

## HESWALL LOWER VILLAGE CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL AND MANAGEMENT PLAN

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### PART 1 – CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

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

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## PREFACE

### **Background to the Study**

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

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

The scope of this Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan is based on the guidelines published by English Heritage ('Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals' and 'Guidance on the Management of Conservation Areas', both dated February 2006) and represents a factual and objective analysis. In accordance with the guidelines, the following framework has been used as the basis for this analysis:-

- Location and population
- Origins and development of the settlement
- Prevailing or former uses and their influence on plan form or building type
- Archaeological significance
- Architectural and historic qualities of buildings
- Contribution made by key unlisted buildings
- Character and relationship of spaces
- Prevalent and traditional building materials
- Local details
- Contribution made by green spaces, trees, hedges, etc
- Setting of the Conservation Area and its relationship with the surrounding landscape
- Extent of loss, intrusion or damage
- Existence of any neutral areas

The document has been structured to encompass these areas of study and concludes with recommendations for the Conservation Area boundary and other matters such as provision of Article 4 Directions.

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

Since the 1967 Civic Amenities Act local authorities have been empowered to designate as Conservation Areas those areas within their districts which were considered 'special'. The subsequent Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act of 1990 consolidated those powers and defined Conservation Areas as:-

*"areas of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance".*

Such areas are diverse. They may be large or small; residential or commercial; civic or industrial; old or relatively modern. They may represent social ideals or civic pride. They may be specifically designed or speculatively produced; modest or grand. They may contain Listed Buildings of architectural or historic interest or may simply have local historic association. However, common to all will be an identifiable environmental quality which should be protected from unsympathetic redevelopment or alteration.

Wirral Council has declared 25 Conservation Areas throughout the Borough reflecting the variety of building styles and environments exhibited within its borders.

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

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

This legislation and policy framework enables the authority to exercise greater control over development within Conservation Areas and, where appropriate, this may be supplemented by the use of 'Article 4 Directions' to remove permitted development rights. In this way, minor changes, such as window replacement or loft conversions, which may be cumulatively detrimental, can be controlled.

National policy stipulates that local authorities have a duty to review, from time to time, their regions to ensure that places of special architectural or historic interest are being protected. The boundaries of existing Conservation Areas may be revised, new areas may be designated and those areas which have been eroded to the extent that their special character has been lost may be de-designated.

Whilst the Council recognises that, for Conservation Areas to remain 'live' and responsive to a changing society, changes must and will occur, it nevertheless undertakes to ensure that all changes make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of its Conservation Areas and do not result in any serious loss of character or features.

Planning legislation supports the authority in this by increasing its control over development. It does this in the following ways:

- Buildings and structures may not be demolished without formal consent from the Council (Conservation Area Consent).
- Trees are protected and all work to them requires consent from the Council.
- New development is expected to reflect the quality of design and construction of the surrounding area and should make a positive contribution to the area's character.
- Local planning authorities may, if necessary, exercise even greater control by removing the basic permitted development rights of householders.

- Under section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, the Council has a legal obligation to ensure that "special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance" of the area when formulating decisions on planning applications.

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

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

Whilst an appraisal aims to identify the essential elements which give an area its character, it is not intended as a detailed evaluation of each building and feature. Therefore any buildings, features and details may still have importance even though not specifically referred to in the document and any omissions do not indicate lack of merit or interest.

## PART 1 – CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

### 1.0 LOCATION

#### 1.1 GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION

1.1.1 Heswall Lower Village lies in the western part of the Wirral Council area approximately midway between West Kirby, the principal settlement on the western shore and Neston. The Conservation Area forms part of the settlement of Heswall and is situated between Telegraph Road, the main north-south route and the Dee shoreline, although it connects with neither

#### 1.2 TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

1.2.1 The Lower Village lies on the west facing slopes of the Wirral Peninsula with good views across the estuary to the Clwydian Hills of North Wales. The land rises from about 10m above sea level to a height of almost 100m.

1.2.2 The geology of the area is Keuper Sandstone partly overlain by Bunter Sandstone by the estuary. Near the shore there is Boulder Clay and some sand and gravel. The steep and narrow lanes are cut into the solid rock in a number of locations showing the colour and strata of the solid geology.

#### 1.3 GENERAL USAGE (E.G. RESIDENTIAL)

1.3.1 The village has a fair range of building uses. Private dwellings predominate but there is a good range of small shops, surgery, public houses and a number of professional businesses. Non-commercial uses include the church and church hall, the school and Richmond Hall – a day nursery.

#### 1.4 CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARY

1.4.1 Heswall Lower Village was designated as a Conservation Area (CA) in 1979. The majority of the existing boundary line follows the street patterns, except to the east where it runs behind the large properties on Dawstone Road, and on the west side where it abuts the churchyard and Church Farm Close.

## 2.0 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

### 2.1 EARLY HISTORY AND ORIGINS

2.1.1 In the Domesday Book the settlement is recorded as Eswelle and it is suggested that the name comes from the Old Norse *hesli waella*. Later

versions of the name are Haselwell (1190), Hosewall (1398) and Weswall (1418)

2.1.2 In the Domesday record Heswall is held by Robert of Rodelent (later known as Rhuddlan), one of the associates of the Earls of Chester. In 1277 it became the property of Patrick de Haselwall, Sheriff of Chester. In 1403 the manor passed, by marriage into the Davenport family, in whose control it remained until the mid C19th.

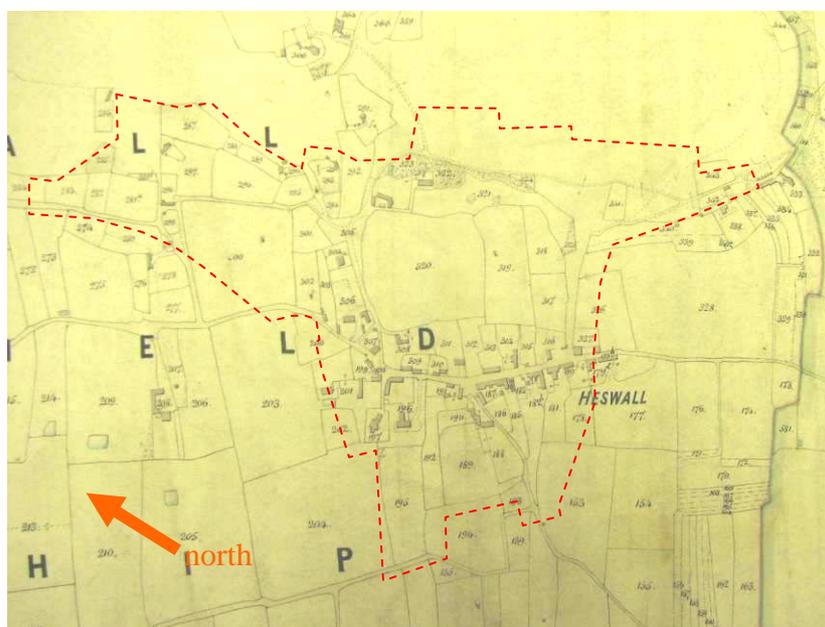
2.1.3 Little seems to be recorded of the history of the estate until the C19th and the only identified building survival before 1800 seems to be the tower of the parish church of St. Peter from the C13th.

## 2.2 19TH CENTURY DEVELOPMENT

2.2.1 Ormerod described Heswall in 1819 as:

*‘situated on the shore of the Dee, along which they present a fertile tract of meadow ground, which gradually changes to a dreary and barren flat as it advances inwards; to the north east this rises into a wild and rocky moor, immediately under which the parish church is situated commanding the estuary and envired by huts and farms mostly of stone, rude in their structure, and placed in great disorder.’*

2.2.2 The first detailed mapping of the layout of the village is the Tithe Apportionment Map of 1849:



*The approximate outline of the current Conservation Area is shown dotted in red.*

2.2.3 The map shows the lines of the tracks and pathways much as they are now. There is the main north west – south east roadway which is part of the route linking Thurstaston and Parkgate parallel but to the west of Telegraph Road.

This is crossed by lanes coming in from the north east – now the main area of Heswall and extending down to the shoreline. Along the main village street there is a more or less continuous line of settlement, particularly on the south side, with a number of dwellings dispersed to the north side of what is now School Hill. The orientation of the plots, where there is any degree of elongation, is such that they tend to run down the slope so that they are not shaded by their dividing hedges. The apportionment document shows that the Black Lion was an inn in 1849, and that opposite to it, the small single storey building, was a school. A number of properties on the main village street are described as shops.

- 2.2.4 There does not appear to be any significantly dominant dwelling or manorial holding such that, apart perhaps from the Rectory the dwellings and plot sizes do not vary greatly. There appears to have been a residence of some size, with grounds in the location of the property known as Dawstone.

The 1870s OS map is very revealing of land uses and of the increasing development of the village as a whole. Intruding on the modest rural settlement is the arrival of a number of Victorian villas, particularly on the higher ground to the east. These include Beechfield, Rosecote, The Dawstone, Heathmount and Delavor House. Typically each has its woodland, formal garden, terrace with fountain and summer house.

- 2.2.5 The map shows that the brow of the hill is open heathland with the beginnings of some encroachment and enclosure by private plots.

- 2.2.6 The map also shows evidence of access improvements. A new road has been laid out linking the top of School Hill with Thurstaston Road with a sweeping hairpin bend. This cuts through existing land holding lines. Similarly a new road, The Lydiate has been laid linking the Village Street with Rectory Lane.

- 2.2.7 Other interesting developments shown on this map are the new school for Boys and Girls on School Hill dating from 1872, the Pinfold for stray animals on Thurstaston Road, the Post Office in the village and a gasometer near the junction of Wallrake Road and Dawstone Lane.

- 2.2.8 In 1866 the GWR and LNWR combined to open a branch line from Hooton to serve the affluent residential area of Parkgate. In 1886 this line was extended through Heswall along the coast to West Kirby. The 1890s OS map shows Heswall station at a location slightly lower down the slope, closer to the shoreline with a new connecting road to the Lower Village extending south west from the street known as Wallrake and passing the junction of Lydiate Road (now The Lydiate) with Rectory Lane.

- 2.2.9 In 1877, for the second edition of Ormerod, Thomas Helsby referred to Heswall as ‘having become a favourite place of resort in the summer by the residents of Liverpool and Birkenhead.’

- 2.2.10 The church of St Peter in Heswall is medieval in origin, the oldest part of the existing fabric being the C14 base of the west tower. The form of this earlier building is shown on the 1870s map as a simple 3 cell church – west tower / nave / chancel with south porch. However major storm damage, possibly combined with the increasing social status of the village gave rise to a major rebuilding of the church in 1879 to designs by J Francis Doyle, the architect of the Royal Insurance Building in North John Street, Liverpool. He had rebuilt Neston church in 1874-5. In 1893 Doyle extended the chancel and added the Brocklebank memorial chapel.
- 2.2.11 By the time of the 1890s map there is an increased density of development in the upper part of the Conservation Area, around the top end of School Hill, Dee View Road and what is now known as The Mount, then Liverpool Road. The development included a Public House (Dee View Inn) at the complex road junction. Lower down, in the village itself the public house had risen in status to become the Heswall Hotel.
- 2.2.12 To the south of the area, on Wallrake is the house known as The Roscote. On the 1870s map this is shown as a simple square on plan. However in the subsequent 20 years the house is much altered and extended and becomes a small estate in its own right. It had been acquired by the Brocklebank family, bankers and owners of a shipping line which traded with the Far East. Apart from the work at the house which was designed by Doyle, they obviously had significant local influence including the extension of the church as a family chapel. They were art collectors of note and donated a C16th Dutch altarpiece to the church, which was later removed to the Walker Art Gallery and is now in the Grosvenor Museum in Chester.

### **2.3 THE 20TH CENTURY: GENTLE GROWTH FOLLOWED BY LATER INFILLING**

- 2.3.1 The map from 1910 reveals that only small changes had taken place over the previous 20 years. A number of ranges of greenhouses have appeared, reflecting the increasing importance of horticulture. The Roscote on Wallrake shows signs of having been developed more fully as a private estate with extensive grounds and outbuildings. The property formerly known as Rosebank, behind the hotel has been extended and renamed The Hermitage.
- 2.3.2 The most significant development to appear for the first time on the 1930s map is Dawstone Park dating from 1931, the small public gardens and play area at the top of School Hill. Evidence from the previous map shows that a small building was cleared away for the laying out of the gardens whose pathways partly followed older tracks, accesses and boundaries.
- 2.3.3 Prior to the period of this map the crown of the hill consisted largely of open scrub or moorland. However in the period immediately following the 1st World War there was significant encroachment onto the land. From the Telegraph Road side a series of fairly densely planned streets appears. On the west side of the hill above Dawstone Road, no doubt taking advantage of the

commanding westerly views, a range of four detached houses in large grounds is constructed (similar to those which were being built at Caldby at the same period).

2.3.4 From about the middle of the century the character of the development process changes. Prior to this new housing (which is its main constituent) is laid out along pre-existing tracks and roadways. However as gaps become filled the pressure grows to use the blocks of land behind the frontages which have in some cases become largely ‘landlocked’. Roscote Close, St Peters Close and Raby Close are prime examples of this trend near the Lower Village core. This, with a predisposition for detached houses of even size surrounded by garden produces the characteristic suburban style development which forms such a large part of UK developed land.

2.3.5 In Heswall Lower Village the process is first visible on the post war OS map. (Stylistic evidence of the buildings shown for the first time suggests that the map dates from the early 1960s). Apart from housing of this type, and individual infilling the most significant buildings between the 1950s and the present day are the new primary school building dating from 1961 and St Peter’s Centre. In addition, Village Road has been widened opposite the shops in Lower Village to provide for short stay car parking for users of the local amenities. The wall in front of the Rectory was rebuilt on a new alignment and the L-shaped barn on the 1950s map truncated. The maps also show that a number of the prestigious large houses from the village have been demolished and their sites used for modern residential development. These include The Roscote, and Rosebank and a number of similar houses just outside the area.

2.3.6 Pevsner writes (in 1971):

*‘There are many C20 houses in the region and further S, and in the more heathery settings along the ridge, but nothing which demands special mention. With the further spread of commuter housing and with the growth of industry on the opposite side of Wirral, the destruction of the rural character of the peninsula continues. Doubtless this is inevitable, but it is grievous that most of the recent housing, of which much in and around Heswall is typical, should be of such poor quality. Moreover, splendid opportunities are being lost with fine sites overlooking the Dee estuary also being built up with abysmal speculative development.’*

## **2.4 ARCHAEOLOGY AND PROTECTED STRUCTURES**

2.4.1 There is little archaeological evidence from within the Conservation Area itself but there have been a number finds of Romano British origin in the area, towards the shoreline, including coins, a dagger, ceramics and brooches which suggest a significant level of activity. A number of medieval coins have also been found in the same coastal band. Thus although the archaeological evidence is limited at present the age of the settlement suggests that there is significant potential.

2.4.2 The area includes 2 listed structures – St Peter’s Church listed Grade II\* and the sundial close to the Church door at the start of the graveyard. There are no scheduled ancient monuments. The Historic Environment Record (maintained by Merseyside Archaeological Service) has 17 entries for sites within the Conservation Area ranging from find spots to particular houses.

2.4.3 The Management Proposals which follow this appraisal recommend the setting up of a ‘local list’ of properties worthy of protection but not of national significance.

### **3.0 LANDSCAPE AND VISTAS**

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

3.1.1 The Wirral is a broadly rectangular peninsula between the Mersey and the Dee estuaries. The land is generally higher to the west, with some steep scarps facing the Dee, while to the east the slopes towards the Mersey are more gentle. The new settlement of Heswall is located on some of the highest land, at around 100m above sea level, whilst the historic Lower Village is on the south west facing slopes of this eminence between 20m and about 80m above sea level. The village does not spread onto the coastal band to any extent as the former Wirral railway line in its cutting formed a physical barrier.

3.1.2 The natural landscape of the sloping site was oak woods, with a predominance of birch and heathland on the top of the hill. The tree cover is now much reduced. On the narrow flat coastal belt there is little tree cover with limited agricultural activity, mainly animal grazing and some arable and recreational uses.

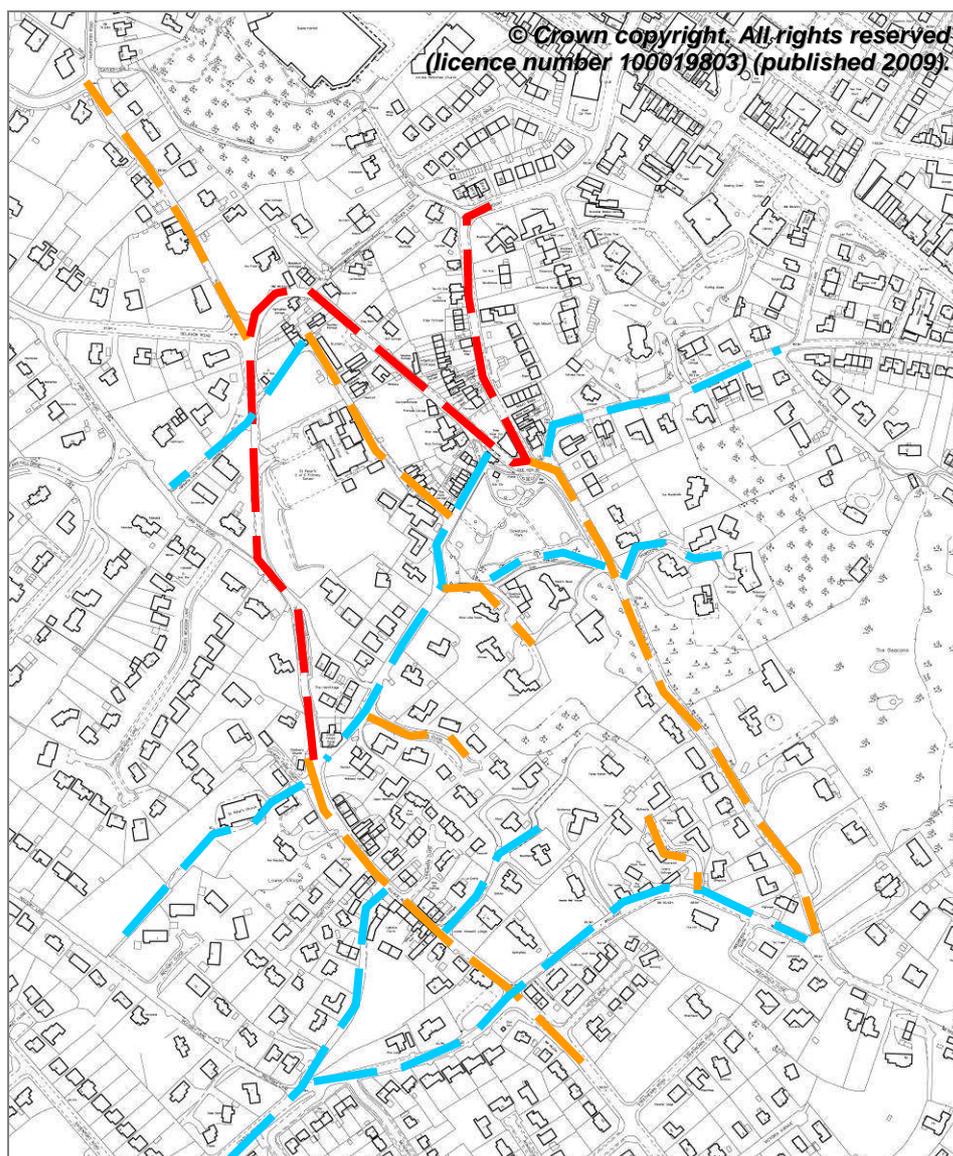
3.1.3 To the north west Heswall adjoins the open agricultural landscape around Thurston. Similarly to the south east the urban area gives way to the open agricultural land around Gayton which forms a buffer between Heswall and Parkgate / Neston.

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

3.2.1 The village offers an attractive variety of spaces defined mainly by the streets but opening up into adjacent green spaces with occasional distant views. Almost every street has its own distinct character arising from two main factors –

- The period at which the street developed or was laid out; and
- The topography.

3.2.2 The streets themselves can be categorised according to the way in which they relate to the topography. Some run parallel to the slope, some run up and down and the more recent run diagonally.



- Roads and paths running parallel to the contours
- Roads and paths running at right angles to the slope
- Roads running diagonally across the slope

3.2.3 Village Road, which is the oldest and principal thoroughfare of the settlement runs parallel to the contour line and is therefore mainly level, with buildings on the east backing into the hill and buildings on the west overlooking the down slope. As the main commercial area it was desirable that the land be reasonably horizontal to accommodate market and trade activities. Similarly Dawstone Road follows the contour – but at a higher level – giving access to the high value building plots above and below. St Peter’s Close, West Grove and Brow Lane are more modern roads which follow the contour line.

3.2.4 A few of the streets run more or less straight up and down the slopes. They tend to be from the early period and reflect the predominance of foot traffic or small horse drawn vehicles. School Hill is the most important of these,

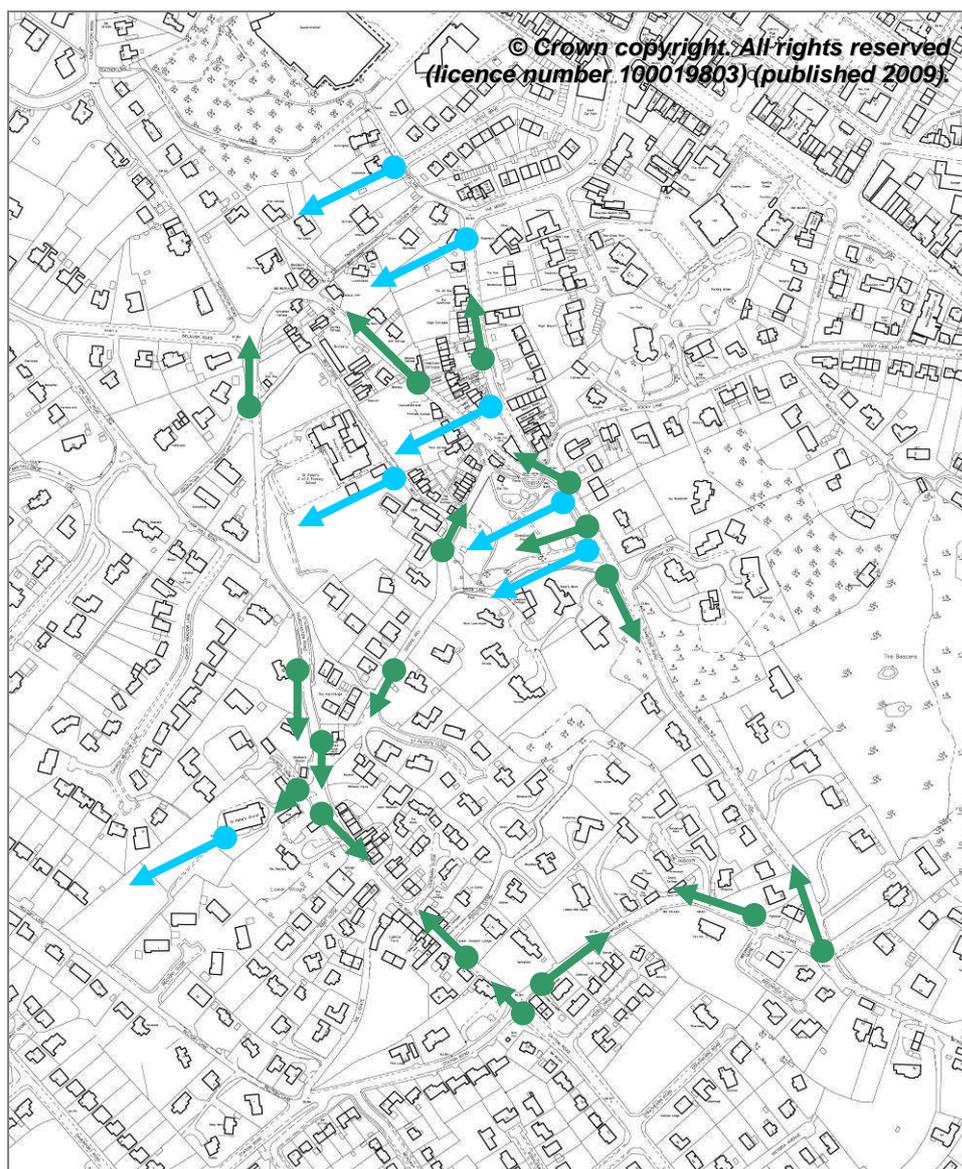
which with Rocky Lane to the north east formed the main access down to Heswall Lower Village from the through routes along the top of the ridge. The Lydiate was the main route from the old village down to the shore line.

- 3.2.5 With increasing commercial and wheeled traffic, and the arrival of motors there was a need for a well engineered medium gradient route down to the village. In the mid C19th the zig-zag route of The Mount – Dee View Road and Thurstaston Road was laid out, involving a number of significant engineering works, not least the rock cutting north east of the Black Horse Hotel.

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

- 3.3.1 Within the Conservation Area the views are limited to those up and down the various streets, across the park and around the church area. The more notable ‘internal’ views are plotted on the map below.

- 3.3.2 A distinctive feature of the area is the views out across the Dee Estuary to the west. This characteristic has informed the layout of some of the housing, particularly the former large Victorian houses, the houses along The Mount and Dee View Road and those along West Grove. However there are very few houses which have no view to the west. The key ‘public’ viewpoints outward are plotted as ‘external’ views on the map following.



-  Key internal views
-  Key external viewpoints

### 3.4 GREEN SPACES AND PLANTING

3.4.1 The principal green spaces are:

- Dawstone Park
- The churchyard
- The school playing fields; and
- The wooded area to the north of Feather Lane

3.4.2 However these form only a modest part of the green character of the area which depends on the large scale very much on the extensive tree cover within individual gardens and, at a more detailed level the variety of the gardens themselves.



3.4.3 **Dawstone Park** was laid out by the local authority in 1931 on a triangle of vacant land at the head of School Lane. It slopes down steeply towards the west. On the north east side it is bounded by a retaining wall off Dawstone Road which is at a higher level. On the north west side there is a further retaining wall at the abutment of School Lane, but in this area the land of the park is the higher. On the south side the park abuts Brow Lane where the trees and vegetation of the park more or less blend into the vegetation along the lane.

3.4.4 In the top section of the park there are a number of formal beds with ‘parks department’ formal bedding schemes. The middle section is largely open grass criss- crossed by paths and with specimen trees. At the lower end is a small quantity of children’s play equipment.

3.4.5 The park would benefit from a scheme of improvement as there is evidence of vandalism and graffiti and maintenance standards are not particularly high.



3.4.6 **The Churchyard** encircles the church building, but is rather narrow at this point. However it extends to the west, down the sloping ground and opening out to include a memorial garden and extensive burial ground. There is a footpath through the churchyard from the village street to Rectory Lane. The churchyard is well maintained and contains an interesting range of monuments and headstones largely in good condition. After the close confines of the Lower Village and the narrow entrance pathway, the

Churchyard provides a sense of release with the most unencumbered views in the area of the Dee Estuary and the Clwydian Hills.



- 3.4.7 The **school playing fields** lie on the north east side of Thurstaston Road which is the main point of view for most observers. It is enclosed by a high and rather utilitarian fence, and some redesign of the approach from Thurstaston Road to make the site seem less forbidding is desirable. There is some formal planting but, of necessity most of the area is of mown grass. Between West Grove and Dee View Road there is an area of largely open land which consists of gardens and allotments. Map evidence suggests that this area also had greenhouses and has long been an area of market gardening.
- 3.4.8 The **wooded area** to the north east of Feather Lane formed part of the former Liverpool County Hospital for Children until its demolition prior to the construction of the Tesco store. It helps screen the Tesco development. Although outside the CA boundary and lacking management it adds to the character and should be retained.
- 3.4.9 The **tree cover** within the area is, in some zones quite extensive. Particularly in the upper part of the village and along Dawstone Road, on the steeper slopes there is a preponderance of pines – Scots Pine, Maritime Pine and Monterey Pine. The Scots pine is native and may be a remnant of the indigenous vegetation from the pre-development stage. In the areas where there are larger dwellings these have been retained and augmented with the other pine varieties. Elsewhere there are a number of mature oaks.
- 3.4.10 In the mature gardens these trees are under planted and enriched with shrubs and herbaceous species producing quite a lush appearance. This is particularly evident in Wallrake, The Roscote and Roscote Close.

## 4.0 TOWNSCAPE AND PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS

### 4.1 GRAIN, SCALE, REPETITION AND DIVERSITY

- 4.1.1 There are five identifiable types of development layout within the Conservation Area and each is characteristic of the era from which it originates.



- 4.1.2 The earliest is the area around **Village Road**, where the layout consists of small rather narrow plots along both sides of the road. Buildings abut the back of the pavement line. In the middle section of the Road, where commercial advantage is greater the buildings are set with gable ends facing the road and some of them are of three storeys. Towards the southern end, the buildings whilst still abutting the road are set with ridges parallel to it indicating a slightly lower land value. Building forms are reasonably diverse, varying in height from single storey to three and with varying openings from full ground floor shop fronts to small cottage style windows.



- 4.1.3 In the higher level part of the village, around the Dee View Inn is a series of mainly **Victorian terraced cottages**. Many of them are set out to take advantage of the view and hence they are oriented so that the main frontages (or in some cases the rear frontages) face west. Plots are narrow and linear, many of the houses having front gardens. Houses are of a full two storeys, sometimes with a raised ground floor which, combined with the rising

ground gives an exaggerated appearance of height. There is much repetition of style and detail. Typically each house has a front door with window alongside, sometimes a bay window, and two windows above. Ridges are parallel to the road and there are chimneys on the party walls helping to give rhythm to the terrace. Along West Grove the pattern breaks up to a degree in that the houses which are of similar scale and design are constructed in pairs.



- 4.1.4 The next main stage of development in the area was that resulting in **large early C20th detached houses** on large rectangular plots. These tend towards the higher ground to take advantage of the views, particularly along Dawstone Road. As substantial detached houses many are designed with three main aspects, rather than just one ‘polite’ frontage. On the west (lower) side of Dawstone Road, where the plots are shallower and the density greater, the houses tend to have two main facades – that facing the road on the east side, and that facing the view on the west where glazing is more predominant. Generally, within these parameters the designs are quite varied. However as they are largely hidden from view detailed comment is not possible.



- 4.1.5 Just off Village Road is the fairly recent development of **Tithebarn Close** from the 1980s. This has a relatively high density and has many of the characteristics of an earlier village settlement. However it follows the principles of the influential Essex Design Guide which though not entirely appropriate to a north west village, has nevertheless resulted in an attractive and harmonious layout. Houses are generally set back from the irregular

road layout with a simple mown grass frontage. They are of two storeys, within a limited range of materials and there is a mixture of orientation with some ridges parallel to and some at right angles to the frontage.



- 4.1.6 The remaining developments are generally of the more **suburban type** with individual detached houses or bungalows standing centrally on their plots and with fairly prominent driveways and garages. The bungalows on School Hill, St Peters Close and the houses of Rectory Close are typical of this rather loose, open type of layout. Roscote Close is a more sensitive example with winding roads and accesses and high hedges

## 4.2 PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS AND FEATURES



- 4.2.1 **Dee View Inn** - This is a late Victorian building set in the acute angle of the road down from the upper part of Heswall to the Lower Village. It is set between Mount Road and Dee View Road, overlooking Dawstone Road, the park and the war memorial. The building is white painted render with black painted quoins under a slated roof. Some of the slating is of fish-tail pattern – this feature should not be lost in any re-roofing. The main roof is of three ridges running east-west with gables onto The Mount and Dee View Road.



**4.2.2 Primary school** - The school is an extensive flat-roofed building from 1961 with large areas of west facing glazing. The principal façade has blue tiled inset panels. Roofs are edged with deep white fascias. As usual with this type of building which has grown and changed there are a number of additional adjoining similar classroom buildings some with shallow pitched roofs.



**4.2.3 Richmond Hall** - This is the original school building from 1872, now used as a day nursery. It is a single storey stone built structure with slated roof and lower extensions. A number of the original windows have been covered with plywood or rendered over, which together with the poor state of maintenance and hard surfaced surroundings give the building a rather run-down character.



- 4.2.4 Black Horse Inn** - Formerly the Heswall Hotel, the building has a stone built centre section and dates from 1843. It is of four storeys in height, the lower two storeys (on the south and west) being of white painted render with black quoins, the upper two a jettied mock timber frame – the whole making a rather attractive combination. At high level the gables and tall chimneys make for a well broken and interesting skyline. The rear of the building is plain brick and of a more utilitarian appearance. There is a small range of stables.



- 4.2.5 St Peter's Church** - Apart from the lower stages of the tower which date from the C14th the church building is now entirely Victorian, the majority from the early 1870s with the Brocklebank memorial chapel from the 1890s. It is built of the local rather hot red sandstone with slated roofs and red clay ridges. For a significant church the building is of a rather modest scale, although the tower on its eminence is prominent in the neighbourhood and from the Dee estuary. Maintenance standards are very high and the surrounds of the church are well planted with shrubs and trees. The approach from Village Road leads through a gateway with stone piers and gives a view of the east window of the church first of all, before opening up to a small semi-enclosed area on the south side of the building. Apart from the view of the tower the general contribution to the main village scene is rather limited. Its access lends it the air of a well kept secret.



**4.2.6 St Peter's Centre** - This contemporary building, constructed in the early 2000s, is fitted onto the site between the entrance to the churchyard and the rectory stables. Maps show a pre-existing building on the site of a rather smaller plan. The centre is single storey and with an extensive flat roof. It is enclosed by natural rubble stone walls with a rather prominent light mortar. The flat roof sails over a shallow clerestory and there are three pairs of lights to the left of the main entrance. It is a polite building which makes a good contribution to the street scene without hiding the church. Though to Heswall residents it is a well known and used Hall and meeting rooms, its very low key and sensitive presence betrays little of its function, size and community importance to the casual passer-by.

### **4.3 BOUNDARIES AND SURFACES**

**4.3.1** Walking around the village, particularly along the steeper streets including the lower part of Thurstaston Road, School Hill, Feather Lane and Wallrake outcrops of the underlying sandstone bedrock are readily observed. A number of these streets have been deeply cut into the road, giving almost vertical cliff-like faces on either side. These 'cliffs' sometimes topped with hedges or walling forms the most basic of boundary definitions.



**4.3.2** It is not surprising that there is wide use of the stone walling for older property boundaries in preference to hedges or fences. It may well be that in forming cutting or levelling plots that the stone was a by-product of the process of establishing the plot. This process of carving building sites out of the hill is visible to the rear of the houses on the north east side of Village

Road, where the rear yards are cut into the rock face. Where there are substantial changes in level the walls also have a retaining function.

4.3.3 A particularly attractive feature of the area is the presence of arched openings with solid doors in the perimeter walls. There are a number on Wallrake, Dawstone Road and also to the property known as Springfield on Village Road. These are an essential characteristic feature which must be retained.

4.3.4 Many sandstone walls within the village have deteriorated unnecessarily due to the almost universal use of cement mortar for repointing from the C20th onwards. This practice commonly leads to the accumulation of soluble salts within the pores of the stone, which leads in turn to failure and decay. Measures should be taken to arrest this decline in the area's stone walls through promotion of recessed (re-)pointing and (re-)construction with a soft lime mortar.

4.3.5 Hedges form significant boundary features in many areas, their abundant growth being a product of the favourable climate. High fences of vertical boarding are used for screen fences around some of the more substantial properties, particularly The Pines on the corner of Thurstaston Road and Dee View road.



4.3.6 Paving surfaces are almost universally tarmac however there are cobble lined gulleys on either side of School Hill. Where there is no made up surface, as on West Grove, the surface sometimes consists of bare rock or otherwise mud or gravel.

## 5.0 ARCHITECTURE, MATERIALS AND DETAILS

### 5.1 PROMINENT STYLES

5.1.1 There is a wide range of architectural styles within the village reflecting the varying social status and period of the housing and the various functions of the non domestic structures. For the houses the main styles represented are:

- the local vernacular cottages
- C19th villas
- late Victorian and Edwardian terraces or semi-detached pairs
- 1950s-80s post war modernist
- 1980s neo-vernacular



5.1.2 **Local vernacular cottages** - These are mainly C19th low 2 storey buildings of stone with slate roofs. In some cases they have been painted or rendered to match the fashion for light colouring and imitation black and white. The example on the left is on School Hill and has original sash windows. The example on the right is a small row of cottages towards the top end of Thurstaston Road with accesses to both that road and Dee View Road, set back behind high hedges and not very prominent.



5.1.3 **19th Century Villas** - These are generally single dwellings of a full two storey height with slated roofs. External walls are frequently rendered with a ‘dash’

finish and were usually of a dark brown or grey appearance with smooth rendered quoins. Windows are vertical sashes with smooth rendered surrounds.



5.1.4 **Late Victorian and Edwardian terraces or semi-detached pairs** - Brick, two storey, usually rendered with slate roof. Some have bay windows.



5.1.5 **1950s-80s post war modernist** - These include houses, bungalows and ‘dormer bungalows’, generally in brick with the usual large windows either white or, more recently stained timber.



5.1.6 **1980s neo-vernacular** - From the 1980s onwards, inspired by the Essex Design Guide of the 1970s and an anti-modernist view there has been a tendency for developers to utilise a neo vernacular style. This is

characterised by simpler forms, a limited range of more traditional materials, casement or sash windows and minimal bargeboards and fascias. This can tend towards pastiche style but good examples, as in Tithebarn Close produce a development of strong character where the built form dominates and roads and turning areas fit into an interesting pattern of spaces created by the building layout.

- 5.1.7 Similar good examples are found in the Lydiate Farm development and adjacent on Village Road. Forms are simple and there is use of light textured render with smooth surrounds.



## 5.2 KNOWN ARCHITECTS AND DESIGNERS

- 5.2.1 J Francis Doyle of Liverpool was the architect for the 1870s reconstruction of St. Peter's following similar work undertaken by him at nearby Neston. He also designed the house known as The Roscote (now demolished) for Thomas Brocklebank the Liverpool shipping magnate and later on a memorial chapel for the same family as an extension to the church.
- 5.2.2 Ainsley Gomon Wood, architects from Birkenhead designed the award winning property Elder Cottage at the entrance to Church Farm Close

## 5.3 MATERIALS

- 5.3.1 The principal vernacular building material is the locally quarried pinkish red sandstone. This would have been extracted from the nearby hillside and carried only a short distance to the construction site. The masonry of the few early properties varies from coursed rubble to tooled and fine ashlar. The lime for mortar could have been derived from shells or have been imported by sea.
- 5.3.2 The roofs on these earlier properties of vernacular origin are largely of Welsh slate. The arrival of the railways made this an economically viable roofing material. Where older roofs have a pitch of about 45 degrees they could have been tiled or probably thatched prior to the arrival of Welsh slate.

- 5.3.3 There is a tradition through the village of the use of rendered facades. It may be that this originated as an extra weatherproofing coating for the original stone, or more likely brick constructions. There are examples of unpainted render coatings which generally have a coarse texture through applied grit or ‘dash’. The nature of the original base material is not clear. The use of textured coatings of this kind implied the need for smooth finish at angles and around openings in order to give a crisp and water resistant corner. This has been developed architecturally into smooth rendered imitation quoins and rendered reveals to doors and windows.



- 5.3.4 The example above on the left shows a property on The Mount with grey/brown dash render and smooth quoins and window dressings. At the rear of the house is a wing where the quoins and dressings are unpainted, but elsewhere they are now white. The next step, as in the example on the right on Dee View Road is to paint the textured render white with the use of black quoins reflecting the late Victorian craze for the use of ‘black and white.’
- 5.3.5 This use of white render with black quoins appears on the Black Horse Hotel, which is taken to the next stage of elaboration by the use of timber framing coloured black and white for the top two floors. Whilst this fashion is widespread in Cheshire and parts of the Wirral there is little in Heswall.
- 5.3.6 Local sandstone and coarse rendered brick or masonry are the two main older materials. More recent properties tend to use brick in various shades.
- 5.3.7 Roofs on newer houses are slate or in many cases smooth or profiled interlocking concrete tiles.
- 5.3.8 This use of varied brick, often imported from a distance, and rather anonymous concrete tiles means that there is almost no sense of local distinctiveness within newer projects.
- 5.3.9 The use of a simpler range of materials in the neo-vernacular developments is an attempt to rediscover this sense of the particular local scene.
- 5.3.10 Most recently the use of local stone on the St. Peter’s Centre has been a welcome attempt to ‘localise’ the building by re-using stone from the boundary wall (itself re-used when the car parking was provided in the Lower Village)

## **5.4 TYPICAL TRADITIONAL FEATURES AND DETAILS**

- Local sandstone boundary walls
- In boundary walls, masonry courses often follow the slope of the ground
- Arched openings with boarded doors in boundary walls
- Tooled ashlar walls for cottages
- 45 deg pitched roofs
- use of Welsh slate
- brown / grey dash render with smooth rendered quoins and dressings
- smooth rendered areas (referred to above) are painted white
- white render with black quoins and dressings

## **6.0 NEGATIVE FACTORS**

### **6.1 OVERVIEW**

6.1.1 The overall condition of the major part of the Conservation Area is good, with examples of good sensitive design and generally good public realm surfaces and signage. The main exceptions to this standard are as follows (not in any order of significance):

- Over-development of individual sites
- Individual buildings in poor condition
- Individual buildings which are detrimental to the prevailing character due to poor design
- Inappropriate use of white plastic windows and doors
- The general lower quality of the area at the top of School Hill and along West Grove
- The need for improved management of the landscape and structures in and around Dawstone Park.

### **6.2 OVER-DEVELOPMENT OF SITES**

6.2.1 Much of the early C20th development of the area consisted of large plots with individual houses of a modest scale – which left a comparatively large area for gardens, trees and wild areas. As in a number of other areas in the Wirral there has been pressure for larger individual houses. Where there is no green belt land and a general lack of individual plots those existing plots, which are perhaps perceived as ‘under-developed’ have been acquired, and the current houses either extended or removed prior to much larger properties being built. There are examples of this process at the entrance to Roscote Close. At La Casita, a bungalow was extended in plan and made two storey; whilst at Wyncote the existing house was demolished and four apartments constructed.



6.2.2 In both these cases the houses dominate the immediate street scene, particularly as they have almost completely open frontages. There is a preponderance of hard surfacing in the forming of parking for a number of vehicles, and there is little opportunity to mitigate this ‘hardness’ with trees or other landscaping due to the lack of available space. Further up Roscote Close the original leafy character is retained. There is a predominance of trees and high hedges such that the majority of the houses are almost invisible.

### 6.3 INDIVIDUAL BUILDINGS IN POOR CONDITION

6.3.1 It is not possible to make generalised statements about these. Some appear to be neglected, whilst others have a character which mars the general appearance and quality of the area.



6.3.2 The properties on West Grove (l) and The Mount (r) are in need of repair, that on The Mount being particularly obvious and the cause of local concern as it lies on the main street.



6.3.3 Richmond Hall on School Hill (l) is in particular need of refurbishment. The blocked up windows have a particularly unfortunate effect in that, from the street the building looks unused. The large area of tarmac which butts right up to the walls, and is typical of a school playground produces a very urban appearance and does not set off the architectural quality of the school building. Breaking up of this hardness by introducing planting and a more varied zoned surface would improve the setting. The flat roofed extensions on the east and west sides do not complement the architecture of the school itself, and if still needed could be replaced in a more harmonious style.

6.3.4 The former Children’s Church (r) is a small single storey building at a key location at the end of the Village Road, and has an attractive visual setting of trees, low walls and seat. It is unfortunate therefore that the building does not appear well cared for. A simple overhaul of doors and windows etc. would restore some of the lost dignity of this simple building.

#### 6.4 INDIVIDUAL BUILDINGS WHICH ARE DETRIMENTAL DUE TO UNSYMPATHETIC DESIGN



6.4.1 The primary school (l) is from 1961, a period when school design was dominated by large flat-roofed structures with extensive areas of single glazing. The large areas of broad white fascia, with horizontal pattern windows emphasise the horizontal, spreading nature of the buildings, whereas most of the traditional structures have a more obvious vertical emphasis. More recent buildings in the group have low pitched roofs which pay more respect to local tradition.

6.4.2 The garage on Village Road (r) has similar characteristics to the school in that it has a significantly horizontal emphasis coupled with the use of white paint and horizontal signboards; however the narrow piers between openings and the piers to the front canopy mitigate the effect. A review of the somewhat standardised signage such that it is less dominant would help to lift the character of the building. The open court in front of the building with a scattering of parked cars also detracts from the street scene.

## 6.5 INAPPROPRIATE USE OF WHITE PLASTIC WINDOWS AND DOORS



6.5.1 Houses on Village Road (l) and School Hill (r) with UPVC windows. The example on the left shows windows which bear some relation to the pattern of the original glazing and work within the original openings, but with the use of standardised sections the subtlety of the original detailing is lost. The inserted glazing bars bear only a passing resemblance to the original as they do not break the glass line, and therefore the glass itself does not have the ‘life’ and varied reflection of individual small panes.

6.5.2 The example on the right has windows which are not respectful of the character of the house itself, being of inappropriate size and scale and with oversimplified and in some cases inappropriate detailing. White UPVC does not age well, sometimes going cream and brittle with the effect of ultra-violet light, nor does it have the subtlety or patina of a good paint system.

## 6.6 THE GENERAL LOWER QUALITY OF THE AREA AT THE TOP OF SCHOOL HILL AND ALONG WEST GROVE

6.6.1 Individual buildings around the Conservation Area in need of improvement have been identified but the area described (and shaded on the Map in Appendix F) would benefit from a more general enhancement scheme, including public realm structures and surfaces.



6.6.2 The upper part of School Hill (1), particularly would benefit from a scheme of enhancement involving the wall to the park, the paving surfaces, the area around the former school and the terrace of houses on the north side of the road. There is little through traffic and so the need for a tarmacadam surface is less pressing. A surface of setts or other appropriate small units giving a better grip may be advantageous.

6.6.3 West Grove is an unadopted lane leading off School Hill. It seems well used by pedestrians as a rear access to the school and by vehicles gaining access to the dwellings and land alongside. It is often the case with unadopted streets that there is a problem of maintenance. The surface is uneven, rutted and poorly drained. It is bounded in one section by a good quality stone wall, elsewhere by hedges, and on the school side by a rather unattractive spiked fence. Despite notices, dog walkers do not clean up after their animals, leaving an unsavoury impression.



6.6.4 The need for improvements in the area identified extends also to some of the properties. There is an attractive stepped terrace of six houses on the north west side of School Hill at the top. It seems that these were originally of a consistent pattern, being of brickwork with a small porch and shallow flat bay at the front at ground level and a single sash window at first floor level, as in the left hand image above. The brickwork is Flemish bond with rubbed brick arches and decorative cornice. Unfortunately only one house remains with its original design, as all the others have been changed by the alteration of windows, door, porch or the addition of render, or indeed all the elements, as in the example on the right above.



6.6.5 Similarly in West Grove a scheme of enhancements for the properties would be desirable. There is a general loss of detail of the older properties, with the usual instances of the replacement of windows by unsatisfactory plastic equivalent, as in both examples above, and by the rendering over, or otherwise covering up of good brick detailing.

## 6.7 POOR ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY OF DAWSTONE PARK

6.7.1 Dawstone Park was laid out in the 1930s on a triangle of vacant land between Dawstone House, School Lane and Dawstone Road. There are access points more or less coinciding with the three corners but it seems not to be used as a through – way by walkers. The houses on the east side of Dawstone Road face onto the park but the elevated road and retaining wall screen most of it from view. This lack of overlooking mean that there is opportunity for minor vandalism which is evident in the graffiti on some walls, uprooted bins and the use of the children’s play corner as an illicit smoking area.





6.7.2 Using the basic infrastructure of perimeter walls and enclosures and the good quality trees it would be desirable to re-landscape the park, perhaps incorporating a small pavilion for shelter and refreshments so that it is a well used place of recreation for a wider section of the local and wider communities.

## 6.8 INAPPROPRIATE SHOP FASCIAS AND FRONTAGES



6.8.1 The illustrations above offer the opportunity to compare hand-lettered shop fascias with printed acrylic signs. In the left hand picture the good quality and distinctive 'Village Shop' sign with its canvas awning has real character compared with the overlarge 'P Williams' sign and its roller shutter box. Similarly in the right hand illustration there is the standard, and over large 'Oyster Grey' (the old post office) sign, between the hand lettered 'Image Gallery' and 'The Village Salon'. Hand lettering need not be too fancy or elaborate – indeed it is less effective if done this way, but it offers scope for local distinctiveness.

6.8.3 Alterations to traditional shop fronts should also be avoided. In a village setting single sheets of plate glass are no more effective in marketing products than those with simple subdivisions. In the right hand illustration the ‘Oyster Grey’s’ (the old post office) window has subtle high level vents which contribute positively to the design whereas the plate glass windows either side are characterless. In the case of the salon, there is little to display in so large and open a window.

## **6.9 LOSS AND DEVELOPMENT PRESSURES**

6.9.1 Few if any significant buildings seem to have been lost from the Conservation Area. Development pressure within the Conservation Area seems to take the form of acquisition of modest houses on large plots followed by their significant extension or demolition and redevelopment with single much larger houses and occasionally apartments

## **6.10 BOUNDARIES AND ENCLOSURES**

6.10.1 The wide use of natural stone walls for boundaries and enclosures has already been described. In the case of the larger properties to the east and south of the Conservation Area the walls are generally about 1.8m in height of lightly tooled squared rubble units. In some cases the walls are a mixture of large and small masonry units brought to courses; in others simply random rubble. Copings are sometimes of triangular blocks, sometimes crenellated (aka ‘soldiers’ or ‘long and short’). These wall types are a distinctive feature of the area, should be conserved, and the tradition continued.

6.10.2 Stone gate piers are a frequent and distinctive feature. The simplest are square section uprights about a metre in height with a small incised disk to receive a house number. Others have house names carved in. Dawstone House has elaborate gothic style octagonal stone piers with decorative caps. The most elaborate are the remaining castellated piers to the former asylum building on the north side of Feather Lane.

6.10.3 There are a number of hedges on Roscote Close, West Grove and Dee View Road but these are a minor feature.

6.10.4 Similarly there are few gates to properties, entrances being largely unenclosed. The significant ‘gate feature’ as already mentioned is the gate or door in a stone arch set within the high perimeter wall.

## **6.11 STREET SURFACES AND FURNITURE**

6.11.1 Street surfaces are largely of tarmac and are not a particularly distinctive feature. In a number of areas stone kerbs remain and there has been a tendency to replace these with concrete units, which tend to produce a rather hard smooth line. Individual drives were almost invariably of gravel but now

there is a strong tendency towards the use of interlocking paving or brickwork. In large expanses this has a rather hard appearance. However the use of unit paving of this kind in Church Farm Close and the approach to the church produces a softer feel than does open areas of tarmac. In Tithebarn Close the changes in surface to differentiate between levels of use and between public and private space is subtle and adds to the quality of the spaces.

6.11.2 Almost the only street furniture is the lighting standards. Early lamp standards remain in some locations but modern standards are rather characterless by comparison.

6.11.3 On Village Road the grouping of the traditional, well maintained telephone kiosk and pillar box outside ‘Oyster Grey’ (the old post office) have a beneficial effect on the street scene and should be retained.



## 7.0 SUMMARY OF SPECIAL CHARACTER

7.1.1 Heswall Lower Village Conservation Area has three distinctive character zones –

- Village Road and its surrounds
- Late Victorian development around The Mount and Dee View Road
- The large individual houses on Dawstone Road, Wallrake and their surrounds.

7.1.2 These are identified on the map included in Appendix F. These areas are interspersed with the green areas of the churchyard, the school playing fields and adjoining former market gardens and Dawstone Park.

7.1.3 The **Village Road** area is characterised by:

- Predominance of non-residential uses
- Village shops of traditional design
- Tall properties abutting the pavement line
- Use of local stone or dark brick
- Strong ‘sense of place’ and individuality
- Sense of enclosure from buildings, walls and trees
- Views along the street
- Feeling of vitality, activity and pedestrian movement
- Community focus (combination of church, church hall, pub, post office, shops and local garage)
- The remnants of the former village farms and associated land

7.1.4 The **Late Victorian** development around the Mount and Dee View Roads is characterised by:

- Narrow house plots
- Two - storey houses, largely terraced or in semi-detached pairs
- Properties designed and oriented to take advantage of views
- Slated roofs with gable ends
- Sash windows (originally) and small enclosed porches
- Rendered wall finishes, usually white
- Use of smooth rendered quoins and window dressings
- Use of ‘black and white’ colour scheme
- Low stone enclosing walls with low stone gate piers
- Few trees and simple gardens

7.1.5 The **Dawstone Road / Wallrake** area is characterised by:

- Winding roads of an enclosed character
- High walls of local sandstone
- Large house plots with properties set well back
- Properties designed to take advantage of views

- Large two storey detached houses
- High quality construction
- Use of render wall finishes, with some brick
- Hipped roofs of Welsh slate or plain clay tile
- Houses often invisible or only partly visible from road
- High access gates with stone gate piers
- Predominance of mature trees (majority are pine trees)
- Mature shrub planting
- Evidence of a well in Wallrake from a plaque in the sandstone wall