



*Devonshire Park Residents Association and Neighbourhood Planning Forum*  
*"Preserving the character & balance of our unique neighbourhood"*

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## **Devonshire Park Neighbourhood Plan**

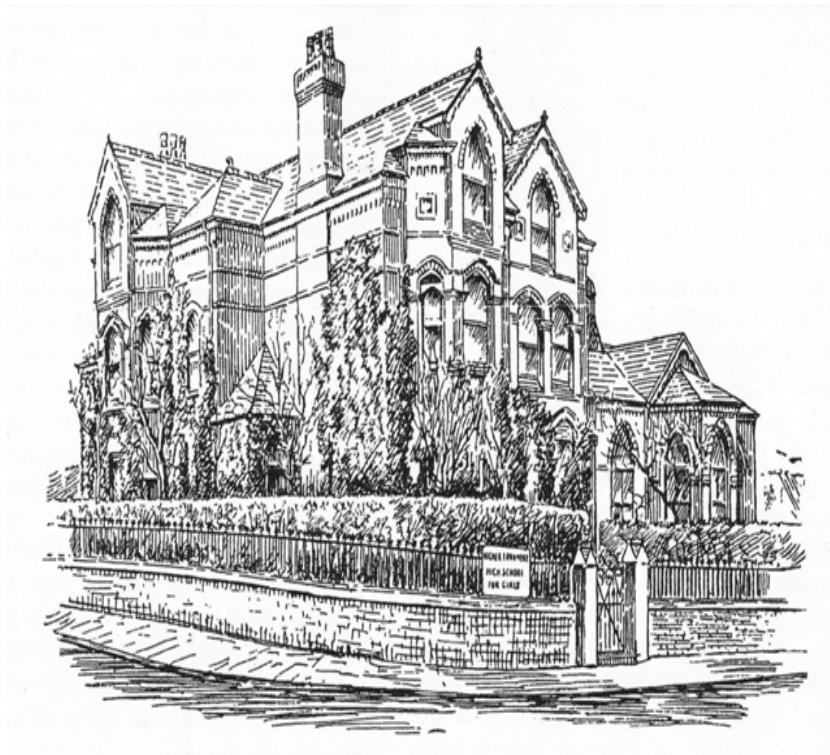
### **Document 1: Proposed Neighbourhood Plan**

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**DEVONSHIRE PARK NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN – REVISED  
FOLLOWING INDEPENDENT EXAMINATION – JULY 2015**

**DEVONSHIRE PARK NEIGHBOURHOOD  
PLANNING FORUM**  
(DESIGNATED 30 APRIL 2013)



**DEVONSHIRE PARK NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN**

**2014-2030**

For further information please contact the Devonshire Park Neighbourhood Planning Forum at <http://devonshirepark.wordpress.com/>



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### **Devonshire Park Neighbourhood Planning Forum**

#### **Neighbourhood Plan for Devonshire Park**

##### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 As one of the oldest residential areas in the historic town of Birkenhead, Devonshire Park has a unique identity born of its heritage and character. The Area is one of four remaining examples of Birkenhead's Victorian Villa Estates; of which two are now designated conservation areas and the other recognised as being of special historic interest.
- 1.2 The Neighbourhood Plan Area is defined by the borders of North Road, Borough Road, Prenton Road East and Greenway Road. There were 654 dwellings in Devonshire Park at 2011, with an estimated population of 1,420 people.<sup>1</sup> The Plan Area is largely residential, with good access to Birkenhead and Liverpool by bus.
- 1.3 The population is served by Devonshire Park Primary School, just outside the boundary of the Plan Area on Temple Road, and local shops at the perimeter along Borough Road. Nearby, Tranmere Rovers football club is a focal point for leisure and community activity.
- 1.4 St Joseph's Parish Centre is a focal point for all aspects of community life. Much use is made of the parish hall and social club for public meetings, interest groups and family ceremonies and celebrations. There is a Kingdom Hall on Stuart Road and a Dental Practice on Greenway Road.
- 1.5 Devonshire Park is a peaceful enclave, typified by broad streets with well-spaced houses set back from the road, enhanced by attractive gardens and original features such as York stone pavements, ornate Victorian drain covers and garden walls built with much sought after Sherwood sandstone quarried locally at nearby Hinderton and Storeton Quarry, which has now closed.
- 1.6 Residents take great pride in the appearance of their homes and gardens. The Villa Estate benefits from many mature trees. There is an assortment of flowering plants and a thriving bird population including sparrows, blackbirds, mistle-thrush, tits, a variety of finches, house-martins and bats. The heron is a frequent visitor to local garden ponds, and there are occasional sightings of the sparrow hawk.

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<sup>1</sup> 2011 Census, Office for National Statistics (ONS), Table KS102EW based on data from constituent Lower Level Super Output Areas (Wirral 21C, 22A and 22B)



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### Housing Stock

- 1.7 The Plan Area is characterised by large, Victorian and early Edwardian character-houses, alongside some contemporary properties built post-World War Two.
- 1.8 There are a number of buildings of particular interest, including the Victorian cottages on Willowbank Road and the Merseyside Bridge Club on Clarence Road. A greater proportion of the Victorian housing consists of 4-7 bedroom properties of which a significant number have been converted to flats or bed-sits.
- 1.9 Of the residences within Devonshire Park, over 40% are already flats/bed-sits, which is significantly above the national average of 22%. The comparable figure for Wirral is 17%<sup>2</sup>. In addition, there are 16 supported housing facilities within the Plan Area.

### Community

- 1.10 Devonshire Park is home to a population of approximately 1,400 residents<sup>3</sup>.
- 1.11 The community has formed a vibrant Residents' Association tasked by its constitution to: *'represent and promote the interests of all residents within the Devonshire Park area'*<sup>4</sup>.
- 1.12 All members of the community are valued and represented. There is particular concern for the protection of vulnerable members of the community, benefiting from supported living in the Plan Area.
- 1.13 The Residents' Association is a diverse group and takes its communal and civic role seriously. A number of members enrolled on a Government sponsored 'Community Development' course in 2010/11.
- 1.14 The Residents' Association was established in 2006, initially to co-ordinate local representations against a commercial housing scheme that residents successfully argued would be detrimental to the character of the area and sustainable balance of community. The proposed development was replicating a model used elsewhere which had adversely impacted on another local community. Since that time the Association has flourished into a strong and progressive vehicle for positive community engagement, extending its reach and influence into community development, safety, conservation and land use planning.

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<sup>2</sup> At the 2011 Census, the figures were 28% for enumeration districts including Devonshire Park and 17.5% for Wirral Borough (ONS Table KS401EW)

<sup>3</sup> Estimated at 1,420 from ONS 2011 Census Table KS102EW

<sup>4</sup> the goal and objectives of the Association are included in the Appendix to this Plan





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- 1.15 Members stay in constant touch through a community Blog, regular monthly newsletters hand delivered to every home, well attended community meetings and organised social events using the local Parish Centre.
- 1.16 Devonshire Park is in many ways a community to which other areas could aspire. By getting as many people as possible involved in building and growing community spirit, protecting and building on local assets and by valuing every member, a strong sense of pride and local identity has been established. Examples are the number of residents who display the Devonshire Park logo on their wheelie bins and the success of the Area's annual festival of Gardens and Hanging Baskets.
- 1.17 In order to comply with the Government's Neighbourhood Planning Regulations<sup>5</sup>, Devonshire Park Residents' Association has established the Devonshire Park Neighbourhood Planning Forum, to take forward the preparation of the Devonshire Park Neighbourhood Plan. The application to designate the Devonshire Park Neighbourhood Planning Forum and Neighbourhood Area on 30 November 2012 was subject to public consultation and was confirmed by Wirral Council on 30 April 2013.

### **2. National Context for the Neighbourhood Development Plan**

- 2.1 The Devonshire Park Neighbourhood Development Plan was initially brought forward in the context of the Government's Neighbourhood Planning 'Front Runner' project. Whilst its planning policies must be developed under the Government's Neighbourhood Planning Regulations and the National Planning Policy Framework, this Neighbourhood Development Plan is a statement of the community's aspirations for their neighbourhood, reflecting the freedoms introduced by the Government.
- 2.2 Spatial planning is a process of place shaping and delivery. The National Planning Policy Framework states that spatial policy should:
1. "be genuinely plan-led, empowering local people to shape their surroundings, with succinct local and neighbourhood plans setting out a positive vision for the future of the area. Plans should be kept up-to-date, and be based on joint working and co-operation to address larger than local issues. They should provide a practical framework within which decisions on planning applications can be made with a high degree of predictability and efficiency";
  2. "not simply be about scrutiny, but instead be a creative exercise in finding ways to enhance and improve the places in which people live their lives";

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<sup>5</sup> Town and Country Planning, England, The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012, SI 637, March 2012 (as amended)



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3. “always seek to secure high quality design and a good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants of land and buildings”; and
  4. “take account of the different roles and character of different areas...”;
- 2.3 These four principles are taken from the twelve core land-use principles that the National Planning Policy Framework says should underpin both plan making and decision taking within the planning system<sup>6</sup>.
- 2.4 This document therefore sets out the community’s vision for the future of Devonshire Park over the next fifteen years. It is based on evidence of existing conditions, community derived objectives and the community’s sense of the local distinctiveness of the Plan Area. The proposed policies are intended to create a framework for private investment that will promote the economic, environmental and social wellbeing of Devonshire Park.
- 2.5 The Devonshire Park Neighbourhood Planning Forum therefore considers that this Neighbourhood Development Plan is consistent with national planning policy.

### **3. Wirral Development Plan Context**

- 3.1 The statutory Development Plan for Wirral currently consists of the Wirral Unitary Development Plan (adopted February 2000) and the Joint Waste Local Plan for Merseyside and Halton (adopted July 2013).
- 3.2 Appendices 4.1 and 4.2 to the Basic Conditions Statement that accompanies this Neighbourhood Development Plan show how the Plan is in general conformity with the strategic policies of the existing Development Plan. The Neighbourhood Plan will, in particular, provide additional local context to assist in the application of Policy HS4 - Criteria for New Housing Development, Policy HS7 - Sheltered Housing, Policy HS8 - Nursing Homes/Residential Care Homes, Policy HS13 - Self-Contained Flat Conversions and Policy HS14 - Houses in Multiple Occupation from the Wirral Unitary Development Plan<sup>7</sup> and will operate alongside Policy WM8 - Waste Prevention and Resource Management and Policy WM9 - Sustainable Waste Management Design and Layout for New Development, in the Joint Waste Local Plan for Merseyside and Halton<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> National Planning Policy Framework, paragraph 17 (CLG, March 2012)

<sup>7</sup> UDP Policies can be viewed online at <http://www.wirral.gov.uk/my-services/environment-and-planning/planning/local-development-framework/unitary-development-plan>

<sup>8</sup> Joint Waste Local Policies can be viewed online at <http://www.wirral.gov.uk/my-services/environment-and-planning/planning/local-development-framework/joint-merseyside-waste-development-plan>



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3.3 Once confirmed following local referendum, the Devonshire Park Neighbourhood Plan will also become part of Wirral's statutory Development Plan.

### **4. Wirral Core Strategy Local Plan**

4.1 Wirral Council is preparing a Core Strategy Local Plan, to replace the strategic policies in the Unitary Development Plan. A Proposed Submission Draft was consulted on in December 2012 and proposed modifications were consulted on in July 2013 and December 2014. Although the emerging Local Plan currently carries limited weight, more weight will attach to the Core Strategy as it advances further towards adoption.

4.2 Appendix 4.3 to the Basic Conditions Statement that accompanies this Neighbourhood Plan shows how the Plan is considered to be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the emerging Core Strategy Local Plan, including the Spatial Vision, Strategic Objectives, Broad Spatial Strategy and Proposed Submission Draft policies, Policy CS6 - Priorities for Suburban Birkenhead, Policy CS21 - Criteria for New Housing Development, Policy CS23 - Criteria for Specialist Housing, Policy CS42 - Development Management and Policy CS43 - Design, Heritage and Amenity<sup>9</sup>.

4.3 The Neighbourhood Plan will, where appropriate, also supplement the remaining policies of the Unitary Development Plan until they are replaced in a site-specific Local Plan.

### **5. Evidence and Neighbourhood Plan Issues**

#### Historical Development

5.1 At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the emerging economy of both Liverpool and Birkenhead produced not only magnificent civic buildings but also a massive increase in housing needed specifically for the labour force, reflected in the increase in population in Birkenhead from 100 in 1800 to 2,500 by 1830. Although these terraced and 'dock cottages' had every amenity they were criticised for their lack of space. It was decided in the 1830's a new type of development was needed, that of the 'Villa Estate', particularly for the merchants and professional classes, who could cross the River Mersey using the new steam ferries.

5.2 The Villa Estates immediately improved the character and appearance of Birkenhead and became much sought after dwellings. These spacious family homes were built from high quality local brick and sandstone, and the estates were often gated (although these gates now only survive at Rock Park and

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<sup>9</sup> The policies of the emerging Core Strategy Local Plan can be viewed online at <http://www.wirral.gov.uk/my-services/environment-and-planning/planning/local-development-framework/core-strategy-development-plan>



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Egerton Park). The Villa Estates not only acted as an impressive adjunct to Birkenhead’s on-going improvements, but acted as a foundation for community life.

- 5.3 Devonshire Park was developed from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century as one of a series of five Victorian ‘Villa Estates’ in Wirral (Parkfield, Rock Park, Egerton Park, Clifton Park and Devonshire Park). Devonshire Park became the last ‘Villa Estate’ to be built, with rapid development from 1877.
- 5.4 The status of Rock Park (dating from the 1830’s) and Clifton Park (dating from the 1840’s) has been reflected by their designation as Conservation Areas (designated in 1979 and 2004 respectively).

House Types

- 5.5 Devonshire Park had 654 dwellings in 2011, with a vacancy rate very similar to that for Wirral (4.3% in Devonshire Park from 2011 Census data for the Park and surrounding Lower Super Output Areas<sup>10</sup> and 4.4% in Wirral<sup>11</sup>). However, the type of housing in Devonshire Park is markedly different from the pattern across Wirral:

*Table 1 – Provision of flats, maisonettes and apartments including in converted or shared houses and above commercial property*

	Devonshire Park		Wirral	
	Number 2011	% 2011	Number 2011	% 2011
Total dwellings	654	100%	145,693	100%
All flats	281	43.0%	25,548	17.5%
of which are...				
Purpose-built flats	56	8.6%	17,222	11.8%
Flats – part of a converted or shared house	220	33.6%	6,317	4.3%
Flats above commercial property	5	0.8%	2,009	1.4%
Source: Devonshire Park - Property Count from Council Property Records 2011; Wirral - 2011 Census (ONS) Table KS401EW				

- 5.6 The proportion of flats/bed-sits is very high, at 43% of the total 2011 stock. Of the 8.6% of purpose-built flats, 30 are within the sheltered housing scheme at

<sup>10</sup> 2011 Census data is derived from Lower Super Output Areas constituting Devonshire Park (ONS Table QS417EW)

<sup>11</sup> The Wirral dwelling vacancy rate is taken from the Council’s HSSA return to Government

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Maritime View in Stuart Road and 12 in the flatted scheme at 1-23 Stuart Road.

- 5.7 The proportion of properties converted from large single dwellings to flats/bed-sits is now estimated at over 33%. Due to the Lower Super Output Area boundaries used in the 2011 Census, it is not possible to precisely calculate the proportion of dwellings by category within the Plan Area from the Census alone. The counts of dwelling types within Devonshire Park at 2011 are therefore absolute, based on Council land and property records.
- 5.8 The distribution of dwelling types within Devonshire Park differs markedly from Wirral as a whole, with a lower rate of purpose-built flats than in Wirral but a rate of converted flats eight times greater than in Wirral as a whole.

Age Structure

- 5.9 The age structure of Devonshire Park is similar to Wirral Borough, although the proportion of young adults (20-29 years old) and 30-44 years old adults is higher than the proportion across Wirral.

*Table 2 – Age Structure in Devonshire Park*

	Devonshire Park		Wirral	
	Number 2011	% 2011	Number 2011	% 2011
Total residents	1,420		319,783	
Age				
0-4	73	5.1%	18,514	5.8%
5-9	62	4.4%	17,677	5.5%
10-14	83	5.8%	19,005	5.9%
15-17	67	4.7%	12,525	3.9%
18-19	33	2.3%	7,338	2.3%
20-24	103	7.3%	18,069	5.7%
25-29	92	6.5%	17,939	5.6%
30-44	283	19.9%	58,992	18.4%
45-59	325	22.9%	67,018	21.0%
60-64	78	5.5%	21,740	6.8%
65-74	117	8.2%	31,319	9.8%
75-84	82	5.8%	21,313	6.7%
85-89	14	1.0%	5,481	1.7%
90+	8	0.6%	2,853	0.9%

Source: 2011 Census (ONS) Table KS102EW  
Notes: Devonshire Park % 2011 from constituent Lower Super Output Areas

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Household Structure

- 5.10 Whilst Devonshire Park’s age structure is broadly similar to that for Wirral as a whole, the concentration within the dwelling stock of flats and bed-sits is reflected in the household structure.
- 5.11 There is a markedly higher proportion of single non-pensioner households than in Wirral as a whole (26% in Devonshire Park compared to 19% across Wirral in 2011).
- 5.12 Family groups (couples and lone parents) are under-represented in Devonshire Park, compared to the pattern across Wirral.
- 5.13 The only group of households apart from adult single person households to have a higher representation are the ‘other households’ group, which consists of non-related adults living together and sharing dwellings (often in flats and bed-sits) (8% in Devonshire Park compared to 5% across Wirral in 2011) .

*Table 3 – Household Structure in Devonshire Park*

	Devonshire Park		Wirral	
	Number 2011	% 2011	Number 2011	% 2011
Total households	635	100%	140,583	100%
One person - pensioner	91	14.3%	20,621	14.7%
One person - other	166	26.1%	26,708	19.0%
One family and no others - all pensioners	30	4.7%	11,955	8.5%
One family and no others - couple - no children	87	13.7%	20,970	14.9%
One family and no others - couple - dependent children	88	13.9%	23,907	17.0%
One family and no others - couple - no dependent children	45	7.1%	9,862	7.0%
One family and no others - lone parent - dependent children	54	8.5%	12,735	9.0%
One family and no others - lone parent - no dependent children	22	3.5%	6,259	4.5%
Other households - other	52	8.2%	7,566	5.4%
Source: 2011 Census (ONS) Table KS105EW				
Notes: Devonshire Park % 2011 from constituent Lower Super Output Areas				



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### Townscape Character

- 5.14 Devonshire Park is set on the western side of the Tranmere ridge to the south of Birkenhead Town Centre. The street pattern is predominantly north-south, with cross streets climbing up the hill completing the grid.
- 5.15 The grid layout to the Villa Estate was set in the 1870's and pairs of houses were placed within it. By the 1890's a large number of pairs of semi-detached villas were completed, setting the space standards of the estate, with front-to-front elevation distances of between 22 and 25 metres, together with the form of front garden walls and gate-piers.
- 5.16 At that time, land to the west of Borough Road was undeveloped, although the tramline ran along Borough Road to Prenton Road West (finishing just before the present Tranmere Rovers football ground).
- 5.17 The majority of dwellings in the Plan Area are 2-3 storey Victorian/Edwardian semi-detached villas. A short terrace of cottages in Willowbank Road, which pre-date the main building of the Estate, have long front gardens set above the street. A two storey block of more modern flats is at the top of Stuart Road, opposite a Maritime Housing Association sheltered housing scheme built in 1984 on the site of a water reservoir.
- 5.18 The eastern end of Stuart Road has a tighter form of layout than the rest of the Estate, with dwellings set closer together and front elevation distances of 18 metres. The shorter front gardens in this area and the steepness of the street enhance this tighter feel.
- 5.19 Only North Road and Prenton Road East have long views, up to the Tranmere Ridge. Elsewhere, east-west views are shorter, as streets such as South Road and Clarence Road terminate at Willowbank Road. The north south streets are curved at their northern ends, leading the eye towards North Road.
- 5.20 The Plan Area is therefore visually contained and there are few views out of the Estate to the wider area. There is however, a view north from Heathbank Road, which is close to the top of the Tranmere ridge, towards Birkenhead Town Centre.
- 5.21 There are no formal areas of public landscaping or greenspace in the Estate and the character of the Plan Area is given by landscaping of individual residential plots. The Residents' Association has encouraged garden and boundary wall maintenance, through 'Best Kept Garden' and 'Hanging Basket' competitions. Mersey Park and Victoria Park are nearby and provide open space for the Estate's residents.



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- 5.22 The boundary treatments to buildings within the Plan Area are varied, from brick and stone walls, sometimes with formal capping, to timber fences and hedges on some elevations. A variety of heights and materials, together with instances of neglect and poor repair give some parts of the Plan Area a poor appearance. In some cases, front walls have been demolished to allow for off-street parking, although gate piers may still be in place. Flat conversions often have unsuitable tarmac car parking areas taking up a large proportion of the site.
- 5.23 During the initial consultation exercise, carried out by the Residents' Association in the summer of 2011, many residents commented on the loss of historic pavement materials, where York stone slabs have been replaced by tarmac.

### Building materials

- 5.24 Most of Devonshire Park's dwellings are of brick, with some stone or terracotta detailing on the Victorian and Edwardian property. Roofs were originally of slate and many were consequently steep-pitched. Windows were originally large sash of timber construction.
- 5.25 The only listed building in the Plan Area is St Joseph's Church but the character of the Plan Area is given by the homogeneity of many of the dwellings, in spite of some unsympathetic redevelopment. Modern houses are of brick with concrete roof tiles.

### Negative Factors

- 5.26 The Residents' Association questionnaire responses highlighted the problem of the high proportion of flat and bed-sit conversions, which have often resulted in detrimental impacts on the built environment and social character of the Plan Area.
- 5.27 In physical terms, the conversion to flats has involved the demolition of front garden walls and the laying of tarmac across front gardens for off-road parking, with a consequent loss of mature trees and shrubs.
- 5.28 In social terms, the lack of interest shown by absentee landlords has resulted in poor property and garden maintenance, with for some properties a damaging effect on the quality of the landscape.
- 5.29 The Plan Area is predominantly residential and disturbance can be caused by the behaviour of some, particularly short-term residents, who tenant some of the flats and bed-sits.





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### **6. Devonshire Park Neighbourhood Plan Aims**

- 6.1 Based on clear values and aspirations, Devonshire Park is a community seeking to take a lead in regeneration, achieved through the continued development of a thriving and sustainable community with a strong sense of civic pride and investment in the Plan Area.
- 6.2 Preservation of the unique character and heritage of the Plan Area, based around preserving the character of the original Villa Estate, is key to local engagement, pride and identity of community.
- 6.3 This, along with the encouragement of appropriate complementary development will, over time, restore the balance of housing so that the proportion of single dwellings within the Plan Area is consistent with the local average.
- 6.4 The availability of affordable family housing as part of the overall housing mix will enable long-term stakeholders to remain and/or settle in the Plan Area, reducing transiency and assisting in the development of a strong and sustainable community with a long term investment in the future of Devonshire Park.
- 6.5 The following aims are considered integral to the future viability and character of Devonshire Park:

1. Building a thriving, sustainable, resident community to invest in the long term future of Devonshire Park
2. Maintaining the remaining stock of larger family sized housing and encouraging the development of new family sized housing where redevelopment and conversion opportunities arise
3. Providing a safe, secure, neighbourly environment for residents and visitors
4. Protecting the environment through conservation of the area's trees, walled gardens and green spaces
5. Preservation or enhancement of the fabric and architectural features that combine to provide Devonshire Park with its unique aesthetic and social character

- 6.6 The community holds that preservation or enhancement of the current stock of family housing is essential to a sustainable future for Devonshire Park; in



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order to encourage families into the Plan Area and to promote a sustainable and balanced community.

- 6.7 The predominance of families and family housing is considered to be a fundamental aspect that contributes to the unique character of the Plan Area in terms of its peaceful and aesthetic environment.
- 6.8 This is therefore the statement and vision for our Neighbourhood Plan for the next fifteen years, as designed and articulated by residents.
- 6.9 Any proposals for development within Devonshire Park can be discussed with the Devonshire Park Neighbourhood Planning Forum, who can be contacted at <http://devonshirepark.wordpress.com/>

### **7. Neighbourhood Development Plan Policies**

Building a Sustainable Community in Devonshire Park

- 7.1 Both the Unitary Development Plan and the emerging Core Strategy Local Plan seek to promote urban regeneration and environmental enhancement. The objectives for the emerging Core Strategy include meeting local housing needs while preserving and enhancing locally distinctive characteristics and the Broad Spatial Strategy, in particular, seeks to ensure that new development makes a positive contribution to local character and amenity and maintains and enhances local character.
- 7.2 This Neighbourhood Development Plan seeks to contribute towards the wider regeneration of the area by promoting the provision of new family housing, re-establishing a high quality residential area and controlling the concentration of properties in multiple occupation within the Neighbourhood Area. The overall objective is to promote a more balanced housing stock that will support a more sustainable mixed community, with a long-term commitment to the Area and a pattern of land use and development that will better reflect the character of the Villa Estate.
- 7.3 The Neighbourhood Plan will also contribute to the delivery of the wider strategy for the area by providing the additional local detail that should be taken into consideration in Devonshire Park, to maintain the distinctive character of the Neighbourhood Area, alongside the other policies of the Development Plan.



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**Devonshire Park Policy 1 – Re-Establishing a High Quality Residential Environment**

**A The provision of dwelling houses, through new development or through the conversion or change of use of existing buildings, will be supported within the Neighbourhood Plan Area, subject to the design criteria in Part B being satisfied.**

**B All development within Devonshire Park will be required to meet the following design criteria in order to restore and preserve the predominant character of the Villa Estate:**

- (1) front and rear separation distances, building heights, plot frontages and set-backs should reflect those of plots in the immediate locality; and**
- (2) frontages and boundary treatment should reflect those in the immediate locality; and**
- (3) development should respect the local distinctiveness of its surroundings through sensitive design and detailing, including appropriate siting, orientation, scale, materials and landscaping.**

**The definition of a dwelling house will be the same as in the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (SI 2015 No. 596) and does not include a building containing one or more flats or a flat contained within such a building.**

**Policy Justification**

7.4 The Devonshire Park Villa Estate contains a number of large Edwardian and Victorian villas and semi-villas, of which a high proportion has been converted into bed-sits and small flats. These conversions have often had a detrimental effect on the character of the neighbourhood, with front garden walls demolished to provide paved parking areas on former front gardens. The additional households also result in high levels of on-street parking, particularly as the neighbourhood is also close to the Tranmere Rovers Football ground, which on match days generates a lot of non-resident parking.

7.5 The overall level of converted flats in Wirral is 4.3%<sup>12</sup>, whilst there are 220 flats in converted buildings in Devonshire Park, representing over 33% of the total dwellings in the area<sup>13</sup>. This level of over-development has been

<sup>12</sup> 2011 Census, ONS, Table KS401EW - flat, maisonette or apartment; part of a converted or shared house (including bed-sits)

<sup>13</sup> See Table 1 above



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highlighted as a problem by 69% of respondents to the area-wide consultation carried out over the summer of 2011 and the community holds that preservation or enhancement of the current stock of family housing is essential to a sustainable future for Devonshire Park, in order to encourage families into the Plan Area and preserve the residential family balance.

- 7.6 The principle of re-introducing family housing into the Plan Area has been highlighted as desirable by the majority of respondents to the Residents' Association questionnaire. Re-use of existing buildings for family housing will help to restore the balance of households within Devonshire Park. Some buildings have already been converted back from bed-sits to single family dwellings and this is to be encouraged.
- 7.7 Part B of Policy 1 sets out the design principles necessary in order to restore and preserve the character of the Villa Estate. Planning applications will need to show how all future development will relate well with surrounding properties and to demonstrate that provision is made for preserving or enhancing the quality and setting of existing buildings of local character or historic and archaeological interest in accordance with the relevant adopted Development Plan policies for Wirral. St Joseph's Church, a grade II listed building with distinctive early English-style exterior in ruabon red brick, terracotta dressings, lancet widows and arched braced roofs, together with high quality features and fittings throughout, is worthy of special protection in its own right.
- 7.8 Developers will also be required to address other relevant adopted Development Plan policies for Wirral, along with any additional statutory responsibilities for the prevention of groundwater contamination and the appropriate management of surface water run-off.
- 7.9 Development which may result in a likely significant effect on an internationally important site must be accompanied by sufficient evidence to enable the Council to make a Habitats Regulations Assessment. Adverse effects should be avoided, or where this is not possible they should be mitigated, to make sure that the integrity of internationally important sites is protected. Development which may adversely affect the integrity of internationally important sites will only be permitted where there are no alternative solutions and there are imperative reasons of overriding public interest, and where compensatory provision has been made. This also applies to sites and habitats outside the designated boundaries that support species listed as being important in the designations of the internationally important sites.



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### **Devonshire Park Policy 2 – Controlling the Concentration of Multiple Occupation**

**Applications for additional flats, maisonettes or apartments, including converted or shared houses, will only be permitted within the Neighbourhood Area where the following criteria are met:**

- (1) a clear local need within Devonshire Park is demonstrated for small flatted accommodation and houses in multiple occupation where planning permission for a change of use is required; and**
- (2) the proposals comply with the design criteria set out in Policy 1; and**
- (3) the development proposed would not detract from the unique character of the Villa Estate; and**
- (4) the development proposed would not harm the living conditions for occupants of neighbouring properties.**

### **Policy Justification**

- 7.10 Residents are concerned to uphold the residential character and living environment of the Neighbourhood Plan Area. The use of properties for multiple occupancy, whether they are apartments or houses in multiple occupation, is significantly different to that of a family dwelling. More intensive use and greater activity would be likely to increase the noise and disturbance for neighbouring occupiers. There are also concerns from residents and from Merseyside Police about community safety issues which may arise as a consequence of the further addition or change of use of housing to provide for houses in multiple occupation<sup>14</sup>.
- 7.11 The community holds that the preservation and enhancement of the current stock of family housing is essential to a sustainable future for Devonshire Park, in order to encourage families into the Plan Area and preserve the residential family balance.
- 7.12 The overall level of converted flats in Wirral is 4.3%<sup>15</sup>, whilst there are 220 buildings converted into flats in Devonshire Park, representing over 33% of the total dwellings in the Plan Area<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> Uses falling within Use Class C4 of the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 (as amended) and sui generis uses for which no Use Class is specified

<sup>15</sup> 2011 Census, ONS, Table KS401EW - flat, maisonette or apartment; part of a converted or shared house (including bed-sits)

<sup>16</sup> See Table 1 above



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- 7.13 Responses to the Residents' Association questionnaire highlighted the problem of the high proportion of flat and bed-sit conversions, which have often resulted in detrimental impacts on the built environment and social character of the area.
- 7.14 In physical terms, the conversion to flats has involved the demolition of front garden walls and the laying of tarmac across front gardens for off-road parking, with a consequent loss of mature trees and shrubs. In social terms, the lack of interest shown by absentee landlords has resulted in poor property and garden maintenance, with for some properties a damaging effect on the quality of the landscape. The Plan Area is predominantly residential and disturbance can also be caused by the behaviour of some, particularly short-term residents, who tenant some of the flats and bed-sits.
- 7.15 As there is already an apparent over-provision of this type of property within the Plan Area, compared to the Borough average, applicants will need to demonstrate that a clear local housing need exists within the Plan Area before any additional provision requiring planning permission will be approved.
- 7.16 The Borough average for the provision of flats, maisonettes or apartments including converted or shared houses and houses of multiple occupation will be calculated from nationally published datasets for the Borough, such as the 2011 Census (Table KS401EW or equivalent).
- 7.17 The proportion of flats, maisonettes or apartments including converted or shared houses and houses of multiple occupation within the Plan Area, will be calculated from the Council's Local Land and Property Gazetteer, supplemented by local survey information, where available.
- 7.18 The figures in Table 1 above will be held to apply until equivalent alternative figures are made available.



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### **Devonshire Park Policy 3 – Controlling the Concentration of Residential Institutions and Hostels**

**Applications for residential institutions or hostels will only be permitted within the Neighbourhood Area where the following criteria are met:**

- (1) a clear local need within Devonshire Park is demonstrated for residential institutions and hostels falling within Use Class C2 and C2A; and**
- (2) the proposals comply with the design criteria set out in Policy 1; and**
- (3) the development proposed would not detract from the unique character of the Villa Estate; and**
- (4) the development proposed would not harm the living conditions for occupants of neighbouring properties, in particular by giving rise to noise and disturbance.**

### **Policy Justification**

- 7.19 A number of properties within the Plan Area are used by residential institutions or provide supported or sheltered accommodation. Although the balance of uses has not yet significantly eroded the Area's overall character, which remains that of a residential family area, there are concerns from residents about the further concentration of such properties within the Plan Area.
- 7.20 The use of properties by a residential institution or for supported or sheltered accommodation is significantly different to that of a family dwelling. More intensive use and greater activity would be likely to increase the noise and disturbance for neighbouring occupiers. There are also concerns from residents and from Merseyside Police about community safety issues which may arise as a consequence of the further addition or change of use of housing to provide for residential institutions or hostels<sup>17</sup>.
- 7.21 The community holds that the preservation and enhancement of the current stock of family housing is essential to a sustainable future for Devonshire Park, in order to encourage families into the Plan Area and preserve the residential family balance. Residential institutions or hostels requiring planning permission will therefore only be approved where it can be demonstrated that a clear local need exists within the Plan Area.

<sup>17</sup> Uses falling within Use Classes C2 and C2A of the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 (as amended) and sui generis uses for which no Use Class is specified



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7.22 The definition of a residential institution or hostel will be the same as in the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 (SI 1987 No. 764, as amended).

### **8. Delivery, Monitoring and Review**

8.1 Once the Neighbourhood Plan has been 'made' by Wirral Council, the Devonshire Park Neighbourhood Development Plan will carry weight as part of the statutory Development Plan for Wirral and will provide additional local detail to be taken into consideration alongside other adopted policies.

8.2 The Council will determine all planning applications, pre-application enquiries and other proposals in the light of the policies set out in the Devonshire Park Neighbourhood Development Plan alongside other relevant policies in the Wirral Unitary Development Plan and the Council's emerging Core Strategy Local Plan. The Devonshire Park Residents' Association and Neighbourhood Planning Forum will look to actively promote the delivery of the Neighbourhood Plan and apply the Neighbourhood Plan's policies in its own decision making. Applicants will be expected to demonstrate in their applications how their proposals conform to the Neighbourhood Plan policies.

8.3 Devonshire Park Neighbourhood Planning Forum and Wirral Council will work together to monitor progress on the Neighbourhood Plan. They will bring forward proposals to review the Plan as necessary during the plan period following procedures for review as may be set out in Neighbourhood Planning Regulations applying at that time. The need for review, for example, will be considered once the Wirral Core Strategy Local Plan is adopted.

### **9. Conclusions**

9.1 The Devonshire Park Neighbourhood Plan aims to achieve the objectives of the Devonshire Park Neighbourhood Planning Forum to preserve and enhance the character of Devonshire Park, which is one of the historic Villa Estates in Birkenhead. These objectives have been formulated by engagement with the local community and reflect the objectives of the National Planning Policy Framework for Neighbourhood Plans.

9.2 The Neighbourhood Plan is consistent with the policies of the Council's Unitary Development Plan; particularly Policy HS4, which requires new housing development to comply with all of its policies, including that the proposal does not result in a detrimental change in the character of the area; and with the Vision, Objectives, Broad Spatial Strategy and local priorities of the Council's emerging Core Strategy Local Plan, including Proposed Submission Draft Policy CS21 – Criteria for New Housing Development.

9.3 The accompanying Sustainability Assessment Report shows that the Neighbourhood Plan would support sustainable development by continuing to





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provide for the beneficial use of land and property while promoting a more balanced population structure, without causing significant harm to other local objectives.

- 9.4 The Neighbourhood Plan is particularly likely to have a positive impact on environmental protection and enhancement and on quality of life and on the character of the Plan Area, by introducing additional controls on certain forms of higher density residential development, which have often resulted in increased disturbance and detrimental impacts on the built environment of the Villa Estate.
- 9.5 The accompanying Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Report indicates that the Neighbourhood Plan is not likely to have significant environmental effects and the accompanying Habitats Regulations Assessment Report indicates that the Plan is not likely to have a significant effect on any European Site.
- 9.6 The Neighbourhood Plan is compatible with the European Convention on Human Rights and complies with the requirements of the Localism Act 2011 and the prescribed conditions of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> Statutory Instrument 2012 No. 637 (in force from 6 April 2012, as amended)



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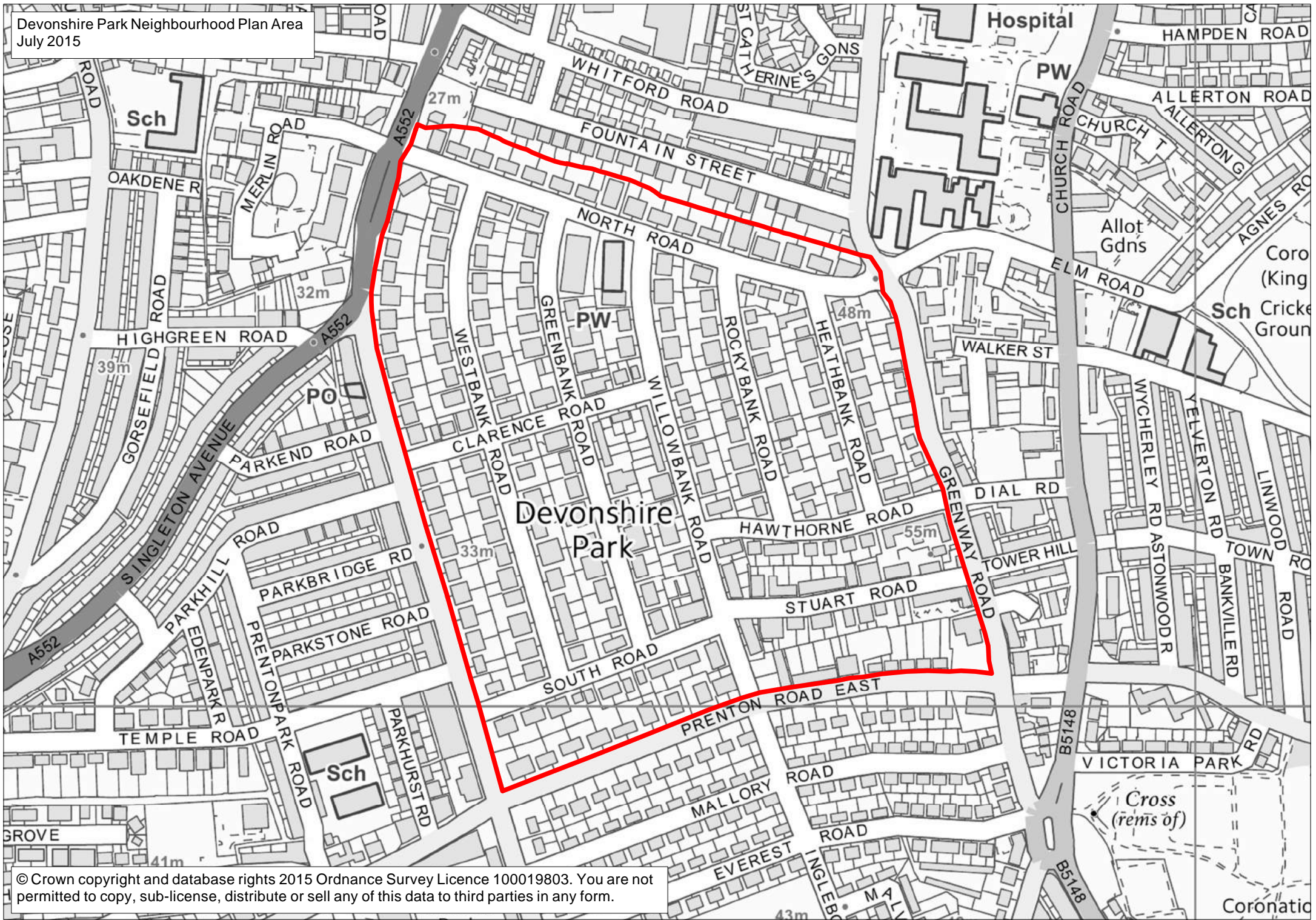
**DEVONSHIRE PARK NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN – REVISED  
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**Figure 1 - Neighbourhood Plan Area**



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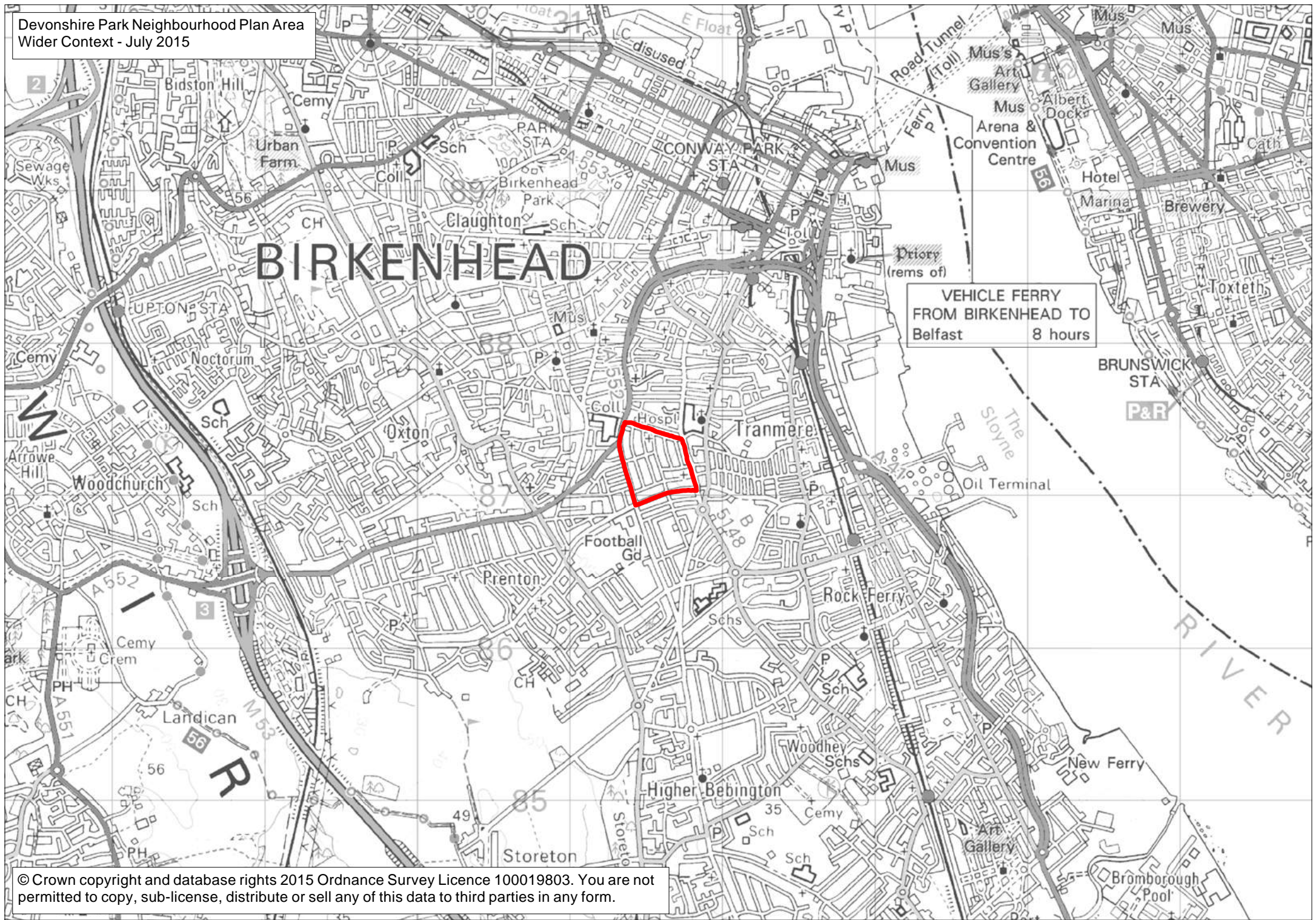
**Figure 2 – Wider Context**



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### **Appendix – Devonshire Park Residents Association Goals and Objectives**

#### Devonshire Park Residents Association Goal:

*“Preserving the unique environmental character and heritage of Devonshire Park and promoting the sustainable balance of community.”*

The Residents Association has six objectives: -

1. To create and sustain a stable and supportive community consistent with national norms in terms of modes of occupation of properties to preserve the character of the area; working together, to ensure developments are compatible with the historical nature and ambience of the estate.
2. To pursue as a matter of first priority the interests of those residents with a long-term investment in the community but also to give transient and temporary residents a stake in the maintenance of standards of good neighbourliness, care for properties and respect for the environment in general.
3. To engender a meaningful community spirit and supplement the valued efforts of the Local Authority and the professional support services on a voluntary basis by:
  - establishing points of contact and support for the vulnerable, isolated and lonely;
  - preventing crime and providing support for those in fear of crime and anti-social behaviour;
  - fostering, through community activity, a sense of involvement for the disengaged and disaffected – in particular young residents;
  - producing information on matters relevant to the community on a regular and accessible basis;
  - actively fostering pride in the cleanliness, maintenance and appearance of all of the public and private areas of the Estate and in standards of behaviour in and around the area; and
  - co-ordinating, harnessing and maximising the capacity of people in the community to improve the lives of fellow residents.
4. To maintain the diverse nature of our community, within Devonshire Park we will seek to preserve or enhance our:
  - 2 centres of religion
  - social care housing (from nursing to outreach)
  - homes with from 1 to 8 bedrooms
  - a convent
  - small business
  - a medical centre
  - properties aged from 20 to 150 years old



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5. To contribute to the wellbeing of Wirral as a whole by establishing modes of local co-operation that may be successfully copied elsewhere.
6. To conserve and enhance the fabric and architectural features that combine to provide Devonshire Park with its unique aesthetic and social character.

The Residents' Association continues to develop ties with other bodies within the wider area and further a-field. Close contact has been developed with other Associations within the wider area to assist with their own issues and the Residents' Association was identified by CLG as a national 'Front Runner' for the implementation of the Localism Bill, to help local communities, local authorities and the Government gain insight into how neighbourhood planning was to work in practice.

Through the powerful medium of the Residents' Association, Devonshire Park residents have also formed a strong partnership with local agencies and services.

The Residents' Association has a designated Community Safety Officer and has nurtured a positive relationship with the local police team.

Most residents believe that Devonshire Park is a relatively safe place to live, due mainly to the residential family balance of the area and a relatively settled population.

In recent years, the Devonshire Park Community Safety Officer has worked closely with the Police Community Support Officers, to allay residents' anxiety and fear in relation to crime and incidents that at times have occurred. Every effort has been made to assist with the needs of vulnerable members of the community. Residents and Police make a connection between levels of crime and flats/bed-sits, a link verified by Home Office statistics.