also provides an opportunity to rest. This area could also be suitable location for a piece of artwork.

Estimated Project Cost:

£100k - £200k

Peahen Junction (Holywell Hill, London Road and High Street)

This junction acts as an important connection between the main retail area of St Peters to the north with the cathedral to the south. Its prominence within the wider network is achieved through the striking architecture of the adjacent buildings, particularly the Peahen public house with its ornate balcony. But the quality of the pedestrian environment is poor, suffering from the common affliction of narrow footways and pedestrian crossings.

The public realm at Peahen junction has recently received a number of improvements and it is acknowledged that further benefits to the public realm will only be possible if traffic capacity is reduced in line with urgently needed measures to improve air quality. Limiting traffic on Chequer Street to buses and access only may make this possible.

Estimated Project Cost:

£50k - £100k

Victoria Junction (Victoria Street with St Peters Street)

The footways on the eastern, Victoria Street side of the junction are sub-standard in width and frequently become overcrowded, forcing pedestrians into the carriageway. For those arriving by train at the City Station and walking to the centre this junction is their first taste of what the city core has to offer. The removal of general through traffic from this junction could enable a much more appropriate balance to be struck, with footways and crossings widened. The ramifications of reducing general traffic on St Peters Street should not be underestimated, as they would facilitate the introduction of a much better pedestrian link between Victoria Street, St Peters Street and the Old Town Hall, creating a far better arrival experience to the city core.

Estimated Project Cost:

£50k - £100k

Marlborough Junction (Hatfield Road with Upper Marlborough Road)

The double roundabouts on Hatfield Road at the junctions with Upper Marlborough Road and St Peters Road fails to create an attractive and convenient link for pedestrians and cyclists. There is only a single formal pedestrian crossing, located on the western arm of the junction. Given the complicated vehicle movements and the lack of deflection that can result in high vehicle speeds the other arms of the junction can be very difficult for people to cross on foot. It is proposed that the carriageway is raised, the corner radii are reduced and a Zebra crossings are installed on the eastern arm in combination with central islands on the minor arms. The mini-roundabouts themselves could be retained, but alternatively they could be removed with no priority assumed.

Estimated Project Cost:

£100k - £200k

Drovers Alleyway

The pedestrian link between St Peters Street and Drovers Way links St Albans main shopping area with the city core's largest car park. As such it is a busy link and, for many, it is their first experience of St Albans after having parked their car. Unfortunately the link lacks any active frontage, being flanked on either side by the blank walls of large floor plate retail stores that face onto St Peters Street. The only activity is generated by a fast food trailer at the St Peters Street end. The bleak appearance is compounded by a tired and poorly coordinated public realm.

Accepting that the adjacent buildings are unlikely to alter their layouts in the short to medium-term, and therefore Drovers Alleyway will continue to lack active frontage, it is proposed that efforts to improve it focus on new lighting to both provide a better sense of security at night, but also provide some public art to the space.

Estimated Project Cost:

£50k - £100k

SPACES

Part of the attraction of urban areas is the hustle and bustle that they generate. It is certainly true to say that people attract people and St Albans market is a wonderful example of the intensity that people can generate and the pleasure that we all take in this 'show'. But equally important are places to pause. For some this is a necessity, while for others it is simply somewhere to rest tired feet, meet with friends, eat a sandwich or just watch the world go by.

It is often assumed that people would rather sit on their own in relative tranquillity than spend time in a bustling town centre. And while it is true that we all like to take a break from time-to-time, people, on the whole, are drawn to the 'theatre' of public spaces. 'People watching' is a common term for good reason and we seem to like nothing more than watching the people and activities of a place unfold in front of us.

Importantly, the range of spaces to pause in a city should be able to accommodate people and activities as wide as the population itself. If the public realm is missing certain groups of people - perhaps the elderly, families or teenagers - then it is normally a sign that certain types of spaces are missing.

Public spaces are also important 'events' in the street network, helping to break-up naturally linear streets into more human-scaled chunks and providing landmarks that aid navigation. With this in mind, they are generally good locations for public art of all types.

The current range of spaces in St Albans is very limited. It is well catered for in terms of large parks, but beyond this there is very little else. A number of the locations listed below may already be considered 'spaces' by some, but the aim is to broaden their appeal and make them work harder for the city and its people:

1 Old Town Hall Square (near St Peters Street with Victoria Street)

2 Market Place

3 George Street (potential pedestrianisation)

4 Sumpter Yard (Holywell Hill with Sumpter Yard)

5 Gombards Corner (Verulam Road with Britton Avenue)

6 Verulamium Skate park

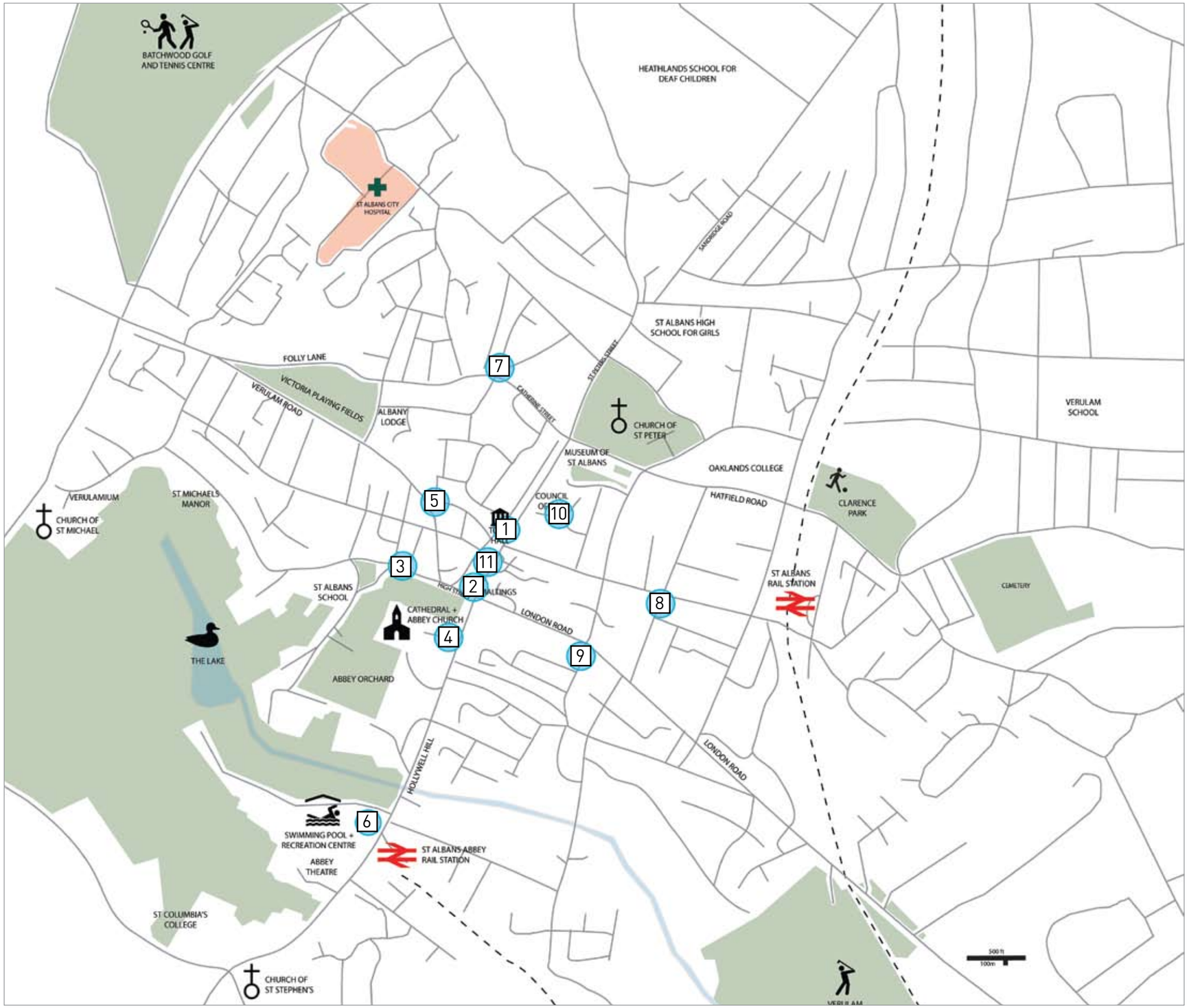
7 Bernard Square (Catherine Street with Bernard Street)

8 Lattimore Square (Victoria Street with Lattimore Road)

9 Key Field Terrace (London Road with Marlborough Road)

10 Civic Centre

11 Lamb Alley & Boot Alley



Key Spaces

Possible Catalysts

Spaces can be ideal places to hold events and to entertain

Spaces are perfect places for public art and historic references

Public spaces should provide for all ages and abilities

Bespoke street 'furniture' can help to reinforce high profile spaces

Opportunities to pause and enjoy streets and spaces can be achieved just about anywhere there is room

Urban spaces don't have to be hard

Creating a focal point for the city that is all-encompassing and flexible

Changes in level can be used as an opportunity to provide 'secondary' seating on steps and walls

Give people the opportunity and they will take it

Adjacent businesses should be encouraged to provide seating where appropriate

Lighting can help to define a space, improve the sense of security, reinforce local character and delight passers-by

Water features draw people in and captivate them

OLD TOWN HALL SQUARE

Despite the claims of the Clock Tower (see above), for many people the Old Town Hall represents the centre of St Albans, located in the heart of the retail area, at the junction with St Peters Street and Victoria Street. Following the improvements to St Peters Street as part of the Department for Transport Mixed Priority Routes Initiative a large and well connected space has been created in front of the Old Town Hall, but it fails to capitalise on these assets.

Although St Albans contains a number of large parks, it lacks any high quality public spaces where people can relax and spend time. In particular the city is missing a flexible civic space that can be used for a range of activities. It is proposed that the area in front of the Old Tow Hall is redesigned to take on this role.

Currently the city lacks spaces that can entertain, a space where children can play and where street entertainers can perform. It is envisaged that the Old Town Square can become such a space.

Conditions & Choices

1. The space feels windswept and ill-defined with limited opportunities to spend time or to be entertained. People therefore pass through this space rather than consider relaxing in it.
2. Given the generally narrow street network in St Albans, the potential opportunity presented by a large, open public space is significant. Unfortunately this opportunity is not being fully realised.
3. St Albans lacks a large public space where events can be held, people can congregate and children can be entertained. The city therefore lacks an obvious centre point.
4. The carriageway to the east of the space acts as a barrier to the footway buildings on the other side. This is compounded by the highway engineering aesthetic that has been adopted through this section. The space therefore feels disconnected from the eastern side of the street.

Catalysts

1. Use tree planting, materials and street furniture to better define the extents of a new public space.
2. Create a recognised, formal public space for St Albans in front of the Old Town Hall.
3. The space should include elements that help to animate the street scene, such as through the use of a water feature.
4. Incorporate the whole street visually into a new space, aided by raising the service road level to that of the rest of the space.

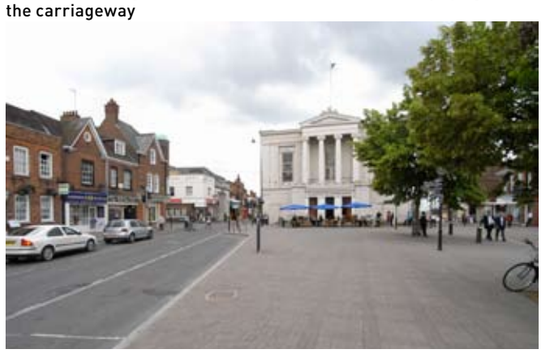
Estimated Project Cost:

£200k - £500k

The Old Town Hall is seen by many as the focal point for the city

The space is large, but lacks definition and ends abruptly against the carriageway

The cafe within the Old Town Hall provides useful animation to the space and outdoor seating for customers



The need for loading will need to be considered as part of any future proposals for the space

Existing space layout

Market Place

This space has huge potential; it has a great sense of enclosure, the adjacent buildings are relatively fine grain and are of architectural merit and the space seems to open up as you walk into it, linking St Peters Street with the Clock Tower. But at the moment the space's main function is to accommodate ten car parking spaces. Pedestrians are left with a pair of narrow footways that hug the building lines. In such a prominent location and in such a good space, this seems like the wrong compromise.

Elsewhere in this document it is suggested that through traffic is banned from Market Place (see Traffic Management), and this is necessary to realise the full potential of Market Place. Loading is essential to the operation of the adjacent shops, but this should be limited to certain periods of the day. For the rest of the day Market Place should act as a recognised public space within the city's public realm. In the shorter term it is suggested that half of the parking bays are used to accommodate new seating and trees in planters. This relatively modest intervention should relatively quickly help to show the potential of this space, and other spaces in the city, having a truly catalytic affect.

Estimated Project Cost:

£25k - £50k

George Street

As an alternative route to the cathedral from the city centre or as an interesting shopping experience in its own right, George Street has a unique offer that is currently blighted by through traffic. The footways are narrow, encouraging pedestrians to just keep moving rather than looking into the many interesting shop windows.

As a minimum George Street could be made one-way eastbound, enabling the carriageway to be narrowed and reducing the vehicle flow. Preferably, through traffic should be banned for at least part of the day, while the street itself could be remodelled as a shared surface, improving access and encouraging people to linger and stroll rather than rush along this street or ignore it altogether.

Estimated Project Cost:

£200k - £500k

Sumpter Yard (Holywell Hill with Sumpter Yard)

The entrance to the cathedral from Holywell Hill fails to convey the significance of what lies beyond. The existing flower bed to the south of the entrance is pretty, but could work harder to help animate this section of the street and provide some much needed opportunities to rest and relax. It is proposed that a small area of seating is incorporated into the flower bed, under the existing tree, also helping to raise the profile of this entrance to the cathedral.

Estimated Project Cost:

£25k - £50k

Gombards Corner (Verulam Road with Britton Avenue)

Some of the most interesting parts of cities are often located at points where different street grids meet. They help to create unique building plots and spaces that are locally distinctive. The junctions of Britton Avenue and Spencer Street with Verulam Road are no exception, helped by the topography to create interesting vistas up the hill as well as unique buildings. Verulam Road also suffers from being dominated by traffic, with very little to break-up its linear nature.

The carriageway at this point should be narrowed to a minimum suitable width (approximately 5.5 metres), the centre line should be removed and the side road junctions raised to footway level. This will help to reduce vehicle speeds, improve informal pedestrian crossing and highlight this point in the wider street network.

Estimated Project Cost:

£50k - £100k

Verulamium Skate Park

St Albans currently lacks public spaces where young people can spend time. This has a number of affects on a place that can include a lack of integration of certain groups into general society, making a public realm that is as inclusive as possible an important social goal. One suggestion is to introduce a skate park. A number of locations have been considered, but after an initial review the areas of Verulamium Park, near to the Leisure Centre off Holywell Hill, seems to provide a location that is easily accessible and visible.

It should be noted that St Albans already contains an existing, indoor, privately run facility called the Pioneer Skate Park, off Heathlands Drive, to the north of the city Centre. Whether a second, public facility is necessary is unclear, but consultation with potential user groups as well as the existing skate park operators is recommended and could potentially reveal some mutual benefits.

Estimated Project Cost:

£100k - £200k

Bernard Corner (Catherine Street with Bernard Street)

In a similar way to Gombard Corner, Bernard Corner is an interesting part of the city because of the unique way that the streets meet. The opportunity presented by Bernard Corner is arguably even greater given the potential to introduce street trees and public seating to provide a location to pause. The carriageway within the mouth of the side road junction is already constructed from blockwork, rather than the more common bitumen. It is suggested that an audit of existing street furniture would help to identify any redundant items, with the possible removal of the existing pedestrian guardrail.

Estimated Project Cost:

£50k - £100k

Lattimore Corner (Victoria Street with Lattimore Road)

Victoria Street is an important corridor for the city, linking the City Station with the centre. In conjunction with more general improvements to this corridor it is recommended that a new public space is created immediately to the west of the junction with Lattimore Road. This is one of only a few points along Victoria Street where the footways increase in width sufficiently to allow activities other than junction movement along the street to be accommodated.

New tree planting and seating will help to create a pocket space on Victoria Street, for people walking between the centre and the station to pause and in which the adjacent cafe and pub can spill out. The resulting activity will help to humanise this street, which can too often feel like a highway whose sole purpose is to just move people through it as quickly as possible.

Estimated Project Cost:

£25k - £50k

Key Field Terrace (London Road with Marlborough Road)

This area has the potential to become a buzzing focal point for London Road, but which is currently dominated by highway infrastructure. The extra street width in this location, relative to much of the rest of London Road, has been used to create a ghost island and right-turn lane. This results in a carriageway that feels intimidating for pedestrians to try and cross. This is particularly important due to the car park off Cottonmill Crescent, which can be accessed from London Road via a pedestrian only route. The existing shops on London Road include a cafe that has outdoor seating, but the size of the carriageway and its bleakness currently make spending time in this location unattractive.

By removing the right-turn lane, widening the footways, introducing tree planting and seating, this area has the potential to become an interesting and attractive node in the local network, that should become far more enjoyable to walk through and spend time in.

Estimated Project Cost:

£100k - £200k

Civic Centre

The space between the front of the Council Offices and the flank of the Alban Arena should embody the city's aspirations and artistic leanings, both through an intrinsic design quality and its ability to host organised events and entertainments that draw people into the space from St Peters Street. Instead the space is bleak and unloved, with a sign containing a long list of banned activities greeting anyone who should venture in. At the very least it should provide those working at and visiting the council offices with a comfortable space to wait or have lunch, and for Arena goers to enjoy a summers evening during a show's interval. Instead, the space appears to actively discourage people from spending time in it.

In the short-term the space could be improved through new seating, but the longer-term redevelopment of the civic quarter has the potential to provide the city with a large, formal space for civic scale events.

Estimated Project Cost:

£1m - £2m

Lamb Alley & Boot Alley

The network of alleys that run between Chequer Street and Market Place are currently predominantly used for the storage of bins associated with adjacent shops. They offer a unique typology of space, unlike any other in St Albans. Currently, the potential of these spaces is not being fully realised, but these unique spaces could offer the city much more - as quirky cut-throughs and intimate shopping areas. Similar areas such as the Lanes in Brighton illustrate the attraction of this type of space. It is recommended that these alleyways are improved in small sections, through new paving and lighting, linking into those areas that already attract significant footfall. As interest spreads, so can the public realm treatment.

Estimated Project Cost:

£100k - £200k

DEFAULTS

INTRODUCTION

The current layout and detailing of the vast majority of streets in St Albans is not the result of a single plan or vision, rather it is the accumulation of numerous and relatively small decisions made over an extended period of time. The operation of our streets and spaces is primarily the result of these numerous small decisions and how they work together in practice. Very often, these changes are given relatively little thought, taking the form of default interventions. Too often the details of such an intervention are done without thinking because 'we've always done it that way'.

There is nothing wrong with having a standard approach to discrete pieces of infrastructure, a starting point from which a design can be adapted to meet the local situation. The problems start when this starting point is already a poor solution no matter where it is introduced. Too often the standard approach to side roads, pedestrian crossings, parking bays and road markings (to name just a few) is poor. A typical example is the default use of pedestrian guardrail on the approaches to a pedestrian crossing, or the use of large diameter radii at side road junctions regardless of the context.

This section considers three common street features and suggests starting points for each. It should be noted that these are only starting points; a best case scenario where the local context allows. As with any intervention in the public realm, the approaches described below should not be applied blindly as in some cases they will not be appropriate or even possible.

This section the looks at a the use of materials and street furniture in the city as well as a new approach to road safety.

SIDE STREETS

The starting point...

- Where kerbs are required corner radii should be as tight as possible, helping to minimise the distance that pedestrians are required to cross and reducing vehicle speeds. It should be assumed that large vehicles will need to cross into the opposing lane to make the turn.
- Maintain a level surface for pedestrians crossing the side road or cross-over
- Where vehicle flows are low then the footway material should continue across the side road or cross over.
- Where vehicle flows are higher a material should be used that mimics the existing footway material, perhaps as a smaller element to withstand the additional loading.

PEDESTRIAN CROSSINGS

The starting point...

- Crossings should be at least 4 metres wide.
- A central refuge should be included to aid informal crossing.
- Only the minimum number of signal heads should be used (normally a single primary and a single secondary for each approach) on the minimum number of signal poles.
- The carriageway at crossings should be raised to footway level.
- Crossing should be located on pedestrian desire lines.
- The use of pedestrian guardrailing should be a last resort.

PARKING BAYS

The starting point...

- Parking bays should be incorporated into the footway such that when they are not occupied by a vehicle they can be used as footway.
- Waiting and loading plates should be placed on adjacent buildings or street furniture rather than separate poles.
- Parking bays should be constructed from either a dark material or a small block element in a coloured mix to minimise the affect of oil staining.
- Where vehicle over-running is a recognised problem bollards should only be used as a last resort.
- The needs of the visually and mobility impaired should be considered when selecting surface treatments and kerb heights (see Paving on page 59).

MATERIALS

Paving

There is a large range of footway paving materials and styles used within the centre of St Albans. All would appear to have been laid for sensible reasons, but there is a lack of consistency, either to create uniformity or to highlight different character areas. Much of the oldest paving still remaining in St Albans consists of small element, dark clay blocks laid in a stretcher bond pattern. Similar reclaimed or imitation blocks have also been laid more recently to match this older paving. However, there are also a number of other approaches that have been adopted, including the use of concrete block work, laid in a herringbone pattern as well as stone-effect or concrete paving with an exposed aggregate finish (Traffica). This is often combined with the use of a contrasting blockwork in a narrow strip running alongside the road kerb. It is believed that this has been used to help demarcate the edge of the footway and carriageway for the partially sighted. It is unclear how useful this has been for pedestrians and is certainly not a common approach in the UK.

The most important features of any footway paving are that it should be simple and well-constructed. Secondly, historic paving (including barrel runs) should be retained wherever possible. St Albans footways have historically been constructed from a 'blue' clay block with non-chamfered edges laid in a stretcher bond. This should continue to be the default material for all key footways in the city core. An alternative approach, that has been successfully employed in the Romelands area is the use of Yorkstone flags, and this may be appropriate in some locations. In other areas of the city core asphalt can be used as the footway material, but it is worth noting that, although initially cheaper to construct, asphalt will not last as long as clay blocks or Yorkstone flags, cannot be relayed and deteriorates rather than improves with age.

It is inevitable that sections of footway will need to be replaced over time. Therefore it is essential that sufficient stock of existing footway materials are kept in storage to avoid the need for temporary and unsightly 'patch' repairs in asphalt.

Forecourts

Forecourts (a privately owned strip that often runs between footways and shop fronts) should preferably be included in any footway works, with paving materials extended to include this area to create a uniform finish. Where it is not feasible to continue the same paving across the forecourt for technical reasons, preferably a thinner slab/block should be used or, where this is not possible, mastic asphalt with a gravel finish can be laid. Metal studs should then be used where necessary to denote property boundaries.

Inspection Covers

Where feasible all new inspection chambers should use recessed covers that accommodate the adjacent footway paving material. Utility companies should contact the council prior to any new installations to agree the location, size and orientation of these covers to minimise visual clutter.

Tactile Paving

The primary role of tactile paving in streets should be to consistently denote the edge of the carriageway where a traditional kerb upstand cannot. Too often the use of tactile paving is inconsistent and confusing, not least because there is some degree of ambiguity and interpretation possible with the existing guidance.

Tactile paving should be used at all controlled pedestrian crossings (including Zebra crossings, crossings with central pedestrian islands and raised tables). Tails of tactile paving, that run perpendicular to the kerb at some signalised crossings, should not be used. Achieving a colour contrast with adjacent materials should take precedence over using 'traditional' red and buff paving.

Lighting

Street lighting is used primarily for safety and security reasons for all road users at night. Therefore it has a significant role to play in ensuring that the city centre remains an inclusive place, one that can accommodate the widest possible range of users. Lighting schemes must therefore meet national standards. Additionally, lighting can play an important role in enhancing an area's character and inherent legibility.

The main streets in the centre should use historic street lighting columns and accommodate other street furniture to minimise street clutter, including bins, signal heads, CCTV and signage.

Carriageway

The oldest remaining carriageways in St Albans are generally lined by granite kerbs and an adjacent channel made from setts. Where these remain they should be retained. Elsewhere the channel is often omitted, while kerbs of both granite and concrete are used.

All new carriageways should use granite kerbs, while only main streets in the city centre should include a channel made of either setts or flush kerb stones.

The use of coloured surfacing for bus lanes and cycle lanes should only be employed where there is a proven history of non-compliance by other road users. Similarly, only the minimum of road markings should be used to guide road users. For example, road centre lines can often be omitted (achieving not only a reduction in clutter, but potential road safety benefits), while double and single yellow lines should be of the narrow variety.

Trees

The planting of new street trees should be encouraged wherever space permits, either as continuous avenues or in groves. Trees can have many positive effects on urban areas, including:

- providing an attractive, calming setting;
- moderating the local climate by providing shelter and shade;
- filtering polluted air;
- perceptually narrow the carriageway, moderating its scale and contributing to speed reduction;
- increasing property values;
- moderating the effects of storms by intercepting rain water; and
- supporting a richer and more accessible wildlife.

The locations of trees should be selected as part of a co-ordinated approach, in order to work with other street elements such as street lighting and CCTV. Species should be selected to respond to the character and scale of the street and possibly to any existing thriving specimens in consultation with the District's tree officer. Trees on main streets will require clear stems of no less than 5 metres to avoid conflict with larger vehicles and to avoid restricting sightlines to traffic signals. The dimensions of tree pits can be altered to avoid potential conflicts with underground services, while still accommodating a sufficient volume of growing medium.

Tree pits should be finished with a permeable surface infill. Tree grills should not be used as they trap litter.

St Albans Council have just reinstated a past initiative whereby members of the public can sponsor a new tree in public parks and green spaces, often close to or adjoining local streets. This is to be commended as it not only increases the number of trees, but also helps to raise their profile. To bolster this work it is recommended that St Albans should aim to plant an additional 100 street trees over the next three years.

Seating

The provision of comfortable public seating should not simply be viewed as a 'nice to have', accommodated when there's some room. For many people they are vital in enabling them able to make a trip on foot. The aim should be to provide somewhere to sit at least every 100 metres within the city core and along key radial routes. With the exception of St Peters Street, St Albans lacks this level of provision. It is recommended that 100 new benches should be provided over the next three years.

STREET FURNITURE

Pedestrian Guardrailing

There are three primary justifications for the use of pedestrian guardrailing (PGR), as set out in the Institute of Highways and Transportation's (IHT) 'Providing for Journeys on Foot'. These can be summarised as being:

- where pedestrians need to be protected from a significant difference in level;
- where pedestrians attempting to cross would be at high risk, or where a known accident problem exists, and other countermeasures have been exhausted; and
- where high pedestrian volumes may need containing to prevent them spilling into the carriageway.

However, there is a growing consensus that over many years there has been an overuse of PGR to the extent that much of Britain's streets have been scarred by it, without it performing a useful function. Importantly, we need to ask not whether the removal of PGR can provide road safety benefits for existing streets, but whether it can at least match the safety benefits associated with PGR, whilst bringing pedestrian and streetscape benefits compared with the more traditional streetscape schemes.

In April 2009 the Department for Transport (DfT) released Local Transport Note 2/09: Pedestrian Guardrailing that sets out the most recent national guidance on the use of PGR. As part of the development of the DfT guidance, research was carried out into how the behaviour of pedestrians is affected by the presence of PGR. 78 pedestrian crossing and junction locations were surveyed across the UK, 37 with PGR and 41 without, in terms of pedestrian movement, vehicle speed, traffic flow and collision record.

It was found that there is no evidence base to prove that PGR has any overall safety benefit. The researchers appropriately conclude that the installation of new guard railing should not be considered if alternative safety measures could be used; it should only be considered when the expected effectiveness is significant, and unnecessary PGR should be removed.

Bearing the potential benefits of PGR in mind, it is necessary to consider the reasons why PGR should not be installed. These include:

- it is usually unsightly, contributing to clutter and the poor visual quality of the streetscape;
- it communicates the clear message that pedestrians are less important than vehicles;
- it can make pedestrians feel hemmed-in;
- It reduces the effective footway width;
- it makes walking less direct and therefore less attractive; and
- it can contribute to streets actually being less safe.

The reasons why PGR can, perversely, have an adverse impact on safety include:

- some pedestrians, especially younger people, will vault over it;
- some pedestrians will walk in the carriageway to achieve their desire line;
- it can obscure driver's views of children and wheelchair users;
- it can encourage inappropriate driving/speeds because drivers feel they don't have to look out for pedestrians crossing; and
- it can encourage pedestrians to feel that they are 'protected' and hence discourage them from looking for potential dangers.

In conclusion PGR should only be used where it is clear that it will make a positive contribution to road safety where no other measures are appropriate or available. A number of methodologies have been developed to access whether existing PGR should be removed or new PGR installed, including one developed and successfully applied by the Urban Movement team at Urban Initiatives.

Bollards

Bollards are used primarily to deter drivers from over-running or parking on footways where their vehicles can damage footway paving and restrict effective footway widths. It is clear from looking at many of the streets in St Albans that footway parking is a problem.

However, they can add to visual clutter and create unnecessary obstructions to pedestrians. Therefore, like all street furniture, bollards should be used sparingly. Preferably an alternative solution should be sought, but where a bollard is felt necessary to act as a physical deterrent, it is suggested that alternative items of furniture are used to achieve the same result, such as a bench, tree or cycle stand, whilst also having other useful functions. The spacing of such items of furniture should also receive careful attention as often fewer, rather than more, could be used.

Public Art

Despite St Albans obvious history and high quality architecture, the centre is relatively bereft of public art – old or new. Public art has the potential to help strengthen a place's identity, enrich people's lives and instil a sense of pride and ownership in the public realm. It can also help to elaborate on a place's past as well as raise its profile. Public art can also contribute towards improved legibility, encourage exploration and raise the profile of an area. Finally, art also has the potential to give economic uplift to an area, contributing to regeneration programmes and increases in land values.

Public art can take many different forms; statues, structures, lighting, water features, landscaping and street furniture among many, be temporary or permanent, be interactive, be located in a single space or be repeated in some way throughout the city. In all cases it is important to get artists involved at an early stage to fully realise the potential that it can offer and plan for public art to be an integral part of the streetscene and not just something that is "bolted-on" at the end.

Wayfinding

St Albans is a place of many 'parts'. From the main shopping area of St Peters Street, to the Cathedral and its grounds, to the more intimate and unique shopping experiences found along George Street. But very often the quickest route between these areas; relative proximity or even existence is not obvious. The design of certain parts of the public realm can be changed to help with this issue, but the often tight and twisting, historic nature of St Albans (one of its many charms) can make finding your way around inherently difficult. This situation is compounded by arrival points (train stations and a number of car parks) that are located outside of the city centre with no obvious routes connecting them. This is where the introduction of a co-ordinated wayfinding strategy could help visitors to explore with confidence, and encourage locals to choose walking or cycling over taking the car.

Consistency in appearance and placement, along with information displayed in an intuitive way, is critical to the success of any wayfinding strategy. Design is also important, particularly in an historic setting such as St Albans. Creating a suite of wayfinding elements that do not dominate the streetscene, yet are easily identifiable is a genuine challenge. Equally, it must continue to look good for years to come.

St Albans already has a number of well placed, well designed finger-posts, located in key locations throughout the city. These should be retained and similar posts introduced to other important locations. To support these, new maps should be placed next to them, highlighting major attractions and character areas.

Street name plates not only help wayfinding, they can also contribute to the character of an area. Where road name plates of historic value already exist these should be retained and maintained where possible. The preferred location for street name plates is on adjacent buildings, walls and other structures, rather than on additional, dedicated items of street furniture.















Street Safety, not Road Safety

The highway network can be divided into two very different types. The first is the motorway and trunk road network, designed to move the maximum number of vehicles as quickly as possible. To achieve this aim this part of the network is heavily managed with conflicts minimised, certain modes banned and instructions for those road users explicit. This is what allows us to drive from London to Manchester, on a good day, in under 3 hours. Historically, the UK has been very successful in creating this type of network that is both very efficient and also very safe.

There needs to be a significant difference between the way that we approach road safety (the safety of motorways, trunk roads and other strategic routes) and street safety (the safety of streets in urban areas). These two distinct parts of the network are used in very different ways and therefore require very different approaches to road safety.

The Principles

The approach to creating safe streets is based on the following two principles:

- Users adapt their behaviour in accordance with their perceptions of the surrounding context; and
- Safety is one of a number of important factors that need to be considered in design (see section 3.7 of the Manual for Streets, 2007)

The paths of different users on their different journeys commonly coincide with each other without collisions ensuing, and everyday experience shows us that, for the most part, people are adept at identifying potential dangers and at adapting their behaviour accordingly. Safety problems occur primarily as the result of users being unable to correctly judge the potential risks to themselves and others, leading to actions (or lack of action) that can lead to collisions. We consider that it is therefore imperative that users are fully aware of the potential dangers around them. This can be achieved in a number of ways.

The Traditional Approach

One option is to minimise the dangers by segregating road users from one another, in space and time, such as through the use of barriers separating different modes and/or movements (segregation in space) and signalising conflicting movements (segregation in time). Another option, often combined with the former, is to make the highway environment as explicit as possible, with signage and road markings used to highlight possible dangers.

Such approaches became conventional in the UK during the 20th century, and were actively promoted by key Government advice in the 1940s and 1960s. However, they have more recently been challenged in terms of their efficacy in certain types of location, particularly in urban areas. The rationale for this challenge includes the concern that the ability of users to correctly judge potential risks can be impaired when certain design and/or control features lead them to assume there is little or no risk, when in fact the risk may be significant. Research has also shown that conventional engineering approaches to highway design in urban areas can lead to increased vehicle speeds (TRL Report No.661, 2007).

Professional Judgement

On the specific subject of the conventional approach to road safety audits, the Department for Transport's (DfT) Manual for Streets (2007) has the following to say:

'[Road Safety Audits] may seek to identify all possible risks without distinguishing between major and minor ones, or quantifying the probability of them taking place. There can also be a tendency for auditors to encourage designs that achieve safety by segregating vulnerable road users from road traffic. Such designs can perform poorly in terms of streetscape quality, pedestrian amenity and security and, in some circumstances, can actually reduce safety level.'

Furthermore, reference should be made to Highways Risk and Liability Claims (UK Roads Board, 2009), which provides a range of evidence that illustrates that many of the fears about liability and the risk of legal action often described by those responsible for making changes to the public realm are unfounded. It reiterates that:

'Drivers are first and foremost responsible for their own safety.'

A New Approach

An alternative option has therefore increasingly been to encourage and enable users to decide better for themselves how to act in response to their surroundings. This can be achieved by removing many standard highway engineering features, adopting more constraining carriageway geometry, and generally making users more aware of one another. Research increasingly confirms that road safety can be improved by applying such an approach, adapted to the specific context.

This alternative approach is supported by the DfT, whose recent Mixed Priority Routes Road Safety Demonstration Project (Summary Report, Dec 2008) aimed to help local authorities tackle stubborn safety problems on complex high streets in new and more effective ways. The recent improvements to St Peters Street formed part of this project. The Summary Report on the 10 pilot schemes concluded that:

'Schemes need to be developed using a first principles approach, i.e. the scheme should be developed on the basis of a sound and detailed knowledge of how the local area operated and should be designed to those needs rather than by rigorous adherence to local authority design standards. It is also vital that inappropriate standards (such as the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges, DMRB) are not used as the basis for design where local authority standards do not exist. Those schemes that adopted this [first principles] approach were the most successful.'

The DfT Manual for Streets 2 (Sept 2010) also supports this alternative approach, setting out the following as one of its key design principles (see section 1.2):

'Using the minimum of highway design features necessary to make streets work properly. The starting point for any well designed street is to begin with nothing and then add only what is necessary in practice.'

The closing phrase in this last quote is especially important. Too often, design decisions are made on safety grounds based on relatively abstract and theoretical arguments when, in practice, the actual safety concerns are unfounded/ misunderstood and/or the proposed changes are generic and not appropriately tailored to local conditions.

Learning from Experience

The context-specific, 'less-is-usually-more' approach to achieving better safety in streets is also supported by our own (soon to be published) work for Transport for London in analysing the collision records of a number of London High Streets. All of the seven streets that were reviewed for this study had been subject to redesigns that adopted the alternative approach to achieving better safety, and indeed two of them were Mixed Priority Route Demonstration Projects. This study concluded that:

'improving [urban mixed priority routes] according to Better Balanced Streets principles need not have an adverse impact on road safety generally.'

In London, the alternative approach to safer streets is embedded in the Mayor's own approach to creating 'Better Streets' (November 2009). Amongst other things, this approach states that:

'...segregation of road users should be avoided wherever possible'; and that

'...people can act responsibly and [their ability to] take reasonable risks should be recognised.'

More generally, 'Better Streets' underlines the importance of taking a balanced, context-sensitive approach to street design:

'A better balanced street is one that pays respect to the competing needs of all users. So, if there are a significant numbers of users other than motor vehicles, such as pedestrians, market stall owners, cyclists, or even performing artists, the street, as a public resource, is balanced through its design and management to optimise the way it meets the needs of all these different users... This illustrates the importance of understanding context to achieving good street design... Because well designed streets must be sensitive to location and context, the key to their successful creation is found less in highway design manuals than in the imaginative application of certain principles to the design of the public realm.'

TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT

The street network in St Albans has developed organically, adapting to meet the city's current needs, but essentially retaining a layout that has been in place for hundreds of years - long before its streets had to accommodate the motorcar. Unlike some other centres of similar size, there has been no ring-road or by-pass constructed in an attempt to divert through traffic away from the city's core. Instead, all through traffic within the city core, along with all bus routes, is signed along a handful of key radial routes into the city, with traffic focused on St Peters Street and its junctions with London Road to the south and Hatfield Road to the north.

The area of St Peters Street also coincides with St Albans' main retail, civic and leisure functions. The result is an uneasy conflict that results in often slow and unreliable journey times for traffic (both local and strategic) and a city centre that can be difficult to move around on foot, noisy, smelly and intimating.

The issues raised above have been partially mitigated by the recent improvement to St Peters Street. These have resulted in a western 'footway' in excess of 12 metres in width. When combined with the existing tree planting, these changes go someway to mitigate against the negative affects of through traffic on the experience of those walking and spending time in the city centre.

However, limiting traffic on St Peters Street to access and buses only has been a long-standing consideration that has the potential to significantly improve the city centre experience. In 2011 Hertfordshire County Council commissioned consultants on behalf of St Albans City and District Council and the Quality Network Partnership to investigate the likely affects of limiting the amount of traffic on St Peters Street, Chequer Street, Market Place and the western end of Victoria Street on the wider network. Essentially, this study was purely quantitative, only considering whether the street network in St Albans could cope with such changes, rather than the potential benefits it could realise or an evaluation of whether the changes should be implemented.

The consultants' analysis looked at various road options and combinations of restrictions on access along the streets listed above. Their findings suggest that the resulting reassignment of through traffic from restriction on St Peters Street (between the junctions with Hatfield Road and Victoria Street) can be accommodated by the existing network. Their predictions include the reassignment of this traffic onto the King Harry Lane/Batchwood Drive corridor to the west, and the Marshalwick Lane/Beechwood Avenue corridor to the east, creating a partial ring road around the city.

At a more local level the network appears less well equipped to cope. The same changes results in increased levels of local congestion at specific times of the day, particularly at the Hatfield Road double mini-roundabout with Upper Marlborough Road and St Peters Road. This is the result of vehicles with a destination within the lower-order roads immediately to the east of St Peters Street who would now need to re-route. However, some other routes actually see congestion levels reduce, while journey times across the board remain fairly consistent with the existing situation.

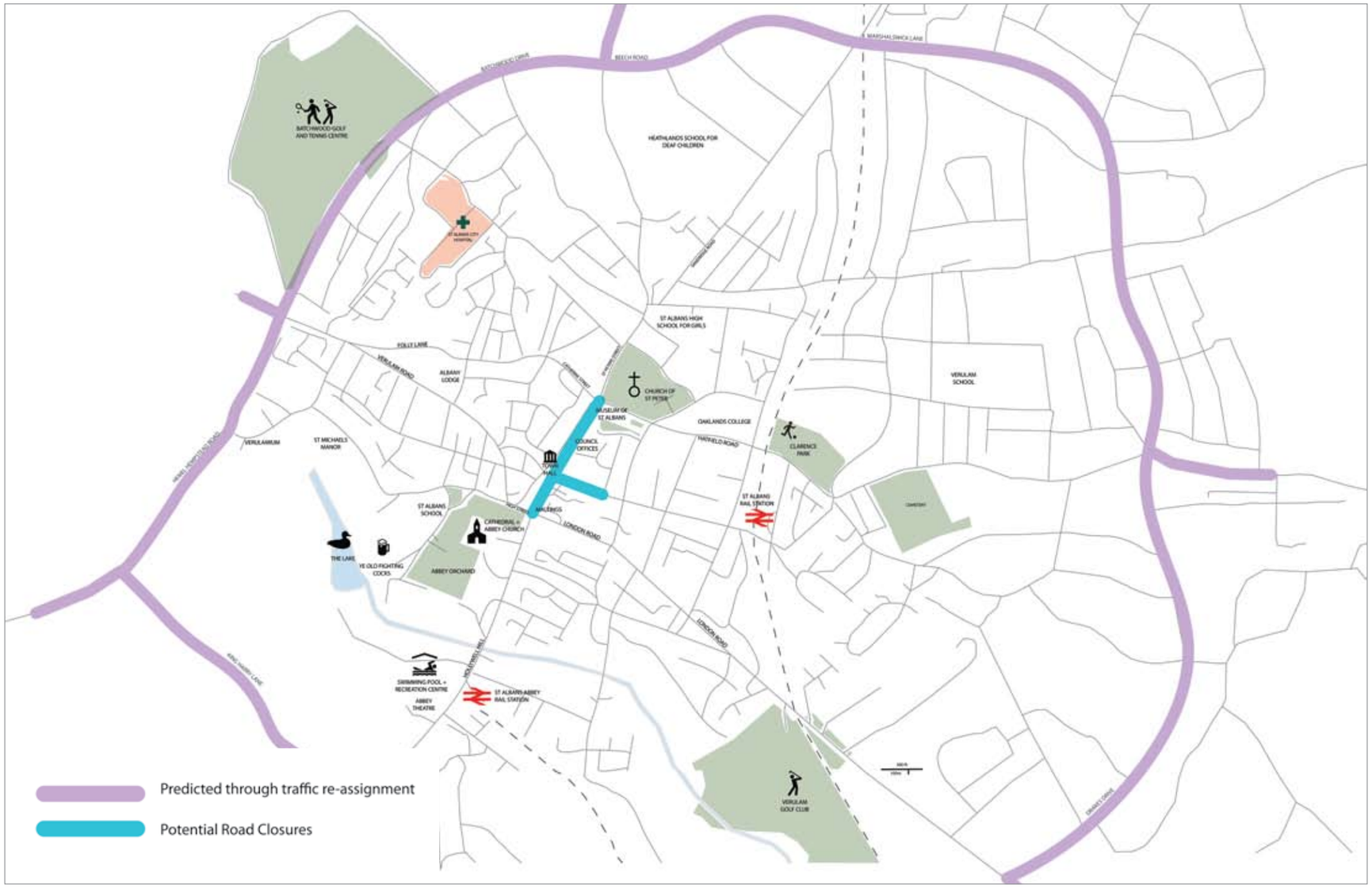
Once access to St Peters Street is restricted, the subsequent closures of Chequer Street and Victoria Street have on the wider street network is relatively small. But the affect on local streets to the east of St Peters Street are greater and more widespread.

Given the relatively low levels of existing traffic using Market Place, restrictions on this street are predicted to have very little affect on the street network in capacity terms.

In engineering terms it is therefore considered entirely feasible that all of the restrictions interrogated as part of this study could be implemented, perhaps in conjunction with some minor alterations to existing junctions, without adversely affecting vehicle journey times.

The bigger question of whether to remove certain types of traffic from these streets is more difficult. Given the existing width of the western footway on St Peters Street, there are limited benefits to be gained in terms of additional space for pedestrians. However, it is not only improving on what is there now that needs to be considered - there is also the question of what such closures would make possible. Potentially, St Peters Street could be downgraded, while Market Place and French Row could be filled with alfresco seating and street entertainers. Significant improvements would also be possible at the junction with Victoria Street where current footway widths are inadequate.

A possible concern with any restriction in through traffic along a street is the loss of natural surveillance that drivers provide, particularly in the evenings, adding to a sense of security. Given St Albans' relatively low levels of night life, the closure of many streets in the city centre to traffic has the potential to make this area at least appear deserted and therefore intimidating. Retaining bus and taxi movements through this area, as well as local access in the evenings, would help to mitigate against this issue.

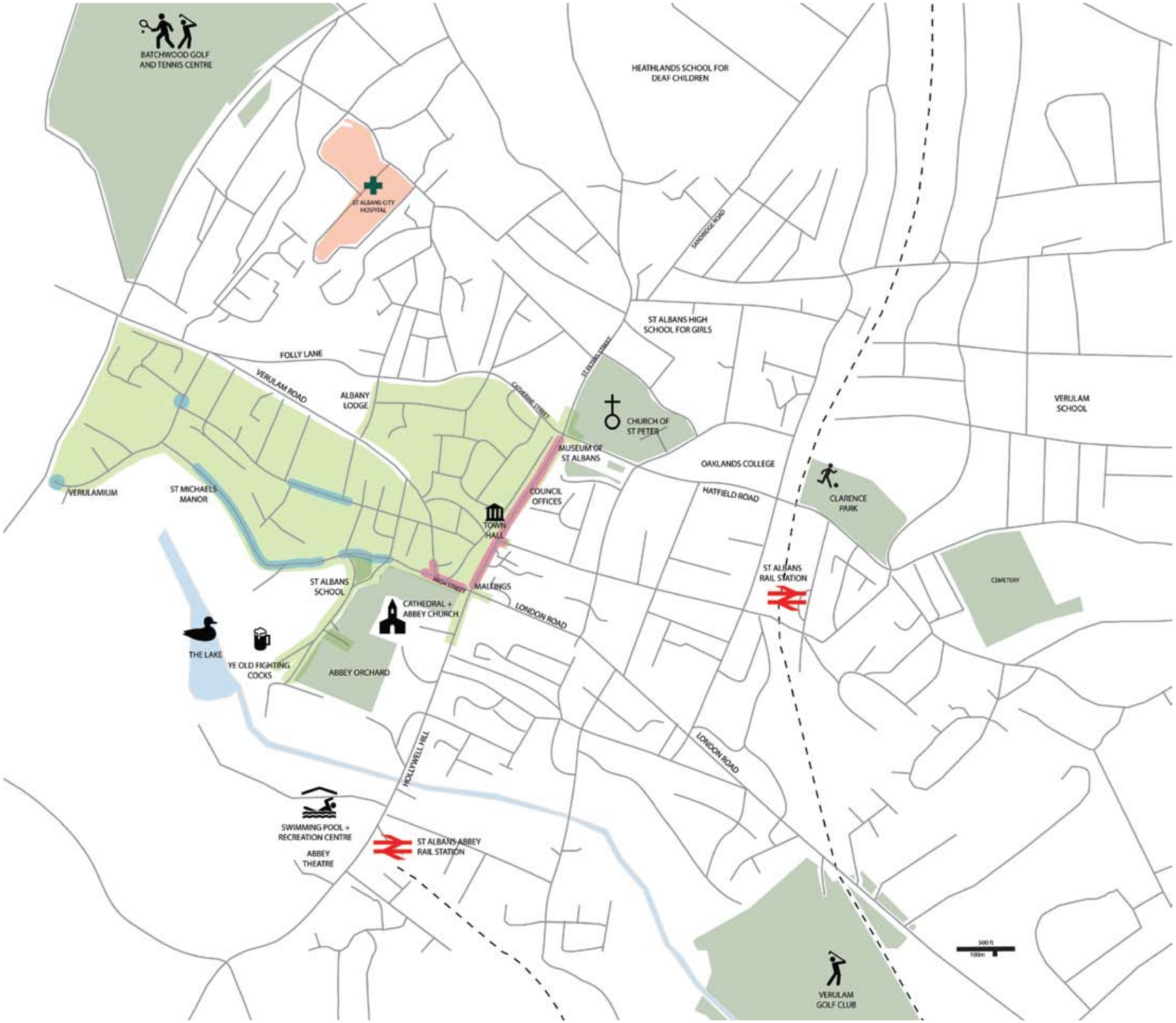


20 MPH ZONE

Hertfordshire County Council is currently consulting on the possible extension of the existing 20 mph zone that covers St Peters Street (south), Chequer Street and High Street. The extension would see the 20 mph zone covering a far larger area, with St Peters Street and Chequer Street forming the eastern edge. The rest of the zone would be approximately defined by Catherine Street to the north, Fishpool Street to the south and Hemel Hempstead Road to the west.

The benefits associated with 20 mph zones are now well established, and include a reduction in both the number and average severity of road traffic collisions, reductions in both air and noise pollution, a street network that is more conducive for walking and cycling, and a public realm that can be more social and comfortable to spend time in.

For the reasons described above, the introduction of a 20 mph speed limit to any urban street within the city is worthy of consideration.



Extent of Proposed Speed Restrictions
Existing 20mph Zone
Areas of Modification

BUSES

St Albans bus network is currently undergoing a number of improvements. These are being delivered as a result of work undertaken by Network St Albans, an organisation that includes St Albans City and District Council, Hertfordshire County Council and the bus operators. The first stage of improvements will include new vehicles, clearer numbering and new timetable information for buses serving the 'S' Routes. This will be accompanied by new bus shelters and measures to improve bus journey reliability.

Further improvements that are planned for the near future include an increase in the number of low emission buses, mobile phone ticketing, bus-rail through tickets and real time bus stop information.

PARK AND RIDE

The idea of introducing a park and ride system to St Albans has been suggested as a means of reducing general traffic congestion in the centre. Encouraging those travelling into the city centre to leave their vehicle at an outlying car park and then complete their journey via a bus service has the potential to free-up a significant amount of road space. This potential road space can then be used as additional capacity for more vehicles, to prioritise other modes or for environmental improvements. Successful park and ride schemes have been operating for some time now in a number of UK towns and cities, including those with historic cores such as Cambridge, York and Norwich.

The success of any park and ride system is based on a number of factors, which can be loosely characterised into "carrots" and "sticks" to encourage drivers to select this option, and are normally introduced as part of a package of measures. On the "stick" side of things, parking supply in the centre can be reduced and prices can be raised, while journey times can be increased by removing highway capacity for general traffic (and often redistributed in the ways mentioned above).

"Carrots" are generally based around comparative journey times between park and ride bus services and general traffic. The introduction of bus priority measures, such as bus lanes and intelligent signal timings can help to isolate buses from general traffic delays, thereby providing park and ride users with a faster journey time into the centre. This is linked closely with the need for a frequent bus service to minimise potential waiting times. As well as time savings there are often also cost savings, with the combined cost of parking and travelling on a park and ride bus being lower than parking in the centre. This is often helped by the lower land values associated with sites at the edge of an urban area relative to those in the centre. However, it is common place for park and ride services to be heavily subsidised for at least the first few years, with the hope that in this time passenger numbers will grow until the service can become self-sufficient. However, many park and ride schemes in the UK continue to require subsidisation long after they are set-up.

The introduction of a park and ride scheme in St Albans presents a number of problems. Firstly, a large proportion of the traffic in the centre is through-traffic and therefore unsuitable for transfer to a park and ride system. Secondly, the road network, including the main corridors approaching the centre, are characterised by relatively narrow carriageway widths, unsuitable for the introduction of bus lanes. This isn't helped by a traffic network that contains very few signalised junctions, currently making it difficult to 'gate' general traffic on the outskirts of the city where bus lanes are more likely to be feasible, potentially allowing buses to bypass general traffic delay.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05 PRIORITIES + PHASING

This strategy, as its title is intended to make plain, is all about delivery. The best of ideas ultimately mean nothing unless they're capable of being implemented and consequently are. Deciding when and where projects get delivered must take into account factors such as: technical feasibility; the amount, source and timing of funding from different sources; construction timescales; relationship with other initiatives and opportunities; and Council priorities.

This section outlines a simple, flexible framework for public realm scheme delivery decisions in St Albans. It is based principally on the present understanding of scheme costs (see details in section 04), and of where it is considered that public realm investment would have the greatest impact – both in terms of site-specific improvements and city-wide inspiration - in achieving the Vision and associated Principles set out in section 02. The views of Council members and officers, other key stakeholders, and the Council's consultants preparing this strategy have led to the identification of the 15 priority public realm interventions shown alongside.

While there is no definite ranking within this group of projects, there is broad agreement about where to focus first: the 'golden triangle' formed by Market Place/French Row, High Street, Chequer Street and the space in front of the Old Town Hall. This approach - of clustering schemes to release complimentary benefits and create a more visible impact - could be employed in a number of subsequent key locations throughout the city core.

Equally, schemes do not have to be implemented in a single attempt. The idea of staged improvements in the same location, with each subsequent intervention buidling on and adding value to the previous ones, is one that is helpfully described in the Mayor of London's approach to street design - 'Better Streets' (November 2009). Worthwhile change can begin with a simple 'tidy up', before moving on perhaps to a de-cluttering exercise and then the sensitive relocation of essential street kit. All this work can deliver benefits prior to the commitment of major effort and expense on more significant changes such as re-surfacing works, structural change or a comprehensive 'make over' of the street or space in question.

The table of schemes alongside has been prepared by way of a very simple 'programme' for sequential scheme delivery. The intention is that this list is both transparent and flexible. The initial order of schemes reflects a pragmatic acknowledgement that the availability of funding and construction resources is likely to necessitate that the delivery of comparatively expensive schemes will need to be interspersed with that of comparatively inexpensive projects.

This initial 'programme' can be flexed as time goes by, according to any changes in priorities; to opportunities that may arise due, for example, to specific development proposals; and of course to the availability of funding.

Ref.	Scheme	Cost
1	**Market Place (Space)**	**£25k - £50k**
2	**Victoria Street (Corridor)**	**£500 - £1m**
3	**100 Trees**	**£250k**
4	**Clock Tower (Connection)**	**£500k - £1m**
5	**City Legibility**	**£200k - £500k**
6	**City Station - Western Forecourt (Gateway)**	**-**
7	**City Core Traffic Management**	**£100k**
8	**100 Benches**	**£200k - £500k**
9	**Old Town Hall Square (Space)**	**£200k - £500k**
10	**St Peters Junction (Connection)**	**£300k - £700k**
11	**George Street (Space + Connection)**	**£200k - £500k**
12	**Holywell Hill (Gateway)**	**-**
13	**Verulamium Park Cycle Routes**	**-**
14	**Green Ring**	**-**
15	**Drovers Alley (Connection)**	**£50k - £100k**

1 min
Abbey Station 12 mins
Westminster Lodge 15 mins
The Maltings 1 min
City Station 14 mins
Christopher Place 1 min
Clock Tower 3 mins
Cathedral 4 mins
Roman Verulamium 17 mins
Taxi Rank 2 mins
The Alban Arena 3 mins
Civic Centre 3 mins
Clarks
Clarks
JIGSAW
Boots
3 for 2
Baby Event
welcome
pharmacy
opticians
beauty
food
baby
photo

06 GOING FORWARD

GOVERNANCE

The UK local authorities that have been most successful in actually delivering a vision for a high quality public realm through the combination of many individual projects (both small and large) are, by and large, characterised by strong leadership and clear accountability. Within such authorities, important measures aren't seen as 'transport projects', 'landscape projects', 'heritage projects' or as having any such narrow purpose: they're seen as 'city projects'.

Good public realm governance structures are at the heart of this success: systems that embed 'Corporate Memory' and ensure delivery, not leaving it to the capacity or goodwill of individual members/officers who inevitably move on.

Typically, a senior Council member will be at the head of this structure and may chair a Public Realm Board that oversees the general direction and makes the high level decisions. Below the Board, likely to meet twice a year, a Public Realm Delivery Group may meet quarterly, and be chaired by the Senior Responsible Officer (e.g. Head of Department). The Delivery Group monitors the progress of key projects and production of key documents, and reviews any important matters referred to it by the Public Realm Working Group. The latter may meet approximately monthly, and is there to ensure that no known activity in the public realm by the Council or its partners, however small in scale, fails to conform with the Strategy.

PUBLIC REALM BOARD

↓

PUBLIC REALM DELIVERY GROUP

↓

PUBLIC REALM WORKING GROUP

The approach promoted by the Historic Towns Forum within its Streets for All documents is a useful starting point for governance, particularly when it comes to the day-to-day operations at Officer level. Creating a truly inter-disciplinary approach is critical. This does not mean that officers must become experts in every profession involved in the public realm. Rather, it is about knowing one's own professional limitations, understanding what others have to offer, and appreciating when to call on their expertise. This interaction needs to be effectively encouraged, enabled and, if necessary, enforced.

All those involved in the delivery of the public realm should be keenly aware not just of the strategy but also of related policies and guidance - both local and national. They need also to understand that the strategy is a controlling document and that any previous custom and practice in their specific areas of work that does not conform with it needs to be reviewed. This applies to any intervention or design approach, no matter how minor, that is not a legal or regulatory requirment - that must be adhered to no matter how minor.

Good design must not be considered a 'nice to have', but instead it should be central to any scheme. To achieve it will necessitate a certain level of co-ordination between officers - and also amongst members and the Council's contractors - that must be in place before designs start to take shape. This is an approach that must be lead from the top.

'Network St Albans' may be a good starting point for bringing together all those involved in transport with St Albans. However, the remit for the city's streets and spaces must go beyond just resolving transport issues, not least because many of the current short-comings in the city's public realm are attributable, at least in part, to an historically narrow focus on such issues alone.

ENDURANCE

Authorities that have implemented a high quality public realm have never done so overnight. Nor have they done so alone. It's always a long haul, with delivery alone taking many years, let alone the maintenance. Success also involves strong partnerships. Commitment is required not only from the most senior Council members and officers and from every practitioner (e.g. District and County officers, their contractors and third party contractors working in the public realm), but also from other stakeholder bodies with a legitimate and necessary interest in the quaity of St Abans public realm and wider built fabric.

This strategy must be seen and used as the foundation stone for ensuring St Albans maintains a clear course towards enduring public realm quality as time goes by and faces and names change. It provides a framework for public realm discipline, a basis for high level evaluation, and a reference to be consulted in making decisions.

This strategy is also designed to enable a focus on the greater good to be maintained on those occasions where narrow interest, inappropriate opportunism, or unnecessary pragmatism threaten to deliver local interventions that weaken the whole. St Albans' public realm is one of the city's glories, and its quality should not be sacrificed for short-term gain, tactical expediency or simple laziness in applying conventional custom and practice.

REVIEW + RENEW

The importance of sticking to a clear Public Realm Delivery Strategy over time, stressed in the preceding paragraphs, must not, however, mean that this document and the schemes it presently encompasses are set in stone. To be truly successful, the city must constantly adapt, as indeed it always has done. In specific terms, this means a number of things:

- The Public Realm Delivery Strategy should be kept under informal review by the Public Realm Board (or equivalent) and subject to formal review every five years.
- Council officers and members should strive to keep abreast of established and emerging better practice in public realm design, both in the UK and further afield. As necessary, this should feed into the reconsideration of specific schemes and/or the review of the Strategy as a whole.
- The Council should always seek to maintain momentum in public realm delivery, never resting on its laurels and, if necessary, focusing on simpler, high quality 'easy wins' if the delivery of larger, more complex, higher profile interventions prove to be problematic for the present.

SUPPORTING STRATEGIES

In preparing this Public Realm Delivery Strategy, it has become clear that there are a number of areas in which the Council could usefully develop supporting and complimentary strategies. These are:

- Wayfinding Strategy. This workstream is already under way and focuses on the provision of information, including signage, that will aid legibility. This is to enable people more easily to find and move between the city's many different parts and specific attractions, especially on foot. The materials used to provide this information should also help to strengthen the city's image.
- Parking Strategy. The more readily that drivers are able to find the most appropriate car park for the direction in which they approach the city and for their journey purpose (e.g. involving a short or long stay), the less will be the negative impact of cars on the public realm, in terms of congestion, air quality, and the walking environment.
- Public Art Strategy. Appropriate public art installations can inspire, delight and generally have a very positive impact on the public realm and the city's image. A strategy is needed to provide guidance on what would be most appropriate where and to help ensure that any associated investment does indeed enhance the city's image.
- Events Strategy. City streets and spaces are wonderful places for enabling exciting, interesting and valuable things to happen. While these are often spontaneous, a thoughtful events strategy should both influence the design of specific locations and help maximise the value of any investment made.

DISTRICT PUBIC REALM STRATEGIES

The process adopted in preparing this strategy for the City, and the structure of the document itself, are intended to be templates for the future preparation of sibling strategies for other parts of St Albans District. These can be brought forward as need determines and resources allow.

START AS YOU MEAN TO GO ON - MARKET PLACE EXEMPLAR

In preparing this Public Realm Delivery Strategy, it has become clear that there are a number of areas in which the Council could usefully develop supporting and complimentary strategies.

This document will be for nothing if it sits on a shelf, never to be read again. What is now needed is for the momentum, which was generated by the City Vision and other previous studies, and which has been built-upon throughout this study, to be focused on a physical project that delivers material improvements for St Albans public realm.

These next steps taken by the Council in progressing improvements to the public realm will be critical to the long-term success of this Delivery Strategy. In particular, its first physical manifestations will establish a level of quality to which all other interventions will be judged. Equally, this first project has the potential to help to galvanise support for investing in the public realm.

Helping others to understand the potential that improvements to the public realm can bring will be crucial to gaining support. The development of outline schemes and particularly the use of visualisations can help to articulate how changes to the public realm can result in tangible improvements to the way that people use these spaces.

Market Place offers the perfect opportunity to implement changes that reinvent the use of this space in a high profile location and for relatively modest sums of money. Relatively low existing vehicular flows combined with pleasing sense of scale defined by the adjacent, fine grain buildings, provides a great location for a much needed place to pause in the city. Initially, the provision of simple seating and tree planting will help to provide the right conditions for encouraging people to savour the public realm. This scheme's success should then provide the impetus and values for subsequent projects in the city centre.

the **urban**movement team at

urbaninitiatives