

## 3. Urban Design

### Purpose and Guidance

#### Introduction

- 3.1 This urban design section provides a summary of the key implications and opportunities to be considered in taking forward the initial vision and ideas. A full urban design characterisation and appraisal is presented in Appendix 2: Urban Design Appraisal.
- 3.2 The technical aspects of movement and transport, and landscape, townscape and visual appraisal (considered here in relation to urban design) are explored in more detail in Section Four (Environment) and Section Five (Movement and Connections). Further detailed neighbourhood and site appraisals will be completed as part of the Development Frameworks and spatial masterplans.
- 3.3 The scope and approach has been informed by current guidance and best practice relating to strategic appraisals, most notably:
- *Creating Successful Masterplans – A Guide for Clients (CABE 2004)* – recognising characterisation as a useful and appropriate method of analysis to inform future options for significant projects.
  - *Urban Design Compendium (English Partnerships/Housing Corporation 2000)* – identifying those aspects to be considered in ‘appreciating the context’.

- *By Design, Urban Design in the Planning System: Towards Best Practice (CABE/DETR 2001)* – identifying the key aspects and urban design objectives/assessment criteria to be considered
  - *Urban Design Guidance (Urban Design Group 2002)* – identifying those aspects of the place that should be taken into account in planning and design frameworks
  - *Design Review (CABE 2006)* – setting out how CABE evaluates quality in architecture and urban design
  - *Design Reviewed Masterplans (CABE 2004)* – identifying lessons learnt from projects reviewed by CABE’s expert design panel and offering advice for more strategic projects
  - *Guidance on Tall Buildings (CABE & English Heritage 2003) and Consultation Draft (CABE & English Heritage January 2007)* identifying criteria to be addressed in relation to the design of tall buildings, including characterisation
- 3.4 The implications and opportunities are considered against the following objectives:
- **Character** – *a place with its own identity*
  - **Quality of Greenspaces and the Public Realm** – *a place with attractive and successful outdoor areas*
  - **Diversity and Adaptability** – *a place with variety and choice and that can change easily*
  - **Ease of Movement** – *a place that is easy to get to and move through*
  - **Legibility** – *a place that has a clear image and is easy to understand*

## Implications and Opportunities

3.5 From the urban design appraisal, the key implications and opportunities to be considered in taking forward the vision are:

### *Character*

3.6 The urban design objective is to create a place with its own identity. This is to be achieved by promoting character in townscape and landscape by responding to and reinforcing locally distinctive patterns of development, landscape and culture.

3.7 The key implications and opportunities are considered below:

- **STRENGTH OF CHARACTER:** there is a distinct contrast between areas of strong and weak character. Those neighbourhoods where the key aspects of the development form remain intact, providing consistent and recognisable patterns, create strong and recognisable character areas with a distinct 'sense of place'. They are focused around the more stable residential neighbourhoods – Claughton, Wallasey and Bidston - and established landscape elements – Bidston Hill, Birkenhead Park, Hamilton Square and Bidston Moss. They are illustrated in **Figure 3.1: Strength of Character - Strong**.

In contrast, those neighbourhoods where the key aspects of the development form have been interrupted, or displaced, create weak character areas with little or no sense of place. They are

focused around those areas which have been subject to on-going piecemeal change and redevelopment – Birkenhead Town Centre, the central areas of the Laird Town Plan and the southeastern extents of the residential Northern Neighbourhoods. Typically, these areas are larger scale, more recent intrusions and transitional areas between the residential neighbourhoods and the 'central industrial belt'. They are illustrated in **Figure 3.2: Strength of Character - Weak**.

***Opportunity:** Wirral Waters is set within extensive weak character areas, with little or no 'sense of place'. Long-held, embedded perceptions of Inner Wirral are grounded in the poor quality, employment neighbourhoods forming the 'central industrial belt'. Beyond the immediate surrounds, the more established neighbourhoods and landscape features define stronger, more consistent character areas, each with their own special qualities and 'sense of place'.*

*The opportunity is to create new, ambitious character and positive identity as a focus for the regeneration of Inner Wirral. The degree of change will need to be transformational – on a scale capable of shifting embedded perceptions of the locality as a poor quality, low value, and deprived environment*

FIGURE 3.1 : Strength of Character - Strong

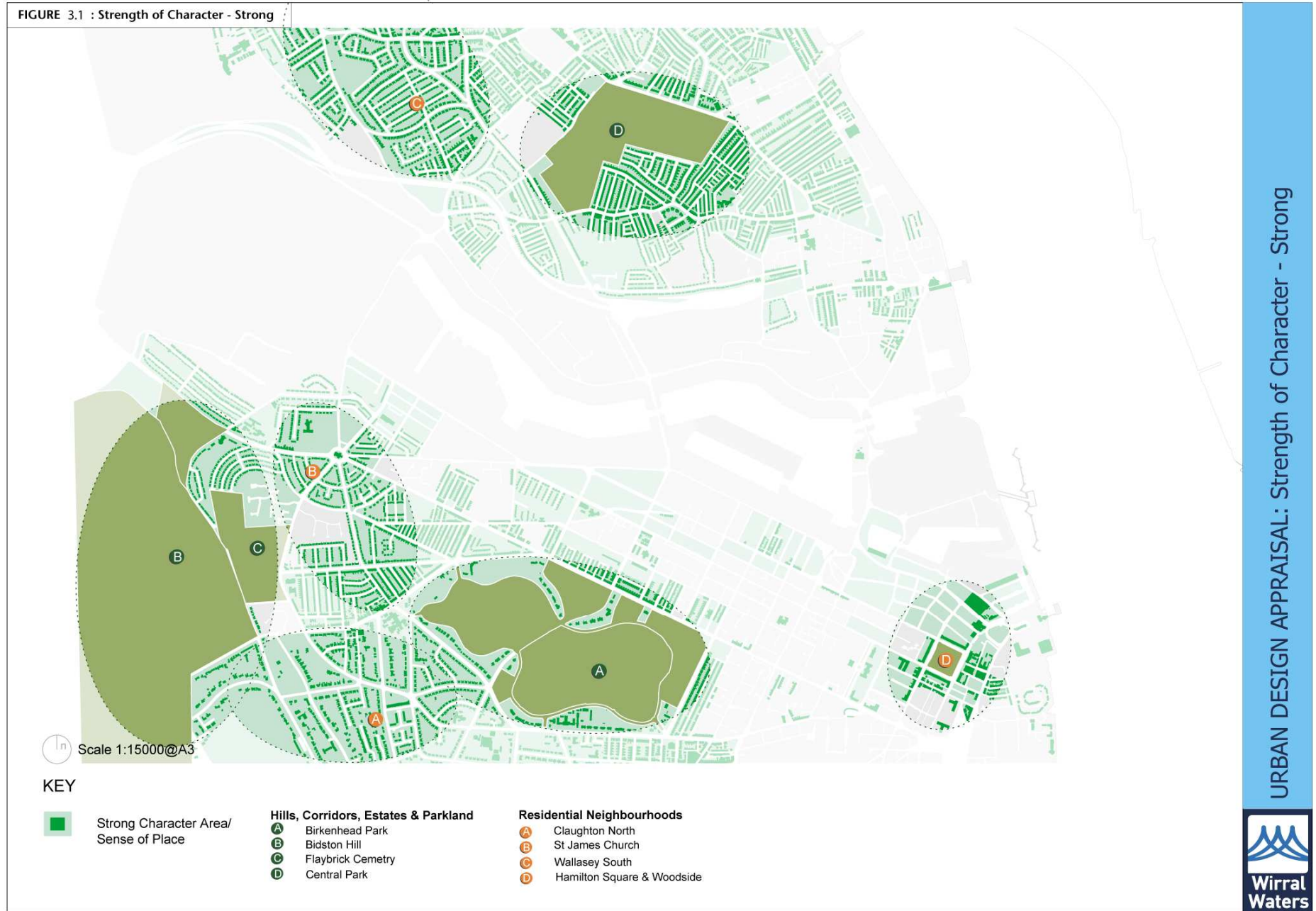


FIGURE 3.2 : Strength of Character - Weak





**REVEALING HIDDEN FEATURES:** across these contrasting character areas, there are distinct and unique features. They are of sufficient scale and/or quality to be able to ‘stand-alone’ as ‘Memorable Places and Events’. Two of the key features are the ‘Great Floats’ and the ‘Laird Town Plan’, both constructed during the nineteenth century and major influences in the growth of Inner Wirral (see **Appendix 4: Archaeology and Cultural Heritage Appraisal**).

The scale of the Great Floats, the (gridiron street network of the) Laird Town Plan, Hamilton Square and Birkenhead Park are all magnificent assets. More local features are the Bascule Bridges (and views across the Floats), the Landing Stages (and views of the River

and Liverpool waterfront, Bidston Moss and the western approach over the M53 elevated carriageways. They are illustrated in **Figure 3.3: Memorable Places and Events**.

The central axis of the East and West Float – the ‘Great Floats’ – is over 2.6km. Together, they form an unparalleled scale and expanse of enclosed water (46ha). The eastern extents of West Float offer an expanse of open inland waterway, the scale of which is more characteristic of a river waterfront than an inland 19<sup>th</sup> Century dock. The scale of the Laird Town Plan and Birkenhead Park is equally impressive. The Town Plan’s principal boulevard is uninterrupted over its 3km length. Hamilton Square is an ambitious composition, whilst Birkenhead Park spans over 58 hectares

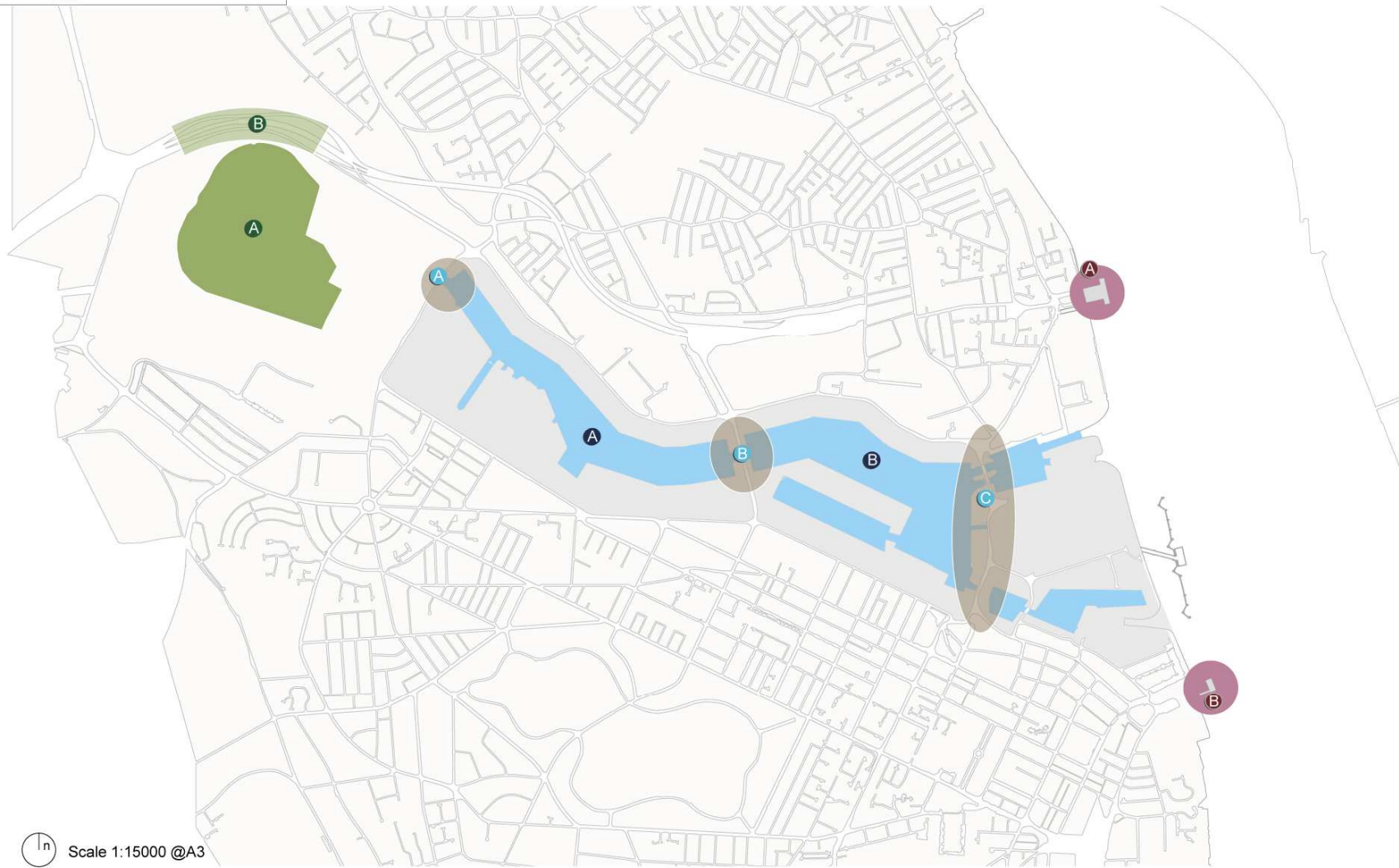
At present, all of these features are isolated between /dominated by the weaker character areas. The Great Floats and the Laird Town Plan are significant, unique and distinctive assets. They remain hidden, interrupted and ‘masked’ by the extensive, poor quality employment environment.

***Opportunity:** Wirral Waters provides the opportunity to reveal the inherent and unique qualities of the Great Floats and gridiron of the Laird Town Plan. The dramatic scale and composition of these assets provide an appropriate starting point to inform the creation of a new identity and character that is ‘of this place’ and of a sufficient scale to deliver transformational change.*

*Unique and distinct uses, activities and events are fundamental ingredients in creating a ‘sense of place’. The inherent nature of the Floats, and associated wharves, provides the opportunity to create a wider diversity and scale of uses, focused around the dockside and bridge crossing. The scale and mix of uses must be sufficient to create a unique destination and ‘anchors’ across Wirral Waters, and complement other established and emerging destinations of the River Mersey City Reaches..*

*The most consistent and direct (hidden) connections are the north-south streets of the central (perpendicular) gridiron between East Float, Birkenhead Town Centre and Birkenhead Park, and East Float, Hamilton Square and Woodside. They provide a specific opportunity to bond Wirral Waters to Birkenhead Town Centre.*

FIGURE 3.3 Memorable Places & Events



Scale 1:15000 @A3

KEY

Memorable Places & Events

<b>Docks</b>	<b>Bridge Crossings</b>	<b>Landing Stages</b>	<b>Western Approaches</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><span style="color: green;">A</span> West Float</li> <li><span style="color: green;">B</span> East Float</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><span style="color: blue;">A</span> Poulton (Penny Bridge)</li> <li><span style="color: blue;">B</span> Duke Street Bridge</li> <li><span style="color: blue;">C</span> Four Bridges</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><span style="color: red;">A</span> Seacombe</li> <li><span style="color: red;">B</span> Woodside</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><span style="color: green;">A</span> Bidston Moss</li> <li><span style="color: green;">B</span> M53 Viaduct</li> </ul>



on-going construction of infrastructure projects, in particular landfill sites and drainage infrastructure. Within the River Birkett

FIGURE 3.4 : Opportunities - Landscape & Public Realm



Scale 1:15000 @A3

**KEY**

- River Mersey City Reaches
- River Birkett Plain

- Laird Town Plan Boulevards
- River Birkett

**Hubs**

- A Birkenhead Park
- B Bidston Moss & Newlands
- C River Birkett Valley

- 1 New Brighton Seacombe Promenade
- 2 Woodside Cammel Laird Promenade

URBAN DESIGN OPPORTUNITIES: Landscape & Public Realm





Valley, the landscape character has been displaced by the Docks and the canalisation of the River Birkett. Significant tree groups are absent or dominated by the 'central industrial belt' environment. There are two distinct and unique landscape features isolated within the River Birkett corridor. Bidston Moss forms a more recent and unique landscape feature. It is unique, man-made feature in a low-lying, flat landscape. The on-going work of Groundwork Trust/NWDA/Forestry Commission is actively transforming the Moss and adjacent NEULAND sites into high quality, high profile landscape features. Together, they provide the only local high quality landscape features and recreational resources.

The Great Floats are recognised as a unique and valuable asset. In many ways, they may be considered as more characteristic of an inland waterway/watercourse than an enclosed dock system. This is a consequence of their scale, continuity and staggered alignment – defined by the underlying topography and course of the River Birkett Valley. As such, they are as much a product of the River Birkett Valley landscape character as of the Laird Town Plan.

***Opportunity:** the inherent nature and scale of the Great Floats as an 'inland waterway' provides the opportunity to establish a stunning landscape setting, capable of 'filling the void' between the West Wirral peninsula' and River Mersey City Reaches and changing perceptions of the quality and consistency of the east Wirral landscape.*

*Extending any future landscape framework to include the full extents of the 'River Birkett Valley' provides the opportunity to connect with the surrounding 'strong' character areas on the surrounding higher slopes - the Northern Neighbourhoods, Birkenhead Park, Hamilton Square and Woodside. This approach – and work with other partners delivering wider landscape regeneration projects – Bidston Moss/NEULANDS, Bidston Hill and the (canalised) River Birkett watercourse.*

*Considering inland waterways as the consistent, connecting element, with the Great Floats as the structuring 'spine' of a wider waterside landscape identity, provides the opportunity to explore the diversity of 'Wirral Waters' concept, and a landscape that is 'of this place' - from a recreational, wetland landscape setting in the west, through to a more urban, mixed use and leisure orientated waterside and public realm setting in the east.*

- **LANDSCAPE HUBS, CORRIDORS AND BOULEVARDS:** within the northern and southern residential neighbourhoods, high quality formal parks and public realm are limited to a number of large 'civic scale' Victorian Parks providing focal points for the immediate and wider residential communities. More informal recreational facilities and corridors are located to the east and west.

To the south, Birkenhead Park is an integral component of the Laird Town Plan. It is a significant, high quality landscape 'hub', well connected by public transport, with a range of outdoor facilities and a Visitor Centre. They provide a focus for formal and informal recreation for the immediate and wider communities. To the north, Central Park is set within the northern neighbourhoods, with more limited facilities and public transport connections, serving the immediate community.

Bidston Hill and Bidston Moss are located to the west of Inner Wirral, marking the transition into the wider landscape peninsula. Bidston Hill is a long standing recreational resource, with informal paths through woodland linking historic buildings and features, such as Tam O Shanter Farm, Bidston Windmill and Bidston Observatory.

Bidston Hill is emerging as a strategic recreational hub, the largest of four sites forming the NEWLANDS project, focused around Junction 1 of the M53. The project is expanding the existing on-site cycle and informal pathways, connecting the strategic cycleways/footpaths connecting south Wirral, through Bidston Moss, to Leasowe and the northern coastline.

Other landscape assets within Inner Wirral are contained to the River Mersey coastline, with strategic cycleway/footpath connections along the riverside promenade linking Sercombe Landing Stage north to New Brighton and the northern and

western coastlines. A more isolated promenade links Woodside south to Cammell Laird and Birkenhead Priory.

These landscape corridors, hubs and parks remain isolated within the wider residential and employment neighbourhoods, separated by the 'central industrial belt'.

**Opportunity:** *considering the Great Floats and River Birkett as the 'structuring spine' of a landscape framework contained between the northern boulevards of the Laird Town Plan, the M53 'cutting', Bidston Moss/NEWLANDS and the River Mersey City Reaches provides the opportunity to establish a strategic connections between existing, isolated landscape corridors and hubs.*

The boulevards of the Laird Town Plan and the buffer zones of industrial and operation port areas provide the starting points for considering opportunities to establish a diverse choice of east-west and north south landscape corridors providing landscape, educational, ecological and visual connections.

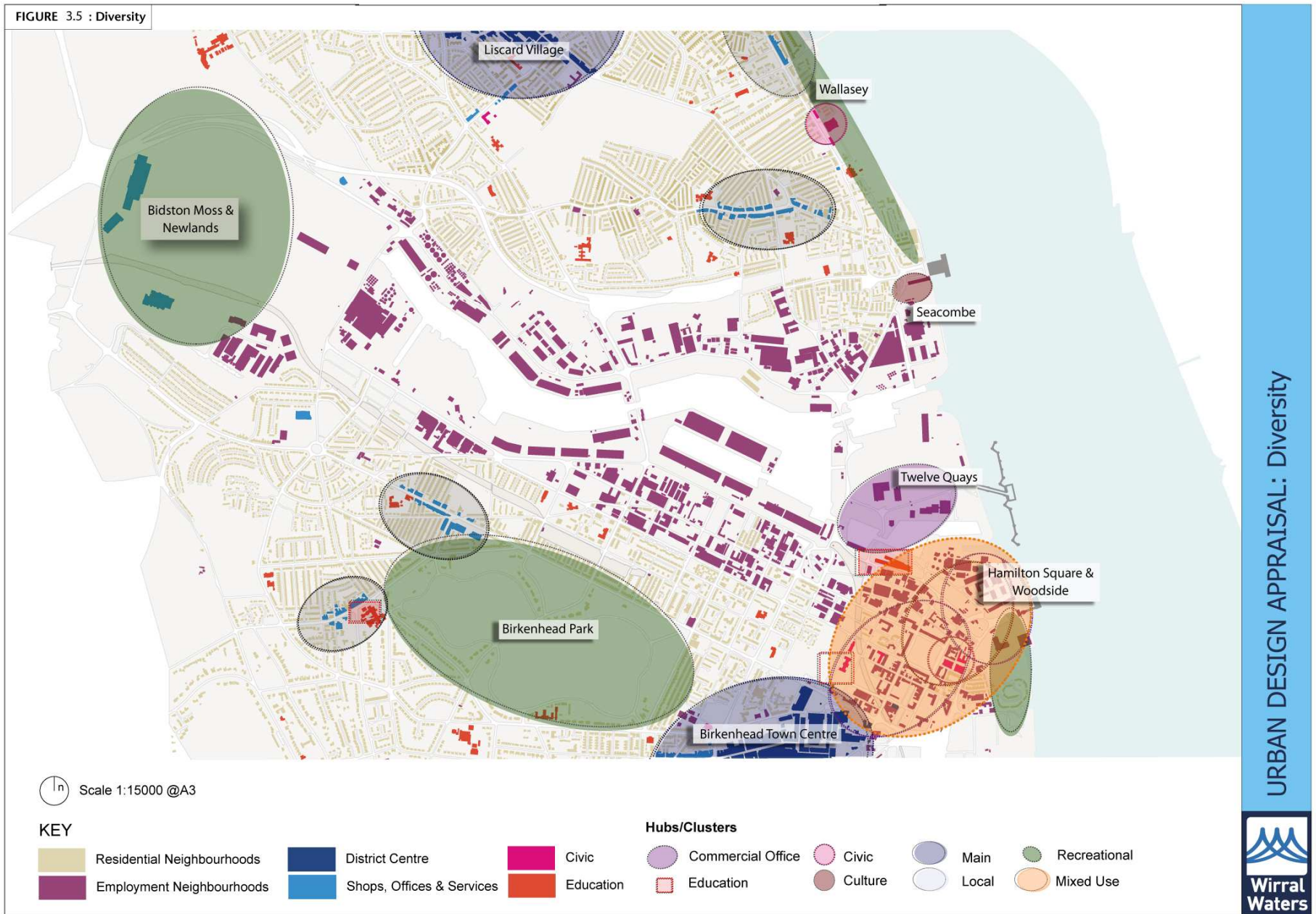
### ***Diversity and Adaptability***

- 3.10 The urban design objective is to create a sense of place with variety and choice and that can change easily. This is to be achieved by promoting diversity and choice through a mix of compatible developments and uses that work together to create viable places that respond to local needs; and promoting adaptability through

development that can respond to changing social, technological and economic conditions.

3.11 The key implications and opportunities are illustrated in **Figure 3.5: Diversity** and **Figure 3.6: Adaptability** and are considered below:

FIGURE 3.5 : Diversity



URBAN DESIGN APPRAISAL: Diversity





FIGURE 3.6 Adaptability



Scale 1:15000 @A3

**KEY**

**Land Parcels**

- Vacant Land/Underused Land
- Depots & Storage/Manufacturing & Processing

**Hubs/Clusters**

- |   |   |   |  |
|---|---|---|--|
| <span style="display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px; background-color: #9933cc; border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%;"></span> Commercial Office | <span style="display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px; background-color: #e91e63; border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%;"></span> Civic   | <span style="display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px; background-color: #6666cc; border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%;"></span> Main  | <span style="display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px; background-color: #339933; border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%;"></span> Recreational |
| <span style="display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px; border: 1px solid red; border-radius: 50%;"></span> Education                                      | <span style="display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px; background-color: #800000; border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%;"></span> Culture | <span style="display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px; background-color: #ccccff; border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%;"></span> Local | <span style="display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px; background-color: #ff9933; border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%;"></span> Mixed Use    |

- **CENTRAL INDUSTRIAL BELT:** the most significant influence on the (physical and visual) character of Inner Wirral is land use. The most dominant is the 'central industrial belt' focused along the Birkenhead Dock system from Bidston Moss to the River Mersey City Reaches. The singularity of uses creates an employment land use 'zone', with little integration, response and transition into adjacent neighbourhoods and hubs. This dominance of this land use patterns is accentuated by the fragmented and interrupted street and building patterns, and the lack of any significant distinctive, high quality landscape or building elements and/or features.

The historic requirement for extensive dockside storage and access, and the incremental growth of industrial workshops and warehouses to the north of the Docks, has created large scale land parcels along the dock edges and adjacent sites. Many of these sites are now vacant/set-a-side and/or underused. They provide extensive land parcels positioned immediately adjacent to strategic highway, rail and ferry connections. The ability to explore alternative formats and/or uses is constrained by the nature, quality and designation of the immediate surrounds as industrial neighbourhoods.

***Opportunity:** Wirral Waters is ideally placed to redress the dominance and separation caused by the extensive 'central industrial belt' neighbourhoods across Inner Wirral. The scale,*

*central location and continuity of the 'Great Floats' provides a focus for the creation of a greater diversity of uses, development patterns and forms, new character areas, activities and identities. Any opportunities considered will need to be of a scale and impact capable of overcoming long-held perceptions of the industrial neighbourhoods, and counterbalancing the dominance of the 'central employment belt'.*

*The scale of vacant/underused sites in a single ownership provides, an unprecedented, comprehensive land resource on a scale usually considered unobtainable in an inner urban area. They provide the opportunity to adapt and diversify, enabling the delivery of structural regeneration proposals without the need for significant intervention and displacement required to develop/expand comparable scale sites in established residential, retail and commercial neighbourhoods.*

- **ESTABLISHED AND EMERGING HUBS:** beyond the 'central employment belt', there is a wider diversity of uses and activities, focused around established and emerging 'hubs'. The most diverse locality is focused around Birkenhead Town Centre, Hamilton Square and Woodside creating the most significant mixed use neighbourhood and 'hub'.

The ability to deliver significant expansion and diversification within these hubs, without significant intervention into established,

surrounding land uses, street networks and building patterns, is limited. There is a history of significant interventions into the urban structure and form to accommodate the reformatting/expansion of established retail and leisure centres, and their associated infrastructure requirements. The impacts of such interventions have typically been negative, resulting in the loss and/or displacement of established characteristics. Emerging cultural, educational and leisure hubs are located on the periphery of these areas, and closest to the more sensitive and/or 'land locked' locations.

**Opportunity:** *Wirral Waters is ideally placed to enable adjacent emerging 'hubs' to expand, enabling a wider diversity of uses to counterbalance the dominance and singular 'zoning' of the 'central industrial belt'. The cultural and educational hubs are those typically associated with higher footfalls/movements and less sensitive to poorer quality environmental settings and approaches. As such, they are well placed to act as 'pioneers', able to support smaller scale, early projects prior to the delivery of larger scale, strategic developments..*

- **INNOVATION AND MARKET CREATION:** the established neighbourhoods of Inner Wirral are dominated by a narrow range of accommodation types and settings. More contemporary development 'offers' are absent, or provided on a limited scale. The ability to deliver more contemporary, innovative and alternative 'products' is constrained by the ability to deliver the required environmental setting, 'critical mass' and unique - 'of this

place' – aspect with the ability to create and attract a more 'pioneering' market.

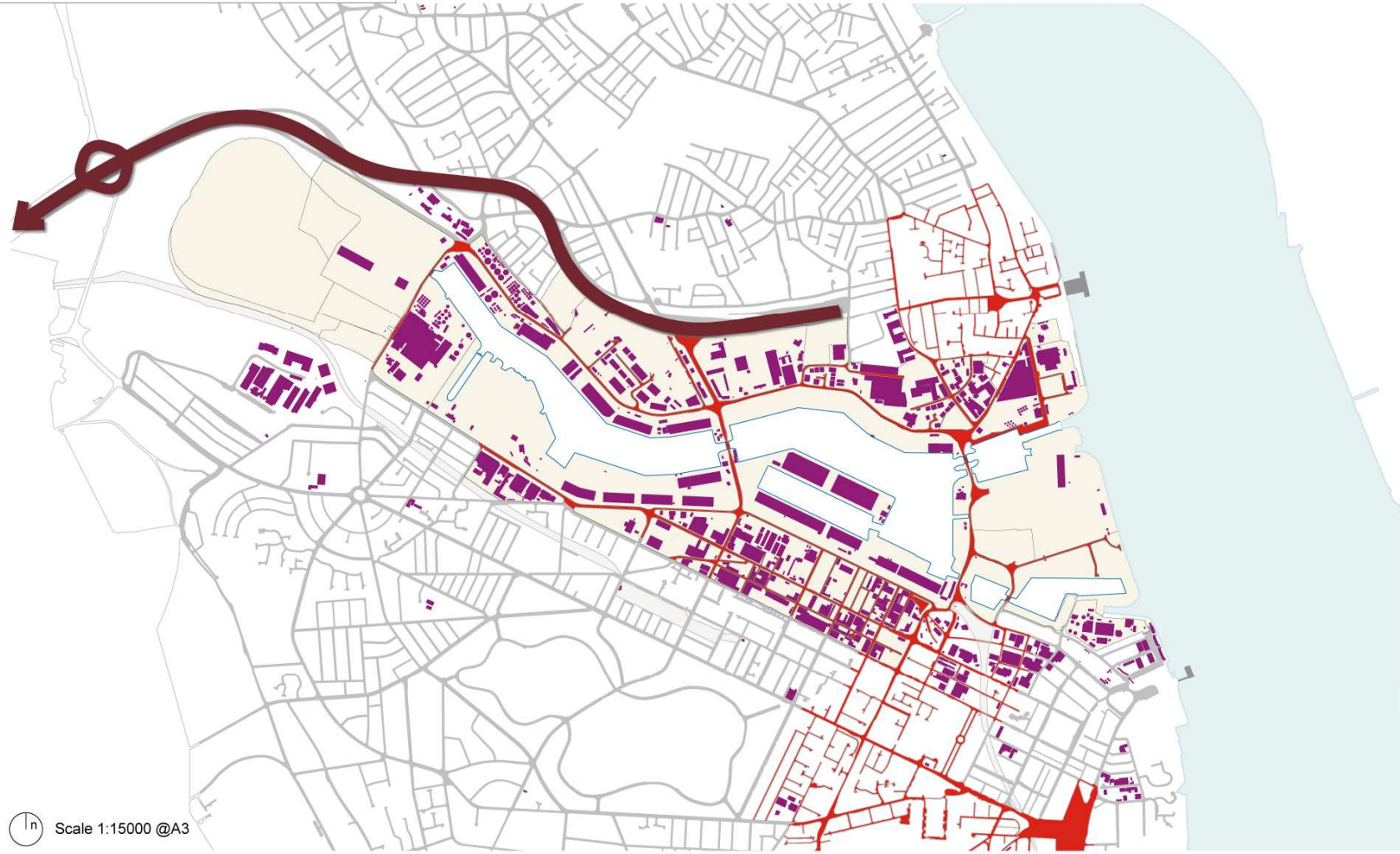
**Opportunity:** *Wirral Waters is the singular location in Inner Wirral with the ability to accommodate a 'critical mass' of change, offering a wider diversity and mix of accommodation, within a unique and distinctive setting and attracting vibrant uses, activities and events.*

### **Ease of Movement and Connections**

- 3.12 The urban design objective is to create a place that is easy to get to and move through. This is to be achieved by promoting accessibility and local permeability by making places that connect with each other and are easy to move through, putting people before traffic and integrating land use and transport.
- 3.13 A more detailed description and consideration of the movement framework and patterns is provided in Section 5: Movement and Connections. The section explores the impacts and opportunities arising as a consequence of the landscape and urban structure, neighbourhoods, clusters and hubs and urban form.
- 3.14 The key implications and opportunities are illustrated in **Figure 3.7: Ease of Movement – Barriers and Connections** and **Figure 3.8: Ease of Movement** and are considered below:



FIGURE 3.7 : Ease of Movement - Barriers & Connections



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KEY

Barriers

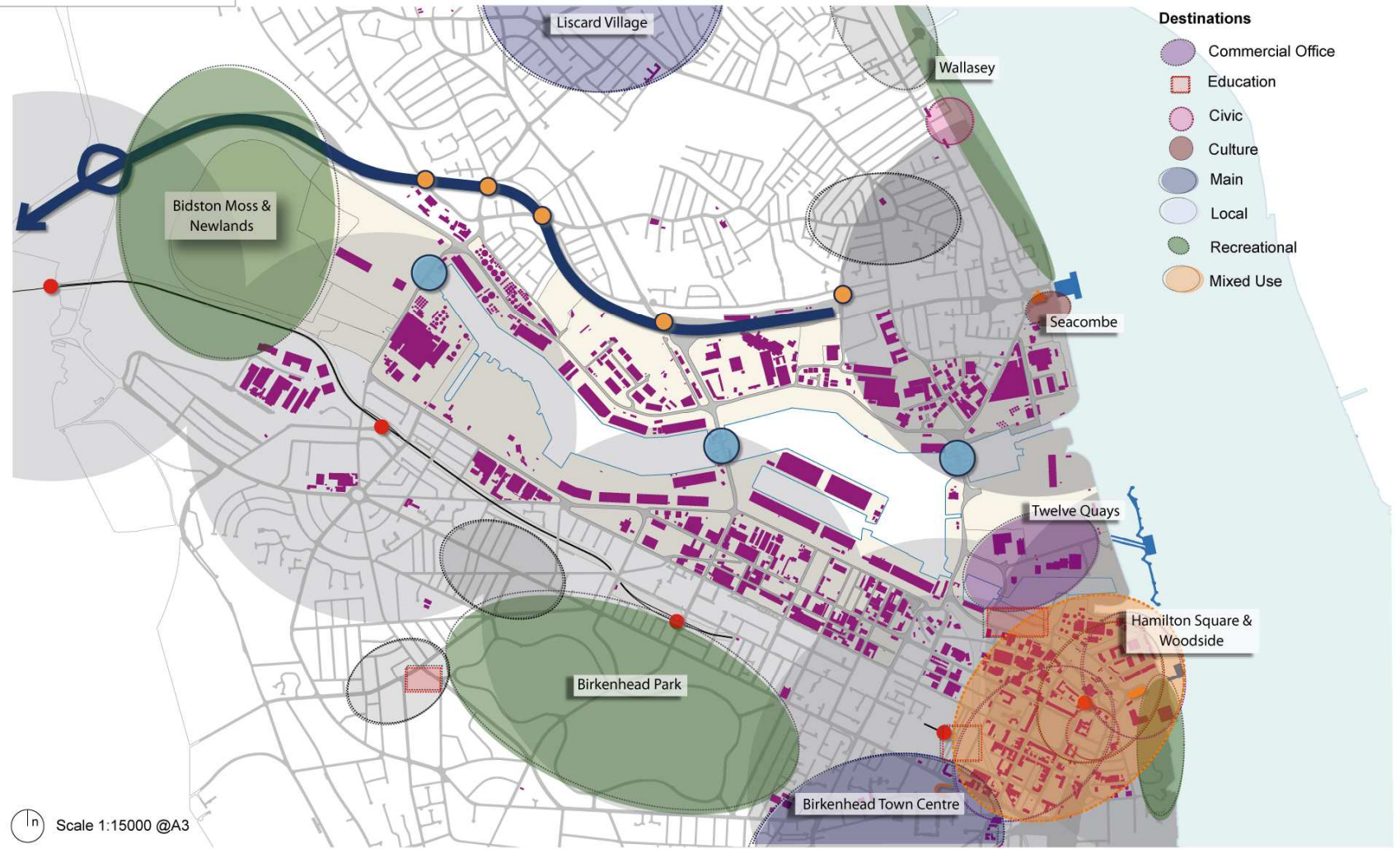
- Land Parcels
- Land Use (Employment)
- Poor (North-South) Connections
- M53 Cutting & Viaduct
- Street Network/Movement Pattern

URBAN DESIGN APPRAISAL: Ease of Movement - Connections & Barriers





FIGURE 3.8 : Ease of Movement



Scale 1:15000 @A3

KEY

- |   |                       |                        |
|---|-----------------------|------------------------|
| <b>Public Transport Hubs &amp; Corridors</b>            | <b>Barriers</b>       | <b>Crossing Points</b> |
| — Merseyrail  | Land Parcels          | ○ Road                 |
| ● Merseyrail Station & Pedestrian Catchment (200m/400m) | Land Use (Employment) | ○ Docks                |
| ■ Mersey Ferry Landing Stage                            |                       |                        |
| ■ Ferries Catchment (400m)                              |                       |                        |
| ● Bus Stations  |                       |                        |
| ● Bus Station Catchment (400m)                          |                       |                        |

- Destinations**
- Commercial Office
  - Education
  - Civic
  - Culture
  - Main
  - Local
  - Recreational
  - Mixed Use

- **MOVEMENT FRAMEWORK AND CONNECTIONS:** the origins of Inner Wirral as a port has created an urban structure with an intrinsic capability for the mass movement of goods and passengers by all modes of transport – road, rail, ferry, car. The expansion of the urban structure from historic growth and crossing points – all focused along/adjacent to the River Birkett valley and its meeting with the River Mersey – has created a network of east–west radial routes to the north and south of the Birkenhead Dock system. There is a distinct contrast between the structure of these radial routes to the north and south, and the finer grain of local streets that they contain.

These street networks provides the movement framework connecting the residential and employment neighbourhoods to the main destinations – the retail and local district shops and services, the educational, civic, cultural and recreational ‘hubs’. As a consequence, there is a contrast in the connections between the neighbourhoods to the north and south of the Birkenhead Docks.

The street network/movement framework to the north has been shaped within the historic radial local routes radiating from the docks and landing stages. These local streets provide a choice of east – west connections between the residential neighbourhoods to the west and north and River Mersey waterfront, and Seacombe Landing Stage. North – south connections are more indirect.

Connections between the northern residential neighbourhoods and the main retail, leisure, commercial hubs at Birkenhead Town Centre, Hamilton Square and Woodside are limited by the crossings points over the M53 ‘cutting’ and the three bridge connections across the Great Floats. These crossing points and corridors are vitally important in connecting the northern neighbourhoods to the services and facilities provided to the south. At present they are dominated by the ‘central industrial belt’.

The Laird Town Plan provides the movement framework to the south of the Docks, with a diverse choice of connections between the parks, residential, commercial, retail and community neighbourhoods and hubs and the Birkenhead Docks. The principal routes provide clear and well defined east-west connections linking strategic approaches from the west (M53) to the local residential neighbourhoods with key destinations.

There are local variations within the gridiron street network. The central gridiron is formed by perpendicular streets. They have been fragmented and interrupted with north-south routes particularly affected. The eastern extents are formed by a ‘deflected’ grid, with streets being aligned to best suit the steeper local topography. The western extents are defined by intersecting radial and east-west routes. As a consequence, north – south connections are less well defined.

The central gridiron provides the widest choice of clear and direct connection to Birkenhead Docks – and East Float in particular. These connections are increasingly dominated and interrupted by industrial and residential developments.

***Opportunity:** Wirral Waters is ideally placed to strengthen strategic connections between the northern neighbourhoods and Birkenhead Town Centre, Hamilton Square and Woodside. The existing crossing points and routes provide the appropriate framework to develop clearer, safer and more active connections through a more diverse range of uses and higher quality building and public realm environment.*

*More locally, the central gridiron of the Laird Town Plan is well placed to provide connections between Birkenhead Town Centre and the Great Floats. Europa Boulevard provides the starting point for creating a choice of clear, safe, attractive north-south connections.*

- **PUBLIC TRANSPORT HUBS AND CORRIDORS:** Inner Wirral is well served by a wealth of public transport infrastructure and frequency of services. They are focused to the south and east, within the Laird Town Plan gridiron and along the River Mersey corridor. The most accessible are the Merseyrail connections between west Wirral and Liverpool, with five stations between Bidston Hill and Hamilton Square. Significant areas of the residential and employment (commercial) neighbourhoods to the south of these stations are

within walking distance. Their higher densities realise the inherent value of this infrastructure. Significant areas of the employment (industrial) neighbourhood to the north of these stations are within walking distance. They fail to realise the inherent value of this infrastructure.

Bus routes are focused along the principal east-west and north - south connections, linking Liscard Village and the local shops and service 'hubs' to Birkenhead. Ferry services (local passenger) are located at the Woodside and Seacombe Landing Stages. As a consequence, Seacombe, Woodside and Birkenhead are the recognised 'hubs' for road, rail, ferry and bus connections.

Bidston Moss is emerging as a strategic recreational hub, with cycleway/footpath connections from the south and north converging around the Moss. The Moss is constrained and isolated, between the M53, railways, and docks. The location is also immediately adjacent to the Poulton (Penny) crossing point (and bus services), Junction 1: M53, and Bidston and Birkenhead North rail stations. Proposals for Park & Ride facilities are being explored by Merseytravel at Birkenhead North. As a consequence, Bidston is emerging as a recognised 'hub' for road, rail and cycleway/footpath connections.

***Opportunity:** the presence of transport hubs anchoring the eastern and western extents of the 'central industrial belt' provides the opportunity to create more diverse and higher density*

*neighbourhoods to realise the inherent capacity and accessibility of these networks and services. The north-south crossing points across the Great Floats are well placed to create mixed use, higher density urban transit (public transport) connections between the northern and southern neighbourhoods and beyond.*

*Poulton (Penny) Bridge crossing point is well placed as a focus for the M53 and strategic highway network, Bidston and Birkenhead Park stations (and Park & Ride), bus connections and strategic pedestrian cycle routes. The Four Bridges (Tower Road) crossing point is well placed as a connection between Seacombe Landing Stage, Hamilton Square and Woodside, Birkenhead Town Centre and the strategic coastal cycleways/footpaths.*

- **BARRIERS:** the 'central employment belt' forms a strategic and consistent physical, visual and perceptual barrier between the northern and southern neighbourhoods, and the eastern River Mersey City Reaches and the western River Birkett Plain and wider western Wirral peninsula landscape.

The extent, consistency and dominance of the industrial buildings and uses, together with the large land parcels created by the Great Floats (and associated wharves) between the three 'crossing points' are the key physical features acting as barriers. The lack of natural surveillance, created by the limited pedestrian activity (especially outside of daytime working hours), the extent of inactive frontages and vacant/underused sites and depots are the key perceptual barriers discouraging pedestrian movements. The limited number

of landmark buildings and structures, and strong and consistent building lines enclosing and defining clear routes through the neighbourhood are the key visual 'missing elements' to orientate and direct those using any routes other than the three main bridge crossing points.

The ability to deliver a significant structural change, capable of addressing/removing these barriers without significant interventions, is limited.

**Opportunity:** *the 'Great Floats' are ideally placed to redefine the wider neighbourhood as a destination. Their inherent qualities are of a scale and continuity capable of changing long held perceptions of the 'central industrial belt' as a fundamental barrier, dominated by poor quality, unsafe, inaccessible, inactive public realm.*

### **Legibility**

- 3.15 The urban design objective is to create a place that has a clear image and is easy to understand. This is to be achieved by promoting development that provides recognisable routes, intersections and landmarks to help people find their way around.
- 3.16 A more detailed landscape, townscape and visual appraisal is provided in Section 4: Environment and Appendix 3: Landscape, Townscape and Visual Appraisal.



3.17 The key implications and opportunities are illustrated in **Figure 3.9: Legibility** and are considered below:

- **CHARACTER AREAS AND LANDMARKS:** there is a clear relationship between the legibility of Inner Wirral and the location, extents and ‘strength’ of ‘character areas’ and ‘memorable places and events’ (set out above).

Many of the distinctive and unique elements – buildings, structures and landscape features - underpinning the ‘strong’ character areas and defining the memorable places and events are also prominent, recognised and valued landmarks. As such, many of the most prominent and recognised landmarks are found within the ‘strong’ character areas, away from the ‘central employment belt’ and River Mersey City Reaches, around Bidston Hill and Birkenhead Park.

Other landmarks/groups are isolated and less prominent. The Bascule Bridges (and moving ships), pumphouses, lodges, cranes and dock walls around the Great Floats are focused along the key north-south connections. They form memorable ‘events’, revealed when passing through the ‘central industrial belt’. Hamilton Square is more contained, creating a stand-alone ‘set-piece’ within the (hidden) gridiron street network of the Laird Town Plan.

As a consequence, there is a distinct absence of prominent, recognisable, high quality and distinctive landmarks from the main approaches into Inner Wirral. This undermines any ‘sense of

arrival’, with the approaches from the River Mersey City Reaches being particularly lacking in prominence, profile and identity.

This situation is accentuated by the recognised, international profile of the Liverpool waterfront (and emerging riverfront developments) and the dominance of the ‘central industrial belt’ and port/ferry related activities from the Mersey estuary.

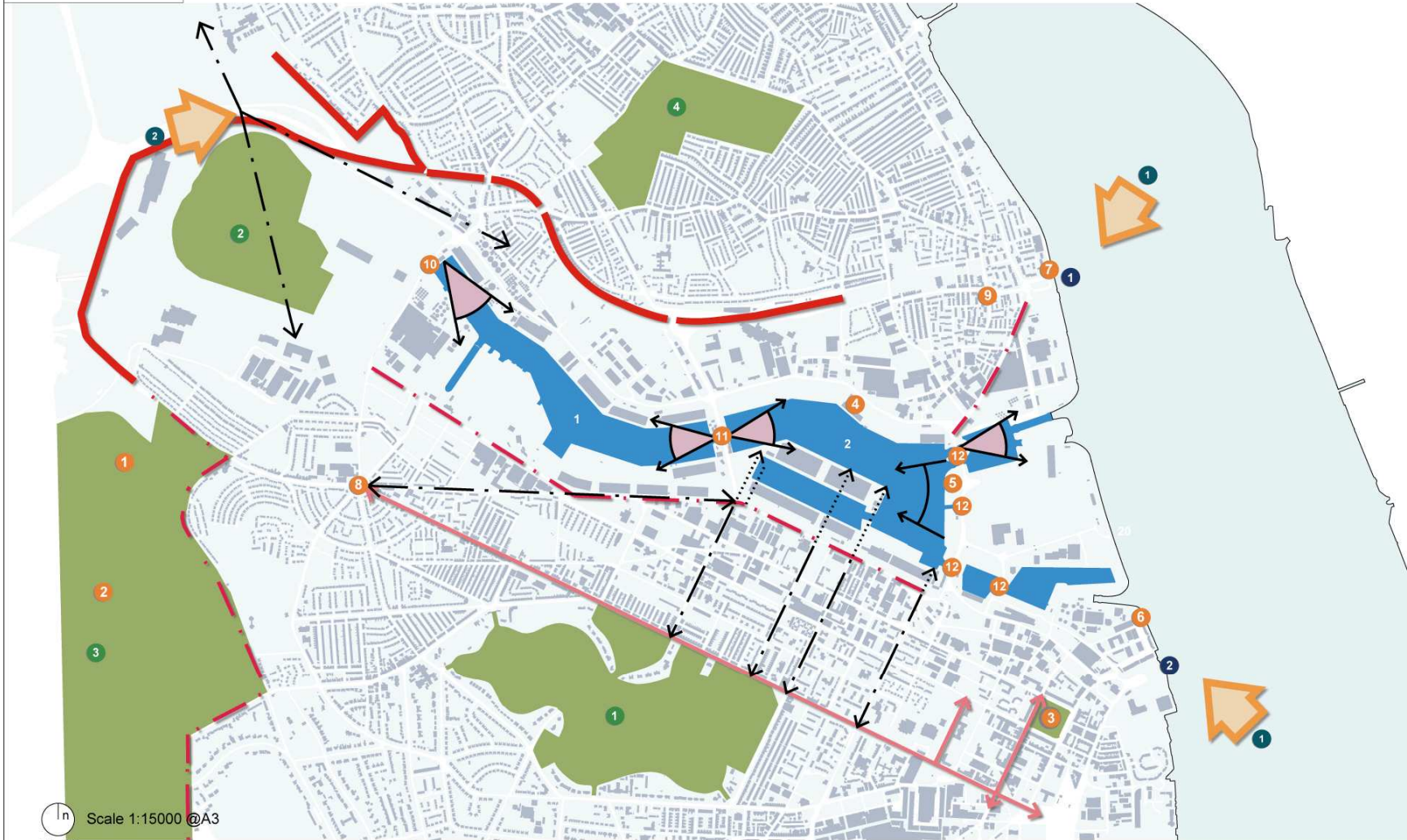
***Opportunity:** Wirral Waters provides the opportunity to create landmark buildings and events of a scale and profile capable of recognition as an international waterfront to complement the recognised profile of the Liverpool city waterfront.*

*The Bascule Bridge ‘events’ provide the opportunity to connect the landscape and inland waterways ‘central spine’ to the three north – south connections. They offer outstanding settings for access to the water edge, and the focus for high quality, public realm, public transport and mixed use destinations/hubs.*

- **EDGES:** historically, the urban structure has provided clear ‘edges’ defining the transition between residential and employment neighbourhoods, and the ‘seams’ connecting adjacent residential and mixed-use neighbourhoods.

Historically, the Wirral Railway Line/M53 alignment and cutting has provided a clear edge (barrier) between the residential neighbourhoods to the north and the industry and docklands to

FIGURE 3.9 : Legibility



Scale 1:15000 @A3

KEY

Edges

- Barrier
- - - Seamed
- · - · - Transition

Landmarks

Buildings & Structures

- 1 Bidston Hill Observatory
- 2 Bidston Hill Windmill
- 3 Hamilton Square
- 4 Corn Warehouses
- 5 Pumphouse
- 6 Queensway Tunnel Ventilation
- 7 Kingsway Tunnel Ventilation
- 8 St James Church
- 9 St Pauls Church
- 10 Poulton (Penny Bridge)
- 11 Duke Street Bridge
- 12 Four Bridges

Landscape

- 1 Birkenhead Park
- 2 Bidston Moss
- 3 Bidston Hill
- 4 Central Park

Memorable Places & Events (Other)

- Docks**
- 1 West Float
- 2 East Float
- Landing Stages**
- 1 Seacombe
- 2 Woodside

Approaches - Gateways

- 1 River Mersey City Reaches
- 2 Bidston Moss & Newlands

Visual Structure

- Open Views
- · - · - Closed Views

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the south. Beaufort Road and Corporation Road – the ‘Birkenhead North to Duke Street’ Boulevard has provided a clear (edge) transition between the residential neighbourhoods of the Laird Town Plan and the industry and docklands to the north.

From the early 20th century, these edges have become fragmented and blurred – a result of employment uses expanding and displacing residential uses and housing renewal projects interrupting established street and building patterns. As a consequence, the clear definition between residential and employment neighbourhoods is poorly defined. The nature and dominance of the industries impacts upon the quality and value of the residential amenity.

The principal streets of the northern and southern residential neighbourhoods have provided edges (seams) between the communities on either side. The focal points have been the clusters of local shops, services and schools connected by public transport (buses). The historic local routes provide a diversity of accessible ‘seams’ across the northern neighbourhoods.

The most significant and prominent ‘seam’ within the southern residential neighbourhoods is the Laird Street – Park Road North – Conway Street alignment – the ‘Birkenhead North to Birkenhead Town Boulevard’ forming the principal east west boulevard of the Laird Town Plan.

**Opportunity:** *Wirral Waters provides the opportunity to define distinct and appropriate relationships between residential, commercial, industrial and mixed use neighbourhoods. The M53 corridor remains as a clear edge and buffer between the residential neighbourhoods to the north. A clearer, more defined transition is required between Seacombe and East Float, focusing along the mixed use transit corridor connecting the Seacombe Landing Stage to the Four Bridges (Tower Road) crossing point.*

*The ‘Birkenhead North to Duke Street’ Boulevard provides the opportunity to create a distinctive, considered transition between the Laird Town Plan and Wirral Waters. This has the potential to be a structural, diverse mixed use, transit corridor significantly improving east-west public transport, landscape, pedestrian/cycleway and visual connections and providing a focus for improved north-south connections between Birkenhead Town Centre and East Float.*

- **VISUAL STRUCTURE:** there is a clear and direct relationship between the visual structure of Inner Wirral and the landscape and urban structure.

The landscape structure, most notably the surrounding hills and gentle river valley, enclose a strategic visual corridor connecting the River Mersey City Reaches in the east to the open, low-lying plains to the west. This visual corridor is dominated by scale and consistency of the Great Floats, together with the poor quality of the buildings and environment of the 'central industrial belt'. From the River Mersey City Reaches, views of the Great Floats are screened by port and industrial development.

Beyond these central areas, the urban structure defines the nature of more local vistas and views. As a consequence, there is a distinct contrast between the visual structure to the north and south. The more 'organic' streets of the northern neighbourhoods reveal unexpected, random vistas across the river valleys.

The gridiron of the Laird Town Plan provide more defined visual structure, with enclosed, framed views along the boulevards. As a consequence, there is a clear, direct and structured visual relationship between the Laird Town Plan and the Great Floats. This connection between East Float and north-south and diagonal boulevards is particularly apparent. The 'strength' of this visual relationship is undermined by the weak building patterns within the central and western gridiron. This has been weakened further by more recent interruptions/displacement of street networks and building patterns. Local visual connections between the Laird Town Plan and the East Float are curtailed by the Dock Wall. Further to the south, from within the 'core' of the Laird Town Plan, there are views across the East Float and river valley.

***Opportunity:*** *Wirral Waters provides the opportunity to create a new visual identity for Inner Wirral from key approaches from the east and west. The scale of change will need to be capable of overcoming the visual dominance of the 'central industrial belt' from the wider River Mersey City Reaches and M53 corridor approaches. The underlying visual structure of the Laird Town Plan provides a unique opportunity to improve visual connections between Birkenhead Town Centre and the East Float.*

### ***Next Steps***

- 3.18 The next steps are to consider the second stage of character based approach – Evaluation. This will be progressed through Workstage 3: Development Frameworks and will involve the development and consideration of a range of options and proposals, leading to the selection of preferred development, design and delivery frameworks, including an urban design strategy and principles. The landscape and urban design framework will be one aspect of the evaluation process, considered alongside other social, economic, environmental, visual, cultural and movement aspects of delivering sustainable communities – as considered in other sections of this Baseline Study.