Figure I: The North Block (left) and raised platform (right) of Stevenage Town Square in 1959 (Maltby, 1959).

The Place of Heritage in the Regeneration of a British New Town:

A Study in Stevenage, Hertfordshire

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Abstract

Through semi-structured interviews with stakeholders in the process and the analysis of academic and policy literature, this qualitative research project explores the place of built heritage within the urban regeneration of Stevenage New Town. The New Towns were a radical exercise in state-led town planning following the social and material devastation of WWII. However, structural oversights and decades of disinvestment have left many of the towns, Stevenage amongst them, in need of urban regeneration. The research is conducted through qualitative methods, including in-depth semi-structured interviews with decision-making stakeholders in the regeneration process and content analysis of public- and private-sector stakeholder policy documentation. Visual sources are also utilised in cultivating a sense of place and visually demonstrating themes. It concludes that the concept of heritage 'preservation' is widely absent within the scheme, leading to the loss of buildings and structures praised for their architectural significance and adherence to New Town values. However, stakeholders are demonstrated to utilise built heritage in a number of more flexible ways. These include the selective reinterpretation of heritage elements and the emphasis of New Town heritage within areas of new development. New Town heritage is argued to occupy a prominent position within the scheme, although it remains subservient to stakeholders wider objectives of socioeconomic and physical renewal throughout the case study area.

Key Words: *Urban Regeneration; Built Heritage; New Town; Stevenage*

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Abbreviations

MOA – Major Opportunity Area

PPP – Public-Private Partnerships

SBC – Stevenage Borough Council

SDC – Stevenage Development Corporation

TCSA – Town Centre Shopping Area

TSCA – Town Square Conservation Area

1   Introduction and Rationale

1.1   The New Towns and Stevenage

This research project offers an in-depth exploration of how the built heritage of a Mark-One[1] English New Town is considered within its urban regeneration. Incited by rising industrial capitalism, deteriorating socioeconomic conditions, wartime destruction and growing calls for urban reform; the New Towns Act 1946 empowered the British government to create new urban settlements across the United Kingdom (House of Commons, 1946b; Clapson, 2013; Hall & Ward, 2014). Besides contributing to London's post-war housing crisis, the Act delivered settlements acknowledged in planning theory as radical, state-led experiments in utopian ideology and modernist planning (House of Commons, 1946c; Coleman, 1990; Hall & Ward, 2014; Bowie, 2017; Henderson, et al., 2017). Today, the New Towns are established urban locales with a population of nearly three-million people (Town and Country Planning Association, 2021). However, as the New Towns Act nears its 80th anniversary, barriers to their sustainable development have emerged, resulting from decades of neglect, disinvestment and structural oversights during conception (Lock & Ellis, 2020). Thus, several New Town authorities are investigating urban regeneration programmes that may allow them to fulfil their arguably vast potential (Forsyth, 2021). While past redevelopment has seen an indiscriminate approach taken towards their heritage, growing re-evaluation of post-war urbanism could potentially shift how New Town authorities consider their historic built environment (Cole & Harwood, 2020; Aelbrecht, 2021; Fitzpatrick, 2022).

In situating heritage within the context of a contemporary New Town's regeneration, a case study of Stevenage, Hertfordshire was employed. Stevenage exemplifies many of the successes, failures, histories and ideologies associated with the movement and is in the preliminary stages of a £1-billion scheme; aiming for *"transformational change"* (Stevenage Borough Council, 2023b). Through comprehensive regeneration of the Town Centre, Stevenage Borough Council (SBC) hopes to overcome issues now synonymous with the Mark-One towns and revitalise the urban space (SBC, 2023a). However, heritage groups (notably Historic England and The Twentieth Century Society) are concerned for the town's unique post-war heritage, described as *"hugely important"* in the legacy of the New Town movement (Price, 2020, p. 1), within a changed urban landscape (Cole & Harwood, 2020; Lock & Ellis, 2020; Price, 2020; Schäbitz, 2020). This significant heritage combined with the imminent 'threat' of urban regeneration, emphasises the need for research into how Stevenage's heritage is considered within a changed urban landscape.

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[1] Those designated from 1946 - 1950

1.2   Contemporary Academic and Policy Discourse

The New Towns are acknowledged as both: *"perhaps the greatest single creation of planned urbanism ever undertaken"* (Hall & Ward, 2014, p. 2) and *"inappropriate to the 21st Century"* (House of Commons, 2002, p. 2). Despite this discourse, literature on the earlier New Towns remains seemingly inadequate. There exists a tendency to focus on the later 'Mark-Three'[2] towns (Edwards, 2001; Degen, et al., 2008; Luck, 2022). Further, the New Town movement inspired similar population decentralisation throughout Europe and Asia; research concerning these towns is more extensive and varied than of those in England (Wang, et al., 2010; Glover, 2012; Forsyth & Pieser, 2019). As a recently emerging theme, also lacking is insight into New Town urban regeneration. Over the last decade, a dearth of research in this area has become noticeably disjointed from rising policy interest (Essex County Council, 2019; Harlow Council, 2022; SBC, 2023a).

The New Towns' socioeconomic decline post-1980 saw national government disengage from the movement; with no overarching strategy to contend the similar issues faced by the twenty-eight towns (Lock & Ellis, 2020). Nevertheless, new developments are once again touted as drivers of socioeconomic growth and sustainability (Malthouse, 2019); with each major political party unveiling plans for New Town-esque developments (Clapson, 2017a; Jenrick, 2019). The most recent variant of this; 'Garden Communities' has been described as a *"21st Century version of the New Towns Programme"* (Taylor & Walker, 2015; Andrew, 2022; Taylor, et al., 2022, p. 10). Progressive elements of the original New Towns are also growing in contemporary planning policy recognition (Lock & Ellis, 2020; Towns Fund, 2022). For example, the twenty-minute neighbourhood[3]; which the Mark-One towns endeavoured to incorporate within their active travel provision eighty-years ago (SBC, 2019a; Talbot, et al., 2022; Town and Country Planning Association, 2023a). Rising policy interest in the New Town concept emphasises the need for further research into how – and why – the original towns developed, the challenges they face and how stakeholders are responding.

1.3   Defining Built Heritage and Urban Regeneration

Built heritage has been defined as *"a building, monument, site, place, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning"* (Historic England, 2021, p. 1). The National Planning Policy Framework vouches for the conservation of these assets for their *"contribution to the quality of life of future and existing generations"* (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2021a, p. 55). Physical heritage of the Mark-One towns concerns their modernist architecture and design, that researchers note is only beginning to be considered (Lock & Ellis, 2020; Price, 2020). Harlow's distinctively modernist Town Hall (*Figure 1*, p. 11) for example;

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[2] Those designated from 1967-1970.
[3] A place wherein an individual is able to meet their daily needs through short, unmotorised journeys (Town and Country Planning Association, 2023b).

constructed to reflect the civic intent and confidence of the New Town movement. It's 2002 demolition was described as *"a cautionary tale"* in future redevelopment of Harlow and the wider New Town network (Harlow Council, 2018, p. 130). The inclusion of Stevenage Town Square on Historic England's 'Heritage at Risk Register' underscores concern for the erosion of Stevenage's heritage, especially during an era of intensive regeneration (Historic England, 2023). In the New Towns, these tangible aspects of heritage are tightly interlinked with the intangible heritage of the planning movement; which may be equally at risk (Elseragy & Elnokaly, 2018; Colenutt & Schaebitz, 2021).

Urban regeneration is an increasingly nebulous term in the literature (Tallon, 2010; Ujang & Zakariya, 2015; Wang, et al., 2021). Potential objectives for the revitalisation of urban spaces include renewing communities, revitalising economies, improving physical infrastructure and, more recently, rehabilitating a place's internal or external image. The processes encompassed within 'regeneration' continue to increase (Cochrane, 2007). Stevenage's regeneration comprises many of these potential objectives. Therefore, a suitable definition for use in this research is made by Roberts (2000, p. 17), who situates regeneration as *"comprehensive vision and action which leads to the resolution of urban problems and which seeks to bring about a lasting improvement in the economic, physical, social and environmental condition of an area"*. This suitably encapsulates the range of objectives held by stakeholders (SBC, 2023a).

Figure 1: Harlow's original Town Hall (back), viewed from the Water Gardens. The Hall was demolished in 2002 for replacement with the 'Water Gardens Shopping Centre', a retail-led regeneration scheme (Tasker, n.d.).

2   Aims and Objectives of the Research Project

As an extension of the suggested under-researched aspects of the New Town movement, and the selection of Stevenage as a case study, the research question that the project aimed to explore was:

How is the New Town heritage present within Stevenage Town Centre
considered within the ongoing process of urban regeneration?

In order to successfully achieve this, a series of four subsidiary research objectives were produced:

1. To examine the ideological heritage, and subsequently produced physical settlements, of the English New Towns, with a focus on the Mark-One towns.
2. To establish the built heritage present within Stevenage Town Centre, and current policy stance towards this.
3. To examine the purpose, method and intended outcome of the urban regeneration of Stevenage Town Centre.
4. To examine how key stakeholders intend to approach the built heritage of Stevenage Town Centre during the urban regeneration process.

3   Review of New Town Literature

3.1   Introduction

The following literature review presents an historical narrative of the British New Towns movement in order to establish the towns ideological basis, subsequent built heritage and current era of urban regeneration.

3.2   Utopian Origins

Besides exhibiting pioneering design, the New Towns aimed to stimulate socioeconomic renewal in response to urban centres which supporters argued were impoverished, overcrowded and dangerous (Clapson, 2017b). Critics of 19th century urbanism found inspiration for these ideals in concepts originating in Thomas More's 1516 book 'Utopia'[4]. This was demonstrably influential to New Town proponents; referenced by the Minister of Town and Country Planning and 'father' of the New Town movement, Lewis Silkin, during a reading of the Bill: *"it is not unreasonable to expect that 'Utopia' of 1515 should be translated into practical reality in 1946"* (House of Commons, 1946c). The founders of the movement believed that by constructing their perception of physical utopia, a new society would grow detached from traditional cities socioeconomic strife (Hobson, 1999; Forsyth & Pieser, 2019). This perspective has since been criticised as overly-optimistic; disconnected from the reality of urban life (Clapson, 2017b). Several academics cite utopian urbanism – constructing the New Towns for an idealised version of post-war society – as an integral pitfall in post-war planning and partly-responsible for the movements socioeconomic decline post-1980 (Jacobs, 1961; Coleman, 1990; Paden, 2003; Seyferth, 2018).

Rooted in similar utopian ideals, are Garden Cities (Clapson, 2017a). Developed by Ebenezer Howard, the movement was an economic, political and socio-cultural proposal that aimed to decant, arguably, overcrowded cities to new semi-urban towns (Osborn & Whittick, 1969). Howard successfully constructed two Garden Cities; possessing innovative physical design attributes that aimed to address the pollution, poverty and unemployment of traditional 19th century urbanism (Howard, 1898; Bowie, 2017; Henderson, et al., 2017). Underpinning Howard's vision was the redistribution of land value, which would theoretically increase when transformed from rural to urban (Howard, 1902). This captured value would then fund community development projects – a socialist ideal central in utopian theory (Town and Country Planning Association, 2023b). Academics have since argued that capitalistic venture co-opted Howard's 'co-operative commonwealth' with socialist values depreciated by the need to repay loans used in purchasing land and construction materials (MacFayden, 1970; Kress,

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[4] More philosophises on Europe's 'corrupt social order' and envisions the ideal society as a complex, self-contained community on the fictional island of Utopia (Davis, 1981. More, et al., 2020).

2016; Veitch, 2017; Tizot, 2018). The Garden Cities faced criticism, that would similarly be aimed at New Towns, from advocates of larger cities over peripheral development (Edwards, 1914; Elkin, et al., 1991). Despite the planning movements' sharing few physical characteristics, differing in architectural language, design and implementation (Ward, 1992; Hall, 2014), the Garden Cities were highly influential to the New Towns with scholars suggesting that the 1946 Act was the legislation of Howard's vision (Hardy, 1991; Aldridge, 1996).

3.3   World War II & the Barlow Report

New Towns did not emerge as a national priority until the conclusion of WWII (Osborn & Whittick, 1977; Gibberd, et al., 1980). The subsequent loss of urban housing, a patriotic desire to provide 'homes for heroes' and a six-year housebuilding interruption served to catalyse the establishment of the Act (Lock & Ellis, 2020). Frederic Osborn, a prominent figure in the Garden City and New Town movements, percieved wartime destuction as having *"opened up new vistas for town planning"* (Osborn & Whittick, 1977, p. 44). A sense of the towns' modernist perspective.

In 1937, Silkin commissioned Montague Barlow to investigate the concentration of population and industry in urban centres (Orlans, 1952). The 'Barlow Report' would become the basis for the New Town initiative (Barlow, et al., 1940; Gibberd, et al., 1980; Larkham & Clapson, 2013; Clapson, 2017b). Scholars have posited that the report's conclusion – that 'planned decentralisation' should occur – supported the notion that it was the Garden City approach which had been most effective in alleiviating urban problems, as opposed to Whitehall's policy of suburban expansion (Petersen, 1968; Hall & Ward, 2014; Clapson, 2017b). In the same way that Garden Cities intended to provide an alternative to increasingly harsh urban life, New Towns were framed as an opportunity to mould the society and urban landscape of Britain following the devastation of WWII – the construction of a new society on the ruins of the old.

3.4   The New Towns Act 1946

Contemporary urban planning in Britain began in the 1940s, a period marked by industrialisation, urbanisation and increased support for urban reform (Ellis, 2017). In 1944, Patrick Abercrombie's '*Greater London Plan*' (*Figure 2*, p. 16) explicitly recommended the creation of New Towns to decant the population of London (van Roosmalen, 1997). Abercrombie suggested they circumvent local authorities; being funded, planned and delivered by central government through Development Corporations – which were to become central in future discourse (Schaffer, 1970; Osborn & Whittick, 1977; Cullingworth, 1979). Abercrombie also voiced his concerns over the involvement of the private sector – underscoring the socialist characteristics of the towns delivery model (Abercrombie, 1944).

Policymakers agreed that urban sprawl needed to be curtailed, to prevent it from *"eating up more and more of the countryside"* and identified New Towns for achieving this (House of Commons,

1946c). However, in what was to become a primary critique of the towns, some voiced concern that they would drain existing urban centres of their population and resources (Rodwin, 1953). William Morrison, MP for Cirencester and Tewkesbury, stated: *"I am not at all convinced … that the full social implications of creating a new town are yet understood"* (House of Commons, 1946c). Nevertheless, the Bill passed on the 1st of August 1946, legislating Silkin's reports (Clapson, 2017b). By the 11th of November, Stevenage had been designated (Lock & Ellis, 2020). Development Corporations acted as the key delivery method of the Act, utilising powerful placemaking tools including compulsory land purchasing and total control of development within the town boundary (Lock & Ellis, 2020). Twenty-eight New Towns were designated between 1946 and 1970 (Tallon, 2021).

The towns were important elements in the creation of the British welfare state and, while rarely associated with the National Health Service, aimed to improve urban life via state-led planning (Alexander, 2009). The towns contributed towards ending the era of 'non-planning' in Britain, allowing for the protection of environmental resources, the employment of greenbelts and the provision of social facilities within urban developments (Greenwood, 1973). For the development of Mark-One towns, private-sector involvement was minimal (Aldridge, 1996). These public-sector-led New Towns were the most effective at delivering affordable housing while creating employment, social and leisure facilities (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2006). This centralised delivery is a tenet of the towns' ideological legacy (Alexander, 2009; Lock & Ellis, 2020). Since the contraction of the welfare state, scholars and policymakers have acknowledged the improbability of centralised town planning on a New Town scale within the current neoliberal climate (Fée, 2020). Therefore, initiatives like Garden Communities represent a shift towards a mixed-development approach (Pinsent Masons, 2021; Taylor, et al., 2022). The normalisation of these Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) in planning may have implications for the regeneration of existing New Towns, potentially diluting their utopian values in exchange for private-sector profit (Town and Country Planning Association, 2014).
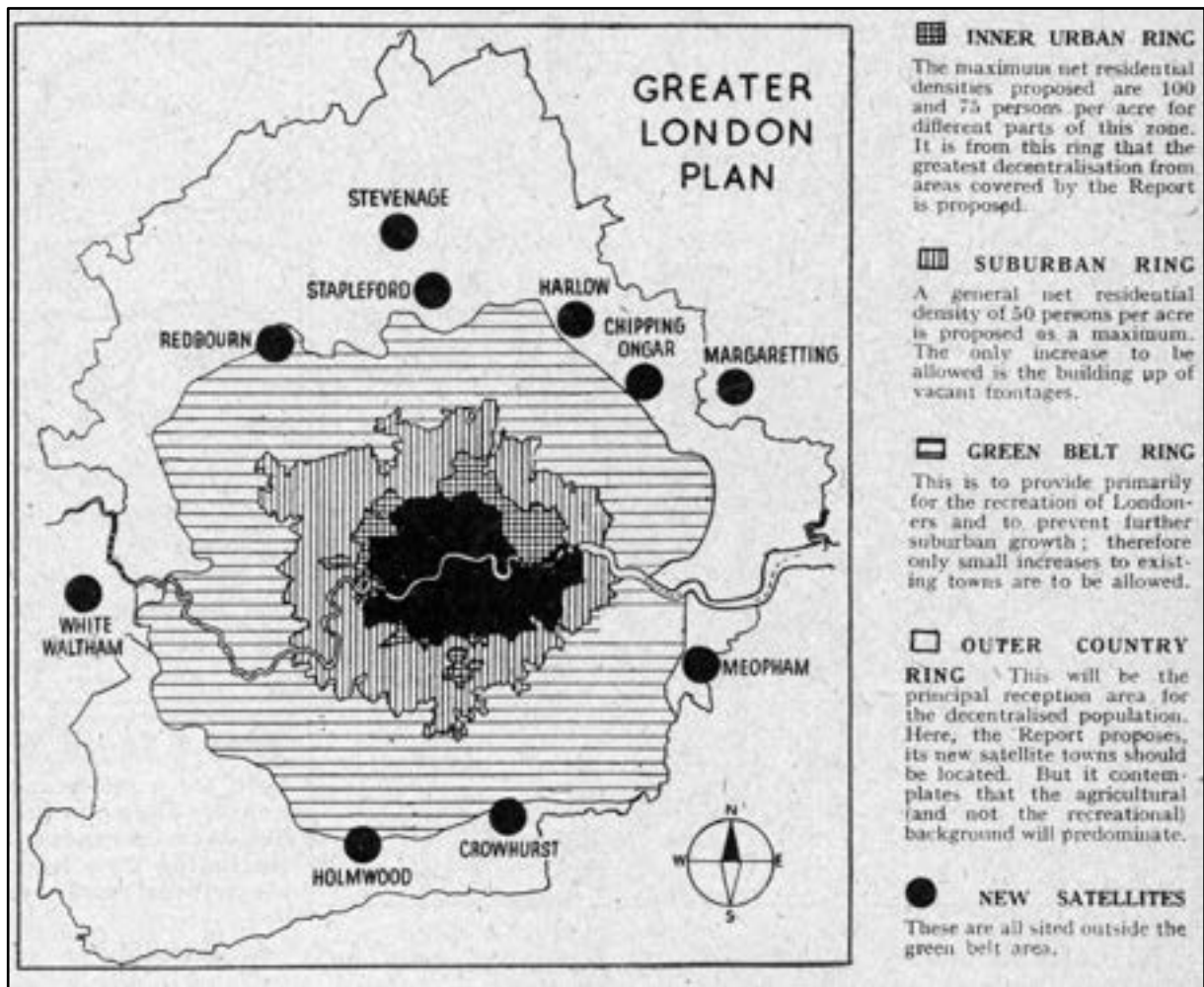
Figure 2: The Greater London Plan's four zonal 'rings', proposed to limit London's urban sprawl through the implementation of greenbelts and New Towns (Abercrombie, 1945).

3.5   Modernism & Masterplanning

The New Towns were products of their time; urbanisation, industrial capitalism and wartime destruction consolidated into an ideology of utopian ideals and centralised urban reform. This physically materialised in the towns, positioning them as manifestations of the modernist planning movement; incorporating experimental design, materials and architecture (Gunn, 2010). Modernist theorists propose urban planning as able to create the ideal physical structure from which a more perfect society can grow (Beaurgard, 1989; Sandercock, 1998). This perspective influenced urbanists from Ebenezer Howard to Le Corbusier and is arguably most recognisable in British New Towns (House of Commons, 1946c; Hobson, 1999).

A core tenet of modernist planning is the 'rational' urban structure, an alternative to traditional, gradually amalgamated urbanism (Gunn, 2010). In attaining this, modernist pioneer Corbusier stated, *"we must build on a clear site"* (quoted in Hall, 1988, p. 310). His vision requiring the total destruction of inner-city Paris, however, is mired in economic and political challenge, with *Ville Radieuse* famously unrealised (Relph, 1987). Therefore, arguably the ultimate form of modernist planning, is the construction of peripherally external settlements – the nature of New Towns. Further modernist qualities include their aim to cure the 'urban disease' of industrial cities (Hobson, 1999), their basis on the *"conviction that the present problems of cities can be best transcended by looking to the future"* (Relph, 2016, p. 24) and their labelling as a "*conscious step in the construction of a new social order*" following WWII (Cherry, 1980, p. 10).

In attempting the rational urban structure, New Town architects utilised the masterplanning technique (*Figure 3*, p. 18) (Hobson, 1999). Masterplanning is defined as *"spatial or physical plans which depict on a map the state and form of an urban area at a future point in time when the plan is 'realized'"* (Watson, 2009, p. 5). An absence of pre-existing infrastructure allowed for strong masterplans, able to guide development throughout the towns' lifetime. This allowed Development Corporations to embed modernist ideals in the towns' physical form (House of Commons, 1946c; Lock & Ellis, 2020). Many of these remain today, including their division into neighbourhood units[5], low-density development[6], land-use zoning, pedestrianised town centres, modernist architecture, public art and segregated active travel infrastructure (Alexander, 2009; Ward, 2016). Heritage groups and academia suggest that these elements of post-war New Town heritage are potentially at risk of dilution through neglect and unsympathetic urban regeneration schemes (Price, 2020; Colenutt & Schaebitz, 2021).

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[5] The neighbourhood unit framework involves dividing a settlement into 'units', each with their own easily-accessible facilities. In the New Towns it was used to reverse the perceived breakdown of community spirit during the inter-war period (Homer, 2000).

[6] Stevenage was initially planned to accommodate 30-dwellings per-hectare. These densities increased as demand for housing grew in the 1960s and 70s (Ward, 2016).
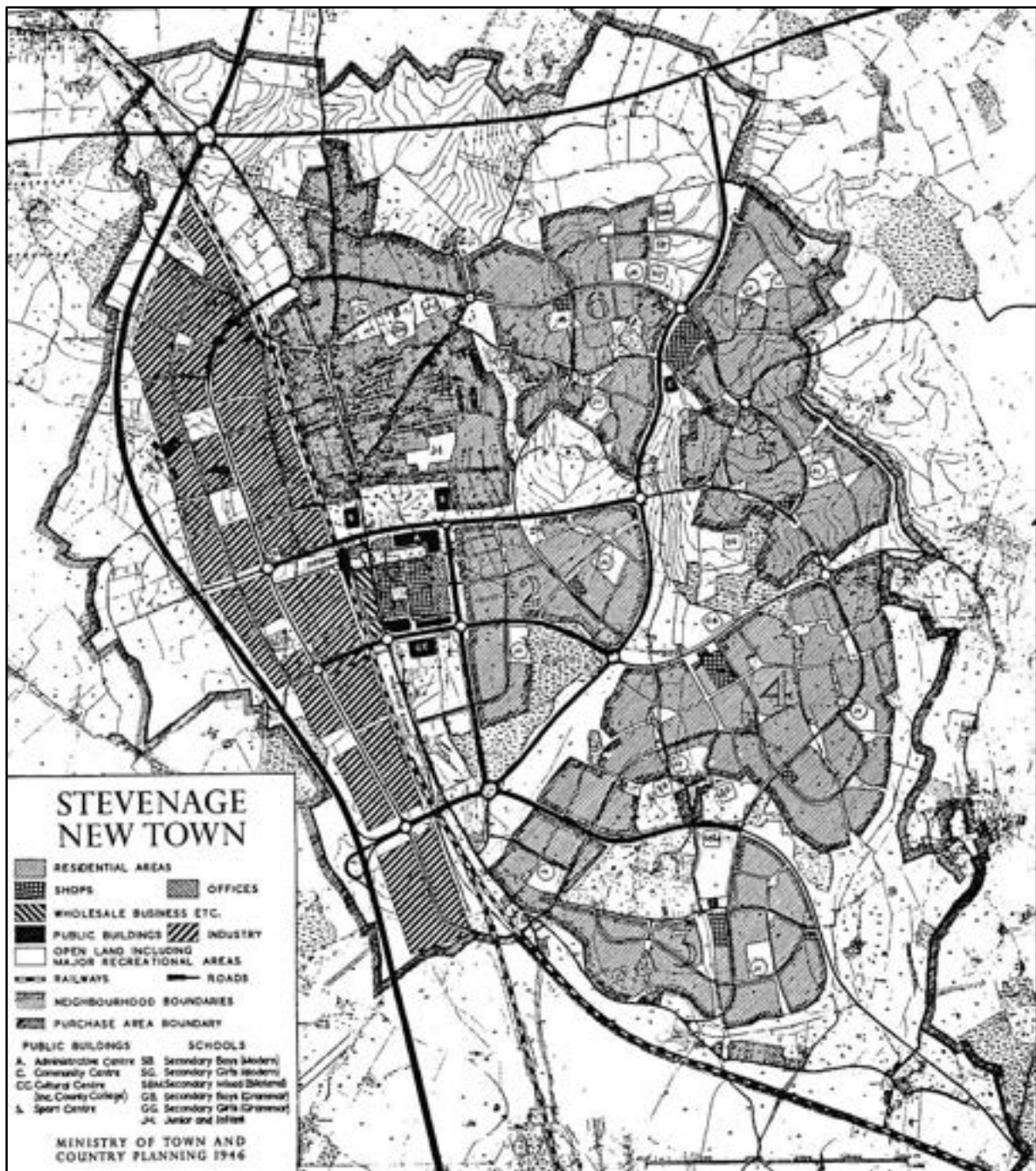
Figure 3: The original Stevenage masterplan drafted in 1946. The six neighbourhood units to the east are distinctly segregated from the industrial area to the west by the mainline railway (Stephenson, 1946).

However, the movement's modernist attributes are partially-responsible for the towns contemporary challenges (Schäbitz, 2020). A tenet of modernism; functionalism, proposes that buildings be designed specifically for their initial use and that the rational urban form be arranged through land-use zoning – described by architect Frederick Gibberd as *"necessary to prevent the evils of the unplanned town"* (Gibberd, 1958, p. 337; Attoe & Logan, 1992; Rivera, 2015). However, functionalism has resulted in poor connectivity, increasing reliance on private vehicles, and overly-rigid town centres primarily comprising retail facilities with inadequate mixed-use space (Coleman, 1990; House of Commons, 2002; Department for Communities and Local Government, 2006; Belford, 2011; Pane, et al., 2018). This surplus of retail provision has resulted in an absent evening economy, unsafe after-hours perception and a dearth of urban activity (Department for Communities and Local Governement, 2006; SBC, 2010a). Further, modernism perceives the urban form as an extension of changing cultural values (Hobson, 1999). For the Mark-One towns constructed between 1950-1970, this meant an urban fabric centred around the increasingly-common private car (Lock & Ellis, 2020). This car-centricity resulted in large, surface-level carparks that disrupt the urban fabric (*Figure 4*, below) (Ward, 2016). Further, pedestrian connectivity beyond the walkable-core is poor, exemplified in Stevenage Town Centre, isolated within a major ring-road creating a 'fortress effect' (SBC, 2002; Town and Country Planning Association, 2021). Despite the ongoing re-evaluation of post-war heritage, New Town authorities may struggle to balance the dichotomous legacy of their town's modernist designs.

Figure 4: Plan of Stevenage Town Centre in 1958. Despite the major pedestrianised avenues and Town Square, large surface-level carparks resulting from the designer's modernist tendencies disrupt the urban fabric and complicate contemporary redevelopment (Mortimer, 1958).

3.6   Successes of the New Towns

The New Towns are no longer 'new', with Stevenage commemorating its 75th anniversary in 2021. Whilst an important contribution to urban planning, the towns are arguably successful developments in their own right (Clapson, 2017b; Lock & Ellis, 2020). In understanding their heritage, their perception as dictatorial compositions of concrete and roundabouts should be balanced with their considerable successes. Firstly, the towns provided sufficient post-war housing. By 1957 they were generating 12,000 homes per-annum (Alexander, 2009). By 1991, the towns had fulfilled 90% of their projected growth (Wannop, 1999). Further, the towns were an economic asset for the government. Their land-value capture feature, a distortion of that piloted in the Garden Cities, allowed them to repay their loans and generate net-income for the Treasury (Reith, 1946; Peiser & Chang, 1999; Lock & Ellis, 2020). The majority of contemporary New Towns have also attracted and retained high-value, knowledge-intensive industries[7]. Stevenage, for example, is a significant life-sciences hub (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2006; Sweney, 2021). Besides economic success, the towns are beacons of modernist art, design and architecture (Lock & Ellis, 2020). This was a key element in their conception, with Silkin stating: *"the new towns can be experiments in design as well as in living"* and a *"chance for the revival or creation of a new architecture"* (*Figure 5*; *6*, p. 21) (House of Commons, 1946c). The towns were physical testament to this, comprising iconic modernist architecture and innovative design elements including Britain's first pedestrianised town centre (Heathcote, 2019). Further, their public art is increasingly recognised as important post-war heritage; in 2022, two Stevenage murals were Grade-II listed[8] (*Figure 7*; *8*, p. 22) (Congreve, 2021; Historic England, 2022).

New Town accomplishments tally to an important legacy of modernist planning and utopian theory and practice on a scale near-unbelievable in the contemporary neoliberal climate. However, the potential loss of their socially idealist tangible and intangible heritage is compounded by the fact that the towns also possess challenges that may necessitate contemporary regeneration. Stakeholders responsible for these decisions are beginning to assess how their built heritage, emblematic of their utopian aspirations, may be incorporated within a post-redevelopment future.

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[7] In the 1980s and 1990s, New Towns were found to house more than half of all industrial areas specialising in high-technology (Begg, 1991).

[8] A tiled mural by artist Gyula Bajó on the former Co-operative House, Stevenage was Grade-II listed following recommendation by Historic England (*Figure 7*, p. 22). Also Grade-II listed was a mural by sculptor William Mitchell adorning Park Place underpass (*Figure 8*, p. 22) (Historic England, 2022).

Figure 5: Grade-II listed warehouse in Stevenage designed by Felix Candela, his only UK work (Snoek, 1963).

Figure 6: Example of modernist residential architecture in Peterlee New Town (Daniel, 1963).

Figure 7: Gyula Bajó's tiled mural in Stevenage Town Centre, Grade-II listed in 2022 (Researchers own, 2023).

Figure 8: William Mitchell's mural 'Scenes of Contemporary Life' adorning Park Place underpass in Stevenage was also Grade-II listed. In 2015 Mitchell posited that the artwork hoped to make the surrounding town "less severe" (Historic England, 2022, pp. 1).

3.7 Decline of the New Towns

Despite their successes, the New Towns faced significant challenges since their construction. Arising due to inherent limitations in their design and underlying ideologies and decades of neglect and disinvestment that followed. Their ambition of fostering an enlightened post-war society, *"a new type of citizen"* (House of Commons, 1946c), has since been argued as unrealistic (Clapson, 2017b). Many of the New Towns, Stevenage amongst them, have historically suffered urban deterioration, socioeconomic decline and the premature shutdown of their Development Corporations.

A significant failing of the towns is apparent in their physical deterioration; compounded by the fact that each were constructed entirely over a 30-year period and thus is uniformly decaying, encouraging costly 'whole-estate' renewal (Lock & Ellis, 2020). This deterioration has negatively impacted their modernist assets. Their once popular pedestrianised centres[9] have been poorly maintained and are unable to compete with external retailers (House of Commons, 2002). Similarly, despite the effective incorporation of active travel in their masterplans, lack of investment has led to under-use of these routes; vegetation has matured to reduce visibility and deteriorated underpasses provide visually unsafe locations. (Lock & Ellis, 2020).

Despite ongoing reappraisal, the towns design and architecture has perhaps attracted the most contemporary criticism (Karimi & Vaughan, 2014; Clapson, 2017b; Lock & Ellis, 2020). From a structural perspective, their masterplans have been described as overly-rigid (Fitzpatrick, 2022). By failing to account for continued growth, the towns sustainable development has been impeded; an issue compounded by their tight administrative boundaries negating outward expansion (Myrick, 2022). Their innovative materials, an element of the town's modernist heritage, have deteriorated – requiring replacement with contemporary materials (*Figure 9*; *10*, p. 24) (House of Commons, 2002; Town and Country Planning Association, 2021). Further, research has suggested that the cold, uninviting architecture of functionalist buildings *"were not popular with residents"* (Morton, 1994; Department for Communities and Local Government, 2006, p. 83). Prominent in the literature is the concept of the 'New Town blues'. Experienced primarily by women abstracted from existing social-circles and integrated in communities wherein they experienced feelings of isolation, heightened by the minimalist architecture (Clapson, 2017b). The phrase has come to represent a general sense of placelessness and dislocation caused by the towns design (O'Malley, 2020).

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[9] Stevenage Development Corporation (SDC) reported in 1969 that *"30% of the shoppers come from outside Stevenage"* (Cole & Harwood, 2020, p. 106).

Figure 9: Stevenage Town Centre's North Block in 2015. The modernist architecture has been poorly maintained and the largely-unused stock rooms above the ground-floor retail units have resulted in the upper-storeys deteriorating further (Eastnews, 2015).

Figure 10: Market Place, Stevenage in 2015. The modernist materials favoured by the New Town movement were difficult to maintain and allowed to deteriorate (Eastnews, 2015).

The towns success in creating 'socially balanced' communities is debated. Their aim to provide for a diverse class base surfaced in a high rate of social housing: between sixty-nine and ninety-seven percent in Mark-One towns (Lock & Ellis, 2020). Poorer families were excluded due to relatively high rents and their untraditional, modernist landscapes were unattractive to the middle-class; by the 1960s they were largely working-class towns (Rodwin, 1956). As a result, almost all New Towns exhibit deprivation (House of Commons, 2002; Alexander, 2009; Lock & Ellis, 2020). Issues of race and ethnicity were also largely ignored. Research on Harlow discerned a community of 'invisible minorites', subject to racial discrimination while absent from town governance. A member of Harlow Council was quoted in the report: *"a lot of it is to do with Harlow, how it formed as a New Town, who moved here … and why people moved here"* (Wrench, et al., 1993, p. 126). Women too were significantly underrepresented in Development Corporations (Goldstein, 1978). Moreover, the towns industries were male-dominated, leaving women to caring, clerical and cleaning work – exacerbating the New Town blues phenomenom (Aldridge, 1996).

The 1980s brought worsening socioeconomic decline. The Conservative government viewed New Towns as partially responsible – allegedly siphoning population and resources from London (Lock & Ellis, 2020). Economic recession and a series of riots in the capital became the final nail in the Development Corporation's coffin; prematurely deactivated under the Thatcher administration. They sold off valuable assets to the private sector (Larkham & Clapson, 2013). These privatised assets were poorly maintained (Edwards, 2001). Additionally, contemporary attempts at urban renewal have been stifled by the fractured land ownership, making whole-estate renewal problematic (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2002). This lack of poltical thought and neoliberal constriction of the welfare state has complicated the sustainable development and contemporary urban regeneration of the towns.

3.8   Heritage and Regeneration

The socialist, utopian ideologies of the New Town movement have culminated in a divisive series of concrete landscapes, their heritage comprising an exemplary display of modernist architectures; emblematic of post-war optimism. Since the rise of New Urbanism, this heritage has been critiqued in academia, policy and popular opinion for its material failures and elitist ideals (Aelbrecht, 2021). Following deindustrialisation and broader rejection of the welfare state, modernist planning was associated with economic failure (Gunn, 2010). By the 1980s, the towns concrete was a symbol of urban decline (Cunningham, 1998). This is reflected in attempts to excise remnants of post-war modernism in exchange for remodelled, reimagined urban centres apparently more capable of fulfilling expected growth (While, 2006). The previously explored demolition of Harlow Town Hall remains a prominent example and the conversion of Harlow's Terminus House into residential apartments has been described as a *"grim perversion"* of New Town ideals (Moore, 2020, p. 1). However, while sparse praise for the

modernist planning movement has previously been reserved for specific 'iconic' structures, the growing reassessment of post-war heritage is encouraging research into the wider ideologies behind the movement (Aelbrecht, 2021; Colenutt & Schaebitz, 2021). This may shift the way that stakeholders consider built heritage (While, 2006).

In correcting perceived design oversights and facilitating an expanding socioeconomic system, the New Towns must inevitably undergo regeneration. An approach increasingly taken, including in Stevenage, is town centre regeneration to catalyse wider redevelopment (Crawley Borough Council, 2022; Harlow Council, 2022; SBC, 2023b). However, large barriers exist to this, including the fractured ownership of assets, the need for whole estate renewal and the under-funding of those local authorities responsible (Lock & Ellis, 2020). Potentially further complicating regeneration is emerging discourse surrounding post-war urbanism (Aelbrecht, 2021). Considering Stevenage's built heritage within the regeneration process could be costly and complex in a Centre that must balance jobs, homes and leisure. However, heritage is increasingly cited as a factor in sustainable urban development, a process which has historically eluded Stevenage (Dogruyol, 2018). Incorporating heritage within regeneration could instil a sense of place and community pride in the Town Centre (Regeneration Through Heritage, 2004) while attracting businesses, visitors and residents (Fryatt, 2021) and mitigating embodied carbon released during demolition and construction work – especially when considering the abundance of CO_2-rich concrete (Bardhan & Debnath, 2022; Burnham, 2022). These benefits will require decisive leadership and intelligent investment.

3.9   Conclusion

Born of utopian ideology, delivered through the centralised planning of a growing welfare state and culminating in unique modernist landscapes, this literature review has explored the tangible and intangible heritage of the Mark-One New Towns. This not only comprises modernist architecture and innovative town planning, but an endeavour in post-war societal egalitarianism. While calls for the preservation of this heritage are rising (Cole & Harwood, 2020; Price, 2020; Colenutt & Schaebitz, 2021), it is evident that the towns challenges likely require large-scale urban regeneration to rectify.

Literature on the towns political origins and physical formation is extensive. Research is lacking however, on the recently emerging theme of New Town regeneration and how their built heritage is considered during this process. This perspective will frame the case study of Stevenage. The following research utilises stakeholder interviews, policy documents and visual sources to inform an exploration of the built heritage of a contemporary New Town within the process of urban regeneration.

4   Methodology

4.1   Overview

In exploring built heritage within the urban regeneration of Stevenage Town Centre, a suitable methodological framework was employed. As described by Cherryholmes (1992), a pragmatic mixed-method approach utilised both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews – including a 'walking interview' – with stakeholders, enabling an 'insider' understanding of the regeneration (Sixsmith, et al., 2003). Secondary data from academic and policy sources were used to supplement and triangulate primary data. The implementation of public- and private-sector secondary data allowed for a comprehensive understanding of heritage within the regeneration process (McGreal, et al., 2002). Moreover, photographic sources provided the case study with a sense of place (Boukra, 1986) and complemented the qualitative assessment of New Town heritage within Stevenage.

4.2   Research Design

As a qualitative study, research was approached from a post-positivistic perspective – a dominant research paradigm within the field of regeneration (Jones, 2017). This approach was taken as it acknowledges stakeholder perspectives are influenced by their own biases, specifically their role within the process. Furthermore, it permitted a mixed-methods approach concerning the integration of primary and secondary data, allowing for a more comprehensive study and reducing potential stakeholder biases (Almeida, 2018). However, there were relatively limited sources of official secondary data; published by organisations potentially holding similar biases to interviewed stakeholders. Nevertheless, this approach adds to the credibility and validity of the research, reducing the issues of relying on a single source (Harrison, et al., 2021).

The study acknowledges and is positioned within existing New Town theory concerning their ideologies, built heritage and contemporary regeneration. Furthermore, the research engages with wider theories of heritage and regeneration. However, the research employed an inductive approach to the role of heritage within the regeneration, aiming to generate original insights (Robson & McCarten, 2015). This accommodated for the spatially heterogenous relationship between heritage and regeneration throughout the Centre and allowed conclusions to inductively develop outside of a set theory or framework (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Inductive approaches are often taken in regeneration research owing to the uniqueness of each case (Samara, 2020; Heath, et al., 2022; Kim, et al., 2023).

In successfully fulfilling the research objectives, an empirical case study was adopted. Crowe, *et al.* (2011) suggests that this enables an in-depth exploration of a process within its 'natural' context – complementary to the inductive approach (Rahimzad, 2018). Stake (2008) ascertains that a case study

must be bound by geographical location and time. Thus, this research explores the roughly rectangular block of land comprising the Town Centre. Despite engaging with certain longitudinal material including documents and photographs, this research applied a cross-sectional perspective – exploring the current period of regeneration. Case studies are perhaps the most common research strategy in heritage-regeneration research, utilised within several studies on international New Town regeneration (Filimon, et al., 2012; Li & Chiu, 2018; Meiling, 2022). As regeneration is increasingly undertaken by *"elite"* actors (Pacione, 2019; Scally, et al., 2021, p. 1), the sampling population was limited to stakeholder bodies – SBC and their private-sector partners. Purposive sampling within this population selected interviewees based on their proximity to the regeneration process – discerned through organisational documents.

Semi-structured stakeholder interviews were selected for primary data collection. Frequently implemented within urban regeneration research (McDonald, et al., 2009; Yu, et al., 2017; Matthews & Gadaloff, 2022), they were adaptable to interviewee's roles, while providing usable data (Whiting, 2007). Following transcription, interviews underwent thematic analysis. These were spatially coded according to their relation to each of the Town Centre's Major Opportunity Areas (MOAs). Within these spatial codes, four sub-codes were generated relating to heritage and regeneration. This focused the research on areas most susceptible to intensive regeneration and allowed comprehensive conclusions from across the Town Centre as opposed to individual instances within it (Rucks-Ahidiana & Bierbaum, 2017). A walking interview was undertaken with an SBC Regeneration Director. This allowed places within the case study area to become 'object prompts' (Leon & Cohen, 2005), socio-spatially integrating heritage and regeneration (Kinney, 2017). Further, original photographs provided the case with a sense of place, visually emphasised themes and allowed for comparison with secondary data imagery (Salucci, 2017).

Qualitative secondary data underwent content analysis within the same spatial codes as the interviews. Despite multiple attempts, no private-sector stakeholders were available for interview. Therefore, private-sector documents supplemented primary data, counteracting the potential public-sector-leaning bias arising from their over-representation within interviews. The triangulation of primary and secondary data increased validity as stakeholder perspectives could be cross-referenced. However, secondary data had to be gathered from official sources, potentially with similar biases to those interviewed.

5   Methods

5.1   Data Collection

5.1.1   Primary Data

According with the sampling regime, fourteen stakeholders were contacted via email or LinkedIn, of which seven were interviewed (six from SBC; one from the Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership) (*Appendix A*). Research accorded with the Class Ethics Protocol and a risk assessment was undertaken (*Appendix B*). Interviews took place online and in-person at the SBC offices in Daneshill House and ranged from fifteen-minutes to one-hour. Pre-written questions (*Appendix C*) acted to guide probing insights, depending on the interviewees role within the regeneration process (Adams, 2015). Questions were divided into three-categories, concerning the interviewees role, the urban regeneration process and heritage. Following verbal consent, interviews were audio-recorded allowing for a verbatim transcription (Longman, 2010; Rutakumwa, et al., 2019). A walking interview was also undertaken with an SBC Director. Each MOA was visited allowing for extensive data collection, this interview was audio-visually-recorded, providing context when analysing. Photographs were taken to visually demonstrate research themes and provide a sense of place (Salucci, 2017).

5.1.2   Secondary Data

Academic sources, primarily books and journal articles, were sourced from Google Scholar and the University of Hertfordshire library. Policy documents were sourced through stakeholder websites. Furthermore, during interviews stakeholders often recommended or supplied further documents. These included planning applications, economy studies, committee reports, visual impact assessments and built heritage statements. Visual sources were gathered from photographic archives Our Stevenage and RIBApix[10] and stakeholder publications; these demonstrated research themes and allowed for comparison with contemporary imagery (Ward, 2016; Pieri, 2018).

5.2   Data Analysis

5.2.1   Primary Data

Interviews were manually transcribed, allowing thorough examination. A basic numeric identification system (*Appendix A*) ensured confidentiality. Transcripts underwent thematic analysis. A coding scheme was created based on the Town Centre's five MOAs. The transcripts were re-examined multiple times to accurately spatially codify them. Within their spatial codes, the data were further categorised into four sub-codes: tangible heritage, intangible heritage, socioeconomic regeneration objectives and

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[10] Our Stevenage is a community resource, archiving historical imagery of Stevenage New Town. RIBApix is the photographic archive of the Royal Institute of British Architects, containing extensive documentation of Stevenage's modernist architecture.

physical regeneration objectives. The two-levels of coding increased depth of analysis and facilitated the interpretation of the data across the Centre by providing an organised structure. Within these codes, the place of heritage within the Town Centre's regeneration process was inductively explored and examined within the context of academic theory.

5.2.2 Secondary Data

Secondary academic data were used in fulfilling *Objective 1*, through a narrative literature review. Secondary policy data underwent content analysis, using identical codes and sub-codes generated during interview analysis. This allowed for supplementation and triangulation with primary data. Despite multiple attempts, no private-sector stakeholders were available for interview. Therefore, secondary data in the form of private-sector documents supplemented primary data, counteracting the potential public-sector-leaning bias arising from their over-representation within interviews to gain a more comprehensive oversight of heritage within the regeneration process. Secondary data was also triangulated with primary data. Statements made in interviews were cross-referenced with secondary sources to ensure validity and in identifying common themes within the primary and secondary data. This allowed for a more rigorous and valid qualitative study than relying on primary data alone.
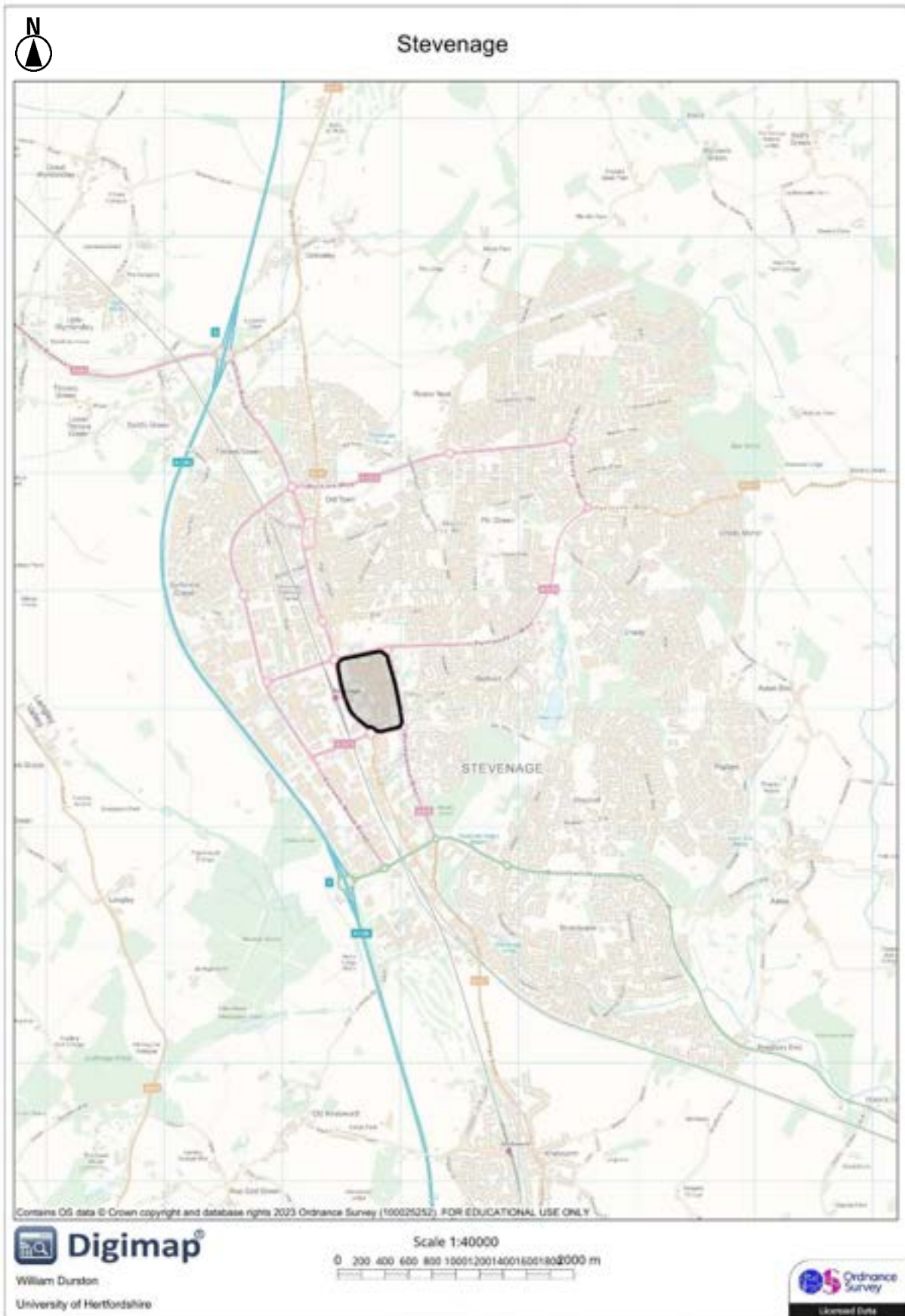
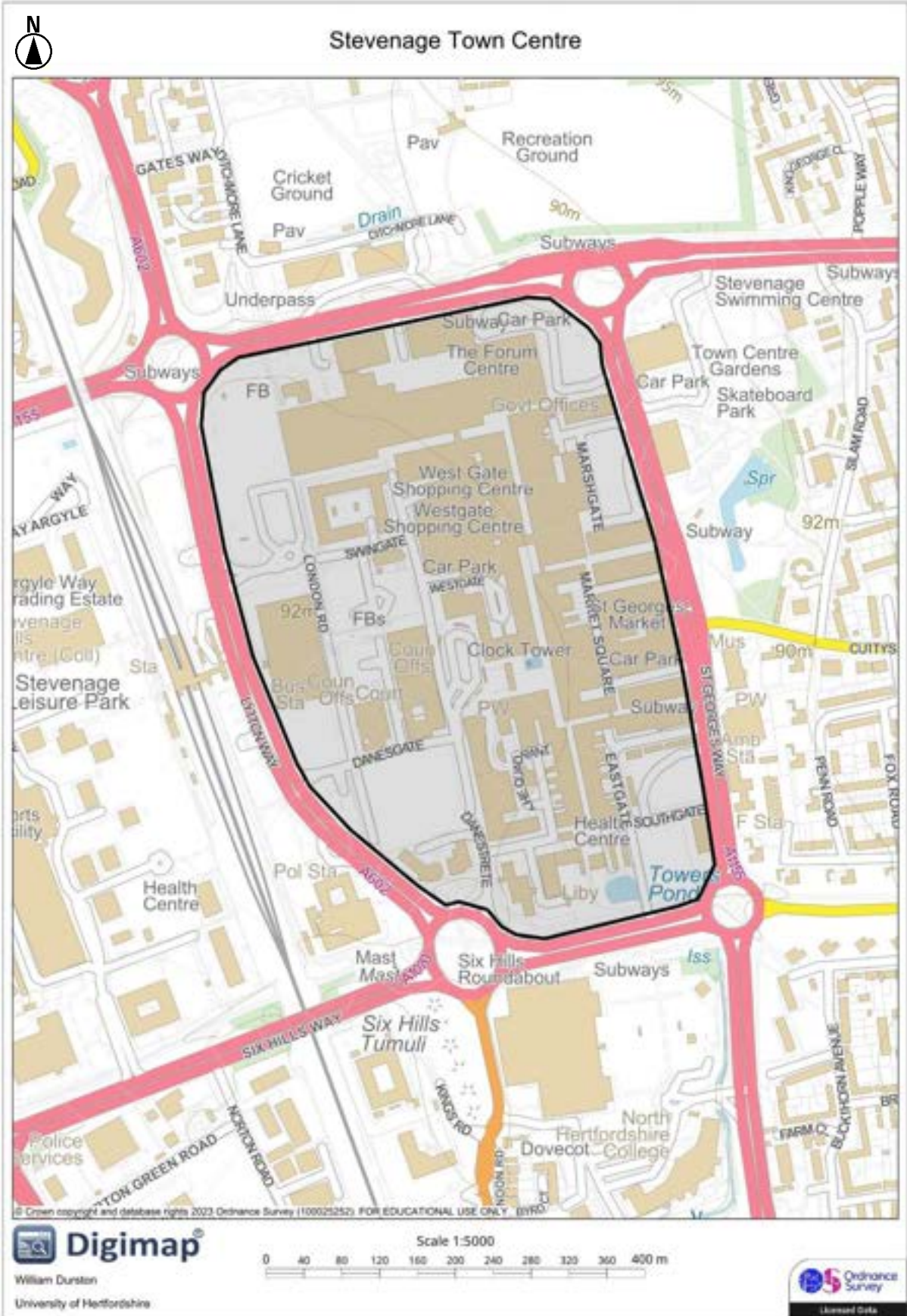*Figure 11: A map highlighting the Town Centre's location in Stevenage (Researchers own, 2023).*

Figure 12: A map highlighting Stevenage's Town Centre - the case study area (Researchers own, 2023).

6   Heritage in the Regeneration of Stevenage Town Centre

6.1   Overview

Situated 27-miles north of London, Stevenage (*Figure 11*, p. 31) was designated to decant population and industry from the capital (Orlans, 1952). The land was undeveloped besides a small village – to become one of six residential units (Wakeman, 2016). Pre-existing residents resisted its transformation into a New Town of proposedly 60,000-persons by the British government; viewed as bureaucratic destruction of their rural idyll (Willmottt, 1962; Stevenage Museum, 2022a). Critics compared the top-down development method to that of communist Russia (Kynaston, 2007). Local resistance slowed initial development, with only twenty-eight permanent dwellings constructed in the first five-years of construction (Alexander, 2009; Ward, 2022). Compulsory purchase capabilities and strong financial backing eventually allowed Stevenage Development Corporation (SDC) to actualise the Stevenage Masterplan (Black, 1951).

The plan envisaged a town positioned on the mainline railway, with industry separated from residential facilities by the tracks (Orlans, 1952). These two-halves were to be conjoined by an entirely new Town Centre (Black, 1951; Ward, 2016). While several Mark-One towns developed around a pre-existing core[11], SDCs decision allowed for a 'blank canvas' (*Figure 13*, p. 34) wherein a uniform display of modernist heritage could develop (Cole & Harwood, 2020). Examples of this include the first pedestrianised town centre in Britain, modernist architecture, abundant public art and the largely-unaltered Town Square (Cole & Harwood, 2020; Price, 2020; Stevenage Museum, 2022b).

Following construction, the Town Centre (*Figure 12*, p. 32) became Stevenage's social core, as its designers had intended (Cole & Harwood, 2020). However, since the 1980s, it has experienced relative socioeconomic and physical decline; exemplifying criticisms of the movement and its arguably naïve objective of urban utopia (SBC, 2020a). Since 2000 there have been two prominent regeneration attempts, faltering over an absence of private-sector funding (McEvoy, 2020). The latest, and arguably most propitious: a twenty-year, £1-billion programme described by the local authority as *"transformational change"* (SBC, 2023a). While SBC was awarded the second-highest national allocation of the Town's Fund[12], the majority of development is undertaken in collaboration with private-sector partners (SBC, 2023a). The regeneration hopes to provide residential, retail, leisure and *"significant public realm improvements"* to the heart of Stevenage's heritage-rich core (Taylor & Gardner, 2018, p. 2).

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[11] including Crawley, Hemel Hempstead and Bracknell (Ward, 2016).
[12] The Town's Fund is a UK government initiative aimed at boosting economic growth and quality of life in England's towns. In 2021 it awarded £1.02 billion between 45 towns (MHCLG, 2021b).

Figure 13: Northeast aerial view of Town Centre construction in 1958 (Maryan, 1958).

Figure 14: Chief Architect Leonard Vincent examining the under-construction Town Centre in 1958 (Day, 1958).

6.2   History and Heritage of The New Town Centre

The Town Centre masterplan was completed in 1955; designed as the focal-point of the town and emblematic of the pioneering spirit of the movement (Black, 1951; Gibberd, 1958; Cole & Harwood, 2020). Inspiration for the Centre's pedestrianisation came from Rotterdam's *Lijnbaan* shopping street (van der Zee, 2018). The *Lijnbaan* seized the 'opportunity' of wartime destruction noted by New Town proponents attempting to actualise the rational urban structure (Osborn & Whittick, 1969; Stephenson, 1992; Kefford, 2022). Throughout the early 1950s, retail groups concerned for commercial viability contended with pro-pedestrianisation residents (Vincent, 1960; Ward, 2016). The protracted outcome of the pedestrian precinct has been described as *"a triumph of public will over capital interest"* (Vincent, 2015b; Cole & Harwood, 2020, p. 190). The centre's post-war architectural and design features range from innovative construction methods to specific buildings, structures, sight-lines, and artwork (SBC, 2010b). The 1959 opening of the centre by Queen Elizabeth II legitimised the design and spirit of the New Town movement in popular discourse. (Kay, 2022).

Figure 15: View looking north on Queensway – Stevenage's primary north-south pedestrianised avenue – in 1959. The timber-finished canopies were a key design element of the Centre; enabling architectural uniformity, visually-separating the street from the building above and providing shelter (Maltby, 1959).

Figure 16: View looking south on Queensway in 1959. Street furniture including lighting, concrete planters and 'bike parks' were specifically designed to complement the modernist aesthetic and overarching 'concept' of the Centre (Maltby, 1959).

A clear design ethos was imposed by chief architect, Leonard Vincent (*Figure 14*, p. 34) (Navickas, 2022). Materials primarily consisted of concrete, steel and glass; selected for their alignment with modernist conventions, besides a significant lack of traditional material following WWII (House of Commons, 1946a; While, 2007). Specifically designed street furniture complemented the Centre's modernist aesthetic (*Figure 16*, above) (SBC, 2010b). Public art, central to the enlightened-urbanism concept, was incorporated through a sculpture programme[13]; providing a town with no pre-existing identity a sense of place, supplying some of Stevenage's most tangible heritage and exemplifying Silkin's conviction in moulding a *"new type of citizen, … with a sense of beauty, culture and civic pride."* (*Figure 7*; *8*; *17*, p. 22, 37) (House of Commons, 1946c; SBC, 2021b; Stevenage Museum, 2022a).

As the socio-physical core of the Town Centre, the Town Square intended to connect residents with the new landscape (Vincent, 1960). The focal-point of this area remains the Clock Tower and adjacent raised platform (*Figure 17*; *18*; *19*; *20*, p. 37-38). The Clock Tower is posited in academia and

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[13] Later New Towns incorporated public art less integrally. Stevenage and Harlow are considered to have embraced public art as a fundamental placemaking tool (Congreve, 2021).

local policy as physical embodiment of the movement's socialist modernism and centralised utopianism (SBC, 2010b; Hatherley, 2021). Surrounding buildings were monitored to ensure their subservience to the Tower; while timber-finished canopies (*Figure 15*, p. 35) running the length of the original shopping area – contrasting the hard materials of the buildings and unifying shopfronts – align with the height of the raised platform (Cole & Harwood, 2020; Price, 2020). Vincent considered the platform essential in facilitating the Centre's topographic transition and providing intimacy and enclosure within the Square (SBC, 2010b). Atop the platform stands 'Joy Ride' (*Figure 17*; *18*, below), designed by Franta Belsky to represent *"a happy new town riding on the back of the old"* and commissioned by SDC in response to the use of art in 'rehabilitating' war-damaged Rotterdam (Belsky, 1958; quoted in Cole & Harwood, 2020, p. 97; Navickas, 2022).

Figure 17: Franta Belsky's 'Joy Ride' in 1959, situated in its prominent location on Town Square's raised platform with the Clock Tower in the background (Maltby, 1959).

Figure 18: 'Joy Ride' and the Clock Tower today. Despite certain alterations, the conservation area is well-preserved (Researchers own, 2023).

Figure 19: Photograph of the Square in 1959. This eastward view of the raised platform, 'Joy Ride' and Clock Tower is considered by heritage groups and stakeholders as one of the key vistas of the Centre (Maltby, 1959; SBC, 2010b; Cole & Harwood, 2020; I07).

Figure 20: Underside view of the Clock Tower in 1959. Surrounding buildings were designed to allow the Tower to stand above them. It's Mondrian panels complement the modernist aesthetic of the surrounding Centre (Maltby, 1959).

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Constructed in three-phases from 1955-1979, the Town Centre is a methodically considered precinct of walkways, buildings and open space; with building heights, architecture, design features, transport infrastructure and street layout filtered through the modernist lens of the New Town ethos. This level of urban control was referred to by Vincent as 'The Concept' (Cole & Harwood, 2020). While this allowed for a uniform modernist aesthetic recognised for its unique cultural legacy, the rigidity in the Centre's design perhaps enhances the synthetic and impersonal impression often associated with Stevenage (Orlans, 1952; SBC, 2010a; SBC, 2015a; Halford, 2016). However, the dissolution of SDC in 1980 signified a *"less disciplined"* shift in subsequent development and a perceived dilution of the concept (Rixson, 1979; quoted in Cole & Harwood, 2020, p. 84).

Perhaps the most significant instance of unsympathetic redevelopment is The Forum Centre (finished in 1997) and The Plaza (2000) (*Figure 21*; *22*, p. 40). Designed to *"increase the economic success of the centre"* (SBC, 2010a, p. 11). These mall-like developments were finanancially unsuccesful; a 2013 Retail Study described The Plaza's high vacancy rate as *"the worst outcome for Stevenage"* (SBC, 2013b, p. 57). The developments have been criticised as individually unattractive and poorly suited within the Centre's carefully considered architecture – more consistent with out-of-town retail parks (Gibberd, 1958; SBC, 2010b; Cole & Harwood, 2020; Price, 2020)[14]. Furthermore, these developments represent an ideological shift. A deviation from Stevenage's – arguably naïve and unsuccesful – ambition of urban-utopia, towards a market-driven, oppurtunity based approach to appease changing retail habits. This is arguably a consequence of growing neoliberalism post-1980 (Lowe, 2005) and the national shift toward retail-led regeneration; described as urban development *"subverted to serve the needs of private companies"* (Monbiot, 2000, p. 4), contrary to the origins of the New Town movement. While The Forum Centre and Plaza have since been acknowedged as *"not a model to be followed in the future"* (SBC, 2010b, p. 22); SBC continued to approach regeneration as a retail-led process (SBC, 2010a). This is evidenced in supporting documents for the 2007-2012[15] regeneration proposal (SBC, 2012).

Furthermore, in 1980 the Town Square was designated a conservation area (TSCA) (*Figure 23*, p. 41) owing to its well-preserved architecture (SBC, 2015a). Moreover, the Centre contains four Grade-II listed structures: the Clock Tower, 'Joy Ride' and Bajó's and Mitchell's murals (Congreve, 2021; Historic England, 2022). Besides these, SBC recognise elements of the Centre as 'locally significant' including trees, artwork, key vistas (*Figure 19*, p. 38) and buildings (SBC, 2022). Despite this legislative protection, organisations invested in preserving Stevenage's heritage believe the area to be

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[14] It has been argued that the construction of The Forum Centre triggered a north-ward shift of retail in the town centre, allowing the original core to further decay (Ward, 2016). However, there is little evidence or acknowledgement of this adverse effect by SBC or other stakeholders.

[15] Plans for a £250-million Town Centre regeneration scheme were abandoned in 2012 following *"adverse economic conditions"*, leading to the disbandment of that PPP (Hunter, 2012, p. 1).

at risk from neglect, disinvestment and the proposed urban regeneration (Cole & Harwood, 2020; Price, 2020; Colenutt & Schaebitz, 2021; Historic England, 2023).

Figure 21: The Forum Centre. It's red-brick architecture does not complement that of the grey-concrete Centre, and its frontage onto a carpark arguably subverts the pedestrianisation of the Centre (Researchers own, 2023).

Figure 22: The Plaza. It's curved architecture and vacant units are perceived as physical and financial detriments to the Centre (Researchers own, 2023).
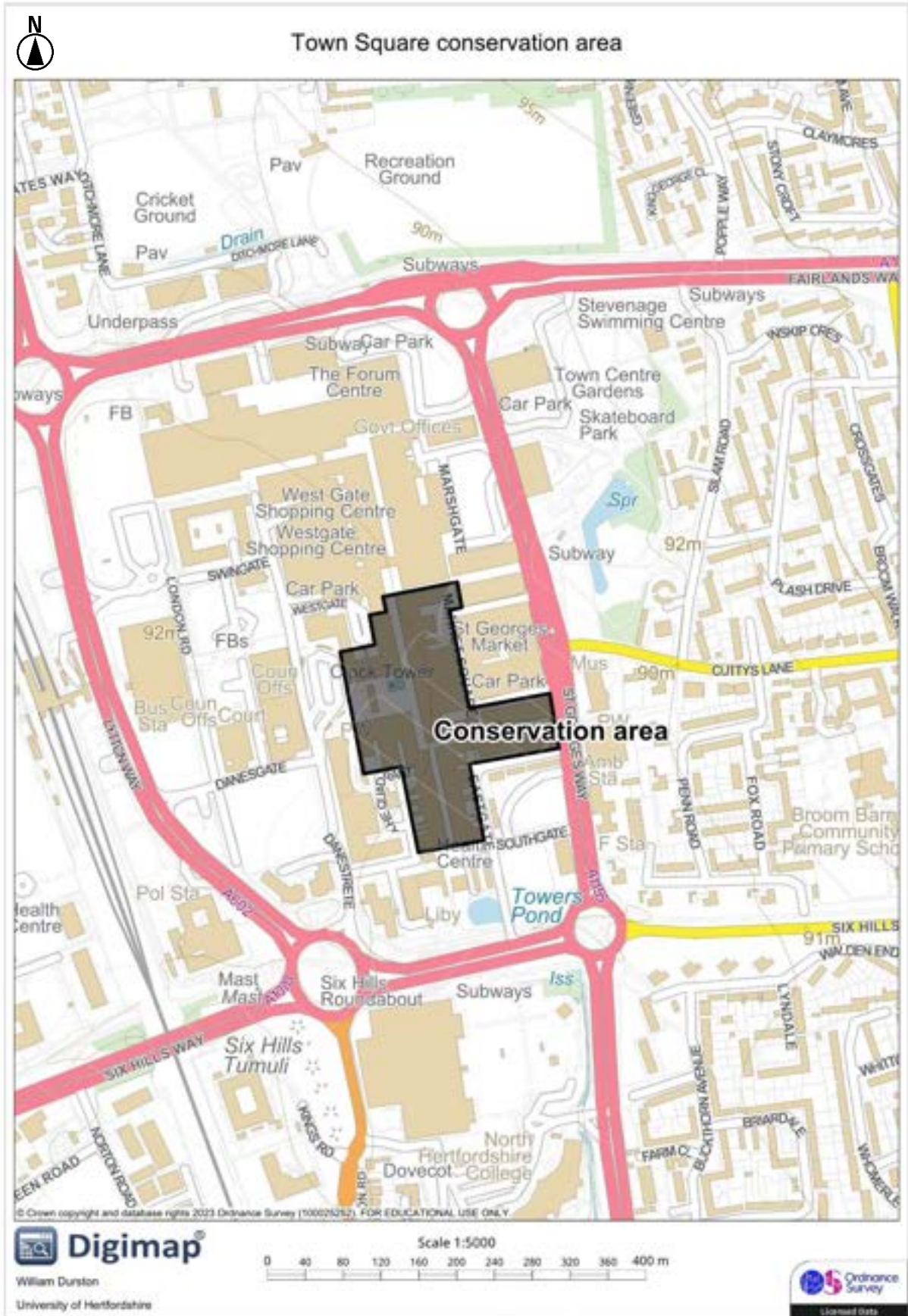
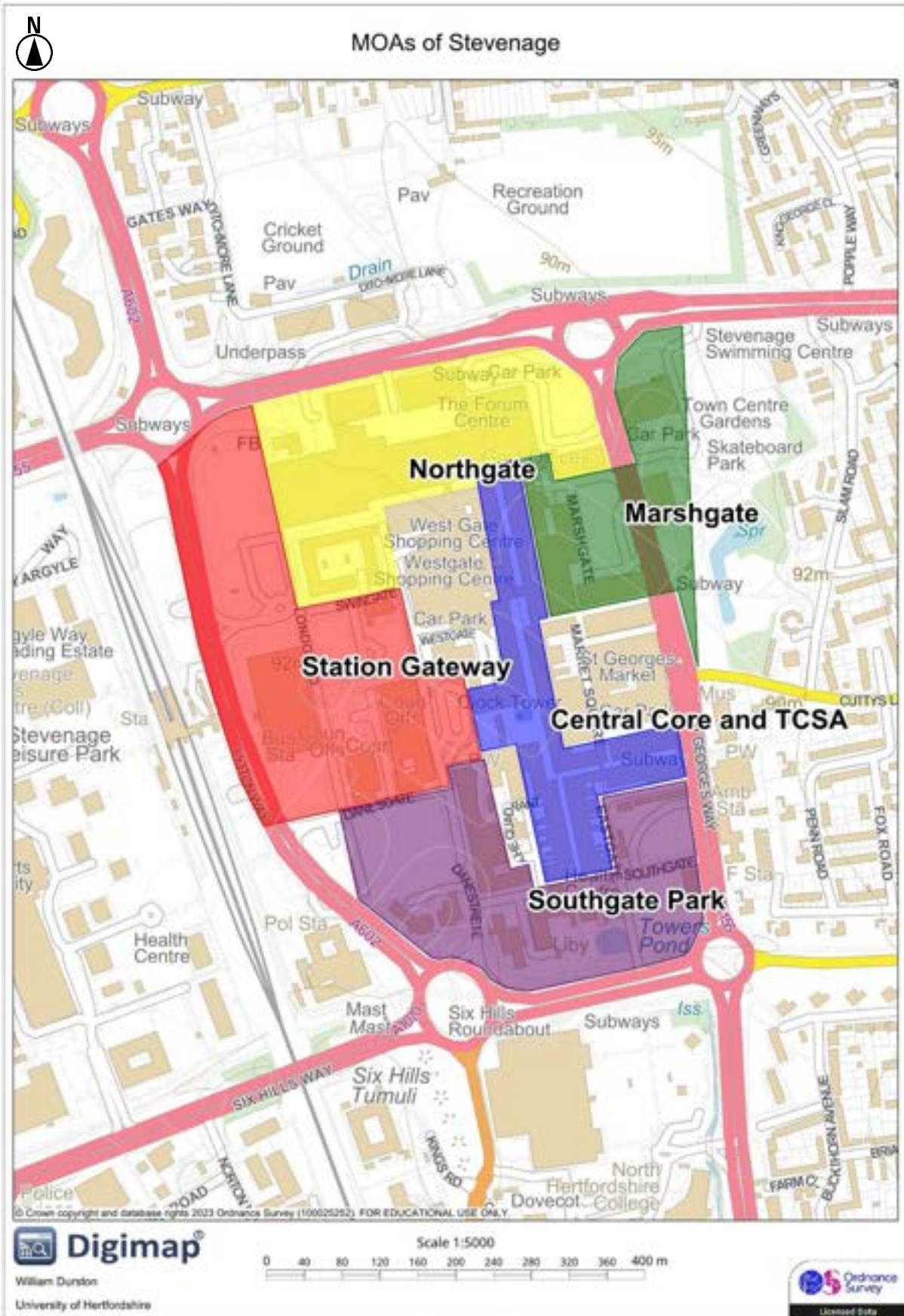*Figure 23: A map highlighting the Town Square conservation area (Researchers own, 2023).*

Figure 24: A map highlighting the five-MOAs and the TCSA of Stevenage Town Centre (Researchers own, 2023).

6.3   Heritage in the Current Era of Regeneration

Outside of the Town Centre's original shopping precinct, referred to as the Town Centre Shopping Area (TCSA)[16], SBC has identified five areas wherein it aims to concentrate investment and redevelopment over the next 10-20-years, with the SG1 project the first step in delivery (SBC, 2015b; I03; I04). These Major Opportunity Areas (MOAs) are: Southgate Park, Station Gateway, Central Core, Northgate and Marshgate (*Figure 24*, p. 42). Three MOAs marked for comprehensive regeneration overlap with the TSCA (Southgate Park, Central Core and Marshgate), SBC acknowledge that development should be *"carefully considered"* here (SBC, 2019b, p. 72; I05). Less-extensive renewal is also planned for the TCSA, and intermediary areas of public realm.

6.3.1   Southgate Park Major Opportunity Area

In 2017, SBC and Mace entered a PPP to deliver two MOAs (Southgate Park and Central Core) through the £350-million SG1 project (I06). Southgate Park comprises the seven-hectare site on the Centre's southern-border. Besides The Plaza, the area is original New Town. Currently, as intended in the original masterplan, the space acts as a 'civic centre' comprising a library, health clinic and police-station (the latter vacant since 2009, its functionalist construction leaving it unsuitable for other uses (I07)). Also present are two high-density residential blocks (*Figure 25*, p. 44) and a one-hectare brownfield site to be delivered through a PPP between SBC and The Guinness Partnership (I05).

SG1 intends to vacate Southgate Park of its civic facilities and initiate residential-led regeneration with mixed-use elements. The two existing residential blocks will be retained and supplemented with further residential facilities of up-to nineteen-storeys (*Figure 26*, p. 44) (I03). The construction of additional tall buildings reflects an ideological shift from the original masterplan, which minimised them to avoid 'urban' connotations that the movement intended to surpass (Vincent, 2015a). Alternatively, stakeholders view taller buildings as an opportunity to *"signify Stevenage's commitment to change"* (I01). In meeting their affordable housing needs, SBC have employed social housing provider Guinness to bring forward a residential scheme; west of the main proposal (I07). This is the primary affordable housing offer of the regeneration. In shifting the MOAs function from civic centre to residential precinct, the demolition of the original services is proposed (I01). These represent elements of the towns carefully-considered composition, with a SDC Manager describing them in 1957 as *"in harmony with the architectural conception of the Town Centre as a whole"* (Duff, 1957; quoted in Cole & Harwood, 2020, p. 45).

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[16] The TCSA was constructed during Phase-I and II (1955-1965) (Cole & Harwood, 2020).

Figure 25: Southgate Park's (from front to back) library, The Towers and Vista Tower. The area remains largely unchanged since construction (Researchers own, 2023)

Figure 26: Visualisation of Southgate Park's proposed 8-19 storey residential facilities and new greenspace (Mace, 2019).

Furthermore, Southgate Carpark is marked for reconfiguration into an 'urban primary-school' (I01; I02; I06). Also proposed is a 'linear park', a public realm feature endeavouring to enhance an existing cycleway and deliver an urban-greenspace. Stakeholders hope that this will encourage north-south active travel between the Town Centre and North Hertfordshire College[17] (I02; I05). The redevelopment of Southgate Park demonstrates stakeholders contending with both the positive (active travel infrastructure, integrated social facilities) and negative (surface-level carparks, functionalist architecture, lack of greenspace) elements of New Town heritage – potentially to the detriment of several original buildings.

The most significant proposal within Southgate Park is the Public Services Hub (*Figure 27*; *28*, p. 46); to be located on the existing Plaza, bordering the TSCA and containing a library, health services, community facilities, council offices and 'national New Town heritage centre' (I06). Grouping services in this core location represents an attempt to alter the Centre's *"lifeless perception"* (I04) and provide for a new urban community (I07). Further, The Hub arguably reflects the original civic intent of the New Town movement and the museum and heritage centre potentially educating residents on the planning movement, inspiring local pride.

However, The Hub factors into Historic England's current refusal to support SG1 (Mace, 2019c). Most contentious is the proposed removal of the Square's raised platform – intrinsic in the tangible and intangible heritage of the Centre. The platform acts as a placemaking feature, provides a place for gathering, facilitates the Square's topographic transition, provides the Square with a sense of intimacy and acts as a prominent location for 'Joy Ride' (Vincent, 1960). While stakeholders intend to recreate the sense of enclosure and topographic transition through The Hub, the platform's removal represents an altering of the concept and the loss of a modernist architectural feature. Ancillary to The Hub would be 'Garden Square' a public greenspace situated on the former bus station[18]. This would remain subservient to Town Square in the public realm hierarchy[19] (as was intended for the location in the 1955 masterplan) and open up east-west throughways to complement the Centre's north-south avenues. This evidences stakeholders willingness to build on the strengths of the Centre's heritage while, in their view, better aligning the Centre with contemporary urban theory – potentially at the cost of original New Town design and architecture.

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[17] Public-investment in North Hertfordshire College hopes to upskill the population, allowing residents access to Stevenage's knowledge-intensive industries they have typically been excluded from (I05).
[18] The bus station was removed in 2022 to facilitate SG1. The heritage impact was considered minimal, as all original features had been altered (I04). The space was designed to separate employment from retail and function as a secondary gathering area outside of the Town Square.
[19] During construction, the Centre's public realm spaces were designed to prioritise Town Square (Vincent, 1960; SBC, 2019b).

Figure 27: Proposed location of The Hub and Garden Square today (Researchers own, 2023).

Figure 28: Visualisation of the proposed Public Services Hub from Garden Square, with the raised platform removed (Mace, 2019).

6.3.2 Central Core Major Opportunity Area and Town Centre Shopping Area

The second SG1 development, Central Core is a concentrated space of heritage assets and considered architectural elements; representing the Centre's socio-physical focal-point. The Square and surrounding TCSA[20] exemplify the modernist principles of the New Town movement; its minimal design approach devised to facilitate the Square's socioeconomic activity through a homogenous urban landscape. This architectural prominence corresponds with the Square's cultural significance as, arguably, the best-preserved New Town core (Historic England, 2023). However, evident physical deterioration necessitates investment, particularly if stakeholders intend for the Square to retain public realm primacy (SBC, 2019b; I02; I03).

Currently the Square's three-storey buildings provide a human-scale, subservient to the Clock Tower; creating key vistas – that stakeholders intend to retain – and an important orienteering tool (SBC, 2010; I05; I06; I07). The five-storey Hub may disrupt this balance between the concrete buildings and *"elegant"* Clock Tower (I04). Alternatively, stakeholders argue that The Hub will reconfigure the Square's western boundary (currently occupied by The Plaza, the demolition of which is welcomed by Historic England), reaffirm the Square's importance and situate 'Joy Ride' in a more inclusive location (Mace, 2019a; Mace, 2019b; I01; I03). Outside of the removal of the raised platform, investment in Central Core and the TCSA has thus far has been respectful to the Centre's architectural character, including instances of extensive redevelopment.

Smaller-scale redevelopment has included updated paving, lighting (referencing that designed by SDC) (*Figure 29*, p. 48) and façade maintenance – opening a tangible divide between publicly-owned assets and their poorly-maintained private counterparts (*Figure 31*, p. 49). Stakeholders hope that by setting a high-standard, private owners will invest towards a similar visual outcome (I06). Further, wayfinding-boards (*Figure 30*, p. 48) now aid navigation through the space which, outside of the pedestrian core, is described as a *"maze of surface-level car parking and rear retail-servicing areas"* (I01). More significant redevelopment includes the internal reconfiguration of functionalist retail-units into leisure facilities – demonstrating the prioritisation of mixed-use development in reanimating the space (I02).

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[20] The TCSA is not deemed an MOA and therefore not marked for significant development. However, certain alterations have been made during the SG1 project.

Figure 29: The updated street-lighting replicating that designed by Vincent and the SDC, described by SBCs Assistant Director for Regeneration as "really popular". Not only do they recreate the original urban feel of the Centre, but they work to reduce the unsafe after-hours perception brought about by previously poor-lighting and lack of evening activity (I06) (Researchers own, 2023).

Figure 30: New wayfinding-boards aid navigation through the space. They reference the Clock Towers open frame and depict Stevenage's historic active travel infrastructure at the base (Ward, 2022).

Figure 31: The west (above) and east (below) faces of Queensway. The west face is privately owned whereas the east is owned by SBC. The differing level of maintenance has resulted from the fractured ownership of the Centre following the dissolution of SDC in 1980. By maintaining as opposed to redesigning the façade, stakeholders further demonstrate their willingness to promote original New Town design. Furthermore, the west face demonstrates the updated canopy design incorporated in 1990. Historic England have described this as "highly intrusive" compared with the original (Cole & Harwood, 2020, p. 92; Researchers own, 2023).

The most notable addition to Central Core is the North Block renewal and introduction of Co-Space. The North Block embodies New Town architecture, designed in the modernist style with notable Bauhaus elements; utilising the *"state-of-the-art for its time"* curtain-wall technique (I01; I06). The façade, balcony and exterior canopy have been restored in their original architectural style; with more durable materials (*Figure 32*, below) (Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership, 2022; I02). Interiorly, the North Block's functionalist design provided large stock-rooms for retail units[21], incompatible with contemporary practices. Their disuse allowed the North Block's upper-storeys to appear *"almost derelict"* – contributing to Stevenage's lifeless image (I06). As part of the renewal, these vacant upper-storeys were converted into Co-Space – a flexible office space (I03). This redevelopment has been sympathetic, even appreciative, of the New Town form with exposed concrete walls (*Figure 33*, p. 51) and interior Crittall windows referencing the Centre's architectural legacy and a timeline depicting the towns history (*Figure 34*, p. 51). With Co-Space exhibiting a high occupancy rate (I06), the North Block could act as a blueprint for heritage-led regeneration of the New Towns. Further, it demonstrates how post-war modernist heritage can be incorporated within urban developments.

Figure 32: The renovated North Block exterior today, an improvement from that seen in Figure 9 while retaining the architectural character of the building (Researchers own, 2023).

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[21] While well-regarded in the 1960s, contemporary 'just-in-time deliveries' negate their usefulness, with increased floorspace representing higher rents and bills for businesses (I06).

Figure 33: Co-Space's exposed concrete wall, referencing the modernist building materials of the Centre's past. The incorporation of these design elements suggests that the reappraisal of modernist heritage is a process occurring in Stevenage (Co-Space, 2023).

Figure 34: Feature wall in Co-Space depicting Stevenage Town Centre's architectural history (Researchers own, 2023).

6.3.3 Station Gateway Major Opportunity Area

Currently comprising Stevenage's railway station, theatre, leisure centre and Lytton Way (part of the ring-road surrounding the Centre); Station Gateway is perceived as essential in stimulating demand for office, residential, leisure and retail space (I04; I07). Furthermore, in 2022 a bus interchange was completed, creating a *"21st century piece of transport infrastructure"* (I06). Station Gateway represents stakeholder aspirations to shift beyond piecemeal, retail-led regeneration (I03). Similar to Southgate Park's nineteen-storey residential blocks, SBC hope that *"bold"* regeneration decisions will improve external perceptions and inspire subsequent investment (I01).

The area retains original New Town features (the theatre, leisure centre and railway station) designed by Vincent and completed between 1965-1975: relatively late in construction owing to a declining budget (Cole & Harwood, 2020). In facilitating the physical transition between leisure centre, railway station and the Town Centre, a concrete walkway (*Figure 35*, p. 53) was designed to pass-through each building. This allowed a pedestrianised throughway between use-classes; described by Historic England as *"one of the town's most powerful pieces of planning"* (Cole & Harwood, 2020, p. 61). Despite its late implementation and budgetary limitations, Station Gateway remains an important element of the Centre's concept.

The regeneration proposes reconfiguring Station Gateway from a *"confusing, negative first impression of Stevenage"*, into an economic centre (I01; I03). This would focus on cultivating business development. In facilitating this transition, original New Town architecture would be replaced with *"high-quality office development"* (I02). As part of this, stakeholders are considering how to overcome aspects of New Town heritage that have continually stunted the Centre's growth. For example Lytton Way, which has historically constricted the Centre, is in the preliminary stages of removal (I05). This will release a large brownfield site, reduce the fortress-effect caused by the ring-road and encourage active travel. However, development would require demolition of the theatre, leisure centre and original concrete walkway feature.

The 2023 opening of a multi-storey carpark (*Figure 36*, p. 53) demonstrates how stakeholders intend to substitute surface-level carparking used for development. The carparks façade, promoting Stevenage as a successful business centre, references Stevenage's contribution to the Mars Rover and satellite production (Stevenage Borough Council, 2021a). Absent are references to New Town heritage, potentially to dispel the historically negative connotations of the planning movement's socioeconomic decline. Station Gateway represents the regeneration shifting away from considering heritage and towards socioeconomic development and the realignment of perceived weaknesses within the original masterplan.

Figure 35: The concrete walkway leading up to the leisure centre, theatre and railway station (Payne, 2020).

Figure 36: Station Gateways new multi-storey carpark, 'advertising' the town's contribution to aerospace engineering (Researchers own, 2023).

6.3.4 Northgate Major Opportunity Area

Currently dominated by The Forum Centre, Northgate's existing architecture represents the perceptible 'weakening' of the New Town concept post-1980 (Cole & Harwood, 2020). Previously, Northgate was the site of original New Town buildings, demolished in the late-1990s in pursuit of retail-led regeneration (Stevenage Borough Council, 2010b). Presently, the redeveloped architecture, said to be in a *"post-modern classical"* style (Cole & Harwood, 2020, p. 63), does not complement the Centre. Further, scholars have argued that its frontage onto surface-level carparks is a subversion of New Town principles, which prioritised pedestrianised avenues (Morrison & Minnis, 2012).

The Forum Centre was unsuccessful at facilitating economic growth or rehabilitating Stevenage's external image (Stevenage Borough Council, 2013a). Thus – aligned with the bold, investment-attracting decisions of the contemporary scheme – stakeholders intend to reconfigure the space into a life-sciences campus (*Figure 37*¸ p. 55); beginning with a £66-million investment for cell-therapy company Autolus' European headquarters. This brings office-space, labs and 400-employees into the Town Centre (I05; I06). Further, in February 2023 it was announced that stakeholders intend to construct four additional life-sciences buildings on the site of former retail-units (SBC, 2023a). The ground-floor of these developments would be mixed-use leisure facilities, an effort to reanimate the Centre outside of retail-hours and stimulate economic growth (I06; I07). Also proposed is the renewal of Fairlands Way underpass – an element of Stevenage's underutilised active travel infrastructure – intending to encourage active travel and reduce the Centre's fortress effect (I07).

The Centre's New Town built heritage is perceived to guide and influence several design choices within the campus development. For example, a public-art programme that *"represents the culture of Stevenage"* is proposed – referencing the New Town's incorporation of art as a community-building and placemaking tool (SBC, 2023a, p. 30). Furthermore, the campus intends to incorporate canopies; historically used to visually separate the street from the building above while retaining architectural uniformity (I06; I07). Similar to Garden Square, the development intends to cohesively integrate within the Centre's dominant offset-grid street-pattern while *"enhancing"* major north-south avenues by promoting similar east-west pedestrian flows (I01).

Figure 37: Visualisations of the proposed life-sciences campus. The complex intends to promote east-west pedestrianised flows, incorporate public art and heavily rely on mixed-use principles to reanimate this area of the Centre, previously occupied by The Forum Centre (Reef, 2023).

6.3.5 Marshgate Major Opportunity Area

Marshgate occupies the northeast of the Town Centre. It is currently occupied by leisure facilities and the Centre's singular greenspace: Town Centre Gardens. The buildings within this MOA comprise some of Stevenage's finest modernist architecture. Combining emerging techniques and experimental materials in a functional manner, resulting in spaces tailored to their intended uses – which they still perform today. Specifically, Stevenage Swimming Pool (opened in 1962) (*Figure 38*; *39*, p. 57-58) and Bowes Lyon House (a youth centre, opened in 1965) (*Figure 40*, p. 58). Designed to complement the retail-dominated inner-Centre; these buildings are important in the physical and ideological heritage of Stevenage, as they sought to cultivate a sense of place and belonging for younger residents, who often experienced the New Town blues phenomenon (Black, 1951; Orlans, 1952; Cowley & Palmer, 2018).

While an asset for the community, the Gardens arguably represent the rigidity within Stevenage's original masterplan through their positioning on the opposite side of the ring-road, negating pedestrianised movement between the Gardens and the Centre's core. To resolve this, SDC provided an underpass, today considered *"a particularly uninviting and inconspicuous entrance to the park"* (Stevenage Borough Council, 2020b, p. 12). While preserving the Gardens, stakeholders intend to confront this issue, intrinsically integrating greenspace within the Centre by redeveloping the underpass (I01; I06). However – demonstrating how the re-evaluation of post-war heritage may disrupt contemporary regeneration – in 2022 the underpass' accompanying mural was Grade-II listed (Historic England, 2022). Thus, reconnecting these two spaces became a more complex procedure (I02; I06).

The most prominent implication of Marshgate's regeneration on built heritage is the proposed demolition of the Swimming Pool and Bowes Lyon House, important structures in the tangible and intangible heritage of the Centre. In exchange, Stevenage would receive a comprehensive leisure centre (I06; I07). While an important amenity, the demolition of the original facilities signifies a loss of exemplary modernist architecture and New Town heritage. However, the buildings are aged; likely requiring maintenance and retrofitting in order to continue to perform their function for a growing populace (I06). Contrary to the North Block redevelopment; stakeholders consider their primary-objective of socioeconomic and physical renewal to outweigh heritage preservation.

Figure 38: Stevenage Swimming Pool interior in 1963 (Pantlin, 1963).

Figure 39: Stevenage Swimming Pool exterior in 1963 (Pantlin, 1963).

Figure 40: Bowes Lyon House exterior in 1966 (Woodrow, 1966).

7   Conclusions

7.1   Regeneration

In fulfilling the third research objective, several conclusions as to the nature of the regeneration itself have been formulated. Firstly, the scheme heavily relies on the principles of mixed-use development. Stevenage has historically been segregated into distinct use-zones, with the Town Centre allocated to retail-provision[22]. This has coalesced in a Centre with an absent evening economy and dearth of urban activity. Thus, the regeneration incorporates mixed-use elements to *"provide for the needs of a 21st century urban centre"* (I01). This can be seen through the use of 'active frontages', on the ground-floor of the life-sciences campus. Here, mixed-use development aims to reanimate the space and stimulate the local economy. Moreover, this marks a distinct shift between past retail-led regeneration and the current proposal, which prioritises retail significantly less. Alternatively, stakeholders intend to incorporate a range of use-classes to drive socioeconomic growth. This shift from retail to mixed-use is reflected within the literature. Chahardowli, *et al*. (2020, p. 8) note the rising acceptance of mixed-use schemes in driving renewal, particularly within *"historic cores"* of urban settlements. Further, White, *et al*. (2023, p. 1) argue that the *"death of the high street"* has partly-resulted from the fifty-year dominance of retail-led regeneration in the UK. As a result, authorities are increasingly employing mixed-use development and regenerating public realm elements to reengage the population with the urban space – as seen in Stevenage Centre. However, Martire and Skoura (2022, p. 1) suggest that the *"adaptible, flexible and authentic"* success of 'mixed streets' results from their incremental development. Stevenage stakeholders could investigate how this notion of urban flexibility may be recreated within a mixed-use regeneration scheme, particularly when addressing the arguably rigid and synthetic connotations of the Centre's original masterplan.

A second conclusion that can be drawn regarding the regeneration ethos, is that stakeholders are employing bold, conspicuous decision-making to accomplish a number of objectives – namely, altering outsider-perceptions and unlocking further investment. Witnessed though the provision of taller-buildings at the Centre's periphery, the removal of Lytton Way and the re-framing of Station Gateway as a 'prospectus' for potential workers, residents and businesses. These decisions intend to alter external-perceptions of Stevenage, for both individuals and organisations, demonstrating that stakeholders are willing and able to extend beyond piecemeal regeneration and allow Stevenage to become a prosperous socioeconomic hub. Subsequently, stakeholders hope that these initial attention-grabbing developments and an appreciating external-perception will attract further investment. Carpenter (2020) argues that this approach partly-results from the neoliberal-shift in leadership of the regeneration process from the public-sector to the private-sector post-1980; whereby local planning

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[22] This has been compounded by various rounds of retail-led regeneration since 1980.

policy is developed with the intent of attracting private-capital – which contemporary urban regeneration, including Stevenage's, often relies upon.

7.2   Heritage

Through engagement with key stakeholders and the analysis of policy literature across the Major Opportunity Areas, a series of conclusions have been drawn as to the place of heritage within the Town Centre's ongoing urban regeneration.

Firstly, the concept of built heritage preservation within the regeneration remains subservient to the scheme's wider socioeconomic and physical objectives – including within the TSCA. This is demonstrated in the proposed demolition of New Town architecture, particularly within Southgate Park, Station Gateway and Marshgate. Here, the removal of civic and leisure facilities marks a loss of original buildings, including those praised for their architectural significance[23]. Furthermore, this physical loss precedes the underlying expulsion of intangible heritage. These buildings symbolise the social idealism of the planning movement (of which the provision of civic facilities was a core element) and its contribution to a more progressive national town planning system (Alexander, 2009). Stakeholders view these spaces as unable to facilitate the level of socioeconomic growth expected of the regeneration scheme. Prioritisation of growth is also seen within the conservation area, with the proposed demolition of the raised platform. Although incorporating heritage is acknowledged as a factor in sustainable urban regeneration (Xuili & Maliene, 2021; Arbab & Alborzi, 2022; Hassan, et al., 2022), multiple studies note that in practice, socioeconomic growth is oftentimes similarly prioritised (Pendlebury & Porfyriou, 2017; Bousaa, 2018; Knippschild & Zöllter, 2021). Moreover, While (2006) suggests that this is especially prevalent in spaces of modernist heritage, where residual connotations of economic decline further dissuade stakeholders from heritage preservation.

While this research argues that stakeholders view 'preservation' as untenable, the Town Centre's built heritage continues to occupy a prominent position within the scheme; through adaptive-reuse, selective reinterpretation and influencing new areas of development. This utilisation of heritage can be perceived through the lens of Ashworth's (1997; 2011) theory, which argues that the 'past built environment' can be approached in three ways[24]. Firstly: 'preservation', which has dominated the last century and is responsible for many of the legislative frameworks governing the historic urban fabric[25]. This approach preserves the built environment with limited stakeholder intervention. 'Conservation'

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[23] As with Station Gateway's concrete walkway and Marshgate's Swimming Pool and Bowes Lyon House.

[24] Ashworth states that the three paradigms can often be found occurring simultaneously within the same urban space at the same time. What he refers to as the *"incomplete paradigm shift"* (Ashworth, 2011, pp. 13).

[25] In Stevenage's case; the statutory listing of structures and artwork and the delimitation of the conservation area. When New Town heritage is approached from a preservation perspective, this is a central government exercise.

constitutes the *"discovery and enhancement"* (Ashworth, 1997, p. 92) of the past built environment. Here, contemporary needs are integral to what is conserved; often through adaptive-reuse (Tiesdell, et al., 1996). Thirdly, 'heritage', reinterprets a version of the past built environment. Here, a curated selection of heritage elements (historic buildings, structures or spaces) are reshaped to suit contemporary requirements.

Conservation is demonstrated in the adaptive-reuse of a number of TSCA buildings; predominantly through maintaining original façade and adapting functionalist interior spaces into more flexible residential, office or leisure facilities. For example, the North Block's interior reconfiguration has shifted the function of the building from retail to leisure (on the ground-floor) and business (as Co-Space on the upper-storey); more aligned with the mixed-use objectives of the regeneration and the nationally-changing perspective of the high street (Carpenter, 2020). This Adaptive-reuse can also be seen in the similar transition of vacant Queensway retail-units into leisure and residential facilities.

However, stakeholders predominant approach constitutes selectively reinterpreting heritage elements to align them with wider objectives and contemporary planning theory. For example, the dynamic of the Town Square, raised platform and bus station; two open spaces at differing levels, with the platform facilitating their transition. Stakeholders intend to retain this dynamic, while reinterpreting the three heritage elements. The raised platform will be removed, with select functions perceived as beneficial (enclosing the Square and facilitating the transition between the two spaces) reintegrated within the architecture of the Public Services Hub. Furthermore, the bus station will remain open space through its transformation into Garden Square – reinterpreting the secondary open space of the original masterplan and aligning it with contemporary understanding of urban greening (Dorst, et al., 2019; National Trust, 2020; Ugolini, et al., 2020). Stakeholder objectives of reanimating the Centre, stimulating economic growth and physically rejuvenating the space are all possible through this reinterpretation of select heritage elements (Albanese, et al., 2021; Ntounis, et al., 2023; White, et al., 2023).

During this selective heritage reinterpretation, stakeholders are contending with the positive and negative legacies of the New Town movement. This is most perceptible in their approach to Stevenage's historically dichotomous relationship with transport infrastructure and movement. Stakeholders are reconfiguring the physical legacy of the towns modernist ideology. Firstly, stakeholders intend to reduce the ring-roads fortress effect through the restoration and promotion of active travel infrastructure (underpasses and cycleways) accounted for in the 1955 masterplan. Most dramatically, Lytton Way's removal signifies an irreversible commitment to reconfiguring the towns modernist legacy. Within the Centre, several surface-level carparks are marked for educational, residential and business development. Furthermore, east-west pedestrianised routes are to be incorporated within Garden Square, Southgate Park and the life-sciences campus. These routes are an

extension and modification of the original masterplans offset-grid street pattern and major north-south avenue. This demonstrates the Centre's built heritage influencing new areas of development – arguably an extension of preserving, conserving and reinterpreting existing heritage.

New Town heritage guiding and influencing new areas of development is also occurring on a smaller scale. For example, the life-sciences campus proposed public art programme is influenced by the Centre's historic use of the medium as a placemaking tool. Contrary to previous redevelopment, stakeholders frequently refer to New Town heritage as a major influence in new design and architecture. Stakeholders are selectively incorporating, and even emphasising, overarching architectural, design and planning elements of the Town Centre within new development. Boussaa (2018) describes this as a method of reinforcing urban uniqueness; that can reconstruct the *"vanishing urban identities"* (p. 3) of heritage-rich urban places. Furthermore, Tomarchi and Bianchini (2022) suggest that basing new development on select heritage elements can respond to overarching narratives of decline and improve external perceptions. Stakeholders employing heritage as an influence within new development suggests that the ongoing reappraisal of post-war, modernism is a process also occurring within Stevenage's New Town heritage.

Stevenage's Town Centre is a carefully considered, well-preserved precinct of modernist architecture and design. However, a preservationist approach, focusing on intrinsic heritage value, within this environment would hinder necessary socioeconomic development. Maintenance expenses and the opportunity cost of foregone development become a *"heritage time bomb"* (Gilmour, 2007, p. 48) for the existence of the urban space. Thus, stakeholders are arguably justified in their prioritisation of socioeconomic and physical objectives. The overarching approach to heritage is more flexible than in the past where it has been viewed wholly as a hindrance to development; it is utilised through adaptive-reuse, selective reinterpretation and in influencing new development – and perceived by stakeholders as a true asset. However, the rejection of preservation will lead to the loss of original New Town architecture. Furthermore, intangible New Town heritage is far less of a prominent feature. Stakeholders are, perhaps inevitably, rejecting the utopian, modernist, socialist aspirations of the planning movement – and its later negative connotations – in favour of promoting Stevenage as a successful socioeconomic hub. This is potentially a symptom of neoliberalism of regeneration (Wang & Aoki, 2019; Simic, et al., 2022) and the growing reliance of any urban development on the PPP model – a shift away from centralised delivery (Macdonald & Cheong, 2014; Alster & Avni, 2022). However, an urban regeneration scheme which aims to reinterpret and reintegrate the more positive physical elements of the New Town movement may accelerate a reappraisal of these optimistic ideologies and the attempted social egalitarianism of the New Towns.

7.3   Limitations and Further Research

This research has successfully examined the ideological foundations and built heritage of the New Town movement, identified how this emerges within Stevenage Town Centre and generated a series of conclusions relating to the Town Centre's regeneration and built heritage within this. It has fulfilled the research objectives through a methodology that utilised primary data in the form of stakeholder interviews, triangulated with secondary documents from a range of policy and academic sources. However, there were aspects of the methodology that were limited in their effectiveness.

For example, despite several attempts to contact private-sector stakeholders, both directly and via the 'snowballing' method following interviews, none were available, potentially narrowing insight into the process. This may have allowed a research bias to emerge that prioritised the perspectives of SBC – the primary organisation interviewed. However, this effect was somewhat-mitigated via an interview with a member of the Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership – an organisation which collaborates with private- and public-stakeholders to facilitate regeneration. This allowed the research insight into the perspective of private stakeholders, albeit potentially not as in-depth as that of SBC. Furthermore, also unavailable for interview were members of heritage groups engaged in the regeneration. Considering this, secondary documents published by the organisations were used extensively in discerning Stevenage's heritage and potential concerns with the regeneration.

Furthermore, an inherent limitation is the evolving nature of the regeneration process. While this research considers the place of heritage within existing plans for the scheme, these are evidently susceptible to change. For example, the life-sciences campus planned for Northgate will have major implications for the Centre – a decision which has only emerged since February 2023. This limitation could potentially be overcome through a retrospective look at the regeneration process, following its proposed completion around 2040. However, this is unfeasible within the time-frame of this research project. This could however provide an, albeit protracted, avenue for further research.

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Appendix A

Interviewee Role	Length of Interview	Date	Location	Identification Code
Executive Councillor for Environment and Regeneration	01:05:10	19/1/23	Phone Call	I01
Head of Infrastructure and Regeneration	00:35:25	26/1/23	Zoom	I02
Strategic Director	00:15:32	30/1/23	Zoom	I03
Executive Member for Environment and Climate Change	00:37:30	10/2/23	Zoom	I04
Leader	00:26:22	13/2/23	Daneshill House, Stevenage	I05
Assistant Director for Regeneration	00:47:41	13/2/23	Stevenage Town Centre (Walking Interview)	I06
Development Manager	00:40:00	15/3/23	Microsoft Teams	I07

Appendix B

Ethics Check List for Students conducting research under an approved class protocol (Student Guidance)

Programme of Study	Human Geography
Ethics UH Protocol number (provided by supervisor)	

RESEARCH PLAN: Specific information

Title of your study	An Investigation into the Objectives, Methods and Impacts of Regenerating a New-Town Town Centre
What is the total number of participants you are collecting data from?	**Interviews**: Members of Stevenage Borough Council and Mace Group. I'm hoping to interview around 5 people. **Questionnaires**: As many as possible
What methods of collecting data are you using? (E.g. interviews, observations etc)	Interviews and questionnaires
Do you intend to collect data from minors or others unable to give informed consent on their own behalf?	No (If yes, please consult your supervisor to ensure this is permitted under this protocol)

You should be able to answer 'Yes' to all these questions, where they are relevant to your research. If unsure of their relevance, you should consult your supervisor/module leader. Please complete the last section and return to your supervisor before starting your research

ENTERING THE FIELD:

I will explain clearly in writing/by email/verbally to participants the aims, purpose and methods of my research.	Yes
I will obtain written/email permission to carry out the research	Yes
I will ensure the participants give informed consent for their participation.	Yes

COLLECTING THE DATA

I will ensure that my data collection methods are adequate and not excessive.	Yes
I will make sure that I ask no unnecessary questions/collect no unnecessary data.	Yes
I will make sure that no aspect of my research will cause distress to my respondents.	Yes
I will check my methods of data collection and general approach against the UH ethics protocol.	Yes

HOLDING AND PROCESSING (ANALYSING) THE DATA

I will ensure that all material that could identify individuals will be kept secure in password-protected files /locked file drawers.	Yes
I will ensure that nobody other than myself will see or hear any video/tape recordings I make **OR** I will obtain written permission to show such material to specified other people.	Yes
I will ensure that the categories of analysis are presented in ways that are not damaging to others.	Yes

REPORTING THE STUDY

I will ensure that all material relating to the data collection is anonymised (unless specifically asked not to do so), including all appended material.	Yes
I will be careful to use respectful language throughout my reporting.	Yes

Name of student: William Durston   Student number: 18034806

Signature of student: *[signature]*   Date: 7/12/22

Signature of Supervisor: *[signature]*   Date: 7/12/22

Ethical Procedures checklist – to be used for research conducted under an approved class protocol

Appendix C

1) What is your position within [*organisation*]?
   a) What is your role within the ongoing and proposed regeneration in Stevenage?
2) Are you aware of Stevenage's status as a New Town?
   a) Does this impact your role at [*organisation*]?
   b) Does Stevenage's status as a New Town arise within the context of regeneration?
   c) If so, how?
   d) Does Stevenage's New Town status have an impact when it comes to regeneration plans and progress?

3) Stevenage has been selected to undergo urban regeneration projects, why do you think this is?
4) What are the **physical** goals that the town is hoping to achieve through regeneration?
   a) Improvements to infrastructure, transport routes, buildings, etc.?
5) What are the **non-physical** goals that the town is hoping to achieve through regeneration?
   a) Improving social conditions?
   b) Improving economic conditions?
   c) Improving the physical environment?
6) Are there any **further objectives** that the town is aiming for via urban regeneration projects that you haven't mentioned?
7) In your opinion, what are the most transformative/large-scale projects being undertaken?
   a) How is this being implemented?
   b) What about these projects stands out?
   c) Any other comments on the general methods of regeneration being used in Stevenage?
8) Have the completed regeneration projects been successful in regard to their objectives?
   a) Can you name any specific examples?
   b) Is it too early to say?

9) Are there any physical aspects of Stevenage that you believe are 'important' to the towns heritage/character?
   a) This could include buildings, infrastructure, artwork, statues, street design, etc.
   b) What is proposed for these during urban regeneration?
10) Are there any aspects of New Town architecture, infrastructure or other physical features that stand out to you in Stevenage?
    a) Should these be preserved during regeneration?
    b) If so, how?
    c) Are they being preserved already?
    d) Will they continue to be in the future?
11) Are there any plans to preserve the New Town heritage of Stevenage during its urban regeneration?
12) Does Stevenage's heritage act to the benefit or detriment of the urban regeneration process?
    a) Are there outliers to this?
    b) Are there plans to distinguish between the 'good' and 'bad' of the Town Centre's heritage?