Cornwall & Scilly Urban Survey

Historic characterisation for regeneration

ST AUSTELL

Objective One is part-funded by the European Union
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Cover illustration

St Austell: the historic core viewed from the south west, 2001 (CCC Historic Environment Section, ACS 5463).

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Abbreviations

CSUS Cornwall & Scilly Urban Survey
DCMS Department for Culture, Media and Sport
DTLR Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions
GIS Geographical Information Systems
LOTS Living Over The Shop scheme
RBC Restormel Borough Council
SWERDA South West of England Regional Development Agency
Summary

Situated in mid Cornwall, close to the south coast, St Austell is the largest town in the county. It is currently the focus of several major regeneration initiatives within and close to its historic core, including the redevelopment of its 1960s shopping precinct (Aylmer Square) and creation of an urban village.

Historical development

Originating as a medieval churchtown, St Austell had become a small market town by the 17th century. The rise of tin and copper mining in the surrounding area brought additional commercial and service functions and by the later 18th century the town could be dubbed the ‘Peru of Britain’ because of the large amount of mining-related business taking place there. Mining continued to be important in the earlier 19th century but severely declined later in the period. Other Cornish industrial centres experienced severe hardship in consequence. For St Austell, however, the rapid advance of the china clay industry after c.1850 based in the area immediately to the north brought substantial new trade and functions. By the beginning of the 20th century it was regarded as the ‘most flourishing town in the county’. The historic core of the town retains buildings of all these phases, including a magnificent late 15th century church, a late 17th century urban manor house, 18th century town houses and 19th century public, civic and religious buildings. The quality of the latter group in particular assert the confidence and success of the town as an administrative, commercial and service centre at this period.

Restructuring of the china-clay industry in the inter-war period marked the beginning of a long phase of economic stagnation and decline. From the 1930s, however, St Austell became a focus for large-scale housing development; the growth of estates on greenfield sites mostly on the eastern side of the town resulted in the progressive absorption of several previously discrete outlying industrial hamlets. The 1960s saw construction of Cornwall’s first purpose-built shopping precinct (Aylmer Square) and first residential tower block, together with piecemeal redevelopment and road creation and widening schemes. Together these changes have had a significant impact on the functions of the historic urban core and this shift has been emphasised by the more recent rise in suburban and settlement-edge retail provision.
Historic settlement character

St Austell’s unique history has created a town with a strong, locally distinctive character. Major elements of this include:

- Hillside location, sloping topography and significant views across and out of the town;
- Radiating medieval street pattern, narrow curving street lines, towering buildings and strong sense of enclosure in the urban core;
- Survival of diverse range of high quality historic fabric and landmark buildings; a rich variety of building materials and architectural forms, from highly designed and ornamented structures to plainer three-storey rendered buildings;
- An industrialised river valley with the buried and standing remains of a rich industrial past
- A surrounding suburban ‘green-belt’ created by the mature trees and shrubs of the established gardens of large residential properties

Character-based principles for regeneration

A strategy for St Austell’s regeneration soundly based on characterisation will incorporate the following elements as fundamental themes.

- Understanding and respect for the distinctive contribution which topography and location make to the townscape.
- A specific focus on repairing tears in the urban fabric, thereby reinstating the overall high quality of the townscape; an emphasis on quality in all new urban design and architecture and in shaping the public realm.
- Respect for the historic urban hierarchy within St Austell and a commitment to reinstating it and to reconnecting key components and linkages within the town.
- Presentation, interpretation and promotion of St Austell as a high-quality historic Cornish town of character and significance.
Character areas and regeneration opportunities

Seven distinct Character Areas have been identified within the historic urban core. These are differentiated by their varied historic origins, functions and resultant urban topography, the processes of change which have affected each subsequently and the extent to which these elements and processes are evident in the current townscape.

1. Central church area. Historic heart of St Austell, hub of the town’s radiating road pattern. Outstanding urban qualities: concentration of diverse buildings of the highest quality, striking streetscapes, a grandly civic air set off by the green oasis of the churchyard.

   - Reinforce primacy within urban hierarchy
   - Public realm improvements
   - Enhance setting of key historic structures
   - Retain historic street setting and surfaces through traffic management scheme

2. Fore Street. Main commercial street & historic east-west routeway, concentration of three-storey buildings set hard to the pavement edge, high degree of enclosure and urban density.

   - Reinforce importance within urban hierarchy
   - Capitalise on the strong urban qualities of the street: repair tears in urban fabric
   - Acknowledge and enhance the quality of the surviving historic fabric: shopfront scheme

3. Western gateway. Nodal point in the town’s communication network, junction of five major routes, edged by several significant buildings.

   - Enhance gateway to urban core
   - Reinstate a tighter urban grain – reduce junction mouth and redevelop important corner plot
   - Development opportunities– Globe yard complex enhancement

4. Industrial river valleys. Historic focus for industrial activity based on water power & communication, now dispersed light industrial activity, housing, footpaths & green areas.

   - Sympathetic conversion and continued use of robust industrial buildings
   - Promote for amenity & historic value
   - Promote further research into the important industrial past of the area
   - Enhanced links to countryside

5. 18th and 19th century urban expansion. Around the central core, contains many of the town’s public, civic & religious buildings, as well as residential terraces and cottage rows. 20th century decline has resulted in vacant & underused buildings, brownfield sites, car parks.

   - Enhance approaches to town centre
   - Urban greening & public realm improvements
   - Renovation & reuse of key historic buildings
   - High quality redevelopment on brownfield sites

6. Aylmer Square and Trinity Street. 1960s pedestrian shopping precinct on greenfield site adjoining historic core; subject of major current redevelopment initiative

   - Respect surrounding historic character in creating new urban quarter
   - Improve integration with historic town through active external edges and increased and legible permeability and connectivity
   - Conserve & enhance ‘greenbelt’
   - Maintain integrity of historic plots
   - Maintain and enhance high degree of plot enclosure

7. Suburban residential area. 19th century suburban expansion forming periphery of historic town: large villas & mature gardens now provide the town’s distinctive ‘green-belt’.

   - Enhance approaches to town centre
   - Urban greening & public realm improvements
   - Renovation & reuse of key historic buildings
   - High quality redevelopment on brownfield sites

These character areas are a means of understanding the past and the present. In turn, that understanding provides the basis for a positive approach to planning future change which will maintain and reinforce the historic character and individuality of each area - sustainable local distinctiveness.

A summary of the attributes for each character area, with key themes for heritage-led regeneration are presented below.
1 Introduction

Regeneration and the historic towns of Cornwall and Scilly

In July 1999 Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly were designated as an Objective 1 area, bringing potential investment from European funds of more than £300m over the nine-year spending period. Economic regeneration schemes and development projects within the region’s towns are likely to form a major element of the Objective 1 Programme.

Regeneration on this scale offers an unparalleled opportunity for contemporary contributions in urban design and architecture to the built environment of Cornwall and Scilly’s towns. At the same time, the Objective 1 programme emphasises environmental sustainability (including the historic environment) and regional distinctiveness as key considerations in regeneration planning. The process of change launched by current regeneration initiatives could, if not carefully managed, have a negative impact on the historic environment and the unique character and sense of place of each of these settlements. The pressure to achieve rapid change could in itself result in severe erosion and dilution of their individuality and particular distinctiveness and, at worst, their transformation into ‘anywhere’ towns.

It is clear from recent research that a high-quality historic urban environment and the distinctiveness and sense of place integral to it are themselves primary assets in promoting regeneration. The effect may be direct, through heritage tourism, for example, but there is a more powerful and decisive emotional and perceptual impact in prompting a strong sense of identity and pride of place which in turn creates a positive and confident climate for investment and growth.

This synergy between the historic environment and economic regeneration was recognised and strongly advocated in the Power of Place review of policies on the historic environment carried out by English Heritage in 2000, and its value clearly highlighted in the government’s response, The Historic Environment: A Force for the Future (2001). The tool by which the two may be linked to create a framework for sustainable development in historic settlements is characterisation.

Characterisation and regeneration

‘The government . . . wants to see more regeneration projects, large and small, going forward on the basis of a clear understanding of the existing historic environment, how this has developed over time and how it can be used creatively to meet contemporary needs.’

( DCMS / DTLR, The Historic Environment: A Force for the Future (2001), 5.2)

Characterisation is in essence the creation of a comprehensive knowledge base on the historic environment. This includes what is known of the settlement’s historic development and the resulting urban topography - the basic components which have contributed to the physical shaping of the historic settlement such as market places, church enclosures, turnpike roads, railways, etc. – together with an overview of the surviving historic fabric, distinctive architectural forms, materials and treatments and the significant elements of town and streetscapes. Characterisation may also provide the basis for assessing the potential for buried and standing archaeological remains and their likely significance, reducing uncertainty for regeneration interests by providing an
indication of potential constraints. Overall, the process offers a means of understanding the diverse range of factors which combine to create ‘distinctiveness’ and ‘sense of place’.

Characterisation is also the means whereby the historic environment can itself provide an inspirational matrix for regeneration. It highlights both the tears in the urban fabric wrought by a lack of care in the past and offers an indication of appropriate approaches to their repair. It emphasises the historic continuum which provides the context for current change and into which the regeneration measures of the present must fit if the distinctive and special qualities of each historic town are to be maintained and enhanced. Characterisation is not intended to encourage or provide a basis for imitation or pastiche: rather, it offers a sound basis on which the 21st century can make its own distinct and high-quality contribution to places of enduring value.

**Cornwall and Scilly Urban Survey**

The Cornwall & Scilly Urban Survey (CSUS) was set up – funded by both English Heritage and the Objective One Partnership for Cornwall and Scilly (European Regional Development Fund) – as a key contributor to regeneration in the region. The project is investigating 18 historic towns and creating for each the information base and character assessment which will provide a framework for sustainable action within these historic settlements.

These towns have been identified, in consultation with planning, conservation and economic regeneration officers within the seven district, borough and unitary authorities in the region, as those which are likely to be the focus for regeneration.

The ‘target’ settlements are:

- Penzance
- St Ives
- Hayle
- Helston
- Camborne
- Redruth
- Falmouth
- Penryn
- Truro
- Newquay
- St Austell
- Bodmin
- Cambelford
- Launceston
- Liskeard
- Saltash
- Torpoint
- Hugh Town / Old Town (St Mary’s, Isles of Scilly).

CSUS is a pioneering initiative aimed directly at cutting across the boundary that traditionally divides conservation and economic development. Nationally, it is the first such project carrying out a characterisation-based assessment of the historic urban environment specifically to inform and support a regional economic regeneration programme. Future regeneration initiatives in other historic settlements, both in Cornwall and further afield, will benefit from the new approach developed by the project.

**CSUS reports**

CSUS reports present the major findings and recommendations arising from the project’s work on each town. They are complemented by digital data recorded using ArcView Geographical Information System (GIS) software, and together the two sources provide comprehensive information on historic development, urban topography, significant components of the historic environment, archaeological potential and historic character. Importantly, the reports also identify opportunities for heritage-led regeneration and positive management of the historic environment.
The reports and associated digital resources are shared with the appropriate local authorities; economic regeneration, planning and conservation officers therefore have immediate access to the detailed information generated by the project. Additional information is held in the Cornwall and Scilly Historic Environment Record, maintained by the Historic Environment Section of Cornwall County Council.

Public access to the report and to the associated mapping is available via the project’s website - www.historic-cornwall.org.uk - or by appointment at the offices of Cornwall County Council’s Historic Environment Section, Old County Hall, Truro.

**Extent of the study area**

The history and historic development of each town are investigated and mapped for the whole of the area defined for the settlement by the current Local Plan. However, the detailed characterisation and analysis of urban topography which together form the primary elements of the study are closely focused on the historic urban extent of the settlement. For the purposes of the project this area is defined as that which is recognisably ‘urban’ in character on the 2nd edition Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map, c. 1907 (Figs. 1 and 2). Outlying rural settlements which have been incorporated into the modern urban area since 1907 are intentionally excluded.
2 St Austell: the context

St Austell is Cornwall’s largest town, with an estimated current population of 28,000. It lies in mid-Cornwall, within the bounds of Restormel Borough Council, approximately 2.5 km from the south coast at St Austell Bay (Fig. 1). It is located between Truro and Liskeard on the A390, one of mid-Cornwall’s two main east-west road routes, and has reasonably good road access north towards Bodmin and the A30 and north west to Newquay and the west of the county. St Austell is also on the mainline rail route linking Penzance and London Paddington.

The regeneration context

St Austell has been a target for regeneration initiatives since at least the early 1960s when the Aylmer Square development was planned as a bold new commercial focus for the town. In the late 1980s the local Action 2000 group initiated a community consultation process to identify priorities for economic and social change and in 1995 the Civic Trust Regeneration Unit produced an Action Plan for the town. However, until recently the climate for change has not been right and many of the documents findings are still valid today. With the possibilities now offered by the Objective 1 program and the extraordinary success of the Eden Project the national and regional profile of the town have been recast and the town’s regeneration is now imminent.

St Austell is currently identified in the Restormel Borough Council Local Plan and the Objective 1 Single Programming Document as a focus for new housing (including affordable housing), increased and diversified employment opportunities and increased commercial and industrial activity. Policies relating to the town centre seek to enhance its shopping, service and cultural provision and improve the environment. An Integrated Area Development Plan for the area is in preparation (Scott Wilson). A diverse range of agencies and partner organisations are involved in current regeneration initiatives, including Restormel Borough Council (RBC), South West of England Regional Development Agency (SWERDA), Restormel Regeneration Partnership, the Prince’s Foundation, Cornwall County Council, the Market House Commissioners, the Town Forum and Chamber of Commerce.

The significance of St Austell in the current Cornish regeneration context is indicated by the variety of projects already in prospect for the town (Fig. 1). The most significant of these is the major redevelopment of the Aylmer Square complex by a partnership led by SWERDA; this is the largest regeneration project currently in prospect in Cornwall and is in itself a key indicator of the changing economic environment in the region. A St Austell Town Centre Regeneration Development Brief has been produced by Feilden Clegg Bradley Architects on behalf of the lead partners to inform planning of the new development.
There are also currently proposals for a significant hotel development in High Cross Street and plans are also being drawn up for the key Market House building and an adjacent piece of land currently used as a car park.

Plans for the creation of a vernacular ‘urban village’ on a brownfield site about 1.5 km from the centre of town have made national headlines and have been compared with the influential Poundbury urban extension to Dorchester, Dorset. The former hospital site on Edgecombe Road is another large brownfield site currently for sale for redevelopment. In addition, SWERDA is planning to use St Austell as a pilot for the recently launched Civic Pride initiative, targeting several of the approach routes to the town centre.

Landscape and setting

St Austell is situated in a landscape of contrasts (Fig. 1). To the north lies the Hensbarrow granite massif and the dramatic industrial landscape of china clay extraction, draining into steep-sided, densely wooded river valleys running south to the sea and the small historic ports of Charlestown and Pentewan.

The modern settlement extends over a considerable area of the southern fringes of the Hensbarrow granite massif, with the historic core lying at about 60m OD. The historic centre of the town is situated at the head of a dry combe on a south-facing, gently sloping hillside, immediately east of the meeting point of two steep-sided river valleys: the White River, or Gover Stream, and St Austell or Vinnick River. The rivers merge and run southwards in a wider and less deeply cut valley to reach the sea at Pentewan. Until the medieval period and silting due to tin streaming it is likely that this formed a tidal creek to within 2-4 km downstream of St Austell. A small stream valley descends from the Downs through Carclaze and the eastern part of the modern urban area to join the sea at Charlestown and Par.

The river valleys have been a focus for industrial uses since at least the medieval period, using the flowing water as a power source for mills and blowing houses. The course of the St Austell river valley historically formed the main route through the Hensbarrow uplands and the siting of the town at the mouth of this ‘pass’ is of some importance. These precipitous valleys provide a striking backdrop to many of the views of the town centre, with the verdant greening of the mature trees, elevated location of a number of valley-side residences and the graceful spanning of the granite railway viaducts. The uplands and clay country provide further dramatic scenery to the north of the town where the horizon is dominated by china clay waste, including...
some of the distinctive surviving pyramidal spoil heaps.

To the east, west and south of the historic town centre the topography is less dramatic, based on a geology of degraded granite at the edges of the massif and slate-grit elsewhere. Generally it slopes more gradually from the uplands of the north down to the sea. This surrounding area has been defined in the Cornwall Historic Landscape Characterisation as Anciently Enclosed Land (predominantly medieval) with some small areas of Recently Enclosed Land on the fringe of the downs to the north and near the sea to the south.

Overall, the quality of St Austell’s landscape setting is a significant asset for the town - the proximity of wooded steep-sided river valleys, the contrast between gently undulating countryside to the south and the ‘Cornish alps’ to the north, the contribution of the hillside location to the townscape.

Physical topography of the urban area

Within the historic town centre the underlying topography adds a crucially important element to the character and interest of the townscape. Most of the town’s streets are laid out on a sloping gradient allowing views across tiered rooftops and out to the surrounding countryside. The church, forming the central hub of the historic town, is sited towards the head of a dry side valley falling to the south west. The land rises to the north-west, north and east. On the south side of the church, Church Street forms a level area from the Bull Ring (east of the churchyard) west into Fore Street, the town’s main commercial street. The latter has been engineered to follow the curve of the contour to achieve one of the few level streets in the town. South of Church Street and Fore Street the land falls to the river valley, rising again on the valley side beyond.

Historic environment designations

The current historic environment designations in the historic urban core of St Austell are listed below.

- One Scheduled Ancient Monument: a relocated medieval cross now situated in Holy Trinity churchyard.
- 39 Listed Buildings (Grade I: Holy Trinity church; Grade II*: Market House, St John’s Methodist Chapel and the relocated medieval cross in the churchyard; 35 Grade II structures).
- A Conservation Area focusing on Fore Street and the church; designated 1968, extended in 1976 and currently being reviewed by the conservation team at Restormel Borough Council.
3 Historical and topographical development

St Austell has an intriguing development and topographical history (see Figs. 3 and 4), although important aspects remain obscure. The town is of particular interest because most other pre-19th century urban centres in Cornwall were deliberately planned foundations, originating either as medieval markets or industrial settlements. On the basis of what is currently known, St Austell appears to be one of the few towns in the county which have grown ‘organically’, and yet there are indications that there were perhaps several attempts to promote a market and urban centre here.

Early origins

The origins of the settlement are obscure, with a legendary foundation by the 6th century Welsh missionary Saint Austell. It is likely that the wider area was settled, farmed and perhaps exploited for minerals from a prehistoric date, although the only suspected site of this period close to the historic town is a possible late prehistoric or Roman period enclosed farmstead (round) at the top of Blowing House Hill. South east of the study area, around the upper lip of the Charlestown valley, there are indications of a Bronze Age ceremonial landscape, represented by the site of a barrow cemetery and a surviving standing stone.

Medieval churchtown

The earliest historically verifiable settlement phase is as the churchtown for an exceptionally large rural parish. However, although the first certain documentary reference to the church is c. 1145, the oval, raised churchyard around the current church of the Holy Trinity (formerly dedicated to Saint Austell) resembles lann enclosures found elsewhere in Cornwall and lends some credence to the possible early Christian origins of the settlement.

Whether early medieval or medieval in origin, it is clear that the church site and its enclosure represent the primary element in the topography of the town; the network of roads radiating from this area still forms the essential framework for the layout of the settlement (see Fig. 4).

At Domesday the area of modern St Austell was divided between several medieval manors, one of which was gifted to Tywardreath Priory by the Cardinham family in the early 12th century. The church is amongst the largest in Cornwall and dates mainly to the 15th century. Earlier elements including remains of a chantry chapel date to c1300 and survive in the south side of the present chancel and Lady Chapel. Of especial note is the 15th century ornately carved tower with its sculpted figures said by Betjeman to be one of the best in the county.


Market and tin town

The scale and quality of Tywardreath Priory’s rebuilding of Holy Trinity church in the mid-late 15th century suggests that it may have been intended as a significant element in creating a prestigious centre at this time, perhaps a planned urban foundation. Although there are no discernible traces of regular burgage strips, the historic topography provides evidence of a former open market place around the churchyard. Significantly, this is at the meeting point of the three local manors. This point is traditionally marked by the ‘Mengu Stone’, now in the churchyard but formerly sited in front of the Old Manor House. This building is set back from the modern street frontage at the east end of Fore Street and there is evidence of encroachment between it and the church; it would originally have faced the west end of the church across the open market area. The plan of the streets to the south of the church also suggests piecemeal infilling of a former open space.

Leland described the settlement in c. 1536 as ‘the poor town of St Austelles . . . nothing notable but the parish church’, but his use of the term ‘town’ certainly suggests that there may have been a market in existence by this time. This change in the function and character of the medieval churchtown was essentially based on the growing industrial activity in the wider area, for which St Austell was well sited to serve as a market and as a servicing, processing and transportation centre. Tin streaming and small-scale mining were already of some importance, with the ore from Hensbarrow being of exceptional quality. Carclaze to the north-east was reputed to have been worked from the 15th century and Polgooth to the south-west from the 16th century. St Austell was at the centre of the major medieval stannary of Blackmore and there is evidence that a stannary court operated from the town, possibly from the manor house. The town’s role as a servicing centre for the surrounding mining activity was already established with an ‘old blowing house’ on a site at Blowing House Hill by 1546.

The ‘town’ was certainly limited in size at this period. Fore Street probably only extended as far as the junction with Grant’s Walk, now an atrophied back lane to the north side of the main street but probably the original approach road to the churchtown for routes from the north along the Trenance valley. In some respects the settlement is likely to have maintained an agricultural character: portions of the medieval field pattern around the core persisted to be depicted on the tithe map of 1842; some of the curved strip field boundaries shaped the later development of the town and have become fossilised within its plan (Fig. 4).

The developing economic functions and status of St Austell are seen in its petition for a market charter in c. 1638, asserting that ‘the town has a great trade in corn, fish and tin’ and was ‘very populous’ with a ‘fair market house’, and in the granting of a Friday market in 1661. The late 17th century construction (and possible rebuilding) of the manor house was as a three-storied structure of overtly urban scale and detailing. In 1695 Celia Fiennes described St Austell as ‘a little market town’ and Gascoyne’s map of about the
same time shows buildings clustered around the north, west and south sides of the church and along the radiating routes. The transfer of landownership and manorial power in the later 17th century to a number of local gentry families (including the Rashleighs, Tremaynes and the Sawles) is likely to have further stimulated the expansion and development of the town and the formalisation of its status.

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**‘The Peru of Britain’**

The 18th century saw a major increase in the scale and degree of industrialisation of Cornish metal ore mining and St Austell’s position within an important mining area dramatically changed the nature of the town. Pococke referred to St Austell in 1750 as ‘a little tinning town’ but by 1788 the Reverend Shaw could nominate it the ‘Peru of Britain’ because of the amount of mining-related business he saw undertaken there. The late 18th century beginnings of the china clay industry reinforced the essentially industrial base of the area.

St Austell’s commercial role was enhanced by the building of the new turnpike road between Truro and Plymouth through the centre of town in 1760. The road followed a route along Western Hill, crossing the river at the Old Bridge (itself dating to the 16th century but likely to have been a crossing point for longer), ran along Fore Street and the churchtown and out by East Hill (Fig. 4). The White Hart Hotel was trading on Fore Street by 1735, but many of the numerous pubs, inns and hotels in the town are likely to date to this later period; the General Wolfe at the west end of Fore Street was in existence by 1785 although perhaps dating from about the time of Wolfe’s death in 1770.

Despite its increasing economic significance, however, the town remained relatively small (Fig 3): the General Wolfe may mark the western extent of the town in the later 18th century, with non-urban industrial and residential uses along Western Hill and in the river valley below it; to the east, the overflow cemetery required by 1793 was created from open fields less than 200m from the centre of town. An anonymous late 18th century traveller noted St Austell as a ‘small market town with a few good houses, but the rest very old and indifferent with very bad pavements’. He was impressed, however, by the ‘good town hall and a very antient and capital church . . . worth the attention of travellers.’

The same author also observed that ‘a great number of miners live here’, although surviving evidence indicates only limited residential provision for the industrial population within the town. There are records of cob-built housing in the river valley, but the majority of
industrial workers lived close to their workplaces, outside the town. This created a pattern of scattered industrial hamlets with cottage rows and later terraces which survived until the post-war expansion of St Austell absorbed most of them into the urban area (for example, Mount Charles and Holmbush).

Neither did the town develop extensive provision for housing the middle and upper classes on a par with the Regency terraces of Truro and Falmouth. Some local wealthy families did have impressive town and business houses close to the centre, however, including the Tremayne house on Fore Street, currently Warren’s bakery, and Charles Rashleigh’s impressive granite-built town house sited below the church, now part of the White Hart Hotel.

‘White Gold’

The meteoric rise of deep metal mining in the first half of the 19th century had a profound influence on many of Cornwall’s towns. This was a period of major urban development in all the industrial areas of the county. The substantial growth not only of the urban core of St Austell but also its surrounding industrial villages is shown in Figure 3. However, whereas during the later 19th and early 20th centuries many of the other Cornish industrial areas experienced severe economic decline, accompanied by large-scale emigration, St Austell rose to became what Hammond described in 1897 as the ‘most flourishing town in the county’. Its continued expansion and prosperity was almost entirely due to the successful development of the china clay industry, known locally as ‘white gold’. St Austell’s role as the ‘capital of the clay country’ sharply divides it from the county’s other industrial towns during this period.

During the early decades of the 19th century there was a substantial increase in the scale of mining in the near hinterland of the town, particularly new copper mines in the area to the south east. In this context, the population of St Austell parish more than doubled between 1811 and 1831. St Austell also held a prominent place in the communication network: much of the mineral output of the area was transported by road through the centre of town to the port of Charlestown (opened 1792) and later to Par and to Pentewan by a new link via a mineral tramway, the terminus for which was sited at the bottom of West Hill. Truro Road was constructed in the 1830s, creating yet another alteration in the western approach to the central area. The town continued as a centre for mining-related activities, including smelting, and a number of foundries were established. St Austell was briefly designated a coinage town between 1834 and the abolition of the coinage in 1838.
The civic pride and aspirations of this period of expansion underpinned much new development: the new and imposing Italianate market house in 1844 incorporated the first town hall; Fore Street was largely rebuilt during the 19th century with increasingly ornate three-storey buildings towering over the narrow, curved street. A variety of other new civic structures were built: a large workhouse (1839), assembly rooms (1846), Corn Exchange (1859) and police station (1866). There were also numerous nonconformist chapels, one of the earliest being that of the Society of Friends (Quakers) in High Cross Street built in 1829.

The mining-based economy was in decline from around the mid-century but new technology for drying china clay enabled a major expansion in the clay industry with a great increase in output from the 1850s; china clay produced in Cornwall, by far the greater part of which came from the St Austell district, rose from c. 13,000 tons in 1838 to 66,000 tons by 1858 and more than 550,000 tons in 1900. Despite the stigma which Rowse noted attaching to workers ‘going to the clay’, the industry proved to be the salvation and the making of the town.

During the later 19th century St Austell increasingly became a centre for banking, administrative and legal services, with most mining and clay companies having offices and carrying out the bulk of their transactions there. Much of this activity was centred on the streets around the east end of the churchtown and perhaps the most impressive surviving office in the town centre is that of the West of England China Clay Company, built in 1908 on High Cross Street on the site of the former Coode family town house.

The arrival of the main-line railway in 1859 also boosted the prestige and commercial links of the town. At around this time several residential suburbs were developed, creating an enclosing zone of large villas, each set within their own pleasure grounds (see character area 7). Many of these villas were built by local investors in the clay industry, many of whom, unlike the outside investors typically seen in the metal ore boom, had long held shops and businesses in the town. Some workers’ housing was also built, notably a group of terraces along Moorland Road, in the industrial valley west of the town, constructed between 1896 and 1907. These were commissioned by Sir Frances Leyland Barrett and designed by the Cornish

The Market House of 1844

Former West of England Cina Clay Offices, High Cross Street
architect Silvanus Trevail, the same partnership responsible for the Liberal Club in Fore Street. Trevail was involved in a number of buildings within the town including the Red Bank, the Devon and Cornwall Bank, the Assembly Rooms, St John’s Methodist Church and Tregarne Terrace. An early example of public workers’ housing was constructed in 1883 on the north-east edge of the town in Colenso Place.

The 20th century

‘As a Cornish town, St Austell ranks high,’ noted a visitor guidebook of c. 1931. ‘It is often spoken of as the richest in the county, and with its many important shops presents a smart appearance. By reason of its pre-eminence in the China-Clay industry it is frequently called “Clayopolis”. The offices of clay-producing companies are on every hand.’ This testimony marks the high point of St Austell’s economic fortunes in the 20th century. Consolidation in the china-clay industry had begun in the period after the First World War and culminated in the formation in 1932 of English China Clays. This had a marked impact on the prosperity of the town: although St Austell remained at the heart of the industry, profits from it were no longer retained locally and the boom years were over. Uncertainty over the future of the industry brought a long-term sense of underlying economic insecurity to the area.

The development of the town as a residential centre accelerated rapidly in the early 20th century: the guidebook cited above notes the impact of china-clay based prosperity on the surrounding area, ‘where houses, villas and bungalows, all fresh from the trowel, spring up like mushrooms.’ The construction of a bypass for the town centre in 1926 took traffic away from the town centre and opened a swathe of land to the south of the historic core for development and the first large scale public housing development was located to the north-east (Fig. 3). This pattern of expansion with mass housing schemes constructed on greenfield sites resulted in the absorption of previously outlying rural and industrial settlements into the extent of the modern urban area (Fig. 3). This housing-based expansion continues to the present and St Austell has grown to be the county’s largest town with an estimated population of 28,000.

During the 1960s, part of the town centre was redeveloped with the construction of Aylmer Square, Cornwall’s first purpose-built pedestrian shopping precinct (see character area 6). The precinct, incorporating a large purpose-built park house, residential tower block, Bridge Road

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supermarket and multi-storey car park, were novel elements in a Cornish town at this period. St Austell was also the location of Cornwall’s first residential tower block, on a site in the river valley west of the centre. A number of road creation and widening schemes were also carried out as part of the modernisation programme, including the insertion of Trinity Street west of Aylmer Square, linking two of the radiating routes to the west, and reshaping part of South Street as a route diverting traffic away from rather than into the historic core.

In the later 20th century St Austell has shared in the general rise of suburban and settlement-edge retail provision, based on rising car ownership. Much of this development has taken place along the A390 east – west route, south of the historic town centre, but there has been some similar provision in the former industrial river valleys to the west.

**Into the 21st century**

The beginning of the 21st century has seen a number of regeneration proposals for St Austell which is already having a significant affect on its economy and character, adding a new layer to the historical process of development. The town is clearly set for a period of major change with a noticeable increase in the volume of planning applications for the town. This potential rapid change will perhaps be as significant in its longer history as the processes which transformed St Austell from a churchtown to a market centre or created the 19th century industrial town.

Included in the broad regeneration strategies for St Austell are strands which aim to build employment, add further housing, boost commercial and industrial activity and tourism and develop retail and cultural facilities. New factors in the regeneration planning process are the immediate success in terms of visitor numbers which the Eden Project has achieved from its opening in 2001 and the new high profile which this and other nearby attractions such as the gardens of Heligan and Wheal Martyn china clay industry museum have brought to the area. Inclusion of St Austell on the new national cycle network emphasises the possible future contribution of tourism to the area economy, with a particular focus on the long-term potential for ‘green’, cultural and special interest tourism.

One factor is perhaps significantly different: past changes have to a large extent been a consequence of the rising fortunes of particular industries, of urban prosperity, of a desire to make manifest civic pride in material form. Conversely, the stimulus to change in the early 21st century has been the underperformance and fragility of the regional economy: regeneration is being led by public bodies and, significantly, by public money, from Europe, national and regional government, regeneration agencies and local authorities. One welcome consequence of this shift has been a new sense of the need for change to be managed and for it to respect and value people, environment and culture. The requirement to incorporate understanding of the historic environment, of character and of local distinctiveness into the process of planning beneficial change for the future is a positive expression of this.
4 Archaeological potential

St Austell’s archaeology is a largely unknown resource: no archaeological interventions (excavations, watching briefs, evaluations, etc) are recorded within the historic core of the town, although there have been a small number within the wider settlement area. An audit of industrial and archaeological sites in the china clay area produced in 1991 includes some information on the St Austell urban area.

While little is known, however, archaeology is potentially a rich asset. The documentary record is silent on many aspects of the town’s development and archaeology is almost certainly the only way in which certain key aspects of its historic development and character can be better understood. Archaeology can also make a contribution in both cultural and economic terms: remains of the past can have significant potential for education, tourism and leisure, as well as in terms of local pride and sense of place.

It should be emphasised that ‘archaeology’ does not refer solely to buried remains. These are of undoubted importance, but in the urban context examination of the historical sequences embodied in standing buildings and other structures can also be extremely valuable: a building survey is likely to yield significant new information. Opportunities for investigation and recording should be sought when buildings are refurbished or undergo substantial alteration. Fig. 5 indicates the survival of historic fabric, defined here as standing pre-1907 structures, which may offer potential for archaeological investigation.

Further documentary research is also likely to yield valuable data: the historian A L Rowse noted that he had come across an early reference to the ‘playing place’ at St Austell but gave no further information! This area of study, together with participation in building survey, may provide a challenging and worthwhile avenue for involvement by local groups wishing to investigate aspects of their heritage.

Archaeological remains are an important and non-renewable resource and as such are protected by national and local planning legislation. One component of future investigation of both buried archaeological remains and standing buildings should be through more extensive targeted implementation of PPG 15 and PPG 16 legislation as part of the development control process.
Indicators of archaeological potential

Fig. 6 indicates the potential extent of archaeological remains, although it must be emphasised that this depiction of potential is indicative, not definitive, and future archaeological investigation and research will test and refine its value.

An understanding of potential is broadly derived from the historic extent of the settlement itself. In simple terms, any location within the area developed to c. 1907 is regarded as having the potential for standing or buried archaeological features; the earlier settlement core (as shown by the 1842 tithe map) may have more complex and deeply stratified deposits.

Additionally, Fig. 6 highlights the historic medieval and post-medieval core of the town: this area is of particular archaeological interest and sensitivity in that deposits are likely to provide valuable information on the early form and development of the settlement.

Similarly, the archaeology of the area of dense industrial activity in the river valley to the west is little known or understood.

The map also identifies a small number of sites and areas of known historic significance: i.e., those where the presence of a significant structure or feature can be identified from historic maps or documentary sources but does not now survive above ground (for example, the site of the Lower Blowing House, Pondhu Road). Not specifically highlighted are sites for which available sources are not adequate to pinpoint a specific location; for example, an antiquarian reference to the former existence of an earlier workhouse in the vicinity of the ‘Old bridge’.

It should be noted that there is also potential within the area for the survival of archaeological remains which predate or are unrelated to the development of the town. In the absence of specific information such as reports of finds, however, there is unlikely to be any prior indication of their presence.

NB. Overviews of the archaeological potential of seven ‘character areas’ within the town are presented in section 5.
5 Present settlement character

Understanding character

In addition to assessing the broad elements of settlement character which define St Austell as a whole, the CSUS investigation identified seven distinct character areas within the town’s historic (pre-1907) urban extent (see below; Fig. 7 and character area summary sheets 1 - 7). These character areas are differentiated from each other by their varied historic origins, functions and resultant urban topography, by the processes of change which have affected each subsequently (indicated, for example, by the relative completeness or loss of historic fabric, or significant changes in use and status) and the extent to which these elements and processes are evident in the current townscape. In simple terms, each character area may be said to have its own individual ‘biography’ which has determined its present character.

The seven character areas offer a means of understanding the past and the present. In turn, that understanding provides the basis for a positive approach to planning future change which will maintain and reinforce the historic character and individuality of each area - sustainable local distinctiveness.

Overall settlement character

Settlement form

The historic core of St Austell is set on south- and west-facing hillsides immediately to the east of a steep-sided river valley. The basic street pattern hints at the origins of the town, with a road pattern focusing on the central hub of the church enclosure. The hillside setting means that most streets are laid on a gradient; this sloping topography adds much to the character of the town. Only in Church Street and the main historic commercial focus of Fore Street have the streets been engineered to follow the contour, marking out their status in relation to the rest of the town.

In the historic core the radiating roads are generally relatively narrow and follow gently curved lines flanked on both sides by towering buildings. This relationship engenders a tight urban grain and sense of enclosure. Throughout the town plot widths vary and although some uniformity is seen along Fore Street there is little to suggest a significant planned element. The plan form suggests a former open market area around the church but the surviving historic town has no formal public open spaces; the triangular road junctions to the east and west of the church enclosure appear to have served this function in the later historic period.

Survival of historic standing fabric

The town contains much surviving historic fabric of interest and quality (Fig. 5). The majority dates to the mid to late 19th century and represents the ambitious rebuilding of the town at this time. There is a concentration of survival around the church with many functionally important structures. Earlier surviving structures include the church, which incorporates fabric of the 13th and 15th centuries, and the ‘Old Manor House’ opposite thought to date to the late 17th century. Several 18th century town houses within this core are also of note including Charles Rashleigh’s former residence, now the White Hart Hotel and the Tremayne’s town house, now Warren’s Bakery.

The town has some good surviving industrial buildings along the river valleys and in the Bodmin Road area. The structural remains of mills, blowing
houses, foundry complexes and workers’ housing form an important part of the town’s built environment and heritage. Equally, the town has good survival of mid 19th century suburban villas set in large grounds; these create an important backdrop of mature trees and planting surrounding the historic core. Two large surviving residences of note are Trevarrick House and Polcarne, whose original landscaped planting contributes to the town’s ‘green belt’.

**Materials, architecture and detail**

The dominant historic building materials and finishes in the town are granite, killas and the local Pentewan and Duporth elvan stones, painted render and slate, with more limited use of brick. Granite ashlar is used in buildings of importance such as the Market House and White Hart Hotel and granite is used extensively throughout for quoins and other dressings. Some lesser status buildings use killas as irregular rubble with a mortar screed over the surface to equalise the irregularities. Other rendered elevations are of timber stud construction to the upper storeys with stone or brick constructed ground floors. Many front elevations in the central retail area are smooth rendered and painted in pale colours, creating a plain and modest architectural character. Slate hanging was formerly in greater use but now survives mostly on side and rear elevations (for example, the rear elevation of the Queen’s Head Hotel, North Street). Roofs are generally hipped or gabled and hung with grey slate with red clay ridge tiles and red brick chimneys. Often invisible from the pavement, roofs play an important role in views across town.

There are a number of larger, extravagant, highly designed and ornamented structures within the town generally dating to the late 19th century but an equally prevalent architectural form is of fairly plain three-storey rendered structures based on narrow plots. From the mid 19th century a limited amount of ornamentation was introduced, including bracketed hoods on window openings, cornices and planted pilaster columns. The town’s 20th century structures have generally broken away from established urban vernacular forms and have introduced new manufactured materials including a grey brick made from china clay waste. The 1930s Post Office on High Cross Street is an example of a relatively late building of quality which remains distinctly of its own time but responds to the surrounding vernacular architectural traditions in terms of its design and use of materials.

**Streetscape**

The network of radiating, gently curving roads creates an intrinsically interesting framework for the town. Notable throughout are surviving elements of good quality granite paving, kerb stones and guttering. In the suburban residential area...
districts there is good survival of granite gate posts and boundary walls.

The town benefits from a number of areas of urban greening. The central church enclosure is a green oasis in the heart of town with the Truro Road park and High Cross cemetery also providing valuable green amenity areas. A ‘tree trail’ has been developed for the town and is promoted through a specific leaflet.

**Landmarks and views**

The town contains a variety of landmark buildings. These serve to punctuate the townscape and add diversity and scale. Important structures include the church, the Market House and Town Hall, the ‘Red Bank’, the White Hart, the Masonic Hall, the former Liberal Club, the Baptist and Bible Christian Chapels, the viaduct and imposing Bodmin Road mill, the brewery and its tower, and North Hill House. These structures are prominent in the impressive townscape views available from some approaches into town.

The roofscape of the town are a prominent feature of its views. Within the urban core the hips and gables cluster around the church in a jumbled disorder. Further from the inner core the pattern of rooflines becomes more regimented, following the line of the radial roads. Whether looking down on the town from the railway station or up from the river valley the stepped rooftops underline the hillside setting of the town and display it as a series of layered tiers with the occasional overlarge roof breaking the grain.

Equally impressive views are available from the edges of the historic core looking out to the surrounding landscape. The sloping topography allows panoramic views across the town’s stepped rooftops to green fields on the opposite valley sides. The horizon is punctuated with silhouettes of derelict engine house to the south west and china clay tips to the north west, visually tying the town to the remnants of its industrial past within the surrounding landscape.

**The character areas**

1: Central church area

(Fig. 7 and character area summary sheet 1)

*This area is the historic heart of St Austell, centred on the church and forming the hub of the town’s radiating road pattern. It has outstanding urban qualities, with a concentration of diverse buildings of the highest quality, striking streetscapes and a grandly civic air, set off by the central secluded green oasis of the churchyard.*

The heart of the town is dominated by the oval mass of the churchyard set on sloping terrain with land rising to the north-west, north and east and falling away to the south.
Church Street flanks the curved line of the enclosure to the south and forms a level area continuing into Fore Street to the west. This is unusual in a town where the streets are generally set against inclines. The topography reinforces this area as the town’s nucleus, with approaches either descending or ascending into the central core, underlining the sense of arrival or departure.

Buildings around the church are generally of similar height, mostly three storeys, and appear to tower over the streets below. They are sited hard to the pavement edge and form a continuous, if slightly staggered, build line following the curve of the narrow streets. The consequence is a very high sense of enclosure and urban containment. Despite the high degree of physical permeability, views out of the central core are limited to brief glimpses to further urban scenes. Although the area once incorporated an open market space, the process of encroachment and infill has resulted in an area of particularly dense urban grain. In particular, the area of probable infill to the south of the church has achieved as much commercial street frontage as possible with narrow shop plots to all external faces. In lieu of any formal public open space the road junctions around the churchyard seem historically to have been used for ceremonial occasions.

There is a concentration of landmark buildings and other high quality structures in the area, emphasising its dominance in the historic urban hierarchy. The church, the manor house, the market house and town hall underline the area’s civic and historic importance, while the important group of 19th and 20th century bank buildings on High Cross Street, the 18th century townhouse of Charles Rashleigh (now the White Hart Hotel) and the early 19th century commercial premises at the bottom of Victoria Place illustrate its economic and commercial importance in the life of the town. The buildings are a diverse mix in terms of age, scale, materials, function and design - generally the area holds the town’s earliest, largest and most important buildings but there is also a significant presence of smaller commercial premises. Most of the buildings date to the 18th and 19th centuries, with few 20th century structures. Overall, they show more reference to cosmopolitan polite
architecture in their design than elsewhere in the town, with vermiculated ashlar, rusticated quoins, modillioned cornices, raised plaster fluted pilasters with ornate capitals and bracketed window hoods appearing frequently.

As elsewhere in the town, the typical window type is the vertical sash but many of the buildings here include a storey with round headed openings, possibly inspired by the piano noble of the former town hall within the Market House. The standard local materials are used in an ostentatious manner, with granite used as finely dressed ashlar (in the Market House, part of the White Hart Hotel and the 1930s Post Office building in High Cross Street) and as a high quality paving material around the southern side of the church yard and into High Cross Street. This area also demonstrates the adventurous use of later 19th century imported materials as typified by the red brick and terracotta of Silvanus Trevail’s ‘Red Bank’ of 1898.

Around the church all structures are aligned facing inwards towards the enclosure and further define it as the focal point of the town. The churchyard does not, however, function as a formal open space but is instead a more private, inwardly contained area. It forms a secluded green oasis at the heart of the settlement and has an air of detachment from the bustle of the surrounding town. The enclosure is removed and sheltered from the activity of the encircling streets by its raised position, strongly defined granite boundaries to the south, iron railings to the north and insulating boundary belt of mature trees: evergreen and summer flowering to the south, deciduous to the north, with palms adding a slightly exotic touch on the eastern side. This urban greening is a key element of views into this area and is a huge asset to the townscape, providing a place of quiet refuge and a vantage point for viewing many of the defining parts of the town.

This central core of the town is an excellent piece of townscape in very good general condition. However, because of changes in pedestrian flow within the town (see below: Fore Street) and the ebb of commercial activity from the historic market area to Fore Street and...
latterly Aylmer Square, its position as the town ‘centre’ has been diminished. Reasserting the quality and primacy of this area is crucial to its future well-being.

2: Fore Street
(Fig. 7 and character area summary sheet 2)

Fore Street is part of St Austell’s key historic east – west routeway and its main commercial street. It is one of the few level streets in the town. A concentration of three-storey buildings set hard to the pavement edge give it a strong feeling of enclosure and urban density.

Fore Street is historically the main commercial street of St Austell and forms the traditional approach route to the church and market area from the west. It is one of the few level streets within the town, apparently intentionally laid out along the contour to achieve its level topography. As a result, it follows a pleasing curve, allowing the streetscape to unfold as the observer progresses along its length. The church tower provides a spectacular end-stop to the east.

The western end has a more dissipated feel, the General Wolfe public house being now distanced from the street by the recent gateway sculpture which does not itself adequately terminate the streetscene. This end of Fore Street is an area of dramatic topographic contrast, with Western Hill falling sharply away to the river crossing and Bodmin Road running up the river valley to the north. Lanes and opes running off the street to north and south rise or fall sharply on the sloping terrain.

The street shows evidence of considerable change over its history. At the eastern end, the original building line splay’s out as it approaches the former market area; older buildings can still be seen behind 19th and 20th century shop extensions, culminating in the Old Manor House, now set well back from the modern street line in a side street. Fore Street has been extended westward from the market area in at least two phases, and there are indications of an earlier line for the approach from Bodmin Road (Fig. 4). The deliberate engineering of the eventual line of Fore Street to follow the contour means that this former line is now a small back lane, Grant’s Walk. Fore Street has always been primarily commercial, although it also formerly contained impressive town houses, hotels and public houses. The plots were short and the back land areas were used for dense residential courtyard developments which were demolished during the 20th century.

Fore Street is continuously edged on both sides with the building line hard to the pavement edge and continuously active frontages addressing the now pedestrianised street. There is a marked rhythm of narrow plots two-three window bays wide, built to three storeys or more, and appearing to loom over the street. The narrow plots and predominantly utilitarian commercial functions of the area produced a modest although distinctive form of design in the 19th century; plain in form, smooth rendered and painted in pale colours, with vertical sashes and either a gabled roof line or roof pitch screened by a plain parapet. Some buildings have upper
floors of timber-stud construction with windows flush with the wall face.

Later 19th and early 20th century buildings reflect the increasing sense of civic pride and investment (symbolised by the magnificent Liberal Club of 1890) and show increased surface ornamentation and scale, width and height increases, with ornate gables and dormer windows. These structures are generally executed in brick with limestone and granite dressings, although many are also painted.

The densely packed buildings, near-continuous build line, level topography and curving line of the street combine to provide a very good sense of urban containment and enclosure. However, several of the later 20th century structures are of two storeys; some include recessed ground floor frontages or are set back on their plots. These features reduce the level of enclosure and break the overall unity of the street.

Several historic shop front elements survive along the street, including a late 19th century cast iron shop front and the robust granite detailing of the ground floor of the landmark former Liberal Club. Most of the shop fronts along the street are of modern plate glass and plastic fascia design with eye-catching signage. These features tend to disrupt the rhythmic, vertical nature of the narrow plots, instead emphasising the horizontal.

Fore Street has undergone a major shift in its primary axis of movement. Historically it has been the key east-west axis of the town – for a long period it was part of the major through route. This changed during the later half of the 20th century with the creation of the Priory car park north of the street and the Aylmer Square development immediately to the south. This relationship, combined with the decline in commercial importance of the church area and pedestrianisation of the street, means that most movement now flows north-south. This change has had a significant effect on the connectivity of various routes, with north-south lanes and opes having been promoted to important communication axis.

The pedestrianisation of the street has been successful in creating a traffic-free...
atmosphere for shoppers and the street is generally busy during the day with the active street frontages providing a sense of bustle. However, the redesigned surfacing, making no distinction between pavement and road, has reduced the linear emphasis of the street, making it feel more like a modern shopping precinct.

Modern streetscaping has provided a number of benches within the street and a degree of urban greening in the form of hanging baskets and planters shaped as locally distinctive mining carts set on tramway rails.

3: Western gateway
(Fig. 7 and character area summary sheet 3)

A nodal point in the town’s communications links and an entrance point to the town centre. The area is well edged by several landmark buildings and offers views into the densely grained Fore Street to the east and out to the town’s river valleys and ‘green-belt’ to the west.

The nodal nature of this area and its links to the surrounding landscape have evolved over a period. Western Hill and Fore Street are probably the earliest routes, with the southern end of Bodmin Road being re-routed to enter the western extension of Fore Street. During the 19th century the suburban development of the town included the construction of Truro Road and the New Bridge as a replacement for the Western Hill approach and the Old Bridge. The northward course of Bodmin Road was also improved. During the 1960s Trinity Street was created as part of a scheme designed to take traffic away from the town centre.

The area has several fine structures of landmark importance; when arriving from the west these are the first overtly urban buildings experienced, heralding the beginnings of the town’s urban core. The late 18th century General Wolfe public house is an important landmark set opposite the western end of Fore Street and is an attractive building for such an important corner location. The adjacent former Globe Hotel is similarly framed in views from the northern end of Western Hill. This more substantial three-storey building uses the sloping topography to accommodate an additional floor whilst not overpowering the lesser scale and massing of its neighbour. The former Assembly Rooms, designed by Silvanus Trevail on Truro Road are a robust piece of 19th century civic architecture; the rusticated ashlar...
and round-headed windows perhaps make reference to the Market House. The Baptist Chapel complex is also of importance with its smaller and earlier chapel now fronting onto Trinity Street and its grander and later replacement to Western Hill.

Prior to the creation of Trinity Street it is clear that the character and commercial activity of the central core continued into this area. This link has been considerably eroded and the looser urban grain, big skies and open space of the wide mouthed junctions is in direct contrast to the intense enclosure of Fore Street and the central core. Nonetheless, the plain rendered, three-storey buildings on Bodmin Road define the corner into Fore Street and merge with similar properties, preserving some of the former integration between the two character areas; the alignment of the General Wolfe, addressing Fore Street, performs a similar function.

The area allows contrasting views both into the dense urban character of the west end of Fore Street, focusing on the spectacular former Liberal Club, and out of town to the green 19th century suburbs (character area 7). Some urban greening has begun in this character area with the planting up of a brownfield site on the western side of the Trinity Street junction with Truro Road, a flower bed on the pedestrian island of the junction and another in front of the General Wolfe, and two constructed planters flanking the gates to Fore Street.

4: Industrial river valleys
(Fig. 7 and character area summary sheet 4)

The river valleys have historically been a focus for industrial activity based on water power and communications, with many mills, blowing houses and foundry sites, industrial housing and transport links. The historic character continues in the present with current use of the area by a dispersed mix of industrial - retail warehouse - service enterprises and by housing, including Cornwall’s first residential ‘tower block’.

To the west of the town centre the Gover and St Austell river valleys merge to form the Pentewan valley. The tributaries and the river have long been used as an industrial power source.

Within the study area the steeply sloping western slopes of the valley and the level lying flood plain in the valley bottom demonstrate a distinctly industrial nature that has shaped the current character of the area. The density of industrial activity along the river valley is high; within the character area alone, which is less than 1 km in length, there are records and/or remains of two blowing houses, a foundry, seven mills, a candle factory and...
the terminus of a mineral tramway with surviving china clay store. Further research and survey would almost certainly identify other historic industrial activities within the area and provide much needed further information about the identified sites. Initial activity on some of these sites is likely to date to the medieval period.

The built environment in this area has a broadly north-south grain, following the course of the river and contours. The river valley itself formed an important transportation link with roads and mineral tramways skirting along its side connecting the heart of the china clay district with the distribution ports. Bodmin Road linked the town to the centre of extraction and formed an important route over the Hensbarrow moor to the north. The historic routes from the west to crossing points on the river, Western Hill and Truro Road, cut across this grain, however.

The defined industrial river valleys character area is large and contains a number of different character elements within it. There is considerable intermingling between the industrial character of the area and the residential character and mature planting of character area 7 to the south-west. This is especially seen along Truro Road with small 19th and early 20th century villas and a recreational park. Throughout the character area there is a mixture of scale in the built environment, with both larger industrial structures and terraces of small, high density workers’ housing. One fine example of the latter is the distinctive group of late 19th – early 20th century terraces along Moorland Road designed by Silvanus Trevail. These form an impressive group and have retained much of their original detailing. The houses are stone built with red brick dressings with slated roofs and red brick chimney stacks. Although obviously of a piece, each terrace unit has slight design variations with some of the end houses displaying gable details.

Many industrial structures survive but have become functionally obsolete. Although some have been converted to other uses, several are derelict and as such under threat, for example the grade II listed Trams mill with its cob cottage on Moorland Road. Modern building within this area echoes its historic character with a mixture of industrial units and high density housing in the form of Cornwall’s only residential tower block.

Landmarks include the 16th century ‘Old Bridge’, identifying the historic river crossing to St Austell from the west. The bridge is close to an attractive riverside walk, which links the old bridge with its 19th century ‘New Bridge’ replacement on Truro Road. The river itself forms an important amenity for the town. Its course is flanked by lush vegetation
which spreads to some undeveloped plots along the river banks, providing a sense of nature in close proximity to the town centre.

There are excellent views north to the imposing spans of the Trenance railway viaduct with the striking three storey elevation of a Bodmin Road mill. The combined scale of the viaduct and the mill structure emphasis the industrial character of the area. These feats of engineering, the drama of the steeply sided wooded valley and the pyramidal clay dumps form an impressive industrial backdrop for the town.

5: 18th and 19th century urban expansion  
(Fig. 7 and character area summary sheet 5)

This area represents an area of urban expansion during the period of industrial prosperity from the 18th to the early 20th centuries. It contains many of the town’s non-conformist chapels and several civic structures, as well as residential terraces and cottage rows. Key routes into the centre pass through it. There has been severe erosion of the historic fabric and the area is now marked by car parks, brownfield sites and underused and vacant buildings. It is an area of significant regeneration potential.

The topography of this character area is generally of sloping terrain around the town centre. The roads radiating from the church pass out through the area to the surrounding landscape. Historic development was concentrated along these roads, with more recent infill development located behind.

The built character of the area is mixed in type and scale. There are institutional and civic structures, all of 19th and early 20th century date, including a number of chapel complexes, the Police Station in High Cross Street and Masonic Lodge, South Street. The chapels are important architectural assets of the town, the Wesleyan Methodist group being listed Grade II*. Generally they are large detached structures with classical architectural design and detail. Most are set in private plots with limited impact from the street front. Often the chapel complex includes a Sunday School building, sometimes an earlier chapel structure that has been outgrown and replaced.

Other major buildings in the area, including the West of England China Clay Company offices and the Masonic Lodge, display architect-designed facades with high levels of ornamentation and non-vernacular materials. The police station on High Cross Street, however, is notable for its more domestic scale and use of vernacular materials and design.
There are also residential rows and terraces, generally small two or three storey structures with rendered and painted external finishes often constructed hard-up on the pavement edge, such as the underused cottage row on High Cross Street, the largely residential row on Market Hill and the grade II listed Elm Terrace. Others of a slightly later date have more architectural detailing, such as bay windows, and are set within garden plots with strongly defined boundary walls, such as the Silvanus Trevail designed Tregarne Terrace.

The area is also defined by erosion and loss; demolition has created a number of brownfield sites, some of which are now used as car parking. Two such examples are the site of the workhouse, now partly underlying the Priory car park, and an area of formerly densely crowded structures adjoining the west side of the Market House. This site is currently the subject of regeneration plans (see section 6).

An important green open space is provided by the late 18th century cemetery at the top of High Cross Street. The grave markers have now been cleared to fenced enclosures around the periphery of the plot and the space is presented as a park and amenity area laid to grass, with benches, meandering pathways, flower beds and mature trees. To the north of this area the gardens of the residential properties also begin the green backdrop which surrounds the town.

6: Aylmer Square and Trinity Street

(Fig. 7 and character area summary sheet 6)

Aylmer Square was begun in 1963 and designed by Alister MacDonald & Partners as a modern pedestrian, multifunctional shopping precinct with multi-storey car park, hotel, earlier 1930s cinema and residential accommodation.
The scheme was designed to push the town ahead of neighbouring rivals and to define it as a first-class shopping centre. During the 1980s-90s it has undergone some upgrading with resurfacing, new street furniture and additional structures.

Despite the sloping site, the topography of the precinct is level to provide a flat shopping area. The opeways giving access from Fore Street slope downhill into the precinct, demonstrating the change in level between the two areas. To the south-west of Trinity Street the land falls away to the river valley.

Prior to the initial development of the complex this was largely a greenfield site, despite its proximity to the historic town core. Some demolition occurred along South Street and at the rear of properties fronting Fore Street; the area also covers the site of the vicarage and its mature gardens.

Unlike other areas of the town the morphology of this area is designed to be inward looking, with shops located around an open public area. The square is designed as a public area with good opportunities for people to sit and congregate. Urban greening is provided within the public square itself, with a street tree and numerous hanging baskets. To the north-west external face of the precinct there is a shopping arcade and various commercial and leisure facilities. The multi-storey facades along South Street are almost wholly inactive.

The buildings making up the area are of a mixture of dates, designs and materials. They are largely rectilinear in design and executed in modern, non-distinctive materials. Many of the designs have a horizontal stress, contrasting with the strong vertical emphasis elsewhere in the town. The precinct running from Old Vicarage Place to Aylmer Square is of single storey shop units with steeply pitched roofs. Further into the square there are larger units which run through to a frontage on Fore Street. One such structure is 31 Fore Street, currently Boots and WHSmiths. This building has three important elevations; to the north it fronts into the conservation area along Fore Street, to the east it provides a relatively active edging to the Aylmer Place ope and to the south it provides an important façade within Aylmer Square. In terms of its materials, scale, articulation, vertical emphasis and architectural interest it makes a positive contribution to the townscape.

The legibility and permeability of this area is limited. The interface between the historic core and the modern precinct is restricted, with points of access being concentrated to the north-east at Old Vicarage Place and via the two widened opes off Fore Street, Chandos Place and Aylmer Place.
7: Suburban residential area
(Fig. 7 and character area summary sheet 7)

A residential suburb surrounding the historic town and forming the town's distinctive 'green-belt'. The mid-19th century development of the railway was accompanied by the development of this residential suburb made up of large houses set within substantial gardens. The mature planting of the area now provides an important element of the town's environment. The historic character of these areas asserts past industrial prosperity and the pride and display of local entrepreneurs.

Surrounding the historic core of the town are residential suburbs dominated by large mid-19th century villa residences. These houses are set within their own pleasure grounds and the presence of mature ornamental trees and shrubs creates a 'green-belt' around the town and forms a lush backdrop to many of the views into and across the townscape.

This suburban green-belt is situated on the higher slopes surrounding the town centre and dominates views into the mid-distance below the green fields of the horizon. Within the study area this character type recurs in three distinct areas; to the north the Palace Road area and the eastern side of Bodmin Road, to the south east the area around Polcarne and South Street and to the south west an area along the River Walk, Truro Road and Trevarrick Hall. Polcarne is designated as an historic park and garden in the Local Plan; it provides an important open space in near proximity to the centre of town with its raised position providing a significant 'green' element in views south from the town centre. Just outside the primary study area is Pondhu House, another of the important 19th century large residences built around the town. Its gardens have been subdivided and now contain the Borough Council’s offices and Pondhu school.

The high-quality stone and brick buildings of St Austell’s late 19th century brewery, located when first built, on an edge-of-settlement site beyond the suburban zone, now form an interesting, if contrasting, outer defining block to the northern element of this character area.

The morphology of these character areas is dominated by the desire for privacy and display, with large house plots shielded from the road by high boundary walls and thickly planted boundary belts of mature trees and flowering shrubs. The houses are set back from the road and approached from imposing gateways leading along meandering drives, ensuring that only glimpses are available from the roadside.

The buildings are designed on a large scale and their architectural style includes an element of flamboyance and ostentatious display; for example, turrets, cupolas and ornate mock-gothic fenestration. Although many of the
structures were built within the same planned development they retain a sense of individuality and uniqueness through this quirky, design book gimmickry. The Palace Road villa development was laid out at the same time as the railway opposite and the surviving northern element and footbridge of the GWR station design of c. 1882 shares the flamboyance of the villas which face it.

The streetscape of these character areas is dominated by mature planting of the large gardens, with shrubs and hedges providing privacy shields along the roadside and ornamental trees playing key parts in landscaped gardens. The leafy atmosphere of these areas is recognised in the Local Plan with the designation of ‘Areas of special character’. Also of importance within the streetscape are the enclosing high boundary walls, often of mixed rubble construction with granite capstones. These walls line the road with the greenery above providing strong enclosure and restricting views into plots and forming an urban equivalent to rural Cornish hedges. The boundary walls are punctuated with elaborate gateways, many of them flanked by granite posts with ornamental capstones and lantern fittings with ornate cast-iron or wooden gates.

Although there has been subdivision of previously extensive pleasure grounds around the largest of the houses such as Trevarrick Hall and North Hill Austell, the character of these areas survives to a great extent because the pattern of development has respected its surroundings; new houses are generally large, private, set back within their plots and within gardens often incorporating the mature shrubs and trees from the former pleasure grounds. Developments have been less successful at preserving historic character where they have introduced more densely grouped residential complexes and where the boundary enclosures have been breached and left unscreened, enabling views into the plot from the road.

**Industrial villages in the St Austell urban area**

Within the St Austell area are several small settlements, originally distinct and separate from the historic core of the town, which 20th century expansion has incorporated into the wider urban area. These include Holmbush and Mount Charles and smaller settlements such as Watering, Bethel, Tregonissey Lane End, Carclaze and Sandy Bottom (Fig. 1). Some of these are likely to have originated as medieval farmsteads: Tregonissey is first recorded in 1200 and Carclaze in 1311. Development in their current distinctive form, however, was based on the rise of industrial activity, particularly from the late 18th and early 19th centuries, and they developed as linear settlements along major communication routes near to mining complexes.

Building forms are diverse, a mix of rows and (later) terraces, cottage pairs and detached houses, with most of the historic buildings set along the axis of the major through routes; areas behind these roads have been infilled by more recent development. Architectural forms and materials are also varied. Many of the earlier buildings are simple two-storey cottages, pairs and rows of semi-coursed or rubble killas with brick chimneys and slate roofs; there are instances of both

![North Hill House gateway, note the partial survival of the flanking gas lanterns](image)
painted stone and render on buildings of these types.

Mount Charles in particular also has some examples of late 19th – early 20th century ‘suburban’ developments of greater architectural pretension. These include two-storey detached villas and short terraces in painted render with bay windows, raised quoins and moulded string courses and labels; two adjoining three-storey terraces of shops with flats above in Victoria Road have paired windows, moulded string courses and in one case Dutch-gabled dormers. These settlements also possess a range of historic public buildings, including schools, chapels, Sunday schools and pubs, and there are a few surviving industrial structures.

**Archaeological potential of the character areas**

**1 and 2: Central church area and Fore Street**

The area around the church and its enclosure was the early core of the settlement and is likely to hold evidence of its origins and subsequent development. Any opportunity for investigation within this core or around the eastern end of Fore Street would therefore be potentially valuable. The churchyard itself may be the site of an early Christian monastic enclosure (lann), dating to the 6-7th century AD. Information on the exact location of early market spaces and the sequence of encroachment and infill would help in refining understanding of the historic topography of the town. This area is likely to have been intensively occupied over a long period and there is potential for sequences of residential and commercial buildings along plot frontages and the remains of outhouses, workshops, rubbish pits and other ancillary activities to the rear. Opportunities to examine standing buildings in this area would also be valuable.

**3: Western ‘gateway’**

The long-term character of this area as a primary entrance to the town and the survival of a number of landmark buildings underlines its possible archaeological significance. There is potential for a sequence of earlier important buildings which have been ‘lost’ during successive changes in the road layout. Brownfield / vacant sites adjacent to Globe Yard and between Truro Road and West Hill are likely to be of interest.

**4: Industrial river valleys**

The river valleys to the west of the town centre have been in industrial use since at least the medieval period and this area
carries very significant potential for survival of both buried and standing archaeological resources. Many industrial structures remain and the area is known to have been the location of blowing houses, foundries, mills, leats and other water power related structures, an industrial tramway and terminus, china clay stores, industrial housing and other features; it may also have been streamed for tin in the past. Tram’s Mill and cottage is an important partly cob-walled industrial structure that although grade II listed is now derelict and in danger of collapse. Archaeological recording of this structure is urgently required.

Historic bridges stand on Western Hill and Truro Road and engineering works associated with the river crossing at various periods may also survive. Valley-bottom alluvial deposits could hold potentially significant environmental information. An early workhouse and possible medieval almshouses are reported in the vicinity of the Old Bridge on Western Hill, although the precise sites are not known.

The Blowing House Hill area has a particular concentration of industrial sites, but is also reputed to be the site of an Iron Age / Romano-British enclosed farmstead (round). Little is known of the site but the chance find of an iron spearhead is recorded.

5: 18th and 19th century urban expansion

This is an area of significant potential for buried archaeology because there has been little or no development on the sites of demolished historic buildings; the sites persist as brownfield land or car parks. The post medieval urban development of this area took place on former agricultural land, however, and deposits are consequently unlikely to be deeply stratified or complex. Some of the standing buildings are under-used or neglected and many are of sufficient interest to merit investigation and recording before they become derelict, are destroyed or (preferably) adapted to new uses. One significant ‘lost’ site is the 1830s workhouse complex formerly in the area now occupied by the Priory car park and Sedgemoor Centre of St Austell College; unusually for this character area there may be earlier remains here deriving from some unknown form of activity related to Tywardreath priory.

6: Aylmer Square and Trinity Street

Much of the footprint of the Aylmer Square development was previously greenfield land. There was some demolition of courtyard developments at the rear of properties fronting Fore Street and of buildings (including a chapel) along the South Street frontage; there were other demolitions at the east end of the site. Any assessment of the potential for survival of buried remains of these structures is dependent on information on the extent and depth of ground disturbance during the original construction of the complex. It seems unlikely that significant deposits survive in this area.

It is recommended that the unique (in a Cornish context) character of the 1960s development is acknowledged in advance of demolition by creation of a comprehensive photographic record, perhaps accompanied by an archive of community memories.

7: Suburban residential area

The relatively late development and relative completeness of this character area, developed on formerly greenfield land, results in little predictable potential for buried archaeology. The individualism and flamboyance of many of the villas, however, merits investigation and recording.
6 Heritage-led regeneration and positive management of the historic environment

Characterising the historic environment of St Austell has produced a valuable dataset on the historic fabric, archaeological potential and townscape character of the historic town. This information can certainly be used as a conventional conservation and planning tool to define constraints, as a yardstick against which to measure new development and policy proposals and as the basis of well founded conservation management, restoration and enhancement schemes and policies.

More importantly, however, characterisation also reveals the essential dynamic factors underpinning St Austell’s character. Regeneration planning which is informed and inspired by these elements can take a much more sure-footed and proactive approach to creating beneficial change, both reinforcing and enhancing existing character and ensuring that new developments are better integrated into the existing urban framework, more focused and ultimately more successful.

Character-based principles for regeneration

St Austell’s unique character is based on its changing functions and fortunes over time, particularly its unique (in the Cornish context) development trajectory during the later 19th and the 20th centuries, the influence of its hillside topography and the mirroring of each of these in its complex organic urban form.

A strategy for St Austell’s regeneration soundly based on characterisation will incorporate the following elements as fundamental themes:

- Understanding and respect for the distinctive contribution which topography and location make to the townscape.

- A specific focus on repairing tears in the urban fabric – those aspects of the current built environment which detract from or are inappropriate to its character – thereby reinstating the overall high quality of the townscape; an emphasis on quality in all new urban design and architecture and in shaping the public realm.

- Respect for the historic urban hierarchy within St Austell and a commitment to reinstating it and to reconnecting key components and linkages within the town.

- Presentation, interpretation and promotion of St Austell as a high-quality historic Cornish town of character and significance.
Regeneration and the historic environment: key themes and issues

Repairing tears in the urban fabric

There is an urgent need to begin the process of repairing the tears in the urban fabric of St Austell, to reinstate the tight urban grain and re-establish a sense of overall quality in the built environment. Some of the later 20th century buildings and shop frontages in the principal retail area are particular priorities in this respect. As an example, older buildings in Fore Street are generally of at least three storeys and built hard to the pavement; some of the street’s more recent buildings are of only two storeys, however, and are set back from the building line. This has resulted in an obtrusive loss of the sense of enclosure which is an important element of the character of the street while also reducing the amount of commercial floor space available.

Reuse of redundant historic buildings

In parallel, it is crucially important that new uses are generated for some of the currently underused and disused historic buildings in this area and elsewhere in the town. Currently these include some of the most significant buildings in St Austell in terms of their contribution to its character and distinctiveness. Many offer potentially highly usable and robust structures, capable of successful conversion. Viable new institutional uses may be difficult to find for the larger structures and imaginative conversion to provide small residential or business units may be a more realistic option; again, occupation of these buildings would beneficially increase levels of activity in the area.

As a general point, additional occupation of some underused buildings could be achieved by further utilising their upper floors. The Red Bank has carried out a successful Living Over The Shop (LOTS) scheme and this could be used as an exemplar to increase residential use and add to the vitality of the town centre. Ensuring that buildings are fully used is likely to improve levels of building maintenance and upkeep.

Public realm

SWERDA’s Civic Pride initiative is to be piloted in St Austell and is likely to address public realm issues on several of the approaches to the centre of town. There is scope for improvement at the key gateway points to the town and ‘arrival areas’, such as car parks and the rail and bus station (see below, character area 5). Many of the pedestrian entrance points to the town centre also offer enhancement opportunities.

Urban greening

Urban greenery and green space plays a significant part in the unique character of St Austell. The central churchyard and urban parks form important facilities and
Heritage-led regeneration and positive management of the historic environment

The surrounding suburban green belt frames many important views and enhances the town’s landscape setting. In order to ensure that this important element is maintained, energetic replanting plans are required. These could potentially be run as community involvement projects (for example, ‘Plant a tree week’ schemes).

One of the aims for the town expressed in the Local Plan is to provide more accessible green areas close to the centre for quiet enjoyment. Several areas have been highlighted where additional planting and the creation of small ‘pocket park’ areas would be beneficial.

The town is set within an area rich in cultural attractions relating to the green environment with gardens such as Heligan and the Eden project. The town could align itself with these projects and examine further the possibilities of branding itself an environmental town. Also of interest may be the idea of ‘slow cities’, pioneered in Italy, which ensure respect for the environment within urban growth and concentrate on sustainability within urban life and local distinctiveness.

Transport, traffic and access improvements

The immense success of the Eden project, drawing close to two million visitors in its first year of operation, has exacerbated existing levels of traffic congestion over a wide area around St Austell, particularly during the summer. A new road link to ease access from the A30 is now planned. There is an increasing policy emphasis on boosting use of public transport, however, and St Austell’s existing combined rail and bus station is a significant asset in this respect. A Park and Ride scheme for the town is planned and this has the potential to reduce future parking capacity requirements in the centre, potentially freeing some current car park space for development.

The national cycle network route passes through the centre of St Austell and the Local Plan identifies a number of measures to encourage the use of cycles, including an increase in the number of designated cycle paths and new provision of cycle parks.

Resolving vehicle – pedestrian conflict

Further provision of pedestrian priority is a key element in improving the urban experience in St Austell, with the primary aim of enhancing the core as a ‘magnet’ for visitors and shoppers. The Local Plan identifies a number of measures aimed at resolving vehicle - pedestrian conflict, including traffic calming measures at the junction of Trinity Street and Truro Road and partial pedestrianisation of Duke Street and Vicarage Place and the central area around the church. In the latter case, the change of priority will help to reinstate this area as a primary focus and a hub for links to the rest of the town and the wider area. It will also help to draw the currently underused area of High Cross Street back into the central core, with the potential for increased pedestrian traffic along the important historic east – west axis of the town from the planned hotel development, the enhanced rail and bus station and the urban village.

These initiatives would be usefully supplemented by a comprehensive review of the overall need for vehicle access.
throughout the town centre, with current routes and volume, to identify the potential for further reductions.

**Timed delivery**

Despite the restricted access through Fore Street, the centre of town still has a lot of large vehicles loading and delivering goods through the day. Schemes such as early morning and early evening delivery could be examined to see if the town centre’s environment could be further improved and the pedestrian again given priority.

**Surfacing and streetscapes**

Resurfacing consequent on further pedestrianisation could be planned to retain a visual distinction between ‘pavement’ and ‘carriageway’; this would emphasise the linear element in the streetscape and maintain the sense of an historic street rather than a modern precinct. Siting of street furniture could advantageously follow a similar emphasis.

It would also be beneficial if historic surfacing elements such as granite paving, kerbs and gutters could be retained and reused and new surfacing materials selected to complement them. New surfaces could be selected to reflect the historic urban hierarchy, using materials and techniques appropriate to the status of each area and, where possible, of the same size unit as nearby historic survivals; historic surfaces in St Austell were not normally of such small units as the herringbone brick finish chosen for the Fore Street resurfacing.

**Conservation designations**

The Local Plan acknowledges the need to extend St Austell’s Conservation Area and offers a wider area of ‘Local historic and architectural importance’ and several areas of ‘Special character’ generally relating to large properties with mature trees and planting. Restormel Borough Council’s conservation team are currently working on proposals for the extended conservation area and their examination extends wider than the CSUS’s primary study area. CSUS investigation of St Austell strongly indicates that a much larger area of the historic settlement merits inclusion in the Conservation Area, indeed much of the primary study area should be considered for such a designation. It is also suggested that the town be recognised as a Historic Settlement in the County Structure Plan.

St Austell currently has 39 Listed Buildings within the primary study area. There are certainly many others which are of special architectural or historic interest and might be considered urgently for listing protection. Restormel Borough Council is examining the possibility of creating a supplementary ‘local list’ to acknowledge the significance of and provide information about locally important historic structures. The ‘other historic buildings’ identified on Figure 5 and in CSUS digital mapping offer an initial baseline for such a list.

**Co-ordinating change**

The diverse range of players involved in the regeneration process underlines the need for comprehensive conservation plans and management schemes for particular sites and areas of the town, to guide and inform future action. Examples include the central area around the
church, High Cross Street, Fore Street, the Market House and the industrial valley to the west of the town centre.

It is recommended that detailed planning guidance be provided for sites identified as major regeneration opportunities, to reduce uncertainty and promote architectural excellence. This guidance would include detailed characterisation, strong urban design guidance and, potentially, requirements for PPG16 evaluation of the archaeological resources and PPG15 assessment of the existing buildings.

Reasserting St Austell’s historic importance

To capitalise on its unique historic environment as a factor in regeneration, it is important that the quality and completeness of the historic environment in St Austell is recognised and used as a positive asset. This requires a basic recognition of St Austell as an historically important town. Themes that could be stressed in terms of making the town’s past accessible include its importance as a churchtown, market town, mining service centre and most obviously its role as capital of the china clay industry.

Recognition of this significance can be as simple as marketing St Austell as an historic town worth visiting in its own right. A new leaflet, ‘Discover St Austell: Historic Buildings’, sponsored by St Austell Chamber of Commerce, town forum, library and Restormel Borough Council, is a welcome initial acknowledgement of the assets which the town’s historic environment represents. It provides a model for further interpretative material on, for example, the visible legacy of the china clay industry. The establishment of a tourist information centre within the town itself, perhaps within the redeveloped Market House, would also send out positive signals.

St Austell currently has a tree trail, a geological trail and is included in a wider church trail; it certainly has features worthy of a town trail. Such a trail would provide the opportunity for better interpretation of key sites to the public and for their identification in the streetscape; for example, through the use of pavement plaques and non-intrusive interpretation boards. Buildings associated with notable historic figures – for example, the White Hart, formerly Charles Rashleigh’s town house - could be proposed as candidates for regional expansion of the English Heritage blue plaque scheme or used as pilots for a distinctively Cornish scheme.

There are major opportunities to integrate such promotion and interpretation of the historic core with other local and district initiatives. St Austell’s location is a valuable positive point in this respect, close to a range of different landscapes including wooded river valleys, unique industrial landscapes and the coastline, beaches and historic ports such as Charlestown. The remarkable industrial past of the area is a key asset, with important surviving industrial archaeology a key marketing factor. Hence, the town trail might be linked with a range of other local themes for green and cultural tourism, including, for example, the industrial archaeology of mining and china clay extraction, landscape and environment and outdoor leisure pursuits.
Enhanced links with the surrounding area

The national cycle network route runs through the centre of town, linking St Austell to Eden, Heligan, the Wheal Martyn china clay museum and with Pentewan and the coastal footpath. The cycle route could itself be used as a corridor of regeneration with surfacing, signage and street furniture emphasising its presence and tying the town into its surrounding landscape and nearby attractions. The Local Plan recognises that further cycle tracks and bike racks are required to encourage the use of bikes over cars. Such items can themselves be used as positive elements in enhancing the public realm; provision of bike racks, for example, could be used as an opportunity to create public art.

The Pentewan, Gover and Trenance river valleys have been designated as conservation corridors linking conservation sites for environmental purposes but also to encourage public access to the countryside and further integration of the town with its surrounding area. Therefore the river courses offer potential as corridors harnessing green leisure to regeneration. Opportunities include improved landscaping, maintenance and promotion of features along the banks such as the old and new bridges and some of the important industrial sites and surviving buildings. Within St Austell, the historic River Walk could be integrated with other town trails to ensure that the river is increasingly utilised as an amenity of the town.

The urban village

Plans for a new urban village at Carlyon Road, 10 minutes walk east from the historic centre of St Austell (Fig. 1), have recently hit the national headlines, being declared ‘the new Poundbury’. The Prince’s Foundation, working in partnership with Restormel Borough Council, Devon and Cornwall Housing Association and SWERDA, is planning to create a new development designed to ‘fit’ the wider urban context. The mixed-use proposals on a long-term brownfield site are very much to be welcomed and the form of the development may provide a model for regeneration on other brownfield sites around the urban core.

Semi-urban village-scale settlements are an established feature of the St Austell area and have a character which is clearly distinct from that of the historic core. This character offers a distinctive local model which could contribute significantly to the creation of appropriate design principles for this and other new settlements in the St Austell urban area. This is not to seek pastiche: the final scheme for this village would most appropriately bring together an avowed participation in the 21st century with an informed respect for the specific historic character of its local antecedents. The development also offers the opportunity to explore issues of sustainability in architecture, planning and patterns of modern urban living. The inclusion of live/work units and the scheme’s refusal to plan primarily for the car go some way towards this. Further potential could be through the use of environmentally friendly architecture and alternative energy sources.

Regeneration opportunities in the different character areas

1: Central church core
(Fig. 7 and character area summary sheet 1)

This is not an area in which large-scale redevelopment opportunities are likely to emerge but it will nevertheless make a vital contribution to St Austell’s regeneration. Most of the current opportunities are individually relatively
modest in scale. Together, they will work to reinstate the area’s primacy within the hierarchy of the town, emphasise its quality and encourage people to visit and use it. If a future redevelopment opportunity should arise, the area merits a contemporary landmark building of the highest quality.

**Market House**

The Market House and former Town Hall is a most impressive structure and plans are currently being drawn up to ensure that it fulfils its potential as a key asset of the town. A conservation plan is required to further understand the building and ensure that future developments enhance rather than compromise its importance. With calls once more for a town council for St Austell, it may be fitting that the town hall element of the building could be returned to civic use. The building would also be an appropriate location for a visitor information bureau, comparable with the successful provision in Bodmin’s Shire Hall. The interior space is large enough to have a mixture of permanent and temporary uses and could itself become a focal point of visits to the centre of St Austell. It would be appropriate to see a continuation of the historic market element within the building, perhaps incorporating Farmers’ Markets and a ‘Made in Cornwall’ theme.

**Pedestrianisation and public realm improvements**

Some traffic-calming measures are already planned to resolve current pedestrian - vehicle conflicts. Victoria Place and Duke Street are to be largely pedestrianised with access only for buses and Church Street and Market Street are to be downgraded for vehicle access with the pedestrian to be given priority. These plans are welcomed as they will ensure a better pedestrian experience of this area and hence encourage people to spend time here enjoying some of the most important parts of the town. However, a key characteristic of this area is the very high quality surviving surfacing, including granite paving, kerbs and guttering, and any resurfacing scheme should aim to retain these materials. Design of new surfacing needs to be informed by the existing elements and avoid non-distinctive ‘anywhere’ solutions. It should be possible as part of pedestrianisation to re-emphasise the historic role of the road junctions as places of public assembly. A triangular area opposite the steps to the Market House might serve as external spaces for the Irish pub and Market House café, with the potential for outside tables and chairs allowing people to relax and appreciate the impressive sculpture of the church tower.

The area to the north of the churchyard currently used for disabled parking would benefit from landscaping and public realm works. It is important that disabled parking facility is retained in the heart of town and that additional spaces are found. However, this area could be made more pleasant through increased urban greening, with the additional benefit of screening the modern bank structure on the far side of Cross Lane. Public seating provision could be increased and this may also be a suitable place for a bike rack. Such furniture provides an opportunity for street art which can enhance the unique character of the area unlike uniform heritage catalogue standards. Local artists could be
involved in the design and the nearby Charlestown or Wadebridge foundries could be used for production. Re-surfacing and an element of public art could reflect this area’s use as a place within the streetscape to sit and meet. The small area in front of the Old Manor House is likely to be made traffic-free in the near future. This area will be an important pedestrian route to the redevelopments planned for the car park in North Street but could also offer a setting for publicly accessible interpretation of the historic core of the town. The Old Manor House is itself one of the most important buildings surviving in the town and will be a key site on a town trail.

**Conservation management**

There are opportunities for a number of relatively minor conservation and public realm initiatives which would themselves have an incremental regeneration impact on this key area of the town.

The majority of buildings within the character area are of good quality and well maintained and presented. Of some need of attention, however, is a range of four shop units at 6-12 Vicarage Hill which forms the focal point of views south-west from the church down Victoria Place. The façade of this Listed Building retains many original features of interest, including elements of the original ground floor shop frontage, with the individual units divided by wooden fluted columns, and first floor fenestration and detailing. The side elevation to Old Vicarage Place plays an important role in the transition from the historic core of town to the modern Aylmer Square precinct. This elevation is of exposed irregular rubble stone and has modern windows. The building would be a very good exemplar for sensitive repair as part of a wider scheme and once repaired would considerably improve the character of the area. Such work would be likely to include roof repairs, replacement guttering, replastering to the front façade, reinstatement and repair of historic detail including elements of the shop frontages, planted pilasters, window repairs and replacement of modern casements, especially those facing Old Vicarage Place. In addition to these structural remedial works the shop frontages could be redesigned to better use the historic fabric as an asset and again be used as good practice exemplars for the area. The improved building would be further enhanced by the planned pedestrianisation of this area.

As a general point, care is required with shop frontages, signage and external finishes to buildings. Historic elements of shop fronts could be respected and incorporated into new designs, with fascias and advertising kept within sympathetic proportions. Much of the present character of the central area derives from the colour palette which has been used in the 20th century; this has
been generally based around earth tones and neutrals and surface treatments are of a matt finish rather than light-reflective and glossy.

The Local Plan highlights 2 Victoria Place / 8 Church Street as detracting from other buildings in the area. The building has a fairly low-key presence on Church Street, maintaining an equivalent roof height to neighbouring properties and addressing its corner location well as it curves round into Victoria Place. Here the building is substantially taller than the former YMCA building because of the difference in ground levels, but this ‘stepping’ between adjacent buildings is seen throughout the town and, indeed, is a feature on the opposite side of the road between the Stag Inn and 1-3 Victoria Place. Overall, the building’s plain architectural style is relatively non-obtrusive but could be improved by small-scale maintenance works including repainting and perhaps refenestration.

The east elevation of the White Hart and adjacent small strip of land which holds a telephone kiosk are on the main traffic route into the town centre and offer a further minor regeneration opportunity. This is the demolition site of the former Corn Exchange building and currently has rather a barren appearance.

The eastern elevation of the White Hart was exposed by the demolition of the Corn Exchange and is now blank, inactive and unattractive, with a bare expanse of repointed stonework, brick patching and a blocked door and window. Some essentially cosmetic landscaping, including resurfacing, street tree planting, and provision of a bench and bike rack, could create a new urban ‘place’ used to rest, meet and relax. The greening would link the area into the central churchyard ‘oasis’. Alternatively this important corner site could be used for the construction of a contemporary landmark building, re-enclosing the Bull Ring area and reducing the dominance of the road. In Cross Lane a demolition plot has been turned into a car park. The loss of the plot’s boundary walls has created a gap in the tight urban grain and sense of enclosure that is so characteristic of this area. By reinstating some form of boundary wall the car park could be screened and the grain restored.

2: Fore Street
(Fig. 7 and character area summary sheet 2)

Fore Street, historically the principal commercial street in the town, is fundamentally a very good urban space. Its historic status within the urban hierarchy needs to be reinforced, especially in the light of the street’s immediate proximity and direct links to the new quarter to be created on the Aylmer Square regeneration site. This strengthening could be initiated by acknowledging and enhancing the quality of the surviving historic fabric and capitalising on the strong qualities of its basic streetscape (see section 4).

Fore Street’s underlying quality certainly merits an approach by which future replacement of even relatively small building components should attract high quality design, informed by the historic characteristics of the architecture of the street. Some of the street’s later 20th century buildings are of only two storeys and are set back from the pavement edge, creating recessed shop fronts. This has resulted in a loss of urban enclosure in...
the streetscape as well as reducing the amount of floor space available. Any future redevelopment of such sites would provide an opportunity to reinstate the building line at street and roof level.

Enhancing retail provision

The Local Plan indicates that some initial preparatory work has already been carried out on a shopfront scheme for Fore Street. This should deliver effective and relatively low cost visual improvements, the aim being to restore shop fronts to a design more consistent with the character of their building as a whole, respecting surviving historic features and overall proportions and emphasising the quality of the street.

The possibility of creating additional retail units is being assessed on the north side of Fore Street as part of the Civic Pride initiative. Here a number of properties have first floor levels on Fore Street which are accessible as ground floor units from the rear in Biddick’s Court. Such developments would be most suitable for specialist retail uses, creating areas of interest for ‘browsers’ without detracting from the primary retail area on Fore Street.

Legibility, movement and pedestrian priority

As a consequence of the later 20th century shift to a north - south movement pattern in Fore Street, minor opes and lanes which previously served only to provide access to the rear of plots are now used as main access points and through routes. It is important that the historic narrowness and subsidiary status of these opes is retained but some enhancement of these links is required to announce the entrance into Fore Street, the centre of town. Possibilities might include colourful vertical banners flying from adjacent buildings and use of the generally blank ope walls as opportunities for public art and local information and interpretation panels.

Pedestrianisation of Fore Street has been extremely successful. A timed access scheme for delivery vehicles would reinforce pedestrian priority. Any future resurfacing scheme for the street could usefully be designed to restore the division between pavement and roadway, to emphasise the curved line of the road and reinforce the feel of an historic ‘street’ rather than, say, a shopping precinct. It would also be helpful if street furniture were to be sited in such a way as not to erode the sense of Fore Street as a routeway or, at each end, to obstruct views out to the church and General Wolfe.
3: Western ‘gateway’
(Fig. 7 and character area summary sheet 3)

Although this area is dominated by road junctions and traffic, it is surrounded by some high quality, even landmark buildings and has in the past been a main gateway into the town centre. A traffic calming scheme is planned in the near future to mitigate the vehicle - pedestrian conflict here and this would provide a good opportunity for further landscaping and visual improvement. The containment of the space was eroded during the creation of Trinity Street, forming the over-wide triple junction between West Hill, Truro Road and Trinity Street. Regeneration initiatives and the traffic calming measure provide an opportunity to re-enclose this space and better define the area.

One of the key sites to target to achieve this is the corner plot between West Hill and Truro Road. This site formerly held a landmark building of wedge-shaped plan which curved around the junction. There still appears to be space for such a building and this area therefore offers a significant brownfield development site.

Urban greening
A simpler landscaping improvement would be to create a ‘pocket park’ here, painting the gable end of 9 Truro Road and planting large trees and climbing plants along and in front of it. With the provision of public seating, possible bike rack facilities and an element of public art this area could be a good amenity to the town. It would also link this area visually and conceptually with the Truro Road urban park and with the mature greenery of the river valley to the west.

Conservation management
Remedial repairs and general maintenance works are required on a number of key structures which bound this character area.

The Baptist chapel has the potential to become a landmark site and its colourful mural panels on the south elevation have already gone some way towards creating an active element to what is otherwise a largely inactive elevation. Its northern elevation has a number of blocked windows which could be enhanced, possibly with the painting in of window fitting detail to give the façade a more active outlook. A further relatively low cost improvement would be the replacement of the gas pipe railings along the Trinity Road elevation with replica railings to the pattern of the surviving historic examples on the West Hill elevation. Further improvements might include re-roofing the southern element of the building (currently under corrugated asbestos) and refenestration to a more sympathetic design.

The former Assembly rooms, now Courts showroom, is a further landmark structure within this small character area. The building is well presented and the replacement windows are of a sympathetic design; signage could be
reduced to further enhance this quality structure.

The General Wolfe public house is a key landmark building forming the visual terminal of views west out of Fore Street. Its closure is of concern. The triangular piece of land in front of it could be relandscaped, but any planting would most beneficially be kept low so as not to obscure views to the building.

A further key building in this area is that currently in use as Klick photograph shop. It is of the plain three storey, rendered style seen throughout the town but, importantly, curves around the corner into Fore Street, linking the two areas and emphasising their close connection. In this it counteracts the blocking effect of the mine wheel design gates which close the western end of the street to traffic through the day. This structure would be a valuable exemplar for sympathetic repair and reinstating a more appropriate shopfront.

**Development opportunities**

Globe Yard, tucked behind the former Assembly rooms and the Globe Hotel, is a currently under-utilised area that could become a great asset to the town. This space could become a pleasant shopping arcade (a number of units are currently up for lease) and the granite steps to Bodmin Road to the north could become an attractive and distinctive townscape feature. Advertising hoardings to Bodmin Road screen an adjacent brownfield site which could potentially be redeveloped as part of this complex. In addition to this the proposed removal of the Fire Station potentially releases an important site at the entrance to the Priory car park, which could also become part of a scheme. The adjacent imposing granite gateway of the Grade II* Methodist church a strong streetscape asset which could also be enhanced.

**4: Industrial river valleys**

(Fig. 7 and character area summary sheet 4)

This area of St Austell has been a focus for industrial activity since the medieval period. The industrial archaeology remains in this area include an impressively large number of standing industrial buildings, many now converted to residential or business uses. Others, however, are underused or derelict. Generally these are robust structures and offer good opportunities for economically viable and sympathetic reuse. The area also accommodates a number of large, modern warehouse-type

Globe Yard, a redevelopment opportunity
units housing a variety of service, retail and distribution businesses. Many of these sites would benefit from sympathetic landscaping and planting to soften the outlines of the structures and surrounding parking. There may be some potential for additional similar units and/or for new housing within the area, but care is required in planning new provision to ensure that the historic and current mix and dispersed quality of industrial/commercial activity, small-scale housing and green space is maintained. A review of brownfield and other potential development land in this character area, undertaken in parallel with detailed assessment of the standing industrial remains and buried archaeological potential, would be a valuable starting point.

Enhancing paths and heritage tourism links
The river itself is potentially a major asset and the Local Plan identifies an aim to improve the environment along its urban course. To the north and south of the study area the river corridor and the former course of a mineral tramway have been made into a popular cycle track and footpath linking the town to the Wheal Martyn Clay museum and to Pentewan harbour. Ideally the two leisure trails could be joined and made into a continuous path. Many parts of the river’s urban course are bounded by private property, however, and a short diversion away from it may be necessary through at least part of the area. There may be some potential here for provision of facilities for people using the river trail. The historic significance of this character area could itself be incorporated in promotion of a wider industrial archaeology tourism package, linking the metal ore and china clay extraction sites to the north of the town with the processing, transportation and service role played by the town itself and the export harbours to the south.

There is potential to improve and promote existing pedestrian routes within the character area. At the southern end near the White River Bridge a public footpath provides access to a triangular area identified as a potential pocket park site in the Civic Trust action plan for the town. The path also leads to Tram’s Mill and cottage; although grade II listed this is now derelict and in danger of collapse and some safety work may be necessary before encouraging further public access to the area. The footpath could be resurfaced to allow all weather use.

The path exits into Moorland Road with its very good group of industrial housing designed by Silvanus Trevail. The quality, completeness and historic connections of this street make it an important and locally distinctive element of the town. The Conservation Area could be extended to cover it and the potential for listing investigated. An article 4 direction would be advisable to maintain many of the original features which currently survive.

From Moorland Road the walk could again link to the river at the Old Bridge at the bottom of West Hill. This 16th century structure could become an...
attractive focal point with minimal landscaping works. There is a triangular area of land to its south which could be incorporated into a scheme. Connecting the old bridge of West Hill with the ‘New Bridge’ of Truro Road is a footpath marked on the late 19th century Ordnance Survey map as the ‘River Walk’. This offers a very pleasant link through to Truro Road.

5: 18th and 19th century urban expansion
(Fig. 7 and character area summary sheet 5)

This character area can contribute significantly to St Austell’s regeneration. It includes several brownfield sites and a variety of good historic buildings which are currently at risk through disuse or under use. Many of the town’s entrance points and arrival areas are also located here and a main theme of the regeneration opportunities is to reinforce and improve these key areas. Arrival points include the bus and rail station and several car parks, together with the important gateway routes of High Cross Street, South Street and East Hill. Trevarthian Road is an important pedestrian link from the Palace Road site of St Austell College to the town centre.

Bus and rail station

The integrated bus and rail station is a major asset for the town but with significant potential for improvement. The rail station itself retains much character, with the ‘up’ platform building, footbridge and signal box forming a fine group of historic railway architecture. The northern side of the station has good survival of surfacing materials which could be retained and enhanced in any future improvements. The recent replacement of the ‘down’ platform building provides a contemporary ‘gateway’ for the traveller’s initial experience of St Austell and there is a major opportunity to supplement it with well-designed, possibly landmark modern buildings for the bus element of the interchange. There is potential to make the forecourt a more interesting place with landscaping and planting and any

scheme here could benefit from the striking view available over the St Austell townscape from this vantage point. Provision for station car parking on both sides of the rail line could be improved. There is potential for better integration of the station on its Palace Road side: a densely planted edge with more appropriate boundary definition would enhance this frontage and bind the station with character area 7.

Car parks and pedestrian approaches

As a general point, most of the town’s car parks would benefit from landscaping and planting to soften and break up the space. The entrance to the Priory car park could be improved following the imminent removal of the fire station. The Biddick’s Court approach from the Priory car park is one such area with opportunities for enhancement.
Recent schemes to open up secondary shopping within historic rear plot structures have been very successful and are adding vitality and interest to this area. Although this area is an essential rear servicing area further landscaping and reduction of its domination by vehicles is planned and desirable. The Local Plan outlines possibilities to extend secondary shopping into the currently residential Grant’s Walk area. An element of urban greening and planting of street trees would soften and integrate this space with its surroundings.

**High Cross Street**

High Cross Street is an important approach to the town centre from the rail and bus station. It is in essence a very good street, with a group of late 19th and earlier 20th century buildings to match any in Cornwall, but is suffering from under use and properties falling into poor repair. The proposed hotel development should reinforce the former high status of High Cross Street itself, and there is potential for ‘trickle-down’ regenerative benefits on buildings and plots in the immediate vicinity. The current proposals include retention of one good historic building but require the demolition of the former police station, itself a significant historic structure; this is to be regretted and a design which allowed incorporation of the building within the new development would be preferable.

The cottage row on the north side of the street also has problems of under use. Several of the units have shop frontages, however, and offer potential for secondary shopping enterprises which the Local Plan is keen to encourage around the primary shopping area of the town. Increased vitality in this area will serve to reinforce the historic east west communication axis through the town.

The late 18th century cemetery in High Cross Street, now an urban park, is a pleasant feature and offers scope for improved use and amenity value. The gravestones have been retained and may offer possibilities for display and interpretation. On the north side of the park is a spiritual chapel with a seating area and ‘peace post’. This is potentially a significant feature in creating a sense of place and enhancing the gateway, although its success in this respect will require control of the advertising hoardings and alcohol free zone signage in the area.

**Trevarthian Road**

This is a street of real character and interest, now predominantly providing pedestrian access from the area to the north of the railway with the town centre. This could provide an additional quiet pedestrian route into the centre from the rail and bus interchange. The footbridge
across the railway provides a vantage point offering spectacular views over the town and surrounding countryside; there may be potential for emphasising this as a vantage point and for some level of interpretation. Closer to the town, the Bible Christian chapel buildings are landmark structures within the townscape and in urgent need of refurbishment and new uses.

**East Hill**

Here, the sense of entering somewhere ‘special’ could be reinforced by recommissioning the disused fountain outside Fountain House and improving the triangular area in front of the good quality building. Further down the hill a landscaping exercise has been carried out for the entrance of the national cycleway into the town centre; one of the distinctive cycle track milestones makes an interesting public art feature. The beneficial appearance of the landscaping could be extended to the west to include two areas of private parking which flank the road.

The area to the south is a demolition site left by structures removed for the re-routing of South Street and offers potential for a new landmark building, addressing the two South Street elevations to south and east and the East Hill elevation to the north. In the late 19th century the car park on the north side of the street was a garden with fountains and glass houses. If demand for parking declines or can be relocated by, for example, Park and Ride schemes, this site could offer a symbolic opportunity to create a new community amenity in the form of a pocket park, perhaps with pedestrian linkage to the High Cross Street cemetery park.

**Duke Street**

Duke Street offers an opportunity for enhancement in its role a gateway to the commercial core of St Austell, a key arrival/departure point for public transport and a minor public space. It is highlighted in the Local Plan as an area for partial pedestrianisation, excluding private cars but retaining access for buses and taxis. There is potential for additional landscaping, the planting of street trees, reduction of the space occupied by the carriageway and other measures to emphasise pedestrian priority. Undercover seating and timetable information would encourage use of public transport facilities. The space is already well defined by generally good quality building and has a major focus in the landmark building of the Masonic Lodge on South Street. Improvement of this gateway should prompt additional pedestrian traffic into and through it and this merits provision of a safe road crossing across South Street.

**North Street**

The car park on the North Street elevation of the Market House is currently the focus of plans for regeneration. Three schemes of varying cost are being drawn up ranging from landscaping to high density redevelopment. The site is well edged by listed and non listed historically significant structures mostly of a residential nature although a few are used as offices and shops. Historically, the site has been densely occupied and the reinstatement of such urban density would again link this area into the town. The site is highlighted in the Local Plan as an area for small scale shopping and change of use of the surrounding
structures to shops and offices is encouraged. This conversion would, however, be detrimental to the basic character of the small cottages along the north side. If the high density redevelopment of the site is progressed a good scheme of mixed, small-scale secondary retail units and affordable housing may enhance the former character of this area. The opportunity to re-open access to the Market House from this side could also be considered as part of the redevelopment plans for this important structure.

6: Aylmer Square and Trinity Street
(Fig. 7 and character area summary sheet 2)

The proposed redevelopment of Aylmer Square is a major opportunity for St Austell. It will undoubtedly enhance the town as a shopping and urban service centre but more importantly will boost confidence in the town and stimulate further regeneration.

Demolition of the previous development is likely be extensive and the new development offers the rare opportunity of creating an entirely new urban quarter, a high quality 21st century contribution to the architecture and urban design of St Austell. To be fully successful, however, it should aim to integrate closely with the existing urban grain and derive in design from an understanding of the essential elements of St Austell’s historic character.

The following summary of primary character elements is offered in relation to the regeneration of Aylmer Square but it is proposed that a similar list, adapted to the particular context, could be beneficial in informing the planning process for all significant developments within the historic town.

Topography
The naturally sloping terrain is a positive feature through much of the town, with strong visual interest created by inclined streets, stepped facades and gable ends and views across rooftops. By contrast, the present Aylmer Square development largely conceals the topography of the site from its interior but emphasises it on the South Street elevation with structures of a height which is out of scale with the remainder of the historic centre. A design which works more closely with the natural landform (while making due provision for the less able and those with trolleys, buggies, etc.) would integrate the area into the rest of the historic town and allow the site itself to contribute to making the place unique and locally specific.

Spaces, street form and plan
The core townscape in St Austell is fundamentally based on a framework of radiating roads; these form mostly narrow, slightly curvilinear, well-edged spaces, each following a purposeful direction. In the new development Old Vicarage Place offers the potential to be developed as a new radiating road within this pattern, providing a purposeful route to a public open area and beyond. Such a strong topographical element, related closely to the form of the rest of the town, would increase the legibility of the new place.

St Austell does not currently have a significant urban public open space. It has had an open market area adjoining the churchyard but this was infilled before the modern period. In more recent times historic photographs show the road junctions at the east and west ends of the church enclosure used for public gatherings and celebrations. These areas are defined spatially by the convergence of roads approaching the core rather than as formally planned spaces. The redevelopment provides a rare opportunity to create one or more new public open spaces but these are likely to integrate more successfully with the surrounding townscape if they follow a similarly opportunistic, less planned
form within the overall plan, and offer a comparable sense of enclosure.

Many local people remember with affection a mature copper beech tree which formerly stood in the area, regarded as a natural landmark for navigation and meetings. New public spaces offer an opportunity to increase the amount of urban greening close to the heart of the town and to make this more significant than basic amenity planting. Such greening could refer creatively to the success of two major local ‘green’ initiatives, Eden and Heligan.

Other landmarks may be contributed by public art, perhaps acknowledging and celebrating locally significant themes; a water sculpture based on the high-pressure monitors used in the china clay industry, for example, would carry a powerful message about the ties of the new quarter to its historic context.

Access and permeability
Design of the new quarter must emphasise its connectivity with other areas of the town. The emphasis on Old Vicarage Place as a radiating route is one element of this but there is also the need for legible and attractive links with South Street, Trinity Street and the General Wolfe area. The model of opes in this area of St Austell (Aylmer Place and Chandos Place) and in other Cornish towns is a good pattern for such connectivity. Not least of the benefits of the Aylmer Square regeneration may be the opportunity it provides to show what can be achieved in urban planning when people are put before traffic requirements.

Further integration between the new development and the rest of the town can be aided by creating active street frontages to Trinity Street and South Street. In both cases this would contribute to reclaiming these streets as places for people rather than ‘concrete canyons’ dominated by traffic as they are at present.

Diversity
Past change in St Austell has taken place piecemeal: the historic processes which have shaped the distinctive character of the place have been organic and change has taken place through many separate visions and creations in a framework of contemporary cultural, economic and technical constraints and opportunities. This has led to a considerable diversity in building form, materials, treatments and architectural expression, contributing strongly to the town’s dense and rich texture. This is the more evident because of the generally narrow plot widths throughout the main commercial areas; only major landmark buildings rest on broader plots.

Here again is an opportunity for design of the new quarter to be informed by and to seek integration with the character of other commercial areas of St Austell. A design in which there is strong vertical differentiation within a mixture of plot sizes will provide diversity and variety. There is potential to add interest and variety by interleaving designs from a number of different architects.

Scale
Most of the historic buildings of St Austell’s urban core are of three storeys, certainly those which have any pretensions to status. Creating new
buildings on this scale would assert continuity between the new and old in the town. Upper storeys could be used to maximise core urban activity through provision of office space, for example, or to add vitality to the town at night by providing urban residential accommodation.

The Aylmer Square scheme provides an opportunity to add a significant 21st century landmark building to the town. The siting and relationship to other important landmarks of such a building require careful consideration, however, and it is worth noting that many of the existing landmark buildings in the town are incorporated into streetscapes rather than being sited to dominate them (for example, the Liberal Club, White Hart, Post Office).

**Views**

The importance of views throughout the town has been noted. Here, in the new development the important views to be achieved are to the church tower – St Austell’s most exciting and characteristic urban view – in order to tie the complex into the historic centre, and out to the town’s ‘green-belt’ (character area 7) and the more distant countryside to the south and west, thereby relating the urban area to its wider urban and landscape context.

NB. The Local Plan notes the possibility of adding a second storey of shops to the roof car park spanning Old Vicarage Place. Views of the church tower may be compromised if the bridge over the street is heightened.

**7: Suburban residential area**

(Fig. 7 and character area summary sheet 2)

One of the most important character features of this area is the mature trees and shrubs found within the large gardens of the properties. This planting benefits not only the immediate locality but also provides a green setting for the town as a whole. It is vital that this character element is maintained and enhanced. This can be achieved through a review of current protection for trees within the area and by encouraging additional and replacement planting. There is an opportunity to work with householders and community groups on a planting programme, providing information on appropriate and characteristic plant and tree types, technical advice and perhaps access to subsidised tree stocks.

The character of these areas is at risk from subdivision of large plots and the insertion of high-density modern housing developments. The subsequent loss of boundary features and mature planting and the introduction of buildings on the street frontage detracts from its distinctive historic character. A residential development of mixed housing and affordable housing is planned for an undeveloped, sloping site to the south of Polcarne. Here, the sensitive location has been recognised with a buffer area of open land being retained to protect the setting of the historic park and garden and further landscaping to screen the new development. A road-widening scheme planned for this section of South Street will affect the high rubble-built boundary wall and thickly planted perimeter belt along its length. It is recommended that these features are carefully reinstated following the road works.
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