



## WEST KIRBY CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL AND MANAGEMENT PLAN

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### PART 1 – CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

Prepared for Wirral Council by Donald Insall Associates Ltd, 2007 - Wirral Council 2009.

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## PREFACE

### **Background to the Study**

This report has been prepared by Donald Insall Associates Ltd on behalf of Wirral Council. Its purpose is to clarify the designation of the Conservation Area, which will protect and enhance the character of the West Kirby Conservation Area.

### **Scope and Structure of the Study**

The scope of this Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan 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.

### **Existing Designations, Legal Framework for Conservation Areas and the Powers of the Local Authority**

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 which 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.

The content of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 is clarified by national Planning Policy Guidance (PPG15): Planning and the Historic Environment and is supported by more recent Regional Planning Guidance for the North West (RPG13), which identifies as a key objective the need to ensure active management of the region's environmental and cultural assets.

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

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 area 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:

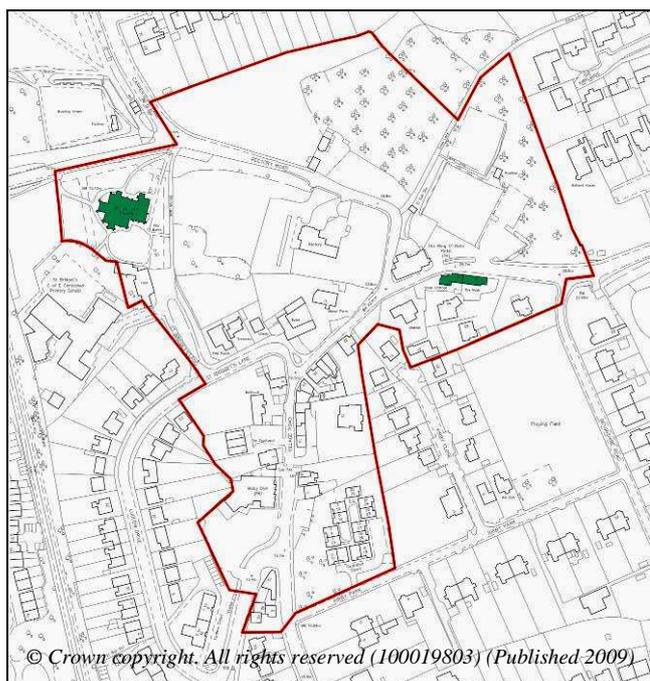
- Buildings and structures may not be demolished without formal consent from the Council (Conservation Area Consent).
- Trees are protected and all work to them requires consent from the Council.
- New development is expected to reflect the quality of design and construction of the surrounding area and 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.

The first step to protecting the inherent qualities of a Conservation Area is having a thorough understanding of its character and Planning Policy Guidance PPG15 advises that "the definition of an area's special interest should derive from an assessment of the elements that contribute to (and detract from) it".

This should then underpin local policies for the area's protection. Such a definition requires a thorough appraisal of the area to assess the contribution of each element (e.g. buildings, boundaries, trees, surfaces, etc.) to the area's overall character. PPG15 notes that "the more clearly the special architectural or historic interest that justifies designation is defined and recorded, the sounder will be the basis for local plan policies and development control decisions".

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.



*Conservation Area Boundary*

**Dating of buildings and sources:** In undertaking this conservation area appraisal, age has been estimated on the basis of visual inspections from public areas only, map evidence (1844 Tithe map, OS maps from decades: 1870, 1890, 1930 and 1950s) and publications: *The Hundred of Wirral*, P Sulley, *The History of Wirral*, SJ Roberts and *Wirral and its Viking Heritage*, P Cavill, S Harding, J Jesch).

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 various periods may exist. This is particularly true of vernacular buildings in ancient settlements where building facades can have been successively remodelled and roofs changed from thatch (universal before the later C18) to slate. Date stones cannot always be relied upon as they could have been incorporated into substantial rebuilding.

**References from Publications:** Show in parenthesis and abbreviated as below and followed by page number.

The Hundred of Wirral, P Sulley, : HoW

The History of Wirral, SJ Roberts: HistW

Wirral and its Viking Heritage, P Cavill, S Harding, J Jesch.: WVH

## PART 1 – CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

### 1.0 LOCATION

#### 1.1 GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION

- 1.1.1 West Kirby (Old Village) is located in the North West corner of the Wirral Peninsula approximately a third of a mile inland from the shoreline of the Dee estuary. The term ‘Old Village’ distinguishes the ancient settlement from the main urban area of West Kirby which developed during the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century after the coming of the railway.

#### 1.2 TOPOGRAPHY

- 1.2.1 Landscape terrain has a considerable influence on the character of the conservation area. The Old Village sits on the lower slopes of a long broad ridge, Caldry Hill, which rises to some 70m above the flat coastal strip alongside the Dee. The west facing upper parts of the hill are wooded heathland. A main road, the A540, linking West Kirby with Heswall runs along the crest of the hill. From here Village Road descends steeply to the Old Village in a series of sharp bends, occasionally cutting into and exposing the sandstone bedrock.



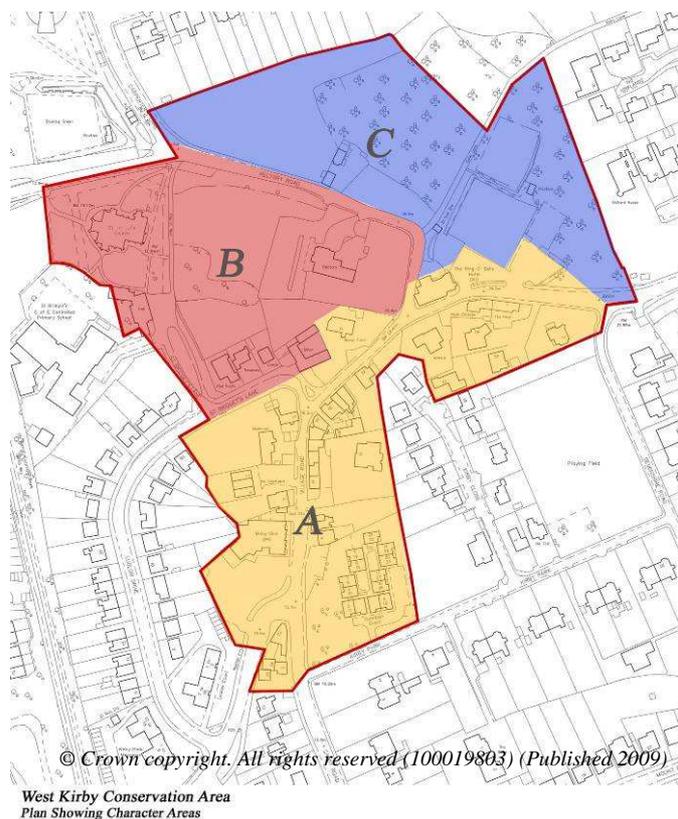
*Village Road descending into the ‘Old Village’*

### **1.3 GENERAL USAGE**

- 1.3.1 Although once an agricultural settlement, the Old Village is a residential area, which also includes two public houses (the Moby Dick and Ring o' Bells), St Bridget's church, primary school and playing fields. To the north of Rectory Road lies an area of private woodland and a small area of open paddock.

### **1.4 CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARY AND STATUTORY DESIGNATIONS**

- 1.4.1 West Kirby Old Village was designated as a Conservation Area in 1973. As well as the village core, the area contains a buffer zone of undeveloped land which gives the northern part of the conservation area a 'semi-rural' setting. The area incorporates three zones of differing character.
- A. Village Road: The principal thoroughfare through the Old Village is Village Road with the conservation area boundary drawn to include the properties which front onto (or can be viewed from) the road from its junction with Devonshire Road at the eastern extremity of the area, extending to the junction with Sandy Lane to the south.
  - B. To the north of Village Road the boundary takes in the land and properties on the north and east side of St Bridget's Lane, the old school house, school playing fields, St Bridget's Church and its Rectory from where Rectory Lane leads back to Village Road.
  - C. North of Rectory Lane the conservation area boundary encompasses an undeveloped area of paddock, woodland and the grounds of the Ring O'Bells.



## 2.0 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

### 2.1 EARLY HISTORY AND ORIGINS OF SURROUNDING AREA

#### Prehistoric

- 2.1.1 Although there is evidence of human occupation in north Wirral since the Middle Stone Age, the first traces of possible settlement at West Kirby are from the later Bronze Age. Funerary vases from this period were found in a cleft in the sandstone escarpment overlooking the Dee and there have also been arrow head finds from the same time.

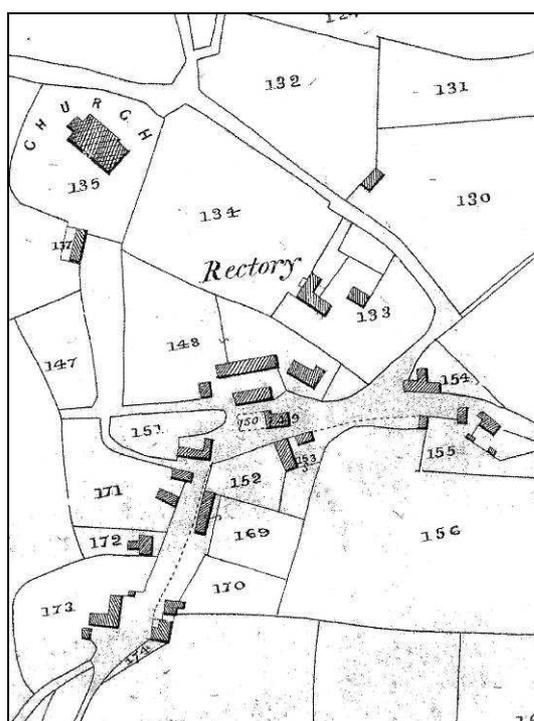
#### Pre Norman Conquest

- 2.1.2 The origin of the name West Kirby is from the Old Norse *kirkjuby* which translates as 'church settlement'. Vikings came to colonise north Wirral during the 10<sup>th</sup> century where they resettled across the Irish Sea from Dublin. It is possible that the name of the village implies that the settlement already existed prior to the arrival of the Vikings. (WVH p.119) However, that it was occupied by and important to the Norse invaders is certain. The dedication of the church to St Bridget, an important Irish saint, indicates that the incomers had adopted the Christianity of that country and either built or renamed the church at West Kirby. 'Name' evidence is further supported by finds of stone cross fragments from the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries and an Anglo Scandinavian form of decorated stone monument known as a 'hogback', probably a grave marker. These items indicate a settled community with

individuals of some status and resources. (WVH p7; HistW p61) West Kirby is one of only eight churches known to have existed prior to the Norman period.

### **Medieval**

- 2.1.3 The Domesday Book does not refer directly to West Kirby. At that time the area formed part of a minor 'hundred' based on Caldby which may have been what remained of the north Wirral Norse enclave (HistW p69). The first documentary reference to West Kirby is from 1081 when William I confirmed the gift of the church and village to the Abbey of St Ebrulf in Normandy by the Norman Baron Robert de Ruddlan. Although not referred to in the Domesday Book, this further testifies to the existence of the settlement prior to the Norman Conquest. The Abbey in France later passed the church and lands to St Werberg's Abbey, Chester. (The deed specifies the town, church and chapel of Hildeburghege (Hilbere). In the late 12<sup>th</sup> century ownership of the church and settlement was subject to legal dispute between St Werberg's and the Abbey of Bessingwerk, Flint. The church remained with St Werberg and following the Reformation with the Dean and Chapter of Chester. The ownership of the Manor stayed with Bessingwerk and was leased to a local family the Kirkbies (HoW p.222).
- 2.1.4 West Kirby was the centre of a large medieval parish (including, Caldby, Frankby, Grange, Greasby, Little and Great Meols and Hoose). Given this status, the present historic core of West Kirby may appear somewhat small when compared to other settlements of similar standing. In the case of many ancient settlements it is possible to interpret the development of their plan form back to the medieval period, especially in relation to roads, pathways and field/property boundaries. However, in the case of West Kirby, apart from the 'fixed point' of the church, the plan form of the settlement in early times is not obvious.
- 2.1.5 From archaeological evidence it is clear that the church has occupied the same site since at least the 10<sup>th</sup> Century and possibly earlier. However, the present relationship of the Church to the village is unusually distant and disconnected compared to other parish centres such as West Kirby, Heswall and Bidston. The boundaries on either side of St Bridget's Lane are unusually widely spaced, suggesting a route of some importance, but its link to the Village core is indirect. The 1844 Tithe map shows that this has not changed in recent times although it does show a further narrow connecting lane to the village core. The earliest houses date from the later 17<sup>th</sup> century; archaeological investigation could possibly determine whether these were on the sites of medieval habitations.
- 2.1.6 Beyond the conservation area a reminder of medieval cultivation may be shown on the 1844 map in the 'enclosure' of the long narrow field boundaries rising up the hill from what is now Carpenters Lane. This is still reflected in the existing pattern of streets (similar to field enclosures at Frankby, HistW p91).



West Kirby 1844 Tithe Map

### **Post medieval**

2.1.7 Throughout the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries West Kirby remained a rural township sustained by small scale agriculture and supplemented by fishing. Records of 1545 indicate a population of approx 70 persons and at 15 persons per acre this represented a higher density than was typical for Wirral, possibly owing to its fishing and seafaring connections. There were local anchorages at Dawpool and Hoylake and records of deposited wills show West Kirby was a home to mariners throughout C17 and C18. (HistW p122) The medieval form of agriculture and field system would have survived until the later C17 with the land being virtually all 'common land'. In 1668 the Manor passed to the Earl of Bridgwater, beginning a long phase of land being enclosed and sold to freeholders. (HoW p219)

2.1.8 A number of existing historic buildings date from the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. This may well be a result of property passing to freeholders who constructed new farms and smallholdings. Some may have been built on medieval sites and some may have resulted in changes to the village plan form.

## **2.2 19TH CENTURY DEVELOPMENT**

2.2.1 By 1801 the population of the township was recorded at 148. These figures do not refer to the 'old village' alone but to the wider township which comprised a number of nearby small holdings, mills and settlements on the northern side of Grange Hill.

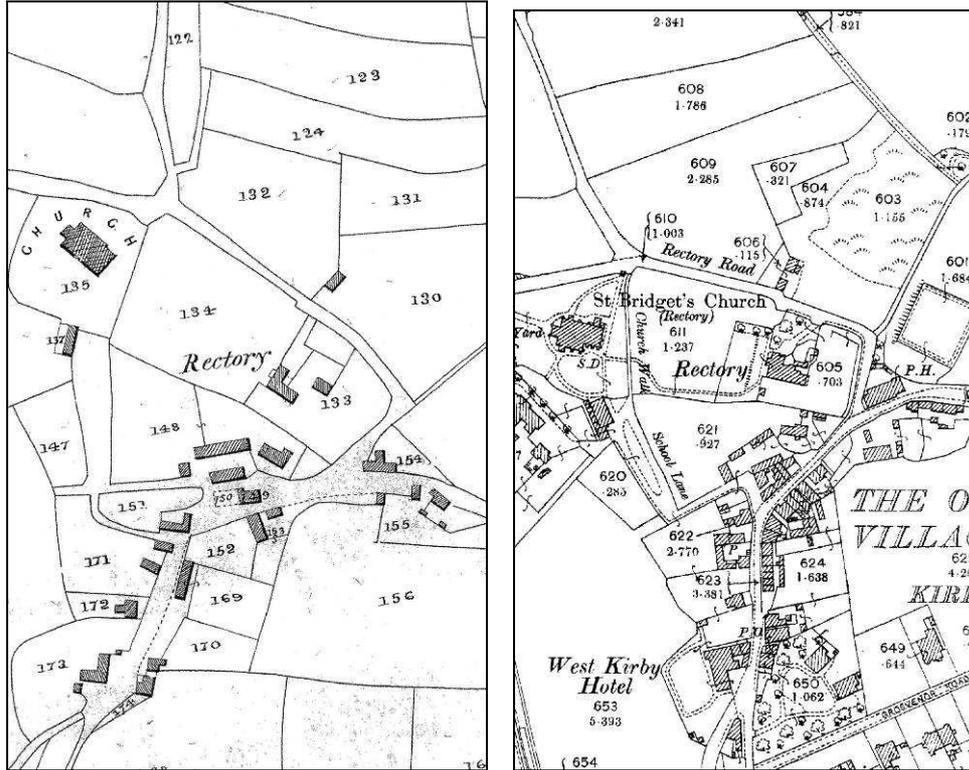
- 2.2.2 As the century progressed the River Dee and the Port of Chester declined rapidly in importance to that of Liverpool and the Mersey. Liverpool's docks and urban area expanded dramatically to create the second port of the Empire. Its success spurred the development of Birkenhead, its docks and the urbanisation of Wirral's Mersey coast. This process was to have increasing influence on the settlements of west Wirral. Subsistence farming and fishing began to be supplemented by the sale of produce to the growing urban areas on the east of the Wirral and Liverpool.
- 2.2.3 The last and most substantial 'enclosure' of common land was ratified by an Act of Parliament of 1830 (HoW p220). This saw the appropriation of virtually all land within the township with the notable exception of the area of wooded heath on the hillside above the village, then known as Liberty Park (now usually known as Caldly Hill). This would have facilitated the development of land later in the century.
- 2.2.4 In 1839 the Mill that had been sited on the crest of the sandstone ridge above the village and had been a local landmark for centuries, was destroyed. It was replaced by the present column for marine navigation constructed in 1841 by the Mersey Docks and Harbour Commissioners.



*Navigation column on Caldly Hill*

- 2.2.5 Over the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century the growing populations of Birkenhead and Liverpool came to regard Wirral's country and coast as desirable places to live, spend their leisure time and recuperate from heavily populated and polluted urban areas. In 1889 the author of the 'Hundred of Wirral' wrote of West Kirby that the 'Air is said to be the same as Torquay and to have equally beneficial powers for the invalid. Owing to these advantages numbers of villas and streets have rapidly sprung up and the place has greatly increased in size'. (HoW p220)
- 2.2.6 West Kirby's rapid expansion as a dormitory town and coastal resort was made possible through Wirral's developing railway system. In 1878 connection was made from West Kirby to the line between Hoylake, Birkenhead and Liverpool and in 1886 a line was opened to Parkgate with links to Hooton and Chester.

- 2.2.7 The new residential areas of the later 19<sup>th</sup> Century were developed on the flat coastal strip to the south of the railway station. Although by the 1880s no farms or holdings of any size still existed, the historic core of the Old Village still retained a semi rural setting separated from the dormitory town by the newly created Ashton Park.
- 2.2.8 Some significant changes to the village core occurred throughout the later half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, as evident from comparison of the 1844 Tithe map and the 1890 Ordnance Survey (OS) plan. The former layout probably shows the old village more or less as it had existed since the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. The only known early 19<sup>th</sup> Century development was the 1830s terrace of cottages on the strip of land to the west of plot 169 and 170. The major changes between the 1844 and 1890 maps are as follows (Plot Nos. as per 1844 map):
- A lane between 151 and 171 linked Village Road with St Bridget's Lane. This joined Village Road immediately in front of the building that is now 5 Village Road which dates from 1746.
  - Village Road appears to have passed to both sides of Plot 149 and 150 (referred to in 1844 as a building site) leaving an island site. By 1890 these plots had been redeveloped and extended over the northern passageway.
  - The house and garden occupying Plot 172 had been redeveloped as the West Kirby Hotel, now the site of the Moby Dick.
  - On the east side of Village Road, Plot 152 was developed and the terrace of cottages extended.
  - Grosvenor Road had been built and two large houses occupied what is now Guardian Court.
  - The grounds of the Ring o' Bells were extended including gardens and bowling greens



(left) Tithe Map 1844; (right) OS map 1890

### 2.3 20<sup>TH</sup> AND 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY CHANGES

2.3.1 The principal changes that have taken place over the last hundred years have included new building, mainly dwellings constructed in former garden plots, and 'improvements' to highway alignments. The majority of these developments took place in the third quarter of the 20th Century. These are summarised as follows:

- West Kirby Hotel and rear garden replaced by the present Moby Dick and its side car park.



The Moby Dick

- Guardian Court (sheltered housing development) erected on the site of two former houses set back from the road in extensive grounds.



*Guardian Court*

- Building opposite the Moby Dick demolished presumably for a highway widening scheme and the present small amenity area formed.



*Amenity area*

- Frontage buildings between No 5 Village Road and Meadhurst demolished and 1-3 The Courtyard developed and set back in the plot to the rear of a communal parking area.



*1-3 The Courtyard*

- Property immediately at the junction of St Bridget's Lane with Village Road demolished and a highway junction and small amenity area formed.
- Five new dwellings constructed on land at the rear and to the side of the Nook and Nook Cottage. In the 1950s this had been the site of nurseries. The early OS maps indicate land to the rear of the Nook as a 'pinfold' (an enclosure for confining livestock)



*Dwellings the south of Nook Cottage*

- Four new dwellings constructed on the north of St Bridget's Lane. The bungalow 'Sator' incorporates former buildings that had existed at least since the enclosure map of 1844, even taking the name then indicated. The other three houses were constructed on predominantly open land previously connected to Sator.

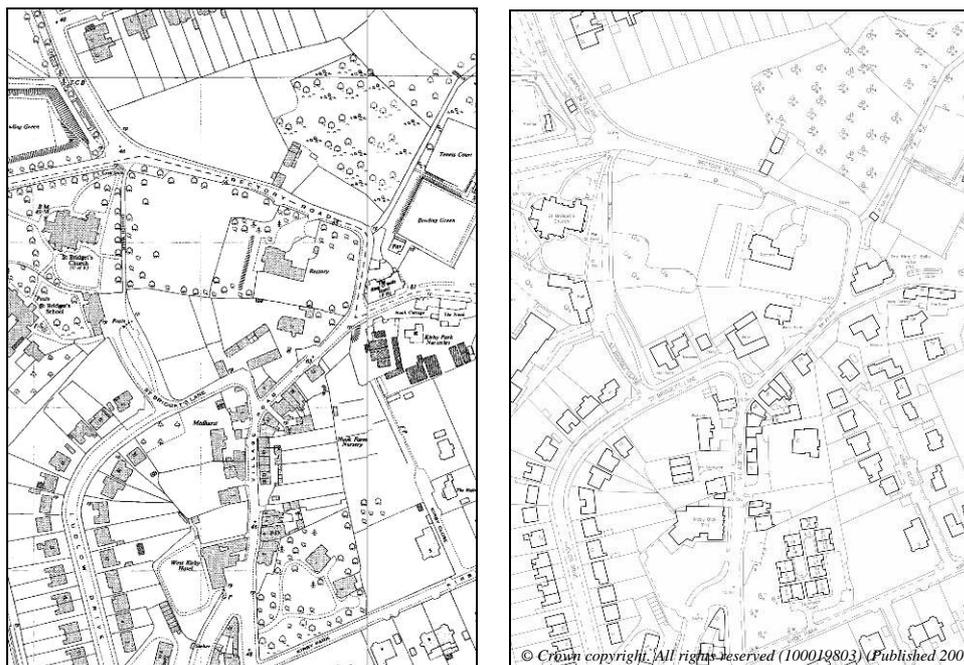


*'Sator'*

- New flats at the rear of 72 Sandy Lane



*flats at the rear of 72 Sandy Lane*



(left)Old Village 1950s; (right)Old Village Current

## 2.4 ARCHAEOLOGY

2.4.1 The Merseyside Archaeological Service Historic Environment Record (SMR) holds accounts of sites of interest (buildings/features/artefact finds). Seventeen locations are recorded, the most significant must be the Anglo/Norse stone cross and hogback artefacts dating from the 10th/11th Centuries which make a significant contribution to the understanding of the Viking colonisation of north Wirral during that period. The majority of SMR entries relate to the Old Village as a rural settlement post 16th Century. There must be further potential for archaeological remains embedded within buildings which now appear outwardly as being 17th or early 18th Century, or within their grounds.

2.4.2 The plan within appendix D superimposes the present OS plan on to the 1844 Tithe map. It shows the changes that have taken place in the intervening period and highlights the buildings that still exist and which pre date the 19th Century.



Hogback grave marker, 10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> century, at St Bridget's church

### **3.0 LANDSCAPE AND VISTAS**

#### **3.1 SETTING AND RELATIONSHIP WITH THE SURROUNDING AREA**

3.1.1 Although now part of a 19/20th Century town much of the immediate setting of the Old Village has retained a verdant and in parts semi-rural setting.

3.1.2 To the west the conservation area is separated from the terraced streets of the 19th Century developments by the Wirral Way, a wood lined pathway (once the West Kirby to Parkgate railway line), and the late Victorian landscape of Ashton Park. Immediately to the east are the modern bungalows of Kirby Close and the grand 19th century houses on Kirby Park and Devonshire Road which overlook a recreation ground. Because of the topography these developments have little visual impact on the Old Village. Beyond, the land rises to the wooded heathland of Caldy Hill (Liberty Park). The northern part of the conservation area comprises wooded grounds and paddock areas which provide a separation and screening from the residential property to the north. To the south Village Road continues into Caldy Road which is characterised by substantial residential properties mostly set in substantial gardens.



*Caldy Hill heathland above the Old Village*



*General view of West Kirby and Dee estuary from Caldy Hill above the Old Village*

### **3.2 CHARACTER AND RELATIONSHIP OF SPACES**

3.2.1 Approaching from the east Village Road winds steeply down from Column Road (A540) with woodland rising to the left. Entering the village, between the Nook and the Ring o' Bells, the space 'tightens' and is enclosed by the building frontages hard against the narrow pavement on the east side and the high garden walls and properties opposite.

3.2.2 Approaching from the west up Church Road from the main town, St Bridget's Church marks the entrance to the conservation area. On both sides are green spaces and heavily wooded boundaries. Nearing the village, Rectory Road turns a sharp bend and rises steeply to its junction with Village Road where it is enclosed by high walls and a rock cutting towards the Ring o' Bells.



*Church Road approaching junction with Village Road*

3.2.3 Spatially and in terms of general appearance, the weakest part of the area is at the junction of Village Road with Sandy Lane where the Moby Dick car park abuts the road.

### **3.3 VIEWS AND VISTAS WITHIN THE AREA**

3.3.1 There are no significant distant views of the Old Village because it is tucked beneath a hillside, is surrounded by wooded areas and is approached by winding roads.

3.3.2 Defining views within the conservation area are:

- the close range views of St Bridget's Church;
- across the fields, open pasture and woods north and south of Rectory Lane;
- looking north up the wide section of St Bridget's Lane towards to the school and church;
- south down Village Road towards the prominent 'corner' building at the junction of Caldly Road and Sandy Lane (72 Sandy Lane);
- north up Village Road to the Ring o' Bells at the corner with Rectory Road

### 3.4 GREEN SPACES AND PLANTING

- 3.4.1 Green spaces and wooded areas add very considerably to the character of the area. This is particularly so in the area to the north of Village Road where tall mature trees, pasture and playing fields create a semi rural appearance to the setting of the church, rectory and Ring o' Bells. These green spaces have a wider significance in Wirral's landscape structure in linking visually with Ashton Park and Caldys Hill



*School playing fields off Rectory Road*



*Paddock off Rectory Road*



*Echo Lane leading uphill from Rectory Lane between rear of Ring o Bells and the paddock*

- 3.4.2 Ornamental 'front gardens' are not a particular feature of the Old Village, the residential properties on the east side being set close to the road at 'back of pavement' and on the west side private gardens are enclosed by high boundary walls.
- 3.4.3 At the south end of and above Village Road, Guardian Court is set within wooded grounds which make a positive contribution to the area.

- 3.4.4 Road improvements in the later 20<sup>th</sup> Century left Village Road with two public amenity areas occupying ‘left over space’. The road widening opposite the Moby Dick resulted in a public seating area. Enclosed at the rear by a retaining wall and shaded by trees, this is a rather dark and little used area but not visually unpleasant. The improved junction of St Bridget’s Lane with Village Road has a small island bed of planting within the widened footway.

## **4.0 TOWNSCAPE AND PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS**

### **4.1 GRAIN, SCALE, REPETITION AND DIVERSITY**

- 4.1.1 Generally the ‘grain’ or development pattern of the built up parts of the conservation area could be described as ‘closely loose knit’ rather than being constructed to regular building lines. At the core of the village, however, properties on the east side of Village Road are in the form of narrow fronted terraces hard against the highway.

### **4.2 PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS AND FEATURES**

- 4.2.1 In terms of visual prominence the notable historic buildings are:
- Ring o’ Bells and the Nook, and Nook Cottage which form the ‘gateway’ to the village from the east.



- St Bridget’s Church and old School House



- The prominent terraces/groups close to the east side of Village Road (Nos 4-8, 14-24, 26-32)



- No. 5 Village Road, prominent on a tight bend in the road



- No. 72 Sandy Lane, prominent on the corner with Village Road



#### 4.2.2 Buildings that are somewhat less visually prominent but have considerable historic interest and contribute to the character of the area are:

- Village Road
- Manor Farm
- The Rectory
- Meadhurst (particularly the sandstone outbuildings onto Village Road)
- Sandstone barns on the north side of Rectory Road

**4.3 BOUNDARIES AND SURFACES**

4.3.1 All adopted road and pavement surfaces are in tarmacadam.

4.3.2 Boundary walls of the local red sandstone are a most important defining feature of the area.



4.3.3 Street furniture: Some traditional lamp posts remain from the era of gas lighting with 'swan neck' conversions:



## 5.0 ARCHITECTURE, MATERIALS AND DETAILS

### 5.1 PROMINENT STYLES

5.1.1 The area contains a range of buildings styles. With few exceptions those that pre date the 20th Century are essentially ‘vernacular’ i.e. constructed by local builders or master masons following the traditional form of construction and style typical for the period. Example buildings from various periods include:

- Rural cottage from the early/mid 17<sup>th</sup> Century single storey whitewashed sandstone with small windows and thatched roof (the Nook).



- Later 17th and 18th Century houses, two storey brick or whitewashed/rendered stone. Earlier examples had casement windows and later ones ‘Georgian’ proportioned sash windows.



- 19th Century and earlier outhouses and storage buildings associated with the village’s agricultural past.
- Early C19 housing terraces on the east side of Village Road. The classical console motifs supporting the lintel above doors shows (albeit in a humble form) the influence of the classical revival used for grander buildings. These buildings are reported to have been once stuccoed, presumably being removed during refurbishment in the 1980s. (Dwellings with ‘rough’ sandstone masonry were traditionally lime washed or rendered for visual effect and to prolong the life of the soft stone and improve weather protection. (Re-rendering in lime stucco in the future would not be unsympathetic to their historic character.) (



- Later C19 'Cheshire Tudor', half timbered upper storeys with gables and dormers followed the popular 'mock black and white timber frame' style of the period. Examples include the Ring o' Bells and 72 Sandy Lane.



- Later 20th Century houses. These are 'one off' designs for individual plots rather than standard mass produced suburban housing.
- St Bridget's Church demonstrates gothic styles in the medieval 'decorated' and 'perpendicular' forms with 19th century restoration/gothic revival. The old 19th Century school-house adjacent is designed to blend with the church in a late 15th Century style.

## 5.2 MATERIALS

5.2.1 The most common materials within the conservation area in respect of the historic buildings are:

### Facades:

- Exposed sandstone masonry
- Brickwork (often closely matching the weathered sandstone)
- Render or white wash

- 'Mock' timber framed upper stories and dormers with rendered or painted stone/brick panels.

**Roofs:**

- Welsh slate
- Thatch (one example)

### 5.3 TYPICAL FEATURES AND DETAILS

5.3.1 **Windows:** There are a number of features which contribute to the style of windows and help to determine the age and character of the building:

- the shape of opening
- the frame material
- the framed sub divisions
- the window opening mechanism
- the number and proportions of glazed panes
- the method of glazing fixing
- the type of glass.
- window furniture
- the degree of recession of the frames into their reveals

5.3.2 In comparison with the life of buildings windows are regularly replaced because of decay in timber frames and changes in fashion. None of the historic building frontages appear now to possess window frames or glazing which date from the original period of construction. The majority are late 20th century, much in double glazed UPVC which have no historic interest

5.3.3 Window shapes, i.e. the size and proportion of the structural window openings are not so prone to change.

5.3.4 Local 17th and earlier 18th Century cottages and houses typically have window openings that are wider than tall or proportions that are not far from square with casement windows. Early 17th Century village cottages had small openings which would originally not have been glazed but with windows covered with waxed linen or other translucent materials (e.g. the Nook). More substantial openings would have had window frames with dividing mullions and casement openings (e.g. Manor Farm). Glazing would have been in the form of leaded lights or small panes.



*(left) Early C17 openings; (centre and right) Later C17 / Early C18 openings*

5.3.5 There are no examples of buildings from the ‘high Georgian’ period of the last half of the 18th Century but those constructed up to the period of the mid 19th Century terrace properties have ‘Georgian’ proportioned openings (taller than wide) e.g. the terrace of 20-14 Village Road with small paned sash windows. Some later 19th Century properties e.g. 22-24 Village Road continued this style but other later 19th Century buildings were designed in a conscious ‘vernacular’ of earlier periods with wider mullioned casements e.g. the Ring o’ Bells, Tudor timber framed style and St Bridget’s school house in a late medieval style with stone mullioned.

5.3.6 **Doors:** There are almost no doors which are historic in form, except that at Manor Farm in solid timber boards with ornamental strap hinges in a shallow arch headed frame. Three buildings set back from the Village Road, Manor Farm, Meadhurst and No. 5 have projecting entrance porches with pitched roofs. These are likely to be later additions.



*Manor Farm, porch and traditional solid timber door with shallow arch head and ornate strap hinges*

5.3.7 **Chimneys** play a part in the visual composition of most buildings - typically they are of simple rectilinear design with clay pots.



- 5.3.6 **Roofs:** Typically buildings from the 17<sup>th</sup> through to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century have pitched roofs contained within side gables and parapet gables. The earlier styles have copings to the parapets which terminate in a kneeler, a corbelled projection that conceals the end of the eaves gutter. All roofs of historic properties are in welsh slate apart from the Nook which is thatched and 72 Sandy Lane which has red tiles. The slate coursing is now uniform but originally would probably have had some gradation with slates ‘diminishing’ in size towards the ridge. Ridges are often tiled, red or dark blue/black. Prior to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century thatch will have been the prevalent material. Projecting gabled or hipped dormers have commonly been added at a later date.



*Manor Farm gable with stone copings and kneeler*

## 6.0 NEGATIVE FACTORS AND BUILDING APPRAISAL

### 6.1 OVERVIEW

6.1.1 **Negative features:** A study of this nature cannot attempt to highlight every part of the built environment that has a detrimental impact on the character or setting of the conservation area. Instead this report summarises the most apparent examples and key problems within the conservation area as a way of encouraging an understanding and awareness of these issues.

6.1.2 **Appraisal of individual buildings:** Appended to this document is a plan showing the contribution of buildings to the character of the conservation area. The plan was produced as a tool to gain an understanding of the significance of different parts of the village and to consider the appropriateness of the boundary. This plan categorizes each building, or group of buildings into the following groupings:

- A: (Red) – Buildings that are critical to the character of the area: typically these may be landmark buildings and / or buildings with most of their original character retained
- B: (Yellow) – Buildings that contribute positively to the character of the conservation area: buildings may have some alterations but original character is still prominent
- C: (Green) – Neutral - Either modern buildings of little interest or buildings where character has been lost beyond economic redemption.
- D: (Blue) – Buildings that detract from the significance or character of the area.

6.1.3 **Post 1950 buildings and Conservation Character:** In assessing the contribution of individual buildings, some difficulties arise in determining the extent to which more recent structures could be said to contribute to area character. The legislation, chiefly The Town and Country Planning(Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas)Act 1990, is concerned with safeguarding the historic environment. It defines conservation areas as ‘areas of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance’. PPG 15 advises that our experience of historic areas depends on a variety of factors including the ‘appropriate scaling and detailing of contemporary buildings’ (4.2). Making judgements on the appropriateness of very recent buildings is often subjective. Their very newness may appear to clash with the historic environment but, over time, this may mellow and a once innovative architectural ‘style’ becomes more generally accepted, even historic. In advance of the ‘test of time’, this appraisal takes a very cautious approach and ranks virtually all very recent buildings as neutral (other than those obviously of very poor design). The

term 'recent' is applied to buildings post 1948 and the closer to the present day the more rigorously the PPG15 test of 'appropriate scaling and detailing' is applied. The status of 'neutral' buildings will, therefore, require periodic review. (1948 is a 'cut off' date referred to in the Act in relation to curtilage structures deemed to be Listed by association with the main building

## **6.2 CHANGES TO PLAN FORM AND RECENT DEVELOPMENT**

6.2.1 West Kirby Old Village is an ancient settlement that has been evolving and changing for over a millennium. At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century it was still a rural community surrounded by small holdings, fields and still some 'common land'. Its main street was in places so narrow that horses and carts would probably have had difficulties passing each other. By the beginning of the twentieth century the new dormitory town was encroaching on the old village, changing its character with new houses, shops and hotel and widening the narrowest section of Village Road. Up until the 1950s the area on the north side of St Bridget's lane was still predominantly open land and the 'backland' east of Village Road was in market garden use associated with Nook Farm Nursery and Kirby Park Nursery. During the late 1960s and 1970s the old West Kirby Hotel was replaced by the Moby Dick, undeveloped 'backland' became sites for further housing, and junction improvements widened roads and spaces. All contributed to further erosion of the village's special character.

6.2.2 Despite this, the new development has not 'overwhelmed' the Old Village. This is due to the new buildings being in the form of 'one off' projects rather than larger scale speculative ventures at high plot densities. Recent developments and conversions, especially fronting Village Road have been consciously designed to relate to context and to echo local architectural details.

## **6.3 UNSYMPATHETIC EXTENSIONS**

6.3.1 There are relatively few extensions within the conservation area of a significant size. Most extensions have been to the rear or sides of houses to provide ancillary accommodation such as porches. In many cases extensions have involved the alteration of existing outriggers and therefore have not substantially changed the form of the building. The front garage extension to 4 Village Road has altered the appearance of the building and is an untypical addition to the street scene. However, local materials and design details help to reduce its negative impact.

## **6.4 CHARACTER CHANGING ALTERATIONS**

6.4.1 Changes that have affected the original or pre-20<sup>th</sup> Century buildings of character within the area include:

- The insertion of new or alteration to existing openings.
- Rendering of previously brick or stone elevations.
- The removal of whitewash or stucco from stone facades.
- Replacement windows and doors, with non traditional designs and materials such as UPVC.
- The removal of shop fronts.
- The installation of dormers of a non traditional form

6.4.2 The most common adverse alteration to historic fabric within the conservation area is the replacement of traditional doors and windows with new materials, styles and opening methods. These alterations are often well intentioned (to improve the thermal or acoustic performance or to reduce maintenance requirements for instance) but often have adverse effects on the character of traditional buildings. Those most apparent are related to UPVC replacement windows. When viewed close too, older timber windows have a 'patina' which blends with the historic structure. In contrast, UPVC has a uniform plastic finish unsympathetic to surrounding older fabric. However, more significant when viewed from a distance and therefore to the character of the conservation area are window replacements which:

- Replace sash windows with top hung opening lights
- Reduce the frame subdivisions of transoms and mullions
- Replace small glazed panes with large panes (including those with mock glazing bars introduced within the double glazing void)
- Bring the frame forward in the reveal to be nearer the exterior façade. (The lack of window reveal reduces the apparent solidity of the building in which it is inserted.)

## **6.5 PUBLIC REALM**

6.5.1 Carriageways and pavements all have modern materials, tarmac and concrete pavings. Post 1950s highway improvement schemes widening carriageways at road junctions have altered special character. The introduction of 'wheelie bins' has had an adverse impact on the street scene where they are stored on the footway particularly by the terraced properties on the narrow portion of Village Road.

## **6.6 LOSS AND DEVELOPMENT PRESSURES**

6.6.1 There have been no recent losses of historic buildings. For a number of years the Interim Housing Policy has not allowed applications for new building resulting in an increase of density. The most obvious concerns in relation to

future development pressures must concern the remaining open playing fields, paddock, pasture and woodland within the conservation area and the further sub-division of building plots. The open and wooded spaces within the area do not appear to be protected by any specific planning designations in the current UDP other than that provided by its conservation area status.

6.6.2 Throughout much of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century a bowling green and tennis court stood at the rear of the Ring o Bells. These were removed in the 1980s but the area has still remained 'green' with a pub garden replacing the bowling green (the former tennis court is overgrown).

6.6.3 The wide green space contained by St Bridget's Lane as it approaches the School retains a memory of the area's rural character and

## **6.7 CHANGES TO THE SETTING OF THE CONSERVATION AREA**

6.7.1 Beyond its boundaries, there have been no recent changes to the setting of the conservation area.

## **7.0 SUMMARY OF SPECIAL CHARACTER**

7.1 The special character of the conservation area can be summarised as follows:

- St Bridget's church is one of the oldest ecclesiastical sites on Wirral with medieval fabric surviving within the 'restored' 19th century church.
- Archaeological finds and artefacts have made an important contribution to the understanding of north Wirral as a Viking colony in the 10th century.
- Examples of 'vernacular' building from the 17th and early 18th centuries.
- Examples of late 19th century mock Tudor style building.
- Open and wooded areas have, in parts, provided the village with a semi rural setting.
- Village Road provides a succession of views through its changing elevation and direction. These are made more interesting by the traditional buildings abutting the street, sandstone walls and exposed bedrock.