

BIRKENHEAD AND TRANMERE NEIGHBOURHOOD AREA HERITAGE AND CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

APRIL 2016





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BIRKENHEAD AND TRANMERE NEIGHBOURHOOD AREA HERITAGE AND CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

Introduction

This report presents a summary of the history and character of the Birkenhead and Tranmere Neighbourhood Area of Wirral in Merseyside. It has been prepared by consultants at AECOM on behalf of Locality, working closely with the Birkenhead and Tranmere Neighbourhood Planning Forum and is based on a detailed appraisal of the area carried out through desk study and fieldwork.

Landscape character assessment is a process used to describe and articulate what is special and distinctive about a particular place by identifying recognisable patterns of elements or characteristics that make one landscape different from another. Landscape is defined by the European Landscape Convention as “..... an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and / or human factors.” This definition is broad and encompasses natural, rural, urban and peri-urban areas.

The information generated through the process of characterisation can be used as evidence to support the planning and design process. This approach is supported by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which states that neighbourhood plans should develop robust and comprehensive policies based on an understanding and evaluation of its defining characteristics (Department for Communities and Local Government DCLG, 2012). In doing so, policies can ensure that development responds to local character and history, and reflects the identity of local surroundings and materials, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation.



Photo 1: Site walkover with forum members

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Approach

The approach of this study follows well-established landscape character assessment techniques. The detailed desk study and fieldwork carried out to inform this assessment underpins the classification and description of character areas and broadly follows the process set out in the “Approach to Landscape Character Assessment” (Natural England, 2014). This approach has been tailored to meet the specific needs of the neighbourhood planning process and draws on further best practice guidance including:

- Using Historic Landscape Characterisation (Historic England 2004);
- Character and identity Townscape and heritage appraisals in housing market renewal areas (Historic England and CABE 2008); and
- Understanding Place Historic Area Assessments: Principles and Practice (Historic England 2010).

Historic England, previously English Heritage has issued a number of guidance and best practice notes covering a range of issues in relation to the conservation and management of historic places and heritage assets all of which are available on the Historic England website (<https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/planning/>).

This study builds upon previous work carried out by the Birkenhead and Tranmere Neighbourhood Planning Forum including:

- Birkenhead and Tranmere Neighbourhood Planning Forum (3rd December, 2015) Consultation record, Where are you coming from?; and
- Birkenhead and Tranmere Neighbourhood Planning Forum (23rd November, 2015) Technical Support Package for Heritage and Character Assessment, Buildings and features at risk.

The Birkenhead and Tranmere Neighbourhood Planning Forum has also conducted informal presentations and site walkovers and captured photography of key buildings. This information has been reviewed to inform this assessment.

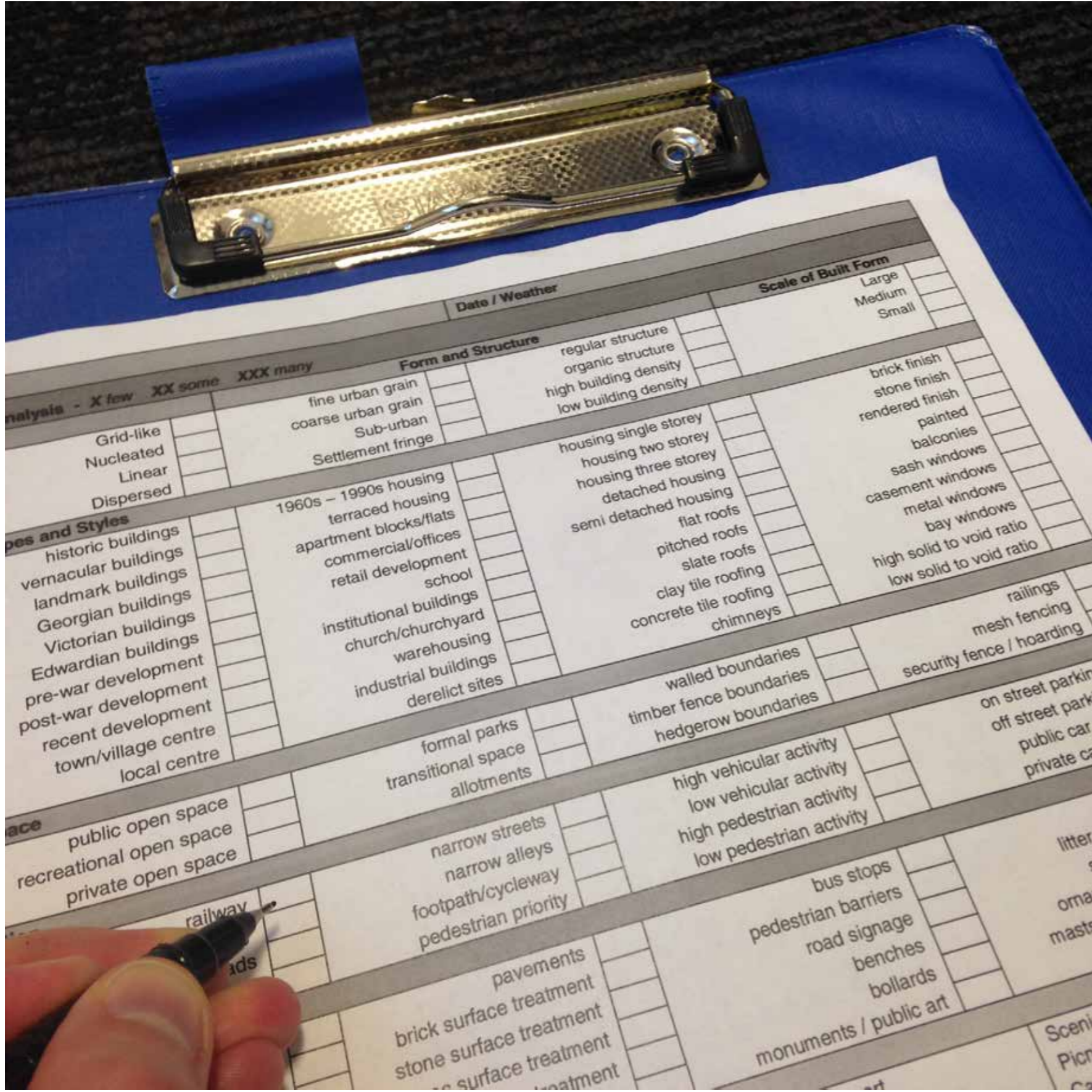


Photo 2: Fieldwork survey sheets

BIRKENHEAD AND TRANMERE NEIGHBOURHOOD AREA HERITAGE AND CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

Consultation

A meeting was held on 7 December 2015 with members of the Birkenhead and Tranmere Neighbourhood Planning Forum and the Wirral Conservation Areas Forum to discuss the structure and focus of the assessment. Members of the forum were also encouraged to share their knowledge and experience of the history and character of the area.

In addition, some members of the forum attended a site visit with AECOM on 14 January 2016 to discuss and point out key aspects of character and issues on site.

Observations from both meetings have been used to inform the study. The key points taken from these meetings are summarised below:

- Views across the Mersey are important and valued;
- Long vistas create a strong street identity;
- Strong historical and cultural associations;
- A wide variety of buildings, which should be celebrated;
- Discrete details within the streetscape, which should be recognised and protected;
- Relevance of transport in historical development;
- Primary routes are busy and active frontages are limited;
- Opportunities and threats of continuing change through development;
- Threat of strong architectural identity being lost through infill of new development; and
- Increasing proportion of derelict shop frontages is a key concern.



Photo 3: Documents and photographs discussed at the forum meeting

CONTEXT



BIRKENHEAD AND TRANMERE NEIGHBOURHOOD AREA HERITAGE AND CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

Context

This section of the report describes the location and context of the Birkenhead and Tranmere Neighbourhood Area and summarises current planning policies which are relevant to the study.

Location

The Birkenhead and Tranmere Neighbourhood Area is located on the Wirral Peninsula, as shown on Figure 1. It lies approximately 3.5km south-west of Liverpool, across the River Mersey, and 22.5km north-west of Chester.

Towns in local proximity include Birkenhead to the immediate north, New Ferry 2.5km to the south-east, Neston 9.5km to the south-west and West Kirby 10.5km to the west. The Birkenhead and Tranmere Neighbourhood Area boundary comprises approximately 116Ha and according to the 2011 census, the population is approximately 15,879.

The north and western boundaries of the area are marked by the A552, which creates a distinct edge to the area. This road connects to the A41 in the east which then leads to the A554 and Birkenhead Tunnel to Liverpool. The A552 also connects to the M53 in the west, which is the main road in and out of Birkenhead both to the south via Ellesmere Port and via the A59 in the north which crosses under the River Mersey via a tunnel to Liverpool. The Mersey Ferry also crosses the River near this location. The other boundaries are less distinct and comprise local roads and backs of houses to the south and east. The primary route through the area is the north-south road B5148, which connects to the A552 to the north and becomes the B5149 to Bebington in the south.

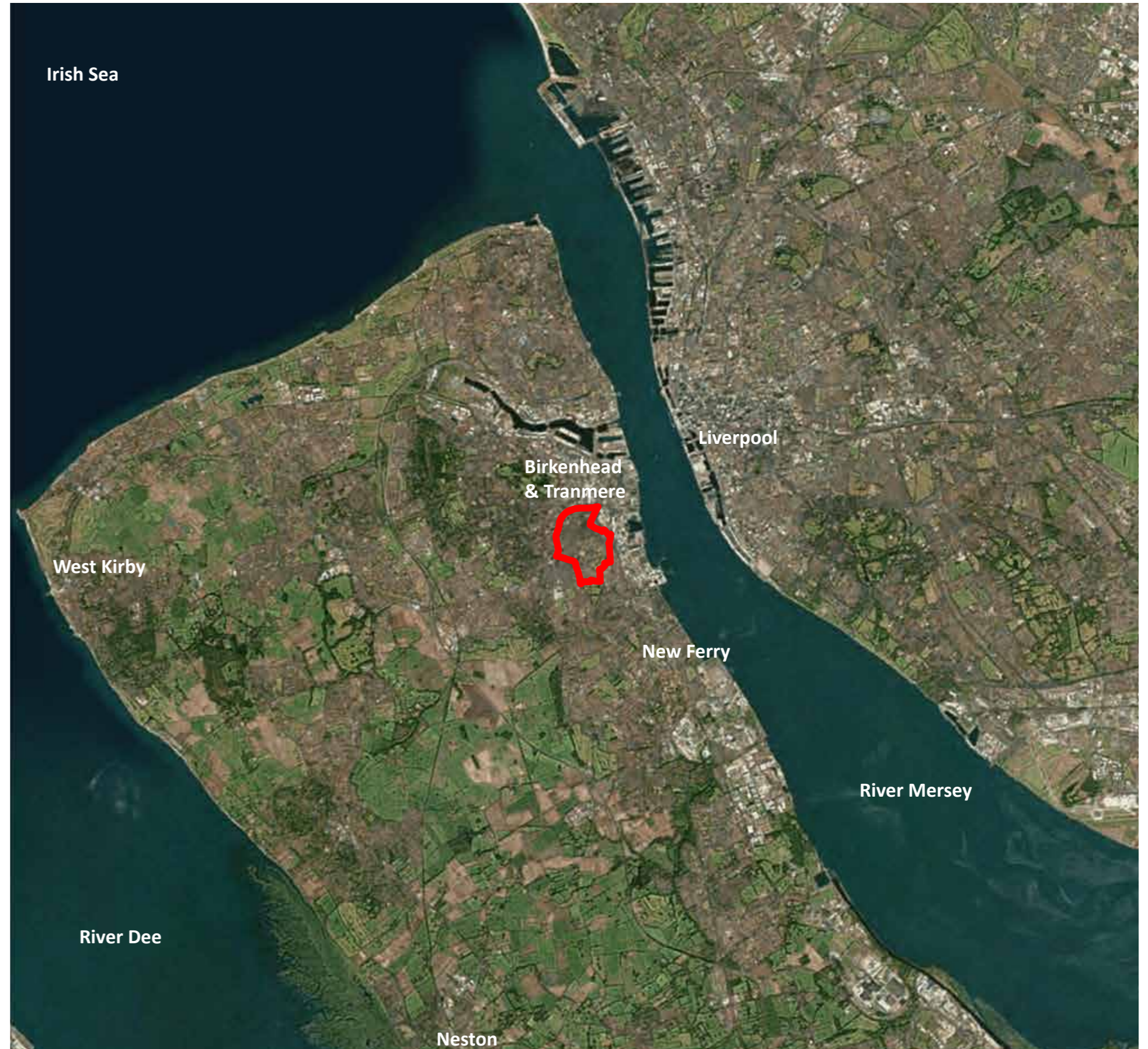
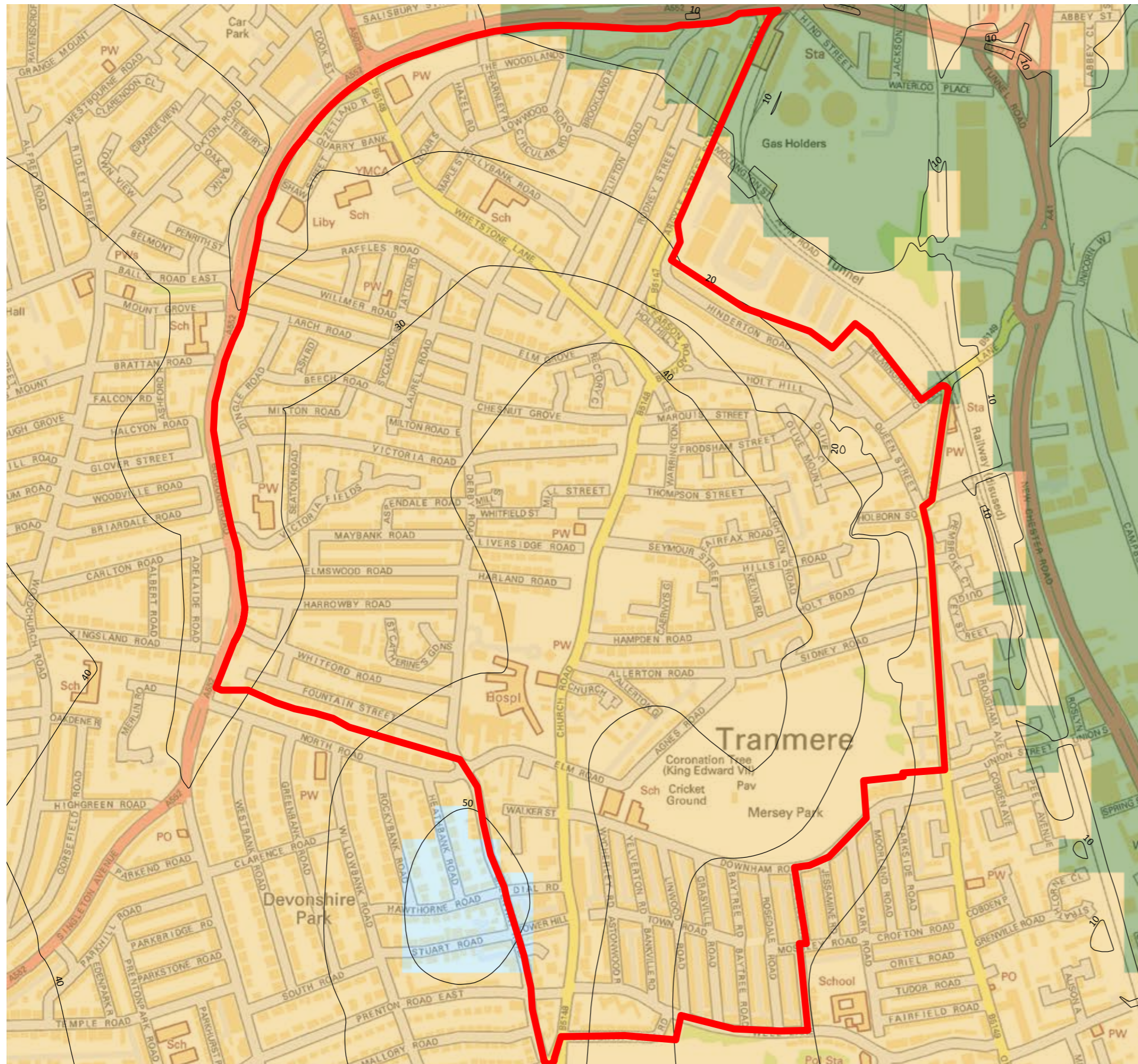


Figure 1: Location and Context Plan

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- Study area
- Contours (10m)
- Elevation (m AOD)
- < 10
- 10-50
- >50

Geology and Soils

The geology of the Wirral peninsula is dominated by glacial boulder clay overlying Triassic sandstone. These form a low-lying but gently rolling platform punctuated by numerous low sandstone outcrops. Within the Tranmere area, Triassic Pebble Beds of Bunter Sandstone are partly overlain by Boulder Clay and, in the inter-tidal areas and sections of reclaimed land, Alluvium. Sandstone faces can be seen along the east of the area, and some buildings and structures are constructed from this local material.

Topography and Hydrology

The area is located on an elevated plateau overlooking the River Mersey. Mersey Park marks a distinct change in topography as the land rises in the north. Within and to the north of the park views across the River Mersey are common due to the change in topography. There are no water bodies within the boundary. At the eastern side of the area there are a number of steep stone faces that remain from quarrying and surrounding these are a combination of steep and gradual slopes down towards the River Mersey. The area surrounding Greenway Road forms the highest point in the area (50m AOD). The land slopes steeply down from this point towards the River Mersey. The lowest point is located at the north end of Rodney Street and Clifton Road (10m AOD) which is to the north east of the area.

Figure 2: Topography Plan

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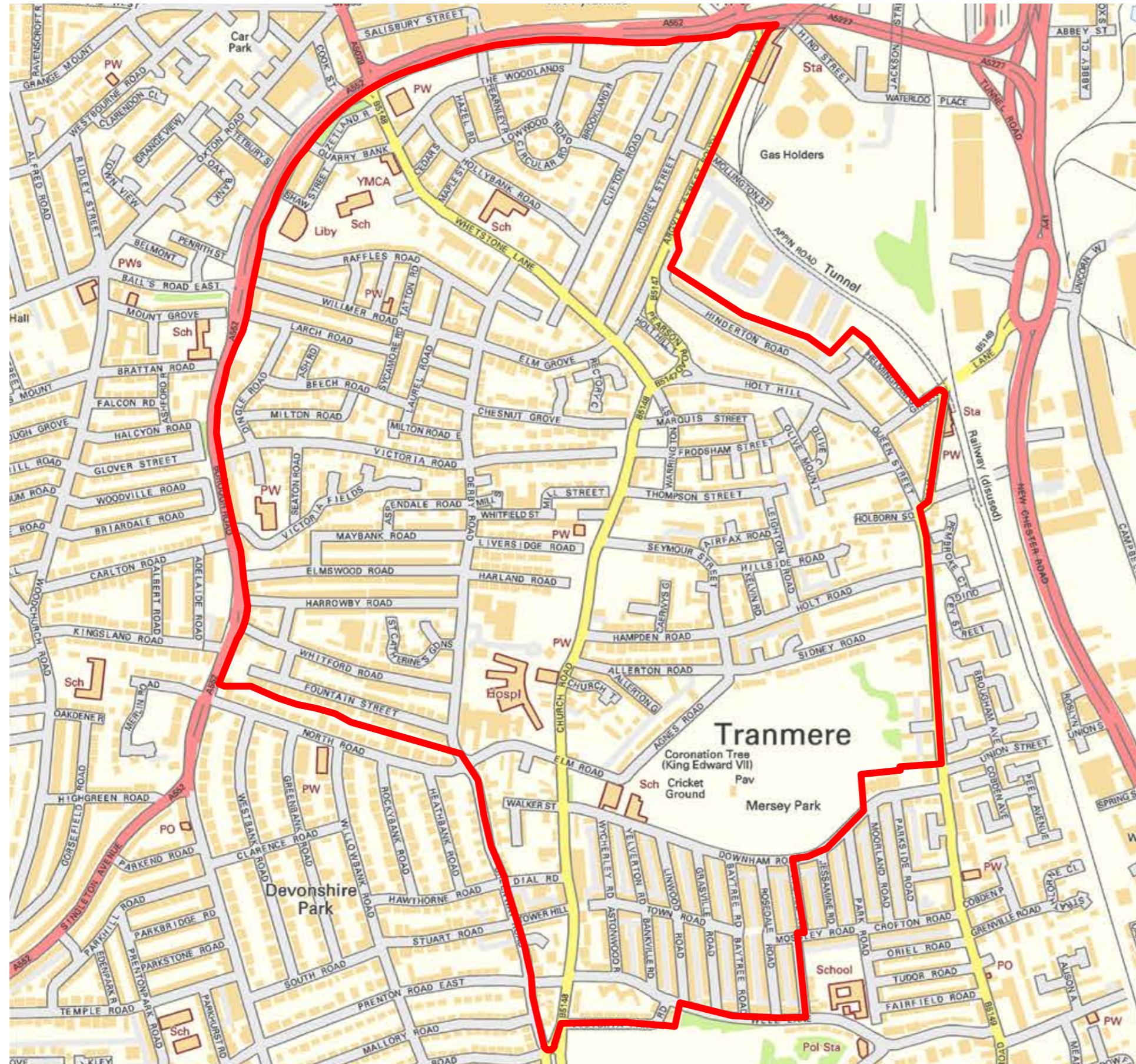


Figure 3: Study Area Location Plan

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Planning Policy Context

National Planning Policy

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), 2012

The NPPF requires local authorities to set out in their Local Plan a positive vision for the enhancement and enjoyment of heritage assets (DCLG, 2012). Part 12 Conserving and enhancing the historic environment clearly states that local authorities should recognise “the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness” and should seek “opportunities to draw on the contribution made by the historic environment to the character of a place”.

Planning Practice Guidance, 2014

Planning Practice Guidance was reviewed, catalogued and published on the internet by the government in 2014 (DCLG, 2014). The section on design includes guidance on promoting landscape character (Paragraph: 007 Reference ID: 26-007-20140306). It states that “development should seek to promote character in townscape and landscape by responding to and reinforcing locally distinctive patterns of development” and that the “successful integration of new development with their surrounding context is an important design objective”.

Local Planning Policy

Draft Core Strategy for Wirral, 2012

The Metropolitan Borough of Wirral published the draft Core Strategy Local Plan in 2012. A revised proposed submission draft is expected to be published for public comment in early 2016. When the local plan is adopted it will replace the Unitary Development Plan (adopted 2000) and will form the basis for planning decisions and future development in the borough.

Policies CS4 to CS11 set out the local priorities, based on the main groups of settlements within the Borough that will need to be taken into account in implementing the Broad Spatial Strategy. The study area falls within Settlement Area 2. The policy sets out the vision for this area.

Policy CS43- Design, Heritage and Amenity states that “all new development will be expected to enhance the character, quality and distinctiveness of the area in which it is located and relate well to surrounding property and land uses and the natural and historic environment”.

Key points noted from this policy suggest that:

- Design solutions should incorporate the preservation of existing buildings of local character;
- Address the need for appropriate green infrastructure;
- Protect and provide unifying features of design such as gate piers, landscaping, walls, boundary fences and the nature, quality and type of materials;
- Prevent over-development and ensure that the density, height, scale, massing and siting and visual impact of any buildings or structures and the provision of landscaping and private amenity open space will be appropriate to the character, grain and layout of the surrounding area; and
- Maintain and enhance the architectural detailing and treatment of main frontages and prominent elevations and align entrances to buildings with active frontages in the public realm.

The policy states any assessment of local character should be consistent with national best practice, such as that set out in *Understanding Place: Character and Context in Local Planning* (English Heritage, November 2011).

The Unitary Development Plan (adopted 2000)

The majority of the adopted Unitary Development Plan was 'saved', to remain in force by a direction issued by the Secretary of State in 2007. The relevant policies are outlined below.

Policy CH01 relates to the protection of Heritage. It states that in considering all development proposals the local planning authority will pay particular attention to the protection of:

- Buildings, structures and other features of recognised architectural or historic importance;
- Historic areas of distinctive quality and character; and
- Important archaeological sites and monuments.

The policy states that Conservation Areas, Listed Buildings, Scheduled Ancient Monuments and other archaeological sites all represent important landmarks throughout the Borough, which directly contribute to the wider character of the area.

Policy GR1 provides for the protection of urban green space throughout the borough. The objective of the policy is to ensure that land required to maintain the network of accessible public open space is protected from development which may harm or diminish the continued value of the site for open air recreation. The policy states that small scale, unobtrusive development would not be ruled out as long as the proposals can demonstrate that they would not prejudice the continued use of the site for open air recreation or prejudice the visual amenity, landscape character or nature conservation value of the site.

Policy GR2 identifies protected Urban Green Space, including Mersey Park in the south of the area and The Woodlands Community Park in the north of the area. Development within these spaces will only be permitted subject to Policy GR1.

Policy GRE1 provides for the protection of a network of accessible public open space throughout the Borough. While the nature of that protection is set out within Policy GR1, the protection given to sites protected by policy GR2 is based upon the role the site plays within the network, its contribution to visual amenity and the character of the urban area, and its contribution towards meeting the standards for the provision of open space. The objective is to ensure that there is no net loss of green space. Green space includes parks, play areas, playing fields, woodlands, as well as individual trees, hedges, private gardens and other features such as river corridors, road verges, and other smaller amenity areas.

Policy GR3 relates to the protection of allotments. The policy allows for allotments within urban areas that are surplus to requirements to be subject to development unless the site would have significant potential to meet a shortfall in the network of accessible public open space or the site would have significant potential to meet a shortfall in land available for sports pitches.

Policy GR4 provides for allotments to be protected from development. The proposals map (Allocation GR4/6) identifies Church Road allotments as being protected from development subject to Policy GR3 because they can help to alleviate local shortfalls in accessible public open space or land available as playing fields.



This report is also informed by a number of other studies relevant to the local area as follows:

Clifton Park Conservation Area Appraisal (2004)

There is one Conservation Area within the Neighbourhood Area. Clifton Park Conservation Area is located in the north of the area and is of local importance. Donald Insall Associates Ltd produced a Conservation Area appraisal on behalf of Wirral Council that identifies architectural styles and materials, character and key buildings. The appraisal also identifies negative factors and opportunities for enhancement.

A Landscape Character Assessment and Visual Appraisal was carried out in September 2009 by TEP on behalf of Wirral Council. The document identifies landscape character areas within the Wirral peninsula. However, the neighbourhood area is identified as 'settlement' which has not been described in any detail within the study.

The Merseyside Historic Characterisation Project (MHCP) was commissioned in 2003 by English Heritage and carried out by staff of the former Merseyside Archaeological Advisory Service, National Museums Liverpool. The study was completed in 2011 and is a study of the Merseyside Conurbation. The report split the area into five sections and the Birkenhead and Tranmere area falls under Wirral. The study focuses on the historical context and how these types have developed over time. The document provides useful information on historical change such as land use and geology which has been referred to in the preparation of this assessment.

-  Study area
-  Clifton Park Conservation Area

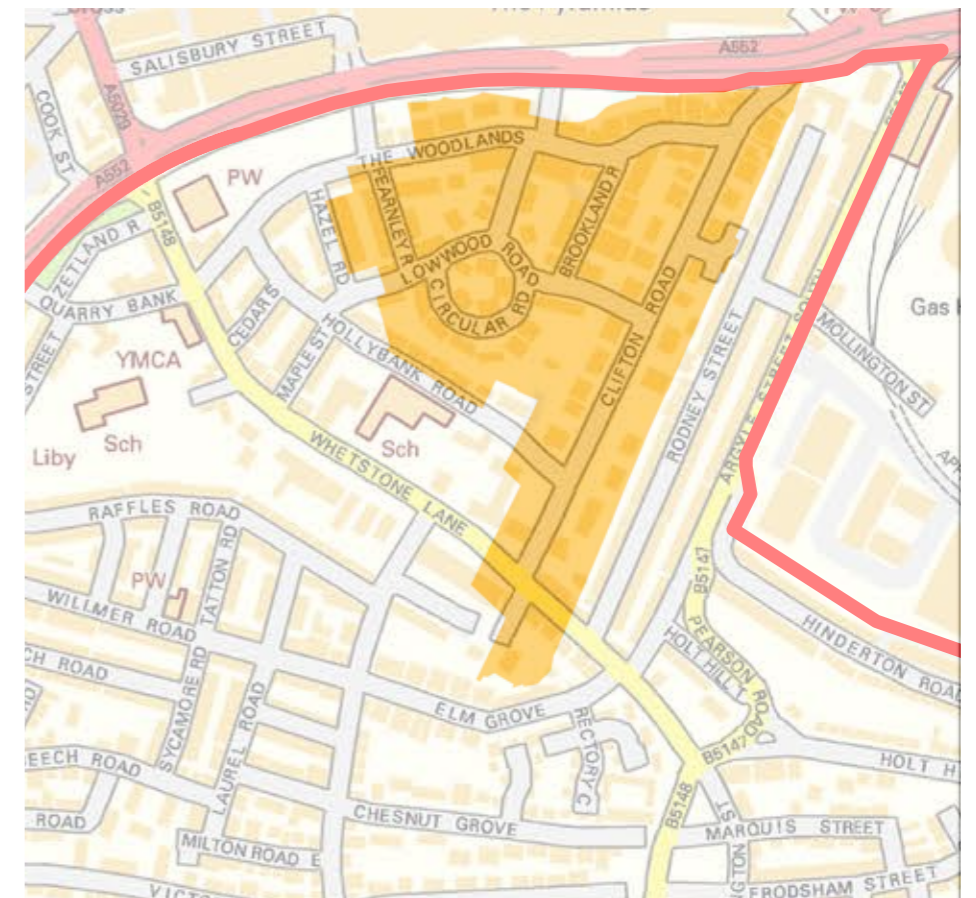


Figure 4: Conservation Area Location Plan Contains OS data Crown copyright (2016)

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT



BIRKENHEAD AND TRANMERE NEIGHBOURHOOD AREA

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Historical Development

Birkenhead and Tranmere developed as separate settlements before later merging to form a single conurbation. To understand the historic development of the neighbourhood plan area it is necessary to first look at the development of Birkenhead and Tranmere separately. At one time Tranmere was more populous than Birkenhead. Whilst the story of Birkenhead is better known, Tranmere's story is less well documented. The urbanisation of both settlements began in the first half of the 19th century. Although they grew side by side they did not expand at the same rate or in the same way. Historical maps of the area can be referred to in Appendix B.

Birkenhead

Although the name Birkenhead is of Viking origin, the town itself had developed very little before the 19th Century, the two notable exceptions being Birkenhead Priory, dating back to the 13th century and the river ferry crossing it provided. Birkenhead was in Norman times and earlier covered mainly with woods but with stretches of heathland and some swampy areas. It is said that Birkenhead derived its name from with the old Norse words 'birch' and 'hefod', meaning from the headlands of birches, or from its position at the head of the river Birken or Birket.

In 1150 a Norman Baron, Hamon de Mascy III of Dunham, who owned considerable land on the Wirral peninsula, founded a Benedictine priory, dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary and St James, which was sited on a headland overlooking the River Mersey, the ruins of which remain and are open to the public. It was the monks of the priory who gave hospitality to travellers and ferried people across the river. Increasing numbers of people wanted to cross the river and in 1330, King Edward III was petitioned by the monks for the sole right to ferry passengers to Liverpool and to charge tolls and subsequently a Royal Charter was granted. During the years before the dissolution of the monasteries in 1536 the ferry thrived and so did the priory. The dissolution meant the priory was closed and the estate was bought from the crown by private individuals and merchants from Liverpool. From the turn of the 18th century views across the Mersey would have revealed a river thronging with ships of all sizes. By the late 18th century, despite the success of the ferry, the population of Birkenhead did not increase by much. By 1810 the population had fallen to 105 and had only risen to 200 by 1821. However, it was all to change in the next fifty years. Over the next two centuries Birkenhead would expand rapidly from these small beginnings to become a major centre of shipbuilding, with thriving docks and substantial industries. It would boast Birkenhead Park (outside the neighbourhood area), which was designed by Joseph Paxton and is widely acknowledged as the world's first publicly-funded municipal park. Its rise in fortune was primarily related to its location on the River Mersey and its proximity to the expanding seaport and mercantile centre of Liverpool.

Tranmere

The extent of the ancient settlement of Tranmere can be traced by a line drawn from the outer basin of the Cammell Laird's shipyard via the gasworks, and along the lower half of Borough Road. At a point a little to the south east of the corner of Briardale Road it ascended to Bennett's Hill via the back passage north of Carlton Road. From Bennett's Hill it ran in a southerly direction along

Woodchurch Road, and then along Moss Lane, Wharfedale Avenue and Storeton Road to Mount Wood Road on the Prenton-Storeton boundary.

Industrialisation completely altered the earlier landscape form of the riverfront. Whilst it is outside of the neighbourhood area, it nevertheless influenced the development of the area. In the north, shipyard berths of steel and concrete were created in early 19th century. Prior to this the land was under agriculture and cattle pasture.

The Happy Valley was an inlet of the Mersey which swept north, north-east and east for a distance of over 2km. Its course is now indicated by Borough Road as the inlet has now been culverted. It flowed into a creek often called Birket Pool. Up to the 1930s the valley floor below the Central Library was always liable to flood when heavy rain coincided with a high tide. As a remedy against this a tunnel was constructed under Everest Road and Tranmere Ridges and the drainage from the upper part of the valley was diverted to flow into the Mersey.



Photo 4: Birkenhead Library, Wirral Memories

Tranmere's rocky foundations are one of Triassic sandstone. This influenced the vernacular as many of the oldest buildings and boundary features are built of this.

Sandstone walls are a feature throughout the neighbourhood area, particularly around Holt Hill, where houses for the more affluent residents were built, and around St Catherine's Hospital. Sandstone was extensively quarried and there were once seven quarries; two in the village, one in Quarry Bank, off Whetstone Lane and four abutting the westerly side of Old Chester Road.

During the Second World War one deep sandstone face near Queen Street was pierced to provide a labyrinth of air raid shelters for some 6,000 people. These are now known as Tranmere Tunnels. The presence of glacial clay also provided brick-making material and many brick fields can be seen in and around the neighbourhood area, indicating that bricks were produced locally, particularly to the north in Birkenhead and to the east near what is now Well Lane.

The historical map of 1843 (appendix B) contains a great deal of information to build a picture of the development of Tranmere since that time. Each parcel of ground is numbered, each field numbered and named, and its area, its use, its owner and its occupier are all noted. Tranmere village in the early part of the 19th century consisted of small cottages, public houses and at the southern end, Tranmere Old Hall.

The early buildings within Tranmere village would have been largely stone-built and stood at an important road junction amidst open fields until well into the middle of the 19th century. In the 1840's it comprised six farms, several large private dwellings, a pinfold (now incorporated into an electricity sub-station in Greenway Road (outside the neighbourhood area) but still identifiable), two quarries, a small brewery (its cellar still in existence), three ales houses, two shops, at least 50 cottages and an ancient cross. It is reasonable to assume that this had been a settlement for some time prior to this. North of the village, and on the way to Holt Hill, stood the new parish church of St. Catherine's, consecrated in 1830. There was a toll bar near Harland Road and a windmill, visible for miles, at the north end of Mill Street denoted the agricultural origins and elevated position of the settlement. The smaller dwellings of the village were single storey stone-built thatched cottages occupied by farm workers or by those engaged in the local industries of brewing, quarrying and milling. The farms of the village lay on other side of Church Lane. Lightbound's Farm located on Church Road opposite Dial Road was believed to date from 1660. This was demolished in 1861. Carter's Farm lay on the north side of Dial Road at its junction with Church Road. This was demolished in 1972.

Tranmere Old Hall formed the southern boundary of the village. It was an ancient brick-built building which stood on a hill and would have had excellent views over the surrounding countryside. It was demolished in 1863. The Hall and its grounds covered a rectangular area of approximately one and a half acres with frontages to Church Road and Greenway Road. Its demolition was closely related to improvements in cross-river transport during the 1860s, namely the advent of the saloon ferry boat and the floating landing stage at Woodside. The Hall was pulled down by a property developer and a new road, Tower Hill, was driven almost through the centre of where the main buildings had been.

19th Century Development

It was during the 19th century that the separate settlements of Birkenhead and Tranmere began to merge together. They were joined by a number of key events and developments to become the familiar settlement that we now see.

The arrival into Liverpool in 1810 of the Scot, William Laird, was one of the main factors in changing the face of the area over the following decades. He was, by trade, a rope maker who diversified into engineering and built a shipyard that was to become famous worldwide for the next 150 years. Laird was inspired to build Hamilton Square (named after his mother's family) and commissioned a family friend, architect James Gillespie Graham, to lay out grand plans for the expansion of Birkenhead, including broad streets thrusting inland from the Square. Although outside the neighbourhood area, this work greatly influenced aspirations for the development of the wider area.

Early residential development in Birkenhead was essentially a product of the age of steam (the ferry (1817) and railway (1840)). At the end of the 18th century both townships were almost completely cut off from Liverpool by a wide, swift,

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dangerous and unbridgeable river with a big tidal range, over which there plied the occasional rowing boat or sailing barge. Change came on Whit Monday 1817 with a steam driven vessel called Etna, which crossed from Queen's Dock carrying a party of Liverpool businessmen en route to Chester Races. The voyage offered a faster, cheaper and more reliable service than any of her predecessors. This also opened up the opportunity for the development of the shorelands of the Wirral peninsula to potential new residents, anxious to escape the congestion and squalor of Liverpool. Instead, Wirral offered space, fresh air, dry building sites, an abundance of clean drinking water, building stone and brick making clay, pleasant viewpoints, easy access to sandy beaches, unspoilt countryside and long frontages to tidal water. One almost immediate effect of the introduction of the steam ferry was to stimulate new select hotel and spa developments in both Birkenhead and Tranmere and for a brief period both became holiday resorts. At first it was Tranmere that benefited from the population influx rather than Birkenhead. This is speculated to be due to the superiority of the ferry, the growth of minor industries and the attraction of Holt Hill as a commanding residential location. Holt Hill is first mentioned in the Bebington registers of 1584. By the mid-1870s, it comprised a number of well-appointed villas; only one of which survives, at the northern end of the Tranmere ridge. Eighteen fields embodying the names of the owners and lying between Lower Mersey Park and Rodney Street are indicated on the map of 1843. At the turn of the 19th century Holt Hill, with its well, dry building sites, accessibility and good views was becoming an important focus for residential development. One resident was the Rev. William Shewell, incumbent of Bidston (1793-1819), who lived in a large house at the eastern end of Shewell's Road. By 1843 this house was surrounded by a pleasure ground and, in 1856 formed the nucleus of Holt Hill Convent School. The name and the boundary wall of this site remain important to the townscape.



Photo 5: Stone wall, Whetstone Lane

However, it wasn't long before Birkenhead's population soared and between 1821 and 1841 it increased by 41 times to 8,223. In contrast the population of Tranmere had not increased nearly as much. The Birkenhead and Chester Railway opened in 1840. This followed with a great many improvements and new innovations including a tunnel extension on the new Chester Railway line that linked the trains and boats. In 1843, Joseph Paxton, one of the most famous landscape architects of the time, was engaged to turn 125 acres of swampy land into a beautiful park. Birkenhead Park opened in 1847. It is reputed to be the first publicly-funded municipal park. Whilst Birkenhead Park is not within the neighbourhood area it has undoubtedly influenced the development of the area by raising the aspiration of residents and making Birkenhead a more desirable place to live. Birkenhead Park became a model for many others

around the world, including Central Park in New York. This includes Mersey Park (within the neighbourhood area), which was completed in 1885 in response to concerns about urban overcrowding and the condition of the poor. Mersey Park includes many common elements of municipal parks including boundary walls, gate lodges, inter-weaving paths, a pavilion and bandstand. Whilst it is a much smaller scale to the nearby Birkenhead Park, the influences are clear.

By 1846 the population of Laird's 19th century vision of 'the city of the future' had grown to about 40,000 and it seemed that nothing could halt its progress. Thus it had increased fivefold in five years.

By the 1840s old farms had ceased to function and old field boundaries had been removed. A vast and optimistic street grid pattern had been planned and the basis for terrace housing had been established. A shipbuilding industry, using a new material (iron) and requiring new forms of craftsmanship had been introduced. However, there were challenges and not everything had gone well. The long straight uniform streets would have been aesthetically challenging in contrast to the wide open farmland that went before.

In 1847 there was a disastrous slump, due to the failure of the docks scheme. This was accompanied by a marked exit, with thousands of people leaving the town, never to return. It was this slump that saw the demise of Birkenhead and Tranmere. This failure, largely due to unforeseen industrial, technical and financial difficulties, shocked the confidence of the leaders of Birkenhead. However, dock construction meant that labourers needed houses quickly and they were much inferior to those of an earlier date. Within 40 years of the Etna river crossing the area was ringed by industry, including commercial docks, gas works, railway stations, graving docks, iron works, and dockside railway. This led to the inevitable exodus of the wealthier occupants and an increase of workers in the area. This changed the type of housing that was required within the area.

By 1861 the population had reached 35,929. The 1860's proved to be the start of a renewal of Birkenhead's fortunes, including the introduction of the first public tram system in Europe. In 1861 the Birkenhead Board of Guardians of the poor was established. Its first action was to build the Birkenhead Institute and the Birkenhead Union Workhouse in Church Road, Tranmere (later to become St Catherine's Hospital) which accommodated 629 inmates. Other improvements included Birkenhead's first purpose built public library. By 1897, the population had grown to 42,997 and with this had come industrial and commercial development together with churches and theatres. The development of Birkenhead during the mid-19th century included much residential property that was later removed to make way for commercial and industrial buildings. The terraces and villas of Hamilton Square and around Birkenhead Park (outside of the neighbourhood area) and Clifton Park (within the neighbourhood area) are important surviving examples from the formative period of the town's development. Much of the wealth of the town came from industries connected with the river.

On 13th August 1877, a Charter of Incorporation was granted and Birkenhead became a borough. This embraced the whole Township of Birkenhead and included the districts of Claughton, Oxton, Tranmere and part of the Township and District of Higher Bebington. By 1881, the population had risen to 84,006 within its enlarged boundaries and was still growing; more houses and public



Photo 6: Example of dwellings within Clifton Park Conservation Area

buildings were being built. By 1891 the population had grown to 99,857 rising to 130,794 in 1911 and 147,946 in 1931. The growth of motorised transport after the First World War meant that the goods ferry services across the Mersey were unable to cope with the increased traffic. Construction of the Mersey Road Tunnel, which measured approximately 3kms between the Birkenhead and Liverpool entrances, started in December 1925 and took over eight years to complete. It opened on 18th July 1934, the same day that the new library on Borough Road (A552) opened.

'Here is a city that has quaffed the magic elixir and secured the philosopher's stone that is always young and always rich. As yet, the disciples of progress have not been able exactly to match the instance of Damascus, but it is said that they have great faith in the future of Birkenhead.' (Tancred, Benjamin Disraeli, 1847)



Photo 7: Birkenhead Library, A552

BIRKENHEAD AND TRANMERE NEIGHBOURHOOD AREA HERITAGE AND CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

Urban Birkenhead grew outwards, ignoring what had gone before, whereas Tranmere expanded taking into account the existing field boundaries and complicated landholding system. Tranmere tended to be developed field byfield and in different ways with each small estate being separated by open land. These units were at first covered in stone built villas set in small gardens and meant for the professional classes. About 50 years later, the open spaces between these estates were mostly occupied by smaller brick-built terraced houses. This piecemeal development of Tranmere meant considerable differences in the type of house to be found within relatively small areas. Only after its union with Birkenhead and on the holdings of the largest farms did anything like large-scale planning become a feature. It was thus a patchwork of development rather than a concentration.

Clifton Park was Tranmere's first planned estate (intended for 'carriage folks') and was meant to cover the lower half of Whetstone Lane and the pleasant woods which flanked the Happy Valley below. It is clear that the original scheme was only half completed. A mid-century writer stated that the villas of Clifton Park were of the 'most beautiful construction in the whole of Birkenhead' and would be 'most desirable in every respect but for the intolerable nuisance of a pestilence spreading odour from a pool by the Gas Works'. The empty spaces were filled in later with smaller red brick houses.

The land between Church Road and Derby Road, known as 'the ancient town field of Tranmere', which was once part of the open field system of cultivation in the early 19th century, was parcelled out amongst six owners. It stretched along both sides of Church Road northwards towards Holt Hill. Here the parcels of land ran east-west. Mid-19th century builders developed these fields northwards. Here the legacy of this ancient field system and land ownerships have influenced the architectural styles and layout of the land. There is an assortment of different architectural styles and a variety of street names. This is true of other development in Tranmere.

Whilst there are areas where streets are long and monotonous, compactly built and straight, there are elements and areas of Tranmere that, like the names of the estates and streets, denote the individualism of the owners who developed them. This has given the area a variety both in street names and architectural type instead of uniformity. Tranmere therefore developed haphazardly and in contrast to Birkenhead. These streets have subsequently been altered further by the individual owners of the properties.

Birkenhead's future was set by developers with a pre-conceived plan with its level ground, no existing village and no elaborate road system and in the possession of one man who could determine its future.

20th Century Development

Tranmere Tunnels are a series of deep tunnel air raid shelters built between 1941 and 1942 to provide accommodation for about 6,000 people during bombing raids of the Second World War on Birkenhead for the protection of Cammell Laird employees and their families. The tunnels were built at an average depth of 15 metres and are 2.6m high by 2.6m wide. They consist of 70 sections and the facilities, as originally provided, included a casualty centre, library, canteens, separate washing and toilet facilities, ventilation, generating equipment, escape shafts, protection against gas attack and steel blast doors. The tunnels took over two years to build and stretched approximately 2km underground with a final

provision to house over 6,000 people. All three entrances to the bunker were secured by double gas proof doors to provide security against a gas attack. By the time the tunnels were completed, at a final cost of £131,000, the need for them had disappeared as the threat of invasion had passed. They were then abandoned. The entrances were finally sealed in 1989 for safety reasons. Tranmere Tunnels Volunteers Limited aspires to turn the tunnels into a tourist attraction. One of the entrances to Tranmere Tunnels can be seen within the sandstone face in Holborn Square (photo 8).



Photo 8: Tranmere Tunnels entrance at Holborn Square

The late 20th century saw a decline in the local industrial employment and with it the area began losing population as residents migrated to better housing or to work elsewhere. Despite a population loss of around 20% between 1981 and 2001, the number of households in Tranmere declined by only 5.5%, reflecting a fall in household size. Nevertheless, housing demand continued to fall and housing vacancy increased to more than twice the Wirral average. There have been a number of initiatives used to try to regenerate the area, including Tranmere Housing Regeneration Partnership, Housing Market Renewal Initiative and a Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder. These initiatives attempted to reduce the number of unfit homes whether by repair or demolition in a partnership approach with private and public sector actors. Over the last 20 years as a result of one or all of these initiatives there has been a profound effect upon the built environment of the area. There have been 19 interventions resulting, in the majority of cases, in the demolition of late 19th and early 20th century terraced housing or later infilling. The most immediately noticeable intervention has been on both sides of Church Road where, between 2008 and 2011, 74 houses were cleared with 164 dwellings proposed. At the time of writing, the area is open space, appearing like a village green with terraces visibly truncated leading up to the area. The planned redevelopment of these plots will radically change the eventual experience of the area.

Other noticeable development has taken place at Whitford Road where 56 new houses have been built. These have altered the urban form by introducing a new typology of housing on streets that were traditionally composed of long, uniform terraces.



Photo 9a: View from Tranmere towards River Mersey 1950, Wirral History

The old Birkenhead Institute and Workhouse, subsequently St Catherine's Hospital, established in the 1860s, was eventually demolished in 2012 and the new St Catherine's Health Centre was built. This has been one of the biggest influences on the built environment and the development of the area in recent times.



Photo 9b: Birkenhead Workhouse, Wirral History

Cultural Associations

The World War One poet, Wilfred Owen, was a resident of the area during his childhood, living at 7 Elm Grove, 14 Willmer Road and 51 Milton Road between 1900 and 1907. A blue plaque fixed to the Elm Grove property testifies to this. A stained glass memorial window to Wilfred Owen (photo 10) is located at the top of the main stairwell of Birkenhead Central Library. It was designed by David Hillhouse and was unveiled in 1995 by Peter Owen, the nephew of Wilfred Owen.

YMCA Wirral, formerly Birkenhead YMCA, has been serving the local community for over 139 years. Keith Sinclair, the Bishop of Birkenhead, refers to the YMCA as the “beacon of light” to people who are struggling and in need of fresh hope.

The YMCA has offered support not only locally, but nationally and internationally. Birkenhead YMCA created sports champions to Olympic standards, inaugurated the Scout Movement in its former building on Grange Road and in the early 1960’s its stage was graced by The Beatles.



Photo 10: David Hillhouse's stained glass window in Birkenhead Library

CHARACTER ASSESSMENT



BIRKENHEAD AND TRANMERE NEIGHBOURHOOD AREA HERITAGE AND CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

Character Assessment

Existing Character Assessments

Existing character assessments have been reviewed to provide some context to this more detailed assessment. The study area falls within National Character Area (NCA) Merseyside Conurbation (58), as defined by Natural England (Natural England, 2013). This NCA is broad but provides some context to the character of the study area. The key characteristics of this area which are of particular relevance to this assessment are:

- A low-lying but gently rolling platform punctuated by low ridges; however, the extensive urban development generally dominates the topography;
- Renowned for its Victorian public parks and designed gardens;
- The built environment is characterised by a mix of red brick and sandstone within the urban centres and a diverse range of modern materials in the outlying suburbs;
- Distinct urban centres have amalgamated to form the Merseyside conurbation, surrounding the larger dominant centre of the city of Liverpool, but divided by the River Mersey - a significant geographical barrier;
- Dense settlement pattern with extensive areas of housing and industry; and
- Extensive transport infrastructure.

Character Area Profiles

The results of the desk study and fieldwork have been analysed and six distinct character areas have been identified, as shown in Figure 5. These have been informed by the following:

- Historical development - including street pattern, land use, conservation areas and heritage assets;
- Movement - including physical boundaries such as railway lines, roads, rivers and gateways, nodes and linkages;
- Urban structure and built development - including density and building height, enclosure, architectural style and detailing;
- Land use and levels of activity;
- Green space and public realm - including those with planning policy and statutory protection, and how this relates to buildings and spaces; and
- Views and their contribution to an understanding of character, including the identification of landmarks.

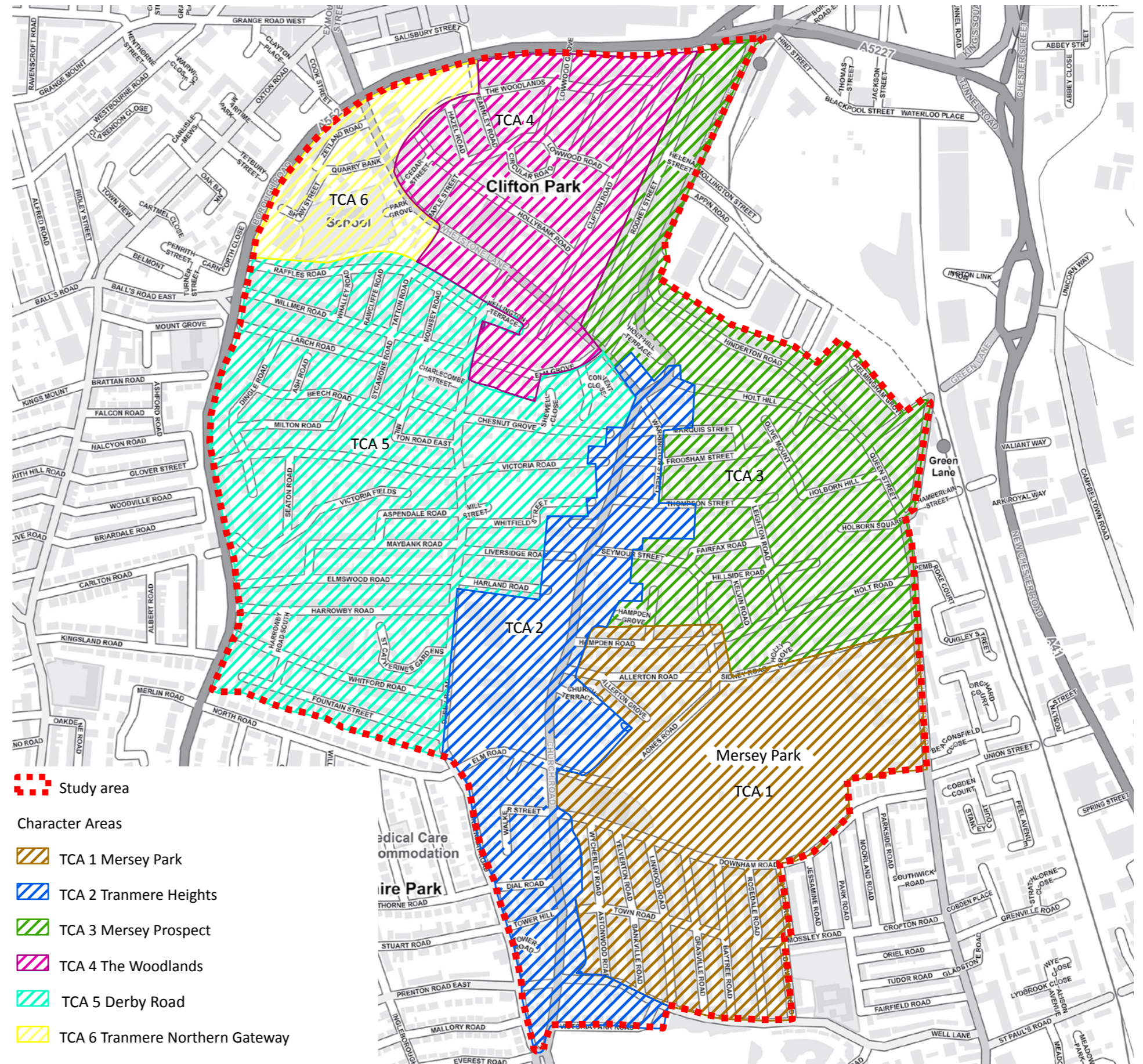


Figure 5: Townscape Character Area Plan

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TCA 1: Mersey Park

Key Characteristics

- A high degree of openness compared to the dense surrounding environment;
- Historic visual links with Mersey Park and vistas through towards Victoria Park in the south linking the two green spaces;
- Features of Mersey Park such as stone boundaries, kerbs, pillars and grates extend into the wider streetscape within the TCA;
- Rows of terrace housing of different styles arranged on a strong, grid-like street pattern south of Mersey Park;
- Original detailing to façades largely remains intact and is generally consistent within individual streets; including render and pebble-dash in places;
- Walled boundaries largely remain to properties; however some have been degraded due to poor maintenance; and
- Cars dominate the streetscape by on street parking. The relatively wide road provides space for parking on both sides of the road and restricts traffic to a single lane north-south.

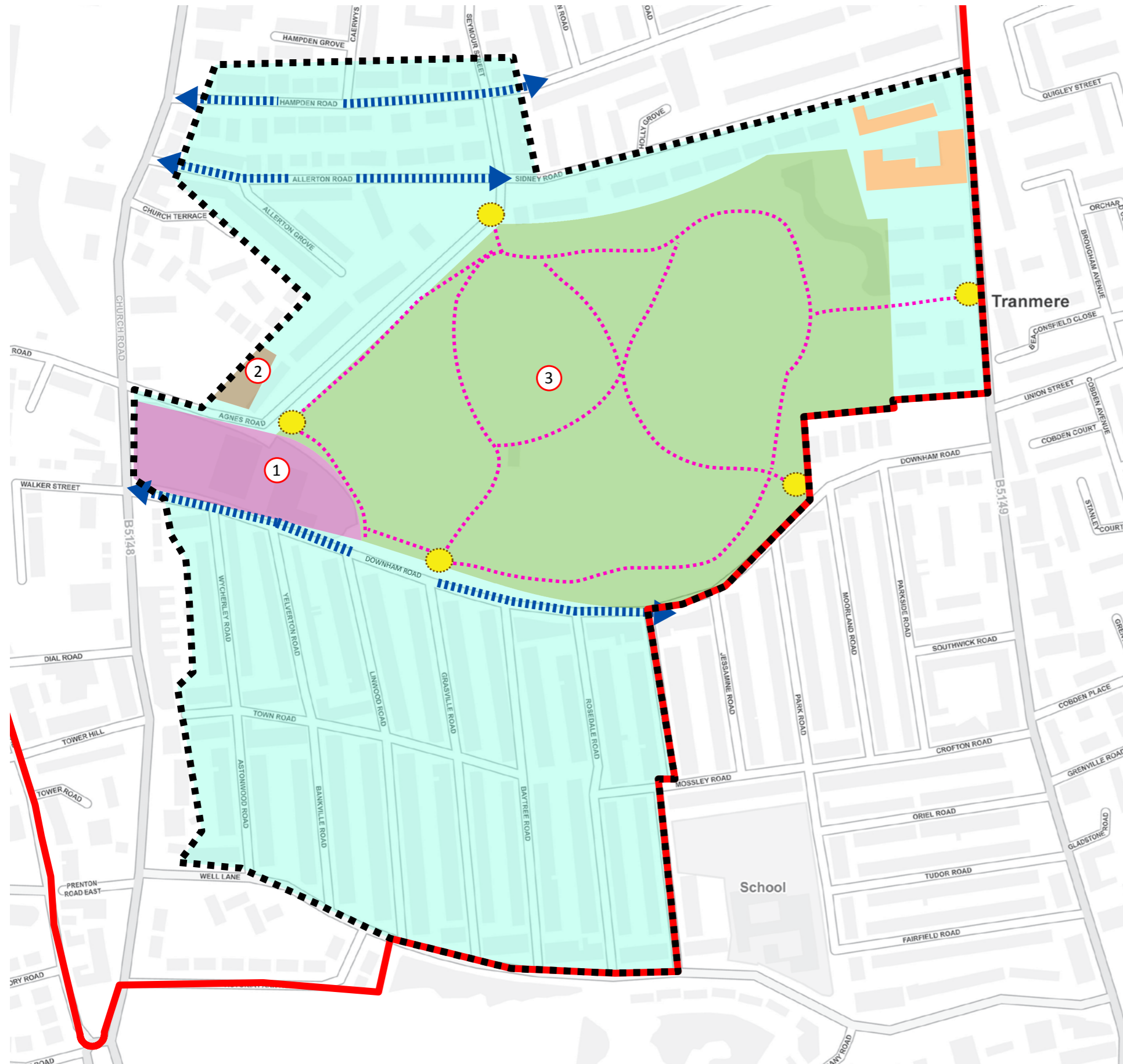


Figure 6: TCA 1 - Mersey Park

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BIRKENHEAD AND TRANMERE NEIGHBOURHOOD AREA

HERITAGE AND CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

Topography and Hydrology

As shown in Figure 2, the highest point within the TCA is at the north eastern end of Mersey Park (40m AOD). From here the land gently drops away towards the south (20m AOD). The open character of the park (photo 13) results in the local variations in topography being more apparent than in other areas where the topography is masked by development.

Movement and Connectivity

As shown in Figure 6, there are a number of pedestrian routes through Mersey Park linking north to south and east to west. The five entrances, which are clearly marked by large brick and stone pillars, allow access from all sides of the park and overall, there is a high degree of permeability. A strong grid of local roads link up with secondary roads through the area including the B5148 to the west and B5149 to the east. Movement east-west is common, with the park limiting north-south movement through the area.

Urban Structure and Built Form

Urban structure is strongly defined by Mersey Park, which creates a distinct break in the otherwise dense urban development which surrounds it. Many of the houses within the area are orientated towards the park and those around the boundaries of the park face onto it. The density of development in the south is high, in contrast to the park, which is very open.



Photo 11: Baytree Road

Houses are typically two storey terraces, laid out in a linear grid to the south. The houses are predominately built out of brick with pitched slate roofs; many of the houses have bay windows to the ground and first floor levels. (photo 11) The long rows of terraces and the unified layout provides a distinctive unbroken

roof line and chimney stacks create a rhythm along the street, as shown in photos 11 and 12. Black or white painted bay windows are a common feature. The houses have a small amount of private front space which is defined by low brick walls capped with stone, and some also with iron railings. The houses are separated by backyards and alleyways which further reinforces the linear urban grain. Houses to the north vary between two or three storey terraces and semi-detached properties (photo 12). These properties generally have both front and rear gardens although front gardens are very small and therefore the frontages of facing buildings are close together. The roof lines are less distinctive compared to the properties south of the TCA due to the variation in building heights and the mix of property styles. This is particularly apparent on Sidney Road where properties consist of two storey semi-detached houses and three storey flats. This mix of building styles along with the steep topography in the area results in an inconsistent and broken roof line.

The majority of the buildings in the area are Victorian. However, there is some 20th century development in the east and in the north of Mersey Park.



Photo 12: Hampden Road

Overall, the common age, style and the layout of buildings leads to a harmonious and unified structure and identity to the area.

The dominant building material in the area is red brick, although some individual houses have been rendered or pebble-dashed. Original stone boundary walls and stone pillar entrances around Mersey Park (photo15) and similar stone gate posts to surrounding properties creates a good sense of continuity.

Heritage Assets

There are no listed buildings within this character area, however, there are many non-designated heritage assets that contribute to the history of the area. This includes Mersey Park, completed in 1885. Mersey Park has suffered from a loss of features, particularly planting, boundary walls, railings, the pavilion and

the bandstand. Other features remain and add to the legibility of the urban form and the former aspirations of the area, including the Lodge and the impressive but now badly damaged gate piers (photo 15), particularly at the northern edge. These features may be suitable for inclusion on a local list.



Photo 13: Mersey Park

Land Use and Land Cover

As shown in Figure 6, land is predominantly split between recreational and residential uses. In the east and linked with the park is Mersey Park Primary School (photo 14). A small number of allotments are located between Church Road and Agnes Road, to the north of the school, with access from Elm Road.



Photo 14: Mersey Park School

Green Space and Public Realm

Mersey Park, which is a formal public park, covers approximately half of the area. It is predominantly laid out as grass with patches of mature vegetation and trees and is crossed by a network of paths. Many of the historic features of

the park remain, including stone flags, low boundary walls, kerbs, pillars and grilles. These materials also extend to several streets set back from the park in the north, such as Hampden Road, enhancing legibility and creating a strong local identity. Some of these features have been replaced by lower quality materials, such as asphalt surfacing to pavements or pre-cast concrete kerbs.

Other distinctive architectural features of the park include flower petal pattern iron grates, which can also be found within Clifton Park Conservation Area, within TCA4. Outside of Mersey Park, green space and vegetation, including mature trees, is limited with the exception of small private gardens or clearance sites where houses once stood. Street trees are restricted to the small area between Mersey Park Primary School and Mersey Park and are not a common feature within the area.



Photo 15: Mersey Park

Views

Owing to the elevated topography and openness of Mersey Park, there are long vistas towards the River Mersey (photo 16b) and beyond towards the southern parts of Liverpool. This is particularly evident on higher ground within Mersey Park and along Sidney Road where views are expansive. There are also views from Mersey Park to Victoria Park from higher and lower ground along the streets in the south of the area, such as Rosedale Road and Baytree Road, which are framed by the buildings which line the streets (photo 16a). Due to the density of the buildings within the area, views between buildings are extremely limited. Views are restricted to along streets and the wider area is not visible, resulting in a lack of orientation along some streets, particularly in the north of the TCA. The spire of St Catherine's Church is a distinguishable feature visible in the north of the TCA.

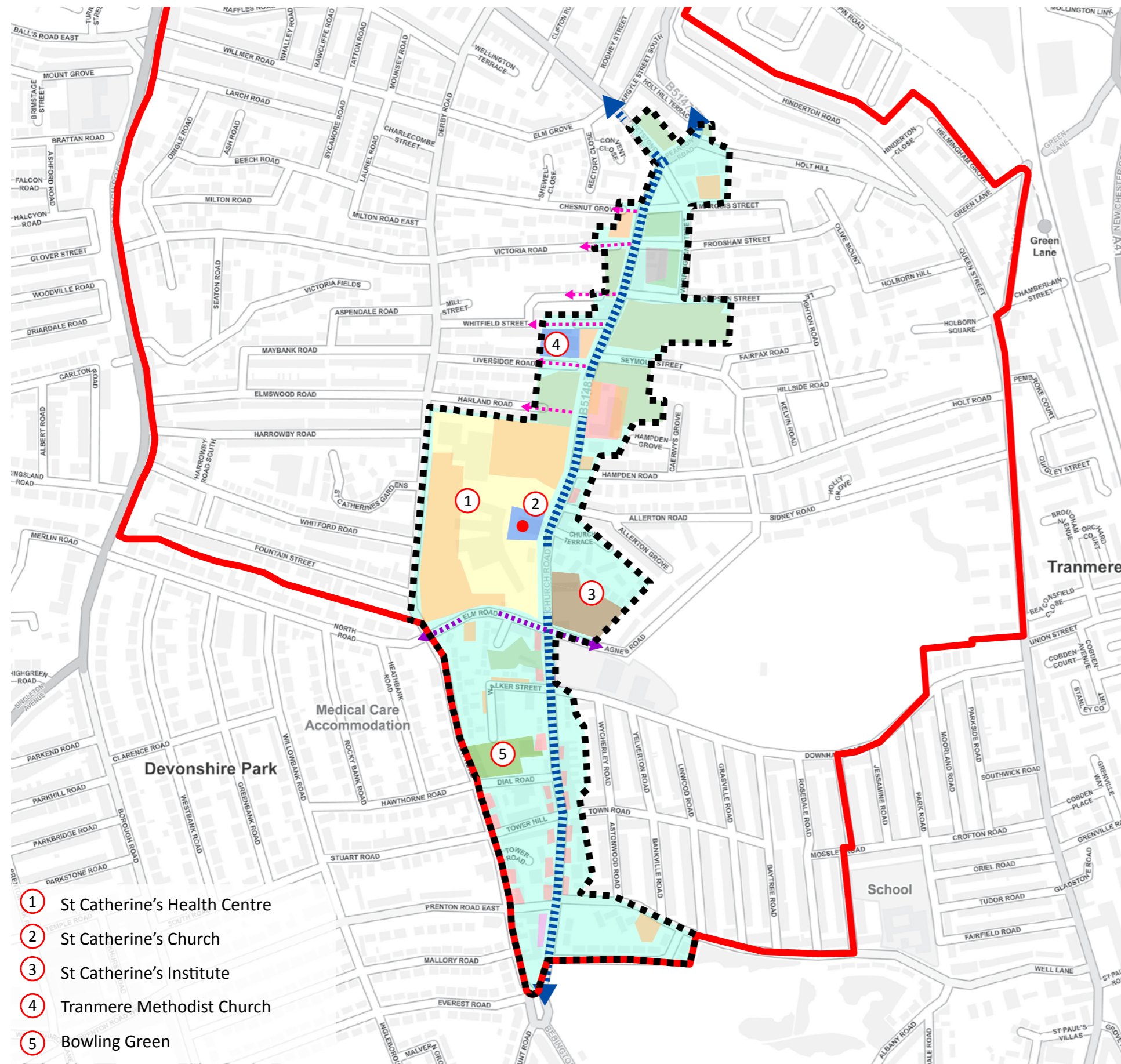


Photo 16a: View from Mersey Park towards Victoria Park



Photo 16b: View from Mersey Park towards River Mersey

BIRKENHEAD AND TRANMERE NEIGHBOURHOOD AREA HERITAGE AND CHARACTER ASSESSMENT



- ① St Catherine's Health Centre
- ② St Catherine's Church
- ③ St Catherine's Institute
- ④ Tranmere Methodist Church
- ⑤ Bowling Green

TCA 2: Tranmere Heights

Key Characteristics

- Larger scale buildings and open clearance sites along Church Road (B5148) which forms the central route through the TCA;
- Number of valuable historical features distributed along Church Road (B5148), the central route through the area with recent 21st century development surrounding them;
- Commercial and community buildings and spaces dominate the central route with a mixture of historic and modern architectural styles;
- Some areas of housing have remained in the south including terraces, flats, bungalows and semi-detached properties, resulting in no clear architectural style;
- Large number of car parks of varying size;
- Street clutter associated with the busy Church Road (B5148) central route including bollards, road signage, lighting, traffic lights and bus stops; and
- Mixture of surface treatments within the public realm including asphalt, concrete slab paving and higher quality paving around St Catherine's Hospital.

- Study area
- Character Area
- Listed Building
- Primary access route
- Secondary access route
- Pedestrian access route
- Community services - medical
- Community services - other
- Community services - places of worship
- Industrial/Warehouse/Storage
- Open space e.g verge, vacant/derelict space
- Green space
- Residential
- Retail
- Car parking

Figure 7: TCA 2 - Tranmere Heights

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Topography and Hydrology

As shown in Figure 2, this TCA includes the highest point within the study area in the south west and along the main road (50m AOD) but overall the land is relatively flat, sitting at 40m AOD. The land falls away gently from this high point, particularly to the south east. The lowest point is at the northern boundary of the TCA (35m AOD). Overall, the flat topography together with vacant sites reaffirms the open character of the TCA.

Movement and Connectivity

As shown in Figure 7, the main gateway into Birkenhead and Tranmere from the south is located within this TCA. Church Road (B5148) provides a key link from north to south. Historically there were many local roads that intersected the B5148 and led into surrounding residential areas. However, many of these have been stopped up. This reduces connectivity and permeability through the area for vehicles. Elm Road to the south of St Catherine's Hospital is the northern most road that allows full access east-west across the area while pedestrians can move freely along all roads and through the hospital grounds.

Urban Structure and Built Form

The urban grain across the majority of this area is coarse due to the large scale commercial and community buildings set amongst a number of sites in the north, which have been cleared of buildings and laid to grass. These sites create a high degree of openness in an otherwise high density urban environment.



Photo 17: Clearance sites

There is a finer urban grain in the south, where the density of development is higher and includes terraced houses, flats, bungalows and semi-detached houses. Due to the mix in property styles and heights the roof line is varied. The historical development and subsequent clearance of much of the area has resulted in no clear architectural style in these locations. The clearance of buildings within the vacant sites either side of Church Road has resulted in a fragmented structure. However, the historical buildings and boundary walls provides a sense of continuity in the otherwise discordant area.

Buildings of historical interest are distributed along Church Road (B5148), such as St Catherine's Church, Tranmere Methodist Church and St Catherine's Institute. Individually these buildings have different architectural styles but the scale and mass of these buildings along with their common use and individuality ties them together. Similarly St Catherine's Health Centre has an individual style making use of modern materials juxtaposed next to St Catherine's Church, which is constructed from local stone. Modern materials have also been used in the buildings opposite St Catherine's Church including the prefabricated steel retail units which include shops, bakery and a fast food outlet. The flats at the northern end of the TCA also use steel although the quality and appearance of these differ. The older part of Tranmere Methodist Church is of a similar style to Mersey Park Primary School (photo 14).



Photo 18: Health Centre and St Catherine's buildings

Heritage Assets

The Church of St Catherine (National Heritage List for England (Historic England reference number: NHLE 1292231)) dating from 1831 is a landmark building within this character area. The tower and spire are highly visible and prominent elements of the street scape. Its distinctive brick and rock face red sandstone with slate roof made it a focal point for civic development. The legacy of the former workhouse, which stood close to the church, can still be seen through the surviving and distinctive red sandstone and red brick boundary walls that enclose the new health centre. A notable survivor is the old gateway to the Municipal Hospital on Church Road. This is a distinctive red brick with stepped stone detailing, coat of arms and the words 'MUNICIPAL HOSPITAL' in gold relief and elaborate gates make a positive contribution to this area and the street scene.

The following buildings have been identified by the Birkenhead and Tranmere Neighbourhood Planning Forum as potential Local List candidates:

- Opposite the gates is the St Catherine's Church Institute, which was built in 1892 in a neo-Tudor style with half timbering, terracotta panels and detailing to the string course. It is a distinctive building that displays the fashions of the time and is now used by the Scouts;

- 1 Greenway Road (Elm Cottage) lies at the corner of Greenway Road and Elm Road. It is an early vernacular farmhouse, with sturdy red sandstone gateposts and dwarf walls. Prior to development to the north west the building would have had open views over the surrounding countryside. It sits in a prominent position and adds greatly to the character of this area;
- 85 to 91 Greenway Road and Tower Road is a row of four terraces, the ground floor of which were outbuildings belonging to Tranmere Hall. The upper storey was added in the 19th century to create the existing houses. Behind them, a length of tall sandstone wall is the sole surviving portion of the medieval wall forming the southern boundary of the grounds of the demolished Tranmere Hall; and
- 140 and 144 Church Road is located on the western side of Church Road and is the remains of an ancient building that was the blacksmith's premises for the village. This is a collection of buildings that point to the settlement's early origins.



Photo 19: Historic hospital gateway

Land Use and Land Cover

As shown in Figure 7, there is a mix of land uses within this TCA. A large proportion of land is given over to community services including the St Catherine's Health Centre and its grounds. There are also a large number of car parks associated with the retail and community uses as well as residential parking areas and garages. The other predominant land uses are residential and open clearance sites.

Green Space and Public Realm

There are a high number of green spaces in this area. However, these areas are generally the result of historic slum clearance where the land has been cleared, levelled and laid to grass. They tend to be bound by knee high timber fences and a lack of vegetation and facilities means they are bland and desolate. Narrow grass verges with groups of trees line roads through the area and some of the larger vacant sites are crossed by informal desire lines.

BIRKENHEAD AND TRANMERE NEIGHBOURHOOD AREA HERITAGE AND CHARACTER ASSESSMENT



Photo 20: Vacant sites and Tranmere Methodist Church

The grounds to the St Catherine's Health Centre are crossed by paths surfaced with high quality, modern materials and include stepped areas, street furniture and planted beds, open grass and trees. This designed landscape ties together the space between old and new building styles. There are also street trees located outside the retail units opposite the health centre. Some large, established trees are located in the open vacant sites, particularly to the east of Church Road. Trees and hedges are located within some private gardens that are visible from public spaces; these are more common in the southern section.



Photo 21: Public Realm adjacent to St Catherine's Health Centre

Views

Views are wide and open along the B5148 in the north of the TCA across the vacant sites. The majority of views are framed by the buildings which line the streets and capture views of houses or commercial buildings. However, views towards the River Mersey open up along the south of Church Road (B5148) at the crossroads of Well Lane and Downham Road. The high point at the junction

of Elm Road and Greenway Road is one of the few locations where there are views to the north over the rooftops and the health centre.



Photo 22: View north along B5148

TCA 3: Mersey Prospect

Key Characteristics

- Dramatic change in topography strongly influences the character, with a steep incline dropping from west to east;
- Long distance panoramic and framed views towards River Mersey and Liverpool beyond;
- Rows of terraced houses of different styles arranged along steep inclined roads;
- Stepped access and steep green embankments are common;
- Exposed rock faces in several locations often associated with green embankments or parking areas;
- Queen Street is a key route through the area resulting in relatively high levels of traffic and pedestrian activity from two train stations located immediately east of TCA;
- Wide range of architectural styles overall but some individual streets with strong sense of unity;
- Large proportion of two or three storey terraced houses with a smaller proportion of semi-detached houses;
- Light industrial areas located along key routes;
- A range of boundary treatments to properties including walls using local stone or brick, hedgerows, timber fences and railings; and
- Mixture of surfacing materials including concrete slab, tarmac and stone paving.

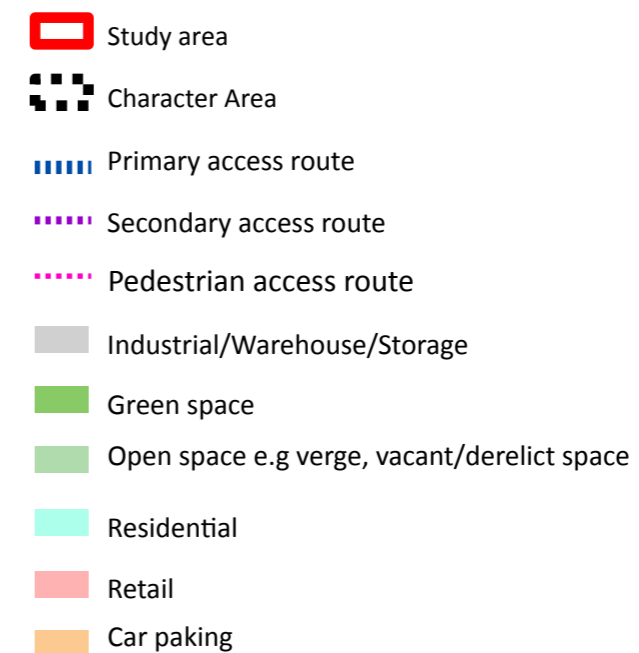
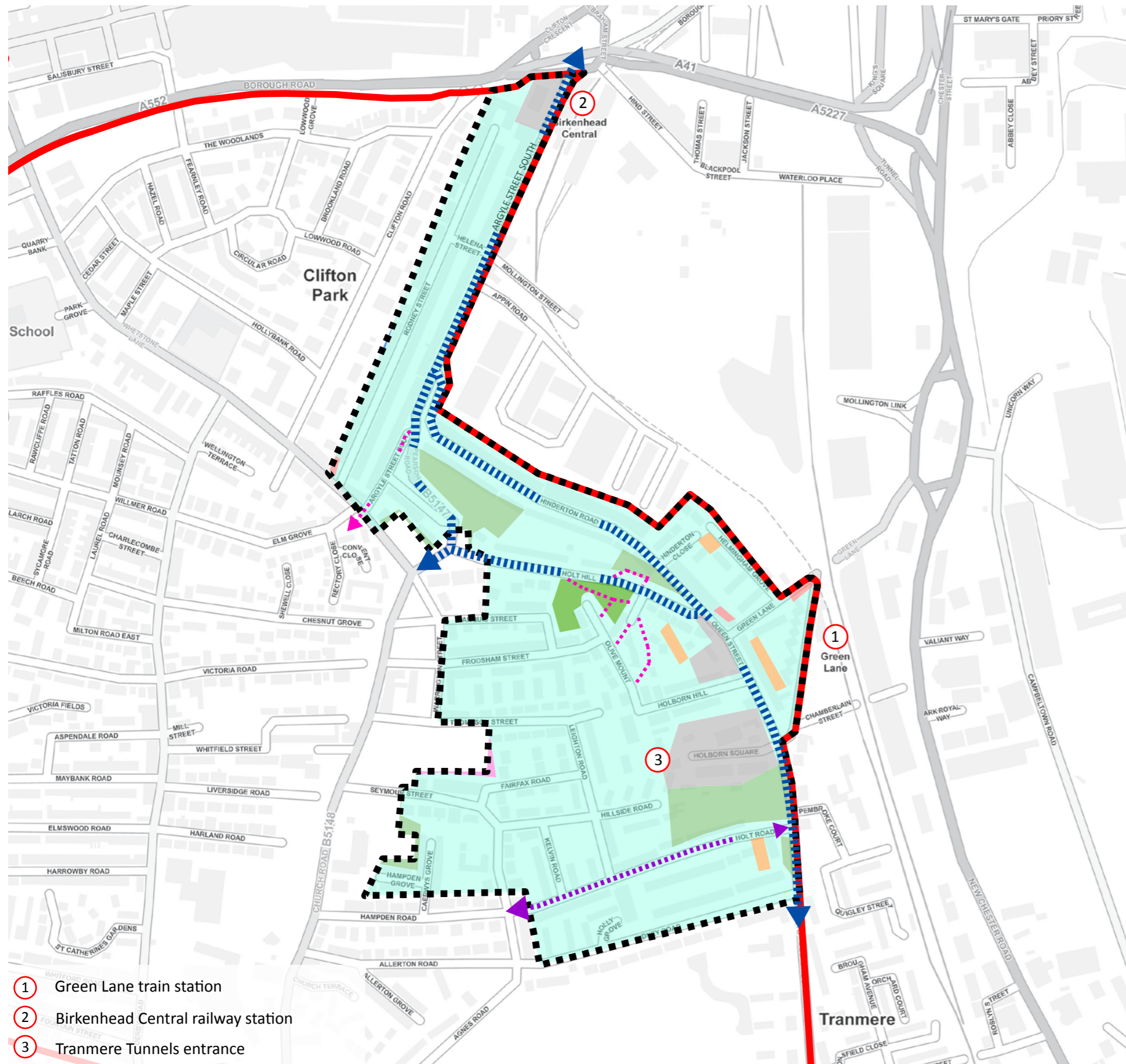


Figure 8: TCA 3 - Mersey Prospect

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BIRKENHEAD AND TRANMERE NEIGHBOURHOOD AREA

HERITAGE AND CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

Topography and Hydrology

As shown in Figure 2, the topography within this TCA is very steep. The land drops dramatically from west to east towards the River Mersey. The highest point is found around Seymour Street (40m AOD) and the lowest along Green Lane (10m AOD). The area west of Seymour Street is relatively flat and the land drops away sharply beyond Seymour Street to the east. The steepness of the area is evident by the widespread use of steps, green slopes and retaining walls throughout the TCA and the exposed geology in cliffs at Holborn Square (photo 24).

Movement and Connectivity

As shown in Figure 8, Green Lane to the east and Argle Street South (B5147) to the north act as key gateways. Old Chester Road (B5149) is a primary route that runs north-south through the eastern part of the area with a number of secondary routes winding up steep slopes towards the B5148 to the west. Green Lane Railway Station and Birkenhead Central Railway Station are both within very close proximity to the eastern boundary of this TCA and generate high levels of activity in the surrounding streets. Access to the major New Chester Road (A41) is provided along Green Lane. The A552 provides direct connections to Birkenhead town centre and Queensway Road Tunnel to Liverpool in the north and M53 in the south. East-west roads are generally narrow with little space for parking. On street parking is common and so pavements are often blocked to pedestrians. North-south roads traversing the slope such as Holt Hill tend to be slightly wider with more space for on street parking.

Urban Structure and Built Form

The urban structure is strongly influenced by the underlying topography. Houses tightly line steep roads, such as Holborn Hill and Rodney Street creating a rigid uninterrupted edge to the streets in much of the TCA (photo 23). The long steep roads of Argyle Street South (B5147) and Rodney Street are lined with Victorian terraced houses. The continuous frontage created by the terraced houses creates a distinctive, unified character. Terraced houses are built out of brick and a number have been rendered or painted. Properties have pitched slate roofs and many of the houses have bay windows to the ground level. Houses step down the steep hill sides such that each house is lower than the next. This creates an interesting roof line. Individual streets have, to an extent retained their Victorian character and strongly defined building lines remain intact. This is generally the case for the primary and secondary routes through the area such as Hinderton Road (B5149) and Rodney Street. The predominant house type is two or occasionally three storey terraces with small or no front gardens with brick boundary walls leading onto the pavement. The narrow streets provide a strong sense of enclosure and containment.

There are some small areas in the south-east where there are larger semi-detached houses, such as Holt Hill, which have larger front gardens with private parking and stone boundary walls.

The urban grain within the TCA is very dense. This is particularly evident on the steep linear streets where houses run back to back with very little private space to the rear. The topography does allow for some open areas consisting of sloped grass verges. Grassed areas such as those along Holt Hill and Olive Mount

provide transitional spaces between the different levels within the TCA (photo 25).



Photo 23: Rodney Street

Heritage Assets

There are no listed buildings within this character area. However, there are a number of historic buildings and features that add to the character and legibility of the area. Tranmere Tunnels are not readily visible and it is not apparent where all of the entrances to them are. However, the former quarry faces they are built into are apparent. They often appear as a sheer rock face rising up behind houses or small commercial units or within the open spaces. This is particularly evident at Holborn Square where the extent of historic quarrying can be seen and appreciated. The tunnels have been identified by the Birkenhead and Tranmere Neighbourhood Planning Forum as a potential Local List candidate.

87 Holt Hill is believed to be the only remaining house built by an early 19th century Liverpool ship-owner in the area. Holt Hill was a very desirable place for wealthy merchants and ship-owners to live due to the fine views that were afforded of the Mersey. This building is a legacy of this important aspect of Holt Hill. However, it is not immediately visible behind a high wall and fencing. This has meant that it is not readily appreciable from the street and its setting has been vastly altered from when it was first built. It has been identified by the Birkenhead and Tranmere Neighbourhood Planning Forum as a potential Local List candidate.

Land Use and Land Cover

As shown in Figure 8, land use is predominantly residential. Other uses are dispersed throughout the area including small areas of green space, small scale industrial areas and small parades of shops located on the ground floor of two storey buildings situated in the east on Queen Street (B5149) and Green Lane and along the northern part of Argyle Street South (B5147). The presence of shops and industrial units increases the level of activity along these streets.



Photo 24: Tranmere Tunnels entrance, Holborn Square



Photo 25: Example of level change between Holt Hill and Hinderton Road

Green Space and Public Realm

There is very little formalised green space. There are a number of informal green spaces which are often formed on slopes at level changes. These spaces divide the area and provide the setting for the buildings. Due to the steep slopes across the area pedestrian guardrails and handrails are common.



Photo 26: Example of stone retaining walls and guardrails to slopes, Holt Hill

The green spaces and verges also include established trees and low level planting in some areas. Stone and brick walls are also a common feature between levels. Stepped access and paths between streets is a key characteristic to the area.



Photo 27: Example of green space to slopes, Holt Hill

Views

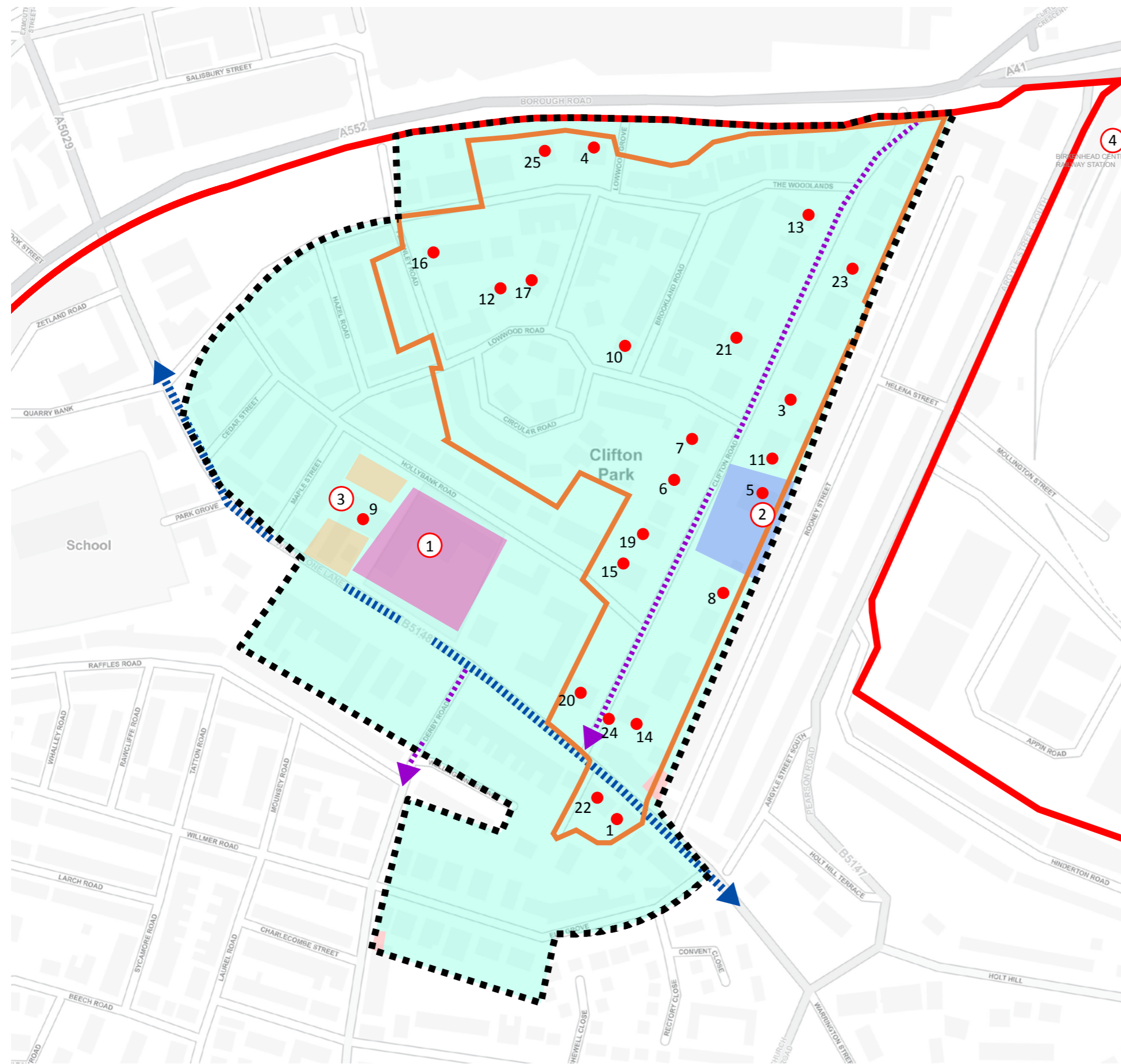
Views are key to understanding the character of this TCA. There are both wide and framed views towards the east throughout. The grid-like layout of the secondary routes allows clear long distance views orientated towards the River Mersey and beyond towards Liverpool. Liverpool's Anglican Cathedral stands prominent on the skyline from a number of locations including Holborn Hill.

The Queensway Tunnel ventilation shaft (Birkenhead side) on Pacific Road is also prominent against the sky from Argyle Street South and Rodney Street (photo 23). Where more modern infill development has taken place, it tends to be sympathetic in its setting. For example, the recently constructed bungalows on Hillside Road are set back from the immediate roadside and continue to allow views along Hillside Road towards the River Mersey and existing terrace along Leighton Road (red building in photo 28 below). This provides visual continuity and focuses views on the remaining original terrace row.



Photo 28: Hillside Road

BIRKENHEAD AND TRANMERE NEIGHBOURHOOD AREA HERITAGE AND CHARACTER ASSESSMENT



TCA 4: The Woodlands

Key Characteristics

- A large proportion of this TCA includes the Clifton Park Conservation Area;
- Historical, nucleated settlement pattern oriented around Circular Road and surrounded by linear and grid-like development;
- Large scale mid-19th century detached and semi-detached houses with large private gardens;
- Two to three storey mid-19th century terraced houses are common with a high proportion red brick;
- Consistent architectural style and details creates a strong sense of place;
- Mature trees along roads and within private gardens are a common feature;
- Common detailing to public realm including petal pattern iron grates, stone kerbs, stone paving, block paving; and
- Stone boundary and railings common.

- Study area
- Character Area
- Listed Building
- Primary access route
- Secondary access route
- Conservation Area
- Community services - education
- Car parking
- Community services - places of worship
- Retail
- 1 Woodlands Primary School
- 2 Masonic Temple
- 3 Wirral Islamic Centre and Shahjalal Mosque
- 4 Birkenhead Central railway station

Figure 9: TCA 4 - The Woodlands

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Topography and Hydrology

As shown in Figure 2, the high point with this area is located at the eastern end of the B5148 (35m AOD). The land falls away gently northwards and westwards through the area to around 10m AOD. The local variation in topography is masked by the development within Clifton Park Conservation Area. The landform is most apparent along the linear route of Clifton Road. As a result of the topography, the houses in the north of Clifton Park Conservation Area have strong visual links to the Pyramid Shopping Centre beyond Borough Road (A552).

Movement and Connectivity

As shown in Figure 9, the primary route is the B5148, which runs east-west and is located in the south of the area. The secondary route is Hollybank Road, which runs parallel just to the north of this. The primary north-south route is Clifton Road in the east which connects to Whetstone Lane and the A552. Birkenhead Central Railway Station is located outside the area to the immediate north east where pedestrian activity is increased, particularly at peak commuting times. A one way system is in place around the northern part of the area which limits traffic and prevents vehicles on the A552 using the local routes as a cut through to Whetstone Lane (B5148). Pedestrian routes are limited to the pavements of roads.

Urban Structure and Built Form

Development within this area radiates out from Circular Road at the centre and forms a linear and loose grid-like pattern towards the outer edges. Large scale mid-19th century detached and semi-detached houses with large private gardens are a distinctive feature within this TCA. Beyond the centre, two and three storey terraced houses are common with a high proportion of red brick. The architectural style and detailing of street facing elevations differs between clusters of buildings or whole streets. Detached houses tend to be set within large private gardens away from the street and the generous distance between building façades creates a sense of openness. Smaller scale terraces are generally set closer to the edge of the road. Common materials of earlier houses include buff sandstone; some are rendered with stone dressings and quoins. Those around Lowwood Road include stone detailing to windows. Other distinctive details include different coloured bricks to the corners or around doors and windows but the patterns and placement used vary. This detailing is unique and distinctive to properties within the TCA. Post-1890s terraces are built in brick and some include rendered or timber framed elements. These bricks vary from solid colour red or buff pressed bricks to brindles or rougher faced common bricks. Recent 20th century development within the Clifton Park Conservation Area, such as that along Hollybank Road and Lowwood Road, is generally of simple design, constructed of brick with limited detailing. Typical developments are often three or four storey blocks of flats (photo 31). In the south east there are a small number of large scale buildings built from sandstone. This provides a rare but locally distinctive character to the area as the building material is unique to the area. The majority of these remain with the stone exposed but some have been rendered. There are also sandstone wall boundaries in the immediate area and wider setting.



Photo 30: Elm Grove

Heritage Assets

The Clifton Park Conservation Area is wholly contained within this character area. Clifton Park was laid out in about 1840 by developer Captain William Sharp to a design by the local architect Walter Scott, who is also reputed to have designed most of the early houses.

Although there has been no large scale development since around 1900, demolition and building work within the last few decades has considerably eroded the historic character of particular parts of the area. Three late 20th century blocks of flats and a school have been added to Hollybank Road, four blocks of flats on the lower end of Clifton Road and a new terrace of housing on Lowwood Road, are noticeable examples of recent change. There are three further smaller examples. Although a few of these buildings were built on vacant sites, others have involved the demolition of historic buildings. Analysis shows that 11 historic buildings appearing on the 1899 map have been demolished since the 1970s. Amongst the 1840s buildings lost to the area over recent decades are numbers 17 & 19 Clifton Road, in which Scott himself lived (now Clifton Court), the coach house to 44 Clifton Road (on Whetstone Lane) and number 38 Clifton Road, part of a highly attractive, semi-detached pair; all of which were within the current extent of the conservation area.

Although it is apparent that many buildings within the area are being maintained or restored, a high level of decay and neglect remains evident. Clifton Road remains dominated by the grand scale of villas between 1840 and 1860. They are confident in their architectural treatment, with robust cornice and eaves details and decorative embellishment establishing them with a strong presence to the streetscene. Clifton Road is particularly impressive when approached from the higher Whetstone Lane end. The buildings here sit proudly with façades orientated perpendicular to the street, making the most of views down the hill. The façades of other buildings address the street and the architectural detailing adds visual interest and denotes the status of the street. There are some infill plots that contrast quite starkly with the architecture of the listed buildings in terms of scale and design, particularly the semi-detached properties



Photo 31: Modern flats, Clifton Road

adjacent to 24 Clifton Road. Here the contrast is quite apparent and both buildings look out of place next door to each other. Towards the northern end of Clifton Park there are less impressive and smaller scale buildings, in smaller plots the density of which increases and eventually becomes terraces with some decorative details.



Photo 32: Example of decorative details to terraces within Clifton Park

Clifton Road contains the following listed buildings (a full list can be found In Appendix A):

- 21 Clifton Road (NHLE 1282589)
- 24 Clifton Road (NHLE 1201604)
- Masonic Temple (NHLE 1217917)
- 31 and 33 Clifton Road (NHLE 1217920)

BIRKENHEAD AND TRANMERE NEIGHBOURHOOD AREA HERITAGE AND CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

- 47 and 49 Clifton Road (NHLE 1217924)
- Gate Piers to numbers 47 and 49 (NHLE 1282591)
- 42 Clifton Road (NHLE 1201606)
- 40 Clifton Road (NHLE 1217922)
- 11 Clifton Road (NHLE 1292236)
- 1 and 3 Hollybank Road (NHLE 1282619)

Within Circular Road the buildings are predominantly constructed from brick. A few early villas form the centre point of this area with rows of terraced housing in surrounding streets. There are four earlier villas which are reminiscent of those on Clifton Road in terms of architectural form and scale, but are slightly less opulent in architectural detailing. The unusual form and density of housing gives Circular Road an intimate feel. This part of the conservation area has suffered from small but cumulatively harmful changes, particularly the loss of original features such as timber windows and boundary treatments, which has eroded the overall quality of the built environment.

Circular Road contains the following listed buildings:

- 8 Lowwood Road (NHLE 1282604)
- 12 Lowwood Road (NHLE 1292035)
- 8 Lowwood Grove (NHLE 1292033)

Whetstone Lane contains many architecturally interesting buildings, although these cannot be grouped easily as having a particularly cohesive style or character. Whetstone Lane contains the following listed buildings:

- 144 Whetstone Lane (NHLE 1282507)
- 140 and 142 with railings, wall and gate piers to front (NHLE 1219043)
- Beechcroft (NHLE 1218097)

There are many other buildings that are also of historic interest, including 150-152, 156-158 and 160-162 Whetstone Lane. These appear to relate to an early phase of development. 150-152 and 160-162 are pairs of semi-detached, two storey houses with three bays, the central of which is blind built of polychrome brick under a slate roof with pediment. The entrance is at the side. They flank 156-158, which is a semi-detached pair built of stone under slate of two storeys with attic. It has two projecting gabled bays with a central porch flanked by a door either side. It is unusual in the street scene as the other buildings are more classically detailed.

The Woodlands runs parallel to Borough Road and is again a mix of housing development. The earliest planned houses within this area are listed, as follows:

- 57 and 59 The Woodlands (NHLE 1291688)
- 72 The Woodlands and 10 Clifton Road (NHLE 1201603)
- Fearnley Hall (NHLE 1291684)

- 53 and 55 The Woodlands (NHLE 1201738)

Many of the earlier houses, forming part of the original plan by Scott, are faced in buff sandstone. The extravagance of the detailing and the boldness of the architecture indicates the confidence and optimism of the time in which they were built. Stylistically most have a neo-classical or Italianate feel, with pilasters, pedimented bays and columned porches. The later houses show a restrained approach to their design and are constructed from less expensive materials. Very few buildings were built between the late 1850s and the beginning of the 1890s and this has led to a clear distinction in style between the two periods of Victorian architecture. Those built from 1890 onwards appear to be built of brick. This is particularly evident in the west of the character area.

Elm Grove has also been included within this character area, although not within the conservation area, as it also contains some substantial semi-detached early Victorian villas that were developed around the same time as Clifton Park. Whilst there have been a number of alterations and loss of original features, the street still reflects the status and popularity of the area during the early 19th century. 7 Elm Grove was one of the childhood homes of the war Poet Wilfred Owen from 1900 to 1903 (photo 33). A blue plaque on this building acknowledges this connection. This building has been identified by the Birkenhead and Tranmere Neighbourhood Planning Forum as a potential Local List candidate.



Photo 33: 7 Elm Grove

Numbers 1-5 Wellington Terrace are an early 19th century sandstone terrace (1-3) and pair of semi-detached houses (4-5). They have been identified by the Birkenhead and Tranmere Neighbourhood Planning Forum as potential Local List candidates.

Land Use and Land Cover

The dominant land use within this TCA is residential. There is one school (The Woodlands Primary School) and two places of worship (The Wirral Islamic Centre/Shahjalal Mosque and the Masonic Temple). The Mosque and Temple, located on Whetstone Lane and Clifton Road respectively, were originally built as houses and later remodelled. All of these buildings are large scale when compared with the surrounding residential properties and include private car parking.

Green Space and Public Realm

There is no public green space within this area. Large, private, well-maintained gardens are common, adding to the grand, verdant and open character of the area. A large proportion of gardens include mature trees and street trees line Clifton Road. A high proportion of these trees are protected by Tree Preservation Orders. Some of the community buildings have replaced gardens with tarmac surfacing for parking. Boundary treatments range from stone to stone capped walls with cast iron railings. In many cases the original walls are at least partly present and there are many stone and some cast iron gate posts. The quality of boundary treatments varies. Surface materials include asphalt, concrete flag, block paving bricks and some stone paving remains. There are petal pattern cast iron grates to roads in some locations.



Photo 34: Example of tree lined street and private gardens, Clifton Road

Views

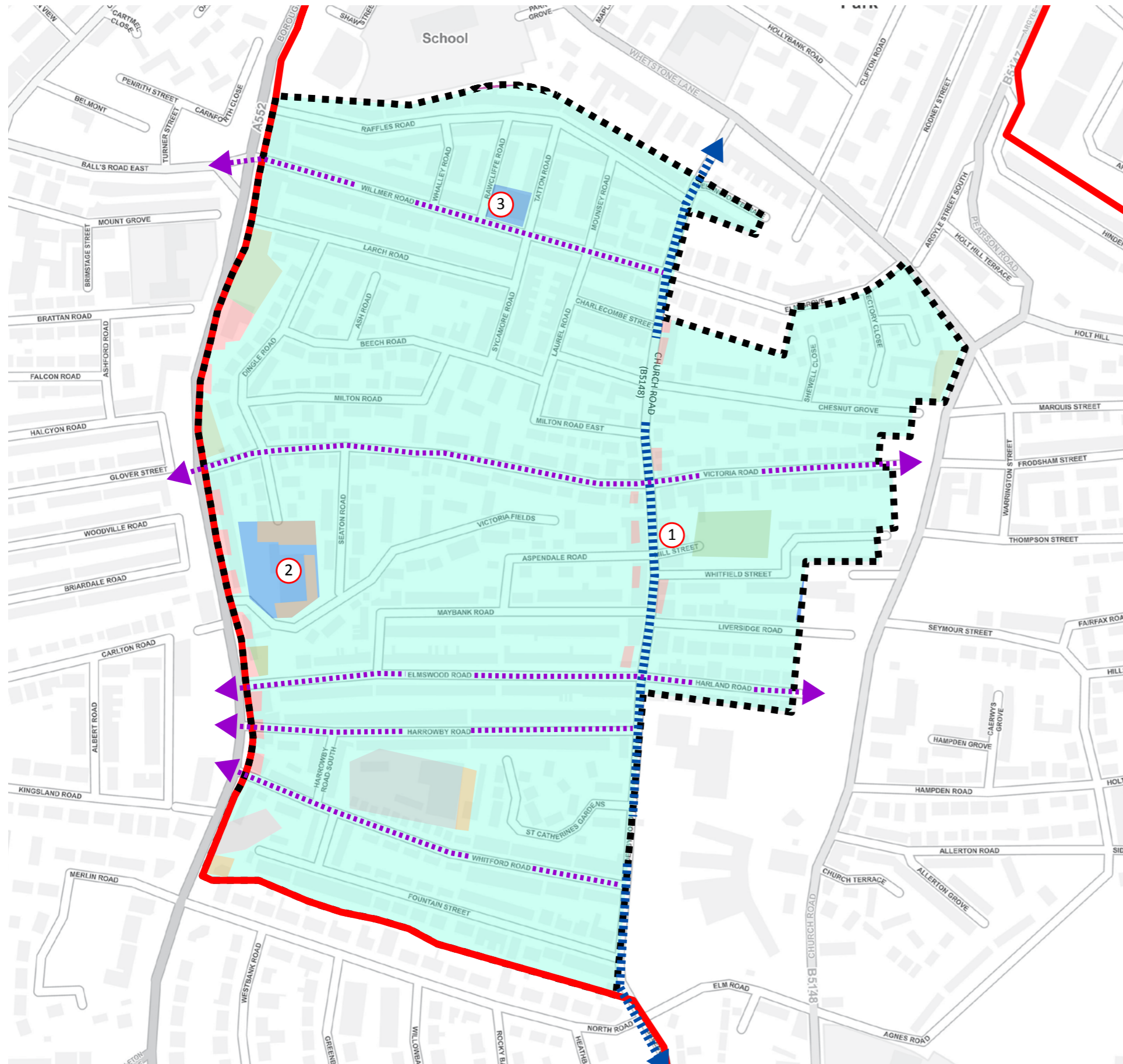
There are long views along Clifton Road due to its elevated position and alignment. Views are framed and softened by mature trees and shrubs within private gardens. The view along Whetstone Lane (B5148) is similar, although the buildings are also visible along the road due to the long sloping topography.

BIRKENHEAD AND TRANMERE NEIGHBOURHOOD AREA HERITAGE AND CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

TCA 5: Derby Road

Key Characteristics

- Predominantly residential area with some commercial and retail use along Derby Road;
- There is a high building density with little public green space;
- Grid-like and linear street pattern with long rows of terraces and occasionally semi-detached houses with similar facade detailing;
- The pattern is disrupted in several areas by more recent development;
- Façade detail includes large proportion of red brick with detailing of differing styles including render and pebble dash;
- Distinct area of modern two storey houses set back from the road edge with small front gardens and areas for parking;
- Generally asphalt surfacing with some stone slabs and cobbles to terraced areas and block paving to areas of modern development; and
- Public realm detailing also includes cast iron drains and black metal gates concealing cobbled alleyways.



- Study area
- Character Area
- Primary access route
- Secondary access route
- Community services - places of worship
- Industrial/Warehouse/Storage
- Car parking
- Open space e.g verge, vacant/derelict space
- Residential
- Retail
- 1 Imperial Tavern
- 2 King's Church Wirral
- 3 Former Presbyterian Church

Figure 10: TCA 5 - Derby Road

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BIRKENHEAD AND TRANMERE NEIGHBOURHOOD AREA

HERITAGE AND CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

Topography and Hydrology

As shown in Figure 2, the high point within this TCA is in the east around Harland Road to Chestnut Grove (40m AOD). The land slopes away from this point towards the west. The lowest point is found along the north-west boundary of the TCA around Borough Road (20m AOD). The topography allows for clear visual links along the terraced lined streets towards the A552.

Movement and Connectivity

As shown in Figure 10, Derby Road provides the primary north-south route through the area. The road is a busy route with on street parking in a number of locations. Key secondary roads run east-west and include Wilmer Road and Victoria Road in the north. To the south Elmswood Road, Harrowby Road and Whitford Road are the key secondary east-west routes. The grid like layout has a strong influence on the character of the area.

Further residential streets run east-west, parallel with the secondary routes. However, these are blocked to through traffic and only allow local access for residents. The main nodal points are formed where the secondary roads from Borough Road (A552) to Church Road (B5149) intersect Derby Road creating key crossroads through the area. More recent areas of housing comprise culs-de-sac such as St Catherine's Gardens, Victoria Fields, Shewell Close and Rectory Close where connectivity is limited. There are a number of alleyways, which are often cobbled. However, these are secured by tall black metal gates (photo 41) which prevent access and create void inaccessible spaces allowing entry for residents only.

Urban Structure and Built Form

There are four key building types within this character area. The predominant type is two storey terraces in long rows along the majority of the east-west roads. The houses are generally built out of red brick and many have been painted, pebble dashed or rendered. Properties have pitched tiled roofs and many have bay windows to the ground level and occasionally some to the first floor. The unified layout along the east west roads provides a distinctive and repeating pattern to buildings and roof line. The houses have a small amount of private space to the front which is defined by low red brick and stone capped walls. Rear space generally comprises small back yards. The terraced houses along the east-west secondary routes create a dense urban grain. The sense of space within the streets varies due to the differing widths of the east west routes; generally the key secondary routes such as Elmswood Road and Willmer Road are wider than the other local routes.

The secondary type is more recent late 20th century infill which comprises single storey bungalows and two storey semi-detached houses within culs-de-sac. This type incorporates a greater mix of architectural styles and as a result is less distinctive. It includes the houses around Victoria Fields, Rectory Close and St Catherine's Gardens. Properties generally include both front and rear private space, resulting in a more open urban grain compared with the surrounding terraced streets, which have little private space. The mix of heights, styles and layout of properties results in a varied roof line. This creates a more organic pattern in the otherwise rigid layout of the TCA.



Photo 35: example of predominant two storey terraces

The third type is a 21st century development consisting of semi-detached houses located on Whitford Road and Fountain Street (photo 36). Buildings are set back from pavement edge with small front gardens with vegetation, areas for parking, distinctive blue brick boundary walls and railings with block paving surfacing and tarmac. Together these provide a consistent character within a small area. Although the properties are set back from the pavement edge, they follow the existing building line which results in a distinct and consistent appearance.



Photo 36: example of bungalows and two storey semi-detached houses

The fourth type is limited to a small area of larger scale semi-detached villa style houses in the north-west around Dingle Road. These properties comprise a greater mix of architectural styles resulting in a less coherent appearance. The larger scale properties follow narrow curved roads such as Beech Road and Dingle Road resulting in a strong sense of enclosure. Properties generally have both front and rear private space; however boundary treatments vary from brick walls, fencing, stone posts, railings and hedging. There are a number of small derelict spaces where buildings once stood throughout the TCA.



Photo 36: example of recent development, Fountain Street

Heritage Assets

The northern part of this area is built on an area of Birkenhead that was referred to Tranmere Park on historic OS maps until the early part of the 20th century. This is likely to have been an aspiration of the landowner to create a similar area to Clifton Park with large impressive houses and landscaped park to cater for the industrialists from Liverpool that were settling in Birkenhead at the beginning of the 19th century.

The central section, particularly around Victoria Road, Seaton Road, Milton Road, Milton Road East, Dingle Road, Beech Road, Laurel Road and Chesnut Grove, is characterised by the remnants of mid to late 19th century development of pairs of semi-detached villas of varying architectural detailing. There is a proliferation of visually pleasing polychromatic brick work, some overhanging eaves, dentil coursing and decorative key stones. This distinct swathe of development has been subject to redevelopment and renewal with the introduction, in the late 19th and early 20th century, of houses designed for dock workers. This typology is found predominantly in the northern and southern sections, where long, uniformed terraces, with some differentiation of architectural style are common.

The area north of Fountain Street and south of Elmswood Road was formerly part of the Union Workhouse, Tranmere Water Works and latterly stabling for the tramway. This is now St Catherine's Gardens. 14 Willmer Road is a brick-built terraced house dating from the end of the 19th century. It is a former home of the war poet, Wilfred Owen, who lived there in 1903 and has been identified by the Birkenhead and Tranmere Neighbourhood Planning Forum as a potential Local List candidate.

51 Milton Road is a rendered semi-detached property dating from late 19th century and was another former home of war poet Wilfred Owen, who lived there from 1903 to 1907. This building has been identified by the Birkenhead and Tranmere Neighbourhood Planning Forum as a potential Local List candidate.

The block comprising 367-375 Borough Road is a rare example of almost unaltered Victorian commercial architecture, dating from about 1890, with an oriel window and cupola at each corner of the principal elevation. There are elements of the original shop fronts yet visible and remnants of ceramic glazed tiles. 377-391 Borough Road is another good example of terraced commercial development dating from the 1890s, with later Edwardian additions such as the terracotta façade dating from about 1911. These two buildings collectively form an important group at this point on Borough Road, where the junction with Willmer Road forms the western gateway into the neighbourhood area. They have been identified by the Birkenhead and Tranmere Neighbourhood Planning Forum as potential Local List candidates.

Also included within this character area is the sandstone wall which originally formed the boundary of a large house at the eastern end of Shewell's Road, a residence which by 1843 was surrounded by a pleasure ground and which was in 1856 to form the nucleus of Holt Hill Convent School. The school was run by the Sisters Faithful Companions of Jesus, a French order of nuns that arrived in Liverpool in 1844. After a series of educational reforms and mergers, the school moved out in 1982. It was demolished that same year and was replaced by Shewell Close, Rectory Close and Convent Close. The names and the boundary wall of this site remain and form an important part of the townscape. The boundary wall has been identified by the Birkenhead and Tranmere Neighbourhood Planning Forum as a potential Local List candidate.



Photo 38: Example of glazed tiles, Derby Road

Land Use and Land Cover

The predominant land use within this TCA is residential. There is a small parade of shops including retail, fast food outlets and commercial uses located on the ground floor of two storey buildings situated along Derby Road. The Imperial Tavern public house is located at the junction of Whitfield Street and Derby Road, amongst the parade. The presence of shops, fast food outlets and a public house increases the level of activity along Derby Road and the surrounding streets. There are two larger scale places of worship, King's Church Wirral and Hillside Christian Fellowship with associated parking.



Photo 39: Derby Road shops

Green Space and Public Realm

There is very little green space within this area and public realm is limited to the pavements edging the streets. The largest green space is located north of Whitfield Street. However this flat grassed area is fenced off and has temporary planning permission for use as a staff car park by the St Catherine's Health Centre. Cast iron drains set into the stone surfacing are common across several streets such as Sycamore Road and Elmswood Road. This feature is also present in TCA 1 and TCA 4. Overall, pavements are generally surfaced with asphalt with some retained stone paving and cobbles at junctions of the terraced streets.



Photo 40: Example of cobbles, Mounsey Road

Views

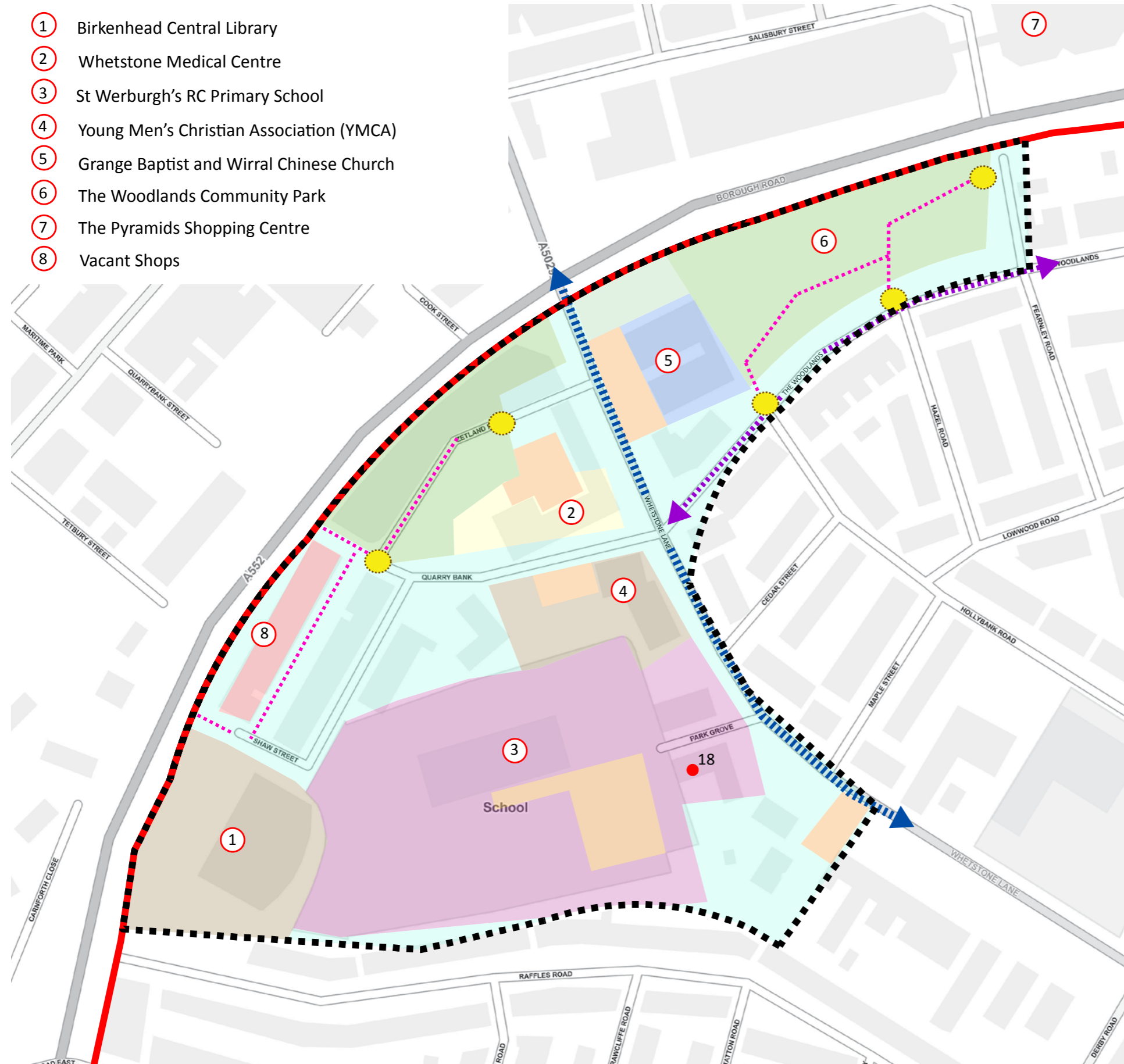
The elevated topography allows clear views along the terrace lined streets from Derby Road towards the A552. The sloping topography is less evident in the areas of modern development where the pattern and density of development limits longer distance views. Due to the density of the buildings and lack of open space within the area, views between buildings are contained to where north south routes intersect. Views along alleyways are inhibited due to the black metal gates in place. Views are restricted to along streets and the wider area is not visible resulting in a lack of orientation on some streets. There are no views towards the River Mersey from within this TCA.



Photo 41: Example of restricted views as a result of gated alleyways, Laurel Road

BIRKENHEAD AND TRANMERE NEIGHBOURHOOD AREA HERITAGE AND CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

- ① Birkenhead Central Library
- ② Whetstone Medical Centre
- ③ St Werburgh's RC Primary School
- ④ Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA)
- ⑤ Grange Baptist and Wirral Chinese Church
- ⑥ The Woodlands Community Park
- ⑦ The Pyramids Shopping Centre
- ⑧ Vacant Shops



TCA 6: Tranmere Northern Gateway

Key Characteristics

- Large-scale buildings line major routes including Borough Road (A552) and Whetstone Lane (B5148);
- Historical and community buildings grouped together located along key routes;
- Residential dwellings, are limited mostly to flats above shops;
- Commercial and community buildings and spaces dominate the area with a mixture of traditional and modern architectural styles;
- Green space is abundant and there are large car parks associated with larger scale buildings;
- Street clutter along primary routes includes bollards, road signage, lighting, traffic lights and bus stops; and
- Mixture of surface treatment within the public realm.

- Study area
- Character Area
- Listed Building
- Primary access route
- Secondary access route
- Pedestrian access route
- Green space entrance
- Community services - education
- Community services - medical
- Community services - other
- Community services - places of worship
- Car parking
- Green space
- Open space e.g verge, vacant/derelict space
- Residential
- Retail

Figure 11: TCA 6 - Tranmere Northern Gateway

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Topography and Hydrology

As shown in Figure 2, the highest point within this area is located in the east along Whetstone Lane (B5148) around 25m AOD. The land falls away from here towards Borough Road (A552) in the west. The lowest point is found at Woodlands Park in the north west of the TCA (10m AOD). Roads and pavement generally slope gradually following the topography. Variations in topography are more evident around Birkenhead Central Library where stepped access is required and along the longer route of Whetstone Lane. The landform is generally masked by dense development.

Movement and Connectivity

As shown in Figure 11, the primary route serving this area is Borough Road (A552), which forms the western and northern boundaries. This is accessible to pedestrians via paths through the Central Library grounds as well as via roads with no through traffic from Raffles Road, Shaw Street and Quarry Bank in the west and Fearnley Road in the north. The main connecting route for traffic and the key gateway into the area is via the Whetstone Lane (B5148). Green space marks the entrance to Whetstone Lane (B5148) from Borough Road (A552), which also allows additional informal pedestrian movement. Woodlands Park in the north provides a pedestrian route, free of traffic and is a key connection across Borough Road (A552) to The Pyramids Shopping Centre immediately beyond the TCA to the north.

Urban Structure and Built Form

The urban grain is coarse with a number of green spaces set amongst large-scale commercial and community buildings. Buildings are generally aligned along the main routes. Due to the varying scale, height and style of properties there is no clear pattern or structure within this TCA.

Although large scale development dominates this TCA, some residential properties have remained on the western boundary. Some of these buildings face onto the A552 and include retail or commercial units on the ground floor. However, these units are vacant and in a poor state of repair. Historical buildings are key features and represent a range of architectural styles. Birkenhead Central Library is the key historic building within this area and it provides a prominent public space. However, its back is turned to the area. The library's frontage looks on to Borough Road (A552) with steps leading down to the roadside (photo 43). The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) is located on Quarry Bank and the façade of this and a modern block of flats opposite are similar in style. Together, these buildings, plus St Werburgh's RC Primary School, Wirral Chinese Church and Whetstone Medical Centre are each isolated within open space or car parks.

Heritage Assets

70 and 72 Whetstone Lane and 1 and 3 Park Grove are grade II listed buildings (NHLE 1201741) built circa 1850 which are arranged either side of Park Grove and form an interesting architectural pair. The deeply overhanging eaves are distinctive and have elements of Italianate style. Once they would have been part of a grouping of similar large semi-detached houses. Their setting is now



Photo 42: Example of modern flats, Quarry Bank

is now significantly different as they flank the entrance to St Werburgh's RC Primary School. They are in an area that is characterised by the YMCA and a less cohesive collection of buildings dating from different periods and of very different architectural styles.

Birkenhead Central Library was built in the 1930s. It replaced the former central library, which dated from 1856 but was demolished to make way for the Queensway road tunnel. It is an impressive building built with strict symmetry, with thirteen bays under a hipped roof. The stone appears to be a white Portland stone. Despite being built during a time when Art Deco was the dominant architectural style the library is, in contrast to the decorative Mersey Road Tunnel built at the same time, restrained in architectural detailing. It is a re-worked neo-Georgian style building with other variations on classical architectural language with pared back detail, flat lintels bar four pediment lintels. The projecting central entrance bay is a double height with a portico supported on giant Doric columns flanking the entrance. Above the entrance is a balcony with a balustrade. For over a century and a half public libraries have been at the heart of English life; in cities, towns and villages across the land they were and are places of learning, leisure, enlightenment and betterment, open to all. This is also true of Birkenhead Central Library. The scale and bold use of architecture shows the immense civic pride and the positivity that was felt in Birkenhead at that time.

The building has suffered from insensitive alteration, particularly the loss of original windows. This building has been identified by the Birkenhead and Tranmere Neighbourhood Planning Forum as a potential Local List candidate.

Land Use and Land Cover

As shown in Figure 11, a large proportion of the area is given over to community services and associated facilities which include both green space and car parks (photo 44). Residential uses are generally limited to flats, some remaining rows of terraces and a small number of vacant terraces with flats above shops.



Photo 43: Birkenhead Central Library and A552



Photo 44: YMCA and car park, Quarry Bank



Photo 45: Birkenhead Central Library public realm

BIRKENHEAD AND TRANMERE NEIGHBOURHOOD AREA HERITAGE AND CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

Green Space and Public Realm

Green space accounts for approximately half of the area resulting in a relatively large degree of openness. However, it is mostly private or not publicly accessible, such as school playing fields. The Woodlands Community Park, which includes a children's play area, is the only formal recreational space within the TCA and is the second largest recreational space in the whole of the neighbourhood plan area. Mature trees mark the boundaries and act as a buffer between Borough Road (A552) and green spaces on the western and northern boundaries. The public realm space in front of Birkenhead Central Library includes steps, boundary walls, pathways and vegetation including mature trees. To the north of this, the pavement widens and accommodates a large planter which provides a green buffer between people and the A552. To the north of this, wide verges include mature trees which enhance the gateway of the B5148.



Photo 46: Green buffer adjacent to A552



Photo 47: Views to The Pyramids Shopping Centre across The Woodlands Community Park

Views

The sloping aspect of Whetstone Lane (B5148) allows long views down towards Borough Road (A552). The curving nature of Borough Road restricts longer views along the edge. Birkenhead Central Library is visible along Borough Road. Mature tree planting, which is relatively rare from within the Neighbourhood Area, is visible at the gateway formed at the crossroads of Whetstone Lane and Borough Road. Views southwards of Birkenhead Central Library from here take the focus away from the busy A552. From within The Woodlands Community Park and the adjacent road there are glimpses across to The Pyramids Shopping Centre.

MANAGING CHANGE



BIRKENHEAD AND TRANMERE NEIGHBOURHOOD AREA

HERITAGE AND CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

Positive Aspects of Character

There are a number of positive aspects of character which should be sustained, reinforced or enhanced. These include the historic development of Birkenhead and Tranmere and visual links with the River Mersey:

- Survival of several historic buildings including Birkenhead Central Library, St Catherine's Church, St Catherine's Institute, Mersey Park School, Tranmere Methodist Church and those within the Clifton Park Conservation Area;
- Provision of planned green space, including the large areas of Mersey Park of TCA 1 and Woodlands Community Park of TCA 6, that contribute greatly to the green infrastructure of the area;
- New high quality public realm within TCA 2 around historic buildings, such as St Catherine's Health Centre;
- New development which maintains historic patterns and scale of development, long distance views and provides private space, such as along Whitford Road and Fountain Street within TCA 5;
- High level of detailing of road facing façades to terraces and semi-detached houses, in particular to doorways and windows throughout the study area;
- Mature trees within Clifton Park of TCA 4, Mersey Park of TCA 4 and around the western and northern boundary provide a buffer to the A552 within TCA 6;
- Links to the wider area such as Birkenhead Town Centre in TCA 6 and TCA 4, Birkenhead Central Station and Green Lane Station in TCA 3; and
- Survival of stone paving and cobbles and streetscape detailing including cast iron drains and grilles.



Photo 48: Remaining stone pillar at entrance to Mersey Park



Photo 49: Example of historic shop frontages and road names, Raffles Road

Issues to be Addressed

The following issues have been identified which could be addressed through new development or active management. These are principally related to the loss of historic street pattern, quality of materials within modern development and the presence of derelict buildings and vacant sites.

- The busy A552 is dominated by traffic which creates a barrier across the wider area restricting access to only a few crossing points;
- Loss of small but locally important shops throughout the area but in particular those on Derby Road and Borough Road within TCA 6 reducing the quality and level of activity in these streets;
- Poor maintenance of buildings along Dingle Road, Harrowby Road and Elmswood Road within TCA 5 and a number of other terraced streets across the neighbourhood area detracts from the quality of the appearance of the streets;
- Loss of historic streetscape features such as stone flags, cobbles and cast iron replaced or covered over with inconsistent modern materials such as that along Sycamore Road, Tatton Road and Derby Road;
- Uninspiring and poor quality gateways on main routes to the north and south of B5148 within TCA 2 and TCA 6;
- Poor quality and inconsistent alterations of individual houses has, in places, resulted in the loss of original detailing, particularly affecting Victorian buildings;
- Some roads closed to traffic are in a poor state of repair and unsafe and unwelcoming to pedestrians; and
- Large vacant sites where houses once stood result in empty, barren spaces which are detracting features within the area.

Sensitivity to Change

There are also some elements which are particularly sensitive to change. These relate to the scale, setting and architectural design and detailing of buildings and the contribution these make to the character of the area. Clifton Park Conservation Area contains a number of large scale properties, with grand and generous settings which enhance the character of the area. Many of these buildings are listed and therefore are particularly sensitive to change.

- Architectural detailing to doors and windows;
- The green spaces which create openness, texture and colour within the densely developed residential areas;
- Recurrent ironwork detailing and motifs, which creates a degree of unity and strengthens sense of place;
- Stonework to paving, pillars, cobbles and boundary treatments that provides consistency to the public realm;
- Use of local sandstone to key buildings and walls;
- Imposing sandstone quarry faces and doorway that conceals Tranmere tunnels;
- The scale and mass of buildings within TCA 4 creating a sense of unity and grandeur; and
- The continuity of building frontages and boundaries along a number of terraced streets within TCA 1, TCA 3 and TCA 5 providing a strong coherent building and roof line. The consistent streetscapes provide a strong sense of place.



Photo 50: Example of architectural detailing to frontages

Character Management Principles

The urban structure and general layout of the area remains similar to when it was originally laid out in the 19th century. However, there is a large quantity of vacant spaces which are a result of the clearance of dilapidated buildings in the 20th century. These sites are particularly evident in TCA 2 along Church Road (B5148). Additionally, infill development, particularly from the post-war period, has resulted in the loss of the original grid pattern of street and the introduction of a more organic pattern in some areas, including culs-de-sac. Furthermore, the design and choice of materials used in the construction of new buildings in some cases detracts from the quality of the area, particularly where it is interspersed between historic buildings.

Physical and visual links with the River Mersey are historically important and remain so today. It is essential that these links are maintained as they greatly contribute to the sense of place.

The main forces for change in the area will be within the large vacant sites throughout the residential areas, such as on Whitfield Street. Development in these locations should aim to maintain the existing qualities of the area in the long term. Support for the community to develop temporary parks or playgrounds should be considered in the short term.

Development within the smaller vacant sites scattered throughout the residential areas should be consistent with the scale and mass of existing buildings and roof lines.

Across the area many houses lack private space resulting in areas where dustbins and cars dominate the street. Where new development is proposed a strategy should be implemented to ensure space for both cars and bins is incorporated to limit clutter.

In order to address the issues highlighted above, managing change in this area should focus on the sustaining and reinforcing the positive aspects of character whilst accommodating development which reinforces or enhances the buildings and streets. The following general principles should be considered within the neighbourhood plan area as a whole:

- A strategy should be developed to improve the appearance and quality of shop fronts and local retail areas to recover some of its important architectural detailing and enhance the quality and sense of place of the area;
- Opportunities to further enhance connections for pedestrians and the introduction of pathways for cyclists should be considered as part of future proposals. In particular at key links in and out of the area as well as around railway stations;
- Development proposals for new buildings, public realm and public art should be used to reinforce key gateways and strengthen the sense of arrival;
- Design proposals for any new development should be responsive to the character of the streetscape in which they sit. Proposed developments should generally be in keeping with the existing scale, height, building and roof line in the immediate setting.

- Development proposals should seek to retain existing boundaries and complement existing materials, detailing and features of the streetscape;
- High quality materials and a high standard of workmanship should be applied in the repair of buildings, pavements and the public realm;
- A plan should be prepared to set out the commitments to the management and future replacement of trees which considers resilience to environmental change;
- Existing high value green spaces should be maintained as green space and consideration should be given to providing allotment space where possible;
- Green spaces should be included in new residential developments and clearance and derelict sites should be considered as both permanent and temporary green spaces; and
- Development proposals should seek to include provision for off-street parking wherever possible;
- Development proposals should seek to provide provision for bin storage for both flats and individual houses or collectively per street, or area.

In addition to the general management principles outlined above, the following specific principles should apply to each TCA.

TCA 1: Mersey Park

The following principles should be considered for TCA 1:

- Design proposals for new development should be responsive to the form of distinctive individual style of the existing buildings in the area;
- Development proposals should seek to retain existing boundaries and complement existing materials, detailing and features of the streetscape such as, large scale stone pillars and walls linked with Mersey Park on Sidney Road and Agnes Road, cast iron grates and drain details such as those on Seymour Street;
- Stone flags within the public realm should be retained wherever possible;
- A management plan for Mersey Park and its associated footpaths (photo 51) should be produced to ensure this high quality public green space is maintained; and
- Consideration should be taken to provide further allotments.

TCA 2: Tranmere Heights

The following principles should be considered for TCA 2:

- A strategy should be developed to improve the appearance and quality of shop fronts and local retail areas to enhance the quality and sense of place of the area, in particular along Church Road (B5148);



Photo 51: Footpath between Mersey Park and Allerton Road

- Opportunities to further enhance connections for pedestrians and cyclists should be considered along Church Road (B5148) and the existing east-west routes which have already been closed to vehicles;
- Introduce features to define and reinforce key gateways to give a sense of arrival in and out of the area for people travelling along the primary route of Church Road (B5148) to the south;
- A single palette of materials should be applied throughout the area to complement the existing public realm, such as around the Health Centre; and
- Proposals for developments which include provision of high quality, multi-functional green space on site are more likely to be acceptable. Current vacant sites should be considered as both temporary and permanent green spaces.



Photo 52: Retail area on Church Road (B5148)

TCA 3: Mersey Prospect

The following principles should be considered for TCA 3:

- A strategy should be developed to improve the appearance and quality of shop fronts along Derby Road to recover some of its important architectural detailing and enhance the quality and sense of place of the area;

BIRKENHEAD AND TRANMERE NEIGHBOURHOOD AREA HERITAGE AND CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

- Opportunities to further enhance connections for pedestrians and cyclists along Holt Hill, Green Lane Railway Station and Birkenhead Central Railway Station should be considered;
- Proposals should seek to retain existing boundaries and complement existing materials, detailing and features such as the sandstone retaining walls on Holt Hill; and
- Stone flags within the public realm should be retained wherever possible.



Photo 52: Example of stepped pedestrian link on steep slope, Holt Hill

TCA 4: The Woodlands

The following principles should be considered for TCA 4:

- Design proposals for any new development should be in keeping with the existing scale, height, building and roof line of existing buildings within the conservation area and compliment them architecturally;
- Proposals should seek to retain existing boundaries and complement existing materials, detailing and features such as stone capped walls with cast iron railings;
- Stone flags should be retained wherever possible and a consistent palette of materials should be used which reflects existing pattern and detailing such as on Clifton Road; and
- Proposals that demonstrate that existing trees will be retained and protected are more likely to be acceptable;

TCA 5: Derby Road

The following principles should be considered for TCA 5:

- A strategy should be developed to improve the appearance and quality of shop fronts along Derby Road to recover some of its important architectural detailing and enhance the quality and sense of place of the area;



Photo 53: Example of mature trees lining streets, Clifton Road

- Opportunities to further enhance connections for pedestrians and cyclists on roads leading to the primary route along Church Road (B5148) and the existing east-west routes which have already been closed to vehicles should be considered;
- Stone flags should be retained wherever possible and a consistent palette of materials should be used which reflects existing pattern and detailing such as the cast iron drain details on Whalley Road.
- Proposals for developments which include provision of high quality, multi-functional green space on site are more likely to be acceptable. Particular focus should be given to clearance and derelict sites, which should be considered as both permanent and temporary green spaces.



Photo 54: Example of cast iron detailing, Whalley Road

TCA 6: Tranmere Northern Gateway

The following principles should be considered for TCA 6:

- Introduce features to define and reinforce key gateways to give a sense of arrival in and out of the area for people travelling along the primary route at the Whetstone Lane A552 Junction;
- The library is a key building for the area as a whole and within this TCA. The building and its setting should be considered a focal point and protected;
- A plan should be developed to revitalise shop fronts adjacent to the library along the A552 and the links between the library and main B5148 route;
- A single palette of materials should be selected to complement the existing public realm such as those located within the library area;
- Proposals that demonstrate that existing trees will be retained and protected are more likely to be acceptable; and
- Existing green space should be protected and maintained in well used areas such as The Woodlands Community Park.



Photo 55: Vacant shops that front onto A552

Next Steps

This study is intended to provide evidence to support the development of policies with respect to heritage and character for the Birkenhead and Tranmere Neighbourhood Plan. As such, it does not provide a comprehensive overview of any contribution of individual buildings, streets or spaces to the character of the area. It should be considered alongside other evidence gathered through the plan making process, such as detailed policy reviews, consultation responses and site options assessments and the evidence base of the Metropolitan

Borough of Wirral Core Strategy Local Plan.

Other work which would strengthen the evidence base and provide a basis for monitoring and managing future change include:

- Detailed architectural study of buildings within the area to better understand their value and contribution to the history of the area;
- Review of shop frontages and strategy for local retail across the area;
- A Green Space Needs Assessment to determine where and what types of green space are required;
- Detailed mapping of all trees within the area, including the updating of Tree Preservation Orders; and
- Design codes for future development and management.

Further guidance on how to use the output of the Heritage and Character Assessment can be found at <http://mycommunity.org.uk/resources/neighbourhood-planning-how-to-prepare-a-character-assessment-to-support-design-policy-within-a-neighbourhood-plan/>.

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All Historic Maps are Ordnance Survey maps obtained from the collection at Birkenhead Central Library

Photo 4 - Wirral Memories

Photos 9a and 9b - Wirral History

APPENDIX A: SCHEDULE OF HERITAGE ASSETS

BIRKENHEAD
INSTITUTION

THIS BUILDING ERECTED BY THE BOARD OF GUARDIANS
OF THE BIRKENHEAD UNION IN THE YEARS 1911-1913
ON THE SITE OF A HOSPITAL FOR THE SICK BUILT IN 1866
WAS OCCUPIED - THE WEST WING AND THE ADMINISTRATION
BLOCK IN 1912, AND THE EAST WING IN 1913.

O TUDOR JONES ESQ. CHAIRMAN

AUGUSTINE QUINN ESQ. CHAIRMAN OF THE
WORKMEN'S UNION

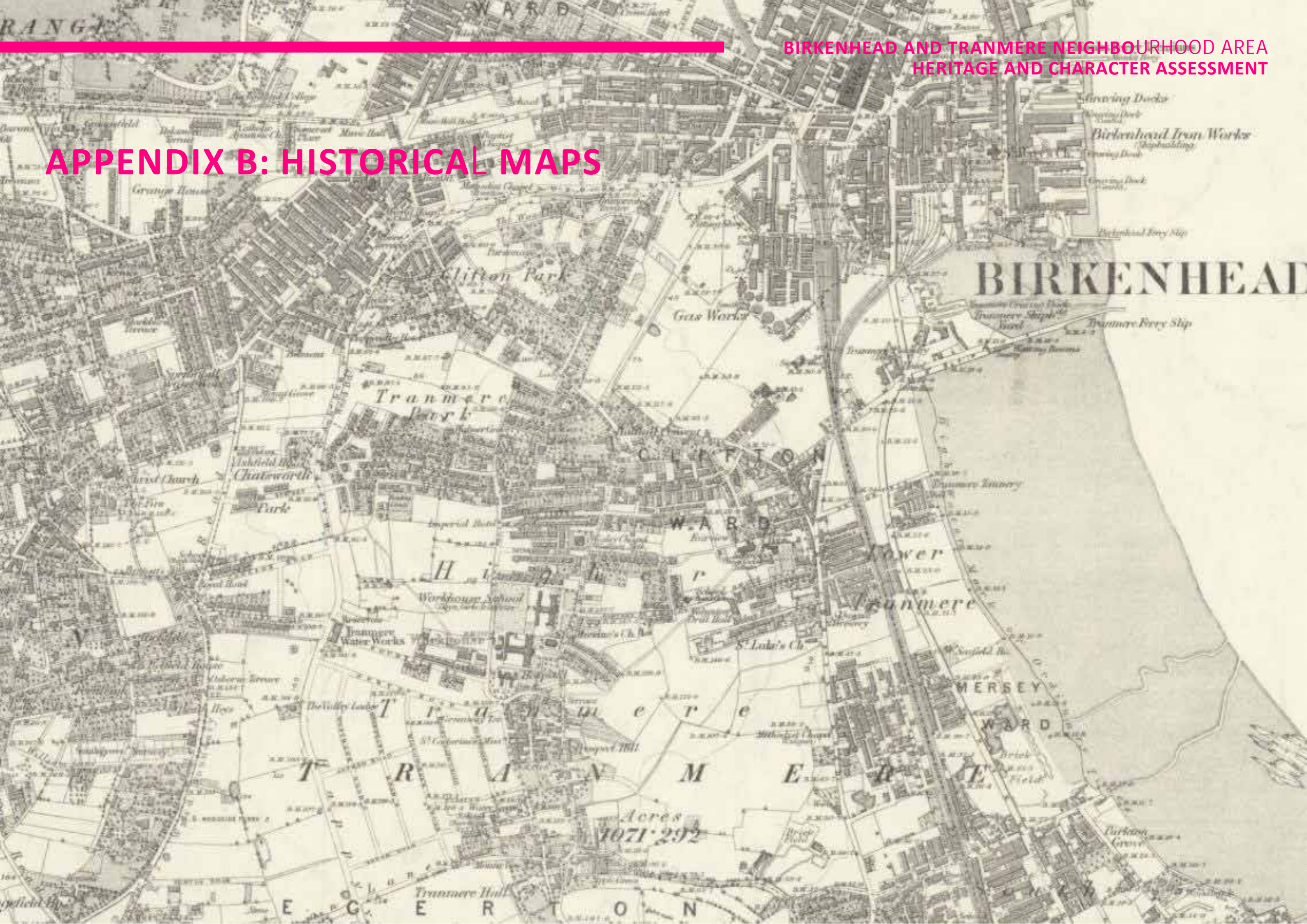
COL. G. F. ALLENBER, V.D. CHAIRMAN OF THE
WORKS COMMITTEE

WILLIAM BIRBY & SONS, ARCHITECTS,
WILSON & CO., LTD., BUILDERS

**BIRKENHEAD AND TRANMERE NEIGHBOURHOOD AREA
HERITAGE AND CHARACTER ASSESSMENT
LISTED BUILDINGS**

ID	LIST ENTRY	NAME	GRADE	EASTING	NORTHING	LIST DATE
1	1282507	144 Whetstone Lane	II	31915	88037	10-Aug-1992
2	1292231	Church of St Catherine	II	31872	87487	28-Mar-1974
3	1282589	21 Clifton Road	II	32021	88293	28-Mar-1974
4	1291688	57 and 59 The Woodlands	II	31901	88447	28-Mar-1974
5	1217917	Masonic Temple	II	32004	88236	28-Mar-1974
6	1201605	34 and 36 Clifton Road	II	31950	88244	28-Mar-1974
7	1282590	30 and 32 Clifton Road	II	31961	88269	28-Mar-1974
8	1217920	31 and 33 Clifton Road	II	31980	88175	28-Mar-1974
9	1218097	Beechcroft	II	31760	88220	28-Mar-1974
10	1282604	8 Lowwood Road	II	31920	88326	21-Jul-1987
11	1217912	23 and 25 Clifton Road	II	32010	88257	28-Mar-1974
12	1292035	12 Lowwood Road	II	31844	88361	10-Aug-1992
13	1201603	The Woodlands	II	32032	88406	28-Mar-1974
14	1217924	47 and 49 Clifton Road	II	31927	88095	28-Mar-1974
15	1201606	42 Clifton Road	II	31919	88193	28-Mar-1974
16	1291684	Fearnley	II	31803	88383	28-Feb-1975
17	1292033	8 Lowwood Grove	II	31863	88366	10-Aug-1992
18	1201741	70 and 72 Whetstone Lane and 1 and 3 Park Grove	II	31651	88210	10-Aug-1992
19	1217922	40 Clifton Road	II	31931	88211	28-Mar-1974
20	1282619	1 and 3 Hollybank Road	II	31893	88114	28-Mar-1974
21	1201604	24 Clifton Road	II	31988	88331	28-Mar-1974
22	1219043	140 and 142 with railings, wall and gate piers to front	II	31903	88050	28-Mar-1974
23	1292236	11 Clifton Road	II	32059	88373	28-Mar-1974
24	1282591	Gate Piers to numbers 47 and 49	II	31910	88098	28-Mar-1974
25	1201738	53 and 55 The Woodlands	II	31871	88445	28-Mar-1974

APPENDIX B: HISTORICAL MAPS



BIRKENHEAD AND TRANMERE NEIGHBOURHOOD AREA HERITAGE AND CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

Historical Map 1843



Historical Map 1882



BIRKENHEAD AND TRANMERE NEIGHBOURHOOD AREA HERITAGE AND CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

Historical Map 1899



Historical Map 1903



BIRKENHEAD AND TRANMERE NEIGHBOURHOOD AREA HERITAGE AND CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

Historical Map 1910



Historical Map 1913



BIRKENHEAD AND TRANMERE NEIGHBOURHOOD AREA HERITAGE AND CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

Historical Map 1927



Historical Map 1928



BIRKENHEAD AND TRANMERE NEIGHBOURHOOD AREA HERITAGE AND CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

Historical Map 1945



Historical Map 1946



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