

**Wirral Borough Council**

# Hamilton Square Conservation Area Regeneration Plan The Case for Change

**Draft final report**  
Prepared by LUC  
April 2024



## Wirral Borough Council

### Hamilton Square Conservation Area Regeneration Plan

#### The Case for Change

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### This chapter sets out the purpose of this Case for Change report and its relationship to the Conservation Area Regeneration Plan

**1.1** LUC was commissioned by Wirral Borough Council in June 2023 to prepare a Conservation Area Regeneration Plan (henceforth 'the Plan') as one of six pilot schemes being trialled by Historic England. The purpose of the Plan is to integrate conservation area management objectives with the wider regeneration strategies and proposals for the wider town centre as a place. The Plan therefore has a wider scope than a traditional conservation area management plan, and therefore has a greater potential to change the lives of the people who live, work or spend their time in the conservation area.

**1.2** The conservation area regeneration plan approach aims to:

- Bring conservation area preservation and enhancement into 'mainstream' economic regeneration and placemaking and ensure it is joined up with other programme and projects in the town centre
- Provide a vision and a cohesive and wide-ranging plan for preserving and enhancing the conservation area as a whole
- Engage stakeholders about the future of the conservation area and the types of change that would be supported
- Provide a practical action plan for delivering improvements to the conservation area by a range of partners, stakeholders and actors
- Raise the profile of the conservation area

**1.3** The Plan is a concise publication for anyone who has an interest in the conservation area. It contextual and background information is therefore brief. This Case for Change report provides the bigger picture analysis, some of which is summarised in the Plan.



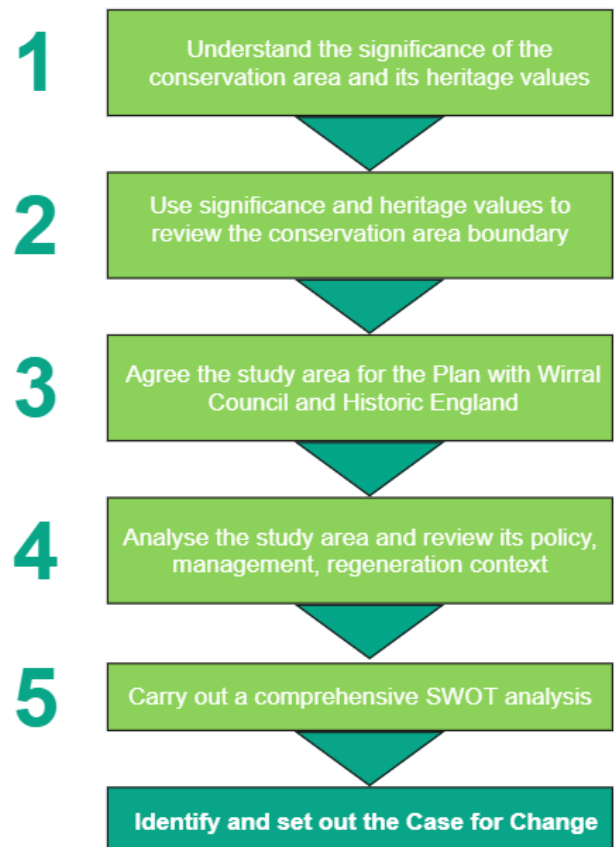
## Chapter 2

### How this Report has been prepared

This chapter sets out the approach to compiling this Case for Change

2.1 LUC's 'understand first, act second' approach to its projects is consistent with the approach to managing change to heritage assets as set out in 'Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance' (English Heritage, 2008). Our approach is summarised in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1: How this report has been prepared



**1: Understand the significance of the conservation area and its heritage values**

**2.2** LUC has distilled information from the sources listed below to define a suite of the conservation area's key heritage values to inform the Plan and its preparation. The categories of significance used are those set out in 'Conservation Principles' (2008). These are broadly analogous with the heritage values defined in the NPPF, but with the addition of communal value.

**2.3** The sources used are:

- Hamilton Square Conservation Area Appraisal (2007)
- Listed building descriptions (National Heritage List for England)
- Aerial Photograph Explorer (Historic England)
- Merseyside HER, as accessible via Heritage Gateway
- Birkenhead Culture and Heritage Strategy: Mapping Research (2021) Counterculture (supplied by Wirral BC)
- Wirral Heritage Topic Paper (n.d., unpublished, supplied by Wirral BC)
- Publicly available historic maps
- Publicly available historic trade directories
- Publicly available historic photos
- The Buildings of England: Cheshire (1971) N Pevsner & E Hubbard
- Site visit and walkover

**2.4** The suite of key heritage values identified via the process are set out in the next chapter.

**2: Review the conservation area boundary**

**2.5** To be useful as a planning tool and deliver meaningful change, the conservation area regeneration plan must have a defined study area with a consistent and logical extent. In this case, the logical starting point is the existing Hamilton Square Conservation Area boundary. This was first designated in 1977, and reviewed and extended in 1994. There was a boundary review conducted as part of the most recent conservation area appraisal (2007) that concluded that the 1994 boundary was appropriate, and proposed no boundary changes.

**2.6** The management of conservation areas is a proactive and evolving process. In this context the statutory requirement to review the extent of conservation areas "from time to time" is desirable and necessary for the following reasons:

- Our general understanding as a society regarding what holds heritage value evolves over time. This is

exemplified by the formation of the Victorian Society in the 1950s when key works from this era were under threat; or the evolution of the 1930s Society into the 20th Century Society as society's understanding and appreciation grew for buildings and developments erected in all decades of the 20th century.

- More information is discovered, shared and understood about local places, including the communal value they hold to particular communities or generations. This allows more informed decisions to be made regarding these places.
- Places evolve and change over time and affect our perception of them. This could be through negative change such as the threat of loss or actual loss of components of our historic environment making those surviving elements more valued by people than previously. Positive change such as the re-use and restoration of historic buildings or revitalisation of the public realm can make previously forlorn places cherished once more.

**2.7** These types of shifts over time are reflected in the boundary of Hamilton Square Conservation Area: the 1977 boundary was strongly focussed on Hamilton Square itself with a tightly-drawn boundary over a compact area of late Georgian and early Victorian townscape. The expansion of the boundary in 1994 brought more buildings from the same era into the conservation area but they are also intermixed with a higher number of later Victorian, Edwardian and pre-1945 buildings. The boundary changes in particular recognised the value of the varied but harmonious townscape of Argyle Street, Market Street and the west side of Chester Street in particular.

**2.8** Rather than being a definitive end-point, the review of the conservation area boundary carried out to inform the Plan is one that reflects the present significance-led approach to understanding heritage assets, and current best practice to designating and reviewing conservation areas.

**2.9** The findings of the conservation area boundary review are set out in chapter 4.

**3: Agree the study area boundary**

**2.10** The study area is the existing conservation area, plus the changes suggested to it. Upon LUC's submission of the suggested boundary, Wirral Council and Historic England conducted a site walkover to assess the proposed changes to the boundary. The proposed changes were accepted in principle and will effectively form an initial suite of proposals in the Plan.

#### 4. Analyse the study area

**2.11** The analysis of the study area is predominantly desk-based, supported by site visits and walkovers. There is a broad range of documents about Birkenhead at present due to its regeneration focus, and the update of the Local Plan. Due to the plan's focus on the conservation area, the analysis started with the analysis of the historic environment. For this the following documents were reviewed:

- The Wirral Local Plan 2021-2037
- Birkenhead 2040 Framework (March 2021)
- Birkenhead 2040 Framework: Cultural Heritage Strategy: Mapping Research (March 2021)
- Birkenhead Town Investment Plan (2021)
- Birkenhead Waterfront and Surrounds Stage 01 Report (December 2022)
- Woodside Landings Draft Masterplan Report (October 2023)
- Dock Branch Neighbourhood Draft Masterplan Report (August 2023)
- St Werburgh's Quarter Masterplan (August 2023)
- Hind Street Neighbourhood Framework (March 2021)
- Hamilton Square Conservation Area Appraisal (2006)
- Wirral Conservation and Heritage Trail
- National Heritage List for England
- Heritage Gateway
- Publicly available historic mapping
- Historic England Aerial Photograph Explorer (APEX)

**2.12** The analysis of the above evidence base led to the identification of gaps in the present knowledge base of the study area, where further analysis would benefit the Plan. The neighbourhood-level masterplans and frameworks also included some useful analysis for some, but not all of the study area, and would therefore require expanding to cover the whole study area. The following additional analysis was carried out by LUC:

- Identifying whether buildings make a positive, negative or neutral contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area. This analysis was specifically requested by Wirral Council, as the analysis supports

the implementation of paragraphs 206 and 207 of the NPPF.<sup>1</sup>

- Identifying whether the existing public realm of the study area makes a positive, neutral or negative contribution to its character and appearance. This complements the similar assessment of the buildings, and supports the implementation of paragraphs 206 and 207 of the NPPF.
- Identifying whether the immediate environs of the study area make a positive, negative, or neutral contribution to its significance. This is not a formal study that defines the setting of the conservation area, but rather a means of identifying which components in the conservation area's environs contribute to its significance, and where new development could enhance or better reveal its significance, in line with NPPF paragraph 206.
- Building lines. Most of the study area is within the early 19th century 'Graham grid' of streets, with looser street patterns to the north and south of this grid that in the case of Argyle Street, continues the line of the grid. Historic maps and aerial photos show that streets were for the most part lined with terraces or buildings with long frontages. These long linear built forms emphasise the grid and create the 'endless vistas' described in the conservation area appraisal. The building line is therefore very important to the character of the conservation area, and where there are gaps or significant breaks in the building line, it impacts this characteristic of the conservation area.
- Building height, grain and density. The heights of buildings in the conservation area are a key facet of the sense of enclosure of the streets and its overall urban character. Taller buildings help to emphasise the grid layout, which is highly evident at Hamilton Square where most of the buildings are four storeys plus basement. It is therefore important to understand the prevailing building heights of the area and its level of uniformity or variety to help understand the character of the area.
- Car parking. The study area and its immediate environs contain a variety of car parking: private on-site parking, public car parks, on-street parking and land unofficially or informally used for car parking. Nearly all of these parking spaces are surface parking that affect the general character and appearance of the conservation area. As an environment that was principally developed before the advent of the motor car and a place that remains very well connected by train, bus and ferry, it is

<sup>1</sup> Paragraph 206 relates to preserving elements that make a positive contribution to a conservation area. Paragraph 207 establishes that the loss of a building that makes a positive contribution to the significance of a conservation area would substantially harm the

conservation area. In addition this same paragraph acknowledges that not all elements of a conservation area will necessarily contribute to its significance.

a useful exercise to understand how much of space is given over to private vehicles.

**2.13** The analysis of the study area via other reports, masterplans and neighbourhood frameworks that support the implementation of the Birkenhead 2040 Framework have not been repeated here, but have been considered as part of the analysis, SWOT analysis and Case for Change.

## 5. Undertake a SWOT analysis

**2.14** The understanding of the study area, its significance and heritage values; the current status of and activity within the conservation area; and the wider policy and regeneration context all feed into a historic environment-focussed strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis. This analysis is key to informing the Case for Change.

**2.15** The regeneration activity underway in Birkenhead means that the SWOT analysis is in a state of flux; for example during the preceding steps, two consultation draft neighbourhood masterplans were published,<sup>2</sup> and two major planning applications in the town centre<sup>3</sup> were submitted to Wirral Council. Added to this is the Council's purchase of the Pyramids and Grange shopping centres in October 2023, which has in turn led to a strategic re-think of the new location of the town centre's flagship market. In parallel, the Council is preparing to deliver some early public realm, connectivity and active travel improvements in Hamilton Street, Hamilton Square and Argyle Street in the near future.<sup>4</sup> Further work is also continuing on the Birkenhead Design Guide.

**2.16** The above progress and changes are all positives, as they are all steps towards delivering the Birkenhead 2040 Framework. The Conservation Area Regeneration Plan will also align with the Framework, and will be used to inform future change and decisions. It is inevitable that some capital projects will take place prior to the Plan being in place in order to build the momentum of investment in the town centre.

**2.17** These early projects could present new opportunities in the conservation area. In this regard the SWOT analysis is a 'snapshot in time' but this does not make it a redundant exercise, or one that will quickly become outdated and obsolete. Many of the opportunities and threats to the conservation area have been present in the medium- and in some cases long-term. The conservation area regeneration plan is a vehicle for identifying them, bringing them to the fore, and identifying a plan of action to harness the strengths and opportunities and address the weaknesses and threats.

**2.18** The SWOT analysis is in Chapter 6.

## The Case for Change

**2.19** The main themes from the SWOT analysis are presented as a concise 'Case for Change' that supports and provides the rationale for the approach, policies and proposals of the conservation area regeneration plan. It identifies:

- Strategic priorities
- Historic environment priorities

**2.20** The Case for Change is in Chapter 7.

<sup>2</sup> Dock Branch Railway Neighbourhood Framework and St Werburgh's Masterplan

<sup>3</sup> Hind Street Urban Village and the extension of the U-Boat Museum at Woodside.

<sup>4</sup> The options for these are set out in Birkenhead Waterfront and Surrounds Stage 01 Report (December 2022)



## Chapter 3

# Significance and Heritage Values

### The first step for any strategy for a historic place is to understand the place and its heritage values

**3.1** The significance of the Hamilton Square Conservation Area has been set out according to four high-level themes:

- Evidential value (also termed archaeological interest) this is the potential of the place to provide evidence about past human activity. While archaeological evidence is generally thought to relate only to below ground remains it can also include built fabric, evidence of street layout and historic landscape features. Rarity value, preservation and date can also all form a part of evidential value.
- Historical value derives from the ways in which past people, events and aspects of life can be connected through a place to the present. This can be illustrative – relating to a specific period – or associative – relating to a person, event or community.
- Aesthetic value (also termed architectural and artistic interest) the visual qualities and characteristics of a place, including architectural style, design, public arts and character. This also encompasses how people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from a place (the ‘wow-factor’, impressions or feelings evoked from a place).
- Communal value derives from the meanings of a place for the people who relate to it, including collective experience or memory. This does not directly equate with community use or amenity value.

**3.2** The following table sets out the significance of the conservation area according to the four main themes discussed above.

**Table 3.1: The Heritage Values of Hamilton Square Conservation Area**

Value	Description
Evidential	<p><b>Birkenhead Priory and ferry crossings</b>, the priory was founded around 1150 and owned the land between Tranmere Pool, the Mersey and Wallasey Pool (modern day Birkenhead).</p> <p>A record of 1330 refers to the Priory operating a ferry across the Mersey, the earliest record of such. The Priory site survives and is a scheduled monument, while the possible site of the ferry launch survives as the Monks Ferry place name. This and the later Woodside ferry launch influenced the later development of Birkenhead.</p>
Historical: Illustrative	<p><b>The Late Georgian Suburb.</b> The conservation area is representative of urban planning for the 19th century industrial and mercantile class with Hamilton Square itself a particularly excellent example, reflected in the grade I listing of the terraces.</p> <p>Hamilton Square and its gridded network of streets were conceived along the lines of Edinburgh New Town: large houses in a formal arrangement on an elevated, flat site sufficiently distanced from the industrial docks and riverside.</p> <p>The societal hierarchy of the time is expressed via the formal frontages and private central garden, with servicing access via backstreets. Similar terraces can be found in other parts of the conservation area, though these are oriented to the street rather than a square.</p> <p><b>The 19th Century Town and Municipality.</b> The conservation area is essentially a Late Georgian and Victorian town built on what was a greenfield site with few prior constraints, growing from a population of 110 in 1801 to 51,649 in 1861.</p> <p>Birkenhead grew around Graham’s grid of streets in a patchwork fashion rather than along old routes or around an ancient church or market place or within defensive walls.</p> <p>The town therefore illustrates late Georgian, but especially Victorian and Edwardian economic activity, governance / administration and social structure.</p> <p><b>The Movement of People, Materials and Goods.</b> The development of the conservation area reflects two strands of</p>

Value	Description
	<p>improvements to transportation in the 19th century.</p> <p>The first strand was the opening of the steam ferry service to Liverpool from Woodside which made Birkenhead attractive to holiday makers, day trippers and those who could afford to build a house and commute to Liverpool from the Wirral.</p> <p>The other strand is the railway: branch lines, yards and good sheds serving docks and industry, which, with improvements to ships and shipping, drove the town’s prosperity and growth.</p> <p>The railway and tramline network also saw Hamilton Square and the town centre ‘bypassed’ by the middle, commercial and mercantile classes as Woodside became a rail, tram and rail terminus from 1878. In addition, the Mersey and Wirral lines, served by a new tunnel under the river, opened in 1886.</p> <p>Both improvements to transportation enabled commuters to live in leafier, coastal, less industrialised and less densely populated parts of the Wirral peninsula.</p>
Historical: Associative	<p><b>Birkenhead Priory</b>, earliest known activity and landowner in Birkenhead and operator of the first known ferry boat across the Mersey.</p> <p><b>William Laird (1780-1841)</b>, initial developer of Hamilton Square and Birkenhead as a town, and an early mass employer in Birkenhead at his shipbuilding works. 63 Hamilton Square, the largest house with the largest garden, with views towards Liverpool and the ferry launch, was built as his home.</p> <p>Although he simultaneously developed Birkenhead as an attractive suburb and an industrial area, in the early 1820s he could not have foreseen the future impacts of the railway system and ever-larger ships in bringing the waterside industry, its attendant infrastructure, and its workforce, ever-closer to his version of Edinburgh’s New Town.</p> <p>At the same time the development of trains and trams made more rural areas further afield accessible as places to live for the middle, industrial and mercantile classes for whom Hamilton Square was built.</p> <p><b>James Gillespie Graham (1776-1855)</b>, architect of the bulk of the Square and designer of the 0.25 by 1 mile grid layout</p>

Value	Description	Value	Description
	<p>bounded by Hamilton Street, Conway Street, Duke Street and Cleveland Street.</p> <p>Primarily a designer of country houses and churches, Graham laid out the Moray Estate of Edinburgh's New Town, including the design of terraces and crescents, shortly before his work in Birkenhead, his client at Edinburgh being the brother-in-law of William Laird.</p>		<p>The urban plan and urban character of the earliest developments of the town in the 1820s set the tone that was followed by successive designers and generations.</p>
	<p><b>John Laird (1805-1874)</b>, eldest son of William Laird and resident of Birkenhead from 1824, John joined his father in business in 1828.</p> <p>He drove the innovation and expansion of the shipbuilding business and developed Birkenhead Docks from 1844 to rival Liverpool, though the two soon merged.</p> <p>He was one of the town's first Commissioners in 1833 and retired from business in 1861 to become Birkenhead's first Member of Parliament following the town's incorporation. He served as an MP until 1874. He also made several donations to the improvement of Birkenhead, and a statue was erected in tribute to him in Hamilton Square within a year of his death in 1876.</p>		<p><b>Polite architecture:</b> this started with the late Georgian composed and formal classicism of Hamilton Square and echoed in other buildings and terraces erected between the 1820s and 40s.</p> <p>Later developments in the conservation area demonstrate the evolutions of architectural tastes and style through the Victorian, Edwardian and early 20th century periods to give a rich and varied townscape, united by a desire for architecture to keep with the times and impress. This is particularly the case for commercial, transportation and municipal buildings as well as the earlier terraces of housing.</p>
	<p><b>Birkenhead Urban District Council / Wirral Council</b>, builder and occupier of the Town Hall and Treasury House offices. Birkenhead has been a centre of local government and administration since 1833, and incorporation in 1861. Wirral Council, formed in 1974 retains its principal offices in the town centre.</p>		<p><b>Materials:</b> imported ashlar sandstone for Hamilton Square itself and a number of buildings outside.</p> <p>The railway allowed factory-made brick to be used in later phases of development, and railway and sea connections enabled the use of imported granite and Portland stone where prestige was sought. There are several examples of terracotta cladding in buildings erected or re-faced in the first half of the 20th century.</p> <p>Welsh slate is the principal roofing material of most 19th century 20th century buildings.</p>
Aesthetic	<p><b>Planned gridiron network of streets with a formal square at Hamilton Square.</b> This gives street spaces a distinctive linear character and levels of enclosure by the buildings that line them. The conservation area appraisal describes 'endless views' along the broad, straight thoroughfares of the grid as a characteristic of the place.</p> <p><b>Urban character of buildings</b> both in terms of density, height and scale, but also in terms of mixtures and juxtapositions of uses and activities. This urban character is a result of the grid-like plan, and many of the earliest buildings being terraces of three storeys plus basement or attic (four storeys in the case of Hamilton Square itself). The largest green open space, the centre of Hamilton Square is urban in character due to its design and context.</p>		<p><b>Skyline:</b> the domed Town Hall tower and the square Italianate tower of Hamilton Square Station dominate the skyline and are landmarks visible from across the Mersey. Only the three ventilation towers of the Mersey Tunnel compete.</p> <p>Although there is a scattering of taller office blocks in the vicinity of the conservation area, they are neither especially memorable nor landmarks by comparison.</p>
		Communal	<p><b>'Ferry Across the Mersey'</b> was a hit 1964 Merseybeat single by Gerry and the Pacemakers. It refers to the ferry service running between Liverpool's Pierhead, Woodside and Seacombe. It is today one of many tourist attractions related to Liverpool's popular culture heritage. Tens of thousands of people, including many tourists from abroad or elsewhere in the UK take the ferry every year.</p>

Value	Description	Value	Description
	<p><b>Commemorative Structures and Plaques.</b> These reflect the people and events that were and often are still valued by the people of Birkenhead. Their locations, design and materials reflect the culture of the times these commemorations were created.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. John Laird Statue, 1877, Hamilton Square</li> <li>b. Monument to Queen Victoria, 1901, Hamilton Square</li> <li>c. Edward VII Memorial Clocktower, 1911, Clifton Crescent</li> <li>d. Birkenhead War Memorial, 1925, Hamilton Square</li> <li>e. Wilfred Owen Memorial, 2019, Duncan Street</li> <li>f. Various tablets, plaques and memorial trees sited in front of the Town Hall, Hamilton Square</li> </ul> <p>At least two of the above have been moved to different location by later generations, reflecting changes in priorities or changes in the esteem held in these memorials.</p> <p><b>Places of Spiritual Value:</b> the national Christian revival of the 19th century that coincided with the growth of Birkenhead resulted in several places of worship and associated halls and schools being erected in the 'Graham grid' of streets. The majority of these were demolished in the 20th century, perhaps reflecting both the de-population of the town centre and its fringes, and the national trend of declining congregations of all denominations.</p> <p>A local factor could be the grid layout of the conservation area: it meant most churches and chapels occupy mid-terrace, or, at best, corner locations which undermines the landmark status and likely wider communal value of these buildings. The lack of churchyards and burial grounds also effectively renders the sites of churches as chapels as mere building plots once worship ceases.</p> <p>It is perhaps telling that the one surviving 19th century church is outside of the 'Graham grid' and has a small burial ground. The recent establishment of a new place of worship by a denomination originating in Hong Kong perhaps reflects changing demographics in the town centre, and its growing population.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>g. Roman Catholic Church of St Werburgh, 1835-37, Grange Road</li> <li>h. The Church of God in Birkenhead, 2021, Conway Street</li> </ul>

## **Chapter 4**

# **Conservation Area Boundary Review**

**This chapter reviews the conservation area boundary. The proposed conservation area boundary is the study area for the conservation area regeneration plan**

**4.1** The conservation area boundary is the study area for the Plan; therefore it is important to review its extent to ensure it covers a cohesive area or architectural and historic interest. The existing boundary was designated in 1994 and reviewed in 2006. The review did not recommend any changes to the boundary.

**4.2** Due to the dual focus of the Plan on both the conservation area and its regeneration, the boundary review will consider the regeneration benefits of the proposed boundary change.

**4.3** The review of the boundary has identified four principal extensions to the conservation area boundary:

- South: Argyle Street to Birkenhead Central Station
- West: Conway Street and Dacre Street
- North: buildings and infrastructure related to Morpeth Branch Dock and Woodside Lairage
- Southeast: Birkenhead County Court, Hamilton Street

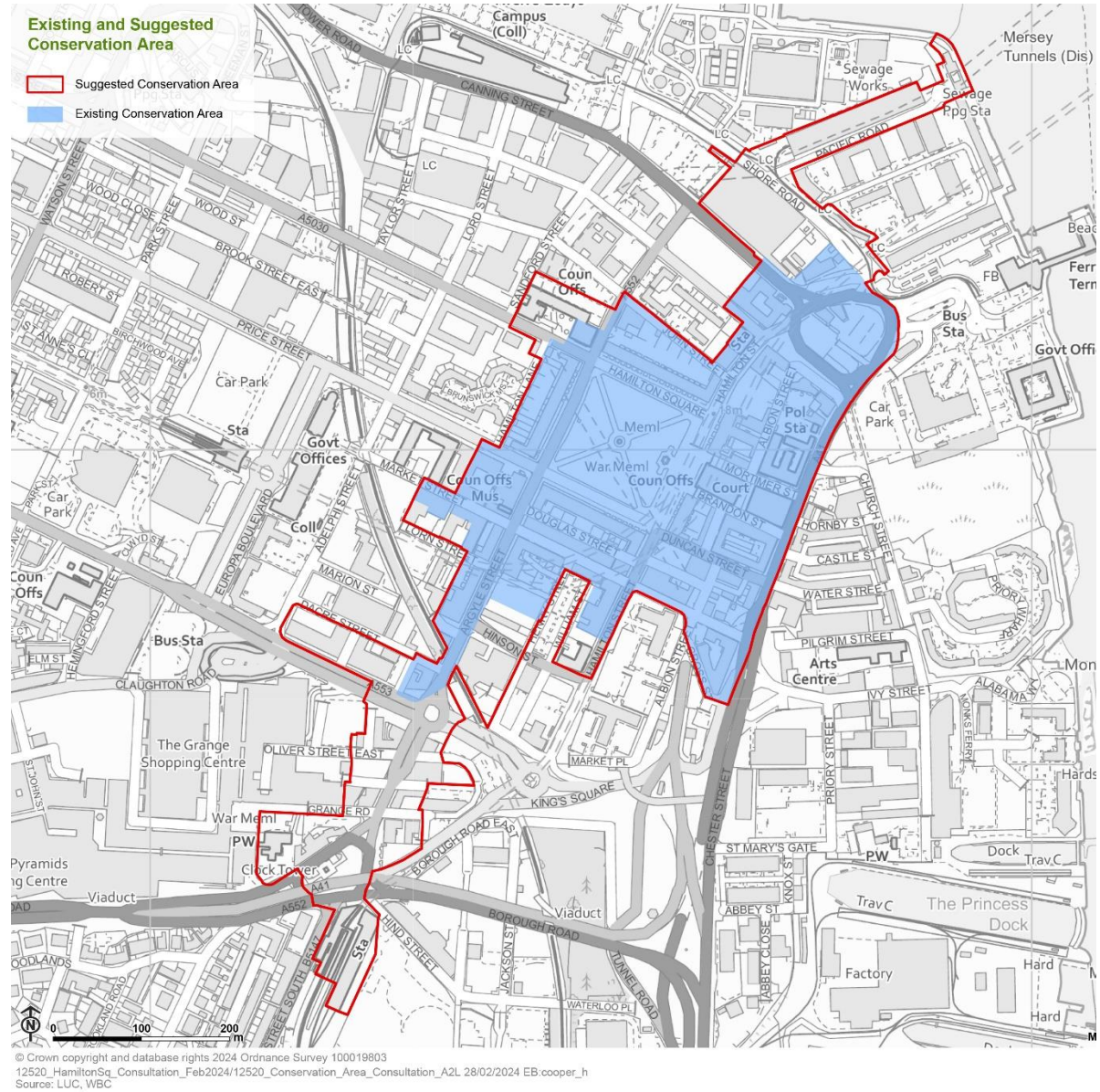
**4.4** These four boundary alterations will each be discussed in turn, using the same sequence of analysis. Figure 4.1, overleaf, shows the existing and proposed conservation area boundary.



Chapter 4  
Conservation Area Boundary Review

Hamilton Square Conservation Area Regeneration Plan  
April 2024

Figure 4.1: Existing and Proposed Conservation Area Boundary



## Extension South: Argyle Street to Birkenhead Central Station

### Historical development and existing character

**4.5** Although there were intended to be several intersecting main thoroughfares in Graham's Edinburgh New Town-style grid of streets, only Argyle Street and Hamilton Street (with Market Street linking them) that became what can be regarded as mixed-use high streets. This is perhaps owing to these streets being adjacent to the town's market hall and market square, close to all three ferry landings, close to the town's earliest railway termini (from 1840 at Grange Lane and from 1844 at Monks Ferry) and the town's earliest group of municipal buildings (the town hall, police station and courts).

**4.6** However, at the same time that the streets within Graham's grid were developing, so too was effectively a 'rival' high street at Grange Lane (now Grange Road), which terminated at its eastern end in the town's Haymarket and the adjoining 'Market Place South.' It seems having north and south entrances to the substantial market hall, each with its own outdoor market place served to spread rather than focus commercial activity in the town. The commercial town centre therefore occupied one edge of Graham's grid but also a network of streets outside of the grid.

**4.7** On this basis it was logical that the line and width of Argyle Street continued south, beyond the edge of Graham's grid at Conway Street to meet Grange Lane. This stretch of Argyle Street consequently developed over the course of the mid to late 19th century in the same mixed use 'high street' manner as the rest of Argyle Street, within Graham's grid, and Grange Lane, outside of Graham's grid. Grange Lane and Argyle Street's importance as Birkenhead's high street and main thoroughfares was no doubt boosted by the opening of Birkenhead Central Station a short distance south of the junction of the two in 1886.

**4.8** In the longer term, Grange Lane prevailed as the town's high street, becoming the preferred location for larger shops, department stores, and, in the mid-20th century, the new location of the market hall. The southern stretch of Argyle Street performed an ancillary role to Grange Lane, and was itself the site of the town's post office, the Argyle Theatre, pubs, banks and comparable shop premises to Grange Lane.

**4.9** Although it is outside of the grid of streets conceived by James Gillespie Graham, this stretch of Argyle Street continues the grid's axis and width, and it is lined with buildings that are similar in age, scale and character to the rest of Argyle Street, albeit with a greater concentration of late Victorian and early 20th century buildings. This stretch of Argyle Street is also regularly intersected by side streets, though not at the same right angle as Graham's grid. These

side streets are similar spatially and in character to the side streets of the conservation area.

**4.10** At its southern end, Argyle Street forms a broad Y junction with Clifton Crescent and Wilbraham Street, with the latter leading to Birkenhead Central Station. To the west is an incomplete cluster of late Georgian buildings dispersed among later developments: St Werburgh's Church and its presbytery, and the surviving earliest section of Clifton Crescent. The area between the crescent and the station building was cleared c.1970 to build the present flyover serving the Queensway Tunnel. This necessitated the relocation of the King Edward VII Memorial Clocktower from a traffic island in front of the station to its present location.

### Heritage Values this area shares with the existing Conservation Area:

- Historic Illustrative: the Georgian Suburb: Clifton Crescent, partial extension of grid layout along Argyle Street
- Historic Illustrative: the Victorian Municipality: the Old Post Office, high street character, former Haymarket
- Historic Illustrative: the Movement of People, Materials and Goods: Birkenhead Central Station, former tram route
- Aesthetic: Urban Character: strong building lines and rhythm of building plots, consistent building heights and character, active frontages, mix of uses.
- Aesthetic: Polite Architecture: styles ranging from late Georgian classical, the revival and commercial styles of the Victorian era and exuberant Edwardian neo-baroque through to modern and classical revival styles of the interwar period.
- Aesthetic: Materials: mixture of brick, stucco, and imported facing stone; slate roofs; timber windows, doors and shopfronts, some metal.
- Communal: Commemorative Edward VII Memorial Clocktower, Clifton Crescent; Roman Catholic Church of St Werburgh, and the Church of God in Birkenhead (a Christian denomination that originated in Hong Kong)

### Visual relationships with the existing conservation area

**4.11** There is a continuation of the linear views along Argyle Street. Birkenhead Central Station forms a termination of the vista south along Argyle Street.

### Listed Buildings in this area

**4.12** The following listed buildings are in this proposed extension to the conservation area (all grade II):

- The Former Post Office, Argyle Street
- Edward VII Memorial Clocktower, Clifton Crescent
- Roman Catholic Church of St Werburgh, Grange Road
- Presbytery to the Church of St Werburgh, Grange Road

#### Non-designated heritage assets in this area

**4.13** Based on the assessment of the area and references to documentary sources, the following are considered to be non-designated heritage assets, and should be considered for local listing:

- 63 Argyle Street
- Former Old Post Office Hotel, Argyle Street
- 73-75 Argyle Street
- 88-94 Argyle Street
- 106-112 Argyle Street
- George and Dragon Hotel, Argyle Street
- North side of Clifton Crescent, including the former Central Hotel and the buildings to either side
- Mersey Railway Building, 35 Clifton Crescent
- Birkenhead Central Station, South Argyle Street
- Former Mersey Railway Offices, South Argyle Street
- Sy Werburgh's Parish Room, Grange Road
- Former Warehouse and Auction Rooms, Grange Road
- Former Waterloo Pub, 63 Grange Road East
- 77 Grange Road East
- Fireman's Arms, Oliver Street East
- 3-7 Wilbraham Street

#### Potential regeneration benefit of this proposed boundary change

**4.14** Based on our assessment of the suite of town centre regeneration documents, we believe there are the following synergies between regenerating the conservation area and the wider regeneration of the town centre. The Catalyst Projects appear in the Birkenhead 2040 Framework:

- **Catalyst Project 2: Dock Branch Park.** The limb of the Park that runs along Argyle Street from Conway Street to Central Birkenhead Station coincides with the Argyle Street 'spine' of this proposed southward extension of the conservation area. There is potential for the creation of the park to cross-pollinate with wider improvements to the vitality and character of the area: addressing

underused buildings and gap sites, improving the appearance and uses of the wider environment along this stretch of the park. The park could be a springboard to heritage-led funding for the conservation area and vice versa.

- **Catalyst Project 3: Birkenhead Commercial District.** The focus of this project is the commercial town centre, to the west of the bus station. However it includes both Conway Street and Grange Road up to their junctions with Argyle Street. There is therefore potential for the catalyst project to focus on improving connectivity and the public realm, while heritage funding pots could be focussed on the buildings and gap sites along these streets where they enter and border the proposed conservation area boundary. Similarly, heritage-focussed area-based funding could also assist with delivering the public realm and connectivity improvements of the Commercial District.
- **Catalyst Project 4: Birkenhead Landing.** Approximately three quarters of the proposed conservation area extension lies within this much larger regeneration area. Its focus is on removing and downscaling infrastructure associated with the Queensway Tunnel and unlocking the potential of the sites and public spaces freed up – including improvements to Birkenhead Central Station and creating a new square in front of it. Conservation area designation would provide an additional strand of potential funding sources (for heritage-led regeneration) and supports a placemaking approach to improving this area. It also gives a statutory basis for managing change to the many non-designated heritage assets in this area.
- The conservation area extension would enable the full length of Argyle Street as a highway and piece of public realm to be treated holistically as one space without the distinction of the part in the conservation area and the part outside the conservation area. There will therefore be a consistent approach to materials, character and specification of public realm and highway works the full length of the street.
- Extending the conservation area would open up the same heritage-led funding opportunities along the whole length of Argyle Street and to a degree its side streets. Such opportunities could be a scheme like Townscape Heritage or a HSHAZ, where there is funding to re-use, repair and restore buildings, improve the public realm, and address gap sites. To a member of the public or a business or building owner, the present conservation area extent may seem highly arbitrary.
- It extends the 'heritage heart' of the 2040 Framework to reach a key gateway to the town: Birkenhead Central



Station, as well as the new neighbourhood planned at Hind Street. Improvements to and investment in the extended conservation area will indirectly benefit the new neighbourhood.

- It brings a stronger placemaking influence and a special regard to the conservation area to the redesign of the space currently blighted by the Borough Road flyover. The conservation area may open up additional streams of funding or allow for ancillary and complementary improvements to the buildings and sites in the vicinity of this space. It would present more opportunity to use the improvements to the space to proactively address the long-term issues affecting the properties at Clifton Crescent and the southern end of Argyle Street.
- It would provide a more robust framework for locally distinctive approaches to the re-use of buildings and gap sites.

#### Extension West: Conway Street and Dacre Street

##### Historical development and existing character

**4.15** Conway Street and Dacre Street form part of the grid of streets laid out according to James Gillespie Graham's plan for Birkenhead. Conway Street was intended to be one of the grander streets. Accordingly, among other developments, it was the initial site of Birkenhead's General Post Office, which may have been built in the 1850s or 60s. Post Office Buildings, a smart parade of six shops with dwellings above, was erected alongside the post office soon after. A furniture storage warehouse was built behind the parade, on Dacre Street in the late 19th century.

**4.16** The land to the west of the Post Office may well have been reserved as a future school site for a few decades. The Birkenhead School Board Higher Elementary School (a secondary or high school) was built in 1903. Educating both boys and girls, the school is vast in its footprint and scale, and is a landmark in the town centre.

**4.17** The post office relocated to new larger premises on Argyle Street in 1907 and consequently the former post office was remodelled and converted into a cinema in 1916 and operated as such until 1956.

**4.18** These two urban 'blocks' of buildings continue the building line, density and urban character of the adjacent Argyle Street and form an attractive linear group despite the later widening of Conway Street, which necessitated the demolition of the buildings lining the southern side.

##### Heritage Values this area shares with the existing Conservation Area:

- Historic Illustrative: the Victorian Municipality: former post office, former high school, 19th century street layout
- Aesthetic: Urban Character: strong building lines and rhythm of building plots, consistent building heights and character, active frontages, mix of uses.
- Aesthetic: Polite Architecture: a long formal Victorian Italianate terrace with warehouses to the rear; former post office remodelled into a free classical style; former school built in a free classical style with a symmetrical street frontage that builds up to a central range topped by a cupola.
- Aesthetic: Materials: handmade brick to the earlier buildings, mass-made brick with stone or terracotta dressings to the later buildings. Slate roofs; timber windows, doors and shopfronts.
- Communal: the former school will hold communal value to past pupils and as a public building, plus the building is a distinctive landmark in the town and its skyline.

##### Visual relationships with the existing conservation area

**4.19** The Conway and Dacre Street buildings form linear group and vista with the block of buildings within the conservation area at the corner of Conway Street and Argyle Street. There is also a glimpsed view of the furniture warehouse and school cupola over the Dock Branch Railway from Argyle Street.

##### Listed Buildings in this area

**4.20** The Wirral Education Centre aka the Conway Centre and originally named the Birkenhead School Board Higher Elementary School is a grade II listed building.

##### Non-designated heritage assets in this area

**4.21** Based on the assessment of the area and references to documentary sources, the following are considered to be non-designated heritage assets, should be considered for local listing:

- Post Office Buildings, 32-44 Conway Street
- Former cinema, 46 Conway Street
- Former furniture storage warehouse, 11-15 Dacre Street

##### Potential regeneration benefit of this proposed boundary change

**4.22** Based on our assessment of the suite of town centre regeneration documents, we believe there are the following

synergies between regenerating the conservation area and the wider regeneration of the town centre. The Catalyst Projects appear in the Birkenhead 2040 Framework:

- **Catalyst Project 3: Birkenhead Commercial District.** The focus of this project is the commercial town centre, to the west of the bus station. However it includes the highway at Conway Street up to its junction with Argyle Street. There is therefore potential for the catalyst project to focus on improving connectivity and the public realm, while heritage funding pots could be focussed on the buildings and gaps sites along Conway Street. Similarly, heritage-focussed area-based funding could also assist with delivering the public realm and connectivity improvements of the Commercial District.
- The conservation area extension would provide more funding opportunities for the non-designated buildings in this area and supports improvements to the public realm that are the same specification and standard as the conservation area.
- Conservation area extension would support treating this stretch of Conway Street more holistically as a small regeneration area with important interfaces to Conway Street, the Dock Branch Railway and Argyle Street. The buildings, gap sites and their public realm could be addressed together rather than in isolation as part of a scheme of conservation area enhancement.

### Extension North: buildings and infrastructure related to Morpeth Branch Dock and Woodside Lairage

#### Historical development and existing character

**4.23** This area developed in a fairly short period of time following the opening of the Morpeth Branch Dock in 1866-68 and the construction of a goods landing stage attached to the Woodside passenger ferry landing stage. The gatehouse piers and walls at the entrance to Shore Road, then a private dock road, are dated 1868 and provided security. The long transit sheds to the southeast of the Morpeth Branch Dock were built in c.1872 and allowed the transfer of goods arriving by ship to be transferred to rail and vice versa. In order to better serve Morpeth Branch Dock, the Cheshire Lines Committee extended its existing goods station located between Shore Road and Canning Street significantly in the 1880s, building a large brick goods shed in two stages in its house style.

**4.24** The transit sheds, Cheshire Lines Goods station and goods landing stage were all linked by rail to Woodside Lairage, a large building for accommodating livestock in transit. Woodside Lairage is now demolished and has been redeveloped as Woodside Business Park, but its two storey offices fronting Shore Road and dated 1906, remain in situ.

**4.25** The Mersey Tunnel ventilation tower was built 1925-34 and is the tallest of the three south of the Mersey. It houses giant fans that ventilate the tunnel.

**4.26** The area includes along Shore Road a section of the rails linking Woodside Ferry Terminal to Wirral Transport Museum. The rails are still used as a heritage tramway. A branch of tram tacks branches from Shore Road into the former transit sheds at Pacific Road. Much of this section of rail along Shore Road is set within a (modern) stone setted surface.

**4.27** Although this area is largely buildings relating to the docks while the conservation area is primarily the mixed use town centre, the character of the existing conservation area begins to change along Hamilton Street with Hamilton Square Station, the Pier Hotel and the pumping station for the railway tunnel. This area continues the transport theme and is a cohesive group of buildings, that demonstrates how the town centre and docks existed and operated side by side.

#### Heritage Values this area shares with the existing Conservation Area:

- **Historic Illustrative: the Movement of People, Materials and Goods:** the former Cheshire Lines station and goods warehouses; the Pacific Road transit sheds; the Mersey Road Tunnel ventilation tower; the dock gateway, offices and ancillary buildings; the tramway tracks.
- **Aesthetic: Urban Character:** strong building lines and imposing buildings, generally consistent building heights and character, active frontages, related historic building and public realm uses.
- **Aesthetic: Polite Architecture:** formal design of the Shore Road gateway, Cheshire Lines buildings, transit sheds and ventilation tower.
- **Aesthetic: Materials:** primarily brick with stone dressings; the transit sheds are usually entirely stone walled. Slate roofs. Stone setts to the tramway.

#### Visual relationships with the existing conservation area

**4.28** From Shore Road there are good views uphill over the Cheshire Lines building and gateway towards the Pumping Station, Pier Hotel and tower of Hamilton Square Station/ Looking out from the existing conservation area, the ventilation tower is a key building on the skyline of the waterfront while the Shore Road gateway formalises the transition from the town to its formerly private docks.

#### Listed Buildings in this area

**4.29** The following listed buildings are in this proposed extension to the conservation area (all grade II):



- Transit Sheds on Pacific Road
- Mersey Tunnel Ventilation Tower, Pacific Road
- Police Booth and Gate Piers at Entrance to Woodside Lairage, Shore Road

#### Non-designated heritage assets in this area

**4.30** Based on the assessment of the area and references to documentary sources, the following are considered to be non-designated heritage assets, should be considered for local listing:

- Cheshire Lines Committee Goods Sheds, Shore Road / Canning Street
- Former Woodside Lairage Offices, Shore Road
- Former dockside railway line, Shore Road

#### Potential regeneration benefit of this proposed boundary change

**4.31** Based on our assessment of the suite of town centre regeneration documents, we believe there are the following synergies between regenerating the conservation area and the wider regeneration of the town centre. The Catalyst Projects appear in the Birkenhead 2040 Framework:

- **Catalyst Project 7: Mass Transit:** The proposed extension includes the first stretch of the proposed tramway from Woodside Ferry Terminal to Wirral Waters. The opening of this public transit line could go hand in hand with the re-use of buildings and enhancement of the public realm so that this first stretch of the system makes a positive first impression of Birkenhead and is vibrant and locally distinctive.
- The extension would bring the conservation area up to the riverside and the Wirral Circular Trail. There is better scope to integrate the conservation area (through redevelopment, public realm improvements, wayfinding) and regeneration activity on the riverside.
- The extension would raise the awareness of and formalise the area's heritage value. Though there are three listed buildings in the area, the conservation area extension would recognise and give planning weight to the heritage values of the wider area.
- The extension would provide an additional incentive for a distinctive, placemaking approach to the potential redevelopment of the area between Canning Street and the waterfront; key buildings and characteristics of the area would need to be sensitively retained and integrated into new development. This is especially important given the area's location alongside the

Woodside Ferry Terminal, a key arrival point that forms people's first impressions of Birkenhead and the Wirral.

#### Extension Southeast: Birkenhead County Court, 76 Hamilton Street

**4.32** This purpose-built courthouse and offices appears to date from the early 1970s. Its construction probably allowed the county court to move out of the courthouse shared with the magistrates court, which now occupies the entire court building behind the town hall. The opportunity to redevelop the site as a courthouse probably came about with the demolition of the Victorian market hall that stood on the opposite side of Hamilton Street, effectively taking away the area's retail focus and opening it up for civic and office uses. The building's architect is unknown.

**4.33** The building continues to house the Birkenhead County Court. It occupies the Hamilton Street – Hinson Street corner of its site, with the remainder used for surface car parking and a raised parking deck.

#### Heritage Values this area shares with the existing Conservation Area:

- **Historic Illustrative:** although built long after the 'Victorian Municipality' era of Birkenhead's growth, the courthouse nonetheless was built to accommodate a civic function of the town centre and relieve the space limitations of the Victorian courthouse behind the town hall. It forms a functional group with the Magistrates Court, police station and town hall that are all within the conservation area, plus many of the offices in the conservation area that are occupied by legal firms.
- **Aesthetic: Urban Character:** the corner location of the building creates strong building lines that can be traced back along Hamilton Street and Hinson Street despite there being gaps in the building lines. It is an imposing building, whose height and scale is generally consistent with the wider conservation area, and has fairly active frontages, especially to the upper floors. Generally the building's siting, form, massing and corner entrance mirror the traditional corner plots of the conservation area.
- **Aesthetic: Polite Architecture:** the courthouse reflects office and civic architecture of the mid-20th century through its exposed concrete structural frame and regular grid-like layout of openings and textured aggregate panels to the upper floors. The elevations are divided into regular bays by the concrete frame and projecting concrete pilasters, with the fin-like concrete mullions providing additional rhythm.

#### Visual relationships with the existing conservation area

**4.34** The Hamilton Street elevation aligns with the buildings to the north, helping to maintain the grid-like linear character of the street and channelling the vista along the street to the distant towers of the town hall and Hamilton Square Station.

**4.35** This building is the only piece of the former building line along the north side of Hinson Street. It helps to channel the vista towards Argyle Street.

#### Non-designated heritage assets in this area

**4.36** There are no listed buildings, and the County Courthouse is considered to be a non-designated heritage asset that should be considered for local listing.

#### Potential regeneration benefit of this proposed boundary change

**4.37** Based on our assessment of the suite of town centre regeneration documents, the principal benefits of this proposed extension to the conservation area are:

- It would recognise the heritage value of this building, which is illustrative of court re-organisation and courthouse building of the mid-twentieth century.
- It could provide impetus to address the gap in the building line between the courthouse and 56 Hamilton Street, thus enhancing the conservation area.
- Similarly the building provides a good indication of how both sides of Hinson Street could be redeveloped in terms of building line, height, massing and active frontage.

## Chapter 5

### Study Area Analysis

This analysis of the present state of the study area informs the Case for Change

#### Planning Policy Review

##### National Policy

**5.1 Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas Act 1990:** Section 72 of the Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas Act (1990) states that attention should be paid to the preservation and enhancement of the “character or appearance of that area”<sup>5</sup>.

**5.2 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF):** Section 16 of the NPPF<sup>6</sup> (Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment) outlines a structure for local authorities to assess the conservation and enhancement of proposals on the historic environment.

**5.3** Paragraph 196 identifies that: “Plans should set out a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment, including heritage assets most at risk through neglect, decay or other threats. This strategy should take into account:

- a) the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets, and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;
- b) the wider social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits that conservation of the historic environment can bring;
- c) the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness; and
- d) opportunities to draw on the contribution made by the historic environment to the character of a place.

**5.4** The conservation area regeneration plan fulfils the requirements of paragraph 196 of the NPPF. It also supports overarching local policies to achieve these objectives.

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<sup>5</sup> Legislation.gov.uk, 2013. Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 [online] Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1990/9/section/72>

<sup>6</sup> Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities, 2023. National Planning Policy Framework [online] Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/64f991c99ee0f2000fb7c001/NPPF\\_Sept\\_23.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/64f991c99ee0f2000fb7c001/NPPF_Sept_23.pdf)

**5.5** Paragraph 197 concerns the review and designation of conservation area boundaries. It states: "...local planning authorities should ensure that an area justifies such status because of its special architectural or historic interest, and that the concept of conservation is not devalued through the designation of areas that lack special interest."

**5.6** The boundary review carried out to prepare the conservation area regeneration plan is informed by an understanding of the existing conservation area's special architectural and historic interest. It is preceded by a review of the conservation area's heritage values.

**5.7** Paragraph 201 outlines that in order to assess potential impact or risk of a proposal on the historic environment, local planning authorities "should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset)". The conservation area regeneration plan fulfils the requirement to identify and assess the significance of the conservation area.

#### Local Policies

**5.8 The Wirral Local Plan 2021-2037:** The Regulation 19, 2021-2037 Wirral Local Plan<sup>7</sup> was submitted for examination on 26<sup>th</sup> October 2022.

**5.9** Hamilton Square Conservation Area contains the largest square of Grade I listed buildings outside of London and is an area of national significance.

**5.10** Any development proposals (including any located within the masterplan area(s)) will only be permitted if they have careful regard to heritage assets and strategic views (**Policy RA 4**) or conserve, preserve and enhance the historic setting and character. Any potential risk for harm or loss to the built heritage must be accompanied by a Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) (**Policy WP2.1, W2 6 and WD 2.1**).

**5.11** Any improvements to historic buildings will be permitted where a "sensitive approach to design and specification ensures that the significance of the asset is not compromised" (**Policy WS 8.3**). Proposals for tall buildings will be accepted if they respect and add to the heritage context, distinctiveness, and identity of Birkenhead (**Policy WS 7.5**).

**5.12 Birkenhead 2040 Framework:** The 2040 Birkenhead Framework<sup>8</sup> recognises Hamilton Square as the "heritage heart with key assets". The cluster of "Georgian buildings,

Laird Grid legacy and Birkenhead Park" are three of the most prominent heritage assets within this area.

**5.13** This framework sets out a draft twenty-year plan of proposals to regenerate the town centre. This draft has undergone an eight-week consultation period that has informed the Framework.

#### Historic Environment Designations

**5.14** There are listed buildings, a conservation area and non-designated heritage assets within the study area of the conservation area regeneration plan. There are no scheduled monuments, historic parks and gardens, world heritage sites designated wrecks, historic battlefields or areas of archaeological interest within the study area.

**5.15** The conservation area is the subject of this Case for Change document, and its boundary and significance have already been discussed. This section will therefore discuss listed buildings and non-designated heritage assets.

#### Listed Buildings

**5.16** There are 51 listed building entries<sup>9</sup> within the study area of which there are five grade I listed buildings, three grade II\* and 43 grade II.<sup>10</sup>

**5.17** Many of these list entries cover more than one building, the long terraces of Hamilton Square being a prime example where five list entries cover 63 individual properties. If individual listed buildings (such as individual terraced houses) and structures (such as telephone boxes and statues)<sup>11</sup> are counted, there are 175 listed buildings in the study area. Over one third of these are the terraces of Hamilton Square, with terraces such as 38-50 Argyle Street and the 'Market Cross' terraces each being single list entries that encompass several individual buildings.

**5.18** There is a high concentration of listed buildings around the original core of the conservation area, at Hamilton Square and the adjacent streets, though there is a spread of listed buildings across the entire study area. The concentration of listed buildings at the core of the conservation area and the wider spread across the study area means that the impact of changes to these listed buildings or their setting must maintain or enhance their special interest, and any harm should be exceptional reasons that may justify this harm.

<sup>7</sup> Wirral Council, 2022. Wirral Local Plan (draft)

<sup>8</sup> Wirral Council, 2021. Birkenhead 2040 Framework Summary [online] Available at: <https://haveyoursay.wirral.gov.uk/regenerating-birkenhead-2>

<sup>9</sup> 44 in the existing conservation area, eight in the extensions.

<sup>10</sup> Within the existing conservation area, this is five grade I listed building, three grade II\* listed buildings and 36 grade II.

<sup>11</sup> But excluding buildings that are deemed listed by being attached to or within the curtilage of a listed building

### Non-designated heritage assets

**5.19** The Local Heritage List for Wirral is at a very early stage of being compiled. The Birkenhead Culture and Heritage Strategy Mapping Research (2021) identifies 14 buildings of architectural merit within the study area as part of a wider survey of Birkenhead. As this survey forms part of the evidence base of the Birkenhead 2040 Framework and its supporting plans, it is logical for these to be classed as non-designated heritage assets for the purposes of the conservation area regeneration plan.

**5.20** The Hamilton Square Conservation Area Appraisal (2006) identifies four buildings of local interest of architectural merit, though one of these, the Woodside Hotel, has since been demolished and two are identified as buildings of architectural merit in the Culture and Heritage Strategy Mapping Research. The appraisal therefore adds only one building to those identified in the Culture and Heritage Strategy Mapping Research.

**5.21** In addition to the above, the review of the conservation area boundary carried out for the conservation area regeneration plan (see chapter 4 above) has identified 21 additional non-designated heritage assets within the proposed conservation area boundary extensions. These are non-designated heritage assets within the proposed extensions to the conservation area have been individually named in Chapter 4. Further non-designated heritage assets have also been identified within the 2006 conservation area boundary as part of the review of the conservation area's significance.

### Buildings that make a positive contribution to the conservation area

**5.22** The non-designated heritage assets and listed buildings are shown as both shaded green in Figure 5.1, as they all make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area. In terms of the NPPF,<sup>12</sup> the loss of any of the green-shaded buildings, listed or otherwise could amount to substantial harm to the character and appearance of the conservation area.

**5.23** Figure 5.1 shows at a glance the overall high quality of the study area's building stock: there is a very high proportion of buildings that each make a positive contribution to its character and appearance.

**5.24** The relatively small proportion of buildings that make a neutral contribution tend to fall into at least one of the following categories:

- Historic buildings that have undergone substantial modernisations or unsympathetic alterations

- Infill development or large building extensions that maintain the conservation area's urban character and building lines, but are of low aesthetic value.
- Infill development that has been quite altered since it was built, thus lowering its aesthetic value.

**5.25** The buildings that make a negative contribution are so few that they may be listed in full here:

- Utilitarian electricity substation buildings
- A utilitarian commercial garage
- A suburban style modern house / office
- The Borough Road flyover

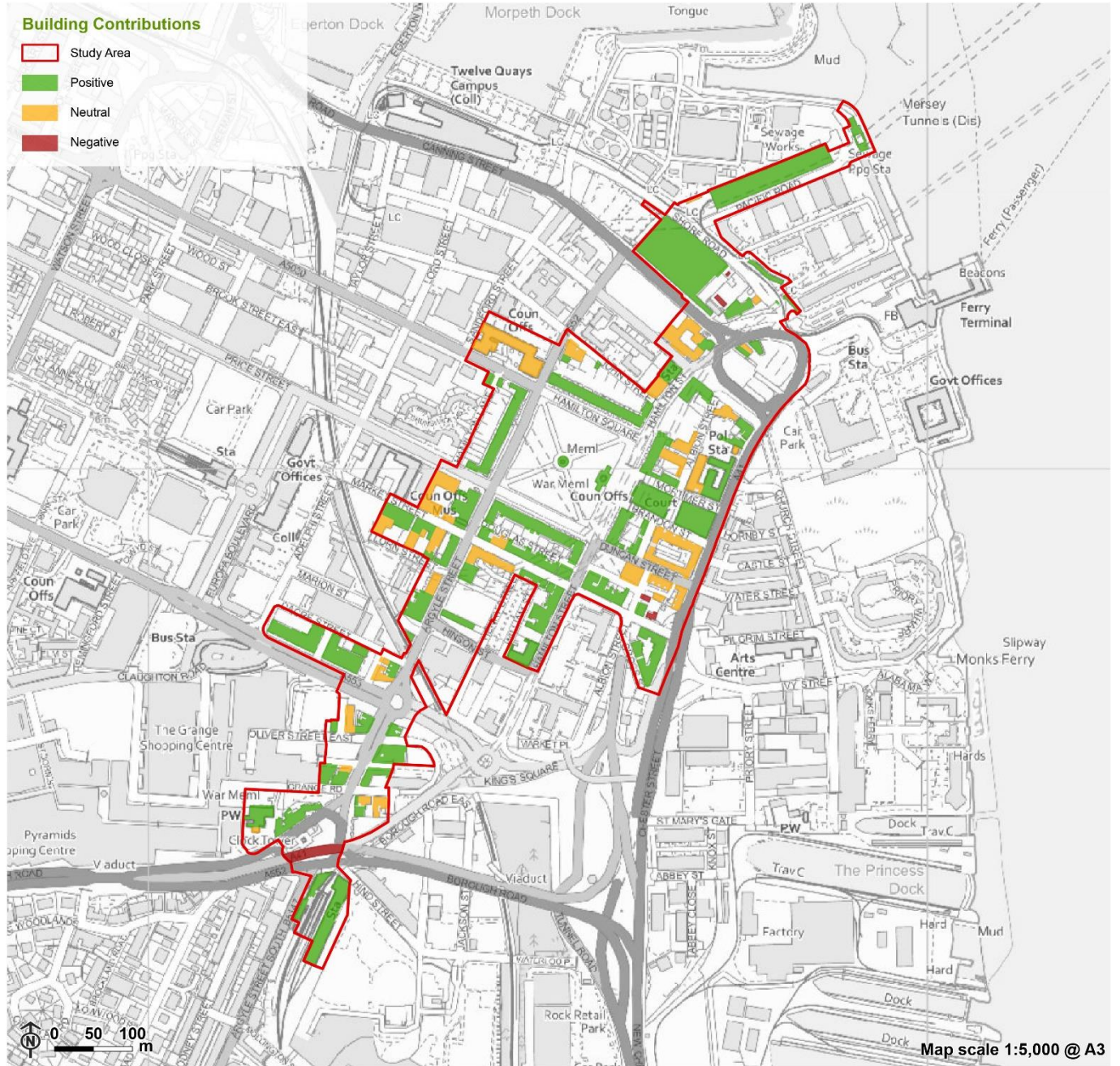
**5.26** None of the above contribute to the study area's heritage values or special character.

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<sup>12</sup> Para 207, NPPF, September 2023



Figure 5.1: Buildings that make a positive, neutral or negative contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area



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12520\_HamiltonSq\_Consultation\_Feb2024/FIG5-1\_12520\_BuildingContributions\_A3L 13/03/2024EB:holmes\_g

## Urban Design Analysis

### Place

**5.27** There are many historic landmarks and key built forms or groups of buildings that have retained their traditional character and contribute positively to create a unique sense of place.

**5.28** Hamilton Square is a central placemaking feature within the study area. The quality and consistency of the built form makes a significant contribution to the public realm. There are no comparable spaces in the study area. The public realm itself can lack quality, due to inconsistent surfacing materials. Cracked concrete paving flags and patchwork bitmac on carriageways and footways contrast sharply with the quality of the built form.

**5.29** The low level railings to the Hamilton Square greenspace limit active use of the space. Planting takes the form of formally laid out linear beds of evergreen and herbaceous shrubs. The diagonal park routes are the only lit footpaths within the Square, presenting a view that this is a space to pass through, not dwell in.

**5.30** The entrances to Hamilton Square are harmed by the roundabouts at what were geometrically laid out corners. As geometry is a key placemaking feature of the design intention, this dilutes its value. This is further emphasised in the south eastern corner which features a narrow and visually jarring curvilinear strip of paving laid out between Hamilton Street and Hamilton Square.

**5.31** This interplay between geometrical streets and curvilinear streets form extends into the wider study area, with the curvilinear A roads appearing as intrusions into the earlier geometric grid of streets.

**5.32** Those spaces left over from the laying out of the 20th century and later parts of the road network are irregular in shape, often taken up by surface-level car parking and poor quality built form. Examples are at Hinson Street, Conway Street and the Woodside Gyratory.

**5.33** Visual detractors comprise poor quality built form, often with inactive and neglected frontages. These buildings undermine both the study area's sense of place and vitality.

**5.34** The prevalence of surface level car parks creates pervasive, inactive land use and creates gaps in the built form that also contribute to a lack of surveillance and do little to encourage walking as a mode of travel.

**5.35** There are glimpses of where the public realm contributes positively, where high quality stone materials have been retained in situ (an alleyway between Argyle Street and

Hamilton Street), stone paving fronting onto Birkenhead Town Hall, and along Shore Road, a former tram route.

### Connectivity

**5.36** The study area is very well served by rail, bus and road networks. Merseyrail stations are located within the north and south of the study area. Buses travel along the many A roads within and adjoining the study area, plus Argyle Street. There are also two bus interchanges located in the setting of the study area: Birkenhead Bus Station to the south west and Woodside Interchange to the north east.

**5.37** The Woodside Ferry terminal is located to the north east of the study area. It is currently closed for upgrades and due to reopen in 2025. This is a £8.6m project between the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority and Wirral Council, to turn the area into a 'vibrant and unique waterfront destination'.

**5.38** Gateways into the study area tend to be characterised by the many busy A roads and their associated roundabouts and gyratories. Some of these routes are located along the periphery of the study area, such as Chester Street, however, they are a common feature of the vicinity of the Mersey Tunnel portal to the south.

**5.39** Wide A roads, with their high volumes of traffic, broad and cluttered junctions, controlled crossings and restrictive barriers, negatively impacts both the setting of the study area and the pedestrian and cycling experience.

**5.40** Away from the A roads, interventions to control vehicle movement such as the introduction of roundabouts to the north east and south east corners of Hamilton Square can often confound pedestrian movement.

**5.41** Surface level car parking is prevalent within the study area and its immediate environs, highlighting the over-reliance on cars as a primary mode of transport to local businesses and services, despite the area's bus and rail connections.

**5.42** On-street car parking is prevalent throughout the area, including provision along Argyle Street, all sides of Hamilton Square, Chester Street, Hamilton Street and Market Street. Market Street is one-way to enable on-street parking.



## Chapter 5 Study Area Analysis

Hamilton Square Conservation Area Regeneration Plan  
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Figure 5.2: Place Analysis

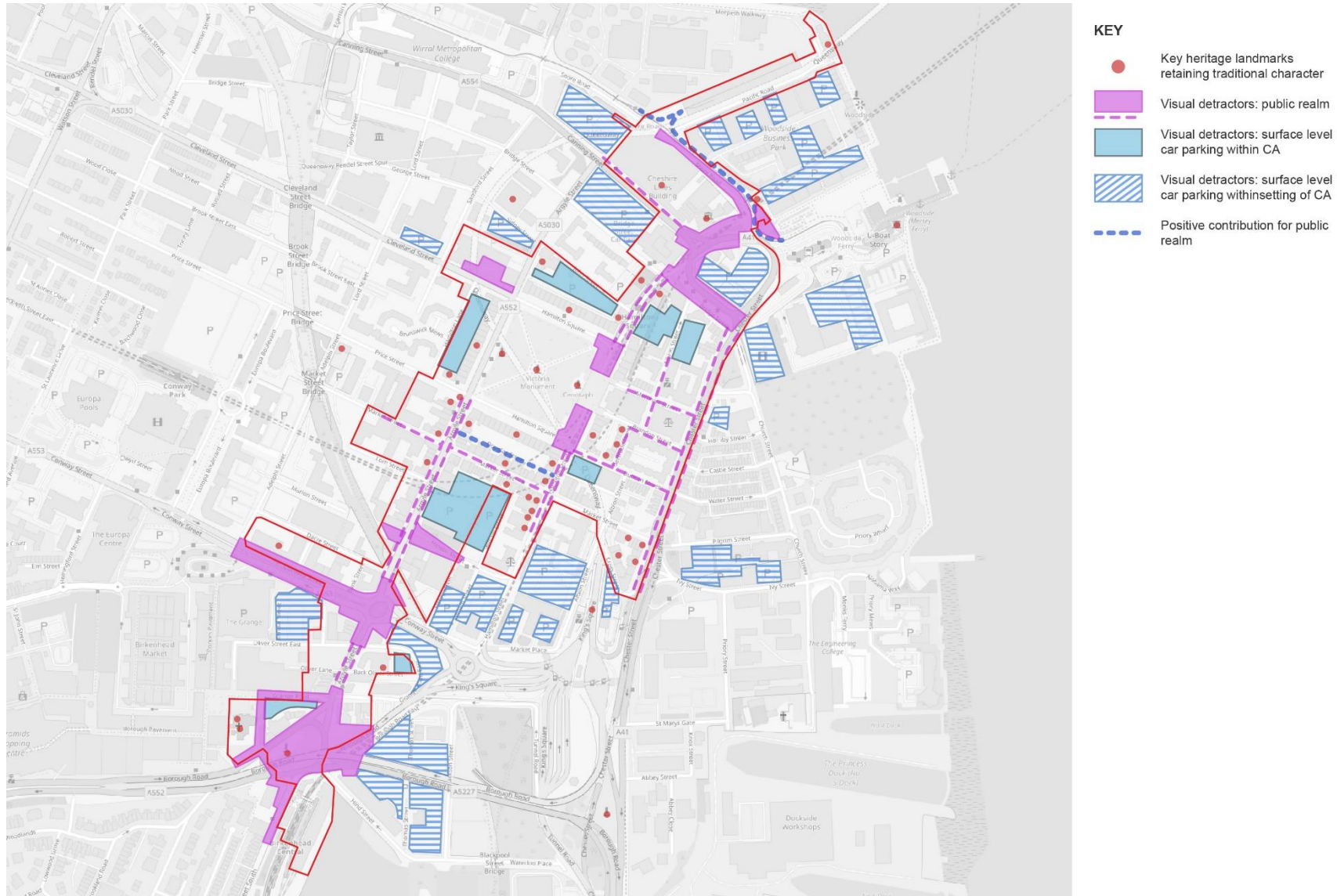
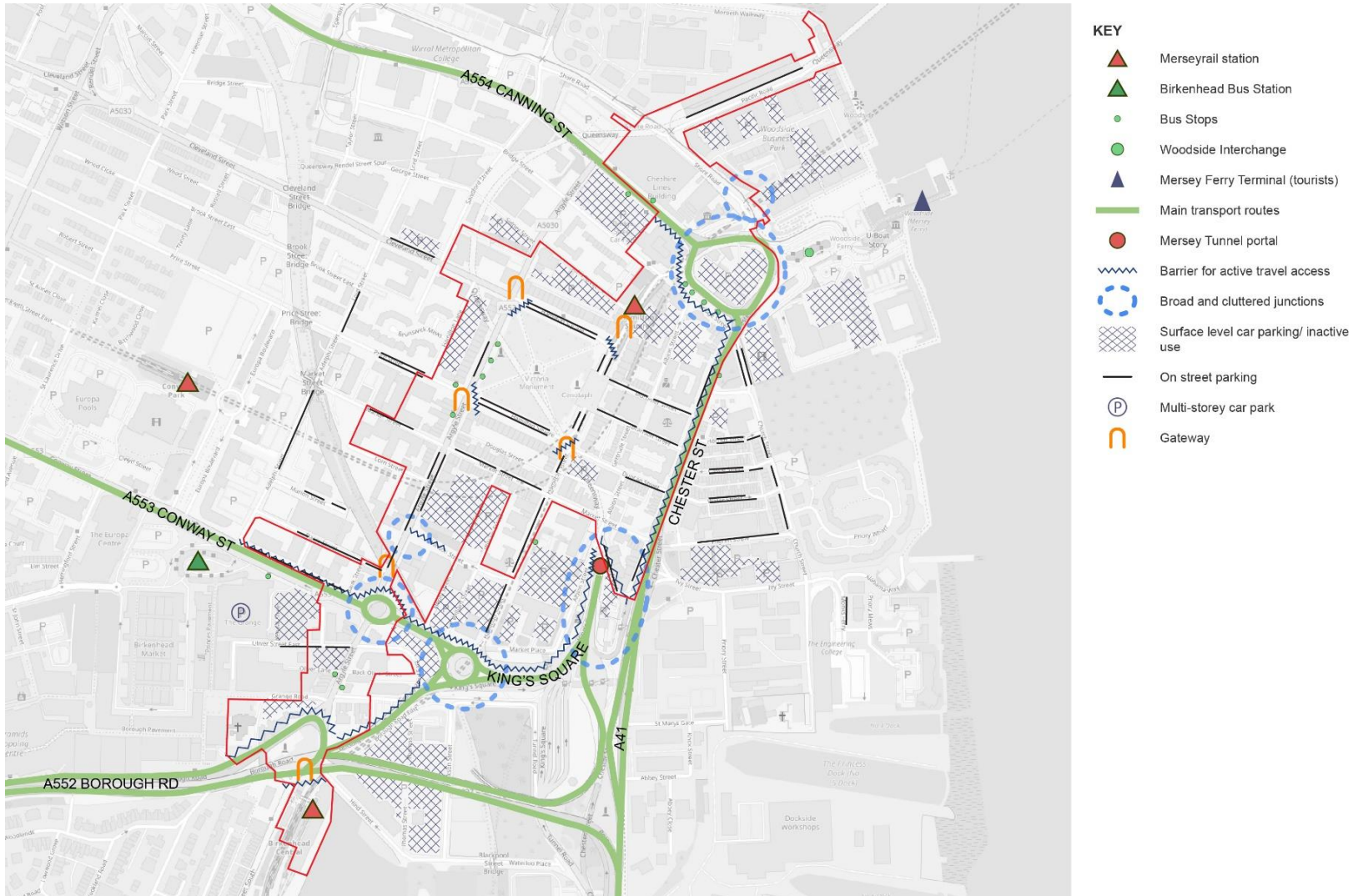


Figure 5.3: Connectivity Analysis



## Public Realm

**5.43** The bulk of the conservation area has a public realm that makes a neutral contribution to the character and appearance of the study area. These neutral areas fall into some or all of the following categories:

- Components of the 'Graham grid' of streets and its later 19th century additions that maintain their general layout and proportions, but have modern surfaces and modern street furniture throughout. These areas also tend to include modern kerblines that change course to accommodate parking bays, bus stops and build-outs.
- Areas with some or all natural stone surfaces but these are laid out in modern layouts and styles.

**5.44** The streets and open space at Hamilton Square make a neutral contribution. Other than the buildings, monuments and commemorative features which all make positive contributions, the spaces in between are by and large paved with modern materials, and the soft landscaping has a pronounced twentieth century municipal character. The layout of the square itself has been altered over time and is fairly incoherent. It seemingly functions as a space for pedestrians to quickly pass through rather than spend time.

**5.45** The key positive features of the public realm are summarised as follows:

- The commemorative statues and structures at Hamilton Square, Clifton Crescent and St Werburgh's churchyard.
- The tramline track, posts and overhead wires along Shore Road and leading into the Pacific Road transit sheds. Although modernised, this infrastructure is a unique feature.
- Douglas Street: although perhaps re-laid 30 to 40 years ago, the use of granite setts and kerbs is evocative of how other side streets and back streets would have once been.
- Stone flag paving that has been retained, such as at much of Market Street and the northern stretch of Argyle Street.

**5.46** The key spaces and factors that make a negative contribution to the character of the study area are:

- Widened, realigned and over-engineered segments of highway. These include the Borough Road flyover and gyratory, the widened Conway Street and its junction with Argyle Street, the sinuous course of Hinson Street, the oversized roundabouts at two corners of Hamilton Square, the redundant areas of public realm around the Woodside Gyratory.

- The busy Chester Street forming an east-west barrier to pedestrian movement, especially where there are railings along the kerblines.
- The busy gyratories at Woodside and Borough Road creating barriers to pedestrians and circuitous pedestrian routes.

## The contribution made by the study area's immediate environs

**5.47** The final application of the 'positive neutral and negative' assessment of the study area is with regard to its immediate environs. This assessment is distinct from the boundary review, as this is not an assessment of the heritage values of these areas. It also does a setting study that defines the characteristics and extent of the conservation area's setting, as its focus is the immediate environs.

**5.48** The appearance, use, character, ambiance, sounds, vibrations and smells of adjoining land and buildings can impact both the character and appearance of the study area, and the suitability or attractiveness of sites or buildings for different potential uses, such as homes or for businesses. The purpose of this exercise is to identify opportunities for enhancement outside of the study area, and to identify where the character of the study area's immediate environs should be conserved. The latter can include areas that contrast in a positive manner.

**5.49** Figure 5.5 shows at a glance that much of the immediate environs of the study area detract from its general character, appearance and ambiance. These negative areas tend to fall into one or more of the following categories:

- Vacant and/or untidy land
- Surface car parks, either open plan or enclosed as compounds
- Industrial estate-style freestanding sheds and buildings that are surrounded by hardstanding and stand in fenced compounds
- Large freestanding office blocks standing in surface car parking
- Large scale highway infrastructure such as flyovers, dual carriageways and the approaches to the Queensway Tunnel

**5.50** The areas that make a neutral contribution tend to be areas of urban style housing, the commercial town centre, commercial buildings that uphold the area's urban character, surviving historic railway infrastructure, and small scale business park buildings in planned layouts.

**5.51** The areas in the immediate environs that make a positive contribution to the study area are as follows:



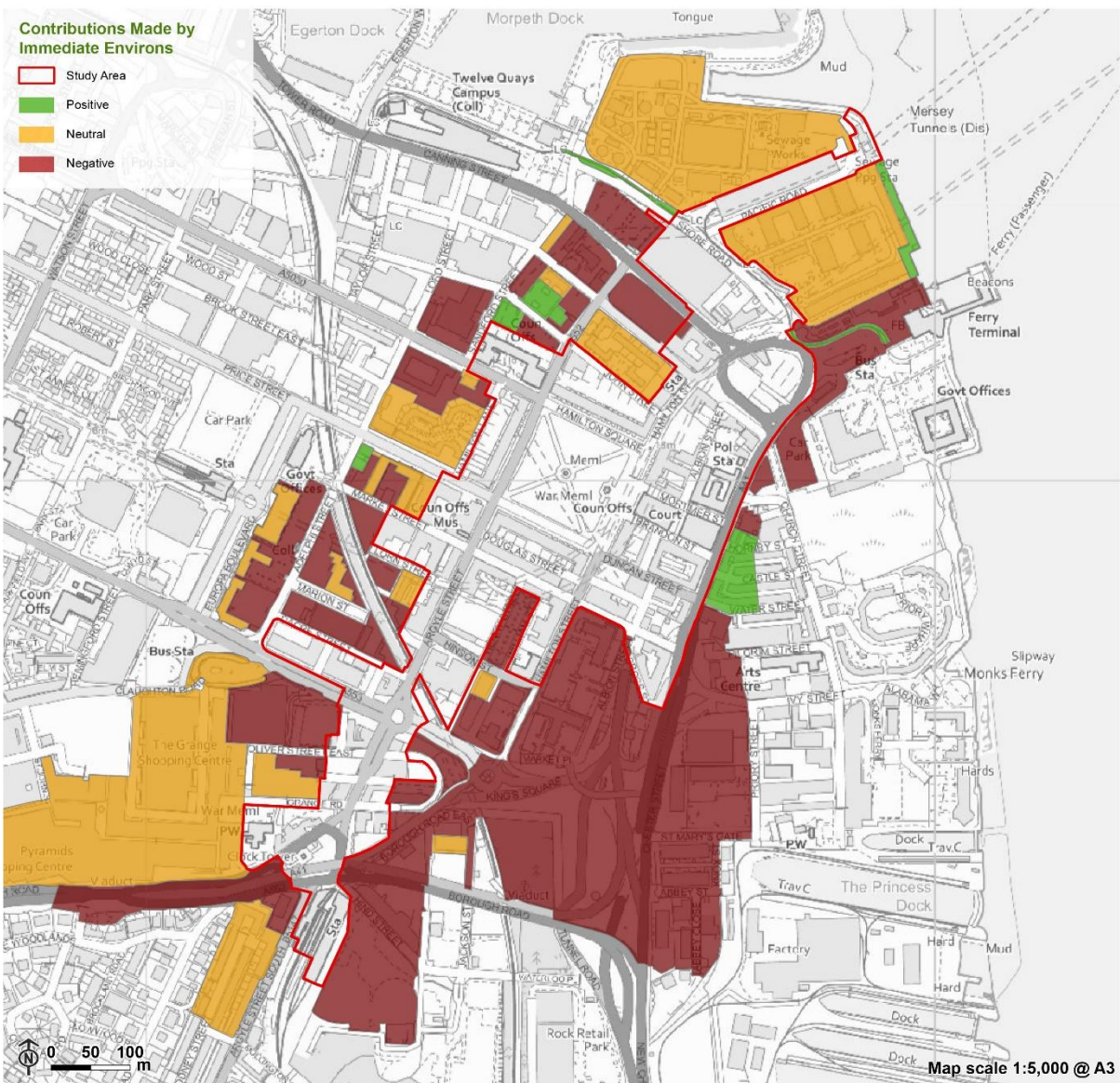
- Clifton Park Conservation Area
- The 19th century terraced streets bounded by Chester Street, Hornby Street, Church Street and Water Street that are similar in character to housing with the study area at Chester street and Duncan Street
- The two ventilation towers of the Queensway Tunnel that are landmarks and complement the ventilation tower within the study area
- Mary Cole House (Wirral Ark), Sandford Street
- The continuations of the tramline on Shore Road
- Wirral Circular Trail on the south bank of the Mersey, the Mersey itself and views towards Liverpool's waterfront and landmarks.

### Building Lines

**5.52** Consistent building lines are a key feature of the historic layout and urban character of the study area. Whether within Graham's grid of street or outside of it, buildings generally met the back line of the pavement, or as at Hamilton Square, were set behind small front enclosures and with the building lines formed by the long terrace behind.

**5.53** Figure 5.6 shows that across the entire study area there are generally strong and continuous building lines that enclose street spaces and provide an 'urban block' quality to the townscape. The limited clearance of buildings or redevelopment of sites mean there are relatively few gaps or breaks in the building lines.

Figure 5.4: The contribution made by the study area's immediate environs

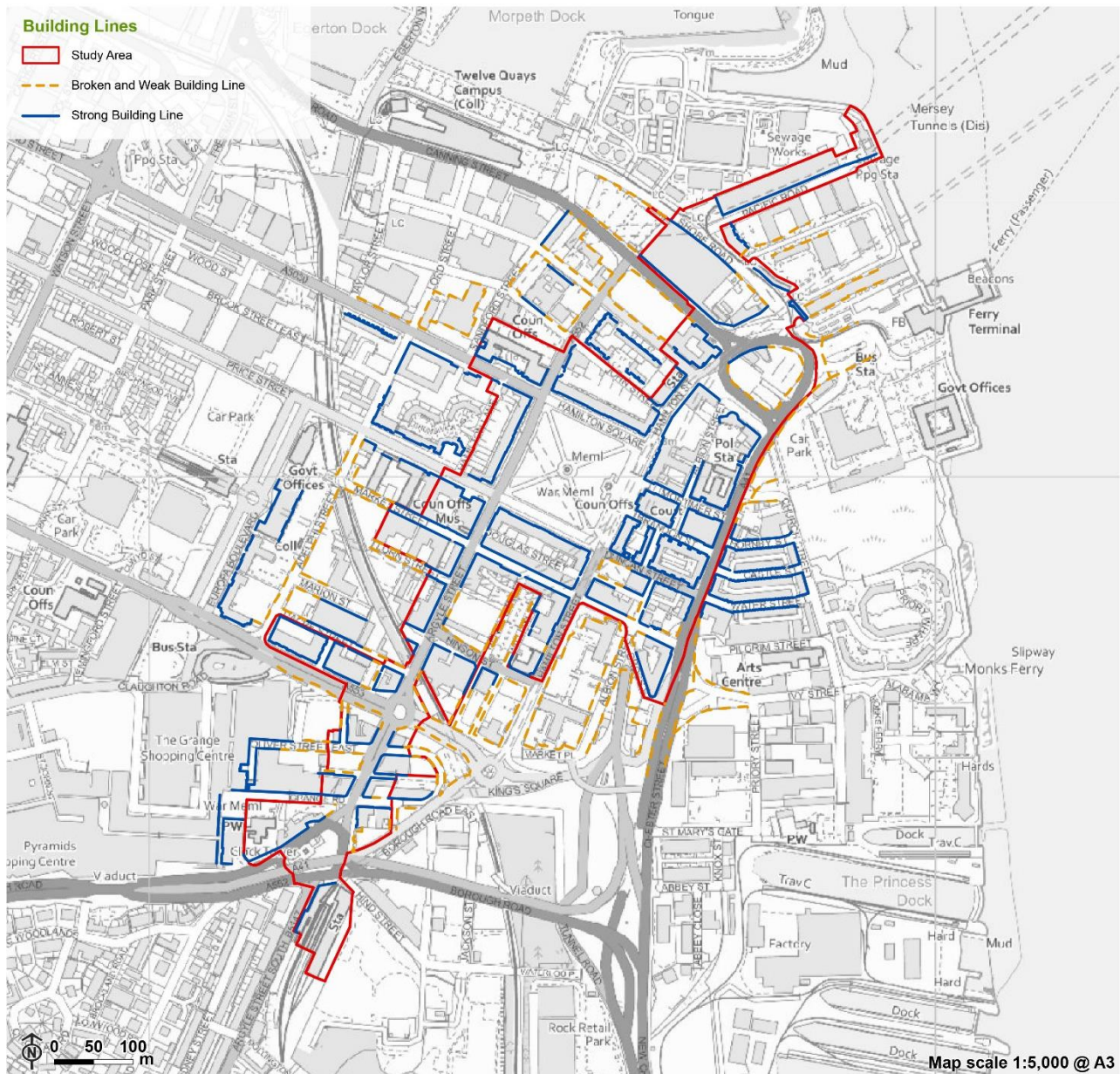




**5.54** This analysis includes the immediate environs of the study area. It shows how upon leaving the study area, the building lines generally cease or break, and the street spaces become less enclosed by buildings. This lack of continuity between the townscape and street enclosure of study area and its immediate environs is a particularly jarring feature.

**5.55** This analysis therefore identifies opportunities for new development to enhance the study area by addressing gaps or ends in the buildings lines, whether in the study area or its immediate environs. The building lines, built forms and level of enclosure to streets are so fundamental to an area's character but are also among the simplest things that new development can repair.

Figure 5.5: Building Lines



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### Building Height, Grain and Density

**5.56** Building height, grain and density are important aspects of the study area's urban and historic character. They help to unify the different phases of development and redevelopment and the diverse range of uses housed in each building. These factors of course affect the spaces within the study area: whether they are enclosed or open, sheltered or windswept and the balance between public spaces, private spaces and built forms.

**5.57** Figure 5.7 shows building heights and footprints, and also gives an indication of grain. The building heights are coloured as a spectrum: five storeys or more as red, four as amber through to two storeys a blue and one storey as violet. Figure 5.7 shows:

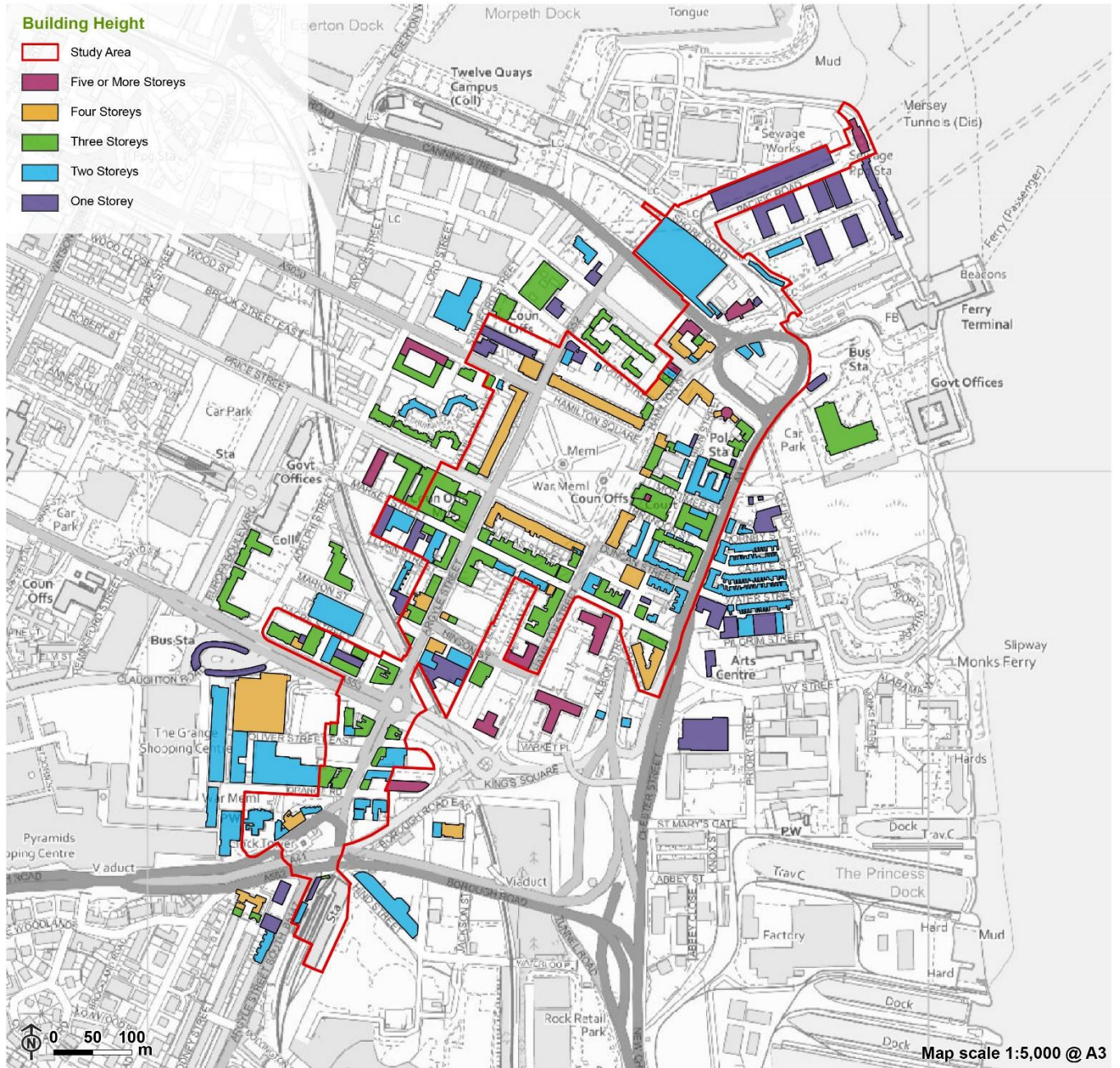
- A majority of three- and four-storey buildings in the core of the study area, facing its principal streets and spaces
- Buildings, structures or parts of buildings of five storeys or more are exceptional, and tend to be landmarks in the skyline.
- In many cases one- and two-storey buildings are often attached to taller buildings or occupy positions on side streets of back streets.
- At the northern end of the study area, there is a noticeable change to larger footprint, lower height buildings that are associated with rail and water transportation and storage. At the opposite end there is a cluster of low buildings at and around Birkenhead Central Station.
- With the exception of the space at the centre of Hamilton Square, there is a fairly high density of building footprints, with open spaces behind built forms or within enclosed courtyards.
- The study area has a fine grain of building plots, with even the longest terraces being made up of individual units of a standard width. Where individual buildings have a large footprint, there are changes in height across the building rather than a uniform height throughout.
- The exception to the grain of the study area is the northern end, where the uses of original uses of the buildings required larger structures and consistent eaves heights.

**5.58** The analysis of building height grain and density includes the immediate environs of the study area so that opportunities for enhancement or conservation can be identified. The analysis of the immediate environs of the study area has revealed the following:

- The grain, heights and footprints of buildings become diffuse and disjointed outside of the study area. There is uniformity in specific locations e.g. the shopping centres, Europa Boulevard, Price Street, Woodside Business Park and around Castle Street, but for the most part the building density, height and footprint becomes noticeably varied and inconsistent.
- To the northeast, southeast northwest and west of the study area the townscape is generally much more open and fractured, with a lower density of buildings, and much larger grain.
- There is little coherence to the siting of tall buildings (five storeys plus). These few tall buildings are fairly liberally scattered, well-spaced and often stand isolated in their plots.
- Open spaces tend to front onto streets with the buildings set back, rather than the buildings forming the street frontage and enclosing the open spaces.



Figure 5.6: Building height, grain and density



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12520\_HamiltonSq\_Consultation\_Feb2024/FIG5-5\_12520\_BuildingHeight\_A3L 13/03/2024EB:holmes\_g

## Car Parking

**5.59** The mixture of building uses in the town centre requires it to accommodate car parking spaces for vehicles owned or used by residents, businesses, workers, shoppers and visitors. This is supplied via a range of means:

- Council-operated off-street pay and display car parks offering short- or long-stay parking
- Privately operated off-street pay and display car parks offering short- or long-stay parking
- Privately operated off-street parking provided on a contract basis
- Paid-for on-street parking within the Birkenhead On-Street Car Parking Zone offering short- and long-stay parking
- Resident permit-only on-street parking
- Private off-street parking for residents, businesses or employees
- 'informal' or 'anti-social' parking on vacant land, pavements or other areas of hardstanding

**5.60** The various forms of on-street and off-street parking mean parked vehicles are a pervasive presence across the study area, and impact its character and appearance in different ways and to differing degrees.

**5.61** The pervasiveness of spaces used for car parking both within and in the immediate environs of the study area, plus the way that people inevitably park their cars outside of the study area and walk in (and vice versa) mean this topic should be explored holistically. The extent of parking areas of all categories are shown in Figure 5.8.

**5.62** Figure 5.8 at a glance shows a considerable amount of land and public realm within the study area, and especially in its immediate environs is used for parking motor vehicles for between half an hour or, in the case of private land, indefinitely. Parked vehicles are therefore a fairly consistent feature of the street scene of the conservation area, and views into and out of it.

**5.63** The necessity of accommodating private cars has had the following impacts on the conservation area:

- The paving over of gardens and other green spaces to provide parking
- Many detached free-standing post-1945 buildings having adjacent or surrounding surface car parks creating gaps and intrusions to the urban form and building lines
- Many private parking sites being in the format of compounds with high fences or walls that give a defensive, unwelcoming appearance.

- Land used for parking being left unkempt in some cases.

**5.64** In total there are:

- 1,161 car parking spaces within council operated pay and display car parks within the study area and its immediate environs. This is the majority of the 1,407 such spaces in the entire town centre.
- 1,001 car parking spaces within privately operated pay and display car park within the study area and its immediate environs.
- An unknown number of on-street parking spaces provided by the Council. These are fairly well distributed around the study area (e.g. along Hamilton Square, Argyle Street, Market Street and Hamilton Street) and its immediate environs.
- An unknown number of resident-only on-street parking spaces. There are in total 643 properties in Birkenhead eligible for residents' parking permits across four different zones, but the geographical spread of these, and ratio of spaces to properties, and usage are unknown.
- An unknown number of privately operated off-street parking spaces that are let on a contract basis.
- Seemingly several locations where parking is unmanaged or unenforced.

**5.65** In terms of usage:

- At peak times there are 923 cars parking in council operated pay and display car parks or on-street spaces. Although this is a large number, it amounts to only 39% of the available off-street pay and display spaces and an unknown proportion of the on-street spaces.

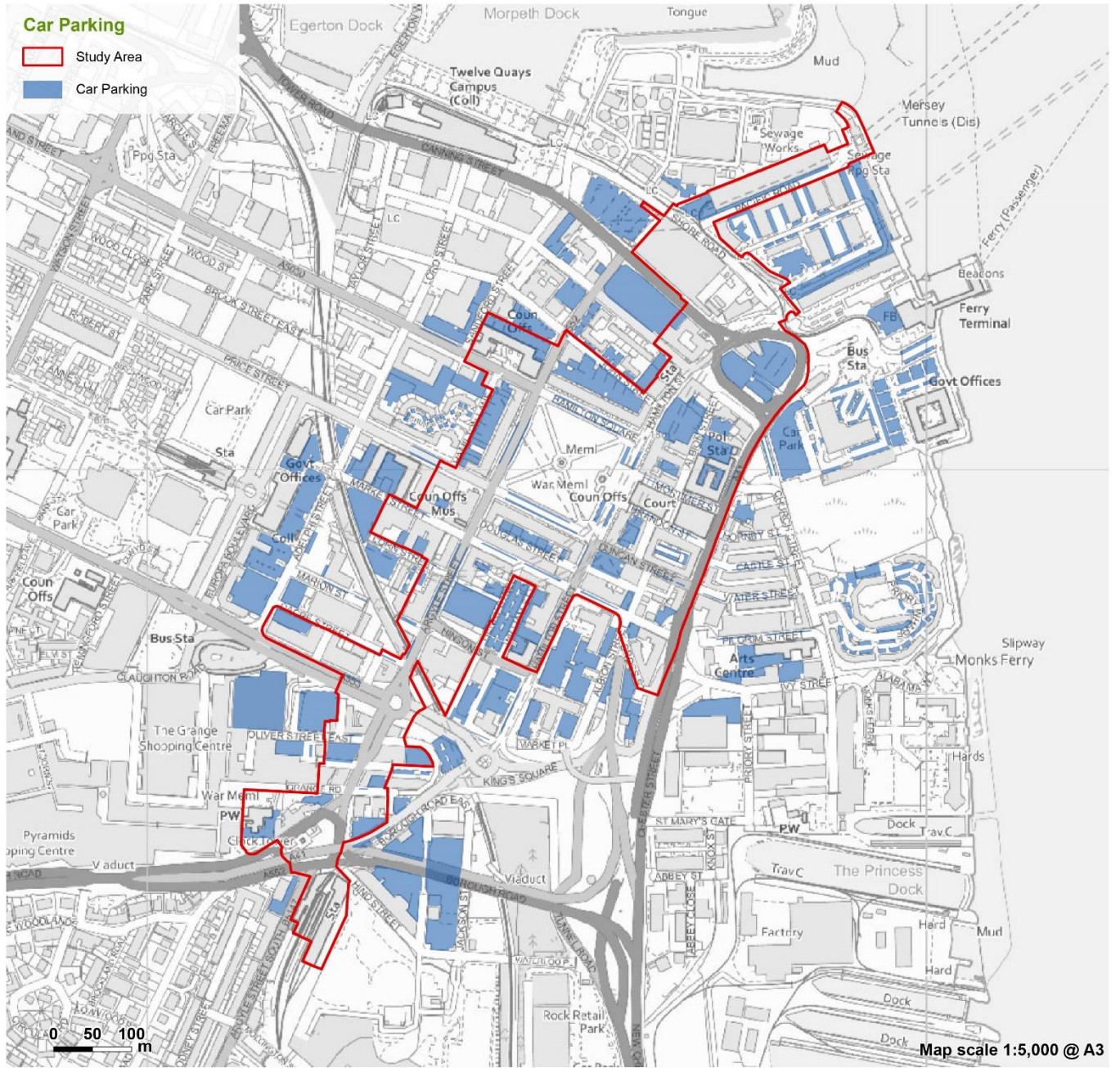
### Council-operated off-street pay and display car parks

**5.66** There are only two of these types of car park in the study area (Wilbraham Street and Duncan Street) two that immediately border the study area (Elgin Way, Hinson Street) and six others within five minutes' walk of the study area. In total these car parks contain 1,161 spaces but at average peak times are collectively only 39% occupied. This means that even at the busiest times for these car parks there are typically 708 empty spaces. These are shown below in Table 5.1.

**5.67** All of the car parks within or directly adjoining the study area are comfortably near the peak average use of 39% (ranging from 32% to 42% use at peak times). The outliers to the average are the smallest and largest car parks near the shopping centre, market and leisure centre which have the highest rates of occupation. These are all the furthest away from the study area.



Figure 5.7: Car parking



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**5.68** Looking at all of the council pay and display car parks in the entire town centre, there are 1,407 spaces and peak usage is 41% (i.e. on average there are 830 empty spaces at the busiest times). Therefore the usage of the council pay and display car parks in and close to the study area are in line with the wider town centre.

**Table 5.1: Car parking in Wirral BC pay and display car parks in the study area or its vicinity**

Ref	Car Park	Total Spaces	Peak Usage (%)
1	Europa Square	150	84
2	Wilbraham Street	54	40
3	Oliver Street	16	100
4	Europa Pools, Conway Street	197	68
5	Hamilton Building, Conway Street	60	15
6	Elgin Way	45	42
7	Woodside Approach	25	32
8	Hinson Street	90	33
9	Duncan Street	24	36
10	Price Street	500	17
	<b>Study Area and vicinity total</b>	<b>1,161</b>	<b>39</b>
	<b>Birkenhead Town Centre total</b>	<b>1,407</b>	<b>41</b>

Source: Wirral Parking Strategy 6 March 2023

#### **Paid-for on-street parking within the Birkenhead On-Street Car Parking Zone**

**5.69** There are approximately 389 on-street pay and display spaces in the entire town centre.<sup>13</sup> Of these, approximately 137 are within the study area and approximately 173 within a couple of minutes' walk from the study area. There are therefore 310 easily accessible on-street spaces within a short distance of the study area.

**5.70** With many of these spaces limited to half-hour and one-hour maximum stays, there is a regular turnover of occupiers as shown in Table 5.2. On a typical day approximately 60% of the on-street spaces are occupied outside of peak times,

rising to a much high level of use in peak times, when many of the spaces are used by more than one car over the peak time period. This is logical if maximum stays are 30 minutes.

**5.71** Taken across all on-street spaces, each space has 1.7 different cars parked on it per day (676 users of 389 spaces), suggesting that the most convenient spaces are used much more than spaces on outlying or side streets.

**Table 5.2: On-street Parking in Birkenhead Town Centre**

Car Park	Total Spaces	Average Usage (spaces)	Peak Usage (spaces)	Total users per day
Birkenhead On-Street Car Parking Zone	Circa 389	235	471	676

Source: Wirral Parking Strategy 6 March 2023

#### **Privately operated off-street pay and display car parks**

**5.72** The car parks in this category that are located within the study area, or its environs are shown in Table 5.3. Two of these types of car park (Hamilton Square and Argyle Street) are within the study area and contain a combined total of 222 spaces. A further three car parks (Bridge Street, Cleveland Street and John Street) directly adjoin the study area and contain a combined 480 spaces. Within two minutes' walk of the study area is the 495 space multistorey car park serving the Pyramids Shopping Centre. There are in total 1,001 privately operated pay and display parking spaces within the study area or two minutes' walk.

**5.73** As there are no statistics available for their usage therefore it is not possible to draw comparable statistics and conclusions as the council-owned car parks. It is worth noting however, that between the council and private operators there are 2,162 pay and display spaces available to anyone driving into the study area or its immediate environs, plus an unknown number of on-street spaces.

**Table 5.3: Privately Owned Public Use Car Parks in the Study Area and its vicinity**

Ref	Car Park	Spaces
	Cleveland Street	35
	Hamilton Square	112
	John Street	25

<sup>13</sup> Count based on on-street spaces listed on parkopeida.co.uk, accessed 19.12.23

Ref	Car Park	Spaces
	Bridge Street	224
	Argyle Street	110
	Pyramids Shopping Centre	495
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1,001</b>

Source: parkopedia.co.uk accessed 18.12.2023

### Privately operated off-street parking provided on a contract basis

**5.74** These car parks offer their clients a guaranteed space at a price lower than pay and display in return for paying for a fixed period of months or years. These are typically let to people who work in the town centre but cannot park on site. These car parks are harder to identify, and the numbers of spaces they contain are unknown, but it appears that such car parks exist within the vicinity of the study area at:

- Adelphi Street
- Albion Street
- Grange Road East
- Market Street (adjacent to the Dock Branch Line)
- Lorn Street
- Shore Road (adjoining the Cheshire Lines Building)

**5.75** It can only be said anecdotally that these collectively contain a few hundred spaces and are for the most part perhaps over 50% occupied. More so than pay and display car parks, in the interest of security and access control, these types of car parks are typically enclosed compounds with one way in and out for vehicles and pedestrians.

### Residents' parking zones

**5.76** These are operated by the Council and ensure exclusive use of spaces in residential streets by residents who have obtained permits. This prevents workers, shoppers and visitors from avoiding paying for town centre off-street or on-street parking, and removes the potential nuisance to residents of not being able to park near their home.

**5.77** There are in total 643 properties in Birkenhead eligible for residents' parking permits across four different zones, but the geographical spread of these, and ratio of spaces to properties, and usage are unknown.

### Private off-street parking

**5.78** These are the communal car parks on privately owned land for the exclusive use of residents, employees and

approved visitors. Examples include the spaces within the curtilage of a block of flats or an office building that are for the exclusive use of the people occupying the building on the site. There is a significant number of these within and in the vicinity of the study area, and indeed across the wider town centre. Examples include:

- Various Wirral Council car parks at Chester Street
- Magenta Living offices
- Premier Inn Birkenhead
- Birkenhead County Court
- Birkenhead Police Station
- Birkenhead Citizen's Advice Bureau
- University Centre Birkenhead
- The Contact Company, Queensgate
- The Child Support Agency
- HM Land Registry
- Europa House, Europa Boulevard
- 6 Europa Boulevard
- Wirral Metropolitan College Conway Park Campus
- Merseytravel Parking, Kingsway Tunnel

**5.79** The numbers of spaces individually and collectively in these car parks are unknown, but anecdotally there could be over 1,000 such parking spaces in and around the study area, and even more if the car parks associated with freestanding commercial / light industrial sheds and business parks are factored.

**5.80** As with private contract car parks, these private off-street parking areas are laid out as enclosed compounds with entrance barriers and one way into and out of the car park for pedestrian and vehicles.

### Informal off-street parking

**5.81** The charging regimes, private car parks and residents-only restrictions across the town centre mean that there are inevitably motorists who seek out charge and restriction-free parking on sites where access is uncontrolled and there is seemingly no enforcement if vehicles are left on the site for an extended amount of time. Potential informal parking sites in and around the study area include:

- The car park associated with the vacant buildings at Clifton Crescent
- A billboard site at Market Street
- Wide pavements on Conway Street

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- The former House of Frase Car Park, Oliver Street
- Vacant land at Oliver Street
- The dead end bridge at Church Street
- Vacant land within the Woodside Gyratory

## Chapter 6

### SWOT Analysis

This chapter outlines the study area's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in terms of place, activity, community and connectivity

**6.1** The SWOT analysis draws on the analysis of the preceding chapter and the understanding of the study area's significance. It has been divided into four categories for ease of reference. These categories are:

- **Place:** the physical and tangible environment of the study area: its heritage assets, its buildings and its spaces.
- **Activity:** how the study area is managed, the regeneration activity happening in and around it, and how buildings, sites and places are used.
- **Community:** the people, organisations and groups that have an interest in the area and its future.
- **Connectivity:** the convenience of getting to and around the study area by different modes of transport.

**6.2** The strengths weaknesses, opportunities of and threats to the study area have been graded in terms of their scale of impact or severity. This is shown by the following colour code applied to each individual item in the SWOT analysis.

Scale or severity of impact	Colour
Key strength or key opportunity	Dark Green
Minor strength or minor opportunity	Light Green
Marginal opportunity	Yellow
Key weakness or key threat	Purple
Minor weakness or lesser threat	Orange

Table 6.1: SWOT Analysis: Place

Strength	Weakness	Opportunity	Threat
High concentration of highly listed buildings at Hamilton Square and the area's heritage value universally recognised (e.g. the Trafalgar Square and St Andrew's Square comparisons). There is also a longstanding conservation area in place since 1970s.	Significant proportion of buildings that have undergone inappropriate alterations in the past such as shopfronts, windows, rendering / painting. These alterations detract from the area's character and appearance.	Historic England is to visit the study area and identify potential new listings.	General: Catalyst projects and masterplans fail to maintain or enhance the character or appearance of the conservation area and/or cause harm.
Key heritage landmarks (all listed) in the skyline / to aid wayfinding: town hall, Conway Building, Merseyrail Station, Ventilation Tower, Edward VI clock tower.	Significant proportion of buildings that are in need of repair (such as repainting, addressing leaks and vegetation growth) and a small proportion of buildings that require extensive major repairs (e.g. Clifton Crescent, 39-45 and 106-108 Argyle Street).	'Benign neglect' of some buildings means they retain much of their traditional character and appearance that can be retained and repaired.	General: planned highway improvements across the town centre harm or miss opportunities to enhance the conservation area
Historic grid layout survives and provides a clear framework and hierarchy of primary, secondary and tertiary streets.	Loss of key buildings historically (e.g. theatres, market hall, large stores) and in recent years (Woodside Hotel, cinemas on Argyle Street and Conway Street). Their sites have often not been redeveloped creating gaps in the townscape.	Potential for area-based heritage-led schemes in the vein of THs and HSHAZs to repair, restore and re-use privately owned historic buildings. Could also be used to improve certain areas of public realm and to deepen, share and celebrate the area's heritage values.	General: Heights of new development in the regeneration areas harm the conservation area. This is both by 'closing in' the conservation area by surrounding and infilling with taller buildings that will dominate views and spaces, as well as impacts on the main features of the historic skyline.
Excellent views from several locations of Liverpool's iconic waterfront: Albert Dock, Three Graces, Cathedrals etc.	Roller shutters and boarded up shopfronts creating inactive frontages that do not feel safe.	Proposal to reduce car parking provision (public, private, on street) and make more efficient use of sites. 'Gentle intensification' to be coupled with proposals to concentrate parking in MSCPs – get people walking the last leg of their journey to work and make the town centre busier.	General: Grain of new development in the regeneration areas harms the conservation area. Large footprint 'urban campus' approach frequently shown in plans: single-block buildings, no townhouses, terraces or finer grain plots.

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Strength	Weakness	Opportunity	Threat
Relatively flat topography of the majority of the study area, well disposed to active travel.	Some conversions and new build developments have supported the retention of existing vacant plots due to the locations of domestic windows, e.g. Hamilton Plaza, Market Street / Albion Street corner.	Trimming back for the Mersey Tunnel infrastructure (overpasses, lanes, payment booths) presents an opportunity to improve the environment around the tunnel entrance and approaches.	General: Building line and built forms of new development in regeneration areas harm the conservation area.
Proximity to several key regeneration areas: Hind Street, Wirral Waters, the Waterfront, Dock Branch Neighbourhood, Birkenhead Central (including new council offices and market). The Council Offices are complete, and the planning application for Hind Street has been submitted.	Significant and prominent areas of surface car parking in and around the study area. Often on cleared sites, 'left over' land, but also many recent employment, leisure and education developments have their own expansive surface parking despite the town centre location.	Consider either restoring the open space within Hamilton Square back to its original layout or hold a design competition for its redesign to suit its civic functions, status as the conservation area's principal green space and the growing residential population of the Square.	General: landscaping and public realm approach harms the conservation area such as the 'greening' of traditional streets, and the proposed locations of street trees.
Large supply of private, council and on-street car parking spaces.	Past highway improvements to increase traffic flow and segregate road users has created intrusions to the grid street layout and has created cluttered junctions that disrupt pedestrian desire lines (e.g. Conway Street roundabout, Argyle Street-Hinson Street junction, Hamilton Square corners).	Potential to reconfigure the grounds of the Church of St Werburgh. Reduce car parking down to an acceptable necessary minimum and look at how this enclosed space could be more biodiverse, help with SuDS, and/or provide a distinctive space away from the bustle of the town centre.	Specific: proposed 12-21 storey buildings between the conservation area and the waterfront: blocks views to/from the conservation area, harmful height, scale and character of development.
The area's urban character supports a reasonable density of dwellings and business premises. Suitable for gentle density with good quality historic buildings providing precedents.	Many highway surfaces are of a poor quality and appearance, e.g. red bitmac, clay pavements) and/or in a poor condition (patchy, broken slabs, weed growth).	Redesign of Clifton Crescent Square – re-siting the clock tower, integrating the town centre and station, improved gateway and accessibility.	Specific: proposed loss of two non-designated heritage assets within the Woodside Gyrratory
Very few buildings detract from the study area's character, the large majority make a positive or neutral contribution.	Clutter to the public realm – pedestrian barriers, bollards, wheelie bins, Euro bins, traffic signals.	Improve street slighting to improve the sense of safety whilst minimising the impact of light fittings on the street scene.	Specific: large open spaces proposed at Woodside, but these spaces may be out of scale with the historic buildings (1-3 storeys generally), providing a weak sense of enclosure and urban character.



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Strength	Weakness	Opportunity	Threat
Uniform building height across the study area, generally 2-4 storeys.	Very poor townscape and first impression from the ferry terminal – a large ‘no man’s land’ centred on the gyratory with passive uses to either side (office estates, business park). Little incentive for visitors to cross the busy roads and explore.	Public realm projects enhance the conservation area by recognising its significance and character.	General: lack of general lighting and/or safety and crime prevention strategy. Unlikely that new buildings and improved gateways alone will address these issues.
Varied grain of development, ranging from single terraced units (e.g. Market Street, Hamilton Street) to large block-sized floorplates (e.g. Conway Building, Post Office, courts, town hall, Cheshire Lines)	Apart from the ferry terminal and riverside walk, the townscape and street spaces make little or no response to the waterfront and its excellent views. Chester Street and the Woodside Gyratory have quite open views, but the foreground is full of clutter and vacant land.		Specific: The proposed waterfront ventilation tower viewing platform would harm the significance of this prominent listed building. Rather than any of options proposed, how about a ‘Trellick Tower’ style lift structure with bridges onto the shaft tower? Ascent and bridge could be part of the viewing experience. Also touches the tower much more lightly.
Varied material palette (ashlar, brick, render) and architectural styles spanning 200 years.	Any spare area of land is used as official or unofficial parking, possibly overprovision of on-street spaces at Hamilton Square, and many modern developments have large areas of private surface parking. This brings the sight, light pollution sound and vibration of motor vehicles into all outdoor public spaces and means people drive directly to their destination rather than walk around the study area.		Specific: no proposals for the space within Hamilton Square. It could contribute greatly to the appeal of the area if sympathetically improved.
Active street frontages to principal streets by and large.	Gap sites and campus-style developments have eroded the urban character, building line and sense of enclosure and overlooking of streets.		Specific: demolition of boundary walls to the Church of St Werburgh, and making the churchyard part of an open campus: harm to listed building and conservation area, may impede how the building and site function.

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Strength	Weakness	Opportunity	Threat
<p>Strong building lines and good sense of enclosure to street spaces (building height versus width).</p>	<p>Unkempt gap sites and car parks detract from the area's traditional urban character, as do low quality municipal and commercial soft/hard landscaping.</p>		<p>Specific: Dacre Street, Marion Street, Lorn Street and Market Street west becoming 'wild streets' that have dense tree lines and undulating swathes of planting of various heights. Would detract from the urban character of these streets and compromise what could be useful service and rear access and parking for the re-used buildings.</p>
<p>'Never ending' character of vistas along the main streets of the grid, with the exception of the view of the rising landform to Tranmere to the south.</p>	<p>The accommodation of cars within plots rather than on streets of public/private car parks results in the 'wrong' type of density: overly tall and monolithic buildings standing in their own compounds of surface parking. This car-led approach is out of step with modern planning.</p>		<p>Specific: Proposal to start tree lines in two corners of Hamilton Square would disrupt the visual set piece of the Square.</p>
<p>The principal green open spaces: Hamilton Square, St Werburgh's churchyard and Clifton Crescent are all well-defined with clear extents.</p>	<p>Some harm already caused by large and tall buildings in the immediate context of the study area, e.g. Queensgate. They create an abrupt change in the townscape and 'box in' the lower, finer grain historic townscape.</p>		<p>Specific: Proposed avenues of trees along Argyle Street. Disrupts 'endless' vistas and the hard, urban character of the space.</p>
	<p>More recent developments often do not present active frontages or principal entrances to the street; instead they are oriented towards their own car parks for people arriving by car.</p>		<p>Specific: Waterfront and Surrounds and Dock Branch Railway retains historic buildings of 2-3 storeys but also places them in zones where buildings of up to 8 storeys are proposed. Suggests these buildings could be demolished or doubled in height without harming heritage assets.</p>

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Strength	Weakness	Opportunity	Threat
	<p>Hamilton Square as a green space is fenced off from the public and is simply a space for passing through rather than enjoying. It has a very bland character. It has also lost its 19th century layout.</p>		<p>General: catalyst projects focus on the public realm / gateways and junctions, but not the existing buildings that surround them. They generally do not address the existing building stock, which will diminish the impacts of these projects.</p>
	<p>St Werburgh's Churchyard is more than 50% bitmac for car parking and access. The graveyard element is inaccessible.</p>		<p>General: Frameworks and Masterplans are heavily focussed on new build rather than improving and re-using existing buildings. Apart from improvements to historic transport buildings (e.g. Hamilton Square and Birkenhead Central Stations, Woodside Ferry Terminal, very few historic buildings are identified for improvement or re-use.</p>
	<p>The space about the clocktower is essentially 'left over' highway land – very low amenity value, not purpose and dominated by traffic on the roundabout and the overpass structure. Unsuitable context for a local memorial and poor entrance to the town centre.</p>		
	<p>The area does not feel especially safe during the day and especially at night. This is borne out by the high number of crimes reported at Argyle Street, Market Street and Conway Street – many of these are public order offences, violence and sexual offences at or near the main licensed premises.</p>		

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Strength	Weakness	Opportunity	Threat
	Lack of safety is exacerbated by poor lighting in some locations, e.g., Hamilton Square and much lower levels of pedestrian traffic at night.		
	Many of the busiest employment, education and civic destinations have their own on-site parking. Their workforce, students and visitors can and do arrive by car and therefore have little or no interaction or use of the town centre, even as pedestrians.		
	Victorian, Edwardian and 20th century heritage make up the bulk of the conservation area. This is often seen as being of lesser value or ubiquitous compared to heritage from earlier eras.		
	A small number of advertising billboards, hoardings and inappropriate signage harm the townscape of the area.		
	The setting makes a particularly poor contrast to the study area in many locations – it frequently creates an unpleasant intrusion on views into and out of the study area, and impacts its ambiance.		

Table 6.2: SWOT Analysis: Activity

Strength	Weakness	Opportunity	Threat
The U-Boat Museum is a tourist attraction located just outside study area. It is about to undergo major investment and expansion, with a planning application for extending the museum being considered by the Council currently.	Significant proportion of vacant and underused buildings (e.g. vacant upper floors) including long- and medium-term. These detract from the vitality and sense of safety of the area.	Use of enforcement powers e.g. planning and listed building enforcement, s.215 Notices to tidy and repair buildings or land; discontinuance notices to remove advertisements; listed building repair notices.	General: Disjointed approach to regeneration activity across the conservation area and its setting causing harm to its significance.
Broad and long-established mix of uses: retail, leisure, office, residential, civic, spiritual, not-for-profit, transport, commemorative etc.	Past schemes to improve the area, e.g. shopfront schemes, have produced alterations that vary in quality and have had a limited impact.	Liverpool University study into energy efficiency at Hamilton Square could offer a best practice exemplar / prototype / guide for the wider area.	General: Limited economic / footfall spin-offs to conservation area from 2040 Framework and masterplans. The area therefore remains marginal in terms of the town centre's economic, tourism and leisure activity.
Nascent creative and not-for profit sector within and close to the study area: Make CIC, Future Yard, and others/	Only a very small proportion of tourists on the Mersey Ferry disembark and explore the town. This has the twin impacts of a lack of visitor destinations and lack of visitor awareness of this side of the river.	Use of Local Listed Building Consent Orders for certain works at Hamilton Square and/or other buildings in the area. Could relate to certain repairs or restorations and/or the findings of the energy efficiency study.	General: the 2040 Framework and masterplans channel investment, building occupiers and footfall away from the conservation area.
Early signs of a diversifying evening economy: Future Yard music venue, drive-in cinema, food hall at the ferry terminal	Wirral Transport Museum and its tramway are temporarily closed, reducing the area's visitor offer and footfall, though visitor numbers were falling (at c.6,000 per annum before closure).	Production of standard acceptable detail drawings for use in applications for uniform development e.g. Hamilton Square or archetypal buildings, e.g. pre-1850s buildings. E.g. window and door details, rainwater goods, roof re-laying, chimney rebuild /restore, secondary glazing, other thermal upgrading.	Smaller impact opportunity sites in and around the conservation 'slipping through the net' by not being in a masterplan area. Placemaking is about marginal improvements having a combined effect.
Successful re-use of many buildings e.g. Future Yard and Make premises, food hall at ferry terminal, offices homes and businesses in terraced buildings.	Low economic performance of the study area and its property market – local and convenience businesses, little variety in housing offer.	Use of a Design Code to guide new development within / surrounding CA generally: heights, massing, forms, identity, building lines, active frontages,	Specific: the key gateway between Clifton Crescent and Birkenhead Central Station is split between the masterplans for Hind Street and St Werburgh. It should be cohesively planned as a single



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Strength	Weakness	Opportunity	Threat
		materials, parking, boundary features, shopfronts and so on.	space with a clear plan for the listed clocktower and surrounding heritage assets.
Wirral Borough Council is committed to make Birkenhead the location for its principal offices and physical point of access for services. This means many employees and council service users will be in the town centre, which can help support businesses and services.	Many of the public sector organisations, not for profits, institutions and businesses are feeling the impacts of austerity, inflation and economic decline. Uncertain futures, cycles of cost-cutting, short term lets, greater reliance on external support, surviving rather than having the confidence and ability to plan ahead and invest. This affects the vitality and character of the study area.	Use of development briefs or a 'development prospectus' for gap sites where there are specific requirements over and above the requirements of a design code as identified through the analysis of the site.	Specific: Argyle Street in particular is featured in different masterplans and schemes proposing different design approaches and detailing to the public realm. Change to this important highway corridor needs to be done in a sympathetic and joined-up along its full length.
Diverse historic building stock: dwellings, mixed use buildings, local government premises, dock buildings, transportation buildings, warehouses, civic buildings, offices and others.	Drug-related offences (possession, use, dealing) are also prevalent in the area, especially Hamilton Square, Argyle Street, Market Street and Conway Street.	Strategy for Council-owned land and assets such as underused car parks, or sites that could provide potential catalyst development.	General: there is no town-centre-wide strategy for on- and off-street car parking. Each masterplan tackles this issue in isolation when this would benefit from a strategic approach.
Liverpool City Region Combined Authority provides a means of integrating Birkenhead with the wider conurbation and offers an additional funding avenue and regeneration partner	Litter and a lack of maintenance to hard and soft landscaping.	Identify key areas for highway improvements that are outside of existing and planned schemes. Suggest potential re-design in order to maximise benefits to the study area's character, appearance and vitality.	General: Council-owned and public sector owned sites are disposed of without a clear development brief that supports the implementation of the Regeneration Framework and Masterplans and maintaining or enhancing the conservation area.
Birkenhead 2040 Framework in place and nine supporting masterplans are in process.		The U Boat Museum is now operated by Big Heritage who have submitted a planning application to expand and reconfigure its exhibit. Big Heritage also own the 'Western Approaches' Museum in Liverpool. Greater potential for linking	General: insufficient action is taken to address the large number of office and education sites that could really improve footfall and vitality of the town centre if they lacked large on-site car parks.

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Strength	Weakness	Opportunity	Threat
		tourist attractions in Liverpool and Birkenhead.	
Council ownership of several key sites within and adjacent to the study area.		The Wirral Transport Museum is now operated by Big Heritage who are potentially in line to take on the soon-to-be-vacated Cheshire Lines Building and Pump House. Potential for revitalised tourist attractions that would be marketed alongside the Western Approaches Museum in Liverpool.	General: lack of suitable information, guidance and support for people who wish to occupy, convert or improve historic buildings leads to a lack of investment or new work that harms the conservation area's character.
Considerable public sector ownership / occupation of sites within and close to the study area: Merseytravel, police, central government.		Economic diversification to make the area less dependent on public sector jobs and workforce, especially as working from home has reduced the level of commuting. Also need to widen out from 9 to 5 office jobs to the evening and leisure economy and non-office sectors.	General: Lack of baseline and defined measures of success in terms of the impacts on the conservation area and heritage assets. What does success look like in terms of the conservation area and how is it measured?
Large employment and footfall base in and adjacent to the study area: several large office buildings, Europa Boulevard, Wirral Met College, University of Chester.		There is a public realm guide, but the CA should have its own, and/or the existing guide should pay greater regard to the character of the conservation area. For example, how to encourage biodiversity and SuDS whilst maintaining or enhancing the area's character. An appropriate approach to street trees. An appropriate approach to highway design.	
The heritage and culture strategy mapping exercise has already identified buildings of architectural merit, local list candidates etc and these have been fed into all masterplans.		Use of the CARP as a means to question and refine the various masterplans and neighbourhood frameworks, especially with regard to building heights, heritage assets and key areas of public realm.	

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Strength	Weakness	Opportunity	Threat
Fairly up to date and comprehensive evidence base of the town centre can be gleaned from the 2040 Framework and supporting masterplans.		General review of premises licensing, pavement licensing, CCTV provision, lighting, enforcement powers, policing etc to address crime and antisocial behaviour. Address the most serious and persistent problems first.	
		Review of street cleaning and cleansing, street bin emptying / locations, and domestic and commercial bin storage, and collection. Are these having the desired effects? Are the persistent issues? Where is adjustment or improvement needed?	
		Review existing council-owned landscaping in and around the public highway. Identify issues and potential improvements, especially ones that provide SuDS, biodiversity, and environmental enhancement.	
		Council and public sector-led rollback of on-site parking. Get more people walking the last leg of their journey to work. Could use underused council owned car parks for free / minimal cost initially. Redevelop or re-landscape the freed-up land.	
		Incentivise town centre shopping, food and beverage to the incumbent office / student population – discounts, special offers, loyalty schemes, newsletter, marketing.	

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Table 6.3: SWOT Analysis: Community

Strength	Weakness	Opportunity	Threat
<p>Extensive public consultation on the framework and masterplans shows very strong local support to drive the regeneration of the town centre.</p>	<p>Potential 'over consultation' and 'consultation fatigue' and growing impatience among consultees after successive rounds of framework and masterplan consultation, exhibitions and so on.</p>	<p>Engagement with property owners and occupiers. Importance of repair and maintenance, but also making it easier for basic tasks to be done like getting gutters cleared, vegetation removed from masonry, joinery painted, windows cleaned, roofs repaired at the same time between adjacent and neighbouring properties: bulk discount, bigger impact, less hassle.</p>	<p>Specific: Church of God in Birkenhead on Oliver Street East is to be demolished with seemingly no replacement facility or building in the St Werburgh's Masterplan. Harms character and vitality of the conservation area.</p>
<p>General support across the borough for Birkenhead to be the focus of new development means no competing towns in the Borough, or a need to 'balance' investment between similar centres.</p>		<p>Guidance and advice for listed building owners, conservation area, traditional buildings. Myth busting, information, promoting best practice signposting.</p>	<p>Potential misinformation or disinformation about proposals for the area that could be a source of opposition to the proposals.</p>
		<p>Register or database of good contractors and craftspeople and building materials or component suppliers. This could be a City Region-wide list or a Pinterest-style site of the work done and details of the firms responsible. This would support and promote the local heritage skills base and make it easier for building owners to find appropriately skilled and experienced contractors.</p>	
		<p>'Conservation area surgeries' to provide in person advice to building owners, occupiers etc.</p>	



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Strength	Weakness	Opportunity	Threat
		<p>Possibility of a BID or similar to take projects forward, provide a source of funding for improvements, marketing etc.</p>	
		<p>The relatively low economic base and land values open up the area to a range of different residents and businesses and hence offer the Council a better chance of shaping the area's vitality. Scope to encourage family homes, student living, social housing as well as meanwhile uses, pop-ups, start-ups and new businesses.</p>	
		<p>Consider the younger generations: research shows they are less likely to own cars and want to live within reach of work, study, leisure and social life. Birkenhead is extremely well-connected and could be attractive to the younger demographics.</p>	
		<p>Creation of a local brand or identity to help market the area and form an 'umbrella' or 'banner' under which all partners (including businesses and not-for profits and community groups) can operate.</p>	

Table 6.4: SWOT Analysis: Connectivity

Strength	Weakness	Opportunity	Threat
Excellent rail connectivity: two Merseyrail stations within the study area, a third just outside. Liverpool city centre is less than five minutes away by rail. The local stations also link out to the national rail network.	Past highway improvements to increase traffic flow and segregate road users has created intrusions to the grid street layout and has created cluttered junctions that disrupt pedestrian desire lines (e.g. Conway Street roundabout, Argyle Street-Hinson Street junction, Hamilton Square corners).	Need to investigate the public realm, connectivity and land uses around the U-Boat Museum, Pump House and Cheshire Lines are part of a nascent Museum quarter / main tourist area and linking it to the town centre.	General: unless particular attention is paid to preserving and enhancing the character or appearance of the conservation area, there remains a risk that projects to improve connectivity and promote active travel do not maximise the opportunities to preserve and enhance the special character and appearance of the conservation area.
Good bus connectivity in the town centre, and its bus station is just outside of study area. This and the rail service have offset the loss of a direct commuter ferry service.	Busy and broad highways sever the study area from itself and its surroundings via active travel e.g. Woodside Gyratory, Chester Street, Borough Road / King's Square, Conway Street.		
The Mersey Ferry terminal offers further connectivity with Liverpool city centre and is a means of tourists reaching Birkenhead.	Mersey Tunnel entrance is very busy: noise, light pollution, odour / air quality can be particularly bad at certain times of day.		
The next-closest inland crossing points of the Mersey after those at Birkenhead are those at Runcorn (rail, car, lorry and bus), some 23km upstream. Birkenhead is therefore a principal destination from Liverpool and a key connection to the Wirral and north Cheshire.	Many of the busiest employment, education and civic destinations have their own on-site parking. Their workforce, students and visitors can and do arrive by car and therefore have little or no interaction or use of the town centre, even as pedestrians.		
Good road links: A41, Mersey Tunnel, A552, A554.			

## Chapter 7

### Case for Change

#### The Case for Change concludes the analysis stage and sets the priorities for the conservation area regeneration plan

**7.1** The Case for Change is the bridge between the analysis of the current status, situation and circumstances of the study area, and the conservation area regeneration plan policies and proposals that aim to conserve it for present and future generations.

**7.2** A 'do nothing' approach is rejected, as historic places need a consistent flow of investment, activity and management simply to maintain them in their present situation. Greater inputs of time, money, skill and expertise are required to improve the futures of historic places. It is crucial that these inputs are guided in a manner that maximises their benefits to the study area, so it remains viable, attractive and vital.

**7.3** This case for change sets out:

- The strategic priorities for the area. These are the overarching and fundamental aspects to managing change in the area.
- The historic environment priorities for the area. This set of priorities nests within the strategic priorities but has a specific focus on the conservation of the heritage assets within the study area.

#### Strategic priorities

##### Placemaking

**7.4** The study area hosts a very broad range of building and land uses and activities, and a correspondingly broad range of people and organisations. These give the area its vitality as well as defining its ongoing economic, civic and social purposes. In this context, a successful regeneration programme is one that understands and responds to these complexities rather than focuses on just the headline issues or has a limited scope.

**7.5** A placemaking approach to regeneration is ideal for a town centre as complex as Birkenhead. The aim of

placemaking is to make the big and small changes that collectively will make a substantial difference to a place. Placemaking brings together built environment expertise, decisionmakers, partners and stakeholders to devise and agree a diverse range of ways that a place can be improved or simply function better or more efficiently.

**7.6** The changes within a placemaking strategy can be high-level and structural such as where should everyone park their cars, to details and fine tuning, like asking does our car park provision and charging regime support the evening economy? Placemaking can be highly ambitious and include big-ticket investment that will bring many new jobs or residents to the area, but it is equally about finer grain issues like streetlighting, pavement dining, untidy sites, wayfinding or the quality of bus stops.

**7.7** Placemaking can have as many strands and as many timescales as its stakeholder team can accommodate, and each change, whether it is easy or hard to achieve, or short-, medium- or long-term in its delivery is working to the same overall objectives. Placemaking programmes can also build significant momentum, as each partner makes their own contribution to the programme's progress, and the smaller and larger changes begin to re-shape the place.

**7.8** The 2040 Framework and its supporting masterplans have done an excellent job of raising the profile of Birkenhead, identifying strategically important developments, and making more people aware of its regeneration potential. A placemaking programme would be the ideal accompaniment and a vehicle for the delivery of some aspects of the plans that could run to 2040 and beyond.

#### Integration with the Birkenhead 2040 Framework

**7.9** The conservation area regeneration plan and the recommended placemaking approach to delivering the conservation area regeneration plan should both nest within and align with the Birkenhead 2040 Framework. They should also consider the masterplans and neighbourhood frameworks that also support the delivery of the 2040 Framework.

**7.10** The 2040 Framework sets the vision and spatial strategy for the regeneration of Birkenhead. The historic environment is prominent in the 'Iconic Birkenhead' vision objective, with some overlap with the 'Cultural Birkenhead' vision objective. The historic environment is also a pervasive feature of the neighbourhoods that the Framework is divided into for the delivery of the town's regeneration.

**7.11** The high level nature of the 2040 Framework means that the conservation area regeneration plan and subsequent placemaking can help implement its vision, spatial strategy and objectives.

**7.12** At neighbourhood level, however the alignment of the conservation area regeneration plan and heritage-led regeneration activity with masterplans and neighbourhood frameworks must be a two-way conversation.

**7.13** The current cohort of draft masterplans and neighbourhood frameworks will affect the study area and its environs. The conservation area regeneration plan is an opportunity to review the proposals of these masterplans and neighbourhood frameworks against historic environment legislation, policy and objectives in order to fine tune their content. This process should be undertaken at the earliest opportunity. It will avoid or minimise the potential harm to heritage assets, identify synergies where there are shared objectives, and provide a suite of heritage-led projects that will complement the masterplan and neighbourhood framework proposals.

#### Design excellence

**7.14** William Laird had great ambitions for Birkenhead. Laird and his architect James Gillespie Graham set an extraordinarily high bar for the urban design and architecture of Birkenhead in the first half of the 19th century. This has inspired future generations to make their own additions to the legacy in the design of buildings used for municipal, commercial, domestic and transportation purposes.

**7.15** It is vital that change and new interventions in the built and natural environment continue the tradition of high quality architecture, urban design and public realm so that the town centre is a depository of design excellence spanning over two centuries.

**7.16** This applies to new buildings, but especially urban design and the approach to public realm. It is also just as important in small scale interventions such as retrofitting to incorporate sustainable design and equality of access into existing buildings of all ages.

**7.17** Excellent design is not the solitary pursuit of a lone designer or design team. It needs to be nurtured through policies and guidance, collaboration across built environment disciplines, the inputs of 'experts' and 'non-experts', and decisionmakers who understand the inherent benefit that excellent design plays in delivering thriving places.

#### Inclusivity

**7.18** The town centre is already inclusive in the sense that it is accessible by a range of forms of transport, accommodates a broad range of building uses and has a diverse housing stock ranging from apartments to traditional 'two up two down' terraced houses to the substantial houses at Hamilton Square, many of which are returning to their original use as single family homes. Across the UK, regeneration is often linked with

gentrification, where ever-higher property values and rental values stoked by regeneration activity create homogenised places, occupied and used by only those who can afford them. This process 'ringfences' the social, environmental and economic benefits of regeneration to a relatively narrow section of the population. It marginalises the poorer, the not for profit and the types of business or creative enterprises that thrive in well-connected places with lower land and property values.

**7.19** The study area for the conservation area regeneration plan is in a unique and very interesting position in that it currently accommodates a range of businesses, including CICs plus there are green shoots of a growing cultural and leisure economy, and planned improvement to the town's tourism offer. The study area is also located at the margins of a few of the 2040 Framework's Catalyst Projects. The placemaking approach to the regeneration of the study area can be used so that the area benefits from the economic, environmental and social spin-offs from these catalyst projects but retains or enhances its diversity and remains the town's 'melting pot' of different activity and people.

**7.20** The study area in its present form can and should be more inclusive. Factors like crime, fear of crime and the psychological cues sent out by neglected buildings and spaces, low quality public realm, inadequate lighting and low footfall are deterring certain user groups from the town centre, particularly outside of weekday business hours.

### Footfall

**7.21** For all of its accessibility by different transport modes and high provision of car parking spaces, the study area has a remarkably low level of footfall on its streets. This gives its streets and spaces an empty and unloved feeling. Simply increasing the number of people walking in the study area supports businesses, makes streets feel safer, has health benefits, and helps with social cohesion as shared spaces become valued through use.

**7.22** There are many facets to increasing footfall that could be delivered through a placemaking approach. Improving pedestrian priority and equality of access are one aspect, as is supporting a fall in private car use either for entire journeys or for the last leg of the commute or journey. Enhanced public realm can play its part, as can giving people more reason to visit Birkenhead such as to attend events, activities, festivals and foster repeat visits. The public realm of the study area could also be more diverse, rather than simply being infrastructure for getting from A to B, the public realm should offer more opportunities for dwell time, interaction, play and pause.

**7.23** There is no simple solution to increasing footfall, but more vital streets can generate so many spin-offs and ancillary benefits that increasing footfall should be a priority.

### Sustainable travel

**7.24** The study area is remarkably well connected by rail, bus, road and water. Despite this, a remarkable proportion of the study area and its immediate environs is dedicated for use by the private car. The grid is a network of mostly through roads and there is a substantial supply of private and public car parking. Many premises have their own fenced-in off-street parking and there are many private contract parking surface car parks. These foster both car dependency but also mean people can spend an entire working day in the town centre but spend only a few minutes - or no time at all - as a pedestrian in its public realm.

**7.25** This balance in favour of the convenience of the motorist is the product of decades of policy and change, but it needs close attention if the town centre is to regenerate. Car parking can be consolidated into fewer locations, opening up existing surface car parking for new uses and development. The notion of being able to park anywhere also needs further thought, as our most vital and attractive town and city centres tend to be the ones where cars are at the periphery rather than the heart of the place.

**7.26** There is understandably reticence to make life less convenient for the motorist, but at the same time the hectares of space in the town centre given exclusively to private cars is seriously harming the environmental quality, sense of place and feeling of safety in the town centre, particularly when cars are locked in fenced off, but unkempt compounds. Given the area's accessibility by other modes of transport it is also a highly inefficient use of land, particularly given the low levels of car park usage, even at peak times.

**7.27** This thorny issue must be addressed as a priority. At the same time demographic changes suggest car ownership is less prized by or viewed as essential by younger generations, particularly in urban areas. The regeneration of Birkenhead could anticipate this growing trend.

### The environment and climate change

**7.28** The study area must respond positively to climate change in the design of its buildings and public realm, as well as through the retrofit of existing buildings and spaces. At the same time the significance and value of its historic environment must be conserved for future generations.

**7.29** Contrary to popular belief, the two objectives of 'greening' buildings and spaces and conserving the historic environment are rarely in direct conflict with each other, it is simply a case of tailoring energy and water efficiency



measures and renewable energy generation to the building or site in question. An overlooked part of this process is appreciating the embodied carbon within the historic fabric and taking a detailed assessment of the thermal efficiency of the existing building rather than relying on estimates.<sup>14</sup>

**7.30** The forthcoming energy efficiency study at Hamilton Square means it could be an important case study in approaching retrofit in historic buildings. Going forward there needs to be a consistent and worthwhile approach to making the area's historic buildings more energy efficient and thus cheaper and more pleasant to occupy.

**7.31** Although the study area's character is hard and urban rather than soft and green, there is scope for increasing its ecological value, biodiversity, microclimate and management of rainfall and runoff whilst maintaining the significance of the historic environment. As with building retrofit, this requires an informed and balanced approach.

#### Looking beyond the boundary

**7.32** Although this case for change report has identified a study area boundary the conservation area regeneration plan should look beyond the boundary, as changes within the conservation area's setting can and will impact its significance. At the same time the use, vitality, appearance, noise, vibration and smells of land and buildings in the immediate environs of the study area will impact the people who occupy and use the buildings and spaces within the study area. This impact extends to the potential desirability of a building or site to a potential new occupier, whether they are a resident or a business.

**7.33** The study area or conservation area cannot be treated as a self-contained bubble. If investment and enhancements are limited to the area within its boundary, it follows that their effects will be far more limited than if they were applied beyond the boundary as well. Similarly, a gung-ho approach to building scale, layout and height outside of the boundary will create an awkward cheek-by-jowl edge at the boundary.

**7.34** Therefore when it comes to area-wide improvements, guidance or policy, the study area and its environs should be addressed holistically rather than having an artificial boundary where there is a step change in the approach to planning and regeneration.

#### Historic environment priorities

##### A fabric first approach

**7.35** The NPPF recognises that the historic environment is an irreplaceable resource that should be conserved and enhanced. In terms of an individual heritage asset such as a historic building, much of its significance is based on the work of its original designers and builders existing and showing how it was used by its original occupiers and how later occupiers have modified it and left their own traces on its fabric. The study area is itself a large heritage asset that has evolved over time in the same manner as the buildings and spaces within it.

**7.36** From significance, placemaking and embodied carbon perspectives, the priority should be to retain, adapt and re-use the historic environment and repair, rehabilitate and restore where appropriate. Ongoing maintenance and timely interventions by previous generations are big reasons why many historic buildings are still standing and in viable uses. This tradition must be continued. Original and traditional materials and building techniques should be employed to ensure compatibility with the historic fabric, while contemporary adaptations or alterations can help keep a building or site in use and add another layer of its evolution that may be valued by present and future generations.

**7.37** The study area and its surroundings bear many clear scars caused by past demolitions, while inappropriate past alterations and neglect are putting the viability and fabric of surviving buildings at risk. An approach that conserves and reuses historic fabric is therefore a high priority for the study area.

##### Addressing heritage at risk

**7.38** The entire conservation area is classed by Historic England as being 'at risk' due to its declining condition and activity. However within the conservation area there are individual buildings that are in a poor or declining condition and are vacant or in partial use. The heritage assets most at risk of decay and loss should be prioritised for intervention before any form of intervention becomes unviable. By the same token the next highest priority are buildings that are neglected but could deteriorate further if their condition is not addressed.

**7.39** The area requires an action plan to prioritise and address buildings and sites that are most at risk due to their condition and/or vacancy. This will help to save these assets, which is consistent with the fabric first approach above, but

<sup>14</sup> The thermal values given to stone and brick walls in energy performance certificates (EPCs) for example assume a particular thickness of wall and method of construction. In practice historic brick

and stone walls vary in thickness and method of construction and are often found to be far more thermally efficient than the national EPC estimate.

will also contribute to moving the entire conservation area off the 'at risk' register.

### Using planning tools

**7.40** Allied to the above two points is taking a proactive approach to using the powers available to the Council enhance individual buildings, sites or the wider conservation area. These tools include:

- Local policy, design codes, supplementary planning documents, development briefs and guidance that support the conservation objectives.
- Grant funding to conserve individual buildings or deliver area-based improvement schemes to buildings and the public realm
- Planning enforcement to address unauthorised works or changes of use.
- Section 215 Notices to tidy up unkempt buildings and land. This can include external repairs and ensuring weather-tightness.
- Repairs Notices and Urgent Works Notices to repair listed buildings that are vacant or the unused parts of listed buildings.
- Discontinuance Notices to remove advertisements with deemed consent or to stop existing lawful uses that are undermining the physical condition of listed buildings.

**7.41** These can all be relatively lengthy and time-consuming to prepare, but so too is the process of regeneration through new infrastructure and development. In an area like Birkenhead town centre, where there is such an important stock of historic buildings and streets, newbuild regeneration and heritage led regeneration must co-exist and cross-pollinate in order to multiply the effects of each.

### Connecting people and conservation

**7.42** There is already a strong local respect and affection for the conservation area and some of its key buildings and pieces of design. At the same time, the more people understand and appreciate what is significant about a place, the stronger the case is for its conservation.

**7.43** The historic environment is conserved in the public interest, so it is important for the people who manage and make decisions about the historic environment to understand its communal value to the local community or particular interest groups. This supports a more informed approach to conservation, which can lead to better decisions in the short- and long-term.

**7.44** It is therefore vital to make people aware of the place, its significance, the potential plans for its future and to engage

and interact rather than inform and consult. People feel ownership of shared historic places, so they should therefore feel ownership of the change that will affect them.

### Interpretation and celebration of place

**7.45** Outside of the processes of planning, development and regeneration Birkenhead as a place should be shared and celebrated far and wide. The significance of the area should be interpreted and shared with as many different audiences as possible with scope for people to share their interest in and stories about Birkenhead.

**7.46** This could be achieved through events, activities, organisations, web resources, studies, articles, tours, visits, social media, digital media, plaques, artwork, exhibitions or festivals that draw their inspiration from Birkenhead's heritage, character and sense of place. The pride of place of the wider community or of specific groups of people can be an important driving force for positive change.

### Linking heritage attractions

**7.47** The study area and its immediate environs are where many people arrive in Birkenhead and are located geographically between many of the town's key heritage assets. The conservation area is therefore an ideal location to connect these different heritage assets and attractions by guiding people to them through wayfinding and cross-promoting Birkenhead's tourism offer.

**7.48** Birkenhead Park is already an important visitor destination, but will be on the national and international tourist map if it achieves world heritage site status. Wayfinding from the ferry terminal and railway stations would help make the town centre part of a visit to the world heritage site.

**7.49** Big Heritage now operate the U Boat Story at the Woodside as well as the Wirral Transport Museum and its tramway. Both attractions are set to be enhanced and revitalised and are linked with Big Heritage's Northern Approaches attraction in Liverpool city centre. The town centre and its heritage assets could be integrated with these attractions through marketing and wayfinding, allowing a cross-pollination of footfall. In a similar manner Birkenhead Priority could be looped into the heritage attractions in and around the town centre.

**7.50** The key is that the town centre becomes somewhere for visitors to explore and discover, perhaps as the venue for a meal out, shopping or entertainment by people visiting a specific attraction.