



CLIFTON PARK CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

A Report for Metropolitan Borough of Wirral by Donald Insall Associates Ltd

June 2004

CLIFTON PARK CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

CONTENTS

SECTION	PAGE
1.0 INTRODUCTION	3
1.1 Background	3
1.2 Scope and Structure	3
2.0 LOCATION	3
2.1 Location Context	3
2.2 Study Area Boundary	3
3.0 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT	4
3.1 Early History of Surrounding Area	4
3.2 The Early Development of Clifton Park	4
3.3 Late Victorian Development	6
3.4 Later 20 th Century Developments	6
4.0 PRECEDENTS	7
4.1 Architectural Precedents	7
4.2 Other Buildings by Walter Scott	7
5.0 TOWNSCAPE CHARACTER AND KEY BUILDINGS	8
5.1 Clifton Road	8
5.2 Area around Circular Road	9
5.3 Whetstone Lane	9
5.4 Planting and Landscaping	9
5.5 Boundary Treatment and Streetscape	10
6.0 ARCHITECTURE AND MATERIALS	10
6.1 Typical Features	
7.0 NEGATIVE FACTORS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCEMENT	11
7.1 Overview	11
7.2 Development Pressures	12
7.3 Quality of Later 20 th Century Development	13
7.4 Unsympathetic Extensions	14
7.5 Alteration to Historic Detailing and Materials	14
7.6 Boundary Treatment and Streetscape	15
8.0 RECOMMENDED CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARY	16
8.1 Summary Justification	16
8.2 The Proposed Boundary	16

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIVE PLATES AND ADDENDA

- 01 Plan Showing Study Area, Proposed Conservation Area Boundary and Listed Buildings
- 02 Plan Showing Approximate Ages of Buildings
- 03 Plan Showing Contribution of Buildings to Area
- 04 Plan Showing Historic Buildings Demolished Since 1976
- 05 Tranmere Tithe Map c. 1843
- 06 1856 map
- 07 1863 map
- 08 1872 OS map
- 09 1898 OS map
- 10 1912 OS map
- 11 1936 OS map

Appendix A - Building Descriptions and Photo References

Appendix B - Listing Descriptions

Appendix C - Extract from 'The Hundred of Wirral', by William Williams Mortimer, 1845

Appendix D - Text from Visit by the Victorian Society, 1976

Appendix E - Photograph of no.s 5-9 Hollybank Road (Now Demolished)

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

This report has been prepared by Donald Insall Associates on behalf of Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council. Its purpose is to advise on the creation of a Conservation Area, which would assist in the protection and enhancement of Clifton Park. It has been a concern that growing development pressures, resulting from the regeneration of Birkenhead, may threaten and erode the aesthetic and historical qualities of the area. The designation of a Conservation Area would provide the Local Planning Authority with additional powers to protect and enhance the areas special characteristics.

Mark Smith, a student of Liverpool University and Mr Hudson a local resident, are to be thanked for their contribution of historical plans and documents.

1.2 Scope and Structure

The scope of this Conservation Area Appraisal is based on the guidance published by English Heritage and is presented under the following section headings:

- Location
- Historical Development.
- Precedents
- Character Zones.
- Townscape and Key building.
- Architecture and Materials.
- Negative Factors and Opportunities for Enhancement .
- Recommended Conservation Areas Boundary.

2.0 LOCATION

2.1 Location Context

The study area is located in a residential area immediately south-west of the main commercial centre of Birkenhead. Just beyond the study area boundaries are Birkenhead Central Station, the Pyramids Shopping Centre and the Birkenhead tunnel entrance. Slightly further a field to the north-west lies Birkenhead Park and to the north Hamilton Square.

2.2 Study Area Boundary (See Plan No. 01)

The study area is approximately triangular in shape. To the south-west it is bounded partly by Whetstone Lane, leading towards the Wallasey docks. To the south-east it follows and includes both sides of Clifton Road. The northern boundary runs along The Woodlands and then cuts back through terraced houses to reach Whetstone

Lane. It should be noted that the area that has been studied is slightly more extensive than the area recommended for Conservation Areas status.

3.0 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

3.1 Early History of Surrounding Area

The early 19th century saw Birkenhead quickly rise from being a small isolated settlement, with a population of around 100, to being a thriving town with income from the shipping trade and a number of resort hotels. Although the name Birkenhead is of Viking origin, the town itself has relatively little of historical interest before the 19th Century; the two notable exceptions being Birkenhead Priory, dating back to the 13th century and the river ferry crossing it provided.

During the 1820s, 30s and early 1840s, Birkenhead grew from a small village to a burgeoning town. Its rise in fortunes being given impetus by its location on the River Mersey and its proximity to the expanding seaport and mercantile centre of Liverpool. Between 1800 and 1830 the population rose from 109 to 2,500. In 1820 a steam ferry service commenced, allowing easy access to Liverpool.

By 1824, William Laird, an industrialist who had established an engineering works and shipyard in the growing town, commissioned architect Gillespie Graham to set out grand plans for expansion. Roadways were constructed to a gridiron plan with the intention that new development should be to a grand scale and buildings faced in stone. This vision began to be realised in the building of Hamilton Square which commenced in 1825 and eventually completed around the end of the 1830s. A Town and Market Hall was constructed in 1833-5, to be replaced by the present Town Hall in 1883. Birkenhead Park was commenced in 1843, to a design by Joseph Paxton, and opened four years later. It is reputed to be the first publicly financed and accessible park and became a model for many others around the world, including Central Park in New York.

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 and Clifton Park 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. In 1824 Laird established a boiler works and shipbuilding yard with the main dock complex opening in 1847. The first half of the 19th century also saw the transport infrastructure of the peninsular take shape. The railway line opened to Chester in 1843, and horse buses ran from around 1848 between Woodside and Oxton. Slightly later in 1860 a tramway was built connecting Woodside ferry with Birkenhead Park, running along Argyle and Conway Streets.

3.2 The Early Development of Clifton Park

Clifton Park was laid out by developer Captain William Sharp to a design by the architect Walter Scott circa 1840, who is also reputed to have designed most of the early houses. The area was intended as an opulent suburb for the wealthy of Birkenhead. It complimented Birkenhead Park which provided a more spacious

residential environment compared to Hamilton Square and the earlier terraces. The prior history of the Clifton Park area has not been researched in detail as part of this study, however, the earliest tithe map evidence (1843) available at the Cheshire Record Office has been examined. It shows large villas built along Clifton Road which must at that stage have been only recently laid out. It also indicates large properties on Whetstone Lane which appear part of an older pattern of routes. Within the triangle formed by these roads and a stream and woodland belt to the north, is an area shown on the plan as ornamental landscape with a central circular driveway and connecting paths.



Number 47, Clifton Road, an original house in the development, by Walter Scott

This obviously ‘planned’ landscape has two possible explanations. It may possibly predate the new residential development and be a part of the private grounds of an earlier single residence. There is no map evidence available to support this theory and it is also counteracted by reports that it was wasteland prior to development (see extract from *The Hundred of Wirral*, by William Williams Mortimer, c.1845). The landscape could, perhaps more likely, have been laid out as an integral part of the new housing layout, so that the large villas built around its perimeter could benefit from the green-space and the opportunities for outdoor walks and recreation it afforded (footpaths link to Clifton Road at three points). If this was a purpose-built parkland, it would represent a small scale version of the concept seen in Birkenhead Park or Princess Park (Liverpool) of similar date. The location of Clifton Park may have been chosen as it provided possible views across the Mersey towards Liverpool. This raised position may have also helped residents avoid the fumes coming from the neighbouring industrial sites. However, the advantage of this position was reportedly soon to be lost, as a gas works was opened to the East of Clifton Road, apparently causing unpleasant smells.

3.3 Late Victorian Development

The early 19th century development boom of Birkenhead had apparently come to an abrupt end by the mid 1840s. Difficulties had set in with the carrying out of the original Gillespie scheme and works to the town and docks suspended. Birkenhead's population reportedly fell between 1841-51, and its wealth dried up, losing out to the success of neighbouring Liverpool's docks.

This sudden depression within Birkenhead seems to explain the almost total cease of building work with Clifton Park for a few decades from just after 1850. The 1876 OS plan shows less progress than could have been expected since the 1840s. The lower section of the western side of Clifton Road was largely completed within 10 years of the park's commencement. The 1876 plan does, however, indicate the commencement of a second phase; two pairs of semi detached houses appear on the circular section of Lowwood Road. Stylistically these also mark a new era of building; constructed of machine pressed brick with timber decoration, they remain of a large scale, but are more modest in their aspirations.

Almost another twenty years pass before any further significant building work occurs. This time, it is the turn of mass housing. Blocks of terraces and semi-detached housing appear, although in massing and layout they are similar to many other terraces in the surrounding streets. Those within the Clifton Park Area are particularly enhanced by the wealth of detail on their facades and attractive setting created by the broken and often curved street layout.



Number 11 Circular Road (c 1880) and 46-50 Woodlands (c. 1890)

Again, this phase of development seems to be concentrated to a period of only a few years. Comparing the 1912 and 1898 OS plans, there is little difference. Indeed, only a handful of houses appear to have been built in the first half of the 20th century, therefore this period has only limited architectural significance within the area.

3.4 Later 20th Century Developments

Although there has 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 new 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 (Plan 04) shows that 11 historic buildings (appearing on

the 1898 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.



(Left) Photograph of numbers 38 & 40 Clifton Road, taken in 1982. (Right) Present day photograph of number 40, since demolition of number 38.



Photographs of coach house on Whetstone Lane, prior to demolition.

Although it is apparent that many buildings within the area are being repaired and / or restored, a high level of decay and neglect remains evident.

4.0 PRECEDENTS

4.1 Architectural Precedents

Although the formal classical style and materials of the Clifton Park can be seen in the buildings of Hamilton Square, the overall layout is clearly in stark contrast. The fluidity of the layout is better compared with that of Birkenhead Park, near which Scott also designed several houses. He designed The Gables on Slately Road in 1865 in which he also lived. Landour (c.1850) in Palm Grove is also attributed to him. Another similar example is Rock Park, a few miles along the Mersey, which is also a development of large villas, built between the late 1830s and early 1840s.

4.2 Other Buildings by Walter Scott

Although Scott was known to have been a prolific building designer in and around Birkenhead, there seem to be few buildings definitively attributed to him. The Market Cross (near the tunnel entrance on Cross and Market Streets) in Birkenhead, General Hospital (1862-3), Park Road North and the main building of Birkenhead School (1871) are examples of his larger buildings. His churches include Christ

Church, Kings Road, Higher Bebington (1857-9) and an old octagonal church (1861) on the site of the Methodist Church in Tranmere. Other works include Wroxhall Abbey, Irewell Bank and Boughton Hall.

5.0 TOWNSCAPE CHARACTER

5.1 Clifton Road

Clifton Road was principally laid out in the 1840s with large detached or semi-detached houses within spacious plots. The footprints of these original buildings take up on average approximately one quarter of their plot. On the western side on Clifton Road these earlier buildings are generally well set back from the Road. The eastern side seems to have a more varied building frontage line.

Although there has been much infilling between the 1890s and the present day along Clifton Road, its overall character remains dominated by the grand scale villas of the 1840s and 50s. Their confident architectural design with robust cornice and eaves details produce the effect that, even though they are set back from the road or partly screened by trees, the houses have a strong presence on the street scene.

Clifton Road is particularly impressive when approached from the higher Whetstone Lane end. Numbers 47 and 49 (built as a single detached building) proudly announce themselves at the top of the road. Their principal architectural facades face up and down the road, leaving a simpler street frontage. Facing it on the other side of the road, number 44 also allows its architectural exuberance to greet the passer-by with both side and front elevations.



An example of the variety of scale and character, seen particularly towards the lower end of Clifton Road. Adjacent house, numbers 20,22 and 24 Clifton Road.

The lower end of the road makes less of an impact. At the bottom the houses are of mixed age but have a consistent restrained scale (two fairly low storeys). In contrast, number 10, although almost certainly once impressive, is now hidden behind a screen of overgrown shrubs and trees. Its stone facing remains unchanged and retains the evidence of the soot and pollution of previous times. Slightly further up, four modern developments of apartments, together with two out of scale post-war semi-detached houses, gives a complete confusion of scale, materials and aesthetics. Although individually none of these buildings are of particularly poor design or build quality, they bear little relationship to the proportions or standards of the original buildings.

5.2 Area around Circular Road

Buildings are predominantly of brick. A few earlier villas form the centre point of this area with rows of terraced housing in surrounding streets. Four earlier villas are reminiscent of those on Clifton Road in terms of orderliness and scale, but are slightly less opulent in architectural detail. The unusual form of Circular Road immediately gives a unique and special feel to the area, even though much of its historic character is well hidden beneath a layer of modern alteration. Although not in a bad state of repair generally, the proliferation of different types of windows, doors, roof tiles and colours of paintwork, does give the road a slightly untidy feel.



Villa c. 1850 (number 8 Lowwood Grove) and terrace on Circular Road (c.1890)

5.3 Whetstone Lane

Although there are a few architecturally interesting buildings, there is a lack of any overriding character or style to the road. Many of the buildings themselves are worthy of protection (as suggested by their listed status) but there is little of interest to their setting. Numbers 140 and 142 are a positive asset to the road, whereas the current derelict state of number 144, although of a similar age, leaves that area of the road looking shabby and run-down.



Numbers 140/142 and 144 Whetstone Lane. Although of a similar date and both listed, they are of stark contrast in terms of condition.

5.4 Planting and landscaping

Although mixed in quality and quantity, the landscaping of the housing plots is vital not only to their appearance, but to the streetscape as a whole. Well maintained gardens in front of houses adds to the grand and lavish character, whereas a tarmacced car parking area neither flatters the original building or adds to any sort of pride. The well kept gardens, particularly along Clifton Road, allow the housing

frontages gradually to be revealed to the visitor adding to the level of interest and excitement.

5.5 Boundary treatments and streetscape

The boundary treatments to buildings within the area are immensely varied. Types vary from attractive stone or stone capped walls with cast iron railings through to concrete block walls and timber fences. The variety of heights and materials together with instances of neglect and ill-repair give many parts of the area a scruffy appearance. However, in many cases the original walls are at least partly still present. A further feature of the area is the many attractive gate posts. Most original gate posts are of stone, but some are of cast iron.

Little remains of the historic road and pavement materials. Roads are of tarmac and pavements generally of modern concrete slabs with some block paving as ‘features’. The area around Circular Road is block paved, without a separate pavement. Only very small and occasional patches of stone paving remain. There are a few interesting features such as decorative cast iron grates to road drains.

6.0 ARCHITECTURE AND MATERIALS

6.1 Typical Features

Most of the earlier houses, forming part of the original plan by Scott, are faced in buff sandstone. Some are rendered with stone dressings and quoins. The high quality of these materials together with the extravagance of the detailing around the eaves and openings is an indicator of the opulence and optimism of the time. Some elevations of houses are of brick where they are less obvious, e.g. st the sides, where they are well set back from road or screened by adjacent building. Stylistically, most have a neo-classical or Italianate feel, with pilasters, pedimented bays and columned porches being predominant. Most buildings have symmetry on at least one façade and are of simple geometric shapes in plan. A few gothic, asymmetrical examples, break this rule.



Number 42 and 44 Clifton, both designed by Scott and built between 1840 and 1850, are contrasting in style.

The slightly later houses of this period, built from around 1855 are still well designed, but show a distinct simplification of detail and are generally constructed from less expensive materials. Number 8 Lowwood Grove, for instance, built in the 1850’s, is constructed of brick, with stone used only for the bay windows. Its cornice is simpler and makes use of polychromatic brick. Number 10 Lowwood Road is also likely to have been built in the early 1850s. It is totally rendered and is

yet simpler in detail, with simple bands dividing the floors and hood mouldings over some of the windows. Some of these houses are of a more gothic style with roofs becoming steeper pitched and windows frequently arched.

Very few buildings of over 40 or so years of age were built as three storeyed. A few may have had a box room on the 2nd floor but possibly only in the cases of 144 Whetstone Lane and 10 Lowwood Road / 15 Lowwood Grove would the accommodation have extended beyond a single room. Similarly, the only single storeyed building was number 42 Clifton Road. Both in height and style it is in stark contrast to its neighbours. Built slightly later than the first few buildings, (it does not appear on the 1843 map) it is of a strong gothic style with decoratively arched windows and doors and high, ornamental chimneys. It was the family home of F.E. Smith, Lord of Birkenhead and Lord Chancellor.

The fact that very few buildings were built between the late 1850s and the beginning of the 1890s has led to a clear distinction in style between two periods of Victorian architecture in the area. All buildings constructed since 1890 seem to have been built using brick; some with rendered or timber framed elements. 1890s bricks vary from solid colour red or buff pressed bricks to brindled, rougher faced common bricks. Ornamental terracotta panels and polychromatic brick details are widespread within the housing of this period.

Virtually all Victorian buildings in the area seem to have originally had timber sash windows. Although, there is a broad range of roof coverings now in existence, it appears that most buildings would originally have been slated. There are many fine tripartite windows, some with decorative cast iron or timber ornamenting the diving sash boxes.

Of particular interest to the mid to late-Victorian houses are the decorative panels and details at the eaves. A few houses have panels reportedly by the Della Robia pottery in Birkenhead. Many others have particularly attractive terracotta details and panels.

7.0 NEGATIVE FACTORS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCEMENT

7.1 Overview

There are a number of issues common to the residential zones of the study area. These are outlined in general in terms under the following headings:

- Development pressures
- Quality of later 20th century developments
- Unsympathetic extensions
- Alteration to historic detailing and materials
- Boundary treatments and streetscapes

7.2 Development Pressures

The area's proximity to local services and public transport has inevitably led to pressure on some of the larger plots for apartment development.

Many of the detached and semi-detached buildings (particularly those dating from 1840s/1850s) are in large plots, therefore the removal of one dwelling could lead to the creation of 10 or more flats. Although house prices have generally risen steeply over the past few years, the popularity of a large detached house in an urban area is minimal compared to that of flats. The value, to a developer, of a single house simply cannot rival that of high density apartments. This development pressure is likely to increase as a result of the publication of Government Planning Guidance (PPG3) which advised Local Authorities to increase residential densities for new development. Recent Regional Planning Guidance which discourages new development in west Wirral may also have the effect of increasing the development pressure within the more spacious and attractive parts of Birkenhead such as the Clifton Park Area.

Although the majority of the larger buildings have already been converted into flats, this does not achieve as high densities as new build. The demolition of the older buildings of architectural value and replacement with new, to higher densities, would inevitably be detrimental to the character of the area. New apartment buildings differ radically from the earlier houses in the depth of their built form and in their scale and proportion (three stories are often squeezed into the height of what historically would have been the height of a two storey building).

The listing of many of the larger houses has undoubtedly protected the character of the area, to some extent. However, the value of these houses (at least up until recently) has meant that is simply not economical to repair any serious problems. Many grand houses, some even listed, have been demolished as a result of this problem. No. 38 Clifton Road has been demolished since the 1980s and a house is currently being built on its site (not to the original design or quality). Despite the recent dramatic increase in property values, there are still examples of buildings which exhibit an air of neglect .

The conversion of the larger, older buildings in the area is not, in itself, necessarily detrimental to the building's preservation. Often, the costs of repair and maintenance to the more elaborate buildings may be difficult for a single occupier to bear, whereas, they can easily be swallowed into the maintenance charge of 5 or so flats. The sensitivity of any conversion scheme is clearly critical. Interior details and room proportions are often lost. Particular care needs to be taken to leave as little trace of the internal subdivision on the exterior as possible. This is often hampered by the requirements of Building Control, for example, with requirements for ventilation and fire escape. Examples of detrimental external features associated with conversions seen within the area are as follows:

- Proliferation of extract grilles and ducts and soil vent pipes.
- Abundance of television aerials and satellite dishes.
- External fire escapes.
- Unattractive and/or excessive signage.
- Large and obtrusive bin stores.

- Large areas of tarmacading.
- Poor quality or only small areas of landscaping.



Number 45 Clifton Road (left) and 53 / 55 Woodlands (right). Both examples of larger properties being subdivided into flats. 45 Clifton Road is dominated by parking in front of the building, ugly signage and an external fire escape. 53 / 55 Woodlands has a tarmacaded parking area taking up virtually all the front area. Its stonework is dotted with extract vents and its roof littered with television aerials.

7.3 Quality of Later 20th Century Development

Recent development has generally been of a simple design, constructed of brick with little ornamentation. Their simple decorative style does not add any architectural value or interest to the street scene, but on a more positive note, there is little to detract from their historic neighbours. It should be noted however, that recently in surrounding areas of the Wirral, there has been a growing demand for larger blocks of apartments, as land prices has risen. At present, typical developments are often of 4 storeys. If this trend should take hold in Clifton Park, it can only be predicted that these buildings would have a considerably more detrimental effect on their surroundings, as roof lines would inevitably be higher than existing buildings and therefore the developments would be more dominant.

A critical factor that governs the obtrusiveness of a new development is landscaping. Most of the modern blocks of flats have at least a moderate amount of trees and shrubs. To enable a successful landscaping design to be achieved, the effect, size and positioning of planting should be considered at a very early stage. Many modern developments simply do not have enough available space for trees and hedges, without the planting becoming problematic within 10 years or so, when it begins to block light and become a safety or security issue.



Clifton Gate (left) and Field House (right). Both recent developments on Clifton Road, of a similar size and quality. Neither building makes a positive architectural contribution to the area nor is sufficiently set back

from the road to be unobtrusive. It should be noted, however, that a good landscaping scheme can have a considerable impact on the site. Field House is well screened behind mature and semi-mature trees and hedges. Clifton Gate, on the other hand, has only a small area of lawn, a few small shrubs and a couple of scrawny, barely distinguishable trees. Although only newly planted, this scheme will never mature into an attractive garden. The building is further blighted by a large area of tarmac, without even a border of planting, on the left hand side for car parking.

7.4 Unsympathetic Extensions

It is fortunate that there are remarkably few instances of obtrusive, unsympathetic extensions at present within the area. Many of the houses are of a strong geometric form, are part of a symmetrical pair or are part of a repetitive terrace. It would be the case therefore that if almost any extension was built onto or near the front façade, some of the qualities of the building (e.g. its rhythm, symmetry or geometry) would be lost. In the cases of semi-detached or terraced properties, the effect of any extension on the block as a whole must be considered if character is not to be lost.



No. 31 & 33 Clifton Road. Although small in scale, an unsympathetic porch with large patio doors is stylistically out of keeping with the rest of the building and upsets the symmetry of the building as a whole.

The materials, form and positioning of any extension must also be carefully considered if the building's character is not to be lost. Materials should be of a quality that matches the existing building and should not detract from it. Traditional materials would generally be preferable to man-made ones, however, there may be instances where a 'sleeker' more modern alternative (e.g. lightweight materials such as glass) may actually detract less. The form of any extension should consider the scale, proportion and massing of the original as well as roof pitch. A new extension should generally be positioned in an unobtrusive position as possible, with the rear elevation being preferred to the front and sides.

7.5 Alteration to Historic Detailing and Materials

The maintenance of the original materials are of great importance to the area's historic buildings. There are many examples of instances where apparently small changes to buildings have gradually eroded its character. This is most apparent when looking at a pair or a terrace of similar buildings. The vast majority of the terraced houses have had their timber windows and doors replaced. Many have areas of painted brickwork, some have lost or replaced their boundary walls. Across the whole area there are many instances where roofing slates have been replaced by concrete tiles, original windows by UPVC double glazing. The list is extensive, and does not just apply to the unlisted properties.



(Left) Grade II listed 34 & 36 Clifton Road. Although generally in a good state of repair, the symmetry of the pair is partly lost due to the unmatching render types and the insertion of top UPVC casement windows into the openings of the left hand house. (Right) Terrace on Brookland Road. The attractiveness of the polychromatic brick is marred by the muddle of different windows, painted brick and cars parked in gardens.

While some particular terraces seem to have irreparably lost their character, the area generally retains sufficient properties which are relatively unaltered for a strong authentic character to still exist, this will be an issue of concern for the future. The future preservation of the architectural character of the buildings that give the area its particular distinctiveness is in the hands of individual owners. Awareness and understanding are obviously a key issues in this respect.

When combined into a terrace, these alterations make the buildings look clumsy and cluttered.

7.6 Boundary Treatments and Streetscapes

One of the easiest and cheapest ways of improving the overall quality and character would be to encourage residents and building owners to repair, preserve and where appropriate reinstate the original boundary walling materials. In many cases gate posts are still present, but are in need of repair. There are many instances where walls have been painted or rendered and that this later coating is failing, leaving the wall with a scruffy appearance. In most cases railings are missing. The most visually successful gardens are those with the gateposts and walls retained and with hedging along the boundary. Although the presence of railing is preferable, houses without them but with a hedge or other shrubs are generally equally attractive.

The growing need for parking in the area has led to the loss of many gardens and the removal of stone gate posts. In other cases the gateposts are being damaged by vehicle collisions. Residents should be encouraged to protect the gateposts from damage by visually unobtrusive means e.g. carefully planted shrubs.

Parking and vehicular access is a defining issue to the future preservation of the area. As car ownership inevitably rises it is important to consider the best way of parking these cars. At present most roads are designated as for local residents parking only. The limited numbers of on-street spaces available has perhaps inadvertently encouraged the loss of some gardens. Should the council consider increasing the available area, it may improve this situation and may also help as a form of traffic calming (although, of course, safety matters must also be considered).

Although vehicular signage and road markings are clearly necessary to aid the safe use of roads within the area, they are often visually obtrusive. The size, type, necessity and positioning of these signs needs to be carefully considered to maintain

and enhance the character of the area. Other highways items such as paving and street lighting are dated and generally poor quality. A programme of improvements would again enhance the area. Other detrimental items within the current street scene include the following: Overhead wires, poor road repairs and unnecessary street furniture of poor quality, such as railings.

8.0 RECOMMENDED CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARY

8.1 Summary Justification

Although Clifton Park consists of predominantly late 19th century housing, it is of particular importance because of the overall architectural quality of the earlier housing and the spacious nature of the plots. Historically it is of great importance as it signifies a critical turning point in Birkenhead's history; from affluence and optimism to a depression in which the expansion suddenly ceased. Although of less architectural importance, the housing of the 1890s serves as an interesting comparison when studying the later growth period.

The majority of the buildings within Clifton Park considered to be of particular interest are grade 2 listed, which offers protection from demolition and unsuitable extension or alteration. The council also has the power to serve a repairs notice on any property. Listing also applies to structures within the curtilage, which protects historical gateposts and garden walls.

Although the retention of these listed buildings is clearly vital to the future character of the area, it is not the only important factor. The turn of the century terraces are not unique, but they do make an aesthetic and historical contribution. Although many are altered and others in need of repair, few have degraded to a state that means that their contribution is lost, where their significance cannot be regained. The loss of almost any historic property would therefore serve to continue the erosion of the area's significance and townscape value.

Conservation Area designation is important not only to protect the buildings from demolition, but their setting. As has been illustrated earlier, the sizes of the plots and spacing of the houses is almost vital, as is the protection of boundary walls and trees.

Most importantly, perhaps, it is hoped that Conservation Area designation will educate residents by making them aware that their area is special and that they can help protect and enhance it.

8.2 The Proposed Boundary

The proposed Conservation Area boundary runs along the back of the houses on the east side of Clifton Road, along the rear of The Woodlands as far as number 45 and then along the road as to Fearnley Road. Turning at right angles the boundary then runs for a short distance up the centreline of Fearnley Road and then skirts around the rest of the western terrace. At Lowwood Road, it crosses over, and again goes down the rear of the properties to include the houses on Circular Road, eventually coming out near the junction of Hollybank and Clifton Roads. It then travels towards and then over Whetstone Lane and includes numbers 140, 142, 144, 146 and 148.