



**SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING GUIDANCE NOTE 19  
HAMILTON SQUARE CONSERVATION AREA**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1. Hamilton Square was designated a Conservation Area in 1977. Of the 63 properties around the square, 62 are listed as Grade I buildings, whilst the Town Hall on the eastern side is Grade II\*.
- 1.2. The square was laid out and built between 1825 and 1846 to designs by Gillespie Graham of Edinburgh, who was commissioned by the ship-builder William Laird. Built of Storeton sandstone, the square was intended to be one of the first residential areas of Birkenhead, and was an architectural 'scene-setter' for further development in the newly formed town. However, in attracting owners belonging to the professional classes, the houses were soon adapted to accommodate their practices and Hamilton Square has remained the primary office sector location for Birkenhead.
- 1.3. Argyle Street, Hamilton Street and Market Street, although not of the same high standard of design as Hamilton Square were traditionally the main retail streets for the town although this role has been diminished in recent years due to retail relocation. However, a number of fine buildings remain and are important in illustrating the early growth of Birkenhead. Some of these are Grade II listed.
- 1.4. Unitary Development Plan (UDP) Policy CH5 relates to planning controls within this area.

**2. BOUNDARY DEFINITION**

- 2.1. The current Conservation Area boundary is drawn tightly around Hamilton Square and the Town Hall, with a slight extension to incorporate Hamilton Square station and the Pier Head. As such, the area encompasses the very early period of Birkenhead's development.
- 2.2. Whilst this has proved to be adequate in the past, there is now some concern that the Conservation Area as designated omits other important buildings and streets nearby. Because of this, development permitted in Argyle Street and Market Street in particular, has not been sympathetic both to Hamilton Square itself and to the other historic properties in neighbouring areas. These areas are also important to fully understand the wider intentions of Gillespie Graham's plan for Birkenhead, in terms of layout and building type.

### 3. ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

- 3.1. Hamilton Square itself is grand in design and presents dignified elevations to the central gardens. The basic elevational form is classically inspired. Buildings have three storey frontages, with a further storey above a cornice, with rusticated ground floor, pilastered doorways, and first floor iron balconies. Other unifying features include unfluted Doric giant orders to end units and pilasters to the central units on each of the four sides of the square. The ends and centres are further emphasised by round-headed ground floor windows, columned porches, and combinations of entablatured and architrave-framed windows. The Town Hall of 1883-7, also uses classical motifs, but is a more florid, Corinthian type building.
- 3.2. Because of the central gardens, and the solid four sides to the square, a positive spirit of place is achieved. Views out of the square are limited. The Town Hall at the eastern end and the Queen Victoria Monument (1905) in the form of an Eleanor Cross in the centre of the gardens create two areas of focus, and act as landmarks. The Town Hall, due to its scale, not only draws the eye from within the square, but also from a larger area. Conversely, the Victoria Monument is a strong feature within the square itself. Its presence is emphasised by the diagonal pathways crossing the square which intersect at the Monument, and the soft landscaping of the central gardens which act as a contrast.
- 3.3. The roads which lead out of the square at its corners form part of the historic grid-iron street pattern of Birkenhead. Important buildings are found on Argyle Street, Hamilton Street and Market Street, and long sight lines contrast with the enclosure of Hamilton Square. The provision of shop fronts at ground floor level, entered directly from the pavement, also contrasts with the stepped entrances to the Hamilton Square properties, and give a different interface between the street and the interior of the buildings.
- 3.4. The strong linear quality of the buildings along the peripheral streets is important as they emphasise the length of the streets and the grid-iron pattern. This is particularly the case with Argyle Street, where three-storey buildings on both sides of a wide street give an enhanced 'boulevard' effect.

### 4. POLICIES

- 4.1. Hamilton Square Conservation Area falls within the area of the Merseyside Development Corporation. Wirral Borough Council will encourage MDC to support the policies outlined below.
- 4.2. The conservation area should be extended as shown on the accompanying plan, to incorporate the remaining period buildings on Argyle Street, buildings and land on the north and south sides of Market Street which also includes the triangular buildings on Cross Street, the Queens Public House and adjacent land and buildings on Bridge Street and Chester Street, and the Woodside Hotel and Shore Road Pumping Station.

- 4.3. New development should not be permitted within the central garden area of Hamilton Square.
- 4.4. New buildings should not be allowed within the curtilage of properties fronting Hamilton Square.
- 4.5. The conversion of existing buildings to the rear of properties on Hamilton Square should not normally be permitted, if, in the opinion of the Local Planning Authority, the proposed use is detrimental to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, and the setting of the listed buildings.
- 4.6. Due to the sensitive nature of the Conservation Area, outline planning applications for new buildings should not normally be accepted.
- 4.7. There should be a general presumption against the demolition of period buildings within the Conservation Area, which, in the opinion of the Local Planning Authority, contribute to the character or appearance of the Conservation Area.
- 4.8. New development should respect Hamilton Square's historic context in volume, scale, form, materials, and quality, as should proposals for development adjacent to or affecting the setting of the Conservation Area.

## 5. FURTHER INFORMATION

- 5.1. Further information with regard to planning policies within Hamilton Square Conservation Area can be obtained from the Local Planning Authority's Conservation Officer.
- 5.2. The following documents may also be of assistance:-
  - DoE Planning Policy Guidance Note 15, Planning and the Historic Environment (September 1994).
  - Merseyside Development Corporation Birkenhead Area Strategy (February 1991).

