



# Conservation Area Appraisal

## Hamilton Square Conservation Area, Birkenhead

**Building Design Partnership**

**Metropolitan Borough of Wirral**

**September 2006**



**Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council**  
**Conservation Area Appraisal**  
**Hamilton Square Conservation Area, Birkenhead**

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# 1.0 Introduction

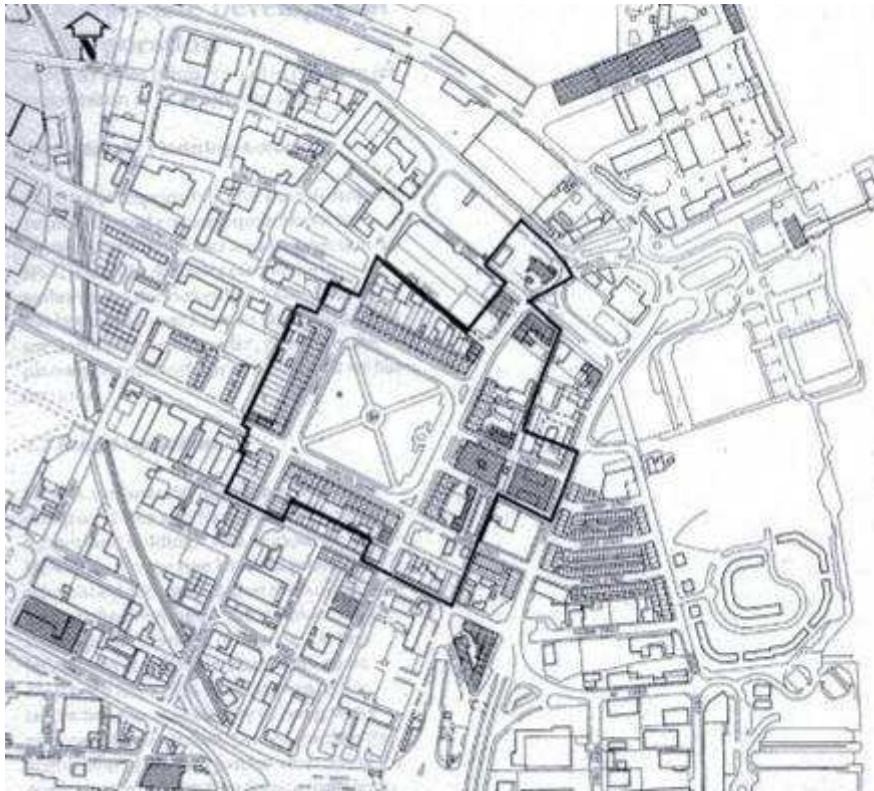
## Introduction

- 1.1 Hamilton Square Conservation Area is a distinct urban area in Birkenhead, Wirral. It is located to the north east of the town centre. The Conservation Area is centred on Hamilton Square and its surrounding streets and also includes an area leading north east towards Woodside Ferry Terminal, which lies on the Mersey waterfront. The Ferry Terminal and its approach are outside of the Conservation Area boundary.
- 1.2 The purpose of this document is to provide a detailed appraisal of the townscape features, buildings and spaces that give Hamilton Square its distinctive character and appearance and which have resulted in its designation as a Conservation Area. The appraisal outlines the historical development of the area and defines the special interest, character and appearance of the built and natural environment within the Conservation Area. The appraisal is intended to provide a basis for considering the impact of development proposals on Hamilton Square and the on-going management of the Conservation Area.
- 1.3 This Conservation Area appraisal has not been the subject of public consultation nor does it comprise a management plan.

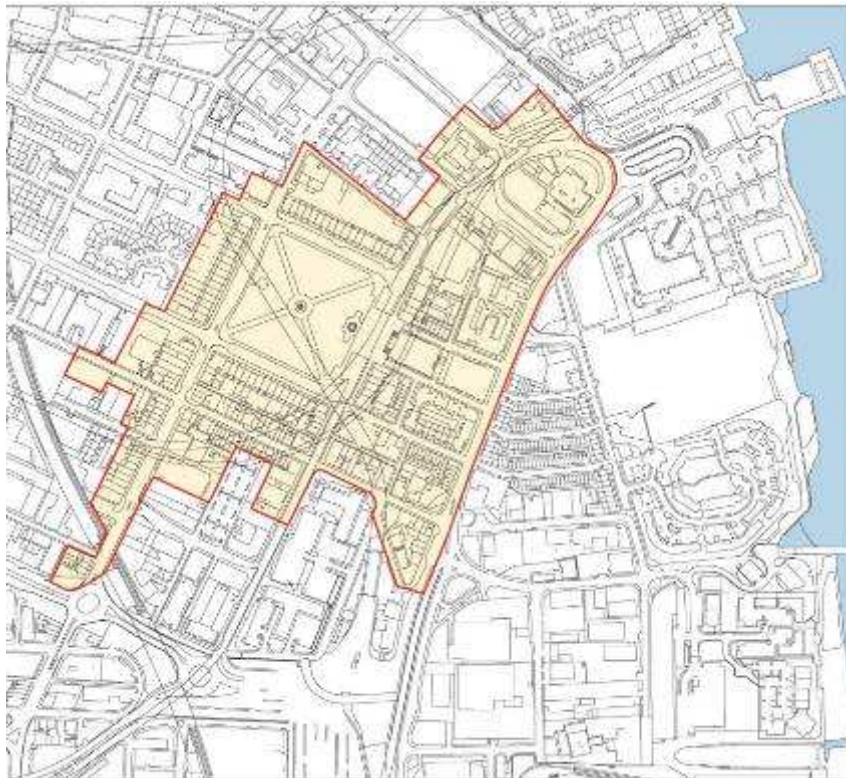
## Conservation Areas

- 1.4 A Conservation Area is an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance. Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council (WMBC), under Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, designated the Hamilton Square Conservation Area in July 1977. It was extended to include the environment surrounding the Woodside Hotel, a further stretch of Argyle Street to the junction with Conway Street and the west side of Chester Street to the junction with Ivy Street. This was in June 1994.
- 1.5 The special character of an area derives from a combination of many things, such as buildings, groups of buildings, spaces, and their relationship to one another and the way they are arranged. In the case of the Hamilton Square Conservation Area, designation is recognition of the architectural qualities and historic significance of the realised portion of the grand Georgian development.

### July 1977 Boundary



### June 1994 Boundary



- 1.6 In producing this appraisal extensive use has been made of the recently issued draft guidance from English Heritage Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals, August 2005.

### **Information Sources**

- 1.7 This appraisal has been compiled through site survey, discussion with WMBC officers, and with reference to the following key sources:
- a. Wirral Metropolitan Borough Local Plan (adopted February 2000);
  - b. Historic Towns and Cities in England's Northwest;
  - c. Pevsner Architectural Guides Liverpool, Joseph Sharples;
  - d. Hamilton Square Design Guide;
  - e. Birkenhead An Illustrated History; and
  - f. Conservation of European Cities – Birkenhead European Commission Studies.
- 1.8 A full bibliography of sources is included as an Appendix to this report.

### **Structure of Appraisal**

- 1.9 The appraisal is structured according to draft English Heritage guidance, as follows:
- a. Planning policy context;
  - b. Summary of special interest;
  - c. Assessment of special interest; and
  - d. Boundary changes.
- 1.10 Appendices are attached, to cover:
- a. Wirral Borough Council UDP Policy Summary; and
  - b. Schedule of Buildings and Structures with Special Interest.

## 2.0 Planning Policy Context

### Introduction

- 2.1 WMBC has a duty to pay special attention to preserving and enhancing the character and appearance of conservation areas in exercising its planning powers. This appraisal will, therefore, provide a consistent and sound basis upon which to determine the impact of proposals on the character of the Conservation Area.
- 2.2 This appraisal also identifies the elements that contribute towards the special character of the conservation area. Negative or neutral features are also identified. This provides the basis from which to develop proposals for the preservation and enhancement of the conservation area.
- 2.3 Every effort has been taken to include or analyse those elements that are key to the special character of the Conservation Area. Where buildings, structures or features have not been specifically highlighted, it does not necessarily follow that they are of no visual or historic value to the Conservation Area. The document is intended to be an overall framework and guide, within which decisions can be made on a site-specific basis.
- 2.4 This appraisal should be read in conjunction with the following policy documents, which provide information on local and national policy relating to conservation areas:
  - a. National planning policy, including Planning Policy Guidance Note 15: Planning and the Historic Environment;
  - b. Local policy, including the adopted Wirral Unitary Development Plan (adopted February 2000).

### National Policy

- 2.5 The Appraisal has been produced in line with the following Acts and guidance:
  - a. The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990:
    - i. Section 71 places the local authority under a duty to “formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas”;
    - ii. Section 69 imposes a duty on local planning authorities to designate as conservation areas any “areas of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to



preserve or enhance". The designation of a conservation area introduces additional planning controls that are intended to ensure that any alterations do not detract from an area's character or appearance and to conserve or improve the "special interest" of an area.

- b. Planning Policy Guidance 15: Planning and the Historic Environment (1994) of which Section 4 relates specifically to conservation areas;
- c. The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004;
- d. Planning Policy Statement 1: Delivering Sustainable Development (ODPM, 2005);
- e. Draft Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals (English Heritage, August 2005);
- f. Draft Guidance on the Management of Conservation Areas (English Heritage, August 2005).

## Local Policy

2.6 The Statutory Development Plan for Wirral currently comprises:

- The Unitary Development Plan for Wirral (adopted February 2000); and
- The Initial Regional Spatial Strategy for the North West (RPG13, March 2003).

Wirral Metropolitan Borough Unitary Development Plan (adopted) contains a comprehensive set of conservation policies. The following policies are of relevance.

- Policy CH1 Development Affecting Listed Buildings and Structures
- Policy CH2 Development Affecting Conservation Areas
- Policy CH3 Demolition Control in Conservation Areas
- Policy CH5 Hamilton Square Conservation Area
- Policy GR1 The Protection of Urban Greenspace
- Policy GR2 Land Designated as Urban Greenspace
- Policy TR1 Protection of Urban Tourist Resources

2.7 A summary of relevant policies is provided in Appendix A: Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council UDP Policy Summary.

2.8 The appraisal is a material consideration in determining development decisions and supports the relevant development plan policies.

- 2.9 Work is underway to prepare a Local Development Framework (LDF) for the Borough, which will replace the existing Wirral Metropolitan Borough UDP. The Core Strategy DPD sets the vision, objectives and spatial strategy for the Borough, for a period of up to ten years. The Core Strategy DPD is not site-specific but may include a Key Diagram. Other Local Development Documents must be prepared in line with the Core Strategy DPD.
- 2.10 “Initial consultation on the Core Strategy began in October 2005, with consultation on strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats and local needs. Consultation on objectives, the scope of the strategic environmental assessment, and the potential targets for the Core Strategy, will be completed during 2006. The target date for adoption is April 2009”.

### **Development Control: Effects on Owners & Residents**

- 2.11 Designation of a conservation area is not intended to prevent future development. Most historic areas have evolved over the centuries and must continue to do so, but in a sensitive manner. All development proposals however are expected to make a positive contribution to the area.

## 3.0 Summary of Special Interest

### Summary of Special Interest

- 3.1 The layout of Hamilton Square is based on a formal street grid and is the only surviving realised portion of a grand design for Birkenhead set out in 1825 by James Gillespie Graham.
- 3.2 The architectural lineage of this scheme links the area to another important example of Georgian classical town planning and architecture, notably the Edinburgh new town, where Gillespie Graham was also the architect.
- 3.3 The plan of Hamilton Square is laid out to utilise the topography of the site to maximum effect. The Town Hall was located and designed to make it visible from Liverpool's waterfront on the Eastern shore of the Mersey, emphasising Birkenhead's civic pride to their neighbour across the Mersey and when standing within the square creating a sense of enclosure broken only by the tower of Hamilton Square Station and the dome of the Town Hall.
- 3.4 The Conservation Area also contains an area to the north of the square centred on Chester Road, which contains structures (and probably archaeology) relating to the various phases of transport development and early communications across the river, ferry (and associated Royal Mail Hotel), road, rail and tram, which converge at a point just beyond the Conservation Area boundary and linked to the ferry terminus, where the Grade II Listed ferry terminal building is situated close to the waters edge.
- 3.5 The following chapter looks in more detail at the elements that make up the special interest of the Hamilton Square Conservation Area.

## 4.0 Assessment of Special Interest

### Introduction

- 4.1 The distinctive character of the Hamilton Square Conservation Area is created by a number of different elements that can be summarised as:
- a. The formal grid of the Gillespie Graham plan;
  - b. The grand scale and general uniformity of design and elevational treatment, particularly within Hamilton Square itself;
  - c. The spacious character and formal arrangement of the central garden area of Hamilton Square;
  - d. The complementary 'visual envelope' to the main Hamilton Square by Argyle Street, Hamilton Street and Market Street;
  - e. The historic Chester Street/Bridge Street/Hamilton Street environment relating to the various phases of transport development focused on the ferry, hotel, road links, rail links and the street tram; and
  - f. The Chester Street eastern boundary environment.
- 4.2 This section contains a detailed assessment of these elements as well as the other features and structures that when combined provide the special interest and special character of the Conservation Area. The section is therefore structured as follows:
- a. Location and setting;
  - b. Layout and plan form;
  - c. Historic development and archaeology;
  - d. Spatial analysis; and
  - e. Character analysis (architectural and townscape).

### A: Location and Setting

- 4.3 Hamilton Square is located within the town of Birkenhead, Merseyside and is situated on the Cheshire bank of the River Mersey opposite Pier Head on the waterfront of Liverpool.
- 4.4 Figure 1 sets it in its regional and local context.

- 4.5 Hamilton Square is a distinct urban area of Birkenhead, and located between Birkenhead town centre, to the south west, and the Woodside Ferry Terminal to the north east.
- 4.6 To the south is the entrance to the Queensway Tunnel completed in July 1934 as a road link between Liverpool and Birkenhead, which emerges at Kings Square in Birkenhead and on Byrom Street in Liverpool.
- 4.7 To the west and north, the formal Georgian grid of Gillespie Graham's plan for Birkenhead continues, but lacks any buildings from the time period, or any buildings of architectural quality.

#### **B: Layout and plan form (including landscape setting)**

- 4.8 The layout of Hamilton Square is defined by the rigid street grid designed to create a new town measuring 1 mile by 0.25 miles. The new town was to be developed south of and parallel to Wallasey Pool.
- 4.9 Remnants of the planned long, straight streets that were to be characteristic of the new town still provide a sense of the rigid street grid beyond Hamilton Square itself, particularly along Argyle Street, Hamilton Street and Market Street and provide a visual envelope for the square.
- 4.10 Hamilton Square therefore is the focal point of the Conservation Area, with streets and vistas running from and into its central gardens. The central gardens provide relief and a sense of openness when moving from the street grid beyond. This creates a sense of the gardens being the core of the Conservation Area and once within them, the definition of this garden space by the four impressive stone terraces, provides enclosure and a special character that is contained within the square.
- 4.11 The layout and plan form (figure 2) of the Conservation Area is also defined by topography. Hamilton Square and Birkenhead Town Hall are located on the upper most point of a ridge overlooking the River Mersey, placing them at the most prominent and visible point of the town singling them out as landmarks. From here the land slopes away from the square down to the River Mersey and the Woodside Ferry Terminal. There is a marked change in topography towards the river characteristic of the riverside landscape along the Wirral and Liverpool riverside. Rising by approximately 15 metres from the Ferry Terminal to Hamilton Square Station the site is on a incline, which is especially steep around the Woodside Hotel which rises from 6 metres at Shore Road in front of the hotel to 9 metres at Canning Street and up to 12 metres at Church Road. This change in levels alters the layout and plan form of the Conservation Area.
- 4.12 Historic maps (Appendix C.) of the site show that as at 1850 the Woodside Hotel was located on the banks of the Mersey. The land in front of the Woodside Hotel down to the present Ferry Terminal is likely to be reclaimed land.

- 4.13 There are four main strategic gateways to the Conservation Area and four local gateways within the Conservation Area that specifically mark the entrances to Hamilton Square itself (figure 2).
- 4.14 The strategic gateways are defined as entrances from:
- a. Canning Street (the A41) as the main vehicular access route into and through the area;
  - b. the south west along Chester Street;
  - c. from the Woodside ferry terminal on the waterfront; and
  - d. the junction of Argyle Street with Argyle Street.
- 4.15 The local gateways are defined as:
- a. Hamilton Square station along Hamilton Street. Hamilton Street forms the main pedestrian route from Hamilton Square and the wider Birkenhead area, including the town centre where important glimpses of the River Mersey can be seen;
  - b. the junction of Market Street and Hamilton Street;
  - c. the junction of Market Street and Argyle Street; and
  - d. the junction of Cleveland Street and Argyle Street where there are important glimpses of Liverpool, especially Queens Dock.
- 4.16 The landscape setting of the Conservation Area gives prominence to the grand architecture planned by Gillespie Graham that was intended to rival its neighbour on the opposite side of the river as well as giving the residential elite impressive views of Liverpool and the river as well as feeling of openness when in and around Hamilton Square.
- 4.17 Birkenhead Town Hall, Hamilton Square and Hamilton Square Station are located on the upper most point of a ridge overlooking the River Mersey, placing them at the most prominent and visible point of the town, maximising the landscape setting that they have been designed to be part of. The computer model and photograph below illustrate the important panorama from the Liverpool bank of the River Mersey and the importance of topography in the landscape setting of the Conservation Area.



- 4.18 Likewise the topography also affords important panoramas of the Liverpool waterfront, most notably Pierhead and Queens Dock.



- 4.19 At a local level the Conservation Area is generally a hard landscape defined by imposing architecture, a tight street grid and long views along tightly defined streets with little relief from open space. The only exception to this situation are the central gardens of Hamilton Square that as time has progressed have become softer through greater tree cover, moving away from their original formal character and providing a setting for three structures of local interest:

- a. the statue of John Laird (1877) on the east side of the square;
- b. the Cenotaph (1925) opposite the Town Hall; and
- c. a statue dedicated to Queen Victoria (1905) at the heart of the square.



- 4.20 In summary, the rigid street grid radiating from Hamilton Square and its central gardens, the sloping topography towards the Woodside Ferry Terminal gateway, the landscape setting and the historic transport interchange define the layout and plan form that contributes to the special interest and character of the Hamilton Square Conservation Area.

### **C: Historic development and archaeology**

- 4.21 The following commentary identifies the important historic and archaeological elements that mark key periods of the Conservation Areas history and that determine the urban form that we see today.
- 4.22 The history of Hamilton Square and Woodside is synonymous with the development of the wider Birkenhead area. It is believed that the Romans first arrived in Birkenhead in approximately AD59.
- 4.23 In the 10th Century Birkenhead became a settlement (haven) for Scandinavian settlers who named the place Bierce Heved meaning 'headland of birch trees' - a mixture of old English and Scandinavian words describing the distinguishing natural landmarks.
- 4.24 In 1150 Bierce Heved was a ferry point across to Liverpool, providing the safest crossing of the Mersey.
- 4.25 Bierce Heved or Birkenhead still remained a small, rural hamlet overshadowed completely by the wealth and power of Liverpool and in 1801 the population was recorded as 110, by 1811 it had risen to 193, and by 1821 it was 310.
- 4.26 In 1824 William Laird established a boiler works in Wallasey Pool to the South of the Woodside site. The boiler works developed into a shipbuilding yard and by 1831 the population of Birkenhead had risen to 2,790. This was almost certainly a direct result of the employment generated by Laird's shipbuilding works.
- 4.27 In 1833 the Woodside Royal Mail Ferry Hotel opened, a relic of Birkenhead's existence as a resort and important mail-coach station serving London and the North of England.



- 4.28 Pevsner and Hubbard in 1971 note similar observations and further identify the Hotel as a historic feature of the area, possibly marking the extent of the river bank prior to the development of the dock complex;
- “the Woodside Hotel, 1833, a survival of Birkenhead’s existence as a resort. The once symmetrical principal elevation is spoilt by recent alterations and additions. The river was formerly nearer, the present Woodside Ferry Approach being reclaimed land”.
- 4.29 Laird had great plans for the town, and commissioned Scottish Architect Gillespie Graham to set out a plan for the town. Graham’s plans featured a tight network of streets centred on Hamilton Square.
- 4.30 Hamilton Square was built between 1825 and 1846 with a site reserved for the Town Hall on the east side. This site was not filled until 1883 when construction on the Town Hall begun, finally being completed in 1887.
- 4.31 Construction on Graham’s plan began at the east end of the new town centred on Hamilton Square, but the mid nineteenth century depression ensured that this was only element of the Gillespie Graham plan to be fully completed.
- 4.32 The siting of the gas works to the west of Hamilton Square and the proximity to the rapidly growing dock system added to the demise of Laird’s great plans for Birkenhead by making the area less desirable with the wealthy. This forced a change in the market and although the development in Birkenhead was still based on Graham’s grid format, it consisted of lower quality, smaller terraced housing to be occupied by the massive influx of migrants looking for work in the growing docks.
- 4.33 Civic infrastructure holds a prominent place in the historic development of Hamilton Square and Woodside with the new docks being completed in 1847 spawning many of the world’s ground breaking ship designs. The area also incorporated Europe’s first street railway and the first rail link to London from Birkenhead in 1878 took place with the opening of a train, tram and ship terminus at Woodside Station. The first underwater railway tunnel was also developed in 1886 serving the current Hamilton Square Station.
- 4.34 One of the last significant elements of civic infrastructure that impacts upon the historic development of Hamilton Square was the construction of the Queensway road tunnel that resulted in the loss of many buildings and a significant residential community.
- 4.35 Not only did a significant element of residential development disappear with the construction of the Queensway tunnel it also led to Conway Street splitting the town centre in two, increasing squalor in the town centre. The Birkenhead Corporation commissioned the “Reilly Plan” in 1946 to address this and more demolition on the Grange Road and Haymarket area took place and the protracted reconstruction over a period of 7 years a lot of custom was lost to the town and the area around Argyle Street and Market Street particularly suffered.

This is a legacy that has left a lasting influence on the function and character of these two streets and their contribution to Hamilton Square Conservation Area.

- 4.36 The “Reilly Plan” was also influential in that it promoted change to address the poor quality waterfront and increasing traffic congestion. Two concepts that are of particular relevance to the history of Hamilton Square Conservation Area are illustrations of a new Woodside Hotel and Woodside Ferry Casino on a site in the approximate location of Great Western House.



**Queensway Tunnel in 1934**



**Woodside Hotel Redevelopment – ‘Reilly Plan’**

- 4.37 One of the latest phase of development to have a significant influence on the Conservation Area came in the 1980's and early 1990's when the Woodside Business Park was built by the Merseyside Development Corporation. The Business Park was expanded only last year the Phase 3 development creating over 26,000 sq ft in 14 single storey industrial/workshop units (from 750 sq ft upwards to 2,000 sq ft) and 12 two storey office units (from 750 sq ft to 1,300 sq ft).
- 4.38 Great Western House (currently occupied by the Child Support Agency) and Rose Brae Court (currently occupied by the Land Registry) were also built around the same time as part of a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) Initiative. Both of these buildings were built on the site of the former Woodside (Birkenhead) Railway Station.
- 4.39 Also, during 1987/1988, Wirral Borough Council undertook the ‘enveloping’ of the Grade I Listed Buildings that define the central Hamilton Square gardens, including cleaning and repair of stonework, re-roofing, reconstruction of chimneys, the repair and replacement of windows, the reinstatement of rainwater goods and other ironwork.
- 4.40 Over £80 million was invested in the Hamilton Quarter between 1995 and 2002 facilitated through Single Regeneration Budget funding. The Hamilton Quarter included the Conservation Area and the funding was used to develop attractions, support arts and culture, refurbish historic buildings, improve traffic and the environment and enhance security. The following investment had a direct influence on the Conservation Area:

- a. Pedestrianisation of areas of Hamilton Square, particularly in front of Birkenhead Town Hall
- b. Facelifts, refurbishment of commercial properties and 'Living Over the Shop' Scheme along Market Street;
- c. Refurbishment of commercial properties and 'Living Over the Shop' Scheme focused along Argyle Street;
- d. Restoration of the Town Hall, housing Wirral Museum;
- e. Birkenhead Heritage Tramway from Woodside to Pacific Road;
- f. Total refurbishment of the Antiques Triangle into 52 flats and ground floor commercial units.

## D: Spatial Analysis

### The character and interrelationship of spaces within the area

- 4.41 Open spaces within (or sometimes immediately beyond) a conservation area, the way they are enclosed, the relationships they have to one another, and the visual contribution they make to the character of a place is an important consideration in defining the special architectural or historic interest of an area. The following paragraphs identify these spaces within the Hamilton Square Conservation Area and are illustrated by figure 3.

### Hamilton Square Gardens

- 4.42 Paragraph 4.9 and 4.18 define the character, enclosure and visual importance of Hamilton Square within the Conservation Area as it provides relief and a sense of openness from the surrounding rigid and tight street grid.
- 4.43 The gardens are also important in that they have been designed to showcase Birkenhead Town Hall as well as providing an appropriate setting for the statue of John Laird (1877) on the east side of the square; the Cenotaph (1925) opposite the Town Hall and a statue dedicated to Queen Victoria (1905) at the heart of the square.



- 4.44 The square only has a relationship with the open space on Duncan Street/Hamilton Street, which currently acts as a surface car park. The relationship is solely one of adjacency and very much visual because Hamilton Square is closed to vehicular traffic from both Hamilton Street and Duncan Street



- 4.45 Hamilton Square also has an indirect relationship with the open space that surrounds the Woodside Hotel and is defined Chester Street/Bridge Street/Hamilton Street. The relationship is indirect because only glimpses of the south-west corner of the Chester Street/Bridge Street open space can be seen from the square along Argyle Street. Even though this relationship is indirect it is important to the special interest of the Conservation Area because of the views afforded across to Liverpool and into Hamilton Square itself.



#### **Chester Street/Bridge Street/Hamilton Street**

- 4.46 There are two components to this area of open space:
- a. Bridge Street frontage
  - b. Woodside Hotel
- 4.47 The Bridge Street frontage (below) sits at the top of the space almost on the same level as Hamilton Square and defined by a scale and design of architecture also similar to the square. Its visual quality has been diminished by insensitive modern infill development and bus stands.



- 4.48 The space slopes from Bridge Street down towards the river and incorporates the Woodside Hotel that is entirely surrounded on all sides by the public highway (Bridge Street, Hamilton Street, Chester Street). As such as a space it suffers in its usability and visual quality, almost entirely being used for surface car parking.

#### **Ferry Terminal**

- 4.49 Although outside the Conservation Area boundary the space adjacent to the Ferry Terminal building abuts the surface car park at the front of the Woodside Hotel and can therefore be said to have a relationship to one another.
- 4.50 This space is a large, wind swept area, which has been poorly maintained in recent years. The Old Lairage area which holds the submarine vessel is particularly poorly maintained, and has become filled with litter and dirty water.
- 4.51 As well as being underused, and windswept the area is also very cluttered containing railings, lamp posts, a range of different ground levels, seating and street furniture which has been poorly maintained, and a variety of streetscape materials. This area is surrounded by the bus station which also reduces its attractiveness but provides commonality and relationship to the Bridge Street frontage that also incorporates bus stands.

#### **Church Street/Chester Street**

- 4.52 The open space that falls between Church Street and Chester Street is not within the Conservation Area but directly adjacent. It originated as the Woodside Station railway cutting and provides an important historic reference point to the development of Birkenhead, Woodside and Hamilton Square as an important public transport interchange.





### Key views and vistas

- 4.53 Figure 4 identifies the strategic views into and out of the conservation area as well as important local vistas. These views and vistas should be considered in light of the commentary in paragraphs 4.10, 4.16 and 4.17 that define important panoramas and landmark buildings that can be viewed from outside and within the Conservation Area.
- 4.54 A Tall Buildings Study has been carried out for the Woodside Regeneration Area, Birkenhead and should be referred to when considering the key views and vistas from within and outside the Hamilton Square Conservation Area.
- 4.55 There are a number of strategic views from the Conservation Area that are enhanced by the topography of the site.
- 4.56 From points on its eastern and northern edges of the Conservation Area there are impressive views across the River Mersey towards Liverpool. In the opposite direction, the Conservation Area is visible from Liverpool, with the dome of the Town Hall located in line with the eastern side of Hamilton Square providing an important landmark.
- 4.57 View eastwards from the waterfront, north of the ferry terminal building across the Mersey towards Liverpool Pierhead are impressive, although views southwards along the River are significantly restricted by the ferry terminal structure. To the north the view is dominated by the Mersey Tunnel Ventilation Tower.
- 4.58 Views from immediately outside of the ferry terminal building represent important gateway views into the Conservation Area dominated at the lower level by the bus station with the Woodside Hotel visible in the background. The topography of the site ensures that beyond the Woodside Hotel other buildings are still visible, and notably the towers of Hamilton Square Station, Birkenhead Town Hall and the Shore Road Pumping Station are all visible and act as local landmarks.
- 4.59 The view from the corner of Shore Road and Chester Street, adjacent to the Shore Road Pumping Station is a further important strategic view. The view to the west follows Chester Street, where the tower of Hamilton Square station provides an impressive vista. Views to the north and the east from this point are fairly restricted due to the low level of this point.

- 4.60 The view from immediately outside of Hamilton Square station can be defined as a strategic view and a local vista. As Hamilton Street rises away to the west the tower of Birkenhead Town Hall is clearly visible. The road falls to the east, towards the waterfront although little of the river is visible from this point due to the presence of the buildings on Chester Street adjacent to the Woodside Hotel, and the Woodside Business Park. The road signage in this area also blocks some of the best views from Hamilton Square Station towards the waterfront.
- 4.61 The corner of Bridge Street, where it meets with Chester Street, outside of the Grade II listed Worsely Arms public house, to the rear of the Woodside Hotel provides a further strategic view and local vista. Due to the sloping topography of the site views to the east, north east and south east of this strategic viewpoint are reasonably clear, providing good views across and into Liverpool, and other parts of the study area itself, despite being partially blocked/limited in places by the Woodside Hotel, Great Western House, and some of the other buildings located between this point and the waterfront.
- 4.62 Local vistas are south eastwards along Church Street towards the former Cammell Laird shipyard and south along Chester Street towards the Queensway Mersey Tunnel.
- 4.63 The other important local vistas are:
- a. From the corner of Hamilton Street/Duncan Street, along Hamilton Street in both directions and into the square.
  - b. From the corner of Argyle Street/Price Street, south along Argyle Street and north east into the square.
  - c. From the corner of Cleveland Street and Argyle Street, south along Argyle Street, south east into the square and north west along Cleveland Street.
  - d. From the Statue of Queen Victoria to Cenotaph and Birkenhead Town Hall.
  - e. From the south west side of Hamilton Square, north east towards Hamilton Square station.
- 4.64 There are three towers within or on the boundary of the Conservation Area and these are significant to the overall character of the area and in particular to strategic views and local vistas into and out of the area as landmarks.
- 4.65 The most significant of the three towers is the Mersey Tunnel Ventilation tower located on Pacific Road. The second tower is located above Hamilton Square station, housing the lift machinery. The third landmark tower is the tower of Birkenhead Town Hall, now Wirral Museum.
- 4.66 The Tunnel Ventilation tower is a significant structure, dominating the Wirral coastline. Designed by Herbert J Rowse in the 1930's, the Art Deco design

characterised by cubic shapes and square towers, mimics the other ventilation towers on either side of the Mersey including those at North John Street, Pierhead and Union Street in Liverpool. It is less elegant than the white ventilation tunnels at North John Street and Liverpool's Pierhead but built of brick has a more gothic appearance, adding to its dominance on the waterfront, and over the Woodside site. There are two further ventilation towers visible at a distance. Although outside of the site, both of these towers are also visible from certain locations within the site.

4.67 The tunnel above Hamilton Square station is of a less significant scale but is nevertheless impressive. Its elevated position over the rest of the site make it highly visible from the waterfront, and its Italianate design make it quite unique to this part of Birkenhead. Also constructed from brick this structure is in keeping with other buildings in the area.

4.68 The tower of Birkenhead Town Hall, now the Wirral Museum is a classical design partly rebuilt by Henry Hartley after a fire destroyed the original tower (designed by C.O. Ellison & Son) in 1901. The copper dome of the tower is visible from almost all points within the site, and is a significant landmark for Hamilton Square and Birkenhead across Merseyside. The significant scale and grand design of each of the towers ensures that each of the towers act as a key node. Each of the three towers serve as significant major landmarks in this area of Birkenhead, and beyond.

## **E: Character Analysis (Architectural and Townscape)**

### **Character components**

4.69 Distinct components of Hamilton Square Conservation Area can be defined by activity or prevailing and current land uses as well as the architecture and historic qualities of individual buildings or groups of buildings.

4.70 The components of the Hamilton Square Conservation Areas are:

- a. Hamilton Square and Gardens;
- b. Argyle Street, Hamilton Street and Market Street Visual Envelope;
- c. The Chester Street/Bridge Street/Hamilton Street Environment; and
- d. Chester Street

4.71 Figure 5 identifies each of the components of the Hamilton Square Conservation Area.

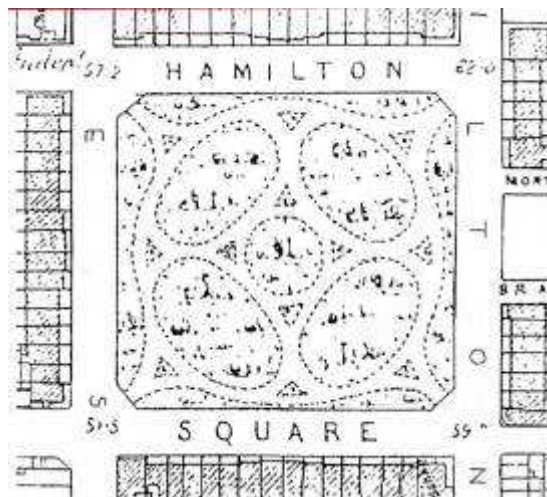
4.72 Each of these components will be examined in turn before presenting the key buildings and structures that also contribute to the character of the Conservation Area.



## Hamilton Square and Gardens

- 4.73 Hamilton Square (figure 6) is the only surviving realised portion of a grand residential design for Birkenhead set out in 1825 by James Gillespie Graham. The architectural lineage of this scheme links the area to another important example of Georgian classical town planning and architecture, notably the Edinburgh new town, where Gillespie Graham was also the architect.
- 4.74 As such the square is defined on all sides by the grand architecture of the 4 storey stone terraces, which retain their original residential character even though current land uses are associated with the role of Birkenhead Town Hall as the Borough's court of law.
- 4.75 Its plan form and layout is also defined by the original Gillespie Graham design, characterised by a rigid street grid, with remnants of the planned long, straight streets stretching beyond Hamilton Square itself, particularly along Argyle Street, Hamilton Street and Market Street that result in a tight urban form across the majority of the area.
- 4.76 The contribution of Hamilton Square to the special interest of the Conservation Area is not simply related to its plan form and layout. The grand scale of architecture is also important and is defined by; the height of the terraced properties that are predominantly 4 stories; their massing, being predominantly 3 rooms deep; the Neo-Classical detail including intriguing pavilion ends; and their construction in Storeton stone. The importance of these buildings is further iterated by their Grade I Listing (see figure 7).
- 4.77 The special interest is furthered by a sense of uniformity in the design of the terraces and their elevational treatment. Each of the four terraces possess a slightly different architectural style, but Gillespie Graham's original Neo-Classical design and detailing ensures that a sense of uniformity exists and when considered together delivers a clear sense of coherent planning.
- 4.78 The important features of the elevational treatment that provide this sense of uniformity and coherent planning are:
- i. Chimney stacks;
  - ii. Storeton stone;
  - iii. Black ironwork with gold detailing, specifically balconies and railings and gates at basement level;
  - iv. Pattern, size and proportion of window openings and windows (small pane double-hung sash and a 4, 5, 4, 3 vertical pattern of glazing bars);
  - v. Original stone entrance steps and landings; and
  - vi. Original doors and their distinctive furniture.

- 4.79 The rigid street grid, scale and uniformity of architecture, and elevational treatment also provide Hamilton Square with a distinct sense of enclosure, which is a particularly important characteristic of the special character of the Conservation Area and Hamilton Square itself.
- 4.80 The definition that the height, depth and spacing of the terraces provide results in a very strong sense of enclosure when standing in the square and its central gardens. This is only broken at each corner of the square where roads intersect and enter the square and by the important and strategic landmarks of Birkenhead Town Hall, the tower of Hamilton Square Station and the ventilation shaft of the Queensway Mersey Tunnel.
- 4.81 It is important to note also that these structures that are the only ones to break the sense of enclosure are those that have been built as key components of the areas civic infrastructure as it has developed over time.
- 4.82 Birkenhead Town Hall not only contributes to the special character of the Conservation and particularly Hamilton Square itself, it also stands as an imposing architectural element and the centrepiece of the magnificent cluster of stone terraces contributing individually to the grand scale of architecture.
- 4.83 The central gardens within Hamilton Square also contribute to its distinct character and the special interest of the Conservation Area.
- 4.84 The central garden was designed and enclosed for the exclusive use of the residents of the houses that Gillespie Graham aspired to create. The plan of the Hamilton Square gardens from around the year 1858 demonstrates its open aspect and formal arrangement.



- 4.85 A quote from the architectural historian Edward Hubbard corroborates the openness and formality of the original gardens as he regretted their;

*“facile formality bereft of large trees which would have offset the grandeur of the square.”*

- 4.86 The gardens were opened to the public in 1903 and although the gardens have been altered considerably over the years, particularly with the inclusion of areas of semi-mature landscaping that are especially prominent along the south-west and north-west boundaries, they still retain a certain degree of formality and openness, particularly in the area of the gardens that front Birkenhead Town Hall.
- 4.87 The sense of formality is enhanced by the presence of the statue of John Laird (1877) on the east side of the square; the Cenotaph (1925) opposite the Town Hall and a statue dedicated to Queen Victoria (1905) at the heart of the square.

### **Argyle Street, Hamilton Street and Market Street Visual Envelope**

- 4.88 Although Hamilton Square can be seen as a distinct element of the Conservation Area in its own right, it is set in context by the adjacent streets of Argyle, Hamilton and Market. These streets provide a complementary 'Visual Envelope' for the square and also reflect Gillespie Graham's grid iron plan for Birkenhead based upon the long, wide and seemingly endless streets stretching across the town from West to East. Argyle Street remains the best example as Hamilton and Market Street have had their long views shortened by modern infill development.
- 4.89 The three streets are characterised by a less grand scale of architecture (height, massing and elevational treatment) than the square but the terrace form still dominates the street scene reflecting the terraced form of the square and further defining the original street grid and tight urban form of the area.
- 4.90 When considered together Argyle Street, Hamilton Street and Market Street provide the 'visual envelope' for Hamilton Square, however, they also contribute individually to the special character of the Conservation Area. Both are considered in the following paragraphs.

### **Argyle Street**

- 4.91 Argyle Street is defined by its length and the terraced form of its three and four storey properties. The terraced form is only punctuated by intersecting streets, a rail cutting and two large detached buildings (a snooker hall and Indian Restaurant).



- 4.92 Argyle Street is also very much a commercial street with most of the ground floor facades incorporating typical retail or office shop fronts. As a commercial street it is also one of the main trafficked routes in the Conservation Area and as such displays much clutter associated with traffic movement and management.
- 4.93 Topography also defines Argyle Street as an individual component of the Conservation Area. The street slopes north-east to south-west from its highest point at Hamilton Square to its lowest point on the boundary of the Conservation Area at the junction with Conway Street, before rising away again steeply to join Borough Road further to the south-west.
- 4.94 The key components of Argyle Street's can therefore be defined as;
- a. a seemingly endless street;
  - b. a terrace form that mirrors the Neo-Classical design of Hamilton Square;
  - c. a main trafficked route; and
  - d. a sloping topography.
- 4.95 When considered together they present a sense of uniformity that gives Argyle Street its own character and contribute to the special interest of the Conservation Area.

### ***Hamilton Street***

- 4.96 Hamilton Street is split into two sections by the public open space in front of Birkenhead Town Hall. Both sections act as a visual envelope for Hamilton Square.
- 4.97 Originally these two sections of Hamilton Street would have appeared as an extension of the stone terraces that frame the Town Hall on the east side of the square due to the scale, form and elevational detail of their architecture. Over time however, a block either side of the stone terraces has been cleared and replaced by surface car parking. Although the continuity of the building line has diminished, the open space either side of the stone terraces frames the east side of the square and further accentuates the importance of the setting of the Town Hall.
- 4.98 The continuity of the building line along the east side of the square has not been totally lost. It is still retained visually by the scale, form and detailing of the architecture on the west side of Hamilton Street.
- 4.99 The scale, form and detailing of this architecture is different on the two sections of Hamilton Street and can be differentiated as the northern and southern sections.
- 4.100 The northern section of Hamilton Street is characterised by individual buildings of a scale and design that directly reflects the Neo Classical design of the stone terraces of Hamilton Square with grand three storey stone façades, similar

patterning, size and proportion of windows and window openings and black iron work detailing. Even the modern infill adjacent to Hamilton Street Station respects the scale, design and window opening/patterning of the adjacent properties.



- 4.101 Hamilton Square Station is located at the northern most end of this section of Hamilton Street and acts as the gateway to Hamilton Square.
- 4.102 The southern section of Hamilton Street is defined by the interesting mix of architectural styles incorporated within the terrace of 3 storey properties that runs along its western side.
- 4.103 The architectural styles range from brick and stone Georgian properties with classical detailing to more ornate detailing in stone and brick to some of the facades.
- 4.104 The height of the buildings and the spacing and proportion of windows/window openings however, give this mixed terrace a sense continuity that provides a visual relationship with Hamilton Square.
- 4.105 The ground floor uses are commercial in their function and the facades reflect this and add to the character of the street.
- 4.106 The continuity and character of the west side of the street is not repeated on the east side of the street as a result of clearance and the only built frontage that remains on the east side of the street bears more of a relationship to Market Street than to Hamilton Street.





### **Market Street**

- 4.107 Market Street is split into three sections by intersecting roads (Argyle Street and Hamilton Street) each with a slightly different character and function.
- 4.108 The first section is the core of the street defined by the parallel Argyle Street and Hamilton Street. The section is defined by a fine grained architecture that is not evident elsewhere in the Conservation Area. This is accentuated by the narrow width of the street and the narrow three storey properties on both sides of the street that provides a sense of enclosure and tight urban form.
- 4.109 The ground floor uses identify with the name of the street that they are located on, being a mixture of small independent retailers and public houses. Recent refurbishment and new build development has seen residential use introduced to Market Street, particularly at first and second floor.



- 4.110 The north-west section of Market Street does not have any discerning character that relates to its mix of land uses; retail, commercial and residential, and the style and scale of architecture. Although this is the case, there still remains a feeling of continuity from the central section of Market Street, which dramatically ends at the boundary of the Conservation Area where the scale and built form disappears from the streetscene.



- 4.111 The north-east section of Market Street lacks any clear definition with row of retail and commercial properties on its northern side that extend the continuity of the core section of Market Street. Beyond this the structure of the street disappears

with areas of surface car parking, vacant open space and individual buildings standing alone.

- 4.112 The Antiques Triangle marks an important gateway to the Conservation Area at the south-east end of Market Street. This Antiques Triangle was once an eclectic collection of antique and bric-a-brac shops that as part of the Hamilton Quarter investment was refurbished to provide 52 flats and ground floor commercial and retail units.



#### **Chester Street/Bridge Street/Hamilton Street Environment**

- 4.113 The Chester Street/Bridge Street/Hamilton Street area (figure 8) is important to the Conservation Area for its reference to the historic development of Hamilton Square and Woodside and its archaeology.
- 4.114 Traditionally a transport interchange area, much of the character and configuration of the Chester Road area today derives from this historic function:
- a. the Woodside Royal Mail Ferry Hotel;
  - b. George Francis Train's street railway;
  - c. Woodside Station train, tram and ship terminus;
  - d. Hamilton Square Station;
  - e. Queensway Mersey Tunnel; and
  - f. Cammel Laird shipyards.
- 4.115 All of these elements still retain a historic reference in the area that include the Woodside Hotel, Hamilton Square Station, the relocated street railway, a remaining wall from Woodside Station (visible from the Merseytravel Bus Layover) and the Shore Road Pumping Station.
- 4.116 Despite the demise in importance of this area as a transport interchange in recent years with the declining role of the commuter service, and the subsequent decline in importance of the bus station, albeit just outside the Conservation Area, the area is still a major transport hub providing a range of public transport options to travel throughout Wirral to Chester and North Wales and to Liverpool. When

considered alongside the adjacent Grade II\* Listed Ferry Terminal and Lairage, the Chester Street/Bridge Street/Hamilton Street retains important historic references to the development of Woodside, Hamilton Square and Birkenhead and will remain so for its future.

- 4.117 Much of the Chester Street/Bridge Street/Hamilton Street area is also characterised by open space, a further legacy of the former use as a transport interchange for trams, trains to Chester, Liverpool and cross country to London and the Mersey Ferry to Liverpool.
- 4.118 Recognition of this open character led to investment in this space as part of the Mersey Development Corporation programme in the 1980's use as performance space, but has seen little use. Ownership and responsibility for this area is not clearly defined resulting in it being poorly maintained. The quality of the public realm has suffered as a result, becoming further degraded.
- 4.119 The remaining spaces within the Chester Street/Bridge Street/Hamilton Street area are used as private car parking areas, and are of low environmental quality, particularly noticeable around the Woodside Hotel. Indeed the general environment around the hotel is poor as it is surrounded on all sides by a busy public highway and large expanses of private surface car parking and low quality ancillary buildings all of which detract from its setting as a building with local interest as well as the overall visual and sensory quality of this environment.
- 4.120 As a structure the Woodside Hotel is the oldest building in this part of the Conservation Area and the north-east extent of its curtilage represents a marker to the original line of the river bank prior to the dock system being developed. As such the Woodside Hotel is one of the first structures in view when exiting the ferry terminal.
- 4.121 Of the other significant buildings within the area, the Waterloo Buildings retain a presence over Bridge Street and provide a visual reference to Hamilton Square beyond and the Worsley Arms Public House and adjacent properties, 27 to 35 Bridge Street, on the corner of Bridge Street with Chester Street exhibit architectural merit, which is unfortunately missing from the modern infill development immediately adjacent.
- 4.122 Number 4 Hamilton Street and the Pier Hotel on the corner of Canning Street also exhibit architectural merit on either side of a poor quality modern commercial infill development that is currently vacant. The Shore Road (Mersey Railway) Pumping Station, constructed in striking red stone, stands in splendid isolation beyond these buildings. The remains of its chimney are noted in the Merseyside Archives as historically important.
- 4.123 The collection of buildings just described provide definition to the south-west and north-west sides of an otherwise open Chester Street/Bridge Street/Hamilton Street area. The space to the front of Bridge Street is particularly well defined and therefore important to the character and special interest of the Conservation Area.



### **Chester Street**

- 4.124 The final component of the Conservation Area is Chester Street that marks its eastern boundary. Only the western side of the street is within the Conservation Area, although there is a visual relationship with development and space on the east side of the street, particularly the residential Mortimer and Brandon Streets that end key vistas either side of Birkenhead Town Hall from within Hamilton Square and the open spaces of the former Woodside Station rail cutting and surface car park at the junction with Church Street.
- 4.125 The Worsley Arms Public House and adjacent buildings mark the gateway to the Chester Road environment from the north and provide some architectural interest although the buildings themselves are in a poor state of repair.
- 4.126 The Police Headquarters stands adjacent to this group of buildings and represents an example of what was at the time considered to be a state of the art police station. It is an interesting modern building situated between a group of more traditional and historic buildings and the important Birkenhead Town Hall.
- 4.127 The Police Headquarters also has a functional relationship with the Town Hall in its role as the Borough's court of law.
- 4.128 The Antiques Triangle marks the edge of the Conservation Area at the end of Chester Street and in between this and the Town Hall stands a row of two-storey red brick terraces that are similar to the terraces fronting Mortimer and Brandon Street and provide an example of the terracing that would have been prevalent in this part of Birkenhead prior to the development of the Queensway tunnel.
- 4.129 A rectangular modern infill residential development completes the western side of Chester Street. This development has not mimicked the adjacent terraces but has attempted to reflect the gable end design and general scale.

### **Key buildings**

- 4.130 The Hamilton Square Conservation Area includes a number of important buildings many of which are listed and others that are of particular local or architectural interest. The schedule below incorporates those buildings that are listed. Figure 7 illustrates the location of the listed buildings within the Conservation Area. Their main elements of interest are contained within the schedule contained within Appendix B.

List Reference	Address	Building	Grade
SJ 3489	Argyle Street	Nos. 28 and 30	II
SJ 3288NE	Market Street	Nos. 3-9	II
SJ3288NW	Market Street	No. 29-47	II
SJ3288NE	Mortimer Street	Nos. 1-6	II*
SJ3289	Hamilton Square	Nos. 1-18	I
SJ3289	Hamilton Square	Monument to Queen Victoria	II
SJ3388NE	Hamilton Square	Town Hall	II*
SJ3288NE	Hamilton Street	Nos. 42 and 44	II

SJ3289	Hamilton Street	Pair of K6 Telephone Kiosks at corner of Duncan Street	II
SJ3289	Bridge Street	Nos. 23-31	II
SJ3288NE	Chester Street	Sessions Court	II
SJ3288NW	Argyle Street	The Letters Public House	II
SJ3288NW	Argyle Street	No. 22	II
SJ3288NE	Hamilton Square	Nos. 58-63	I
SJ3288NE	Hamilton Square	War Memorial	II
SJ3289	Hamilton Street	Nos. 24, 26 and 28	II
SJ3288NE	Hamilton Street	No. 50	II
SJ3289	Hamilton Street	Hamilton Square Station	II
SJ3288NE	Hamilton Street	The Copperfield Public House	II
SJ3288NE	Market Street	Nos. 11 and 13	II
SJ3288NE	Market Street	Nos. 25 and 27	II
SJ3288NW	Market Street	Nos. 56-66	II
SJ3288NE	Hamilton Street	No 56	II
SJ3288NW	Hamilton Square	Nos. 35-51	I
SJ3289	Hamilton Square	Statue of John Laird	II
SJ3289	Hamilton Square	Nos. 19-34	I
SJ3288NE	Duncan Street	No. 6	II
SJ3288NW	Argyle Street	Nos. 38-50	II
SJ3388NW	Argyle Street	Nos. 32, 34 and 36	II
SJ3289	Shore Road	Pumping Station and boundary wall	II
SJ3288NE	Chester Street	Nos. 94-104	II
SJ3289	Argyle Street	Nos. 19 and 21	II
SJ3288NE	Market Street	No. 12 and Glass Barrell Public House	II
SJ3288NE	Hamilton Square	Nos. 52-57	I
SJ3288NE	Hamilton Square	Nos. 30, 32 and 34	II
SJ3288NE	Hamilton Square	Midland Bank	II
SJ3288NE	Mortimer Street	Nos. 1-6	II*
SJ3288NE	Brandon Street	No. 17	II
SJ3288NE	Cross Street	Nos. 5-15	II
SJ3288NE	Gertrude Street	Former Stables and Carriage Houses to nos. 52-57	II
SJ3289	Price Street	No. 2A	II

4.131 The following buildings are not listed but have some local interest or architectural merit/interest:

a. Woodside Hotel

- i. The Woodside Hotel is currently occupied as a public house and is the oldest built structure within the Chester Street/Bridge Street/Hamilton Street area, completed in 1833.
- ii. Pevsner and Hubbard in 1971 stated that it was an example of Birkenhead's existence as a resort, but that the symmetrical principal elevation is spoilt by recent alterations and additions. The river formerly nearer, which marks a historical line of the river

bank, with the present Woodside Ferry approach being reclaimed land.

- iii. Indeed, the Woodside Hotel does not have significant architectural quality, not least as the interior has been completely altered over the years, and additions to the exterior, including a extension to the east side of the hotel facing towards the bus station and the River Mersey are low quality.

b. Police Headquarters, Chester Street

- i. This building represents an example of a state of the art police station with every technological assistance and equipment incorporated available at the time it was opened by Sir David Maxwell Fyfe, Secretary of State for the Home Department in 1953.
- ii. It is an interesting modern building situated between a group of more traditional and historic buildings and the important Birkenhead Town Hall and is impressive when lit at night.
- iii. It also has an important functional relationship with the Town Hall in its role as the Borough's court of law.

c. Pier Hotel, Canning Street.

- i. The frontage of the public bar retains the original Birkenhead Brewery Crest and a distinctive stone façade that gives this building particular architectural and historic interest.

d. No. 70 Argyle Street

- i. This is a red brick building with stone detailing around the windows, cornices and third storey dormer windows. Unfortunately the building stands on its own adjacent to a railway cutting and has proved difficult to convert or refurbish. It is therefore currently at risk.

### **Intrusion and damage**

4.132 There are, however, some elements which have a negative impact on the character of the conservation area and these are summarised below:

#### ***Surface car parks***

a. Hamilton Street/Duncan Street

- i. This surface car park has replaced a block of buildings that would originally have retained the continuity of the stone terracing on the east side of Hamilton Square.

- ii. It has sparse tree cover to the edges fronting Hamilton Street and Duncan Street but this does not offset the visual intrusion of a poor quality space and many parked cars.
- b. Market Street
  - i. A vacant piece of land between the Glass Barrell Public House and the Hornblowers Public House has been utilised as a small surface car park. It has a low wooden fence around it and is not surfaced properly.
  - ii. It backs onto a single storey side extension to the Hornblowers Public House and a palisade fence on its northern boundary.
- c. Woodside Hotel
  - i. Figure 8 Chester Street/Bridge Street/Hamilton Street illustrates the expanse of surface car parking that surrounds the Woodside Hotel.
  - ii. The surface of the car parking areas range from tarmac with formal markings to simple concrete covering. As such the public realm has no coherence or visual quality and detracts from the setting of the Hotel that is building of local interest and the special interest of the Conservation Area as a whole.
- d. Chester Street
  - i. This surface car park is outside the Conservation Area boundary but opposite the Police Headquarters building on Chester Street.
  - ii. The surface car park has been surfaced in black tarmac and surrounds a brick building housing a sub station. The visual appearance of the car park opposite an important local building, adjacent to a good quality area of terraced houses and close to the Birkenhead Town Hall is poor and detrimental to these important buildings and groups of buildings.
  - iii. It also breaks the continuity of the built form on the east side of the street.

### ***Infill development***

- e. The east side of Argyle Street contains two stand alone buildings that break up the continuity of the terraced form that begins at Hamilton Square. The two buildings are in use as a snooker hall, which appears to have been converted from a cinema, and an Indian Restaurant. Both buildings are not of the scale or form that is consistent with the rest of Argyle Street and represent an area of the Conservation Area where the characteristics of its special interest begin to break down close to the

southern boundary. The snooker hall is in poor repair but could if refurbished sensitively provide architectural interest. The Indian restaurant does not have much architectural merit.

- f. A new development of residential flats has been built between the Waterloo Buildings and the Worsley Arms Public House Bridge Street. The architecture, yellow brick and scale of the residential development does not complement the historic and listed buildings that it stands beside and does not enhance the character of the Conservation Area at this point.
- g. A modern office development has been developed between number 4 Hamilton Street and the Pier Hotel Canning Street that is a visual intrusion to an otherwise historic and positive architectural setting, especially with Hamilton Square Station and Shire Road Pumping Station on either side. The white render, red brick and red window frames are all uncharacteristic of this component of the Conservation Area as is the form and detailing does not protect or enhance the special character.

### ***Vacant space***

- h. Chester Street/Market Street
  - i. A small area of tarmac and grassed vacant land is located on the corner of Chester Street and Market Street, opposite the refurbished Antiques Triangle.
  - ii. This is an important gateway into the Conservation Area and the vacant land and the advertising hoarding that encloses it on two sides are detrimental to the character and special interest at this important south-east entrance.

### **Neutral areas**

4.133 Whilst not detrimental to the character of the Conservation Area, there are two environments that do not enhance the character or special interest of the Conservation Area:

- a. Woodside Hotel
  - i. As described in paragraph 4.131, the Woodside Hotel is a building of local interest. Its contribution to the special interest of the Conservation Area, however, is offset by the environment that it is set within.
  - ii. It is located within the centre of a large vehicular gyratory that serves the busy A41 and A554 highways. As such the Hotel and its curtilage are separated from the rest of the character area as well as being subjected to the noise, pollution and movement from the constant and heavy flow of traffic. The gyratory generates a

negative visual and sensory experience within the character area as well as presenting a poor setting for the Hotel.

- iii. This setting is not aided by the recent alterations and additions to the exterior of the building or the ancillary buildings, structures and large expanse of formal and informal surface car parking within the hotel's curtilage. This results in a complex of buildings and spaces that lacks quality and coherence in both its built form, open space and public realm to the detriment of the character of the area and the special interest of the whole Conservation Area.
- iv. The open space in front of the Woodside Ferry Terminal furthers this negative experience because of its adjacency to the frontage of the Hotel. The space is a large, wind swept area, which has been poorly maintained in recent years. The Old Lairage area which holds the submarine vessel is particularly poorly maintained, and has become filled with litter and dirty water.
- v. As well as being underused, and windswept the area is also very cluttered containing railings, lamp posts, a range of different ground levels, seating and street furniture which has been poorly maintained, and a variety of streetscape materials. This area is surrounded by the bus station which also reduces its attractiveness
- vi. There are positive elements that are in the vicinity of the Woodside Hotel and its immediate environment, most notably to the south-west and north-west that incorporate the Waterloo Buildings, 4 Hamilton Street, Hamilton Square Station, the Pier Hotel and the Shore Road Pumping Station, all of which are listed.
- vii. These buildings and the spaces that they overlook counter balance the detrimental visual and sensory impact of the A41/A554 gyratory and Woodside Hotel environment that can be surmised to result in an area that has a neutral influence on the special interest of the Conservation Area.

b. Hamilton Street Surface Car Park

- i. One of the cleared blocks on either side of the stone terraces that define the east side of Hamilton Square has been replaced by a formal surface car park.
- ii. The boundary of the car park onto Hamilton Street is 1.8 metre stone wall with stone coping and 2 metre plus stone gate posts. The stone is one that is characteristic of the stone that has been used to construct many of the historic and period buildings within the Conservation Area, for example, number 4 Hamilton Street.

- iii. Although the car park has interrupted the continuity of the building line that is likely to have once existed along Hamilton Street, it, along with the other surface car park at the junction with Duncan Street, frames the east side of the square and further accentuates the importance of the setting of the Town Hall.
- iv. Any detrimental impact that this surface car park makes to the Conservation Area is further offset by the stone boundary wall and gate posts fronting onto Hamilton Street.

### **Problems. Pressures and Capacity for Change**

- 4.134 The previous paragraphs of this section have identified particular problems within the Conservation Area that have a detrimental and neutral impact on its character and special interest.
- 4.135 One of main problems within the Conservation Area is the poor quality surface car parks that as well as having a visual impact also break down an otherwise tight, dense urban form
- 4.136 The other main problem relates to insensitive infill developments that do not respect the scale, form, detailing or materials of buildings across the Conservation Area. As a consequence this breaks down the tight, dense urban form and sense of enclosure that gives the area its character and special interest.
- 4.137 Given the nature of the historic development of the Conservation Area set out earlier in this section it can be inferred that these problems are symptoms of historic development that reflect an area that has been the subject of grand plans for its transformation that have never been fully realised.
- 4.138 The Conservation Area, particularly Hamilton Square has seen significant investment that has been focused on protecting and enhancing the character and special interest as well as providing a sustainable economic future that will also serve to protect and enhance this important urban area.
- 4.139 This investment has achieved positive change within the Conservation Area and has never been able to secure its sustainable economic future.
- 4.140 The prime example of this situation is the Hamilton Quarter SRB project that sought to transform the area into an arts and cultural quarter. Although elements of this have been achieved, a vitality and vibrancy has never been able to be sustained in the long term and there is evidence to suggest that Hamilton Square is becoming increasingly reliant on the legal profession and their associated businesses that cluster close to the Borough's court of law contained within Birkenhead Town Hall.
- 4.141 Investment into the area has also affected detrimental change and the "Reilly Plan" of 1946 is testament to this. The plan influenced great change as a result of the construction of the Queensway Mersey Tunnel, mostly to the detriment of the Conservation Area, particularly to the trade and custom of Argyle Street and

Market Street and the large residential areas to the south and south east. This is a legacy that is still felt today and can be evidenced by the residential new build and conversion that has occurred along Argyle and Market Street that have historically been focuses of retail and enterprise.

- 4.142 Inevitably the economic and social future of an area is related back to its land use. To be able to sustain the long term future of an urban area, particularly one that is historically and architecturally important, a viable land use has to be supported and this is a challenge for the Hamilton Square Conservation Area in the future.
- 4.143 Recent regeneration projects have been produced that seek to address this situation and contribute to a strategy for the sustainable future of the area.
- 4.144 The Woodside Development Area Regeneration Strategy was completed in 2005 and considered the development and regeneration opportunity at Woodside, Birkenhead and presents a preferred strategy to achieving the area's potential.
- 4.145 The strategy was also prepared in response to a there being a growing development interest in sites in the Woodside area and Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council proactively seeking to secure a successful and sustainable future for Woodside and Hamilton Square.
- 4.146 The strategy was premised on creating a new, distinct, mixed use Quarter which complements the offer of Birkenhead Town Centre and supports the continued regeneration of Hamilton Square and set out some key development aims;
- a. To create a landmark destination for Birkenhead to which people want to return again and again;
  - b. To preserve, as far as possible, key views to Liverpool Waterfront;
  - c. To enhance, as far as possible, and animate the key views from Liverpool;
  - d. To create and maintain and proactively use a high quality public realm;
  - e. To maximise accessibility to the site, particularly for pedestrians and those using public transport, whilst minimising the impact of car parking on the public realm;
  - f. To create a central 'promenade' or 'causeway' linking Hamilton Square, through the Woodside Hotel site and on to the Woodside Ferry Terminal. This should be a key focus of visitor and leisure attractions as part of creating a vibrant 'street' scene;
  - g. To minimise the barrier effect of the A41 Chester Road; and
  - h. To better integrate the Pacific Road Arts and Exhibition Centre and the Tram Museum into the Woodside area.



- 4.147 A Tall Buildings Strategy has also recently been completed to further inform and guide the growing development interest in the Woodside Development Area in particular and protect and enhance the character and special interest of the Hamilton Square Conservation Area.
- 4.148 These strategies should be referred to alongside this Conservation Area Appraisal in order to inform any development proposal within the Woodside Development Area and Hamilton Square Conservation Area.
- 4.149 These strategies, the development interest and proactive work of Wirral Borough Council clearly indicate that there is capacity and pressure for change within and directly adjacent to the Hamilton Square Conservation Area. This change must be managed sensitively and carefully in the context of protecting and enhancing the character and special interest of the Conservation Area set out in this Appraisal.
- 4.150 The best way to achieve this is for a Conservation Area Management Plan to be developed to support this Appraisal document in managing change. This is the responsibility of Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council.

## 5.0 Boundary Changes

### Introduction

- 5.1 An important aspect of the Conservation Area appraisal process is considering where the boundary of the conservation area should be drawn.
- 5.2 For existing areas, the boundary has already been defined, however, the urban environment evolves over time and the appropriateness of current boundaries should therefore be re-assessed on a regular basis, which is suggested by English Heritage as a five-year cycle.

### Appropriateness of the Current Boundary

- 5.3 This appraisal has demonstrated that the character of the Hamilton Square Conservation Area derives from 6 component areas that incorporate similar architectural, spatial and sensory elements that define the Conservation Areas overall special interest as well as contributing their own character as a further contribution to the special interest.
- 5.4 The similar architectural, spatial and sensory elements can be defined as the:
  - a. Gillespie Graham street grid;
  - b. Long, wide and seemingly endless streets;
  - c. Sense of enclosure and tight urban form;
  - d. Scale, form and detailing of terraced and individual buildings with particular reference to the stone terraces surrounding Hamilton Square; and
  - e. Strategic views and local vistas.
- 5.5 The detail provided in Section 4 presents the individual character of each of these component areas that also contributes to the special interest of the Conservation Area.
- 5.6 On this basis the appraisal included within Section 4 concurs with the boundary extension designated in 1994 and at the present time does not recommend any reassessment of this boundary.

### Future Assessment

- 5.7 The appraisal, however, has identified that the immediate environment surrounding the Woodside Hotel in conjunction with the open space in front of the Woodside Ferry Terminal, is detrimental to the character and special interest of the Conservation Area and that it is only the existence of the Waterloo Buildings, 4 Hamilton Street, Hamilton Square Station, the Pier Hotel and the Shore Road

Pumping Station that provides a balance to ensure that the overall impact is neutral rather than detrimental or negative.

- 5.8 Given this situation and the future development potential of this area as advocated by the Woodside Development Area, Tall Buildings Study and Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council, future reviews of this boundary, particularly with regard to a Conservation Management Plan, should monitor this environment closely.

## **Appendix A: Borough Council Conservation Policies**

### **Introduction**

The Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council Local Plan (adopted) contains a comprehensive set of conservation policies. These are as follows:

## **Appendix B: Schedule of Buildings and Structures with Special Interest**

## **Appendix C: Historic Maps**

## Bibliography

- Wirral Metropolitan Borough Local Plan (adopted February 2000);
- Historic Towns and Cities in England's Northwest;
- Pevsner Architectural Guides Liverpool, Joseph Sharples;
- Hamilton Square Design Guide;
- Birkenhead An Illustrated History;
- Conservation of European Cities – Birkenhead European Commission Studies;
- Merseyside Archaeological Service Designation Record
- Merseyside Archaeological Service Sites and Monument Record
- Wirral Urban Areas Survey Report 1983, Merseyside County Council/Merseyside County Museum
- Extracts from Merseyside Archaeological Service Records Relating to Hamilton Square Conservation Area:
- Pevsner and Hubbard, 1971
- Rees, 1991
- Ashmore, 1982
- Dodgson, 1972
- Woodside Development Area Masterplan Strategy

