



Historic England

THE NEW TOWN CENTRE, STEVENAGE, HERTFORDSHIRE: Architecture and Significance

Emily Cole, with Elain Harwood

Discovery, Innovation and Science in the Historic Environment



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**THE NEW TOWN CENTRE,
STEVENAGE,
HERTFORDSHIRE:**
Architecture and Significance

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SUMMARY

The historic market town of Stevenage was the first location to be designated for major expansion under the New Towns Act 1946, making it Britain's first post-war new town. As part of this a new town centre was planned from 1946. Informed by the ideas of architects and planners including Gordon Stephenson and Clarence Stein, the detailed design was undertaken by Stevenage Development Corporation, under Chief Architect Leonard Vincent. The shopping precinct, with surrounding car parks and bus station, was built first, begun in earnest in 1956 and officially opened in April 1959. Its design is notable: the fully pedestrian precinct is one of the earliest examples of this kind of development in Britain and on a scale unequalled in Europe at the time of its initiation. The shopping precinct was designated as a conservation area in 1988 (revised 2010), and is notable for its uniformity, integrity and level of survival; it contains two grade-II listed structures (the sculpture *Joy Ride* and the clock tower). Provision was also made in the town centre for offices, community, entertainment and public buildings. Stevenage's success and growth resulted in extensions to the central area in the 1960s and 1970s but by the early twenty-first century this was said to be in decline. There is an ongoing scheme of regeneration and change for the town centre, which this report aims to inform.

CONTRIBUTORS

The text of this report was researched and written by Emily Cole and Elaine Harwood. New photography has been provided by James O. Davies and Patricia Payne, picture research was undertaken by Emily Cole, and desktop publishing has been undertaken by Katie Carmichael.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Automobile Association
ABC	Associated British Cinemas
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BHS	British Home Stores
BR	British Railways
FRIBA	Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects
HALS	Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies
HE	Historic England
HEA	Historic England Archive
HLF	Heritage Lottery Fund
LCC	London County Council
LTE	London Transport Executive
MHLG	Ministry of Housing and Local Government
NHLE	National Heritage List for England
PSA	Property Services Agency
RAC	Royal Automobile Club
RIBA	Royal Institute of British Architects
SBC	Stevenage Borough Council
SDC	Stevenage Development Corporation
SM	Stevenage Museum
SUDC	Stevenage Urban District Council

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INTRODUCTION, SCOPE AND SOURCES

This research report has been produced at the request of colleagues in the Development Advice Team, East of England Region, and aims to inform the consideration of proposals regarding the redevelopment of Stevenage town centre. This area, having enjoyed considerable success during the last four decades of the twentieth century, was felt to be in steep decline by the early 2000s.¹ This reflected, in part, the opening of the Stevenage Leisure Park in Six Hills Way in 1996 (including a cinema, bowling alley, restaurants and bars), escalating a process seen to a lesser degree following the opening of the Roaring Meg Retail Park in 1988. Stevenage Borough Council responded by developing a regeneration strategy for the town centre. A final report was published by the Council in January 2002, and set out proposals including a new pedestrian street joining the arts and leisure centre to the Town Square area, an increased number of commercial premises, and relocation of the bus terminus to a site by the railway station.² The first phase of a £1 billion regeneration programme has now been initiated, including the radical remodelling of 1960s blocks on Park Place (completed 2018).

Stevenage is notable as being Britain's first new town, its draft designation of 1 August 1946 being confirmed that November. Like other new towns located in the South-East, it was built with the aim of providing overspill accommodation for Londoners. The new town included – around the town centre – an industrial area, residential areas or 'neighbourhoods', each with its own hub of shops, community facilities and recreation spaces, and open farmland. Stevenage new town was developed adjacent to an existing historic settlement, located to the immediate north of the new town centre, rather than the old core becoming the basis of the new – as at Crawley, Hemel Hempstead and Bracknell new towns.

Work on planning Stevenage's town centre area began in 1946, and continued throughout the early 1950s, with the final scheme approved in December 1954. The new shopping precinct – an early experiment in pedestrianisation – was opened by Her Majesty The Queen on 20 April 1959, and was seen as an achievement 'not only for modern planning but also for local opinion', which was fundamental to the adoption of a pedestrian plan.³ Such was its success that an extension of Stevenage's shopping area was already being planned in 1958-9 and was built in 1962-4, with further extensions undertaken over the following 10-15 years. Also constructed in the late 1950s and 1960s were a series of commercial, entertainment and public service buildings around the shopping precinct, with more added in the 1970s, before the dissolution of Stevenage Development Corporation in 1980. Altogether, these structures – designed as part of a single concept by or under the oversight of the Corporation's architectural team – are notable for their unity, integrity and, at the time of writing, level of survival.

The town centre area has been defined as the roughly rectangular block of land bounded by Six Hills Way (to the south), St George's Way (to the east), Fairlands Way (to the north) and Lytton Way (to the west) (Fig. 1, and see Figs 40 and 49). The two latter roads were opened in the late 1960s, by which time the new town centre was already well established; Lytton Way bypassed the old Great North Road or



Figure 1. Aerial photograph of Stevenage town centre, taken from the north in 2018. The area is enclosed by Fairlands Way (bottom of the picture), Lytton Way (right), Six Hills Way (top) and St George's Way (left). (©Historic England Archive, Damian Grady, 33749/026)

London Road (A1), which thenceforth became an internal route only, and Fairlands Way replaced Northgate. The principal part of the town centre – named 'the core' by Stevenage Development Corporation – is the pedestrian shopping precinct, the first phase of which was designated as a conservation area in 1988 (revised 2010).⁴ On the west of this was built the main through road, Danestrete, running north-south, with a bus station towards its centre, next to the Town Square, and on the south was a subsidiary road, Southgate, running east-west (see Fig. 37).

In order to put the structures of the 'core' within their proper context, the group of public buildings on the immediate fringe of the town centre – notably, the railway station to the west of Lytton Way and the buildings on the east side of St George's Way – have also been included in this study, though the far larger College of Further Education (opened on a site to the south in 1961) has not. The chronological focus is the period between the mid-1950s and the mid-1970s, when the majority of the town centre was constructed.

The first part of the report provides – at the request of colleagues at Historic England – a summary of the garden city and new town movements, with an account of the general development of Stevenage new town and an analysis of Stevenage's significance within the history of pedestrianisation. The second part comprises a more detailed study of the chronological development of the town centre, in order to place its buildings in proper context. The report then goes on to consider the area's buildings and components in detail – many of these are currently threatened with demolition or change – and finishes off with an assessment of the town centre's

significance. A timeline, included as Appendix 1, provides a chronology of key dates in the architectural history of Stevenage town centre from 1955 to 1980.

This report includes much new research but also draws upon Elain Harwood's ongoing investigations into Britain's new towns, to be published as a book by Historic England and Liverpool University Press. Throughout, the focus will be the history and architecture of Stevenage's town centre, while its survival and significance will also be assessed. It should be noted that no work has been undertaken to clarify the centre's use, the number of shoppers, vacancy rates or the type and number of shops which it now contains. Those interested in these subject areas are referred to documents commissioned and made available by Stevenage Borough Council, including a 'Retail Study' of 2013. Also of relevance is the MA thesis written by Tony Calladine (now Regional Director for the East at Historic England), which sets out the findings of a rapid survey of the town centre undertaken in summer 1999, describing the status of the shopfronts at that time.⁵

To date, Stevenage new town has attracted a fair amount of scholarly attention. Books published include Jack Balchin's *First New Town: An Autobiography of the Stevenage Development Corporation 1946-1980* (1980) and Bob Mullan's *Stevenage Ltd: Aspects of the Planning and Politics of Stevenage New Town, 1945-78* (1980), together with various local histories and 'picture' books, such as *'Brave New World': Early Memories of Stevenage New Town* (edited by Judith Carruthers, 1996). There are also some valuable online resources, most notably the Heritage Lottery funded 'Our Stevenage' site (created 2011), a place for anyone connected with Stevenage to record their memories and photos, and the 'Talking New Towns' site, an online oral history project which went 'live' in 2014, also supported by the HLF.⁶ However, few if any of these works provide a focus on Stevenage's architecture or detailed information on the buildings of the town centre.

In contrast, the primary material on Stevenage's architecture and development is extensive. The new town and its buildings were written up in contemporary journals including *The Surveyor* and the *Architects' Journal* (cited, as relevant, elsewhere in this report and in the bibliography). Some of the papers of Stevenage Development Corporation are held by The National Archives, but the most substantial collection rests with Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies; this includes specific files on the town centre buildings and a currently uncatalogued collection on the town centre.

There are numerous photographs and related material (including original models and selected newspapers) at Stevenage Museum, while the British Pathé website includes a number of interesting films, including two which depict the Queen's visit of April 1959 and one, in colour, showing the town centre in July the same year.⁷ Of particular note is the film *Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush* (1967), which was shot in Stevenage new town and includes various scenes set in the town centre. Useful evidence is also provided by contemporary newspapers (held by the British Library, Hertfordshire Archives and Stevenage Museum), the planning records held by Stevenage Borough Council (although most early documents are on microfiche, and currently inaccessible), and Stevenage Development Corporation's annual reports.

PART ONE: GENERAL HISTORY AND CONTEXT

The Garden City and New Town Movements

New towns grew out of the garden city movement, both being a reaction to very large and overcrowded cities, but with essential differences; the extent of these was masked by writers in the planning movement such as Frederic Osborn (1885-1978), a powerful personality who provided a link between the two movements. A member of the government's New Towns Committee chaired by Lord Reith in 1945-6, Osborn saw the new towns as more direct a continuum of the garden cities than proved the case.

Ebenezer Howard (1850-1928) conceived the garden city, as expounded in his *Tomorrow, a Peaceful Path to Real Reform* (1898), as a utopian ideal founded on ethical investment. This was an evolution of the Victorian tradition of five per cent philanthropy in which the land and other assets of the town were to be owned co-operatively. This social organisation of the town was very important to Howard, as is reflected in the original title of his tract; it was republished in 1902 as *Garden Cities of Tomorrow* after it had given force to the nascent town planning movement.

Land for the first garden city, at Letchworth in Hertfordshire, was acquired in 1903, with land for the second, south of the villages of Digswell and Welwyn in Hertfordshire, following in 1919. Both were well established by the Second World War, although development continued until the 1960s. Letchworth and Welwyn reflect the architecture of their times, respectively adopting predominantly the Arts and Crafts movement and Neo-Georgian styles, and comprised a central town centre close to a new railway station surrounded by areas of housing and (separated) industrial estates. The staunchest supporters of the garden city movement, like Osborn, were keen to separate themselves from Hampstead Garden Suburb, developed by Raymond Unwin (1863-1940) – master planner at Letchworth with Barry Parker (1867-1947) – concurrently from 1906, with a similar housing layout but without a commercial centre or industrial area.

The first signs of a changing view towards garden cities occurred towards the end of the First World War, when Ebenezer Howard sought out his young acolyte C. B. Purdom to collaborate on a new book, *New Towns after the War* (1918). They were joined by Osborn, a conscientious objector then in hiding in London who did much of the actual writing, and the book was published as the work of 'The New Townsmen'. In many ways this was a reinterpretation of *To-morrow, A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*. There was the same emphasis on modest-sized towns planned by a single authority that held freehold of all the land. However, whereas in *To-morrow* the freeholder had been a company of shareholders, now Purdom and Osborn allowed the possibility of ownership by the state, a municipality or trust, with the government advancing loans towards capital projects. Although Howard persisted with a private company offering limited dividends to develop and manage the town, as realised in his single-handed endeavour at Welwyn Garden City, available personal wealth was dwindling. Public investment was needed to fill the gap, but little was forthcoming before 1945 – though the government gained experience in

building for industry with new trading estates in the North-East and Wales, built some housing for its munitions workers and was active in building new estates and suburbs.

The vision for new settlements beyond Britain's city centres developed in strength during the years of the Second World War, reflecting continued concern for urban congestion. In the inter-war years, the population of Greater London alone increased by two million. The County of London Plan of 1943 – the work of the town planner Patrick Abercrombie (1879-1957) and J. H. Forshaw of the London County Council – envisaged just over a million people moving out of the capital, while Abercrombie's Greater London Plan of the following year (published 1945) proposed a ring of eight or ten new towns around the capital (including Stevenage and Harlow among its suggested locations). This idea was taken up with enthusiasm by the Ministry of Town and Country Planning, formed in 1943, and seen as a favoured alternative to the continued suburban expansion of Greater London. The wartime coalition and 1945 Labour government gave their support, and the latter formed a New Towns Committee to consider their organisation and management; this body first met on 19 October 1945. Guiding principles were worked out by Lord Reith (1889-1971), Chairman of this committee, which provided the basis for the New Towns Act of 1946.

Stevenage was the first of Britain's post-war new towns, designated on 11 November 1946. As with other new towns, it was built as part of 'planned decentralisation from congested urban areas', as well as providing accommodation for the many London workers and industries displaced during the Second World War.⁸ There were two broad types of new town – those established where there was previously 'only a scattered and rural population', and those that formed 'major extensions of existing small towns'.⁹ Stevenage is a balance of the two, having an existing older settlement, but also having scope, unusually, for a completely new town centre.

The designation of a further seven new towns around London followed – Crawley in West Sussex (designated in January 1947), Hemel Hempstead in Hertfordshire (February 1947), Harlow in Essex (March 1947), Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield, Hertfordshire (both May 1948), Basildon in Essex (January 1949) and Bracknell in Berkshire (June 1949). Additionally, two northern new towns were designated during these years – [Newton] Aycliffe (April 1947) and Peterlee (March 1948), both in County Durham. Corby followed in April 1950. There were also two new towns designated in Scotland, East Kilbride and Glenrothes (designated in May 1947 and June 1948 respectively), plus one in Wales at Cwmbran (November 1949).

Of the eight new towns round London, only Stevenage, Harlow and Basildon offered the opportunity for a wholly new town centre. The architect Frederick Gibberd (1908-84) planned the town centre at Harlow as a series of pedestrian squares from 1947, with detailed plans in 1952-4 (see p. 24). However, it was changed in execution, with Market Place (1955-6) – the first part of the scheme to be built – being crossed by an access road until this was closed in 1964 (Fig. 2). Part of Harlow's town centre was demolished in 2018, but Market Place and its immediate environs survive well. In Basildon, Ford quickly became the largest employer and car ownership was the

greatest in any new town, so there was a still greater incentive for a pedestrianised town centre. Its site was open land between two earlier settlements, Laindon and Pitsea, which was where construction of the new town began. The design for the new town centre was produced only in late 1955 and construction began in December 1956, the first shops opening in 1958 (Fig. 3). Basildon's town centre has been the target of some rebuilding, with more planned. There have been still more alterations at Crawley, where a new town centre was built to the east of the old high street.



Figure 2. Photograph showing Market Place, Harlow, as originally built in 1955-6 – to designs by the architect Frederick Gibberd – with the access road visible on the right. The road was closed and the square fully pedestrianised in 1964. (©Historic England Archive, AA98/06939)



Figure 3. The pedestrianised Town Square at Basildon new town, in a photograph of 1962. This was begun in December 1956, with the first shops opening in 1958. (Henk Snoek/RIBA Collections)

This was planned in 1949-52 and built from 1953 until the early 1970s; it was pedestrianised in 1971. At Bracknell the town centre has been demolished; it was built to a Master Plan of 1963 replacing most of the historic town centre, but was largely rebuilt again from 2013 onwards following a new plan of 2006-8 by Rogers Stirk Harbour.

As noted, Britain's post-war new towns differed in various ways from the pre-war garden cities. For example, the garden cities had been built with the aim of keeping families in the countryside as well as encouraging dispersal from London. Letchworth was planned with a large agricultural area around it; though this part of the experiment failed, Welwyn might have had a similar agricultural belt had land been available, and the early industries relied heavily on local labour. In contrast, the greater part of the populace in the post-war new towns around London came from the capital and its environs. For instance, Stevenage's first residents were almost all working-class urbanites, with some two-thirds coming from London and Middlesex. At all new towns, a high number of the earliest migrants worked among the building trades. This was especially prevalent at Stevenage, and in time spawned a distinctive and dynamic leadership on the local council and in the community.¹⁰

There were other differences between the garden cities and the new towns. For example, scale – with an initial planned population of 60,000 people, Stevenage was intended from the first to be twice the size of the garden cities, with very distinct neighbourhoods of 10,000 people surrounding a new town centre, and policies changed in the mid-1950s for it to become still larger. Unlike the garden cities, Stevenage was based on an existing town. The old settlement had a population already approaching 10,000 people (see p. 9), so was treated as one of the neighbourhoods. It had some wider influence on the town: for instance, its high street gave some support until the new town shopping centre was completed as well as providing a source of established traders for whom the first small shops were designed.

Before Stevenage, new towns in other countries were mainly built in association with new mines or heavy industries, often in remote areas. Among the most interesting forerunners are the five towns built in the 1930s by Benito Mussolini as part of his draining of the Pontine marshes, where the government built housing as well as a striking series of public buildings: Latina, Sabaudia, Pontinia, Aprilia and Pomezia. Some political counterpoise might be offered by the three small greenbelt towns erected between 1935 and 1940 as part of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, which were early experiments in the separation of cars from pedestrians: Greenbelt, Maryland; Greendale, near Milwaukee, Wisconsin; and Greenhills, near Cincinnati, Ohio. More new towns were built in the United States in association with public works (for instance, by the Tennessee Valley Authority) and for munitions workers during the war, and others followed after 1945 – privately funded and aimed largely at commuters.

Post-war, only Stockholm boasted a programme of new settlements comparable with the ring of new towns established round London in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The city expanded rapidly during the war, and the 'Arbet-Bostad-Centrum'

(‘work-dwelling-centre’, usually known as the ‘ABC model’) was an initiative of 1952 by the admired Stockholm city planner Sven Markelius (1889-1972) to bring the variety and animation of city life to suburban satellite towns. These developments are contiguous with Stockholm and not truly new towns, but each aimed to provide work, shopping and service facilities for 60,000 people, the same as Stevenage and Harlow when first planned.

The first and most significant development was Vällingby, a linear sequence of neighbourhoods some 12 miles from Stockholm city centre. The central area of shops, offices and entertainment buildings was built around a deck over the tracks (Fig. 4). This central square retains the colourful paving by Erik Glemme and fountains set out in 1952-4, which were carefully restored as part of a regeneration programme in 2001-8 that introduced additional housing, more efficient heating and recycling facilities to the district. While the architecture is less homogenous than at Stevenage, a number of individual buildings like the Fontänen Cinema and St Thomas’s Church have statutory protection, and the overall ‘mid-century modern’ character was carefully retained as part of the area’s restoration.¹¹ For some years Stevenage and Vällingby enjoyed close links, and the influence of the design of Vällingby can be clearly seen in Stevenage’s town centre (see p. 23).



Figure 4. Of influence to the design of Stevenage town centre was Vällingby, Stockholm, a satellite town of 1952-4, designed by the city planner Sven Markelius. This photograph, from Lennart Olson’s *Byggmästaren* (1956), shows the central square, which was carefully restored in a regeneration programme of 2001-8.

The Netherlands saw a number of villages expanded into substantial towns. More important was the building of wholly new towns on land reclaimed between 1950 and the 1980s from the IJsselmeer: Emmeloord from the 1950s on the Noordoostpolder, followed by Dronten, Lelystad, Almere and Zeewolde in Flevoland. Most countries developed a new towns programme only much later. The ring of towns around Paris followed legislation in 1965, with large-scale construction beginning around 1970; of nine *villes nouvelles*, five were near Paris. Belgium saw the designation of Louvain-le-Neuve as a small town centred on its university in 1969, while in Sicily the town of Gibellina was rebuilt on a new site following an earthquake in 1968. In West Germany, a group of industrial settlements were brought together as Salzgitter in 1942, but post-war the emphasis was on rebuilding and extending existing towns. By contrast, Eastern Europe saw a large number of towns established round new sites of heavy industry, including Poland’s Nowa Huta (properly a part of Kraków), begun in 1949; Dunaújváros, Tatabánya, Kazincbarcika

and Tzaújváros, begun between 1947 and 1955 in Hungary; and Halle-Neustadt in East Germany, designated in 1967.

In England, Stevenage and the other 'phase one' new towns had an influence on those planned in a second wave, to ease over-population in Birmingham and Liverpool, and to provide employment in the North-West and North-East – Skelmersdale, Lancashire (designated October 1961), Dawley New Town, Shropshire (January 1963; redesignated as Telford in 1968), Redditch, Worcestershire (April 1964), Runcorn, Cheshire (April 1964), and Washington, Tyne & Wear (July 1964). A third wave of larger towns followed later, comprising Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire (January 1967), Peterborough, Cambridgeshire (July 1967), Northampton, Northamptonshire (February 1968), Warrington, Cheshire (April 1968) and Central Lancashire (March 1970). However, this programme was not continued: in 1976 Labour Party policy moved decisively away from establishing new towns in favour of regenerating the inner cities. The Conservative government elected in June 1979 was still more opposed to new towns than Labour.

Overview of Stevenage New Town

The Early Years of the New Town

As has been noted, Stevenage was the first of a group of settlements established under the New Towns Act 1946, created as 'self-contained and balanced communities for work and living'.¹² Its designation as a new town was strongly favoured by Lewis Silkin (1889-1972), then Minister of Town and Country Planning, and was already being discussed before the end of Second World War, with Stevenage Urban District Council agreeing in principle to the proposal in January 1945.¹³ The site had much to commend it for practical and technical reasons: for instance, it was adjacent to the mainline railway and the Great North Road, there was plenty of water available, natural drainage was good, and there was an existing 'administrative nucleus'.¹⁴ However, the idea was not without controversy: many of those living in the small market town of Stevenage, which then had a population of around 6,400 people (plus wartime migrants), raised protests, expressing their views in person to Silkin at a public meeting on 6 May 1946. This gave it national profile in both the press and politics.

Not long after this, on 6 August 1946 – five days after the New Towns Act passed into law – some 6,100 acres in and about Stevenage were served a draft Designation Order as the site of the first of Britain's new towns. A public inquiry was held on 7-8 October; the Minister of Town and Country Planning decided to proceed with the plan, and the final Designation Order for Stevenage was made on 11 November 1946, setting out an intended population of 60,000 people, many of whom were to be employed in the manufacturing industry.

Under the New Towns Act, each settlement was to be managed on a day-to-day basis by a development corporation, reporting to the Ministry of Town and Country Planning and its successors – the Ministry of Local Government and Planning (1950-1), the Ministry of Housing and Local Government (1951-70) and the

Department of the Environment (1970-80). These development corporations were similar in their role and management structure to a local authority, but were not elected in the same way, being more akin to organisations such as the BBC. It was on 5 December 1946 that Lewis Silkin established Stevenage Development Corporation, which had the vital role of planning, building and managing the new town.

Local resentment and opposition continued, however, with a further case made against the government, accused of not having followed proper procedure in designating the new town. Famously, the railway station boards at Old Stevenage were changed to 'Silkingrad' on the night of 19-20 December 1946, expressing the locals' powerlessness against the will of the government.¹⁵ Nevertheless, there were supporters too, including the Trades Council, which saw numerous opportunities. The controversial nature of the scheme stymied the work of the Development Corporation in these crucial early months, with a High Court judge finding in favour of local residents in February 1947. This decision was subsequently over-ruled by the Court of Appeal and the House of Lords and finally, in July 1947, the Designation Order for Stevenage was approved. Planning began in earnest at the end of that month, but due to economic controls imposed that summer it was only from 1949 that greater freedom of action was allowed. For instance, the Corporation began its compulsory purchase of land from that year.

Meanwhile, consideration had begun regarding the layout of the new town at Stevenage. The process of design was complex and comparatively prolonged, involving various architects and planners, with the key period lasting from the mid-1940s until the early 1960s. Initial design work was undertaken in 1945-6, primarily by Gordon Stephenson (1908-97) and Peter Shephard (1913-2002) of the Ministry of Town and Country Planning. Both had studied under Patrick Abercrombie – Shephard was Abercrombie's godson – and worked on his Greater London Plan (1944, published 1945); Stephenson and Shephard were part of a group of architects and planners which favoured the principle of neighbourhood planning.¹⁶ When formal appointments began to be made to Stevenage Development Corporation over the course of 1947-8, Stephenson and Shephard were favoured for the positions of Chief Architect and Deputy Chief Architect, which would enable them to see their work through to completion. However, the Ministry was reluctant to release Stephenson, and in 1948 he left to become Professor of Civic Design at Liverpool University, though he did later return to work on Stevenage as a consultant (see below).¹⁷

Instead, in October 1947, the role of Chief Architect and Planner was offered to Clifford Holliday (1898-1960), who since the inter-war period had worked closely with Patrick Abercrombie; by the time of his death, Holliday was said to have been responsible for the re-planning of ten towns and the planning of several new ones, including settlements in Palestine and Ceylon.¹⁸ At the end of 1947, seconded by the Ministry, Peter Shephard was appointed as Holliday's deputy.¹⁹ The two did not agree about the plan of Stevenage, however, and after nine months Shephard resigned, setting up in private practice in September 1948.²⁰ The architect and planner who was to have the greatest impact on Stevenage, Leonard Grange Vincent (1916-2007), joined as Assistant Chief Architect in 1949 and was promoted as

Deputy Chief Architect in 1950 – he worked alongside Holliday until the latter’s departure for Manchester University in 1952 and then as deputy to Donald Reay (see below) until 1954.²¹

Stevenage Development Corporation’s first and most urgent task was to produce a Master Plan of the new town. Stephenson and Shephard’s plan of 1945-6 was subsequently heavily revised by Holliday and his team, with a new version completed in 1949, a year after construction had been begun (Fig. 5). Like other new towns, Stevenage was based on the principle of neighbourhood planning, a concept which had its origins in Britain in the decade before the Second World War and which was fundamental to Abercrombie’s County of London Plan of 1943.



Figure 5. The Master Plan for Stevenage new town was first prepared in 1945-6 and is shown here in its 1955 form, as depicted in a tiled mural within Daneshill House, Danestrete (completed 1961). The town centre is middle-left, next to the railway line. (©Historic England Archive, Patricia Payne, DP232449)

Stevenage's Master Plan envisaged a new town centre – located a mile south-east of Stevenage old town – surrounded by six neighbourhoods: Old Stevenage plus five entirely new areas, Bedwell, Broadwater, Shephall, Chells and Pin Green. Each of these was intended to house around 10,000 people and had its own neighbourhood centre and facilities, including shops, schools, churches, community centres and pubs, plus recreation grounds.

The earliest work at Stevenage new town focused on housing – naturally a priority – and the industrial area created to the west of the railway line, which would provide employment for the new residents. The Development Corporation built factory units for companies to rent, sites being let to firms including the Bay Tree Press (Stevenage new town's first factory, opened in 1952), De Havilland Propellers Ltd (which came to Stevenage from Hatfield in 1953), Kodak Ltd (which transferred from Harrow in 1954) and English Electric Aviation Ltd (which arrived from Luton in 1955 and became the town's biggest employer, merging with Vickers in 1960 to become the British Aircraft Corporation).²²

Meanwhile, the first houses in Stevenage were completed in 1951 in Broadview off Sish Lane, not far from the old town.²³ The first of the six neighbourhoods to be developed was Bedwell, built in 1952-3, with Broadwater following from 1953, Shephall beginning in 1953-5, Chells from 1958, and Pin Green from 1962. Already, by 1953, Stevenage's population had reached 13,000, and by the period ending 31 December 1954, shortly after national building restrictions were lifted, the Corporation had built just over 3,000 houses.²⁴ This represented significant progress, but development was not as rapid as in other new towns – for instance, within the same period, just over 4,000 houses had been built in Hemel Hempstead (designated in February 1947) and more than 5,300 in Harlow (designated March 1947).²⁵

Plans for Stevenage New Town Centre

During these years, Clifford Holliday and his architectural team at the Development Corporation further considered the concept and layout of the town centre – sited 'at the focal point of the road pattern linking the residential neighbourhoods with the industrial area'.²⁶ Gordon Stephenson liaised with Holliday in his capacity as a consultant, and in 1950 secured approval to engage the American Clarence S. Stein (1882-1975) as a 'second consultant'.²⁷ Stein was already acknowledged as a definitive figure in planning and the garden city movement in particular, having – with the architect Henry Wright – produced plans for developments including Sunnyside Gardens in New York (built 1924-9), Radburn, New Jersey (1929-32, the first neighbourhood to separate traffic and pedestrians), and Maplewood, Louisiana (1943). Stein authored a book, *Towards New Towns for America*, published in 1951.

Naturally, therefore, Stein was keen to assist Stephenson with the planning of Stevenage town centre, while the Development Corporation considered itself 'fortunate in being able to obtain the advice of so pre-eminent an expert'.²⁸ In August 1950, Stein collaborated closely with Holliday and Stephenson, producing a sketch plan of a pedestrian town centre and a three-page report outlining the design and function of the site.²⁹ Stein's report, dated 5 September 1950, was submitted to

the Development Corporation that month, with a detailed plan of the town centre scheme.³⁰ At a meeting on 20 September, Stephenson explained the proposals in detail, focusing on the pedestrian scheme, the road system and ‘the method of bringing both cars and buses to within walking distance of the shops’ – he noted that ‘These principles were new in Great Britain but they had been adapted in the U.S.A.’, and added that he, Holliday and Stein were all ‘solidly agreed on the scheme in principle’.³¹ Later, Stephenson recalled that:

In presenting the plan, we knew there would be no precedents to cite. The only examples to draw from would be Venice, the Kalverstraat in Amsterdam, Europe’s first pedestrian shopping mall, Radburn and an exploratory suburban pedestrian shopping centre design executed by Clarence Stein and Matthew Nowicki ... Acceptability was going to be the difficulty. Prejudice stemming from conventional wisdom, inexperience and lack of knowledge would have to be overcome.³²

A diagrammatic plan of the town centre was produced by Stein in October 1950, and a final, coloured version followed in November (Fig. 6).³³ Stein provided advice about the more detailed aspects of the scheme into spring 1951, and Stephenson also brought in his Liverpool colleague Brandon Howell (1918-87), who made a special study of American shopping centres.

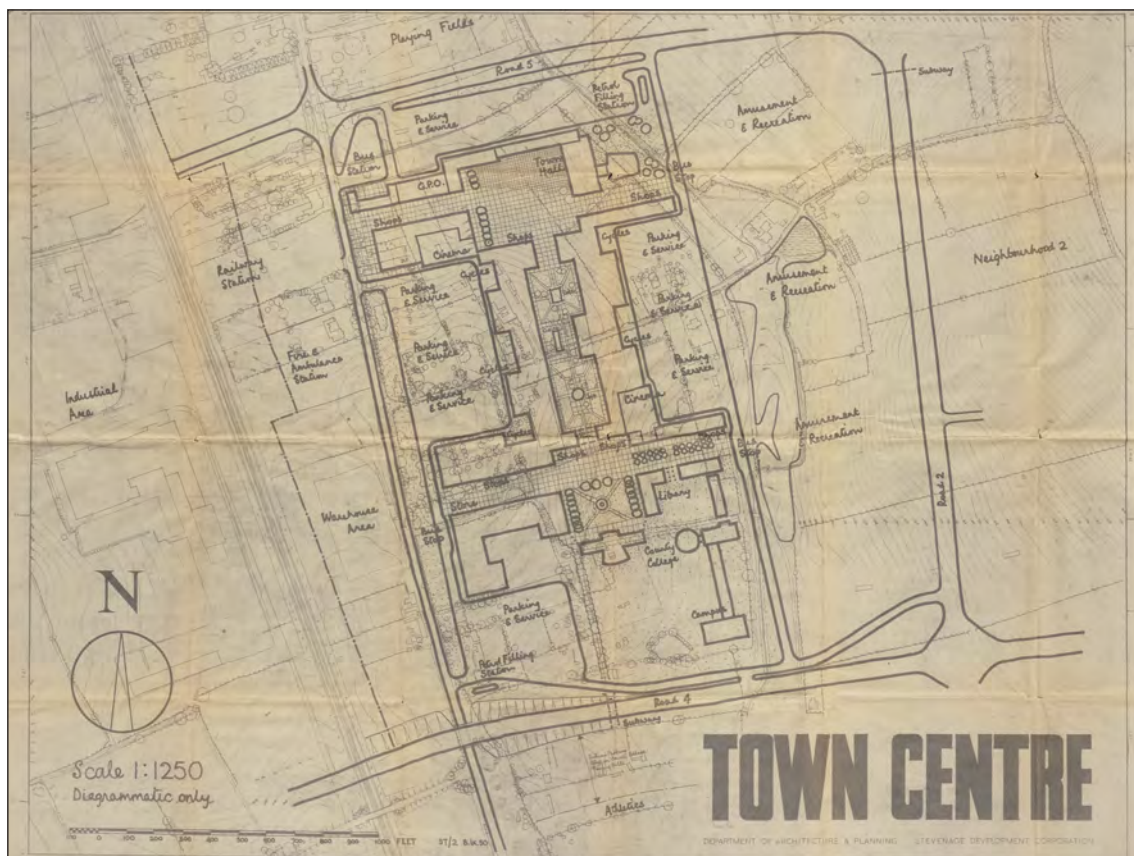


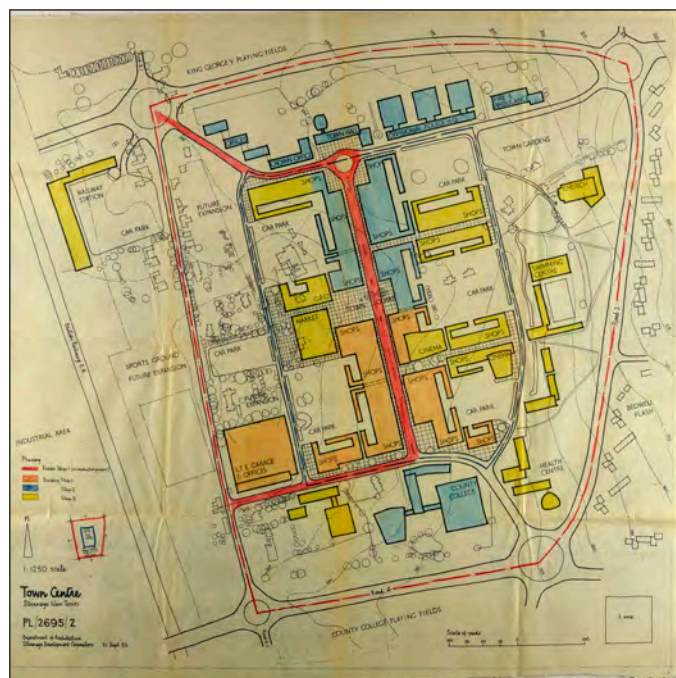
Figure 6. Plan of Stevenage town centre, dated October 1950 and signed ‘CSS’ – Clarence S. Stein. This and other plans produced around the same time were of fundamental influence on Stevenage town centre as built. (Clarence Stein papers, # 3600. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library, USA)

The vision of the town centre as conceived and set down by Stephenson, Stein and Holliday was of fundamental influence on Stevenage town centre as built. For instance, Stephenson's reference in 1950 to shops being 'grouped around a central north-south court, with an east-west pedestrian access group to the south and another to the north' relates closely to the 'core' of the town centre as realised in 1956-9, as does Stephenson's focus on 'canopies to afford shelter' – though the suggestion that shops should be of a single storey was rejected at the behest of the MHLG.³⁴ Stephenson also set out plans for a 'cultural centre including a County College' at the southern end of the shopping precinct, an administrative centre balancing this at the north, an industrial area on the west of the old A1 and a 'green area' (with buildings such as a church and swimming baths) on the east – all features of the town centre as subsequently planned in detail. As to cars, these were to be 'left in the parking spaces round the outside of the Centre behind the services entrances, and people will continue on foot to the front of the shops'.³⁵

The outline plan for the new town centre was accepted in principle by the Development Corporation at the meeting in September 1950 – even though it represented 'a marked departure from current practice', especially in being pedestrianised.³⁶ The scheme was submitted to the Minister of Local Government and Planning in December 1950, and further details of the scheme had been worked out by the end of February 1951.³⁷

As is discussed below, although the pedestrian scheme was approved in principle by the Ministry in June 1951, and a more detailed report was submitted by Gordon Stephenson in November 1951, it attracted controversy in the years which followed – chiefly on the basis of its novelty and predicted levels of commercial success.³⁸ An alternative plan – with a central north-south road – was drawn up and seriously considered in 1953 (Fig. 7). By this point, Holliday had left to take up the chair of Town and Country Planning at the University of Manchester and been succeeded as the Development Corporation's Chief Architect and Planner by Donald Patterson Reay (1914-2002) – who came to Stevenage in March 1952 from an identical post at East Kilbride new town in Scotland.³⁹

Figure 7. Stevenage town centre proposals as reworked by the Development Corporation to incorporate a central road, September 1953. This planned approach was temporary: the pedestrian scheme was reinstated in spring 1954. (Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies, CNT ST/41/T10, plan PL2695/2)



In turn, Reay was succeeded in late 1954 by Leonard Vincent, who by that point had worked for Stevenage Development Corporation for over five years (see pp. 10-11).⁴⁰ It was under Vincent and his team that the town centre was planned in detail and constructed, as shall be seen, with Vincent working on a revised Master Plan from that year, completed in 1955.

However, it is important to emphasise that designs and plans for the ‘New Town Centre’, as it was most commonly termed, were a team effort, with Raymond Gorbing (1921-2013) the ‘architect-in-charge’. A member of the Corporation’s architectural team, Brian Alford – later Chief Architect – recalled in an interview of 1987:

I think the thing I’m really most proud of is probably the town centre. I was involved in that, when I say I was involved it was a team effort very much in fact. Everything in the town was a team effort; nothing was designed by an individual. It was a matter of feeding information from everybody; we don’t necessarily take credit because a thing is architecturally good. It’s a matter of whether it works or not, which is most important. And from that point of view I think the town centre was the most successful part, because it was produced against terrific opposition at the time ... I’m glad to say the public supported whole-heartedly the idea of a pedestrian centre, and that’s how we got it at Stevenage.⁴¹

Stevenage New Town in the 1960s and 1970s

The population of Stevenage rose consistently throughout the years, reaching 30,000 by the end of the 1950s – a new final population of 80,000 was agreed in 1959, up 20,000 from the original estimate; this led to the completion of a revised Master Plan, approved in autumn 1961. However, the year 1961 saw the start of what proved to be a significant delay and interruption to construction. First, in July, the government imposed a cut back on public expenditure, which led Stevenage Development Corporation to temporarily limit its construction programme, except for work already planned and underway, and to slow down its pace.⁴² This included work in the town centre and some neighbourhoods (especially Pin Green), as well as on the road network – the Stevenage bypass of the A1 (M), begun in May 1960, opened only in July 1962. Still, the early 1960s saw the completion of some highly significant projects in the town centre area, comprising commercial, entertainment and community facilities. These included Daneshill House (offices for Stevenage Development Corporation), the Mecca dance hall, the county library and health centre (all opened in 1961), a swimming pool and a bowling centre (both opened in 1962), and a youth centre (opened 1965) (Fig. 8).

Then, in 1962, the government announced its ‘bombshell’ decision to reconsider the future size and population of Stevenage new town.⁴³ While these highly controversial proposals were considered and numerous objections raised – there were plans for a town with a population of 150,000, nearly 50 per cent greater than the 80,000 set out in the current Master Plan – expansion of the town centre in particular was put on hold. The Development Corporation produced a ‘technical study’ investigating



Figure 8. A photo of June 1960 showing Leonard Vincent (second from left), Chief Architect of Stevenage Development Corporation, discussing the model for his Mecca dance hall, opened in 1961. (With kind permission of Stevenage Museum, PP501)

the proposals, published on 1 March 1963. This set out its belief that expansion was feasible, even desirable – a view opposed by Stevenage Urban District Council, Hertfordshire County Council and others.⁴⁴ This study led to the draft Stevenage New Town (Designation) Amendment Order, published in August 1964 to propose enlarging the designated area by 1,550 acres (to the west as far as Langley but also to the north-east), and this was followed by a public inquiry later that year. These investigations were both time-consuming and costly for the Development Corporation, and – as is shown below – had a significant impact on development of the town centre.⁴⁵

Around this time, the future of Stevenage Development Corporation itself was even in doubt, and given the uncertainty the Corporation's Chairman encouraged the Chief Architect, Leonard Vincent, to set up as a freelance consultant.⁴⁶ He did this by joining the embryonic practice formed by Raymond Gorbing, with whom Vincent had worked closely at the Development Corporation since 1950. Vincent & Gorbing, formed in 1962 and still going strong today, continued to provide architectural design, planning and development advice for Stevenage in the years which followed, though their work also extended beyond this area.⁴⁷ At this time (1962), Vincent was appointed Consultant Architect and Planner to the Corporation, with dedicated offices and a secretary on the fourth floor of Daneshill House; he continued in this role until the dissolution of the Corporation in 1980, even though he had retired as a partner of Vincent & Gorbing in 1976.⁴⁸ Meanwhile, the Corporation appointed other Chief Architects in-house – first, in 1962, Leslie Aked (1912-84), Deputy Chief Architect since 1954, and then in 1979 Brian Alford, who had succeeded Aked as Deputy in 1962.⁴⁹

As this indicates, there was a comparatively small and tightly knit group of architects responsible for the design and planning of Stevenage throughout the lifetime of the Development Corporation. As Andrew Saint has noted, the existence of this team meant that Stevenage “‘farmed out” less of its development than Harlow and some other [new] towns’, a fact which gave unity to its design, especially in the town centre.⁵⁰

In April 1965 the government announced that Stevenage would not expand to a target of 150,000 – but there was still no firm decision taken about the town's ultimate population. The new Master Plan unveiled in September 1966, produced

by Leonard Vincent, included additional areas of housing and industry, plus redevelopment of Old Stevenage to incorporate a new population figure of up to 105,000. Other proposed changes were the introduction of dual carriageways and an increase of the town centre parking provisions, to cope with greater levels of custom. Expansion would be a recurring theme, being considered throughout the rest of that decade and into the 1970s and reflected in Vincent's adjusted Master Plans of 1972 and 1978 – by which time the population of Stevenage had reached 73,000.⁵¹

In association with these proposed changes, an important phase of planning and construction was undertaken in Stevenage town centre between 1962 and the mid-1970s. Some aspects of this, such as the northern commercial area and the railway station, had always been intended. Many others, however, reflected the expected rise in population and visitor numbers, such as proposed multi-storey car parks. It was only in 1977 that the government finally decided not to make extension orders for Stevenage and Harlow, and to allow the towns to grow by 'natural increase' alone.

The Dissolution of Stevenage Development Corporation and Town Centre Building in the 1980s and 1990s

Under the provisions of the New Towns Act of 1946, new town development corporations were intended as temporary, the government being given the power to 'wind up' these bodies when they had completed their work. The revised New Towns Act of 1959 established a Commission for the New Towns, a national body which was to take over and manage new town property when each settlement was completed. The Commission was set up in 1961, and by 1979 owned assets in four of Britain's new towns, its focus being industrial and commercial buildings.⁵² Meanwhile, the New Towns (Amendment) Act of 1976 enabled the transfer of other new town assets, such as housing, shops and public houses, to local authorities.

In 1977, the government announced that the development corporations of Stevenage and many other first phase new towns, including Harlow, Bracknell and Basildon, would be wound up in the next five years.⁵³ On 30 September 1980, Stevenage Development Corporation was formally dissolved and sole control of the town was vested in Stevenage Borough Council, ending what had been a somewhat fraught relationship between two separate authorities and a vital period of vision, energy and productivity on the part of both. The Conservative government forced Stevenage Development Corporation to sell many of its assets on the open market at great speed, in spite of protests. It handed over all it could to Stevenage Borough Council on 1 April 1978 and 1 April 1980, including around 150 shops, while industrial, commercial and other assets were vested in the Commission for the New Towns on 1 July 1980.⁵⁴ On the Corporation's formal dissolution, the Council also acquired its former offices – Swingate House and Daneshill House – for its own use. In 1981, a Council report noted that 'It is likely that the major part of the shopping area will pass into private ownership during the next few years' – a change which had consequences for Stevenage town centre's appearance and unity.⁵⁵

In more recent decades, Stevenage has been further expanded and developed. For instance, residential neighbourhoods built since the winding up of the Development

Corporation include areas within Pin Green, Poplars, Symonds Green, Chells Manor and St Nicholas. As is discussed below, the town centre has also been expanded and altered, with additions including the Westgate shopping centre (opened 1988) (Fig. 9), The Forum Centre (1996-7) and The Plaza (1999-2000). These were seen as contributing to the regeneration of the town centre, but the nature of their design – so different from that of the 1950s and ‘60s work – reveals the absence of the over-arching vision formerly provided by the Development Corporation.⁵⁶ In other instances, buildings constructed as important components of the town centre under the Corporation – such as the Head Post Office and bowling centre – have been demolished and redeveloped under the Council. Overall, however, the town created during the 1950s and ‘60s survives surprisingly intact – certainly in comparison with other new towns of the same generation and with reconstructed town centres such as Coventry.



Figure 9. Aerial photo of 2010 showing the Westgate shopping centre. This development, opened in 1988, was built on the site of the West Gate surface car park, and includes an indoor shopping precinct with parking above. (©Historic England Archive, Damian Grady, 26717/010)

Stevenage Shopping Precinct within the History of Pedestrianisation

Origins, Antecedents and Parallels

One of the most notable and pioneering features of the planning of Stevenage town centre is its pedestrianisation, and this aspect of the town will here be considered and placed into a wider context. The idea for a pedestrian town centre at Stevenage was first suggested in 1946-7, when the architect Peter Shephard drew up plans in his capacity as an employee of the Ministry of Town and Country Planning and a consultant to Stevenage Development Corporation. These were further developed by the first Chief Architect and Planner of Stevenage new town – Clifford Holliday – in liaison with external consultants. These included the planners Gordon Stephenson, Brandon Howell and the American Clarence Stein, then on a visit to Britain, who liaised with Holliday and Stephenson about plans for Stevenage in 1950-1 (see pp. 12-13).

At this time, the concept of pedestrianisation was innovative, but not entirely novel in Britain or abroad. Shopping arcades, bazaars and galleria had existed for centuries, while there had been pedestrianised areas of some towns and cities going back many years: St Mark’s Square in Venice is one of the most famous, while examples in England include The Pantiles in Tunbridge Wells, Kent (begun c. 1698), Bath Street in Bath (1791) and Sicilian Avenue in London’s Holborn (1906-10).⁵⁷ Shopping arcades reached their height in Britain in the late nineteenth century,

and remained popular until around 1910, especially in seaside resorts and market towns.⁵⁸ However, these were isolated developments, with no wider influence on mainstream town planning.

Pedestrian planning was given its major impetus by the rise in popularity of the motor car and the development of road networks from the inter-war years. As Wilfred Burns noted in 1959:

In the inter-war period ... the volume of traffic and its potential killing capacity increased out of all recognition ... arteries which were lined with the older shopping centres lost their interest as meeting places, and centres where once a happy atmosphere had prevailed now became death traps.⁵⁹

At the same time, there was a move towards the creation of shopping parades and centres – Burns wrote that ‘Isolated and scattered shops were now frowned upon’.⁶⁰

In the United States, the difficulties of driving and parking in town centres were felt earlier than in Europe, having already been experienced by the late 1920s, and led to the construction of shopping precincts – generally on the edge of towns or in new suburban areas. A pioneer in this area was Clarence Stein, who designed pedestrian shopping centres for the new towns of Greenbelt, Maryland (1937), and Maplewood, Louisiana (1943).⁶¹ Other notable proposals of these years – highlighted in the book *Shops and Stores* (1948) by the architect Morris Ketchum, Jr – included the McLoughlin Heights shopping centre in Vancouver, Washington (1942, by Pietro Belluschi), and the Linda Vista shopping centre in San Diego, California (1943, by Earl Giberson and Whitney Smith).⁶² Ketchum himself was responsible for a related project, conceived in 1947 and opened in 1951: Shoppers World in Framingham, on the edge of Boston, Massachusetts. In this pedestrian scheme, surrounded by car parking, a department store at each end ensured a good footfall through the site – the one feature never fully realised at Stevenage because of its phased development, which placed emphasis on the central square.⁶³ The public buildings at either end were intended as anchors instead.

The emerging generation of planners was increasingly aware of the need to balance the convenience of shoppers with the problem of traffic. More generally, pedestrianisation began to be favoured: the combination of vehicles and pedestrians shopping was deemed to be both dangerous and uncongenial, with London’s Oxford Street and Lord Street in Liverpool being described by Patrick Abercrombie as ‘grotesque survivals of the horse-drawn vehicle age’.⁶⁴ In his book *Town Planning and Road Traffic* of 1942, the traffic planner Herbert Alker Tripp of the Metropolitan Police advocated shopping precincts for pedestrian safety, with vertical segregation seen as ideal.⁶⁵ A double-decker street scheme, with people and cars on different levels, was an idea explored by various people in the early twentieth century; for instance, a theoretical scheme of this type was proposed for Regent Street in London in 1926.⁶⁶

Tripp’s concept of pedestrian precincts attracted only limited attention at the time, but was picked up in Britain in the post-war years, when the number of motor

vehicles continued to grow and the environmental benefits of such planning were increasingly recognised.⁶⁷ A notable feature of these new precincts was their architectural uniformity, which was in sharp contrast to the heterogeneity of earlier, unplanned historic centres. However, throughout the 1950s, pedestrian planning was still viewed as risky and experimental. In commenting on the proposals for Stevenage in September 1950, a representative of the MHLG noted that the plan was ‘something quite new here and no comparison was available’, adding that he felt ‘some disquiet about the novel layout of shops’.⁶⁸ S. L. G. Beaufoy, also of the MHLG, acknowledged that ‘It is true that so far we have no standing example of a main town centre designed for pedestrian access only’. He did, however, reference the Kalverstraat in Amsterdam, Europe’s ‘first pedestrian shopping mall’ – a sixteenth-century street closed to traffic around the late 1920s – and also noted that a scheme of this kind had been approved for the centre of Coventry.⁶⁹

The Coventry development was pioneering in Britain, and was the vision of the City Architect, Donald Gibson (1908-91). He introduced a pedestrian open-air shopping street into his plans for rebuilding the city centre after war damage. Gibson’s initial design of 1941 pre-dates that for Rotterdam’s more famous Lijnbaan (see below), and was conceived after night raids in November 1940 had blocked Smithford Street; Gibson noticed that traffic moved more freely round Broadgate in consequence.⁷⁰ In June 1945 Coventry Corporation acceded to shopkeepers’ demands to retain the cross street for cars, but over the shopping street at right angles it remained adamant, and a design for shops on two levels was approved in April 1947.

The first element was designed in 1951-3 and constructed in 1954-6 as the Upper Precinct, with buildings by Gibson and W. S. Hattrell & Partners; this was a small, defined development with two ranges of shops being joined by aerial pedestrian walkways at first-floor level (Fig. 10, and see Fig. 167). It was listed at grade II in



Figure 10. The Upper Precinct at Coventry was a pioneering pedestrian development in Britain, conceived by the City Architect Donald Gibson. The first element of a larger scheme, the Upper Precinct was proposed in 1941, designed in detail in 1951-3 and constructed in 1954-6. It was listed at grade II in 2018. (©Historic England Archive, AA98/06068)

2018 as being the earliest pedestrian planned development in England.⁷¹ However, a wide Market Street had already been laid out for cars before Gibson's successor, Arthur Ling (1913-95), showed in 1955 that pedestrian precincts in Rotterdam (Netherlands) and Kassel and Bremen (Germany) were profitable. Ling secured support from Woolworth's – then Britain's most influential retailer – for the decision to be reversed, with work on Market Street (renamed Market Way at that point) being completed in c. 1959.

As an architect Gibson is associated with modern design and prefabrication, first for housing and later for schools, but his sketches of 1941 are surprisingly monumental. Jeremy Gould has described how 'A series of sketch perspective drawings showed the new buildings mostly in a stripped classical style with columns, arches, pediments and pitched roofs resembling the more conservative town halls of the 1930s'.⁷² Other influences come from Sweden and Fascist Italy.⁷³

The final phase of Gibson's plan to be built, in 1957-60 – after Stevenage town centre had been initiated – was the pedestrian Lower Precinct, on the west side of Market Way (Fig. 11).⁷⁴ Here residual classicism gave way to a lighter style belatedly indebted to the Festival of Britain, with zig-zag roofs, patterned balcony fronts, neon decoration and tile murals by Gordon Cullen. The buildings were lower in height, since the offices over shops had proved hard to let, a problem also found in other rebuilt city centres.⁷⁵ Each of Coventry's precincts incorporated a square with two shopping levels, connected by ramps and staircases. The Lower Precinct also included the circular Lady Godiva café and a Mecca dance hall.



Figure 11. A later part of Coventry's pedestrian scheme was the Lower Precinct, built in 1957-60 – after Stevenage town centre had been initiated. Shown here with the circular Lady Godiva café in the centre, the Lower Precinct was substantially altered shortly after this photograph was taken in 2000. (©Historic England Archive, James O. Davies, AA003483)

Another especially well-known development is the Lijnbaan, the principal shopping street of Rotterdam in the Netherlands, which like Coventry was a response to pre-war congestion and wartime bombing. Comprising 65 shops in six blocks, it was commissioned in 1951, begun in July 1952 and completed in autumn 1953, to designs by Johannes 'Jo' van den Broek (1898-1978) and Jacob Bakema (1914-81) (Fig. 12, and see Fig. 71).⁷⁶ The development – reserved primarily for high-class shopping – was Europe's first purpose-built pedestrian street, with canopies in front of the retail premises.⁷⁷ In recognition of its status, the first phase of the Lijnbaan



Figure 12. A birds'-eye view of the Lijnbaan in Rotterdam, Netherlands, an innovative pedestrian scheme designed by Van den Broek & Bakema and built in 1952-3. This was of influence on both developments at Coventry and the pedestrian shopping precinct at Stevenage. (Gemeente Rotterdam, National Archives of the Netherlands/Fotocollectie Rijksvoorlichtingsdienst Eigen)

was designated a national heritage site in 2010, and has been restored in recent years by Mei Architects & Planners, with the initial phase of work completed in 2018.

There is no question about the influence of the Lijnbaan on Stevenage – for instance, in terms of its architecture, and also in its careful balance of offices and housing over the shops. This was acknowledged at the time: Leonard Vincent took members of Stevenage Development Corporation and Stevenage Urban District Council to see Lijnbaan for themselves in April 1954 – the Corporation subsequently noting that if it was possible to make a pedestrian street a success in that city, then it should be even more successful in Stevenage, 'where conditions would be more favourable'.⁷⁸ Coventry councillors also visited the Lijnbaan around the same time. Later, in 1959, on the completion of Stevenage town centre, the local press commented that 'Several local people have visited Lijnbaan recently and have been amazed at the similarity to Stevenage'.⁷⁹

However, Stevenage Development Corporation did not agree 'that the two centres are so alike', being most emphatic that 'the Lijnbaan centre is just not in the same street as Stevenage's'.⁸⁰ Raymond Gorbing of the Corporation's architectural team commented that though both were modelled on the same idea, Lijnbaan was much smaller than Stevenage town centre, being 'only equivalent to one of Stevenage's neighbourhood shopping centres', while the Rotterdam development was only 'semi-pedestrian' and had no large car parks like those surrounding Stevenage town centre.⁸¹ Still, the connection between the two is very clear. The scale of Lijnbaan was later changed: it was extended in 1966, and is now at least equal in size to Stevenage as realised in 1956-9.

The influence of the United States and Coventry was underlined by Leonard Vincent, while according to Ray Gorbun another influence on Stevenage Development Corporation was the ‘pedestrian type centre’ at Vällingby in Stockholm, Sweden (1952-4; see p. 8 and Fig. 4).⁸² This is a quintessential example of the picturesque modernism associated in Britain with the Festival of Britain. Clarence Stein had been to Sweden in 1949, the year before his involvement in the design of Stevenage town centre, and had been shown plans for Vällingby by its architect, Sven Markelius.⁸³ Another important antecedent was closer to home: the proposals for Ongar in Essex drawn up by Peter Shephard for Abercrombie’s Greater London Plan in 1944 – only a year before he first became involved at Stevenage (Fig. 13).⁸⁴ These, based on the ‘Stein notion’ of planning, included designs for a pedestrian town centre, with features such as projecting canopies and the retention of mature trees – both of great relevance to Stevenage town centre, though the Ongar project was abandoned in 1946 because of transport difficulties.⁸⁵



Figure 13. Proposal for a neighbourhood centre at Greensted, Ongar, Essex, an example of a suggested new town. The perspective – from Patrick Abercrombie’s Greater London Plan (published 1945) – is by Peter Shephard, who later worked at Stevenage. (Courtesy of Paul Shephard)



Figure 14. The Festival of Britain’s ‘Live Architecture’ exhibition at Lansbury, Poplar, London, built in 1950-1 to the designs of Frederick Gibberd, included an off-street market and pedestrian shopping precinct to keep Crisp Street clear for through traffic. (© Elain Harwood)

A little later, in 1948-51, the architect and town planner Frederick Gibberd prepared plans in conjunction with an LCC team led by Senior Planning Officer Arthur Ling for a pedestrian shopping centre at the Lansbury Estate in East London, the ‘Live Architecture’ exhibit of the Festival of Britain.⁸⁶ The precinct was built more or less as planned (Fig. 14), but in scale its pedestrianised area is much smaller than Stevenage town centre, being more akin to a neighbourhood centre of a new town – and indeed anticipated a very similar design by Gibberd for The Stow, Harlow (see below). Also of a small scale was Princesshay in Exeter, a narrow pedestrian precinct planned in 1946 as part of post-war reconstruction of the city centre. This was begun in 1949 but built slowly, only being completed in 1962; Princesshay was demolished in 2005.

It should be emphasised that many of these developments were being considered or were underway at the same time as the planning of Stevenage, and it is difficult to say which is ‘first’ – they were part of a general movement. Leonard Vincent later commented that ‘most architect planners round about 1950 had come to the conclusion that it was a good idea to keep traffic out of shopping centres’.⁸⁷ In the same interview, Vincent emphasised the point about contemporaneity:

So the idea gradually built up that this [pedestrianisation] was the right idea, Coventry had the same and also Rotterdam had the same thing and we used to get together with Rotterdam Civic people and Coventry Civic people and discuss things and Coventry started for us in Britain, you could say that they were first off the mark but we were closely behind and sort of tended to overlap. We were still thinking there but they actually got physical construction mainly because of the War devastation, Stevenage didn’t suffer anything like that so that point didn’t arise.⁸⁸

Other new towns influenced in the same way were Harlow and Crawley. At the former, the work proposed by Frederick Gibberd drew upon the designs he had produced for the Lansbury Estate. The Stow in Mark Hall South, a larger than usual neighbourhood centre built in 1951–4, was originally conceived by Gibberd as a pedestrian development, but at the last minute Harlow Development Corporation asked for a road. Similarly, Gibberd planned Harlow’s town centre as a series of pedestrian squares from 1947, producing detailed plans in 1952–4. However, the Chairman of Harlow Development Corporation, Richard Costain, demanded that an access road should cross the Market Place, the first part of the scheme to be built, in 1955–6, meaning that the original scheme was not wholly pedestrianised (see Fig. 2). The access road was closed in 1964 but can still be traced. At Crawley, where the Development Corporation was chaired by the architect Sir Thomas Bennett (1887–1980), the first section of the new town centre was begun in late 1952 and opened in December 1954 as the Broadwalk. This took the form of a pedestrian link, with parallel shopping parades containing 25 shops, running between the old High Street and Queens Square (completed 1958).⁸⁹ Like Princesshay in Exeter, this was small in scale, with the remainder of the town centre built to a conventional plan.

Stevenage’s Pedestrian Town Centre: Evolution of the Design and its Impact

Even with this rising trend towards pedestrianisation among architects and planners, the proposals for Stevenage town centre were seen as being highly innovative in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and were also very controversial. It was only after considerable discussion that the outline plans were approved in June 1951 (see p. 14). In the months preceding this decision, the MHLG had expressed its concern that the proposed town centre was ‘too much of a novelty’ and, if the experimental pedestrian centre failed, there would be no alternative shopping area ‘of a more conventional nature’.⁹⁰

Although the plans were worked up in greater detail later that year and endorsed again in October 1952 – Donald Reay being asked to move on to the detailed planning – there was still a sense of doubt and considerable resistance. Woolworth’s

led a campaign for a traffic road through the new shopping centre, arguing with other larger retailers that customers preferred to be dropped off at a shop door. A new Chairman of the Development Corporation, the architect Thomas Bennett – who came to Stevenage from an identical position in Crawley new town – agreed, being ‘from the beginning very much opposed to a pedestrian town centre’.⁹¹ Bennett and others worried that such a precinct would be more difficult to let than one of the conventional type. In December 1952, Bennett changed tack entirely by moving away from the pedestrian plan, causing ‘indignation, if not rage’ among many of his fellow board members at the Corporation.⁹² In March 1953 the debate was resumed, when Reay and Leonard Vincent produced alternative plans showing a pedestrian and vehicular-based shopping centre.⁹³

In May 1953, Bennett’s stance was strengthened at a meeting with members of the Multiple Shops and Retail Distribution Association. The Corporation’s team found a hostile mood: F. G. Lamborn of Woolworth’s reported that ‘whenever the flow of traffic through a shopping street had been restricted the trade of the shops in that street had been adversely affected’, and he believed that an entirely pedestrianised town centre at Stevenage would jeopardise its success.⁹⁴ There was even concern about external canopies discouraging the public from being ‘driven into the shops’ in inclement weather, and the retention of mature trees obstructing the views of shopfronts.⁹⁵ The Multiples voted 3:1 in support of a traffic centre. In August, the Development Corporation’s board voted 4:3 in favour of a dual carriageway through the town centre – chiefly in view of ‘the financial aspect’ – and a month later the Corporation’s architects were asked to produce detailed drawings for the scheme, allowing for conversion of the road to a pedestrian way at a future date, if desired (see Fig. 7).⁹⁶ For the Chief Architect Donald Reay, who viewed the pedestrian centre as his ‘baby’, this was an enormous disappointment.⁹⁷

However, support for the revised approach was far from widespread – if anything, it was the opposite. One of the members of the Development Corporation, Evelyn Denington, worried about road casualties, highlighting a factor in favour of pedestrianisation. The growth in motor vehicles brought with it a frightening rise in traffic accidents – not least in Stevenage, where there were seven deaths on the Great North Road in 1953 and 1954.⁹⁸ The District Council still favoured a pedestrian scheme, as did Bennett’s successor as Chairman, Sir Roydon Dash (1888-1984) – though Dash remained conscious that pedestrianisation had ‘never been tried in this country on a large scale’ and he was surprised by the strength of support from local residents.⁹⁹ Dash, in post from May 1953, stated that the Corporation had to ‘balance the attractions of a pedestrian type centre against the doubt of whether it would be as successful financially as a conventional type’.¹⁰⁰

In January 1954, a local group including John and Susan Morris of the Stevenage Town Forum organised an open meeting – chaired by Arthur Ling (then still at the LCC) and attended by representatives of the Development Corporation and the MHLG; this passed a resolution desiring ‘a pedestrian town centre for Stevenage’ unanimously.¹⁰¹ One of those present summed up the general feeling by stating, ‘I am absolutely certain that ... money will be spent with more pleasure and with more safety in a pedestrian centre’.¹⁰² A report from the Metropolitan Estates and Property

Company based on Canadian research also recommended pedestrianisation as the better long-term option, and soon the Ministry was convinced.

In April 1954 the Corporation noted that it had 'been compelled to revise its plans for the Town Centre', a group including Reay and Vincent made an exploratory (and successful) visit to see the pedestrianised Lijnbaan in Rotterdam in May (see p. 22 and Fig. 12), detailed drawings were with the MHLG shortly afterwards, and a new scheme, drawn up by Leonard Vincent, was approved in December 1954 – slightly later than those for Coventry and the town centre at Harlow.¹⁰³ However, unlike them, it was a complete pedestrianised scheme from the first, and claimed with justification to be the first all-pedestrian shopping and administrative centre in the United Kingdom (Fig. 15).¹⁰⁴

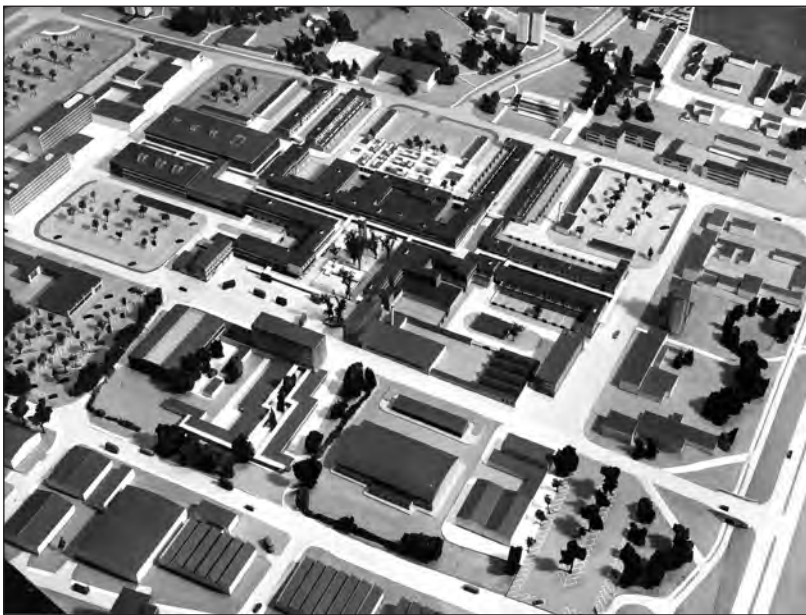


Figure 15. Model of Stevenage town centre from the south-west, produced by the Development Corporation in c. 1959. It includes not only the first phase work completed that year, but also proposed buildings including the extension of the shopping precinct, the town hall, Daneshill House, the dance hall and The Towers. (With kind permission of Stevenage Museum, P3346)

In later years, Vincent recalled much of process leading up to the final plan of Stevenage town centre:

the opposition to [a] pedestrian centre was enormous but mainly from what I might say was the vested interests as they were, in the sense that they thought it was a recipe for disaster. I remember addressing the Multiple Traders Association on our proposals for Stevenage and they just thought I was round the bend. They thought I was one of these long haired ... ideologists that hadn't really a clue what it was all about you see and had a bit of a rough time quite frankly but I was proved right. In fact so much so that one of the big advocates of non pedestrian centres, one of the Directors of the firm that advised many, many people said to me in a letter, which I thought was very nice, he said Mr Vincent you were right and I was wrong ... This was in 1970ish, eight or nine years later perhaps ten. When of course all the town centres were being thought of being changed to pedestrian centres.¹⁰⁵

Vincent's colleague Ray Gorbing, in an interview on the same subject, made the same general points:

Whilst I was working at the plans for the original pedestrianised centre we persuaded the Development Corporation board that, you know that it should be the pioneers in England for a pedestrian shopping centre.

The estates department ... were really anti pedestrianising the centre, they used to say "It will never work". They said "You can't have a shopping centre without a street", you know without traffic going along and all the rest of it. And in fact, if I remember rightly, having produced our scheme it was then put up to the ministry and in fact it was thrown out. I then worked on another scheme which made Queensway a road. In fact, it was slightly different, obviously the distance between the shops were different, but ... it turned it into a traffic road. And this was going to be the scheme because all the traders said "No it's not going to work".

But in fact, by dint of a lot of plugging away I suppose and public relations work and there were meetings held within the town for the public. And the public were very good indeed and ... they came down on the side of a pedestrian centre. And in the end it was very touch and go they decided to have a go and we built the first bit which was Queensway, the Square, Woolworths, Finefare and that section, you know and ... as a trading centre, initially it was a great success and so it went on from there.

It was quite an innovation. People came from all over the place to have a look to see how this funny old shopping centre was getting on.¹⁰⁶

As Gorbing noted, the novelty and success of Stevenage town centre was much commented upon at the time. For instance, in 1958 *The Surveyor* wrote of it as 'a unique experiment in modern commercial development'.¹⁰⁷ In the Development Corporation's own journal, *Purpose* – named after the Corporation's motto, 'Consider Thy Purpose' – Leonard Vincent emphasised Stevenage's novelty:

When the time came to build the centre of the New Town most people hoped for a new approach to design. Generally, however, no more than compromises have been offered, presenting too often the disadvantages of the orthodox without the advantages of new thinking. There is at present one exception, for Stevenage Town Centre achieves for the first time complete segregation of pedestrians from traffic.

Gloomy prognostications regarding the modern approach are entirely refuted at Stevenage. People have clearly demonstrated that they are prepared to travel considerable distances in order to

shop in an area clear of traffic hazards and with ample parking facilities.¹⁰⁸

Today, pedestrianisation is so familiar to us that it is difficult to appreciate how novel Stevenage town centre must have seemed at the time. *The Builder* spoke of Stevenage as proving ‘the undoubted success of an all-pedestrian centre and shopping precinct’, due not only to its ‘relaxed and convivial atmosphere’ but to the fact that the car had been properly catered for, with car parking on the centre’s perimeters being welcome and popular.¹⁰⁹ In similar wording, a visitor of 1959 congratulated the Development Corporation on:

a very nice piece of work which serves its purpose extremely well in that it allows people to shop with the maximum amount of convenience free from the worries of traffic and, to some extent, protected from the worst of the weather [thanks to the canopies]. The motorist is well provided for by the big car parks which are very handy, but keep the cars away from the shopping walks.¹¹⁰

In a colour film promoting Stevenage new town, issued in July 1959, the narrator commented:

In the town centre, known as phase one of the original plan, we can see a few of the attractive innovations that might well be copied elsewhere. Notice the refreshing absence of traffic congestion. That’s because no vehicles are allowed in the shopping area, a blow to motorists considerably softened, however, by the free parking facilities.¹¹¹

In 1959, the Development Corporation’s Chief Engineer, George Hardy, emphasised the safety this provided to all pedestrians, especially children: ‘No more do you see harassed mothers clutching at little Johnny or Mary to prevent them running into the road’. Instead, the town centre was full of ‘swarms of children running all over the place in perfect safety’.¹¹²

Visitors travelled to Stevenage specifically to witness the pedestrian precinct. In March 1959, before the precinct’s formal opening, there was already talk of ‘the numerous unofficial visitors, some of whom travel from quite a distance just to see for themselves why all the fuss is made about the famous Stevenage Centre’.¹¹³ The Development Corporation spoke proudly about this fact, writing in autumn 1958 that even its unfinished state, the town centre ‘seems to have captured the imagination and fired the enthusiasm of a wide circle of planners and architects, professional organizations, and members and officers of local authorities and national governments from far and near’.¹¹⁴

Visitors in these early years included MPs and an official from the Ministry of Transport, who came to the town centre in May 1959 ‘to inspect the lay-out of the pedestrian ways’ – a photograph in the local newspaper showed the group looking up Queensway towards the Town Square (Fig. 16).¹¹⁵ In 1960, while visiting Stevenage to mark a start on the new A1 bypass, the Minister of Transport Ernest Marples took time to view the town centre, ‘particularly from the pedestrian and vehicular



Figure 16. Stevenage town centre attracted numerous visitors, including officials from the Ministry of Transport — shown here looking along Queensway towards the Town Square. (*Stevenage Pictorial*, 8 May 1959)

traffic separation aspect'.¹¹⁶ In the same year, the Development Corporation wrote of 'a visiting group of foreign landscape architects' who had referred to Stevenage's core as 'the famous walking town centre'.¹¹⁷ Stevenage as a whole attracted thousands of visitors in the late 1950s and early 1960s – before pedestrianisation became widespread, it was a notable and acknowledged pioneer of its type (see p. 181). Later, in 1985, Gordon Stephenson – one of the early planners of Stevenage – wrote, 'If we do not count Venice, Stevenage was probably the first town in the world to be designed with a pedestrian core'.¹¹⁸

The Later History of Pedestrianisation

By the end of the 1950s, the attitude to pedestrianisation had changed significantly in Britain. From being seen as risky and experimental at the start of that decade, it became – largely due to the example set by Coventry and Stevenage – an accepted approach to town planning. In 1959, Wilfred Burns stated that:

If a shopping centre is to be safe for people to meander about looking into one shop on one side of the street, and then in another shop on the other side, there is no doubt that the shops must be grouped along traffic-free streets, or pedestrian precincts as they are usually called ... Pedestrian precincts for shoppers, with roads circling the shopping area, ... give ideal conditions for shoppers and for the moving vehicle ... It is, in fact, the only sensible plan on which to base designs for shopping centres in the future, whether they be town centres or major suburban centres.¹¹⁹

By this point, various schemes for pedestrianisation in British towns and estates were in hand or at design stage. For instance, by early 1958 Frederick Gibberd had designed a pedestrianised centre for the Park neighbourhood in Swindon – a precinct for some 14,000 people – while Arthur Ling and his team in Coventry had completed designs for the Lower Precinct; the chief architect for the latter

was Douglas Beaton (see Fig. 11).¹²⁰ A design of 1958 was the outdoor pedestrian shopping precinct at Jarrow, Tyne & Wear, a symbol of the town's revival following the Depression of the 1930s, with 93 shops in a 'T'-shaped concourse. This was built by Sam Chippindale (1909-90), perhaps the most famous developer of shopping precincts, operating from Bradford as the Arndale Property Trust Ltd with Arnold Hagenbach – the development at Jarrow, the first phase of which was completed in 1961 to designs by Alan Sunderland, was the earliest Arndale Centre (it is now the Viking Centre). By 1959, there were also small-scale pedestrian precincts in the residential neighbourhoods of towns such as Northampton (Park Square, King's Heath, of 1953-4) (see Fig. 17) and Coventry (Willenhall, of 1958-9), while in 1958 the LCC planned a town centre on pedestrian walkways above a major road and bus station at its proposed new town of Hook, Hampshire.¹²¹ Pressure from local residents, the county council and the government forced the LCC to abandon Hook in 1960, but it published the scheme the following year, securing wide publicity and perhaps a greater esteem than had the proposals been built.¹²²

The model of Stevenage town centre was taken up at Basildon, a larger new town where the first phase of the pedestrian town centre built slowly in 1956-62 included a market, a square that contained public buildings and the principal Anglican church, while a second square at the other end of the main precinct was dominated by an eye-catching tall block of flats (listed grade II) (see Fig. 3). At Harlow a main pedestrian shopping precinct in the town centre, The Broad, led to the library, opened in 1962, and thence opened out into a pedestrian square and water gardens where stood the council offices, opened in 1963 (demolished in 2004). Harlow's neighbourhoods also featured pedestrian centres – as at Bush Fair in Netteswell, for instance, which has a pedestrian precinct built in 1956-9 (Fig. 18).¹²³ Other new towns in England were less ambitious, or their centres were never fully realised, as at Hatfield or Peterlee.



Figure 17. Small-scale pedestrian precincts became increasingly popular in Britain from the early 1950s onwards. Early examples include Park Square, King's Heath, Northampton (1953-4). (©Historic England Archive, Patricia Payne, DP247533)



Figure 18. An example of a small-scale pedestrian precinct in a new town is Bush Fair in Netteswell, Harlow, built in 1956-9 and shown here in a photograph of c. 1960. (©Historic England Archive, AA98/06942)

A pedestrianised approach was increasingly favoured, particularly as it helped to prevent road accidents and was more amenable for the public on foot. In the early 1960s, this trend was strengthened by the availability of funding for redevelopment schemes in towns that had not necessarily suffered much war damage, but which required adaption to suit motor traffic.¹²⁴ A further boost came with the influential report Colin Buchanan prepared for the Ministry of Transport, *Traffic in Towns* (1963), which strongly advocated the separation of pedestrians and traffic.¹²⁵

In an article entitled 'The Town of Tomorrow: It's Here Today', published in 1962, Kenneth J. Robinson spoke of pedestrian shopping areas providing 'a feeling of serenity, a holiday mood, an escape from the noise, smell and danger of traffic-filled streets'. He continued that this:

form of planning is vital now that people need the chance of retreating from thundering oil tankers to places – in their town centres – where they can think, talk and relax; places where they can shop without having to cling nervously to their children; above all, places where they can walk from their houses on to streets that are not shared by motor traffic.¹²⁶

Robinson felt that this type of environment was the future, and Britain's planners agreed. He wrote that 'The town that separates cars from pedestrians is no longer a Utopian dream', citing as 'three superb examples' Coventry, Stevenage and Cumbernauld new town near Glasgow – the latter an enclosed shopping mall designed by architect Geoffrey Copcutt under chief planner Hugh Wilson in 1961-2 and built in 1963-7, with the town centre raised on a deck above the roads.¹²⁷ Britain was acknowledged as leading the way. In 1962 'hundreds of foreign planners and architects came to this country to visit tomorrow's towns ... They walked through traffic-free shopping squares, after leaving their cars on roof-top car parks which are never overcrowded'.¹²⁸

Local authorities increasingly used their powers of compulsory purchase to redevelop older buildings and create entirely new pedestrian town and city centres. Demolition on this scale was highly controversial – for instance, in Blackburn, between 1962 and 1964, 15 acres of the town centre were cleared to create a 500,000 sq. ft shopping centre and market hall (Fig. 19).¹²⁹ The creation of such areas involved the diversion of traffic onto alternate routes, which usually took the form of inner ring roads or bypasses – something else which involved the demolition of historic buildings. Other schemes from the 1960s include: the originally open-air Merrion Centre in Leeds (phase one of 1962-4), which was later covered over as a mall; the three-level precinct Victoria Circus in Southend (1968); and the Whitgift Centre in Croydon, London (1969), a 12-acre development which like the Merrion Centre was originally unroofed.¹³⁰ There were also proposals for two-level developments, such as the 'High Oxford Street' project of 1961, envisaging a pedestrian deck spanning the street.¹³¹ From later in the decade is the shopping precinct (The Walks) built over a service road and the River Loddon at Basingstoke in Hampshire, influenced by the LCC's unexecuted proposals for Hook. This was designed by Llewelyn-Davies, Weeks & Partners and built in 1968-72, but was covered over and partly rebuilt in conjunction with a new indoor mall in 1999-2002. Applications to convert historic

Figure 19. As pedestrian planning grew in popularity, many local authorities used powers of compulsory purchase to redevelop whole town and city centres. Examples of this include Blackburn, Lancashire, where a huge new development was built in 1962-4. (©Historic England Archive, BB001502)



streets to pedestrian zones were also made ‘thick and fast’ from the late 1960s – the earliest to be implemented including London Street in Norwich (1967), the High Street in Southend, Essex (1968), and London’s Carnaby Street (1973), one of the most famous examples of its time.¹³²

From the mid-1950s, covered pedestrian shopping centres began to be constructed. The first European example was built in 1955-6 at Luleå, Sweden, to the designs of Ralph Erskine, with the first fully enclosed shopping centre in America opened in 1956 at Edina, Minnesota. The concept proved immediately popular in cold climates but was made possible only by the arrival of efficient fluorescent lighting after the Second World War. The building of examples in Hawaii and Australia saw their adaptation to hot climates.

The indoor shopping mall first appeared in Britain in 1960 with contemporaneous schemes for the Elephant and Castle in London and the Bull Ring in Birmingham, both opened in 1964 (Fig. 20). Numerous similar developments followed, including the earliest indoor Arndale Centre – at Cross Gates, Leeds, built by Sam Chippindale



Figure 20. The first indoor shopping centres appeared in Britain in 1960, with the contemporaneous Elephant and Castle in London and the Bull Ring in Birmingham, both completed in 1964. The latter is shown here in a photograph taken on the day of opening. (©Historic England Archive. John Laing Photographic Collection, jlp01/10/00149)

and Arnold Hagenbach and opened in 1967 – and Nottingham’s Victoria Centre (1965-72).¹³³ In new towns, the concept was made fashionable by Cumbernauld, built in 1963-7 (see p. 31). The enclosed mall was particularly suited to Scotland’s climate, as it was to that of the United States and Northern Sweden, but it was adopted by most of the Mark 2 and Mark 3 new towns – at least in part because Hugh Wilson, the master planner of Cumbernauld, brought the concept south with him when in 1962 he was commissioned to design the first Mark 2 town, Skelmersdale.

Similar covered shopping centres followed at Runcorn in 1972 and Washington in 1971-3 and 1977-8, as well as in Scotland, using the natural contours and artificial levels to separate pedestrians, parking and through traffic. Overall 488 indoor shopping centres were built in Great Britain between 1965 and 1983.¹³⁴ Examples in Greater London include Brent Cross, built in 1972-6 and important for being a destination in its own right rather than as part of a traditional town centre or suburb. Much larger out-of-town malls followed, such as the MetroCentre in Gateshead, built in 1984-7. Meanwhile, this period saw some earlier outdoor malls enclosed – including Basingstoke’s The Walks and Liverpool’s St John’s Centre (built from 1965; first phase opened 1970). The latter was enclosed and partly rebuilt in the 1990s; its landmark St John’s Beacon was listed in 2020.

Alongside the rising popularity and number of covered shopping centres in Britain came increasing criticism of open-air shopping precincts; by the early 1970s, these were regarded by many as ‘windy deserts’.¹³⁵ The exposed rear elevations and delivery yards on the perimeters of such developments were seen to be a visual problem, not easily overcome, and the British weather was an almost constant impediment. However, open-air pedestrian areas continued to be created. For instance, the town centre at the new town of Aycliffe, begun c. 1959, was pedestrianised only in 1970-3, while Corporation Street in Corby was laid out as early as 1951-8 but pedestrianised only in 1974. After 1980, the move was even more clearly towards covered shopping malls and also out-of-town (and edge-of-town) retail parks, although from the beginning of that decade a more successful generation of open-air precincts, with more enclosed plans, evolved.¹³⁶ Today, pedestrianisation is considered the norm for most town and city centre shopping streets, with concerns now greater than ever before about the environmental damage caused by motor vehicles. In this context, developments such as Stevenage seem pioneering and far-sighted indeed.

PART TWO: THE LAYOUT AND DEVELOPMENT OF STEVENAGE TOWN CENTRE

Overall Design and First Phase of Construction, 1955-62

Location and Layout

From the outset, the Ministry of Town and Country Planning proposed that the new town centre at Stevenage would be built about a mile south-east of the old, near the existing railway line, which would be served by a new station (the site for which was agreed in 1946 and moved in 1962; see pp. 176-9). The proximity of a bus station and the Great North Road were paramount. As has been noted, Gordon Stephenson and Peter Shephard drew up plans for a pedestrian town centre for Stevenage in 1946-7, and the scheme was further evolved by the Development Corporation from that point – with Leonard Vincent being the key figure, as Deputy Architect from 1950 and Chief Architect from 1954. A model of the town centre was produced in 1954, the scheme was approved in December that year, and detailed plans were produced in 1955-6. These were exhibited to the public and press, with models, at a special conference held at the MHLG offices in Whitehall on 22 May 1958 (Fig. 21).¹³⁷ The overall aim for the town centre was, according to the Development Corporation, ‘to create an intimate urban atmosphere reminiscent of some of the older cathedral cities’.¹³⁸

The approved plan for Stevenage’s town centre – an area of around 55 acres, about half of which was occupied by the central shopping core – varied and evolved over time, and was amended in the light of experience, needs, government policy and economics. All versions featured ‘the core’ of the town centre, and this area was constructed first, in 1956-9. Its main component was a street of shops on a north-south axis (Queensway), about a

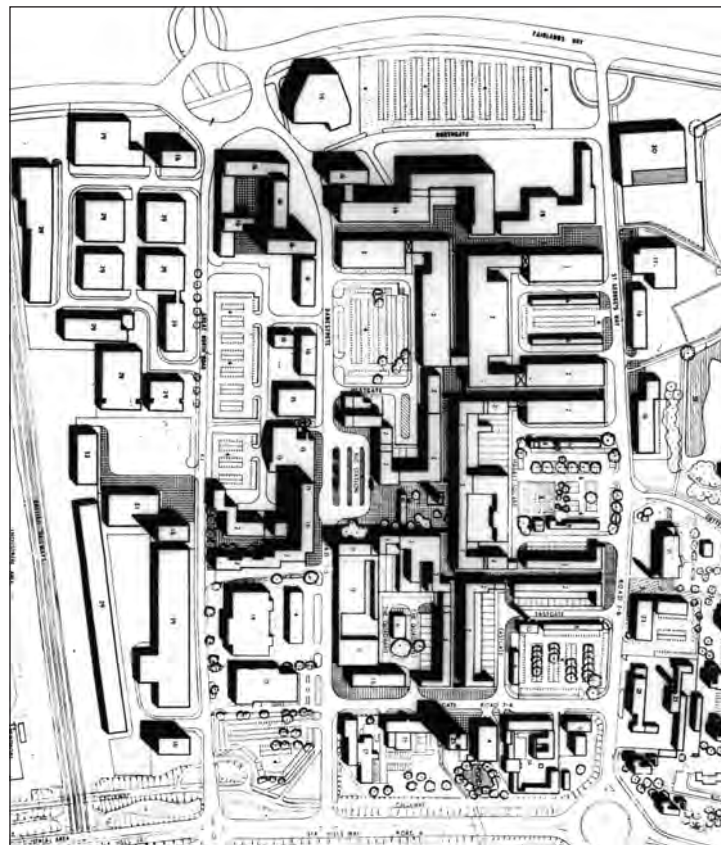


Figure 21. Comprehensive layout plan of Stevenage town centre, produced by the Development Corporation in December 1959 (here rotated so north is at the top). As with the model produced around the same time (see Fig. 15), this shows both completed and proposed buildings. (With kind permission of Stevenage Museum, P6439)

third of a mile in length and 49 ft in width, divided – as Leonard Vincent noted – into ‘three unequal lengths and planes’ (Fig. 22).¹³⁹ The orientation was devised to ensure ‘as equal as possible a distribution of sunlight between the two sides.’¹⁴⁰ At right angles were two shorter pedestrian ways running east-west – Market Place and Park Place. Another such way, The Forum, was planned from the beginning but only completed later. Around its mid-point, Queensway opened out into the Town Square, which continued as an L-shaped block to the north-west, framing the bus station and creating ‘another square surrounded by buildings’ (Fig. 23).¹⁴¹ This commercial



Figure 22. 1:1,250 Ordnance Survey map showing the central area of Stevenage in 1963, including Queensway. At this point, the northern edge of the shopping precinct was marked by Park Place. (© and database right Crown Copyright and Landmark Information Group Ltd [All rights reserved 2020]. Licence numbers 000394 and TP0024.)

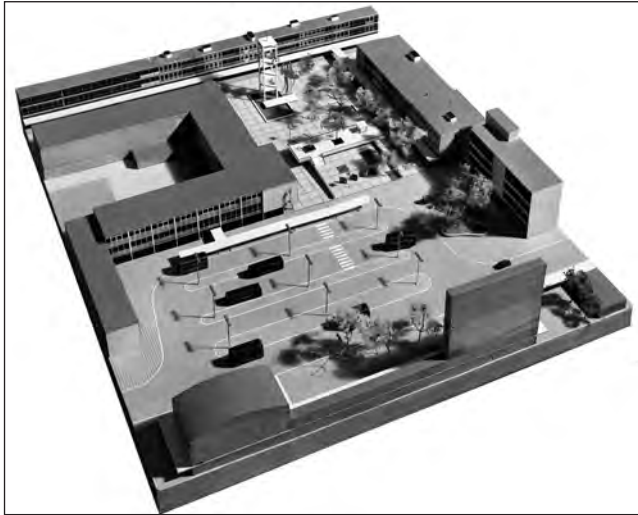


Figure 23. Model of the Town Square, produced by Leonard Vincent and his team at Stevenage Development Corporation in 1956. The Town Square comprised both the blocks around the square itself and an L-shaped arm at the north-west bounding the bus station. (With kind permission of Stevenage Museum, P3672)

centre was served by various surface car parks, arranged around the outer edges of the town centre and forming an integral part of Stevenage's pedestrianised planning concept (see pp. 102-4). Vincent noted in 1960 that 'The motor vehicle should be accepted as a dominant factor, and any plan which lightly brushes it aside is doomed to failure'.¹⁴²

The layout and nature of the buildings around the 'core', on the fringes of the shopping precinct, changed in its detail after the mid-1950s, but there were certain constants. Vincent wrote in 1959 that 'Generally, commercial buildings and buildings for entertainment and social activities will be situated on the east and west sides of the core', and this vision endured.¹⁴³ At the north of the town centre, towards Old Stevenage, the Development Corporation's plan set out a precinct of municipal buildings (to be named 'The Forum'), while there were 'County Buildings' forming a comparable complex to the south, fronting onto Southgate. As illustrated by plans and models published in articles throughout the second half of the 1950s, the west side of the bus station and Danestrete were to be dominated by the bus garage, Corporation offices, and entertainment buildings including a dance hall, while there were community buildings on the east side of St George's Way ('Road 2'), with the Town Centre Gardens beyond.¹⁴⁴ The site for the railway station was on the west, beyond the Great North Road (or London Road, A1). The industrial and service area was to the west again, while to the south of the town centre, beyond Six Hills Way ('Road 4'), was the College of Further Education, built by Hertfordshire County Council.

In order to retain a sense of history and continuity, the Corporation made the inventive decision of incorporating many existing trees into the new landscape – an approach conceived by at least 1949 and informed by the consultants Gordon Stephenson and Clarence Stein.¹⁴⁵ These trees – which appeared to visitors to be 'growing out of the concrete' – created points of interest, linking old and new, as well as providing shade to shoppers and breaking up the new open spaces.¹⁴⁶ This was especially the case with the Town Square and the 'fringe'; it was not found possible to retain trees in the main pedestrian ways.¹⁴⁷

The use of these mature trees was commented upon by various visitors. For instance, Sir Isaac Hayward, Leader of the LCC, praised the ‘natural look created by retention of trees’ as well as the ‘outstanding’ proportions of the buildings.¹⁴⁸ A landscaping approach to the town centre was carefully formulated, including these trees, which were surrounded by granite setts. The Development Corporation’s landscape architect, Gordon Patterson (b. 1928), wrote of the town centre being arranged so that there was a variety of enclosed, ‘constricted’ areas and ‘broader openings’, creating ‘an illusion of space, so essential if a place is not to appear dull’.¹⁴⁹ According to Patterson, the existence of mature trees actually led to the choice of siting for the Town Square, while in two cases mature trees were lifted and replanted. New trees were planted in car parks, ‘to provide shade and relief to what otherwise might have been a monotonous expanse of tarmac’.¹⁵⁰

Unity of Design

One of the most notable aspects about the design and planning of Stevenage town centre is its unity, producing what was termed at the time a ‘planner’s dream’.¹⁵¹ In planning as in reality, it was the vision of Leonard Vincent and his colleagues at the Development Corporation - a limited number of architects which stayed constant until 1980 (see p. 16). Vincent set out a clear design ethos, which guided the work of his own team as well as that undertaken by others, on the rare occasions where companies were permitted to use their own in-house architects – for instance, this was the case with the Co-op’s large Town Square premises, as well as those built by W. H. Smith & Sons, Boots, Sainsbury’s, Woolworth’s, Dolcis and Freeman Hardy & Willis (Fig. 24).¹⁵² Designs had to be formally approved by the Corporation’s Planning Committee, and construction was timed to fit in with the overall schedule of works. As



Figure 24. The shopping precinct at Stevenage is notable for being unified in its design. On the rare occasions where companies employed their own architects – as was the case in this part of Queensway, at shops including Woolworth’s and Boots – Leonard Vincent of the Development Corporation adapted their designs to his modular ethos. (©Historic England Archive, James O. Davies, DP275704)

the Corporation's journal noted in 1955, all multiple stores were to be built under a common contract, 'to secure uniformity in design and construction'.¹⁵³

The Chief Architect's guidance covered areas including external design, height, materials and landscaping – for all buildings within the town centre area – subjects which are explored in detail in Part Three of this report. Where structures were built by Hertfordshire County Council or Stevenage Urban District Council, sites were still set out by (or agreed with) the Corporation, and design had to follow the Corporation's overall design ethos. Surviving letters reveal that Vincent's striving for this unity of design was consistent and enduring, lasting throughout the 1950s, the 1960s and beyond, and was one of the elements of Stevenage new town that he felt provided the foundation for its international reputation (see p. 59). Just one instance is his stipulation that buildings constructed by anyone other than the Corporation should have open boundaries, the danger being that if each was fenced, 'the effect will be to lose the unity of the Town Centre'.¹⁵⁴

Leonard Vincent and his team conceived a grid design for the elevations of most of the commercial buildings in the town centre (see p. 71), and asked the in-house architects from the major companies to follow their example. An especially notable feature of the town centre was the first-floor canopies, provided for the convenience of shoppers and to give cohesion to the overall design, unifying the architecture 'in a dramatic manner, so that there is less need to control shop fronts'.¹⁵⁵ These connected all shops, and were finished in timber, contrasting with the hard materials of the buildings (Fig. 25).¹⁵⁶ The shopping precinct also included a number of single-storey cross canopies, crossing the width of the pedestrian ways (see p. 76, p. 88 and Fig. 72). In terms of height, Leonard Vincent's view was that buildings of no more than three storeys should dominate the town centre.¹⁵⁷

Vincent and his team worked with a set range of materials for the town centre buildings, another way of adding continuity to the scheme as a whole. Facings were of permanent materials, in order to keep levels of required maintenance to a minimum. The curtain walls of the main blocks, such as those in the main part of Queensway, had precast concrete mullions with natural Portland stone aggregate and galvanised steel window frames. All the canopies were made of concrete and steel



Figure 25. One of the unifying external features of Stevenage town centre is the use of canopies above the ground-floor shopfronts. These connected all shops, and were finished in timber. Shown here is the north side of the Town Square, in a photograph of 1959. (With kind permission of Stevenage Museum, P3945)

cantilevers, but finished in timber. Throughout, the main contractor for the town centre work was Harry Neal Ltd of London.¹⁵⁸

Vincent and his team designed all the town centre's signage and street furniture, including lamp standards, special post boxes, concrete flower planters and 'bike parks' placed at the centre of the shopping ways. Paving was in two shades of grey, 'with random panels of granite setts round trees and where changes of level take place', and Vincent and his team also prepared an advertisement scheme for the whole town centre, integrating it with the architectural design (see p. 73).¹⁵⁹ An additional factor ensuring unity was the completion of the core of the shopping precinct in a comparatively short time. Vincent's colleague at the Corporation, Victor Stallabass, Chief Estate Officer, noted in 1959 that 'It must be very rare that a project for a shopping centre as large as the Stevenage Town Centre is carried through in one stage of building'.¹⁶⁰

The resulting cohesion was commented upon at the time, not least by Leonard Vincent, who wrote a series of articles – many repeating the same content, and some published anonymously – in 1958-60, around the time of the town centre's completion. In 1959, he wrote proudly, 'The Centre is a complex of buildings forming a coherent architectural conception, as well as meeting the needs of numerous tenants or building lessees'.¹⁶¹ Vincent continued:

Around the square and central pedestrian way the frame construction is in pre-cast reinforced concrete, clad in steel, glass, stone, brick, mosaics, and other suitable material. The structural frame is a dominant feature, but the buildings are designed to form a backcloth to the three-dimensional, spatial conception and to the movement of the people on their daily business. The buildings in the minor pedestrian ways are in cross-wall construction, with infilling panels of steel, glass and brick.¹⁶²

A sculptural programme was incorporated from the beginning by Stevenage Development Corporation, as at Harlow – other new town programmes were less formal, later and/or focused on artists in residence – and played an important role: the programme added interest, character and distinctiveness to the streetscape, and contributed to the sense of an overall theme. Stevenage Development Corporation had a policy of encouraging local artists such as those based at Digswell Art Centre, Welwyn, in contrast to the Harlow Arts Trust's national approach. In Stevenage town centre, there were three major commissions: the bronze sculpture *Joy Ride*, completed in 1958 by the Czech sculptor Franta Belsky (1921-2000) and set atop the platform in the Town Square (see pp. 96-97) (Fig. 26); the mural of 1957-8 on the north side of the Co-op premises in the Town Square, designed by Hungarian artist Gyula Bajó (1907-84) and symbolising the co-operative movement (see p. 76 and p.78); and the aluminium wall sculpture by Peter Lyon (b. 1926) of Birmingham, erected in 1964 on the west face of Davants at 21/23 Town Square, overlooking the bus station (see Fig. 98). The design of the latter work – described by a Corporation spokesperson as 'a series of curved, pointed wings' – was selected in 1963 from three produced in maquette form by different sculptors.¹⁶³ The piece was designed to 'catch

south and west light and throw interesting shadow patterns on the concrete surface of the building façade', and was illuminated by lamps after dark.¹⁶⁴



Figure 26. The bronze sculpture *Joy Ride*, by Czech sculptor Franta Belsky, was unveiled on top of the platform in Stevenage's Town Square in September 1958. Its plinth has since been altered. (©Historic England Archive, Steve Cole, DP084276)

Chronology of Construction and Early Success of the Town Centre

The first phase of work on Stevenage's town centre focused on the road network, which had to be built from scratch, with the exception of the Great North Road (also known as London Road) and, opening off that, Bedwell Lane. A thoroughfare parallel to the Great North Road, initially known as Road 7/5 and later named Danestrete, was begun first, in autumn 1954, followed by Southgate and Queensway, with the back access roads to shops (see Appendix I).¹⁶⁵ A contract was agreed between the Development Corporation and the London Transport Executive, with the creation of a bus station a priority. Situated adjacent to the Town Square, the bus station was in full use by early 1959, served by an LTE bus garage to the south-west (see pp. 110-11).¹⁶⁶

Meanwhile, construction of the pedestrianised shopping precinct was initiated in June 1956, with on-site prefabrication of reinforced concrete frameworks, but the main building contract began on 14 September, after final approval for the work was granted on 13 July.¹⁶⁷ Construction was of two types: precast reinforced concrete-frame type in the Town Square and the major routes, and brick cross-wall construction in the 'minor pedestrian ways', Market Place and the south part of Queensway.¹⁶⁸

The plan, as set out in 1951, had been to begin at the south end of the town centre development, that being furthest away from the High Street of Old Stevenage – enabling the latter to function separately for as long as possible.¹⁶⁹ In actuality, work started with the main part of the Town Square, but did proceed generally in a south to north direction. The first range to be built was ‘block 7’ on the south side of Town Square. Construction then moved to ‘block 9’ (the north side of Town Square) that November, and then to ‘block 8’ (the east side of the Square) and the multiple stores from December 1956.¹⁷⁰ The south part of Queensway (blocks 3 and 4) was initiated in January 1957, and by spring landscaping details had been prepared for the Town Square itself and the main pedestrian ways. Throughout the course of 1957 work progressed along the east-west Market Place (blocks 1 and 2), north up Queensway and into Park Place (the remainder of blocks 8 and 9) (for the numbering of blocks, see Fig. 59). By summer 1957, the skeleton structures were being given their external cladding and internal dividing walls, many of which were of brick construction.¹⁷¹ Work was also initiated on the remaining part of the Town Square, on the north side of the bus station, which lagged slightly further behind.¹⁷² This L-shaped block was built in two phases: first the east section, part of block 9, which was constructed in 1957-8; and then the north section, block 10, built in 1958.¹⁷³ During construction, the bus station itself was used as a storage area for building materials including paving slabs, as is shown by surviving photographs.¹⁷⁴

Shopfitting began – with the Co-operative Store on Town Square – in January 1958, and paving of the pedestrian ways and in most of the Town Square was due to be complete by May that year.¹⁷⁵ The cross canopies and canopies of the shopfronts were added slightly later, from the middle of 1958 (Fig. 27).¹⁷⁶ The first major shop to open was the Co-op on Town Square (Fig. 28). Further multiples opened in July 1958 and the months up to the end of the year. The Town Square itself was in use that same July, though work on the clock tower, pool and platform only started around that time (see below and Fig. 58).¹⁷⁷ At the end of December 1958, over 60 per cent of



Figure 27. A photograph of 1958 showing construction of Stevenage’s shopping precinct, begun two years earlier. The view looks north along Queensway, towards the Town Square. (With kind permission of Stevenage Museum, P3885)



Figure 28. The first major shop to open in Stevenage town centre (in June 1958) was the premises of the Letchworth, Hitchin and District Co-operative Society, at the south-east corner of the Town Square. It is shown here, with its colourful tiled mural by artist Gyula Bajó. (© Elain Harwood)

shop premises were occupied and open, with the rest predicted to be trading by Easter 1959.¹⁷⁸ By the end of 1959 there were 108 shop units altogether (including five multiple stores, the Co-operative Store, a supermarket and two banks trading), along with 50,000 sq. ft of office accommodation, 53 flats and maisonettes, 48 garages, two public lavatories, two car parks and a boiler house (see Fig. 104).¹⁷⁹ Trading began at the open market square, located between Queensway and St George's Way, in November 1959, the area being used as car parking when not full of market stalls (Fig. 29).¹⁸⁰ This was accessed through a number of the multiple shops, which were designed as "through" shops' – presumably including Tesco on Market Place and Sainsbury's on Queensway.¹⁸¹ After a slow start, the weekly (Friday and Saturday) market was described as 'slowly improving' by August 1960.¹⁸²



Figure 29. The town centre's open market was in Market Square, between Queensway and St George's Way. It began trading in November 1959, and was moved to the ground floor of the multi-storey car park opened on the site in 1973. (With kind permission of Stevenage Museum, PP196)

Even before its official opening in April 1959, Stevenage town centre had proved popular. In February 1959, the Development Corporation reported that the car parks in the town centre were already overcrowded, while new garages were in high demand.¹⁸³ In April the same year, a local newspaper commented that Stevenage had 'quickly become a popular shopping rendezvous' (Fig. 30).¹⁸⁴ Retailers reported the Christmas trade of 1959 as being 'absolutely astounding', with shoppers



Figure 30. A photo of 1958 – before Stevenage's town centre had been formally opened – showing a busy throng of shoppers in the south part of Queensway. (RIBA Collections)

having to ‘almost to fight their way through the crowds in the four thoroughfares – Queensway, Market-place, Town Square and Park-place – to get into the shops, and finding a space in one of the Centre’s big car parks was an impossibility’.¹⁸⁵ The local newspaper added that ‘Throughout 1959, Stevenage New Town Centre rapidly established itself as the premier shopping centre of the district and its “shop walks”, as Stevenage Development Corporation likes the pedestrian ways to be known, became more crowded every week’.¹⁸⁶ By 1964, a survey was able to show that 50 per cent of shoppers travelled to the town centre by car, some from up to a hundred miles away.¹⁸⁷

Validating the vision of Sir Roydon Dash, the Corporation’s design team and so many locals, the pedestrianised scheme proved especially noteworthy. *The Builder* spoke of Stevenage as proving ‘the undoubted success of an all-pedestrian centre and shopping precinct’, due not only to its ‘relaxed and convivial atmosphere’ but to the fact that the car had been properly catered for, with car parking on the centre’s perimeters being welcome and popular.¹⁸⁸ The town centre’s novelty was much commented upon and, as has been mentioned, people came from Britain and further afield to visit Stevenage and see the effect of the pedestrianised town centre (see pp. 28-9 and p. 181).

The Town Square in particular was admired by architectural journals of the time. This was designed not as a simple open area – the conventional approach, found for instance at Harlow’s Market Square (see Fig. 2) – but as a space of different components or parts, unified by the presence of mature trees (Fig. 31; see Fig. 23 and pp. 94-99). The design made the most of the site’s slight gradient (it slopes down from west to east) and added visual interest. At the east end is the clock tower and raised pool (built 1958), a feature which has come to be seen as the iconic representation of Stevenage town centre but which was novel and experimental at



Figure 31. View of 1965 showing the Town Square and bus station from the roof of Daneshill House, looking north-east. (With kind permission of Stevenage Museum, P7377)

the time. The *Stevenage Pictorial* commented that the tower – and the sculpture *Joy Ride* to its west, placed atop the raised platform – will be ‘one of those features of the Centre about which people will argue for many years to come’.¹⁸⁹ Thinking about the Town Square and the shopping precinct overall, Leonard Vincent wrote: ‘The various pedestrian ways and squares are at different levels, which adds considerably to the interest and appearance of the [Town] Centre’.¹⁹⁰

First Phase Buildings Beyond the Shopping Precinct

Both planning and construction of Stevenage town centre were undertaken in phases, some of which overlapped. From the first part of the first phase, 1954–59, belong the major infrastructure and shopping precinct – roads, car parks, bus station, bus garage, and shops, banks, public house and other commercial premises, with offices, flats and maisonettes above. This allowed the commercial heart of the town to function as early as possible. In a secondary stage of this first phase, from 1958 to 1962, were added key office developments, important public provisions such as the county library and police station, and entertainment facilities, including the dance hall, bowling centre and swimming pool. These were sited in four locations: the west, beyond the bus station; the south, along Southgate; the east, between St George’s Way and the Town Centre Gardens; and the north, beyond Queensway.

The earliest to be developed – following the substantial completion of the ‘core’ of the centre – were those buildings to the south-west of the Town Square: the Head Post Office, Langley House and the Corporation’s own office block, Daneshill House, all begun in 1958–9 (Fig. 32; see Part Three). Such offices helped to create, as one journal put it, ‘a variety of employment in Stevenage and to encourage decentralization of offices from London’.¹⁹¹ In the case of Daneshill House, the development helped to ensure that Corporation staff were placed in the heart of the new town centre, and able to easily oversee progress – the organisation’s former headquarters, at Aston House, on the east of the town, was around four miles away.



Figure 32. Daneshill House (right) and the Head Post Office (left) seen in a photograph of the 1980s, taken looking south across the bus station. (Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies, CV350)

By 1959, Vincent and his team were also engaged on detailed design work for the dance hall and bowling alley on the immediate north of Daneshill House, begun in 1960 and 1961 respectively. The Mecca dance hall opened in October 1961, and the Ambassador bowling centre in 1962. Also, within a month of the opening of the bowling alley, a swimming pool was completed on the east of the town centre, increasing the number of venues for leisure time.¹⁹² All of this construction followed the overall plan, as set out by the Development Corporation (see Figs 15 and 21). For instance, in 1959 the Social Relations Officer Tom Hampson wrote that: 'To complete the Centre, there are County Council buildings at the south end and municipal buildings at the north, and the eastern and western fringes have to be built up partly with blocks of offices and commercial buildings, but buildings for recreational and social uses are also to be sited there.'¹⁹³

The buildings of Southgate were being designed in 1959, following a general plan set down some years previously; a delay in actual construction was caused by government economy cuts.¹⁹⁴ The details of this plan evolved over time. Originally, it was intended that the site – an island of land between Southgate and Six Hills Way (see Fig. 22) – form a civic centre, with buildings built and run by Hertfordshire County Council. Negotiations were underway with the County Council from the mid-1950s onwards, and in time broadened to include facilities for the Development Corporation and the North-West Metropolitan Regional Hospital Board. By 1959, they had reached a point where the proposed buildings comprised – from west to east – an outpatients' clinic, for the Hospital Board; a library, health centre and police station, to be designed by the County Architect; and a residential point block, to be designed by the Corporation. Leonard Vincent provided detailed advice throughout this process, and all designs had to be approved by the Corporation. The four premises built by the Hospital Board and the County Council were all completed in 1960-61 (Figs 33 and 34). In May 1957, the need for general consistency and harmony was made clear by the Corporation's General Manager, Major-General Alan Duff, who wrote that:



Figure 33. The view along Southgate in 1966, looking east. Visible on the right are the library and health centre, The Towers point block, the police station and garages, and Southgate House. (With kind permission of Stevenage Museum, PP2208)



Figure 34. The view along Southgate in 2020. Very little has changed since the mid-1960s. (©Historic England Archive, Patricia Payne, DP278110)

If the appearance of the Town Centre is to be as my Corporation would like, it means that the design of the County Council buildings must be in harmony with the general architectural conception of the Town Centre as a whole ... this may mean spending more money on them than would otherwise be required.¹⁹⁵

The Corporation's 13-storey point block, The Towers – built opposite the south end of Queensway – was a slightly later insertion into the Southgate scheme, built in 1960-3 (see pp. 143-6). Originally, the site for this block was to be let to Hertfordshire County Council for use as a fire and ambulance station or a magistrates' court. However, in 1958 the Corporation persuaded the Council to accept alternative sites for these buildings, so that they could fulfil the need for a tall block, required both in itself and for its contribution to the wider town centre scheme (Fig. 35).

As this development was underway, the County Council was also busy developing a site to the south, beyond Six Hills Way, as a further education college offering day-time and evening courses. Begun in 1959 and opened 1961, with additions of 1961 and 1965, this was rebuilt in 2003 as the Stevenage Centre of North Hertfordshire College.¹⁹⁶ Additionally, work was being undertaken on 'fringe' buildings on the east side of St George's Way and on the Town Centre Gardens – a 12-acre site begun in autumn 1958, seeded and planted in spring 1959, the first phase completed in 1960 and officially opened in January 1962.¹⁹⁷ The earliest of this east 'fringe' group of buildings was the Church of St George, begun in 1956 and opened in November 1960 (Fig. 36; see pp. 157-9).



Figure 35. The Towers, closing the south end of Queensway. The block was designed by SDC in 1959 and built in 1960-3. (©Historic England Archive, Patricia Payne, DP232456)

Originally, from 1956, there had been plans for building 'Crown Offices' to the south of the church, but in the end the site was developed in the early 1970s as offices (Manulife House; see pp. 155-6). To the south again was the fire



Figure 36. Late 1960s photograph of the Church of St George (built 1956-60), looking south-west towards Market Place, East Gate car park and the buildings of Southgate. (Courtesy of Martin Woodrow)

and ambulance station, opened in July 1962, while to the north, at the junction of St George's Way and Fairlands Way, another phase one proposal was the swimming pool, an Urban District Council project. This was marked on plans and models produced in 1959, but was only begun in April 1961, and opened in October 1962.¹⁹⁸ Along with the Mecca dance hall, opened the year before, it was the earliest social amenity in the new town centre, and was especially welcomed by young people.¹⁹⁹

Second Phase of Construction, 1962-65

As has been noted elsewhere in this report, the phases of work on Stevenage town centre were not clearly defined – they overlapped with each other, with design work for the second phase, for instance, being undertaken while the first phase was still under construction. Priority was naturally given to commercial, retail and entertainment premises, along with key community facilities, which meant that some buildings intended by the late 1950s had to wait before detailed design and construction was initiated. Where comparable premises already existed comparatively nearby – as with the town hall and the railway station in Old Stevenage – this naturally reduced the sense of urgency, though the railways' limited budget after the Beeching cuts was another factor.²⁰⁰ Phasing is made even more complex on account of the delays to the programme of work, caused by government restrictions on expenditure and the proposed expansion of the new town (see pp. 15-16). In some instances, buildings which were intended as part of the second phase were built much later on, or – as with the municipal offices – not at all. The phases set out in this report therefore reflect actual construction, rather than outline design, though the latter has been factored in where possible.

The expansion of the commercial core of the town centre began to be considered in 1958, by which time the first phase precinct was largely complete.²⁰¹ The proposed programme of work would extend Queensway to the north, meeting a new east-west pedestrian route running from St George's Way to Danestrete. It was initiated in order to meet the needs of the increasing population and rising demand for shops from both locals and those living further afield. It was already clear by 1959 that 'Such is the demand for shops that they [the Development Corporation] are planning a second phase of 100 more shops for local traders and multiples'.²⁰² In spring that year, the Corporation's Chief Estate Officer commented that 'Already the waiting list is growing of traders wanting to take shops in the second part of the Centre, including a number of the present lessees of the first part who would like to take larger premises so as to extend their business'.²⁰³

The town centre plan of December 1959 (revised March 1962) also shows blocks of shops proposed for the site to the rear of Daneshill House, extending west to meet the Great North Road (Fig. 37).²⁰⁴ These were to be reached via a pedestrian route, passing through the ground floor of Daneshill House itself. This scheme was abandoned in the mid-1960s.²⁰⁵ Meanwhile, plans for the buildings of the north extension of the commercial area were prepared in 1960 and worked up in detail in February and March 1961 (see p. 79).²⁰⁶

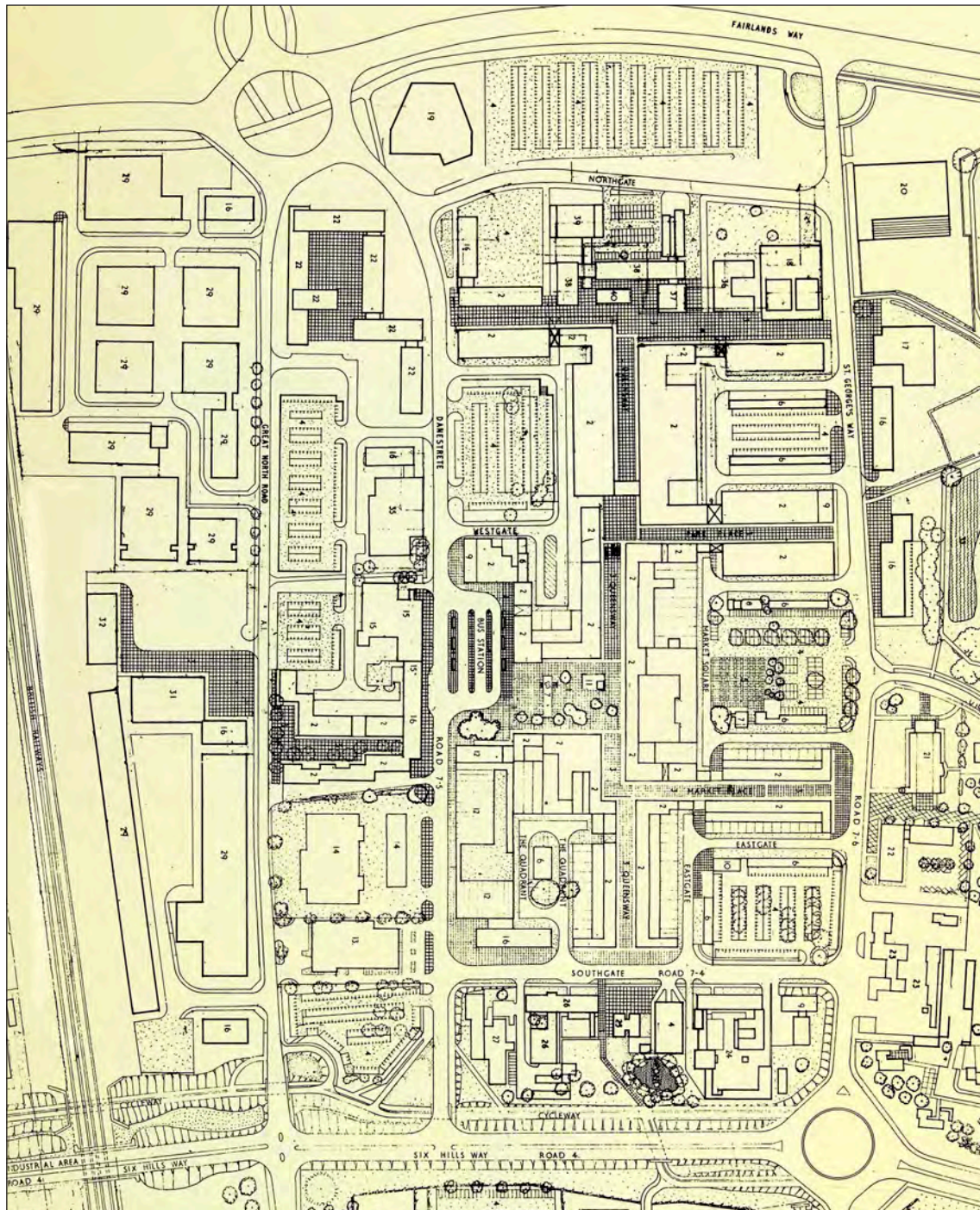


Figure 37. The 1959 layout plan of Stevenage town centre as revised in March 1962 (rotated so that north is at the top). (Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies, CNT/ST/15/4/13)

The most significant component of this second phase of works was to be the municipal buildings or civic centre at the north of the town centre, a site which according to Clifford Holliday belonged ‘as much to the old town as the new’.²⁰⁷ The exact composition and layout of this precinct has a complex history, which does not fall within the scope of this report. It variously included law courts, registry office, art gallery and museum, with offices for Stevenage Urban District Council, replacing the town hall in Orchard Road, Old Stevenage. It was given the name ‘The Forum’,

and was variously referred to as the ‘new council offices’, the ‘municipal buildings’ and sometimes the ‘town hall’. This area was to be served by a new road, Northgate, connecting St George’s Way with Danestrete; this thoroughfare opened to traffic in late January 1962, but was reworked and curtailed in the early 1970s, following the construction of Fairlands Way and Lytton Way.²⁰⁸

Although the municipal buildings would be built for and run by the District Council, with some areas provided for Hertfordshire County Council, it was agreed that Leonard Vincent would be the architect. He produced sketch plans and outline layout drawings in spring and summer 1961, illustrating a large block of municipal offices, bounded to the north by Northgate, with a museum, art gallery and law courts to the east, and separate lettable offices to the west, the whole to be carefully landscaped (Fig. 38).²⁰⁹ The detailed costs and design of the offices were considered that August and September, though the process was not entirely straightforward.

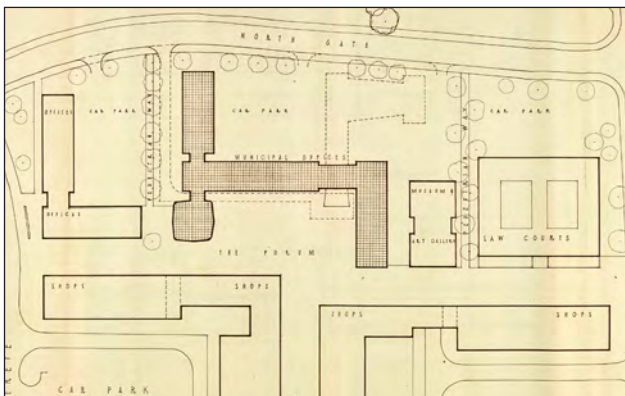


Figure 38. Drawing by Leonard Vincent and his team of July 1961, showing the proposed layout of the town hall complex at the north end of Queensway. (Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies, Off Acc 793, bundle 36, no. 1)

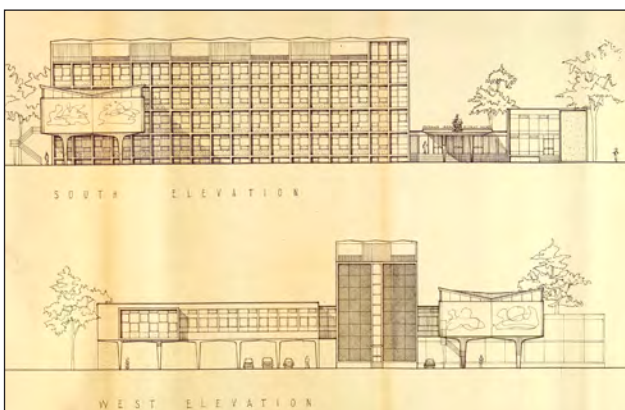


Figure 39. Drawing by Leonard Vincent and his team of July 1961, showing the proposed elevations of the town hall at the north end of Queensway. Stevenage Urban District Council was critical of the modern form of Vincent’s proposals. (Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies, Off Acc 793, bundle 36, no. 7)

Correspondence reveals a difference of opinion between the District Council and the Corporation about architectural design, for instance. The Council was opposed to the modern form of Vincent’s proposals, which envisioned a frame structure and council chamber supported on stilts, and asked him to redesign the offices as a building ‘of traditional design’, with ‘load bearing walls’ – an approach Vincent argued was ‘completely impracticable’, inflexible and extremely costly.²¹⁰

A letter of April 1962 makes clear that the building as proposed at that time – it had still not been fully approved – would comprise: a main office block for the Council, of five storeys plus basement, with a council chamber on stilts projecting at the front left; a two-storey east wing for other Council departments and the civic suite; and a three-storey west wing at the rear for County Council services and the registry office (Fig. 39).²¹¹ A formal agreement between the Council and the Corporation was being prepared in May 1962, and a drawing

appended to a memorandum of July shows the nearly final scheme, with a roughly H-shaped town hall block, a court house to the east and a museum and art gallery to the north-west.²¹² In the same month, the Council set out an objection, on privacy grounds, to a change to the plans – the inclusion of shops to either side of the council buildings – and also asked for the court house and museum and art gallery to be moved slightly further forward.²¹³ In June 1962, Leonard Vincent noted that this civic, legal and cultural precinct ‘would form a very pleasant part of the Town Centre’.²¹⁴ The aim was to complete work in spring 1963.

However, by this point, it must already have been clear that there would be a delay. As has been noted, in summer 1961 the government had called for economies in public expenditure (see p. 15), although the Development Corporation emphasised in late 1961 its intention to build ‘new offices and a new Council Chamber at The Forum in the Town Centre as soon as the Government’s squeeze on capital expenditure is off’.²¹⁵ The proposals for expansion of Stevenage new town, announced in July 1962, changed everything. In August that year, the Corporation stated that ‘further planning of development at the northern end of Stevenage Town Centre is to be suspended’, pending completion of the ‘technical investigation’ into possible expansion.²¹⁶ In a note of the same month, the Corporation added that ‘If any substantial increase in the target of the town were agreed, the present site for these [municipal] offices might be needed for shops’.²¹⁷ The prospect of further delay and loss of all the expended effort was, naturally, ‘intolerable’ for Stevenage Urban District Council.²¹⁸ At a formal meeting on 18 September 1962, the Corporation’s Chairman, Sir Arthur Rucker (1895-1991), expressed considerable sympathy for the Council’s position, but emphasised that if the town was to be nearly doubled in size, the planned offices would be too small and no longer in the most appropriate location.²¹⁹ The Corporation offered to erect ‘almost immediately’ a block of offices which the Council could use temporarily (Southgate House, see below), while the planning of the town centre was reconsidered.²²⁰

Reflecting these discussions, the local press announced, at the end of September 1961, that the second phase of town centre expansion ‘will now be Staggered’, and would be completed in three further stages – the first up to the junction with Park Place, beginning in June 1962; the second stage starting in January 1963; and the third stage ‘at some later date yet to be decided’.²²¹ In the end, it was the municipal precinct element – part of ‘Stage III’ – that suffered. Plans for the extension of ‘Road 5’ (Fairlands Way) – and the creation of Lytton Way, ‘Road 10’, bypassing the Great North Road on the west – were also temporarily halted. However, the Corporation did decide to go ahead with plans to construct a group of residential tower blocks on the fringes of the town centre (see p. 54-5).

Thankfully, plans for the town’s expansion did not delay commencement of the north shopping area. This was initially designated as ‘the second stage of the first phase’ – completion of the first phase of commercial development having been marked by the Queen’s unveiling in April 1959 – though it is named ‘Phase II’ on surviving plans (Fig. 40).²²² Site work was initiated in spring 1961, focusing on the area at the junction of Queensway and Park Place, and eastwards into Park Place itself, with construction beginning in summer 1962.²²³ Surviving aerial photographs of this

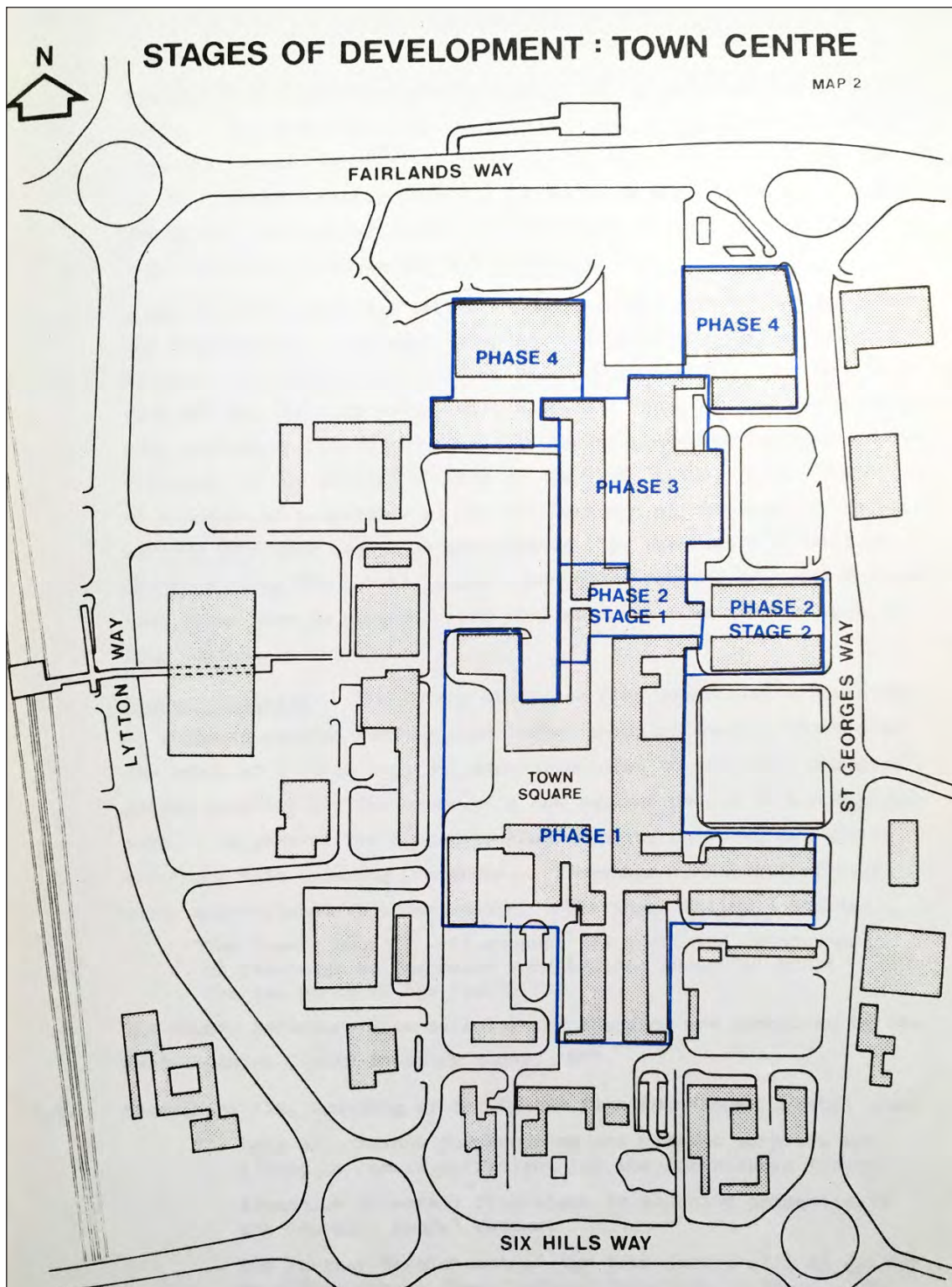


Figure 40. Plan from *Stevenage District Plan: Shopping Topic Report* (1981) showing the phasing of the town centre's commercial precinct. The dates of building construction are as follows: Phase I (1956-9); Phase II (1962-4); Phase III (1967-70); Phase IV (1970-6). (Courtesy of Stevenage Borough Council)



Figure 41. Aerial photograph of 1962 showing clearance work at the north of Queensway (at the top of the picture), in preparation for the building of 'Phase II' of the shopping precinct. The view, looking north, also shows construction underway on The Towers and the library extension (bottom of the picture). (With kind permission of Stevenage Museum, PP1292)



Figure 42. Features of Phase II of the shopping precinct, constructed in 1962-4, included a two-storey glass bridge (left of photo), a Littlewoods department store (centre) – facing onto a 'square' – and new buildings in Park Place (right). (©Historic England Archive, James O. Davies, DP275708)

time show building underway in this area (Fig. 41).²²⁴ Two especially important components of this scheme of work were a Littlewoods department store and a two-storey steel and glass bridge, crossing Queensway (Fig. 42; see pp. 80-1).²²⁵

Development of the shopping area north of the bridge was due to be initiated at the start of 1963, but in November 1962 the Development Corporation announced that the programme of work would be postponed, pending a decision about the town's expansion. The Corporation decided that it required flexibility regarding the future development of the northern area as a whole, including the proposed site for the civic centre, in order to allow 'sufficient room for the types of shops which a much bigger town would need and could probably attract'.²²⁶ The future of this area was still unclear in late 1965, as a decision about Stevenage's population had still not been made.²²⁷ Instead, in order to meet the needs of those companies who had 'booked' sites in this area and were not prepared to wait until completion, the programme of work was re-phased: from 1963, as 'stage 2' of 'Phase II', Park Place was extended eastwards to St George's Way, plans being altered to allow for 'rather larger standard units' (Fig. 43).²²⁸ The 22 shops in Park Place, with offices above, were completed by the end of 1964.²²⁹ The local press highlighted a 'bumper Christmas' that year; in 1965 a survey showed that 20,000-30,000 people visited the town centre on a Saturday, more than a quarter coming from the surrounding region.²³⁰



Figure 43. Park Place, looking east towards Queensway. This pedestrian way was extended in the early 1960s to include 'larger standard units', with shops on the ground floors and a mixture of commercial and residential use above. The brick wall towards the centre of the picture represents the end of the first phase work of 1956-9. (© Elain Harwood)

Another town centre project belonging to the second phase of construction – although the first phase of design – was the youth centre, built as a central focus for the new town's many young people.²³¹ This was situated on a site to the south of the slightly earlier swimming pool, on the east side of St George's Way. The full details of the ambitious project, termed a 'palace for teenagers', were announced by the Development Corporation in May 1962 (Fig. 44).²³² Work began in early 1964

Figure 44. Design of 1962 for the youth centre (Bowes Lyon House), St George's Way, intended as a 'palace for teenagers'. This was one of the earliest commissions by Leonard Vincent and Raymond Gorbing in their new freelance partnership. (Courtesy of Vincent and Gorbing Ltd)



and the building – named Bowes Lyon House – was opened in April 1965 (see pp. 159-166).

A slightly later second-phase project was Southgate House, on the corner of Southgate and St George's Way (see pp. 149-52). This site had been allocated to offices and a public house since at least 1959, but the programme of work was expedited by the delayed plans to build municipal offices for Stevenage Urban District Council at The Forum.²³³ At a meeting in September 1962, Leonard Vincent emphasised that the offices could be designed so as to include a council chamber and civic suite, for use by the Council until their permanent offices were completed. A site on the west of Danestrete was offered as permanent Council accommodation that November, the Corporation emphasising that it would not be possible to complete the offices 'for at least four years'.²³⁴ The Council, desperate to leave their 'inadequate, overcrowded and scattered offices', including the town hall in Old Stevenage, accepted the offer regarding Southgate House, but said that they would have to consult further regarding their permanent offices, since they were to serve others (including the County Council) as well.²³⁵

Southgate House (now Vista House) was designed as a 15-storey block by Leonard Vincent in his capacity as consultant to the Development Corporation and freelance architect (Fig. 45). Begun in 1963, it was completed in autumn 1964 and was at that time the tallest building in Stevenage.²³⁶ Visually, it relates to the slightly later building (in 1965-7) of two 18-storey residential point blocks in Silam Road – Brent Court and Harrow Court.²³⁷ Overall, the construction of tall buildings in the area was kept to a minimum number, 'to avoid the outline of a continuous mass of high



Figure 45. Late 1960s photograph taken from Brent Court showing the east side of the town centre, including Southgate House on the far left. At the time of its completion in 1964, it was the tallest building in Stevenage. (Courtesy of Martin Woodrow)

buildings seen from various approach routes to the Town Centre'.²³⁸ In 1966, the Long Ship pub and restaurant – the second of two licensed premises in the town centre – was opened on the ground and first floors of Southgate House, marked externally by a large mosaic by the sculptor William Mitchell (1925-2020; see Fig. 143).

Third Phase of Construction, 1966-79

The proposals for expanding Stevenage new town – considered from summer 1962 – continued to have an impact on development in the later 1960s and '70s, as the Development Corporation had to think about a rising population and a greater number of visitors to the shopping precinct. A model of the town centre exhibited by the Corporation in March 1963 proposed a significantly expanded central area, new features including: three multi-storey car parks along St George's Way; a multi-storey car park on the site of the Westgate (or West Gate) surface car park; shops at the north end of Queensway and to the north-west; a large development at the north-east of the centre, with residential point blocks set on a podium formed by car parking; public buildings to the west of Daneshill House; and a town hall at the north end of Danestrete, near a new railway station.²³⁹

The transfer of the town hall to this area reflected revised plans for the northern quarter of the town centre. By the mid-1960s, it had become very clear that the area at the top of Queensway, formerly intended for municipal offices, was more urgently required for additional retail development. This is shown by the town centre plan prepared by Vincent, Goring & Partners in September 1967 (Fig. 46).²⁴⁰ There was a hope that one of the buildings here would be a department store, such as a branch



Figure 46. Town centre plan of September 1967, prepared for Stevenage Development Corporation by Vincent, Goring & Partners. 'S' stands for shops, while the town hall is shown as 'CC' (civic centre). (Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies, CNT/ST/15/4/19)

of John Lewis; this never came to pass, but BHS did arrive in this area in 1976 (see Fig. 82).²⁴¹

Leonard Vincent – who had taken the lead with these proposals in his successive roles as Chief Architect to the Development Corporation and then (from 1962) Consultant Architect and Planner – emphasised that the town centre would be expanded predominantly to the north and west. As well as a re-siting of the town hall and municipal buildings, this would involve the building of new shops (‘some possibly in larger units than so far constructed’), extension of recreational and entertainment facilities, and the closure of some roads and the diversion of others – including the part of the Great North Road (old A1) adjacent to the town centre, which would become a route for internal traffic only.²⁴² Vincent saw the proposals as creating an opportunity for ‘a more completely pedestrian centre and further pedestrian precincts which would flow naturally from the existing areas’.²⁴³ Many of these structures – including the town hall – never went ahead, but the plan of 1963 gave a general sense of the direction of future development.

The year 1966 saw the completion of both a new Master Plan for Stevenage and a new detailed plan for the town centre, working up some of the proposals set out in the 1963 model. Under this, Queensway would finally be extended to the north (‘Phase III’; see Fig. 40) – with new shops including Marks & Spencer and Sainsbury’s – and would join a new pedestrian way set on an east-west axis, at the north of the town centre. These provisions would be catered for by an increased amount of car parking, and would help to ensure Stevenage was able to meet demand from the rising population. Other proposals of this time were the closure of the north section of Danestrete, making it a service road for the car parks, bus station, taxi rank and loading bays, and the furthering of plans for a new road (‘Road 10’, now Lytton Way) on the west, bypassing the old Great North Road. On the east of the new commercial area were to be additional shops leading towards St George’s Way and the swimming pool, while on the north-west was to be placed a new civic square with town hall and law courts. The town centre plan of 1967 shows new entertainment buildings intended for the west of the town centre – to the rear of Daneshill House, the dance hall and the bowling centre – comprising a skating rink, cinema and arts centre (see Fig. 46).²⁴⁴ It was also at around this time – in 1968 – that design work was initiated on the new railway station, which would replace the station at Old Stevenage.

Among the first work initiated during the phase of work from 1966 was the further expansion of the commercial ‘core’ of the town centre. This involved the building of blocks of shops extending northwards from the two-storeyed bridge and Littlewoods, themselves completed in 1963. The detailed plans for these shopping parades had been drawn up by Leonard Vincent and approved in early 1961 (see p. 79), but construction of phase III of the commercial precinct only began in 1967. It was largely complete by spring 1970, including around 25 new shops such as Sainsbury’s and Marks and Spencer’s (see pp. 82-3) (Figs 47 and 48).

In the first half of the 1970s, the town centre’s commercial premises were expanded again around a new east-west pedestrian way at the north, named The Forum.

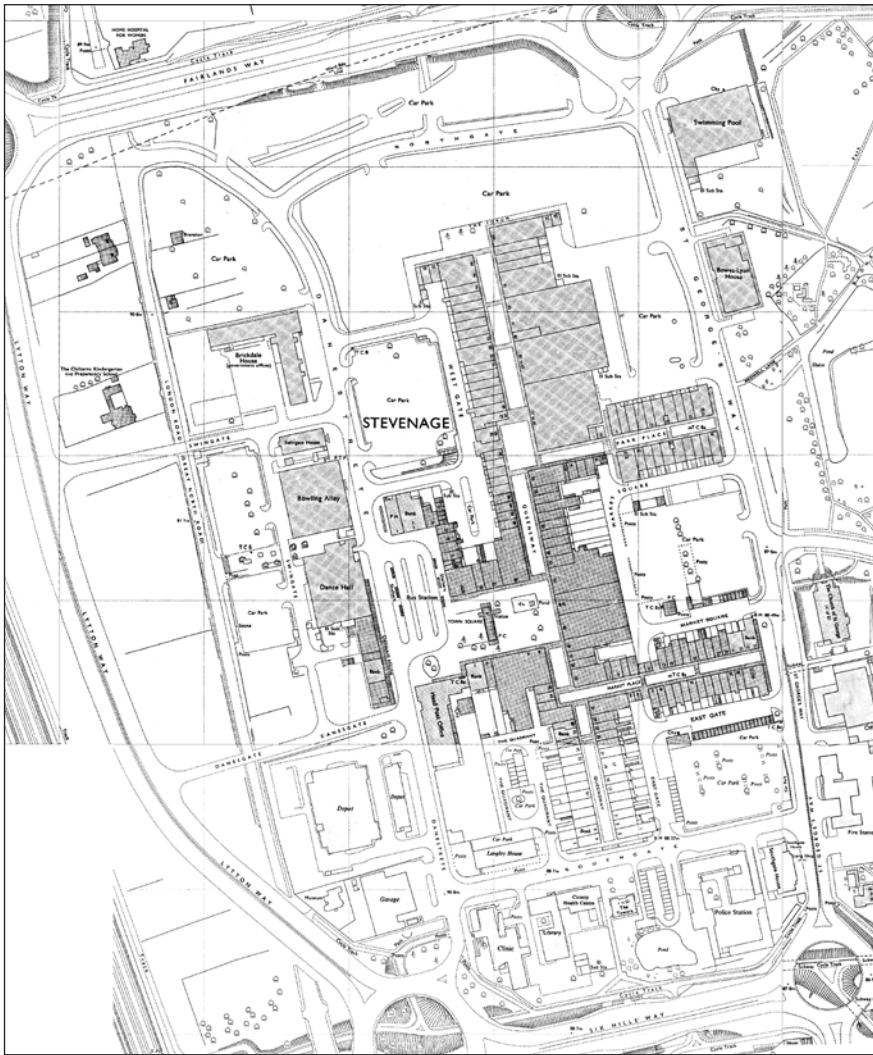


Figure 47. 1:1,250 Ordnance Survey maps of 1971 showing Stevenage town centre, with recent development including the extension of Queensway to the north (shown here with its original cross canopies) and the new outer roads, Fairlands Way and Lytton Way. (© and database right Crown Copyright and Landmark Information Group Ltd [All rights reserved 2020]. Licence numbers 000394 and TP0024.)



Figure 48. View from beneath the two-storey bridge looking north into the newly completed Queensway extension of 1967-70. (With kind permission of Stevenage Museum, P10616)

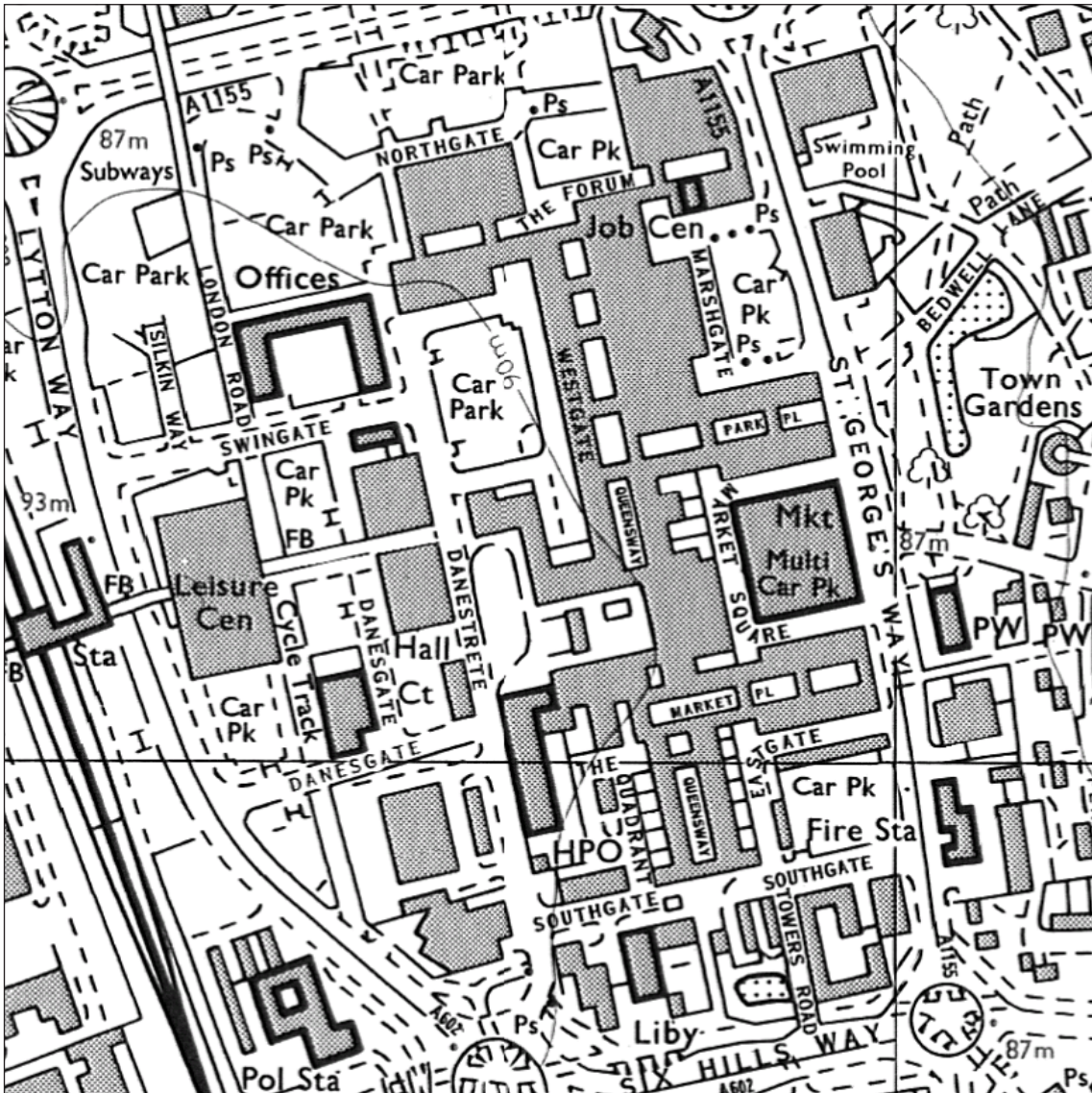


Figure 49. Small-scale (1:10,000) Ordnance Survey map of 1987 showing Stevenage town centre, including all the original cross canopies, the 1970s blocks at The Forum and the pedestrian walkway, joining the station to the town centre. (© and database right Crown Copyright and Landmark Information Group Ltd [All rights reserved 2020]. Licence numbers 000394 and TP0024.)



Figure 50. Advert for the Grampian Hotel in The Forum, opened in 1973 and built over shops. It is now the Ibis. (With kind permission of Stevenage Museum)

This programme of work – ‘Phase IV’ – included the Tesco supermarket with ABC cinema above, built in 1970-3 at the north-east corner of the town centre, and to the west the C&A and BHS stores (completed 1975 and 1976 respectively) and the Grampian Hotel (completed 1973), the latter built over shops (Figs 49 and 50; see pp. 84-7).

Alongside this development, the Corporation began to think about the parking requirements for the expanded town centre, as seen in the Master Plan of 1966. Leonard Vincent was anxious that the town’s first multi-storey car park should be ‘simple and right in every way’, and remained fiercely protective of the unified design of the town centre.²⁴⁵ This is well illustrated by correspondence of 1968 relating to the building of the first multi-storey car park, in St George’s Way. A letter of Vincent from November of that year – aghast at the height and massing of the proposed 11-level structure – will be quoted at length, to emphasise this vital point:

There is the important question of aesthetics in the Central Area concept. It has never been my intention that car parks should dominate the buildings which form the core. These have been deliberately kept at three-storey height. Differences of height to add architectural interest to the Central Area are produced by buildings on the perimeter, i.e. flats, office blocks, etc. This is the basic concept of the Town Centre design. This concept has been recognised and commended nationally and internationally as such by those concerned with such development. The introduction of any structure out of scale with the core would produce a disastrous result, however well it is designed. It is absolutely essential in my opinion, that the car parks must be no greater in scale than the present buildings in the core and should be subordinate to the architecture of the Town Centre ... It is absolutely essential that the concept of the Town Centre is not destroyed by ancillary buildings such as car parks and we are in grave danger of so doing if these come about as now tentatively suggested. I must record that I am, and would be, bitterly opposed to any move which destroys this concept and this world-wide reputation which the Centre now enjoys.²⁴⁶

The detailed plans for the St George’s Way multi-storey car park were produced by the Development Corporation in 1969, and it was built in 1971-3 (see pp. 105-6). As the structure was constructed over the existing surface car park in Market Square, site of Stevenage’s weekly market, it was adapted so as to accommodate a permanent market on the ground floor, while an open market was set up in the old Great North Road, to the west of the town centre. The car park connected directly to both sides of the newly dual-carriage-wayed St George’s Way. By this point, the construction of retail premises along The Forum was advancing, and the need for additional parking facilities was clear. Plans for a second multi-storey car park were never realised, but a large surface car park was provided at the top of Queensway, on the west of the new Tesco (see Figs 49 and 78).

As has been noted, when the decision was taken to develop the area at the north end of Queensway as commercial premises, the proposals for the site of Stevenage's municipal offices had to be reconsidered. This meant the wastage of a huge amount of design and other work, and must have been a cause of major frustration to both Stevenage Urban District Council and the Development Corporation. By the late 1960s, the Council had occupied for around five years accommodation intended as only temporary (Southgate House). The Council remained desperate to have dedicated offices, and was keen to be close to the proposed railway station. For its part, the Development Corporation emphasised that it was anxious that a site be found which 'would be a credit to the Council and the Town'.²⁴⁷

Sites offered on the north of Fairlands Way, by King George V Playing Field, proved unacceptable to the Council, and attention soon shifted to the west side of Danestrete – close to Swingate House. The approved town centre plan of September 1967 included a roughly U-shaped block labelled 'Civic Centre' on the site now occupied by Tesco – that is, to the north of Brickdale House, bounded on the north by Fairlands Way (see Fig. 46). On the west, the site allocated to the law courts was divided from the civic complex by the old Great North Road.²⁴⁸ In 1974 Leonard Vincent produced details of a scheme for the same area including civic offices, a museum, art gallery and hall.²⁴⁹ However, although negotiations continued until March 1976, space was tight and land was increasingly valuable to the Corporation. Moreover, by that time, it had become clear that the Corporation would soon be wound up, leaving its offices at both Daneshill House and Swingate House vacant. The Council – redubbed Stevenage Borough Council following its creation as a non-metropolitan district in 1973 – moved into these on the dissolution of the Corporation in 1980, marking an end to decades of plans for a dedicated municipal complex. As Elain Harwood has noted, Stevenage town centre 'is much reduced in scale and grandeur by the absence of a major civic building' – though Daneshill House was later altered so as to provide a civic suite (see p. 119).²⁵⁰

Just as the civic centre proposals were revised, so too were those for the law courts. By 1970, the idea of building these at the north-west of the town centre had been abandoned. Plans to locate law courts alongside a new police station were also shelved, and attention shifted to the building of a magistrates' court on a site to the rear of Daneshill House, not far from the new police station at the south-west corner of Lytton Way. Earlier, this general site had been set aside for a cinema, negotiations for which were underway in 1967, with Rank's preferred architect Dry Halasz Dixon producing drawings.²⁵¹ However, Rank pulled out of discussions in January 1970. The magistrates' court opened in 1973, on the corner of Danegate and the old Great North Road (see p. 175-6).

Meanwhile, plans for a dedicated railway station for the new town centre finally bore fruit. Initial designs were produced by Vincent & Gorbings in 1966, in association with British Railways, proposing a site to the west of Lytton Way, a thoroughfare completed in 1969.²⁵² Final designs were worked up by British Rail's regional architects and engineer in 1971, and the station was completed in 1973 (see pp. 176-9). It was linked to the town centre by a pedestrian walkway, intended since at least 1967 and designed in 1971 by R. B. (Roy) Lenthall (1924-2008), Chief



Figure 51. View looking west, showing the early 1970s pedestrian walkway built to link the town centre with the arts and leisure centre and railway station. (©Historic England Archive, Patricia Payne, DP278094)

Engineer of Stevenage Development Corporation (Fig. 51).²⁵³ Construction at the Danestrete end involved alteration work to the north side of the Mecca dance hall, widening the pedestrian way at that point (see p. 124). The section crossing Lytton Way was complete by late 1973, with the whole of the walkway fully opened in 1975.²⁵⁴ Elaine Harwood has written that the ‘steady descent’ of this walkway – which passed through the arts and leisure centre and then sloped down towards the Mecca dance hall, bowling centre and bus station – ‘remains one of the town’s most powerful pieces of planning’.²⁵⁵

Another important structure of these years was the arts and leisure centre (see pp. 170-4) (Fig. 52). This venture came out of the efforts of the Stevenage Arts Guild and, in particular, the survey ‘The Arts in Stevenage’, produced in October 1963 by Sir William Emrys Williams (1896-1977), former Secretary-General of the Arts Council.²⁵⁶ Initial sketch plans were produced by Vincent, Gorbing & Partners in 1965 – a year after the formation of the Stevenage Arts Trust, tasked with developing



Figure 52. Aerial photograph showing Stevenage town centre in 1986, looking north-west. Southgate House is in the foreground, Manulife House on the right, and the orange-coloured arts and leisure centre can be seen at the centre-left. (With kind permission of Stevenage Museum, PP855)

proposals.²⁵⁷ In 1968, Stevenage Urban District Council and the Development Corporation commissioned a feasibility study exploring the possibility of a combined arts and sports centre, the final brief being accepted in 1971. The three-level centre was built in 1974-5 on a site to the west of the dance hall and bowling centre, on the other side of the old Great North Road – which on the completion of Lytton Way in 1969 had been closed to all but local traffic. The complex represented a then-novel collaboration between arts and sports groups, and was a major achievement for the town.

Construction Work, 1980-Present

The buildings noted above were the last to be constructed under Stevenage Development Corporation. This body was wound up, with other new town development corporations, in 1980, and many of its responsibilities (and some of its land holdings) passed to Stevenage Borough Council (see p. 17). It had done an admirable job of creating a strong and enduring concept for the town centre and Stevenage as a whole, following that through with building work and then maintaining the town with the same ideals.

Over the last four decades, construction in the town centre has slowed in pace, but has continued – alongside various demolitions and programmes of alteration. The evolution of Stevenage in these years falls beyond the primary scope of this report, but a summary of work undertaken in the 1980s and 1990s would help to place earlier buildings in context. Overall, although the original core of the town centre survives extremely well, this programme of work has seen the erosion of the townscape created in the 1950s and '60s and adapted and maintained up to the late 1970s. However, the commercial context of the later twentieth century was undoubtedly challenging. A lack of long-term planning and ill-judged piecemeal interventions have dogged all the new town centres and most post-war estates in England. While Stevenage town centre has not been immune from this, the core of the area has stood up remarkably well.

One of the major town centre schemes of the 1980s was the 200,000 sq. ft Westgate Shopping Centre, opened on 14 April 1988, built by the property company Trafalgar House and designed by Crighton Design – although the recent *Buildings of England* volume for Hertfordshire ascribes it to the firm Renton Howard Wood Levin.²⁵⁸ This indoor shopping mall was built on the former surface car park to the west of Queensway and the north of the Town Square (see Fig. 9).²⁵⁹ The mall has pedestrian entrances from The Forum at the north and Queensway on the east, while it also incorporates a multi-storey car park at the south-west, entered from Danestrete. It was probably at the time of the shopping centre's completion – in conjunction with the conversion of existing 'through-ways' as entrances – that the original west canopies and cross canopies of the upper part of Queensway were removed, along with those of the west part of The Forum, and the new arched, glazed canopy built (see Fig. 91).

Also of this time was the development at the north-west corner of the town centre, at the top of Danestrete, on the site proposed for the civic centre in the late 1960s.

This retail complex, designed by Vincent, Gorbing & Partners, incorporated a Tesco superstore, as well as smaller shop units, a food court, a petrol station, public toilets and other facilities (Figs 53-54). It was approved by Stevenage Borough Council in April 1987, and in 1988 Tesco moved to the newly completed buildings from their smaller, earlier premises at the east end of The Forum.²⁶⁰ The new supermarket complex has been described as being ‘post-modern classical’ in style, and is of yellow and red brick.²⁶¹ Kathryn Morrison and John Minnis made the interesting comment that, by ‘facing onto surface car parks’, this development subverted ‘the principles of the original [Stevenage] town plan, in which shops faced onto pedestrian ways, while parking was hidden at the rear’.²⁶²

A major development of the 1990s was undertaken at the opposite end of The Forum to the new Tesco – that is, the north-east of the town centre, where the ABC cinema and Tesco had been opened in 1973. Here, the 1970s buildings on the north side of The Forum were demolished in the mid-1990s, along with the cross canopies, and replaced by the ‘Forum Centre’ – a new shopping mall. This multi-purpose unit was approved in August 1996 and built in 1996-7, to designs by Jeff Downes of the architects Corstophine & Wright Kenzie Lovell Ltd (Fig. 55).²⁶³ In form and materials, it is very different to the earlier buildings of the town centre. It is constructed of orange brick, with a lower floor faced in coloured concrete tile, a clock tower at the north-east corner and a galvanised metal roof. Although there is a canopy above the ground



Figure 53. Photograph of The Forum in 1998, looking west towards the Tesco complex of the late 1980s. (Courtesy of K. Morrison)



Figure 54. The Tesco superstore, built at the north-west corner of the town centre in 1987-8 to designs by Vincent, Gorbing & Partners. (©Historic England Archive, Patricia Payne, DP278149)



Figure 55. The Forum Centre (built 1996-7) viewed from the south-east, with artist José de Alberdi’s sculpture of 1971-2 in the foreground. The sculpture was moved to this location in the 1990s. (© Historic England, Emily Cole)

floor, this is glazed, rather than being of the timber-faced style used elsewhere in the town centre.

Meanwhile, work undertaken in the Town Square area has included: the rebuilding and extension of Daneshill House (the new offices of Stevenage Borough Council) in the early 1980s, and the reconstruction of the adjacent bus station around the same time (see Figs 108 and 115); the alteration and extension to the east of the raised platform in 1992-3 and remodelling of the pool at the base of the clock tower (see pp. 100-2); and the demolition of the former Head Post Office building (in 1999). In Danestrete, the 1990s and early 2000s saw the demolition of the bus garage (in 1993), Langley House (in c. 2003), the Central Garage (in c. 2005) and the bowling centre (in c. 2002), all first phase structures of 1959-62. The Post Office and sorting office to its rear were replaced by a leisure and retail complex named The Plaza, of two main storeys, filling a large site between Town Square and Southgate (Fig. 56) (see p. 114).



Figure 56. Aerial photograph showing The Plaza retail and leisure complex, built in 1999-2000 on the site of the former Head Post Office, on the corner of Danestrete and the Town Square . To the rear (south) is the Holiday Inn on the site of Langley House and on the right are the flats and retail buildings on the site of the former Central Garage and bus garage. (©Historic England Archive, Damian Grady, 26717/014)

PART THREE: THE BUILDINGS OF STEVENAGE TOWN CENTRE

This section of the report will provide a detailed description of the buildings of Stevenage town centre, together with car parks, the bus station and the Town Square. It includes all the structures completed in this area, even if they have been subsequently demolished, but excludes structures proposed but not built, such as the civic centre. As the town centre features an especially large number of commercial premises and car parks, these are grouped together, for ease. However, a chronological and geographical logic applies, as the town centre was begun with the blocks of the Town Square and Queensway, along with the perimeter car parks.

The other town centre structures are arranged by location and in a very rough chronological order, starting with the Town Square, moving west to Danestrete, then down to Southgate and the south-east and south-west corners of the town centre, up St George's Way to the far north-east of the town centre, and finally the north-west and west areas, near London Road and the railway station. By ordering buildings in this way, many form natural groups on account of the planning of the town centre – for instance, the offices and entertainment buildings are predominantly on Danestrete and the public service/community buildings on Southgate.

Shopping Precinct: Queensway, Market Place, Town Square, Park Place, The Forum

Date: 1956-9 (phase I); 1962-4 (phase II); 1967-70 (phase III); 1970-6 (phase IV)

Design: For phases I-III, Stevenage Development Corporation – under Leonard Vincent as Chief Architect and after 1962 as Consultant Architect and Planner

For phase IV, various commissioned freelance architects

The pedestrian shopping precinct represents the 'core' of Stevenage new town centre, and includes Queensway, Market Place, the Town Square, Park Place and The Forum (see Figs 22 and 47). This area was built in phases (see Fig. 40), the full details of which are set out elsewhere in this report, but a summary is provided here, for clarity.

The shopping precinct was – after the roads and services – the first part of the town centre to be begun, aiming to provide necessary income for Stevenage Development Corporation (which held the freehold for all property save churches and some public buildings) and to provide an amenity for residents of the surrounding neighbourhoods, together with the wider area. Only a minority of traders were granted ground leases for the new town centre premises, including banks, Sainsbury's, Boots and Woolworth's. The leases granted by the Corporation were mostly for 21 years, though some of the major multiples who had erected their own buildings had 99-year leases of their sites. Thus the Development Corporation tried to ensure that the maximum profits would fall to it and its successors for reinvestment in the town.

Phase I

The first part of the centre to be developed, beginning in autumn 1956, was the Town Square (see Appendix I). In January 1957, construction moved to the south part of the main commercial route, Queensway, with work progressing throughout that year along the east-west Market Place, north up Queensway, and also into the remaining part of the Town Square, adjacent to the bus station.²⁶⁴ In this phase of work, construction terminated at the junction of Queensway and Park Place; archive photographs show a rural landscape beyond this point (Fig. 57, and see Fig. 22). The most northerly building on the west side of Queensway was no. 46 (originally occupied by C. J. White children's wear), while that on the east was no. 75 (Hendersons of Herts house furnishers). The latter block turned the corner to continue as an entrance to upper floor chambers ('Park Place Chambers') at 2 Park Place and five further commercial premises, 4-12 Park Place (see Fig. 43).²⁶⁵ To the immediate south, in the open area between Park Place and Market Place, was the Market Square, which accommodated a car park and, from late 1959, a weekly market (see Fig. 29).

Shopfitting began in January 1958 with 'Co-operative House', the large store at the south-east corner of the Town Square which housed the Letchworth, Hitchin and District Co-operative Society (see Fig. 28). Other shops were fitted out and their façades finished during that year and into 1959. Strictly speaking, the first shop to open – on 14 June 1958 – was Lavells confectioners and tobacconist's at 30 Queensway.²⁶⁶ However, the accolade of being the first (and largest) retail premises to open in Stevenage town centre generally goes to Co-operative House at 6-8 Town Square, which opened the same day; the building was subsequently adapted – for



Figure 57. As completed in 1959, the first phase of Stevenage's shopping precinct ended at the junction of Queensway and Park Place, and had a rural setting beyond. It was extended from this point in 1962-4. (© The Francis Frith Collection)

instance, a ground-floor restaurant was opened in 1961 – and was converted for use as a Primark in the early 2000s.²⁶⁷ Another three of the main multiple stores were opened in July 1958 (including Boots in Queensway), along with Lloyds Bank at 3-5 Town Square, with the other principal retailers following in subsequent months.²⁶⁸ For instance, Fine Fare supermarket and Davants furniture store, on the north side of the Town Square, both opened at the end of October 1958.²⁶⁹



Figure 58. A photograph of 1958 showing the laying out of the Town Square and construction of the clock tower. (With kind permission of Stevenage Museum, P3887)

The Town Square itself was in use by the end of July, but was still something of a construction site, with work on the clock tower and pool begun in August 1958 and the platform initiated around the same time (Fig. 58; see pp. 94-8).²⁷⁰ In all, 55 shops were built in 1956-8, and by the end of 1959 there were 108 shop units altogether, as well as a public house (see p. 69) (Fig. 59). These were served by a boiler house, located within the East Gate (now Eastgate) car park (see Fig. 104) – the provision of a single facility negated the need for ‘a number of chimneys, each adding its smoke to the atmosphere’, and helped meet

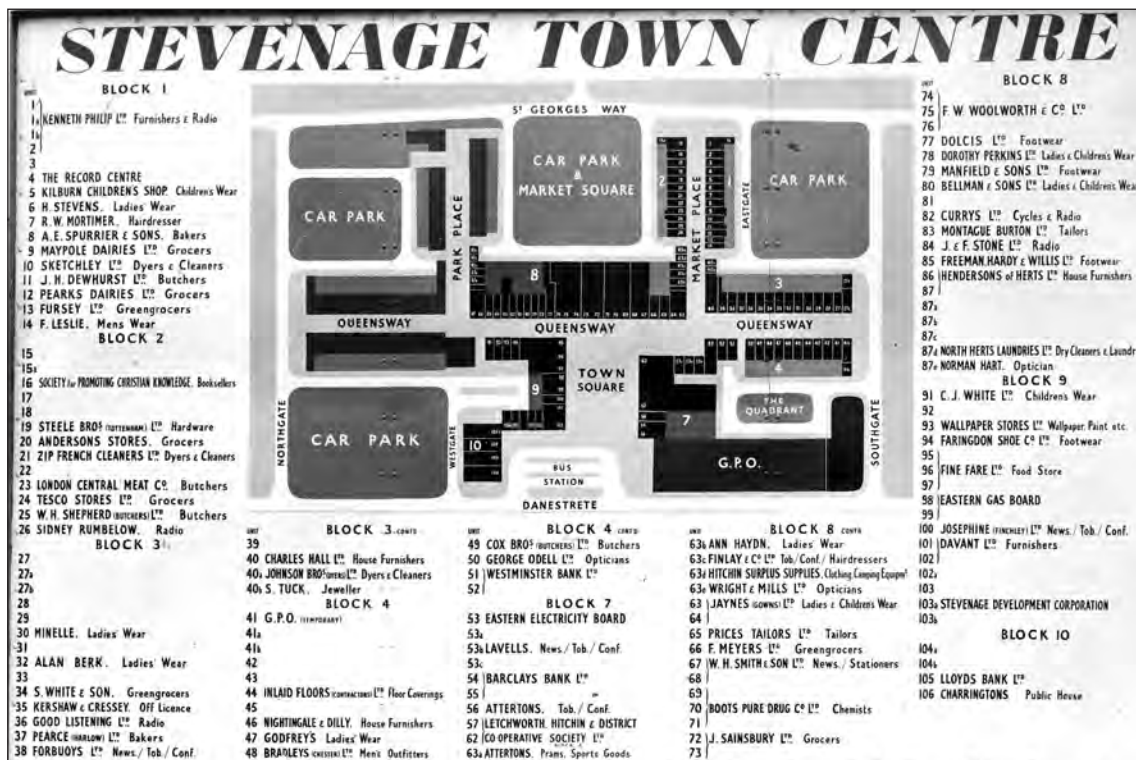


Figure 59. A map, with key, of the commercial premises in Stevenage town centre, produced in 1958. The shopping precinct was still not complete at that point, and some of the premises were not yet occupied. (With kind permission of Stevenage Museum, P6555)

the requirements of the Clean Air Act, which came into force at the end of 1956.²⁷¹ Shoppers were provided with two sets of public toilets: one in the Town Square (beneath the platform) and another in Market Square.²⁷² The first phase of the town centre was officially opened by Her Majesty the Queen on 20 April 1959, on the eve of her 33rd birthday. As part of the ceremony, the Queen unveiled a panel on the clock tower in the Town Square which commemorated the completion of the first stage of the town centre and the naming of Queensway. She also visited a number of shops, including a butchers' in Market Place.²⁷³

At this point, Stevenage town centre included, in addition to the Co-op, various multiple stores. Most of these were in block 8 of Queensway, on the east side of the Town Square (see Fig. 24) – the concept of having the major retailers in this location had been fixed since at least May 1953. They included W. H. Smith (at 39-41 Queensway), Boots (at nos 43-45), Sainsbury's (at nos 47-49) and Woolworth's (at nos 51-55) – the last mentioned was until its closure in 2008 in the most visible location of all, facing the clock tower (see Fig. 67).²⁷⁴ Close by were other chain stores including Dolcis (at 57 Queensway), Dorothy Perkins (at no. 59), Currys (at no. 67), Montague Burton's (at no. 69) and Freeman, Hardy & Willis (at no. 73). Meanwhile, on the north-east corner of the Town Square (at no. 29), opposite Co-operative House, was a branch of Fine Fare, a supermarket chain established in Welwyn Garden City in 1951 and which grew to rival companies such as Tesco and Sainsbury's before being sold and disappearing in the late 1980s (Fig. 60). There was a Tesco at 17 Market Place, backing onto the Market Square, a Rumbelows two doors away, branches of Sketchley dry cleaners and Maypole Dairies roughly opposite, an Eastern Electricity Board showroom at 60 Queensway (opposite Market Place; see Fig. 70), and an Eastern Gas Board showroom on the immediate west of Fine Fare, facing onto the Town Square (see Fig. 25). Stevenage Development Corporation pursued a lettings policy for the town centre to create and maintain what was felt to be a 'proper balance' of shop types, traders and uses.²⁷⁵

The town centre, as completed in 1958-9, also included two banks: a Lloyds in the north-west arm of the Town Square (nos 3-5; see Fig. 68) – the earliest to open, in July 1958 – and a Barclays in the south block of the Town Square (nos 2-4), opened on 29 September 1958 (the same day that *Joy Ride* was unveiled; see p. 96); slightly later the Westminster Bank opened at 24-26 Queensway, in the west range of the southern stretch near Market Place, while the other two major banking firms – Midland and National



Figure 60. The east side of Fine Fare supermarket, facing Queensway, as it existed in 1959. Fine Fare was a major feature of the Town Square area until its closure in the late 1980s. (With kind permission of Stevenage Museum, P3795)

Provincial – had opened premises by the end of 1961.²⁷⁶ These banks had opted ‘not to be grouped together but to be dispersed among the shops’, and Barclays was given the first choice of location – selecting the prominent position of 2-4 Town Square, between Co-operative House and the Head Post Office, united by a continuous canopy (Fig. 61).²⁷⁷



Figure 61. The south side of Stevenage Town Square, showing the former Barclays Bank with the former Co-operative store beyond. Originally, the canopy of Barclays linked with that of the adjacent Head Post Office (demolished in 1999). (©Historic England Archive, James O. Davies, DP275663)

The completed town centre also featured one public house – the Edward the Confessor, situated at 1 Town Square next to Lloyds, on a corner plot, facing the bus station (Fig. 62). It was the only pub in the area until the opening of the Long Ship at the base of Southgate House in 1966 (see Fig. 143) and fulfilled the vision for the town plan, which placed entertainment buildings towards the west of the centre. The pub was run by Charrington’s and was opened by A. L. Wigan of the brewery in autumn 1959, closing in 2006.²⁷⁸ The brewery’s journal described the building, which included bars and a restaurant, as being:

unusual in many ways ... It conforms with the office buildings which form three sides of a square and it records an ancient link between King Edward and the Manor of Stevenage.²⁷⁹



Figure 62. The Edward the Confessor pub at 1 Town Square, a Charrington’s house opened in autumn 1959, facing the bus station. It was until 1966 the only pub in Stevenage town centre. (Courtesy of the National Brewery Centre)

Otherwise, shops in the town centre were mainly run by a variety of local or regional firms, including hairdressers, hardware stores, grocers, butchers, clothes shops, bookshops and cafés (Fig. 63).²⁸⁰ Some of these were large and prominent, as with Davants furniture shop at 21-23 Town Square, opened in October 1958 (see Fig. 98). On its south side, this has two highly glazed upper floors supported on four slender pilotis. The building was planned and fitted out to include a first-floor restaurant but no lessee could be found, so it was adapted for use as a meeting room and later offices.

The vast majority of Stevenage’s commercial precinct is of three storeys. The only section which is of two storeys is the part of Market Place on the east – immediately beyond the pedestrian links leading through to Market Square on the north and East Gate on the south (Fig. 64, and see Fig. 83). Overall, as noted in 1959, the precinct’s upper-floor space provided 50,000 sq. ft of office accommodation (some grouped into ‘chambers’ for separate letting), plus 53 flats and maisonettes.²⁸¹ The latter – chiefly if not entirely at the south end of Queensway and in Market Place – were intended to provide housing

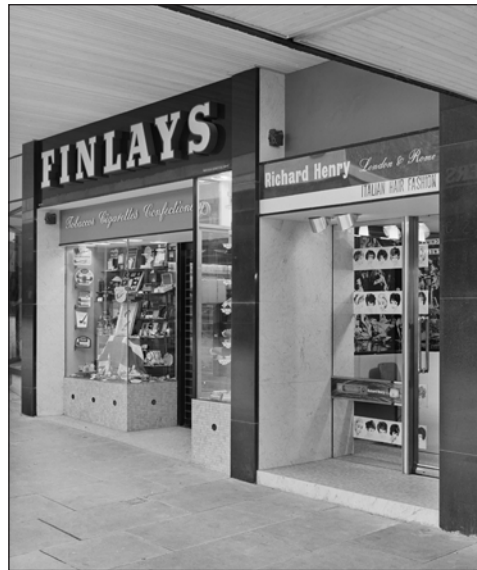


Figure 63. Shopfronts at the west end of Market Place – Finlays tobacconists and Richard Henry’s hair salon – in a photograph of April 1959. (©Harris and Sheldon Group Limited. Reproduced by kind permission)



Figure 64. A photo of 1963 showing the two-storey section of Market Place, looking east towards the church, with flats placed above the shops. The whole ensemble, including street furniture, was designed by Leonard Vincent’s team at SDC. (With kind permission of Stevenage Museum, P6857)

for families and were also seen as a means of preventing the centre ‘becoming dead outside shopping hours’.²⁸² The Corporation’s Chief Estate Officer noted that:

Around the main square and over the large shops the upper floors of the buildings are put to various commercial uses. Many shops have their own storage and staff rooms on the upper floors. Elsewhere, provision has been made for offices for professional men – solicitors, accounts, insurance – and drawing offices ... Two of the upper parts have been taken by ladies’ hairdressers and one is open as a dancing school.

Over the smaller shops in Market Place and the southern leg of Queensway, flats and maisonettes are available for the managers and assistants in the shops below ...

The living accommodation has, in nearly every case, been leased with the shop. The Corporation’s policy has been to let the shops (or in a few cases the shop sites) direct to the trader who will actually occupy the premises, and not to grant leases to investment companies.²⁸³

Service access to both shops and the floors above was from the rear of the commercial blocks, via ground-floor entrances and external staircases – as, for instance, on the east side of The Quadrant car park (Fig. 65). Even where upper-floor accommodation was let with a ground-floor shop, it had its own separate access.

External design of the commercial precinct was the work of Leonard Vincent and his team at the Development Corporation, with Raymond Gorbings as the architect in charge. Clear design principles were adopted. Unity and consistency was the major aim (see pp. 37-40); all the work undertaken on this ‘core’ area in the first phase is clearly of a piece, including the buildings designed by (or for) the multiple retailers, and the projecting canopies above the ground-floor shopfronts are a consistent feature throughout. Architects were asked to follow the grid design conceived by the Development Corporation, or their designs were altered by Vincent and his team to conform to this. The design of the town centre was based on a 3 ft 4 in. module using a 20 ft grid, with shop frontages varying from 20 ft to 120 ft, methods of construction being identical (Fig. 66).²⁸⁴

In formulating this approach to external design at Stevenage, Vincent was aware of recent developments, both in Britain



Figure 65. A photograph of 1959 showing rear access stairs to maisonettes placed above the town centre shops. (John Maltby/RIBA Collections)



Figure 66. A view of c. 1960 from the Town Square towards Queensway, showing the unified grid design used for the exterior architecture of Stevenage's shopping precinct. This was novel at the time, though has since come to be widespread. (© The Francis Frith Collection)

and further afield. The rebuilding of the 'blitzed cities', beginning with Plymouth but including Bristol and Coventry, had drawn a lukewarm response from the architectural press, notably in a series of articles in the *Architects' Journal* in late 1952. In October, D. Rigby Childs and Colin Boyne raised questions about the rebuilding of Bristol's Broadmead district, contrasting the 'haphazard variety' of high streets that have grown up over many centuries with the uniform heights and materials found in the rebuilt centre, a cheaper version of Coventry's stripped classicism in style. They felt that the attempts made to control the fascia and signage on these varied elevations had failed, a comment also made of Plymouth and later of Exeter. They wrote:

Oddly enough there is a factor common to all these buildings – or, at any rate, most of them – and that is the steel or concrete frame. This structural element in almost every instance has been disguised, or obscured, but nevertheless is there. Might not this, then, provide a solution for obtaining unity in the street? Let the City Corporation erect the structural frame – preferably on a module – for the whole, or part, of a street, and let each shop lease the number of bays it requires and fill in the floors and roof, and within the concrete frame, design its own, brazenly self-advertising façade. Then, however discordant the elements, they would be partially disciplined by the repetitive three-dimensional pattern of the frame.²⁸⁵

Stevenage is the one town centre where this stratagem was adopted, because – unlike Harlow and the later new towns – the Development Corporation’s Architect’s Department controlled the whole design.

Stevenage town centre also reflects a profound change in façade design after 1952. That year had seen the breakthrough made in curtain-walled office design with the building of Lever House in New York by Gordon Bunshaft of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill. A uniform grid (usually secondary to the main structure) across the entire façade, infilled with glass, timber or composite panels, offered a light, well-scrubbed image appropriate for a company manufacturing soap products. It was quickly adopted by other firms wanting to appear progressive. Large areas of glass, sometimes without risers or fascias, were beginning to dominate the most progressive storefronts – led in Britain by the chain of Dolcis shoe shops erected to the designs of Ellis E. Somake. Bringing these elements together to provide a minimal backdrop for the latest in display techniques was a logical next step, made possible by the rapid development of curtain walling in Britain in the years 1955-7. This progress was aided by the withdrawal of restrictions on office heights in London and the development of aluminium and glass walling techniques, in which glass companies such as Pilkington’s brought Britain to the fore. The *Architectural Review* demonstrated this rapid development in a series of articles. In May 1957 – while Stevenage town centre was under construction – it devoted a whole issue to ‘Machine-Made America’, showing how curtain-walling had swept the United States, and followed it in September by ‘Walls off the Peg’, a substantial report on British systems, some of which were already being exported to North America and Europe.²⁸⁶

In between, in August 1957, the *Architectural Review* published an article by Kenneth Browne (subsequently the magazine’s townscape editor) showing how the neutral design of Stevenage town centre made a perfect background for the bold advertising of the time. Browne wrote that ‘The recent statement by Stevenage Development Corporation that it intends to encourage outdoor advertising in its new shopping centre and the positive proposals put forward for using it to create a “live” core to the town deserve high praise.’²⁸⁷ Instead of controlling the fascias and signage, Stevenage had controlled the architectural design, and this was deemed far more successful. Stevenage Development Corporation’s comprehensive scheme for outdoor ‘advertisements’ – prepared largely by I. M. Purdy, working under Leonard Vincent – also included illuminated signs, ‘brightness zoning’ at night, directional and hanging signs under the canopies, the lettering used for names of stores, and even the placement of such lettering. This was believed to be the first of its kind in the country, and had a national impact; the Corporation’s journal noted, ‘To judge from their technical publications, professions appreciate the direct and positive approach that is being made in Stevenage to this problem.’²⁸⁸

However, variety was also carefully incorporated by Vincent and his team. Most buildings in the town centre were dominated by plain runs of glazing with exposed concrete aggregate beneath, but some in Queensway had coloured panels – variously red, blue, yellow, black and white, giving a ‘gay and eye-catching’ appearance to the town centre.²⁸⁹ As late as 1977, Nikolaus Pevsner and Bridget Cherry were able to

comment that these coloured panels were ‘an unfussy design that still appears fresh and undated’.²⁹⁰ On the upper floors of Woolworth’s facing onto the Town Square, the red-coloured panels were decorated with Ws, both at first- and second-floor level (Fig. 67, and see Fig. 98).²⁹¹ Primary colour was also introduced in some glazing – for instance, in the side windows of the flats in Market Place.

A smaller number of buildings were characterised by exposed brickwork, a notable feature of both Barclays and Lloyds banks, employed by Leonard Vincent and his team to create interest and variation to the townscape (Fig. 68, and see Fig. 61).²⁹²



Figure 67 (above). A colour postcard of around the 1960s showing the façade of Woolworth’s – beyond the Town Square and clock tower – with its decorative Ws set in red panels on the upper storeys. (Author’s collection)



Figure 68 (left). Lloyds Bank at 3-5 Town Square, opened in July 1958 in a position facing south over the bus station. The exterior of the building survives largely unaltered, and shows how Leonard Vincent and his team used exposed brick to create variety within the town centre’s architecture. (©Historic England Archive, James O. Davies, DP275664)

In the Town Square, the architects used the sloping site to introduce further variety in this highly prominent area. The canopy of Barclays was slightly higher than that of the adjacent Co-op, while opposite, on the north side of the square, Vincent and his team used the change in level to introduce a different design element: Davants, at 21/23 Town Square, has overhanging upper floors supported by four tall piers, the pedestrian route below leading to the bus station and the north-west arm of the Town Square (see Figs 98 and 168). The curtain-walled frontage of Davants' upper floors helps to introduce the design of the offices (the Head Post Office and Daneshill House), built slightly later on sites to the south-west, while its plainer side elevation – accommodating an abstract aluminium sculpture from 1964 (commissioned 1963; see pp. 39-40) – serves to introduce the north-west arm of the Town Square.

Elsewhere in the town centre, other notable details include the distinctive square-profiled, glazed balconies projecting at first-floor level above the shops at the south end of Queensway (Fig. 69, and see Fig. 35), while the two-storey Market Place has projecting first-floor bay windows on the south side and small balconies on the north, serving flats and maisonettes over the shops (see Fig. 64). Blank walls of brickwork, render or concrete aggregate, the latter incised with lines forming a grid, are a feature at the ends of blocks – as, for instance, at the junction of Queensway and Market Place (Fig. 70). Blank walls in the Town Square area were used for the display of artwork or lettering – that on the north side of Co-operative House bears a mural by the Hungarian artist Gyula Bajó (see Figs 28 and 73), that opposite originally had illuminated lettering bearing the name of Fine Fare on a mosaic ground (see Fig. 25), while the west side of Davants features the aluminium sculpture mentioned above.



Figure 69. The buildings in the south part of Queensway were designed with residential accommodation placed above the shops, and featured first-floor glass-edged balconies, which survive well. (©Historic England Archive, James O. Davies, DP275696)



Figure 70. Variety in the design of Stevenage town centre was created by the use of blank walls such as this – faced with concrete aggregate and incised with lines forming a grid. It is opposite the junction of Queensway and Market Place, and is seen here in a photo of 1959. (With kind permission of Stevenage Museum, P3799)

As this indicates, the range of materials employed in the town centre work is varied, also including steel and stone.

Throughout the commercial core of the town centre, Vincent and his team made use of Crittall steel windows. A Crittalls advertisement of 1959, quoting Vincent, stated proudly that:

Stevenage new town is remarkable for many things and perhaps not least for the fact that Crittall windows are installed in over half the buildings in the area. Almost all the town centre buildings, half the factories in the industrial area and most of the houses in the town ... have Crittall windows. And they are windows that have been *positively rustproofed* by the hot-dip galvanizing process, which means less maintenance costs.²⁹³

There was a deliberate effort to include interest in the layout. This is not simply linear; instead, the pedestrian ways are broken up by changes of plane – most notably, the dog-leg where Queensway joins Market Place and, further north, where it joins Park Place (see Figs 22 and 47) – and featured single-storey piered ‘cross canopies’, traversing the pedestrian routes, joining together the canopies of the parallel ranges of commercial premises. Of these cross canopies, which mimicked those of developments including the Lijnbaan, the Development Corporation noted in 1958 that they ‘meet a real need in providing shelter for shoppers in wet weather’ (Figs 71-72).²⁹⁴ The needs of pedestrians were carefully considered in other ways; there were, for instance, ‘no kerbs to hamper prams or pedestrians’, a point noted by a promotional film in July 1959.²⁹⁵ Another aim was the creation of a sense of intimacy. Tom Hampson of the Development Corporation wrote that this ‘feeling of intimacy and enclosure as opposed to one of coldness and draughtiness’ was achieved by ‘a careful relation of heights of buildings to widths of spaces opposite’, while the Corporation’s landscape architect Gordon Patterson spoke about the interplay of ‘constricted’ areas and ‘broader openings’, which helped to avoid dullness.²⁹⁶ The cross canopies had a major part to play here.

For a few key companies, building stores in prominent locations, the architecture was designed by the firms’ in-house staff or consultants, and then modified where necessary by Vincent and his team. This was the case, for example, with Co-operative House – the ‘Stevenage Super Store’ on the Town Square.²⁹⁷ As was stated in the Corporation’s journal in 1955, all multiple stores were built under a common contract, ‘to secure uniformity in design and construction’.²⁹⁸ As a consequence, it is difficult to tell these buildings apart. An advertisement of 1959 noted that the Co-op – visited by Prime Minister Harold Macmillan in August that year – was ‘remarkable for its architectural style embodying the spirit of the New Stevenage’, adding that it was ‘regarded as one of the outstanding stores in the co-operative movement and has been the subject of praise from all parts of the country’.²⁹⁹ On its north elevation, facing the Town Square, the Co-op features a colourful tiled mural, 27 ft by 20 ft (Fig. 73, and see Fig. 28). This is the work of Hungarian-born Gyula Bajjo or Bajó, in-house artist with the Co-operative Wholesale Society Architects’ Department, and symbolises the ‘spirit and activities of the Co-operative Movement’, showing figures at work.³⁰⁰ As Lynn Pearson has noted, the mural incorporates ‘Stevenage-related



Figure 71. The cross canopies at the Lijnbaan in Rotterdam, built 1952-3, appear to have provided the direct design inspiration for those in Stevenage town centre. (Jac. de Nijs, National Archives of the Netherlands/Fotocollectie Anefo)



Figure 72. A cross canopy in Market Place, Stevenage, built as part of the first phase works in 1956-9. These were provided to offer shoppers protection from the weather and to introduce interest to the town centre's design. This is one of the few surviving examples. (©Historic England Archive, Patricia Payne, DP278107)



Figure 73. The coloured tiled mural of 1957-8 by artist Gyula Bajó, on the north face of Co-operative House in the Town Square (now Primark). It symbolises the ‘spirit and activities of the Co-operative Movement’. (© Elain Harwood)

images of buildings into a composition based on romanticised figures representing industry, commerce, transport and agriculture’.³⁰¹ It is the earliest of the four major co-op murals of the 1950s and ‘60s, the others being in Ipswich, Hull and Scunthorpe (all of 1963).³⁰²

As to the shopfronts themselves, the Development Corporation made less attempt to assert control. Leonard Vincent wrote that ‘canopies emphasise and unify the architecture in a dramatic manner, so that there is less need to control shopfronts. Shopfronts have, within reason, been allowed freedom, and generally a high standard has been achieved’ (see Figs 57 and 63).³⁰³ There was even greater independence of design with regard to shop interiors. Victor Stallabrass, Chief Estate Officer of the Corporation, commented that:

It was decided at the outset that the work of the main contractor must be kept as straightforward as possible, so as to minimise the number of variations once construction had begun. For this reason, all the internal finishes of the shops were left to the tenants, who were thus free to design these to meet their individual needs.³⁰⁴

Larger shops were carefully planned so they fitted in with the general scheme, while smaller shops were designed to 'three or four standard sizes so that sufficient choice was given for lessees in the various trades'.³⁰⁵ Throughout, the novel concept of pedestrianisation had to be followed; this meant that every shop had to have a customer entrance from a pedestrian way, but also a goods entrance from a service road at the rear. This practical planning, taking account of access, led to the placing of large retail units at the corners of blocks.³⁰⁶

Phase II

From at least the late 1950s, there had been detailed plans for the expansion of Stevenage's commercial core to the north. The Development Corporation's 'comprehensive layout plan' of December 1959, for instance, shows blocks to the north of those completed in 1958-9, running up to meet the planned civic buildings ('The Forum'), and also blocks on an east-west axis in Park Place and at the far north, creating a pedestrian route on the south side of The Forum (see Fig. 21). The popularity of the town centre as completed in 1959 had confirmed that further commercial premises were urgently required. Design work for 'Phase II' was undertaken in February and March 1961 by Leonard Vincent and his team; it is notable that detailed plans for much of this northern expansion survive, in the collections of The National Archives.³⁰⁷ A document of this time stated that: 'The layout of this Proposal follows the main principles of the First Stage and has been carefully related to the arrangement and levels of the existing pedestrian ways and shopping blocks'.³⁰⁸ The Ministry of Housing and Local Government advanced the money for this scheme in May 1961, and site work began around that time, focusing on the area at the junction of Queensway and Park Place (see Fig. 41).³⁰⁹

As has been discussed earlier in this report, this expansion was undertaken in two main stages – an approach formulated in autumn 1961 and amended in mid-1962, due to government economies and planned expansion of Stevenage (see p. 47-50).³¹⁰ Construction of the first part of Phase II was begun in August 1962 and completed in 1964 (see Fig. 40).³¹¹ Work involved the extension of Queensway to the north by the addition of six extra retail premises plus a restaurant on the ground floor (part of the new 'block 11'), reaching a glazed, two-storey bridge, facing an open area which became known as 'Littlewoods Square' (see Fig. 42).³¹² The upper floors in the new Queensway block were commercial in nature, providing additional shop space (such as storage, showrooms and staff areas) plus also a small number of offices. In a letter of April 1961, it had been noted that letting the upper floors as part of the retail premises, rather than separately, helped the Development Corporation avoid 'the untidy appearance which we have noted on similar types of shops in Crawley'.³¹³

As planned in 1961, work was then to proceed northwards, but instead this element of the development was postponed in favour of extension on the east. From 1963, as the second part of Phase II, the existing work on the south side of Park Place (part of 'block 8') was extended to meet St George's Way on the east (as 'block 14'), while properties were built for the first time on the north side of Park Place ('block 13').³¹⁴ As in the first phase of works, exterior canopies and single-storey covered 'links' or cross canopies afforded shoppers 'all-weather protection'.³¹⁵

The largest and most prominent building of these years was the new Littlewoods department store, with its main frontage at 77-79 Queensway and a side elevation with 'look through' facing Park Place (see Fig. 42).³¹⁶ Littlewoods was opened on 17 October 1963 by Councillor Ken Ellis, Chairman of Stevenage Urban District Council. The press published an artist's impression of the new store, along with a description:

The imposing new three-storey building ... is of 410,875 cu. ft. The sales area, on the ground floor, will cover 8,835 sq. ft., with a further 1,280 sq. ft. of space for an 88-seater self-service cafeteria which will include quick grill service ... Everything will be freshly cooked, quickly for the customer who orders it.³¹⁷

The cafeteria and sales space was on the ground floor, stock rooms on the first floor, and staff rooms and a kitchen on the second floor.³¹⁸ The remaining shops in this part of the Queensway extension were opened in November and December 1963, in time for Christmas.



Figure 74. The two-storey glass bridge in Queensway, constructed as part of the shopping precinct extension of 1962-4. This originally included a Chinese restaurant on the first floor and a social club (the Labour headquarters) above. (©Historic England Archive, Patricia Payne, DP278104)

Other notable features of this phase of the town centre scheme were the ‘bridge restaurant’ and ‘bridge offices’ on separate levels of the steel and glass structure crossing Queensway (Fig. 74).³¹⁹ The former – on the first floor, with a large dining room and small dance floor – was finally opened as a Chinese restaurant (‘Blossom Garden’) in May 1964, after a delay while catering equipment was supplied and fitted.³²⁰ The latter, above, became the Clarion Club, the social headquarters of Stevenage Labour Party, opened unofficially on 17 December 1963 and officially (by George Brown, Labour’s Deputy Leader) in February 1964 – before being abruptly closed in February 1965 by the leaseholders, Ruobal Ltd, following a series of burglaries.³²¹ As access to the restaurant was gained in part via a ground-floor shop, this could not be let along with the others, and ‘in order to avoid an unsightly gap in the shopping frontage’, the Development Corporation itself fitted a shopfront there.³²²

The 22 shops with 20,000 sq. ft of office space above in Park Place – comprising the second stage of Phase II – were begun in 1963 and completed by the end of 1964.³²³ These featured ‘rather larger standard units’, designed to accommodate those companies who had booked sites in the northern quarter of the town, at The Forum, only to find this scheme postponed to a later phase of work.³²⁴ Some of the two floors above the ground-floor retail premises in Park Place were designed for commercial use and others as flats and maisonettes.

In design, the Park Place blocks were similar but simpler and plainer than the earlier work of Queensway, but retained the general design ethos (see Fig. 43); for instance, they had canopies above the ground floor and were of three storeys, with opaque panels beneath the windows. Open pedestrian ‘through ways’ linked this area with the Market Square to the south and the Marsh Gate car park to the north, while single-storey cross canopies – of the type used in the phase one work – were used to divide Park Place into three segments. There were four in all: one at the east end, facing St George’s Way; another running between 17 and 26 Park Place; a double canopy at the junction of Park Place and the pedestrian through-ways to north and south; and a canopy at the west end, by Littlewoods (see Fig. 47).³²⁵ As with the street end of Market Place and the south of Queensway, the easternmost cross canopy continued as covered shelters on the east façade of the ranges facing St George’s Way. Additionally, the 1960s work saw the introduction of a cross canopy in Queensway, marking the north point of the 1956-9 work.

The Littlewoods block on the corner – closed in c. 2002, when all Littlewoods stores were sold nationally, and now a discount store – has a somewhat austere appearance on account of its exterior of exposed concrete aggregate. The store has generous ground-floor display windows but only a narrow run of clerestory lights on the first floor (where the stock rooms were located) and a larger window on the south side, lighting the area used as staff rooms. It was ‘specially designed for Littlewoods’ Ltd’, presumably by their own architects – an approach reflected by the absence of detail for this building on surviving Development Corporation plans.³²⁶

In contrast, the extension of Queensway to the immediate west is difficult to tell apart from the 1950s work (‘block 9’) it adjoins (Fig. 75). It has the same continuous glazing, with yellow-coloured panels beneath the second-floor windows and grey



Figure 75. View from Littlewoods Square towards the west block of Queensway. The section with the yellow-coloured second-floor panels dates from 1962-4, and adjoins the 1950s work to the south. The entrance to the Westgate shopping centre was added in c. 1988. (©Historic England Archive, James O. Davies, DP275705)

beneath those on the first floor. This extended range included a pedestrian way (named a ‘way-through’ on plans) linking Queensway with what was originally the Westgate car park at the rear; opening off the north side of this was a staircase accessing the offices above the shops.³²⁷ At the end of the new block – at 58-60 Queensway, facing east – was placed a blank area of wall bearing abstract decoration formed of jet black tilework. The steel and glass bridge, projecting to the east from this, rests on pillars, and is a larger and more architecturally developed version of the single-storey cross canopies found throughout the commercial core.

Phase III

The next programme of work, ‘Phase III’ of the commercial development, was due to be begun in early 1963, and would have included the completion of the northern area of Queensway, along with the civic centre at The Forum. However, the timescales were altered pending consideration of plans for expanding Stevenage (see p. 53). The Corporation decided that it required flexibility regarding the future development of the northern area of the town centre as a whole, including the proposed site for the town hall, in order to allow ‘sufficient room for the types of shops which a much bigger town would need and could probably attract’.³²⁸ The future of this area was still unclear in late 1965, and there was a further delay following a public local inquiry on the 1966 Master Plan.³²⁹

Finally, in 1967, development went ahead, with tenders received and site work being initiated that year.³³⁰ Completed in 1969-70, ‘Phase III’ involved the construction of

parallel shopping parades extending northwards from the two-storey bridge ('block 11' on the west and 'block 12' on the east) (Fig. 76, and see Figs 40 and 47). The detailed plans of these had been produced in early 1961 by Leonard Vincent and his team at the Development Corporation, along with the work to the immediate south.³³¹ As laid out in these drawings, there were, in all, 14 shop premises on the west side and eight on the east; the latter were far larger in size and backed onto their own yards. Both blocks had further commercial space on first- and second-floor levels. This new part of Queensway featured three single-storey cross canopies supported by slender piers, breaking up the area between the two-storey bridge and The Forum into three roughly equal parts (see Figs 47-9 and Fig. 85).³³²



Figure 76. The north part of Queensway under construction in 1969, looking south towards the two-storey bridge. (With kind permission of Stevenage Museum, P11188)

External design – overseen by Vincent in his capacity as Consultant Architect and Planner to the Corporation – followed the ethos of the earlier work, being of three storeys with projecting first-floor canopies above shop windows; these descended in height from south to north, in line with the slope of the site.³³³ The glazing of the upper floors was similar to the rest of Queensway, but the panels beneath the windows were clad in slate, and strong vertical elements were incorporated between the glazing, faced with concrete aggregate; these rose upwards in places to form a parapet (see Fig. 91). The east block extended slightly further north than that on the west, allowing the latter to front an open space with the character of a square. There were additional retail units on the north return of each block (with offices above), forming the start of the new Forum pedestrian way; occupants of these included Hendales estate agents at 20 The Forum and W. Austin & Son funeral directors at 24 The Forum.³³⁴

This extended area of Queensway also featured various national retailers, drawn to Stevenage by the higher population figures agreed at this time. In the new east block, these included Sainsbury's (at nos 89-91) – opened on 7 October 1969, when the earlier and smaller Sainsbury's by the Town Square closed; this new store was briefly the largest Sainsbury's trading in the country, with a sales area of 13,800 sq. ft, before being surpassed by the slightly larger branch opened in Colchester the following week.³³⁵ In the same block, at 85 Queensway, was Marks and Spencer's, opened in April 1970 (and closed in 2015) (Fig. 77). Both Sainsbury's and Marks and Spencer's were planned for future adaptation, if required, which would enable them to link to a planned multi-storey car park on Marsh Gate to the rear.³³⁶ Other new arrivals of this time, opened in 1969-70, were Mothercare, the Times furnishing company, Taylors



Figure 77. Photo of 1998 showing the Marks and Spencer's store in the north part of Queensway. This was opened in 1970 and closed in 2015. (Courtesy of K. Morrison)

Ltd and Timothy Whites; there were around 25 new retailers in the area, while the Littlewoods premises of 1962-3 to the south were extended.³³⁷ A section of the upper floors over the standard units was designed as office accommodation.

Phase IV

In the early to mid-1970s, Stevenage's commercial core was extended yet again (as 'Phase IV'), with buildings closing the northern end of the development, along the east-west pedestrian way named The Forum (see Fig. 40). Due to a change in official policy by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, the Development Corporation had, reluctantly, to pass the work to private developers, and the range of architects working on Stevenage town centre broadened from this point.³³⁸ David Rixson of Vincent & Gorbing, unofficial deputy to Leonard Vincent in his consultancy work to the Development Corporation, has commented that the town centre buildings designed by external agencies produced an architecture that was 'less disciplined'.³³⁹

Site works began in late 1969, and in July 1970 the Development Corporation advertised a site at the north-east corner of the town centre for a supermarket, cinema and petrol station.³⁴⁰ The successful tenders came, respectively, from Tesco, Associated British Cinemas (ABC) and National. The cinema was a major new facility for the new town, and came around a decade after discussions had broken down regarding construction of a cinema on the site subsequently developed as the Mecca dance hall. This large new commercial block was built between July 1971 and autumn 1973 to designs by Inskip & Witzynski. The cinema was adjacent to St George's Way and the swimming pool on the east, while in a three-storey range to the west of this was the Tesco, with 40,000 sq. ft of retail space and offices above (Figs 78-79).³⁴¹ Plans to link the building to a new multi-storey car park at Marsh Gate via a high-level bridge – providing direct disabled access to the cinema – were in hand in 1969-72 but were ultimately abandoned, causing some controversy (see p. 107).³⁴² The cinema, featuring a bar and two small auditoria (one seating 400; the other 200) set over a ground-floor foyer, opened on 18 November 1973 with screenings of *Jesus Christ, Superstar* and *Live and Let Die*. It later became part of the Cannon Group, being renamed the Cannon in February 1987, and finally closed in April 1994.³⁴³ The Tesco moved to a new site at the west end of The Forum in 1988 (see Figs 53-4).



Figure 78. This block in the east part of The Forum, built in 1971-3, contained a Tesco supermarket with offices above. Visible in this photo, taken in 1989, are the original cross canopies. A year before this, the Tesco had closed and moved to a new, larger store at the west end of The Forum. (With kind permission of Stevenage Museum, PP1189)



Figure 79. The east part of the 1971-3 block on The Forum contained an ABC cinema. This became part of the Cannon group in 1987, and closed in 1994, at which point the whole block was demolished. Its site is now occupied by a surface car park. (With kind permission of Stevenage Museum, PP1192)

Once this block had been completed, work began on further commercial premises in The Forum. These comprised: a three-storey block (nos 28-38 The Forum) facing the Tesco development on the south, continuing the line of the phase three work; and a block to the west, running up towards the government offices at the north end of Danestrete. The east block contained the job centre and, by at least the late 1980s, a branch of Nationwide (Fig. 80).³⁴⁴ Until around c. 1990, it was joined to the Tesco/cinema block opposite by piersed cross canopies of precisely the same type built in the commercial core to the south. One of these closed The Forum at its east end, as in Park Place and Market Place to the south (see Figs 49 and 79).

The commercial premises to the west were divided from the Tesco block by a surface car park and an area resembling an open square. This featured an abstract fibreglass sculpture designed by the artist José de Alberdi and unveiled in March 1972 at the north end of Queensway (see Figs. 55 and 80).³⁴⁵ On the north side of the west section of The Forum was a branch of C&A Modes Ltd, opened

Figure 80. The mid-1970s block at the south-east corner of The Forum, in a photograph of 1998, with the sculpture by José de Alberdi moved to this position in the 1990s. The cross canopies shown in Figs 78-79 had been removed by this point. (Courtesy of K. Morrison)



in 1975 (Fig. 81; compare Fig. 92). This store was the work of Manchester-based architects Leach, Rhodes & Walker, who designed a number of C&A premises.³⁴⁶ The blocky structure was built with a concrete frame faced in exposed aggregate panels, with shop windows on ground- and first-floor levels (those on the upper floor were removed or covered over in c. 1990). The incised lines in the aggregate continued the design theme set by the first phase work of 1956-9. On the adjacent site to the west, at 7 The Forum, and of a similar design (though with windows on the first and second floors), even larger premises were built as a British Home Stores (BHS) department store, opened in 1976 (Fig. 82). The C&A closed in 2000, while BHS closed in 2016. Originally, both stores were linked to the premises on the south side of The Forum by single-storey cross canopies of the type found throughout the earlier pedestrian ways (see Fig. 49). A photograph published in 1980 shows three of these, and at this date the C&A does not appear to have had separate canopies above the ground floor of its main (south) façade.³⁴⁷ The cross canopies were probably removed at the same time as the others in the northern part of the town centre, in c. 1990, and the elevations of the C&A presumably altered at the same time.



Figure 81. View of 1998 showing the C&A in The Forum, with the BHS beyond. These stores were opened in 1975 and 1976 respectively. Originally, as with the 1970s blocks to the east, there were cross canopies in this area. (Courtesy of K. Morrison)



Figure 82. The BHS store in The Forum viewed from the south-west in 2020. The store closed in 2016. (©Historic England Archive, James O. Davies, DP275715)

Opposite BHS, on the south side of The Forum, was a commercial block including nine shops with the seven-storey, brick-faced Grampian Hotel rising above, entered from the north-west corner (see Figs 50 and 52). The hotel was begun in 1970 and opened in February 1973, to designs by Archer Boxer Partners.³⁴⁸ Run by a firm named Enterprise Hotels, it was considered a ‘luxury’ amenity, built for ‘discerning visitors to Stevenage’.³⁴⁹ The hotel boasted 100 bedrooms – all with a private bathroom, television, telephone and morning call system – while the first-floor area included the hotel reception, cocktail bar, grill room and a 350-person banqueting or ballroom suite, all lit by windows running along the north and west sides. There was a licensed snack bar on the ground floor, available for lunches. The building had become the Hertford Park Hotel by the 1990s, and is now the Ibis. Across the way, at the north-west corner of the town centre, is the Tesco supermarket development of 1987-8, designed by Vincent & Goring (see Figs 53-4). Originally, the low block of this date adjoining the BHS was occupied by shops including Debenhams and Peacocks, but this has since been incorporated as part of the Tesco.

Level of Survival

It is impossible in a report of this scope to document the many changes undertaken to the commercial core of Stevenage town centre, including the coming and going of various retail firms, alterations to the interiors of shop premises and replacement of paving and lighting. In terms of the original design concept, the work of the first phase (1956-9) survives extremely well, reflecting its designation as a conservation area in 1988 (with the boundary amended in 2010). Remaining features include timber-faced canopies throughout the town centre area, decorative aggregate panels and exterior decoration (such as the large mural on Co-operative House, currently not on the statutory list; see Fig. 73), some street furniture (including bicycle ‘parks’), and some below-canopy hanging signs. The majority of the precinct’s steel-framed, pivot-opening Crittall windows survive – though windows seem to have been entirely replaced where they lit residential rather than commercial premises, in Market Place and the south part of Queensway. However, on these residential upper floors the original metal and glass-fronted balconies remain (Fig. 83, and see Fig. 69).



Figure 83. Market Place today, looking north-west towards Queensway. Original features of this pedestrian way include the metal-railed balconies to the first-floor flats. (©Historic England Archive, James O. Davies, DP275698)

Also surviving are most of the coloured panels in the upper floors of commercial premises in Queensway, included to provide a sense of variety and interest – for instance, the yellow panels of the former Dolcis at 57 Queensway are still there, as are the black and white panels to the north and (now in a poor condition) the red panels above the former W. H. Smith's (now Superdrug) (see Fig. 101).³⁵⁰ The decorative Ws formerly on the façade of Woolworth's have been removed, and the yellow and blue panels originally above Boots have in more recent years been replaced entirely in blue (see Fig. 24). Throughout the central area, there are also smaller surviving details from the 1950s work – including, for instance, the roundels beneath the first-floor windows of Lloyds Bank, bearing the company's logo, the black horse (see Fig. 68).

As has been noted, the original town centre scheme included a fairly high number of single-storey covered cross canopies or 'links' in the pedestrian ways, supported on slender piers, providing both shelter and points of visual interest. These were a unifying feature, used in all the phases of work undertaken between 1956 and the mid-1970s (Figs 84-85, and see Figs 47-9). In the earliest phase of the 'core', they were as follows. There were three cross canopies in the south section of Queensway – one at the south end, forming a bridge between canopied shelters on the Southgate elevations of the adjacent blocks (which remain); a double cross canopy by the pedestrian through-way to The Quadrant car park (between 24 and 26 Queensway) (see Fig. 30); and a cross canopy at the junction with Market Place (see Fig. 70).³⁵¹ Three cross canopies were also included in Market Place, comprising: one at the east end (extending round to the east elevation of the blocks) (see Fig. 36); one extending south from no. 21; and one by the through-way to East Gate car park (Fig. 86). There was also a cross canopy on the north of the junction of Queensway and Market Place (see Fig. 70), and two more by the Town Square – one extending from the Co-op towards W. H. Smith's (Fig. 87) and another from Fine Fare to Woolworth's, continuing the canopies on the south and north sides of the Town Square (see Fig. 98).³⁵²

Of these cross canopies, the sole survivors today are the three in Market Place. The other canopies were taken away at different points. Judging by the evidence of aerial photographs, the canopy by Fine Fare and that added to the north in the early 1960s, joining 70 and 50/52 Queensway, were removed in the 1980s.³⁵³ Those in the sections of Queensway to the south of the Town Square – including the canopy adjacent to the Co-op – were apparently taken away as part of public realm works undertaken in 2005-6, without planning permission, due to poor condition; a film and photos show that they were still present in Queensway in 2004 (Fig. 88).³⁵⁴ The removal of so many of these canopies is a cause for regret; it would be good to see a programme of sympathetic replacement, and protection and preservation of those that remain in Market Place.

As noted above, shopfronts in the town centre were never given particular emphasis by the Development Corporation, and there have naturally been many changes in these areas. In his survey of Stevenage town centre of 1999, Tony Calladine stated that the majority of shopfronts in the core had, even by that time, been completely replaced, though a number did survive.³⁵⁵ Typical materials used included black



Figure 84. Photograph of 1959 showing the cross canopy at the south end of Queensway. This seems to have been removed in 2005-6, along with others in the area. (John Maltby/RIBA Collections)



Figure 85. Cross canopies were a unifying feature of all phases of Stevenage's shopping precinct, as built between 1956 and 1976. This photograph shows the cross canopies that formerly existed in the north part of Queensway, built 1967-70. These were removed around 1990. (With kind permission of Stevenage Museum, PP11145)



Figure 86. Three cross canopies were built in Market Place, all of which survive. This photograph shows the pedestrian way in c. 1960. (© The Francis Frith Collection)



Figure 87. A photograph of 1998 showing the cross canopy still intact on the south side of the Town Square, running from Co-operative House to W. H. Smith's. This seems to have been removed as part of public realm works in 2005-6, along with others in the area. (Courtesy of K. Morrison)

granite, green and Travertine marble, aluminium (notably for window frames), mosaic tiles and timber – which is a useful pointer when identifying survivals. The exterior changes to the former Fine Fare (closed in the late 1980s, subsequently becoming Gateway supermarket, Somerfield, QD and, in 2017, Starbucks) are perhaps especially noteworthy, and regrettable – alterations have occurred on both the south and east sides, where the original display windows and mosaic facing have been entirely replaced (see Fig. 101). This important town centre building formerly had a first-floor self-service café, served by a balcony on the south side, remembered by many locals, and had an interesting series of display windows on the east (see Fig. 60).³⁵⁶ In other cases, however, the premises in this area are still occupied by the same companies – as with Boots in Queensway, for example.



Figure 88. A photograph of 2004 showing the cross canopies in the south part of Queensway, in poor condition. They were removed shortly afterwards. (© Elain Harwood)

At the time of writing, an active programme of alteration is being carried out on the north side of the Town Square, at numbers 21-29, including the former Davants (later Hardy's; latterly McDonalds) and Fine Fare premises, which form part of the conservation area. Approved in April 2019 (with amendments approved January 2020), this programme of work involves an internal reworking for mixed retail, restaurant and office use, the creation of a communal lobby at no. 25 (originally the newsagents Josephine), and external refurbishment – including new curtain walling, new aluminium windows, a replacement of the canopy at no. 23 (the former Davants) with a modern, internally-lit equivalent, the replacement of the concrete cladding at nos 27-29 (the former Fine Fare), and the refurbishment of the balcony at the same premises.³⁵⁷ This takes in both the main south elevation of the block and the side frontages to west and east. Until this programme of work was commenced, the façades of nos 21-29 were largely original, at least above ground-floor level, although – as has been noted – the signage and mosaic facing of the former Fine Fare were removed some time ago.³⁵⁸

A larger scheme of regeneration proposed for the town centre may have an even more radical impact on this area. Structures proposed for demolition include the elevated platform in the Town Square, the Barclays to its south (at 2 Town Square) and numbers 1-19 Town Square (including the former Edward the Confessor pub and Lloyds Bank) – all part of the original phase of work undertaken in 1956-9 and, except for the north-west arm of the Town Square, all included within the Town Centre Conservation Area.³⁵⁹ The same programme of work proposes redevelopment of the bus station, a core feature of the town centre as conceived and built, and demolition of Daneshill House and the Mecca dance hall, along with Swingate House. In the place of these structures are proposed a 'public services hub' and a series of tall buildings, of five to ten storeys.

The second phase of work on the shopping precinct (1962-4) – comprising the two-storey bridge in Queensway, and the area to its immediate south and east – survived largely intact until the mid-2010s. In 2016, permission was granted for a programme of heavy remodelling and extension of much of the Park Place premises. Designed by Gardner Stewart Architects, work was undertaken in 2017-18 – beginning with the block on the south (14-38 Park Place), and then the block on the north (nos 5-29). The reworked three-storey premises were heightened by an additional three storeys; this extra accommodation provides a variety of studio, one-bedroom and two-bedroom flats. The blocks at the St George's Way (east) end are broader than the rest, forming 'pavilions' (Figs 89-90). Overall, the work is of a completely different scale and character to the buildings of 1963-4. There is no obvious trace of the original fabric remaining. Sadly, as part of this work and refurbishment of Littlewoods Square, original cross canopies were removed – those at the east and west ends of Park Place were taken down as recently as 2017. The other two cross canopies in Park Place – a double canopy at the junction with the pedestrian through-ways to north and south, and one running between 17 and 26 Park Place – were removed in the 1990s.³⁶⁰

Thankfully, however, enough survives on the south and north sides of Park Place (including the former Littlewoods and the shops to its east) to provide context and



Figure 89. Recent redevelopment in Stevenage town centre has included the rebuilding of most of Park Place, work undertaken in 2017-18. This photograph shows the area from above. As can be seen, the former three-storey blocks have been increased in height to match that of the adjacent multi-storey car park. (©Historic England Archive, Damian Grady, 33749/029)



Figure 90. A photograph showing the heavily remodelled Park Place blocks (2017-18) from the east. Also visible are William Mitchell's relief sculptures of 1973, decorating the subway built at that time as part of the alteration of St George's Way as a dual carriageway. (©Historic England Archive, Patricia Payne, DP278119)

a sense of original massing (see Figs 42-3). The steel and glass bridge also survives well, as does the extension block at 48-60 Queensway, with its coloured panels on the upper floors and sculptural black tilework – though the ground-floor through-way is now one of the entrances to the Westgate shopping centre (opened in 1988) (see Figs 74-5).

Of the phase three work to the north (1967-70), the major physical change has been the removal of the cross canopies and the construction on the west of a large, continuous 'arcade', in place of the original canopies above the shopfronts (Fig. 91, and see Fig. 165; compare Figs 48 and 85). This has a glazed arched roof supported by white metal piers; it is highly intrusive, disguises both the shopfronts and much of the block above, and has no precedent within Stevenage town centre.³⁶¹ This feature seems to have been added around the early 1990s, following the construction of the Westgate shopping centre to the rear.³⁶² Much more recent is an application approved in December 2018 concerning 85-103 Queensway (on the east), extending from the former Marks & Spencer's up to The Forum, including the range facing north. This proposes partial demolition of the existing buildings to allow the erection of new residential blocks – of some height at the south end of the redevelopment area – along with 'enhancements' to shopfronts and replacement canopies.



Figure 91. To date, the principal alteration to the north part of Queensway, built in 1967-70, has been the replacement of the canopies with a glazed arcade – work seemingly undertaken in c. 1990, following the opening of the Westgate shopping centre. (©Historic England Archive, James O. Davies, DP275707)

In terms of changes to the phase four work (1970-76), a glass canopy similar to that on the west side of Queensway (and those of the Forum Centre) has been added to the three-storey commercial block at the far east of The Forum – probably in the early to mid-1990s, when the Tesco and cinema block opposite was demolished and the piered cross canopies in this area were removed. The site of the former block is now occupied by a surface car park, on the immediate east of the mid-1990s multi-purpose complex named the Forum Centre (see Fig. 55). It provides a sorry contrast to what might have been built here as a focal point of the town centre – the town hall and other municipal buildings. The materials of the modern structure, predominantly red brick with tilework facing, are at odds with those of the Development Corporation’s commercial work to the south. In the area to the west, the former C&A and BHS premises survive (Fig. 92), as does the opposite block containing the hotel, but again the cross canopies have been removed, seemingly in the first half of the 1990s (they had gone by 1998, see Fig. 81). The formerly open through-way between the Queensway block completed in 1970 and the Grampian



Figure 92. Photograph of 2020 showing the former C&A premises (now occupied by New Look), with the former BHS store beyond (to the left) and part of the 1990s Forum Centre on the right. (©Historic England Archive, Patricia Payne, DP278100)

Hotel block of 1970-3 was altered as an entrance to the Westgate Centre in the late 1980s. In 2019, an application submitted to Stevenage Borough Council proposed partial demolition of the former BHS store and replacement with an 11-storey block, comprising a ground-floor retail area and around 250 flats above.³⁶³ In October 2020, the Council deferred making a decision about the scheme to a future meeting.³⁶⁴

The Town Square (including the clock tower and platform)

Date: 1957-8

Design: Stevenage Development Corporation – under Chief Architect Leonard Vincent

This section focuses on the structures within the Town Square itself. The commercial blocks surrounding it having been described above – in brief, these comprised multiple stores on the east (block 8, including Woolworth's and Boots), Co-operative House and Barclays on the south (block 7), Fine Fare supermarket, the gas showroom, Josephine's newsagents and Davants on the north (block 9), and firms such as Lloyds Bank in the north-west arm of the Town Square (block 10), along with the town centre's earliest and most prominent public house, the Edward the Confessor, and temporary offices of the Stevenage Development Corporation (in use until 1961).³⁶⁵

By at least summer 1956, there was a clear design concept for the Town Square, focusing around a clock tower set in a raised pool and an adjacent elevated platform or podium, accessed by steps and intended for use as an 'open-air café'.³⁶⁶ Models of the Town Square scheme were produced that year (see Fig. 23),³⁶⁷ with more detailed sketches and perspective views prepared in early 1957, along with additional models (Fig. 93); notably, many of these survive, in the uncatalogued collections of Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies.³⁶⁸ Drawings show the clock tower and platform in relation to each other (Fig. 94), while an open, paved area to the other (west) side of the platform was shown as housing a fairground carousel. Even by

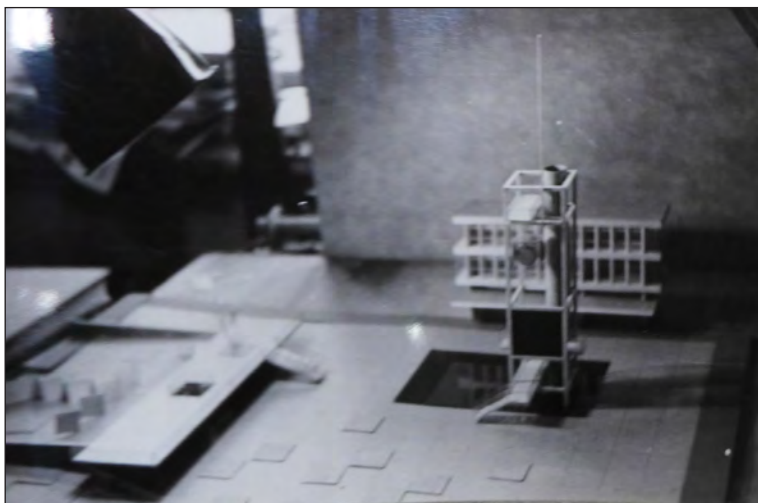


Figure 93. Model of the Town Square, produced by the architects of Stevenage Development Corporation in c. 1957. It shows the clock tower on the right and the platform on the left. (Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies, Off Acc 793, bundle 14)



Figure 94. Sketch of the Town Square scheme, looking north, produced in c. 1957 by a member of Leonard Vincent's team. The steps of the platform are visible on the left. (Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies, Off Acc 793, bundle 14)

this early stage, a piece of sculpture was marked on the top of the platform, which was formed of a long, narrow structure aligned north-south, across the centre of the square, enclosing public lavatories beneath. The 1957 annual report of Stevenage Development Corporation stated that 'it is hoped to commission a sculpture to be placed in a prominent position in the Town Square, where a tall vertical feature with a public clock is planned and where there will also be a ceramic panel on one of the main buildings' (the Co-op mural; see Fig. 73).³⁶⁹

The detailed, technical drawings for the platform and public toilets – part of 'contract 299', along with the public lavatories in Market Square and the boiler house in East Gate – were produced on 29 March 1957 and revised on 30 December that year.³⁷⁰ They show that the men's toilets were on the north (with four cubicles and urinals) and the women's on the south (with 12 cubicles). Each had an attendants' room and an entrance lobby with a dog-leg screen, while there was also a store at the centre, between the two sets of facilities. Natural light was provided by a high-level run of narrow glass louvres arranged as squares along the west side of the structure, almost flush with the plinth and railings above, and there were similar louvres above the north entrance. There were never any louvres on the east, this elevation being more simply faced in load-bearing bricks. On each side, the platform itself projected slightly, overhanging its base level – to a greater degree at the sides than on the long edges to the east and west. Due to the sloping ground of the Town Square area, the east staircase was taller than that on the west (they had, respectively, 20 and ten risers). The platform was flanked to north and south by ramped paving, allowing pedestrians to access the bus station and the areas on the west without the need to ascend the platform steps (see Figs 31 and 168). To the west was an open paved area forming a courtyard; the plane of this was roughly level, and it was edged by railings to each side – except on the west, which was open to the bus station.³⁷¹

The Town Square was in use by July 1958, though work on the clock tower and pool – delayed by the London dock strike – only began in August 1958, and the platform was underway at the same time (see Fig. 58).³⁷² The clock tower is of pre-stressed, precast concrete, clad with black polished marble, and infilled with panels of Broughton Moors slate and coloured tiles. Its clock (made of Perspex) was fully



Figure 95. The north side of the Town Square and the east side of Queensway – with platform and clock tower – seen at night, in a photograph of 1959. (With kind permission of Stevenage Museum, P6100)

chiming, and the ‘cat-ladder’ rising to the clock chamber was of stainless steel, as were the railings. In 1959, Leonard Vincent wrote, ‘Though it is an open structure, several panels of tiles and stone have been introduced into the tower, which has been designed from a “looking-up” point of view’.³⁷³ The clock tower was placed at the south-east corner of a large, rectangular pool, edged with low brick walls, lined with matching black tiles and illuminated after dark (Fig. 95).³⁷⁴ This featured a raised circular fountain on its west side, and its inner sides were lined with mosaic tiling.

The platform and public toilets seem to have been completed first, and cost a total of £18,600.³⁷⁵ The height of the structure was carefully matched to the surrounding buildings. Seen from Queensway on the east, the top of the platform’s railings was level with the canopies of the surrounding commercial premises (see Fig. 168), while from the west, the height of the platform itself corresponded to the canopies (see Figs 25 and 95). From the bus station side, the platform – intended as an elevated seating and assembly area – masked the raised pool, but the sight of the clock tower rising above has become iconic (Fig. 96).

Atop the platform, in an elevated and highly prominent position, was the first public statue erected in Stevenage new town: a bronze sculpture produced in 1958 and unveiled on 29 September that year by David Bowes-Lyon (1902-61), Lord Lieutenant of Hertfordshire.³⁷⁶ This depicts a mother swinging her small son over her back in play, and was originally placed on a stone-faced polygonal plinth, set on a square cobbled base (see Fig. 26).³⁷⁷ The work had been commissioned in 1957 from the Czech artist Franta Belsky and was inspired by the use of art in the rebuilding of the

Figure 96. A view of 1959 – looking east – showing the raised platform and the clock tower beyond. The platform was intended as a seating and assembly area. In the foreground is the paved ‘square’ dividing the platform from the bus station and Danestrete. (John Maltby/RIBA Collections)

bombed city of Rotterdam.³⁷⁸ Belsky’s brief was that the Stevenage work ‘should be as symbolic for a recently created new town as [Ossip] Zadkine’s sculpture *May 1950 – a destroyed city* is for Rotterdam’; the Chairman of the Stevenage Development Corporation, Sir Roydon Dash, commented that ‘It seemed desirable to us to place here something which would, as a work of art, reflect the youth and vigour of the new community and give expression to the alliance of beauty and practical need at which we aim’.³⁷⁹ At its unveiling, Belsky explained that ‘the work had to be humanistic and cheerful’.³⁸⁰ Later he described the finished piece, named *Joy Ride*, as ‘a symbol of the new towns – a happy new town riding on the back of the old’.³⁸¹ Originally, the broad flights of railed steps to the platform were placed on the east and west, aligned with each other, the clock tower and *Joy Ride* (Fig. 97). As is shown in surviving photographs, the resulting effect was imposing.³⁸²

The clock tower, completed to the immediate east at a total cost of £14,600 (including the pool), was formally unveiled on 13 December 1958, when the Swedish Ambassador gifted a decorated Christmas tree on behalf of the people of Vällingby – a development, as stated, that was of influence on the design of Stevenage town centre (see p. 8 and p. 22).³⁸³ On this occasion, the full lighting of the Town Square was switched on for the first time.³⁸⁴ As part of her visit on 20 April 1959 to officially open the town centre, the Queen



Figure 97. A photograph of 2009 showing the west staircase of the platform, aligned with the sculpture *Joy Ride* and the clock tower beyond. (©Historic England Archive, Steve Cole, DP084289)

unveiled a plaque on the south side of the clock tower commemorating the completion of the first phase of the 'core' and the naming of Queensway. On the tower's east side was placed a panel bearing a schematic map of Stevenage new town, formed out of coloured tiles by Carter's of Poole. This was apparently designed by Leonard Vincent, and decorated by Phyllis Butler at Carter's Hamworthy works. The geometric tiles on the undersides of the tower's levels were designed for Carter's by the artist Peggy Angus (1904-93).³⁸⁵ Later, the clock tower was modified by the addition of a plaque on the west side to Lewis Silkin by sculptor Franta Belsky (unveiled by Prime Minister Harold Wilson in January 1974) and a panel on the north side was added to commemorate Stevenage Development Corporation, with its dates 1946-80.³⁸⁶

On its completion, the innovative and highly modern design of the clock tower provoked various reactions. One local found it 'a bit of a shock' and, comparing it to a fire station, water tower or lift, commented, 'I hope the trees will screen the thing when they're in leaf'.³⁸⁷ However, it quickly became a landmark of Stevenage town centre and has since been recognised as an iconic piece of its design, being granted grade II listed status in 1998.

Certainly, the Development Corporation was thrilled with the finished Town Square, which also featured a number of mature trees, in carefully chosen locations, as well as Corporation-designed street furniture (Fig. 98). Part of its success was credited to the raised platform, an integral and important part of the complex as a whole, enhancing (or disguising) the gradual slope of the site, and helping to divide the clock tower and pedestrian area from the bus station and Danestrete to the west. In 1960, Leonard Vincent wrote that:



Figure 98. The Town Square in 1970, with in the foreground some of the mature trees retained by Stevenage Development Corporation as part of construction of the new town centre. (With kind permission of Stevenage Museum, P2818)

The intimate feeling and enclosure of the main square is achieved by siting at the change of level from the bus square a large, railed platform, placed over the public conveniences, thus forming a retaining structure against the higher level of the bus square.³⁸⁸

A visitor of early 1959 commented, in a similar vein:

the square struck me as being very clever, first in the careful preservation of the trees, and secondly because of the large concrete deck over the public conveniences which turns what might have been an eyesore into an attractive architectural feature.³⁸⁹

The Town Square, and the raised platform and clock tower in particular, quickly became the most photographed (and filmed) elements of the town centre scheme, and a focal point for the social life of Stevenage.³⁹⁰ The Development Corporation's designers had intended that the town centre be 'a place for meeting, for sitting and chatting, for eating or dancing', and in 1959 the Corporation's Social Relations Officer, Tom Hampson, commented that:³⁹¹

Even in its present state, the social significance of the Town Centre is apparent. It is not only a shopping centre. People do sit around in the Town Square; they meet and talk there; children play there.³⁹²

The Times stated in 1958 that the raised platform was to be used 'for speeches, concerts, and sitting in the sun', while Hampson felt that the Town Square as a whole had enormous possibilities – that it was capable of being used as a 'vast auditorium for public spectacles and special occasions', along the lines of a Greek agora, a Roman forum, a continental piazza or an English village green.³⁹³



Figure 99. The Town Square was intended and used as a focal point for the community; one staff member of Stevenage Development Corporation saw it as a 'vast auditorium for public spectacles and special occasions'. This photograph shows spectators watching Morris dancers in 1960. (*Stevenage Pictorial*, 8 July 1960, p. 36)

So indeed proved to be the case. Newspapers and other sources show that the Town Square, and especially the platform, was the focus for countless community events and special occasions over the following decades. Perhaps most notable was the Queen's visit to Stevenage in April 1959; the Queen and her party approached the Town Square from the west, and stood on the steps of the platform before a crowd of 35,000 onlookers gathered along Queensway.³⁹⁴ Smaller events over these years – held on the platform, by the clock tower with watchers standing on the platform, or on the paved area to the west, again with viewers on the platform – included the 'Festival of Light' on 13 December 1958, the May Day celebrations in May 1959, Morris dancing in July 1959 and summer 1960 (Fig. 99), an art exhibition in July 1960, an 'open-air ballroom' on 17 October 1960 (marking the laying of the foundation stone of the Mecca dance hall), an open-air dance in August 1961, a mass protest about redundancies in October 1962, and a visit by the Minister of Housing and Local Government, Sir Keith Joseph, on 6 May 1963.³⁹⁵ At the end of 1962, the Development Corporation stated that the Town Square area, including the platform, had been used 'for all kinds of meetings, performances and events', more than at any earlier time, noting: 'The Corporation is glad to see this use developing and fulfilling one of the purposes for which the Square was planned'.³⁹⁶ This area was a particular feature of the film *Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush* (1967), which includes shots of the platform, clock tower and Town Square as a whole.³⁹⁷

Level of Survival

Overall, the Town Square scheme survives extremely well, and this is both reflected by and thanks to its inclusion within the Town Centre Conservation Area (designated in 1988 and amended in 2010). The clock tower and *Joy Ride* were both listed grade II in 1998. The two other notable pieces of exterior decoration, the Co-op tiled mural and the aluminium sculpture on the side of 21/23 Town Square, are currently undesignated. There have, however, been alterations, carried out in a phase of work in the 1990s. Firstly, and most dramatically, the platform and public toilet block was altered on its east side. Permission for this was granted in February 1992, and the work was presumably undertaken immediately afterwards; it was complete by February 1993 (Fig. 100).³⁹⁸ The original staircase in this area – aligned precisely with the staircase on the west (see Fig. 168) – was removed, the centre of the platform was extended to the east (the original east overhang being under-built), and two new flights of stairs were inserted, running north and south against the platform's east side. The store/attendant's room on the east elevation, which projects between the two staircases, is faced in glass bricks, to provide natural light. At the same time, the railings around the elevated platform were replaced with modern work, though this is almost identical in scale and type to the original – aside from a horizontal band of metal chequerwork, at odds in its style and design with the Town Square. *Joy Ride* has, probably also in the early 1990s, been reset in what seems roughly its original position, and its plinth and the paving on top of the platform have been replaced. On the west, the original narrow row of louvred glass lights has either been replaced or covered over.

However, in other respects, the platform survives well, and retains its original height and general massing. It still has its wide band forming an overhanging canopy on



Figure 100. A photograph of February 1993 showing the recently completed alterations to the east side of the raised platform in the Town Square. (With kind permission of Stevenage Museum, PP1203)

the north and south sides, while the west elevation is largely unaltered, and includes its original flight of stairs, edged by the original railings (see Fig. 97). These would provide invaluable structural evidence, were the east flight ever to be replaced in sympathetic form. The paved area on the immediate west of the platform – marking the division between the main part of the Town Square and the bus station – also survives, edged to north and south by its original railings and still framed by the buildings formerly occupied by Davants and Barclays. Some of the original trees of the Town Square remain, though others have been lost, while the original street furniture has been replaced in its entirety.



Figure 101. The east part of the Town Square in 2013, with the clock tower and pool, the platform visible on the left and the former Fine Fare supermarket (reworked as QD). The pool was altered in c. 1995. (©Historic England Archive, James O. Davies, DP159947)

Photographs show that it was slightly later that the pool of the clock tower was altered. At the time of the completion of the work on the platform, in 1992 or early 1993, the original pool survived, with its brick-built surround topped by granite slabs (see Fig. 100).³⁹⁹ It was only in February 1995 that an application was granted for refurbishment of the clock tower and pool, the Council decreeing that works should be in keeping with the original style and materials.⁴⁰⁰ At this point, the edges of the pool were rebuilt – they are now higher than was the case originally – and the pool was relined. As part of this work, tiling in bright primary colours was installed, in the style of the artist Piet Mondrian, and the original circular fountain on the west was replaced in the same position by a more prominent and highly raised fountain in a larger, square surround (Fig. 101). Also, the level of the pool's water was raised; it is now flush with the edges, while before it was quite low. This is generally sympathetic to the character and materials of the 1950s work, though benching added around the perimeter of the pool now somewhat obscures its form. The clock tower survives largely if not entirely unaltered, including the decorative panels (one inserted in 1974 and another in 1980, see p. 98) and the coloured tilework to the undersides of the platforms.

There is no threat to the listed clock tower – one of the iconic features of Stevenage town centre – but the adjacent platform, a key component of the overall Town Square scheme, has been proposed for demolition by Stevenage Borough Council as part of a large redevelopment programme submitted in December 2019.⁴⁰¹ This would see the construction of a 'public services hub' in the location of the platform, while the adjacent Plaza development to the south-west would also be replaced. As part of this scheme, the listed *Joy Ride* sculpture would be re-sited.

Car Parks and Garaging

Date: 1958-c. 1960 (surface car parks); 1971-73 (multi-storey)

Design: Stevenage Development Corporation – under Chief Architects Leonard Vincent and Leslie Aked and Chief Engineers George Hardy (until 1963) and Eric Claxton (until 1972)

The provision of plentiful car parking was fundamental to the concept of the pedestrianised town centre at Stevenage. The Development Corporation took a realistic view of this subject – they knew that the success of the commercial core rested on there being adequate parking, garaging and service roads, as well as bus services. In early 1951, the Corporation was already thinking about the number of parking spaces that would be required, and sought advice from the RAC and the AA.⁴⁰² At that time, it was felt that space for around 2,000 cars would be adequate for a town of 60,000 people. The target number did rise in time – by 1959, Leonard Vincent was stating that the ultimate aim was to have 4,000 car parking spaces.⁴⁰³ Car parks were 'designed to allow for decking over should the need arise' – that is, conversion to a multi-storey arrangement – which would increase capacity to around 12,000 cars 'without disturbance of buildings or services in the Centre'.⁴⁰⁴

In an article published in 1959, Vincent wrote that as well as service roads behind the shops, the town centre had surface car parks ‘in the re-entrant angles formed by the blocks of buildings’.⁴⁰⁵ This planning, with car parks on the perimeters and commercial blocks within, is a highly distinctive aspect of Stevenage new town centre (see Figs 21, 22, 37 and 46-7). It is especially evident on the east side, along St George’s Way, where the minor pedestrian ways of Market Place and Park Place (plus, later, The Forum) alternate with car parking space at East Gate, Market Square and Marsh Gate. The provision set aside by the Corporation was of interest to others: in May 1960, for instance, J. D. Marshall, the Engineer and Surveyor of Stevenage Urban District Council, wrote to Leonard Vincent saying he had received enquiries from other authorities about the car parking facilities at Stevenage, and requesting accurate, up-to-date information.⁴⁰⁶

Four surface car parks were provided in the first phase of works. These were: at Westgate, also known as the ‘north-west car park’, to the north of the Town Square (opened 1 October 1958, with 196 spaces initially, increased to 243 by 1963); at East Gate, the ‘south-east car park’, immediately to the south of Market Place (opened 14 October 1958, with around 210 spaces; Fig. 102); ‘Daneshill’, the ‘south-west car park’, on the west side of Danestrete (opened 14 December 1958 with 160 spaces); and the Market Square car park on the east, formed of two parts (the east part opened on 22 May 1959, with 141 spaces, and the west on 22 October 1959, with 85 spaces). Additionally, there were nine car parking spaces provided to the rear of the north-west arm of the Town Square and 20 in ‘The Quadrant’, the latter designed as a cul-de-sac on the north side of Southgate (both opened on 14 October 1958).⁴⁰⁷ Further car parking was provided over the following few years, to meet the needs of the popular and – by 1963 – expanding commercial core, which included both new shops and new offices (Fig. 103). The ‘Swingate’ car park on the west of Danestrete, by the new Mecca dance hall, opened on 30 August 1960 (with 223 spaces). Also of around this time was the ‘north-east car park’ (with 211 spaces) at Marsh Gate, to the north of Park Place.



Figure 102. The provision of adequate car parking was an important consideration for the pedestrianian town centre at Stevenage. Four surface car parks were laid out in the first phase of works, including this one at East Gate, opened in October 1958. (©Historic England Archive, Patricia Payne, DP278109)

Altogether, this first-phase provision totalled around 1,300 car parking spaces in the town centre, plus room behind shops and offices. There was a conscious effort to spread the parking provisions out, in order to ‘bring about an even distribution of spaces’.⁴⁰⁸ As the town centre was further expanded, additional car parks were added – for instance, by 1973 there was a car park at the north of the area, beyond The Forum (see Fig. 49).⁴⁰⁹ It had been the aim that ‘convenient access’ would be provided



Figure 103. This map of 1963 shows the parking provision in Stevenage town centre. By that time, there were 1,311 spaces altogether, spread throughout the area. North is to the left. (Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/T49, vol. 1)

to shoppers ‘from the car parks into the pedestrian ways’.⁴¹⁰ Thus, open ‘through-ways’ were provided in the shopping blocks, linking these areas to the car parks, some being marked by single-storey cross canopies on piers – for instance, as at the through-way between Market Place and the East Gate car park (see Fig. 86).

Some of these surface car parks included not just open, marked out spaces, but also a smaller number of single-storey garages. Additionally, the East Gate car park housed, at its north-west corner, the boiler house which powered the heating for the blocks of the first phase commercial core, while the Market Square car park included a block of public toilets at its south-west corner (see Figs 22, 41 and 45).⁴¹¹ These two structures were of almost identical design, with a butterfly roof; they were designed in February 1956 and July 1956 respectively.⁴¹² Notably, the boiler house survives, without its chimney, and is now in use as a workshop or similar (Fig. 104).⁴¹³

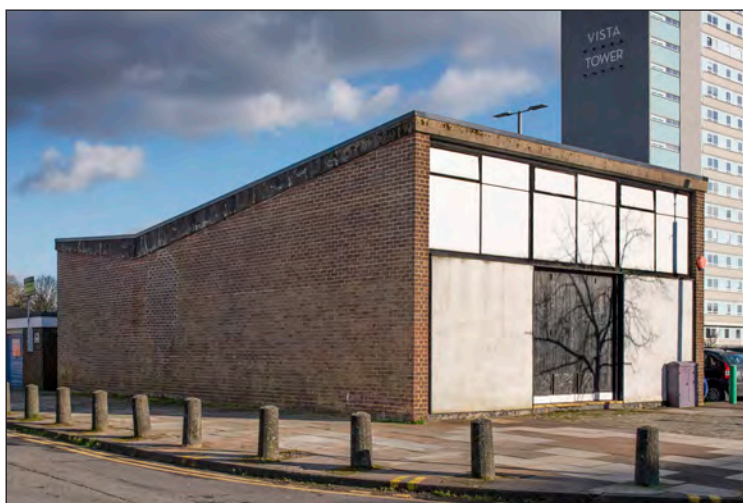


Figure 104. Surviving at the north-west corner of the East Gate car park – though now without its tall chimney – is the former boiler house, built to power the heating of the buildings in the first phase of the shopping precinct. It was designed by Leonard Vincent and his team in February 1956. (©Historic England Archive, James O. Davies, DP275711)

At the time of the completion of the first phase of the shopping precinct, in 1959, there was no 'definite scheme' for multi-storey parking in the town centre.⁴¹⁴ Such car parks were in their infancy at that time: the first multi-storey car park built in London since the 1930s was the Lex Selfridge Garage in Duke Street, Marylebone (1958-60), while the first open-deck example in England was built in Coventry in 1959-60, to serve the pedestrian Lower Precinct.⁴¹⁵ The new town of Hemel Hempstead built a multi-storey car park in 1960, replete with a tile mural by Rowland Emmett that is now listed at grade II. This was a rapidly evolving area, and following the proven success of Stevenage town centre, the outlook upon car parking changed. With car parks in full occupation at peak periods, by 1963 Leonard Vincent and the Development Corporation's Chief Engineer were considering schemes for multi-storey car parking, and a special working committee was set up to consider the subject.

In spring 1963, the team was considering plans and sections of an eight-storey car park for 620 cars on the site of Market Square, accessed from St George's Way.⁴¹⁶ Initial costs were provided by Concrete Ltd (Bison), in collaboration with Vincent, and the Chief Engineer was asked to prepare a scheme for 'dualling' St George's Way, providing both entry and exit lanes for multi-storey car parks and considering the possibility of integrated pedestrian underpasses or footbridges.⁴¹⁷ In 1966, a master plan for parking was produced by Vincent in collaboration with the traffic engineers W. S. Atkins & Partners, on the basis that 7,000 parking spaces would be required by the end of the planned period.⁴¹⁸ In the layout plan of the town centre prepared in September 1967 (see Fig. 46), multi-storey car parks were shown in various locations: three on St George's Way (at East Gate, Market Square and Marsh Gate); at the far north, beyond The Forum; and one on the west side of the Great North Road.⁴¹⁹

The first scheme to be initiated was that at Market Square, accessed from St George's Way. Vincent was anxious that this multi-storey car park should be 'simple and right in every way' and, as has been mentioned earlier in this report, responded angrily when initial designs were overly large in form, rising up through 11 levels (see p. 59).⁴²⁰ He emphasised that any structure 'out of scale with the core would produce a disastrous result, however well it is designed', and felt it 'absolutely essential' that car parks were 'no greater in scale than the present buildings in the core and should be subordinate to the architecture of the Town Centre'.⁴²¹ Vincent also highlighted the fact that the objective had long been to provide an even distribution of parking spaces, which meant there was no 'cogent argument' for one car park being larger than another. In a letter to Concrete Ltd, Vincent stated that for the Market car park, 'great care is needed to ensure that a simple elegant structure is provided which will be integral with the existing character of the entire Town Centre'.⁴²²

Sketch designs were produced by Vincent and the Chief Architect Leslie Aked's team in late 1968, and the full scheme was approved by the Corporation in May 1969.⁴²³ Surviving architectural drawings, produced under Aked, are dated March 1969 (market area), July-September 1969 (plans), and August-September 1970 (sections and elevations).⁴²⁴ The proposed building had parking on three main levels above ground plus further space on the roof and in a basement, and connected directly to

both sides of St George's Way through the creation of an underpass.⁴²⁵ Although it proved difficult to obtain Treasury funding for the comparatively expensive scheme, the car park, built using a Bison precast concrete framework, was begun in March 1971 and completed in late 1973 (Fig. 105).⁴²⁶ At the rear of the ground floor, space was provided for an indoor market – on the same site on which an open market had been held since 1959 (see Fig. 29). This opened on 6 December 1973 (Fig. 106).⁴²⁷

Vincent and his colleagues began immediately to think about additional multi-storey car parks for the town centre. In February 1969, it was noted that 'All the signs are that the standard of shopping in the Town Centre is improving rapidly and is likely to continue to do so. The regional draw is such that some 30% of the shoppers come from outside Stevenage'.⁴²⁸ In May that year, while considering the detailed drawings for the Market car park, the Planning Committee also approved the basic designs and sketch elevations for two other car parks in St George's Way. In December



Figure 105. The multi-storey car park on St George's Way, built in 1971-3 on the site of the former Market Square car park. It is viewed here from the south-west, showing the entrance to the ground-floor market. (©Historic England Archive, James O. Davies, DP275699)



Figure 106. The indoor market at the time of its opening in December 1973. (With kind permission of Stevenage Museum, P3285)

1969, detailed elevations were approved for the 'north-east car park' at Marsh Gate, intended to be the second to be built.⁴²⁹ The committee agreed to follow the 'design principles so successfully used' for the first multi-storey car park. The programme of work, as set down in September 1969, was to open the Marsh Gate car park in April 1972, multi-storey car parks on Fairlands Way in 1973 and 1974, and then another at East Gate.⁴³⁰ Parking was also to be provided on the roofs of the proposed phase four shops in the northern area.

However, this programme was ultimately abandoned – partly as the shopping precinct at the north end of Queensway remained under construction and no final decision had yet been made about the town hall complex, and partly due to a government moratorium on the building of multi-storey car parks. The Ministry made clear that until the St George's Way building had 'proved itself a winner', public money would not be provided for similar schemes.⁴³¹ Preliminary designs for the north-east car park were still being discussed in 1972, with proposed features including a footbridge over St George's Way – to join the town centre with the youth centre and swimming pool on the east – high-level disabled access to the new ABC cinema on the adjacent site at The Forum, and incorporation of the block of shops and offices opposite Tesco.⁴³² Still, by 1976, there had been no significant progress, partly on account of the continued government restrictions and the financial climate. There was talk instead of two separate developments: a multi-storey car park on an island site at the north-east corner of the town centre as well as a three-storey Marsh Gate development on the surface car park, with retail premises on the ground floor and offices above.⁴³³ Further designs were produced in autumn 1979, the multi-storey car park being no higher than the neighbouring developments and being entered from Fairlands Way.⁴³⁴

By 1980, it had become clear that finance had to be provided from private enterprise, and a deal was struck with National Car Parks Ltd (NCP).⁴³⁵ However, the north-east multi-storey was shelved at this point and never built.⁴³⁶ Today, its potential site is occupied by surface car parking, adjacent to the Forum Centre (built 1996-7). Similarly, the Marsh Gate development never went ahead – the area still has its original surface car park – and neither did any of the other proposed multi-storey car parks of the 1969 programme. A slightly later addition was the multi-storey car parking included as part of the Westgate shopping centre, completed in 1988 on the site of the new town's earliest surface car park (see Fig. 9). This occupies three levels above ground (including the roof), and is accessed from Danestrete. Most of the other original surface car parks remain – at East Gate, Marsh Gate, Swingate, to the rear of the Mecca, and The Quadrant, for instance – as does the multi-storey built on Market Square, of some architectural and historic interest in its own right.

A large redevelopment scheme submitted by Stevenage Borough Council in December 2019 proposes the loss of the two surviving surface car parks of the 1950s 'core' – The Quadrant and the car park at East Gate.⁴³⁷ Under these proposals, The Quadrant would be replaced by a block on the site of the former sorting office (now part of The Plaza), while the East Gate car park would be redeveloped as a block of up to four storeys. This would involve the loss of the existing free-standing garaging, along with former boiler house at the north-west corner of the East Gate site.

Bus Station, Town Square/Danestrete

Date: 1955-6 (opened 1958)

Design: Stevenage Development Corporation – under Chief Engineer George Hardy

Like the car parking, the bus station was an integral element of the original plans for Stevenage town centre, and was built as part of the first phase of works – designed to be ‘continuous with the pedestrian area’ (Fig. 107, and see Fig. 23).⁴³⁸ With surrounding roads and roundabouts, it was under construction in 1955 and 1956 – earlier than the adjacent commercial development. In the Development Corporation’s journal for summer 1956, it was noted that the bus station had been completed, and in early 1957 negotiations about its operation were held between the Corporation, the District Council and the London Transport Executive.⁴³⁹ However, the bus station only formally opened on 15 October 1958, having been used for the drop-off and storage of building materials in the interim, as well as for construction; in 1956, it was noted that prefabricated concrete components of the new buildings were being assembled at the bus station, ready for use.⁴⁴⁰ The bus station was served by a London Transport Executive bus garage and offices, opened in April 1959 on a site to the south-west (see pp. 110-1).



Figure 107. The bus station is an integral and significant component of the pedestrian town centre at Stevenage. It was placed in the heart of the area and is shown here in a photograph of c. 1960, framed by the buildings of the Town Square. (© The Francis Frith Collection)

The need for a bus station within the town centre, along with adequate public car parking, had been dictated early on by the pedestrianised scheme. In the Development Corporation’s quarterly bulletin for January 1955, it was stated that ‘The bus station has been so located that passengers set down at this point have immediate access to the shops around the other three sides of the square, without the hazards of main road crossings.’⁴⁴¹ In 1958, *The Surveyor* stated approvingly that

‘shoppers leaving buses at the bus station or cars in the car parks have only a few steps to walk to the nearest shop’.⁴⁴² The same journal commented: ‘All the west side of the town square is occupied by a bus and coach station which will be used as the main interchange point by all local and regional and some long distance services’.⁴⁴³ As part of the closest – indeed, the only – traffic route to the core of the town centre, the bus station also served as the drop off point for the visits of dignitaries, including the Queen in July 1959. It was an element of the town centre scheme regularly featured by the press and in films, and proved enduringly popular, helping to attract a higher number of visitors and reducing the number of cars.⁴⁴⁴

The bus station was designed as an open area, longer on its north-south axis than that of the adjacent Town Square, set to one side of Danestrete. It served to divide the shopping area from the offices, entertainment buildings and (later) railway station to the west. Flanked by the extending arm of the Town Square on its north and east sides, it was effectively another square. A higher than average number of premises in this block were occupied by catering establishments, including the Edward the Confessor pub, the Highflier café and the Gatehouse restaurant – making them accessible and useful as waiting and meeting spots for those travelling to the town centre by bus.⁴⁴⁵ Originally, the bus station’s turning area was formed around two long, very narrow elliptical islands, raised slightly above the road surface and containing lamp-posts designed by Leonard Vincent and his team. The bus shelters – simple metal-framed structures originally only on the station’s east and west sides – were designed by Thomas Bilbow and his architectural team at the LTE.⁴⁴⁶ There were no enclosing railings, the station being open to adjacent pavements; this ensured visual and physical continuity between the Town Square and Danestrete.

The bus station was enlarged around the mid-1970s, and was the focus of a major reconstruction around the early to mid-1980s.⁴⁴⁷ It seems to have been at this time that the original islands were removed and the bus station was extended slightly to the west, narrowing Danestrete. Progress is shown in a series of photographs which survive at Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies (Fig. 108, and see Fig. 32).⁴⁴⁸ New lines were marked out, and stopping points rearranged. In more recent years



Figure 108. A view from the roof of Daneshill House showing the bus station as enlarged and reworked in the mid-1970s and early to mid-1980s. The original islands were removed at this time, but their former location is still visible in this photograph. (Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies, CV350)

(probably in the 1990s or early 2000s), the whole bus station has been enclosed with railings and small semi-circular islands planted with trees and shrubs have been introduced, along with modern bus shelters. It is one of the areas due to be redeveloped as part of the regeneration of central Stevenage; the Council wishes to move the bus station to a different location.⁴⁴⁹

Bus Garage, Danestrete

Date: 1957-9

Design: London Transport Executive – under Chief Architect Thomas Bilbow

The town centre bus station was served by a large bus garage and offices, built for the London Transport Executive on a site to the immediate south-west, beyond that subsequently developed as Daneshill House. The garage was begun around late 1957, about a year after the bus station had been completed.⁴⁵⁰ It opened on 27 April 1959, six months after the official opening of the bus station, and replaced smaller garages in Stevenage Old Town and Hitchin (Fig. 109).⁴⁵¹ The opening ceremony was performed by Martin Maddan (1920-73), MP for the Hitchin Division.

The garage was the work of Thomas Bilbow (1893-1983), FRIBA, Chief Architect to the London Transport Executive. It was the second built to a new design specially evolved for country areas and new towns in particular – the first was in St Albans Road, Hatfield, opened in March 1959 (since demolished).⁴⁵² The Development



Figure 109. The bus garage on Danestrete, seen from the south-east. The garage was built in 1957-9 to designs by the London Transport Executive, and comprised a low range of offices with taller garage block behind. It was demolished in 1993. (With kind permission of Stevenage Museum, P3777)

Corporation's journal *Purpose* noted that the Stevenage garage was 'planned on a "streamline" layout and considerable attention has been paid to the exterior design'.⁴⁵³ At the front of the garage, facing onto Danestrete, was a 145-ft long brick-built, single-storey range with a sloping roof. An article published in 1959 shows that this contained the LTE offices, a public enquiry office or traffic office, staff rooms, a canteen and recreation room, and kitchen.⁴⁵⁴ The public enquiry office was entered at the right end of the range.

Behind this block, with a service roadway between, was the covered garage or bus park itself, flanked to east and west by workshops, stores and service areas (see Figs 41 and 111). This was a large, tall structure, spanned internally by tubular steel trusses, with no central supports. Windows were set high up in the asbestos-sheeted walls, and there was also a long central roof light. The building provided clear floor space measuring 185 ft by 98 ft – sufficient to house 49 buses, while there was room for an additional 16 buses to park in the open air. The total cost of the project was £150,000, and the contractor was Gilbert-Ash Ltd.

The bus garage was managed by London County Bus Services in the 1970s and '80s, but fell out of use in 1991, and proposals for redevelopment of the site began to be considered from around that time. In June 1993, Stevenage Borough Council approved a scheme submitted by AGP Architects of Manchester for retail units on the site, with service yard, car parking and landscaping.⁴⁵⁵ The bus garage was demolished in early 1993 and replaced in 1994-5 by this new, single-storey commercial development, of red brick with prominent gables.⁴⁵⁶ In 2003, presumably to enable occupation by the fashion and homeware shop Matalan, the Council approved a proposal to allow the building to be used as a single retail unit.⁴⁵⁷ In 2017, outline planning permission was granted for the building of around 520 new homes on the site. In 2019, the site and the adjacent car park were purchased by the Guinness Partnership, one of the country's largest housing associations, who announced in August 2020 that they would be taking forward this development.⁴⁵⁸

Head Post Office, corner of Town Square and Danestrete

Date: 1958-9 (Head Post Office); 1961-2 (sorting office)

Design: Stevenage Development Corporation – under Chief Architect Leonard Vincent (for the Ministry of Works)

The area to the west of the core of the town centre and the Town Square had always been intended for the development of offices, as well as entertainment buildings, and the Head Post Office was the earliest of these to be completed. In May 1958, *The Surveyor* stated that 'At the south west corner of the [town] square will stand the new head Post Office, with floors above accommodating local offices of central government departments'.⁴⁵⁹ In the winter 1957-8 issue of the Development Corporation's journal, it was noted that this site then presented a 'serious gap', and that the Corporation had offered to design and build the new premises, to ensure a speedy completion.⁴⁶⁰ Final approval for the design of the structure was granted

in April 1958.⁴⁶¹ Work was delayed at the start, but was initiated on 10 November 1958 and was completed on 10 September 1959 (Fig. 110).⁴⁶² A formal opening of the Head Post Office was performed in early December 1959 by Councillor A. C. Luhman, Chairman of Stevenage Urban District Council.⁴⁶³ The new building – which then had the largest public space of any Post Office in North Hertfordshire – replaced a temporary Post Office at the south end of Queensway.⁴⁶⁴



Figure 110. The Head Post Office on the south side of the Town Square, designed by Leonard Vincent and his team and built in 1958-9. The building was demolished in 1999 and replaced by The Plaza development. (With kind permission of Stevenage Museum, P3947)

The four-storey building was designed by Leonard Vincent and his team at Stevenage Development Corporation, undertaken on behalf of the Ministry of Works – an arrangement that meant that construction could begin without further delay. It matched the style of contemporary office development on adjacent sites – Daneshill House to the west and Langley House to the south (see below). The Head Post Office building had a reinforced concrete frame with end elevations of solid concrete, and metal curtain walling to north and south. It was characterised by its ‘vast expanse of glass’, with three storeys of curtain-walled office space over a brick ground floor.⁴⁶⁵ The latter was topped by a timber-faced canopy, ‘so that the public can enter and leave under cover’.⁴⁶⁶ This served to unify the new building with the rest of the town centre scheme and connected directly with the canopy of the adjacent Barclays Bank (opened in September 1958; see Fig. 61), and the rest of the south side of the Town Square. Beneath the upper-floor windows, panels were made opaque by a blue infill behind the glass, giving the building a distinctive and colourful effect, similar to that achieved in Queensway (see Fig. 32). The Head Post Office was recessed from the Town Square building line, in order to preserve a group of mature trees. Rather than looking out over the Town Square or the paved area to the west of the raised platform, it was aligned with the bus station, from which it was divided by a raised oval-shaped planter in which the trees were set. To the rear of the building, at the south-east, was a boiler house heating the new structure, with a chimney of about the same height as the new block.

With Langley House, Stevenage’s Head Post Office was featured in the *Architect & Building News* in May 1961, the article including photographs, technical drawings

and plans.⁴⁶⁷ These show that the ground floor housed the Post Office counters and attendant areas, including rooms for mail dispatch and the postmaster. At the west of the ground floor a staircase enabled Post Office staff to access a dining room and lounge, while a separate staircase on the east led to the offices on the third and fourth floors. These were initially occupied by the Inland Revenue, for whom a dedicated office block (Brickdale House; see pp. 132-4) was constructed elsewhere in the town centre in subsequent years. It had been suggested, back in November 1957, that offices for Stevenage Development Corporation could be located here also, but it was decided that ‘for architectural reasons it would be undesirable for this [the Post Office] building to be higher than four or five storeys’.⁴⁶⁸

It was always the intention to extend the Post Office building – a site for a sorting office was approved in August 1960, and this work was undertaken by the Ministry of Works in 1961-2.⁴⁶⁹ In September 1962, the local paper announced that the sorting office at Old Stevenage would be closed imminently, the postmaster would move across and the building in the Town Square would become the ‘centre of all postal services for the area’.⁴⁷⁰ The new block was completed in November 1962, and was situated to the rear of the Head Post Office building, at the south-west, next to Langley House and The Quadrant car park (Fig. 111).⁴⁷¹ The 7,200 sq. ft single-storey structure – characterised by its sawtooth roof profile – contained not only the sorting department but also a large canteen and clubroom, and was available to all the government employees based in the Post Office building.⁴⁷² Sufficient space was allowed for any future expansion that might be required. Also created as part of this phase of works were van yards to the rear of the sorting office. In winter 1962/3, *Purpose* noted that – on an average day – the new sorting office handled 52,000 letters and packets, plus some 1,500 parcels.⁴⁷³



Figure 111. An aerial photograph of 1986, looking east. The sawtooth roof of the sorting office, built in 1961-2 at the rear of the Head Post Office, is visible at the centre-left of the image. (With kind permission of Stevenage Museum, PP852)

The Post Office building survived well until the late twentieth century, with minor changes including a ground-floor extension to include an accounts office undertaken in c. 1976 and a rear extension in c. 1979.⁴⁷⁴ However, redevelopment of the site was being suggested in the early 1980s, by which time the Post Office was considered too small for its purpose, and by 1999 the building was vacant and to let.⁴⁷⁵ It was demolished later that year, along with the sorting office, and replaced by The Plaza – a substantial licensed premises and leisure development comprising seven units for A3 use (restaurants, cafés, bars) and one for D2 leisure use (Fig. 112).⁴⁷⁶ The application for this development, seemingly built by Jones Lang Wootton of London on behalf of Greenport Estates, was approved in March 1999.⁴⁷⁷ This originally included premises such as a Yate’s Wine Lodge, the Wetherspoon’s Standard Bearer pub, a nightclub and a gym, and was built in a location overlooking the bus station and, obliquely, the Town Square. Another pub in the complex is called the Old Post Office and is run by Stonegate.

The Plaza is a building of two storeys, built of red brick with stone dressings; features include an enclosed, curved open arcade on the east side, with a glass-bricked turret, of loose Moderne or Art Deco influence (see Fig. 56). In the view of Stevenage Borough Council, as expressed in its Town Square Conservation Area Appraisal of 2010, The Plaza has adversely affected the setting of the Conservation Area. The appraisal states that:

Apart from its height, which is consistent with existing buildings within Town Square, The Plaza ignores the original principles which underpin the vision of the town centre. In particular, its curving form, lack of stylistic consistency and busy facade treatment stand in stark contrast to the linear forms and plain facades of Town Square and Queensway. The omission of a canopy along the frontage also marks it out as following a different aesthetic. This is not a model to be followed in future.⁴⁷⁸

The Plaza is one of the buildings proposed for demolition under a large-scale redevelopment plan submitted by the Council in December 2019.⁴⁷⁹



Figure 112. The Plaza, Danestrete, a retail and leisure development built in 1999-2000 on the site of the Head Post Office and sorting office. Its style is not sympathetic to the post-war architecture of Stevenage town centre. (©Historic England Archive, James O. Davies, DP275699)

Langley House, corner of Danestrete and Southgate

Date: 1959-60

Design: Stevenage Development Corporation – under Chief Architect Leonard Vincent

As noted above, the Head Post Office, Langley House and Daneshill House formed a physically and stylistically related complex of offices at the west of the town centre, and are here introduced in broad chronological order, by date of completion. Langley House was begun as a speculative development by Stevenage Development Corporation in summer 1959, and formed part of that body's efforts to attract a range of both employers and workers to the new town, and to encourage offices to move out of London; it had already become clear, by 1957, that there was strong demand for offices and professional accommodation within Stevenage's town centre.⁴⁸⁰ The tender for work was accepted on 22 June 1959 and by spring 1960 a deal had been agreed with British Railways, who took on the new building for their Eastern Region, employing around 200 people.⁴⁸¹

Langley House, providing 20,000 sq. ft of office space over three floors, was begun on 12 October 1959 and completed on 5 October 1960, to designs by Leonard Vincent and his team at the Development Corporation, with Ray Gorbings as senior architect (Fig. 113).⁴⁸² In autumn 1960, *Purpose* reported that British Railways was then fitting out the building, which was to be used principally for freight accounting work.⁴⁸³



Figure 113. Langley House, Southgate, viewed from the south-west. This office block, designed by Leonard Vincent and his team, was built in 1959-60 and occupied by British Railways. It was demolished in c. 2003 and replaced by a Holiday Inn hotel. (With kind permission of Stevenage Museum, P3952)

With the Head Post Office, Langley House was featured in the *Architect & Building News* in May 1961.⁴⁸⁴ The office block – which had a simple, rectangular plan – was set back slightly from Danestrete, with its main frontage on Southgate.⁴⁸⁵ It had a car park to the rear, entered via the service road on the east, which also provided access to The Quadrant car park. In design and materials, Langley House closely resembled both the Head Post Office and Daneshill House. It was built of in situ reinforced concrete columns, with plate floors and roof and metal curtain walling supplied by Crittalls. Glazing was maximised, to ensure the offices within were light and airy. The architects made use of the sloping site by creating a basement in the east part of the building, used for filing and storage. Above this were three floors of offices, planned with flexibility in mind. There were staircases at the south-west and north-east corners – the former clearly visible through the glass end wall on the west (the east end wall was of brick). Materials were carefully chosen to ensure continuity with the rest of the town centre – for instance, there was a wall of exposed aggregate panels at the north-west.

By late 1963, rumours were circulating about the future of the BR accounting centre at Stevenage, but a local paper was able to state that the work performed at Langley House was 'indispensable to the proper running of the King's Cross District and must continue there'.⁴⁸⁶ In later decades of the twentieth century, the building was occupied by a variety of companies, including Lynx Express, a parcel delivery company. In 2003, Stevenage Borough Council approved an application to demolish Langley House and build a 128-bedroom hotel. This is formed of four-, five- and six-storey blocks, is faced in red brick, render and timber cladding, and has a glass 'tower' at its south-west corner, above the main entrance. It opened as a Holiday Inn Express in 2004, and forms part of a roughly contemporary group which also includes The Plaza development to the north (of 1999-2000) and flats on the site of the Central Garage opposite (of 2005-6; see p. 135 and Fig. 56). Unfortunately, none of these buildings reflect the scale, design or materials of the 1950s and '60s work, and they form a harsh contrast with neighbouring buildings such as the early 1960s outpatients' clinic. There are outline plans for demolition of buildings in this entire block, including The Plaza and The Quadrant car park to the east, so their future is currently uncertain.

Daneshill House, Danestrete

Date: 1959-61

Design: Stevenage Development Corporation – under Chief Architect Leonard Vincent

Daneshill House was the last to be completed of the three contemporary and stylistically related office developments to the west of the Town Square – the others being the Head Post Office and Langley House (see above) – but was also the largest and the most significant. It was built as the headquarters of Stevenage Development Corporation, to replace their former offices at the historic Aston House, four miles away from the town centre, on the east of Stevenage. It therefore brought the

Corporation right into the heart of the new town it was building, both functionally and visually, and succeeded far smaller temporary offices set up at 13 Town Square, on the east side of the bus station.⁴⁸⁷

Originally known simply as ‘seven-storey offices’, Daneshill House was designed by Leonard Vincent and his team.⁴⁸⁸ Initial drawings were displayed at a meeting in May 1957, preliminary sketch plans were approved in July 1958, and more detailed designs were produced in the latter months of 1958 and into spring 1959.⁴⁸⁹ John Mowlem Ltd were appointed as contractors, and construction work began in September 1959 on a site to the immediate south-west of the bus station, overlooking the Town Square.⁴⁹⁰ It was, at that time, the first building to be constructed on the west side of Danestrete, aside from the bus garage (Fig. 114). By summer 1960, the local press were publishing photographs of the ‘new view of the Town Centre’ afforded from the roof of Daneshill House (see Figs 98-99), and in early December 1960 Corporation staff were viewing their new offices.⁴⁹¹ The final move took place in the second week of January 1961, by which point the office block had already become ‘a familiar landmark in the Town Centre’.⁴⁹² Meanwhile, consent was granted for the demolition of Aston House and its replacement with housing.⁴⁹³



Figure 114. One of the most important offices developments in central Stevenage was Daneshill House, Danestrete. This was built in 1959-61 as Stevenage Development Corporation’s own headquarters, to designs by Leonard Vincent and his team. (With kind permission of Stevenage Museum, P3963)

In order to ‘help the economics of the project’, Daneshill House included on its ground floor four shop units.⁴⁹⁴ It was intended that these lead into a planned pedestrian shopping link between Danestrete and the old Great North Road to the rear, though this scheme was abandoned around the mid-1960s (see p. 47 and Fig. 37). In June 1959, Midland Bank agreed to lease most of this commercial area, and in June 1960 the remaining unit was let to J. Ward Hill, turf accountants.⁴⁹⁵ The Development Corporation built only the shell of these areas, and a photograph taken in winter 1960/61 shows the ground floor awaiting completion.⁴⁹⁶ The façades and internal fitting were the work of the companies concerned, following guidance set by Vincent and his team, who also decreed that a canopy must be provided matching those elsewhere in the town centre.⁴⁹⁷ The new Midland Bank opened in late 1961.⁴⁹⁸

Adjacent to these units, the ground floor contained a reception lobby for the Corporation offices, and rooms including an enquiry office, a letting office and a

'VIP lounge'.⁴⁹⁹ Above rose six storeys of offices, totalling just over 19,200 sq. ft of accommodation, all featuring the then 'new method' of underfloor heating.⁵⁰⁰ Plans show that, as originally built, Daneshill House had a simple rectangular form with staircases at its south-east and north-east corners and toilets at the north-west corner of each floor.⁵⁰¹ The above-ground levels each contained a central corridor with offices either side. Stevenage Development Corporation, with its small board rather than elected members, had no need of a council chamber.

Externally, Daneshill House is curtain-walled, with its floors and staircases clearly visible (see Fig. 32).⁵⁰² The glazed wall cladding was supplied by Crittalls, as with the rest of the town centre. It was fixed from the inside, for ease of replacement; large panes of glass meant that there was considerable wind pressure on the beads at all times.⁵⁰³ As noted, the ground floor contained premises for Midland Bank and a betting shop, as well as an entrance to the Corporation's offices. The latter, next to the covered pedestrian way intended to be developed to the west, was in a single-storey block, next to the Mecca dance hall.⁵⁰⁴ The building's ground-floor area was covered by a projecting canopy, which extended across the whole width of the block, forming a continuous canopy with that of the adjacent dance hall and continuing round to the south side of Daneshill House. On the main (east) façade, this originally had under-canopy lighting and carried the name of Stevenage Development Corporation.⁵⁰⁵ At the south-east corner of the building, facing onto Danesgate, is a mural of decorative tilework, a muted grey in colour.

Naturally, the internal arrangement of Daneshill House changed over the years, with departments moving from floor to floor and even from building to building. There was some interplay in the early 1960s between Daneshill House and the single-storey temporary buildings to the rear of the site, put up to serve Lloyds as a clearing house (see below). Later, in 1968, some of the Development Corporation's staff moved to nearby Swingate House (see pp. 129-31), then recently vacated by Lloyds, prompting a slight rearrangement within Daneshill House in 1969-70.⁵⁰⁶ A plan of the building dating from around the early 1970s, following these alterations, shows the Corporation's social relations and administrative staff as occupying the first floor of Daneshill House, the engineers and legal staff on the second floor with the engineers housed on the third floor also, the architects occupying the fourth floor and the west side of the fifth, the quantity surveyors on the east side of the fifth floor (moved here from offices in Park Place in 1968), and finance on the sixth.⁵⁰⁷ Midland Bank remained a constant on the ground floor – relaunched as HSBC in 1992, following a takeover – but Hill's betting office was succeeded in subsequent years by the Bedwell Estate office (by 1967) and a model maker's shop (by 1969).⁵⁰⁸ This smaller shop was offered to Midland for an extension in late 1967, but by 1972 there was talk of a larger extension to the rear of Daneshill House.⁵⁰⁹ The Midlands premises certainly were extended, but the larger programme of work seems to have been shelved in the early 1970s.

Daneshill House was changed fairly substantially following the demise of the Development Corporation in 1980. For the first time since the start of the new town, Stevenage Council was able to occupy its own dedicated office space, moving into Daneshill House from its temporary premises in Southgate House at the start of the

decade (see p. 152). An application to rework the building so as to include a council chamber, civic suite and additional civic space was approved in October 1983, and by September 1985 the area around Daneshill House was a building site.⁵¹⁰ An application for recladding the building followed in 1986.⁵¹¹ The most visible alteration carried out at this time was the building of a new reception block, between Daneshill House and the Mecca dance hall. This is of two storeys and projects forwards over the pavement, with an area of exposed brickwork above supported on pilotis. Around the same time, Daneshill House was substantially extended to the rear, providing space for the civic facilities mentioned above (Fig. 115).

Internally, one especially notable feature was retained in this work: a tiled mural close to the main entrance – at the foot of the north-east staircase – containing a coloured map of Stevenage, with decorative striped tiles to each side (see Fig. 5). This seems to date from c. 1960 and is in situ. It is believed to have been made by Carter's of Poole, the company which supplied tilework for clock tower and which produced popular ceramics of a distinctive design and pearl matte finish.⁵¹²

Aside from the changes undertaken in the 1980s, Daneshill House survives reasonably well. The canopy over the ground floor has been removed, but the upper floors – externally, at least – seem to remain largely as built, though the original yellow-coloured panels beneath the windows have been replaced (compare Figs 32 and 115). Daneshill House is one of a series of buildings proposed for demolition by Stevenage Borough Council as part of a large redevelopment scheme, submitted in December 2019.⁵¹³ Plans propose its replacement with a seven- to eight-storey block, with matching blocks on the site of the dance hall and Swingate House to the north. Daneshill House was turned down for statutory listing in 2020, partly on account of the degree of internal alteration to the original structure.



Figure 115. On the demise of Stevenage Development Corporation in 1980, Daneshill House became the offices of Stevenage Borough Council. This view, from the south-east, shows the extensions constructed in c. 1985-6 to adapt the building for use by its new occupants. (©Historic England Archive, Patricia Payne, DP278097)

Temporary buildings to the rear of Daneshill House, Danestrete

Date: 1960

Design: Terrapin prefabricated units (for Stevenage Development Corporation)

For completeness' sake, it is worth giving a brief account of the structures which once occupied the site to the immediate west of Daneshill House – at the south end of Swingate. These were built in mid-1960, by which time construction of Daneshill House was well advanced. They took the form of a series of temporary structures composed of Terrapin huts; there were three linked structures in all, one to the north and two to the south. In autumn 1960, *Purpose* reported that Lloyds Bank Branches Clearing Centre had moved into these temporary premises, 'in the form of attractive pre-fabricated buildings tucked away behind the new Corporation office block in Danestrete'.⁵¹⁴ The clearing centre had moved to Stevenage from the City of London in September that year, with a staff of 80 people who handled up to 120,000 cheques a day.

The arrangement was only intended as temporary – work began on permanent offices for the Lloyds Clearing Centre further north in Danestrete in 1961 and the company moved there in late 1962 (see pp. 129-31). The vacated temporary structures were then leased to Stevenage Development Corporation.⁵¹⁵ *Purpose* noted in its issue of winter 1962/3 that the Corporation intended to use the Terrapin huts as an exhibition hall and reception centre for visiting parties – the Corporation's technical report of 1962 was on display here, for instance – while other parts of the hut complex were leased to Leonard Vincent and Raymond Gorbing's new architectural firm, the Stevenage Day Nursery and the new Times Social Club.⁵¹⁶ The nursery moved to the site in winter 1962/3 from the former Sish Lane canteen building by the King George V playing fields to the north, while the Times Club, a local group registered in 1961, had its official opening in the new premises on 22 December 1962; Vincent and Gorbing's tenure also began in 1962.⁵¹⁷ Judging by a 1967 layout plan of the town centre, it was the north hut in the complex – labelled 'offices' – which was used by the Corporation, while the two to the south accommodated the nursery and club respectively.⁵¹⁸

Vincent and Gorbing moved their firm to the newly opened Southgate House in autumn 1964 (see p. 150), and the nursery and social club – still in this location in spring 1964 – seem to have moved out the following year.⁵¹⁹ In July 1965, the huts were leased by the Corporation to the Arts Guild of Stevenage and the Lytton Players, a well-established dramatic and musical society, as a first step in an arts centre project. An additional Terrapin hut was added to the complex to meet their needs in September 1968.⁵²⁰ However, by this time, the future of the buildings was limited. In the comprehensive layout plan produced in November 1965, the temporary buildings were shown in dotted outline only, with drawings indicating their replacement with blocks of retail premises extending towards the old Great North Road.⁵²¹ The huts were still shown on the town centre plan of September 1967, but had gone by the time the 1:1,250 Ordnance Survey map was published in 1971 (see Fig. 47).⁵²² The site was reworked as the south extension of Swingate and the creation of Danesgate,

a new road which linked Danestrete to the Great North Road and Lytton Way (the latter completed in 1969). In the mid-1980s, the site was redeveloped by Stevenage Borough Council as the west extension to Daneshill House (see Fig. 115).

Mecca Dance Hall (the ‘Locarno’), Danestrete

Date: 1960-61

Design: Stevenage Development Corporation – under Chief Architect Leonard Vincent (for Mecca)

As has been noted, the area to the west of the bus station was set aside in the original plans of Stevenage for entertainment buildings, which the town centre sorely lacked in its earliest years. Initially, the Development Corporation hoped to build a cinema in this location, and various negotiations were carried out in the mid-1950s with ABC and Rank (Odeon).⁵²³ However, these proved to be fruitless, and by 1958 proposals focused instead on a dance hall. Clearly, the Corporation took a proactive approach in finding a suitable company to work with. In 1961, the Joint Chairman of Mecca, Alan B. Fairley, gave ‘full marks to the Development Corporation’s energetic and imaginative General Manager, Mr R. S. McDougall, for his persistence, which finally persuaded Mecca to come to Stevenage’.⁵²⁴

Mecca had its origins in the late nineteenth century as a temperance caterer, but had successfully diversified into dance halls in 1927, with its first premises of this type opening in Brighton.⁵²⁵ By this time, dance halls were big business, occupying ‘a pivotal place in the culture of working- and lower-middle-class communities in Britain’.⁵²⁶ The subsequent years underlined Mecca’s huge popularity, and expansion continued in the two decades following the Second World War, with most halls taking the name Locarno from the showcase venue in Streatham, South London – one of the company’s earliest acquisitions (opened 1929). The 1950s was a decade of particular success, and has been described as the ‘golden age of the dance hall’.⁵²⁷ At the time of the Stevenage dance hall’s opening in 1961, Mecca operated 41 venues across Britain, with three more in planning or under construction. These included the Café de Paris in London’s Piccadilly Circus, the Lyceum on the Strand, and Locarnos in cities such as Birmingham, Bradford, Coventry, Derby, Hull, Nottingham and Liverpool.⁵²⁸ Mecca termed itself, with justification, the ‘world’s largest Ballroom organisation’; it also operated ice rinks and – following the legislation of play for stakes under the Betting and Gaming Act of 1960 – bingo halls.⁵²⁹

Design work for the new dance hall at Stevenage was undertaken by Leonard Vincent and his team at the Development Corporation, in collaboration with Mr A. Askew of Mecca. Plans for the dance hall were drawn up in March 1958 and a model of the scheme was produced by the architect in 1960 (Fig. 116, and see Fig. 8); this was put on show in a specially designed kiosk building in Danestrete, while the dance hall was under construction.⁵³⁰ Building work began in May 1960, the contractors being Harry Neal Ltd, who had undertaken all the first phase work in



Figure 116. The model of the Mecca dance hall, produced in 1960 by Leonard Vincent and his team. During construction, the model was exhibited in a specially designed kiosk on the site in Danestrete. (With kind permission of Stevenage Museum, P3357)

Stevenage town centre.⁵³¹ The foundation stone was officially laid on 17 October 1960 by Henry Brooke (1903-84), Minister of Housing and Local Government; the event was celebrated with an ‘open-air ballroom’ in the Town Square and a cocktail party for around three hundred guests from the town and surrounding area, held in a marquee on the car park at the rear of the Mecca site.⁵³² In September 1960, thinking of the new Mecca, the *Stevenage Pictorial* commented that: ‘Many things have been said in the past about the lack of entertainment in Stevenage, but now it seems that the town could well become an entertainment centre for the greater part of North Herts’.⁵³³

Vincent designed the dance hall as a broad building of two low storeys at the front, facing Danestrete, and a taller structure housing the ballroom to the rear, with its stage on the west side (Fig. 117). The front block was faced in brick, with a ground-floor entrance and a run of large windows on the first floor, with a further glazed area on the north façade, lighting and revealing the staircase. The two levels were divided by a projecting canopy, which linked with that of the adjoining and contemporary Daneshill House, built in 1959-61 (see above). Originally, as can be seen in surviving historic photographs, the dance hall carried the words ‘Mecca Dancing’ on its parapet and ‘Locarno’ on the canopy above the ground floor.⁵³⁴ There was also a neon sign on the dance hall’s rear (west) elevation, facing over the car park towards the old Great North Road and the railway line.⁵³⁵ There were two small, single-storey buildings projecting to the north of the ground floor. During construction, the northernmost and slightly larger of these contained the architects’ model, making it visible to the public. Later, generally termed the ‘kiosk’, it was used for selling sweets, flowers, souvenirs and such like; by the early 1970s it had become a recruiting centre, and was demolished in 1975.⁵³⁶



Figure 117. The Mecca dance hall in Danestrete – built in 1960-1, and shown here just after completion – was a major new entertainment facility for Stevenage. The ballroom was contained in the large, metal-clad block at the rear. Daneshill House is shown on the site to the left. (With kind permission of Stevenage Museum, P6821)

The taller ballroom block was given a gently sloping roof and was clad in corrugated metal (probably aluminium) sheeting. Initially, there were plans to include accommodation for some of the building's staff within the structure, but in the end they were offered houses in the town instead.⁵³⁷

The opening of the new Mecca – a ceremony performed by Councillor Mick Cotter, Chairman of Stevenage Urban District Council – took place on 2 October 1961, ‘with all the colour and pageantry, music and merriment for which Mecca Dancing have rightly gained a world-wide reputation’.⁵³⁸ Mecca invited 800 guests, and the large ballroom – designed to hold around 2,000 dancers, plus 700 ‘sitters out’ – was full.⁵³⁹ At the Mecca's first open day, held on 3 October, over 20,000 people came to look around, while the formal opening was marked with a grand ball on 6 October, the press noting that ‘my dear, simply everybody was there’.⁵⁴⁰ The manager, B. A. Elmer-Smith, stated that his aim was to make the venue ‘the most wonderful ballroom in the world’, while Mecca boasted of its aim to ‘provide West End entertainment and catering in a real live setting at the Stevenage Locarno’.⁵⁴¹ The venue was the first Mecca ballroom opened outside one of Britain's major cities, and was designed to appeal to people living in a broad geographical area.⁵⁴² It was claimed that it was ‘the most modern of its kind’ in Britain, while an advertisement published at the time of opening boasted that ‘Stevenage now possesses public and private dancing facilities unequalled anywhere in the country’.⁵⁴³ Unquestionably, the new dance hall was welcomed enthusiastically by locals of all ages; one guest was heard to remark that ‘With all this here it will surely be well-nigh impossible to say now “There's nowhere to go and nothing to do in Stevenage in the evening”’.⁵⁴⁴

One journalist commented that ‘The lighting effects in the ballroom have to be seen to be believed’.⁵⁴⁵ This large double-height space, with a balcony at its outer edges on three sides, had a Canadian maple strip dance floor, a revolving stage and a ‘night-sky ceiling’, lit with thousands of tiny lights, ‘offering an Arabian Night-like fantasy’ (Fig. 118).⁵⁴⁶ Both the revolving stage – a practical solution to the problem



Figure 118. The interior of the ballroom in the Mecca dance hall, designed to hold around 2,000 dancers along with 700 ‘sitters out’. It had a revolving stage and, like other Mecca ballrooms, was notable for its elaborate lighting scheme, offering ‘an Arabian Night-like fantasy’. (With kind permission of Stevenage Museum, P6825)

of providing non-stop music – and the ambitious lighting scheme were characteristic of Mecca dance halls of this time.⁵⁴⁷ There was seating in the ‘under balcony’, and the licensed ‘Tudor Rooms’ and restaurant on the first floor, ‘for eating out in night club style’ and for functions such as wedding receptions; this separate social club had its own smaller ballroom.⁵⁴⁸ There were also beautifully appointed ladies’ ‘boudoirs’ and gentlemen’s ‘stag rooms’ (complete with electric pressers and razors for men who went dancing straight after work).⁵⁴⁹ Bingo nights – made permissible under the Betting and Gaming Act of 1960 – were held from the outset, the first taking place on 10 October 1961, and remained popular during the ‘bingo boom’ of the early 1960s.⁵⁵⁰ Plans show that the toilets were located at the front of the building, to either side of the main foyer.⁵⁵¹

Dance halls began to decline as a whole from the mid-1960s onwards, in favour of venues such as discotheques and nightclubs.⁵⁵² However, the Stevenage premises clearly remained extremely popular, partly due to the lack of alternative, similar facilities within the town during these years. Over the course of the 1960s and ‘70s, the building was used for club events, parties, dances, regular social nights and, increasingly, bingo and live music performances. Bands which performed in the ballroom at Stevenage included the Rolling Stones (1964), The Who (1965), The Hollies (1965), the Small Faces (1966 and 1968), Cream (1967), Bill Hailey (1969) and Thin Lizzy (1973). Alterations were carried out over this period, but they were generally comparatively minor. In 1966, Leonard Vincent – in his capacity as consultant to Stevenage Development Corporation – prepared drawings relating to a proposed extension and enclosure of a courtyard at the rear, outline approval being granted in July that year.⁵⁵³ In 1967, Mecca expressed interest in using the adjacent bowling alley as a bingo club, but nothing came of the idea.⁵⁵⁴

There was much correspondence between the Development Corporation and Mecca between 1969 and 1976 relating to the construction of the pedestrian walkway linking the town centre to the new railway station (see Figs 49 and 51). This was created to the immediate north, between the dance hall and the bowling alley. In order to ensure the link was of sufficient size and status, the Corporation paid for the removal of a mature tree, the small kiosk building at the north-east corner of the dance hall and a chair store which projected into the route, together with the building of new stores, dressing rooms and women’s toilets to the rear. This work, designed and begun in 1970, was finally completed after considerable delay in 1976.⁵⁵⁵ The Corporation stipulated that the facing brickwork used for the new work should match that of the existing structure.⁵⁵⁶

Today, the dance hall survives fairly well, and is still run by Mecca, predominantly as a bingo hall. The massing of the building is that of 1960-1, with the lower front range and the taller, larger, metal-clad ballroom rising behind (Fig. 119). James Bettley, in his revision of the Hertfordshire Buildings of England volume, opines that this and the bowling centre were ‘Unworthy of their position’ in the town centre.⁵⁵⁷ Undoubtedly, the dance hall’s original impact has been reduced by various alterations. Although the main elevation to Danestrete is generally intact, its first-floor windows have been covered over, the original lettering has been removed and the canopy has been reworked as a heavier, thicker structure, blocking some



Figure 119. A photograph of 2020 showing the exterior of what is now Stevenage's Mecca bingo hall. The massing of the building is that of 1960-1, but there have been various alterations, such as the remodelling of the canopy. (©Historic England Archive, Patricia Payne, DP278095)

narrow clerestory lights. The insertion of the two-storey entrance block to Daneshill House in the mid-1980s, which projects forwards over the pavement, means that the canopy no longer links with that of the adjacent office block on the south. At the north-east corner of the dance hall, there have been changes, some of them undertaken as part of the 1970s works noted above. The single-storey access/fire escape block adjoining the entrance range has been rebuilt or extended forward to the pavement, and now obscures the lower half of the staircase glazing. Also, a single-storey yard with front double doors has been added, connecting the street to the ground-floor cellar, while the metal cladding of the rear, ballroom block has been painted a garish blue.

Internally, the former ballroom survives as the main bingo hall, with gallery and stage, though there have been various changes (Fig. 120). The decorative metal balustrade to the gallery is original, as are the staircases with their handrails. However, a modern suspended ceiling has been inserted, the stage has been replaced and the proscenium has been enclosed within a projecting cube of walling. It is possible, however, that features of 1960-1 survive beneath later covering – including the maple floor. The area at the front of the building now serves as an amusements area, with numerous fruit machines. The Mecca dance hall is one of a series of buildings proposed for demolition by Stevenage Borough Council as part of a large redevelopment scheme, submitted in December 2019.⁵⁵⁸ Under these plans, the building would be replaced by a seven- to eight-storey block, with matching blocks to its north and south, on the sites of Daneshill House and Swingate House.



Figure 120. The interior of the former Mecca ballroom photographed in 2020. The space is now the main bingo hall and has been much altered, though the original gallery and staircases survive. (©Historic England Archive, James O. Davies, DP275632)

Ambassador Lanes Bowling Centre, Danestrete

Date: 1961-62

Design: Stevenage Development Corporation – under Chief Architect Leonard Vincent (for Ambassador Bowling Ltd)

The construction of a bowling alley was another important entertainment amenity for Stevenage town centre. In plans and drawings of the mid-1950s, this site – to the north-west of the bus station and the Edward the Confessor public house – had been allocated to a cinema, along with that to the south, subsequently developed as the dance hall. As noted above, discussions with cinema companies had broken down by 1958, and in August 1960 Stevenage Development Corporation announced plans for a bowling alley, to include a snack bar and nursery.⁵⁵⁹ The craze for ten-pin bowling had spread to the United Kingdom from America, with the first commercial bowling hall, ‘Tenpin Lanes’, opening in London’s Stamford Hill on 20 January 1960.

After a slight delay while the number of lanes to be housed in Stevenage’s new bowling centre was reconsidered, construction began in late autumn 1961, following completion of the dance hall.⁵⁶⁰ This was on the adjacent site, divided from the bowling centre by an open pedestrian way, incorporated into the walkway from the new railway station in the first half of the 1970s. The *Architects’ Journal* spoke of the bowling centre as forming part ‘of an embryo entertainment centre ideally situated in relation to the town centre, public transport and parking spaces’, adding that ‘The only major disadvantage is the restricted length of the site which results in the reduction or elimination of certain plan requirements’.⁵⁶¹ The new centre was run by Ambassador Bowling Ltd, a subsidiary of Associated Television (ATV), who opened a bowling centre of the same type in Ipswich in early 1962. In February that year, the local press reported that the Stevenage building was ‘a network of girders’, while in March the Development Corporation’s journal *Purpose* stated that the building’s ‘steel framework is already disappearing under its brickwork cladding’; by the end of July 1962, the bowling equipment was being installed.⁵⁶²

The venue – the first bowling centre in any British new town, and one of the largest in England at that date – was opened for a press launch held on 13 August 1962 and the public were given access from 26 August.⁵⁶³ However, the official opening ceremony was delayed until the following month, to make sure all the complicated American Machine & Foundry (AMF) equipment was operating properly.⁵⁶⁴ On 15 September 1962, the tape was formally cut by Dr Charles Hill (1904-89), Luton’s MP and ex-Housing Minister, and the actor Roger Moore (1927-2017), star of the new ATV series ‘The Saint’, inaugurated the lanes by rolling ‘the Golden Ball’.⁵⁶⁵ The Chairman of Ambassador Bowling noted that there were, at that point, 27 such bowling centres in Britain, but the number was expected to rise to around 60 by the end of 1963.⁵⁶⁶ Charles Hill expressed his hope that the new centre would appeal to people of all ages, and would be a ‘great joy and benefit to Stevenage’.⁵⁶⁷

The ‘snazzy’ new Ambassador bowling centre – featured in *Architects’ Journal* in March 1963 – was designed by Stevenage Development Corporation under Leonard Vincent, other members of the team being L. W. Aked (Deputy Chief Architect),

T. D. Carter ('architect in charge') and Ray Gorbng, in liaison with Ambassador Bowling Ltd (Fig. 121).⁵⁶⁸ Construction was undertaken by Harry Neal Ltd, as with most other buildings of this date in Stevenage town centre.⁵⁶⁹ Like the front range of the dance hall to the immediate south, also designed by Vincent and his team, the building had a low, broad profile, with a flat roof. It was described by the *Architects' Journal* as being essentially 'a large box, containing the maximum number of bowling lanes', with a more open front 'attracting passers-by with views of the bowling lanes'.⁵⁷⁰ The local press stated that the bowling centre was designed to:

fit into the visual scheme presented by the appearance of this modern town centre, and at the same time to meet the rather rigid functional requirements imposed by the needs of the game and the limitations of the size of the available site.⁵⁷¹



Figure 121. The second major entertainment venue opened in Stevenage town centre: the Ambassador Lanes bowling centre, built in 1961-2, next to the Mecca dance hall on Danestrete, to designs by Leonard Vincent and his team. The building was damaged by fire in 1966, rebuilt and later demolished (in c. 2002). (With kind permission of Stevenage Museum, P7077)

On its main (east) elevation, textual interest was provided by a facing of exposed aggregate panels of a type used widely in the 1950s and '60s town centre works. The stepped entrance was around the centre of the frontage, with a canopy above it, four bays of windows to its left (lighting the club/bar and club meeting room) and then an entrance to the Wimpy Bar. Above, the words 'Ambassador Bowling' were set out in large and distinctive lettering. The rear façade was entirely plain, but did carry the name of the centre, visible from the old Great North Road and the railway.⁵⁷² At the time of its completion, the Ambassador bowling centre was the most northerly building on Danestrete, but Swingate House was completed on the site to the north shortly afterwards (see below).

Within, the bowling centre was described as being 'palatial with its lanes, spectator space and Wimpy Bar'.⁵⁷³ There were 26 lanes in all, with room for 130 players and 150 spectators; the use of castellated beams helped provide 19,000 sq. ft of

unobstructed floor space, while acoustic ceiling tiles were used in order to try and combat the inevitable degree of noise (Fig. 122).⁵⁷⁴ As the size of the lanes dictated the internal arrangement and dominated the space, the other elements of the building, including the spectator area and concourse, were more limited than was desirable. As is shown by the plan as published in 1963, the spaces other than the lanes were squeezed into a long, thin 'strip' on the east.⁵⁷⁵ The Wimpy Bar – at the south-east corner of the building, described by *Tenpin Monthly* as being 'elegant' and 'strikingly decorated' – accommodated a further 67 people, and doubled as a club meeting room, which could be divided off using folding screens; it was part of a chain of snack bars and restaurants which had arrived in the UK in 1954.⁵⁷⁶ There were also lavatories and staff offices, and a small licensed clubroom and bar for members, opened in December 1962 on the south of the entrance foyer – though, on account of high entry prices and limited demand, this was in jeopardy by February 1963.⁵⁷⁷ The bowling centre was open seven days a week and until 4am at weekends, promising to be, as one newspaper put it, 'a favourite haunt for insomniacs'.⁵⁷⁸ It certainly proved popular: the press noted that on 6 October 1962, 1,000 people visited the bowling centre for its Saturday session.⁵⁷⁹



Figure 122. The interior of the Ambassador bowling centre, Danestrete, in a photograph of 1962. The venue featured 26 lanes in all, and also included a Wimpy Bar. (With kind permission of Stevenage Museum, P6858)

Sadly, in April 1966, the Ambassador bowling centre was damaged by a serious fire; apparently, only the interior of the Wimpy Bar was left unscathed.⁵⁸⁰ The building was reworked, advice being provided by Leonard Vincent, who emphasised that the 'design of this building was most carefully considered' and that changes should be as minimal as possible.⁵⁸¹ The intention had been for Vincent, Goring & Partners to design the new work themselves – they had set up as freelance architects in 1962 – but by the end of 1966, they seem to have 'dropped out of the picture'.⁵⁸² Some of the new work – which included the insertion of five additional windows in the rear elevation – reflected advice given by the Chief Fire Officer.⁵⁸³ The 'Ambassador Bowl' reopened in February 1967, having apparently been installed with 14 bowling lanes and machines, to replace the 26 of the first phase.⁵⁸⁴

By 1972, the Stevenage bowling centre was in financial trouble, reflecting the fall in popularity of bowling alleys nationally. A campaign was launched to save it from closure, and there was also resistance to a proposal to convert the building as a bingo hall; locals did not want to lose a valued sports facility in the town centre.⁵⁸⁵ The possibility of building an office block in its place was considered by the Development Corporation, but it was felt that 100,000 sq. ft would be required and that would be 'completely out of scale on this site'.⁵⁸⁶ The idea that the Corporation could run

the venue itself was seriously considered at this time, but it was Stevenage Borough Council that took up the bowlers' case and funded the venue; in 1973 the architect Alan Rowe described the facility as 'recently municipalised', though 'comparatively unprofitable'.⁵⁸⁷ The Corporation's General Manager during these years, Jack Balchin, wrote in 1980 that the Council 'has reshaped the interior, improved the amenities and decor, has once again changed the management and, with a further fresh start in 1980, hopes to increase the Bowl's attraction and the financial support which the bowling public will give'.⁵⁸⁸

Clearly, the climate remained challenging, for the bowling alley is said to have closed in c. 1989, and an application of that year proposed the building of a single-storey extension and canopy for a new entrance, along with recladding of the whole structure.⁵⁸⁹ However, it was still 'Stevenage Bowl' in 1991, though was owned by Quasar amusements by 1996. It was only in early 2002 that the Council made an application – approved that June – to demolish the building and replace it with an 84-space surface car park.⁵⁹⁰ The bowling centre was subsequently taken down, and the car park survives on its former site. There are current plans to redevelop this site with buildings of various scales, taking in the sites of the adjacent Swingate House and Mecca dance hall.

Swingate House, corner of Danestrete and Swingate

Date: 1961-2

Design: Stevenage Development Corporation – under Chief Architect Leonard Vincent

As has been noted in relation to Langley House, Stevenage Development Corporation was proactive in its efforts to attract large companies to the town centre. It did this by building office accommodation in order to 'create a variety of employment in Stevenage and to encourage decentralization of offices from London'.⁵⁹¹ Only slightly later than the office blocks to the west and south-west of the Town Square was Swingate House, built for the Lloyds Bank Branches Clearing Centre. This had moved from the City of London to temporary premises to the rear of Daneshill House in autumn 1960 (see p. 120).

At that point, it was already intended that the centre would soon move to a 'six-storey building to be constructed in Danestrete'.⁵⁹² This was designed by Leonard Vincent and his team at the Development Corporation in early 1961, and was begun in July the same year, around the time that work was initiated on the bowling centre on the adjacent site.⁵⁹³ The Corporation's journal, *Purpose*, commented that 'Thus gradually the perimeter of the Town Centre is being built up and is making an enormous difference to its appearance as well as bringing more and more people into the centre at all hours of the day'.⁵⁹⁴ The new block – not far from the branch of Lloyds Bank at 3-5 Town Square – was completed in December 1962, and the Lloyds Clearing Centre moved in immediately (Fig. 123).⁵⁹⁵ The Corporation's journal *Purpose* noted that:



Figure 123. The south front of Swingate House, Danestrete, built in 1961-2 as offices for the Lloyds Bank Branches Clearing Centre. From 1968, the block was used by Stevenage Development Corporation and later by Stevenage Borough Council. (©Historic England Archive, James O. Davies, DP275643)

The well-lighted and electrically heated offices on the upper floors are occupied by different departments of the centre, the top floor having dining room, canteen and kitchens, while the ground floor will accommodate the mechanical equipment without which no great financial organisation could nowadays operate efficiently.⁵⁹⁶

The original plans of early 1961, and later plans dated January 1968, show that in layout Swingate House was similar to Daneshill House (Fig. 124).⁵⁹⁷ A simple rectangular structure with its end walls to east and west, and staircases at its south-east and north-west corners, it had its main entrance in the east elevation, and a subsidiary entrance to the west; a ramped entrance now on the north façade seems to be a more modern creation.⁵⁹⁸ Originally, most of the floor spaces were left open, without partitions, though there were enclosed rooms relating to the postal area on the fourth floor and the staff rooms (next to dining room and kitchen) on the fifth floor. Later, from at least 1968, the upper-floor levels were altered to contain offices arranged either side of a central corridor.

Externally, Swingate House was austere in design, without the glazed curtain walling that had been used at earlier offices in the town centre, including Daneshill House.⁵⁹⁹ The elevation drawings were produced by Vincent and his team in April 1961, and show that the ground floor was faced in brick, there were canopies above the two entrances, the upper floors were clad in vitreous glass mosaic 'by specialists', the windows were of anodised aluminium, there were hardwood sliding doors linking the fifth-floor main dining room and managers' dining room to balconies facing towards Daneshill House, and there was a precast artificial stone coping at roof level (see Fig. 123).⁶⁰⁰ On the south, the offices overlooked the single-storey bowling centre, but the north outlook was open until the first block of Brickdale House was completed in 1966.

In 1968, Lloyds vacated Swingate House 'for centralisation reasons'.⁶⁰¹ The Development Corporation decided to retain the building as overspill office accommodation, and in that year there was a rearrangement of Corporation staff

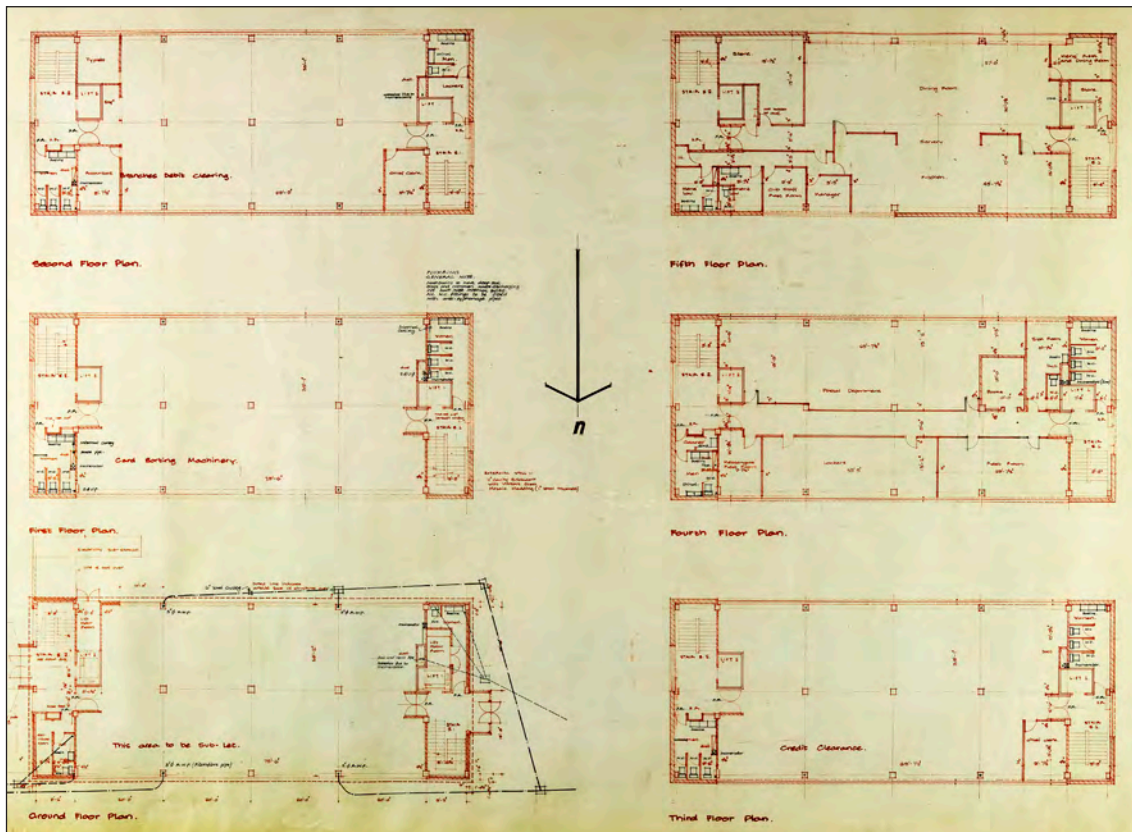


Figure 124. The original floor plans of Swingate House, produced in April 1961 by Leonard Vincent and his team. In layout, the offices were similar to Daneshill House, with a simple rectangular block and corner staircases. (Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies, Off Acc 793, bundle 67)

between Swingate House and Daneshill House.⁶⁰² The fourth and fifth floors of Swingate House were set aside for catering, while members of the Corporation's Chief Executive Office were among those moved across to Swingate. The Corporation had taken up its new accommodation by August 1968, and retained occupation until its demise in 1980.⁶⁰³ At that point, Swingate House became, with Daneshill House, the offices of Stevenage Borough Council, though staff of the Council had already been using Swingate House by at least the 1970s. Sandblasting and redecoration of the exterior was undertaken in 1982.⁶⁰⁴

The building remains in the hands of the Borough Council today. It retains its overall massing and various original features, including staircases which are little altered, with their early 1960s wooden handrails. Swingate House is one of a series of buildings proposed for demolition by Stevenage Borough Council as part of a large redevelopment scheme, submitted in December 2019.⁶⁰⁵ Under these proposals, it would be replaced by a large block mainly of seven and eight storeys.

Brickdale House, corner of Swingate and Danestrete

- Date:** 1964-66 (stage I); c. 1967-68 (stage II); 1973-4 (stage III); 1986-7 (stage IV)
- Design:** Ministry of Public Building and Works and its successor after 1970, the Department of the Environment; stage III and stage IV design by the Property Services Agency

The development of the town centre's office provision continued with Brickdale House, built on a site adjacent to Swingate House (see above), at the north end of Danestrete. This complex – known as the 'Crown offices' development or 'Crown building' – was designed by the Ministry of Public Building and Works, in collaboration with Leonard Vincent and his team at the Development Corporation.⁶⁰⁶ It was intended as offices for the Land Registry in particular – which had been housed since 1959 in temporary, constricted accommodation above the Head Post Office and subsequently in Southgate House – but also catered for other government departments including the Inland Revenue.

Sketches for the site were being produced in early 1962, when the bowling centre and Swingate House were still under construction on the neighbouring sites. The vision at that time was that the office complex would be linked by a pedestrian route with the town hall and other municipal buildings at The Forum to the north-east, although the latter never went ahead (see Fig. 37).⁶⁰⁷ The Ministry formally agreed to acquire the site in August 1962; the application to build the offices was signed off in April 1963 and, after a delay, detailed plans were submitted to the Corporation by the Ministry's architect towards the end of that year.⁶⁰⁸

These envisaged a phased approach to construction, to be undertaken over several years. The first stage of work, initially scheduled for completion in autumn 1964, was to comprise a four-storey office block of 25,000 sq. ft parallel to and fronting onto Danestrete, with a car park to the rear.⁶⁰⁹ Construction began in March 1964, and was finished in 1966 (Fig. 125). That February, staff from four government



Figure 125. A photo of 1967 showing the recently completed phase one block of Brickdale House, Danestrete (built 1964-6), and work beginning on phase two, to the north. The offices were built to designs by the Ministry of Public Building and Works and housed staff from four government departments. (With kind permission of Stevenage Museum, P7276)

departments, the Land Registry, the Ministry of Pensions and National Insurance, the Ministry of Labour and the National Assistance Board, all moved into what was named Brickdale House.⁶¹⁰ This was a curtain-walled structure – a later and slightly less distinctive version of the same design type used at Langley House (see Fig. 113).⁶¹¹

The second stage of the project comprised the building of the main Land Registry office on the same site, in a three-storey block aligned east-west. This was linked to the slightly earlier range, the two forming an L-shaped complex; it seems to have been begun in 1967 and completed the following year.⁶¹² The aim was that ‘by 1970 the scheme will provide work for more than 300 people, including a nucleus of experienced staff to be transferred from London’, with staff to be recruited locally until the completion of the programme in the mid-1970s.⁶¹³

In 1971, the Development Corporation was expecting Treasury approval for a modified stage three – another, larger office block – to begin on site that year, comprising a building of no more than six storeys (originally, a block of ten storeys had been envisaged).⁶¹⁴ The planning application for this stage three block, built for the Department of the Environment, was approved in November 1973, and construction was completed in 1974 (Fig. 126).⁶¹⁵ This block was added on the west side of the existing Brickdale House complex, parallel to the old Great North Road, the buildings as a whole forming a U-plan, with a surface car park at the centre. Ordnance Survey maps show the building in place by 1975, and aerial photographs of the mid-1980s show this six-storey block, slightly detached from the L-shaped offices to the immediate east (see Fig. 52).⁶¹⁶ An extension to the complex was approved in autumn 1976, taking the form of employment offices, serving the Department of Employment.⁶¹⁷



Figure 126. The west and south blocks of Brickdale House, built in 1973-4 and 1986-7 respectively, to designs by the Property Services Agency. (©Historic England Archive, James O. Davies, DP275650)

In the 1960s, Brickdale House had enjoyed an open prospect northwards. This was only a temporary context, however. A layout plan of the town centre prepared by Vincent, Gorbing & Partners in September 1967 indicated changes such as the curtailing of Danestrete at its junction with Swingate and the development of the land thus cleared, to the north of Brickdale House, as Stevenage’s ‘Civic Centre’ (see Fig. 46).⁶¹⁸ This proposed municipal complex, including town hall, art gallery, museum and other related buildings, was moved to this location after the allocated site at the north of Queensway was repurposed for the expansion of the shopping precinct. Further details of the scheme were worked up by Vincent in the early to mid-1970s. However, the civic centre never made it off the drawing board. Instead,

by the late 1980s, Brickdale House was bounded on its north side by a Tesco superstore, and on its east by the Westgate shopping centre, both completed in 1988 (see Figs 9 and 54).

In 1985, a year before the Tesco development was first mooted, a planning application was submitted proposing the extension of the Brickdale House complex. A further application was approved in summer 1986, and work went ahead in c. 1986-7.⁶¹⁹ This, designed by the Property Services Agency, saw the construction of a six-storey block on the south, facing Swingate; a gap was left on the south-east of the complex to provide access to the central car park. The new range was in a similar form and connected to the existing west wing. The latter block seems to have been altered externally at this time, to make the west and south ranges appear 'of a piece'. In 1995, permission was granted for the addition of new entrance canopies and alterations to the elevations of Brickdale House.⁶²⁰

In more recent years, Brickdale House has been vacated by the government departments for which it was built. For instance, the Land Registry moved out in 2009. In 2013-15, a series of permissions were granted by Stevenage Borough Council relating to the reworking of the building.⁶²¹ The east block was heavily remodelled as one- and two-bedroom apartments, to designs by GHM Partnership, with an additional two storeys added, and the north block was reworked also.⁶²² The building, in its new partly residential use, retains its former name, Brickdale House.

Central Garage, Danestrete

Date: 1960-61

Design: Max Lock (for Shell-Mex BP Ltd)

The south end of Danestrete represented an important point within the town centre. It was the vehicular gateway to the heart of Stevenage new town, being the principal through route – with the bus station at its centre, next to the Town Square. Following the closure of the old Great North Road (London Road) to through traffic in c. 1969, it became the only through route, though Danestrete was subsequently curtailed at the north in the late 1970s or early 1980s.

It was, therefore, an obvious location for a petrol station, garage and car showroom. This was intended from a comparatively early stage. For instance, the town centre layout plan of 1959 shows a garage and showroom on the west side of Danestrete, to the immediate south of the bus garage (see Fig. 21).⁶²³ In actuality, the selected site was very slightly further south – directly opposite the junction with Southgate – close to the Danestrete/Six Hills Way crossroads. Discussions about the provision of a large garage and car showroom in this location were underway by 1959, and in 1960 the buildings were under construction.⁶²⁴ They were built for the company Shell-Mex BP Ltd, and opened at the end of 1961, with the name 'Central Garage' (Fig. 127).⁶²⁵ This was then the only petrol and service station in Stevenage town centre, and by early 1962 had already proved 'a boon to many motorists who work



Figure 127. The Central Garage, Danestrete, was the first building of its type in Stevenage town centre. It was built in 1960-1 for Shell Mex BP Ltd, to designs by the respected architect Max Lock, including both a car showroom and a filling station. The site was redeveloped as flats in 2005-6. (With kind permission of Stevenage Museum, P3738)

in the Town Centre, and a useful supply point on the way to the Industrial Area'.⁶²⁶ It was leased to Zenith Motors, which had its headquarters in East London and operated a number of other garages and showrooms in the Home Counties.

Notably, the new Central Garage was designed by the well-known architect and planner Max Lock (1909-88). Archive photographs show that the showroom took the form of a simple but dramatic two-storey, box-like structure with glass walls to north, east and south. In front of this was a pull-in with petrol pumps. At the south-east corner, pumps were arranged as an island with an openwork 'tower' rising from a canopy above, slightly taller than the showroom. This was presumably designed as a landmark, and referenced the clock tower in the Town Square. To the rear of the showroom was a large garage building or motorists' shop, with contoured roof inset with windows, and to the south was a surface car park.

In subsequent years, the Central Garage continued to be operated by Zenith, who also opened other petrol stations and garages locally.⁶²⁷ By the late 1980s, the building was Zenith's headquarters, and later became the headquarters of the car dealership Gates of Stevenage. An aerial photograph of 1986 shows that the garage had by then been extended as a car showroom to the rear, facing onto Lytton Way (see Fig. 111).⁶²⁸ Gates moved out in March 2003, and in February 2005 permission was granted for demolition of the Central Garage and replacement with a development of 85 sheltered apartments. These, named Pinetree Court, are made up of brick blocks variously of four, five and six storeys, and extend through the full depth of the site, right up to Lytton Way (see Fig. 56).

Outpatients' Clinic, corner of Southgate and Danestrete

Date: 1959-61

Design: Peter Dunham (for the North-West Metropolitan Regional Hospital Board)

The development of the island site bounded by Southgate, Danestrete, Six Hills Way and St George's Way has a fairly complicated history, the detail of which falls beyond the scope of this report. The site as a whole was initially allocated entirely to Hertfordshire County Council, with various schemes drawn up between 1955 and 1958; terms for the land were agreed with the Development Corporation in autumn 1957.⁶²⁹ The buildings were originally to comprise – from west to east – Crown offices, library with health centre, courthouse, police station and fire station.⁶³⁰ By the time the siting of the buildings gained final approval in September 1958, however, various changes had been made.⁶³¹

In the final scheme, the County Council built two buildings in Southgate (the conjoined library and health centre and the police station), the Development Corporation built two (The Towers and Southgate House, the latter an addition of 1963-4) and a final building was allocated to the North-West Metropolitan Regional Hospital Board (see Figs 33-4 and 37). The design of all these structures had to be approved by the Corporation and follow their approach for the rest of the town centre (see p. 44). When built up, Southgate was closed (in 1962) at each of its ends by traffic bollards, preventing through passage by cars and other vehicles.⁶³²

The site allotted to the North-West Metropolitan Regional Hospital Board – at the west end of Southgate, at the corner of Danestrete, across from the Central Garage and opposite Langley House (see pp. 115-6) – was developed as an outpatients' centre or clinic, maintained and administered as an annexe of the Lister Hospital in Hitchin. The Development Corporation's annual report of 1958 recorded that the Board had agreed to build a clinic on the site.⁶³³ For the designs of the building, the Board turned to one of their approved consultants – the architect Peter Dunham (1911-97) of the firm Messrs Dunham, Widdup and Harrison, appointed in November 1957.⁶³⁴ His first designs were discussed in May 1958 and a revised scheme was approved that November. Tenders for the new building were approved in November 1959, and work began around that time, alongside development further west on Southgate (Figs 128-129).⁶³⁵

In design, the Stevenage centre followed the model of a pioneering diagnostic outpatients' clinic in Corby new town, designed in 1955 for the Nuffield Organisation by John Weeks of Llewelyn Davies and Weeks (it survives much altered). However, at Stevenage the model was adapted to two storeys and with the addition of dental facilities. The new outpatients' building was officially opened on 20 April 1961, the ceremony being performed by Lord Moynihan (1906-65), Chairman of the North-West Metropolitan Regional Hospital Board.⁶³⁶ Lord Moynihan emphasised that the new facility was 'not a casualty department in any sense of the word'.⁶³⁷



Figure 128. The outpatients' clinic built at the corner of Danestrete and Southgate for the North-West Metropolitan Regional Hospital Board. Designed by freelance architect Peter Dunham, the building dates from 1959-61 and is shown here shortly after completion. (With kind permission of Stevenage Museum, P6773)



Figure 129. The same view of the outpatients' clinic in 2020, showing how little the exterior of the building has been altered over the past six decades. (©Historic England Archive, James O. Davies, DP275679)

However, it was still a very welcome addition to the amenities of Stevenage town centre at a time when the nearest general hospital was in Hitchin, around six miles away. Although there had been calls for the building of a dedicated hospital in Stevenage for some years, and a site had been set aside at Corey's Mill in 1955, the press noted in 1961 that it would not be open for 'a minimum of six or seven years'.⁶³⁸ It was only in October 1960 that the Minister of Health had announced that a 400-bed hospital for Stevenage would go ahead, with the building (the Lister) designed in 1964 and finally opened in 1972.⁶³⁹ This delay had strengthened the case for the building of the outpatients' clinic, which operated alongside the new town's various surgeries and health centres – including that on the adjacent site in Southgate (see below). It offered a 'full range of consultative and specialist clinics', served by staff from the Lister or North Herts Hospitals.⁶⁴⁰

The outpatients' clinic – which was written up and illustrated in the specialist journal *The Hospital* in March 1962 – survives well as a building of 1959-61, at least externally, features including original windows.⁶⁴¹ It is formed of two-storey

and single-storey blocks, arranged to make the most of the site, which slopes down from west to east. The block at the corner of Southgate and Danestrete was designed as an ‘eyecatcher’: its upper floor (the former gymnasium) is clad in the exposed aggregate panels used elsewhere in the first phase town centre buildings, but here it is set with diagonal (rather than straight) lines, with tiles at the intersections. On the west these are blue, but on the north the tiles bear what was presumably the coat of arms of the North-West Metropolitan Regional Hospital Board. The ground floor is of brick, as is the lower, longer and simpler two-storey range to the east, though this has a small area of flint facing adjacent to the entrance. Formerly, this entrance area was enclosed by a projecting canopy set on piers – of the type used throughout the commercial core of the town centre – but this has now been removed. A large single-storey block (originally for pathology) adjoins the entrance range, the junction of the two enclosing an open area at the north-east of the site originally used as an ambulance park.⁶⁴² Today, it is a staff car park, serving the building in its modern use as the NHS’s Danestrete Clinic. There is also a further car park to the rear of the site (always set aside for staff parking).

On the west side of the building, a notable survival is an original railed staircase and rampway, providing access to the clinic for disabled people and those in wheelchairs (Fig. 130). This is decorated with flint facing, and contributes to a characteristically late 1950s landscape – the dual carriageway, underpasses and cycleways of Six Hills Way (completed in 1956) are to the immediate south, while the ramp stands adjacent to two Scots pine trees which were already mature when the clinic was opened and were consciously retained by the Corporation as part of a wider landscaping policy (see pp. 36-7).⁶⁴³ The Corporation saw the south side of Southgate as an important area of the new town: in 1960, Leonard Vincent wrote that:

the whole of the Town Centre has been laid out with the intention that the tree belt along the northern side of Six Hills Way should define and contain all the Town Centre development as a firm visual boundary between that development and Six Hills Way.⁶⁴⁴

The Development Corporation was reluctant even to allow fences to be erected in this area, in order that the unity of the town centre could be maintained.⁶⁴⁵



Figure 130. The west (Danestrete) side of the outpatients’ clinic, showing the original ramped entrance way and railings, as well as the mature Scots pines retained by Stevenage Development Corporation when the building was constructed. (©Historic England Archive, James O. Davies, DP275684)

Internally, the outpatients' clinic had an area of just under 14,000 sq. ft. The floor plans published in 1962 show the original arrangement.⁶⁴⁶ The ground floor was divided into a series of small consultation, examination and X-ray rooms, with associated spaces including a large waiting room, staff rooms and pharmacy. The first floor, accessed both by the external ramp and an internal staircase, contained a dental surgery, offices, dining room, changing rooms and – in the tall block at the north-west – a double-height gymnasium. This served the physiotherapy department, and was 'specially designed as an independent reinforced concrete frame structure', isolated from rooms beneath.⁶⁴⁷ The overall aim was to provide a 'homely building, which offers a friendly welcome to the patients' – and to achieve this materials and decoration were carefully chosen, including a large abstract mural providing a 'strong and gay splash of colour' by the entrance.⁶⁴⁸

The future of the outpatients' clinic is unclear. A large redevelopment scheme submitted by Stevenage Borough Council in December 2019 proposes demolition of all the buildings on Southgate, aside from The Towers and Southgate House.⁶⁴⁹ Under this scheme, the site of the outpatients' clinic and the adjacent library and health centre would be occupied by a single block of up to nine storeys, with a similar block on the east side of The Towers.

County Library and County Health Centre, Southgate

Date: 1959-60 with extension of 1961-64

Design: Hertfordshire County Council – under County Architects C. H. Aslin (until 1959) and G. C. Fardell (job architects: Alexander B. Thomson and Peter D. Anderson)

Most of the schemes drawn up for Southgate in 1955-58 included a library and health centre in the same general location – that is, towards the west end of the road, south of the entrance to The Quadrant car park. Hertfordshire County Council devised a conjoined scheme for these premises, which occupied separate halves of a unified structure – a concept originally approved in September 1957.⁶⁵⁰ Site plans and elevational drawings had been completed by the architectural team of Hertfordshire County Council – under the County Architect – by September 1958, and detailed designs followed.⁶⁵¹ Final consent for the construction of the library was granted in April 1959 and work began thereafter, the shell of the building being complete up to first-floor level by October that year.⁶⁵² Already, by that time, it was decided that the first phase of the library would 'not be adequate' for Stevenage's needs, a local paper reporting that 'the contractors will probably stay on site and complete the whole project'.⁶⁵³

The library and health centre is a broad, low structure of two storeys (Figs 131-2). The library part was designed successively by Mr Adams and Alexander B. Thomson of Hertfordshire County Council Architects' Department, while their colleague Peter D. Anderson undertook design for the health centre component; Anderson was the health centre expert for the county.⁶⁵⁴ Just to the right of the centre of the main



Figure 131. A photograph of c. 1970 showing the integrated county library and health centre, Southgate, built in 1959-60 to designs by the architects of Hertfordshire County Council, with The Towers point block beyond. (With kind permission of Stevenage Museum, P7379)



Figure 132. The county library and health centre in 2020. Externally, the building survives well. (©Historic England Archive, Patricia Payne, DP278133)

(north) front, the building breaks forward to form a ‘tower’ over the entrance. As originally constructed, the health centre section was larger and deeper in scale than the library. Although the detail of the design was left to the County Architect’s team, the Corporation provided guidance and made clear their expectation of high quality, as well as harmony with other buildings of the town centre (see p. 45-6).⁶⁵⁵

Priority was given to the library component of the building as it was a facility that had been needed for some time.⁶⁵⁶ This had been completed by November 1960, and was said to make ‘a striking addition to the structure of the Town Centre’.⁶⁵⁷ Over the course of December and January it was fitted with 30,000 books, and was formally opened on the evening of 18 January 1961, the ceremony being performed by the poet Cecil Day-Lewis (1904-72). The facility was opened to the public the following day, featuring a foyer and ‘spacious’ adult lending and reference library on the ground floor and a children’s library above, with books ‘within easy reach of young readers’.⁶⁵⁸ It supplemented the pre-existing inter-war library in Orchard Road, Old Stevenage. Within a short time, the library had shattered the Hertfordshire County record for the largest number of issues in one day: 4,956, more than half of which

were issued from the junior library.⁶⁵⁹ In its account of the library's opening, the *Stevenage Gazette* wrote:

The severe rectangular outline is broken by an abutment built around the stair well at the front of the building, and extensive use is made of glass on the north and south walls. Inside there is an impression of space created largely by 10ft ceilings and low shelving in the public departments.⁶⁶⁰

Meanwhile, the health centre – intended from at least 1956, and accommodated within the east half of the building – was in use from October 1960 but only formally opened on 2 May 1961 by Edith Pitt (1906-66), Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Health; its main facility was infant welfare clinics, though other clinics were also held.⁶⁶¹ At the rear of the health centre a special feature was a covered pram shelter and adjacent 'play terrace' (see Fig. 135).⁶⁶² It seems to have been slightly later that the rear land was developed as a car park; an aerial photograph of the early 1960s shows the area as covered with plants and trees.⁶⁶³

As noted, Hertfordshire County Council expanded the central library in a programme of works undertaken almost immediately after opening. This was carried out to meet demand – the new town was growing all the time, with the anticipated ultimate population increased from 60,000 to 80,000 in 1959. The Development Corporation's journal noted that: 'In the few years which it has taken to plan, built and equip this new branch the population of Stevenage has increased, and the facilities it offers must be expanded almost at once'.⁶⁶⁴ Preliminary sketch plans for 'phase two' of the library – which increased accommodation from 4,000 sq. ft to 12,000 sq. ft – had been prepared by early February 1960, soon after work on the first phase had begun, and approval was granted in November that year.⁶⁶⁵ The idea of an extra floor level was suggested, partly, it seems, on the basis of advice given by Leonard Vincent, who had formed the core of the town centre with buildings of three storeys. However, the county librarian was opposed to the concept of placing public rooms on a third floor, and the Deputy County Architect suggested that – whilst a third storey might be used for stacks and other storage – it might lead to 'a somewhat dumpy three-storey block', appearing to be 'neither one thing nor the other'.⁶⁶⁶

Detailed plans for a two-storey extension were prepared in February to April 1960 under G. C. Fardell as County Architect (a position he held in the period 1959-73), and were submitted to the Corporation in August 1960.⁶⁶⁷ Work on site was well underway by October 1962, and progressed throughout 1963, with book stock and shelving moved into the new extension in October; the extended building was in use from that month but only fully completed in late February 1964, a moment formally marked by a small ceremony on 29 April 1964.⁶⁶⁸ The new works – creating what was described by the Development Corporation as 'Among the finest library facilities in the county' – trebled the size of the library premises, extending it back towards Six Hills Way.⁶⁶⁹

The existing public rooms were reworked. The earlier core, as completed in 1960, became the junior library, with children's lending library on the ground floor (Fig. 133) and children's reference library above; the latter featured a dedicated room

for study or for use by school classes.⁶⁷⁰ On the west, there was an open, grassed courtyard to the rear of this (see Fig. 131), while the remainder of the ground level – lit on both west and east by windows set in re-entrant bays – accommodated the adult lending library, the librarian’s room, book stores and a loading bay. A large new staircase towards the centre of the building provided access to the first floor, where the extension included an adults’ reference room, a study room and a ‘periodicals lounge’ or lobby.⁶⁷¹ The first floor was lighted by a run of curtain-walled glazing at the rear of the building, a set of seven windows on the west, and a series of inverted windows on the east, matching those on the ground floor (Fig. 134).

In November 1979, permission was granted for a minor third phase of work at the library.⁶⁷² This took the form of a two-storey side extension, which served to infill the open courtyard on the west side of the building. It was presumably undertaken in 1980 or 1980-1; construction was certainly complete by 1986.⁶⁷³ Externally, this work is marked only by a plain brick wall, of slightly different tone to the adjacent brickwork of the earlier phases. Internally, the infilling provided facilities including a lift shaft.

Today, both the county library and the county health centre continue in the use for which they were built. The structure survives largely as built in 1959-60 and extended in 1961-4, original features including windows, the main library staircase and, notably, the projecting single-storey pram shelter projecting at the rear of the health centre (Fig. 135) – now a comparatively rare survival, though similar, smaller shelters do still exist in the health centre at Harlow. As with the



Figure 133. The interior of the children’s lending library on the ground floor of the Southgate building as reworked and extended in 1961-4. (With kind permission of Stevenage Museum, P7221)



Figure 134. Detail of the east façade of the county library extension, built 1961-4. These windows were designed to light the adult lending library on the ground floor and an adult reference room above. (©Historic England Archive, James O. Davies, DP275690)

adjacent outpatients' clinic, the future of the library and health centre is unclear. A large redevelopment scheme submitted by Stevenage Borough Council in December 2019 proposes demolition of all the buildings on Southgate, aside from The Towers and Southgate House, and their replacement with two tall blocks.⁶⁷⁴



Figure 135. At the rear of the health centre in Southgate a notable surviving feature is the pram shelter, built as part of the construction works of 1959-60. (©Historic England Archive, James O. Davies, DP275688)

The Towers, Southgate

Date: 1960-63

Design: Stevenage Development Corporation – under Chief Architect Leonard Vincent

The Towers was a late addition to the Southgate scheme, and occupied a site which had originally been allocated to Hertfordshire County Council buildings, including a magistrates' court. In May 1958, Stevenage Development Corporation wrote to the County Council to ask if the site for the proposed court could be handed back to them, for the construction of a tall block of flats.⁶⁷⁵ This was required both in itself and for its contribution to the wider town centre, which was rapidly taking shape to the north. An unsigned letter, almost certainly by Leonard Vincent, argued that 'From the Corporation's point of view it would assist very materially if we could have

this small site as architecturally and aesthetically it would be of enormous advantage to be able to “close” the south avenue in our Town Centre immediately’.⁶⁷⁶ As the Council had not intended to begin work on a court for some years, this was readily agreed. Initially, the Corporation hoped to include a restaurant or public house on the ground floor of the tower block; however, this proposal was subsequently transferred to a slightly later block, Southgate House.⁶⁷⁷

Detailed plans were worked up in 1959 – The Towers is a conspicuous part of a model of the town centre produced in that year (see Fig. 15) – and final approval for the 13-storey scheme was granted in February 1960. A sketch of the proposed point block was published in the Development Corporation’s journal and by the local press, who noted that its height would make it ‘a distinctive landmark in the town’ (Fig. 136).⁶⁷⁸ At the same time, an announcement was made about two other point blocks to be built on the perimeter of the town centre – the first was High Plash in Silam Road, to the east of Town Centre Gardens, and the second was High Croft in Roebuck Gate, to the south.⁶⁷⁹ All were consciously designed as points of visual interest, contributing to a wider vista.



Figure 136. Design drawing of 1960 – produced by Leonard Vincent and his team at Stevenage Development Corporation – illustrating The Towers, Southgate, a residential point block built in 1960-3. It is shown with the edge of the health centre on the right, the police garages on the left and the edge of the police station on the far left. (With kind permission of Stevenage Museum, P3754)

Construction of The Towers began in March 1960; the *Stevenage Pictorial* published photos of the new town centre taken from the top of the piledriver on 18th of that month.⁶⁸⁰ Piling had been finished by summer 1961, the programme of work being tied in with the similar blocks at Silam Road and Roebuck Gate for ‘economic and practical’ reasons.⁶⁸¹ Tenders for the main part of construction were sought in March 1961, by June 1962 work was well progressed on the exterior of The Towers, and by mid-March 1963 the new building – described as ‘A very neatly planned block of flats with many amenities’ – was almost complete.⁶⁸² Work was finalised later the same month.⁶⁸³ A total of 50 flats in the block were allocated to the staff of the major local firm, English Electric Co. Ltd, especially single young people, after their own hostel scheme at Bedwell Plash fell through; it was hoped that their presence would give the town centre some life after 5.30 p.m.⁶⁸⁴

Externally, The Towers is a classic point block with a roughly square plan, rising to 13 storeys (see Fig. 131). In August 1963, the *Stevenage Gazette* commented of

it and the two related point blocks, ‘These three are quite severally outstanding, though a stranger might be puzzled as to which to take for a landmark, for they are almost identical triplets’.⁶⁸⁵ The Towers was the tallest building in the central area of Stevenage at the time of its completion, being substantially higher than the seven-storey Daneshill House. The 15-storey Southgate House, to the east, came slightly later, in 1963-4 (see Fig. 45).⁶⁸⁶ The Towers has its main fenestration on its east and west elevations, with smaller square windows on the north and south sides, either side of narrow, vertical light wells. The various floor levels are marked by horizontal banding. The Towers occupies a site on Southgate between the health centre and the police station garages, and is aligned so that it closes the south end of Queensway, forming a focal point to the town centre development (see Fig. 35).

The building’s small, one-bedroom-plus-sitting-room flats featured double-glazing to their main windows, electric floor warming, and high thermal insulation in the external walls.⁶⁸⁷ Those accommodated above sixth-floor level enjoyed ‘A Room with a View’, having a prospect that was both urban and rural, and overlooked ‘all the behind-the-scene activities of the constabulary’ in the adjacent police station.⁶⁸⁸ A feature of the courtyard at the rear of The Towers, between the block and a pond, was a sculpture of three seated figures (Fig. 137). This was commissioned by Stevenage Development Corporation from the artist David Noble of the Digswell Art Centre, Welwyn, and modelled in reinforced concrete.⁶⁸⁹ In 1963 as today, the work could be ‘peered at through the fence by people using the footpath between the flats and the County Health Centre’.⁶⁹⁰



Figure 137. Photo of 2020 showing the sculpture of three seated figures at the rear of The Towers. This was the work of artist David Noble, and was completed in 1963. (©Historic England Archive, James O. Davies, DP275693)

Overall, The Towers survives well (see Figs 34 and 132). Its fenestration is in the same form as that of the early 1960s, and the sculpture *Seated Figures* remains in its original location. Current redevelopment proposals by Stevenage Borough Council do not threaten The Towers itself, but would radically change its context.⁶⁹¹ Under this scheme, all the buildings either side of The Towers – excluding Southgate House – would be demolished and replaced by two tall tower blocks. Were these to go ahead, they would dwarf The Towers in massing, if not in height.

Police Station and adjacent garages, Southgate

Date: 1959-60 (police station); c. 1964-65 (garages)

Design: Hertfordshire County Council – under County Architect C. H. Aslin (job architects Norman Purnell, George Newell and Cyril Lovegrove)

From quite an early date, there had been an intention to build a police station as part of the centre of Stevenage new town. For instance, in Stevenage Development Corporation's book *Building the new town of Stevenage* (1954), it was stated that: 'It is planned to establish a divisional headquarters in the town centre which, together with a magistrates' court, will be the judicial centre for the district.'⁶⁹² The site for Hertfordshire County Council's divisional police headquarters was under discussion from 1956, and the details of its location were being worked up in August and September 1957.⁶⁹³ Initially, it was intended to place it at the south end of Queensway, on the site subsequently developed as The Towers (see above). However, the site finally chosen was to the east, and had the practical advantage of being bounded by three roads – Southgate to the north, Six Hills Way on the south, and a short new route named Towers Road on the west. There were discussions between the Corporation, the County Council and the divisional Chief Constable about including a magistrates' court as part of the scheme, to save on the need to construct two sets of cells.⁶⁹⁴ However, it was decided that the court would be built later in a different area of the town centre (see p. 175), and in June-July 1958 drawings of the proposed police station were prepared under the County Architect, C. H. Aslin (1893-1959).⁶⁹⁵ A formal application for the construction of the police station was made by the County Council in August 1958, and the site was formally approved that month.⁶⁹⁶

Work on the police station began in 1959, and the exterior of the three-storey structure was largely complete by June 1960.⁶⁹⁷ The building was occupied from the end of August 1960, a local newspaper commenting: 'It may look bleak from the outside but inside the new police station ... is light and airy'.⁶⁹⁸ The police station came into full use from early October the same year, but was only formally opened in January 1961 (the same month as the county library), the ceremony being performed by Rab Butler (1902-82), then Home Secretary.⁶⁹⁹ It replaced the earlier police station in Stanmore Road, Old Stevenage.

The plans of the police station produced in June 1958 – the architects working under the County Architect were Norman Purnell, George Newell and Cyril Lovegrove –

showed a three-storey main block with, at the rear, a cell block with exercise yard, a drill yard, parade room and parking.⁷⁰⁰ Within, the police station included a ground-floor public entrance and waiting room, 'light, warm and comfortable', an enquiry office, a staff recreation room and canteen.⁷⁰¹ The main elevation of the police station faces north onto the East Gate surface car park, and presents a plain, broad frontage of 12 bays, the left of these containing the entrance with wider windows above (Fig. 138). To the east, an access route leads through to the yard. There are single-storey blocks extending to the rear, enclosing the yard on all four sides, with a break for a vehicle entrance. The police station is different in character from the buildings designed by Leonard Vincent and the Development Corporation in the town centre, reflecting its separate (County Council) ownership and design process – although, as noted, the design and plans for all buildings on Southgate were formulated in consultation with the Corporation.



Figure 138. The police station in Southgate, built in 1959-60 and seen here from the north-east shortly after its completion. The building was designed by the architects of Hertfordshire County Council. (With kind permission of Stevenage Museum, P3950)

On the site to the immediate west, on the other side of Towers Road, is a garage block built to serve the new police station (Fig. 139). This was included in plans by at least early 1960; it is also clearly shown on the layout plan of the town centre produced in December 1959 and revised in March 1962, and appears in a model of the town centre produced in c. 1959 and the 1960 design of The Towers (see Figs 15, 37 and 136).⁷⁰² However, the garage block was ascribed to a second phase of construction. It had not been built at the time survey work was undertaken for



Figure 139. The multi-storey police garage block in Southgate, built in c. 1964-5 and shown here in a photograph of 2020, awaiting demolition. (©Historic England Archive, Patricia Payne, DP278114)

the 1:1,250 Ordnance Survey map of 1963, but was complete by 1966, according to a photograph of that date held in Stevenage Museum.⁷⁰³ Probably, construction was undertaken in c. 1964-5 (see p. 150).⁷⁰⁴ The block, presumably designed by Hertfordshire County Council, is notable as a comparatively early example of stacked garage accommodation. On the east side, 12 garages are accessible from street level. At the south, a curved ramp leads to an open upper floor, which provides space for 24 garages. Meanwhile, on the west, a ramp leads downwards to further car parking space. The building is low and squat, characterised by its blank upper storey of plain brick, forming the rear walls of the raised garages to west and east and an end/screen wall on the north. On the façade facing Southgate, the upper wall has, in more recent times, been clad in corrugated metal.

The Southgate police station quickly became redundant in terms of its intended purpose. Already, by January 1963, more space was needed, and for a time there were plans for expansion into the lower floor of the proposed office block on the adjacent site, Southgate House (see below).⁷⁰⁵ In the mid- to late 1960s, expansion and a reorganisation of the police force in the area brought about an amalgamation, and the need for larger police headquarters in Stevenage became urgent.⁷⁰⁶ By January 1968, the site for a new divisional and sub-divisional police station was being discussed – a position bordered by the railway line, Six Hills Way and Lytton Way, with the site of the new railway station to the north.⁷⁰⁷ Work began on this new structure – designed by the architectural firm Clifford Culpin & Partners, with advice from Leonard Vincent – in summer 1972, and it was completed in 1974.⁷⁰⁸ At that point, the former police station in Southgate became a social services centre run by Stevenage Borough Council, also used as the base of some associated voluntary groups and as an annexe of the further education college to the south; it remained in this general use until its closure in 2009.⁷⁰⁹

The building has undergone some alterations and is now vacant and boarded up, but retains its original massing (Fig. 140). Permission for its demolition, along with that of the adjacent garage block, was granted by Stevenage Borough Council in December 2019. Under proposals submitted the same month, the buildings would be replaced by a tall and large block, with a smaller (four-storey) building on the East Gate car park opposite.⁷¹⁰



Figure 140. The former police station in Southgate in a photograph of 2020. Permission for its demolition, along with the adjacent garage block, was granted in late 2019. (©Historic England Archive, Patricia Payne, DP278113)

Southgate House (now Vista House), corner of Southgate and St George's Way

Date: 1963-64 (public house on lower floors: 1965-66)

Design: Leonard Vincent of Vincent & Gorbing (pub: Barnard Reyner for Watney Mann) (for Stevenage Development Corporation)

The second phase of work on the town centre included the construction of the tallest building in Southgate and indeed in the central area – Southgate House, a 15-storey office block located to the immediate east of the police station. This site had been allocated to a public house in the town centre layout plan of 1959, but when there was a lack of interest by brewers and other possible lessees, it was soon set aside for a larger development.⁷¹¹ Stevenage Development Corporation's annual report of 1961 reported plans for a 'multi-use block to be built in Southgate', to incorporate a pub with restaurant but also general commercial space.⁷¹²

The need for this block became pressing over summer 1962, as it became clear that the town hall and municipal buildings at the north of the town centre would have to be postponed, while proposals about the possible expansion of Stevenage were considered (see p. 50). Stevenage Urban District Council was desperate for new, larger premises, and in September 1962 the Corporation offered to build 'almost immediately' offices for their temporary use.⁷¹³ Meanwhile, the Corporation also justified the need for the new office block as an important means of providing jobs for the large cohort of teenagers set to leave school in the coming years.⁷¹⁴ That same month, September 1962, Leonard Vincent – recently established in private practice with Ray Gorbing – worked up drawings for the building, and these were agreed in principle in January 1963 (Fig. 141).⁷¹⁵



Figure 141. Design drawing of 1963 for the Southgate House office block, St George's Way, designed by Vincent & Gorbing as freelance architects. This architectural firm was based in the building in 1964-88, and several floors were also occupied by Stevenage Borough Council. (With kind permission of Vincent and Gorbing Ltd and Stevenage Museum, P3950)

However, Hertfordshire County Council was worried about what the project meant for possible expansion of the adjacent police station, while the Ministry of Housing and Local Government expressed concerns about the shortage of car parking in the area.⁷¹⁶ By January 1963, it was proposed that a multi-storey car park would be built on the adjacent site (that of the East Gate car park), while instead of a pub and restaurant the lower floors of Southgate House would contain additional accommodation for the Police. Not long after, the Chief Constable resolved not to extend the police station for the time being, and in March the Minister of Housing and Local Government approved the original scheme.⁷¹⁷ The construction of the multi-level garage block to the west of the police station (see above) appears to have received final approval around this time, and no doubt helped to assuage some of the concerns that had been raised by the Ministry.

In August 1963, the press wrote about the intended 'huge office block', and later the same month noted that the Council had agreed terms with the Development Corporation for their lease of the building – this was initially for a period of five years.⁷¹⁸ Construction began around April 1963.⁷¹⁹ The Development Corporation's journal for that season noted that piling operations for Southgate House had been completed, and work was underway on the erection of the reinforced concrete structure.⁷²⁰ The building was ready for occupation in September 1964, and at the end of that month Stevenage Urban District Council moved into their new offices – from 'long since overgrown' premises in Old Stevenage (Fig. 142).⁷²¹ The Council's offices occupied the first to fourth floors, the highest of these levels including a civic suite.⁷²² The remainder of Southgate House – which totalled an area of 70,000 sq. ft – was to be leased either as a whole or by separate floor, and offered under-floor heating, three high-speed lifts and double-glazed windows from the sixth floor upwards.⁷²³ Those who took up accommodation included the private practice of Vincent & Gorbings themselves, who moved into the 13th and 14th floors of Southgate House in autumn 1964, and the Land Registry, based here briefly after leaving the Head Post Office building and before completion of Brickdale House.⁷²⁴

As noted, the Corporation intended that the lower part of Southgate House accommodate a public house and restaurant, and eventually, in June 1964, a deal was struck with the brewery Mann, Crossman & Paulin, part of Watney



Figure 142. Southgate House in 1966, following its completion. At this point, work was still underway on the pub on the lower floors. (With kind permission of Stevenage Museum, PP2209)

Mann.⁷²⁵ Until that point, these levels had been completed only in shell form. In 1965, Mann's began work on the public house, the elevations and interiors of which were designed for them by the architect F. Barnard Reyner (1909-87) of Coventry. Run for Mann's by the firm's subsidiary St George's Taverns, the pub occupied the ground and first floors of Southgate House, and opened on 24 October 1966. This coincided with the height of popularity of themed pub decoration, and the new premises – named the Long Ship – were fitted out on a Viking theme.⁷²⁶ On the ground floor was the 'Viking Bar' (resembling a traditional public bar), the 'Danish Lounge' (saloon bar) and a grill room. The latter two spaces could accommodate 160 people and were arranged over separate levels, while on the first floor was the 'Long Room' restaurant. This extended through the width of the pub and had its own balcony; with space for 150 people, it was available for functions. Sculpture was a feature of the pub: the restaurant was decorated with a plaster long ship by the artist Barry Jackson, while the pub's exterior bore a 60-ft-long mosaic of a Viking longboat by William Mitchell, making it a prominent landmark in the town centre (Fig. 143). Also on the first floor was a three-bedroom flat for the pub's manager.



Figure 143. The Viking-themed Long Ship public house, at the base of Southgate House, in a photograph published in the Watney Mann magazine *The Red Barrel* in 1967. The pub opened in October 1966 and featured on its façade a large mosaic by the artist William Mitchell. This was removed as part of the remodelling of the ground floor in 2001. (Courtesy of Heineken UK)

Externally, Southgate House was dominated by glazed curtain walling and concrete cladding. Like other tall buildings in Stevenage town centre – including Daneshill House and The Towers – the block was carefully designed and sited, giving it impact within the landscape (see Figs 45 and 52). Its effect when seen from the Town Centre Gardens on the east, beyond St George's Way, was especially admired, and it was designed to harmonise with the campanile of St George's Church when viewed from this side.⁷²⁷ Like Daneshill House, the top of the building was used as a vantage

point to overlook the town centre.⁷²⁸ Southgate House was aligned north-south on its narrow site, with its main elevation facing towards St George's Way and the fire and ambulance station opposite (see below), and an entrance in the narrow north façade. Notably, its exterior – and especially Mitchell's mural – was featured in the film *Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush* (1967).

Although the Urban District Council had only intended to remain in Southgate House for five years, the building remained the Council's home for much longer, due to the continued postponement of construction of a dedicated town hall. In 1973, the Council asked the Corporation for another five-year extension of its lease, and also asked to be given the opportunity to take over any floors vacated by the Land Registry.⁷²⁹ The Council – which became Stevenage Borough Council in 1973 – only finally moved out following the dissolution of Stevenage Development Corporation in 1980, at which point they moved into the Corporation's former offices at Daneshill House (see pp. 118-9). The practice of Vincent & Gorbing remained slightly longer, moving out of Southgate House in 1988.⁷³⁰

Over the last two decades, Southgate House has been subject to alteration. In 2001, the pub (by then a nightclub) closed on the lower storeys, and these levels were rebuilt as an open car park.⁷³¹ William Mitchell's large mosaic was sadly removed and destroyed at that point.⁷³² In 2014, permission was granted for a change of the building's function from office to residential use. It was divided into around 65 flats, and the exterior altered – work including the replacement of all the original fenestration. The building reopened in 2016 as 'Vista House', with a new grey and teal colour scheme (Fig. 144). Redevelopment proposals submitted by Stevenage Borough Council in December 2019 do not affect Southgate House directly.⁷³³ However, with The Towers, it would be the only building on Southgate to remain, the sites to east and west of The Towers being redeveloped with two tall blocks, dwarfing both the 1960s buildings in their scale.

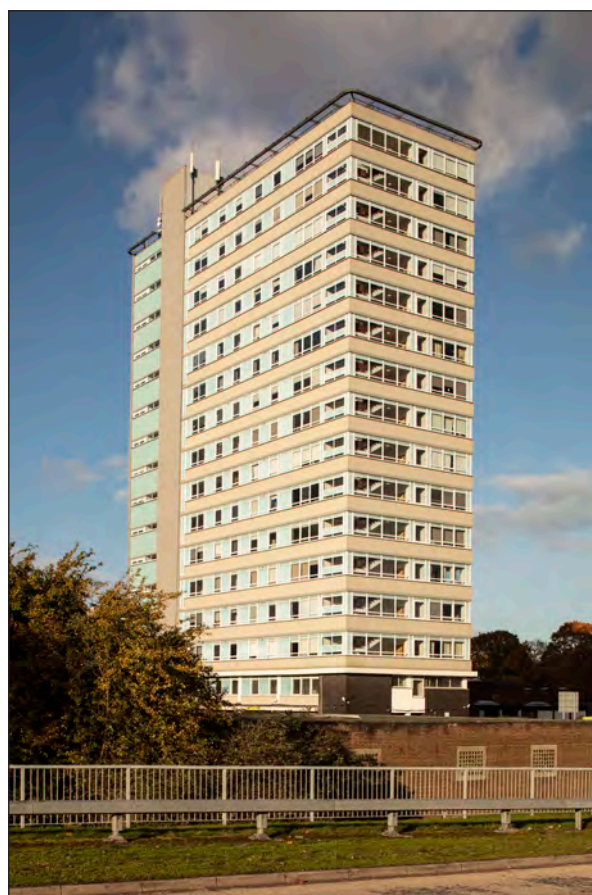


Figure 144. A photograph of 2020 showing what is now Vista House. Southgate House was renamed following a remodelling of 2014-16, which saw it altered from office to residential use. (©Historic England Archive, Patricia Payne, DP278115)

Fire and Ambulance Station, St George's Way

Date: 1961-62

Design: Hertfordshire County Council – under County Architect G. C. (job architect: Cyril Lovegrove)

On its south and north sides, Stevenage town centre was rigidly confined by Six Hills Way and Northgate/Fairlands Way respectively; with the exception of the further education college to the south of Six Hills Way, a detached structure set within its own grounds, these outer areas contained no facilities associated with the town centre. However, the picture was different with regard to the east and west sides. St George's Way serves as the eastern perimeter of the town's 'core', but is not a true boundary in terms of the town centre's amenities (see Figs 37 and 47). There are several important town centre buildings on the east side of St George's Way, as well as the Town Centre Gardens, and these will here be described, in order to put all the town centre buildings in their proper context.

It should be noted that St George's Way began life as a standard road, with conventional-type crossings, enabling locals and visitors easy access to the buildings on its east side. It was only in 1972 that it was reopened as a dual carriageway, in association with the construction of the town's first multi-storey car park on the former Market Square (see pp. 105-6). This involved the raising of the road slightly, and some complex engineering due to the culvert for the Stevenage brook.⁷³⁴ Two pedestrian underpasses were constructed at this time to facilitate access to the town park and other amenities; these feature relief sculptures by the artist William Mitchell, of 1973, and were described by Jack Balchin, the Development Corporation's General Manager, as 'small scale yet of aesthetic and constructional merit' (see Fig. 90).⁷³⁵

The most southerly building on the east side of St George's Way, across the road from Southgate House and the East Gate surface car park, is Stevenage's fire and ambulance station – built to replace that of 1904 in Old Stevenage. Initially, in the mid-1950s, it was intended that this be located on the island site on the south of Southgate, along with other buildings constructed by Hertfordshire County Council.⁷³⁶ However, once negotiations began concerning the building of an outpatients' clinic and a point block on part of this site, the Council was persuaded to relocate their fire and ambulance station to the other side of St George's Way. In 1959, the new site was approved and terms agreed between the Development Corporation and the County Council, with the fire and ambulance station shown in its new position on the town centre layout plan of December 1959 (see Fig. 21).⁷³⁷ It was intended that the building provide for three fire engines and seven or eight ambulance vehicles, as well as having a 'good drill yard'.⁷³⁸

Drawings for the scheme were prepared in 1960 by the County Architect G. C. Fardell and his team, the job architect being Cyril Lovegrove, working with Oliver Harris of Stevenage Development Corporation.⁷³⁹ Various amendments were requested by the Development Corporation and Stevenage Urban District Council. For instance, in September 1960 the County Council was asked to reduce the

height of the proposed hose drying tower of the fire station, 'to ensure no visual conflict with the campanile of St George's Church', situated on the adjacent site.⁷⁴⁰ In November 1960 Fardell wrote to Leonard Vincent, mentioning discussion that had taken place on site the week before and stating that he had moved the drying tower to the south-east corner of the site – 'Thus, I believe, removing any possibility of a conflict with the campanile of the Parish Church', adding 'I think we both agreed that these two vertical features were rather close together'.⁷⁴¹

Work began in January 1961 and was almost complete by spring the following year, the fire and ambulance station opening in July 1962 (Fig. 145).⁷⁴² The Development Corporation's journal, *Purpose*, noted of the new building that:

The last of the group of County Council buildings at the southern end of the Town Centre was recently completed ... Besides housing all the necessary apparatus for fire fighting in the Stevenage district, the building provides training and practice facilities for the innumerable aspects of modern fire, salvage and rescue work and domestic quarters for the resident Superintendent.⁷⁴³



Figure 145. The fire and ambulance station on St George's Way, built in 1961-2 to designs by Hertfordshire County Council. and shown here in a photograph taken shortly after completion. (With kind permission of Stevenage Museum, P7053)

The main, two-storey building on the site is aligned east-west, with a narrow elevation to St George's Way. To the north of this are the fire engine houses, while to the south is the ambulance park and the hose drying or drill tower mentioned above. This was designed to be around 67 ft high and featured blue facing bricks, with openings on the west elevation framed in hardwood surrounds.⁷⁴⁴

Overall the scheme survives well, with its original massing and in the use for which it was built, though the windows and doors have been replaced in sympathetic

style (Fig. 146). However, there have been discussions about demolishing the fire and ambulance station and replacing it with a new facility. In 2006, a scheme proposed the building of a new three-storey station, with four floors of flats above, on the site of Manulife House, and the construction of housing on the former fire and ambulance station site.⁷⁴⁵ In the end, a different scheme was adopted, whereby Manulife House was retained and converted as a hotel (see below).



Figure 146. A photo showing the fire and ambulance station in 2020, with the reworked Manulife House on its left. (©Historic England Archive, Patricia Payne, DP278152)

Manulife House, St George's Way

Date: 1972-73

Design: Gollins, Melvin, Ward & Partners (for Stevenage Development Corporation)

The site to the north-east of the East Gate car park, on the other side of St George's Way, was initially – in the mid-1950s – set aside for 'Crown Offices', to be built by the Ministry of Works. The site is labelled in this way on a drawing of September 1956, for instance, and also on the town centre layout plan of December 1959, revised in March 1962 (see Fig. 37).⁷⁴⁶ However, as has been discussed elsewhere in this report, by early 1962 attention had shifted to a site at the north end of Danestrete. This was subsequently developed as the Crown Offices, known as Brickdale House (see pp. 132-4).

With the change in plan, Stevenage Development Corporation was left with an empty site between the fire and ambulance station and St George's Church. This was set aside for offices; initial designs were produced in c. 1962 and a planning application for a ten-storey block and a four-storey block was approved in August 1963, with work set to begin once tenants had been found for Southgate House,

opposite.⁷⁴⁷ In fact, there was a delay, the office block not being built until 1972-3, to designs by Gollins, Melvin, Ward & Partners (Fig. 147).⁷⁴⁸ Manulife House was opened on 14 October 1973.⁷⁴⁹



Figure 147. Manulife House, St George's Way, under construction in 1972 – in a view looking east from the East Gate car park, past the boiler house chimney. (With kind permission of Stevenage Museum, P11168)

Originally, the offices were intended as an L-shaped block, 'designed to have the least impact on the church'.⁷⁵⁰ In reality, the building took the form of a large concrete box – it was known locally as the 'White Cube' – with the main floors supported by a pierced ground level (see Fig. 52).⁷⁵¹ It was described by Nikolaus Pevsner and Bridget Cherry as 'six sleek storeys of open-plan offices, rather awkwardly sited', while for Jack Balchin, General Manager of the Development Corporation in 1969-76, it was 'an ill bedfellow of the church on the one side and of the fire and ambulance one-storey station on the other'.⁷⁵² The block – also known as the Manufacturers Life building – took its name from its principal occupants, Manulife Life Insurance, formed in the 1970s as a subsidiary of the Canadian insurance company Manulife (founded as the Manufacturers Life Insurance Co. in 1887). An illuminated Manulife sign was a prominent feature at the top of the office block, making it a notable landmark.⁷⁵³ Other occupants of Manulife House included Stevenage Borough Council, who used the building as overspill accommodation from their main offices across the road at Southgate House.⁷⁵⁴

In 1996, Manulife Life Insurance was acquired by Canada Life and the Stevenage offices were closed.⁷⁵⁵ Described as a 'pale grey monolith', the building was in a poor state of repair by 2006, having been the target of vandals and arsonists.⁷⁵⁶ In that year, Stevenage Borough Council granted permission for revised plans proposing its conversion as a 140-bedroom hotel (the scheme had originally been approved in 1999).⁷⁵⁷ The building was totally reclad and remodelled, opening as a Holiday Inn in 2009 (see Fig. 146). Talking about the scheme in 2006, a representative of the design consultancy Turley Associates commented that 'Once complete the building will in fact appear completely brand new both inside and out and virtually unrecognisable'.⁷⁵⁸ This is indeed the case.

Church of St George (now Church of St Andrew and St George), St George's Way

Date: 1956-60

Design: John Seely of Seely & Paget (for the diocese of St Albans)

The earliest building completed on the east side of St George's Way was, appropriately, St George's, the parish church of Stevenage. Reflecting its significance, this was given a prominent site on the east side of the town centre, separated from the shopping precinct by St George's Way and from the Town Centre Gardens by Cuttys Lane (see Fig. 22). The building formed part of the diocese of St Albans, which was responsible for commissioning its design, worked up in liaison with Stevenage Development Corporation. The designs were entrusted to John Seely (1899-1963), Lord Mottistone, part of the architectural partnership Seely & Paget. Mottistone was then Surveyor to the Fabric of St Paul's Cathedral, and was known for work including the 1930s remodelling of Eltham Palace, London, and for a series of churches.⁷⁵⁹ The job architect was P. H. Field Phillips, while the builders of the church were Messrs Ratlee and Kett of Cambridge.⁷⁶⁰

The foundation stone of St George's was laid on 14 July 1956 by HM Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother; the Development Corporation's journal noted that the architects' drawings showed 'a striking and attractive building of contemporary design', with a tower 'which will give height to the Town Centre'.⁷⁶¹ Work began on site clearance in early 1958, after modified designs were approved, by which time the 'core' of the town centre was nearly complete.⁷⁶² By December 1959 the concrete framework of the church had been built, with the campanile at its south-west corner.⁷⁶³ This was aligned directly with Market Place, creating a focal point in the view eastwards (see Fig. 64) – just as The Towers was later built as a focal point at the south end of Queensway. Work moved onto the interior of the church from early 1960, and by August that year the press was able to report that the scaffolding had been removed and the building was nearly complete.⁷⁶⁴ St George's was formally consecrated by the Bishop of St Albans on Advent Sunday, 27 November 1960, in the presence of the Queen Mother, an event covered by the BBC; it succeeded the 600-year-old St Nicholas's as Stevenage's parish church.⁷⁶⁵ The undercroft was still not finished at that point, but work was completed shortly afterwards.

St George's Church is a striking and substantial building – at the time of its completion, it was the largest parish church built in England since the Second World War (Fig. 148, and see Figs 36 and 45). In 1961, the Development Corporation wrote of it being 'one of the most photographed – and most talked about – buildings in Stevenage', and described it as synthesising 'the old and the new' – 'the familiar plan of an English Church interpreted in present-day materials and methods of construction'.⁷⁶⁶ The church was constructed of a reinforced concrete frame, with precast concrete flint-faced wall panels. The roofs are barrel-vaulted and copper covered, while there is a clerestory fitted with plain glazing, and further plain glazing in the north wall, above the single-storey brick narthex. The circular campanile is a notable component of the church's design and a landmark for the wider area. This

is of openwork pre-stressed concrete revealing a spiral staircase within, rising to a spire. Reaching a height of 106 ft, this featured an electronic peal of bells.⁷⁶⁷

Internally, the church – which could seat 800-900 people – is a conventionally planned aisled space with a strong post-war character, in terms of its design (Fig. 149). Bays are defined by intersecting concrete paraboloid arches; the outer sides of these continue as flying buttresses, connecting the aisle walls to the clerestory. The barrel-vaulted and quarter-circle ceilings are now lined with plywood sheets. The window above the altar on the south was originally of plain glazing, with a simple yellow-coloured crucifix. The stained glass, the work of Brian Thomas – the preferred artist of Seely & Paget – was installed to obscure the view of Manulife House when it was built on the adjacent site in the early 1970s (see above).⁷⁶⁸ At a lower level is the undercroft, which originally housed the Lady Chapel, vestries, rector's office, rectory where meals for a hundred could be served, kitchen, and a council room seating 80.⁷⁶⁹ In 1976, a licence was granted for use of this area by Stevenage Borough Council, and Stevenage Museum moved in the following year.



Figure 148. The striking exterior of the Church of St George (now St Andrew and St George), seen from the south-west. The church was built in 1956-60 to designs by Seely & Paget; at that time, it was the largest parish church built in England since the Second World War. (©Historic England Archive, Patricia Payne, DP278139)



Figure 149. The interior of the Church of St George, looking south. (©Historic England Archive, Patricia Payne, DP232461)

The church was rededicated to St Andrew and St George in 1984, following the closure and demolition of St Andrew's Church in nearby Bedwell Crescent, originally opened in 1953 (closed in 1963, and subsequently used as a church hall). The parish church was listed grade II in 1998, the list description taking particular note of its 'dramatic structural form' and describing the building as 'a focal point in Stevenage'.⁷⁷⁰

Bowes Lyon House Youth Centre, St George's Way

Date: 1964-65

Design: Leonard Vincent of Vincent & Goring (for Stevenage Youth Trust)

Further north on the east side of St George's Way is another key development in the history of Stevenage town centre – the youth centre. This belongs to the second phase of construction on the town centre, though the need for provisions for the new town's many younger people was acknowledged by at least the early 1950s. In 1954, Stevenage Development Corporation noted that the 'young incoming population present a challenge', and that the premises established in Old Stevenage by the local youth club 'will shortly be too small for the increasing membership'.⁷⁷¹ It was continued that 'All those organizations devoted to work amongst youth are gradually coming to play an increasingly important part in the town's activities'.

Nationally, too, there was increasing focus on the provision of activities for the ever more numerous and prosperous youth. In November 1958, the Minister of Education appointed a committee to investigate the way in which youth services could contribute to 'assisting young people to play their part in the life of the community'.⁷⁷² The resulting report – named the Albemarle Report after the committee's Chairman, Lady Albemarle – was published in February 1960, and recognised that both young people and youth leaders required better facilities; it advocated five years of experimental building. The Ministry of Education launched a £7 million construction programme for youth clubs in England and Wales in 1960-3, with further financial support promised for 1963-6.⁷⁷³

Meanwhile, a committee had been formed in January 1959 – under the initiative of Stevenage Development Corporation and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation – to plan for 'the disproportionately high number of young people in Stevenage and other New Towns'.⁷⁷⁴ Its report of May that year recommended that the Stevenage Youth Advisory Council should be reconstituted as a youth committee for the town, and that a site in the town centre should be reserved for a youth centre. Later the same year, the Stevenage Youth Trust was formed, with R. S. McDougall, General Manager of Stevenage Development Corporation, as its Secretary, and Sir David Bowes-Lyon, Lord Lieutenant of Hertfordshire, as Chairman. The Trust stated its intention of spending £100,000 over seven years improving youth facilities in the new town – both to meet the needs of the increasing population, and to curb the tendency of locals to visit London and other large urban centres in search of entertainment.⁷⁷⁵

Architectural work on a youth centre for Stevenage town centre began in early 1958, and a youth officer was appointed in May 1960. His report of late 1961 confirmed the architect's proposals, but it was only in May 1962 that the Development Corporation released details of the intended building, 'A palace for teenagers', designed by Leonard Vincent of Vincent & Gorbing in their new capacity as freelance architects.⁷⁷⁶ This was to be located in a convenient and prominent position on St George's Way, next to the swimming pool. It was hoped that the youth centre would appeal to both 'those who know and those who as yet do not know how best to use their leisure'.⁷⁷⁷ The building itself was to be 'One of the most ambitious ever planned', with a 'Revolutionary "Raft" Design' – a concrete raft being placed 12 ft above the ground, supported by piers (see Fig. 44).⁷⁷⁸ The architects were working on revisions to the design in July 1963, and again in 1964, prior to and following the appointment of the centre's general manager that September.⁷⁷⁹ The Corporation's journal published a photograph of the architects' model of the building in spring 1964, and this appeared in *The Times* that February.⁷⁸⁰

Construction of the youth centre began in March 1964, with the foundation stone laid on 1 June that year.⁷⁸¹ This ceremony was performed by Lady Bowes-Lyon (1907-96), it having been announced in December 1963 that the new centre would be named in honour of her late husband, Sir David.⁷⁸² At the ceremony, Lord Cobbold – the new Chairman of the Stevenage Youth Trust – described the project as 'probably the largest and most important thing of its kind in the country'.⁷⁸³ The youth centre was formally opened in early April 1965 by Lady Bowes-Lyon, and named Bowes Lyon House (Fig. 150). It was built at a total cost of £100,000; the capital cost was provided by the Stevenage Youth Trust, with grants awarded by the Ministry of Education, Hertfordshire County Council, Stevenage Urban District Council and Stevenage Development Corporation.⁷⁸⁴ The emblem of the building was the Scottish lion rampant.⁷⁸⁵

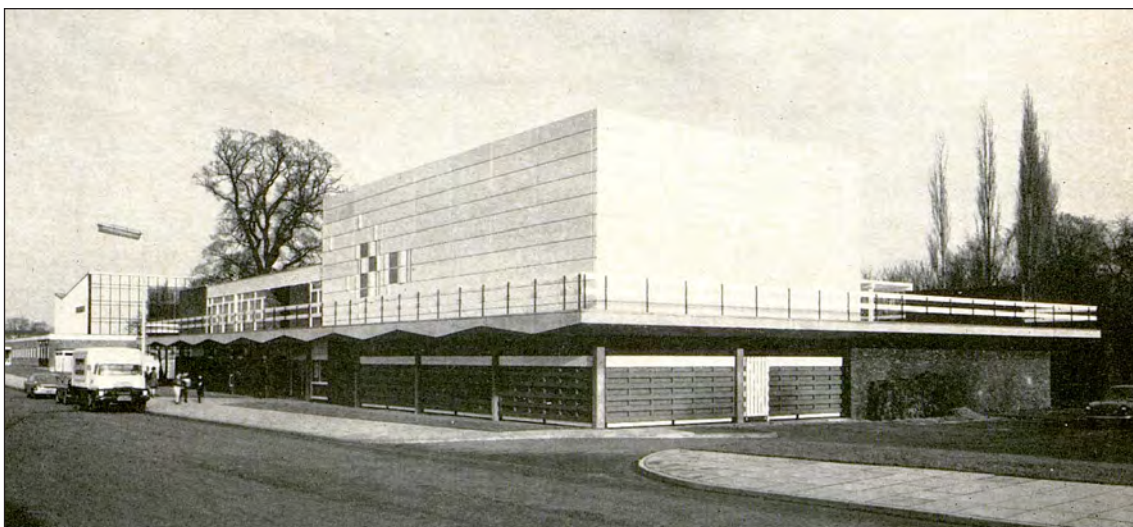


Figure 150. Bowes Lyon House youth centre, St George's Way, viewed from the south-west in a photograph published by the *Architects' Journal* in 1966. The building was designed by Leonard Vincent in his new capacity as a freelance architect.

Bowes Lyon House was planned flexibly – ‘because fashions change rapidly with the young’ – to allow for a range of different functions and activities; its total floor space of nearly 30,000 sq. ft (including terraces) was planned to accommodate 2,000, but it was found that it could comfortably hold 800 people at any one time.⁷⁸⁶ Full details of the building were set out in an article in the *Architects’ Journal* in 1966, with a similar ‘appraisal’ following in 1969.⁷⁸⁷ These included the building’s floor plans, which show that the ground level was largely open plan, being designed to be adaptable; the only permanent features were the heating plant at the north-west and changing rooms/toilets at the centre of the east side (Fig. 151). The entrance hall was opposite, at the centre of the west elevation. On the north of this was an area intended as a shop and for display but subsequently given over to other uses (see below), with a workshop for crafts and DIY behind. On the south of the entrance hall, beyond a ticket desk and cloakroom, a more unconventional arrangement was adopted: a single large space was provided for open air games, heated by beam heaters in the ceiling. On its west side and partly on the south this was screened off from the outside world by ‘boldly detailed’ open planked panels.⁷⁸⁸ Originally, this area included a contoured roller-skating rink. On its east side, the space connected directly with an open arcade filling the ground floor of the building’s east elevation, linking the youth centre to the park beyond.

A large staircase in the entrance hall led up to the first floor, on the concrete raft supported on piers; here the main entertainment spaces were placed, to afford views over the town centre and Town Centre Gardens (Fig. 152). The main staircase ascended to a lounge or foyer, used as a snug and placed above the entrance hall, with toilets and changing rooms opening off its north side and an office on the south. On the north-west of this lounge was a ‘magnificently equipped’ coffee bar/restaurant with kitchen; this was open to the public daily (except weekends) for lunches and functions, but by 1966 was mainly used for the purchase of soft drinks.⁷⁸⁹ At the south-west corner of the building, divided from the lounge by a pivot screen, was the 60 ft by 40 ft ‘main hall’ with a gallery on its north side; this space was intended principally for sports, but also for dancing. On one side, at the south-east corner of the centre, was a square terrace, named an ‘open air room’ on the plans. This flexible space – intended largely for sports – was linked by sliding doors to the main hall, so the spaces could be used together when required. From the terrace a spiral staircase rose to a small upper level, containing staff and service areas and – an addition by the building’s management – a netted compound for a guard dog. Towards the centre of the east side of the building were two clubrooms and an exhibition lobby, while the largest first-floor room was at the north-east corner: a ‘multi-purpose hall’ or ‘theatre hall’, with movable stage (Fig. 153). As noted in the Development Corporation’s annual report for 1964, the ‘whole of this floor is surrounded by a promenade gallery with space for sitting and gossiping or standing and watching’; this was also termed a ‘sunbathing terrace’.⁷⁹⁰ As a whole, ground- and first-floor areas provided space for activities including: cinema, a discotheque, disc spin, live music, TV, dances, archery, basketball, badminton, volleyball, football, weight training, netball, table tennis, judo, art and theatre.⁷⁹¹ The building’s internal decoration was simple and functional; walls were of brick, mostly left plain or painted, while ceilings were boarded or (in the larger halls and café) of steel girders.

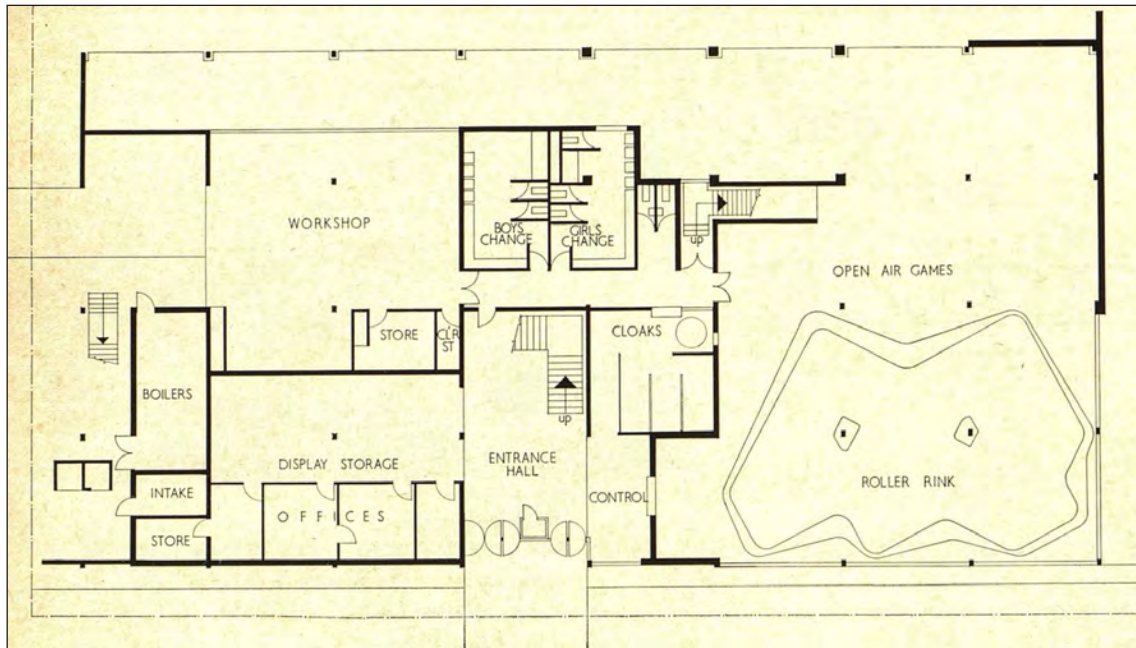


Figure 151. The ground-floor plan of Bowes Lyon House youth centre as built in 1964-5 (north is to the left). Features included a workshop and a roller-skating rink, partly open to the air. This proved a ‘white elephant’ and had been infilled by 1966. (Courtesy of Vincent and Gorbing Ltd)

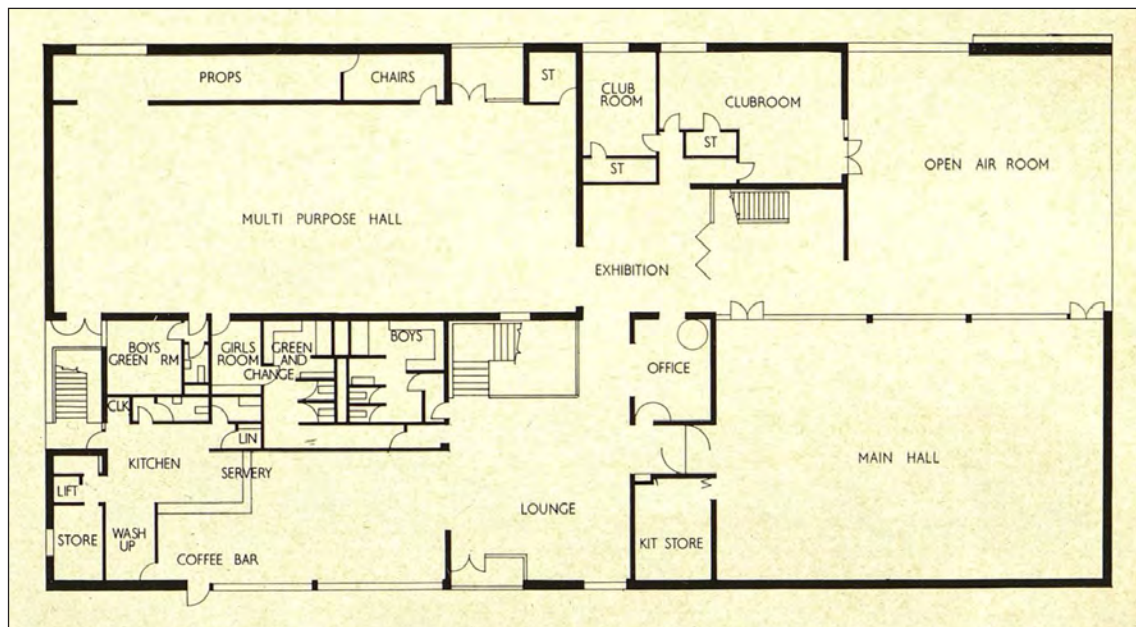


Figure 152. The first-floor plan of Bowes Lyon House as built (north is to the left). There were three main spaces at this level: a coffee bar/restaurant, a sports hall (or ‘main hall’) and a multi-purpose or theatre hall. (Courtesy of Vincent and Gorbing Ltd)



Figure 153. The interior of the first-floor ‘multi-purpose hall’ or ‘theatre hall’ at the north-east corner of Bowes Lyon House, in a photograph of c. 1965. (With kind permission of Stevenage Museum, P6993)

Of the construction of the youth centre, the *Architects’ Journal* commented that ‘Structurally and materially, the building is far more convincing than the accommodation provided ... The architectural treatment of this one-off, or rather first-off, building and the general detailing is well handled and rational.’⁷⁹² As noted, the building was designed with a reinforced concrete raft or table on the first floor, supported on reinforced concrete columns. It has a large, flat-roofed block at the south-west corner. This was given horizontal planking on the ground floor, around the roller-skating rink,

while it was plain and windowless on the upper level. The block was faced on two sides by horizontal panels of precast concrete exposed aggregate – like that used elsewhere in Stevenage town centre – and on the main (west) façade was decorated with an abstract mural by P. J. Ellis, signifying the Seven Ages of Man and their interests.⁷⁹³ Around this block and continuing around all elevations ran the terrace, at first-floor level; this was supported by slender piers, the lower level comprising a covered walkway, with a zig-zag profile to the underside of the canopy. The block at the north-west corner was designed as brick-faced and lower, with first-floor windows lighting the coffee bar on the west side and the main entrance below, while the section at the north-east – above the multi-purpose hall – was given a butterfly roof resembling that of the adjacent and slightly earlier swimming pool, designed by the same architects.

Bowes Lyon House was notable for its range of internal provisions, and quickly attracted youth from the area.⁷⁹⁴ By early 1966, an average week saw between 1,700 and 2,000 young people – aged between 14 and 25 – pay to use its facilities, with Friday evenings proving especially popular.⁷⁹⁵ It was a noteworthy experiment: in the words of a local paper, the building took the concept of youth clubs ‘right out of the back streets and away from the parish hall’.⁷⁹⁶ According to the same source, the amenity was ‘perhaps the most ambitious Youth Centre in the country – probably in the world’. However, due to its experimental nature, there were various aspects of the building which were not as effective as hoped. This was exacerbated by the fact that the brief for running the centre and the users it catered for changed half-way through construction, and even after building work was complete, following the appointment of a general manager; as the *Architects’ Journal* pointed out, ‘As is so often the case the chap who is expected to run the show and make it pay had no say in the earlier planning’.⁷⁹⁷ These changes saw emphasis placed on a completely commercial pattern of use (not intended at the time of the original design), with lettings providing income to keep the centre going – though, as a means of encouragement, specialist societies and clubs were offered use of the premises free of charge.⁷⁹⁸ In its early years, Bowes

Lyon House hosted various gigs by notable musicians; for instance, The Who, Paul Simon and John Mayall and the Bluesbreakers (featuring Eric Clapton) all performed here in 1965, while David Bowie played in the building in 1966 and 1967, and it was also used for scenes in the film *Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush* (1967).⁷⁹⁹

Given the youth centre's position in the town centre, there was naturally a fair degree of competition – for example, from the Mecca dance hall and the Ambassador bowling centre. Still, in 1966, a writer could comment that 'It is holding its own, but is restricted by space problems'.⁸⁰⁰ The centre's management claimed that there was not enough small activity space for informal social use and meetings, that the first-floor café suffered from no direct public access (it was closed as a financial failure after around a year), and that the two separately placed first-floor halls, each seating 300, precluded 'very large and profitable entertainments'.⁸⁰¹ Local business owners objected to the idea that the youth centre include a shop, so one of the changes made after construction was the repurposing of the area on the left of the entrance hall as a mixed-use space.⁸⁰² Thus a potentially valuable source of income was lost. Meanwhile, as another means of raising income, the craft workshop on the ground floor was converted to the 'Lyons Den' cellar bar, a space open by 1966 and used for table tennis and as a discotheque and folk club.

Other changes were made in the light of experience and use. For instance, within a year of the centre's opening, the roller rink on the ground floor had proved to be a 'white elephant' and was filled in.⁸⁰³ The *Architects' Journal* suggested that an ice rink may have proved more popular, and also noted that if the area had been made more visible to passers-by, rather than surrounded by slatted boarding, this might have helped create an 'audience attraction'.⁸⁰⁴ By 1969, this former open-air room had been totally reworked, with partitioning and fitting out undertaken by the centre's staff and some of the members. The room was enclosed on its east side, and subdivided to form a series of games rooms – used, for instance, for table tennis and billiards. At the north-west corner of the new space, backing onto the ticket counter, a small coffee bar was added; by 1969, this was 'in constant use and replaces the upstairs bar most evenings'.⁸⁰⁵ On the building's east side, part of the former arcade was enclosed to create a rifle and archery range, with a target at its south end. Plans published by the *Architects' Journal* in 1969 show the ground floor as completed and as altered.⁸⁰⁶

On the first floor of Bowes Lyon House, changes were also made, although they were smaller in number. By 1969, the coffee bar had long been out of use, aside from occasional special bookings and use as part of the Friday night disco.⁸⁰⁷ It was made a more flexible space, doubling as a games room, and was partitioned off from the lounge by sliding doors.⁸⁰⁸ The main hall to the south came to be used almost solely as a gymnasium – Vincent & Gorbings commented that, had they known this would be the case, they would have designed it differently in the first place.⁸⁰⁹ On the other hand, it was found that the multi-purpose hall at the north-east was not really suitable for sports, as it was fitted up and used so regularly for drama and entertainments. Supervision was found to be a problem, as the building contained so many separate spaces – the *Architects' Journal* article referred to 'the torturous layout on both floors'.⁸¹⁰

By the time many of these changes were undertaken, Bowes Lyon House had come under different management. As a commercial venture, it proved to be a ‘costly mistake’.⁸¹¹ Highlighted in particular was the ‘naivety’, given the English climate, of providing an open-air roller-skating rink and a large upper-floor terrace, both taking up valuable space. Criticism was also voiced about the arrangement of the town centre’s entertainment facilities as separate spaces. It was felt, for instance, that if the youth centre and the adjacent swimming centre had been combined as a single enterprise, profit would have been greater and social advantages would have been maximised too.⁸¹² In 1966, the *Architects’ Journal* noted the usefulness and popularity of Bowes Lyon House but commented that, like the roughly contemporary youth centre at Withywood in Bristol (opened 1963), the Stevenage building:

is undoubtedly an enlightening but not to be recommended experiment. Education and planning authorities should by now realise the social, administrative and economic folly of arbitrarily divorcing youth service buildings from other basic cultural, recreational and sports facilities.⁸¹³

There was some worry about what the opening of a new arts and leisure centre elsewhere in the town centre, under serious discussion from 1968 and opened in 1975 (see pp. 170-4), would do to the business of the youth centre.⁸¹⁴ On the other hand, the commercial emphasis of the centre served to alienate some of the members and potential members; for instance, the two large first-floor halls were, by 1966, in such high demand for entertainment and social activities alone that there was little adequate space left for sports.⁸¹⁵

By July 1967, the situation had become so severe that financial responsibility for Bowes Lyon House passed from the Stevenage Youth Trust directly to Hertfordshire County Council, and a new, ‘quite opposite’ form of management was adopted.⁸¹⁶ This removed the pressure to raise high levels of income: the centre was run entirely from council budgets and nightly charges, without reliance on commercial lettings or amusement machines. As a consequence, as observed by the *Architects’ Journal* in 1969, ‘Bowes Lyon House now appears to function more clearly in the manner for which it was designed’.⁸¹⁷ It was at this time that changes were made, including the boarding over of the windows of the main hall, to facilitate use for sports, and conversion of the coffee bar to a more flexible space. There were still issues with the building’s plan – ascribed mainly to evolving concepts about youth provision – and attendance figures were in decline: in winter 1968, around 1,100 customers and members visited per week, a drop from the 1,700-2,000 attendees of 1966, though the latter included commercial lettings.⁸¹⁸ Most of these visitors were teenagers, and Monday to Thursday attendances were found to be up by 75 per cent. One journalist commented in 1969 that ‘So far as youth service buildings are concerned, Bowes Lyon House is more than ever the “centre” of youth activities throughout the new town area’.⁸¹⁹

Local competition for the youth centre increased into the 1970s: for example, a cinema was completed on the opposite side of St George’s Way in 1973 (see p. 84). In early 1972, in an attempt to attract more custom, Bowes Lyon House was granted permission to sell beer and cider on the premises – claiming to be the first

such centre to be given an on-licence.⁸²⁰ In 1974, the youth centre was described as being a ‘popular pay-as-you-enter establishment’ which ‘offers a wide variety of activities’.⁸²¹ An additional attraction came in 1978 in the form of an open-air skatepark, built on the immediate east of the youth centre – near the rifle/archery range – with concrete walls and platforms added a year later.⁸²² Believed to be one of the earliest in Britain, it incorporated the remaining ground-floor arcade on the centre’s east side.

Today, named the Bowes Lyon Young People’s Centre, the building is still run by Hertfordshire County Council and remains in the use for which it was built, hosting activities such as live music, drama, arts and sports. It is also home to the ‘Stevenage Access Point’, which provides advice on subjects such as careers, housing and finance. Architecturally, it survives well – the exterior is largely intact, aside from replacement of the railings on the terrace which wraps around the building and of the doors and windows, especially on the ground floor of the west façade (Fig. 154). The interior retains original girder ceilings (for instance, in the sports hall/gymnasium) and exposed brick walls. The skatepark also survives on the centre’s east side, though it was shut for a time in 2015-16 and there were concerns that it would be demolished.⁸²³ Historic England considered the skatepark for statutory designation, but in March 2016 it was decided that it did not make the grade. The future of the youth centre complex as a whole, highly innovative in its day, is now unclear: there are current plans, as part of regeneration of the town centre, for a large new ‘sports and leisure hub’ on the site of both Bowes Lyon House and the adjacent swimming pool.



Figure 154. The exterior of Bowes Lyon House youth centre in 2020. There have been alterations since the mid-1960s, but these are comparatively minor, and the building remains in the use for which it was built. (©Historic England Archive, Patricia Payne, DP278137)

Swimming Pool, corner of St George's Way and Fairlands Way

Date: 1961-62

Design: Stevenage Development Corporation – under Chief Architect Leonard Vincent (for Stevenage Urban District Council)

On the site to the immediate north of Bowes Lyon House is the Stevenage town centre swimming pool – a very welcome and popular amenity at the time of its completion, and also one of the first swimming baths constructed nationally since the Second World War.⁸²⁴ The pool was the responsibility of Stevenage Urban District Council, who in July 1954 proposed a design with a folding wall that could open onto a sun terrace and paddling pool in summer.⁸²⁵ A site for the pool had been reserved by 1957, but a delay was caused by financial limitations on the part of the Council.⁸²⁶ Further planning work was undertaken in 1958, but the major step forward came in 1959, when Leonard Vincent agreed to supply, for free, a design for the building and the Corporation offered the Council a site at the junction of St George's Way and Fairlands Way.⁸²⁷ Later the same year, the MHLG offered the Council a grant towards the cost, while in 1960 financial assistance was offered by Hertfordshire County Council and the Development Corporation.⁸²⁸

This enabled the project to go ahead in earnest: designs for the swimming pool – based on sketches produced by Vincent in 1959 – were approved in June 1960, a model was produced around that time, and work began in April 1961.⁸²⁹ The full details of its facilities were publicly announced in October 1961, around the same time as the opening of the Mecca dance hall; the press noted that the pool was one of the 'key amenities that young people of the town, in particular, have been waiting for'.⁸³⁰ By that point, the steel framework of the swimming pool was under construction; it was due to be the 'latest thing in swimming pools', according to Development Corporation architect Bob Taylor.⁸³¹ By August 1962 the swimming pool was 'practically finished', and it was officially opened on 13 October that year by Lord Lindgren (1900-71), Chairman of Stevenage Urban District Council.⁸³² The Corporation's journal commented that 'It can fairly be said that in a town where something new is almost commonplace, few events have been more eagerly awaited than this', and described the pool as perhaps 'the most valuable recreational asset the town has yet acquired'.⁸³³ It was the only indoor pool of its size and type for miles around. The full architectural details of the Stevenage pool were set out in an article in *Architects' Journal* in February 1963 and another in the same journal in November 1964.⁸³⁴

The main external feature of the new, aluminium-clad building was the butterfly roof over the tall block containing the pools, its south-facing windows formed within a distinctive curtain-walled grid design recalling the commercial buildings of the town centre (Fig. 155). To the north and west of this were single-storey blocks. On the west wall of the pool, facing St George's Way, there was just one word: 'Swimming'. Internally, the main hall contained a large swimming pool built to competition standards, being 110 ft long and having a maximum depth of 12 ft 6 in.; there was a fixed concrete 'diving stage' at its east end, with two platforms (Fig. 156). To the north of this was a tiered seating area accommodating 304



Figure 155. The exterior of the swimming pool on St George's Way, at the time of its completion in 1962 to designs by Leonard Vincent and his team at the Development Corporation. The large gridded windows on the south, lighting the pool hall, were covered over in c. 2000. (With kind permission of Stevenage Museum, P7353)



Figure 156. The pool hall of the swimming baths building in St George's Way, in a photograph of 1962. This included a large main pool, a smaller training pool and a gallery for spectators. (With kind permission of Stevenage Museum, P7054)

spectators, and there was also a small, 42 ft-long training pool to the west. There were high-level windows on the north, above the spectator area, and the whole south wall was double-glazed. In summer, sliding windows in the lower part of this elevation served to unite the hall with a south-facing sunbathing terrace, overlooking the Town Centre Gardens.⁸³⁵ The single-storey block on the west was narrow, containing – from north to south – the lavatories, entrance foyer with ticket kiosk and terrazzo staircase leading up to the gallery, staff offices, kitchen, and a ‘light and airy’ café, accessible from the sunbathing terrace.⁸³⁶ The larger area to the north of the pool hall contained service rooms, a clubroom (at the north-east corner), for use as meetings and as part of swimming galas, and – in the space under the spectators’ gallery – changing rooms. The building’s design is notable in having paid special attention to the needs of disabled people, for whom swimming was considered to be ‘an excellent remedial exercise and relaxation’.⁸³⁷ The total capacity of the pool was 600 bathers.

Today, the building is still in its original use, run for the Borough Council by Stevenage Leisure Ltd. An application for a complete refurbishment was approved in February 2000.⁸³⁸ This involved various exterior alterations, including the recladding of the building and a new entrance extension (Fig. 157). The latter, on the west, takes the place of the original canopied entrance, is surrounded by glass bricks, has a curved frontage and rises slightly above the original roofline. It seems to have been at this point that the sunbathing terrace and south-facing windows of the pool hall were removed or covered over. In the single-storey block on the west, seven out of the original 13 small windows now survive, and a service doorway has been inserted. Internally the building has naturally been modernised over the years, but the main pool hall is largely the same as in 1962: there are still the two pools, a diving board to the east and the spectator gallery to the north, though the ceiling has been relined, there being no sign of the original cedar boarding, and the decorative tiling on the walls of the pool hall has been removed. The building has expanded changing rooms and now incorporates a dance studio and a ‘wellness centre’, including a spa. Its future is unclear: there are current plans, as part of regeneration of the town centre, for a large new ‘sports and leisure hub’ on the site of the pool and the adjacent youth centre.



Figure 157. The swimming pool building viewed from the north-west. Alterations undertaken in c. 2000 included the recladding of the structure and a new entrance extension on the west. (©Historic England Archive, Patricia Payne, DP232454)

Arts and Leisure Centre, between Lytton Way and London Road

Date: 1974-75

Design: Raymond Gorbing of Vincent & Gorbing (for Stevenage Urban District Council)

The west side of the town centre was, like the east, not as rigidly defined as the boundaries to north and south. In fact, it was more fluid than any other boundary, and was intended as an area of future expansion for Stevenage town centre. Originally, Danestrete formed the west side of the town centre's 'core', the only building completed in the 1950s on its far (west) side being the bus garage. With development of the early 1960s, however, comprising the Central Garage, Daneshill House, the dance hall, the bowling centre, Swingate House and Brickdale House, the boundary moved further westwards, becoming the old Great North Road or London Road. It was only in the early 1970s that this road was closed to through traffic, following the completion in 1969 of Lytton Way as a bypass (see Fig. 49).⁸³⁹

Focus on this west area of the town centre reflected, in particular, construction of a new railway station (see pp. 176-9) but also the proposed expansion of Stevenage more generally; for instance, in the early to mid-1960s, there was talk of residential development to the town's west and north-east (see pp. 15-16). As a result, the Development Corporation's architects, with Leonard Vincent as Consultant Architect and Planner, gave much thought to the development of the west side of the town centre, which they hoped would attract further businesses to Stevenage. Meanwhile, this quarter of the town also saw the construction of amenities which had been held up for various reasons, and therefore had lost the sites initially ascribed to them – for instance, the magistrates' court (see below).

One of the major projects of this phase was the arts and leisure centre. This originated in the early 1960s, when the need for a permanent arts centre was highlighted by local groups such as the Stevenage Arts Guild. In April 1963, the Development Corporation commissioned Sir William Emrys Williams, former Secretary-General of the Arts Council, to investigate the cultural needs of the new town.⁸⁴⁰ The resulting report, 'The Arts in Stevenage', was published in October of that year, and recommended the building of a town centre arts complex. In January 1964, a committee was formed comprising members from the Development Corporation, Stevenage Urban District Council, Hertfordshire County Council and Stevenage Arts Council. They began to scope out the proposed complex, which the press termed 'the most exciting project facing the town'.⁸⁴¹

Initial sketch plans by Vincent, Gorbing & Partners were unveiled in September 1965. These envisaged a building including a theatre, an exhibition hall, meeting rooms, art studios and a bar/restaurant.⁸⁴² A site was identified to the west of the old Great North Road, behind the dance hall and bowling centre. Just to the south of this, the temporary premises formerly occupied by the Times Club and the day nursery were leased in July 1965 to Stevenage Arts Guild and the Lytton Players, a well-established dramatic and musical society, as a first step in the project (see p. 120). The following January, the Development Corporation set up the Stevenage Arts

Trust, tasking it with developing the proposals. Sir William Emrys Williams was appointed Chairman, and in April 1966 Vincent & Gorbing were formally appointed to produce detailed designs.⁸⁴³ The proposals were discussed, but the predicted high cost – £355,000 – meant that the scheme was put on hold due to lack of capital.

Meanwhile, in 1965 a separate trust had begun to explore the possibility of building an indoor sports centre in Stevenage, like the one opened in Harlow new town a year earlier; Billingham Forum in County Durham, conceived in 1960 and opened in 1967, was another important contemporary example, combining indoor sports facilities with an ice rink and a professional theatre.⁸⁴⁴ The arts and sports interests in Stevenage planned their accommodation separately until January 1968, when the Eastern Sports Council suggested that they work together to plan a single, shared building – then a novel concept. In June that year, Stevenage Urban District Council commissioned Elizabeth Sweeting (1914-99), general manager of the Oxford Playhouse, and Denis Molyneux (1925-2019) of the Sports Council with the task of developing the proposals and producing a report. As was noted in 1976, ‘the combining of the two leisure forms is not new ... but sufficiently unusual to engender a research programme to determine the precise requirements’.⁸⁴⁵

In 1969, Vincent & Gorbing were reappointed to produce designs for the new scheme, the partner in charge being Ray Gorbing. These incorporated a raised walkway which extended east from the new railway station, over Lytton Way, through the upper level of the arts and sports complex, and sloped down to reach Danestrete between the dance hall and bowling centre (see Fig. 51). The scheme was presented by Gorbing in July 1971 and agreed, the design for the station being approved a month later. In view of a continued shortage of funding and rising costs, plans for a basement were cut, and the bowls hall and viewing gallery of the main sports hall had to be reduced in size. Further revisions were made to the designs in June and December 1972, and a planning application was approved in August 1973.⁸⁴⁶ The foundation stone for the complex was laid on 14 June 1974 by Baroness Lee (1904-88), best known as Jennie Lee, former Minister for the Arts. Construction was undertaken in 1974-5 by the firm Marples Ridgway.⁸⁴⁷ The centre was in use from 3 November 1975, and was formally opened by HRH The Duke of Edinburgh on 13 February 1976.⁸⁴⁸ It was featured in the *Architects’ Journal* in December 1976, along with similar centres in Horsham and High Wycombe.⁸⁴⁹ The article, written by Donald Adie, concluded that the concept behind the centre had ‘resulted in a most successful function from the architectural and managerial viewpoints and must rank among the most fully developed and wide-ranging leisure centres in Britain’.⁸⁵⁰

Externally, the three-storey arts and sports centre was unusual, and proved controversial (Fig. 158, and see Fig. 52). Built of in situ reinforced concrete, it was almost entirely clad in panels of reinforced orange-coloured fibreglass (GRP); this served to insulate the building from road, railway and aeroplane noise. The projecting rectangular panels gave the building a padded effect, while their colour led the building to be locally dubbed ‘Gorbing’s Orange Box’.⁸⁵¹ In 1976, Donald Adie wrote of the centre:

The building form, designed as a simple rectangular coloured box, reflects the integration of activities within and also expresses the introvert nature of these activities ... The external moulded cladding panels reflect the scale of the building and their bright colour provides a positive image which is commonly referred to as the 'orange box'. Special consideration is given to the disabled with most facilities available for their use.⁸⁵²



Figure 158. The west elevation of the arts and leisure centre as built in 1974-5, to designs by Raymond Gorbing, seen here in a photograph of 1988. Its distinctive colour and design led to its being known as 'Gorbing's Orange Box'. (With kind permission of Stevenage Museum, PP1193)

In summing the building up, Adie noted of its external design that 'something with a fraction more interest or emotional appeal might have entertained Stevenage rather better over the years', though he noted that the standard of finish internally was very high.⁸⁵³ The cladding did not weather well: GRP had a brief use in the external cladding of buildings in the early 1970s, but was found to break down under ultra-violet rays; this was an usually large and prominent example.

As noted, a high-level walkway passed through the upper storey of the building, and this originally featured windows looking down into the interior of the centre, including the bowls hall.⁸⁵⁴ At the centres of the west and east elevations, there were large concrete-framed openings – groups of three windows on each side, the fourth (north) opening accommodating the elevated walkway (Fig. 159). The centre was open seven days a week from 10 a.m. until midnight – later for theatre shows or late films.



Figure 159. View showing the central concrete openings on the west elevation of Stevenage's arts and leisure centre, with the elevated walkway passing through that on the north and linking railway station and town centre. (©Historic England Archive, James O. Davies, DP275657)

As built, the main access to the centre was via the second-floor walkway which passed through the building, separate disabled access being provided on the ground floor of the east elevation.⁸⁵⁵ The concept was a building divided as a whole into two parts – on the south were the sports facilities, and on the north were spaces for the arts – though this was not strictly adhered to. Light to the ‘almost entirely inward looking’ building was provided by various courtyards.⁸⁵⁶ There were three main spaces, dominating the building’s plan and rising through all three levels: a two-court sports hall at the south-east, suitable for games such as volleyball, tennis, badminton and fencing; a slightly smaller, six-rink ‘bowls hall’ or indoor bowls pitch at the north-east, capable of conversion for other sports (Fig. 160); and a 507-seat theatre at the north-west.

This was initially to be named the Danesgate Theatre but instead, at the suggestion of Roger Dyason, the first arts’ manager of the centre, it became the ‘Gordon Craig Theatre’ – named after the influential actor and theatre director Edward Gordon Craig (1872-1966), born in Stevenage, the son of actress Ellen Terry. The theatre had a first-floor foyer, single raked tier of continental seating, an adjustable proscenium arch and facilities for the disabled.⁸⁵⁷ It was also capable of use as a cinema and conference hall.



Figure 160. The interior of the bowls hall in 2017. The upper level of the far wall originally included windows opening onto the second-floor level elevated walkway. (©Historic England Archive, Patricia Payne, DP236998)

Adjacent to the sports hall were ground-floor changing rooms, double-height indoor squash courts, a double-height ‘practice hall’ and a ‘conditioning room’ or gymnasium. Meanwhile, on the north and north-east of the theatre were dressing rooms, rehearsal spaces, scenery stores and, at the north-east corner of the centre, a fully equipped workshop. At the south-west of the second floor – above the squash courts and practice hall – were a music room, dark room and arts studios for painting, pottery and photography, along with committee rooms. Shared spaces were on the immediate south of the walkway, towards the centre of the plan. They included a café and bar on the first floor, alongside a concourse for spectators overlooking the sports hall, a ‘large and flexible’ exhibition area to the west of the bar, and a weekday crèche on the east of the second floor, near the entrance foyer.⁸⁵⁸ The plant room and theatre fly tower rose up as projecting blocks above the roofline. The total cost of the project was around £2.7 million, financed by a lend-lease arrangement with a merchant bank.⁸⁵⁹ Understandably, the new centre proved popular from the outset, offering a wide range of facilities for locals and visitors to Stevenage, and was considered a ‘bargain’ financially.⁸⁶⁰

Today, the building is still the arts and leisure centre; it is run by Stevenage Leisure Ltd (SLL), a charitable leisure trust which also runs Stevenage swimming pool. As well as the Gordon Craig theatre, which survives well, the complex still includes its little-altered sports hall and bowls hall along with facilities including squash courts,

a dance studio and an arts and crafts studio. Internally, there have been various changes. In May 1991, Stevenage Borough Council agreed to the refurbishment of the first floor of the centre, with the creation of a new reception foyer and a new staircase to the ground floor.⁸⁶¹ These works included the removal of the original entrance within the upper-floor walkway, and at the same time or subsequently the windows which looked down into the centre from that level were blocked.

Externally, the level of alteration has been far greater (Fig. 161). In c. 1992 a new main entrance was created on the building's east side, replacing that in the walkway. This is formed within what was originally one of the large concrete-framed windows, and is accessed by the walkway and also by separate steps inserted as part of these works. The main entrance is set within a curved glass screen, typical of the early 1990s, and leads into the area that was originally the concourse/spectator viewing zone. The building's panelled, orange-coloured exterior only lasted a couple of years longer.⁸⁶² An application approved in August 1993 proposed recladding of the entire structure, together with external changes.⁸⁶³ Works were presumably undertaken in 1993-4, and the building now presents a smooth, white finish, with blue- and yellow-coloured horizontal bands at the top of the elevations. However, the original concrete-framed windows and walkway openings survive at the centres of the east and west sides.



Figure 161. The west front of the arts and leisure centre, facing onto Lytton Way, showing the results of the recladding works undertaken in c. 1993-4. (©Historic England Archive, Patricia Payne, DP237000)

Magistrates' Court, corner of Danesgate and London Road

Date: 1972-73

Design: Hertfordshire County Council – under County Architect
G. C. Fardell

The siting of a court building in Stevenage town centre has a complex history, and is associated with the developing – and ultimately postponed – plans for a town hall and municipal complex. For a time, around the mid- to late 1950s, it was proposed that a magistrates' court be built alongside a police station in Southgate. However, as Hertfordshire County Council admitted that the work could not be initiated for some considerable time, the site was used for other purposes – The Towers, a residential point block.⁸⁶⁴ In 1958-9, it was agreed that the law courts be moved instead to the north-east of the centre, in the area known as The Forum, alongside the municipal offices and museum and gallery; the law courts are shown in this position on the town centre layout plan of 1959, revised in 1962 (see Fig. 37).⁸⁶⁵ This was still the proposal in 1965, but by 1967, along with the other civic buildings, the law courts had been moved again – this time to the north-west area of the town centre, between London Road and the soon-to-be-built Lytton Way.⁸⁶⁶ Leonard Vincent was writing to the County Architect, G. C. Fardell, about law courts in this position in 1968, and it was proposed that work begin in 1970.⁸⁶⁷

Soon alternatives were being considered yet again. In December 1969, the idea was revived of siting law courts and police station next to one another – either on the



Figure 162. The magistrates' court, seen from the junction of Danesgate and London Road. The building was constructed in 1972-3 to designs by Hertfordshire County Council. (©Historic England Archive, Patricia Payne, DP278135)

site allocated to the law courts or on that set aside for a new police station, at the south-west corner of Lytton Way.⁸⁶⁸ However, this was dismissed, and separate sites were agreed – the north-west site was finally rejected as ‘over-generous’, cost being a major concern.⁸⁶⁹

The proposal to locate the magistrates’ courts on land between London Road and Swingate – formerly allocated to, successively, a hotel and a cinema – was agreed in 1970.⁸⁷⁰ Sketch plans had been produced by the County Architect’s team by September that year and the site was formally agreed that month – its proximity to the new police station, built in 1972-4 on the west side of Lytton Way, being noted. An application for planning permission was made by Hertfordshire County Council in early 1971, and this was approved by the Corporation’s Planning Committee in May that year.⁸⁷¹ Tenders were invited in January 1972, and work began in March. Alongside construction of the court building, the north-south route formerly named Swingate was reconfigured as part of Danesgate.

The new magistrates’ court opened in the first half of 1973, replacing an earlier magistrates’ court in the High Street of Old Stevenage. The building, on a site which slopes gently up from south to north, is of a simple design, comprising a brick-built, single-storey block (Fig. 162).⁸⁷² The main entrance is on the east side, facing Daneshill House. Today, the courthouse remains in the use for which it was built.

Railway Station, Lytton Way

Date: 1971-73

Design: British Railways Eastern Region – under Chief Civil Engineer Harold Ormiston and Regional Architect Sydney Hardy (job architects: R. D. Hind and C. Pallister) – in association with Stevenage Development Corporation and Vincent & Gorbing

Plans for a railway station to serve Stevenage new town date right back to 1946, when staff of the Stevenage Development Corporation agreed a site with the London and North Eastern Railway’s engineers.⁸⁷³ This – to be located on the west side of the old Great North Road, opposite the northern end of the town centre – was to replace the earlier station at Old Stevenage, opened in 1850 at the west end of Julian’s Road. However, there was no money for the project for the foreseeable future and, although British Railways was preparing schemes for the station in 1953, it was noted that they expected to build it only ‘when the condition of the traffic justifies it’ and when the old station had been outgrown.⁸⁷⁴ Even in 1954 the Corporation could state that the station ‘is not likely to be built for some years’.⁸⁷⁵

It was only in 1961 that the British Transport Commission formally agreed to consider building a new station, but this was to be at minimum cost, ‘rather like a bus station’.⁸⁷⁶ The Development Corporation insisted that it be accompanied by a pedestrian way leading to the new town centre. Work on the scheme was underway in 1962, on a site slightly south of that first proposed and parallel to the new bus

station; however, by the time the land agreement had been outlined, the development of Stevenage town centre had been put on hold due to government cuts and the proposed expansion scheme. British Rail turned instead to the subject of cost; in June 1965 the Corporation agreed it would provide the ticket office and car parking, while British Railways would build the platforms and parcels office. Design work, undertaken in liaison with Vincent & Gorbing, took shape in 1966.⁸⁷⁷

The Development Corporation's annual report for 1969 reported that a formal planning application had been submitted by British Rail for the proposed railway station.⁸⁷⁸ The design for the building, which incorporated a raised walkway extending eastwards, was approved in August 1971.⁸⁷⁹ Design and construction was the work of Harold Ormiston, Chief Civil Engineer for British Rail's Eastern Region, and the Regional Architect, Sydney Hardy; Hardy was succeeded in 1974 by A. M. Boal, while the job architects were R. D. Hind and C. Pallister.⁸⁸⁰ Widening of the railway track was initiated in summer 1971, and construction began shortly afterwards, the main contractor being W. & C. French Ltd.⁸⁸¹ The station in Old Stevenage was closed on 22 July 1973, and the new station was opened for trains the following day. It was officially opened on 26 September that year by Shirley Williams (b. 1930), then MP for Stevenage.⁸⁸² This was a major landmark in the new town's history, and helped to make Stevenage easily accessible to a broader population – attracted by new facilities such as the Grampian Hotel and the expanded shopping precinct.

The new town railway station – featured in *Building Design* in October 1973 and *The Architect* a month later – was built with two island platforms (Fig. 163).⁸⁸³ The slow-line platforms were constructed to a standard BR design, incorporating precast concrete planks, while the fast-line platform faces were of 'a special design' using precast concrete cantilever beams projecting from concrete block walls, to enable construction to proceed with minimal interference to rail service.⁸⁸⁴ The platforms, each 247 metres long, were linked to a first-floor booking hall – this first-floor 'bridge' also contained administrative offices, lavatories and two shops. The station was served by three lifts, provided for disabled people as well as for the conveyance of mail and luggage from a loading bay – a shared arrangement criticised in *The Architect*.⁸⁸⁵ Access from the forecourt on the east was via a two-lane passenger conveyor (originally a Dunlop 'Starglide'), while the station was linked to Stevenage town centre by the elevated walkway discussed elsewhere in this report (see pp. 60-1) (Fig. 164); this was raised 18 ft above Lytton Way and passed through the arts and leisure centre, completed in 1975. Both the walkway and the passenger conveyor were the work of Stevenage Development Corporation, rather than British Rail.⁸⁸⁶ In 1980, Jack Balchin, General Manager of the Corporation in 1969-76, wrote of the resulting effect:

The tie-up via the overhead bridge, walk-way and ramp between Railway and Bus Station ensures minimum inconvenience to travellers out-commuting to work. This had always been in the Corporation's mind but it had to wait nearly thirty years to see the fulfilment.⁸⁸⁷



Figure 163. Stevenage railway station, Lytton Way, built in 1971-3 to replace the Victorian station at Old Stevenage. This photograph looks south-east across the tracks and platforms. The building was designed by British Railways Eastern Region. (©Historic England Archive, James O. Davies, DP275655)



Figure 164. Stevenage railway station viewed from the elevated walkway, looking west towards the first-floor booking hall. (©Historic England Archive, James O. Davies, DP275656)

Meanwhile, *Building Design* described the station as a:

clean well-lighted place ... A streamlined Inter City image without the Euston/New Street rhetoric is created by details like the insitu [*sic*] concrete pillars carrying the walkway in a surprisingly attractive form. The deck is supported by four U-section brick piers and two of the three lift shafts which tower distinctively above the roof line.⁸⁸⁸

The deck carrying the elevated first-floor ticket office area was constructed of in situ reinforced concrete over the platforms, and of prestressed concrete T-beams over the tracks, with concrete infill. The station's walls are predominantly of red Thurcroft engineering brick, including those of the three prominent 'towers' on the south side, flanking the railway lines – with another on the east, by the entrance (a later addition). The *Buildings of England* volume concludes, 'A satisfactory composition of three bold red brick towers and a long bridge', and references the station at Broxbourne, Hertfordshire, of 1959-61, also with towers.⁸⁸⁹ At Stevenage, the elevated walkway links with the passenger conveyor on the north side, while there is a staircase at the south-east, and on the west side of the station steps lead from the 'bridge' down to a large car park. Two station car parks were provided by the Development Corporation, who also built a footbridge to the Gunnels Wood employment area.

Both of the station's island platforms have indoor waiting rooms and these were refurbished in May 2012. A further refurbishment, begun in 2013 and completed around 2015, has seen works including the introduction of further passenger lifts and remodelling of the concourse area, including the retail units. The station has been extended from four to five platforms in 2020, but generally survives as built.⁸⁹⁰ Its future is uncertain: as part of regeneration of the town centre, there has been talk of a new railway station.⁸⁹¹

PART FOUR: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF STEVENAGE TOWN CENTRE

Novelty and Influence

As Jack Balchin set out in 1980 on the demise of Stevenage Development Corporation, of which he had served as General Manager, Stevenage can claim several ‘firsts’.⁸⁹² The most relevant, in terms of this report, is firstly its designation in 1946 as a new town: Stevenage was the earliest in Britain, and resulted from legislation that was the first in the world to produce an organised nationwide programme of new towns, a spark of life after so much wartime destruction. Stevenage was described as ‘the pioneer New Town in this country’ in 1972, and its impact was felt internationally.⁸⁹³

Secondly and of equal note is the status of Stevenage’s pedestrian town centre as the earliest and most significant of its type and scale. In 1956, the *Architects’ Journal* wrote that Stevenage boasted ‘the first pedestrian centre of its size in Europe’, while in 1985 Gordon Stephenson – one of the early planners of Stevenage – stated, ‘If we do not count Venice, Stevenage was probably the first town in the world to be designed with a pedestrian core’.⁸⁹⁴ Stevenage as a whole has attracted significant interest over the past seven decades, but the town centre has perhaps received the greatest accolades. As Balchin wrote, ‘Of the many features in Stevenage for which the new town is well known among planners and informed public, the pedestrian centre is perhaps outstanding’.⁸⁹⁵

It has already been shown that Stevenage’s town centre was part of a wider move towards pedestrianisation in the years following the Second World War, and was preceded in Britain by work in central Coventry (see pp. 18-24). However, there is no question that Stevenage was in the vanguard in this country, as is shown by the controversy which surrounded the proposed scheme (see pp. 24-8). Pedestrian planning of its town centre commenced in 1946 – just five years after initial proposals were made for the pedestrian precinct at Coventry, and a year earlier than Frederick Gibberd produced a pedestrian plan for Harlow town centre – and the pedestrian concept was well advanced at Stevenage by 1949: before design work had been undertaken for the most comparable European pedestrian precincts, the Lijnbaan in Rotterdam (built 1951-3) and Vällingby in Stockholm (1952-4).

The planning process at Stevenage was prolonged and fraught with challenges – the pedestrian scheme had reached a detailed stage by 1950, but was briefly set aside in favour of a vehicular approach in 1953 (see Figs 6-7). So it was that the first phase of work on Stevenage town centre – begun in earnest in 1956 – is slightly later in date than the Upper Precinct in Coventry (built 1954-6; listed grade II in 2018) and Harlow Market Square (1955-6). However, Stevenage’s town centre was still completed earlier than the vast majority of other British and international comparators. These include Basildon town centre (1956-62), Coventry’s Lower Precinct (1957-60), the Arndale Centre in Jarrow (1958-61), the Merrion Centre in Leeds (1962-4), Cumbernauld new town centre (1963-7), Santa Monica Mall in California, USA (opened 1965), and the first pedestrianised town centre in Germany,

Oldenburg (opened 1967). In this sense, Stevenage paved the way for what followed: in 1959, it was stated that ‘The traffic-free shopping street is clearly the norm for the future’, and so proved to be the case.⁸⁹⁶

Stevenage town centre is especially notable for its scale and its status as a unified concept, built ‘of a piece’ (see below), with 1960s and ‘70s expansion in matching style (Fig. 165). In contrast to developments such as the Lijnbaan in Rotterdam, it was not a simply an interjection into an existing historic centre. It was a complete pedestrianised scheme from the first – unlike schemes which were completed slightly earlier such as Princesshay in Exeter, the Smithford/Market Street redevelopment in central Coventry that includes the Upper and Lower Precincts, Crawley’s Broadwalk and Harlow’s Market Square. Comparing Stevenage’s town centre to the Lower Precinct at Coventry, Raymond Dash – Chairman of the Development Corporation – described the former in 1958 as ‘a more thorough-going piece of planning’ because it ‘could be planned with greater freedom on virgin ground’.⁸⁹⁷ In the same year, the Corporation’s Chief Architect Leonard Vincent commented that ‘there were one or two other places in Europe with similar pedestrian shopping centres, but Stevenage was the first town in England to “go the whole hog” in this respect’.⁸⁹⁸ Slightly later, in 1962, Kenneth Robinson stated that Stevenage town centre was ‘more elegant in its scale and proportion than most of the shopping areas at Coventry’.⁸⁹⁹

Architects, planners and government officials flocked from around the world to see Stevenage in person, and especially its ‘famous walking town centre’ (see Fig. 16).⁹⁰⁰ These included: Sir Isaac Hayward, leader of the London County Council, who came to Stevenage with some of his colleagues in March 1959, to help inform the Council’s intended new town at Hook in Surrey;⁹⁰¹ Prime Minister Harold Macmillan, who visited Stevenage in August 1959, describing the town centre as ‘one of the best in the country – indeed in the whole world’;⁹⁰² the German Minister of Housing Herr Paul Lücke, who visited Stevenage in April 1960, describing it as ‘An example to everybody’;⁹⁰³ 35 Dutchmen from the mining town of Geleen, who visited in 1960 as part of research for a planned shopping centre;⁹⁰⁴ the Minister of Transport Ernest Marples, who when visiting Stevenage in 1960 took time to view the town centre, ‘particularly from the pedestrian and vehicular traffic separation aspect’;⁹⁰⁵ officials from Ingelheim, Germany, Stevenage’s ‘twin town’, the local paper commenting in 1960 that ‘The New Town of Stevenage greatly impressed them’;⁹⁰⁶ representatives of the LCC’s ‘out-county’ expanded towns, who visited in early 1961;⁹⁰⁷ Jo Grimond, leader of the Liberal Party, who visited Stevenage in November 1962 and stated that he was ‘greatly impressed’ by what he had seen;⁹⁰⁸ and Mr W. I. Morgan, Minister of Health and Local Government in Northern Ireland, who visited in 1963, as part of outline planning for the new city of Craigavon in County Armagh.⁹⁰⁹ Over the course of 1962, visitors to Stevenage from other parts of the country and especially from abroad topped the 4,000 mark – including architects from France, Israel, Japan, Sweden and Russia – while in 1963 Stevenage welcomed visitors from some 80 countries.⁹¹⁰

Even in the mid-1970s, Stevenage was still attracting hoards – in 1974-5, 8,145 visitors arrived from 80 different countries.⁹¹¹ Naturally, therefore, its influence



Figure 165. Aerial view of Stevenage shopping precinct, looking south along Queensway from The Forum to the Town Square, showing buildings completed between 1958 and 1970. (©Historic England Archive, Damian Grady, 26717/005)

was very wide indeed, while Stevenage Development Corporation, for its part, was active on the international stage – contributing, for example, to planning exhibitions held at Ingelheim, Berlin and Geneva in 1961-2.⁹¹² It is difficult today, given the developments which followed and were influenced by Stevenage town centre, to appreciate its novelty and pioneering nature. It is telling, in this regard, to note that in 1951 a representative of the MHLG wrote that ‘we have no experience of building a new town centre in this country from scratch’⁹¹³

Stevenage town centre was pioneering, but it was also far-sighted. Its pedestrian layout reflected the rising problem of traffic and vehicular pollution in the post-war years, but the town’s planners had no idea at the time that this issue would continue to escalate over the course of the century and into the 2000s. Since the 1950s, pedestrian planning has come to be the accepted approach to the commercial areas of town and city centres. Indeed, it is so widespread now that it is difficult to imagine a time when pedestrian shopping centres were rare – as was the case before the 1950s, with the exception of developments such as covered arcades. For a time, open-air pedestrian precincts were overtaken in popularity by covered shopping centres – hence developments such as the Lower Precinct in Coventry were roofed over, work undertaken in 2001 (see pp. 32-3).⁹¹⁴ However, the wheel has now turned full circle and indoor shopping centres like Birmingham’s Bull Ring (first phase of rebuilding completed in 2003) and Nottingham’s Broadmarsh (under demolition in 2020) are being replaced by partly open pedestrian streets on the Stevenage model.

Unity and Quality

Stevenage town centre was the product of intensive work and thought by a number of talented architects and planners. The most significant of these were (in order of the date of their involvement): Gordon Stephenson, Peter Shephard, Clifford Holliday, Clarence Stein, Donald Reay and Leonard Vincent – each notable and highly successful in their fields, and many of them closely connected with Patrick Abercrombie, providing a direct link to the Greater London Plan (published 1945) and the birth of new towns in Britain. Through these figures, direct lines were drawn to pioneering schemes such as Radburn and Greenbelt in the United States and proposals for Ongar in Essex.

However, while the concept of Stevenage town centre emerged from the minds of various figures, its design and planning is notable for being so integrated. As an architect with Stevenage Development Corporation from 1949 (Chief Architect from 1954), and then Consultant Architect and Planner to the Corporation from 1962 to 1980, Leonard Vincent was the unifying presence, with his deputy and later partner Raymond Gorbing. He and his team were responsible for designing almost every aspect of the town centre’s architecture and layout – from materials and elevational treatment to signage and street furniture. Where Vincent’s team did not produce the designs themselves – as for instance with the buildings erected by Hertfordshire County Council – they provided clear advice to others, and the Corporation had the final say on approved designs. Only Frederick Gibberd at Harlow enjoyed a comparable long-term oversight of a new town – Gibberd was active there from 1947

to 1980 – but important shops at the core of his plan, Broad Walk, were built by commercial developers using their own architects.

The quality of the work at Stevenage town centre was much commented upon at the time, and it is notable that this success was achieved by Vincent and his team despite the considerable constraints on public funding. Jack Balchin wrote in 1980 that the town centre ‘deserves its reputation as not only the earliest of modern pedestrian centres but as one of the best’.⁹¹⁵ The town centre is a notably early example of curtain walling in Britain (Fig. 166), and its neutral framework as a basis for advertising, signage and neon lighting, described by Kenneth Browne as ‘really creative’, earned it a special feature in the *Architectural Review* in 1957 (see pp. 72-3).⁹¹⁶



Figure 166. A coloured postcard of around 1960 showing Stevenage Town Square, viewed from the west. (Author’s collection)

For his work on the town centre, Leonard Vincent was appointed a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) in the New Year’s Honours’ List of 1960 – a unique distinction for an architect at a time when those in public offices received little recognition from within the profession.⁹¹⁷ During 1960 Vincent also had the rare accolade of seeing his designs for Stevenage included in the Royal Academy summer exhibition, and was awarded a distinction in town planning by the RIBA; additionally, Stevenage received an award at the International Exhibition of Architects held in Havana that year.⁹¹⁸

A clear ‘concept’ covering the layout and design of Stevenage town centre was in place by at least 1949, and this became stronger and more detailed over the subsequent years – especially 1954 to 1966 – in the hands of Leonard Vincent and the architectural staff at the Development Corporation. This unifying concept encompassed the design of details (such as lettering) but also layout, points of visual interest (such as sculpture), boundaries of sites, and the massing and height of buildings – in particular, the idea that the core of the town centre should be limited to three storeys, with taller buildings adding ‘architectural interest’ at key sites on the perimeters (as with Daneshill House, The Towers and Southgate House).⁹¹⁹ Vincent and his colleagues worked hard to ensure that the overall townscape at Stevenage followed and complied with their vision – for instance, refusing to allow the construction of tall buildings except on key sites.

The concept was something that bound the work of the 1950s to the expansion phases of the 1960s and '70s, and ensured consistency in areas including materials and height – so it is that features such as the single-storey cross canopies are as characteristic of the 1956-9 commercial core as of the extension to the commercial zone undertaken up to the mid-1970s (see Figs 84-5). In a note of 1968, quoted at length elsewhere in this report (see p. 59), Vincent emphasised the importance of this internationally recognised concept, and felt that the integrity of the town centre's design should be protected at all costs. Certainly, it is this concept, and the integrity and unity of design, that is the major aspect that makes Stevenage town centre so special – today as in the 1950s. Elaine Harwood has commented that Stevenage town centre 'is a homogenous complex in which the main arcades of shops and offices work as a single composition, something rare in any precinct and unique in a new town centre'.⁹²⁰

Level of Survival

There is no doubt that the town centre has seen decline since the dissolution of Stevenage Development Corporation in 1980. This is partly because of the diversification of freehold property owners from that point (see p. 17), resulting in decreased control and a weakening of the 'concept', but also because of the challenging economic climate of the late 1900s and early 2000s. In 1980, Stevenage Borough Council was optimistic about the future of Stevenage – Councillor Brian Hall stated that as long as the Council could complete necessary development, Stevenage would 'be a model town in 20 to 30 years time', and 'a fantastic place to live'.⁹²¹ Around the same time, Jack Balchin commented that 'Every weekday testifies to the wisdom of those – architects, Board members, councillors, public – who stuck out for a pedestrian centre ... There is to be seen in the congregated people the fast beat of the heart of the town'.⁹²² However, within 30 years, the town centre had seen decreased visitor numbers and the closure of many commercial premises, a process exacerbated by the building of edge-of-town retail and leisure parks (see p. 1).

In terms of preservation, Stevenage survived almost exactly as built at the time of the dissolution of the Development Corporation in 1980. Not long after that, one writer commented, thinking about Stevenage's future:

Stevenage was a protected species in its early days. It was patronised by government ministers, nurtured by planners and guarded by its own development corporation. Forty years later, all that has gone. Now Stevenage must fight its own battles.⁹²³

Since then, there have been a number of changes and alterations. Some of these have not been particularly detrimental to the original town plan and fabric. For instance, the Westgate shopping centre, opened in 1988, was slotted into the area behind the existing pedestrian ways, on the site of a former surface car park (see Fig. 9), while the 1987-8 Tesco development and 1996-7 Forum shopping centre are also on the fringes of the precinct (see Figs 1 and 54-55).

More radical changes have included: the replacement of the canopies with a glazed walkway on the west side of the upper part of Queensway (around the late 1980s;

see Fig. 91); the remodelling of the platform in the Town Square (in 1992-3; see Fig. 100); the demolition of the bus garage in Danestrete (in 1993); the demolition of the former Tesco and ABC cinema block at the north-east of the centre (in c. 1995); the demolition of the Head Post Office building at the corner of the Town Square and its replacement with The Plaza development (1999-2000; see Fig. 112); the demolition of the bowling centre on Danestrete (in c. 2003); the demolition of Langley House on the corner of Southgate and Danestrete (in 2003-4) and the Central Garage on the adjacent site (in 2005), and replacement with a hotel and flats; the removal of many of the single-storey cross canopies in the pedestrian ways (between c. 1985 and c. 2006); and the radical remodelling and extension of the early 1960s Park Place blocks in 2017-18 (see Figs 89-90). At the time of writing, there is also a scheme underway on the north side of the Town Square, including the former Davants store, and on the east side of the upper section of Queensway.

However, these changes are still comparatively low in number, given the scale of the town centre. With the exception of the Head Post Office, the bowling centre and the bus garage, all the key components of the 1950s town centre scheme still currently remain – including all of the commercial core, the bus station, Daneshill House, the Mecca dance hall, the parish church, and the surface car parks at East Gate and The Quadrant. This level of survival allows for a ready understanding and appreciation of the accomplishments of Leonard Vincent and others at the Development Corporation, and the architectural impact achieved in the 1950s and '60s.

Also surviving are most of the structures which formed part of the 1960s extension of the commercial 'core' – including the two-storey bridge, the former Littlewoods store, and the north part of Queensway – together with all the major buildings constructed on the peripheries of the precinct in the late 1950s and '60s, including Swingate House, Brickdale House, the outpatients' clinic, the library and health centre, The Towers point block, the police station, Southgate House, the fire and ambulance station, the youth centre and the swimming pool. Slightly later but still notable surviving features of the town centre as completed are the 1970s multi-storey car park on St George's Way, the arts and leisure centre, the Grampian Hotel with former commercial premises (BHS and C&A) opposite, the magistrates' court, the railway station and the elevated walkway. Altogether, this represents almost the entire scheme devised by Leonard Vincent and described by him as an internationally reputed 'concept' (see p. 59). To date, buildings which have been lost or altered have generally been of subsidiary significance – with the exception of the missing cross canopies, the Town Square platform and the Head Post Office.

In terms of its state of survival, Stevenage town centre is certainly much better preserved overall than the town centre of any other British new town, including Harlow, Crawley, Basildon and Bracknell, which have all been the subject of significant alteration and demolition. It is also more intact than its major (and slightly earlier) comparator – the Upper Precinct at Coventry (listed grade II in 2018). Architecturally the two schemes are similar in their use of a functional style and projecting canopies, but Stevenage is more consistent, tauter in its use of 3 ft 4 in. and 5 ft grids, and more complete – there have been various changes to the Upper Precinct, including the addition of a glazed escalator (Fig. 167). Meanwhile,

Coventry's slightly later Lower Precinct – completed a year after the 'core' of Stevenage town centre – is far more radically altered and has been roofed over.

It is especially notable that Stevenage's original shopping precinct of 1956-9 survives intact, with no large-scale demolition or extension. No other British town centre pedestrian precinct of the 1950s or '60s has such architectural interest or survives to the same degree. This level of integrity is rightly reflected by the precinct's conservation area designation, though there is a case to be made for the extension of the area's boundaries (see below).



Figure 167. The Upper Precinct in Coventry, shown here in a photograph of 2014. The blocks to left and right were listed grade II in 2018, despite alterations including the addition of a glazed escalator. (©Historic England Archive, Steven Baker, DP164621)

Assessment of Architectural Significance of Surviving Structures

It is natural that change should occur and be desirable in a town centre like that at Stevenage, and indeed it is current plans for regeneration that have led to the production of this report. With this in mind, it may be useful to assess the significance of the component buildings and areas of the town centre. Without question, the most noteworthy element of the town is the shopping 'core' as built in 1956-9 – comprising Queensway (up to the junction with Park Place), Market Place, and the Town Square, with its platform, western 'square' and L-shaped northern arm embracing the bus station (Fig. 168). This core – including its most famous and visible part around the clock tower and platform – has already been designated as the Town Centre Conservation Area, created in 1988 and revised in 2010, and includes two grade II-listed structures – the clock tower and the sculpture *Joy Ride*. However, there is a case to be made that this designation should be extended to include the remainder of the first-phase commercial area, the L-shaped block comprising 1-15 Town Square (numbers 17-19 are already included), and even to extend north to take in the extension of 1962-4, including the two-storey bridge at the junction of Queensway and Park Place. Individual features which may be worth consideration of statutory designation include the surviving ceramic mural on Co-op House (see Fig. 73).

Of key significance for their relationship to this core area, and their fundamental importance to the successful working of the pedestrian concept, are the bus station, the service roads behind the commercial blocks and the surviving surface car parks, with garaging, sited in their returns. These survive at The Quadrant (off Southgate) and at East Gate, the latter retaining the building constructed in c. 1957 as the boiler house powering the whole shopping precinct, helping the development to meet the requirements of the Clean Air Act (see pp. 67-8). This boiler house – at the north-west



Figure 168. The Town Square – shown here in a photograph of c. 1960, looking west – is the most famous component of Stevenage town centre. It is at the heart of its conservation area, and contains two listed structures: the sculpture *Joy Ride* and the clock tower. (© The Francis Frith Collection)

corner of the car park – survives well, though without the tall chimney which once towered above its roofline (see Fig. 104).

Slightly beyond the core area, but also of major significance because of their impact on its design, are the blocks which extended Queensway to the north (up to the two-storey bridge) and projected into Park Place on the east, along with three key buildings: the seven-storey office block Daneshill House, the 13-storey residential block *The Towers* and the (grade-II listed) Church of St George. The first-mentioned closes part of the vista west from the Town Square (and formed the offices of Stevenage Development Corporation), *The Towers* closes the vista south along Queensway, and the campanile of the church closes the vista at the east end of Market Place (see Figs 35 and 64). *The Towers*, completed in 1963, is identical to two other point blocks in the central area of Stevenage – and is later in date than Daneshill House – but is especially notable for its impact on the design of the commercial core, and was carefully sited and designed by Leonard Vincent with this in mind, as with the church tower. In this, these structures mimic arrangements at developments such as Vällingby and the Lijnbaan, where tall blocks were similarly used as focal points at the ends of pedestrian ways. Mention here should also be made of the important but currently vulnerable statue of *Seated Figures* in the grounds behind *The Towers*. Had the Head Post Office survived, this could have been included amongst this group of buildings – in design, it matched the roughly contemporary and adjacent Daneshill House, and made a major contribution to the design and impact of the Town Square area.

To a second tier of significance can be ascribed other buildings complete by the mid-1960s and situated on the fringes of the commercial core. These comprise: the Mecca

dance hall on Danestrete; the Hertfordshire County Council structures on Southgate – that is, the library and health centre and the police station – along with the outpatients' clinic on the same road (built for the Regional Hospital Board); and, on St George's Way, Southgate House, the fire and ambulance station, the youth centre and the swimming pool. Of these, the most intact and notable architecturally are the dance hall, the outpatients' clinic, the library and health centre, and the youth centre (Bowes Lyon House) – perhaps most unique, in terms of its design and survival, is the youth centre, though most prominent on account of its height is Southgate House.

Other buildings which would have belonged within this secondary tier, had they survived, are the Ambassador bowling centre, Langley House and the Central Garage (formerly flanking the outpatients' clinic to west and north), and the bus garage on Danestrete – although of these, only the bowling centre and Langley House were designed by Vincent and his team. Also of the early 1960s are Swingate House and the earliest blocks of Brickdale House on Danestrete. However, these have been greatly altered, and never had the architectural impact of fully curtain-walled office blocks like Langley House and Daneshill House. Also, Swingate House – with Southgate House – can be viewed as a later addition to the original scheme, part of the push for office jobs in the early 1960s and reflecting the need for more office space following the collapse of proposals for a civic centre.

The key buildings from the late 1960s design phase are the extension of Queensway at the north, from the two-storey bridge up to The Forum, and the multi-storey car park on the site of the Market Square off St George's Way. Leonard Vincent was involved in the design of these, and on that account they are worthy of attention. However, the level of survival and significance overall is lower than that of the work pre-dating 1965. It is especially regrettable that the canopies on the west side of this area of Queensway have been replaced.

All of the structures built within the town centre during the time of Stevenage Development Corporation (that is, before 1980) are important, as they formed part of the 'concept' discussed above. However, those with the lowest quality in terms of design are those of the final phases of Corporation work, from c. 1970 onwards. By this point, the Corporation was predominantly using external architects – by no means just Vincent & Goring – and although the materials and general style of the earlier post-war work was replicated where possible, the resulting architecture was more varied and disparate (see p. 84). From this phase are buildings such as the Grampian Hotel and the shops beneath, the C&A and BHS stores on the opposite side of The Forum, the magistrates' court, Manulife House, the west and south extensions to Brickdale House, and the former (now demolished) Tesco and ABC block at the north-east corner of the town centre.

However, special mention should be made of the arts and leisure centre and the elevated walkway joining the town centre to the railway station – designed respectively by Vincent & Goring and Stevenage Development Corporation (with Vincent's input). Both of these were visionary and highly successful pieces of design; although the arts and leisure centre has since been much altered, the walkway survives largely as built, and makes a vital contribution to the townscape.

Historic and Communal Significance

This report has not aimed to assess the historic and communal significance of Stevenage town centre, but certain important points should be made. The pedestrian precinct is a triumph of public will over capital interest, big business and government: it was the local population of Stevenage, together with the District Council, that fought for the pedestrian town centre, and which won this vital battle (see pp. 25-6). As the architect David Rixson has noted, ‘blood was spilled’ during this ‘vicious’ debate, but all ultimately agreed that the end result was worth it.⁹²⁴ As is mentioned elsewhere in this report, many opponents of the pedestrian scheme later admitted that they had been wrong (see p. 26).

On account of its pioneering nature, Stevenage town centre attracted thousands of visitors, from Britain and abroad (see above, pp. 28-9 and 181). For at least 40 years, it was also a highly successful shopping destination, drawing customers not only from Stevenage but from Hertfordshire more broadly. Visitors and locals thronged in particular to the Town Square area, arriving by bus, by car and on foot. The area, and the raised platform in particular, has functioned as a civic hub, used variously for dances, exhibitions, meetings, celebrations and protests (see Fig. 99). It was here that the Queen stood on opening the town centre in April 1959. The area was also the heart of the town centre in terms of commerce, the Town Square being surrounded by major companies and retailers such as Woolworth’s, Fine Fare, Barclays, the Co-op and Boots.

Other surviving buildings with notable social and communal importance – aside from the church, the significance of which goes without saying – are the former Edward the Confessor public house at 1 Town Square (until the mid-1960s, the only pub in the town centre area), the Mecca dance hall (the focus for entertainment for decades, hosting numerous dances and concerts including the Rolling Stones and The Who), Bowes Lyon House youth centre (also used as a music venue, but also for a range of other communal activities), the library (one of the largest and most popular of its type in the area), the swimming pool complex (a major leisure facility for the new town), and the arts and leisure centre (akin to a community centre in its facilities, which included a crèche). Daneshill House is also of special note: although the original designs for the town centre were produced at Stevenage Development Corporation’s former base in Aston, it was at Daneshill House that Vincent, his colleagues and his successors produced designs from 1961, including those for the north expansion of the commercial core and for the proposed civic centre (see Figs 38-9). Even after setting up as a freelance consultant in 1962, Vincent continued to have dedicated offices in Daneshill House, retaining them until 1980 (see p. 16).

Stevenage town centre is undoubtedly at a pivotal point in its history. The proposed redevelopment aims to bring about regeneration and revitalisation, but would also involve significant change to the scheme – the town centre ‘concept’ – realised by Stevenage Development Corporation over a period of 25 years. It is hoped that this report will inform this vital process.

APPENDIX I: TIMELINE OF TOWN CENTRE CONSTRUCTION UNDER STEVENAGE DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION (1954-80)

1954	autumn	Work begins on road network (including Danestrete)
1955		Work begins on bus station, Danestrete
1956	June	On-site prefabrication begins for shopping precinct Work on bus station completed around now (but not opened until October 1958; see below)
	July	Final approval for town centre works Laying of foundation stone of St George's Church, St George's Way
	September	Main building contract for town centre begins, with work on south side of Town Square
	November	Work begins on north side of Town Square
	December	Work begins on east side of Town Square
1957	January	Work begins on south part of Queensway, extending into Market Place, north up Queensway and into Park Place Work begins on north arm of Town Square Work begins on bus garage, Danestrete
1958	January	Shopfitting begins, with the Co-op in the Town Square
	June	First shops opened (Lavells and Co-op)
	c. June	Completion of work on north-west arm of Town Square (nos 1-19)
	July	The Town Square comes into use
	July-Dec.	Further multiples, banks and shops opened
	July	Opening of Lloyds at 3-5 Town Square – the first bank to begin trading in the new town centre
	August	Work begins on clock tower, pool and platform in Town Square

	autumn	Work begins on Town Centre Gardens
	September	<i>Joy Ride</i> unveiled on platform in Town Square Barclays opened at 2-4 Town Square
	October	Official opening of bus station, Danestrete Opening of Westgate, East Gate and The Quadrant car parks
	November	Work begins on Head Post Office, Danestrete
	December	Unveiling of clock tower Opening of Daneshill car park
1959		Work begins on police station, Southgate
	April	Official opening of the town centre by HM The Queen Opening of bus garage, Danestrete
	May	Opening of east part of Market Square car park Work begins around now on county library and county health centre, Southgate
	autumn	Opening of Edward the Confessor public house, 1 Town Square
	September	Work begins on Daneshill House, Danestrete Completion of Head Post Office
	October	Work begins on Langley House, Southgate Opening of west part of Market Square car park
	November	Trading begins in the open market, Market Square Work begins around now on outpatients' clinic, Southgate
	December	Official opening of Head Post Office
1960	March	Work begins on The Towers, Southgate
	May	Work begins on the Mecca dance hall, Danestrete
	June	Construction around now of Terrapin huts to rear of Daneshill House, used initially by Lloyds Bank Branches Clearing Centre (from September)
	August	Opening of Swingate car park
	October	Foundation stone of Mecca dance hall laid

		Langley House completed
		Police station and health centre in Southgate in full use from this month
1961	November	Consecration and opening of St George's Church
	January	Completion of Daneshill House, Danestrete
		Opening of county library, Southgate
		Opening of police station, Southgate
		Work begins on fire and ambulance station, St George's Way
	April	Site work begins for extension of shopping precinct
		Opening of outpatients' clinic, Southgate
		Work begins on swimming pool, St George's Way
	May	Opening of county health centre, Southgate
	July	Government call for economies in public expenditure – some town centre works temporarily put on hold
	Work begins on Swingate House for Lloyds Bank	
c. autumn	Midland Bank opens on ground floor of Daneshill House	
October	Opening of Mecca dance hall, Danestrete	
November	Opening around now of Central Garage, Danestrete	
1962	January	Opening of first phase of Town Centre Gardens
		Opening of Northgate to traffic
	June	Final scheme for civic centre approved around now
	July	Announcement of proposals for Stevenage expansion
		Opening of fire and ambulance station, St George's Way
	August	Work begins in earnest on extension of shopping precinct
	August	Press launch and public opening of Ambassador Lanes bowling centre, Danestrete
	September	Official opening of Ambassador Lanes bowling centre
	October	Opening of swimming pool, St George's Way
	November	Completion of sorting office at Head Post Office, Danestrete

	December	Opening of clubroom and bar at bowling centre Completion of Swingate House for Lloyds Bank Branches Clearing Centre, Danestrete Times Social Club moves to Terrapin huts to rear of Daneshill House, and Stevenage Day Nursery moves to the adjacent premises around the same time Stevenage Development Corporation announces the suspension of some town centre projects, including the civic centre, pending a decision about expansion
1963	March	Completion of The Towers, Southgate
	April	Work begins on Southgate House, St George's Way
	October	Opening of Littlewoods in new north extension of Queensway W. E. Williams's survey 'The Arts in Stevenage' published
	Oct.-Dec.	Opening of shops in north extension of Queensway
	December	Unofficial opening of Clarion Club in two-storey bridge, Queensway
1964		Installation of aluminium sculpture by Peter Lyon on west face of 21/23 Town Square
	February	Official opening of Clarion Club (see above)
	March	Work begins on youth centre (Bowes Lyon House), St George's Way Work begins on Brickdale House, Danestrete
	April	County library reopened following extension (completed late February)
	May	Opening of Chinese restaurant ('Blossom Garden') in two-storey bridge, Queensway
	June	Foundation stone laid for youth centre
	September	Completion of Southgate House, St George's Way
	December	Completion around now of 22 shops with offices above in Park Place
1965	April	Opening of youth centre (Bowes Lyon House) Announcement that large-scale expansion of Stevenage will not go ahead

	July	Lease of Terrapin huts to rear of Daneshill House to Stevenage Arts Guild and Lytton Players
1966	February	First phase of works at Brickdale House completed
	April	Bowling centre seriously damaged by fire
	October	Opening of the Long Ship pub and restaurant at base of Southgate House, St George's Way, with mosaic mural by William Mitchell
1967	February	Reopening of bowling centre
		Work begins on far north section of Queensway
1968		Completion of stage two of Brickdale House
	September	New Terrapin hut built to rear of Daneshill House for Arts Guild of Stevenage and Lytton Players
1969		Completion of Lytton Way
	October	Sainsbury's opens in north section of Queensway
1970		Work begins on Grampian Hotel
	April	Marks & Spencer's opens in north section of Queensway
1971	March	Work begins on multi-storey car park, St George's Way
	July	Work begins on commercial block on The Forum at north-east of town centre
	September	Work begins around now on new railway station, Lytton Way
1972		Work begins on Manulife House, St George's Way
	March	Work begins on magistrates' court, Danesgate
		Unveiling of untitled sculpture by José de Alberdi, Queensway
1973		Underpasses completed beneath newly dual-carriageway St George's Way, with relief sculptures by William Mitchell
	February	Opening of Grampian Hotel, The Forum
	c. spring	Opening of magistrates' court, Danesgate
	July	Stevenage new town railway station opens to passengers (a day after the station at Old Stevenage is closed), with elevated walkway over Lytton Way

	September	Official opening of railway station (see above)
	October	Opening of Manulife House, St George's Way
	November	Opening of ABC cinema and Tesco in north-east block, The Forum
	December	Opening of covered market on ground floor of multi-storey car park, off St George's Way
1974		Stage three of Brickdale Houe completed
		Police station moved from Southgate to new building on Lytton Way
	February	Unveiling of plaque to Lewis Silkin on west side of clock tower
	June	Foundation stone of arts and leisure centre laid
1975		Elevated walkway from railway station to town centre completed
		Opening of C&A, The Forum
		Completion around now of block on south side of The Forum, opposite Tesco and ABC cinema
	November	Arts and leisure centre opened for business
1976		Opening of British Home Stores (BHS), The Forum
	February	Official opening of arts and leisure centre
1978		Opening of skatepark to east of youth centre (Bowes Lyon House)

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- 87 www.talkingnewtowns.org.uk/content/topics/developing-a-new-town/leonard-vincent-about-stevenage-pedestrianised-town-centre (acc. 29 January 2020)
- 88 <https://www.talkingnewtowns.org.uk/content/topics/developing-a-new-town/leonard-vincent-about-stevenage-pedestrianised-town-centre> (acc. 16 April 2020)
- 89 Burns, *British Shopping Centres*, plate 21; Peter Gwynne, *A History of Crawley* (Chichester, 1990), p. 165; Crawley Development Corporation, *8th Annual Report* (1955), in eds Anthony Burton and Joyce Hartly, *The New Towns Record 1946-2002* (London: IDOX Information Services, 2003) (CD/DVD compilation, RIBA); <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/sussex/vol6/pt3/pp83-89#anchorn100> and <http://crawley.cyng.org.uk/CN-NewTown.html> (acc. 9 September 2020). The Broadwalk was designed by H. S. Howgrave Graham, the architect of Crawley Development Corporation.
- 90 TNA, HLG 115/34 (minutes of meeting of 4 April 1951)
- 91 Stephenson, *On a Human Scale*, p. 101
- 92 Balchin, *First New Town*, p. 271
- 93 At this point, the Corporation decided that the shopping streets of a pedestrian centre should be narrower than those conceived by Holliday, Stephenson and Stein in 1950-1. The concept of a 120 ft boulevard was entirely set aside: Balchin, *First New Town*, p. 271
- 94 HALS, CNT ST/1/2/41 (reports of 25 August and 4 September 1953); Balchin, *First New Town*, pp. 271-2
- 95 Balchin, *First New Town*, p. 290, note 11
- 96 HALS, CNT/ST/4/1/T10, plan PL/2695/2 and CNT ST/1/2/41 (reports of 25 August and 4 September 1953); 'Stevenage Wants its Pedestrian Centre', *Architects' Journal*, vol. 119 issue 3075 (4 February 1954), p. 158; Balchin, *First New Town*, p. 272. See also: TNA, HLG 115/35-36; SDC, *Quarterly Bulletin*, no. 10 (1 July 1953), p. 8
- 97 *Architects' Journal*, vol. 133 issue 3446 (4 May 1961), p. 634
- 98 SDC, *7th Annual Report* (1954) and *8th Annual Report* (1955), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*; Balchin, *First New Town*, p. 128
- 99 SDC, *Quarterly Bulletin*, no. 14 (1 July 1954), p. 2

- 100 Ibid
- 101 See: 'The Financier's View of Planning', *Architects' Journal*, vol. 119 issue 3074 (28 January 1954), p. 118; 'Stevenage Wants its Pedestrian Centre', *Architects' Journal* (4 February 1954), pp. 157-8; Stephenson, *On a Human Scale*, p. 103; 'Susan Morris' in Huw and Connie Rees, *The History Makers* (Stevenage, 1991), pp. 83-9
- 102 'Stevenage Wants its Pedestrian Centre', *Architects' Journal* (4 February 1954), p. 158
- 103 SDC, *Quarterly Bulletin*, no. 13 (1 April 1954), p. 2; *ibid*, no. 14 (1 July 1954), p. 2; *ibid*, no. 16 (1 January 1955), p. 1; Stephenson, *On a Human Scale*, p. 104; Balchin, *First New Town*, pp. 274-5
- 104 SDC, *8th Annual Report* (1955), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*. See also: SDC, *Purpose: Town Centre Number* (spring 1959), p. 9
- 105 <https://www.talkingnewtowns.org.uk/content/topics/developing-a-new-town/leonard-vincent-about-stevenage-pedestrianised-town-centre> (acc. 16 April 2020)
- 106 <https://www.talkingnewtowns.org.uk/content/topics/developing-a-new-town/mr-ray-gorbing-architect-arguments-pedestrian-town-centre-text> (acc. 16 April 2020)
- 107 'First shops opening in Stevenage town centre', *The Surveyor and Municipal and County Engineer*, vol. 117 no. 3449 (31 May 1958), p. 553
- 108 L. G. Vincent, 'Planning and Design', in SDC, *Purpose: Town Centre Number* (spring 1959), p. 11
- 109 'Stevenage Town Centre', *The Builder*, vol. 198 no. 6087 (15 January 1960), p. 127
- 110 *Stevenage Pictorial*, 6 March 1959, p. 22
- 111 <https://www.britishpathe.com/video/new-town/query/stevenage> (acc. 15 April 2020)
- 112 G. E. Hardy, 'An Engineer's Problems', in SDC, *Purpose: Town Centre Number* (spring 1959), p. 18
- 113 *Stevenage Pictorial*, 6 March 1959, p. 22
- 114 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 13 (autumn 1958), p. 3
- 115 *Stevenage Pictorial*, 8 May 1959, p. 18
- 116 *Ibid*, 20 May 1960, p. 1
- 117 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 19 (summer 1960), p. 6
- 118 Stephenson, 'Architecture, Town Planning and Civic Design', *The Town Planning Review*, p. 156
- 119 Burns, *British Shopping Centres*, pp. 72-3
- 120 *Architectural Review*, vol. 123 issue 732 (1 January 1958), pp. 14-17
- 121 Burns, *British Shopping Centres*, plates 26 and 27; Lewison and Billingham, *Coventry New Architecture*, p. 108; *Architects' Journal*, vol. 121 no. 3175 (20 January 1955), pp. 85-100
- 122 LCC (Graeme Shankland *et al*), *The Planning of a New Town, Data and design based on a study for a new town of 100,000 at Hook, Hampshire* (London, 1961)
- 123 See: <https://www.architecture.com/image-library/RIBApix/image-information/poster/bush-fair-neighbourhood-centre-harlow-essex-the-pedestrian-precinct-with-the-sculpture-boar-by-elisa/posterid/RIBA10538.html> (acc. 10 September 2020)

- 124 Morrison, *English Shops and Shopping*, p. 258
- 125 Ibid; Colin Buchanan, *Traffic in Towns* (London, 1963)
- 126 Kenneth J. Robinson, 'The Town of Tomorrow: It's Here Today', *Sunday Times* (11 November 1962), p. 51
- 127 Ibid, p. 51 and p. 53
- 128 Ibid, p. 52
- 129 Morrison, *English Shops and Shopping*, pp. 258-9
- 130 Ibid, p. 250 (fig. 260), p. 256 and p. 258
- 131 Ibid, p. 370
- 132 Morrison and Minnis, *Carscapes*, p. 367
- 133 Zita Adamson, *Sam Chippindale, Shopping Centre Pioneer* (Knaresborough, 1993), pp. 17-22
- 134 John A. Dawson and J. Dennis Lord, *Shopping Centre Development, Policies and Prospects* (London, 1985), p. 42
- 135 Ibid, p. 260
- 136 <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/iha-shopping-parades/heag116-shopping-parades-iha/> (acc. 3 August 2020); Morrison, *English Shops and Shopping*, p. 260
- 137 "Planner's Dream" at New Towns', *The Times*, p. 7. The model of Stevenage town centre was widely published, appearing in works such as: Burns, *British Shopping Centres*, plate 80
- 138 'First shops opening in Stevenage town centre', *The Surveyor* (31 May 1958), p. 553
- 139 Vincent, 'Planning and Design', in *Purpose: Town Centre Number* (spring 1959), p. 11
- 140 SBC, *Stevenage District Plan: Shopping Topic Report*, section 3.15
- 141 Vincent, 'Planning and Design', in *Purpose: Town Centre Number* (spring 1959), p. 11
- 142 Leonard G. Vincent, 'The Town Centre, Stevenage', *Town Planning Review*, vol. 31 no. 2 (July 1960), p. 103
- 143 Vincent, 'Planning and Design', in *Purpose: Town Centre Number* (spring 1959), p. 12
- 144 See, for instance: 'Proposed Town Centre, Stevenage', *Architects' Journal*, vol. 124 issue 3203 (19 July 1956), p. 83; Vincent, 'Planning and Design', in *Purpose: Town Centre Number* (spring 1959), pp. 11-12
- 145 Balchin, *First New Town*, p. 257; TNA, HLG 115/34 (letter of 27 February 1951). The preservation of existing trees had also been a notable feature of Vällingby in Sweden; see: 'Vällingby', *Architectural Record* (April 1957), p. 182
- 146 Colour film of July 1959: <https://www.britishpathe.com/video/new-town/query/stevenage> (acc. 15 April 2020)
- 147 Gordon Patterson, 'Town Centre Landscape', in *Purpose: Town Centre Number* (spring 1959), p. 26
- 148 *Stevenage Pictorial*, 6 March 1959, p. 22
- 149 Patterson, 'Town Centre Landscape', in *Purpose: Town Centre Number* (spring 1959), p. 25

- 150 Ibid, p. 26. A plan of 1958 shows lines of trees in the car parks: TNA, HLG 115/233
- 151 “Planner’s Dream” at New Towns’, *The Times*, p. 7
- 152 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 5 (autumn 1956), p. 10. The architects were as follows: Mr Gray of Hooper, Belfrage and Gray for Sainsbury’s; Mr Bailey for W. H. Smith’s; I. V. Mitchell for Boots; H. W. Schofield and Mr Goodman for Woolworth’s; and Ellis Somake for Dolcis: draft text, Elaine Harwood, *New Towns* (Historic England/Liverpool University Press), forthcoming
- 153 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 1 (autumn 1955), p. 11
- 154 HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/T29, vol. 2 (letter of 17 October 1960)
- 155 Vincent, ‘Planning and Design’, in *Purpose: Town Centre Number* (spring 1959), p. 13. See also: ‘Stevenage Town Centre’, *The Builder* (15 January 1960), p. 128
- 156 ‘Stevenage Town Centre’, *The Builder* (15 January 1960), p. 128
- 157 SDC, *13th, 16th and 17th Annual Reports* (1960, 1963 and 1964), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*
- 158 The individual contractors for the ‘core’ of the new town are set out in: SDC, *Purpose: Town Centre Number* (spring 1959), p. 33. See also advertisement for Harry Neal in: *Architectural Review*, 1 January 1957, p. liii
- 159 Vincent, ‘Planning and Design’, in *Purpose: Town Centre Number* (spring 1959), p. 13
- 160 V. Stallabrass, ‘The Shopping Centre’, in *Purpose: Town Centre Number* (spring 1959), p. 22
- 161 Vincent, ‘Planning and Design’, in *Purpose: Town Centre Number* (spring 1959), p. 12
- 162 Ibid, p. 13. See also: L. G. Vincent, ‘Town Centre’, *Architecture and Building*, vol. 34 no. 6 (June 1959), p. 209, and Vincent, ‘The Town Centre, Stevenage’, *Town Planning Review*, p. 106
- 163 *Stevenage Gazette*, 29 November 1963, p. 1; SDC, *Purpose*, no. 29 (autumn 1963), p. 9
- 164 *Stevenage Gazette*, 29 November 1963, p. 1; SDC, *Purpose*, no. 31 (summer 1964), p. 2. See also: https://www.ourstevenage.org.uk/content/topics/stevenage_sculptures/wall-sculpture-by-peter-lyon (acc. 30 January 2020)
- 165 G. E. Hardy, ‘An Engineer’s Problems’, in *Purpose: Town Centre Number* (spring 1959), p. 15; SDC, *Quarterly Bulletin*, no. 18 (1 July 1955), p. 1
- 166 Hardy, ‘An Engineer’s Problems’, in *Purpose: Town Centre Number* (spring 1959), photos on p. 17
- 167 SDC, *Purpose: Town Centre Number* (spring 1959), p. 32; TNA, HLG 115/140 (document of 6 March 1961)
- 168 Vincent, ‘Town Centre’, *Architecture and Building*, p. 209 and p. 212
- 169 TNA, HLG 115/34 (letter of 27 February 1951)
- 170 SDC, *Purpose: Town Centre Number* (spring 1959), p. 32; SDC, *Purpose*, no. 5 (autumn 1956), p. 10
- 171 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 7 (spring 1957), p. 11; *ibid*, no. 8 (summer 1957), p. 10; *ibid*, *Town Centre Number* (spring 1959), p. 32
- 172 A photo published in winter 1957/8 shows all the ranges of the town centre in place except for the north range by the bus station: SDC, *Purpose*, no. 10 (winter 1958 [i.e. 1957/8]), p. 11

- 173 These dates are based on the evidence of photographs in Stevenage Museum; see, for instance, P3886, P3905, P3927 (in which the building materials of the north range are just visible) and P3930 (with the pub nearly complete, in the distance behind the Head Post Office). The Lloyds in the north block was opened in July 1958.
- 174 See, for instance: 'Progress in Pictures' in *Purpose: Town Centre Number* (spring 1959), p. 32
- 175 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 10 (winter 1958 [i.e. 1957-8]), p. 10; *ibid*, no. 11 (spring 1958), p. 10; *ibid*, *Town Centre Number* (spring 1959), p. 32; 'Stevenage Town Centre', *The Contract Journal* (23 April 1959), p. 385
- 176 A photograph of 1958 in the collections of Stevenage Museum (P3887) shows the buildings around the Town Square as complete, and work beginning on the clock tower (initiated in August), but the canopies above the shopfronts are only in frame form and the cross canopies had not then been built (see Fig. 58).
- 177 SDC, *Purpose: Town Centre Number* (spring 1959), p. 32
- 178 *Ibid*, no. 14 (winter 1959 [i.e. 1958-9]), p. 11. See also: Balchin, *First New Town*, pp. 277-8
- 179 SDC, *Purpose: Town Centre Number* (spring 1959), p. 33; Vincent, 'Town Centre', *Architecture and Building*, p. 206
- 180 SDC, *13th Annual Report* (1960), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*
- 181 Vincent, 'Planning and Design', in *Purpose: Town Centre Number* (spring 1959), p. 12
- 182 *Stevenage Pictorial*, 5 August 1960, p. 12
- 183 HALS, CNT/ST/2/1/5 (reports of February, March and June 1959); SDC, *11th Annual Report* (1958), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*
- 184 *Stevenage Pictorial*, 17 April 1959, p. 1
- 185 *Ibid*, 1 January 1960, p. 1
- 186 *Ibid*
- 187 HALS, CNT/ST/5/AP/P15, vol. 3 (press notice, December 1964)
- 188 'Stevenage Town Centre', *The Builder* (15 January 1960), p. 127
- 189 *Stevenage Pictorial*, 6 March 1959, p. 22
- 190 Vincent, 'The Town Centre, Stevenage', *Town Planning Review*, p. 105
- 191 *Architect & Building News*, vol. 219 no. 22 (31 May 1961), p. 713
- 192 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 26 (autumn 1962), p. 3
- 193 Hampson, 'The Heart of a Town', in *Purpose: Town Centre Number* (spring 1959), p. 28
- 194 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 5 (autumn 1956), pp. 8-9
- 195 HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/T29, vol. 2 (letter of 21 May 1957)
- 196 For photos of the college building, see: SDC, *Purpose*, no. 24 (March 1962), pp. 8-9. See also: Balchin, *First New Town*, pp. 224-5
- 197 For further information on Town Centre Gardens, including the landscape scheme drawings of March 1958, see: TNA, HLG 115/124 and SDC, *Purpose*, no. 22 (July 1961), pp. 6-7. For the commencement of works, see: SDC, *Purpose*, no. 13 (autumn 1958), p. 12. The gardens

were designed as a 'buffer' between the town centre and the housing areas to the east: SDC, *Purpose*, no. 20 (autumn 1960), p. 7

- 198 For instance, see the town centre site layout of December 1959: HALS, CNT/ST/15/4/13
- 199 *Stevenage Gazette*, 6 October 1961, p. 1
- 200 HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/R2, vol. 1 (letter from British Railways to SDC, October 1964). All investment in the line (proposed for electrification as far as Hitchin) was stopped in November 1961.
- 201 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 13 (autumn 1958), p. 12; *ibid*, no. 14 (winter 1959 [i.e. 1958-9]), p. 11
- 202 SDC, *12th Annual Report* (1959), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*
- 203 Stallabrass, 'The Shopping Centre', in *Purpose: Town Centre Number* (spring 1959), p. 22
- 204 HALS, CNT/ST/15/4/13
- 205 It is shown on the town centre layout plan of November 1965, but not on that of September 1967: HALS, CNT/ST/15/4/17, CNT/ST/15/4/19 and CNT/ST/5/1/AP/T49, vol. 1 (note of 17 March 1964)
- 206 SDC, *13th Annual Report* (1960), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*; TNA, HLG 115/141
- 207 Balchin, *First New Town*, p. 267. For a photograph of Leonard Vincent's mid-1950s model of the town centre, including the complex at the north, see: *Architectural Review*, 1 January 1957, p. liii
- 208 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 24 (March 1962), p. 11. The building of the Tesco block at The Forum in the early 1970s involved curtailing Northgate on its east side, and by 1974 the street had been curtailed on its west side also; see: HEA, os_74173_v_221 (aerial photograph of July 1974). This made it a no-through road, accessed via a link from Fairlands Way on the north. It has since been removed altogether.
- 209 HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/T41, vol. 1 (for instance, see Vincent's letter of 24 April 1961 and sketch plan of July 1961), and uncatalogued material: Off Acc 793, bundle 36 (bound volume of drawings of July 1961)
- 210 *Ibid*, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/T41, vol. 1 (letters of 10 October 1961 and 13 October 1961)
- 211 *Ibid* (letter of 30 April 1962). See also uncatalogued material: Off Acc 793, bundle 36 (bound volume of drawings of July 1961)
- 212 *Ibid*, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/T41, vol. 1 (note of 11 May 1962 and drawing appended to memo. of 11 July 1962)
- 213 *Ibid* (letter of 5 July 1962)
- 214 *Ibid*, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/T31, vol. 1 (letter of 7 June 1962)
- 215 *Stevenage Pictorial*, 1 December 1961, p. 20. See also: *Stevenage Gazette*, 30 August 1963, p. 1
- 216 *Stevenage Gazette*, 24 August 1962, p. 1
- 217 HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/T41, vol. 1 (note of 14 August 1962)
- 218 *Ibid* (minutes of meeting, 18 September 1962)
- 219 *Ibid*

- 220 Ibid
- 221 *Stevenage Gazette*, 29 September 1961, p. 1
- 222 Ibid; TNA, HLG 115/141; and see: SBC, *Stevenage District Plan: Shopping Topic Report*, sections 5.1-2
- 223 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 20 (autumn 1960), p. 11; *ibid*, no. 22 (July 1961), p. 10
- 224 See, for instance: *Stevenage Pictorial*, 19 October 1962, p. 5
- 225 *Stevenage Gazette*, 18 January 1963, p. 2
- 226 *Ibid*, 16 November 1962, p. 1
- 227 *Ibid*, 1 October 1965, p. 3
- 228 *Ibid*, 16 November 1962, p. 1
- 229 SDC, *17th Annual Report* (1964), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*; SDC, *Purpose*, no. 33 (summer 1965), p. 4
- 230 *Stevenage Gazette*, 1 January 1965, p. 3; SDC, *19th Annual Report* (1966), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*
- 231 For instance, see the town centre site layout of December 1959: HALS, CNT/ST/15/4/13
- 232 *Stevenage Pictorial*, 11 May 1962, p. 3
- 233 For instance, see the town centre site layout of December 1959: HALS, CNT/ST/15/4/13. The site in Southgate was one of two offered to the Council at a meeting on 18 September 1962, the other being next to St George's Church, on the east side of St George's Way: HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/T41, vol. 1 (minutes of meeting, 18 September 1962)
- 234 *Stevenage Gazette*, 16 November 1962, p. 1
- 235 *Ibid*
- 236 *Ibid*, 15 March 1963, p. 1
- 237 These two blocks were approved in August 1963: *Stevenage Gazette*, 30 August 1963, p. 1; SDC, *21st Annual Report* (1968), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*; TNA, HLG 115/440
- 238 *Stevenage Gazette*, 30 August 1963, p. 1
- 239 *Ibid*, 1 March 1963, p. 1
- 240 HALS, CNT/ST/15/4/19
- 241 Pers. comm. (David Rixson of Vincent & Gorbing)
- 242 SDC, *17th Annual Report* (1964), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*
- 243 *Stevenage Gazette*, 1 March 1963, p. 9
- 244 HALS, CNT/ST/15/4/19
- 245 *Ibid*, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/P15 (press notice of December 1964)
- 246 *Ibid*, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/M47, vol. 1 (memo. of 28 November 1968)
- 247 *Ibid*, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/B62, vol. 1 (notes of meeting of 4 January 1973)

- 248 Ibid, CNT/ST/15/4/19
- 249 Ibid, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/T29, vol. 2 (memo. of 6 January 1969)
- 250 *Architect & Building News* (31 May 1961), p. 713; draft text, Harwood, *New Towns*, forthcoming
- 251 Draft text, Harwood, *New Towns*, forthcoming; HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/C7 (report of 28 August 1969)
- 252 For Lytton Way under construction, see, for instance, an aerial photograph of April 1969: HEA, MAL/69031/v137 (Meridian Airmaps Limited photography)
- 253 'Stevenage Station', *The Architect*, vol. 3 no. 11 (November 1973), p. 52
- 254 HALS, CNT/ST/15/4/19, and see photos in: 'Stevenage Station', *The Architect* (November 1973), p. 52
- 255 Draft text, Harwood, *New Towns*, forthcoming
- 256 HALS, CNT/ST/4/1/T/10/5/1
- 257 For this and other information, see: <https://www.thegordoncraigtheatrearchive.org.uk/history/the-new-towns-theatre> (acc. 13 May 2020)
- 258 *Irish Independent*, 30 November 1988, p. 17; James Bettley, Nikolaus Pevsner and Bridget Cherry, *The Buildings of England: Hertfordshire* (New Haven and London, 2019 edn), p. 546. Possibly, Crighton Design – retail specialists – were responsible for the planning and interiors of the centre, while RHWL may have been brought in as consultants for the elevations.
- 259 The proposal for this development appears to have been approved in November 1984: Stevenage Borough Council planning records (84/2/0348/8)
- 260 Stevenage Borough Council planning records (86/2/0020/8); Stevenage Museum, PP1188-9 and PP1192
- 261 Calladine, *Stevenage New Town Centre: The Conservation of Modern Buildings*, p. 62
- 262 Morrison and Minnis, *Carscapes*, p. 385
- 263 Stevenage Borough Council planning records (96/2/0071/9; see also 94/2/0135/9); Calladine, *Stevenage New Town Centre: The Conservation of Modern Buildings*, p. 62
- 264 A photo published in winter 1957/8 shows all the ranges of the town centre in place except for the north range by the bus station: SDC, *Purpose*, no. 10 (winter 1958 [i.e. 1957/8]), p. 11
- 265 For the various companies which occupied the retail premises in this first phase, see the plan of the town centre (with key) held by Stevenage Museum: P6555 (see Fig. 59)
- 266 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 12 (summer 1958), p. 10; *Stevenage: The Story of the First New Town*, p. 3
- 267 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 12 (summer 1958), p. 10; *Purpose: Town Centre Number* (spring 1959), p. 32; SDC, *Purpose*, no. 22 (July 1961), p. 5; *Stevenage Pictorial*, 17 April 1959, p. viii
- 268 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 27 (winter 1963 [i.e. 1962/3]), p. 14
- 269 Ibid, no. 13 (autumn 1958), p. 11
- 270 Ibid, *Town Centre Number* (spring 1959), p. 32. See: Stevenage Museum, photo P3887 (1958)
- 271 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 1 (autumn 1955), p. 11; ibid, no. 6 (winter 1957), p. 9. For a contempo-

- rary image which includes the boiler house, see: *ibid*, no. 33 (summer 1965), p. 2
- 272 *Ibid*, no. 1 (autumn 1955), p. 11
- 273 For film footage, see: <https://www.britishpathe.com/search/query/stevenage> (acc. 15 April 2020)
- 274 For archive material relating to Sainsbury's, see: <https://sainsburyarchive.org.uk/catalogue/search/branch/ref/p1146-stevenage-4749-queensway-1958-1969-sainsburys-branch> (acc. 5 May 2020)
- 275 Stallabrass, 'The Shopping Centre', in *Purpose: Town Centre Number* (spring 1959), p. 23; SBC, *Stevenage District Plan: Shopping Topic Report*, section 5.3 and see Map 4 (which shows shops divided into four types: convenience, durable, mixed retail and services)
- 276 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 12 (summer 1958), p. 5; *ibid*, no. 13 (autumn 1958), p. 5; *ibid*, no. 23 (November 1961), p. 4. The first-mentioned issue includes a photograph of the interior of Lloyds Bank, while the interior of Barclays was featured in the autumn 1958 issue and the exterior of the Midland Bank at Daneshill House is in the November 1961 issue. There are further historical images of Barclays, from the front, side, rear and of the interior, in the Barclays Group Archives; see: www.archive.barclays.com (acc. 2 October 2020)
- 277 HALS, CNT/ST/1/2/41 (report of 8 March 1955); draft text, Harwood, *New Towns*, forthcoming
- 278 The NBC holds a Charrington Leases ledger which shows that the pub's lease commenced on 22 July 1959 (for 99 years), the date of the lease being 5 August 1959 (Charrington Leases ledger no. 29, p. 373): pers. comm. (Vanessa Winstone of the National Brewery Centre)
- 279 *Toby Journal* [Charrington's in-house magazine], autumn 1959, p. 41
- 280 Writing in 1959, Victor Stallabrass summarised that the newly opened town centre included: three department or variety stores; 19 food shops; 27 clothing shops; 14 furnishing, hardware, household goods; 6 radio and television stores; 5 newsagents/tobacconists; and 22 miscellaneous shops, including two bookshops and one specialising in gramophone records and music instruments. There were also three cafés, four hairdressers and three banks. See: Stallabrass, 'The Shopping Centre', in *Purpose: Town Centre Number* (spring 1959), p. 24
- 281 *Ibid*; Vincent, 'Town Centre', *Architecture and Building* (June 1959), p. 206
- 282 *Architects' Journal*, vol. 127 issue 3301 (5 June 1958), p. 862
- 283 Stallabrass, 'The Shopping Centre', in *Purpose: Town Centre Number* (spring 1959), p. 24
- 284 Vincent, 'Town Centre', *Architecture and Building* (June 1959), p. 209
- 285 D. Rigby Childs and D. A. C. A. Boyne, 'Bristol', *Architects' Journal*, vol. 116 no. 3005 (2 October 1952), pp. 397-9
- 286 Ed. Ian McCallum, 'Machine-Made America', *Architectural Review*, vol. 121 no. 724 (May 1957), pp. 295-93; Michael Brawne and Alan Craig, 'Walls off the Peg', *Architectural Review*, vol. 122 no. 728 (September 1957), pp. 166-87
- 287 Kenneth Browne, 'Space to Let: Plan for Advertising in a New Town', *Architectural Review*, vol. 122 no. 727 (August 1957), p. 123
- 288 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 8 (summer 1957), p. 11; *ibid*, no. 9 (autumn 1957), p. 11
- 289 <https://www.britishpathe.com/video/new-town/query/stevenage> (acc. 15 April 2020)
- 290 Nikolaus Pevsner, rev. Bridget Cherry, *The Buildings of England: Hertfordshire* (New Haven and London, 1953, 1977 revision), p. 352

- 291 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 8 (summer 1957), p. 11. See also photograph showing Woolworths and Sainsbury's in: Vincent, 'Town Centre', *Architecture and Building* (June 1959), p. 208
- 292 Originally, the ground floor of the Barclays building featured 'a stylish combination of green and black marble along with buff-coloured stone cladding': Calladine, *Stevenage New Town Centre: The Conservation of Modern Buildings*, p. 21. For contemporary photos, see: www.archive.barclays.com (acc. 2 October 2020)
- 293 SDC, *Purpose: Town Centre Number* (spring 1959), p. 3
- 294 Ibid, no. 13 (autumn 1958), p. 16. For the cross canopies at the Lijnbaan, see: Van Der Broek and Bakema, 'The Lijnbaan at Rotterdam', *Town Planning Review* (April 1956), p. 25 and figs 5-6, fig. 8 and fig. 10, and Burns, *British Shopping Centres*, plate 59
- 295 <https://www.britishpathe.com/video/new-town/query/stevenage> (acc. 15 April 2020)
- 296 Hampson, 'The Stevenage Town Centre', *Town and Country Planning*, p. 15; Patterson, 'Town Centre Landscape', in *Purpose: Town Centre Number* (spring 1959), p. 25
- 297 *Stevenage Gazette*, 13 September 1963, p. 2. Unlike the Co-op, Fine Fare was happy for Leonard Vincent and his team to design their Stevenage store.
- 298 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 1 (autumn 1955), p. 11
- 299 *Stevenage Pictorial*, 17 April 1959, p. viii
- 300 *Co-operative Architecture 1945-1959* (Manchester, 1959), frontispiece; https://www.ourstevenage.org.uk/content/topics/stevenage_sculptures/c-w-s-mural-by-g-bajio (acc. 12 May 2020); Lynn Pearson, *England's Co-operative Movement: An Architectural History* (Swindon, 2020), p. 185, p. 193, pp. 194-5
- 301 Pearson, *England's Co-operative Movement*, p. 195
- 302 Ibid, p. 219
- 303 Vincent, 'Planning and Design', in *Purpose: Town Centre Number* (spring 1959), p. 13
- 304 Stallabrass, 'The Shopping Centre', in *Purpose: Town Centre Number* (spring 1959), p. 22
- 305 Ibid, p. 23
- 306 Ibid
- 307 Plans are dated 27 February, 'proposed' on 6 March 1961, and there is also an annotated version of the comprehensive layout plan of December 1959: TNA, HLG 115/141. For further related information, see: TNA, HLG 115/140. We are grateful to Matthew Bristow for bringing these documents to our attention.
- 308 TNA, HLG 115/140 (document of 6 March 1961)
- 309 Ibid; SDC, *Purpose*, no. 20 (autumn 1960), p. 11; *ibid*, no. 22 (July 1961), p. 10
- 310 TNA, HLG 115/140 (letter of 15 June 1962)
- 311 Ibid, HLG 115/141
- 312 For a photograph of this area as completed, see: SDC, *Purpose*, no. 30 (spring 1964), p. 4
- 313 TNA, HLG 115/140 (letter of 6 April 1961)
- 314 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 28 (summer 1963), p. 11. Planning permission for the new buildings in Park Place was granted on 11 June 1963; see: committee report discussing planning application of 2016 (16/00511/FPM): <https://publicaccess.stevenage.gov.uk/online-applications/>

[applicationDetails.do?activeTab=documents&keyVal=OB48WNP HHJZ00](#) (acc. 23 June 2020). For the numbering of the blocks in this northern area, see the annotated layout plan of December 1959: TNA, HLG 115/141

- 315 *Stevenage Gazette*, 14 September 1962, p. 1; *Architects' Journal* (19 July 1956), p. 83
- 316 *Stevenage Gazette*, 14 September 1962, p. 1. See Kathryn Morrison's 'Building Our Past' site for further information on Littlewoods generally and a photo of the side entrance to the Stevenage store: <https://buildingourpast.com/2016/04/22/remembering-littlewoods-stores/> (acc. 19 May 2020)
- 317 *Stevenage Gazette*, 4 October 1963, p. 1
- 318 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 26 (autumn 1962), p. 12; *Stevenage Gazette*, 14 September 1962, p. 1. For a photograph of the cafeteria, see: SDC, *Purpose*, no. 30 (spring 1964), p. 4
- 319 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 30 (spring 1964), p. 4
- 320 Ibid (including interior photograph); *ibid*, no. 30 (summer 1964), p. 5; *Stevenage Gazette*, 25 October 1963, p. 1. See also: <https://stevenagemuseum.com/category/talking-new-towns/> (acc. 19 May 2020)
- 321 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 30 (spring 1964), p. 4; *Stevenage Gazette*, 25 October 1963, p. 1; *ibid*, 20 December 1963, p. 2; *ibid*, 5 February 1965, p. 1; *ibid*, 5 February 1965, p. 1 and p. 3
- 322 *Stevenage Gazette*, 25 October 1963, p. 1
- 323 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 28 (summer 1963), p. 11; *ibid*, no. 32 (winter 1964/5), p. 10; *ibid*, no. 33 (summer 1965), p. 4; SDC, *17th Annual Report* (1964), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*
- 324 *Stevenage Gazette*, 16 November 1962, p. 1
- 325 For photos of Park Place from its east and west ends, see: SDC, *Purpose*, no. 32 (winter 1964/5), p. 10; Balchin, *First New Town*, p. 287. For the double link in Park Place, see: SDC, *Purpose*, no. 33 (summer 1965), p. 4
- 326 TNA, HLG 115/140 (letter of 19 April 1961); HLG 115/141
- 327 *Ibid*, HLG 115/141 (plan of 29 February 1961)
- 328 *Stevenage Gazette*, 16 November 1962, p. 1
- 329 *Ibid*, 1 October 1965, p. 3; SDC, *20th Annual Report* (1967), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*
- 330 SDC, *21st Annual Report* (1968), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*; HALS, CNT/ST/4/1/T/10 (letter from J. Palmer, MHLG, to SDC, 27 October 1967)
- 331 TNA, HLG 115/141
- 332 For contemporary photos of this area, see: Stevenage Museum P11145, P10616 and P11188, Balchin, *First New Town*, p. 283, and Alan H. Rowe, 'Stevenage – a new concept', *Built Environment*, vol. 2 no. 8 (August 1973), p. 464
- 333 This is especially clearly shown in: Stevenage Museum, P11188 (photo of 1969)
- 334 *Harrow Observer*, 15 January 1971, p. 14; *Liverpool Echo*, 10 February 1981, p. 4
- 335 <https://sainsburyarchive.org.uk/catalogue/search/saima4sq29-images-of-stevenage-8991-queensway-branch>; <https://sainsburyarchive.org.uk/catalogue/search/branch/ref/p1090-stevenage-8991-queensway-1969-1986-sainsburys-branch> (acc. 5 May 2020). The vacated Sainsbury's premises by the Town Square were shared between Boots and Wool-

- worth's to increase their retail space: Balchin, *First New Town*, p. 283
- 336 HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/M47, vol. 1 (memo. of 5 October 1979)
- 337 SDC, *21st and 23rd Annual Reports* (1968 and 1970), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*
- 338 Draft text, Harwood, *New Towns*, forthcoming
- 339 Pers. comm. (David Rixson, formerly of Vincent & Goring)
- 340 SDC, *21st Annual Report* (1968), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*
- 341 Balchin, *First New Town*, pp. 283-4; Stevenage Museum, PP1188-9 and PP1192
- 342 Draft text, Harwood, *New Towns*, forthcoming; HALS, CNT/ST/4/1/C54, vol. 1
- 343 <http://cinematreasures.org/theaters/48940> (acc. 12 May 2020)
- 344 Stevenage Museum, PP1183 and see PP1189; Balchin, *First New Town*, p. 283. The east block is not shown on an aerial photograph of July 1974, so must have been constructed slightly after that time; see: HEA, os_74173_v_221
- 345 HALS, CNT/ST/4/1/T/10/5/1. For a photo of the sculpture published in 1980, see: Balchin, *First New Town*, p. 289. The sculpture was moved to a position to the east in the 1990s.
- 346 See: <https://buildingourpast.com/2016/01/18/ca-modes-part-iv-the-last-decades/> (15 May 2020)
- 347 See photo in: Balchin, *First New Town*, p. 283, and also on p. 287
- 348 Pevsner, rev. Cherry, *The Buildings of England: Hertfordshire*, p. 352; *Middlesex County Times*, 29 June 1973, p. 41; Balchin, *First New Town*, p. 283
- 349 Grampian leaflet and advert in the collections of Stevenage Museum; Balchin, *First New Town*, p. 283
- 350 For film footage showing many of these coloured panels in 1959, see: <https://www.britishpathe.com/video/new-town/query/stevenage> (acc. 15 April 2020)
- 351 For a photo of the cross canopy at the south end of Queensway, see: Balchin, *First New Town*, p. 289, and RIBA 52880 (<https://www.architecture.com/image-library/ribapix.html?keywords=stevenage%20maisonettes>, acc. 29 July 2020). The latter link also includes the RIBA photo (no. 52879) showing the canopy halfway along this part of Queensway. For photos of the cross canopy at the junction of Queensway and Market Place, see: Vincent, 'The Town Centre, Stevenage', *Town Planning Review*, plate 10; Stephenson, *On a Human Scale*, p. 102; and https://commons.m.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Historic_Stevenage_New_Town_Centre_-_geograph.org.uk_-_313043.jpg (acc. 29 July 2020)
- 352 The cross canopies by the Town Square are well represented in surviving photos and films; see, for instance: <https://www.britishpathe.com/video/new-town/query/stevenage> (acc. 15 April 2020); SDC, *Purpose*, no. 34 (spring 1966), p. 6; Hampson, 'The Stevenage Town Centre', *Town and Country Planning*, p. 13 and p. 15; 'Stevenage Town Centre', *The Contract Journal*, p. 384; Balchin, *First New Town*, p. 290; <https://www.shutterstock.com/editorial/image-editorial/queensway-the-shopping-area-in-the-new-town-of-stevenage-1475494a> (acc. 29 July 2020); https://stevenage-consult.objective.co.uk/events/19217/images/web/2421720_0_1.jpg (acc. 29 July 2020); and <https://www.architecture.com/image-library/ribapix.html?keywords=stevenage%20main%20shopping> (acc. 29 July 2020)
- 353 Neither of these cross canopies appears on an aerial photograph of March 1989: HEA, os_89065_v_087
- 354 <https://www.ourstevenage.org.uk/content/places/stevenage-on-film/here-we-go-round-the-mulberry-bush-now-then-part-1> (acc. 23 September 2020); pers. comm. (Chrissie Barnes)

and Andy Sowden of Stevenage Borough Council)

- 355 Calladine, *Stevenage New Town Centre: The Conservation of Modern Buildings*, p. 16
- 356 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 19 (summer 1960), p. 9; Stevenage Museum, P3795. For memories of the café, see, for instance: <https://www.thecomet.net/news/fond-memories-of-fine-fare-after-starbucks-comes-to-stevenage-town-centre-1-5043115> (acc. 5 May 2020). For a photograph of the interior of the café, see: Stevenage Museum P3795
- 357 For the 'Built Heritage Statement' informing this scheme, issued by CgMs in January 2019, see: https://publicaccess.stevenage.gov.uk/online-applications/files/CEF02297AE6D4E5536EF5EA4C17D3A0E/pdf/19_00063_FPM-BUILT_HERITAGE_STATEMENT_STEVENAGE_TOWN_SQUARE_BUILDINGS_APPLICATION_-_JAN_19-535246.pdf (acc. 16 July 2020)
- 358 For the original appearance of the north side of the Town Square, see: Stevenage Museum, P3945 and P6895
- 359 Stevenage Borough Council planning records (19/00743/FPM)
- 360 This is shown by aerial photographs; see: HEA, os_89065_v_087 (March 1989, when the cross canopies were in situ) and os_99318_v_078 (August 1999, by which time they had been removed)
- 361 Rowe, 'Stevenage – a new concept', *Built Environment*, p. 464
- 362 The glazed arcade can just be glimpsed in an aerial photograph of January 1995 (HEA, ea_bks_95002_v_070), but does not appear in one of March 1989 (os_89065_v_087), though the cross canopies in this part of Queensway had already been removed by that point.
- 363 <https://www.thecomet.net/news/stevenage-flats-planned-for-former-bhs-building-1-6383839> (acc. 16 July 2020)
- 364 <https://www.thecomet.net/news/high-rise-flats-planned-for-the-forum-in-stevenage-1-6875132> (acc. 20 October 2020)
- 365 See map of Stevenage town centre with key: Stevenage Museum, P6555
- 366 'Proposed Town Centre, Stevenage', *Architects' Journal* (19 July 1956), p. 83
- 367 Stevenage Museum, photos P3671-2 and 'Planning Schemes: Town Centre, Stevenage', *Architectural Review* (1 January 1958), pp. 13-14
- 368 HALS, uncatalogued material: Off Acc 793/14. We are grateful to the archivist at Hertfordshire Archives for drawing this and other related material to our attention.
- 369 SDC, *10th Annual Report* (1957), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*
- 370 HALS, Off Acc 793/21
- 371 For an especially clear contemporary photo showing the platform from the west, with the 'square' between it and the bus station, see: 'Stevenage Town Centre', *The Contract Journal* (23 April 1959), p. 385
- 372 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 12 (summer 1958), p. 10; 'Stevenage Town Centre', *The Contract Journal* (23 April 1959), p. 385
- 373 Vincent, 'Planning and Design', in *Purpose: Town Centre Number* (spring 1959), p. 13
- 374 Useful footage of the original form of the pool is provided by: <https://www.britishpathe.com/video/new-town/query/stevenage> (acc. 15 April 2020), <https://youtu.be/rNHKzSyliAQ> and <https://youtu.be/6L-6OdTM0JM> (acc. 6 October 2020)

- 375 Vincent, 'Town Centre', *Architecture and Building* (June 1959), p. 213
- 376 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 11 (spring 1958), pp. 10-11; *ibid*, no. 13 (autumn 1958), p. 11; SDC, *12th Annual Report* (1959), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*; "'Joyride" Expresses New Town's Youth', *The Times* (30 September 1958), p. 6
- 377 The sculpture and its base can be well seen in: <https://www.architecture.com/image-library/ribapix/image-information/poster/sculpture-entitled-joyride-town-centre-stevenage-hertfordshire/posterid/RIBA11054.html> (acc. 30 January 2020)
- 378 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 9 (autumn 1957), p. 11
- 379 SDC, *11th Annual Report* (1958), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*; Franta Belsky, *Sculpture* (London, 1992), n.p.; "'Joyride" Expresses New Town's Youth', *The Times* (30 September 1958), p. 6
- 380 "'Joyride" Expresses New Town's Youth', *The Times* (30 September 1958), p. 6
- 381 Belsky, *Sculpture*, n.p.
- 382 See, for instance: https://www.francisfrith.com/stevenage/stevenage-town-square-c1960_s191061, https://www.francisfrith.com/stevenage/stevenage-town-square-c1960_s191501, https://www.francisfrith.com/stevenage/stevenage-town-square-c1960_s191062 and https://www.francisfrith.com/stevenage/stevenage-the-town-square-c1960_s191086 (acc. 30 January 2020)
- 383 Vincent, 'Town Centre', *Architecture and Building* (June 1959), p. 213; SDC, *12th Annual Report* (1959), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*
- 384 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 13 (autumn 1958), p. 12
- 385 <https://www.pooleimages.co.uk/carters-tiles> (acc. 4 December 2020)
- 386 Originally, the west panel bore the Stevenage Development Corporation coat of arms in one corner and the year 1958 in another.
- 387 *Stevenage Pictorial*, 6 March 1959, p. 22
- 388 Vincent, 'The Town Centre, Stevenage', *Town Planning Review*, p. 105
- 389 *Stevenage Pictorial*, 6 March 1959, p. 22
- 390 See, for instance: <https://www.britishpathe.com/video/new-town/query/stevenage> (acc. 15 April 2020)
- 391 Patterson, 'Town Centre Landscape', in *Purpose: Town Centre Number* (spring 1959), p. 26
- 392 Hampson, 'The Heart of a Town', in *Purpose: Town Centre Number* (spring 1959), p. 29
- 393 *Ibid* and see: "'Joyride" Expresses New Town's Youth', *The Times* (30 September 1958), p. 6
- 394 <https://www.britishpathe.com/video/royal-news-stevenage/query/stevenage> and <https://www.britishpathe.com/video/selected-originals-royal-news-stevenage-aka-queens/query/stevenage> (acc. 15 April 2020)
- 395 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 13 (autumn 1958), p. 12; *Stevenage Pictorial*, 8 May 1959, p. 36; SDC, *Purpose*, no. 16 (autumn 1959), p. 15; *Stevenage Pictorial*, 8 July 1960, p. 36; *ibid*, 30 September 1960, p. 1; SDC, *Purpose*, no. 19 (summer 1960), p. 7; *ibid*, no. 19 (summer 1960), p. 16; *Stevenage Pictorial*, 4 August 1961, p. 7; *ibid*, 12 October 1962, p. 1; SDC, *Purpose*, no. 28 (summer 1963), p. 1
- 396 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 27 (winter 1963 [i.e. 1962/3]), p. 12

- 397 <https://www.ourstevenage.org.uk/content/places/stevenage-on-film/here-we-go-round-the-mulberry-bush-now-then-part-1> and <https://www.ourstevenage.org.uk/content/places/stevenage-on-film/here-we-go-round-the-mulberry-bush-now-then-part-2> (acc. 23 September 2020)
- 398 Stevenage Borough Council planning records (91/2/0402/9); Stevenage Museum, photo PP1203
- 399 Photo in the collections of Stevenage Museum (PP1203). Compare with P6099 and P9168, showing the pool as originally completed.
- 400 Stevenage Borough Council planning records (2/0016/95 and see also 2/0136/92)
- 401 Ibid (19/00743/FPM). An earlier proposal for conversion of the toilet block to café use went nowhere: *ibid* (07/00807/FP)
- 402 TNA, HLG 115/34 (letter of 27 February 1951)
- 403 Vincent, 'Planning and Design', in *Purpose: Town Centre Number* (spring 1959), p. 12; Vincent, 'Town Centre', *Architecture and Building* (June 1959), p. 209
- 404 Vincent, 'Planning and Design', in *Purpose: Town Centre Number* (spring 1959), p. 12, and see: SDC, *Purpose*, no. 12 (summer 1958), p. 12
- 405 Vincent, 'Town Centre', *Architecture and Building* (June 1959), p. 209 and p. 208 and see p. 213
- 406 HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/C37, vol. 2 (letter of 5 May 1960)
- 407 Ibid, and CNT/ST/5/1/AP/T49, vol. 1. It should be noted that different documents give different parking capacities for these and other car parks. The figures given here come from a list of car parks of 2 February 1961, a marked up plan of February 1963 and an undated note, with revisions of April 1962.
- 408 HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/M47, vol. 1 (memo. of 28 November 1968)
- 409 All of these car parks are well shown on historic aerial photographs, while there is also a good early view of the East Gate car park, taken from the top of the piledriver used for The Towers, in: *Stevenage Pictorial*, 18 March 60, p. 14
- 410 SDC, *Building the new town of Stevenage*, p. 22
- 411 For the position of these buildings and the garages, see: HALS, CNT/ST/15/4/13 and CNT/ST/15/4/17 (plans of 1959 and 1965)
- 412 HALS, uncatalogued material: Off Acc 793 21 (drawings for the boiler house are dated 3 February 1956 and those for the Market Square public toilets are dated 27 July 1956; both were part of 'contract 299')
- 413 The chimney was still in existence in 1972, but had gone by at least 1986; see: Stevenage Museum, P11168 and PP852
- 414 HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/M47, vol. 2 (letter of 9 June 1960)
- 415 Morrison and Minnis, *Carscapes*, pp. 201-2
- 416 HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/T49, vol. 1 (letters of 19 April and 9 May 1963 and memo. of 28 May 1963). This building was not necessarily of eight full storeys, due to mezzanines.
- 417 Ibid, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/T49, vol. 1 (meeting minute, 10 January 1964)
- 418 Ibid, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/M47, vol. 1 (memo. of 28 November 1968)

- 419 Ibid, CNT/ST/15/4/19
- 420 Ibid, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/P15 (press notice of December 1964)
- 421 Ibid, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/M47, vol. 1 (memo. of 28 November 1968)
- 422 Ibid (letter of 29 November 1968)
- 423 Ibid (Planning Committee minutes, 9 January 1980)
- 424 Ibid, uncatalogued material: Off Acc 793, bundle 28
- 425 See: Balchin, *First New Town*, p. 41
- 426 Ibid, p. 284; SDC, *24th Annual Report* (1971), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*
- 427 <http://www.stevenagetowncentre.com/indoor-market/about/> (acc. 9 October 2020); pers. comm. (Alan Ford of Stevenage Museum) and see photo P3285
- 428 HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/M47, vol. 1 (letter of 25 February 1969)
- 429 Ibid (Planning Committee minutes, 9 January 1980)
- 430 Ibid (note of 23 September 1969)
- 431 Balchin, *First New Town*, p. 284
- 432 HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/M47, vol. 1 (note of meeting, 15 June 1972, and memo. of 21 June 1972)
- 433 Ibid (notes of meeting of 16 February 1976 and memo. of 23 February 1976)
- 434 Ibid (memo. of 5 October 1979)
- 435 Ibid (Planning Committee minutes, 9 January 1980, and letter of 18 March 1980)
- 436 For aerial photographs showing this area of the town centre, see, for instance: <https://www.ourstevenage.org.uk/content/places/aerial-views-of-stevenage/aerial-view-of-the-town-centre-1986> (acc. 15 May 2020) and HEA, Aerofilms collection, EAC454378 (23 May 1984) (copy in HALS library, Ste. 21)
- 437 Stevenage Borough Council planning records (19/00743/FPM)
- 438 Hampson, 'The Stevenage Town Centre', *Town and Country Planning* (January 1959), p. 14
- 439 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 4 (summer 1956), p. 11; *ibid*, no. 7 (spring 1957), p. 11
- 440 *Ibid*, no. 5 (autumn 1956), p. 10; *ibid*, no. 13 (autumn 1958), p. 11. See also: SDC, *9th Annual Report* (1956) and *12th Annual Report* (1959), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*; and photos in: Hardy, 'An Engineer's Problems', in *Purpose: Town Centre Number* (spring 1959), p. 15. For another photo of the bus station in use as a storage area, with construction of the north side of the town Square underway, see: Stevenage Museum, P3886
- 441 SDC, *Quarterly Bulletin*, no. 16 (1 January 1955), p. 1
- 442 'First shops opening in Stevenage town centre', *The Surveyor* (31 May 1958), p. 553
- 443 *Ibid*, p. 554
- 444 <https://www.britishpathe.com/video/new-town/query/stevenage> (acc. 15 April 2020)
- 445 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 19 (summer 1960), p. 9

- 446 Ibid, no. 12 (summer 1958), p. 10
- 447 Pers. comm. (John Hammond)
- 448 HALS, CV350. Compare with photo of the enlarged bus station as published in 1980, when the original islands still remained: Balchin, *First New Town*, p. 231
- 449 Stevenage Borough Council planning records (19/00743/FPM)
- 450 SDC, *9th Annual Report* (1956) and *10th Annual Report* (1957) in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*; SDC, *Purpose*, no. 8 (summer 1957), p. 10
- 451 SDC, *12th Annual Report* (1959), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*. A photo published in 1959 shows the bus garage being laid out in 1958; see: Hardy, 'An Engineer's Problems', in *Purpose: Town Centre Number* (spring 1959), p. 15
- 452 Thomas Bilbow, 'London Transport Garage at Hatfield', *Official Architecture and Planning*, vol. 22 no. 4 (April 1959), p. 182; Thomas Bilbow, 'London Transport Garage for Stevenage', *Official Architecture and Planning*, vol. 22 no. 8 (August 1959), p. 365
- 453 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 16 (autumn 1959), p. 5
- 454 Bilbow, 'London Transport Garage for Stevenage', p. 365; SDC, *Purpose*, no. 12 (summer 1958), p. 10
- 455 Stevenage Borough Council planning records (92/2/0358/9)
- 456 I am very grateful to John Hammond for information supplied in relation to the bus garage.
- 457 Stevenage Borough Council planning records (03/00006/FP)
- 458 <https://matalansitestevenage.info/officers-fired-after-removal-of-united-airlines-passenger-5/> (acc. 21 October 2020)
- 459 'First shops opening in Stevenage town centre', *The Surveyor* (31 May 1958), p. 554
- 460 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 10 (winter 1958 [i.e. 1957/8]), p. 10
- 461 Ibid, no. 12 (summer 1958), p. 11; Stevenage Borough Council planning records (58/2/0068/5, approved 22 April 1958)
- 462 *Architect & Building News* (31 May 1961), p. 724; SDC, *10th Annual Report* (1957), *11th Annual Report* (1958), *12th Annual Report* (1959) and *13th Annual Report* (1960), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*; Hampson, 'The Heart of a Town', in *Purpose: Town Centre Number* (spring 1959), p. 29; *Stevenage Pictorial*, 25 September 1959, p. 17. For papers relating to the Post Office site, see: TNA, HLG 91/686
- 463 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 17 (winter 1960 [i.e. 1959/60]), p. 5
- 464 Ibid and no. 14 (winter 1959 [i.e. 1958/9]), p. 11
- 465 *Stevenage Pictorial*, 25 September 1959, p. 17
- 466 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 12 (summer 1958), p. 11
- 467 *Architect & Building News* (31 May 1961), pp. 721-4. For other photographs of the building, see: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/36844288@N00/33460851718> and <http://britishpost-officearchitects.weebly.com/c1960---town-square.html> (acc. 30 January 2020)
- 468 HALS, CEO/T/4/13, vol. 1.
- 469 Stevenage Borough Council planning records (60/2/0154/6). The PSA collection in the HEA includes six photographs of the sorting office in Danestrete, dated 13 November 1962 (P/

G09087).

- 470 *Stevenage Pictorial*, 28 September 1962, p. 3
- 471 SDC, *16th Annual Report* (1963), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*
- 472 *Stevenage Pictorial*, 28 September 1962, p. 3
- 473 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 27 (winter 1963 [i.e. 1962/3]), p. 4
- 474 Stevenage Borough Council planning records (75/2/0157/7, approved 18 September 1975, and 78/2/0385/7, approved 1 March 1979)
- 475 Balchin, *First New Town*, p. 231; Stevenage Borough Council planning records (80/2/0063/8, 83/2/0187/8 and 84/2/0371/8). In 1987, an application sought to build a new four-storey office block including space for the Post Office: *ibid* (87/2/0104/8)
- 476 Calladine, *Stevenage New Town Centre: The Conservation of Modern Buildings*, p. 22
- 477 Stevenage Borough Council planning records (98/2/0198/9)
- 478 <http://www.stevenage.gov.uk/content/15953/26685/26727/27889> (acc. 30 January 2020)
- 479 Stevenage Borough Council planning records (19/00743/FPM)
- 480 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 18 (spring 1960), p. 10; *ibid*, no. 10 (winter 1958 [i.e. 1957/8]), p. 10; *ibid*, no. 16 (autumn 1959), p. 10
- 481 *Ibid*, no. 18 (spring 1960), p. 10; *ibid*, no. 10 (winter 1958 [i.e. 1957/8]), p. 10; *Architect & Building News* (31 May 1961), p. 715
- 482 *Architect & Building News* (31 May 1961), p. 713 and p. 715
- 483 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 20 (autumn 1960), p. 4; SDC, *14th Annual Report* (1961), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*
- 484 *Architect & Building News* (31 May 1961), pp. 713-5
- 485 For a photo of the building in October 1963, see: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/mark-bruce/4998085417> (acc. 29 July 2020)
- 486 *Stevenage Gazette*, 29 November 1963, p. 1
- 487 *Stevenage Pictorial*, 25 September 1959, p. 1; *ibid*, 12 August 1960, p. 1. The Development Corporation retained use of 13 Town Square until 1961, when it was taken over by the citizens advice bureau, as part of the 'Family Centre' run by Stevenage Council of Social Service: SDC, *Purpose*, no. 31 (summer 1964), p. 12; Balchin, *First New Town*, p. 252
- 488 HALS, CEO/T/4/13, vol. 1 and uncatalogued material: Off Acc 793/17 (drawing of 3 February 1960)
- 489 *Ibid*, CEO/T/4/13, vol. 1. For drawings showing the 'general arrangement' of the building, dated April 1958 and revised in March and April 1959, see: uncatalogued material: Off Acc 793, bundle 61
- 490 *Stevenage Pictorial*, 25 September 1959, p. 1; SDC, *Purpose*, no. 21 (winter 1961 [i.e. 1960/1]), p. 4
- 491 *Stevenage Pictorial*, 8 July 1960, p. 36, and see *Stevenage Pictorial*, 24 June 1960, p. 27; HALS, CEO/T/4/13, vol. 1 (note of 2 December 1960)
- 492 *Stevenage Gazette*, 13 January 1961, p. 1; SDC, *14th Annual Report* (1961), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*; SDC, *Purpose*, no. 21 (winter 1961 [i.e. 1960/1]), p. 4

- 493 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 19 (summer 1960), p. 11
- 494 HALS, CEO/T/4/13, vol. 1
- 495 Ibid. Terms with Midland Bank were agreed at a meeting on 13 October 1959.
- 496 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 21 (winter 1961 [i.e. 1960/1]), p. 4
- 497 HALS, CEO/T/4/13, vol. 1. The architect for Midland Bank was Mr S. A. Murden, FRIBA. A drawing showing a detail of the canopy was prepared by Leonard Vincent in February 1960: HALS, uncatalogued material: Off Acc 793 17
- 498 See photo and mention in: SDC, *Purpose*, no. 23 (November 1961), p. 4
- 499 HALS, CEO/T/4/13, vol. 1 (note of 20 April 1961)
- 500 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 21 (winter 1961 [i.e. 1960/61]), p. 4
- 501 For example, see: HALS, uncatalogued material: Off Acc 793, bundle 61 ('Town Centre Office Block')
- 502 For contemporary photos, see: Major-General A. C. Duff, 'London's New Towns', *The Sphere* (13 January 1961), p. 75 and https://www.francisfrith.com/stevenage/stevenage-the-local-no-c1961_s191106 (acc. 30 January 2020)
- 503 HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/D4, vol. 1
- 504 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 15 (spring 1959), p. 33
- 505 HALS, CEO/T/4/13, vol. 1; https://www.francisfrith.com/stevenage/stevenage-the-local-no-c1961_s191104 (acc. 30 January 2020)
- 506 HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/D4, vol. 2
- 507 Undated plans in: HALS, uncatalogued material: Off Acc 793 17
- 508 Ibid, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/D4, vol. 2
- 509 Ibid (note of 5 September 1972)
- 510 Stevenage Borough Council planning records (83/2/0298/8); HEA, Aerofilms collection, EAC454378 and EAC454379 (of May 1984) (copy in HALS library, Ste. 21)
- 511 Stevenage Borough Council planning records (86/2/0420/8)
- 512 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 15 (spring 1959), p. 33. The attribution of the panel to Carter's has been confirmed by the experts Lesley Durbin of the Tiles & Architectural Ceramics Society and John Smart. The latter suggests that the outer tiles are almost certainly the work of artist Peggy Angus.
- 513 Stevenage Borough Council planning records (19/00743/FPM)
- 514 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 20 (autumn 1960), p. 4
- 515 Ibid, no. 24 (March 1962), p. 10
- 516 Ibid, no. 27 (winter 1963 [i.e. 1962/3]), p. 3
- 517 Ibid, p. 3; *ibid*, no. 28 (summer 1963), p. 8. The day nursery had been based at the Sish Lane canteen since 1957: SDC, *Purpose*, no. 34 (spring 1966), p. 6
- 518 HALS, CNT/ST/15/4/17

- 519 Ibid, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/T49, vol. 1 (note of 17 March 1964)
- 520 Ibid, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/A11, vol. 2; SDC, *Purpose*, no. 33 (summer 1965), p. 14
- 521 Ibid, CNT/ST/15/4/17
- 522 Ibid, CNT/ST/15/4/19
- 523 Ibid, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/C7 (memo. of 12 April 1956)
- 524 *Stevenage Pictorial*, 6 October 1961, p. 9
- 525 James Nott, 'Dance Halls: Towards an Architectural and Spatial History, c. 1918-65', *Architectural History*, vol. 61 (2018), p. 210; James Nott, *Going to the Palais: A Social and Cultural History of Dancing and Dance Halls in Britain, 1918-1960* (Oxford, 2015), p. 26
- 526 Nott, 'Dance Halls', p. 205, and see: Nott, *Going to the Palais*, p. 1
- 527 Nott, *Going to the Palais*, p. 72
- 528 *Stevenage Pictorial*, 6 October 1961, p. 8
- 529 HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/M2, vol. 1 (letter of 7 October 1963); Carolyn Downs, 'Mecca and the Birth of Commercial Bingo 1958-70: a case study', *Business History*, vol. 52 no. 7 (2010), pp. 1086-1106
- 530 HALS, CNT/ST/2/1/5 (report of 31 March 1958); SDC, *Purpose*, no. 18 (spring 1960), p. 14. For a photo of the model, see: SDC, *Purpose*, no. 19 (summer 1960), p. 4 and Stevenage Museum, P3357. For a photo of the dance hall with the kiosk, see: Stevenage Museum, P6821
- 531 *Stevenage Pictorial*, 20 May 1960, p. 1
- 532 Ibid, 30 September 1960, p. 1; SDC, *Purpose*, no. 21 (winter 1961 [i.e. 1960/61]), p. 16
- 533 *Stevenage Pictorial*, 2 September 1960, p. 1
- 534 For photos of c. 1960 and c. 1961 and slightly later, see: https://www.francisfrith.com/stevenage/stevenage-the-locarno-c1961_s191106, https://www.francisfrith.com/stevenage/stevenage-the-locarno-c1961_s191104 and <http://www.stevenage.gov.uk/news-and-events/press-releases/119910/87358/> (acc. 30 January 2020). A photo was also published in: SDC, *Purpose*, no. 34 (spring 1966), p. 8
- 535 HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/M2, vol. 1
- 536 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 18 (spring 1960), p. 14; HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/M2, vol. 2 (letter of 10 March 1975)
- 537 HALS, CNT/ST/2/1/5 (report of 31 March 1958)
- 538 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 23 (November 1961), p. 3
- 539 *Stevenage Gazette*, 29 September 1961, p. 13
- 540 Ibid, 6 October 1961, p. 1; *Stevenage Pictorial*, 6 October 1961, p. 1
- 541 *Stevenage Pictorial*, 6 October 1961, p. 9
- 542 Ibid
- 543 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 23 (November 1961), p. 7; *Stevenage Pictorial*, 6 October 1961, p. 8
- 544 *Stevenage Gazette*, 6 October 1961, p. 8

- 545 *Stevenage Pictorial*, 6 October 1961, p. 9
- 546 Ibid, p. 8; *Stevenage Gazette*, 29 September 1961, p. 13. For an especially full view of the ballroom's interior and its lighting, see: *Evening Standard*, 3 October 1961, p. 32
- 547 Nott, 'Dance Halls', p. 209, pp. 216-7 and p. 228
- 548 *Stevenage Pictorial*, 6 October 1961, p. 9; *Stevenage Gazette*, 29 September 1961, p. 13
- 549 See double-page spread in: SDC, *Purpose*, no. 23 (November 1961), pp. 6-7; and *Evening Standard*, 3 October 1961, p. 32
- 550 *Stevenage Pictorial*, 6 October 1961, p. 8; Downs, 'Mecca and the Birth of Commercial Bingo 1958-70: a case study', p. 1100
- 551 HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/M2, vol. 1 (plans of 5 April 1966)
- 552 Nott, 'Dance Halls', p. 229; Nott, *Going to the Palais*, pp. 92-8
- 553 HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/M2, vol. 1 (letter of 18 July 1966)
- 554 Ibid (letter of December 1967)
- 555 Ibid, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/M2, vol. 1 and vol. 2
- 556 Ibid, vol. 1 (agreement of 31 March 1970)
- 557 Bettley, Pevsner and Cherry, *The Buildings of England: Hertfordshire*, p. 546
- 558 Stevenage Borough Council planning records (19/00743/FPM)
- 559 *Stevenage Pictorial*, 2 September 1960, p. 1. A planning application for the construction of the bowling alley was agreed on 9 August 1960: Stevenage Borough Council planning records (60/2/0098/6)
- 560 SDC, *14th Annual Report* (1961), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*; SDC, *Purpose*, no. 21 (winter 1961 [i.e. 1960/61]), p. 10; *ibid*, no. 24 (March 1962), p. 10. However, a start date of July 1961 is given in: *Architects' Journal*, vol. 137 issue 10 (6 March 1963), p. 526
- 561 *Architects' Journal* (6 March 1963), p. 522
- 562 *Stevenage Pictorial*, 2 February 1962, p. 1; SDC, *Purpose*, no. 24 (March 1962), p. 10; *Stevenage Pictorial*, 20 July 1962, p. 26
- 563 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 26 (autumn 1962), pp. 4-5
- 564 *Stevenage Pictorial*, 21 September 1962, p. 33
- 565 *Stevenage Express*, 21 September 1962, p. 16
- 566 Ibid
- 567 Ibid
- 568 Ibid, 17 August 1962, p. 13; SDC, *Purpose*, no. 21 (winter 1961 [i.e. 1960/61]), p. 10; *Architects' Journal* (6 March 1963), p. 521. See also photos held by the RIBA, showing both the bowling centre's exterior and interior in 1963: <https://www.architecture.com/image-library/ribapix.html?keywords=stevenage%20bowling> (acc. 3 June 2020)
- 569 *Architects' Journal* (6 March 1963), p. 528
- 570 Ibid, p. 522

- 571 *Tenpin Monthly*, September 1962, reproduced on: <https://uktenpinhalloffame.co.uk/2019/02/03/history-of-tenpin-bowling-in-the-uk-part-26-ambassador-lanes-danestrete-stevenage/> (acc. 3 June 2020)
- 572 For the rear and south elevations, see: *Architects' Journal* (6 March 1963), p. 525
- 573 *Stevenage Express*, 17 August 1962, p. 13
- 574 *Architects' Journal* (6 March 1963), p. 524. For a photo of the lanes and the seating area, see: *ibid*, p. 527 and <https://www.architecture.com/image-library/RIBApix/licensed-image/poster/ambassador-bowling-centre-stevenage-hertfordshire-the-seating-area-at-the-foot-of-the-tenpin-alleys/posterid/RIBA51004.html> (acc. 3 June 2020)
- 575 *Architects' Journal* (6 March 1963), p. 522 and p. 524. The architect 'endeavoured unsuccessfully' to persuade the client to reduce the number of bowling lanes, in order to provide extra space for facilities including a nursery: *ibid*, p. 524
- 576 <https://uktenpinhalloffame.co.uk/2019/02/03/history-of-tenpin-bowling-in-the-uk-part-26-ambassador-lanes-danestrete-stevenage/> (acc. 3 June 2020); *Stevenage Gazette*, 15 February 1963, p. 1; *Architects' Journal* (6 March 1963), p. 524 and photo on p. 525
- 577 *Stevenage Gazette*, 15 February 1963, p. 1
- 578 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 27 (winter 1963 [i.e. 1962/3]), p. 8; *Stevenage Pictorial*, 2 February 1962, p. 1
- 579 *Stevenage Pictorial*, 12 October 1962, p. 1
- 580 <https://uktenpinhalloffame.co.uk/2019/02/03/history-of-tenpin-bowling-in-the-uk-part-26-ambassador-lanes-danestrete-stevenage/> (acc. 3 June 2020)
- 581 HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/B62, vol. 1 (letter of 2 December 1966)
- 582 *Ibid* (letter of 22 December 1966)
- 583 Stevenage Borough Council planning records (66/2/0162/6)
- 584 SDC, *20th Annual Report* (1967) and *21st Annual Report* (1968), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*; <https://uktenpinhalloffame.co.uk/2019/02/03/history-of-tenpin-bowling-in-the-uk-part-26-ambassador-lanes-danestrete-stevenage/> (acc. 3 June 2020)
- 585 HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/B62, vol. 1; Balchin, *First New Town*, p. 211. See also planning application to convert the centre to a bingo hall: Stevenage Borough Council planning records (73/2/0034/7)
- 586 HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/B62, vol. 1 (draft letter stamped 1 November 1972)
- 587 Rowe, 'Stevenage – a new concept', *Built Environment* (August 1973), p. 465. See also: Balchin, *First New Town*, p. 211
- 588 Balchin, *First New Town*, p. 210. Planning records show that the Council applied to make various minor changes to the building in 1980: Stevenage Borough Council planning records (80/2/0335/8)
- 589 <https://uktenpinhalloffame.co.uk/2019/02/03/history-of-tenpin-bowling-in-the-uk-part-26-ambassador-lanes-danestrete-stevenage/> (acc. 3 June 2020); Stevenage Borough Council planning records (89/2/0463/8)
- 590 Stevenage Borough Council planning records (02/00070/FP)
- 591 *Architect & Building News* (31 May 1961), p. 713
- 592 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 20 (autumn 1960), p. 4

- 593 SDC, *14th Annual Report* (1961), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*. The original plans for the Lloyds Offices are dated 20 February 1961 and form part of the uncatalogued collections of Hertfordshire Archives: HALS, Off Acc 793, bundle 67
- 594 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 21 (winter 1961 [i.e. 1960/61]), p. 10
- 595 SDC, *16th Annual Report* (1963), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*
- 596 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 27 (winter 1963 [i.e. 1962/3]), pp. 10-11
- 597 HALS, uncatalogued material: Off Acc 793, bundle 67 (TC 9887; plans drawn 20 February 1961), *ibid* (TC 100043; plans drawn 20 April 1961) and Off Acc 793 17 (plans drawn 4 January 1968)
- 598 *Ibid*
- 599 For a photograph of the building as originally completed, see: SDC, *Purpose*, no. 27 (winter 1963 [i.e. 1962/3]), p. 11
- 600 HALS, uncatalogued material: Off Acc 793 bundle 67 (TC 10042)
- 601 SDC, *22nd Annual Report* (1969), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*
- 602 HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/D4, vol. 2; SDC, *22nd Annual Report* (1969)
- 603 HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/D4, vol. 2
- 604 HEA, P/G25730-1 (PSA photographs)
- 605 Stevenage Borough Council planning records (19/00743/FPM)
- 606 HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/T31, vol. 1
- 607 *Ibid*
- 608 *Ibid* (minute of 10 December 1963); *Stevenage Gazette*, 30 August 1963, p. 1; *ibid*, 14 September 1962, p. 1; Stevenage Borough Council planning records (63/2/0045/6); SDC, *16th Annual Report* (1963), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*
- 609 *Stevenage Gazette*, 14 September 1962, p. 1; SDC, *Purpose*, no. 26 (autumn 1962), p. 12
- 610 HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/T31, vol. 1; SDC, *17th Annual Report* (1964) and *19th Annual Report* (1966), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*. For photos of Brickdale House under construction and newly completed, see: SDC, *Purpose*, no. 33 (summer 1965), p. 11; *ibid*, no. 34 (spring 1966), p. 12
- 611 Pevsner, rev. Cherry, *The Buildings of England: Hertfordshire*, p. 352. The PSA collection in the HEA includes photographs of Brickdale House in its various stages of development: stage II (dated 28 February 1967 and 25 June 1968; P/G11549 and P/G12579) and stage III (dated 21 August 1974; P/G20547). Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, these images were inaccessible during the course of research for this report.
- 612 Pers. comm. (Alan Ford of Stevenage Museum); HEA, P/G11549 and P/G12579
- 613 *Stevenage Gazette*, 14 September 1962, p. 1
- 614 HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/T29, vol. 2 (note of 22 March 1971); SDC, *Purpose*, no. 26 (autumn 1962), p. 12
- 615 Stevenage Borough Council planning records (72/2/0065/7); Balchin, *First New Town*, p. 284; Stevenage Museum, image P11193 (showing construction in 1974); HEA, P/G20547
- 616 1:10,000 OS map of 1975; aerial photograph of 1986 (Stevenage Museum, PP855): <https://>

www.ourstevenage.org.uk/content/places/aerial-views-of-stevenage/aerial-view-of-the-town-centre-1986 (acc. 23 June 2020); HEA, Aerofilms collection, EAC454378 (23 May 1984) (copy in HALS library, Ste. 21). See also: Billsborough, 'The History of the First New Town', *Building Trades Journal* (June 1980), p. 16; Balchin, *First New Town*, p. 285

- 617 Stevenage Borough Council planning records (76/2/0166/7)
- 618 HALS, CNT/ST/15/4/19
- 619 Stevenage Borough Council planning records (85/2/0025/8 and 86/2/0185/8)
- 620 Ibid (95/2/0335/9 and 98/2/0249/9)
- 621 Ibid (13/00443/CPA, 14/00023/FP, 14/00078/FPM and 15/00273/CPA)
- 622 <https://www.ghmpartnership.co.uk/portfolio-item/brickdale-house/> (acc. 3 June 2020)
- 623 HALS, CNT/ST/15/4/13
- 624 SDC, *12th Annual Report* (1959), *13th Annual Report* (1960) and *14th Annual Report* (1961), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*
- 625 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 24 (March 1962), p. 5
- 626 Ibid
- 627 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 28 (summer 1963), p. 3; *ibid*, no. 26 (autumn 1962), p. 12
- 628 Stevenage Museum, PP852. This extension also appears on the 1:10,000 Ordnance Survey map of 1987.
- 629 HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/T29, vol. 1
- 630 Ibid (drawing of 20 April 1956)
- 631 Ibid, vol. 1. For the Southgate scheme as finally approved, see: CNT/ST/15/4/13 and CNT/ST/5/1/AP/T29, vol. 1 (plans of 23 June 1958)
- 632 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 24 (March 1962), p. 11
- 633 SDC, *11th Annual Report* (1958), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*
- 634 'Stevenage Out-Patient Centre', *The Hospital*, vol. 58 no. 3 (March 1962), p. 151. Peter Dunham was an interesting local architect who trained under A. E. Richardson at the Bartlett and practised from Dunstable/Luton and later in Suffolk. He seems to have specialised in small private housing schemes and individual houses, often combining modern and traditional elements, but also designed schools and factories as well as work at Luton and Dunstable Hospital (1939, as Parrott and Dunham). His best-known work is perhaps a group of farm-workers' cottages in the Cotswolds from 1948. See: Elain Harwood, *Space, Hope and Brutalism* (London, 2015), pp. 56, 633
- 635 London Metropolitan Archives, HA/NW/A/11/008, PGPC 413/57 (minutes); PGPC 58/58 (report, 27 July 1958); HA/NW/A/11/009, PGPC 27/59 (report, October 1959); HA/NW/A/12/008, BLW 24/58 (report, May 1958), BLW 55/58 (report, November 1958)
- 636 SDC, *12th Annual Report* (1959), *13th Annual Report* (1960) and *14th Annual Report* (1961), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*; SDC, *Purpose*, no. 22 (July 1961), p. 4; *Stevenage Gazette*, 21 April 61, p. 1; *ibid*, 28 December 1963, p. 11
- 637 *Stevenage Gazette*, 21 April 61, p. 1
- 638 Ibid; SDC, *Purpose*, no. 3 (spring 1956), p. 8; *ibid*, no. 18 (spring 1960), p. 3

- 639 SDC, *14th Annual Report* (1961) and *17th Annual Report* (1964), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*; *Stevenage Pictorial*, 18 March 1960, p. 1
- 640 'Stevenage Out-Patient Centre', *The Hospital*, p. 147
- 641 Ibid, pp. 147-151
- 642 HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/T29, vol. 1 (plans of 23 June 1958, revised August and November that year). Although part of this area is shown as being laid out as a path and lawns in a photograph published in 1962: 'Stevenage Out-Patient Centre', *The Hospital*, p. 150
- 643 See: 'Stevenage Out-Patient Centre', *The Hospital*, p. 147
- 644 HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/T29, vo. 1
- 645 Ibid (letter of 17 October 1960)
- 646 'Stevenage Out-Patient Centre', *The Hospital*, p. 148
- 647 Ibid, p. 150 and see p. 151
- 648 Ibid, p. 150
- 649 Stevenage Borough Council planning records (19/00743/FPM)
- 650 HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/T29, vol. 1 (appendix to minutes of 16 September 1958)
- 651 Ibid
- 652 Ibid (note of 12 March 1959); *Stevenage Pictorial*, 23 October 1959, p. 19; Stevenage Borough Council planning records (59/2/0030/59)
- 653 *Stevenage Pictorial*, 23 October 1959, p. 19
- 654 HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/T29, vol. 1. Among other such buildings designed by Anderson are Buntingford health centre (1968-70, with D. Fisher) and the family rehabilitation centre in Royston (also 1968-70, with R. Fowler).
- 655 Ibid, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/T29, vol. 1 (letter of 21 May 1957)
- 656 SDC, *Building the new town of Stevenage*, p. 31
- 657 HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/T29, vol. 1 (note of 11 April 1958); *Stevenage Pictorial*, 18 Nov 1960, p. 5
- 658 *Stevenage Gazette*, 6 January 1961, p. 1. See also: SDC, *Purpose*, no. 21 (winter 1961 [i.e. 1960/1]), p. 5. The latter includes interior photographs of the new library, while there is a further interior photograph in: SDC, *Purpose*, no. 22 (July 1961), p. 2
- 659 *Stevenage Gazette*, 9 August 1963, p. 2. The previous record had been held by Hemel Hempstead with 3,500.
- 660 *Stevenage Gazette*, 13 January 1961, p. 1
- 661 SDC, *9th Annual Report* (1956) and *14th Annual Report* (1961), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*; SDC, *Purpose*, no. 21 (winter 1961 [i.e. 1960/1]), p. 5; *The Times*, 2 May 1961, p. 13
- 662 HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/T29, vol. 1 (plans of 23 June 1958, revised August and November that year). For a photo of the Pram shelter shortly after the centre's opening, see: SDC, *Purpose*, no. 21 (winter 1961 [i.e. 1960/1]), p. 5
- 663 Stevenage Museum, PP1292. A note of October 1963 stated that midwives and health visi-

tors had to carry across their heavy equipment from The Quadrant car park, on the other side of Southgate, and wanted parking to be provided at the health centre: HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/T29, vol. 2 (memo. of 21 October 1963)

- 664 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 21 (winter 1961 [i.e. 1960/1]), p. 5
- 665 HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/T29, vol. 1 (letter of 3 February 1960); Stevenage Borough Council planning records (60/2/0185/60)
- 666 HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/T29, vol. 1 (letter of 3 February 1960)
- 667 Ibid (plans of 1 February 1960, revised 3-4 April, and letter of 12 September 1960)
- 668 *Stevenage Pictorial*, 19 October 1962, p. 5; SDC, *16th Annual Report* (1963) and *17th Annual Report* (1964), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*; *Stevenage Gazette*, 4 October 1963, p. 1; Stevenage Museum, PP2213 (photo of 30 August 1963); SDC, *Purpose*, no. 29 (autumn 1963), p. 12; SDC, *Purpose*, no. 30 (spring 1964), p. 6; HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/T29, vol. 2 (letter received 14 April 1964)
- 669 *Stevenage Gazette*, 13 January 1961, p. 1; SDC, *Purpose*, no. 30 (spring 1964), p. 6
- 670 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 29 (autumn 1963), p. 12; *Stevenage Gazette*, 1 May 1964, p. 1
- 671 HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/T29, vol. 1 (plans of 1 February 1960, revised 3-4 April); SDC, *Purpose*, no. 29 (autumn 1963), p. 12; SDC, *Purpose*, no. 30 (spring 1964), pp. 6-7
- 672 Stevenage Borough Council planning records (79/2/0346/79)
- 673 Stevenage Museum, PP852
- 674 Stevenage Borough Council planning records (19/00743/FPM)
- 675 HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/T29, vol. 1 (letter of 15 May 1958)
- 676 Ibid. See also memo. of 30 July 1958 and undated minute of 1959 or 1960 (filed immediately after letter of 22 August 1958)
- 677 Ibid (letter of 15 May 1958)
- 678 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 20 (autumn 1960), p. 5; *Stevenage Pictorial*, 26 February 1960, p. 1. For a copy of the sketch, see: Stevenage Museum, P3754
- 679 *Stevenage Pictorial*, 26 February 1960, p. 1; Vincent, 'Planning and Design', in *Purpose: Town Centre Number* (spring 1959), p. 12; HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/B5, vol. 5 (report of 26 June 1961)
- 680 *Stevenage Pictorial*, 18 March 1960, p. 14. See also: SDC, *13th Annual Report* (1960), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*
- 681 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 22 (July 1961), p. 11
- 682 *Stevenage Pictorial*, 1 June 1962, p. 1; *Stevenage Gazette*, 15 March 1963, p. 1; HALS, CNT/St/4/1/F1, vol. 1
- 683 SDC, *16th Annual Report* (1963), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*; SDC, *Purpose*, no. 27 (winter 1963 [i.e. 1962-3]), p. 5
- 684 HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/T29, vol. 1, CNT/ST/4/1/F1, vol. 1 (reports 26 June 1959 and November 1960), and CNT/ST/5/1/AP/B5, vol. 5 (report of 26 June 1961)
- 685 *Stevenage Gazette*, 23 August 1963, p. 3
- 686 For a photo of The Towers shortly after its completion, see: SDC, *Purpose*, no. 32 (winter

- 1964/5), cover
- 687 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 20 (autumn 1960), p. 5; *Stevenage Gazette*, 15 March 1963, p. 1
- 688 *Stevenage Gazette*, 15 March 1963, p. 1
- 689 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 29 (autumn 1963), p. 9
- 690 *Stevenage Gazette*, 29 November 1963, p. 1. See also: *ibid*, 16 November 1962, p. 1
- 691 Stevenage Borough Council planning records (19/00743/FPM)
- 692 SDC, *Building the new town of Stevenage*, p. 30
- 693 HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/T29, vol. 1
- 694 *Ibid* (letter of 5 May 1958)
- 695 *Ibid*, vol. 1
- 696 *Ibid* (letter of 22 August 1958 from Aslin to Vincent)
- 697 *Stevenage Pictorial*, 3 June 1960, p. 1. See also: SDC, *13th Annual Report* (1960), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*
- 698 *Stevenage Pictorial*, 2 September 1960, p. 28
- 699 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 20 (autumn 1960), p. 5; SDC, *14th Annual Report* (1961), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*; Balchin, *First New Town*, p. 279
- 700 HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/T29, vol. 1 (plans of 23 June 1958, marked received 14 November 1958, with revisions of August and November 1958)
- 701 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 20 (autumn 1960), p. 5; *Stevenage Pictorial*, 2 September 1960, p. 28
- 702 *Stevenage Pictorial*, 26 February 1960, p. 1; HALS, CNT/ST/15/4/13; Stevenage Museum, P3345-6. See also town centre model reproduced in: *Stevenage Gazette*, 1 March 1963, p. 1
- 703 Stevenage Museum, PP2208
- 704 A letter in TNA, HLG 115/233 (27 November 1963), states that the Southgate House site was no longer needed for garages.
- 705 TNA, HLG 115/233
- 706 Balchin, *First New Town*, p. 231
- 707 HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/T29, vol. 2
- 708 *Ibid* (including note of 14 July 1972)
- 709 Balchin, *First New Town*, p. 231
- 710 Stevenage Borough Council planning records (19/00743/FPM)
- 711 HALS, CNT/ST/15/4/13
- 712 SDC, *14th Annual Report* (1961), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*
- 713 HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/T41, vol. 1 (notes of meeting, 18 September 1962)
- 714 TNA, HLG 115/233 (papers of December 1962); *Stevenage Gazette*, 15 March 1963, p. 1
- 715 TNA, HLG 115/233. For Vincent & Gorbings's sketch of the exterior of Southgate House, see:

Stevenage Museum, P7127

- 716 TNA, HLG 115/233
- 717 Ibid; *Stevenage Gazette*, 15 March 1963, p. 1
- 718 *Stevenage Gazette*, 23 August 1963, p. 3; *Stevenage Gazette*, 23 August 1963, p. 3; SDC, *Purpose*, no. 29 (autumn 1963), p. 10
- 719 SDC, *16th Annual Report* (1963) and *17th Annual Report* (1964), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*; *Stevenage Gazette*, 4 October 1963, p. 2
- 720 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 28 (summer 1963), p. 10. See also: *ibid*, no. 29 (autumn 1963), p. 11
- 721 *Ibid*, no. 32 (winter 1964/5), p. 4; SDC, *17th Annual Report* (1964). in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*; *Stevenage Gazette*, 23 August 1963, p. 3; HALS, CEO/T/4/13, vol. 1 (letter from SUDC of 20 November 1964, on Southgate House letterhead). For a photograph of Southgate House as completed, see: SDC, *Purpose*, no. 32 (winter 1964/5), p. 2
- 722 *Stevenage Gazette*, 4 October 1963, p. 2. For a photo of the interior of the committee room, see: SDC, *Purpose*, no. 32 (winter 1964/5), p. 4
- 723 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 28 (summer 1963), p. 10; SDC, *17th Annual Report* (1964), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*
- 724 Pers. comm. (David Rixson, formerly of Vincent, Gorbing & Partners); *Stevenage Gazette*, 29 October 1965, p. 1; *ibid*, 17 September 1965, p. 1; SDC, *Purpose*, no. 33 (summer 1965), p. 11
- 725 This and the following information is derived from the table of post-war public houses compiled as part of Historic England's ongoing post-war pubs project, and is based on the following sources: *The Red Barrel* [in-house brewery magazine for Watney's], February 1967, p. 19; *Stevenage Gazette*, 27 October 1966; HALS, CNT/ST/7/1/ CEO-L/2/8/1 (vol. 1 includes plans and elevations); Balchin, *First New Town*, p. 219; SDC, *19th Annual Report* (1966) and *20th Annual Report* (1967) in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*
- 726 For exterior and interior photos published in the Watney's in-house journal, *The Red Barrel*, see: <https://boakandbailey.com/2018/09/watneys-pubs-of-1966-67-failsforth-harlington-lambeth-stevenage-wythenshawe/> (acc. 21 October 2020)
- 727 *Stevenage Gazette*, 1 January 1965, p. 1
- 728 See photographs in: SDC, *Purpose*, no. 33 (summer 1965), p. 2; *ibid*, no. 33 (summer 1965), p. 15
- 729 HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/B62, vol. 1 (notes of meeting of 4 January 1973)
- 730 Pers. comm. (David Rixson, formerly of Vincent & Gorbing)
- 731 <https://www.ourstevenage.org.uk/content/places/stevenage-on-film/here-we-go-round-the-mulberry-bush-now-then-part-2> (acc. 23 September 2020); pers. comm. (Alan Ford of Stevenage Museum). Stevenage Museum holds a copy of a newspaper article reporting on the demolition of the Long Ship mural, dated 22 March 2001.
- 732 https://www.ourstevenage.org.uk/content/places/public-houses/the_viking_longboat (acc. 9 June 2020); Pers. comm. (Alan Ford of Stevenage Museum)
- 733 Stevenage Borough Council planning records (19/00743/FPM)
- 734 Balchin, *First New Town*, pp. 130-1
- 735 Bettley, Pevsner and Cherry, *The Buildings of England: Hertfordshire*, p. 545; Balchin, *First New Town*, p. 140 and see photo on p. 141

- 736 HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/T29, vol. 1
- 737 Ibid and CNT/ST/15/4/13
- 738 Ibid, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/T29, vol. 1 (file note, meeting of 11 June 1959)
- 739 Ibid
- 740 Ibid (note of meeting, 7 September 1960)
- 741 Ibid (letter of 14 November 1960)
- 742 Ibid (minute of 15 November 1960); SDC, *14th Annual Report* (1961) and *16th Annual Report* (1963), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*; SDC, *Purpose*, no. 24 (March 1962), pp. 10-11
- 743 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 26 (autumn 1962), p. 5
- 744 HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/T29, vol. 1 (minute of 15 November 1960)
- 745 <https://www.thecomet.net/news/the-game-s-up-for-manulife-1-281830> (acc. 10 June 2020)
- 746 HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/T31, vol. 1 (drawing of 21 September 1956), and CNT/ST/15/4/13
- 747 SDC, *16th Annual Report* (1963) and *17th Annual Report* (1964), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*; Stevenage Borough Council planning records (63/210015/63)
- 748 Pevsner, rev. Cherry, *The Buildings of England: Hertfordshire*, p. 352. This book gives the building's date as 1973-4, but it had been begun by 1972. For photos of the building under construction, see: Stevenage Museum, P11133 and P11168-9, and 'Stevenage Town Centre and Town Garden', *Landscape Design* (November 1972), p. 35. An application for illuminated lettering for the new building was approved in August 1973: Stevenage Borough Council planning records (73/2/0204/73)
- 749 Pers. comm. (Alan Ford of Stevenage Museum); <https://www.thecomet.net/news/the-inn-crowd-1-271824> (acc. 10 June 2020).
- 750 Balchin, *First New Town*, p. 284
- 751 <https://www.thecomet.net/news/the-inn-crowd-1-271824> (acc. 10 June 2020). For a photo published in 1980, see: *Building Design* (19 September 1980), p. 45
- 752 'Stevenage Town Centre and Town Garden', *Landscape Design* (November 1972), p. 35; Pevsner, rev. Cherry, *The Buildings of England: Hertfordshire*, p. 352; Balchin, *First New Town*, p. 285
- 753 <https://www.thecomet.net/news/the-inn-crowd-1-271824> (acc. 10 June 2020); Stevenage Borough Council planning records (73/2/0204/73)
- 754 The Council's Technical Director was based at Manulife Houe, for instance, in 1982: <https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/48906/page/2798/data.pdf> (acc. 9 June 2020). See also: Balchin, *First New Town*, p. 287
- 755 <https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/48906/page/2798/data.pdf> (acc. 9 June 2020)
- 756 <https://www.thecomet.net/comet-life/second-thoughts-for-manulife-1-279104> and <https://www.thecomet.net/news/the-game-s-up-for-manulife-1-281830> (acc. 9 June 2020)
- 757 Stevenage Borough Council planning records (06/00148/FP)
- 758 <https://www.thecomet.net/news/is-that-it-1-279372> (acc. 10 June 2020)

- 759 Clive Aslet, 'An interview with the late Paul Paget', *Thirties Society Journal*, no. 6 (1987), pp. 16-25
- 760 HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/C6/K/vol. 1; <http://stevenagechurch.org/history-2/> (acc. 10 June 2020)
- 761 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 5 (autumn 1956), p. 5, and see: *ibid*, no. 3 (spring 1956), p. 3
- 762 *Ibid*, no. 7 (spring 1957), p. 11; *ibid*, no. 9 (autumn 1957), p. 11; *ibid*, no. 12 (summer 1958), p. 8
- 763 *Stevenage Pictorial*, 4 December 1959, p. 31; SDC, *Purpose*, no. 16 (autumn 1959), p. 11
- 764 *Stevenage Pictorial*, 12 August 1960, p. 5
- 765 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 20 (autumn 1960), p. 5; *Stevenage Pictorial*, 25 November 1960, p. 1; SDC, *14th Annual Report* (1961), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*
- 766 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 21 (winter 1961 [i.e. 1960-1]), p. 8 and p. 9. For a contemporary article on the church, see: *ibid*, no. 21 (winter 1961 [i.e. 1960/1]), pp. 8-9
- 767 SDC, *14th Annual Report* (1961), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*
- 768 <http://stevenagechurch.org/history-2/> (acc. 10 June 2020); Balchin, *First New Town*, p. 285. According to the Buildings of England, the stained glass is of 1966: Bettley, Pevsner and Cherry, *The Buildings of England: Hertfordshire*, p. 544. This is an error, as shown in the text of this report.
- 769 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 21 (winter 1961 [i.e. 1960-1]), p. 9
- 770 <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1376615> (acc. 10 June 2020)
- 771 SDC, *Building the new town of Stevenage*, p. 34
- 772 Albemarle Committee, terms of reference, quoted at: <https://infed.org/mobi/the-albemarle-report-introduction/> (acc. 30 August 2020)
- 773 Ministry of Education, Building Bulletin, no. 20, *Youth Service Building: General Mixed Clubs* (London, 1961); Building Bulletin, no. 22, *Youth Club, Withywood, Bristol* (London, 1963); A. J. Peters, *British Further Education: A Critical Textbook* (Oxford, 1967), pp. 205-7
- 774 *The Times*, 14 October 1959, p. 7; TNA, NT 90/2; *Architects' Journal*, vol. 143 issue 5 (2 February 1966), p. 342
- 775 *The Times*, 3 November 1959, p. 8
- 776 *Architects' Journal* (2 February 1966), p. 344; *Stevenage Pictorial*, 11 May 1962, p. 3; SDC, *Purpose*, no. 25 (June 1962), p. 6; *Architects' Journal*, vol. 150 issue 37 (10 September 1969), p. 654
- 777 *Architects' Journal* (2 February 1966), p. 345
- 778 *Stevenage Pictorial*, 11 May 1962, p. 3
- 779 *Stevenage Gazette*, 12 July 1963, p. 1; SDC, *Purpose*, no. 30 (spring 1964), p. 10; *Architects' Journal* (2 February 1966), p. 345; *Architects' Journal* (10 September 1969), p. 654
- 780 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 30 (spring 1964), p. 10; *The Times Educational Supplement*, 14 February 1964, p. 378
- 781 *Stevenage Gazette*, 28 February 1964, p. 1; *ibid*, 5 June 1964, p. 1; Balchin, *First New Town*, p. 251; SDC, *17th Annual Report* (1964), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*; *Architects' Journal* (2 February 1966), p. 354. For the building under construction, see: SDC, *Purpose*,

- no. 32 (winter 1964/5), p. 11
- 782 *Stevenage Gazette*, 13 December 1963, p. 14
- 783 *Ibid*, 5 June 1964, p. 1
- 784 *Architects' Journal* (2 February 1966), p. 356; *Stevenage Gazette*, 9 April 1965, p. 8; SDC, *17th Annual Report* (1964), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*
- 785 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 32 (winter 1964/5), p. 11
- 786 *The Times Educational Supplement*, 14 February 1964, p. 378; *Architects' Journal* (2 February 1966), p. 345 and p. 346
- 787 *Architects' Journal* (2 February 1966), pp. 341-355; *ibid*, vol. 150 issue 37 (10 September 1969), p. 645 and pp. 653-660. These articles and the following sources form the basis for the description given in this report: *Stevenage Gazette*, 28 February 1964, p. 1; SDC, *17th Annual Report* (1964), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*; *The Times*, 3 April 1965, p. 10; SDC, *Purpose*, no. 25 (June 1962), p. 6; *ibid*, no. 33 (summer 1965), p. 4; *ibid*, no. 34 (spring 1966), p. 10
- 788 *Architects' Journal* (2 February 1966), p. 349. See also: SDC, *Purpose*, no. 34 (spring 1966), p. 10
- 789 *The Times Educational Supplement*, 14 June 1967, p. 2020; *Architects' Journal* (2 February 1966), p. 346 and p. 349
- 790 SDC, *17th Annual Report* (1964), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*; *The Times*, 3 April 1965, p. 10
- 791 *Architects' Journal* (2 February 1966), p. 346
- 792 *Ibid*, pp. 349-350
- 793 Bettley, Pevsner and Cherry, *The Buildings of England: Hertfordshire*, pp. 544-5
- 794 *Architects' Journal* (10 September 1969), pp. 654-5
- 795 *Ibid* (2 February 1966), p. 346
- 796 *Stevenage Gazette*, 7 February 1964, p. 1
- 797 *Architects' Journal* (2 February 1966), p. 352 and p. 345
- 798 *Ibid* (10 September 1969), p. 656
- 799 <http://steve60s.blogspot.com> (acc. 23 July 2020); <https://www.bowiewonderworld.com/tours/tour58.htm> (acc. 11 September 2020); <https://www.ourstevenage.org.uk/content/places/stevenage-on-film/here-we-go-round-the-mulberry-bush-now-then-part-2> (acc. 23 September 2020)
- 800 *Architects' Journal* (2 February 1966), p. 345
- 801 *Ibid*, p. 346; *The Times Educational Supplement*, 14 June 1967, p. 2020
- 802 *Architects' Journal* (2 February 1966), p. 346
- 803 *Ibid*
- 804 *Ibid*, p. 346 and p. 349
- 805 *Ibid* (10 September 1969), p. 659

- 806 Ibid, pp. 655-6. The east arcade had always been used for archery: *Architects' Journal* (2 February 1966), p. 344
- 807 Ibid (10 September 1969), p. 654 and see p. 659
- 808 Ibid, p. 654
- 809 Ibid
- 810 Ibid, p. 657
- 811 *The Times Educational Supplement*, 14 June 1967, p. 2020
- 812 *Architects' Journal* (2 February 1966), p. 349; *Architects' Journal* (10 September 1969), p. 656
- 813 Ibid (2 February 1966), p. 341
- 814 Ibid (10 September 1969), p. 656
- 815 Ibid (2 February 1966), p. 347
- 816 Ibid (10 September 1969), pp. 656-7; HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/Y1, vol. 1
- 817 *Architects' Journal* (10 September 1969), p. 657
- 818 Ibid, p. 656
- 819 Ibid
- 820 *The Times*, 14 February 1972, p. 2
- 821 Ibid, 8 February 1974, p. 15
- 822 <https://rideukbmx.com/longform/concrete-relics-searching-for-englands-forgotten-transitions> (acc. 11 June 2020)
- 823 <https://www.thecomet.net/news/repair-work-looks-set-to-start-on-closed-stevenage-skate-park-bowes-lyon-following-2-000-strong-petition-1-4442820> (acc. 11 June 2020)
- 824 *Architects' Journal*, vol. 140 issue 20 (11 November 1964), p. 1143
- 825 HALS, CNT/ST/4/1/T/10/2, vol. 1
- 826 SDC, *10th Annual Report* (1957), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*
- 827 Ibid, *11th Annual Report* (1958); HALS, CNT/ST/4/1/T/10/2, vol. 1; Balchin, *First New Town*, p. 210
- 828 HALS, CNT/ST/4/1/T/10/2, vol. 1; *Stevenage Pictorial*, 20 May 1960, p. 44; SDC, *14th Annual Report* (1961), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*
- 829 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 14 (winter 1959 [i.e. 1958-9]), p. 12; *ibid*, no. 20 (autumn 1960), p. 4; HALS, CNT/ST/4/1/T/10/2, vol. 1; *Stevenage Pictorial*, 16 December 1960, p. 1; SDC, *14th Annual Report* (1961), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*; *Architects' Journal*, vol. 137 issue 7 (13 February 1963), p. 366
- 830 *Stevenage Gazette*, 6 October 1961, p. 1
- 831 *Stevenage Pictorial*, 20 October 1961, p. 36; *Stevenage Gazette*, 6 October 1961, p. 1. See also: SDC, *Purpose*, no. 23 (November 1961), p. 15
- 832 *Stevenage Pictorial*, 24 August 1962, p. 32; *Stevenage Gazette*, 19 October 1962, p. 1 and

p. 9; SDC, *16th Annual Report* (1963), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*; HALS, CNT/ST/4/1/T/10/2, vol. 1. See also photos held by the RIBA, showing both the pool building's exterior and interior and taken by John Pantlin in 1963: <https://www.architecture.com/image-library/ribapix.html?keywords=stevenage%20swimming> (acc. 13 May 2020)

- 833 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 26 (autumn 1962), p. 11
- 834 *Architects' Journal* (13 February 1963), pp. 362-7; *ibid* (11 November 1964), pp. 1143-51
- 835 For information and photographs, see the articles cited above, as well as: SDC, *Purpose*, no. 27 (winter 1963 [i.e. 1962/3]), p. 16; *ibid*, no. 33 (summer 1965), pp. 6-7; *ibid*, no. 29 (autumn 1963), p. 1; *ibid*, no. 34 (spring 1966), p. 9
- 836 *Architects' Journal* (13 February 1963), p. 363
- 837 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 19 (summer 1960), p. 11. See also: *Architects' Journal* (13 February 1963), p. 364
- 838 Stevenage Borough Council planning records (99/00492/FP)
- 839 For Lytton Way under construction, see, for instance, an aerial photograph of April 1969: HEA, MAL/69031/v137 (Meridian Airmaps Limited photography)
- 840 *The Times*, 18 April 1963, p. 5; SDC, *Purpose*, no. 28 (summer 1963), p. 3
- 841 *Stevenage Gazette*, 17 September 1965, p. 1
- 842 *Ibid*
- 843 The sources for this and the following information, unless otherwise stated, are: HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/A11, vols 1 and 2, and CNT/ST/4/1/T/10/5/1; Donald Adie, 'Building Study: Three Sports Centres', *Architects' Journal*, vol. 164 issue 49 (8 December 1976), pp. 1075-1088; *Building Design*, 30 August 1974, p. 5; and <https://www.thegordoncraigtheatrearchive.org.uk/history/the-new-towns-theatre> (acc. 13 May 2020)
- 844 <https://sportsleisurelegacy.co.uk/chapter-2-first-flush-of-centres/> (acc. 16 June 2020); Balchin, *First New Town*, p. 212
- 845 Adie, 'Building Study: Three Sports Centres', *Architects' Journal*, p. 1083
- 846 Stevenage Borough Council planning records (73/2/0073/7). An initial planning application had been approved in October 1971 (71/2/0157/7).
- 847 Adie, 'Building Study: Three Sports Centres', *Architects' Journal*, p. 1088
- 848 *The Stage*, 23 October 1975, p. 1
- 849 Adie, 'Building Study: Three Sports Centres', *Architects' Journal*, pp. 1075-88
- 850 *Ibid*, p. 1083
- 851 <https://www.thegordoncraigtheatrearchive.org.uk/history/the-new-towns-theatre> (acc. 13 May 2020). For the centre's original orange colour, see the aerial photograph of 1986: <https://www.ourstevenage.org.uk/content/places/aerial-views-of-stevenage/aerial-view-of-the-town-centre-1986> (acc. 11 June 2020)
- 852 Adie, 'Building Study: Three Sports Centres', *Architects' Journal*, p. 1076
- 853 *Ibid*, p. 1084
- 854 *Ibid* (photo)
- 855 The plans of the centre are reproduced in: Adie, 'Building Study: Three Sports Centres', *Archi-*

tects' Journal, p. 1077. NB the plans are wrongly labelled, so that the first floor appears as the second, and vice versa.

- 856 Ibid, p. 1083
- 857 Morley-Priestman, 'Stevenage Leisure Centre', *The Stage*, p. 21
- 858 Ibid, p. 20
- 859 Ibid, p. 21
- 860 Adie, 'Building Study: Three Sports Centres', *Architects' Journal*, p. 1084
- 861 Stevenage Borough Council planning records (91/2/0114/9)
- 862 For the building's appearance in 1986, see: <https://www.ourstevenage.org.uk/content/places/aerial-views-of-stevenage/aerial-view-of-the-town-centre-1986> (acc. 15 May 2020)
- 863 Stevenage Borough Council planning records (93/2/0182/9)
- 864 HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/T29, vol. 1 (letters of 15 and 16 May 1958)
- 865 Ibid (minutes of 8 December 1959); CNT/ST/15/4/13
- 866 Ibid, CNT/ST/15/4/17 and CNT/ST/15/4/19
- 867 Ibid, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/T29, vol. 2 (letters of 15 March 1968 and 25 June 1968)
- 868 Ibid (letter of 3 December 1969 and note of meeting of 6 March 1970)
- 869 Ibid (committee minute, 1 September 1970)
- 870 Ibid
- 871 Ibid (committee minute of 1 September 1970 and letter of 12 May 1971). Inexplicably, the recent revision of the Buildings of England Hertfordshire volume gives the date of 1961 to the magistrates' court, said to have been designed by Jack Digby of the County Architects' Department: Bettley, Pevsner and Cherry, *The Buildings of England: Hertfordshire*, p. 544. Possibly, confusion has been caused by the existence of an earlier design.
- 872 For a photo of the building published in 1980, see: Balchin, *First New Town*, p. 285
- 873 Stephenson, *On a Human Scale*, pp. 90-1
- 874 SDC, *Quarterly Bulletin*, no. 10 (1 July 1953), p. 12
- 875 SDC, *Building the new town of Stevenage*, p. 14
- 876 SDC, *14th Annual Report* (1961), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*; HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/R2, vol. 1 (report of a meeting between SDC and British Railways, 9 October 1962)
- 877 HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/R2, vol. 1 (report of 19 April 1966)
- 878 SDC, *22nd Annual Report* (1969), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*
- 879 HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/A11, vol. 1 (report of 10 August 1971)
- 880 Pevsner, rev. Cherry, *The Buildings of England: Hertfordshire*, p. 354; *Building Design*, 5 October 1973, p. 15; 'Stevenage Station', *The Architect* (November 1973), p. 52. For biographical details of Hardy and Boal, see: <https://www.steamindex.com/people/architects.htm> and http://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk/architect_full.php?id=402593 (both acc. 7 October 2020)

- 881 SDC, *24th Annual Report* (1971), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*; HALS, CNT/ST/5/1/AP/T29 (minutes of meeting, 6 August 1971); 'Stevenage Station', *The Architect* (November 1973), p. 52
- 882 https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stevenage_railway_station (acc. 14 May 2020)
- 883 *Building Design* (5 October 1973), p. 15; 'Stevenage Station', *The Architect* (November 1973), p. 52
- 884 'Stevenage Station', *The Architect* (November 1973), p. 52
- 885 Ibid
- 886 Balchin, *First New Town*, p. 147
- 887 Ibid
- 888 *Building Design* (5 October 1973), p. 15
- 889 Bettley, Pevsner and Cherry, *The Buildings of England: Hertfordshire*, p. 545
- 890 https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stevenage_railway_station (acc. 14 May 2020)
- 891 See, for instance, 'Stevenage Town Investment Plan' of October 2020
- 892 Balchin, *First New Town*, p. 352
- 893 'Stevenage Town Centre and Town Garden', *Landscape Design* (November 1972), p. 33
- 894 *Architects' Journal*, vol. 124 issue 3203 (19 July 1956), p. 83; Stephenson, 'Architecture, Town Planning and Civic Design', *The Town Planning Review*, p. 156
- 895 Balchin, *First New Town*, p. 267
- 896 Burns, *British Shopping Centres*, p. 74
- 897 HALS, CNT/ST/2/1/5 (letter by Royston Dash to *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 24 October 1958)
- 898 "Planner's Dream" at New Towns', *The Times* (23 May 1958), p. 7
- 899 Robinson, 'The Town of Tomorrow: It's Here Today', *Sunday Times*, p. 53
- 900 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 19 (summer 1960), p. 6
- 901 *Stevenage Pictorial*, 6 March 1959, p. 22
- 902 <https://www.britishpathe.com/video/pm-sees-new-towns/query/stevenage> (acc. 15 April 2020); SDC, *Purpose*, no. 16 (autumn 1959), p. 3
- 903 *Stevenage Pictorial*, 8 April 1960, p. 15; SDC, *Purpose*, no. 18 (spring 1960), p. 3
- 904 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 18 (spring 1960), p. 3
- 905 *Stevenage Pictorial*, 20 May 1960, p. 1
- 906 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 18 (spring 1960), p. 3; *Stevenage Pictorial*, 17 June 1960, p. 16
- 907 *Architects' Journal*, vol. 133 issue 3441 (30 March 1961), p. 452
- 908 *Stevenage Gazette*, 30 November 1962, p. 7
- 909 Ibid, 4 October 1963, p. 1

- 910 SDC, *Purpose*, no. 27 (winter 1963 [i.e. 1962/3]), p. 12; *ibid*, no. 31 (summer 1964), p. 7; SDC, *15th Annual Report* (1962), p. 367, in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*
- 911 Balchin, *First New Town*, p. 349 and p. 345
- 912 SDC, *15th Annual Report* (1962), in *The New Towns Record 1946-2002*
- 913 TNA, HLG 115/34 (memo of 14 March 1951)
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