



## LOWER BEBINGTON DRAFT CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

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## VOLUME 1 – CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

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## PREFACE

### 1 Background to the Study

This report has been prepared by The Built Conservation & Design Section of Wirral Council. The purpose of this report is to provide a full conservation area appraisal to inform a management plan, appended at the end of this document. It is intended that both documents will be proposed for formal adoption by Wirral Council in due course.

### 2 Scope and Structure of the Study

The scope of this Conservation Area Appraisal is based on the guidelines published by English Heritage (*Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals* and *Guidance on the Management of Conservation Areas*, both dated February 2006) and represents a factual and objective analysis. In accordance with the guidelines, the following framework has been used as the basis for this analysis:-

- § Location and population
- § Origins and development of the settlement
- § Prevailing or former uses and their influence on plan form or building type
- § Archaeological significance
- § Architectural and historic qualities of buildings
- § Contribution made by key unlisted buildings
- § Character and relationship of spaces
- § Prevalent and traditional building materials
- § Local details
- § Contribution made by green spaces, trees, hedges, etc
- § Setting of the Conservation Area and its relationship with the surrounding landscape
- § Extent of loss, intrusion or damage
- § Existence of any neutral areas

The document has been structured to encompass these areas of study and concludes with recommendations for the Conservation Area boundary and other matters such as

provision of Article 4 Directions.

### 3 The Planning Policy Context

Since the 1967 Civic Amenities Act local authorities have been empowered to designate as Conservation Areas those areas within their districts which were considered 'special'. The subsequent Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act of 1990 consolidated those powers and defined Conservation Areas as:-

*"areas of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance".*

Such areas are diverse. They may be large or small; residential or commercial; civic or industrial; old or relatively modern. They may represent social ideals or civic pride. They may be specifically designed or speculatively produced; modest or grand. They may contain Listed Buildings of architectural or historic interest or may simply have local historic association. However, common to all will be an identifiable environmental quality that should be protected from unsympathetic redevelopment or alteration.

Wirral Council has designated 25 Conservation Areas throughout the Borough reflecting the variety of building styles and environments exhibited within its borders. Lower Bebington is the 26<sup>th</sup> area considered for designation.

The content of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 is further clarified by the National Planning Policy Framework (and the Good Practice Guide of the superseded PPS5): Planning for the Historic Environment.

The principles of these documents are further supported by Wirral Council's local Heritage Conservation policies contained within its Unitary Development Plan.

### 4 Forthcoming LDF

This legislation and policy framework enables the authority to exercise greater control over development within Conservation Areas and, where appropriate, this may be supplemented by the use of 'Article 4 Directions' to remove permitted development rights. In this way, minor changes, such as window replacement or loft conversions, which may be cumulatively detrimental, can be controlled.

National policy stipulates that local authorities have a duty to review, from time to time, their regions to ensure that places of special architectural or historic interest are being protected. The boundaries of existing Conservation Areas may be revised, new areas may be designated and those areas which have been eroded to the extent that their special character has been lost may be de-designated.

Whilst the Council recognises that, for Conservation Areas to remain 'live' and responsive to a changing society, changes must and will occur, it nevertheless undertakes to ensure that all changes make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of its Conservation Areas and do not result in any serious loss of character or features

Planning legislation supports the authority in this by increasing its control over

development. It does this in the following ways:

- § Buildings and structures may not be demolished without formal consent from the Council (Conservation Area Consent).
- § Trees are protected and all work to them requires consent from the Council.
- § New development is expected to reflect the quality of design and construction of the surrounding area and should make a positive contribution to the area's character.
- § Local planning authorities may, if necessary, exercise even greater control by removing the basic permitted development rights of householders.
- § Under section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, the Council has a legal obligation to ensure that "special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance" of the area when formulating decisions on planning applications.

In relation to designation of new assets, the National Planning Policy Framework sets out the following policies:

“127. When considering the designation of conservation areas, 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.”

Whilst an appraisal aims to identify the essential elements which give an area its character, it is not intended as a detailed evaluation of each building and feature. Therefore any buildings, features and details may still have importance even though not specifically referred to in the document and any omissions do not indicate lack of merit or interest.

In undertaking this conservation area appraisal, age has been estimated on the basis of visual inspections from public areas only, map evidence and various texts.

The appraisal constitutes the evidence base for development frameworks and plans in terms of heritage conservation and the cultural environment. It reads alongside other data and characterisation studies in shaping the delivery of policy.

Many buildings have been altered considerably over time and would require detailed study to fully interpret. The dates provided in the gazetteer, unless otherwise stated, are approximate and relate to the original phase of construction or if that cannot be determined the most prominent parts. Unless clear documentary evidence is referred to, the periods ascribed to buildings should not be regarded as definitive. Where the original period of construction has been estimated, fabric from earlier periods may exist. This is particularly true of vernacular buildings in ancient settlements where building facades can have been successively remodelled and roofs changed, for

example from thatch to slate. Date stones cannot always be relied upon as they could have been incorporated into substantial rebuilding or mark an important event such as a marriage or change of ownership.

## 5 Summary of Special Interest

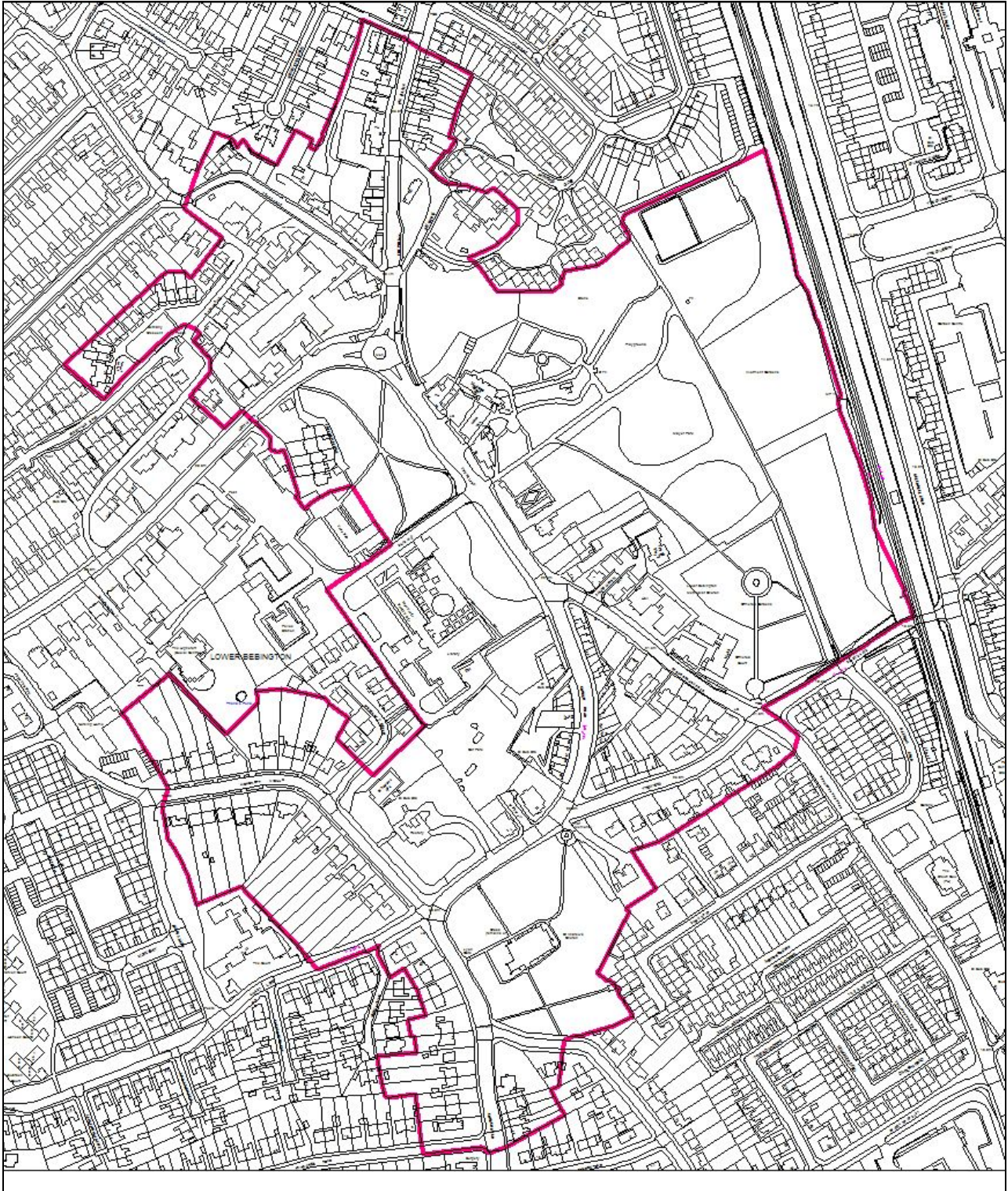
The special interest of Lower Bebington Conservation Area is varied but can be roughly described as follows:

- § Contrast between the historic zone of the remnants of the village, and the Brave New World of the Civic Centre and its environs, and enveloping suburbia;
- § Some sense of a village within a former rural setting, subsequently urbanised;
- § Mixture of buildings of all periods from pre-industrial to modern. Survival of pre-railway buildings;
- § Sense of enclosure provided by boundary walls to properties, contrasted by open environment of the Civic Centre;
- § Prevalent trees and soft landscaping to private residences and public spaces providing a degree of softening to the urban environment and improved air quality;
- § Generally small scale but small number of larger merchants dwellings;
- § Pre-industrial origins and organic morphology of the village core;
- § Legacy of Joseph Mayer, philanthropist and educationalist. The pastoral haven of Mayer Park remains at the heart of the settlement.
- § Varied topography of development on a series of contours falling West-East down to wards the Birkenhead-Chester railway and former tidal marsh beyond.

Map 7 in the appendices shows a diversity of connections and movement existing within the village, with routes, often historic, criss-crossing the area. A path connects Ellens Lane with Townfield Lane through Mayer Park. Another path leads up through the Park via Dickens Avenue, over the main road and then transects the green space in front of the Town Hall, then crossing Heath Road, and leading in turn to a lane cut through the rock which opens onto Green Lane.

It is possible to avoid the busy road curving around St Andrews by walking past the war memorial and through the churchyard to either St Andrews Road or the continuation of Church Road. Other routes exist up Highcroft Avenue and around the rear of the Civic Centre.

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*Lower Bebington proposed Conservation Area boundary 2013*

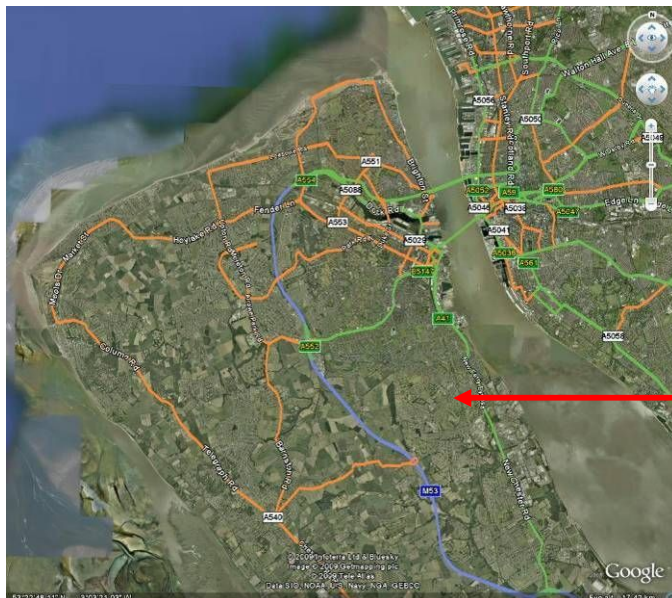


## 1.0 LOCATION AND CONTEXT

### 1.1 Geographic Location

The village of Lower Bebington lies on the line of the former principal route to Chester from Birkenhead, in between the village of Tranmere and the hamlets of Spital and Poulton Lancelyn. The route follows the lower contours of the hill that rises up from the lower levels adjoining Port Sunlight to reach the settlement of Higher Bebington.

The original village pre-dates the surrounding later post-industrial conurbation of greater Birkenhead and Bebington. The village is broadly a linear settlement, with buildings on and adjacent to the route. The land either side of the road and the routes that lead off it have gradually been developed for housing. Lower Bebington has no well defined "centre" as such, but the principal buildings are the Mayer Hall complex, The Civic Centre and adjacent shops and pubs and St Andrews Church. The route through the village is a classified B road – the B1536.



**Bebington**

### 1.2 Topography and Geology

The Wirral peninsula is a low lying undulating plain, interspersed with wooded sandstone ridges. The highest point at Poll Hill in Heswall is a little over 100m above sea level. The peninsula is formed of Keuper and Bunter sandstones and marls belonging to the Triassic formation, with a small area of Carboniferous sandstone near Neston. The sandstones are generally hidden under superficial glacial deposits of boulder clay.

Lower Bebington lies on the lower slopes of the sandstone ridge of Storeton Hill, above the marshy land to the East which was later developed into the model village of Port Sunlight. The proximity to Storeton gave ready access to high quality building stone, and many of the pre C20 buildings are constructed

of Storeton sandstone. The route from Birkenhead winds around and across a series of gentle bends and undulations in the landscape, producing a pleasant and varied progression southwards towards Spital. Although some areas of the village are quite densely developed with housing, the presence of larger open areas of green landscaping in Mayer Park and in front of the Civic Centre create a more leafy and open aspect.

The settlement is served by two train stations – “Bebington” station at the northern end and “Port Sunlight” station just beyond the south eastern corner of the village. It is well connected to the economic hubs of Birkenhead, Liverpool and Chester, and lies not far distant from two junctions on the M53 motorway, at Eastham and Clatterbridge.

### 1.3 General Usage

Lower Bebington is now primarily suburban in character, with the great majority of the buildings in residential, mostly family accommodation, with medium-sized front and rear gardens to houses. However, along the principal route there is a significant retail / commercial presence, with traditional shops and small businesses. The main community buildings are Mayer Hall, Pennant House no. 65 The Village, the Civic Centre and Medical Centre and St Andrews Church and the Methodist Church & Centre.

The smaller shops and retail offer appears to be struggling, in common with many High Streets in the region, and some measures may be needed to sustain this sector in the future. Nevertheless, the concentration of retail, recreative (Mayer Park), commercial, religious and community uses create a fairly diverse mix of uses that, combined with the generous suburban catchment, should sustain the built heritage well into the future.

The overall form of the village has changed little since 1971, when the community functions were all combined into the newly constructed Civic Centre. The Pennant House complex continues to be in low-level use as a community hall and the area’s One-Stop-Shop. Mayer Park is the area’s principal green space and the backdrop to the aforementioned complex of buildings connected with Mayer.

### 1.4 Conservation Area Boundary and Statutory Designations

The proposed boundary encircles the historic core of the village as it extends:

To St Andrews Church to the South, to the Chester-Birkenhead railway to the East, from and the Rectory northwards part the Civic Centre to Heath Road and Acres Road before terminating at Townfield Lane and Mayer Park at its northern extremity.

This perimeter encloses the historic properties of greatest note in the settlement. Perhaps equally importantly, it preserves the characteristic irregular morphology of a pre-industrial linear settlement along the line of a track and later a road.

To the south the ancient foundation of St Andrews church becomes obvious as the line of the road curves dramatically around its sacred space. The church is an impressive landmark, and a grade I listed building. Its stone spire dates from the C14 and marks out the approach to the village from some distance away.



*View from the entrance to Highcroft Avenue, showing the sweep of the road.*



*View of the church and its impressive spire and lych gate.*

The western boundary runs along the edge of the Civic Centre and down towards Acres Road. Highcroft Avenue has also been included as an area of important high quality 1930s suburban development in the Arts & Crafts style so typical of English urban expansion in this period.



*View of the library from Civic Way, showing the indifferent quality of the landscaping.*



*Green Lane from the South, showing the original school building at the North-western end of the village.*

The boundary is nowhere particularly well defined, as later infill- and redevelopment have conspired to create a rather varied, if disjointed boundary that tends to diffuse out into the surrounding suburban areas.

Townfield lane at the northern edge is a thoroughfare of some antiquity, and leads up from the northern end of Bebington towards the former pre-enclosure or "Townfield". Its identity has been lost although it continues as a straight line through Mayer Park and down towards Port Sunlight.



*The Birkenhead – Chester railway forms the eastern boundary of the Conservation Area.*



*The stately manager's properties on The Wiend form the southern boundary of the site.*

Mayer Park and the Chester-Birkenhead railway form the eastern limit of the area, with the boundary following the line of the Wiend and Ellens Lane back up towards St Andrews Church.

## 2.0 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

The etymology of Bebington has been suggested as the settlement of Bebb's kin ("ing" meaning "kin of", and "ton" roughly translated as "farmstead"). The "ings" are thought to indicate an early Germanic wave of settlement. As Romano-Celtic power waned in the West of Britain Germanic tribes from Eastern England, and occasionally North-West continental Europe, took advantage of the resulting power vacuum and availability of good farming land to colonise and settle in sizeable numbers. These -tons are thought to slightly post-date the early "hams" like Eastham, and are probably associated with the other -tons such as Prenton, Moreton, Bidston etc.

It is likely that this Germanic settlement overlies an earlier Celtic settlement of some description, and the site of St Andrews Church in particular may have Celtic or even prehistoric origins as a ritual centre. The curvilinear form of the churchyard points towards a Celtic foundation for the ritual Christian site that may predate the settlement's Germanic colonisation.

### 2.1 Prehistoric & Roman

Although there is evidence of human occupation in Wirral since Mesolithic (1) times, particularly in the North of the peninsula, there is little known evidence for early activity in the Bebington area. Local finds from the prehistoric period include flint scatters, axes and traces of Bronze Age roundhouses – a middle Bronze Age settlement site has been excavated at Irby by National Museums Liverpool, recently compiled into a report. Neolithic stone axes and flints have been discovered at the nearby Bromborough Courthouse site, closer towards the estuary.

By 70 CE the Roman march northwards had reached Chester and a substantial fortress and garrison was established there, complete with local commander. Roads radiated from the city and into North Wirral – to the successful port at Meols, and to Birkenhead and on to Wallasey. It is possible that the main route through Bebington dates to the Roman period, or may have originated as a prehistoric trackway.

There are reports of finds dating to before 70CE in the Wirral, and this is a reflection of the fact that the regional tribe of the time, the Cornovii, were an ally of Rome – offering their support to the conquerors as soon as the invasion took place in 43 CE. The discovery of Roman coins within the churchyard at St Andrews may strengthen the case for regarding this site as a possible pre-Christian centre.

### 2.2 Pre Norman Conquest

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<sup>1</sup> In Britain, generally 10,000 BC to 5,500 BC

The name Bebington attests to an early mediaeval foundation, and although the name is shared between Higher and Lower Bebington it is likely that some evidence of pre-Norman activity survives in undisturbed deposits in the vicinity. Before the mediaeval era, the area was under Roman and Romano-British control, with an overwhelmingly Celtic population that spoke a dialect similar to Welsh or Cumbric. As Roman power in the region waned and Belgic and Germanic tribes from eastern England and the continent saw an opportunity to gain control of the area; satellite towns grew up which later formalised into settlements like Bebington.

In the same way that the local population capitulated to invaders from Italy and learnt to endear themselves to Roman rule and the benefits that it brought, initially at least, they later became disillusioned with the heavy taxation, rampant inflation and imperfect security provided by the Roman state. This ground down and dispirited population was content in the end to change these masters for Germanic chieftans, acquiring a new hybrid dialect and vocabulary based on trade with them that eventually became the English language.

Whilst this transition of power and influence away from the Mediterranean and towards the Germanic states to the East was underway, some links with the South were maintained. A St Maenas flask was discovered in the finds at Meols, and grouped together there with other finds from Byzantium and North Africa this suggests that the Celtic church in NW England maintained some links with the Christian church in the Mediterranean.

The early hams are seen to derive from Saxon settlement that progressively converted Romano-British settlements into Germanic villages. Saxon mercenaries from the continent were employed by an increasingly beleaguered late Roman administration in the fourth century to protect Romano-British assets against raids by Celtic tribes from the North. When the legions left the country at the end of the 4th, the mercenaries settled permanently, their military attachments allowing them to assume power for themselves in the process.

Seeing the fertility of the land, efficiently cultivated by the Romano-British tribes, they encouraged further settlement by calling their tribal relations from their Anglo-Saxon homeland in North Germany, Denmark, Belgium and the Netherlands to come and emigrate to Britain. Other factors may have played a part. The urban nature of Romano-British life in towns such as Chester is thought to have led to a predisposition to higher levels of plague and disease amongst the Celtic population.

Similarly, the catastrophic eruption of Mount Pinatubo in 535CE led to the blanketing to the northern hemisphere in cloud, reducing, temperatures, rainfall and crop yields and encouraging the migration of peoples from marginal agricultural areas like the poorly drained areas of North Germany to the warmer, more temperate, and more agriculturally productive climes of Britain.

In addition to the historical and linguistic evidence for a Germanic

foundation, Lower Bebington lies on a route between the other early mediaeval foundations of Tranmere to the North and Poulton, Bromborough and Willaston to the South.

Bebington could have been Christian from the late Romano-British period onwards, and the mention of a St Patricks Well in nearby Bromborough may suggest a connection with this saint in the mid C5th. With the fall of the Roman Empire, the Wirral is thought to have lapsed back into paganism until the Christian religion was re-established by St Chad in 670.

Bromborough is now widely regarded as the most likely location for the Battle of Brunanburh that took place around 937CE. This conflict was the result of a planned attack by a consortium of Hiberno Norse tribal leaders and the combined forces of the Anglo-Saxon King Athelstan and his brother Edmund, based at Chester. The Norse-Celtic forces were defeated, though at great cost to the Wessex contingent. The outcome was essentially the creation of a unified English state across middle and southern Britain that co-operated, to an extent, in matters constitutional. The battle was therefore a seminal event in the development of the English and British states.

Chester was increasingly an important centre for trade, with the port at Meols becoming subservient to the burh at Chester. Bede describes the city as being a civitas – an administrative centre. The expulsion of Norsemen from Dublin around 901 CE led to their settlement on lands granted by Aethelmund around Chester, and this could be the source of archaeological and place-name evidence for Viking settlement on lands around Liverpool Bay.

At this time, it is possible that the southern part of Wirral was under Anglo-Saxon control, with the northern half loosely under Hiberno Scandinavian rule. This is suggested largely by place-name evidence, with a scattering of names ending in -by, e.g. West Kirby. Celtic names in the north of Wirral, e.g. Irby (“village of the Irish”), Wallasey (“island of foreigners” – Celts?) and Landican indicate that the possibility of semi-autonomous Celtic communities in this area.

In addition, finds such as a Hogback stone, grave markers and fragments of standing crosses demonstrate a settled community, which eventually endorsed the Christian religion. The name Raby suggests a community on the border of this self-governing territory, with a centrally located Parliament site at Thingwall and a trading centre at Meols as indicated by a wealth of finds that suggest a beach market on the north Wirral littoral. Bebington lay securely within the Anglo-Saxon zone, and its nearest English neighbour, Bromborough, possesses fragments of an Anglo-Saxon Cross outside the church of St Barnabas.

It is important, however, to remember that this was an era of instability and constantly changing identities and alliances. It is impossible to definitively disentangle the Anglo-Saxon heritage from the Celtic and Scandinavian settlements and their political and cultural distinctions. Much of the inheritance is a shared Anglo-Scandinavian one, and recent genetic surveys

clearly show that the present population of the area is approx. 75% Celtic, deriving originally from northern Italy, Spain, France and the Rhineland. Together with the Ukraine and Turkey, Italy is thought to have been a refuge during colder periods in the Glacial Maximum, with people surviving in small groups before expanding northwards as the ice sheets retreated.

The Historic Settlement Study for Wirral has now been published (see Appendix 1) and this cites the principal findings of archaeological investigations and landmarks in the area. This document should be the starting point for all future archaeological research in the locality.

## 2.3 Medieval

The Norman Conquest of England in 1066 had far reaching consequences across all sphere of life in the country. All local landowners were dispossessed of their holdings, and these territorial spoils shared out piecemeal amongst French and Norman barons. This event in one stroke created the "us-and-them" class culture of England, with Norman overlords dominating and controlling – together with the church – every detail of their conquered subjects' lives.

So it was in Wirral, with most of the peninsula falling into the hands of Earl Hugh D'Avranches, Baron Hamon de Massey, and Scirard de Launcelyn. The land at Bebington previously appears to have been held by Earl Edwin. Later in the mediaeval period, the English Stanley and (in the C17th) Vyner families rose to prominence in the Wirral as total Norman supremacy waned and the French lines became integrated with the emerging English gentry. The majority of land in and around Bebington continued to lie in the hands of the Anglo-Norman (Lancelyn) Greene and Massey-Stanley families until the modern period, and they continue to this day to have close connections to St Andrews Church and other local institutions and charities.

In terms of landscape, former patterns of landuse have tended to survive more successfully than the built heritage. This is very discernible in both parts of Bebington, where the pattern of pre-enclosure farming is still apparent, particularly when looking at the tithe maps. Fields are arranged in strips, generally perpendicular to the main thoroughfare: with larger fields further away from the village and smaller cultivated plots adjacent to townhouses.

St Andrews Church is thought to contain some pre-conquest masonry on its southern side, and aspects of its internal character, in particular the massive cylindrical columns are characteristically Anglo-Norman. The church was extended to the East and North later in the mediaeval period and the stone spire was added at this time also. There is a mention in the Domesday Book of a priest being in existence at Poulton, and the living of a Capella [chapel] at Bebintone being given to the Abbey at St Werburghs in Chester. This could either represent St Andrews Church or another, perhaps pre-Conquest



chapel, closer to present-day Poulton Hall.

The years 1509 to 1547 were marked by a huge upheaval in the English way of life under Henry VIII, who changed the country's religion and introduced new forms of local and national government. The impact of these reforms was widely felt, particularly in settlements that had grown up around monasteries and Abbeys. It was in this period that the parish of Bebington gained importance, with the town functioning as the administrative centre for the land between the neighbouring parishes of Heswall, Hooton, Birkenhead and the sea.

The de-forestation of Wirral in the late mediaeval period may have helped to improve its economic fortunes. Under the early Norman barons, much of the Wirral was designated as a "forest" in the official sense – in other words it was unlawful to create any barriers to deer by enclosing land with fences etc. This word "forest" in this usage has nothing to do with the presence or planting of trees therefore, but the primacy of hunting does prevent the undertaking of enclosed pasture or arable, and must have impoverished the peninsula's early economy to an extent. The need for the land to produce a variety of foodstuffs and goods to service its successful ports and their associated trades may have made this de-forestation a necessity.

## 2.4 Post-medieval

The Jacobean and Tudor period saw great expansion the wealth and importance of the region as a whole, and in the Wirral played its part in the "Great Rebuilding" of the C17th. This is made clear by the fact that there are only a handful of domestic buildings dating from before the C17th in anything resembling their original form on the peninsula – the earlier buildings are generally either ecclesiastical or fortified structures.

Historical records show little formal parliamentary enclosure around Bebington – it is possible that enclosure of open fields or strips had been underway informally in the township from mediaeval times onwards, if they existed at all. A record dating from 1656 describes the enclosure of 20 acres to endow St Andrews School.

The enclosure of common land for farming was a natural development as agricultural techniques improved and pastoral dairy farming expanded to produce milk products for an urban market and rendered marginal land more productive. Rock cut cellars appear en masse in Jacobean and later houses as dairy products needed to be kept cool for storage and processing. Within the conservation area, smaller enclosures held a number of cottages and gardens, facing on to the main road. The boundaries of these enclosures remained substantially the same into the mid-19th century and some persist today. There is little evidence of consistent plot widths in the manner of burgage plots, but in the village the gables of properties would have faced onto the main street, with crofts and workshops stretching out behind.

The only property within the area that dates to the C17th is no. 25 The

Village – Willow Cottage. This is a building typical of that period and shared many features with other listed cottages in the Wirral, such as The Nook in West Kirby, Prenton Hall, the Wheatsheaf and Vineyard Farm in Raby and Rose Cottage in Hoylake. These are characteristically single storey structures, with secondary accommodation in the roofspace, often built next to a principal thoroughfare and sited atop bedrock.

The mostly Georgian edifice of Bebington Hall once stood on the elevated land overlooking the Pennant House complex, being demolished in the postwar period in order to create the landscaped setting for the new Civic Centre and Town Hall. This is likely to have been one of the more significant properties in the village, replacing an earlier vicarage, and is identified on Council hazard maps as a site of archaeological potential.

Like many buildings in the village that have been lost over the years, photographs of it survive in the archive of local images in Bebington Central Library. It was a linear stone built property of two stories, and would have functioned as the manor house for the village.

## 2.5 From the 18th Century

Bryant's Map of 1831 shows Bebington in its pre-industrial form, the only buildings marked out being St Andrews Church, Bebington Hall and two pubs – The Rose & Crown and The Ship.

The tithe map of the area from the 1840s continues to show a distinctly agrarian settlement, with agriculture being the principal landuse. Nonetheless, there is a reasonable concentration of built property identifiable in the village, which is likely to constitute an increase and which reflects the growing prosperity of the area as commercial activity in the region markedly grows from the C18th.

The line of the Chester – Birkenhead Railway is marked out on the tithe map, following its present course to the East of the settlement. Its principal impact is infrastructural and economic, bringing Bebington further into the suburban domain. By 1840 the tramway taking stone quarried from Storeton Woods down to the tidal Pool in what is now Port Sunlight, is in existence.

It is difficult to distinguish late C18th properties from those built in the early part of the C19th but notable properties that date from the Georgian and Regency periods include: The Grange - Elmbank, 20 The Village, 32 Heath Road, nos. 73-79 The Village, nos. 15-19 The Grove, no. 65 the Village (Coach & Horses public house), no. 18a The Village (The Wellington public house), the schoolhouse and nos. 5-7 Acres Road and nos. 1-5 Toleman Avenue. The great majority of these are early C19th, with only no. 32 Heath Road being of a likely C18th date.

It is necessary to mention the influence of quarrying operations in Storeton Woods on the local economy. Storeton sandstone was noted for its suitability as a building stone from early times and quarrying operations in locations around Storeton would have been undertaken from early times. It is said that the Romans were the first to use this stone for the construction of their buildings, and this may be true. However, it was in the late mediaeval period that stone became the material of choice for fortified, higher status and ecclesiastical buildings.

The village of Storeton itself is generally constructed of this stone, which was found to be both easily worked and extremely durable. The quarry workings ceased to be operational in the early C20th and the opencast workings were filled in with debris sourced from the construction of the Birkenhead Road tunnel in 1930s.

The quarried material was transported on a primitive railway owned by the mines' owners the Stanley family, leading southwards and then eastwards through Higher Bebington and down to the River Dibbin for onward transport. The railway itself is long gone, and survives only in the alignment of some boundaries and roads, for example Quarry Road – the former wharf likewise is identifiable through the road names in Port Sunlight of Water Street and Wharf Street.

## 2.6 Early-Mid 19th Century Development

The character of Bebington was to change dramatically when Birkenhead and Liverpool expanded enormously as mercantile and maritime centres. The introduction of a steam boat ferry service from Birkenhead Ferry in 1820 and from Woodside Ferry in 1822 were to later have a transformative effect on many towns and villages along the eastern shores of the Wirral.

The economic and industrial success of Liverpool and neighbouring towns and cities were to have great consequences also for their populations. With little or no sanitation squalor and disease was rife. Mortality rates were high, particularly amongst the young. Merchants used their wealth to take advantage of the availability of property in less polluted settings within commuting distance of the cities. Wirral presented many benefits in this regard, being essentially tranquil and rural yet close to the Port of Liverpool.

Merchants houses, generally neoclassical in design, start to appear on plots of land close to village centres, for example nos. 73-79 The Village. They are generally of a high quality, featuring a number of architectural devices that are decorative as well as functional such as: fine brick and stone masonry with fine joints, slate roofs, fine timber joinery and sash windows, heavy cornices, plinths and sill bands to add a little grandeur and to protect the building from the weather.

Many more of these houses were built in the country house manner, located within landscaped grounds, e.g. Mount Allars, Richmond Hill, The Oaklands,

the Acres, Apsley house, The Kirklands, Clifton Mount, The Poplars and Church Villa. Hungry for land, many of these were demolished as the C19th wore on, and land values made the construction of terraced or multiple properties more attractive.

The Coach and Horses and The Wellington public houses were operational at this time and would have seen a steady rise in trade as economic activity and the number of travellers increased.

However, it is still likely at this time that Lower Bebington was still identifiable as an entity separate from the surrounding towns, and its overall character remained rooted in agriculture and a rural way of life.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> edition OS map, a number of farms are clustered around the central heart of Lower Bebington. None of these survive today, but some of the parcels of land still conform to their former holdings. Amongst these, generally tenanted, the following farms can be identified: Church Farm, Elmbank and Victoria Farm.

## 2.7 Mid to Late C19th

The ability of Bebington to combine easy access to economic centres with the tranquillity and clean air and water of a rural environment proved ever more attractive, and a steady stream of new building projects for the mercantile and professional classes arrived in Bebington. However, the village was not such a hotbed of property development that all the older properties were cleared away and redeveloped en masse. In general, the newer properties sat alongside their older neighbours to create a pleasingly varied townscape.

Ferry services to Liverpool expanded, whilst the Birkenhead Docks began, for the first time, to turn a profit. The ability of people to commute in large numbers to these centres of economic and industrial activity enabled the large scale expansion of housing to occur in settlements like Bebington.

Fine properties constructed during this period include The Orchard at no. 71 The Village, with more terraced and semi-detached properties springing up also, for example nos. 6-12 Bromborough Road and the Rectory to St Andrews Church. It is believed that Bebington Hall was formerly the residence of the minister before it was constructed.

The 1874 OS map shows a succession of these substantial properties in their own grounds, mostly dating from sometime in the C19th. Many are now lost, as in the later years of the century the demand for building land intensified and the area saw a huge expansion in red brick terraced

housing. The area of land called Trafalgar on the map shows the construction of that development underway, with a network of tightly packed streets laid out and new houses on site.

By the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition OS in the 1880s the character of the area is starting to change from rural to a more suburban form. The single most important development in this period is the construction of the Lever Bros factory on marginal, marshy land to the East and the associated industrial village of Port Sunlight. The factory brought additional employment opportunities for local workers, whilst the introduction of neo-historicist architecture in the English style influenced the style of building in neighbouring areas like Bebington.

The growing success of Lever Brothers and the mercantile metropolis of Liverpool and Birkenhead meant that developers and owners could choose from the best quality materials and have their properties designed by celebrated architect-builders. There was a move towards larger and more heavily decorated properties, even for middle class families.

The Church was not immune to these changes, and there were developments for this institution also. The former Rectory was re-designated the Abbot's Grange (now demolished) and a new Rectory constructed closer to St Andrews Church. The rectory remains in use today and is an impressive exercise in terracotta in a Gothicised Arts & Crafts style

In addition to the Anglican places of worship, non-conformism was growing in strength because of its appeal to the now fully enfranchised working classes. A Wesleyan Methodist chapel appears in Bromborough Road at the turn of the century, followed by a linked church hall some time later.

### Joseph Mayer

Economic progress did not always translate into social and cultural advancement, and the Levers were not the only businessmen in the locality to understand this. In 1860 Joseph Mayer, a Liverpool jeweller and goldsmith came to live in Bebington and established a free public library service in a house rented from local eccentric Thomas Francis in the centre of Lower Bebington Village, now demolished.

In order to accommodate more books, Mr Mayer purchased the land at the back of the Rose & Crown public house, the farm there being known as Pennants Croft. The farmhouse, now called no. 65 The Village nearby was adapted, adding more rooms and a clock tower adjacent to the front entrance. This library opened on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1870.

Joseph Mayer also bought the area now known as Mayer Park and constructed Pennant House, and the adjoining Mayer Hall – an open-plan

building specifically designed to house his collection of artefacts. In 1878, having regard to his failing health, Joseph Mayer formed the Mayer Trust in order to ensure continuing provision for the upkeep of the library and the grounds to the rear. Even after the passing of the Public Libraries Act in 1892, the library remained in the administration of the Mayer Trust, until 1930. In that year, in a scheme overseen by the Charity Commissioners, the library was handed over to the then Bebington and Bromborough Urban District Council.

The words "Tyranny's foe" appear at several points about the group of buildings, often carved into stone. Mayer encouraged people to think for themselves. Furthermore he appreciated that critical thought was not an innate faculty but required self-education and wider reading.

## 2.8 20th and 21st Century Changes

In the early years of the C20th, Britain was the richest country in the world, with London its commercial centre and Liverpool the second city of Empire. Confidence was at an all time high, and this translated into the greatest expenditure on domestic housing per capita that there has ever been, before or since. It is said that the best quality housing stock of Britain was constructed in the period 1900-1914, with even lower class housing being built to exacting standards. Due in part to the decline in apprenticeships, these quality standards were never to be achieved again and this is borne out by inspection of those properties, which reveal an array of fine materials and unsurpassed workmanship.

The Wiend in the village saw the construction of new houses for the managers of Lever Bros in Port Sunlight, and these remain in place. We cannot identify the architects of these buildings, information which may still come to light.

It was the huge wealth of Britain in the early C20th that caused other nations to look on enviously, and this precipitated the two world wars that were to bring so much destruction to Merseyside, both materially and socially.

The reaction of the British here, as elsewhere, was to sometimes to emulate the grand classicism of Prussia (particularly in terms of public buildings), and at other times retrench back into the familiar references of English domestic architecture. The latter approach can be seen elsewhere in the neo-vernacular houses in The Wiend, and in the Arts & Crafts style houses in Highcroft Avenue.

WWI was also in itself an opportunity to test at first hand the physical condition of its military forces. Upon inspection up to 30% of those eligible

for combat operations were found to be unfit for military service: due to a combination of malnourishment, tuberculosis and other conditions. The realisation that Britain was in danger of losing the war due to everyday conditions and poor nutrition led to a number of reforms, and to the creation of new sporting facilities aimed at increasing fitness.

The Oval Sports Ground started out life as the Wirral Agricultural Show Grounds, and was constructed in 1906. Shortly afterwards it became Port Sunlight Recreation Ground, was acquired by Levers in 1919 and was passed to Cheshire County Council in 1966. It sits adjacent to Bebington Cemetery – itself a very notable piece of landscaping, with fine chapels.

New architectural projects tended to feature wide road widths that promoted natural ventilation and the clearing away of feared miasmas that spread disease. Sunlight was seen as a possible cure for tuberculosis, despite germ theory having been proven in the 1870s, and windows were broadened to increase daylighting in interiors, occupying a greater percentage of any façade.

The 1930s 4<sup>th</sup> edition Ordnance Survey map shows a number of features, showing how the area had developed over the preceding century. Mayer Park has retained its original landscaping, though no longer a private garden, and Ormerod Gardens are now laid out further to the South in memory of the celebrated antiquary and historian. The suburban semi-detached houses of Highcroft Avenue are fully built and there are new planned developments around the perimeter of the village in Brereton Avenue, Parkside Road and St Andrews Road.

## 2.9 Later Twentieth Century

The devastation wreaked by the two wars caused Britain to become more cautious about the sustainability of territorial acquisitions overseas, and the nation looked increasingly inwards upon itself. It looked instead to technology and science to drag the nation out of its post-war malaise, and to help solve its severe housing crisis. Coupled with substantial national debts arising out of the conflicts, housing had to be constructed efficiently and at as low a cost as possible.

The motor car allowed yet more people to commute to work from suburban centres, and new housing estates sprung up all around Bebington. The new social housing tended to be constructed from bricks, fired at a low temperature to save on fuel, and covered with a protective layer of pebbledash. Following modernist principles, lower storey heights and an emphasis on horizontality streamlined architecture, with more glazing and a freer approach to detailing as structural engineering allowed housing to be constructed more quickly, eating up much of the available land.

Cheaper energy, allied with larger areas of glazing, meant that the new architecture was often insubstantial, poorly insulated and now poses problems in relation to energy efficiency.

This love affair with modernism culminated in the construction of the Bebington Civic Centre in 1971. The centre was constructed on an area of raised ground above the main road and fronting on to Mayer Park. The contrast with the Mayer Complex could not be more stark. Gone are the references to Gothicism, craft and the intimate use of domestic details in the rest of Bebington, the new complex is unashamedly modern classical in style and features extensive unenclosed landscaping to create a feeling of openness and technocratic progress.

## 2.10 Archaeology

The Merseyside Archaeological Service Historic Environment Record (HER) formerly held details of sites of interest relating to the historic environment of Wirral. Due to administrative changes, the record is now accessible only at cost. However, other records exist in the Cheshire Record Office and Bebington Central Library itself holds a range of historical material, together with the Mayer Collection. It is hoped that normal service at the HER can be resumed as soon as possible, and that the record can be digitised and made more accessible to the public.

As would be expected from a location so close to a major port, some of the archaeological evidence relates to World War II defences, which were surveyed as part of the Defence of Britain Project. No formal defences exist within the proposed area, but there are some fortifications nearby, around the Unilever factory in particular.

The lack of known finds should not be interpreted as a lack of potential, and the rich history of the village dating back to Celtic times makes the need to learn more about its early remains a key priority in the future. It is also possible that pre-modern remains survive incorporated within later Georgian buildings, and buildings archaeology and recording needs to be granted due importance.

Both the Urban and Rural Landscape Characterisation Studies for the Wirral have been published. The character of Bebington is highly varied, and derives in part from how the focus of the settlement has changed over time. There are few identifiable areas of high archaeological potential within the study area, the exceptions being the site of the former Bebington Hall and St Andrews Churchyard.

## 3.0 LANDSCAPE & VISTAS



### 3.1 Character and Inter-Relationship of Spaces

The character of Lower Bebington is essentially diverse but can be summarised as a rural village which became subsumed into C19th and C20th suburbia. Its form is linear, with a series of former farms concentrated around the meeting of roads in the centre and historic properties extending up and down the main street from Townfield Lane to St Andrews Church.

A key feature of the conservation area is the strong presence of trees and mature landscaping. A group of trees marks the gateway to the area just South of the church, whilst the arboretum of Mayer Park and landscaping around the Civic Centre helps to reinforce a leafy and almost salubrious quality that sets the village apart from the urban estate land around it.

### 3.2 Views and Vistas

The topography of the village, and the way in which its routes weave around the contours makes for a varied morphology that further enhances the character of views within and around it.

From the South, the entrance to the village is marked by tall trees and St Andrews Church, its spire visible from far further afield. Here the road swings around the churchyard to create a sweeping bend, framed by the trees on adjacent church land and sandstone walls. The road then leads into the village, with the single mass of the Civic Centre buildings contrasting with the more organic, historical development beneath it.



*Southern gateway into Lower Bebington, with prominent trees, the spire of the church in the distance and the Regency development of Mersey Terrace to the right.*

From the East, the junction of Ellens Lane with Bromborough Road is a busy one and is marred by the speed and frequency of local traffic. Still, the entrance to Mayer Park remains impressive whilst the first set of managers' houses in the Wiend towards above it.

From the West people and traffic are directed down Heath Road towards the roundabout and its fountain. Houses sit up on higher ground to the North, with the landscaped grounds of the Civic Centre on the left.

From the North, it is the older properties on each side of Bebington Road that mark the entrance to an area of different townscape character, with retail premises on the West side and a line of Edwardian villas on the East.

Map 7 shows the major pedestrian routes through Lower Bebington. On foot is the best way to explore any area, and this map shows that the areas as a whole is quite permeable to pedestrians and cyclists. There are a few difficult junctions to negotiate, and some of the roads are quite busy at peak times. However, walking allows one to discover the back lanes of the village and to appreciate how the smaller alleyways have given way to broader and faster roads. The stone lined path between heath Road and Green Lane is as atmospheric as it is narrow and intimate.

## 4.0 CHARACTER ANALYSIS

The conservation area can be loosely divided into a number of sub-zones, each of which has its own character. The inter-relationships and contrasts between these zones contribute to the character of the conservation area as a whole. A plan showing the division into zones is included as Map C in the Appendices.

### 4.1 ZONE A : CIVIC CENTRE AND ENVIRONS

The Civic Centre is emblematic of the prevailing values of the time when it was constructed. Land for development was plentiful and the municipality was a powerful driver for change. All pre-existing structures were cleared away in advance of the construction of it and the slightly earlier town hall on the north side of Civic Way. The most notable of these lost properties being Bebington Hall to the North and a pair of Georgian townhouses on Church Road.

The built development fronting Church Road incorporates a supermarket, built in the same style, and contemporary with, the Civic Centre, plus a row of shops. These units are in a contrasting style to the more traditional arcade of shops on the East side of the road. The overall feel is overwhelmingly municipal, with a spacious character incorporating clearly zoned functions – surface car parking, local amenities, shops and public spaces.

### 4.2 ZONE B : RESIDENTIAL ZONE

This area encompasses the greater residential area of Lower Bebington, and is very varied in they types of houses and their arrangement. The oldest properties tend to site in their own curtilage, reflecting the need for a vegetable plot, pig sty or orchard to supplement bought foodstuffs.

Georgian, Victorian and Edwardian properties tend to present a polite architectural facade to the road, with room to the rear for stables, coach houses and privies.

After WWI the suburban character of new residential development became reinforced. The style of developments became anti-urban, with terraces of houses becoming replaced by single or semi-detached dwellings. Front and rear gardens are as generous as the plot will allow and garages, often integrated with the main dwelling, appear for the first time. More extensive front gardens allow forecourt and driveway parking.

The overall aspect is pleasantly leafy and suburban, with mature landscaping softening the density of built development that sits within it. A degree of pride is taken in the maintenance of neat front gardens.

### 4.3 ZONE C : PENNANT HOUSE AND MAYER PARK

The Mayer Hall Complex is a unique collection of buildings and parkland that is perhaps more reminiscent of a landed estate than an urban residence. The size of the holding points towards the fact that land and property was somewhat cheaper in the mid C19th than at the end.

Joseph Mayer's was a singular vision. His enclosure on the South side of the main road incorporates an impressive residence for himself in Pennant House, the gallery of Mayer Hall and no. 65 The Village, plus the independent Rose & Crown public house. Mayer Park, named after him formed the grounds to his private house, with these and the parkland beyond being donated to the town corporation along with the buildings in his ownership in the 1920s. The overall feel is of a nucleus of large and complementary public buildings set within a generous expanse of parkland, competently landscaped and with a distinguished set of tree plantings.

The courtyard that is enclosed by these buildings is itself an important space, shared between occupiers of the pub and disabled parking for the Mayer buildings. Towards the North, part of the park is occupied by a rather mundane set of buildings which comprise sheltered housing for the elderly.

#### **4.4 ZONE D : NORTHERN GATEWAY**

The row of retail properties at the northern end of the conservation area announces one's arrival into the village proper. Again, the mixture of property styles is quite varied, as is the modulated building line, which points to incremental development over many years. The exception is the line of Edwardian houses, some now in commercial use, on the eastern side of The Village. The derelict no. 2 the Village lets down the appearance of this gateway.

### **5.0 PRINCIPAL AND LANDMARK BUILDINGS**

#### **5.1 St Andrews Church and Rectory**

According to legend, there has always been a ritual and religious centre on this ground. The sub-circular form of the churchyard points towards the church being allied to the early Celtic christian tradition – a period after the Roman Conquest in which the Celtic tribes managed to perpetuate their traditions (a fusion of christian and pagan beliefs-rituals) in the face of Germanic incursions from the East.

A book on the church was written by Richard Lancelyn Greene in 1993, and remains the principal reference source for those wishing to know more about it, and this account relies heavily upon it. It is thought that the first church was constructed from timber, being replaced shortly before the Norman Conquest with a stone church. This was possibly known as the Whitchurch, or White Church, probably due to its use of the pale white stone from nearby Storeton.

Several courses of Anglo-Norman masonry from around the time of the Conquest appear in the southern wall of the south aisle, adjacent to the later porch. This can be recognised by the sub-cuboid shape of the stones, which became later elongated in the mediaeval period. The southern portion of the church core is recognisably Norman, with oversized cylindrical columns, sub-rounded arches and simple, classical details. One of the arches veers off at an angle where the nave was later widened, and this is typical of the way in which churches at the time were periodically extended and embellished as new money sought to find favour by funding improvements at an old institution.

The principal later additions are the grand chancel and transept added at the East End in the perpendicular style and the stone spire (later emulated at the nearby St Barnabas, Bromborough). The north aisle is a late addition, added during the course of a C19th restoration, as the congregation increased due to population pressure.

The churchyard is capacious and contains a fine array of trees and other memorial features. Comparison of the lower levels of C11th masonry with the paths around the church show the dramatic build-up of earth around the building over time, due to successive burials, imports of material and levelling, and soil action.

The landmark nature of the church and its spire remains unchallenged in the area, and the parish remains closely connected to a network of other community institutions and activities. The way in which the road elaborately curves around the building shows its special significance over time. The lych gate on the west side is the main entrance, whilst the war memorial adjacent to its north east corner provides a focal point for remembering the town's fallen.

The Churchyard contains one further listed structure – a sundial of 1764, adjacent to the path running south from the church, and some 15 m distant from it. It is in poor condition and lacking its metal dial to top.

On the northern side of the churchyard there is the war memorial, dedicated to the memory of those who fell in the two great wars of the C20th.

The rectory offers a fine counterpoint to the church. Built on open land opposite the church, its panoply of late Victorian architectural devices and terracotta exudes an air of refined domesticity on a generous and confident scale. Together with St Andrews Church Hall and St Andrews itself the church accounts for a sizeable proportion of land within the village.

The church is a significant stakeholder in the village, having links also to the local St Andrews Primary School. In addition to assessing its architectural and historical interest, we need to acknowledge the church's social significance and the central role of this and other religious institutions in the life of the village.

Local historian Alan Roberts has compiled a history of the parish of St Andrews, which contains information on the evolution of this administrative unit as a

political and economic. The study also looks at social development in relationship to the parish, in terms of poor relief sponsored by the parish and the changes introduced by the passing of the Poor Law. This Act prompted the construction of the local Union workhouse at Clatterbridge, later to become Clatterbridge Hospital. Mr Roberts' study contains many useful illustrations and archive photographs of places and buildings in Bebington parish.

*Lych Gate to St Andrews Church – a memorial to churchwarden Clarke Aspinall, in oak, 1893.*



*St Andrews Rectory*



## 5.2 Mayer Hall Complex

Joseph Mayer was a Liverpool merchant and philanthropist who believed in the reinvestment of wealth back into the community. Fundamentally he promoted the idea of learning and education, providing a free library – one of the first of its kind – and building Mayer Hall: a centre for art and cultural advancement.

Mayer was a goldsmith and jeweller by trade in Liverpool and invested his profits by purchasing land in Bebington in order to construct his grand residence Pennant House, clearing away farm buildings in the process. One farmhouse remained, no. 65 the Village, and this was converted into the free library – a function that it fulfilled until the construction of the Civic Centre in the mid C20th.

Pennant House, an early Victorian Villa, was heavily remodelled by Liverpool architect E Heffer, whose signature gothic towers, including a clock tower, appear also on no. 65. Heffer pulled down the agricultural barn and rebuilt it as Mayer Hall on the same site. The latter building was intended to house Mayer's prodigious and diverse collection of artworks and historical papers. Other works by this architect have been listed in the past. The house has been remodelled internally, but still features an impressive staircase.

At the time of writing, the house operates unsatisfactorily as a One-Stop-Shop, whilst Mayer Hall struggles on in low levels of community use and no. 65 remains vacant. Pennant House could arguably be put to a more productive and appropriate use, perhaps reflecting its original purpose, whilst no. 65 would function better as leased offices or as a amenity centre or café for Mayer Park. Mayer Hall would benefit from a new management regime of the sort that could promote more intensive use by the community. All buildings now require significant investment.

Pennant House and no. 65 sit adjacent to Mayer Park. Originally the house overlooked a private garden for Mayer, but this became subsumed into the public park when Mayer's estate was gifted to the corporation in the 1920s. Whatever new uses are found for the house and no. 65, they should benefit from evening activity of the sort that provides surveillance for the park after hours, in order to dissuade vandalism. Some defensible space and enclosure for each property would be equally desirable.

The legacy of Joseph Mayer's passion to empower communities through education is commemorated by the mounting of a blue plaque, in his name, on Pennant House.

*Mayer's residence - Pennant House*



*Mayer Hall*



*No. 65 The Village*



*(no. 65, detail)*



### 5.3 Rose & Crown Public House



*The Rose & Crown public house, facing The Village, with datestone.*

This building is one of the oldest in Bebington, being a coaching inn on the old road from Chester to Birkenhead and Wallasey. The datestone reads GWH 1732, whilst the individual to which it refers is unknown. The building itself appears more or less in its original configuration, being of stucco (now Roughcast render), with emphasized stone / stucco quoins to the angles, string course, dentilled eaves cornice and plinth.

The first floor windows have moulded architraves with triangular pediments incorporating plaster decoration. From the front the building seems to have started out life as a pair of houses, perhaps being changed into an inn in the C19th when travel became a more widespread activity. The façade of this building is well preserved, and the building could possibly merit listed status in due course. The ground floor windows appear to have been widened and simplified in their details in the past, but the overall effect remains impressive. The interior has been altered but retains a traditional public house character and ambience.

### 5.4 Wellington Public House

This building also appears on the tithe map of 1844, and also seems to comprise an earlier structure that has been transformed into a coaching inn. A series of archive photographs and paintings of Bebington is available for viewing within Bebington Central Library, and this features an image of The Wellington prior to its mock-tudor improvements in the Edwardian period. The earlier form of the building, with its moulded architraves and portico with classical columns shares a similar Georgian character to the Rose & Crown.





*The Wellington Public house – today, and at the turn of the C20th.*

### 5.5 Willow Cottage – no. 25 The Village

The cottage is listed grade II and sits alongside the main thoroughfare on the northern side of the village. Although it appears unique in the area, the construction of the cottage is entirely typical of C17th yeoman cottages in this part of England, its similarity with other vernacular buildings in the Wirral noted above. The building sits on slightly raised ground above the road, in all likelihood on dry bedrock to prevent damp. It is of one storey, part-timber framed with accommodation in the roof lit by a small dormer window and is thatched in straw. There are two chimneys and hearths, one centrally in front of the main entrance and one above the northern gable, both axially aligned on the ridge.

Of roughly three bays, the central portion of the building projects forward is majority timber-framed; it is likely that this represents the original core of the dwelling, later extended on either side – that to the NE becoming a separate dwelling. In common with other timber-framed buildings in the Wirral, it appears that the lower timber-framed panels have been replaced with stone as the original sole plate and framing have rotted away – buttresses have been added for additional stabilisation.

Perhaps contemporary with this activity (early C18th?) the building has been extended to the North with a timber-framed extension (with a piggery attached) and to the South with a stone-built wing. The northern wing with its domestic details is suggestive of residential expansion, whilst the stone built northern section could indicate the housing of livestock.

The timber-framing elements are quite slender and this is usually indicative of a later date of construction, as timber supplies in the area were becoming diminished through ship construction and other industry. As a whole the building is well preserved, with historic timber windows of a probable mid C18th date. The building's historical and architectural value is equalled, if not excelled, by its value as a townscape element and reminder of Bebington's rural origins – aided by its verdant and tranquil setting within its own rounded garden enclosure. The blackening of its timber is rather unnecessary and visually stark - the whole building would be better limewashed in a softer white, timbers and all.

The author has gained access to some of the interior, and it is possible that the building incorporates pre-C17th remains. The upper floor in the Southern portion contains a lower and steeper cruck, tie-beam removed, with a later, larger and broader cruck above it – indicating the presence of an earlier, lower, narrower and more modest dwelling(?). Carbon and / or dendrochronological dating of the timbers may help to resolve this conundrum.



*Willow Cottage – facing the Village, and detail of window and framing.*

## 5.6 The Grange (Elmbank)

This is one of the few remaining post-enclosure farms that survives in anything approaching its original form. The farm no longer has any land, but the farmhouse and barn remain still, and are accessed from the north from Townfield Lane, through impressive gateposts. There is a further access from a lower level on Acres Lane, and this is the “polite entrance”, with views of agricultural operations shielded from view.

The overall effect is late Georgian, with a finely built low stone wall and saddleback copings on Acres Road, leading through gates and up a winding drive, enclosed within a similar wall to the main house. There is a definite aspirational quality to the property when approached from this location, with good use made of the topography to create an elevated and prestigious up to progress to the house.



*The Grange, overlooking Acres Road*

## 5.7 Civic Centre

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the limitations of Pennant House complex as a municipal facility and the town's ad hoc medical facilities were become increasingly obvious. There was an aspiration for change, and a break away from scattered amenities towards a dedicated, multi-functional civic centre for the town. The population was growing and the land westwards of the main road and opposite Pennant House was chosen as the site for a substantial new investment. The Town Hall already stood to the North so the new centre linked well with its offices; a large new car park was laid out to the South.

The building was far more than simply a new municipal facility. Its uncompromising modernist character was in deliberate opposition to the traditional architecture of the surrounding area and Pennant House in particular: it was horizontal in character, rather than the verticalised Gothic of the older buildings. Where they were decorated, it was plain; where they were intimate and humane, it was big, technocratic and brutal; where they were built up from bricks, it was steel framed and faced in huge cast panels; where they were modulated in aspect and style, it maintained a consistent aesthetic; where they were dark and enclosed, it was linear, open and overt; where they were contained, its borders were undefined. There were many such confident, modernist buildings constructed at the time in Cheshire, but nowhere is the vision so resolutely expressed as at Lower Bebington.

As a document of architectural history and municipal confidence the Civic Centre is difficult to equal. Its construction is documented in a video dvd, available from the Central Library showing its original design and progress on site. It is reputed to be the most ambitious district civic project ever undertaken in the country at the time of its inception. The loss of the Poplars, a late Georgian pair of buildings on The Village, was regarded as a minor issue when compared with the benefits afforded by the new centre – they were removed simply to provide view of the centre from the main road; something that would not be regarded as acceptable today.

The Georgian Bebington Old Hall had been lost a few years earlier to permit the construction of Bebington Town Hall and the landscaping around it. This building was one of the most dominant edifices in Bebington and its lofty presence above Heath Road is documented in various pre-1950 photographs. A faculty of 1727 attests to the rebuilding of the older rectory on the same site of Bebington Old Hall. The C18th Georgian pile appears to have been extended several times in the later Georgian and Victorian period.

The Civic Centre remains a beacon of municipal values, together with its annexes and the town hall – the latter presently under threat from demolition - and both its ships funnel, and liner-like form bring a slight maritime feel to the sea of landscaping in which it sits. Despite its system-built design, the Civic Centre features many touches of quality, from marble detailing to its interior, slate sills to the windows and the use of marble pebbles from the Isle of Skye

as a weathering surface to its wall panels. English Heritage have visited the Centre recently in response to its unique contribution to the development of municipal libraries, and it is mentioned in their national survey of this building type. The ambition of the facility perhaps reflects local pride in the legacy of Joseph Mayer – an attempt to provide a modern memorial both to his memory and the district in which he lived.



*The Civic Centre – showing library, with upper floor on podium and porthole windows to ground floor; funnel boiler chimney and pyramidal roof to atrium.*

## 5.8 Managers Houses, The Wiend

These properties are immediately imposing, being substantial and rising up above The Wiend where it meets Bromborough Road and forming a groups of three pairs of houses leading up the hill and towards St Andrews Church. Whilst their architectural composition is comparable with the more highly designed houses in Port Sunlight Village, the greater size and elaboration of their details and ornamentation elevates them far above the general run of factory housing.

Their materials are traditional, with much exposed joinery, rendering and with tall chimneys. However, it is the mastery and multiplication of their architectural details that sets them apart. Despite their grand size at 2.5 storeys, the eaves still manage to work their way down, via a series of interconnecting roof forms, to the top of the ground floor, and overhang deeply. Ample gardens are provided front and back. The pairing of the three buildings, further emphasises the interconnected nature of the factory staff and their lives, both industrially and domestically. The resolute symmetry of

the buildings shows the exact consistency with which each rank was treated in terms of the privileges and standard of accommodation afforded to them.

Lever Bros, however progressive in its fostering of its workforce's welfare, was nevertheless typically conservative and hierarchical in its management structure. The siting of factory managers in far grander accommodation at some remove from the mass of the ordinary workers houses has much in common with Bromborough Pool Village, where the managers' houses are located on the other side of The Green, and further away from the chaos and smells of the factory.



*Lever Bros. managers' housing on The Wiend, Arts & Crafts Architecture on an formidable scale.*

## 5.9 Bethany Crescent

This group of almshouses sits within its own enclosed grounds, with a date of 1927 inscribed over the entrance archway. The single-storey properties are arranged neatly around a landscaped green, which sits between them and the entrance. These modest dwellings are beautifully and meticulously detailed, displaying their Arts & Crafts heritage marvellously – deep tiled roofs with low, overhanging eaves, corbelled chimneys set within roof slopes, broad (formerly timber) casement windows, entrance archways or porches, small front gardens. The whole development fulfils its purpose effortlessly, creating a sense of calm and dignified repose for residents and their visitors. The public area to the front is overlooked by all properties, promoting security and informal surveillance that renders less sympathetic forms of security redundant.



Although it has a modest range of principal buildings, Bebington is mainly characterised by its complement of backcloth buildings – a range of modest dwellings from before the mid-C20th that together form a harmonious and unassuming foil to the principal buildings. It is this ability of our towns to create a sort hierarchy of buildings, with a quantity of modest dwellings acting as a sort of background tapestry from which civic structures project physically and architecturally that is such a welcome quality

### 5.10 No. 2 The Village

This run-down building, located on the corner of Townfield Lane, used to be the Dog and Gun public house. Constructed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the C19th, the pub was run by a Mrs Anne Deighton. Now, sadly, after a period as a Post Office and latterly betting shop, the property is vacant and neglected.



*Dog and Gun PH, ca. 1913, when a Post Office. No. 2 The Village, today.*

## 6.0 ARCHITECTURE, MATERIALS AND DETAILS

### 6.1 Prominent styles

The prevailing style of the buildings varies greatly with the age, size and the nature of the properties within the area. The earliest buildings in the area are vernacular in style, often built in local stone, with their forms dictated by the

functions they embodied. These structures, few in number, were often enlarged and adapted as agricultural and domestic practices developed – often visible in the alignment of the masonry coursing where roofs were raised and plans expanded.



*No. 32 Heath Road – traditional C17th vernacular stone cottage. Vertical sash windows were probably added in the early C19th; traditional timber sashes recently reinstated.*



*Mersey Terrace – neoclassical Regency terrace in lime stucco render, with: end-gable chimneys, slate roof, parapet gutter and cornice with blocking course above (to support heavy cornice), hood moulds over windows, sill band to 1<sup>st</sup> floor windows, some evidence of architraves, low stone wall and stone gate piers, fanlight over door and panelled pilasters either side of front door (sadly replaced).*

Later, neoclassical designs were introduced as the merchant classes began to settle in the area. Georgian and Regency style terraces appear at points across the area. By the mid-C19th century pressed brick and stone were becoming the facing material of choice as stucco render came to be seen as a less “honest” material. A good example of this type of development is Park View Terrace on The Village: regular, fine brickwork in Flemish bond, slate

roofs with stone copings and cast iron rainwater goods, stone lintols and quoins, stone sill band and round-arched door surrounds with cast iron fanlights, sash windows and a later canted bay window, unglazed panelled doors; 2 room plans on each floor.



*Park View Terrace – fairly standard yet refined early Victorian terrace. The paired sash windows to the ground floor are relatively unusual for the time; dated 1852.*

As the economy improved, materials came to be more affordable and this allowed the creation of larger properties, with grander proportions, even for families of the middling sort. Properties such as the Firs came along in the later C19th, their tall ceiling heights and roofs allowing them to dominate Bromborough Road below. The bay windows are characteristically late Victorian, as are the large paned windows.





The Edwardian period saw a less restrictive attitude to architectural styles, with a more inventive and varied approach to developments. Mass produced components such as terracotta and moulded timber were arranged together in generous quantities, with improvements in production and transport bringing in smooth pressed red bricks en masse from grand manufactories like the Ruabon brickworks in North Wales.

The terrace of properties at nos. 1-15 The Village were constructed in the early C20th, and show a form of construction that is typically Edwardian: broader areas of glazing, set in a pebbledash ground, with red pressed brick and terracotta dressings and roof crestings & chimneys, rounded terracotta copings to the front boundary wall and stone gateposts. The overall feel is modern, yet traditional and conservative.



*Nos. 1-15 The Village – typical Edwardian development in pebbledash and terracotta, with timber details.*

The inter-war period saw the mass introduction of suburban semi-detached dwellings into the surrounding areas, made possible largely by improvements in public transport, and the mobility created by access to motor cars. These buildings varied in style and details, but Bebington has some good examples of suburban housing, generally created for nuclear families, in places such as Highcroft Avenue.

The quality of these suburban houses is high, and they continue to be popular residences. Generally soft in appearance through the use of painted pebbledash, the use of other details adds interest and variety: bow windows with mullions and transoms, mansarded or hipped roofs in clay tiles, chimneys, porches and integrated garages – some original, timber doors and driveways to accommodate the private car.



*Typical yet attractive suburban house in Bebington. Some fine details to be seen in its stone window dressings, leaded windows, moulded multi-centred arch framing the recessed porch, bracketed deep set eaves and generous front garden to accommodate parking for a car. This house is virtually unique in the area for having retained its original windows and front door.*

Post war housing in the area is rare, still rarer is any such of note. The modern housing that has come to the area has concentrated firmly on the quantity of units, rather than their quality. Developments that could fall into this category include: the new development at Church Farm, No. 30 Heath Road and nos. 34a&b Heath Road. These arguably represent a step backwards from some of the 1960s developments that at a minimum featured decent room sizes and more generous areas of glazing.

## 6.2 Known Architects & Designers

St Andrews Church. A fairly typical and probably destructive “restoration” of the church was undertaken in three stages in the Victorian period courtesy of the following architects: Moffat 1846-7, W. & G. Audsley 1871-2 and Charles E. Deacon in 1897, the latter responsible for some internal fittings. We are lucky to retain an engraving from 1819, showing the church with box pews prior to restoration and re-ordering.

Mayer Hall was designed by E. A. Heffer and both the adjacent no. 65 The Village (an earlier farmhouse dated 1716) and Pennant House were enlarged and remodelled by the same architect to the requirements of Joseph Mayer. The use of pebbledash and a series of clock towers are characteristic of Heffer’s work elsewhere in the region, some of his buildings being listed.

The other significant architect designed building within the area is of course the Civic Centre, designed by Patterson, Macaulay and Owens in 1967-71.

Described elsewhere here this building is characteristic of the faith placed in technology and system-building methods. The angularity of its slab construction and use of exposed aggregate cladding relied both on the provision of a highly maintained landscape and a level of care and repair not possible since the 1970s. The design of the building is unforgiving of the piecemeal and low-level maintenance it has received in recent years. Greedy of land, the Centre makes a powerful and highly architectural statement from its position above The Village.

### 6.3 Typical Features & Details

It is the minor details, particularly to the polite fronts of buildings, that contribute to the greater part of the character of an area. A conservation area is greater than the sum of its parts, and this holistic approach obliges us to look at ways of preserving identifiable reminders of a particular craft or architectural tradition.

#### *Windows.*

Windows are said to be the “eyes of a building”, and just, like their physiological counterparts, are capable of expressing both beauty and personal histories.

Early on in the development of buildings, windows were “wind-eyes” and were small openings within earth built walls covered in either vellum or waxed paper to let in the light, whilst keeping some of the weather out. Shutters, occasionally louvred, were sometimes added on the outside to help repel more of the elements.

As glass was re-introduced to the UK in the mediaeval period, small-paned casements, set within lead comes and wrought-iron sub-frames, were introduced, often puttied directly into close-set stone or timber mullioned openings. Some were later hinged to provide opening lights. As glass became more widespread and affordable, the lead comes of larger windows were commonly supported on wrought iron stays, set into the mullions, to help prevent sagging of the lead as it slowly softened and bowed under the influence of gravity.

Timber sash windows were introduced to Britain in the mid-C17th and start to predominate in buildings across the country from this time onwards. Larger panes of glass had started to be produced in quantity as cylinder and crown glass, and were puttied into the new timber sashes. The glazing in these new glazing units was regular in proportion, with each pane, and each sash being taller than it was wide, roughly in the ratio of 1:1.6 – the “*Golden Section*”.

Very few windows in Wirral contain early glazing units of this type, even where earlier openings survive. The only small paned window openings in Lower Bebington are those to be seen in Willow Cottage and St Andrews Church. The former building is typical for the period in featuring both

horizontally sliding sashes and leaded lights set between chamfered stone mullions.

Regrettably a large number of historic windows have been replaced within the conservation area, although information as to their original form can be gleaned from the structural window openings that remain.



*C17th-18th small paned, horizontally-sliding sash, Leaded light in the same property to first floor of Willow Cottage.*

Later on, as window designs became more polite and consistent in line with Georgian predilections for order and symmetry, vertically sliding sashes, with sash boxes, became the standard window type. These windows allowed the plane of each elevation to remain wholly vertical, even when the window was opened. Equally, the use of weights and pulleys allowed each sash to be lifted almost effortlessly, with double-hung sashes providing ventilation to the upper reaches of each room, where the hot air was most moist and most required changing.

Given that sash windows are often misunderstood in terms of their principles and mechanisms, and poorly maintained, many have been replaced with more conventional casements which inevitably disrupt the planar nature of Georgian facades. Replacement units in pvc or aluminium also lack the elegant and slender sections and details of the original examples. Such disfigurement is particularly unfortunate in paired or terraced properties where visual imbalances appear so obvious.

Recent projects undertaken in partnership with Wirral Council have involved the removal of inappropriate window units installed in recent years, and their replacement with traditional timber sashes incorporating the latest slim profile glazing technology.



*New double-glazed timber sash window, installed in Bromborough Pool Village as part of comprehensive upgrading by Riverside Housing. Beauty and efficiency effortlessly combined – note wavy handmade glass on exterior of d-g units, giving increased privacy and optical character.*



*New sash window, again in Bromborough Pool. Note later details such as larger panes and horns to strengthen the connection with the mid-rail now that only one vertical glazing bar is present to secure it.*

### *Doors*

Few original doors remain from historical times in Bebington. Like windows, Many have succumbed to replacement with unsuitable upvc doors, which, unlike timber doors, have proven impossible to repair, and less secure. This is particularly the case with housing association properties, which are under a duty to secure energy efficiency; a pre-occupation with one single factor, without considering draught-stripping or the culturally and environmentally sustainable solution of retain and repair. Doors illustrate the architectural fashion of the times.

The earliest doors were generally of ledged and braced plank construction, occasionally riveted for additional strength. Later on panelled doors were introduced to accord with classical fashions – to start with of six panels, sometimes giving way to two longitudinal panels and then in turn to four. Early doors often had letter boxes cut into them when the postal service was introduced. Others feature original door furniture such as antique bronze door knobs, locks and knockers.

Porches are sometimes added to grant a degree of weather protection around an opening. Care should be taken to ensure that new installations conform to the original form and specification of porches within a particular terrace or pair of buildings. Lead flashings, laid to falls, should generally be employed to shed water.



*Fine and authentic, deeply panelled mid-Victorian door on The Village; now sadly replaced by a standard unit, lacking the original's individuality.*



*Simple but similarly original four panelled mid-Victorian door. Note inserted letter box, installed when national deliveries were introduced. Fine joinery let down by synthetic green paint colour.*

### *Roofs & chimneys*

Early roof in the area would have been covered with thatch, perhaps of heather, straw, bracken or reed, with higher status buildings such as churches or manor houses often being covered in stone slates. A stone roof is heavy and requires a strong and substantial roof structure to support it – only the preserve of the wealthy.

As transport improved, mass produced materials such as clay tiles and Welsh or Westmorland slates became prevalent, with many thatched roofs being re-roofed in these more durable and repairable materials. St Andrews retains its stone spire, whilst its main nave roof is now slated.

Early roofs did not generally have chimneys, with smoke diffusing naturally out through the thatch, without losing heat up through the chimney and protecting the thatch from pests in the process. However, the respiratory problems, poor visibility, soot and inescapable smell associated with atmospheric woodsmoke persuaded owners to install chimneys, which became fashionable en masse in the mid- C17th.

The presence of these added chimneys on the side of properties can sometimes help to date buildings to before the latter half of that century. However, some chimneys were also added on the inside, often replacing smoke hoods and inglenooks that were the forerunner of masonry chimneys.

There are a variety of chimneys in the village, indicating the prevalence of open fires as a principal form of heating over time. The higher the chimney the better the draw and the burn and so those with the requisite funds could build high. The managers' houses in the Wiend contain some of the most impressive (and expensive to maintain) chimneys in the area.

Cast iron is emblematic of rainwater goods from all architectural periods from when mass drainage and sanitation were introduced from the 1840s onwards. It is durable, recyclable and modern cast iron systems can be protected from rust – it is usually the fixings, hoppers and brackets that decay or can require attention over time, rather than the pipes themselves. For post-war properties, galvanised steel or zinc systems are a more economical alternative. Plastic rainwater goods are not durable and should not be used.

Similarly traditional lead flashings present many advantages over cheaper modern alternative materials – being traditional and quiet in heavy rain, recyclable and malleable. Where metal theft has been a problem for owners, perhaps at a lower level on a building, sheet zinc or stainless steel can be used instead with only a minor impact on appearance.

Earlier buildings tended to have more overhanging eaves – necessary to throw water clear of more porous walling materials and essential before gutters and universal drainage became commonplace. Where traditional styles of building were revived in the early C20th, a taste for deeper eaves emerged once again. Extending the eaves further outwards and down from the wall increases the sheltering ability of roofs and reduces the ability of incident sunlight to overheat interiors during the middle part of the day in summer.

Deeper eaves are sometimes decorated with classical cornices in the Georgian and Victorian periods, later moving on to deliberately exposed rafters and purlins, especially on gables, in an attempt to emphasise the craft of carpenters. Barge boards and fascias were also often elaborately carved and ornamented and were frequently topped at the apex with a carved and pointed finial. Such features are commonly the victims of weathering, located high up in exposed situations that are difficult to maintain and repaint without expensive scaffolding – hence they are diminishing in number across the country as they fail and are replaced with inferior, flat plastic substitutes.





*Tall chimney with ornate corbelling on one of the manager's houses on The Wiend.*



*St Andrew's Rectory has an impressive array of chimneys – fires symbolised wealth and an ability to hire servants to maintain the hearths.*

### *Facing masonry*

A variety of traditional wall finishes are used within Bebington. The use of timber framing in the earliest houses necessitated the use of wattle & daub panels within the linear timbers. Little of this original material has survived in the village, with brick nogging often inserted later to afford a more substantial material that required less regular maintenance. Timber framing was usually set on top of a rubble stone foundation, cemented in lime mortar – to keep the framing dry and therefore to prevent rot.

As bricks became mass-produced and could be transported longer distances via canal or rail, brick masonry became the standard walling finish. It did not require regular limewashing, and did not suffer from the same gaps and consequent draughts around the perimeter of timber framing panels that could make life in a timber-framed house uncomfortable. Since war and the expanding empire had seen the available supply of native hardwoods go the way of the British Navy, timber (by the early C19th imported softwoods) was reserved for joinery and roof structures, and was not generally used for walling.

Within Bebington, the proximity of the Storeton quarries ensured that the use of stone, especially rubble quarry waste, for wall construction persisted into the mid C19th. This rubble walling could then be covered in a lime stucco mixture, to emulate the appearance of perfectly smooth ashlar masonry.

### *Outbuildings and Garages*

The presence of outbuildings around a property may indicate the presence of former wash houses, stables, pigstys or other workshops. These ancillary

buildings are physical documents of former trades and lifestyles and their origin must be understood before arguments are presented in favour of their loss.

The fine inter-war properties on Highcroft Avenue contain integrated garages that blend into the front elevation successfully. Those original examples that remain have the following characteristics: the use of modest dimensions, hipped or pitched roofs, natural timber and small paned windows. These demonstrate that garages do not need to be an unsightly encumbrance within the curtilage of a property, but can be dignified structures in their own right.

### *Boundary Treatments*

There is a wide variety of boundary features within the area, though most of these are of a suburban character. The earliest boundaries are formed from local sandstone sub-rounded rubble blocks, capped with triangular copings. Early gateposts are notable feature, often constructed from single pieces of stone.

Later treatments include low brick walls, occasionally with moulded cast concrete copings. Gates are generally of timber or mild steel, the latter shaped into decorative patterns, with sometimes only pedestrian gates being retained as driveways are kept constantly open for constant vehicle access. Where masonry walls have been removed, they are sometimes replaced with privet hedges, which require less costly maintenance and which provide a softer and secure boundary if healthy.

In the Georgian period, front forecourts in towns were sometimes enclosed with iron railings and gates. Bebington's more suburban location, and the lack of basement development meant that there was less call for iron railings. Instead terracotta and the aforementioned stone copings were regarded as sufficiently secure. Even The Grange, with its Georgian stone wall boundary enclosure par excellence, incorporating stone saddleback copings, shows no evidence of having had iron railings. It retains its stylistically correct iron gates, however, complete with "dog bars" at the bottom to prevent access by canines.

As Britain became a richer, more stable and more orderly country the need to be enclosed by iron railings diminished, and ironwork was abandoned in favour of moulded terracotta copings. This taste for decorative wall cappings has all but disappeared in recent years, and rudimentary copings such as brick on edge details and simple brick piers has become a cheaper solution. Nonetheless, concerns about security in recent years and a fear of the general public, engendered by a sensationalist media, have seen the creation of some semi-fortified boundary enclosures to quite modest domestic dwellings, with high, motorised gates and tall but insubstantial mild steel railings. Such extreme treatments are rare but they are also anathema to the generally peaceful, communitarian and easy-going character of Lower Bebington. Where additional security is required, the height of walls can be increased by

planting prickly or vegetation such as holly or other vegetative material. Semi-solid barriers such as hit-and-miss cedar fencing is better from a security perspective since it prevents the creation of "dead ground" where miscreants can lurk unseen.

Merseyside as a whole has some of the most impressive entrance gateposts of any region of the country, which has inspired dedicated studies on the subject. Sadly, not everybody values these artefacts, and they can be prone to removal simply in order to create a wider vehicle entrance. Some are shattered due to the presence of rusting, untreated ironwork, which expands and shatters the stone. Where gate hinges and latches are rusting, they should be removed by drilling, galvanised / zinc primed and / or set within resin to prevent this from occurring.



*Typical Regency carved stone gateposts, Mersey Terrace.*



*Traditional iron gates and sandstone gateposts to The Grange, Acres Road*



Stone rubble front boundary wall, with triangular stone copings and timber gate.  
Note gentle upwards curve of wall towards entrances.

– The Wield

#### 6.4 The Public Realm and Streetscape

There are a variety of other smaller features that survive in and around the

spaces and places of Bebington that are significant and which deserve attention. For example, the fountain in the roundabout at the bottom of Heath Road helps to turn an otherwise mundane piece of traffic engineering into a townscape feature.

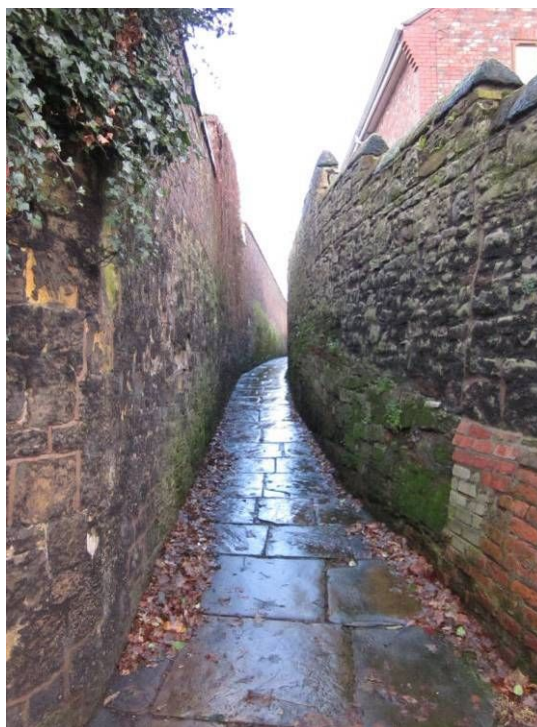
### *Paving*

There is little traditional paving remaining within Lower Bebington. However, it is important to keep and maintain flagged paths where they exist in the village. Exposed aggregate flags are preferable to pre-cast concrete, whilst stone kerbs should be replaced with conservation grade kerbs, in preference to pre-cast concrete, as a minimum measure.

A line of large York stone flags forms a public path from Toleman Avenue to the pedestrian crossing in front of Mayer Park. Closed off during the winter months due to safety concerns, this path should be maintained for the future, if possible with a more sympathetic method of winter closure.



*Original drinking fountain at bottom of Heath Road, no longer functioning but a significant landmark in the village.*



*York stone flagged narrow path between Green Lane and Heath Road, its narrowness emphasised by the tall sandstone walls either side..*

### *Street Furniture*

There is little in the way of bespoke street furniture in the village, with most benches etc. being sited within Mayer Park. The entrance to the park next to Bromborough Road shows the pride invested in public amenities at the time it was transferred to the authority. Its present poorly maintained appearance shows the reduction in the funding available for the maintenance of public assets and is a sad reflection on how the legacy of Joseph Mayer is valued.

Lighting columns are generally modern. A smart contemporary design would probably be appropriate for most areas in the village, given its mixed character.

### *Shopfronts*

The village retains a significant retail presence along The Village and Church Road. There are a variety of shopfront styles, with some respecting the traditional character of the area more than others. The important thing is to respect the proportions of the traditional shopfront, with shop windows framed by traditional stall-riser to base, pilasters and glazing bars to side and entablature above. The stallrisers are generally tiled, with the remainder of the solid elements being fabricated from moulded timber joinery. Doorways are generally recessed, though they may be enclosed with an outer grille when the shop is closed.

Some shopfronts retain this time-honoured theme, and this approach to the appearance of shops should be maintained when considering applications for planning permission. Internally-illuminated signage should be avoided.



Barber's Shop in Church Road, incorporating, traditional framework – tiled stall-riser, high-level transoms, trad signage and plain lettering. Formerly a traditional butchers. Note that the signage does not extend beyond the moulded fascia. The projecting shutter box over the front door is an

unfortunate addition.

## **7.0 NEGATIVE FACTORS AND OPPORTUNITIES**

It would not be possible to document every inappropriate change in the fabric of the conservation area. In addition, the area can be divided logically into separate zones and a change that can be tolerated in one zone, may look out-of-place in another. Similarly, a minor change that may not detract significantly from the appearance of a lower category building may prove to be most unwelcome in a more important property.

Nonetheless, some key threads of harmful changes can be summarised as follows.

### **7.1 Recent Development**

Lower Bebington has seen some rather uninspiring development in recent years that has typified other similar developments in suburban towns. The complex of flats at no. 3 Heath Road has had an unfortunate impact upon the character of the conservation area. The large bulk of this building is emphasised both by its rectangular shape, and by its elevated position above the roundabout at a prominent junction. The use of mock-tudor cladding does little to enliven its dour, heavy and lifeless character. It is not the materials that offend, it is the form of the building itself that is out-of-place. Regimented lines of openings and a roof-line that fail to alter with the topography lend the building an institutionalised quality at variance with the small-scale, domestic qualities of other properties in the village. The development has dated badly, however efficient it may have been in accommodating people at higher density in a town centre.



No. 3 Heath Road

The development at Church Farm is similarly unfortunate in townscape terms. Many contemporary developments fail to site front doors where they are traditionally to be found: on the street. The siting of a front door on a public thoroughfare gives each development a social, as well as an architectural, quality that strengthens the relationship between a dwelling and the public realm.

This opportunity for public interaction is undermined by the layout of the scheme. The entrance to the development is dominated by an entrance for private vehicles, with little facility for pedestrians. Children are unlikely to feel safe playing in this space, for fear of damaging either themselves or the cars parked there. The design of the buildings themselves fails to generate any real interest or to create a unique character. Here also, the need to create a high number of units at a required density has come at the expense of creating a liveable and characterful scheme.

Recent housing developments in nearby Port Sunlight demonstrate that it is possible to design new housing at a viable density whilst preserving important aspects of context and a social connection with the street.





Church Farm

## 7.2 Unsympathetic alterations

Very few of the buildings within the conservation area are listed and therefore some minor works can be carried out without the need for official consent to be obtained from the local authority. Although modest in terms of their individual impact, the ability of these changes to accumulate en masse over several properties means that the character of the whole area becomes compromised.

Minor yet inappropriate alterations to buildings include:

Replacement windows and doors of different materials, overall design and proportion and detail to the originals. For example replacing original sash windows with casements made of uPVC

- § Replacement roof materials of different type, colour, texture and scale to the original, often associated also with altered materials and details in rainwater goods, eaves and verge treatment. For example replacement of original slate or clay plain tiles with interlocking concrete tiles.
- § The insertion of new, or alteration to existing, openings that affect the aesthetic appeal and proportions of a building.
- § Poor quality repairs, such as cement based pointing spreading over the face of stone or brick.
- § Alterations to cladding materials for the main structural walls, for example rendering of stone or brick intended to be seen and the

removal of render to expose underlying masonry not intended to be seen.

- § Alterations to boundary treatments, such as the removal or replacement of sections of boundary wall, gates and railings.
- § The installation of unsuitable new gates and boundary treatments, and loss of garden boundary walls and forecourts for curtilage parking.
- § Excessive areas of hard-standing in modern materials.
- § Attachment of highly visible new technologies such as satellite antennae and photovoltaic panels. Solar thermal panels for water-heating can be very efficient, however, and may eventually be incorporated into building surfaces less obviously than they are today.

Although window and roof replacement or alterations may be well intentioned, eg to improve thermal or acoustic performance or to reduce maintenance requirements, the visual effect can damage the authenticity of the building's original design.

Along with roofs, windows are the most commonly replaced elements in buildings. They are vulnerable to deterioration and changes in popular taste have influenced the loss of original windows in historic buildings. In today's regulatory framework, with increasingly stringent building regulations in force, building owners may consider it more economic to opt for off-the-shelf double glazed uPVC windows than to commission bespoke replacements in the spirit and the material of the original.

The changing influence of fashion can be seen in examples of "cottagey" small paned windows, not based on any genuine historic precedent.

In some cases an attempt has been made to emulate the form of original windows but with limited success. The framing elements of a modern, double-glazed uPVC window are by necessity much thicker and differently proportioned to the slim profiles of the originals, are often stormproof, rather than flush-fitting and can detract from the true character of the building. The reconfiguration of opening panes can also drastically change the appearance of a building.

The arguments are generally conducted between upvc and timber. However, steel is often the optimum material for mid and late C20 buildings. Steel frames are slender, letting in more light, can be galvanised or fabricated from stainless steel and their superior strength allows double- or triple-glazing. Unlike aluminium steel frames can be welded and repaired, and even recycled if irreparably damaged.

It is invariably better to repair original timber and metal windows and surrounds where possible, especially in that this allows the retention of handmade glass and individually glazed leaded lights. Nonetheless, recent developments in slimline double-glazing and in polymer coatings for timber have allowed the manufacture of replica timber units that are virtually indistinguishable from the originals, and which can be employed where the historic glazing is beyond repair. Parallel advances in preserved and engineered natural timber and the reintroduction of linseed oil paints mean that the resistance of timber to warping rots has very much improved.



*Note the contrast in appearance between the original flush-fitting inter-war timber windows on the l-hand property and the unsuitable later replacements on the r-hand property. The horizontal character of the latter is totally out of place.*

### 7.3 Condition, loss and development pressures

The great majority of buildings within Lower Bebington are well and thoughtfully maintained. However, the appearance of a whole group of buildings can be challenged by the obvious disrepair or unthinking alteration of one of them.

In terms of actual loss of properties, the imposition of the Interim Housing Policy – introduced in 2006, which affected Bebington, took some of the pressure of development in the village. This was not before some loss had already occurred at Church Farm, the site of a significant new residential development, and nos. 34a&b Heath Road, where two unremarkable new houses replaced a single earlier dwelling.

A slowing down in the housing market in the time since the aforementioned developments were implemented has removed some of the impetus for denser development within village centres. Similarly, the re-categorization of

demolition as development in statutory planning terms, means that the local authority has more influence over the loss of key properties. As of 2011, any property owner wishing to demolish a building over a certain size must first submit an application for prior approval to the planning department. Demolition cannot always be resisted, but conditions can be imposed on any approval, including a requirement to digitally record the building, to salvage and store or reuse its materials in a new building either off- or on site.

It is difficult to say what development pressures will come to bear on the village in the future. However, there is always the possibility that proposals to remove selected single properties, particularly those within attractive or spacious grounds, and to replace them with a more intensive development, will come forward.

Pennant House is underused at present, with the Council's One-Stop-Shop being the only tenant. If this facility were to transfer to the Civic Centre, it may permit the wholesale conversion of the building to an alternative use. No. 65 the Village is presently in a similar predicament, being vacant and difficult to convert to another use. Creating some defensible space around these buildings and Mayer Hall through fencing and hedging may enable them to sustain themselves better in future conversions. In recent months, a local amenity group has come forward with constructive proposals for no. 65.

No. 2 The Village appears to have been empty for some time, at least at ground floor, and this is unfortunate given its location at the gateway to the conservation area. No. 14 Bromborough Road is also vacant due to the downturn in local retail trade, and has acquired disfiguring metal roller shutters with external shutter boxes in the process.

#### **7.4 Changes to the Public Realm, open space and the setting of buildings.**

Few changes have occurred to the public realm of the village in recent years. However, it is important that the historic character of Lower Bebington's public spaces are taken into account when proposing new interventions, such as new crossings, cycle paths or highways engineering.

English Heritage has produced some official guidance on the setting of heritage assets and how this should be considered when considering new development proposals adjacent to a heritage asset. Obviously, the setting of an asset could include views and its presentation in public areas, the presence of mature landscaping. All these and other values could be impacted by new development that involves the introduction of new works or features, or the removal of old ones.

The level of care and maintenance is another important factor when considering how the quality of the public realm is retained and safeguarded for the future. The opportunity for the public realm to play a full part in

place-making, and for the setting of heritage assets to be preserved and enhanced in the future, should be the foremost consideration. A lot will obviously depend upon the level of resources and investment that can be secured towards this end.

Opportunities for future enhancement include the large area of surface car parking at the rear of the Civic Centre, the conservation of stone boundary walls and the preservation and improvement of landscaped open space in and around Lower Bebington.

In recent years, the development of new cycle routes within Wirral has created something of a new market for attractions and cafes etc. in terms of cycle-based touring. Routes such as the no. 56 cycle route pass close to Bebington, and there is the possibility of linking this route to the coast at Bromborough and from there either Northwards to New Ferry or Southwards to Eastham.

## SECTION 2 – CONSERVATION AREA RECOMMENDATIONS

### 2.1 Recommendation for Article 4 Directions

Conservation Area status affords significant protection to buildings area above a certain size within the designated area. However, it is still possible to alter these buildings and their boundaries, and their significance can be weakened by carrying out a range of minor changes. This is particularly the case with private residences, or “dwelling houses”, where owners can undertake significant changes by exercising permitted development rights.

Where local authorities consider that the individual features within an individual property, or run of properties, are especially valuable, they can further withhold permitted development (pd) rights by placing an Article 4 Direction. Part or the whole of each conservation area can be protected in this way, and the schedule of pd rights can vary from one property to another, taking account of differing needs.

Article 4 Directions are commonly applied to higher category or Local List properties, perhaps where an application for statutory listing has failed. They are also often placed on terraces of properties where there is a consistent set of architectural details, e.g. windows / doors that informs a local aesthetic, enhances group value and underpins the historical planning of an area.

Lower Bebington, with the exception of Trafalgar, lacks consistent terraces of properties that could be preserved via such as Direction. Furthermore, many properties have lost their original details through ongoing “improvements”, for example the houses in Bethany Crescent have lost all their original windows in an attempt to improve their thermal efficiency.

It is therefore unlikely that a good case could be made in the case of some of

the more modest buildings in the area. Higher status buildings of listable quality, could, however, be better preserved either through Local Listing or Article 4 directions, and this is something that should be considered. In the meantime, much can be achieved through positive education, the dissemination of advice and by nurturing a sense of civic purpose within the local community.

## 2.2 The Future

Designation as a Conservation Area carries with it the expectation that a higher standard of design, more informed by an analysis of context and aspect, is required. There is also a presumption in favour of preserving Green Spaces that enrich the quality of the landscape in and around the conservation area. Enhancement of biodiversity is a parallel aspiration.

There is a possibility that nearby Port Sunlight and Bromborough Pool will come forward as candidates for World Heritage Site status: this will throw into sharper relief the importance of Lower Bebington as the civic hub of the area, together with the inspirational legacy of Joseph Mayer and his influence on the subsequent industrialised philanthropy of William Hesketh Lever. These and other agendas for positive management will be detailed further in the forthcoming Conservation Management Plan for Lower Bebington, as and when the conservation area is designated.

In terms of delivering effective conservation within the village, it is essential that the local community is an engaged and active participant in the process. Thus far local ward councillors and members of the Wirral Society have been active protagonists in seeking to designate a conservation area in Lower Bebington. However, as yet there is no identifiable local stakeholder group that is able to assume this role. It is hoped that this situation will change in time. Thus far Mayer Park lacks a Friends group or association, and this is essential if the park is going to be able to secure funding for its ongoing improvement and enhancement.

## 2.2 Other Information

In addition to Wirral Council, many other organisations can help, by providing education and advice. These include:

The Society for the Protection of Buildings - <http://www.spab.org.uk/>

Common Ground - <http://www.commonground.org.uk/>

The Victorian Society - <http://www.victoriansociety.org.uk/>

The Georgian Group -

<http://www.georgiangroup.org.uk/docs/home/index.php>

The Twentieth Century Society -

[http://www.c20society.org.uk/new\\_index.html](http://www.c20society.org.uk/new_index.html)

Council for British Archaeology - <http://new.archaeologyuk.org/>

Historic Environment Local Management - <http://www.helm.org.uk/>

SAVE Britain's Heritage: <http://www.savebritainsheritage.org/index.php>

Wirral Council contact:

Matthew Crook – Senior Conservation Officer,  
Development Management,  
Wirral Council,  
Wallasey Town Hall – North Annexe,  
Brighton Street,  
Wallasey,  
Wirral,  
Ch44 8ED

Bebington Central Library contains many sources of information on the history of Lower Bebington, and also houses the Joseph Mayer Collection. Other local institutions such as Bromborough and Birkenhead Central Libraries and Wirral Archives hold similarly relevant records.

### 2.3 Bibliography

Nicholson, S & Warhurst, M, *Joseph Mayer 1803 – 1886*, Merseyside County Museums, 1982.

