

2. Urban Design Appraisal

Purpose and Guidance

2.1 This urban design appraisal defines and evaluates the strategic urban setting and identifies the implications and opportunities to be considered in taking forward the initial vision. 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.

2.2 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 which should be addressed in relation to the design of tall buildings. The updated consultation draft emphasises a characterisation based approach to initial appraisals

2.3 In summary, the purpose of this appraisal is to:

- Provide an overview of the historic origins of Inner Wirral
- Identify, describe and map key elements and features of the urban setting and the patterns/character areas they create
- Identify past/on-going ‘forces for change’ and how changes have/are impacting upon characteristic elements and activities
- Consider the implications and opportunities for the landscape and urban setting against key urban design objectives. In particular, identifying those areas where conservation is a likely priority; those structural opportunities for creating new character areas; and those existing, distinctive characteristic elements/features capable of informing/underpinning future regeneration proposals.

Approach - *Characterisation*

- 2.4 'Characterisation' is a useful method of analysis developed by English Heritage, Natural England (formerly Countryside Agency) and local authorities, and supported by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE). It provides a means of understanding the overall physical and visual character of an area, rather than focusing just on the quality of one or two special buildings or places within it.
- 2.5 Recent developments in best practice for the character based approach have emphasised that the most important principle in undertaking appraisals and developing future proposals is to clearly distinguish between two key stages of character assessment - CHARACTERISATION and EVALUATION
- 2.6 The first stage - 'characterisation' - involves identifying, describing, classifying and mapping the key elements and features of the strategic setting, and the patterns and character areas they form. The second stage - 'evaluation' - involves the consideration and appraisal of different ideas, options and proposals, in particular their impacts/benefits on existing character areas/sense of place and their ability to create new character areas/sense of place.
- 2.7 Workstage 3: Development Frameworks (following this Workstage 2: Baseline Study) will progress the second stage of character based approach – evaluation. This will involve the development and consideration of a range of options and proposals, leading to the

selection of a preferred regeneration framework, including an urban design strategy and principles.

- 2.8 Beginning as a tool for managing landscape change and regeneration, the characterisation process is now recognised CABE, English Heritage and others as being equally relevant as a starting point in preparing strategic frameworks and spatial masterplans:

"Understanding the character of a place is a crucial component of masterplanning. It can help in understanding the way social, cultural and economic factors have influenced its evolution, and it can make informed decisions on how the area should continue to change and respond to the conditions of today – and tomorrow – and reinforce the uniqueness of the place".

(Creating Successful Masterplans: A Guide for Clients CABE 2004 para 3.2.3)

- 2.9 The first consideration is identifying and understanding the 'strength of character' of the setting. 'Strength of character' is considered as a measure of the 'intactness' and 'distinctiveness' of each character area/locality.
- 2.10 Intactness is a measure of how far removed a locality is from its original urban form/activity. It has a visual and functional dimension. The former reflects the degree to which characteristic features have been interrupted and/or displaced and new, individual features have been introduced. The functional dimension relates to how 'fit for

purpose' the characteristic elements and features are to support/adapt to their current/projected uses.

- 2.11 Distinctiveness is a measure of the diversity of elements that define a particular locality/character area, and the presence of locally unique features that help to distinguish one particular place from another. Those localities/character areas that have a clear and consistent pattern of key elements/features and unique distinguishing features and activities tend to have a 'stronger' character than those that have less distinct patterns and/or features.
- 2.12 The consideration of 'strength of character' provides a more rationale basis for considering future approaches to development - conservation/enhancement where the character of a locality is particularly strong/intact, and more structural change where the character of a particular locality is particularly weak/fragmented - displaced.
- 2.13 Understanding the extent and condition of characteristic features is essential to ensure that future changes are responsive to the most valuable assets of the past. It helps to ensure that change and development responds to what is characteristic or valued about any particular setting, and that opportunities for improving/creating character are realised. Fundamentally, where the historic character has been significantly altered, the character based approach informs how strategic new character areas may be created.

- 2.14 This awareness of physical and visual attributes provides the platform for understanding the 'sense of place' - a wider concept associated with physical and visual attributes, together with animation and activities, and identities and meanings. Unique and successful places typically benefit from all three - a distinct physical setting, animation and vitality - an 'urban buzz' - and cultural identities and recognised functions derived from long standing associations/events.
- 2.15 Understanding of the physical settings provides a wider platform for strengthening and creating a distinct 'sense of place'. This may be achieved by supporting existing activities, animation and cultural associations and introducing new activities, uses, destinations, animation and cultural events.

Scope and Structure

- 2.16 In response to current guidance, best practice and the unique scale of the opportunity, this appraisal is completed in two sections. The first section considers the physical elements, activities and identity as the 'key aspects of urban design' (*By Design, Urban Design in the Planning System: Towards Best Practice*). They are set out as:
- **Landscape**
 - **Urban Structure**
 - **Neighbourhoods (Mix) and Urban Form**
- 2.17 The second section of the appraisal considers the implications and opportunities for improving the performance of the Wirral Waters

locality against key urban design objectives (*By Design - Urban design in the planning system: towards better practice*).

2.18 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*

2.19 In considering these aspects, implications and opportunities, this report is structured into four sections. They are:

- Origins
- Key Elements and Patterns
- Intervention, Impacts and Intactness
- Implications and Opportunities

Origins

2.20 The key to development in the Wirral has been the steady improvement of communications. This began in 1330 with the

establishment of the original ferry across the Mersey from the Priory in Birkenhead. The increased reliability of steam-powered boats in the 1820's encouraged wealthy businessmen and merchants to establish country houses and estates on the Wirral. The introduction of the Wirral's first railway in 1840 further encouraged settlement in the area which has continued up to the present day

2.21 The settlement pattern on the Wirral is a mixture of large country houses and estates, predominantly built using local red sandstones, and larger towns and villages such as Heswall, Hoylake and West Kirby. The towns and villages, which have developed for workers in Birkenhead, Liverpool, Ellesmere Port and Chester, are a mixture of traditional sandstone buildings and modern post-war housing development

2.22 Increased pressure for accommodation in this commuter belt has led to the expansion of many of the settlements resulting in loss of identity and gradual coalescence.

2.23 Benedictine Priory was founded at Birkenhead between 1154 and 1199, and this represents the beginning of the development of the town. It is possible that the name derives from 'Birchen Head', meaning 'on a birch covered headland', but it is more likely that it refers to the position of the settlement at the mouth of the River Birket. The Priory was responsible for the first ferry service across the Mersey, and, although in succeeding centuries there was an increasing amount of traffic through the Wirral, Birkenhead was not

extensively settled. The census of 1801 shows a population of just 110.

2.24 Europe's first tramway system was built in Birkenhead in 1860.

Wirral Peninsula to Mersey Port (1800 – 1860)

2.25 The introduction of a paddle-steamer in 1815 greatly shortened the journey time across the Mersey and meant that the ferry was no longer dependent on the weather. As a consequence, Birkenhead began to grow quickly, and by 1846 the population was around 40,000. At the beginning of the 19th century the low cost of land and potential for growth made the construction of docks on the Wirral an attractive alternative to further docks on the Liverpool side of the river, whilst the deeper water on the west side of the Mersey also allowed bigger ships to use these facilities. As a result, Morpeth and Egerton Docks were opened in 1847, and the Great Float opened in 1851. 1840 had seen the opening of the Birkenhead to Chester railway, planned by George Stephenson, and together these improvements in communications encouraged the growth of Birkenhead.

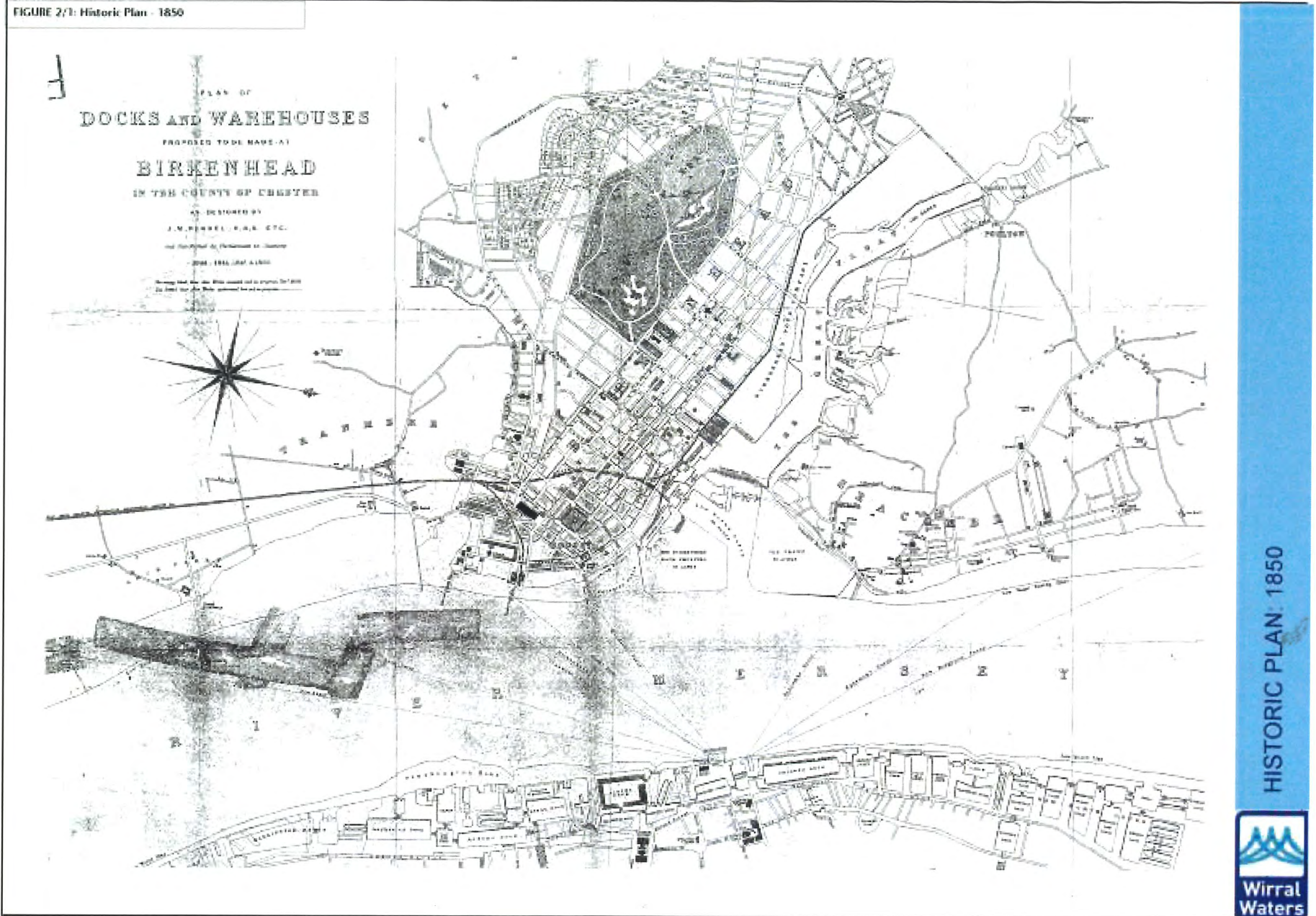
2.26 Hamilton Square, one of the finest squares in the country, was opened in 1833. It was built by William Laird, whose shipbuilding concern had grown to be a major international company, and Birkenhead's leading employer, and who named it after his mother. The first Town Hall and market hall were opened in Hamilton Street in 1835.

2.27 The shipbuilding industry developed, along with others; notably flour milling and soap manufacturing, and, as the population of Liverpool realised that they could commute from Wirral, dormitory towns such as Wallasey began to develop. **Figure 2/1: Historic Plan 1850** shows the proposals for the extension of the docks at Birkenhead. This plan illustrates the intention to consolidate the banks of the Great Float, which, at this time, were largely unimproved.

2.28 Further inland, little development is shown to the east of the village of Poulton. The buildings of five industrial facilities are shown spaced along the north bank of the Great Float, but it is unclear whether there are existing or proposed facilities. To the south of the Great Float, the grid street plan of Birkenhead can be seen to have been laid out around Birkenhead Park, although little development appears to have yet occurred amongst this framework. The municipal park itself had been purchased in 1841, at which time it was low lying, a mixture of fields, marsh and commons, and contained a small farmhouse. It had been opened in 1847, and represents the first publicly funded example of its type.

2.29 There was, at this time, apparently no development on the southern bank of the Great Float, to the north of Corporation Road, aside from a group of three large warehouses at the end of Cathcart Street, in the area of the proposed Vittoria Wharf. Development on the bank of the Mersey, to the south of the Great Float, was restricted to three ferry slips at this time.

FIGURE 2/1: Historic Plan - 1850



HISTORIC PLAN: 1850



Birkenhead Town Plan (1861 – 1890)

- 2.30 The construction of the docks appears to have been completed along quite different lines to those proposed in the plan of 1850. The Great Float had been divided into western and eastern portions by the construction of Duke Street swing bridge. Entry to the eastern portion was gained through the Morpeth and Alfred Docks (the latter constructed in 1866), each of which was then separated from Great Float East by a swing bridge. The Parish of Poulton-cum-Seacombe, to the north of the docks, was still largely rural in nature, although patches of terraced housing had been constructed to the north of the mouth of the Great Float, and a settlement had appeared at Somerville, approximately halfway between Seacombe and Poulton.
- 2.31 The northern edge of the docks accommodated several warehouses at this time, but was by no means densely developed. In place of the industrial facilities shown, or proposed, on the 1850s map, are depicted several larger works complexes, and a shipbuilding yard occupied the bank of the Mersey immediately to the north of the Alfred Dock.
- 2.32 To the south of the Great Float, the southern docks were lined with warehouses served by railroad sidings radiating from an extension of the mainline from Chester, which had been indicated as a proposed extension on the 1850 plan - these warehouses had grown up following the repeal of the corn laws and the creation of Birkenhead

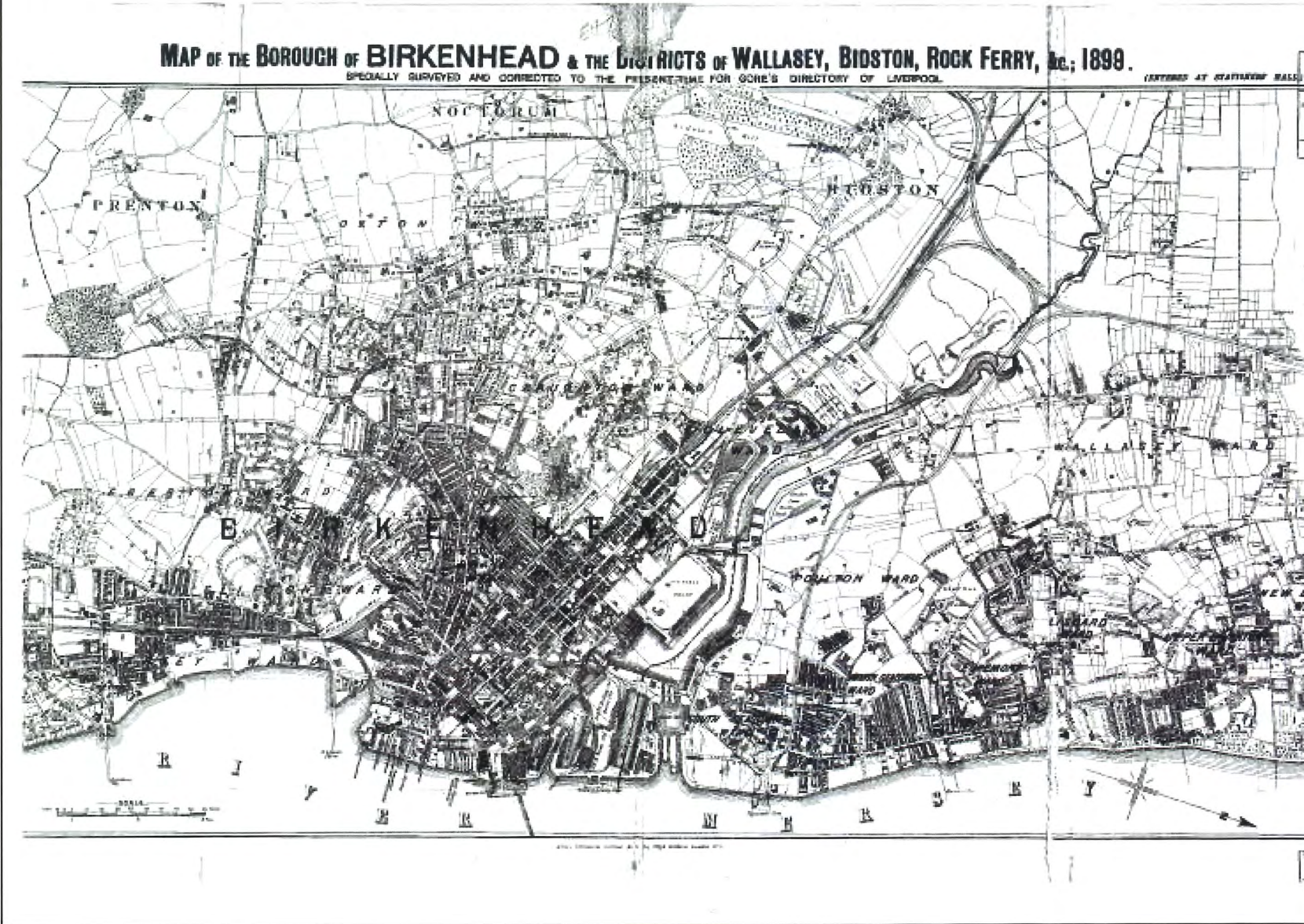
as a major gateway for the importation of grain into the north of England.

- 2.33 By 1875, the majority of eastern Birkenhead, to the east of the park was by this time largely developed with terraced housing, whilst estates of more substantial dwellings had spread to its south. Between the Ferry Termini, the bank of the Mersey accommodated densely packed slipways and graving docks.

The Rise and Fall of Birkenhead Docks (1891 – 1938)

- 2.34 Figure 2/2: **Historic Plan 1899** shows that the situation was essentially little changed by this date. The Wirral Railway had been constructed across the parish of Poulton-cum-Seacombe; the warehouses along the north side of the docks were now served by its sidings, and it is likely that the arrival of the railway was responsible for the continued development of Seacombe, in which terraced housing had proliferated after 1875. To the south of the docks, Birkenhead had continued to grow, although significant development had yet to spread to the west of Birkenhead Park. Development had continued at the mouth of the docks, with the construction of the Woodside Lairage in what had been the works of the Pacific Steam Navigation Company, to the south of Morpeth Branch Dock.

FIGURE 2/2: Historic Plan - 1899



HISTORIC PLAN: 1899



Wirral Waters

Figure 2/3: Historic Plan 1911 shows that Seacombe and Poulton, both now largely built up, had begun to merge, through the expansion of the Summerville township. To the north of the docks, and to the south of the Wirral Railway, industrial development had continued and the eastern end of the docks themselves were lined by warehouses by this time. In the southern docks, Vittoria Wharf had been partially excavated to incorporate Vittoria dock, whilst Birkenhead had spread to envelop the park.

- 2.35 Development around the docks had reached its peak by 1936. **Figure 2/4: Historic Plan 1936** shows the north docks to have been lined with industrial facilities and warehouses along the full length of the Great Float, and the Seacombe – Somerville – Poulton conurbation had coalesced around Central Park as the only remnant of the open land that had characterised the area in the middle of the 19th century. To the south, in Birkenhead, further growth had resulted in the redevelopment of areas to the south west of the park, which had been occupied by large residences in extensive grounds, with estates comprising smaller houses, although these were still more substantial than those to the north west of the park.

The war years and their aftermath (1939 – 1950)

- 2.36 Birkenhead, as well as Wallasey were heavily bombed during the second world war between August 1940 and January 1942. Derelict and potentially bomb-damaged buildings are shown on aerial photographs of the docks taken in 1945. Comparison with the

Ordnance Survey map of 1935 shows that buildings had been lost along the northern edges of the docks, particularly around the Albert Dock, which forms their northern entrance.

- 2.37 Limited redevelopment took place following the war but, overall, the evidence of aerial photographic surveys conducted in 1945 and 1947 suggest that the later 1940s was a period of stagnation in the development of the docks. Little expansion of the warehousing and factory buildings surrounding the docks is recorded in this period, whilst land immediately to the north of them appears to have been turned over to allotments or was left as scrubby wasteland. Evidence of bomb craters remained visible in these areas for many years.

East: West Wirral Peninsula (1951 – 1980)

- 2.38 Some regeneration is recorded in photographs of the docks from 1955 onwards. Buildings in the process of demolition, as well as new structures are recorded along the northern edges of the docks, as well as around its northern entrances. Further construction of new large buildings is recorded at the western end of the docks on photographs taken in 1962 and 1973, whilst the warehouses surrounding the Vittoria Docks were replaced with larger structure between 1973 and 1975.

FIGURE 2/3- Historic Plan - 1911

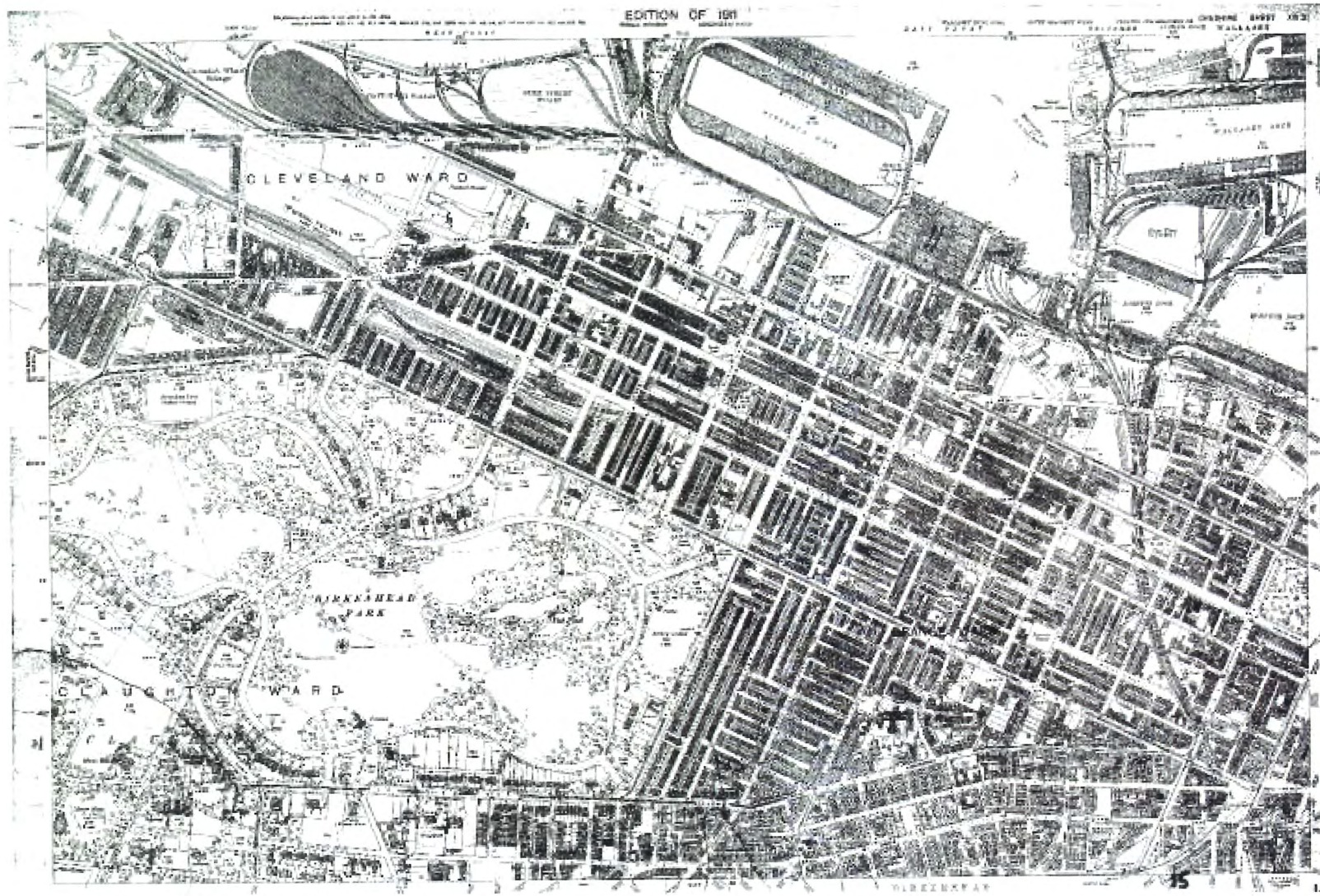
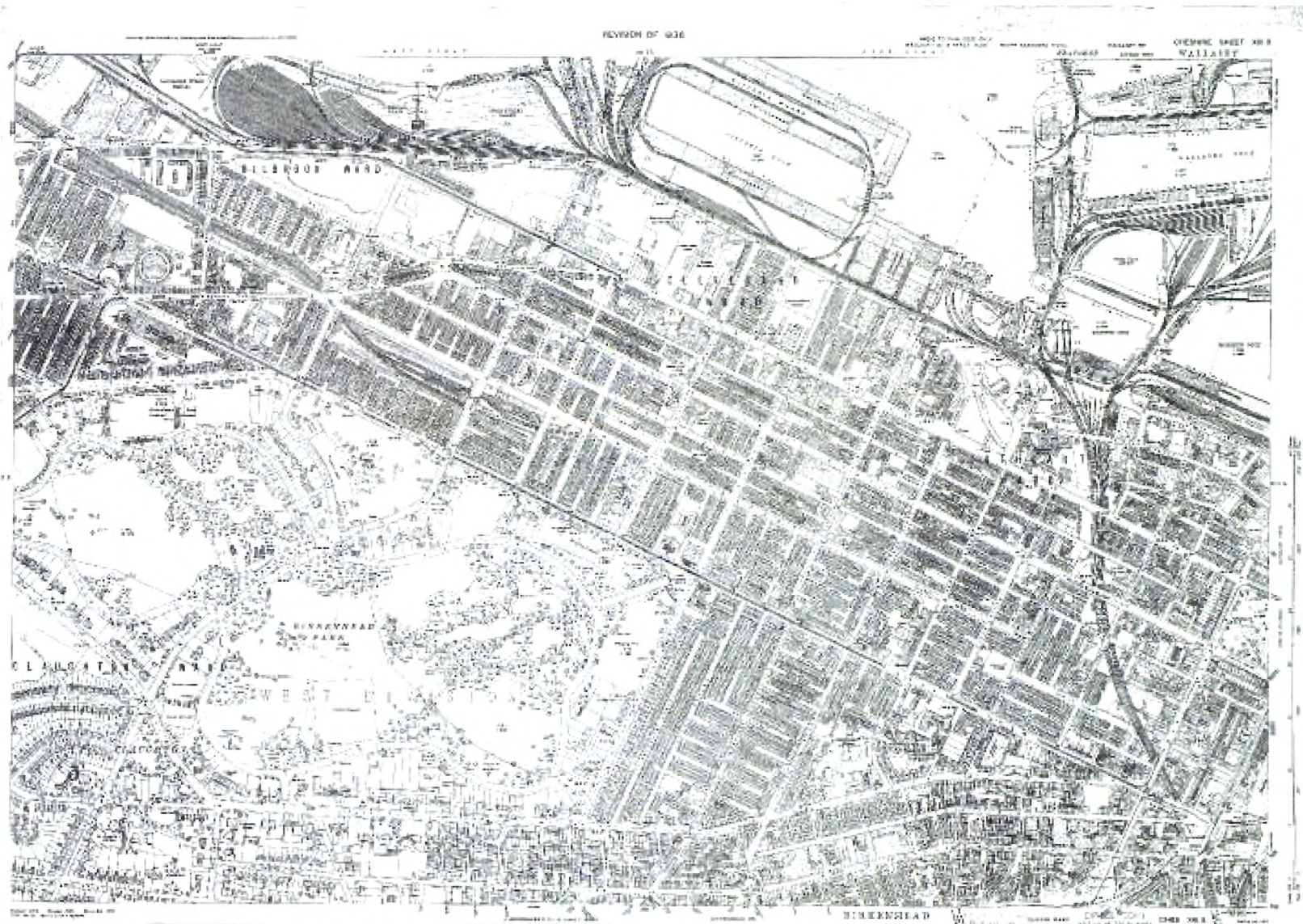


FIGURE 2/4 Historic Plan - 1936



The Challenges of Regeneration (1981 – 2005)

2.39 The process of replacing warehouse and factory buildings with modern structures continued throughout the 1970s and 1980s including the clearance of land surrounding Wallasey Dock and along the southern and northern edges of the East Float and demolition of factory buildings to the south of the west float. The declining use of trains for loading freight is reflected by the removal of the rails and marshalling yards at Cavendish Wharf between 1979 and 1982. The marshalling yards between Wallasey Dock and Egerton Dock were also removed between 1979 and 1982 and buildings cleared from this area. It is likely that this reflects the downturn in the docks' fortune in the latter part of the twentieth century.

Key Elements and Patterns

2.40 This section identifies and considers those key elements and features of the landscape and urban setting, together with the patterns they form. They are considered under the headings identified as 'key aspects of development form' in *By Design - Urban design in the planning system: towards better practice*, namely:

- Landscape
- Urban Structure
- Neighbourhoods (Mix) and Urban Form

Landscape Structure

2.41 The Wirral 'peninsula' has originated from the formal landscapes of former large country estates, smaller agricultural landholdings, natural coastal scenery and wooded sandstone ridges which combine to create an underlying unique and diverse landscape character. The diversity of the Wirral landscape is represented by two distinct, contrasting character areas – a distinctive agricultural landscape and estuary coastline to the east and more urban residential and industrial neighbourhoods and maritime coastline to the east.

2.42 With the exception of Hoylake, West Kirby and Leasowe, the western and central (northern) Wirral coastline remain largely undeveloped, with small towns and villages set within popular coastal recreation and nature conservation areas. This remains as the more widely recognised Wirral peninsula 'landscape identity'. This pastoral landscape is separated from the industrial areas of Inner Wirral by a central landscape 'spine' – an agricultural/recreational corridor (containing the M53 alignment).

2.43 This 'spine' defines the transition from the undulating west Wirral landscape, with tree covered sandstone outcrops and open aspects of the Dee Estuary and coastline, to the dense settlement patterns of industrial housing and docklands of Inner Wirral facing the Mersey estuary.

Strategic Elements

2.44 The most distinctive, valued and recognised strategic elements forming the landscape structure of the eastern Wirral peninsula landscape are:

- Central Spine and Eastern Sandstone Ridge
- River Birkett Plain and Corridor
- Wallasey Hill
- River Mersey 'City Reaches'

2.45 They are illustrated in Figure 2/5: Landscape – Strategic Elements and are considered below.

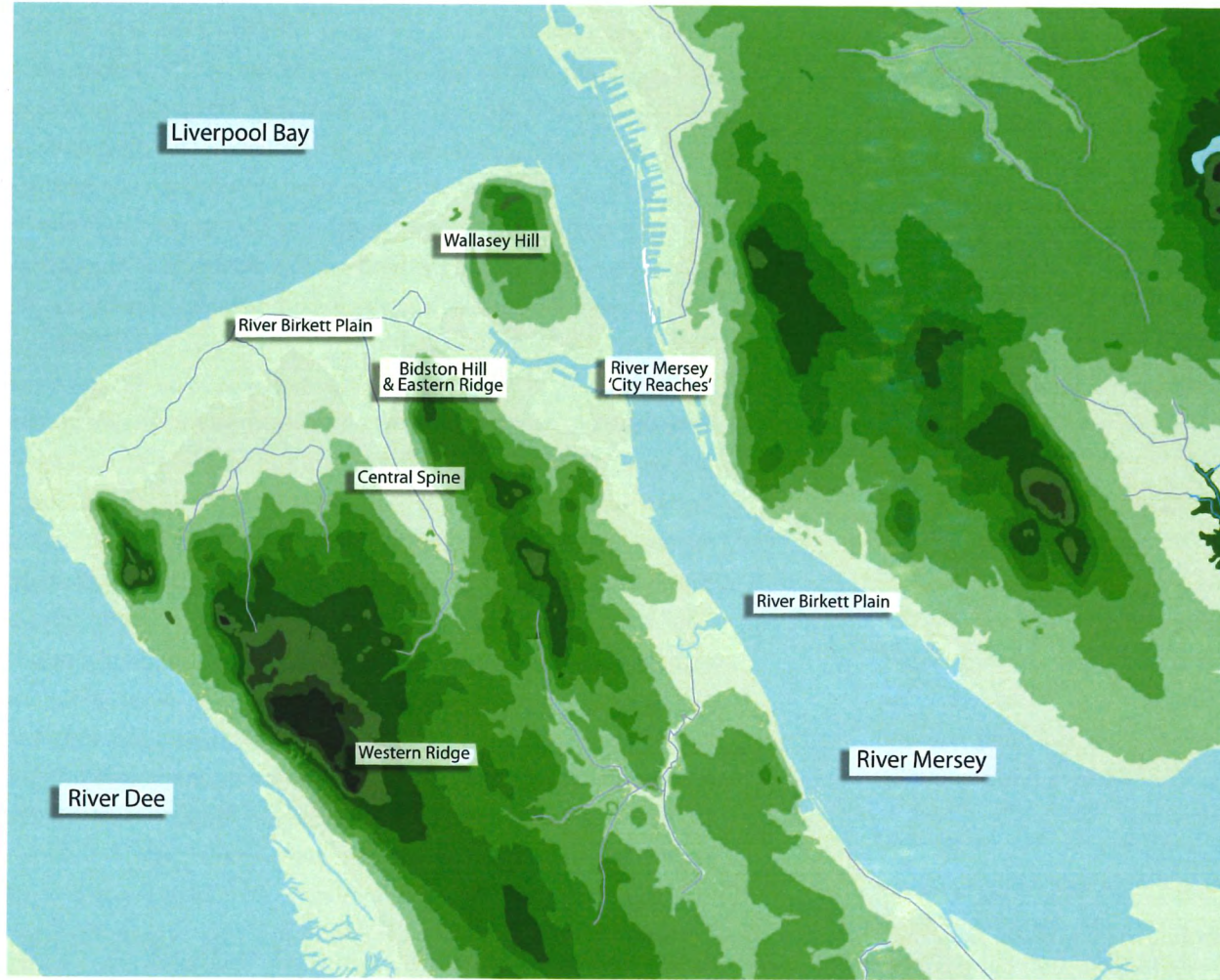
1. **Central 'Spine' and Eastern Sandstone Ridge:** sandstone ridges and outcrops are amongst the most dominant features of the peninsula, contrasting with the low-lying floodplains and open seascapes. They support areas of mature woodland dominated by pines and extensive tracts of heathland and gorse-covered slopes. There are two principal ridges, running north to south, enclosing the central landscape 'spine' and the M53 corridor, and marking the highest points of the peninsula. The 'eastern ridge' contains Birkenhead and Woodside to the east.
2. **Wallasey Hill:** is an additional 'stand-alone' sandstone outcrop extending across the northeastern extents of the Wirral peninsula. The Hill contains the western edge of the mouth of the River Mersey.

3. **River Birkett Plain:** the flat, low-lying northern extents of the Wirral peninsula are contained between the sandstone ridges to the southeast and southwest, the sand dunes along the western and northern coastline, and the Wallasey Hill to the northeast. This landscape is characterised by a flat, low-lying, topography - forming a natural drainage waterbasin for the central landscape 'spine' and the northern extents of the peninsula. This extensive, open, diverse floodplain is drained from west to east by the River Birkett.

The central extents contained between Moreton, Bidston and Leasowe is low-lying, under-used remnant agricultural and horticultural landscape. It has been the favoured location for strategic infrastructure servicing the growth and expansion of Inner Wirral, the docks and ports and the wider Merseyside Conurbation. The most notable components are the M53 Motorway and associated slipways and spoil heaps (construction phase), railways, land fill sites and isolated retail and industrial developments.

Moving north, the low-lying pastoral landscape merges into the unmanaged sand dunes and beaches forming the northern coastline. They provide a significant recreational resource for walking, cycling, riding, golfing and an ecological/wildlife corridor connecting West Kirby to New Brighton.

PLAN 2/5: Landscape Structure - Strategic Elements



key

- 90m Contour
- 80m Contour
- 70m Contour
- 60m Contour
- 50m Contour
- 40m Contour
- 30m Contour
- 20m Contour
- 10m Contour
- 5m Contour
- Water
- Canals
- Rivers

URBAN DESIGN APPRAISAL: Landscaper Structure - Strategic Elements



4. **River Mersey 'City Reaches'**: the River Mersey corridor stretches from Greater Manchester, through Warrington to Liverpool and Wirral. There is a diversity of landscape and urban developments along this corridor. However, the 'city reaches' contained between the Liverpool and Inner Wirral are unique, due to the scale and nature of the docks, urban structure and form, and the levels of river activity.

Local Elements

2.46 These strategic elements provide the wider setting for more local elements. The most distinctive, valued and recognised local landscape elements are:

- Hills, Valleys and Corridors
- Woodland and Tree Groups

2.47 These local landscape elements also form key elements of the Urban Structure (set out below). They are illustrated in **Figure 2/6: Landscape Structure – Elements** and are considered below.

1. **Hills, Valleys and Corridors**: the wider topography generated by the strategic elements creates a number of distinctive local landscape features. They underpin the visual structure of the landscape and urban setting, creating visual corridors between the low-lying wetlands to the west and the River Mersey 'City Reaches' to the east. They are:

- A. **Bidston Hill**: forms the northern extents of the eastern sandstone ridge. It contains Birkenhead and Claughton to the east and, together with Wallasey Hill defines and encloses the western extents of the River Birkett Valley. The Hill and sandstone ridge dominate the local landscape due to their height and scale, relative to the flat river plains to the north. From the steeper slopes of the peak of the Hill and ridge, the ground fall gently to the west, north and east, blending into the surrounding landscape and urban development.
- B. **River Birkett Valley**: this shallow (remnant) river valley connects the River Birkett floodplain to the River Mersey 'City Reaches'. Wallasey Hill provides a consistent degree of enclosure to the north, with the lower slopes reaching to the dock wharves of the East and West Floats. Enclosure to the south is more intermittent. Bidston Hill provides the greatest degree of enclosure, with the lower slopes reaching to the dock wharves of the West Float. Elsewhere, the southern banks of the valley are gentler and less pronounced, forming a level plateau to the south of East Float. At the western extents, the degree of enclosure is stronger, with an area of higher ground separating the plateau from the River Mersey 'City Reaches'. Hamilton Square occupies this higher ground, with the lower slopes reaching to the dock wharves of Morpeth Dock and the Woodside Landing Stage.

FIGURE 2/6: Landscape Structure Elements



Scale 1:15000 @A3

KEY



River Birkett Corridor
River Mersey Corridor

URBAN DESIGN APPRAISAL: Landscape Structure- Local Elements



- C. **Bidston Moss:** is a reclaimed landfill site, forming an 'alien' raised landform within the low-lying, flat River Birkett Plain. It is located at the (former) transition between the River Birkett Plain and Valley. Its central position within the valley interrupts physical and visual connections between the River Birkett floodplain and the Wirral Waters docks. The River Birkett has been realigned (to the south) and canalised to accommodate the (former) landfill site. Since its closure as a landfill site, Bidston Moss has undergone a dramatic transformation from an open household waste site to recreational and landscape asset. Large scale tree/woodland planting, grasslands and small waterbodies, pathways and cycle routes provide educational and informal recreational facilities.
- D. **River Birkett Watercourse:** the 'Wallasey Pool' and the (original) River Birkett connected the River Birkett Plain to the River Mersey. To enable the construction of the Birkenhead Dock system, wharves and industrial neighbourhoods, the River Birkett has been realigned and the 'Wallasey Pool' displaced. The current alignment is along the lower southern slopes to the west of Wallasey Bridge Road. From here, the River is culverted under dockside wharves into the West Float. The alignment has been canalised with steep banks devoid of tree and waterside planting.
2. **Woodland and Tree Groups:** are contained to the higher crests and lower slopes of the sandstone ridges and hills, with little tree planting within the low-lying river valleys and plains. Within the urban areas, tree groups are contained to the urban Victorian Parks, Squares and Cemeteries. As a consequence, where tree groups occur, they create distinctive landscape features. The most significant tree groups are:
- A. **Bidston Hill:** the higher peaks and steeper slopes support more significant woodland and tree groups, typically within the grounds of large detached villas and estate houses. The prominence of the woodland and tree groups is emphasised by their elevated position. The gentler and lower slopes support more contained, broken tree groups, interrupted by the encroachment of residential developments. The lower slopes also support tree planting within urban greenspaces – allotments, cemeteries, parks – providing a more sensitive transition from landscape setting to urban development.
- B. **Parkland and Squares:** the Victorian urban development contains a limited number of established tree groups within Birkenhead Park, Flaybrick Hall Cemetery, Hamilton Square and Central Park. Where they occur, they form prominent and distinct features, due to their scale (maturity) and consistency. The most significant tree groups are within Birkenhead Park, with woodland, tree

groups and avenues forming structural elements within a parkland setting. A more recent addition is significant (semi-mature) tree planting along Europa Boulevard. Elsewhere, significant tree groups are absent, isolated or in the early stages of establishment/development.

- C. **Bidston Moss:** is unique. Together with the (former) Cross Lane Tip, Bidston Local Nature Reserve and Bidston Golf Course, the Moss supports extensive tree and woodland groups in the low-lying River Birkett Floodplain. They form the Bidston Moss NEWLANDS Project (NWDA/Forestry Commission), aiming to regenerate underused landscape resources through woodland planting and access/safety improvements. The prominence of these tree groups upon Bidston Moss is accentuated by their elevated position within a low-lying river landscape corridor.

Urban Structure

- 2.48 The immediate topography and watercourses, the location of the Wallasey and Woodside Landing Stages, and the scale and extent of the Birkenhead Dock System have dictated the location and alignment of strategic movement connections and urban structure
- 2.49 Together, they have directed and enabled the expansion of the historic maritime 'growth poles' - most notably Woodside and Seacombe - from local enterprises to key components of an international port facility, and Birkenhead as the focus for retail,

leisure, cultural and civic facilities for the expanding residential population.

- 2.50 Historically, the lower lying slopes and wetlands remained undeveloped, with earlier settlements and town expansion exploiting the higher levels and hills. East-west connections have been channelled into the valley and contoured along the northern and southern banks. North-south connections have focused at crossing points, between the settlements of Bidston (cum Ford) and Poulton (Bridge Road), and along the River Mersey corridor between the Woodside and Seacombe (Tower Road).
- 2.51 The historic radial routes, crossing points, docks, railways and more recent strategic highways infrastructure remain as the underlying urban structure and have successively guided the location and structure of more local 'neighbourhood' streets, parks and public realm spaces have been accommodated. Those key strategic elements forming the urban structure are:
- Historic Local Routes
 - Laird Town Plan
 - Wooded Hills, River Corridors, Estates and Parkland
 - Docks and Dock Roads, Bridge Crossings
 - Railways
- 2.52 They are illustrated in **Figure 2/7: Urban Structure – Strategic Elements** and are considered below.

FIGURE 2/7: Urban Structure - Strategic Elements



KEY

- (Historic) Local Routes**
- A Poulton to Liscard Village
 - B Duke Street towards Wallasey
 - C Woodside Ferry to Chester
 - D Seacombe Ferry to New Brighton
 - E Seacombe Ferry to Liscard Village
 - F Seacombe Ferry to Poulton & Wallasey
 - G Poulton to Scotts Quay

- Laird Town Plan**
- A Hamilton Square
 - B St James Church
 - C Birkenhead North to Birkenhead Town
 - D West Float to Hamilton Square
 - E Birkenhead North to Duke Street
 - F Poulton (Penny) Bridge to Corporate Road
 - G Duke Street to Four Bridges
 - H Birkenhead Park to Flaybrick Hill Cemetery
 - I Birkenhead Park to Duke Street Bridge
 - J Birkenhead Park to East Float
 - K Birkenhead Town to East Bridges
 - L Europa Boulevard

- Hills, Corridors, Estates & Parkland**
- A Bidston Hill
 - B River Birkett Landscape Corridor
 - C Birkenhead Park
 - D Flaybrick Hill Cemetery
 - E Liscard Hall & Central Park
 - F Bidston Moss

- Great Docks & Floats**
- A Egerton Dock
 - B Morpeth Dock
 - C East Float
 - D West Float
 - E Alfred Dock & River Lock
 - F Wallasey Dock & Twelve Quays
 - G Vittoria Dock
 - H Bidston Dock

- Bridge Crossings**
- A Four Bridges (Tower Road)
 - B Duke Street Bridge
 - C Poulton (Penny) Bridge

- Railway Lines**
- A Wirral Railway Line
 - B Wirral Railway Line
 - C Wirral Railway Line
 - D Birkenhead Line

- Strategic Highway Connections**
- A Kingsway Tunnel
 - B Queensway Tunnel
 - C M53 Corridor

URBAN DESIGN APPRAISAL: Urban Structure - Strategic Elements



Strategic Elements

2.53 The most distinctive, valued and recognised strategic elements are:

1. **Historic Local Routes:** prior to the rapid expansion of landing stages, docks and supporting employment, residential and commercial neighbourhoods a network of historic local routes extended across the Wirral peninsula. They radiated from the historic ferry crossing points on the River Mersey, Birkenhead and local industries along the banks of the River Birkett to the villages, hamlets and Estates to the north. Routes to the south radiated across the wider Peninsula, with a limited number directed towards Chester.

Many of these routes influenced the location and street pattern of the expanding urban area and remain as characteristic elements of today's urban structure. They are particularly prominent to the north of Birkenhead Docks, structuring the residential neighbourhoods of Poulton, South Seacombe and Liscard. They are characterised by constantly changing and winding alignments, responding to local topography and previous field and enclosure land use patterns. The structure to the south of the Docks is almost exclusively defined by the Laird Town Plan.

The Historic Local Routes are:

- A. **Poulton to Liscard Village:** formed by Poulton Bridge Road - Mill Lane. Historically, this route connected Liscard to

Poulton and the Wallasey Pool Bridge (now Poulton (Penny) Bridge) across the Wallasey Pool (since enclosed as Bidston Dock and filled. The route remains as a structural connection rising up the steep incline from Bidston Dock across the M53 cutting.

- B. **Duke Street towards Wallasey:** formed by Duke Street - Gorsey Lane - Oxton Road - Woodstock Road, this route connected the River Birkett valley north to Mill Lane Hospital, crossing Mill Lane and onto Wallasey. The route remains as a structural connection rising up the steep incline to meet the M53 junction and cross onwards towards Wallasey. The original alignment (now Old Gorsey Lane) has been displaced by a raised embankment connection constructed as part of the M53 junction which is named as Gorsey Lane.
- C. **Woodside Ferry to Chester:** - formed by Chester Street as the principal route south following the eastern Mersey coast. The route remains as a structural connection, significantly altered and upgraded to service recent developments and the Queensway Mersey Tunnel.
- D. **Seacombe Ferry to New Brighton:** - formed by Church Street and Brighton Street as the principal route north contouring along the top of the slope following the eastern Mersey coastline. This route differs from other historic local routes as Brighton Street follows a straight, unbroken alignment. Historically, Church Street connected the Landing Stage to St Paul's Church, before turning



north over the Wirral Railway sidings in cutting below. Today, Church Street and Brighton Street remains as structural connections to the north. The cutting has been infilled and developed for housing.

- E. **Seacombe Ferry to Liscard Village:** formed by Borough Road – Liscard Road this route formed the principal connection between Liscard Village and Hall. The route remains as a structuring element, following the northern edge of Central Park to connect with the Poulton Bridge to Liscard Village route (A).
 - F. **Seacombe Ferry to Poulton and Wallasey:** formed by Borough Road – Poulton Road - Breck Road this route provided the principal east-west connection contouring along the higher ground and running parallel to the emerging Docks to the south. The route remains as a structuring element through the residential neighbourhoods contained between Central Park and the M53 cutting.
 - G. **Poulton to Scott's Quay:** formed by northern Dock Road, this route provided the principal east-west connection, offset from the northern edge of the Docks to the south. The route remains as a structuring element.
2. **Laird Town Plan:** the 1824 Birkenhead Town Plan was commissioned by William Laird and produced by the (Edinburgh New Town) architect James Gillespie Graham. The Plan prompted the most considered and comprehensive period of development

for Birkenhead, realising the opportunity provided by a relatively level 'plateau', with immediate connections to a natural inland harbour, the River Mersey frontage and the booming port of Liverpool.

The 'plateau' is contained between the higher ground of the southern bank of the River Birkett valley (now enclosed to form Birkenhead Docks), the significantly higher ground of the Bidston Hill sandstone ridge to the southwest, and the slightly elevated ground to the east (now supporting Hamilton Square).

The Plan is structured around a number of strategic elements, four stand-alone elements connected by a distinct and recognisable gridiron. This street network provides a clear hierarchy of ten strategic boulevards. They are considered prominent, contrasting with other streets due to their scale, their straight, uninterrupted alignment over significant distances and more generous widths.

The four 'stand-alone' elements are:

- A. **Hamilton Square:** is the principal focal point for the eastern extents of the Town Plan. It is a coherent, grand, enclosed formal square with central gardens, tree groups and memorials. The Square occupies an elevated position above the docks to north and the River Mersey to the east, with a more gentle transition towards Birkenhead town to the south.

- B. **St James Church:** is the principal focal point for the western extents of the Town Plan and the central point of a radial street pattern. The eastern boulevard radiating from the Church cuts across and terminates the western extents of the gridiron. The Church occupies an elevated position above the docks to the north and the Town Plan to the east. The Church is also located on the lower slopes of Bidston Hill, with the ground rising to the southwest.
- C. **Birkenhead Park:** is the principal focus for the southern extents of the Town Plan, and is aligned along the east west gridiron orientation. The Park is considered below under Hills, Corridors, Estates and Parkland.
- D. **Flaybrick Hill Cemetery:** is the principal focus for the far western extents of the Town Plan. The Cemetery is considered below under Hills, Corridors, Estates and Parkland.

The ten boulevards are:

- E. **Birkenhead North to Birkenhead Town:** formed by Laird Street – Park Road North – Conway Street, this is recognised as the principal east west boulevard connecting St James Church, to Birkenhead Park and Birkenhead town. Distinguishing aspects are a straight, uninterrupted alignment over 3km and across the central ‘dip’, a generous width (ranging between 15-25m between building frontages), enclosure by the established tree

groups and parkland of Birkenhead Park along its southern central extents, and the presence of St James Church ‘anchoring’ its western end.

- F. **West Float to Hamilton Square:** a group of two parallel principal east-west boulevards - Cleveland Street and Price Street connecting southern extents of the West Float dockside to Hamilton Square. Key aspects are straight, uninterrupted alignments over 2km falling towards the West Float, generous width (ranging between 15-25m between building frontages), and the presence of Hamilton Square ‘anchoring’ their eastern ends.
- G. **Birkenhead North to Duke Street:** formed by Corporation Road radiates from St James Church to Duke Street (Bridge) enclosing the western extents of the Cleveland Street and Price Street boulevards. Key aspects are a straight, uninterrupted alignment over 1.5km falling towards East Float, a generous width (ranging between 20-25m between building frontages), and the presence of St James Church ‘anchoring’ its western end.
- H. **Poulton (Penny) Bridge to Corporation Road:** formed by Beaufort Road connecting the far western extents of the Town Plan to Birkenhead North. Key aspects are the straight, level, uninterrupted alignment over 900m and the generous width created by the open aspect of the (redundant) railtrack running along the northern road kerblines.

- I. **Duke Street to Four Bridges:** formed by Corporation Road connecting two of the historic crossing points – Duke Street and Tower Road. Key aspects are the straight, level, uninterrupted alignment over 950m and the Dock Wall enclosure along the northern edge – with the building line set back some distance beyond.
- J. **Birkenhead Park to Flaybrick Hill Cemetery:** formed by Park Road North and Bidston Road connecting these two strategic elements. Key aspects are the straight, deflecting alignment over 1.2km rising towards Bidston Hill, and the continuous continuity and enclosure created by the residential properties along each frontage.
- K. **Birkenhead Park to Duke Street Bridge:** formed by Duke Street connecting the Ashville Road (running through Birkenhead Park) to the Duke Street Bridge. Key aspects are the straight, uninterrupted alignment over 650m falling towards the docks.
- L. **Birkenhead Park to East Float:** formed by Park Road East and Vittoria Street connecting the eastern extents of the Park to the Docks. Key aspects are the straight, uninterrupted alignment over 1km, enclosure by the established tree groups and parkland of Birkenhead Park along its southern western extents, the presence of the Grand Entrance to the Park at the crossing point with the Conway Park/Park Road North, and the prominent rising topography to the southern extents.

- M. **Birkenhead Town to Four Bridges:** formed by Rendel Street, Watson Street and Exmouth Street connecting the western extents of Birkenhead Town to Tower Road. Key aspects are the straight, uninterrupted alignment over 1km and the presence of the (unused) Mersey Tunnel Entrance at the northern extents.
- N. **Europa Boulevard:** is a more recent addition to the southeastern extents of the Town Plan. It is shorter in length than the more strategic boulevards, aligned along the north-south gridiron orientation. It provides two parallel highways enclosing two parallel boulevards immediately adjacent to Birkenhead town.

- 3. **Hills, Corridors, Estates and Parkland:** the wider setting provides a diversity of valuable local landscape elements, as described above. A number of these elements contribute to the urban structure of Birkenhead, Seacombe, Poulton, Liscard and Bidston, and their particular aspects are considered here in more detail.

There are five strategic landscape elements. They are:

- A. **Bidston Hill:** is a natural feature forming the northern extents of the mid Wirral sandstone ridge. It is the highest landform in the locality, marking the transition from undulating higher ground to the low lying wetlands of the River Birkett. It is a significant feature in historic development and present structure of Inner Wirral,



containing Birkenhead and Claughton to the east and the River Birkett corridor to the north. Its height, steep sides and bedrock have deterred extensive development and it retains significant areas of indigenous woodland and tree groups. The Hill is the focus for a number of landscape assets including Flaybrick Hall Cemetery and Taylor's Wood.

- B. **River Birkett Landscape Corridor:** is the remaining landscape element connecting the Birkenhead Dock system to the wider low-lying wetland landscape to the west of the M53 corridor. The River Birkett is canalised within a narrow landscape corridor, contained between Merseyrail railway lines to the immediate north and industrial and retail buildings and development parcels to the south. It connects to three isolated landscape parcels separated by the M53 elevated viaduct, and the associated slipways and connections to the wider strategic highway network. The three land parcels are the Bidston Local Nature Reserve (LNR), the (former) Cross Lane Tip, and the Bidston Golf Course.
- C. **Birkenhead Park:** is a grand Victorian Park and integral feature of the Laird Town Plan (its contribution to the Plan is considered above). The Park was designed by Joseph Paxton and opened in 1847 and is said to have inspired the design of Central Park in New York. The Park is the most significant entity within the Town Plan and Birkenhead, over 1.2km in length and covering 58

hectares. It is characterised by extensive open grassland, tree groups and lakes, informal pathways and recreational facilities. The scale and visual structure accommodates the otherwise prominent rising topography into the 'garden suburbs' residential neighbourhoods to the south and Bidston Hill beyond. Ashville Road bisects the Park, creating eastern and western parkland.

- D. **Flaybrick Hall Cemetery:** forms the most western element of the Laird Town Plan and is set within a coherent woodland setting. Located on the lower slopes of Bidston Hill, it provides a gentle transition between the Laird Town Plan and the woodland and villas to the west.
- E. **Liscard Hall & Central Park:** Central Park is a large Victorian Park created from the grounds of Liscard Hall Estate during the late nineteenth century. The Park is a significant asset serving the residential neighbourhoods of Liscard, South Seacombe and Poulton approximately 1.2km north of Birkenhead Docks. The scale of the Park is significant, approximately 700m in length and covering 24 hectares as a single land parcel. It is contained within the strategic radial routes leading to Seacombe and Wallasey Landing Stages, with an elevated position overlooking the River Mersey to the east, New Brighton to the north and Birkenhead Docks to the south.
- F. **Bidston Moss and Cross Lane (former) Tip:** is a reclaimed landfill site and has benefited from a sustained and structural programme of native tree planting, grassland

and wetland creation, and the construction of informal pathways and cycling facilities.

4. **Docks and Dock Roads, Bridge Crossings:** the opportunity to capture the success of the maritime industries and trading activity spilling over from the Liverpool docks enabled the expansion of the Landing Stages and the development of the extensive Birkenhead Dock System.

The Laird Town Plan proposed a dock system to enclose the northern extents of the Plan. The works required the diversion and canalisation of the River Birkett and the enclosure of the Wallasey Pool. Construction of the 'Great Float' (East and West Float) began in 1844, followed by further extensions to the east and west to create an extensive series of inland waterway components and bridge crossings.

The Docks are:

- A. **Edgerton and Morpeth Docks:** constructed in 1847, these two docks marked the beginning of the transformation of the River Birkett and Wallasey Pool into the Birkenhead Dock System. In contrast to the adjacent docks to the west, they are smaller in size and scale (1.4 and 4 ha respectively). They remain as structural elements, enclosing the north eastern extents of the gridiron. Both docks are tightly contained within the surrounding road network.

- B. **East and West Float:** constructed between 1851 (East) and 1860 (West) forming the 'Great Float'. The scale of the docks is unique. East Float (25 ha) is nearly 1km in length along its central axis, and nearly 200m across. The dock edge running parallel to Tower Road is 465m. West Float (21ha) is 1.4km in length along its central axis, and ranges from 120 to 155m across. Together, they form an unparalleled scale and expanse of enclosed water (46ha). The northern Dock Road runs parallel to the East and West Float dock walls from connecting the Poulton (Penny) Bridge Crossing, the Duke Street Bridge Crossing and the Four Bridges (Tower Road) Crossing. The Dock Road is offset by approximately 80m creating narrow wharfs along the northern edges of the Floats. The southern extents of the dock wharfs are contained by the northern edges of the Laird Town Plan 'Boulevards'. The southern wharfs of West Float are of a larger scale than those along the northern edge, ranging from 300m width in the east to 130m width in the west. The southern edge of East Float was historically significant in scale. This was later reduced to allow the construction of Vittoria Dock and Wharf. The northern extents of East Float are contained by a larger scale wharf (nearly 1km in length). Together, the scale of the docks and the wharfs create significant land parcels, with only three crossing points, each over 1km apart, between Birkenhead (to the south) and Poulton and Seacombe (to the north).

- C. **Alfred Dock and River Lock:** constructed in 1866, this is the only remaining working connection between the East Float and the River Mersey. In contrast to the adjacent docks to the west, the Dock is smaller in size and scale (4ha) and is tightly contained by adjacent commercial land uses, in particular the Twelve Quays Terminal to the south.
- D. **Wallasey Dock and Twelve Quays:** constructed in 1877, has been filled to allow for the construction of the Twelve Quays Terminal. There are no visible remains. The Twelve Quays Terminal forms a single land parcel contained between Morpeth Wharf in the south, Alfred Dock and Loch to the north, the Four Bridges (Tower Road) Crossing to the west and the River Mersey to the east.
- E. **Vittoria Dock:** constructed in 1909, is smaller in scale than the adjacent Docks (5Ha) and the most regular shaped (490m length and 100m across). The southern edge of the Dock is contained by a narrow wharf (90m). The northern edge is contained by Vittoria Wharf (100m width)
- F. **Bidston Dock:** constructed in 1933, has been filled in. The Dock area, the remaining wharfs and the redundant railway siding create a significant scale land parcel (18ha) enclosing the western extents of the Birkenhead Dock system.

The Bridge Crossings are:

- A. **Four Bridges (Tower Road):** is a historic route connecting the Laird Town Plan to Seacombe. The infilling of Wallasey Dock has created a causeway along the southern extents. The northern bridge spans the single remaining connection between Birkenhead Docks and the River Mersey.
- B. **Duke Street Bridge:** is of more recent origins (circa 1860) and connects Birkenhead Park and the central areas of the Laird Town Plan to the M53 (Liverpool) and Liscard and Wallasey.
- C. **Poulton (Penny) Bridge:** one of the most historic routes and now connects Bidston and the western extents of the Laird Town Plan to the M53, Poulton, Liscard and Wallasey. The Bridge is now a causeway, as Bidston Dock has been filled.

Railways: introduced during the later stages of the nineteenth century, provided the earliest significant strategic connections. They created a dramatic step-change in both the docks catchment and the ability to transport higher volumes and heavier weights and cargoes, and larger numbers of sea bound passengers. The introduction of local passenger services also enabled easier and more reliable connections with Liverpool, facilitating the expansion of surrounding residential neighbourhoods.

Two railway lines were introduced - the Wirral Railway Line and the Birkenhead Railway Line. The Wirral Railway Line constructed in ***, approached north east Wirral through the central, flat, low-lying wetlands of the Wirral Peninsula 'central spine', before turning east around the lower slopes of Bidston Hill. At this point, the railway line separated into four spurs, including:

- A. **Wirral Railway Line – Hamilton Square and Southern Docks:** the main spur continued to the east to align with the emerging Laird Town Plan gridiron. The line separated into two lines as it ran east across the Poulton (Penny) Bridge Crossing Point.

The first line ran parallel to the southern dock walls of the 'Great Floats' between the Poulton (Penny) Bridge and the Four Bridges (Tower Road) Crossing Points. Running parallel to the most northern east-west boulevards of the Laird Town Plan, this railway line defined the transition between the Town Plan and the docks. The (redundant) railway line alignment and track remains in place.

This second line turned southeast and entered a cutting, running along an east-west alignment parallel to the Laird Town Plan boulevards. The influence/impact on the urban structure was minimal as the line was in cutting. Today, this line forms the principal Merseyrail connection between

north and west Wirral, and Hamilton Square and Liverpool city centre.

- B. **Wirral Railway Line – Seacombe Landing Stage and Northern Docks:** a second spur continued north to encircle Bidston Moss. The line separated into two as it crossed the (original) River Birkett.

The first line entered a cutting and connected to Seacombe Landing Stage. This alignment now accommodates the M53, connecting to Liverpool city centre through the Kingsway Tunnel. The second line turned east to run parallel to the northern dock edge through agricultural land and scattered mills and engineering works Scott's Quay. The (redundant) railway line track remains in place.

Both lines played a significant role in structuring the subsequent expansion and development to the north of the Docks. The northern railway line cutting remains as the defining element marking the transition from employment/maritime activities to the residential neighbourhoods of Poulton, Wallasey, Seacombe and Egremont.

- C. **Wirral Railway Lines – Western and Northern Connections:** the third and fourth spurs continued to the north and west connecting to the wider residential neighbourhoods and

agricultural hinterlands of West Wirral and the New Brighton Resort. Both remain as railway lines across open landscape forming part of the Merseyrail system.

- D. **Birkenhead Line:** an independent line, approached Birkenhead Docks from the south along the western boundary of the River Mersey. The branchline separated into two lines to the south of Birkenhead Town centre and entered into cuttings. As a consequence, their impact/influence on the urban structure has been limited.

The first connected to the Woodside Landing Stage and remains in active use the principal Merseyrail line connecting Liverpool city centre and Hamilton Square south to Chester. The second line connected to Morpeth Dock, Wallasey Dock and the Seacombe Ferry Terminal. This (redundant) cutting remains as a physical connection between Birkenhead Town centre and the Birkenhead Dock system.

5. **Strategic Highway Connections:** the Laird Town Plan and Historic Local Connections provide a diverse and intricate network of highway connections serving local and district needs. The regional and national importance of the locality, in particular the dock and port activities and the close connections with Liverpool, has required the introduction of significant highway connections.

The Strategic Highway Connections are:

- A. **Kingsway Tunnel:** connects the M53 Motorway to the northern approaches to Liverpool city centre. The route and tunnel infrastructure has been accommodated within the Wirral Railway Cutting and sidings previously serving the Seacombe Landing Stage. The most eastern extents of the cutting, adjacent to the Landing Stage and St Paul's Church, have been infilled and developed as housing. The impacts from the introduction of this tunnel on the urban structure have therefore been minimal.
- B. **Queensway Tunnel:** connects the A41 strategic highway network to Old Haymarket, Liverpool city centre. The Tunnel emerges at the junction of Chester Street, a 'Historic Local Route', and Conway Street, the principal east-west Boulevard of the Laird Town Plan. The impact on the urban structure has been dramatic, with the associated infrastructure requiring extensive land areas, fragmenting historic patterns and connections. The streets and neighbourhoods to the east of Birkenhead town centre, focusing around Birkenhead Priory and Cammell Lairds have been severed from Birkenhead Town Centre and the Laird Town Plan gridiron.
- C. **M53 Corridor (formerly Wirral Railways):** the most significant restructuring of historic transport connections has been the introduction of the M53 motorway along the alignment of the Wirral Railway Line. From the southern approach around Bidston Hill, the carriageways are elevated above the low-lying wetlands creating extensive

tracts of underused, isolated land parcels. Moving east, the motorway enters into a Cutting. The infrastructure – slipways and junction roundabouts have displaced historic street networks and interrupted the urban structure.

'Neighbourhood' Typologies

2.54 The key strategic elements set out above define the overarching urban structure. Each contains and influences a finer grain of local streets and greenspaces forming distinct and recognisable neighbourhood patterns (typologies).

2.55 The neighbourhood typologies are:

- Northern Neighbourhoods
- Dockside and Lower Valley Slopes
- Laird Town Plan
- Birkenhead Town and Riverside
- Southern Neighbourhoods

2.56 They are illustrated in **Figure 2/8: Urban Structure – Neighbourhood Typologies** and are considered below.

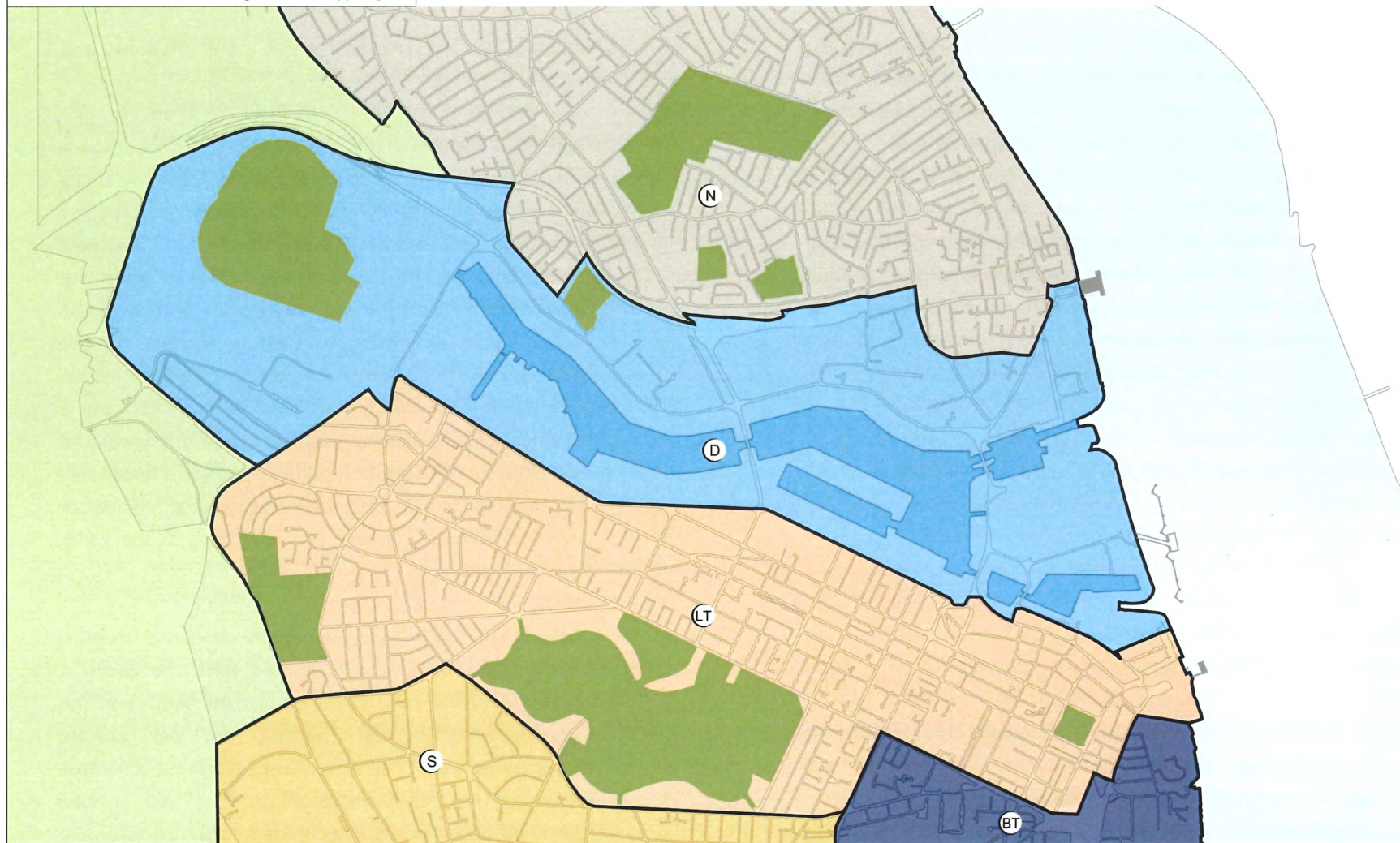
A. **Northern Neighbourhoods:** structured around the Historic Radial Routes to the north of the M53 corridor. The local street networks are characterised by a fine/medium grain of parallel/loop residential street patterns connecting to the more 'organic' radial routes which meander between

Wallasey, Liscard, New Brighton and Poulton and Seacombe.

There are variations across the northern neighbourhoods street patterns, forming six local groups. These variations are a consequence of incremental expansion from the key 'growth poles' over an extended time period. The most notable contrasts are the shift from the finer grain late 18th/early 19th Century street networks to the east to the medium grain early/mid 20th Century networks to the west. The more fragmented and inconsistent street networks to the south east and south west are a consequence of piecemeal post war housing renewal and redevelopment. These local patterns provide a reasonably well defined street network, providing a choice of structured through routes and connections to the wider network.

B. **Dockside and Lower Valley Slopes:** are contained between the M53 corridor to the north and west, the northern boulevards of the Laird Town Plan to the south and the River Mersey to the east. The local street networks are structured around the Birkenhead Docks and Bridge Crossings. They are characterised by their 'cell' layouts, with single access points and culs-de sacs serving extensive land parcels.

FIGURE 2/8: Urban Structure - Neighbourhood Typologies



Scale 1:15000 @A3

KEY

- | | | | |
|-----------|----------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| Strategic | Landscape Edge | N Northern Neighbourhoods | BT Birkenhead Town & Riverside |
| Parks | | D Dockside & Lower River Valley | S Southern Neighbourhoods |
| | | LT Laird Town Plan | |

URBAN DESIGN APPRAISAL: Urban Structure - Neighbourhood Typologies 1



There are variations across the Docks and Lower Valley Slopes street patterns, forming three local groups. These variations are a consequence of recent larger scale redevelopment. The sloping valley sides contained between the M53 and the northern dock road, together with Scott's Quay and Twelve Quay's provide larger scale land parcels accessed via cul-de-sacs. The street networks around Bidston Moss are also limited to cul-de-sacs serving employment, retail and leisure sites contained to the south. The level dock wharfs provide more extensive, uninterrupted land parcels with direct access from the dock roads and limited internal street networks.

These local patterns provide a poorly defined street network, excluding through routes and connections to the wider network.

- C. **Laird Town Plan:** is contained between Birkenhead Docks to the north, Birkenhead Park and Town Centre to the south, the River Mersey to the east and Bidston to the west. Its boulevards and gridiron are the most distinctive and recognisable elements within Inner Wirral.

There are variations across the Laird Town Plan street patterns, forming three local groups. These variations are a consequence of the original plan layout responding to the local topography. To the northwest, the local streets form

a fine grain, distorted gridiron linking Hamilton Square to Woodside, a response to the steep topography falling towards the Woodside Landing Stage. To the centre of the Town Plan, the local streets form a fine grain gridiron with local streets running parallel to the strategic boulevards.

These local patterns provide a well defined street network, providing a choice of through routes and connections to the wider network.

To the west, the shifting alignments of the strategic boulevards contain a more medium grain, fragmented local street pattern. There is an increase in the presence of cul-de-sacs and internal 'loops', providing a relatively well defined street network, providing a choice of through routes and connections to the wider network.

- D. **Birkenhead Town and Riverside:** contained between the Laird Town Plan to the north and west and the River Mersey to the east. The local street networks are characterised by a medium/large scale grain of parallel streets orientated along east-west alignments. They connect to the Laird Town Plan and intersect with Chester Street, the Historic Radial Route connecting Woodside and Birkenhead to Chester. The local street pattern is fragmented and dislocated, bisected by the Queensway Tunnel approaches and elevated connections.

There are variations across the Birkenhead Town and Riverside street patterns, forming two local groups. These variations are a consequence of recent larger scale redevelopment. The street pattern to the west is significantly fragmented, with pedestrianised retail streets and larger development parcels disrupting east-west connections. Those to the east remain relatively intact, in particular the north-south connections. These local patterns provide a poorly defined street network, excluding direct east-west through routes and connections to the wider network.

- E. **Southern Neighbourhoods:** contained between Birkenhead Park and the Laird Town Plan to the north, Bidston to the west and Birkenhead Town to the east. The local street networks are less structured and more 'organic' than the regulated Laird Town Plan. They are characterised by medium grain street patterns formed by 'loop's and cul-de-sacs' - characteristic of interwar and post war residential.

There are variations across the Southern Neighbourhood street patterns, forming two local groups. These variations are historic, with the western extents responding to the topography and woodland groups along the lower slopes of Bidston Hill.

These local patterns provide a reasonably well defined street network, providing a choice of through routes and connections to the wider network.

Neighbourhoods and Urban Form

- 2.57 Inner Wirral has a defined urban form, supporting a diversity of established residential and employment neighbourhoods and retail and community clusters.
- 2.58 The key elements of the urban form are building types, and the building groups and patterns. Together they provide the defining aspects of urban form – scale and enclosure, density and design appearance. Where these elements combine to form consistent, strong, distinct and recognisable patterns, they define the urban character and contribute to the 'sense of place'.
- 2.59 Building patterns and types are influenced by their anticipated uses, together with their construction period and materials. Inner Wirral supports a wide range of uses and activities (**Figure 2/9: Urban Form – Uses and Activities**). They are structured into distinct land (and building) use patterns and key periods of growth forming recognisable neighbourhoods and 'hubs'. There are two dominant neighbourhoods.

FIGURE 2/9: Urban Form - Uses & Activities



Scale 1:15000 @A3

KEY

- | | | | | |
|--|--|---|--|--|
|  Residential Neighbourhoods |  Parks |  Local Retail |  Culture |  Public Houses |
|  Education |  Leisure & Recreation |  District Centre |  Place of Worship |  Community Centre |
|  Civic |  Commercial Hubs |  Employment |  Health |  Child Care |

2.60 They are:

- Residential Neighbourhoods
- Employment Neighbourhoods

2.61 Together, they define many of the key characteristics of the urban form. They are extensive, with the residential neighbourhoods, with the employment neighbourhoods forming a 'central band', illustrated in **Figure 2/10: Urban Form – Neighbourhoods**.

2.62 Within these neighbourhoods, there are a number of 'clusters' and 'hubs', each specific to a particular locality and activity. They are:

- Retail, Leisure and Community Hubs
- Civic, Cultural and Education Hubs
- Recreational Hubs and Corridors

2.63 Each neighbourhood contains recognisable building patterns, groups and types, with associated characteristic patterns of scale and enclosure, density and design appearance. The neighbourhoods, their defining characteristics and the clusters they contain are considered below.

1. **Residential Neighbourhoods:** have developed on the higher ground to the north and south of the Birkenhead Dock system.

They have emerged from the historic 'growth poles' of Woodside, Poulton, Liscard and Seacombe and have focused around the key

elements of the urban structure – the Historic Local Routes, the Laird Town Plan, Central Park, Birkenhead Park and the Birkenhead Docks.

The Birkenhead Docks and associated Employment Neighbourhoods separate the Residential Neighbourhoods into the Northern and the Southern Neighbourhoods. Each has developed in response to particular influences, most notably distinct periods of growth (materials, technologies and expectations) and local street networks. Key building patterns, groups, types and their associated aspects are illustrated in **Figure 2/11: Urban Form – Residential Typology**, **Figure 2/12: Urban Form – Residential Scale**, and **Figure 2/13: Urban Form – Residential Density** and are considered below.

Northern Neighbourhoods

These neighbourhoods have emerged from the historic 'growth poles' of Poulton, Liscard, Egremont and Seacombe. They have expanded in a diverse and incremental pattern, focusing around the Historic Local Routes and Central Park. They are contained by the landscape setting to the west, the River Mersey to the east and the M53 to the south.

FIGURE 2/10: Urban Form - Neighbourhoods



Scale 1:15000 @A3

KEY

- Residential Neighbourhoods
- Employment Neighbourhoods

URBAN DESIGN APPRAISAL: Urban Form - Neighbourhoods



FIGURE 2/11: Urban Form - Residential Typology

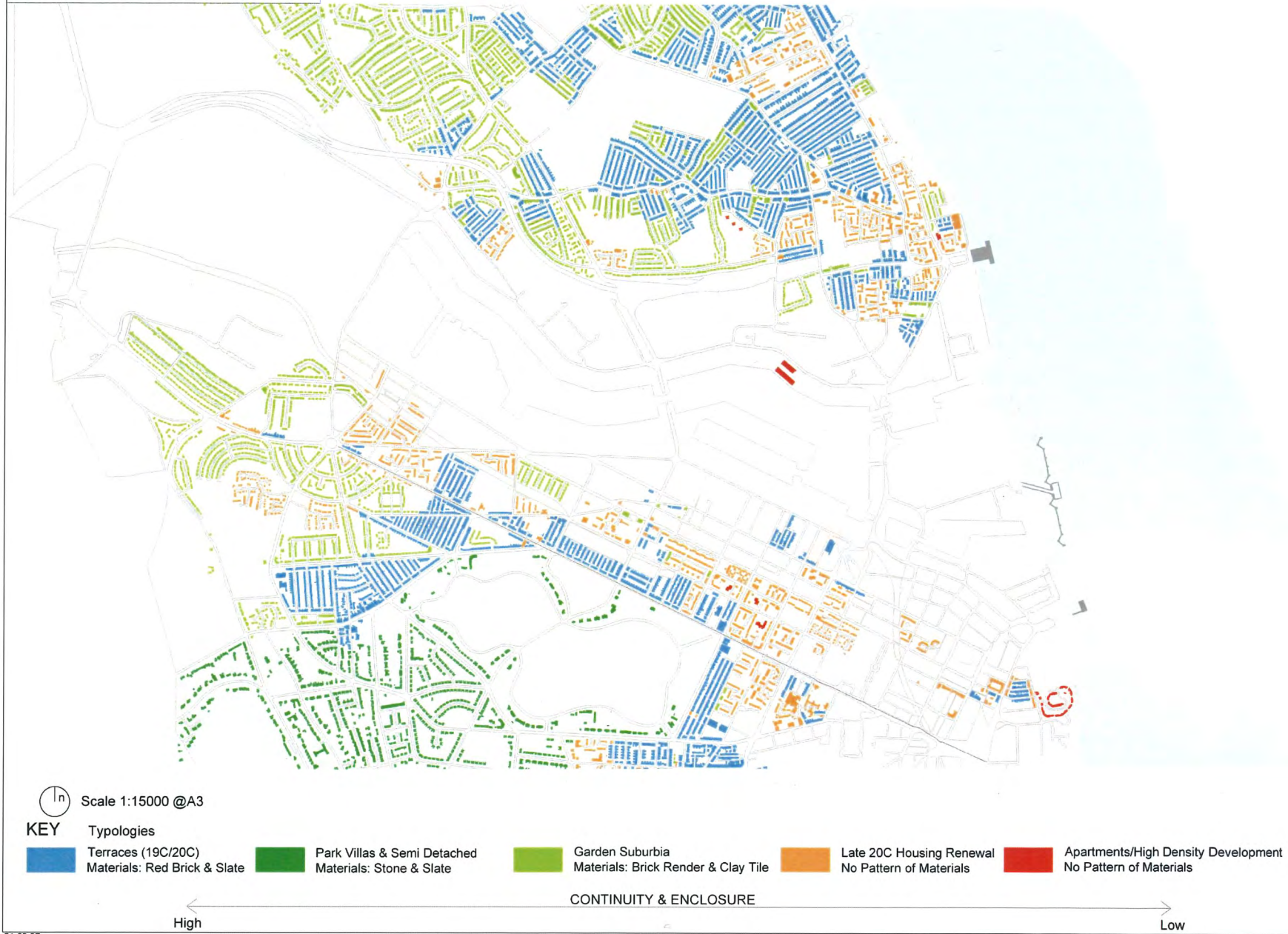
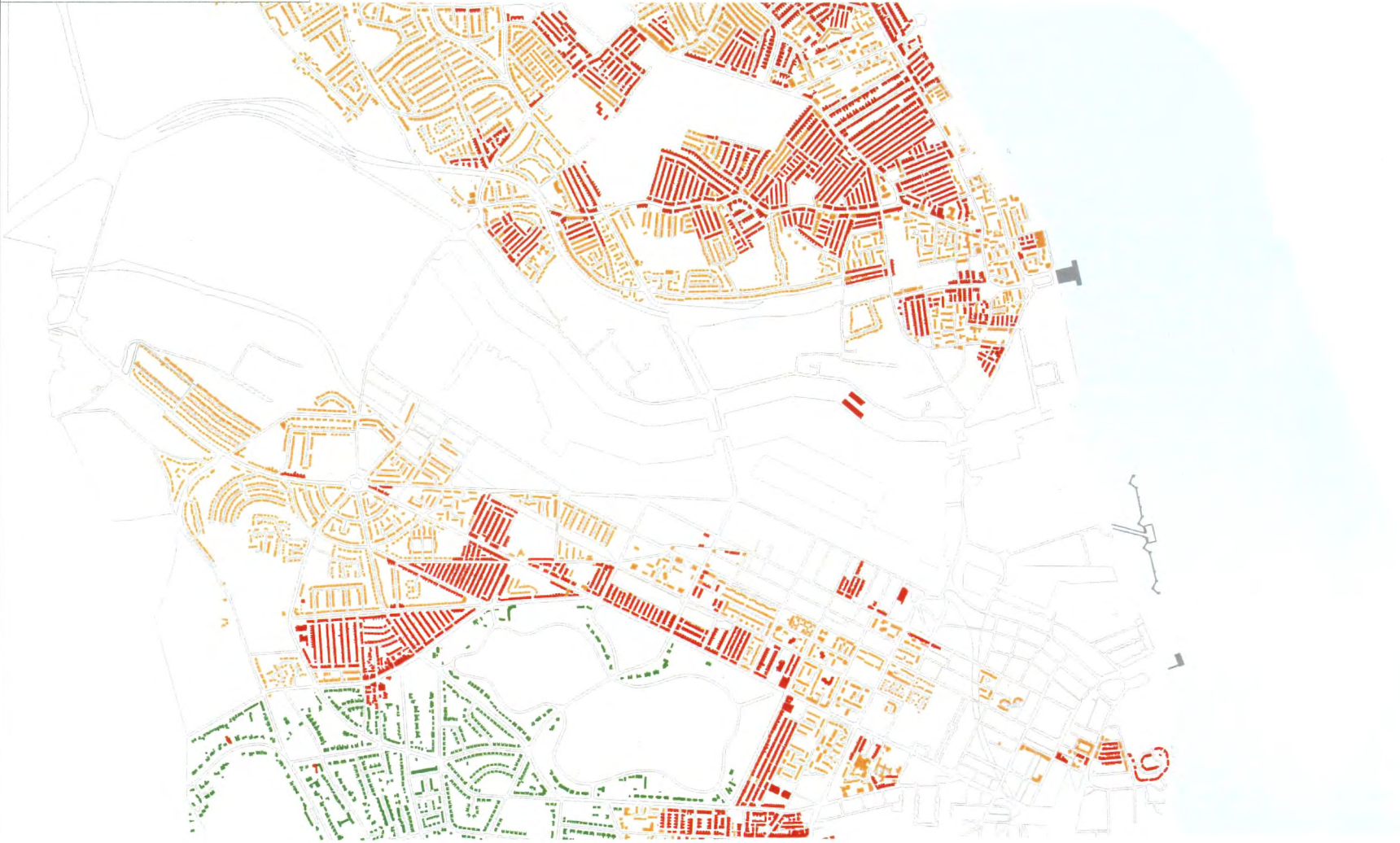


FIGURE 2/12: Urban Form - Residential Scale



Plan 2/13: Urban Form - Residential Density



Scale 1:15000 @A3

KEY



URBAN DESIGN APPRAISAL: Urban Form - Residential Density



Key characteristics are:

- A. **Building Pattern and Type:** the neighbourhoods provide a fairly consistent and fine grain building pattern and range of building types, with local variations directly related to the local street networks and development period. The dominant building types are late 19th century/early 20th century terraces, and inter/post war 'garden suburb' semi-detached and terraced properties.

These two types create a recognisable shift in building patterns and types from east to west. The earlier 19th/late 20th century terraces dominate towards the east. They are focused around the historic 'growth poles' of Seacombe, Liscard, Central Park and the Historic Radial Routes. The exception is a contained, isolated group of earlier terraces focused around the historic 'growth pole' of Poulton to the west.

Early to mid 20th century 'garden suburb' semi-detached and terraced properties dominate towards central and western neighbourhoods, focusing around the Historic Local Routes. The central areas, contained between Central Park and the M53, are typically inter/post-war terraced (social) housing. The western extents moving towards Wallasey are typically inter/post-war semi-detached (private) housing.

Elsewhere, there are pockets of late 20th century housing renewal types – 'Radburn', terraces, mews and towers. They appear as 'stand-alone' building groups, providing inconsistent building patterns. They are focused to the east, with several building groups connecting to form assembly of fragmented building pattern along the River Mersey bank between Wallasey Town Hall and Scott's Quay.

Isolated purpose built apartments/flats are scattered across the neighbourhoods with no particular focus or clusters. The most significant apartment conversions are the Corn Warehouses on the northern wharf of East Float.

The M53 forms a clear boundary separating the Northern Neighbourhoods from the Maritime and Industrial Neighbourhoods to the immediate south.

The exceptions are Poulton and South Seacombe, forming peripheral, dislocated neighbourhoods. Historically, they have always been peripheral to the residential neighbourhoods to the north, having developed to the south of the Wirral Railway (now the M53 alignment) and closer to the expanding Birkenhead Docks, wharfs, warehouses, mills and industries. However, their isolation has become more pronounced as the scale and intensity of

industrial uses has moved north, and late 20th century housing renewal developments (Radburn and Cul-de-sacs) have displaced clear and direct street and building pattern relationships.

B. Scale and Enclosure: the development periods (construction materials and technology) and building types have contained building heights to two storeys across the Northern Neighbourhoods. Taller buildings and structures are limited to the civic and retail building groups, and distinctive landmark features including churches, the Tunnel Ventilation Shafts and scattered mid/late 20th century residential towers.

The clear relationship between building pattern and street networks provides a strong and consistent sense of enclosure. These patterns remain relatively 'intact' and combine to form distinctive characteristics of the Northern Neighbourhoods, particularly along the Historic Radial Routes and within the earlier terraces and 'garden suburbs'.

More recent late 20th century housing renewal developments have fragmented these established patterns and building lines and interrupted the degree of 'intactness' and sense of enclosure, particularly within South Seacombe.

C. Density: the range of building types provides a corresponding range of densities from 60-75dph for early 19th century terraces in the east, to 40-45 dph for later inter and post war 'garden suburb' semi-detached properties to the west.

D. Design Quality – Materials and Appearance: the neighbourhoods provide a fairly consistent degree of design quality, materials and appearance – atypical of the late 19th/ early 20th Century terraces and inter/post war 'garden suburbs' semi-detached and terraced properties.

The late 19th/early 20th Century terraces are characterised by red brick and slate roof construction. The inter/post war 'garden suburbs' are characterised by red brick, render and clay tiles. Across the neighbourhoods, the materials remain prominent and consistent, contributing to the local character.

More recent post war 'infill' housing developments are of a more limited design quality, often with materials poorly related to their surroundings.

Southern Neighbourhoods

These neighbourhoods have emerged within the Laird Town Plan and later planned stages of expansion to form Birkenhead North, Birkenhead Town, Hamilton Square and Claughton (North). Their

growth has been structured by the Laird Town Plan street networks, with later stages focused around Birkenhead Park, Flaybrick Hill Cemetery and Bidston Hill.

Key characteristics are:

- A. **Building Pattern and Type:** the neighbourhoods provide a range of fine grain building patterns, with local variations directly related to the local street networks and construction date. The dominant building types are late 19th century/early 20th century terraces, inter/post war 'garden suburb' semi-detached and terraced properties and pockets of late 20th century housing renewal types – radburn, terraces, mews and towers. Together, these three types create a distinct transition in building patterns and types from north east to south west.

The remaining late 19th/early 20th century 'back to back' terraces and the focused along the immediate northern and western edges of Birkenhead Park and provide a consistent, fine grained building pattern and type.

Inter/post war 'garden suburb' semi-detached and terraced properties dominate the western extents of the Laird Town Plan, and those neighbourhoods to the southwest of Birkenhead Park. They are also characterised by consistent fine grain building patterns and building types. Smaller

semi-detached and terraced (social) properties are focused towards the western extents and Bidston Moss, with larger (private) semi-detached properties marking the transition into Claughton to the southwest of Birkenhead Park.

Late 20th century housing renewal types – 'Radburn', terraces, mews and towers dominate the northern and eastern extents - contained within the Laird Town Plan. These areas are characterised by an inconsistent and fragmented fine grain building pattern. The street networks have been altered, with smaller street blocks amalgamated to form larger development parcels. The consistent building patterns and types of the earlier terraces have been displaced by a multitude of building patterns and types ranging from 'Radburn', semi-detached and terraced properties, courtyards and mews. They also displace and interrupt the historic street network and visual connections, with north-south routes being particularly affected.

Beckwith Street (running parallel to Park Road North and the northern Birkenhead Park boundary) and the Merseyrail cutting mark a clear transition from the distinct and 'intact' pattern of the late 19th century/early 20th century terraces to a fragmented array of unrelated late 20th century housing renewal and 'stand-alone' building groups and street networks.

There is a very fine building pattern on the lower slopes of Bidston Hill, with large detached villas set in large gardens and woodlands. Birkenhead Park also contains a number of large detached and semi-detached villas.

Isolated purpose built apartments/flats are scattered across the neighbourhoods. Birkenhead Park provides a focus for new build and apartment conversions, particularly along the southern boundary. Many of the larger semi-detached and detached villas to the southeast are being demolished and redeveloped for low rise apartments.

- B. Scale and Enclosure:** the development periods (construction materials and technology) and building types have contained building heights to two storeys across the Southern Neighbourhoods. Taller buildings and structures are limited to the civic, retail and health building groups, and to distinctive landmark features – e.g. churches.

There is a distinct contrast between the varying degrees of enclosure. The earlier terraces and 'garden suburbs' remain relatively 'intact' and combine to form distinctive characteristics of the Northern Neighbourhoods, particularly around Birkenhead Park and to the south and east. More recent late 20th century housing renewal developments have fragmented these established patterns and building lines and interrupted the degree of

'intactness' and sense of enclosure, particularly within the central northern and eastern extents of the Laird Town Plan.

The boulevards of the Laird Town Plan provide a particularly recognisable sense and continuity and scale of enclosure where building lines remain intact and tree groups are established.

The scale of enclosure is lessened by the ratio of street width to enclosing building height. The wide street widths of the Laird Town Plan were provided to accommodate a grander scale and pattern of building composition, as witnessed by the completion of the earliest stages around Hamilton Square. Beyond the Square, however, this building composition failed to materialise. The incremental growth of smaller scale, poorer quality buildings has failed to provide the same sense of scale, composition and enclosure.

- C. Density:** the range of building types provides a corresponding range of densities from 75-90dph for late 19th century/early 20th century terraces around the historic 'growth poles'; to 40-45 dph for later inter and post war 'garden suburb' semi-detached properties to the west and south; and to 8-12 dph for detached villas towards Bidston Hill.



D. **Design Quality – Materials and Appearance:** the neighbourhoods provide a consistent degree of high quality across three distinct building typologies – 19th/early 20th Century terraces, inter/post war ‘garden suburbs’ and late 19th Century/early 20th Century park villas and semi detached villas.

The late 19th/early 20th Century terraces are characterised by red brick and slate roof construction. The inter/post war ‘garden suburbs’ are characterised by brick, render and tiles. Across the neighbourhoods, the materials remain prominent and consistent, contributing to the local character.

The late 19th/early 20th Century park villas and semi detached villas are of a high design quality, constructed from stone and slate. The materials and impressive design features remain prominent and consistent. They contribute, together with the dominant and cohesive street and parkland tree cover, to the local character.

2. **Employment Neighbourhoods:** have developed on either side of the Birkenhead Docks and along the River Mersey waterfront. The Birkenhead Docks neighbourhoods are contained between the low-lying wetlands of Bidston Moss (to the west), the Laird Town Plan

to the south and the M53 (formerly Wirral Railway Line) to the north. The River Mersey neighbourhoods are contained between the Cammell Laird site to the south and Seacombe Landing Stage to the north. The two meet and merge at Twelve Quays.

The neighbourhoods have developed through four key stages of growth. The earliest stage consisted of industrial works and mills - ‘stand-alone’ developments scattered across the slopes to the south of the Wirral Railway Line. The second stage followed the construction of the Docks and associated railways, enabling the rapid expansion of port related warehouses and workshops along the dock edges and waterfront. The third stage, from the early 20th century onwards, witnessed the incremental expansion of smaller industrial workshops and warehouses into the Laird Town Plan, displacing residential terraces, and the River Birkett corridor. The fourth and most recent stage has been the growth of commercial office and trading neighbourhoods and clusters. Beginning with the conversion of larger residential properties, this has been supported by the more recent introduction of purpose built offices and office/trading building groups.

This staged pattern of growth and on-going adaptation to new markets and activities has created an array of employment neighbourhoods and clusters, supporting unique activities and markets. Each has developed and adapted in response to particular influences, most notably the nature and scale of uses and activities

to be accommodated within the building(s), and the associated access, servicing and storage requirements.

Each neighbourhood and cluster, and their key building patterns, groups, types and associated aspects, illustrated in **Figure 2/14: Urban Form – Employment Typology**, **Figure 2/15: Urban Form – Employment and Retail Scale**, and **Figure 2/16: Employment – Intensity of Use** and are considered below.

Port Neighbourhoods

These neighbourhoods are intrinsically linked to the handling, processing and storage of port cargoes. As such, they are focused along the dock edges and wharfs of the East and West Floats. They are contained within local roads enclosing the Floats - Dock Road to the north and Beaufort Road - Corporation Road to the south.

Their growth has been influenced the nature of cargoes, together with handling and storage requirements rather than physical parameters. They have been able to evolve in a planned and cohesive manner due to the direct and unhindered control and management provided by a single ownership.

As cargoes and their particular requirements change, the building, access, servicing and storage infrastructure responds – with new building emerging and existing buildings becoming redundant and available for conversion. As such, the Port Neighbourhoods are in a relatively constant state of flux.

Key characteristics are:

- A. **Building Types and Structures:** the neighbourhoods provide a discordant range of building types and structures rather than recognisable patterns. The dominant types are large warehouses and processing/storage tanks, with smaller (historic) buildings and structures created during the construction of the docks – port master's offices, pumphouses, etc.

FIGURE 2/14: Urban Form - Employment Typology

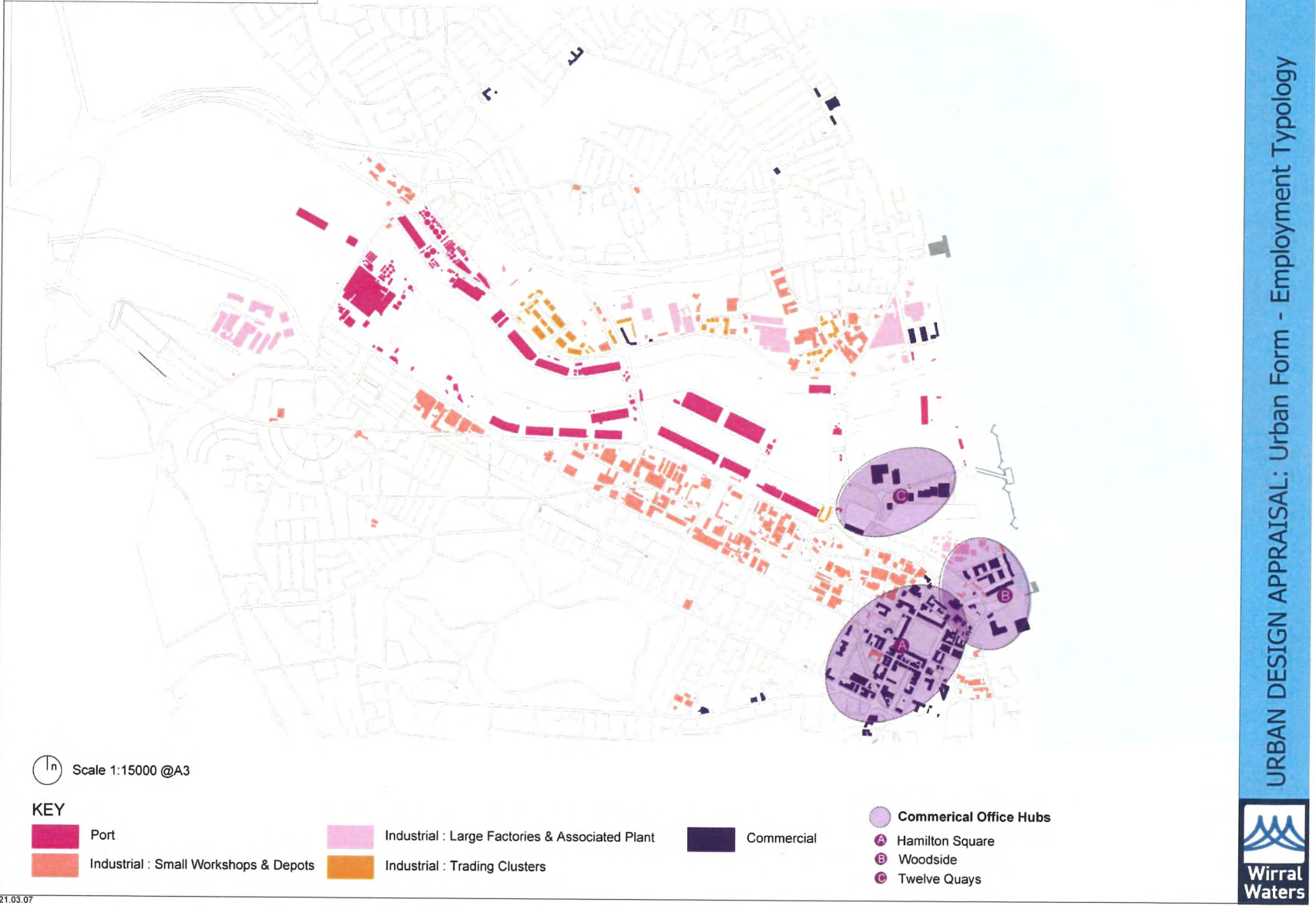
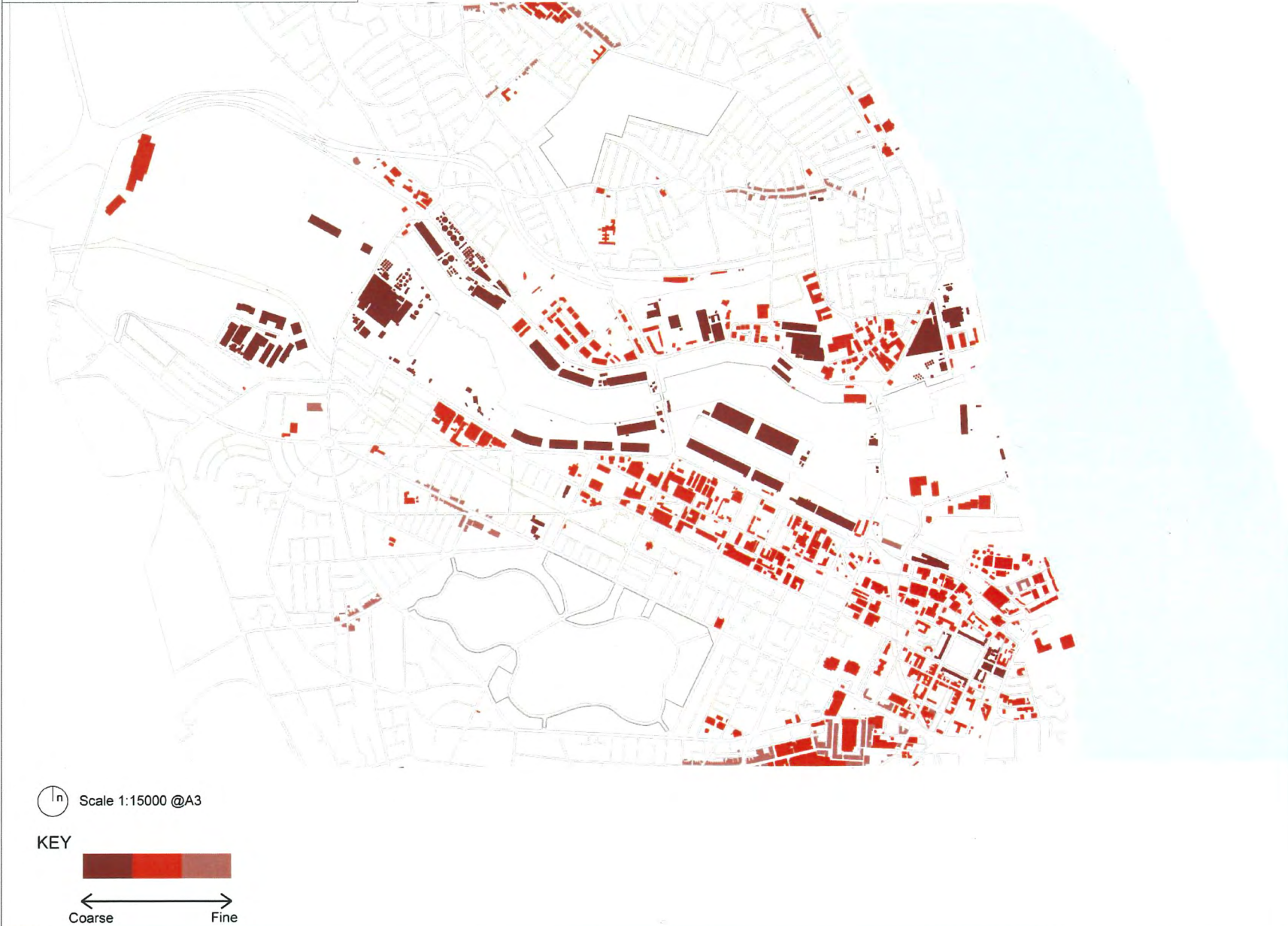


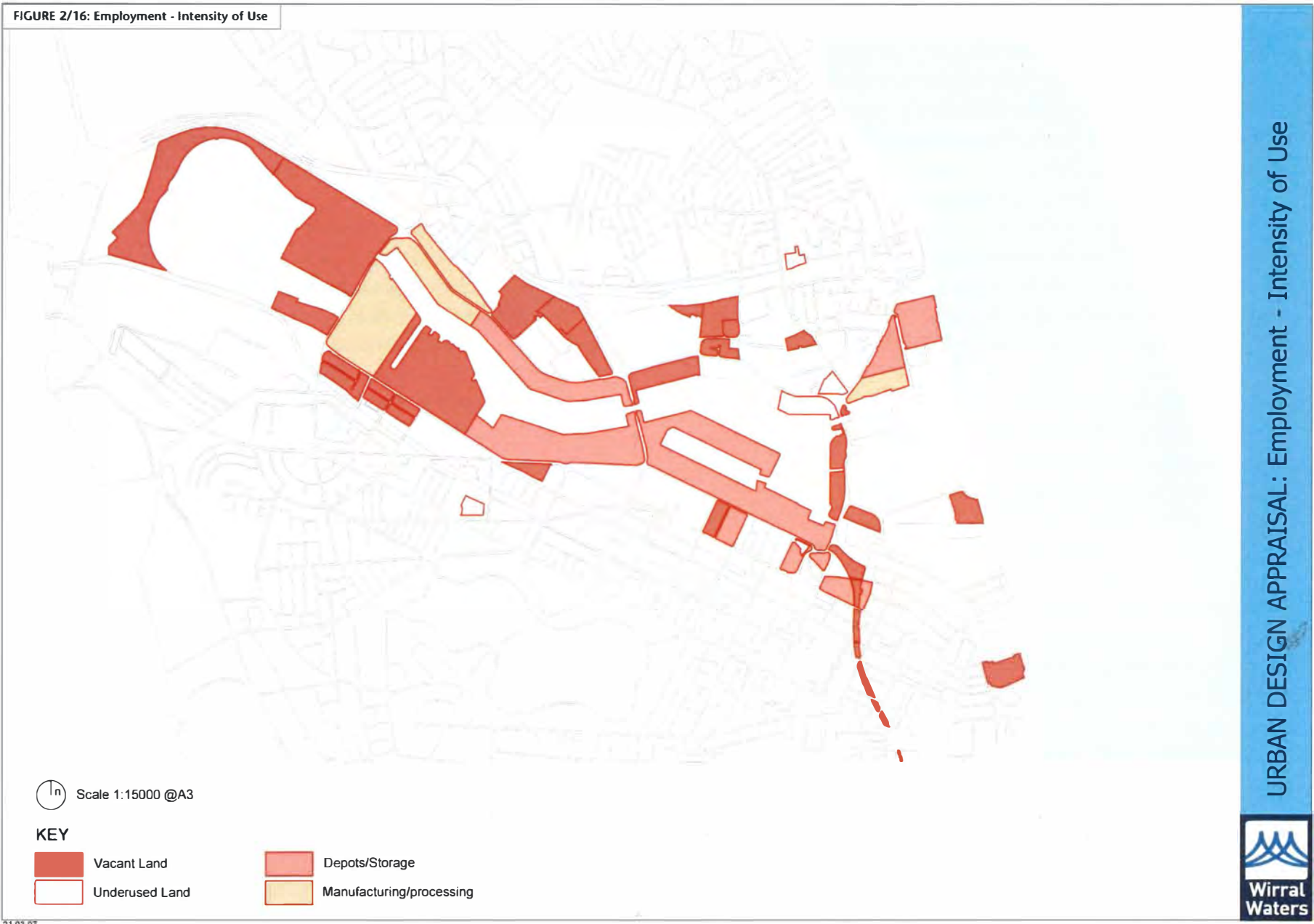
FIGURE 2/15: Urban Form - Employment & Retail Scale



URBAN DESIGN APPRAISAL: Urban Form - Employment & Retail Scale



FIGURE 2/16: Employment - Intensity of Use



URBAN DESIGN APPRAISAL: Employment - Intensity of Use



There is a distinct transition from prominent groups of processing/storage tanks to the west and east, with large warehouses along the dock edges of East and West Float, centred on the Duke Street Bridge Crossing.

The processing/storage tanks located at the western extents of West Float, on both the northern and southern wharves, form the largest and most prominent cluster. The northern (Tate & Lyle) group extend across the Dock Road to a narrow land parcel which supports further processing/storage tanks. The southern (Mobil (vacant)) group and associated buildings are contained between Wallasey Bridge Road and Graving Dock No. 3. They dominate the local environment. The processing/storage tanks, located on the immediate northern edge of Alfred Dock, are more limited in scale.

The large warehouse building groups fall into two groups. The first group, located on the northern wharves of West Float, are earlier, smaller brick warehouses. They accommodate a range of business with no direct relationship to the dock edge or involvement in handling cargoes.

The second group, located on the southern wharves and East and West Float and on Vittoria Wharf, are significantly larger and of more recent construction. They

accommodate a smaller number of businesses with a direct requirement for a dockside location. They are actively involved in handling, processing and storing cargoes and cranes are located along the dock edges adjacent to these warehouses.

Other isolated warehouses are located on the northern wharf of East Float. The most significant are the Grain Warehouses, currently being converted into residential apartments. A further isolated warehouse is located at the dock edge, adjacent to Tower Road.

The Port Neighbourhood is also characterised by open (hardstanding) spaces. They are provided as active storage/circulation areas or remaining as underused land parcels following demolition of buildings/clearance of rail tracks and sidings.

- B. **Scale and Enclosure:** the development periods (construction materials and technology) and building types provide a contrast in building heights. Earlier buildings, including warehouses, are of a smaller scale, particularly set against the dramatic scale of the East and West Floats. The more recent warehouses are the most significant buildings, and their increased scale is emphasised by their close grouping, proximity to the waters edge and tall cranes

Across the neighbourhood, the fragmented building groups do not create any coherent sense of enclosure. The exceptions are the large warehouses focused around Vittoria Wharf. Their scale, close grouping and rigid alignment with the dock edges effectively enclose and contain Vittoria Dock.

C. **Density:** the scattered building patterns and structures, open hardstanding areas required for storage and circulation, and vacant sites provide a relatively low ratio of built development to site area. This characteristic is a direct consequence of the open nature of the docks and wharves, the need for extensive storage and circulation spaces, and the requirement to hold cleared sites open to accommodate enquiries/interest from potential importers/exporters. The on-going relocation of port activities has also generated large areas of vacant and underused sites. The requirement for flexibility also required large areas to be held as open land parcels.

D. **Design Quality – Materials and Appearance:** the operational port area provides a limited degree of design quality, with the vast majority of buildings and structures constructed from industrial materials and cladding. The result is a discordant and poor quality, visual environment.

The exceptions are isolated historic buildings, the most notably being the Grain Warehouses and Hydraulic Tower. They are of sandstone and red brick construction and contribute to the local character. Their contribution is limited by their existing condition (vacant and in disrepair). The Grain Warehouses are undergoing sensitive restoration, increasing their prominence, condition and appearance.

E. **Activities:** a unique characteristic of the Port Neighbourhood is the activity and interest generated by the movement of ships, and the handling of cargoes.

Shipping berthed, waiting or moving between the Alfred Dock, East and West Float generates significant interest due to the close proximity and clear views from the three Bridge Crossings, and the stopping of traffic when the Bridges are raised.

The tall cranes provide a further source of animation when loading/unloading cargoes, again clearly visible and prominent from the three Bridge Crossings.

The ship repairers operating at Graving Dock No. 3 – West Float also generate significant interest due to the regular berthing of ships at the dock edge/within the dry dock. The SeaCat is particularly prominent due to its unique profile, its scale and colour.



Industrial Neighbourhoods and Trading Clusters

These neighbourhoods have grown from three key locations – the slopes contained to the north of the East and West Floats and the M53; the sites located along the northern edge of the Laird Town Plan, and the sites surrounding the Cammell Laird site.

Historically, these locations offered larger scale, undeveloped land and vacant sites, some distance from the expanding residential neighbourhoods and immediately adjacent to rapidly expanding docks and the supporting rail and road infrastructure. The piecemeal nature of their ownership and development is evident in the fragmented land ownerships, building patterns and types.

Their growth is related to the success and expansion of the Docks and the requirement for supporting industries to be located nearby. Both neighbourhoods have expanded significantly, enabled by the displacement of earlier residential terraces, the releasing of large scale land parcels from railways and sidings, and the extension of road and housing developments further to the east – enclosing further land.

Key characteristics are:

- A. **Building Pattern and Type:** the neighbourhoods provide a discordant range of building types and structures rather than recognisable patterns. The dominant types are small

workshops and depots, large factories and associated plant, together with late 20th/early 21st century 'stand-alone' trading units set out as contained building groups.

The small workshops and depots dominate the northern extents of the Laird Town Plan, focusing around the Duke Street Crossing and along the boundary with East Float. Contained within the local gridiron street network, building patterns and types are diverse, with no clear structure or pattern. Many of the sites are open depots, enclosed by high brick walls.

The gradual encroachment of industrial development from the Dock edge and into the Laird Town Plan has displaced earlier terraces. Price Street marks the transition from residential to industrial neighbourhoods. Beyond Price Street, isolated groups of residential terraces remain, dominated by the industrial environment.

Beyond the Laird Town Plan, local clusters of small workshops and depots mark the transition between industrial and residential neighbourhoods. This type is characterised by remnant late 19th century/early 20th century single storey workshops – most often occupying corner sites, and more recent small infill units. The most significant groups are those workshops enclosing the south western extents of (the residential neighbourhoods of)

South Seacombe, and those contained between the residential developments at Rosebrae (to the immediate south of Woodside) and Cammell Laird.

Many of the small workshops are set within/along the edge of large, open areas of hardstanding. A significant number are the only buildings within entire development blocks, particularly those contained within the Laird Town Plan. A limited number are contained within a development block which is completely built out, with workshops joined together.

They support a diverse range of employment activities; in particular car repairs and parts dealers, building supplies, engineering workshops, fleet vehicle operators and council depots and storage yards.

Large factories and plant dominate the slopes contained to the north of the East and West Floats and the M53, Scott's Quay and the western extents of the River Birkett corridor. This area is characterised by more extensive sites and coherent building groups, often developed through the consolidation of a number of smaller sites. The buildings are higher than surrounding buildings, to accommodate processing plant and storage requirements. The building groups and layouts are often defined by the site boundaries and topography, in contrast to the clear linear

alignment of the dockside warehouses in the Port Neighbourhoods.

They support a limited number of employment activities - relating directly to the processing and/or packaging of particular materials and/or products.

The late 20th/early 21st century 'stand-alone' trading units are clustered into small groups. They are characterised by regular buildings types and sizes, focused around a single access point enclosing courtyard parking/servicing. The clusters are focused along the slopes contained to the north of the East and West Floats and the M53, with the two most recent developments fronting onto the dock road north of East Float. A further cluster is positioned at the entrance to the railway cutting running past Birkenhead Town Centre to the junction of Tower Road and Corporation Road.

They support a range of employment activities relating to manufacturing, storage, distribution and counter sales.

- B. **Scale and Enclosure:** there is a distinct contrast between the smaller scale of the workshops and trading clusters and the large scale factories and associated plant. The height of the factory buildings is emphasised by their position close by the pavement edge; siting on elevated and/or open



ground, clustering into prominent groups and setting within larger scale/amalgamated sites. The most prominent building groups are the large factories to the north of East Float and those positioned on Scott's Quay.

The fragmented building patterns and random building types throughout all of the industrial neighbourhoods and trading types undermine any sense of enclosure and continuity. Within the Laird Town Plan, the occasional occurrence of smaller workshops and/or depot walls on all corners at an intersection of the gridiron streets provides some degree of enclosure. However, this is often undermined by the random building types and heights, and the wide street widths.

- C. **Density:** the wide diversity of building patterns, the extent of large areas of hardstanding, and a number of vacant and underused sites creates a contrasting range in densities across the industrial neighbourhoods. The more regular site and building patterns and types within the Trading Clusters create more consistent densities. Generally, development densities are low (****% site coverage), with the lowest site development yields generated by the vacant and underused land parcels contained between the East and West Floats and the M53.

- D. **Design Quality - *Materials and Appearance:*** the clusters provide a limited degree of design quality, with buildings and structures constructed from a vast range of materials. The result is a discordant and poor quality visual environment, emphasised by the poor condition of prominent vacant sites, boundary structures and the public realm.

The expectations are the more recent 'stand-alone' trading units. Their design quality, materials and appearance is limited by their immediate context.

Commercial (Office) Neighbourhood and Clusters

The core commercial neighbourhood for Inner Wirral is focused within and to the south of Hamilton Square. A significant majority of the original town houses enclosing the Square and surrounding streets have been converted into offices. Beyond this core, smaller commercial office clusters are focused around the Woodside Landing Stage, along the eastside of Europa Boulevard, and around Egerton and Morpeth Docks.

The growth of key commercial office 'hubs' has focused around those locations with the most accessible and direct connections to Liverpool city centre – Woodside and Hamilton Square. The most significant additions to the commercial clusters have been provided by the large scale relocation of public sector agencies, together

with the expansion and relocation of local government (Wirral MBC) departments and regeneration led office developments.

Outside of these locations, commercial offices are found amongst the shops and services within the local community hubs (see below), with isolated buildings scattered across the Port and Industrial neighbourhoods.

Key characteristics are:

- A. **Building Pattern and Type:** the commercial neighbourhood and surrounding hubs provide a contrasting range of building patterns and types. There are three dominant types - converted Georgian town houses and terraces, low rise commercial building groups and 'stand-alone' medium rise building groups.

Hamilton Square provides fine/medium grain building patterns, with local variations directly related to the local street networks and construction date. Three Georgian terraces enclose the Square to the north, west and south. The eastern frontage is enclosed by the Town Hall, with terraces either side.

These provide a clear and recognisable building pattern enclosing the Square and gardens. The terraces were constructed as grand, four storey town houses. This

generous proportions and robust construction has provided a durable and adaptable building structure suitable for contemporary office requirements. The smaller terraces, enclosing the surrounding streets, provide a more fragmented building pattern

Twelve Quays Business Park is the most significant low rise, commercial building group. It is contained between the Twelve Quays Ro-Ro Ferry Terminal and Egerton and Morpeth Docks. This building group is set apart from other low rise, commercial building groups – a consequence of its larger scale, higher design quality and prominent location.

Woodside Business Park, Wirral Business Centre, Tower Quays, Kelvin Court and isolated buildings within Scott's Quay also provide low rise commercial building groups. They have a fine grain building pattern and generic building type, and are located on small land parcels, immediately adjacent to highways and/or industrial/port related premises. Buildings are typically one/two storeys, set out as perimeter blocks around a central courtyard. They appear as self contained, isolated developments due to their limited scale and their discordance with surrounding buildings and activities.

'Stand-alone' office developments have also been developed in groups of two or more buildings to provide accommodation for government agencies and local government. They are distinct from the low rise, commercial buildings groups due to their scale and isolated building form - with associated parking and servicing infrastructure. They also generate significantly higher levels of pedestrian activity and movements, particularly during early morning, late afternoon and lunch times.

These building groups are typically positioned adjacent to earlier commercial clusters and include Westminster House and Old Haymarket House (to the immediate west of Queensway Tunnel entrance/egress), Great Western House and Rosebrae Court (to the immediate south of Woodside Landing Stage, and the North and South Annexe (either side of Wallasey Town Hall).

- B. **Scale and Enclosure:** there is a distinct contrast between each of the three building patterns. The scale of Hamilton Square as a 'set-piece' and focal point of the Laird Town Plan sets it above other building groups within Inner Wirral. The scale of the Square is defined by the building height, massing and continuity of enclosure, together with the scale and consistency of vistas out of the Square along the gridiron streets, the openness of the contained Square

and gardens, and the focal point created by the Town Hall. The two north-south routes connecting to the Square (Argyle Street and Hamilton Street) also support a consistent building pattern and degree of enclosure.

Outside of the Square, the scale of office groups is defined by building heights and grouping. The most prominent are the Westminster and Old Haymarket House group and the Great Western and Rosebrae House group. However, both groups fail to provide any degree of continuity of enclosure, being set in extensive open areas of surface car parking.

The scale and enclosure provided by the low-rise building groups is limited due to their low building heights, fragmented building patterns and poor relationships with surrounding buildings, streets and spaces.

- C. **Density:** there is a range of densities across the three building patterns. The low-rise commercial buildings generate the lowest yield of floorspace. The medium-rise 'stand-alone' offices provide a higher yield, but with large site areas given over to surface parking. The Hamilton Square town house conversions also provide higher yields, with no off street parking and limited servicing areas.

D. **Design Quality – Materials and Appearance:** the Hamilton Square cluster provides an exceptional degree of design quality. The only fully realised part of the Laird Town Plan, the buildings enclosing Hamilton Square area of stone construction with slate roofing. The buildings have benefitted from ongoing investments, are in good condition and, together with the formal square, provide a high quality environment.

Europa Boulevard also contributes to the quality of the visual environment, with a diversity of buildings materials and appearances connected by the prominent tree boulevards.

Further afield, building groups around Morpeth Dock and Woodside Landing Stage are of limited design quality, with a range of materials and design approaches.

3. **Retail and Community Hubs:** provide the focus for a range of shops, services and community facilities. Historically, they have grown to support the expanding northern and southern residential neighbourhoods. They have developed in the most accessible and active locations - along the principal movement corridors and crossing points as key elements of the emerging urban structure, as illustrated in **Figure 2/17: Urban Form – Retail and Community Hubs.**

With the significant growth in Wirral's residential, employment and visitor populations during the early 20th century, Birkenhead Town Centre and Liscard Village have emerged as the 'main' hubs serving this wider and more mobile audience. They have both been subject to on-going redevelopment and investment from the mid 20th= century onwards, to create shopping environments suited to the needs and expectations of the day.

Birkenhead and Wallasey Town Halls remain as 'Civic' Hubs – providing the focal points for a range of local authority services. Other historic focal points - Poulton Road – Borough Road, Brighton Street, Laird Street and Upton Road - remain as 'local' hubs.

FIGURE 2/17: Urban Form - Retail & Community Hubs



URBAN DESIGN APPRAISAL: Urban Form - Retail & Community Hubs



Beyond these 'hubs', community services and facilities are more isolated and self-contained. The most common community buildings outside of the 'hubs' are schools and places of worship.

The 'main', 'local' and 'civic' hubs have developed in response to particular influences, most notably distinct periods of growth (building types and materials), changing shopping patterns and expectations, and innovation and adaptation in the delivery of social and community services and facilities. The key building patterns, groups, and types of each 'hub' and their associated aspects are considered below.

'Main Hubs' – Birkenhead Town Centre

Birkenhead Town Centre has witnessed the most significant scale of redevelopment within Inner Wirral. Over time, its role has developed from a local neighbourhood hub serving the expanding Southern Residential neighbourhoods, to a wider one of serving the wider residential and employment neighbourhoods beyond Birkenhead. This has resulted in an expansion of the retail core, and more recently the addition of new leisure activities. New expanded retail and leisure facilities form the core of the town centre, together with a wider range of long-standing community services and facilities.

Key characteristics are:

- A. **Building Pattern and Type:** there is a diverse range of building patterns and types within the core, mostly comprising late 20th century medium/large grain retail stores, surrounded by a finer grain building pattern with a more diverse range of building types and activities.

The retail core is centred on four structuring elements throughout – The Grange and Pyramid Shopping Centres, the Market Hall and Europa Square.

Grange Road was formerly a historic east-west route through Birkenhead Town Centre, providing a focus for local shops and services. The development of the Grange and Pyramids shopping centres displaced this historic highway and building pattern. The Grange Road alignment has been retained along its original alignment as the principal east-west pedestrian route. It is not covered and enclosed on either side by a range of retail units with a medium/large grain building pattern, increasing in size from west to east. This pedestrian street leads to the Pyramids Shopping Centre and the Market Hall at the eastern extents.

The Pyramids Shopping Centre is a large scale, single development block within the Town Centre. Internally, it is

divided by a single east-west pedestrian mall with a fine grain pattern of retail units. The 'Pyramids' connects Grange Road to the shops enclosing the Market Hall.

The Market Hall occupies the central, pivotal position within the Town Centre. The Hall is extensive and, at 145m by 75m, is the largest uninterrupted building footprint in Birkenhead. The Market is enclosed to the east, south and west by the rear elevations of retail units.

These finer grain retail units face onto three 'pavements' or pedestrian routes offset from the building lines of the Market Hall. They form a circular route from Europa Square, around the Market Hall. The retail units face onto the 'pavements' with their rear elevations facing the Market Hall.

Europa Square connects the Market Hall to Conway Street, the principal east-west boulevard of the Laird Town Plan. It is enclosed on the western side by the Europa Centre, an extensive, uninterrupted building footprint just smaller than the Market Hall. The Birkenhead Town Bus Station - an award winning structure - encloses the eastern extents. The Square is dominated by surface car parking and provides a transition across Conway Street to the Leisure Centre, Cinema and Europa Boulevard.

Beyond the retail core, Europa Boulevard connects Conway Street to Price Street providing a key connection to the residential and employment neighbourhoods to the north. The Boulevard provides a central, tree-lined verge and is enclosed on both sides by new office, education and local government buildings providing a transition into the commercial neighbourhood around Hamilton Square.

Grange Street West forms the only remaining, intact historic finer grain building group and accommodates shops, services and community facilities. Other scattered buildings remain along Argyle Street to the east.

- B. **Scale and Enclosure:** the scale of the shopping redevelopment is more closely associated with the employment neighbourhoods, as illustrated in Figure 2/15: **Urban Form – Employment and Retail: Scale.** As a consequence, there is an abrupt contrast between the large scale of the late 20th century, leisure and associated infrastructure developments in the retail core and the finer scale of the surrounding residential and commercial neighbourhoods. The scale of Europa Centre, the Market Hall and the Pyramids Shopping Centre in particular is discordant with the surrounding street networks, building patterns and heights.

The retail core is centred upon four internal structuring elements, with rear elevations and servicing areas facing outwards towards the surrounding residential and commercial neighbourhoods. These elevations and building lines do little to relate to the surrounding streets, buildings and spaces. They are fragmented, with blank elevations offering a limited degree of continuity and enclosure.

- C. **Design Quality – Materials and Appearance:** the historic building groups remaining along Grange Road West provide a fairly consistent degree of design quality, characterised by stone buildings and slate roofing. Their prominence and quality is undermined by their condition and streetscape setting.

Elsewhere, the town centre is dominated by the Pyramids Shopping Centre. This is atypical of 1960's/70s town centre redevelopment and is of limited design quality.

'Main Hubs' – Liscard Village

Liscard Village has undergone more limited redevelopment, and continues to serve as a focus for the Northern Residential neighbourhoods. With the exception of the central retail core, local shops and services still predominate along the historic routes leading into the village.

Key characteristics are:

- A. **Building Pattern and Type:** the Village is a more contained hub, located at the junction of four historic radial routes connecting the Northern Residential Neighbourhoods. Historically, the principal route has historically been Liscard Road, a north-south route through Liscard Village. Each of the radial routes supports a fine grain building pattern, providing a diversity of local shops, services and community facilities.

The development of the shopping centre has interrupted this historic street network and displaced the building pattern. The retail core of the Village has been developed as a shopping centre enclosed within a one-way (clockwise) gyratory road system.

A pedestrian route – Liscard Way – has been created along the historic (Liscard Road) alignment. This forms the principal structuring element of the shopping centre, together with Cherry Square – a small, pedestrian space to the west. Both are open and enclosed on either side by a range of retail units with a medium/large grain building pattern, increasing in size from west to east. The other key elements are a commercial office building and a residential tower – Liscard House.

Beyond the shopping centre, the finer grain building group along the historic radial routes remain intact, accommodating shops, services and community facilities.

- B. **Scale and Enclosure:** there is a recognisable contrast between the large scale of the late 20th century retail core and the finer scale of the historic buildings enclosing the local routes approaching the Village. As a consequence, there is. The retention of the historic route through the centre, and the more responsive finer building grain, assists in connecting the new retail elements to the surrounding streets, buildings and spaces. The residential tower provides a distinct contrast between the centre and the surrounding low rise residential neighbourhoods.

The shopping centre faces inwards onto Liscard Way and Cherry Square, with rear elevations and servicing areas facing outwards onto the gyratory and surrounding residential and commercial neighbourhoods. These elevations and building lines do little to relate to the surrounding streets, buildings and spaces. They are fragmented, with blank elevations offering a limited degree of continuity and enclosure.

Beyond the shopping centre, the historic local routes are characterised by consistent building heights and lines creating a strong degree of enclosure.

- C. **Design Quality – Materials and Appearance:** the village has been significantly redeveloped and provides a limited degree of design quality. The redevelopment is atypical of 1960's/70's town centre with no clear, overarching visual identity.

The poor visual quality is accentuated by the dominance of surface car parking around the village centre and the prominence of servicing entrances and storage yards.

Beyond the immediate Village Centres, the historic buildings and streetscape provide a fairly consistent degree of design quality.

'Civic Hubs'

Hamilton Square and Woodside are long-standing focal points for administrative and civic activities, since the construction the Town Hall in Hamilton Square (18**). This role has developed in part to their close proximity to the Landing Stages, and the expanding dock system and Southern Residential neighbourhoods. South Egremont has provided a similar focus for the Northern Residential neighbourhoods, focusing around Wallasey Town Hall.

From the mid 20th century, both Town Halls have served as the focus for the development of 'civic hubs', with civic and administrative functions/services being expanded through the

relocation/expansion of both local and wider regional/national government staff and services.

The most significant expansion has been at Birkenhead and Woodside, supporting the growth of these locations as 'Commercial Neighbourhoods'. Birkenhead has been the location for a range of Wirral MBC Departments and Services, based in Westminster House and, more recently, the converted Railway Warehouse. Regional and national government agencies (Land Registry and CSA) have located to both Birkenhead and Woodside, based in Old Haymarket House, Great Western House and Rosebrae Court.

Wallasey Town Hall (South Egremont) has been expanded through the addition of two Annex buildings.

'Local Shopping and Services Hubs'

Historically, local shops, services and community facilities were brought forward as integral parts of the structure and patterns of the residential neighbourhoods. They were located along the historic radial routes and crossing points, focusing upon the key movement corridors. They remain as 'local' hubs, accessible and closely associated with the surrounding residential neighbourhoods.

4. **Emerging Hubs:** beyond the longer established retail, civic and local shopping hubs, there an increasing number of more specialist

hubs focusing upon (further) education, culture and recreation. They are most often adjacent to, or on the periphery of, the main retail and community hubs, as illustrated in **Figure 2/18: Urban Form – Emerging Hubs.**

'Educational Hubs'

Sixth Form, Further Education and Training Colleges are located at the western extents of Birkenhead Park, at Europa Boulevard and at Morpeth Dock. They generate significant activity assist in underpinning peripheral/emerging locations as safe, attractive and viable locations. The more recent facilities are in stand alone, purpose built buildings developed in isolation or a part of a building group.

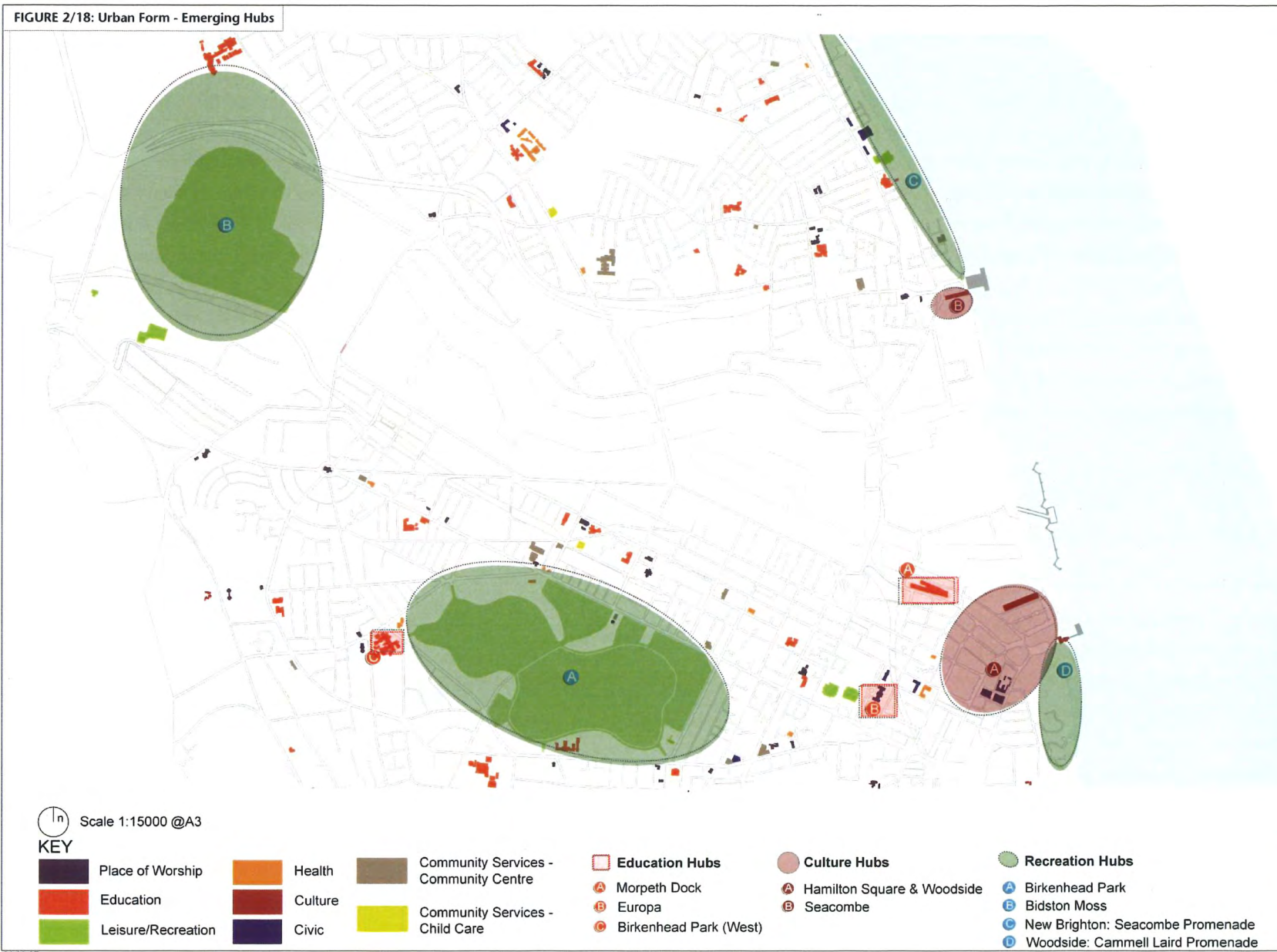
'Cultural Hubs'

Theatres and attractions within Inner Wirral and focused around the 'Hamilton Quarter' – Hamilton Square and Woodside, or in more peripheral, stand alone locations. The Hamilton Quarter is the most prominent, with the Wirral Museum in the former Town Hall, the Woodside Landing Stage, Historic Tram and Pacific Theatre. The Seaport Facility at Seacombe Landing Stage is a stand alone facility. All of the above facilities are within converted/restored buildings forming part of the wider urban form.

'Recreational Hubs'

There are three focal points for (outdoor) recreational activities within Inner Wirral, all part of the landscape structure. The long established destinations are Birkenhead Park and the River Mersey promenades. Birkenhead Park is an integral element of the Laird Town Plan and provides a range of formal and informal sport/recreational activities. The New Brighton to Seacombe promenade, and the Woodside to Cammell Laird promenade provide linear recreational corridors along the western bank of the River Mersey. Bidston Moss is an emerging recreational resource, being developed as part of the NEWLANDS project. The 'Moss' is unique, forming a focal point for strategic recreational cycleways/footpaths and surrounding sites.

FIGURE 2/18: Urban Form - Emerging Hubs



URBAN DESIGN APPRAISAL: Urban Form - Emerging Hubs



Interventions, Impacts and 'Intactness'

2.64 This section identifies those 'forces for change' requiring interventions – clearance, redevelopment and changes of use. The degree of change, and the impacts upon the key elements and patterns of the landscape and urban setting is considered to determine the condition and 'intactness' of the landscape, urban structure and form are considered under the following headings:

- Intervention and Impacts
- 'Intactness'

Interventions and Impacts

2.65 The key elements and features of the landscape, urban structure and urban form have been identified and considered, together with their established patterns and characteristics.

2.66 Typically, significant interventions into these established patterns are large scale infrastructure projects (construction and upgrading) serving regional and sub-regional needs and growth – motorways and strategic highways, light and heavy rail, tunnels, bridges, town centre regeneration and expansion, etc. The need for such strategic interventions within Birkenhead, Bidston, Liscard, Seacombe, Woodside and Poulton has been limited by five key factors.

2.67 They are:

- A. **Topography and Movement Corridors:** the mid Wirral Sandstone Ridge and Bidston Hill, its most northern extents, the higher ground to the north and south of the River Birkett Valley, the River Birkett and the Wallasey Pool, and the steep western bank of the River Mersey have directly influenced and contained those routes available for major transport infrastructure.

Two strategic movement corridors have emerged. The principal corridor is the 'central landscapes spine' approaching from the south, contouring around the lower northern slopes of Bidston Hill before turning east between the gentler slopes of the River Birkett Valley. The second focuses along the western banks of the River Mersey, linking to New Brighton in the north and Chester to the south.

- B. **Topography and Urban Expansion:** strategic destinations and routes are focused towards the historic Landing Stages and Birkenhead Docks, contained within the lower valley floor away from the urban residential, commercial and employment neighbourhoods which have focused upon the higher slopes and level ground to the north and south.

- C. **Laird Town Plan:** the construction of the Laird Town Plan as a considered entity including a delivered a clear and distinct gridiron structure, with all strategic infrastructure requirements integrated into the original concept – roads, rail, tunnels, bridges, etc
- D. **Integration of Historic Local Routes:** the integration and retention of historic strategic routes throughout the incremental growth of the residential neighbourhoods to the north of the Birkenhead Docks provided a diversity and choice of strategic highways connecting to the south and M53 corridor.
- E. **Integration of Rail Infrastructure:** the growth of the Birkenhead Dock System and Landing Stages was facilitated by a network of railway lines, constructed as integral parts of the urban structure. The diversity of this network has enabled a transition from freight to rail passenger services with direct and accessible connections between Bidston, Birkenhead, Hamilton Square and Woodside, the wider Wirral peninsula, Liverpool city centre and Cheshire.

2.68 As a consequence, the need for intervention into the established urban structure and form to deliver later stages in infrastructure has been limited.

2.69 Key projects have included:

- A. **Redevelopment and Expansion of Birkenhead Town Centre:** the historic town centre has been continually redeveloped and expanded throughout the 1960's, 1970's and 1980's. To accommodate the expansion and enable the creation of a wider diversity of retail premises extensive clearance was required between Claughton Road in the north, Charing Cross to the west, Borough Road to the south and Argyle Street to the east. Grange Road, a key east-west link was pedestrianised to form one of the principal internal structuring elements of the new centre. The replacement urban form is poorly related to the remaining historic street and building patterns of the surrounding residential and commercial neighbourhoods. As such, it is considered that the impact of this development upon the urban structure and structure has been significant.
- B. **Queensway Tunnel:** completed in 1934, this tunnel connects Woodside and Birkenhead to Liverpool city centre. The tunnel has two access points, the principal at the junction of Conway Park and Chester Street to the immediate east of Birkenhead town centre.

The construction of the Conway Park/Chester Street access point required the clearance of earlier streets and buildings



to accommodate the large areas of carriageway for toll booths and tunnel access. Elevated carriageways were constructed to provide strategic connections to the east from the tunnel, linking to Birkenhead town centre and beyond, also requiring the clearance of earlier streets and buildings. As such, it is considered that the impact of this tunnel entrance/egress and approaches upon the urban structure and form has been significant.

A second (closed) access point is located to the immediate south east of the East Float, near the junction of Corporation Street and Tower Road (Four Bridges) and has mostly been accommodated within the existing street network. As such, it is considered that the impact of this tunnel entrance/egress and approaches upon the urban structure and form has been minor.

- C. **M53 and Kingsway Tunnel:** completed in 1969, this motorway was constructed along the alignment of the Wirral Railway Line. Arriving from the south along the 'central landscape spine', the carriageways rise across a viaduct over the low lying wetlands north of Bidston Moss before entering the Wirral Railway Line cutting serving the Seacombe Landing Stage.

The cutting was expanded and excavated further to allow the motorway to enter the Kingsway Tunnel, connecting

to the strategic highway network to the immediate north of Liverpool city centre. Additional infrastructure was required beyond the original railway alignment and cutting to allow for two highway junctions and connections linking into the existing highway network.

The first and most significant extension was to the immediate west and north of Bidston Moss, to form Junction 1 of the M53. To traverse the low-lying wetlands, a series of elevated carriageways and slipways were constructed, together with new highways connecting to Wallasey in the north and Bidston to the south. The alignments cut across the patchwork field pattern, leaving small groups of fields isolated from the wider landscape. They remain underused and in poor condition.

This impact is particularly evident between Junction 2 & 1, where the Motorway is elevated over the River Birkett via two fly-overs, each with their own slipways, and all three of the MerseyTravel railway lines serving Wirral converge into a single line. A significant amount of land has been isolated from the wider landscape, and released into other uses including a small retail park, a golf course, a wildlife reserve and the Bidston Moss landfill site

The second junction was constructed to align with the Duke Street Bridge Crossing and provided new



connections south to the Birkenhead Dock Systems and north to the established residential neighbourhoods of Wallasey and Liscard. Due to the confines of the railway cutting, the junction was created on higher ground either side of the cutting.

The construction of the junction and connecting highways has displaced the historic street network and introduced an 'expressway' system dominating the immediate environment. However, the containment of the M53 to the 'cutting' has limited the need for significant intervention into the established urban structure. As such, it is considered that the impact of this development on the landscape structure has been significant. The impact on the urban structure and form has been moderate.

- D. **Twelve Quays:** the docks and wharfs forming the western extents of Birkenhead Docks were redeveloped in 2002 to form the Twelve Quays 'Roll-On/Roll-Off' (RoRo) Ferry Terminal. The construction required large areas of hardstanding to accommodate vehicles waiting to board. The extents of this hardstanding have been contained between Alfred Dock to the north, Tower Road to the west, Egerton and Morpeth Docks to the south and the River Mersey to the east. The construction required the infilling of Wallasey Dock and the closure of the north-south pedestrian route along the River Mersey. As such, it

is considered that the impact of this development on the urban structure and form has been moderate.

- E. **Redevelopment of Liscard Village Town Centre:** a more localised intervention introducing larger scale retail units and a residential tower into the Village, required local clearance. As such, it is considered that the impact of this retail expansion upon the urban structure and form has been moderate.
- F. **20th Century Housing Renewal:** the on-going clearance and redevelopment of individual residential building groups and land parcels has introduced a range of discordant building groups, interrupting established street and pedestrian networks and building groups.

The focus of redevelopment around the early 19th century/early 20th century terraces, and the on-going cumulative impact has displaced the consistent and recognisable 'intact' building patterns. They have been replaced by significant areas of poorly related street and pedestrian connections, building groups and types and greenspace links and spaces. The most affected areas are the residential neighbourhoods between Seacombe Landing Stage and Birkenhead Docks, and between Birkenhead Town Centre, Birkenhead Park and Birkenhead Docks. As such, it is

considered that the impact of this development on the urban structure and form has been significant.

- G. **Expansion of Employment Uses south into the Laird Town Plan:** from the early 20th century, there has been a gradual encroachment of low quality employment development – workshops and storage depots into the central areas of the Laird Town Plan, as illustrated in **Figure 2/19: Birkenhead Urban Block Analysis**. This process is directly related to the clearance and retreat of residential neighbourhoods from the historic ‘edge’ – Corporation Street – to the contemporary ‘edge’ – Price Street - which remains as the transition from residential to employment neighbourhoods.

The expansion of this east-west employment ‘belt’ has emphasised the physical, visual and functional disconnection between the Northern Residential Neighbourhoods, and the Southern Residential and Commercial Neighbourhoods and ‘main’ community hubs. As such, it is considered that the impact of this development on the urban structure and form has been significant.

- H. **Bidston Moss:** operating as a landfill site between 1936 and 1995, the site is now reclaimed and supports developing woodland and grassland habitats. The extents

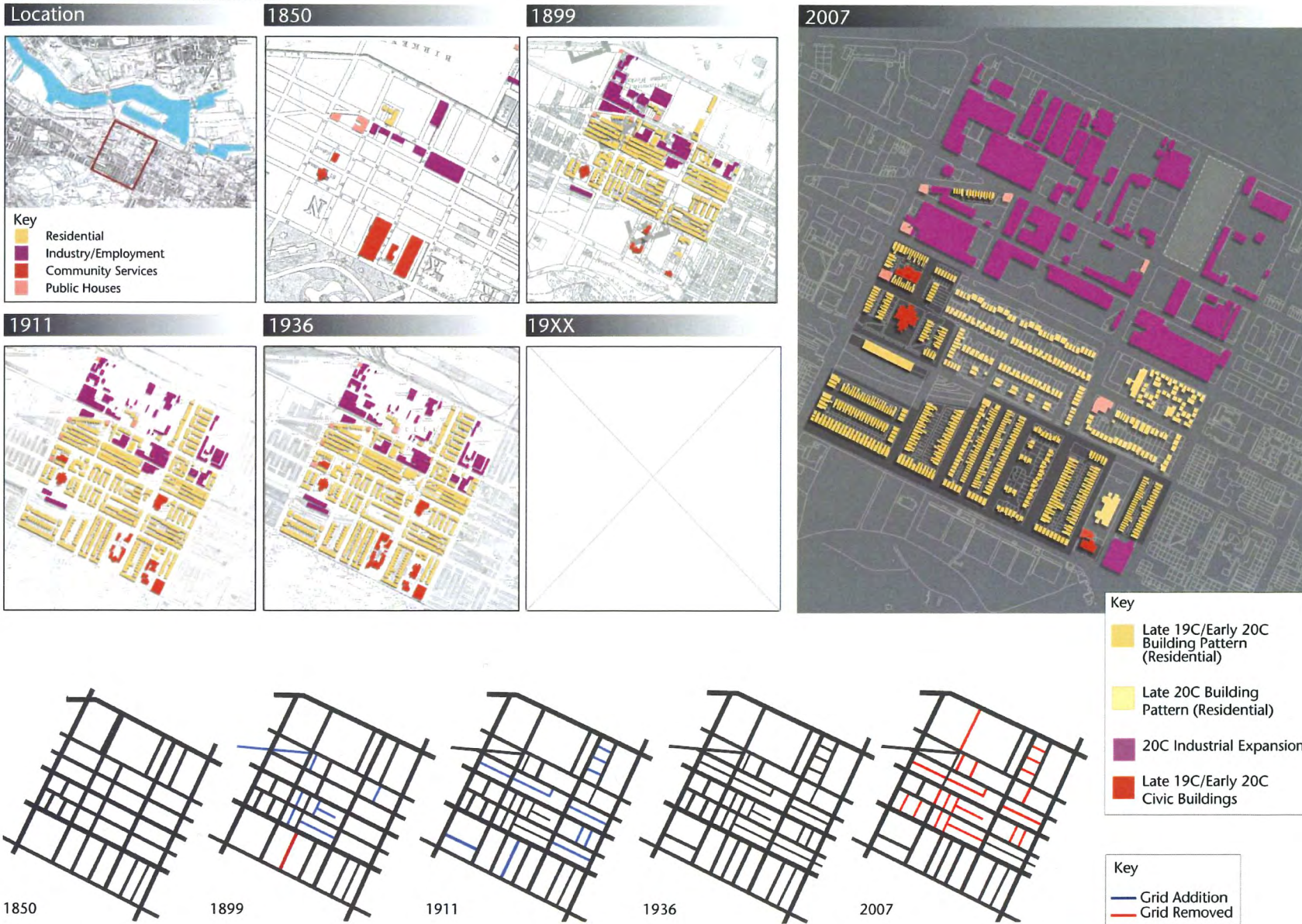
of the landfill have been contained between the M53 and railway lines and sidings to the north and west, Bidston Dock to the east and railway lines and sidings to the south. As such, it is considered that the impact of this development on the urban structure has been minor.

- I. **Flexibility and Responsive Port Activities:** the nature of the port activities requires a responsive and adaptable building pattern and typology. The urban form of the Docks remains in a constant state of flux creating an unstructured and discordant building pattern. The most significant, higher quality buildings and structures remain. As such, it is considered that the impact of these developments on the urban structure and form has been minor. The impact upon urban form is significant.

‘Intactness’

- 2.70 Significant interventions impacting upon the key elements and established patterns of the urban structure and form have been contained to specific locations.
- 2.71 The location and degree of these impacts upon the urban structure is illustrated in **Figure 2/20: Intactness – Urban Structure**. Key impacts, including retail town expansion, housing renewal, and highways and tunnel construction have focused around Birkenhead town centre, the central areas of the Laird Town Plan, and the northern and southeast extents of the Northern Neighbourhoods

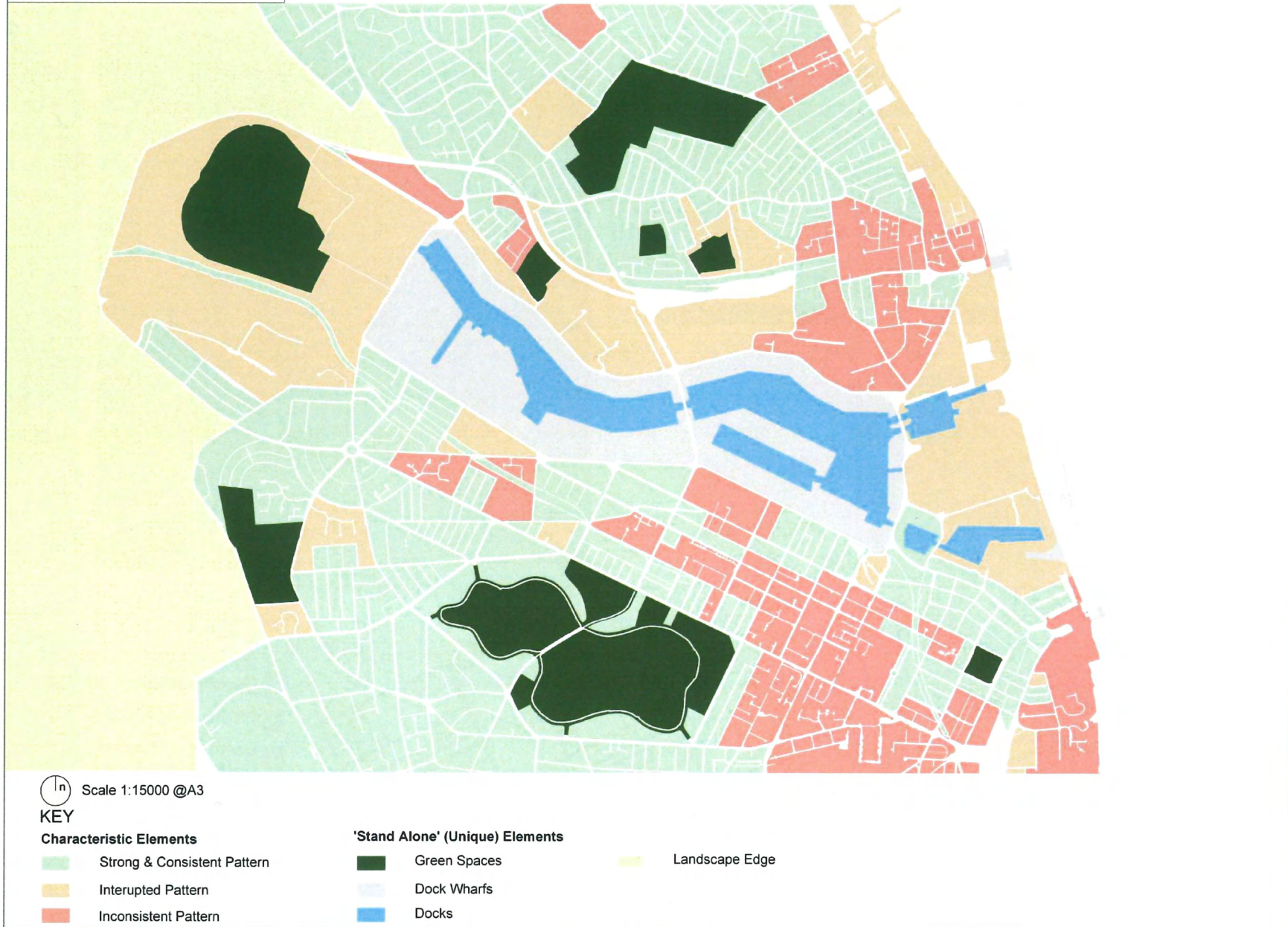
FIGURE 2/19: Birkenhead Urban Block Analysis




URBAN DESIGN APPRAISAL: BIRKENHEAD URBAN BLOCK ANALYSIS
 Expansion of Employment Uses



FIGURE 2/20: Intactness - Urban Structure



URBAN DESIGN APPRAISAL: Intactness - Urban Structure



- 2.72 The degree of these impacts upon the urban form is illustrated in **Figure 2/21: Intactness – Form**. Key impacts, including retail town expansion, housing renewal, highways and tunnel construction, port redevelopment, encroachment of employment uses have focused around Birkenhead town centre, the northern and central areas of the Laird Town Plan, the northern and southeast extents of the Northern Neighbourhoods, and the ‘central industrial belt’.
- 2.73 The clear correlation between the location and degree of impacts on both urban structure and urban form is illustrated in **Figure 2/22: Intactness – Urban Structure and Form**. The residential neighbourhoods are subject to on-going, cumulative changes – brought about by the redevelopment and conversion/adaptation of individual buildings and building groups – and more localised impacts. More structural interventions are focused towards the retail and employment neighbourhoods and hubs, where the scale and nature of change is more significant, and the impacts more widely felt. The most significant impacts are focused around the central gridiron of the Laird Town Plan, Birkenhead Town Centre and the southeastern extents of the residential Northern Neighbourhoods.
- 2.74 Elsewhere, the key strategic elements - the gridiron streets of Laird Town Plan, the Birkenhead Dock System and Historic Local Routes, the local streets and building patterns of the residential neighbourhood remain intact – providing a cohesive and distinct

framework for building and movement patterns, and uses and activities.

- 2.75 As a consequence, there is a clear contrast between the ‘intactness’ of the established, stable and intact residential neighbourhoods to the west and southwest, and the more active and evolving residential, employment neighbourhoods and retail hubs to the east and south east
- 2.76 The implications and opportunities arising from these impacts and varying degrees of ‘intactness’ are considered below.

FIGURE 2/21: Intactness - Urban Form



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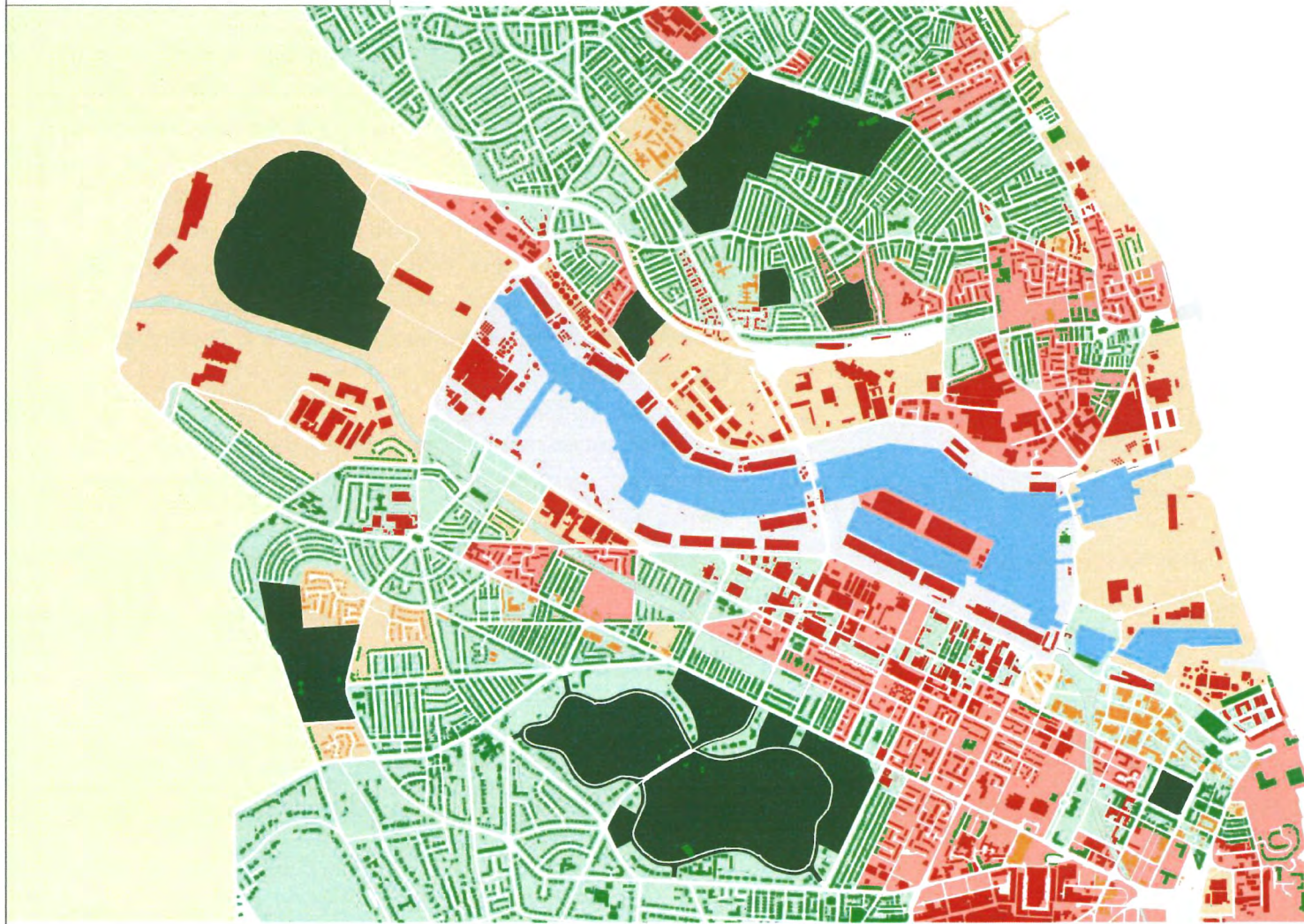
KEY

- Characteristic Elements
- Strong & Consistent Pattern
 - Interrupted Pattern
 - Inconsistent Pattern

URBAN DESIGN APPRAISAL: Intactness - Urban Form



FIGURE 2/22: Intactness - Urban Structure & Form



Scale 1:15000 @A3

KEY

Urban Structure

- Strong & Consistent Pattern
- Interrupted Pattern
- Inconsistent Pattern

Urban Form

- Strong & Consistent Pattern
- Interrupted Pattern
- Inconsistent Pattern

'Stand Alone' Unique Elements

- Green Spaces
- Dockside
- Docks
- Landscape Edge

Strength of Character

- Strong Character
- Weak Character

URBAN DESIGN APPRAISAL: Intactness - Urban Structure & Form



Implications and Opportunities

2.77 This section evaluates the performance of the key aspects of the development form – landscape, urban structure, neighbourhoods and urban form – against those key urban design objectives set out in *By Design - Urban design in the planning system* considered most relevant at this strategic level.

2.78 The appraisal is considered under the following headings:

- **Character and Sense of Place** – *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*

Character and 'Sense of Place'

2.79 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.

2.80 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 2/23: 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 2/24: 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'.*

FIGURE 2/23: Strength of Character - Strong







Scale 1:15000@A3





KEY

 Strong Character Area/
Sense of Place

Hills, Corridors, Estates & Parkland

-  Birkenhead Park
-  Bidston Hill
-  Flaybrick Cemetry
-  Central Park

Residential Neighbourhoods

-  Claughton North
-  St James Church
-  Wallasey South
-  Hamilton Square & Woodside

URBAN DESIGN APPRAISAL: Strength of Character - Strong



FIGURE 2/24: Strength of Character - Weak



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

REVEALING THE UNIQUE: 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'. The scale of the Great Floats, the (gridiron street network of the) Laird Town Plan, Hamilton Square and Birkenhead Park is magnificent. 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 2/25: 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 19th

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..

FIGURE 2/25: Memorable Places & Events



URBAN DESIGN APPRAISAL: Memorable Places & Events



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.

Landscape and Public Realm

- 2.81 The urban design objective is to create a place with attractive and successful outdoor areas, where public places are clearly distinguished. This is to be achieved by promoting and clearly defining public spaces and routes that are attractive, safe and work effectively for all.
- 2.82 The key implications and opportunities are illustrated in **Figure 2/26: Opportunities: Landscape and Public Realm** and are considered below:
- **PLACEMAKING – a positive force for change:** the Great Floats, the gridiron street network, Birkenhead Park and Hamilton Square are valuable assets forming the Laird Town Plan 'composition'. Beyond these features, there remain extensive tracts of 'weak' character areas with little or no sense of place. They contain and isolate the Great Floats from the 'strong' character areas to the north and south, and the wider landscape setting to the west.

These 'weak' character areas containing the Great Floats are focused along the River Birkett Plain and Valley. The landscape quality of this corridor has been fragmented and displaced by significant interventions, the gentle topography being the only remaining characteristic. This poor landscape quality reinforces perceptions of the Wirral peninsula as a landscape of 'contrasting coastlines'.

The landscape of the western extents of the peninsula is widely recognised and valued as a high quality setting and recreational resource, more closely associated with the landscapes and identities of the Shropshire, Cheshire and Staffordshire Plain. The Coastal Dunes support a range of recreational activities, including the international profiled Hoylake Open Championship course. More locally, Bidston Hill is one of Wirral's best known assets, valued for its established history and visual landmarks including the windmill, observatory and woodlands.

In contrast, the landscape of the eastern extents of the peninsula is perceived as limited and fragmented, part of the maritime and industrial Merseyside conurbation rather than a valuable and diverse landscape setting.

FIGURE 2/26: Opportunities - Landscape & Public Realm



URBAN DESIGN OPPORTUNITIES: Landscape & Public Realm



Within the River Birkett Plain, the landscape character has been undermined by the M53 motorway, slipways and associated development, creating small, isolated land parcels with no clear function or identity. The low-lying landscapes to the north of the peninsula have also been subject to incremental impacts from the on-going construction of infrastructure projects, in particular landfill sites and pumping stations. Within the River Birkett 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 – an 'alien' landform in a low-lying, flat landscape. The on-going work of Groundwork Trust/NWDA/Forestry Commission is actively transforming the Moss and adjacent NEWLAND 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/NEWLANDS, 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 indoor and outdoor facilities and a Visitor Centre. They provide a focus for formal and informal recreation for the immediate and wider communities. 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.

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

2.83 The urban design objective is to create a 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.

2.84 The key implications and opportunities are illustrated in **Figure 2/27: Diversity** and **Figure 2/28: Adaptability** and are considered below:

- **CENTRAL INDUSTRIAL BELT:** the most significant influence on the (physical and visual) character of Inner Wirral is land use. – in particular the ‘central industrial belt’ focused along the Birkenhead Dock system. The singularity of uses creates an employment ‘zone’, with little integration, response and transition into adjacent neighbourhoods and hubs. This dominance is accentuated by the fragmented and interrupted street and building patterns, and 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 mills on the lower slopes 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 alternatives formats and/or uses is constrained by the nature,

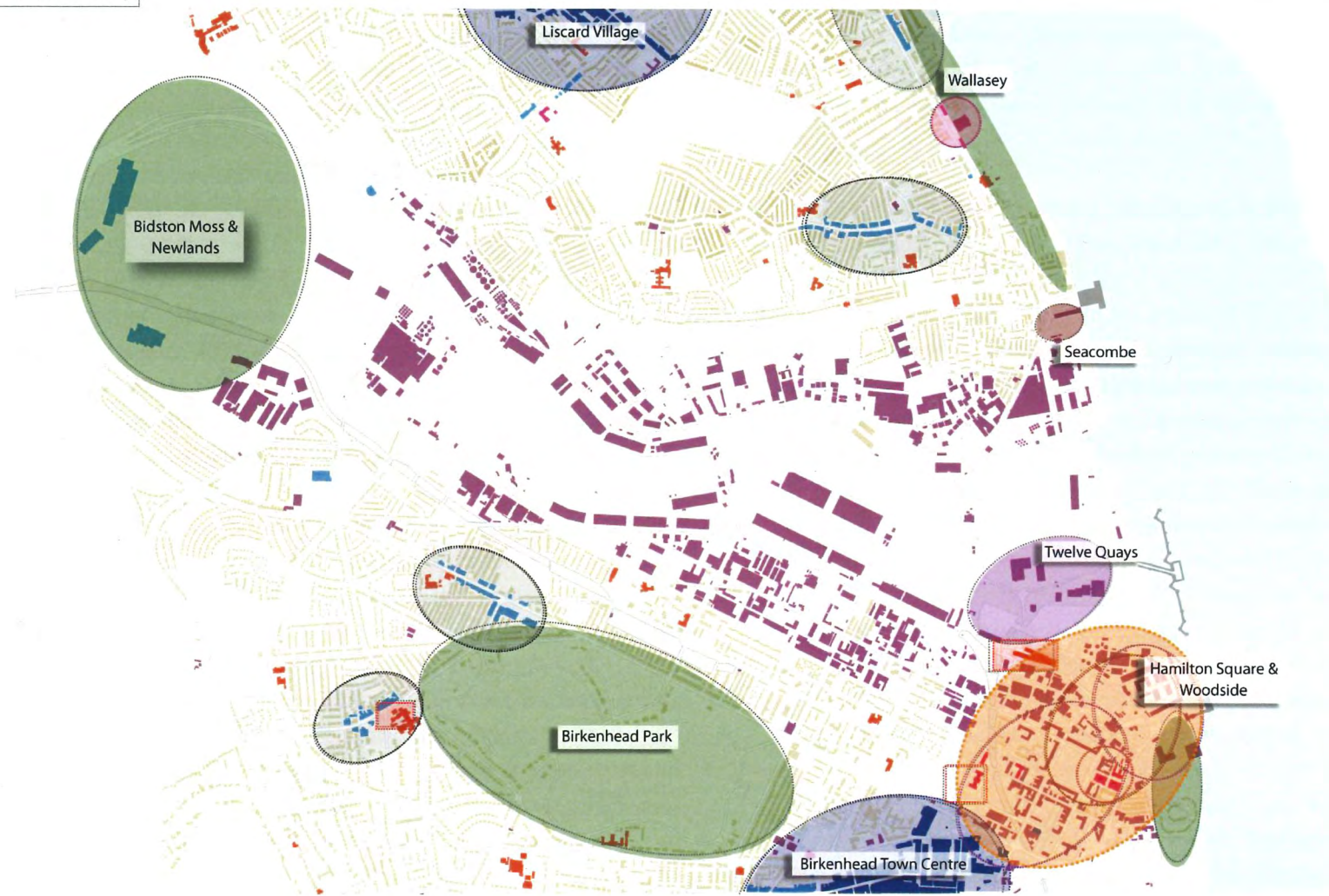
quality and designation of the immediate surrounds as industrial neighbourhoods.

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 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 landholdings 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.

FIGURE 2/27: Diversity



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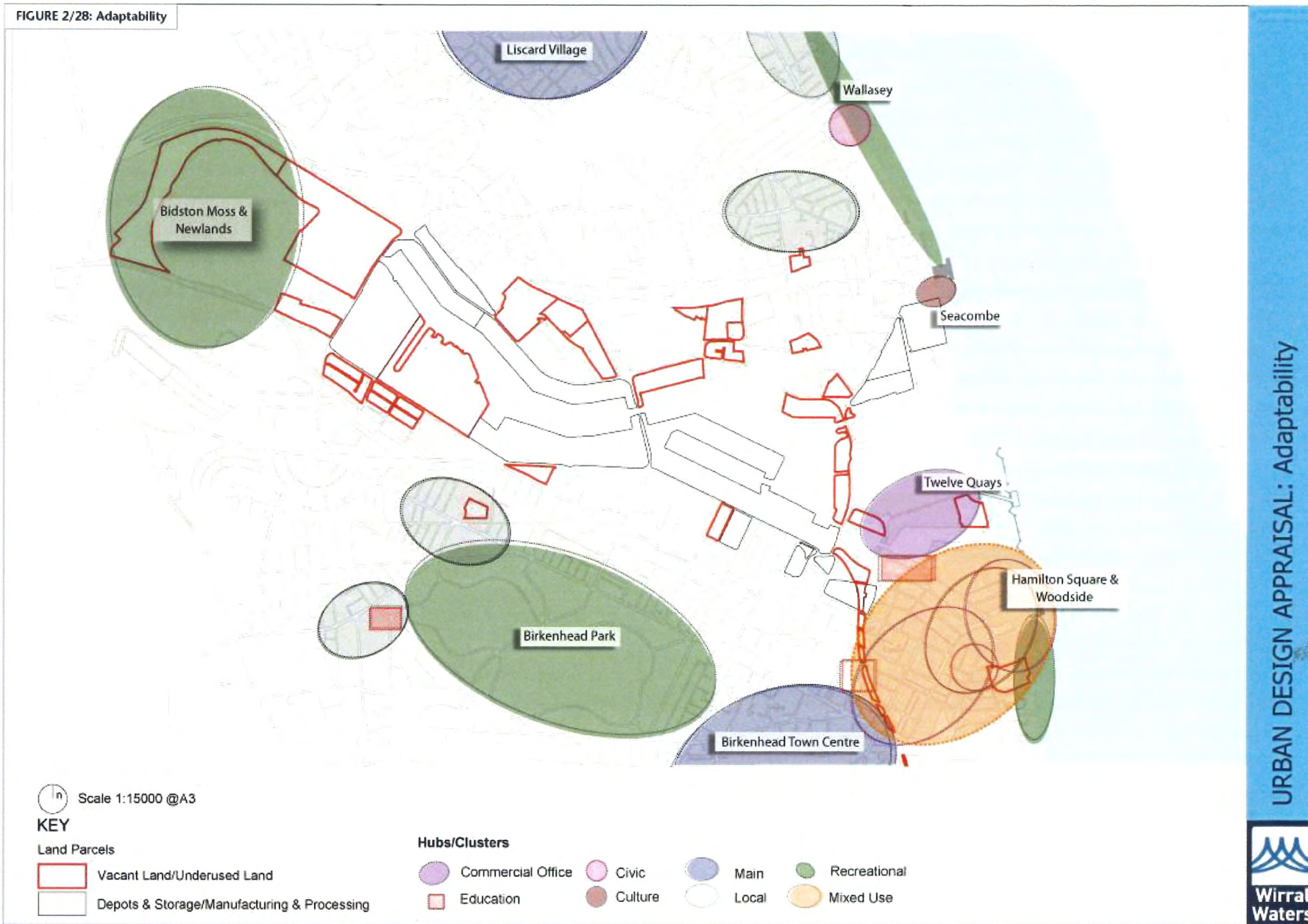
KEY

Residential Neighbourhoods	District Centre	Civic	Commercial Office	Civic	Main	Recreational
Employment Neighbourhoods	Shops, Offices & Services	Education	Education	Culture	Local	Mixed Use

URBAN DESIGN APPRAISAL: Diversity



FIGURE 2/28: Adaptability



- **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.

Ease of Movement and Connections

- 2.85 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.



- 2.86 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.
- 2.87 The key implications and opportunities are illustrated in **Figure 2/29: Ease of Movement – Barriers and Connections** and **Figure 2/30: Ease of Movement** and are considered below:

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 an intricate network of radial routes leading to, and connecting across, 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 network 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.

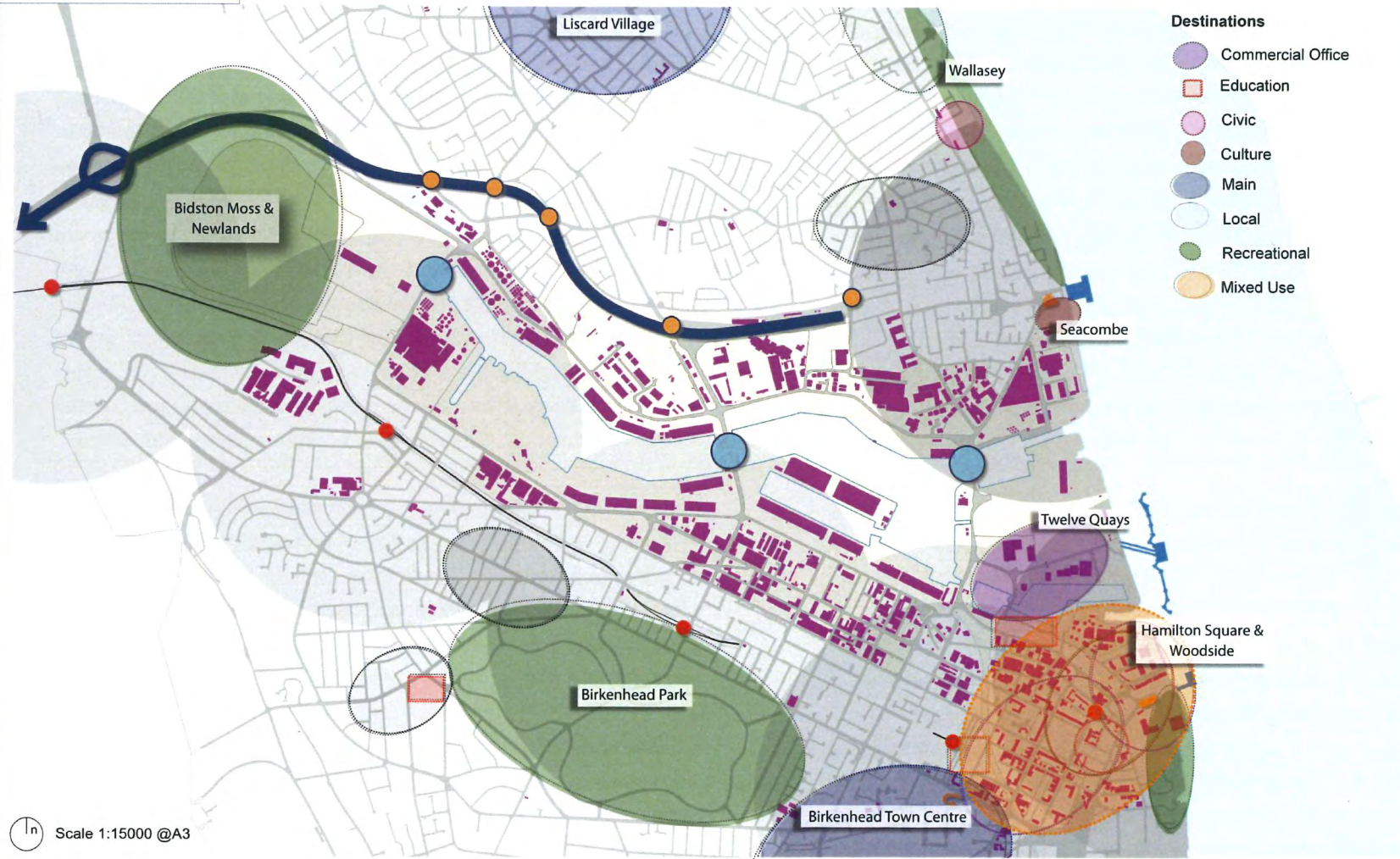
FIGURE 2/29: Ease of Movement - Barriers & Connections



URBAN DESIGN APPRAISAL: Ease of Movement - Connections & Barriers



FIGURE 2/30: Ease of Movement



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

Scale 1:15000 @A3

KEY

- | | | | | | |
|--|--|--|---|--|--|
| Public Transport Hubs & Corridors | | Barriers | | Crossing Points | |
| Merseyrail | Mersey Ferry Landing Stage | Bus Stations | Land Parcels | Road | Docks |
| Merseyrail Station & Pedestrian Catchment (200m/400m) | Ferries Catchment (400m) | Bus Station Catchment (400m) | Land Use (Employment) | | |

URBAN DESIGN APPRAISAL: Ease of Movement



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 and 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. The 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 to 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 as 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:

- 2.88 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.
- 2.89 A more detailed landscape, townscape and visual appraisal is provided in Section 4: Environment and Appendix 3: Landscape, Townscape and Visual Appraisal.
- 2.90 The key implications and opportunities are illustrated in **Figure 2/31: 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.

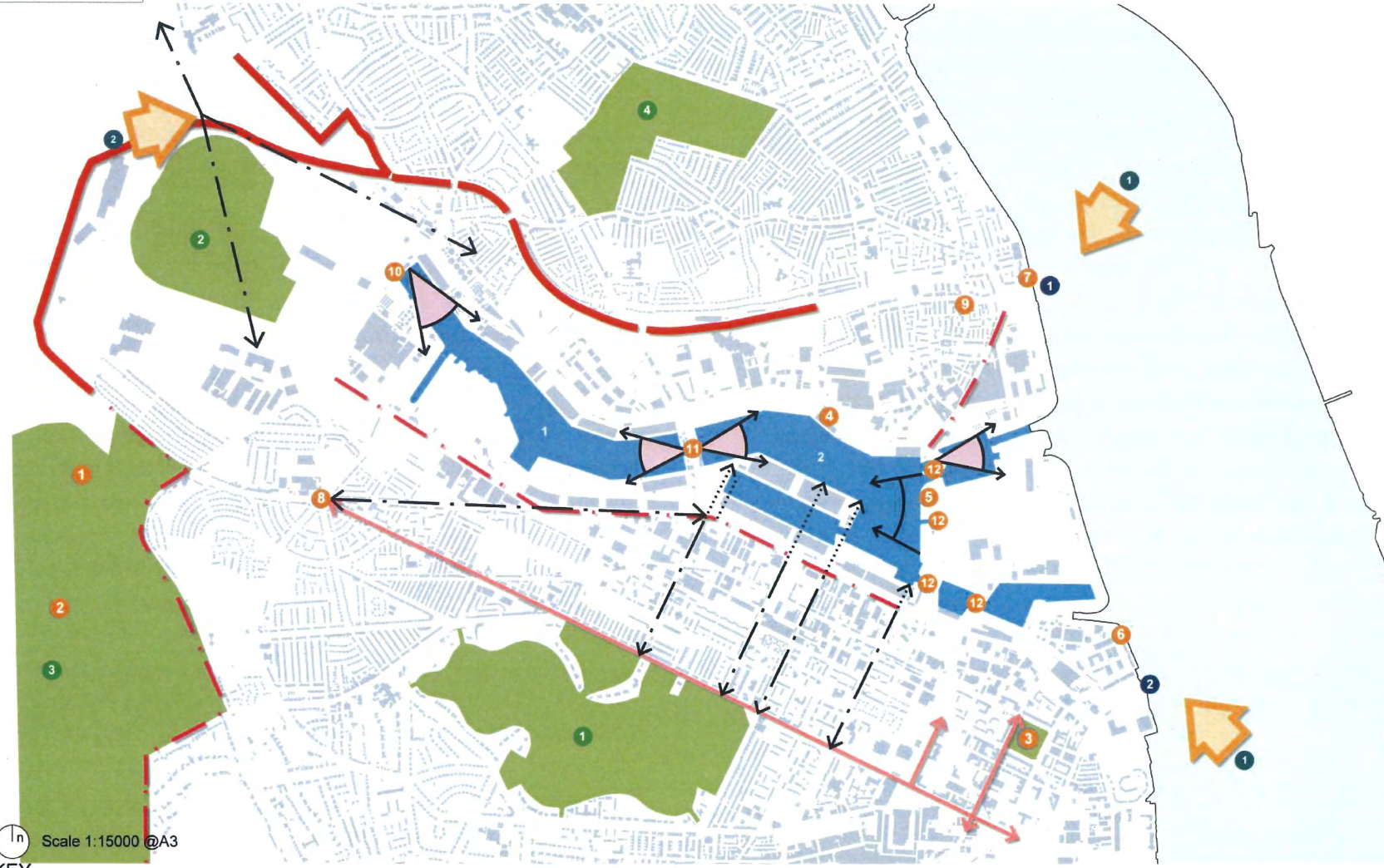
Other landmarks/groups are isolated and less prominent. The Bascule Bridges (and moving ships), pumphouses, lodges, cranes and dock walls around the Great Floats are focused along the key north-south connections. They form memorable 'events', revealed when passing through the 'central industrial belt'. 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 landmarks 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.*

FIGURE 2/31: 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)

- 1 West Float
- 2 East Float
- 1 Seacombe
- 2 Woodside

Approaches - Gateways

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

Visual Structure

- Open Views
- - - → Closed Views
- A

URBAN DESIGN APPRAISAL: Legibility



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 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 impact 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, 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

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.