1. Introduction

The integrity of St Helier’s historic built environment has been slowly eroded since the end of the Occupation, though over the past fifty years the pace and magnitude of the changes has not been consistent. For example, in the 1960s and ‘70s, the programmes of urban renewal swept away many old streets and traditional neighbourhoods, whereas in recent years the losses have been much more incremental. Still, the cumulative effect of minor alterations, let alone the outright demolition and replacement of historic buildings, has greatly diluted the original character of many parts of St Helier. Most worrying, however, is the fact that the Town’s historic character is still under threat despite four decades having passed since conservation was first enshrined in Jersey’s planning legislation.

Although it could be stated that the Town’s built heritage was not sufficiently protected by the 1964 Island Planning Law, as many ancient buildings (eg Hue and Dumaresq Streets) were summarily demolished over the subsequent two decades, since the passing of the 1987 and 2002 Island Plans there have been great strides forward in the statutory regard for historic buildings. The question remains, however, whether enough is being done to restrict the demolition of serviceable historic buildings or stem the gradual loss of original architectural details and elements of historic fabric.

The onus to maintain and repair St Helier’s historic buildings is, of course, the responsibility of the private property owner. The reasons for the decline in the integrity of historical properties might include the following:

- Lack of awareness/concern/appreciation amongst owners
- Difficulty in obtaining technical information, guidance and advice
- Ill-judged attempts to improve/modernise properties
- Poor or non-existent maintenance; wilful neglect
- Lack of incentives to conserve/restore

In addition, although the States’ Department of Planning & Building Services has worked hard within its remit and available resources to improve stewardship of St Helier’s historic built environment, it may be the case that the present regime of statutory controls is inadequate for the task at hand and that in order to prevent the continued erosion of the Town’s character, further measures must be introduced. Certainly, the introduction of Conservation Areas should augment the States’ power to control development and alterations in sensitive historic places.
2. Why Conserve?

Historic buildings and streets provide the context in which we live, work and play. These urban spaces are a record of the lives of previous generations, and they are the foundations to be bequeathed to generations to come. Of course, the historic built environment is not static, it is evolutionary, with every generation taking the burden the responsibility of maintaining the best of the old whilst creating new and complementary buildings of quality to be enjoyed in the future.

But why conserve relics of the past? What is the value of retaining the buildings and urban spaces of those gone before us?

Much of the postwar period has seen the ebb and flow of conflict between the two schools of thought: those who view the historic built environment as something worth saving, and those believing it to be an obstacle to progress. Naturally, there have always been extremists on either side of the debate, either wishing to preserve everything at all costs or to comprehensively redevelop without restriction.

St Helier’s Masonic Temple is a prominent local landmark

Fortunately, in recent years there has been a softening of attitudes at the extremes and an increasing amount of pragmatism and compromise. Much of this softening of attitudes has been the result of more detailed analysis of the economic value of conservation as well as a greater understanding of people’s intuitive appreciation of the historic built environment. Importantly, there has also been increasing evidence of how older properties can be reused and adapted to suit modern day needs.

2.1 Cultural Capital

The economics of conservation has become increasingly tangible as new studies over the past decade are starting to show that (public and private) investment in the historic built environment is earning profitable returns. What is most interesting, however, is the fact that studies also show that such investment is reaping cultural rewards as well, not only enhancing the environment but also improving the quality of people’s lives. The regeneration of older buildings has led to the revitalisation of neighbourhoods and communities which previously had little hope for the future.

Throughout the UK, it has been shown that attractive, successful and eminently liveable places are often those with a long history and a distinctive character. Historic buildings contribute much of that character, evoking a sense of continuity and of quality. As a source of memory and continuity, the built heritage plays a critical role in the cultural identity of a population. One’s “sense of place” depends greatly on one’s surroundings, and if this local environment is visually stimulating and well respected it will also engender civic pride. With such pride in the community there is likely to be social cohesion within it as well.

The cultural capital of the historic built environment is not just about buildings — it has as much to do with the people who come into contact with them. The historic environment is a ‘public good’ in the sense that everyone is able to derive benefit from a handsome, well-kept building or street even if they do not directly pay for it. Well maintained historic streets and town centres add vitality to a community, engaging both local residents and visitors, and attracting people to shops, restaurants and other local businesses. An attractive, diverse, vibrant and creative local culture can lift people’s aspirations.

Several recent studies in the UK have quantified people’s views on the role of the historic built environment in their lives and communities. In 2003, English Heritage published *Heritage Counts*, a review of both the cultural and economic value of its investment in regeneration schemes across England. More recently, a House
of Commons Committee published a lengthy report entitled *The Role of Historic Buildings in Urban Regeneration*. Both documents underline the contribution made by conservation projects in improving the physical and social well-being of communities in decline.

### 2.2 Public Opinion

Whereas the Commons report focused primarily on the economic value of regenerating the urban environment, *Heritage Counts* provided ample evidence that old streets and buildings are appreciated by the population at large by quoting numerous opinion polls. For example, some 76% of respondents to a MORI poll in 2000 agreed that their lives are richer for having the opportunity to visit and see examples of the UK’s built heritage. Yet this perception of “heritage” was not restricted to visitor attractions such as stately homes and cathedrals. The report pointed out that there is a growing recognition that heritage can be something that is “all around us,” that is, the landscapes, streets and houses in which we live.

A poll undertaken by MORI in 2003 in three distinct parts of the country (Bradford, Cornwall and west London) showed a high level of interest in the conservation of their local areas. Some 91% of residents in Cornwall, 85% of residents in Bradford and 82% of London residents either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement “the heritage in my local area is worth saving.” A 2000 MORI poll of 5000 people in England found that 83% believed that the historic environment “plays an important part in the cultural life of the country” and 76% think “their own lives are richer for having the opportunity to visit or see it.”

In its evidence to the Commons Committee earlier this year, the Civic Trust made the case that not only was the presence of historic buildings of great cultural value to a local community, but their destruction could have severe negative effects on morale. When the public feel that the local authority are demolishing loved local buildings it engenders a “feeling of powerlessness” in that the redevelopment process has no public involvement or support. Thus a frustrated and indifferent population begin to feel it is pointless to vote and “that they have no control over, and therefore no responsibility for, their local environment.”

Interestingly, people surveyed not only appreciated the old buildings around them, but also coveted them to a certain degree. A survey by MORI of London residents suggested that the most popular choice of residence was a “pre-war semi-detached house” for which 70% of respondents expressed a preference. In the same poll, a “period terraced house” was viewed favourably by 69% of respondents, whilst 61% would also desire a “flat in a converted historic building.” At the bottom of the scale were flats in tower blocks, which only attracted a positive reaction from 10% of the Londoners polled.

Recent polls have also confirmed that people understand the intrinsic value of protecting old buildings. According to *Heritage Counts*, MORI “surveyed owners and residents of registered buildings to gauge their enthusiasm for living in a historic property. Of the 300 people questioned, 50% said that, taking everything into account, the listing of their property was a ‘very good’ or ‘fairly good’ thing. Only 4% saw it as a ‘very bad’ thing.”

Historic buildings can serve a variety of public uses
2.3 The Economics of Conservation

It has been stated above that people value the historic environment, derive enormous benefits and satisfaction from it, and are concerned when it is neglected. Such positive views on old buildings, however, must be judged alongside the economic equations. In recent years, there has been an increasing amount of data showing not only the positive effects of conserving (and reusing) old buildings in the economic regeneration of declining urban areas, but also that conservation is far more sustainable than demolition and new construction.

It is not a simple exercise to determine the benefit deriving from the historic environment and express it in monetary terms. Although it may be intuitive that public support for the built heritage stems from the sheer visual pleasure of its architectural or historic character, it cannot be denied that the historic environment is a hugely significant economic asset, and it follows that its direct benefits — and the return on investment in conservation — can be measured and assessed in the same way as other aspects of the economy.

Members of the Commons committee investigating the role of conservation in the regeneration of urban areas acknowledged that there was “overwhelming evidence” that historic buildings played a crucial role in reinvigorating neighbourhoods, and their repair and reuse helped “to boost the local economy,” create jobs and achieve “a better use of natural resources.” The committee also concluded that a pragmatic, rather than a purist, approach to conservation was most beneficial in regeneration work, reporting that historic buildings “should not be retained as artefacts, relics of a bygone age. New uses should be allowed in the buildings and sensitive adaptations facilitated, when the original use of a historic building is no longer relevant or viable.”

2.4 Value of Historic Buildings

In its evidence to the Commons Committee, the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors commented: “There is often a win / win situation where keeping the best of the old and introducing high quality, sensitive new development, can achieve the best result for regeneration (and sustainability) and the historic environment. Regenerators need to appreciate the value that historic buildings can represent, and that sympathetic development of such buildings can be of benefit to both the building and the area.”

The “value” suggested by the RICS can be interpreted in many ways. First of all, conservation-led projects often build on the quality inherent in the traditional building stock. Given the popularity and desirability of older properties, it has been determined that offices in registered buildings in the UK tend to have higher rents. According to research undertaken by the Investment Property Databank, over the past two decades registered offices in the UK achieved higher total returns than non-registered offices, indicating that there is a prestige value to registered buildings.” Similarly, a MORI survey noted in Heritage Counts found that a pre-1919 house is worth on average some 20% more than an equivalent house of a more recent vintage.

The intrinsic nature of historic properties can also have advantages in terms of enhancing economic vitality. Many old buildings in urban settings, when sensitively converted, are well suited to house the small and medium-sized companies that are seen as the engine of a growing economy. This “small business incubation” is often driven by design-based firms seeking distinctive premises. Many older properties lend themselves to creative and stylish conversions, enabling contemporary design solutions deftly blending the old with the new. In addition, when these small businesses are located in a densely populated town such as St Helier, there are great opportunities for people to work in close proximity to their homes, thus minimising the need to travel. In fact, mixed-use developments are often the mainstay of regeneration schemes in...
the UK.

2.5 Tourism

Maximising the potential of historic areas derives other economic benefits as well. According to the Commons evidence of the Institute of Historic Building Conservation, research from the US indicates that investment in building rehabilitation — as opposed to general industrial investment — “delivers far higher incomes, a lot more jobs on average, in terms of heritage-based tourism and money spent particularly in historic environment attractions, which is matched by vast amounts of expenditure in the wider economy.”

Cities and towns wishing to reinvigorate the tourist trade need to emphasise their unique selling point: what makes them distinctive and different from competing tourist destinations. If a town has an attractive built environment — as St Helier certainly does — it should strive to develop its distinctiveness.

St Helier has a rich variety of historic properties

It has long been recognised that a majority of tourists visiting the UK do so because of its history. A 1995 survey showed that 54% of overseas visitors cited historic buildings as one of the things that encouraged them to visit London. It also showed that, even if they did not come to London specifically for the purpose, 79% of all overseas visitors went to a historic building while they were there. More recently, a 2002 visitor survey of Scotland indicated that 82% of respondents claimed that “history and heritage” was either “very” or “quite” important in their decision to visit the country.

2.7 Cost Effectiveness

In addition to the value of conservation in terms of small business growth, tourism and general prosperity, there is another important reason why the reuse of historic properties makes good economic sense. By definition, conservation is eminently sustainable — both in terms of financial investment and in the best use of natural resources.

The Heritage Counts report dispels the myth that older properties are more costly to maintain over time. New research undertaken for Heritage Counts used sophisticated methodologies to analyse the relative whole-life costs of older buildings compared with more modern housing. The study compared three houses of a similar size in the Manchester area: one Victorian building, a 1920s house and one built in the 1980s. A team of architects, quantity surveyors and mechanical and electrical engineers projected the maintenance costs of each house over a 100-year period and costs were calculated on a like-for-like replacement or repair basis.

The five main areas of maintenance assessed were:

- decoration
- fabric maintenance
- services maintenance
- utility costs
- insurance

According to Heritage Counts,

“the research demonstrated that, contrary to earlier thinking, older housing actually costs less to maintain and occupy over the long-term life of the dwelling than more modern housing. Largely due to the quality and life-span of the materials used, the Victorian house proved almost £1,000 per 100m2 cheaper to maintain and inhabit on average each year than a property from the 1980s. Construction
features such as a slate roof, quality softwood double hung sash windows and cast iron rainwater goods fared much better than the concrete tile roofs, poorer quality softwood windows and PVCu rainwater goods typically used on 1980s dwellings."

Overall, the annual maintenance and occupancy costs per 100m² of internal floor area were shown to be:

Victorian House: £2,648.00
1920s House: £3,112.00
1980s House: £3,686.00

Over and above the question of simple maintenance, there is now solid evidence that refurbishment is more cost effective than demolition and reconstruction. In order to combat the local authority’s plans to compulsorily purchase extensive numbers of Victorian terraced houses in Nelson, Lancashire — and replace them with new-build houses — English Heritage engaged quantity surveyors to compare the relative costs of repair/improvement and demolition/rebuilding.

According to Heritage Counts, “the surveyors found that, on the basis of repair cost projections stretching over 30 years, the cost of repairing a typical Victorian terraced home in Nelson was some £24,600 while a more substantial refurbishment cost something in the region of £38,500. By contrast, the cost of demolishing one of these houses, replacing it with a newly built home and maintaining that home over 30 years was in the region of £64,000.” At the public inquiry, these findings were instrumental in the rejection of the local authority’s redevelopment plans and thus much of the historic building stock was saved from demolition.

Therefore, it can safely be claimed that conservation of well-built historic properties offers value for money over the long term. And it is this long view that is frequently mentioned in current studies of successful regeneration. The conservation, conversion, repair and maintenance of older properties is never a quick fix or a fast return. Rather, it is an investment requiring both vision and patience, and an investment capable of sending out strong signals to other property owners and investors that the area is a good bet. Hopefully, such activity can spark, in the words of English Heritage, “a virtuous cycle of improvement.”

Traditional buildings provide prestigious addresses

Historic properties can be the focus for successful regeneration
2.8 Environmental Sustainability

The sustainability of historic buildings must also be viewed in the context of the local and global environment. Few industries are as energy-intensive as the construction industry, and a remarkable amount of waste is also generated by the building trades. For example, the UK Government’s Performance and Innovation Unit report, Resource Productivity: Making More With Less (2000), stated that “energy is consumed in the production of construction materials such as bricks, cement and metals and in their distribution. The energy produced from non-renewable sources consumed in building services accounts for about half of the UK’s emissions of carbon dioxide. Over 90% of non-energy minerals extracted in Great Britain are used to supply the construction industry with materials. Yet each year some 70 million tonnes of construction and demolition materials and soil end up as waste.”

There are undoubtedly ways in which the production of construction materials can be made more efficient — and more environmentally sustainable — but short of augmenting industrial regulations a far simpler method to combat such waste is to recycle not only building products but also the buildings themselves. The current building stock represents itself a substantial investment of capital and energy, and this should not simply be wasted in the drive for new homes, offices and shops. Demolition and construction already account for 24% of established total annual waste in the UK, and despite several years since the institution of a landfill tax, there is little evidence that this waste mountain has been reduced.

2.9 Conclusion

It is clear that the conservation of historic buildings makes good cultural and economic sense. Conservation provides benefits ranging from civic pride and social cohesiveness to job creation and environmental sustainability. It has taken several decades for these truisms to work their way to the forefront of government thinking, but many in the field have been arguing the case for many years. More than thirty years ago, the eminent architect and town planner, Lord Esher, testified at a public inquiry into Glasgow’s road expansion plans that the importance of conservation must be recognised. If a solution to the proposed devastation of the historic environment could be found, Esher argued, “you do not merely protect old buildings and give them a new lease on life, but you conserve more than buildings; you conserve the gross capital value. You conserve the investment that previous owners have put into a city in which they believed and on which they thought it was worthwhile to spend their money. Your conserve their investment and you conserve that city’s attraction to the outside world. It becomes a place worth visiting, worth seeing, worth staying in. These are inevitable but vital economic factors. They are not sentimental factors.”

Summing up his testimony, the late Lord Esher concluded that “conservation is often thought of as just a fad of a few... The truth is that it is hard economics.”

2.10 References

English Heritage, Heritage Counts, 2003
English Heritage, Power of Place, 2000
English Heritage, The Heritage Dividend, 1999
English Heritage, Conservation-led Regeneration, 1998
Performance and Innovations Unit (UK Cabinet Office), Resource Productivity: Making More with Less, 2000
Urban Task Force, Towards an Urban Renaissance, 1999

The character of St Helier owes much to its historic built environment
3. Loss of Original Fabric

The scale of the loss of original, historic fabric in St Helier’s building stock is great. Some houses may have simply had their front doors replaced, or their shutters removed, and are otherwise unmarred. More common, perhaps, are the buildings that suffer from multiple negative interventions; that is, properties that have had several original features altered, removed or replaced. Thus, the number of traditional (ie pre-1914) properties still wholly intact is certainly small. Regrettably, even many fine interwar [1919-40] buildings have also been altered in some way, or simply neglected and left to decay.

The main alterations to the traditional fabric of St Helier’s historic building stock may be generalised as follows:

3.1 Roofs

• Coverings — replacement of original pantiles or slates with flat concrete tiles or manmade slate

• Rooftline, structure — alteration of pitch to accommodate extra attic space; formation of bulky mansard extensions

• Dormers — Removal of traditional Jersey dormers such as cubical Georgian and decorative Victorian dormers, and replacement with outsized, boxy modern dormers; loss of original details like timber finials, filigree bargeboards and glazed cheeks

• Chimneys — cement rendering, truncating or removal of patterned brick stacks; removal of terra cotta pots

• Drainage goods — replacement of cast iron and lead items with uPVC
3.2 Windows and Doors

- Windows — removal of sliding sash windows with original (some specific to Jersey) details such as grooved central astragals, decorative horns, crown or cylinder glass; replacement of multipaned sashes with single panes of plate glass; replacement of traditional timber sashes and boxes with unsympathetic materials and methods of opening (most notably tilt/turn windows manufactured in aluminium or most commonly, uPVC)

- Shutters — often partially or completely removed across a facade, much to the detriment of the building’s unity of design (presumably partial removal indicates separate owners in a subdivided house)

- Doors and door surrounds — replacement of original timber panelled doors (that are appropriate in style with the doorcase and house) with unsympathetic generic doors from builders’ merchants, manufactured either in timber or uPVC, and bereft of traditional detailing and ironmongery; alterations to fanlights and transoms often incur the loss of decorative glass and other features
above left: partly reglazed house in St Mark’s Road
above right: PVC door and windows in Great Union Road
below left: PVC tilting windows (plus dormers) in Belmont Road
below centre: neglected traditional sash & case in Poonah Road
below right: mixed loss of original features in Douro Terrace
above: mooted but inharmonious colours in West Park Avenue
below: dominant blue in a pastel New Street block

above: overwhelming trim colour in Chevalier Road
below: traditional hues in Roseville Street?
3.3 Decoration and Ornamentation

- Render (stucco or cement) — removal of render and exposure of brick or rubble walls beneath; loss of decorative detail
- Paint Colours — incoherent array of painted facades, dominated by magnolia and similar bland treatments; apparent lack of historical provenance for colour selection; tasteless combinations of clashing and inappropriately bright colours, either between neighbours or on an individual building

3.4 Setting

- Front gardens of individual houses — removal of boundary wall, gates, railings and green space of front gardens in favour of paved car park area; loss of trees and other greenery; installation of garage or house extension to front of house
- Settings of formal terraces, crescents — destruction of communal pleasure grounds/formal carriage drives to set-piece terraces, thus destroying the original composition and character of the historic architecture; loss of green interface between building and street diminishes the amenity of the wider area, thus “hardening” the environs, exacerbating street noise, reducing wildlife habitats etc.

3.5 Other Fabric Problems

- Shop and bar fronts — alteration or removal of original material (doors, windows, signage) and replacement with generic fit-out with oversized glazed areas, fascias etc
- Satellite dishes, TV antennas — cluttering of rooftscape with
excessive numbers of dishes and antennas (most common in subdivided properties)

- removal of inappropriate alterations to chimneys

Whereas the fabric of Sites of Special Interest, proposed SSIs and Buildings of Local Interest are at present protected by statute, there are sizable numbers of older properties whose character is being destroyed by unsympathetic repairs and alterations to the above features. These unregistered buildings, many humble and unsophisticated, form an important backdrop for St Helier’s finer architecture and thus, as a group, make an invaluable contribution to the wider townscape. Also, as many of these “lesser” buildings are found in areas originally established as working class neighbourhoods, there is a social or cultural value to the properties that might not justify registration on pure architectural or historical grounds but should still ensure a degree of statutory protection. The designation of Conservation Areas is an important way in which the greater townscape can be protected, and it is important that such protection is not only afforded to St Helier’s commercial centre and salubrious streets but to the outlying neighbourhoods as well.

4. Buildings at Risk

Assessing the current state of abandoned, derelict, neglected properties is always difficult within the period of a limited study,
for the status of such buildings is often quite fluid. Many sites recorded during recent fieldwork as being a “Building at Risk,” upon investigation, appear to be the subjects of proposals currently in the planning system. Some buildings (namely Sussex House in Clarence Road) are apparently destined to be demolished, whereas others, such as small residential properties in Aquila and Great Union Roads, are in a parlous state and need urgent stabilisation. Perhaps the most common building groups that might be considered to be “at risk” are interwar structures (often motorcar garages) and traditional workshops. These utilitarian structures — both the streamline Moderne buildings and the vernacular asymmetrical workshops — add immense character to St Helier, and provide a sharp contrast to the orderly details and classical refinement of so much of the town’s residential properties.

Usually tucked in back lanes and in minor side streets, the humble workshops are also seen in prominent streets such as Gas Place, Minden Place and Victoria Street. Many of these premises still retain their original use; others have been converted to other commercial uses (eg retailing) or have been converted into residences. These small workshop buildings, often standing in isolation amongst residential properties, are an integral part of St Helier’s historic built environment and should be preserved. Retaining such mixed use sites are crucial to the town’s economy and vitality, and reuse for commercial (i.e. light industrial) purposes should always be the preferred option. If residential redevelopment of the site is the expressed intention of the owner, conversion of the existing fabric should always be encouraged (rather than demolition).

St Helier has — relative to the UK — a noticeably large number of fine buildings built between the wars in Art Deco, Art Moderne and
early International Style. Apparently, few structures of this period are Registered Buildings (e.g., Collins Office Products on the corner of Don Road and Frances Street; “Greencourt” in Green Street). Many are humble garages (e.g., Le Sueur’s in Colomberie/Hilgrove Street). Many are under threat due to development pressure (Le Sueur’s) or simple neglect (Arrow Insurance in Hill Street, opposite Halkett Place) and thus are at risk of demolition.

A reassessment of these interwar structures should be made — based on a thorough survey and academic appraisal — with a view to adding them to the Register of Buildings and Sites. Any losses of this unusual collection of buildings would severely impact upon the breadth of St Helier’s architectural patrimony.

In common parlance, “buildings at risk” are those under threat of demolition due to severe decay, redundancy or outright dereliction. Many such buildings are actually most in need of a sympathetic, imaginative and resourceful owner. Unfortunately, in the wrong hands a perfectly viable building can be neglected to a point where demolition is the only alternative. On the other hand, if a structure is physically sound, but it has lost so many historic features that little or none of the original character survives, its architectural and historical integrity has thus been so compromised that perhaps it too could classified as being as a “building at risk.” At present, with so many older properties in St Helier lying outwith the protection of the Register of Buildings and Sites, there is a vast amount of the Town’s architectural character at risk of irreparable damage or
outright loss. Again, the importance of thorough Conservation Area designation cannot be overemphasized.

4. Objectives

4.1 Education

The obvious objective of any conservation initiative is the improvement in the standard of repair and maintenance of the older building stock. In order to achieve and maintain good stewardship of the historic built environment, it is advisable not only to adopt a combination of controls and incentives, but there must also be present a certain level of understanding on behalf of the property owners. After all, it is a maxim in the conservation field that there is no such thing as a “problem building,” there are only “problem owners.” Therefore, the education of building owners is paramount if high standards of repair and maintenance are to be achieved and sustained.

The education of building owners (and leaseholders) is not, however, an end in itself. Similar training must also be available to contractors and tradesmen in order to ensure that repairs are undertaken to the highest standard. In essence, the objectives of any public educational campaigns should include the following:

• Greater appreciation of and sympathy for St Helier’s built heritage
• Awareness of the cultural value of the historic built environment

4.2 Statutory Controls

Successive improvements to the statutory protection of Jersey’s historic buildings (1964 Planning Law, 1987 Island Plan, 1992 Register of Buildings and Sites, 2002 Island Plan, interim policies for the conservation of historic buildings 1998) have been invaluable tools for the States’ efforts in preserving fine examples of St Helier’s historic built environment. Together with the 1997 Historic Building Repair Grant scheme, these statutory mechanisms are undoubtedly effective, though one might question whether there is any scope for modest improvements in the system.

For example,

• Can the designation of Sites of Special Interest be
streamlined (so that pSSIs are processed more efficiently)?

- Should more BLIs be upgraded to SSI status (for enhanced protection and maximum grant eligibility)?
- Should the Historic Building Repair Grant scheme be augmented/extended?
- Should the proposed Conservation Area only include the medieval core of the Town, or should a single, large Conservation Area cover most of St Helier?
- Should there be several, smaller CAs for specific areas (e.g., commercial centre, Havre-des-Pas, NW New Town, NE New Town)?

5. Proposals

5.1 Protection of unregistered buildings/extension of Conservation Areas

The number of Registered buildings in St Helier is limited, and if only a single, central Conservation Area is designated (as proposed in the 2002 Island Plan), much of the late 19th-century town outwith the retail/commercial core would remain unprotected. At present, many “minor” buildings, streets and neighbourhoods are suffering irreparable damage to their character due to a lack of statutory protection. Unless these lesser buildings are Registered, it is only the removal of permitted development rights within designated Conservation Areas that will ensure that the integrity of these buildings is preserved and the character of the whole of St Helier is not further diluted.

In order to ensure a degree of protection for these unregistered buildings, a case may be made for the designation of either a larger, single conservation area across the Town (incorporating the commercial centre and residential districts of the northwest, northeast and Havre-des-Pas), or a series of separate areas each with its own identity but enjoying equal protection.

5.2 Promotion of better stewardship through education

The key to improving the repair and maintenance of historic properties is education. Once property owners, leaseholders and contractors are empowered with appropriate information on the value of conservation and its practical application, then part of the battle can be considered to be won.

Technical education can be undertaken in a variety of ways. Certainly, the Department of Planning & Building Services’ 1999 policy statement, Traditional Timber Windows and Doors, is a cogent, accessible and handsomely produced document combining detailed technical and planning information. Apparently, this document, along with its partner brochure, A History of Timber Windows and External Doors in Jersey, have encouraged many building owners in St Helier to reinstate like with like rather than replace their original timber sash windows. The States might wish to consider extending the range of such policy documents to include other historic building features (as outlined above) which are at risk of alteration, removal or replacement.

In addition to the dissemination of technical information through a series of free leaflets, there might be a case made for the commissioning of a definitive conservation/restoration/
maintenance guide for St Helier’s historic architecture, perhaps
dmodelled on the Care and Conservation of Georgian Houses
published by the erstwhile Edinburgh New Town Conservation
Committee, the Glasgow West Conservation Manual, numerous
publications from Bath etc (there being many models in the UK and
abroad). Apparently there is considerable academic and practical
knowledge of Jersey’s built heritage amongst local professionals
and lay experts, but comparatively little has been published in
recent years. Certainly, there is an absence of published technical
material on St Helier’s architecture or buildings, and little of
specific interest to the owner/restorer of the island’s historic
properties since Joan Stevens’ two volumes of Old Jersey Houses
were published in the 1980s.

There is undoubtedly a great wealth of historic photographs of St
Helier, providing a clear image of the Town buildings prior to the
gradual decline of its architectural integrity in the later 20th century.
The collections of the Société Jersiaise contain vast amounts of 19th
and early 20th views, whilst the Historic Buildings Section of the
Department of Planning & Building Services has a sizable archive
of survey photographs from the 1960s and ‘70s. These and other
collections are invaluable as a record of the traditional appearance
of buildings in the Town prior to the postwar regime of alterations,

Initiatives to celebrate St Helier’s historic architecture —
publications, lectures, exhibitions, walking tours — could be
instrumental in improving standards of maintenance and repair.
The establishment of an annual Architecture Festival, which need
not focus solely on historic buildings, but might also feature public
debates on contemporary design, competitions or consultations,
could be geared to attract a cross section of the community. Annual events such as Doors Open Day, held throughout the UK since the early 1990s, attract a wide variety of lay people into buildings — old and new — not generally open to the public. Such events may start up slowly, but can grow steadily over the years with appropriate support from public bodies and private institutions.

It would probably be difficult for the States to undertake a wide ranging campaign of conservation education on its own, but amenity and professional bodies, libraries, learned societies, local media, acting together with the States, all have a role to play in promoting St Helier’s built heritage. There may be scope for a joint effort — perhaps under the auspices of the Jersey Heritage Trust — to co-ordinate campaigns that promote, for example, best practice in building maintenance. In addition to using publications to disseminate information, more direct methods could be used such as specialist masterclasses for building contractors and practical demonstrations for building owners. A series of classes or seminars could be instituted as a part of a maintenance week. Such an annual programme of events sponsored throughout the UK each November by the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings.

5.3 Proactive campaigns to reinstate lost character

Whilst it is of crucial importance to control the incremental loss of traditional features and the unsympathetic alteration of the historic building stock, it is perhaps of equal importance to promote the reinstatement of these elements that contribute so much to the character of St Helier. To complement its encouragement of best practice in repair and maintenance, the States could undertake proactive campaigns to promote minor improvements — some merely cosmetic — to historic properties with a view to enhancing the public faces of these buildings, and, in turn, the appearance of the townscape as a whole.

With appropriate technical guidance, and perhaps certain incentives, owners could be prevailed upon to improve their properties by:

- using traditional, historically accurate paint colours to decorate facades
- harmonising paint colours across a terrace or semi-detached houses
• “picking out” or polychroming ornamental details (eg stucco, ironwork, carved timberwork)

• “picking out” stucco name plaques of set-piece terraces and other formal developments (for aesthetic purposes and to enhance local awareness of building provenance/history)

• encouraging the common use of traditional terrace or building names

• reinstating ornamental details (eg window shutters, dormer trim, cast iron crestings, decorative chimney pots, awnings, canopies)

• rejuvenating formal settings: reinstating trees and other plantings in private or communal gardens (particularly important for set-piece terraces — Royal Crescent in Don Road and Don Terrace in Clarence Rd are examples of good, mature planting which complement the buildings)

• rationalising the parking areas in front of major terraces to limit the paved area and reduce the visual impact of the cars on the appearance of the building

Enhancing the appearance of one’s property, particularly when a communal effort amongst neighbours, can contribute to rare feelings of civic pride, and pride in ownership is a cornerstone of good conservation practice. The greater the appreciation for the aesthetic value of the property, the greater the likelihood that the building will be appropriately maintained.
above: parking in terrace garden in Clarence Road
left: planting for the future in St Mark’s Road
below: a sterile front in St Mark’s Road
4.4 Enhance grant programme

In most instances, the cost of undertaking appropriate and sympathetic repairs to the fabric of historic properties is more expensive than the use of modern alternatives. It is often difficult for statutory authorities to encourage building owners and contractors to “do the right thing,” especially when the economic value of a high quality (and long lasting) repair is not readily obvious to them. If the use of statutory controls is the proverbial stick of the conservation world, then grant funding may be considered to be the carrot.

For more than fifty years, central government in the UK has made grant funding available for the repair and restoration of historic buildings, gardens and townscapes. In 2002-03, for example, English Heritage awarded over £39m in grants (out of an agency budget of £115m) and Historic Scotland distributed £11.5m out of its total outgoings of £53m. Most grants are distributed directly by these executive agencies (and their counterparts in Wales and Northern Ireland), but increasingly, a percentage is handled by small charitable trusts established (in partnership with local authorities) in specific districts, town or neighbourhoods.

According to a recent English Heritage survey, 87% of a sample of 3000 people in England agreed that public funds should be used to preserve the historic built environment. Similarly, a 2001 survey by the Scottish Civic Trust of over 1000 people found that 95% of respondents believed that the protection of Scotland’s historic built environment is important, and 88% agreed that public money should be spent preserving this heritage.

The discretionary use of public funding promotes best practice in a pro-active way by enabling appropriate high quality materials and superior workmanship. Grant schemes demand high standards (which, of course, must be met if grant is to be paid) and thus fosters improved skills in the building trade. Equally important, perhaps, is the wider public benefit gained through the use of grant funding as the visual amenity of a street or neighbourhood is enhanced by the reinstatement or repair of the traditional features of a town’s historic buildings.

In 1995, the States of Jersey took the first steps in establishing its Historic Building Repair Grant scheme. Launched in 1997, the scheme was originally targeted at Sites of Special Interest (including proposed SSIs) with grants amounting to 40% of the grant-eligible cost (maximum of £10,000). Encouragingly, the scheme was expanded in 2002 to include Buildings of Local Interest (the largest proportion of Registered buildings in Jersey). Grants to BLIs are appropriately smaller (30% of eligible costs,
with a maximum of £7,500), and are only applicable to the exteriors of buildings whereas SSI grants may also cover special internal features.

At present, the annual budget for the entire island amounts to £75,000 (with the possibility of a reduction to £60,000 in the upcoming fiscal year). With this level of funding, it is inevitable that awards must be kept small in order to distribute the grants over such a wide area.

By comparison, in 2004/5 the Glasgow Conservation Trust West distributed c.£400,000 last year (95% coming from Historic Scotland), the Edinburgh World Heritage Trust spent £1.29m in 2002/3 and the fledgling City Heritage Trusts (in Inverness, Dundee, Aberdeen and Stirling) have been provided with grant budgets amounting to £200,000 per annum for an initial period of three years.

Of course, the architectural, demographic and socio-economic profiles of St Helier/Jersey and these Scottish cities are not strictly comparable, but it is interesting to note the levels of funding that have been made available and also that after thirty-four years of trust-based grant schemes in Edinburgh, and fifteen years in Glasgow, Historic Scotland has committed itself to expand its grant-making facilities through local agents in another four cities.

According to English Heritage, for every £1 spent on their grant funded repair schemes, another £5 is raised through private and public sources. English Heritage also states that spending on repairs and maintenance creates more sustainable employment than new-build construction. Conservation work is generally more consistent, being less reliant on one-off major projects, and, interestingly, labour comprises some 70% of budget costs (as opposed to the 30% used for materials). Such an equation, for an island such as Jersey, with money staying in the local economy as wages rather leaving the island in terms of imported materials, should be welcomed.

There is undoubtedly a case to be made to increase the availability of grant assistance in St Helier for the repair and restoration of external fabric of traditional buildings, as much work needs to be done to halt the incremental loss of architectural character throughout the Town. If increased capital funding were available, in addition to standard works such as the repairs of traditional doors and windows, there might also be scope for special themed campaigns to tackle certain troublesome issues such as the restoration of terrace gardens, cast iron features, ornamental dormers etc. In order to address certain problems or special sites, it might be necessary to raise levels of grant.

Even in times of economic instability, investment in heritage should be seen as an investment in Jersey’s infrastructure. Whether an enhanced grant scheme could be handled within the limited resources of the Department of Planning & Building Services would require further examination, but the feasibility of establishing a charitable trust, along the lines of the models mentioned above, should also be given serious consideration. Certainly, the bodies represented by the Jersey Heritage Advisory Panel, with their many years of experience on heritage issues, should be well placed to support such a new organisation, working of course in conjunction with the States.
5.5 Promote increased owner-occupation in the Town

On balance, owner-occupiers tend to take better care of their properties than do absentee landlords. Recent research in the West End of Glasgow, which has Scotland’s highest concentration of let properties and Houses in Multiple Occupancy (i.e. bedsits), demonstrates that owner-occupiers generally maintain the buildings and gardens with a view to enhancing their investment, whereas absentee landlords in a buoyant rental market generally regard their properties as short-term sources of ready income and thus pay little heed to long-term maintenance requirements.

If the quality of the built environment is upgraded, then the quality of life in St Helier should also improve. If the States desire an active, vibrant and attractive town, and if St Helier is to reach its potential economically, socially and in townscape terms, there must be a concerted effort on behalf of all parties to address the issues of quality. How the States might attract more owner-occupiers into St Helier (obviously at the expense of absentee landlords) is an open question.

It is obviously outwith the remit or power of the Historic Buildings Section to manage ownership patterns in the Town, but it is worthwhile to consider that if high standards of repair and maintenance are to be achieved, and sustained, there must be a seismic shift in attitude among owners of historic properties. As stated above, a certain degree of change can be undertaken through controls, education, and financial incentives. Unless, however, there is the political will to alter the demographic profile of St Helier, in other words, to attract more “stakeholding” owners who will take pride in the care and condition of their buildings — and seek to enhance their investment — it will continue to be an uphill struggle to maintain the status quo, let alone improve the lot of the Town’s architectural heritage.

St Helier’s built heritage positively enhances one’s impressions of the town, as seen above: Victoria Street, and below (left to right): Don Road, Val Plaisant, Roseville Street
above: well kept buildings exude confidence and civic pride, Victoria Street
below: typical home in private ownership, Oxford Road

above: Havre-des-Pas houses in mint condition, Queen’s Road
below: one of the town’s small gems, La Route du Fort