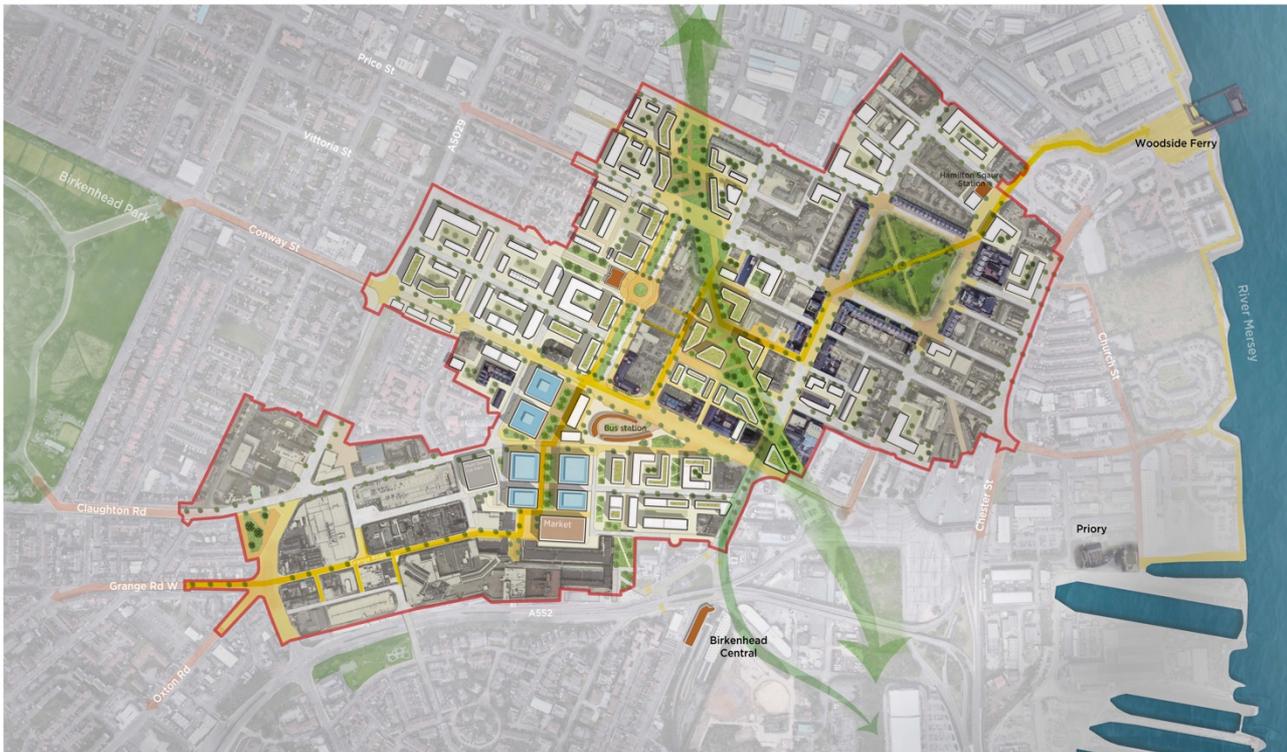


# Central Birkenhead Neighbourhood Framework

April 2021



DRAFT

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**Date: April 2021**

Appendix 1: Central Birkenhead High Street 2020 Assessment

Appendix 2: Central Birkenhead Plot Reference Plan

Appendix 3: Central Birkenhead Outline Infrastructure Requirements

Appendix 4: Monitoring Framework Draft KPIs

**This document has been prepared by Avison Young (UK) Limited for and on behalf of Wirral Council.**

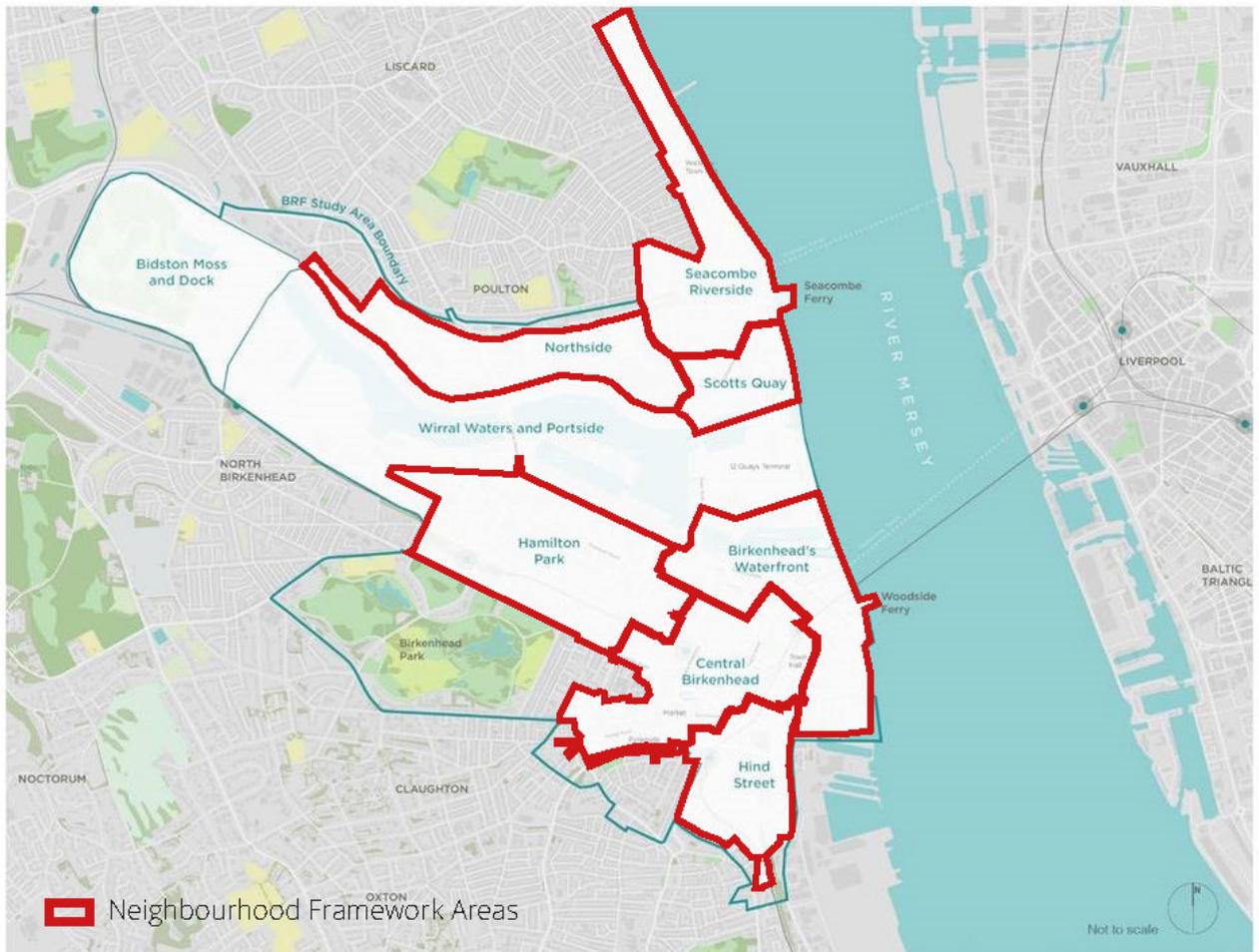
# 1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Neighbourhood Framework (NF) for Central Birkenhead has been produced by Avison Young on behalf of Wirral Borough Council and is one of a series to be prepared as part of the Birkenhead Regeneration Framework 2040 (the 'BRF'). The document has been produced to consider the strategic recommendations of the BRF in more detail at the neighbourhood level. It's preparation has enabled greater focus on the delivery strategy associated with the ambitions of the BRF, at the neighbourhood scale and below.

## **Birkenhead 2040 Framework**

- 1.2 This NF for Central Birkenhead has been prepared in the context of the BRF. The BRF sets out an overarching strategy for the regeneration of the Birkenhead urban area. This includes the identification of nine neighbourhoods each with their own character and contribution to the programme. The BRF establishes a draft vision and high level strategy for potential land use change, including scale of potential brownfield housing delivery, alongside supporting public realm and infrastructure requirements, all to be tested further through NF production as appropriate.
- 1.3 The BRF specifically recommends the preparation of NFs for seven of the nine neighbourhoods identified, illustrated in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1:1: Birkenhead 2040 Neighbourhoods



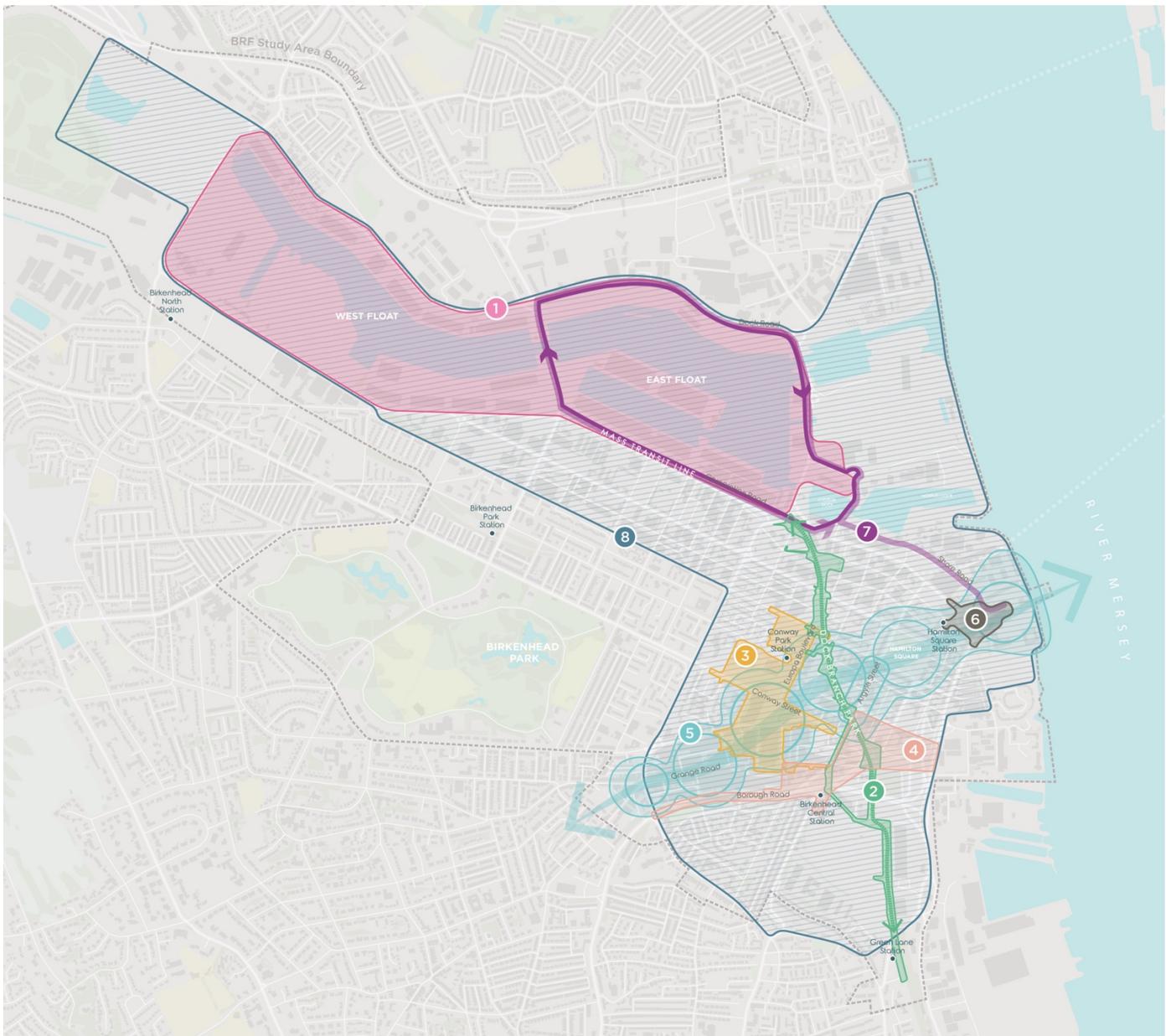
1.4 This NF, for Central Birkenhead, has been developed having regard to the BRF Vision and Objectives. It has further regard to the wider strategy of the BRF, including the prominent role of this particular neighbourhood within the wider strategy. Central Birkenhead features heavily within the spatial priorities identified within the BRF, including:

- Building a strong core; Central Birkenhead is identified to have a vital role in defining the sense of place, identity and health of the wider town and communities;
- Connecting through Birkenhead's 'Heritage Heart' to the Waterfront as an iconic place, a vibrant corridor, and a cultural destination – with the 'Heritage Heart' falling within Central Birkenhead; and
- Recognition of the importance of a commercial offer within Central Birkenhead to deliver the wider economic strategy ambitions including specifically the importance of the delivery of the Commercial District proposals.

## Interface with the Catalyst Projects

- 1.5 The BRF identifies a significant degree of underutilised and vacant brownfield land across Birkenhead on which development can and should be delivered in line with the principles and spatial priorities set out.
- 1.6 But it also recognises that there is a reason why these sites are not coming forward currently in this way as a result of the market failures that do exist across Birkenhead. There is no one factor preventing high quality development being delivered, but it is known that viability and market perception is having a material impact.
- 1.7 The Framework addresses this issue head on – through the identification of a number of catalyst projects, all of which are progressing, to address structural place or market issues, and ultimately create the right conditions for investment and value growth.
- 1.8 These catalyst projects, as shown in Figure 1.2 and summarised in the following text in no particular order, are strategically important for Wirral – underpinning the reconnection, reimagination, and rediscovery of Birkenhead.

Figure 1.2: Catalyst Projects



Key

- 1 Wirral Waters
- 2 Dock Branch Park
- 3 Birkenhead Commercial District
- 4 Birkenhead Landing
- 5 East-West Cultural Axis
- 6 Woodside Gyratory
- 7 Potential Phase 1 Route for Mass Transit
- 8 Birkenhead District Heating Demand Zone Boundary

## **Dock Branch Park**

- 1.9 Dock Branch Park is a transformational project, running through the heart of Central Birkenhead in its first phase. The Phase 1 park, designed to bring back to life the disused railway cutting between Wirral Waters and Argyle Street, will be delivered to create a vibrant open space environment facilitating active travel and accommodating cultural and creative activities. This includes proposals to accommodate a new museum offer within Central Birkenhead spilling into the park environment.
- 1.10 The design has been informed by the desire to not just deliver a new linear park within Birkenhead, but also to leverage wider regenerative impact – including ensuring connections to Hamilton Square, the Commercial District, and unlock development sites along its stretch. The nature of the park and associated development potential will have a material impact on Birkenhead more widely – creating a unique new community and fundamentally changing the character of the core of the town.
- 1.11 A masterplan has been produced for Phase 1 of Dock Branch Park, which has in turn informed the preparation of a landscape design approach, cost plan and planning strategy. Dock Branch Park has been included within the Birkenhead Town Deal programme, the subject of a current funding bid to Government in early 2021.
- 1.12 If considered one-dimensionally, bringing the corridor into use will enhance pedestrian, cycling and potentially in the future public transport movement and connectivity through the area. But beyond being a route for enhanced movement, it has the potential to be a unique linear park and cultural corridor, bringing vibrancy and driving values within this new residential-led neighbourhood of Central Birkenhead.
- 1.13 More detailed masterplan will be progressed for this new neighbourhood as part of the implementation of the BRF.

## **Birkenhead Commercial District and Mixed-Use Quarter**

- 1.14 The Commercial District and Mixed-Use Quarter lies right at the heart of Central Birkenhead and is a critical project to kick-start the restructuring and diversification of the extensive and dysfunctional retail core of the area.
- 1.15 The direct physical change that will result from the delivery of the proposals being developed by Wirral Growth Company (WGC) will materially change the physical environment of the retail core, diversify land uses, directly improve footfall of office-based employees, and create new attractions and experiential offer in the centre of Birkenhead.
- 1.16 Phase 1 will see the delivery of the first two buildings of the Commercial District – including 150,000 sq. ft. of office space including a new home for Wirral Council employees alongside private sector occupiers. Early years delivery will see the demolition of the existing market building and temporary relocation of traders

to St Werburghs Square, before they are permanently housed in a new market building within the core of the Commercial District.

- 1.17 Wider proposals include early year aspirations to deliver new homes at the north of Europa Boulevard on car parking land owned by the Council, and longer-term potential for mixed use delivery in key locations along Europa Boulevard and at Europa Square. Wider interventions include proposals for improvements to Europa Boulevard, Conway Street, and Birkenhead Bus Station.

### **Wirral Waters**

- 1.18 Wirral Waters, which benefits from an outline planning permission, is a catalyst project for Birkenhead and Wirral, but with a reach beyond that of the BRF, this NF and the emerging Local Plan given its scale.
- 1.19 The BRF recognises key projects being progressed within the Wirral Waters that fundamental to this catalytic impact on the regeneration process. In combination they address significant portside decline and bringing valuable sites back into vibrant use, and developing embryonic markets including new high quality residential development of a mixed tenure nature in this unique waterside setting, alongside the establishment of new Grade 'A' Office accommodation on Tower Road Other projects include Northbank, MEA Park, Vittoria Studios, Marina View, Tower Road South (transformational public realm) and Four Bridges.
- 1.20 Delivery of development and investment at Wirral Waters will directly influence development potential across Birkenhead generally, including a need to have regard to ensuring a balanced mix of uses and housing tenures and types across the urban area across the outline planning permission and the 2040 Framework and NFs.
- 1.21 Early phase delivery across Wirral Waters will be key to delivering the full ambition and scale of development captured within the outline permission, but as importantly will underpin market development and drive private sector investor confidence in the wider Birkenhead urban area.

### **'Birkenhead Landing'**

- 1.22 The BRF identifies the need and opportunity to bring down both flyovers that currently cut across Hind Street, severing this new neighbourhood from Central Birkenhead. The environment around the flyovers is heavily engineered and has a significant negative visual and physical impact. This is particularly pronounced in the area outside Birkenhead Central Station and on land north of Hind Street, where the town centre is severed from neighbourhoods to the south. Additionally, the flyover structures are surplus

to requirements as there is capacity to use alternative routes to connect to Queensway Tunnel. In time they will also present a major maintenance liability.

- 1.23 The flyover removal programme will have a direct impact on wider infrastructure located between Birkenhead Central Station and the core of the Central Birkenhead neighbourhood, referred to as 'Birkenhead Landing' – removing infrastructure currently as wide as a motorway in parts severing the centre from the existing and future residential communities to the south.
- 1.24 This comprehensive approach is needed to unlock the key additional development opportunity for a new exemplar Urban Village at Hind Street. This is an essential project to address severance and the 'concrete collar' that sits around the Central Birkenhead core area and will enable the simplification of infrastructure across the area. The removal of the flyovers will also provide the opportunity to create a new public space outside of Birkenhead Central Station, which will enhance the attractiveness for and viability of a new residential neighbourhood connecting it to the adjoining St Werburgh's area.

### **The East-West Cultural Axis**

- 1.25 Supporting and developing the continued expansion of the cultural and creative economy is fundamental to the BRF. Geographically this will focus on the Central Birkenhead and Waterfront areas – building on existing offer, business clustering, and the physical attributes of in particular the heritage assets at Hamilton Park, the Priory and the Waterfront – with the potential to run as a network of spaces and buildings as an axis connecting these two neighbourhoods.
- 1.26 The axis has at its heart the ambition to bring the core of Central Birkenhead closer to the newly imagined waterfront area. It will include the implementation of an activation strategy which will be fundamental to driving footfall within the retail core, and generally creating vibrancy and attract visitors to the centre. This experiential consideration of the core will be fundamental to the commercial success of Central Birkenhead, and in particular the sustainability of its retail, food and drink and leisure offer in the future.

### **Woodside Gyrotory**

- 1.27 One of the key considerations within this NF is how to create better connections between Central Birkenhead and its waterfront. It is crucial that through the delivery of the regeneration programme that the right conditions are created for investment in Birkenhead – and it is clear that the separation (physical and psychological) between Central Birkenhead and the Waterfront is one of the key dysfunctions of the area currently. The presence of the Woodside gyrotory is one of the fundamental reasons for this separation – and its removal will be a key driver of the two key areas connecting and being continuous in terms of development, public realm, function and crucially feel.

## Mass Transit System

- 1.28 A mass transit network for the Central Birkenhead and Wirral Waters areas of the Borough have been discussed for several years. Through recent feasibility work undertaken on behalf of the Council, a wider mass transit network prospect has been identified, serving key regeneration zones such as Wirral Waters, Seacombe Riverside and the south of Central Birkenhead.
- 1.29 The mass transit network is needed due to the absence of 'last mile' high-quality public transport alternatives connecting to and between planned regeneration and the high quality Merseyrail system. In some cases, such as Wirral Waters, there is a need to overcome an existing impasse in which large-scale or high-density development on brownfield land is hindered by constrained public transport accessibility, but at the same time provision of public transport has not been previously considered feasible due to lack of demonstrable demand. This 'Chicken & Egg' paradigm is presently being examined through preparation of a Mass Transit Delivery Strategy and Business Case, which is being prepared to recommend ways in which this impasse can be overcome.

## Birkenhead District Heat Network

- 1.30 Investment in Birkenhead must be future proof. New energy infrastructure is needed if development across the area is to contribute to achieving net-zero carbon emissions to help avert the climate crisis. During 2021 the Council will be working with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to develop a detailed business case for the implementation of a comprehensive heat network for Central Birkenhead. The emerging Local Plan will include policies to safeguard key sites to facilitate the delivery of this project and require major developments to connect to the system where feasible.

## Document Structure

- 1.31 The remainder of the document is structured as follows.
- Section 2: Central Birkenhead Context: Summary of baseline analysis to present snapshot of context for the NF within the Central Birkenhead neighbourhood, including SWOT analysis summary;
  - Section 3: Vision and Objectives: Setting the vision and principles for the Central Birkenhead NF in response to the context, drivers and opportunities identified;
  - Section 4: Central Birkenhead Neighbourhood Framework: Proposed mix of land uses, and identification of key projects coming forwards as a result of the NF process;
  - Section 5: Birkenhead Primary Retail Area: Recommendations relating specifically to the planning policy approach to retail and mixed-use delivery within Central Birkenhead; and

- **Section 6: NF Delivery Strategy and Next Steps: Including project action plan, phasing plan, consideration of funding, delivery vehicles and governance.**

**1.32 This Central Birkenhead NF is supported by technical evidence informing the process undertaken including:**

- **Place and Movement Baseline; and**
- **Demographic and Market Baseline.**

## 2. Central Birkenhead Context

- 2.2 Central Birkenhead covers a significant and complex area, with its boundary shown at Figure 2.1. This section describes the key characteristics of the area and identifies the key issues and opportunities which the Neighbourhood Framework will need to address. It summarises more detailed analysis captured within the Central Birkenhead NF Place and Movement Baseline report, and the Central Birkenhead NF Demographic and Market Baseline report.



## **An Uncertain Outlook: Impact of COVID-19**

- 2.4 This document has been prepared throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and is therefore cognisant to the fact that future land use requirements need to remain flexible to account for changing patterns of demand.
- 2.5 At the time of writing the extent of the impact on our centres or the wider economy is not known – but we are seeing the acceleration of decline on the high street as the vulnerabilities of high street retailers are laid bare, with reduction in retail expenditure during 2020, and the national economy is expected to enter a period of recession.
- 2.6 Considerable job losses are forecast across the country, and across sectors, and at the time of writing there is increasing speculation regarding taxation levels including specifically likely increases in income tax which combined will clearly have a further impact on retail expenditure in the short to medium term.
- 2.7 Many high street retailers have already been lost across high streets nationally – most recent names announced including store closures by Boots, Marks & Spencer, and John Lewis, and retailers including Cath Kidston, TM Lewin, Debenhams, Laura Ashley, Go Outdoors, Monsoon, Oasis and Warehouse falling into administration – and with less than 15% of rental payments made for this quarter<sup>1</sup> much more contraction within the sector is expected.
- 2.8 Nationally, the direct implications of COVID-19 are visible on the built environment already – with significant investment having been delivered in increasing public space, outdoor seating areas, and active travel routes throughout the last nine months. This will have a lasting impact on how the spaces between buildings are planned.
- 2.9 The NF is being produced in this context – with potential additional opportunities across the high street in particular emerging as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes the potential emergence of distressed retail assets within the centre which may require intervention to enable their positive re-use in the future.
- 2.10 A Liverpool City Region Town Centre Recovery Report has been prepared including consideration of Birkenhead Town Centre. The report, ‘Anchor, Belong, Connect’, was published in February 2021 – following the establishment the City Region Town Centres Commission in January 2020.
- 2.11 The report recognises that “town centres, are not just physical places but anchor, belong and connect to us in ways that are both tangible and intangible.” Looking to the future, beyond COVID-19, the report is

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ft.com/content/325403ad-f1c0-46fd-a861-a46db7c32580>

clear in acknowledging that town centres have and should change and evolve, to create a sense of place and belonging, and to operate as hubs for businesses and civil society.

- 2.12 The next 12 months, through 2021, and into 2022 are likely to see considerable market and economic uncertainty. However, the sites identified as priorities in this NF document will remain priorities in this wider context. During such period's opportunities will exist for public funding support, and indeed anticipate potential to leverage greater intervention through this NF under the 'Levelling Up' Government focus, in partnership with the Liverpool City Region.

### **A Failing Retail Core: Need for Contraction and Diversification**

- 2.13 Birkenhead Town Centre is identified as a Sub-Regional Centre and Wirral's designated main comparison retail shopping centre destination, in theory serving a population of some 33,000 people within a 15-minute walk-time catchment, and over 325,000 people across the borough. More widely, the centre has an enviable potential catchment including the Liverpool City Region, Cheshire and North Wales with an immediate catchment of the Wirral Peninsula.
- 2.14 In reality though, the centre does not draw on this catchment to its full extent because of weakened and declining retail and wider experience offer for consumers and visitors in the context of existing and established retail within Liverpool City Centre, Chester City Centre, and the Cheshire Oaks Outlet Village..
- 2.15 The market, once Birkenhead's pride and joy, now has significant vacancy and is a sad manifestation of the decline within the town centre. Only a small proportion of active traders represent the thriving quality of the market of old which was a genuine destination and draw for visitors and residents.
- 2.16 Additional footfall drivers are acutely needed to support a wider resurgence across the high street.
- 2.17 The centre is now blighted by vacant shop frontages, focused in two core areas - Princes Pavement and Milton Pavement, creating a stark and poor arrival to Grange Road and the Pyramids Shopping Centre. The proportion of vacant retail units in the town centre is more than double the UK average. Footfall was 10.3m in the core of the high street in Birkenhead within the enclosed Pyramids Shopping Centre in 2019; a staggering reduction of 7.6m when compared to 2008. Footfall counts undertaken in January 2020 showed a further decline suggesting annual levels of under 4m, which although based on winter data further compound the sense of falling patronage within the centre.
- 2.18 The evidence supports the future policy-led refocussing of the high street, whilst supporting development of food and drink, leisure and culture within key locations including across the East-West Axis and Dock Branch Park where appropriate active uses would be considered.
- 2.19 There is almost no diversity in uses across the heart of the centre - with little by the way of leisure, no office uses (beyond those on upper floors relating to retail uses below), and limited residential uses within

the core. Birkenhead has been identified as the 9th worst area nationally as a food-oriented destination. The proportion of betting shop / casino provision within the centre is over double the national average. Outside of trading hours the centre is largely deserted and is an unattractive and intimidating environment.

- 2.20 The Wirral Retail and Centres Study 2019 (WRCS) was been prepared (pre-COVID-19) by WYG on behalf of the Council as assessment of retail and leisure needs over a fifteen-year period to 2034, together with a review of the health of the Borough's town, district and local centres to underpin emerging Local Plan strategy and policies. During the production of this NF, WYG have been commissioned to undertake an update of the quantitative elements of the retail study considering update of Experian data issued in Oct 2020 considering some COVID-19 impacts. The findings of this update are not available at the current time.
- 2.21 The WRCS concludes that there is a need to deliver change within the Birkenhead Central 'high street' to ensure that it can successfully compete and draw on its full potential catchment building on its existing individuality, be a focus/hub for its communities, attract a mix of additional land uses beyond retail/leisure, (including residential, educational, community and office uses) and extend the 'dwell time' and spend of visitors/residents visiting the town centre and in turn the vitality and viability of the centre.
- 2.22 Given its timing, the WRCS was able to comment on the then emerging masterplan for the Commercial District and Mixed-Use Quarter but was not able to comment on this NF. The comments provided in relation to the Commercial District and Mixed-Use Quarter are relevant to this NF however, and are therefore included below:
- The masterplan proposals to introduce a mix of additional land uses into the town centre is fully supported by the retail study (and the National Planning Policy Framework) and will increase town centre footfall, extend 'dwell time', and spend.
  - Having regard to the importance of the market to the town centre, its relocation needs to be carefully considered to make sure it better integrates with the rest of the town centre and is in a sufficiently prominent position with good levels of footfall to remain attractive to existing market stall operators and to potential new ones.
  - For existing retailers and businesses in the town centre to fully benefit from the masterplan redevelopment, the integration and linkages between the Neighbourhood Framework area and the rest of the town centre will be important.
  - The town centre evening/night-time economy needs improvement. It recommends that the masterplan redevelopment includes a café/restaurant quarter which is as centrally located to the retail core as possible.

- The proposed civic uses will provide an important centrally located hub of community uses which will provide a further reason for residents to visit the town centre and in turn link their trip with other uses in the town centre.
- It will be important to seek to provide alternative town centre premises for those retailers/leisure operators which will be displaced as a result of the proposed regeneration plans. Of particular concern, would be the loss of the Vue Cinema from the town centre, if this site is redeveloped as proposed in the WGC masterplan in the longer term. It's relocation to a more central location in the town centre together with supporting food and drink uses (and the potential for a bowling facility) would significantly enhance the evening/night-time economy of the town centre, and is something being considered by the Council as owner of the asset in consultation with the operator.
- The town centre contains a high number of vacant units. The potential relocation of existing displaced operators resulting from the masterplan development will assist in some of these units being re-occupied. The delivery of the masterplan itself will also make Birkenhead more attractive to operators and investors which could in turn further reduce vacancy levels. For those vacant units located in the more peripheral parts of the town centre the Council should adopt a more flexible approach to allow alternative uses including residential.
- It is recommended that the masterplan development seeks to accommodate the requirement/ identified need for health and fitness facilities in Birkenhead. Alternatively, existing vacant units should be investigated and discussed with potential health and fitness operators to establish whether any would meet their requirements.
- The existing town centre retail core provides a poor level of environmental quality. Whilst, the new masterplan development is likely to involve attractive public realm areas, the existing retail shopping streets are also in need of public realm/environmental enhancement/investment.
- The pedestrian linkage between Birkenhead Central Railway Station and the town centre is poor. It recommends that any wider town centre strategy investigates potential options to improve this linkage.
- Although a quantitative need for an additional 1,100 sq. m. net comparison goods floorspace has been identified, given the number of vacant units in the town centre and in the absence of any developer/retailer demand for additional floorspace in the town centre no requirement for additional site is recommended
- The WRCS identified uncertainty regarding the future re-use of the vacant House of Fraser store, and recommended that, in order to avoid a potential long-term void in the town centre, the Council investigate a potential refurbishment/redevelopment strategy for the unit at the earliest opportunity. The Council have subsequently acquired this building and are exploring meanwhile uses ahead of longer-term residential development on the site.

- Whilst assessing hotel needs was not part of the remit of the WRCS, it is noted that with the exception of the Premier Inn on Conway Street, there is no hotel accommodation in the town centre. The WRCS recommends that, subject to the demand from hotel operators, additional centrally located hotel accommodation is considered as part of the masterplan development.

- 2.23 The decline of the centre is manifesting in the rental values achievable in this area which are low and falling. Zone A rents have not recovered from the effects of the global financial crisis in 2008 and continue to decline. Based on comparable evidence available at the time of writing, prime Zone A rents achievable in Birkenhead are in the order of £55 per sq. m. based on the few transactions evidenced. Low values have undermined private sector investment in the form of improving existing assets or delivering new development in this area for many years.
- 2.24 An assessment has been undertaken of the current performance of Birkenhead town centre against the 25 priorities for intervention identified through High Street UK 2020 research, demonstrating the extent of failure in the centre. High Street UK 2020 was a knowledge exchange project partially funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and completed by the Institute of Place Management (IPM) at Manchester Metropolitan University.
- 2.25 The research identified 25 priorities as being key to all UK High Streets or town centres to help focus activity and resources on action that will have the most impact on vitality and viability. A RAG (Red/Amber/Green) rating has been undertaken for the Birkenhead high street against these 25 priorities - with only 6 identified as being green at the current time, demonstrating significant room for improvement across the area. More detail on this assessment is provided at Appendix 1.

### **Birkenhead's Relationship with Liverpool City Centre**

- 2.26 The proximity of Liverpool City Centre is both an opportunity and a challenge for Birkenhead, emphasised by the connectivity between the two centres - including directly and sustainably via Merseyrail within minutes, and future ambitions for a cycle superhighway between the centres via the Queensway Tunnel.
- 2.27 The opportunity comes in the form of the commercial and residential investment that may come from being virtually co-located with such a successful centre. Birkenhead 2040 recognises that the demand for both office and residential uses within Birkenhead is linked to supply and demand factors over the water, creating opportunities for development across the LeftBank.
- 2.28 The challenge is perhaps most notably apparent in the context of this NF - and the fortunes of the high street. It is undeniable that the presence of the extremely successful Liverpool ONE shopping area has had and will have an impact on footfall and expenditure within Birkenhead's high street. It is not within the interests of success, nor is it considered realistic, for Birkenhead to try and compete directly with Liverpool ONE in this context - rather Birkenhead needs to find a complementary place and distinctive identity and role for Birkenhead in this wider context.

2.29 The baseline analysis has specifically identified the opportunity for Birkenhead's high street to be positioned positively through the maximisation of its unique assets defined to include its Market, Dock Branch Park, its heritage, its connectivity and its waterfront.

### **Wider Failure across the Centre and its Catchment**

2.30 Wirral has too few private sector jobs and remains a net exporter of labour. Worklessness and acute levels of socio-economic deprivation in Birkenhead has changed very little since it was described by the Centre for Social Justice as one of the country's "welfare ghettos" with rates of benefit dependency ranking the area as the 4th worst nationally.<sup>2</sup>

2.31 As many as 13.5% of working age people in the ward of Birkenhead & Tranmere claim out of work benefits, more than double the Wirral and City Region averages.<sup>3</sup> Of those in employment, retail is the second largest sector, employing 12.9% of all in employment in the area.<sup>4</sup> Continued decline in the retail sector is having a disproportionate impact on deprivation within Birkenhead.

2.32 A male born in Birkenhead will die almost 10 and half years earlier than a male born in a more affluent area of the borough (the benchmark here being Heswall).<sup>5</sup> Birkenhead has high rates of crime and anti-social behaviour and the perception of safety suffers as a result. There were 1337 instances of anti-social behaviour in 2018, a level four-times the England average, and there has been a consistent upwards trend in violent crime over the past 10 years.

2.33 Over 33,000 people live within a 1-mile radius of Central Birkenhead – over 10% of the total Wirral population – across over 16,000 households.

2.34 Using the Mosaic groups<sup>6</sup>, the most common group within 1 mile of Birkenhead Town Centre is Transient Renters, which is significantly more than any other group and with an index value of 598, nearly 6 times the national average. The other two most popular groups, which are over twice as common in this locality than the UK average, are Family Basics and Vintage Value.

2.35 A description of these groups are as follows:

- **Transient Renters:** This group tends to refer to single people who are renting low cost homes for a short-term rent. The most common age for transient renters is 18-25, with a household income of £20-

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<sup>2</sup><https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/library/signed-written-off-inquiry-welfare-dependency-britain>

<sup>3</sup> DWP Aug-18

<sup>4</sup> 2018 BRES

<sup>5</sup> Life Expectancy by Ward: [Source: Wirral 2019](#)

<sup>6</sup> Mosaic is a comprehensive cross-channel classification system by Experian. It creates an easy to understand segmentation that allocates individuals and households into groups and detailed types. This gives a detailed understanding of the type of people who live in different locations.

29,000 and no dependents. They may be single occupiers or sharers. The housing they live in tend to be older terraces are predominantly rented with very little home ownership.

- **Family Basics:** This group refers to families with limited resources who budget to make ends meet. The most common characteristics are parents aged 25-40 with 3 or more children and with a household income of less than £15,000 a year and they often struggle with limited resources. Some of this group will own their own low-cost home whilst others will rent from social landlords.
- **Vintage Value:** This group is characterised by elderly people with a limited pension income and who mostly live alone. They most likely are council or housing association tenants who live in purpose-built flats or small houses and require support from family or friends.

2.36 The NF aspires to greater diversification within Central Birkenhead, and the BRF aspires for the same across Birkenhead. Specifically, a more balanced population and demographic breakdown will create more stability and resilience for non-residential uses across the area in the future. This includes enhancing the spend profile and disposal income across the immediate catchment to support local retail and other commercial uses.

2.37 The demographics of the catchment highlight the following critical considerations for the NF:

- Existing low car ownership is in part an indicator of worklessness, low paid employment and good existing connectivity. However, it is also something that should be embraced as a positive, and car-free lifestyles supported to ensure low carbon growth where it relates to choice rather than lack of economic opportunity and disposable income. It emphasises the importance of delivering improved pedestrian and cycle links to the centre and unlocking the 'concrete collar' that 'wraps' the town centre created by over-engineered roads. This includes dual carriageway scale roads running through the centre and to the south – creating severance to local communities.
- Significant unemployment and low incomes emphasising the importance of creating employment opportunities within the core – recognising the need to diversify employment away from retail given the decline but also recognising the levels of skills and qualifications within the local area.

### **Moving from Housing Market Failure to Housing Delivery**

2.38 There is evidenced housing market failure within Central Birkenhead – open market sales delivery (homes and apartments) is materially compromised by viability. Most new build delivery coming forwards is underpinned by social housing delivery – and predominantly social rent, and/or modest in scale, innovation

and design quality. Existing supply is dominated by social housing and private rent. Levels of home ownership within the centre and its 1-mile radius catchment is half that of the national average.

- 2.39 The BRF has identified a significant extent of underutilised land within the urban area – which presents an opportunity, in the right market conditions, to deliver considerable new homes to meet housing need without the need for Green Belt release.
- 2.40 The BRF recognises the importance of facilitating housing delivery through the adoption of the emerging Local Plan, early phase development on public sector owned land (including the need for strategic land assembly to expand public ownership and influence change across the area), funding support to enable private housing delivery, and importantly ensuring high quality development and supporting mix of uses, amenity and community provision to encourage wider investment,
- 2.41 At the time of writing there is some residential development already planned within the core of the centre – including the conversion of Market Court (the former office space above TK Maxx on Grange Road) to 59no. 1 and 2 bed apartments (tenure unknown) under permitted development rights, and Hamilton Hub, a student accommodation block on Cleveland Street. The WGC outline planning application also includes for the delivery of up to 650 homes on Europa Boulevard.
- 2.42 Residential development to the west, outside of this NF and indeed outside of the BRF boundary, has been delivered successfully – with schemes including those delivered at Beaufort Road ranging from 2–4 bed houses showing positive sales rates and above average values achieved – but high quality mixed tenure and type housing delivery (rather than apartments) is yet to emerge in the core of the centre – a key market failure to be addressed through this NF.
- 2.43 Whilst important, these piecemeal developments will not address the evidenced housing market failure across the centre – instead a comprehensive approach to housing delivery across a range of property types and tenures is required to ensure that future development does not reinforce the existing lack of choice.
- 2.44 The NF recognises the need to deliver a broader range of housing tenures and typologies in particular family homes within the urban area to meet housing need over the emerging Local Plan period to 2037 but also to enable a more sustainable housing mix. This includes new housing delivery and bringing vacant and underutilised houses back into positive use. There is a great credibility to this strategy, particularly in the context of the scale of public sector grant funding being made available to de-risk sites and deliver transformational programmes.
- 2.45 The Council's **2021** Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) evidence base emphasises that population increases are going to be driven by a significant increase in the number and proportion of older residents, with the population aged 65+ years expected to increase **by 29% between 2020 and 2037**, placing

specific pressure on delivery of accommodation within sustainable locations with immediate and easy access to amenity and services.

- 2.46 Beyond meeting this specific need, there is evidence highlighting the importance of diversifying residential accommodation within Birkenhead more widely – including diversifying tenure (with current high levels of social housing provision), and diversifying type (including greater provision of homes alongside apartments, particularly important given the scale of proposed apartment development permitted at Wirral Waters).

### **Topography**

- 2.47 Birkenhead's urban area is combined from natural landform and land reclaimed from the river estuary south of Poulton connecting to the River Mersey. At the time of the land reclamation during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the only identifiable features of Birkenhead as it exists today was the Woodside Ferry terminal and the Priory (now the remains of the Priory) – both of which sit outside of this NF area but are relevant in the wider context.
- 2.48 Birkenhead has unique topographic characteristics. Higher ground lies to the north and south of the River Birket, which was reclaimed and repurposed for the extensive inner dock system: The Great Float.
- 2.49 Central Birkenhead occupies a prominent location on a distinctive ridge of higher ground which dictated the original course of historic routes to the riverbank, The Priory, and ferry crossings. This leaves the centre largely free of flood risk constraints.

2.50 '

### **Birkenhead's Heritage Legacy**

- 2.51 As the evolution of the urban area is mapped over time, it is clear to see a logical progression of the central area, linked to the growth of the wider Birkenhead urban core and its economic influences. From its effective formation in medieval times, through 18th Century growth and the emergence of the importance of the port – fuelling new development and the creation of the high value heritage core.
- 2.52 Development and growth continued and peaked in the 20th century, with the urban form between the 18th and 20th centuries spreading Birkenhead along key routes. The current retail core is located on the ridgeline – and along one of the earlier formed routes connecting the wider Wirral communities to the port and waterfront.
- 2.53 Whilst there is morphological logic to this evolution of the centre – Birkenhead is quite disjointed– pulled apart from its core as it has grown.

- 2.54 Birkenhead is famous for its 'Laird grid' formation – so identifiable across the historic core and through to the Parkside neighbourhood, framing Birkenhead Park. And on the face of it the retail area appears to have imposed on this grid – breaking up its uniformity and logic. But this is simply not the case – there is logic to the east-west flow of the retail area, originating from these routes connecting Wirral to its waterfront and taking advantage of the natural ridgeline that exists.
- 2.55 The physical issue in Central Birkenhead is not the breaking up of the grid network – which simply never existed in the southern core of the area – but rather the currently legacy of subsequent development, which means that the interface between the grid and the natural ridgeline based east-west connections of the Grange Road area have been lost.
- 2.56 Birkenhead's 'heritage heart' remains clearly identifiable – formed by the cluster of Grade I listed Georgian buildings around the Hamilton Square conservation area. This cluster, including the Birkenhead Town Hall and Magistrates Court, is the largest concentration of Grade I listed buildings outside of Trafalgar Square in London (see Figure 2.2).
- 2.57 Hamilton Square, named after William Laird's mother-in-law, was designed as the civic heart of Birkenhead. Laird commissioned Edinburgh architect James Gillespie Graham to design it on land he had acquired to create a new town – based on his design of Edinburgh New Town. The original design was far greater than the core left today – its full ambition is shown by the location of the original Birkenhead Market, between Hamilton Street and Albion Street. Construction started in 1825.
- 2.58 Although no longer in use, the Central Birkenhead area still bears the scars of the former Birkenhead Dock Railway Branch Line – connecting Bidston Dock to Rock Ferry – as its line curved through the intended Laird grid layout. The line, one of the oldest in the world was opened in 1838 – less than 10 years after the Rainhill Trials in St Helens, continuing to put Merseyside at the forefront of rail passenger movement.
- 2.59 There is little evidence to document the origins of the interface between the line as it curves through the grid – and whether it broke the grid, or the grid simply continued around it – but the resulting physical environment is poor across this relatively under-utilised area between the two strongest Laird influences remaining to date – Parkside and the historic core of Hamilton Square.

Figure 2.2: Birkenhead Central Heritage Assets



### **Existing Land Uses**

- 2.60 Central Birkenhead is dominated by commercial uses at its heart – with retail the most dominant activity along Grange Road, the Pyramids and the Pavements Shopping Centres.
- 2.61 Residential uses are identified to be peripheral to the centre geographically, with the second most prominent use in the core noted to be car parking – either multi-storey or surface level. There is a notable lack of diversity within the core of the central area.
- 2.62 The land use mapping doesn't tell the full story of the central area – what is more significant is the general underutilised nature of uses in the centre. There is notable vacancy across all the commercial uses identified – and there are areas of considerable underutilisation and decline in the physical environment of the centre generally.
- 2.63 The analysis shows a centre that has become too dispersed, leading to fragmentation and sporadic pockets of activity. There is no sense of 'centre' of coherent character areas or 'neighbourhoods'.
- 2.64 It is often the case that over-scaled highways dominate buildings and pedestrians and create 'voids' in the pedestrian mental map. There's an overarching lack of positive identity.
- 2.65 Birkenhead Park and Hamilton Square provide truly outstanding, world class green spaces in proximity to the town centre. But these remain the only green infrastructure elements within the urban fabric, and connectivity between them is poor.

Figure 2.3: Central Birkenhead Existing Land Uses



Land Uses

-  Predominantly residential
-  Predominantly industrial/ light industrial
-  Town centre mixed use (retail/ services/ commercial/ leisure/ civic)
-  Predominantly retail/ services
-  Educational
-  Green/ open space/ woodland
-  Town centre boundary (Local Plan)

## Strategic Connectivity

- 2.66 Central Birkenhead is extraordinarily well connected with the presence of a range of transport infrastructure and assets, but patterns of strategic movement are generally noted to be through the town not to it.
- 2.67 Strategic road infrastructure connecting to Liverpool via the Queensway Tunnel originates in the central area – although effectively bypasses the core by virtue of the A41 comprising the eastern boundary of the neighbourhood.
- 2.68 These key routes and nodes are identified to include three Merseyrail stations (Birkenhead Central, Conway Park, Hamilton Square) as hubs on the New Brighton, West Kirby, Chester and Ellesmere Port branches of the Wirral Line. It takes less than 3 minutes to get to Liverpool (Sub Regional Centre) from Hamilton Square by rail – much less time than it takes to travel from Liverpool One to the Georgian Quarter of Central Liverpool, and half the time it takes to get from London Kings Cross to Moorgate at the heart of the City of London.
- 2.69 The centre also benefits from being home to Birkenhead Bus Station – the strategic hub for bus services linking Wirral communities to the centre, but also connecting more widely to Liverpool to the east (via the tunnel) and Chester to the south. The bus station is located almost perfectly between the three rail hubs of Central, Conway and Hamilton – all of which would be easily walkable or accessed sustainably if the connecting environment can be improved. This strategic positioning of public transport infrastructure is an asset and should and does facilitate pedestrian movement between the assets across the centre – but also serves to facilitate movement of people out of Birkenhead and Wirral more widely. The excellent rail provision in the area with poor surrounding environment immediately around the stations does not encourage people from west of the Borough or New Brighton to stop in Birkenhead to shop and spend time rather than to head to Liverpool City Centre.

Figure 2.4: Central Birkenhead Connectivity

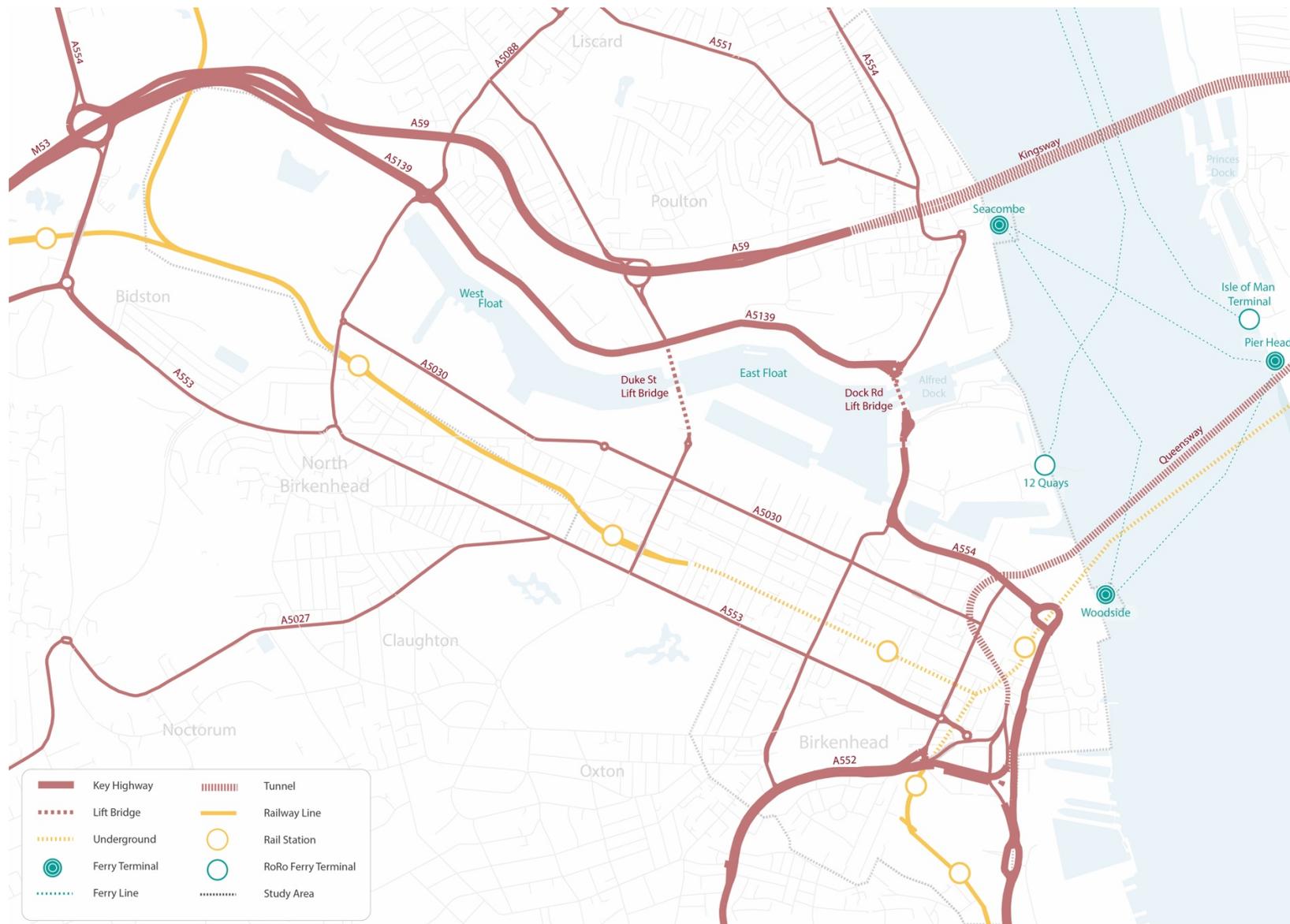
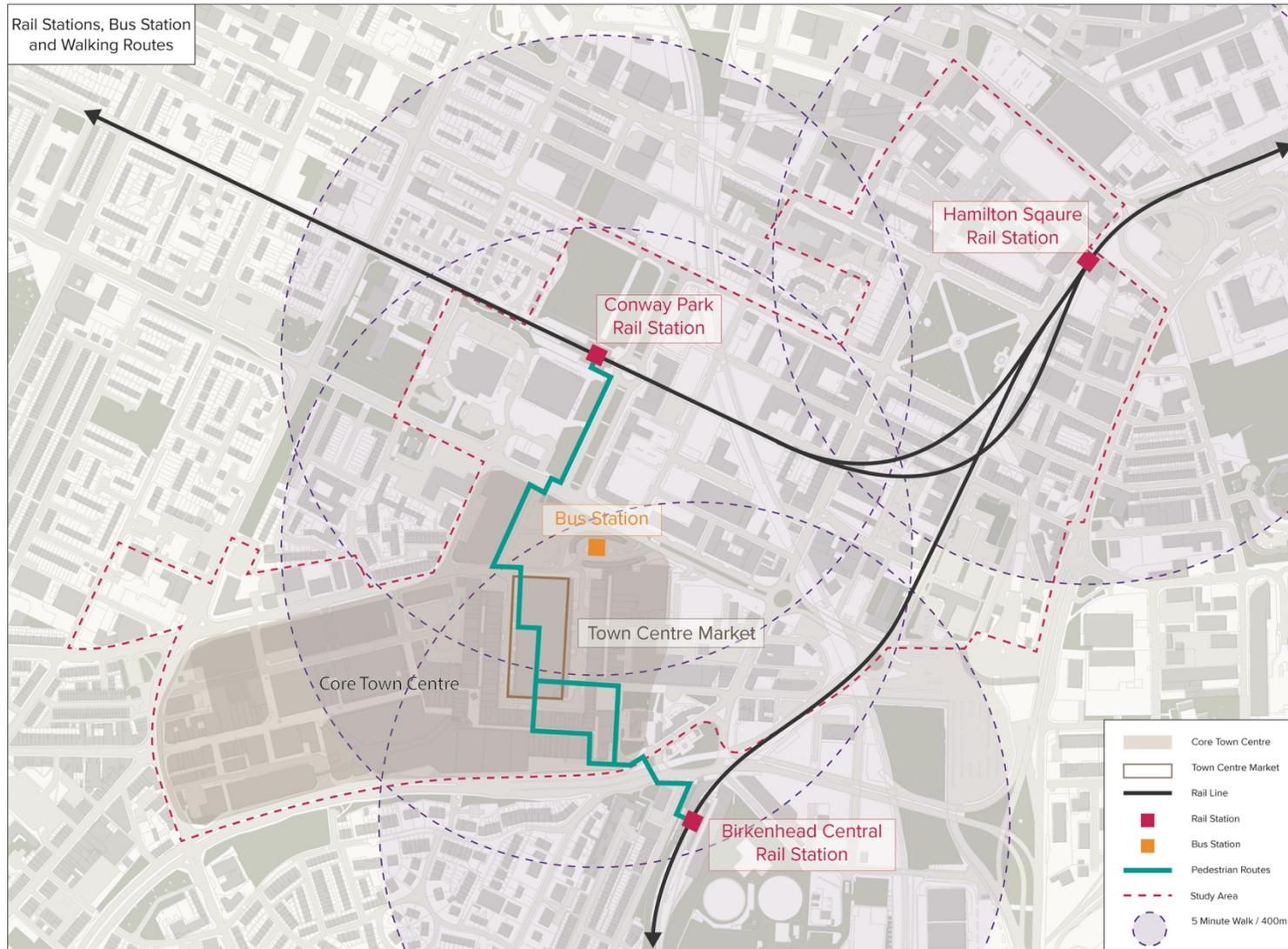


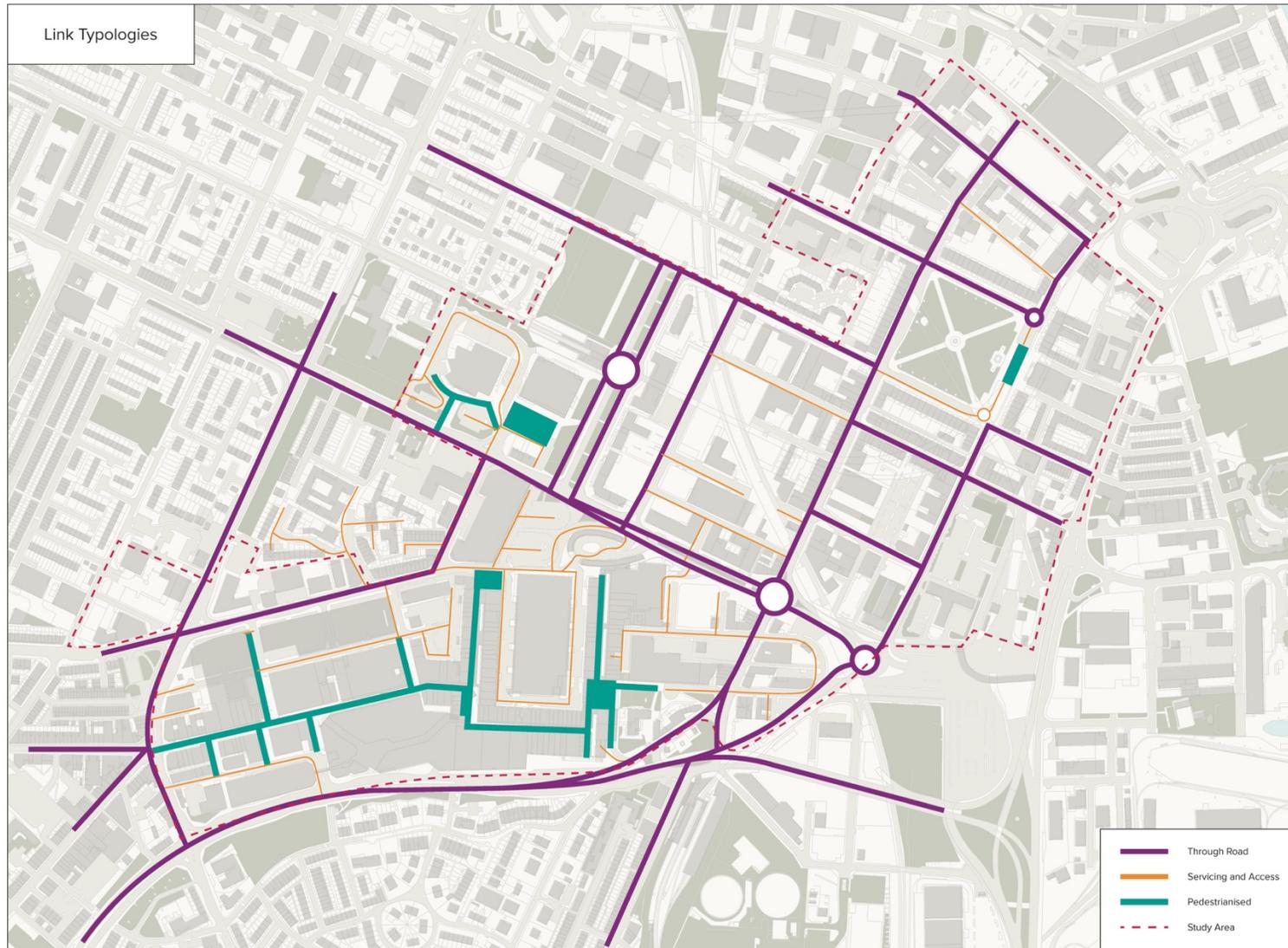
Figure 2.5: Public Transport Connectivity



## **Localised Movement and Connectivity**

- 2.70 There is a relatively strong network of primary roads across the core area of Central Birkenhead – but the roads create effective ‘boxes’ of movement within which there are more notable issues. Specifically, these issues relate to less legible and simple movement within the boxes – where zones are heavily pedestrianised or there is notable conflict with the abundance of servicing routes.

Figure 2.6: Central Birkenhead Linked Routes



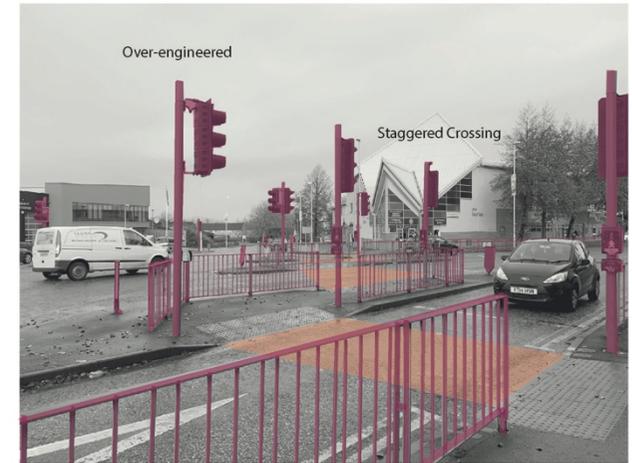
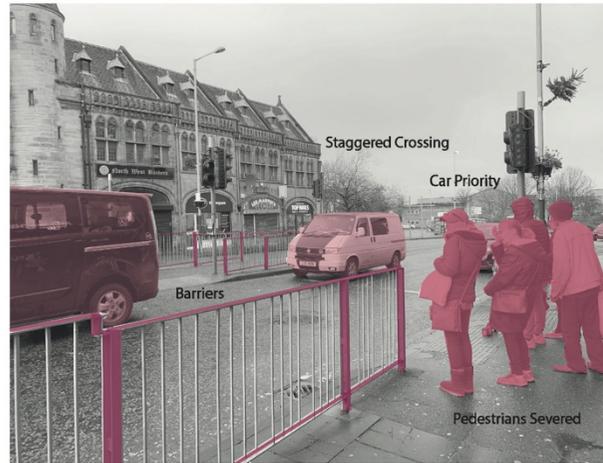
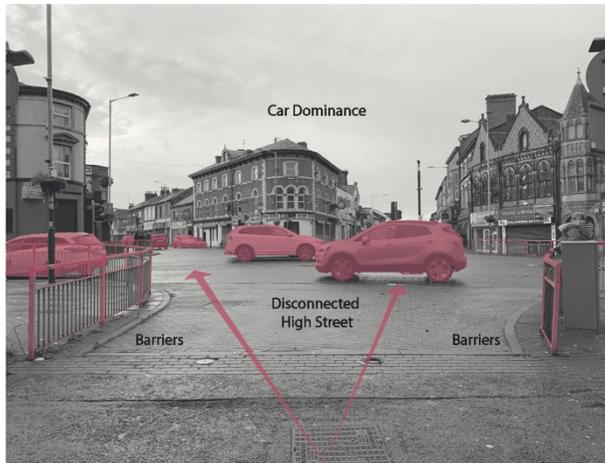
- 2.71 Service routes create specific issues within the centre; creating conflict with pedestrian movements given the often-internalised retail spaces.
- 2.72 There is a significant supply of car parking provision across the centre of varying quality and across a range of ownerships. The Council owns a significant proportion of the surface level car parking across the centre. Multi-storey car parking is available across the centre, but it is privately owned, and is of relatively poor quality.
- 2.73 Perhaps unsurprisingly the most frequent bus routes across the centre are focused on the core roads connecting to the bus station – being Conway Street and Claughton Road as the entry and exit routes to and from the station. It is further apparent that a significant proportion of the bus journeys go to and through the Queensway Tunnel linking across to Liverpool.
- 2.74 Collision data for Central Birkenhead highlights the areas of most significant conflict between pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles. Serious incidences are clustered on some of the busiest routes – including Conway Street, Claughton Road and around the Charing Cross area. This includes fatalities around the crossings on Conway Street towards Europa Boulevard and the leisure centre, and at Charing Cross.
- 2.75 The impact of the ‘concrete collar’ on the high street in particular –including Borough Road and Conway Street, the A552 and the A5029 – is apparent from the road traffic collision data – with incidences noted along this route reflecting ‘desire lines’ of informal crossing points aligned with the residential neighbourhood to the south. The impact of connectivity to the communities to the west of the centre is also noted – with specifically high and significant incidences along the A5209 and at the Charing Cross junction. This road infrastructure is identified as a material severance factor between these wider residential communities (all located within walking distance of the core) and the retail heart of the centre.

### **Legibility and Coherence of Place**

- 2.76 Looking back to the peak of Central Birkenhead’s economic role it is fascinating to observe a coherent, intact, and memorable built environment - a place which successfully merged the original organic urban structures with the planned grid, creating vibrant flowing streets.
- 2.77 Today, there are large parts of the core where the quality and coherence of the built environment has declined and is poor. It largely lacks a sense of continuity, and illegible and disconnected in place and suffers from poor environmental quality that deters visitors and restricts ‘instinctive’ movement.
- 2.78 Central Birkenhead has four important gateway locations, but they currently underperform and the sense of connectivity with the centre is weak as a result. The gateways are identified as Birkenhead Central Station, Conway Park Station, Charing Cross and Hamilton Square. Their current nature divides and fractures the centre rather than binding it.

Figure 2.7: Central Birkenhead Key Gateways





## SWOT Analysis

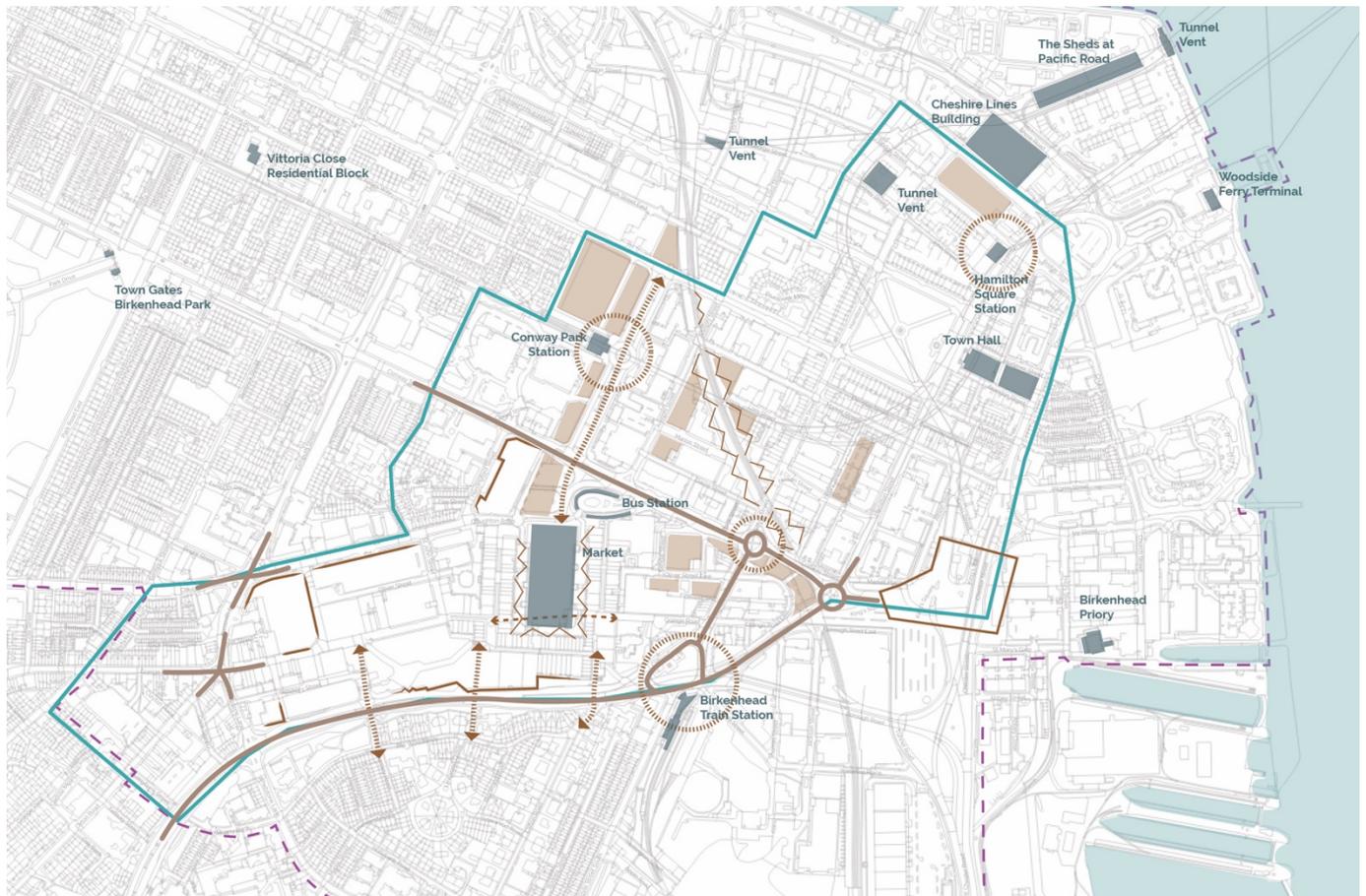
- 2.79 The baseline analysis undertaken as part of the NF process has fed into a SWOT analysis set out in Table 2.1, and Figures 2.8 and 2.9 below.

**Table 2.1: SWOT Summary**

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<b>Uncertain outlook: Impact of COVID-19</b>			
<p>Regeneration framework already underway at time of COVID-19. Early Council response through Economic Resilience group. Strong Chamber of Commerce and BID networks.</p>	<p>Existing decline within retail core exacerbated during the pandemic. Over-exposure to retail and public sector employment within the local economy.</p>	<p>Government funding programmes emerging during the COVID-19 pandemic. Potential to address long term issues within town centre core including physical environment and extent of vacant stock. Greater control through distressed retail assets,</p>	<p>Potential loss of confidence visiting the town centre across the catchment population. Uncertain outlook as to the length of lockdown, and future lockdowns / ongoing social distancing restrictions.</p>
<b>High Street Contraction</b>			
<p>Established retail centre with population within walking distance. Existing presence of Birkenhead Market – with loyal following within the community. Council has already established Wirral Growth Company in partnership with Muse Developments to deliver regeneration within the town centre.</p>	<p>Outdated and poor-quality retail stock across the Pavements shopping area. Level of vacancy within the town centre retail offer. Losses of comparison retailing ‘draw’ in recent years including Marks and Spencer and House of Fraser. Decline within the physical fabric of the Birkenhead Market building which is in severe need of investment.</p>	<p>Potential catchment stretching into Cheshire and North Wales if the offer within the centre is attractive enough. Lack of diversity within the centre creates opportunity to have significant impact by new uses being introduced. WGC proposals for Commercial District including new uses and new home for Birkenhead Market. Extent of Council ownership.</p>	<p>Ongoing market uncertainties and accelerated high street contraction during COVID-19 pandemic. Viability of development within early phases. Competing centres could recover more quickly attracting footfall that would otherwise have come to Birkenhead.</p>
<b>Town Centre Living</b>			
<p>Accessibility of existing service and amenity provision within the town centre. Early delivery at Wirral Waters is creating market interest and improving local values. Proximity to Waterfront, Hamilton Square and Birkenhead Park.</p>	<p>Not an established private sector residential investment or development market. Poor quality environment across the town centre generally. Low values within the local area and dominance of social housing stock of varying quality.</p>	<p>Significant underutilised brownfield land with the potential to deliver new housing development.</p>	<p>Viability of early development phases. Poor quality design in early phases would undermine aspirations to develop a strong residential offer. If community provision is not delivered alongside residential including schools and health provision market demand and sustainability could be undermined.</p>

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<b>Heritage Legacy</b>			
<p>Multiple important heritage assets across Birkenhead including The Priory, Birkenhead Park, Hamilton Square, and St Werburgh's Church. Laird Grid remains intact and prominent across the town centre.</p>	<p>Poor quality environment generally across the town centre does not do justice to the heritage assets that exist.</p>	<p>Potential to improve wider environment and connections between the assets to bring them back to life and increase community use and enjoyment of them.</p>	<p>Lack of investment over a sustained period could see the assets lost to the community.</p>
<b>Connectivity and Physical Environment</b>			
<p>Number of important sustainable movement nodes including three Merseyrail Stations and Birkenhead Bus Station. Strategic road connectivity includes the Queensway Tunnel connecting to Liverpool City Centre, the A41, and the M53.</p>	<p>Dominance of road infrastructure locally creates barriers for localised non-vehicular movement - on foot and cycle, detracting from these short journeys being made sustainably. Poor quality 'gateways' to the town centre. Limited green infrastructure within the core of the town centre.</p>	<p>Enhanced localised connections and physical environments around sustainable transport hubs will encourage use. Potential to deliver residential development within the town centre encouraging no car culture and localised movements. Strategic intervention across the movement network to address the 'concrete collar' around the town centre.</p>	<p>Without strong policy relating to car parking provision as part of new residential development there is the risk that reliance on car travel will preserve. Without progression of the wider regeneration and development plans, improvements to sustainability connectivity could create greater out commuting from Birkenhead.</p>

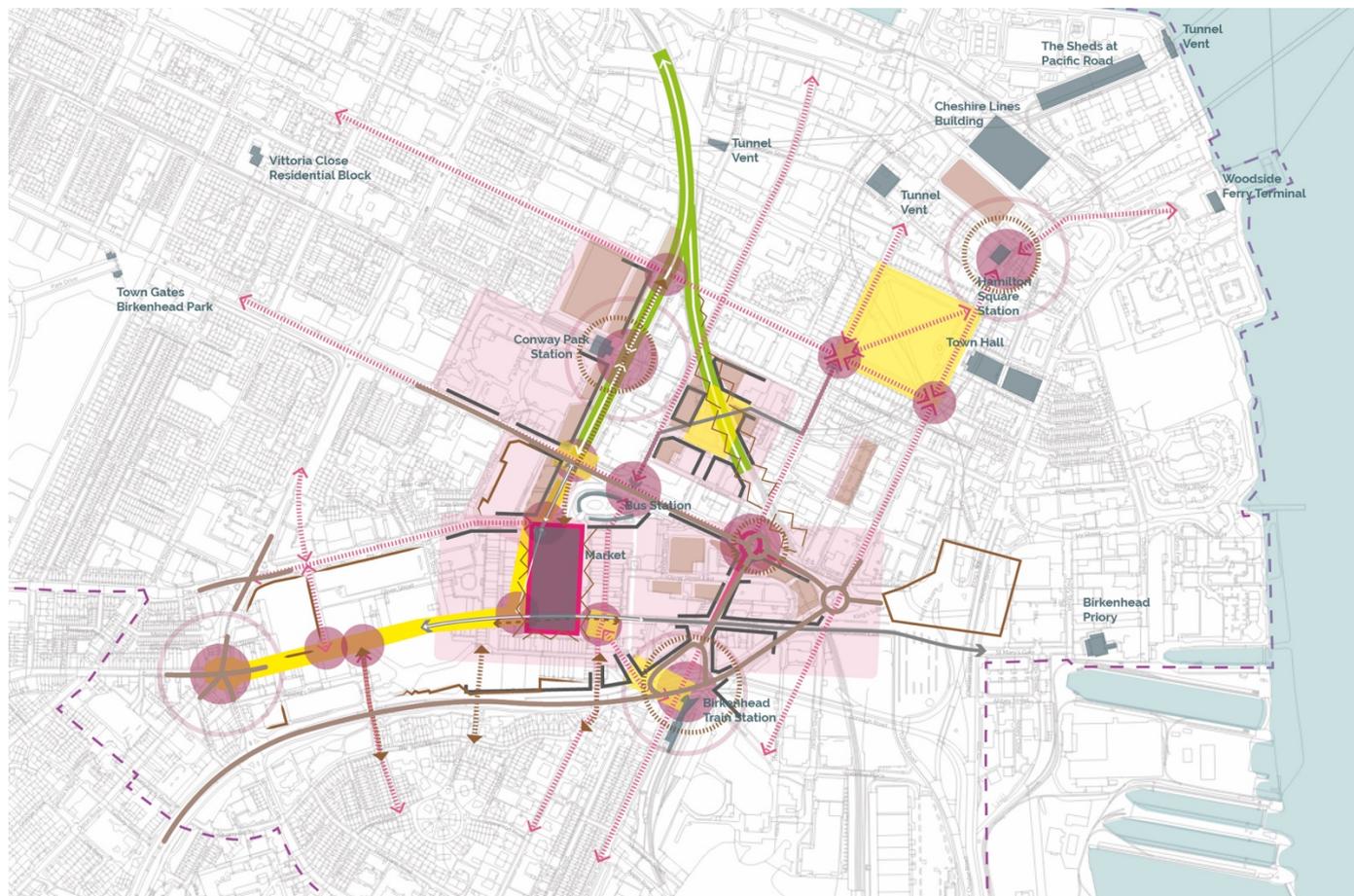
Figure 2.8: SWOT Analysis - Issues



Issues Key

-  Area with poor experiential quality
-  Land/ building low quality, vacant or not appropriate to setting
-  Poor quality connection/ route
-  Poor quality gateway/ arrival point
-  Oversized highway infrastructure
-  Lack of physical road connection
-  Lack of connection to waterfront (physical/ visual)
-  Hard edge (building)
-  Barrier (physical/ visual)

Figure 2.9: SWOT Analysis – Opportunities



Opportunities Key

-  Opportunity areas
-  Enhance corridor
-  Gateway/ arrival point enhancements
-  Improved connectivity
-  Highway restructuring to enhance pedestrian/ cyclist experience
-  Key frontage
-  New or enhanced public space/ public realm
-  Strategic green corridors
-  Housing led regeneration area

## 3. Vision and Objectives

### Vision

- 3.1 Building on the high level vision set out in the Draft BR for Central Birkenhead, the NF baseline analysis has recognised the complexities that exist across Central Birkenhead – the series of neighbourhoods that need to be improved and brought to life through development and investment in the coming years, and the interface that each has with the identified catalyst projects. Together they will be complementary to and accessible to Liverpool City Centre, but unique as an alternative place to choose to live in, work or spend time in.
- 3.2 The Birkenhead 2040 Framework (BRF) process identified the challenges that exist within Birkenhead today as a result of how the urban area has grown, and in particular how as neighbourhoods have historically emerged within Birkenhead they have in effect pulled-away from each other creating shatter zones right in the core of the area.
- 3.3 Whilst this NF acknowledges the importance of the individual sub-neighbourhoods that exist, it is imperative that there is a unifying vision to bring them together. Their interface and overlap must create a strong centre to Birkenhead – and deliver the opportunities that exist.
- 3.4 On that basis, the NF vision for Central Birkenhead is:

*If Birkenhead is the heart of Wirral, then its core needs to be the best – made up of a series of thriving, resilient, strong, exciting, creative neighbourhoods connected to its waterfront and serving and supporting residents and attracting visitors. Its town centre will be rebalanced and vibrant. Its heritage assets will be celebrated and fully utilised. The regeneration of Birkenhead will start in its core – Central Birkenhead.*

### Central Birkenhead Objectives

- 3.5 Sitting beneath the vision are a number of objectives – identified to guide investment and change and a means against which to establish a robust monitoring framework to test the impact of implementation.
- 3.6 The Central Birkenhead NF objectives span the complexities of this neighbourhood area – and ensure successful sub-neighbourhoods are delivered with their own identities but working and contributing on a collective basis.
- 3.7 In no particular order:

- **A sustainable core:** A concentrated and simplified high street, with a mix of uses and environment that ensure its long-term sustainability, vibrancy and quality, concentrated within an identified and protected high street at Grange Road.
- **A diversified core:** Creating vibrancy through the introduction of a mix of uses which encourage longer dwell time and linked trips including an improved hotel offer alongside leisure to complement high street retail, and the creation of a quality evening offer. Collectively giving visitors more reason and opportunity to spend time and money within Central Birkenhead.
- **A walkable and sustainably connected centre:** Maximising the potential of the current and future residential communities within and near to the high street, by facilitating sustainable movement of visitors and shoppers. Improving arrivals and routes through the Central Birkenhead area through investment in key gateways to the NF with meaningful, high quality, safe and legible links to Birkenhead's Waterfront.
- **An environmentally and digitally exemplar neighbourhood:** Delivering positive and meaningful impact on the climate emergency, delivering a smart and sustainable core including sustainable energy infrastructure and future proofing strategic public realm delivery to enable future connectivity and sustainability.
- **An attractor of visitors:** Drawing in visitors and spend from a wider catchment, competing well with sub-regional centres, becoming a destination of choice – attracting people with Birkenhead's heritage, enhanced by a high-quality physical environment and experience and a programme of events and activities that create a buzz about this place year on year.
- **A home for all:** Delivering high quality residential development of a variety of types and tenures, within an environment and public realm that supports Central Birkenhead becoming a home for people, creating safe, healthy and vibrant communities that in turn will generate activity, spend power and footfall to underpin wider ambitions.
- **A physical environment to be proud of:** Delivery of strategic and incidental scale open space and public realm as destinations and places in their own right. Building on Birkenhead's past, bringing the heritage assets it houses to life –and ensuring a high-quality design and long-term stewardship of buildings, public realm and landscape.
- **An investable proposition:** Leveraging private sector investment through creating the right conditions and opportunities for development in line with this NF across Central Birkenhead.

## 4. Central Birkenhead Neighbourhood Framework

### Options for Regeneration

4.1 The BRF identified an initial number of opportunity sites with the capacity for just under 1,000 new homes to be tested further through the NF process. Through the NF process a number of additional opportunity sites have been identified on the basis of being underutilised, vacant, being promoted for development, and/or being owned by the Council (including vacant and non-vacant Council assets) – with the NF allowing for more localised analysis to be undertaken than through the Birkenhead 2040 process. In response to the BRF, NF baseline analysis and SWOT, and in line with the F vision and objectives two alternative masterplan options have been tested.

- **Re-Use and Re-Purpose** – selective redevelopment of identified core areas and buildings, working with existing grain where appropriate with scope for refurbishment and re-purpose; and
- **High intervention** – focus on redevelopment of identified core areas and buildings, opportunity to challenge structure of the place and create a new identity.

4.2 Alternative strategies for the delivery of public realm, landscape and movement interventions have been considered under each option.

### Option Testing

4.3 Having established alternative options for Central Birkenhead, both have been tested through consideration of:

- Contribution to strategic objectives and the BRF vision;
- Leverage of private sector investment, i.e. the extent to which the options will enable and attract private sector investment;
- Viability – cost/value considerations, considered in the context of wider dialogue regarding potential public sector funding support that may be available;
- Technical assessment – high level assessment of technical viability in terms of highways, sustainability, heritage, planning, any known abnormalities around contamination and the need for remediation; and
- Deliverability – land ownership, reliance on public sector funding, planning risk, and potential for public – private partnership delivery.

4.4 The outcome of the option testing process is summarised in the following table – applying a RAG (red/amber/green) rating and explanation for each consideration.

**Table 4.1: Option Appraisal Summary**

	Re-Use and Refurb		High Intervention	
	RAG Rating	Comment	RAG Rating	Comment
Contribution to strategic objectives and the framework (BRF) vision		Option does not capture full extent of under-utilised land and property across the NF area. Catalyst projects not fully maximised under this option - with sites remaining across Argyle / Conway and less direct contraction of the high street through retention of Princes Pavements.		Scale of ambition captured within the option reflects the vision for Central Birkenhead. Full development potential around catalyst projects reflected, and intervention delivers against the land use mix and approach envisaged at sub-neighbourhood level.
Leverage of private sector investment		Lack of critical mass within development locations will create limited scope for value uplift to support private sector investment. Refurbishment of existing buildings likely to be at least as expensive as redevelopment and more compromised in terms of flexibility which is unlikely to facilitate delivery by the private sector.		Option would deliver significant critical mass of development opportunity to attract private sector investment in the medium to long term. Scale of change captured would materially change Central Birkenhead and its commercial appeal - making private sector investment more likely.
Viability		Option is not viable overall so will require public sector support. Unlikely to generate material public sector funding at scale of development identified.		Option is not viable overall so will require public sector support. Scale and nature of change envisaged is more likely to underpin business case for public sector intervention - subject to the availability of funding. Option more likely to lead to fundamental market change- and land value increase for later phases.

<p>Technical Assessment</p>		<p>Desktop based assessment has not identified any material issues to delivery; site clearance required in instances but none of the buildings are listed and no material contamination likely to exist based on predominantly light industrial uses. Scale of development considered to be sensitive to wider heritage considerations.</p>		<p>Desktop based assessment has not identified any material issues to delivery; site clearance required in instances but none of the buildings are listed and no material contamination likely to exist based on predominantly light industrial uses. Scale of development greater than under the first option but building heights and density has been modelled sensitively relative to Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas.</p>
<p>Deliverability</p>		<p>Heavy reliance on public funding with likely challenging business case. Refurbishment unlikely to be delivered across assets not owned by public sector.</p>		<p>Heavy reliance on public funding but considered possible to justify intervention based on the strategy and scale of change possible under the option. Significant proportion of the development land is under public sector ownership, under option to the public sector, or under single ownership.</p>

4.5 Key conclusions and observations drawn from the option appraisal carried into the Neighbourhood Framework include:

- Importance to maximise the development potential across land within public control, and underutilised sites in particular associated with supporting catalyst project delivery – to create a meaningful scale of change to address market challenges and perceptions of Birkenhead – moving away from piecemeal delivery and ad hoc investments to respond to the vision and objectives;
- Whilst the option testing encourages greater intervention and scale of change is required to deliver against the established vision and objectives, it has demonstrated the viability challenges within the first phase of delivery across the NF area as the strategy seeks to establish the platform for greater value in the area. The ambition to deliver therefore will need to be supported by a robust funding programme and dialogue with partners, certainly within the first phase of delivery;
- To feed into an understanding of development potential and need for funding, the NF recognises that further survey work may be required in key locations. This is likely to be particularly important along Dock Branch Park given the nature of proposals and undeveloped nature / extent of growth that has occurred since the line closure. Within the core urban area, potential costs associated with utilities

should be further tested with known proposals for upgrades planned as part of the WGC delivery strategy within the Commercial District including potential for a new sub-station to be delivered.

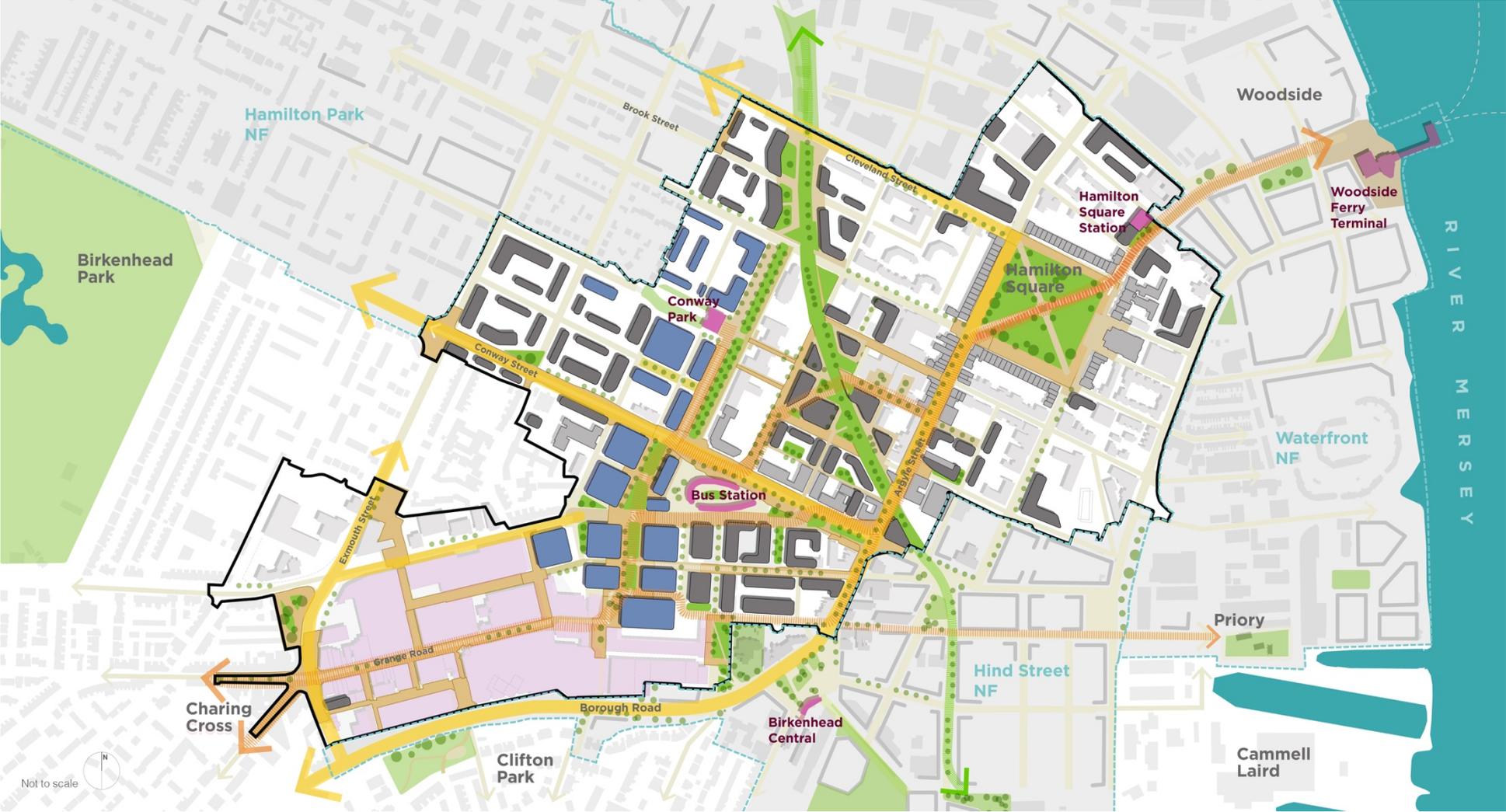
- Taking all the above into account, the NF optioneering process identified the importance of early and ongoing strategic engagement with key partners, in this context Network Rail, the Combined Authority, Homes England, MerseyTravel and WGC to inform the delivery strategy for the NF.

## Neighbourhood Framework Preferred Option

- 4.6 Following the option testing process, a preferred option for the Central Birkenhead NF was identified. This preferred option builds on the two alternatives, recognising and capturing the merits of both where appropriate. It is therefore in effect a third, consolidated, option for the Central Birkenhead neighbourhood area, illustrated in Figure 4.1. This third option is the basis of the Central Birkenhead NF strategy.
- 4.7 The NF for Central Birkenhead advocates a balanced approach to retention and redevelopment – focusing retention on buildings with specific architectural merit (not always identified as Listed Buildings) and where it is believed there will be enough business and commercial case for retention.
- 4.8 The NF recognises and supports the importance of the selective re-use of existing buildings in the context of the wider environmental and sustainability objectives within the BRF. However, it also recognises the commercial challenges with conversion of existing buildings, and that in some cases retention and re-use will not address fundamental issues that exist in the physical structure of sub-neighbourhoods within Central Birkenhead.
- 4.9 The Neighbourhood Framework for Central Birkenhead is unashamedly ambitious. This reflects several factors aligning to support such considerable change within this critical area of Birkenhead, including but not limited to:
- The extent and nature of failure identified in the centre – specifically the critical need to restructure the high street, diversify land uses, and bring activity into underutilised or abandoned areas of the central area;
  - Leveraging the opportunity associated with the Council's own asset base, both those earmarked for development through the WGC masterplan in the Birkenhead Commercial District and Mixed-Use Quarter and outside of this area;
  - Leveraging the opportunity associated with the Council's own employment base – recognising the important role that the introduction of its employees into the core of the centre will do for footfall and to support local businesses (including wider public sector and supply-chain spin-off opportunities); and

- The impact of all the catalyst projects identified within Birkenhead 2040 on the Central Birkenhead area, and the opportunity to maximise the opportunity to influence real physical and place change on the back of these investments.

Figure 4.1: Neighbourhood Framework for Central Birkenhead: Concept Masterplan



-  Central Birkenhead Neighbourhood Framework boundary
  -  Adjacent Neighbourhood Framework boundaries
  -  Potential future opportunities for redevelopment and/or new development as part of a mixed use central Birkenhead (indicative building footprints)\*
  -  Potential future opportunities for intensification, reuse and/or refurbishment of existing buildings\*
  -  Development opportunities proposed as part of WGC outline planning application, submitted August 2020 (indicative building footprints)
  -  Existing buildings retained
-  Existing transport interchanges forming key nodal points and landmarks
  -  Focus for main shopping area around Grange Road
  -  Strategic pedestrian and cyclist flows to be facilitated and encouraged
  -  Key multi-modal routes supporting strategic movement through the centre
  -  Opportunities for public realm enhancements to enhance quality of place and legibility of key pedestrian and cyclist links

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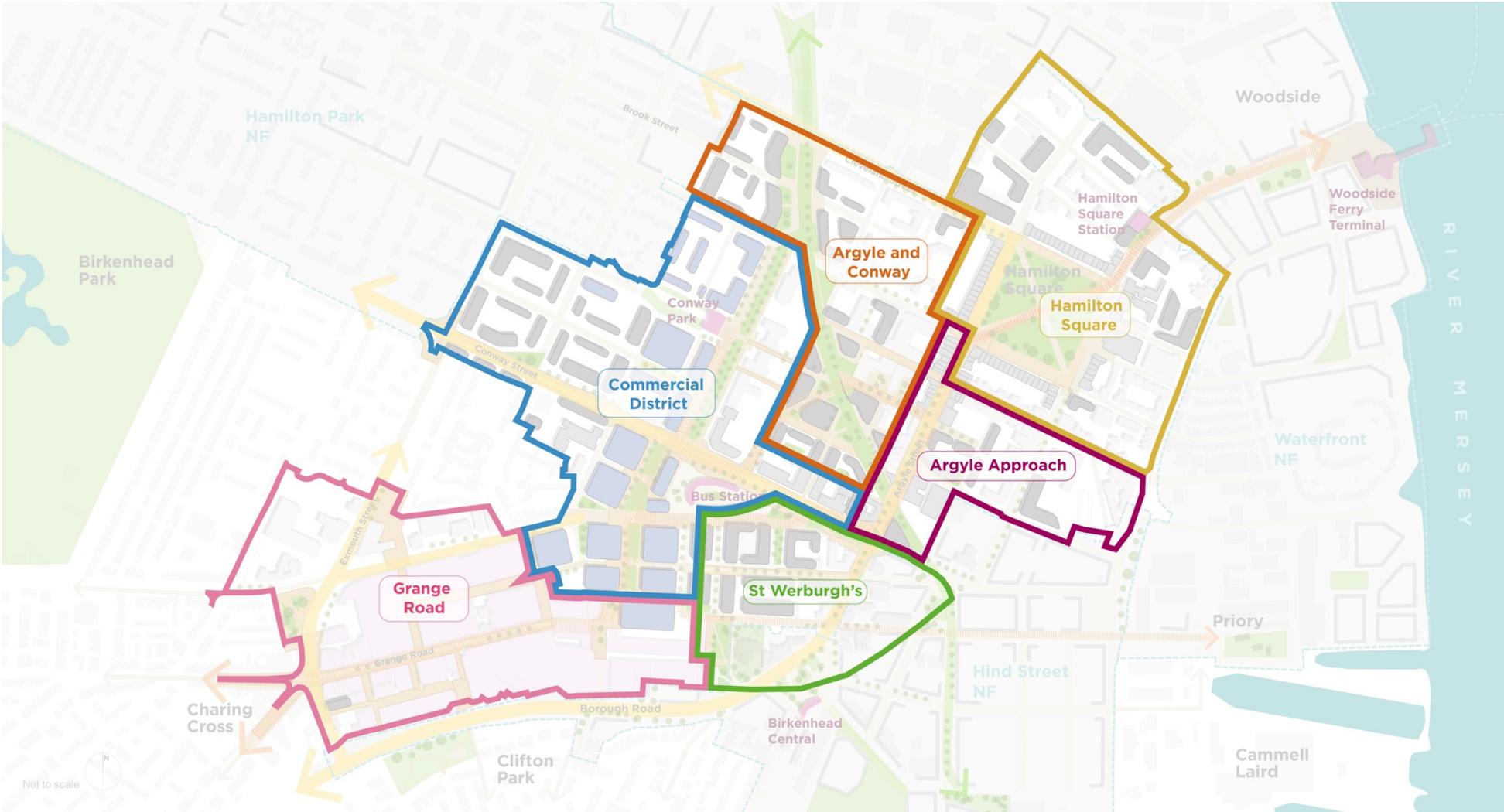
\*refer to phasing sequence later in Neighbourhood Framework for potential land use composition

- 4.10 The key development opportunities and areas of major change within the Neighbourhood Framework are:
- Consolidation of traditional high street retailing within a newly defined Grange Road quarter – focused on a true high street where the trading environment is evidenced to be strongest and the property offer the most high quality and versatile alongside supporting improvements to this area to create a positive visitor and consumer experience;
  - Redevelopment of Council owned assets assuming vacant possession where necessary during the delivery period to support the wider ambition for Central Birkenhead – including Europa Pools and the Vue Cinema, with the former assumed to be relocated out of the area, and opportunity to accommodate a cinema within the future plans for redevelopment generally across the Commercial District and Mixed-Use Quarter, subject to the impact of COVID-19;
  - Subject to the finalisation of a town centre car parking strategy, infill development could occur through the release of surface level car parking; and
  - The introduction of a more sustainable mix of uses across the centre but concentrated in key locations, creating six new neighbourhoods within the core as described above – St Werburgh’s, Birkenhead Commercial District and Mixed-use Quarter, Argyle and Conway, Argyle Approach, and Hamilton Square in addition to the consolidation and strengthening of Grange Road as the retail destination at the heart of the centre, in line with the vision. This includes the accommodation where relevant of the catalyst projects, including for example the consideration of the impact of the Dock Branch Park proposals on Birkenhead Commercial District and Mixed-use Quarter and Argyle Approach, and the East-West Axis on Hamilton Square.

#### **Delivering transformation through Central Birkenhead’s Neighbourhoods**

- 4.11 The Central Birkenhead Neighbourhood Framework comprises a series of six mini neighbourhoods (see Figure 4.2 ). These mini neighbourhoods demonstrate a degree of dysfunction in how they operate currently but each has the potential to positively contribute to the Central Birkenhead area, each with a distinct identity. Bringing these areas together as one coherent, thriving and positive central area is at the heart of this NF. These neighbourhood’s form key project areas to deliver the Neighbourhood Framework and their potential are described in turn below.
- 4.12 It should be noted that whilst the new Birkenhead Market falls within the Commercial District project it has been defined as falling within the Grange Road neighbourhood area. The market is considered to be a critical development in the context of the high street – within Grange Road. It will form a key ‘bookend’ to the high street – creating a definitive end to the high street beyond which a wider mix of uses is proposed.

Figure 4.2: Central Birkenhead Neighbourhoods Project Areas



**St Werburgh's:** The built environment between the Commercial District and Hind Street is perhaps the most apparent physical legacy of retail decline and highway dominance within the town centre. The planned removal of the flyovers and the reconfiguration of the Borough Road gyratory envisaged through the 'Birkenhead Landing' catalyst project, plus the interface of this area with both the Commercial District and Hind Street development areas presents significant opportunity for change and intensification. A new ultra-sustainable residential led mixed-use neighbourhood could be created here within the heart of Birkenhead, delivered within a historic setting of the Listed Church and its grounds connecting the High Street and Commercial District with new neighbourhoods beyond to the east.

Figure 4.3: St Werburgh's Vision

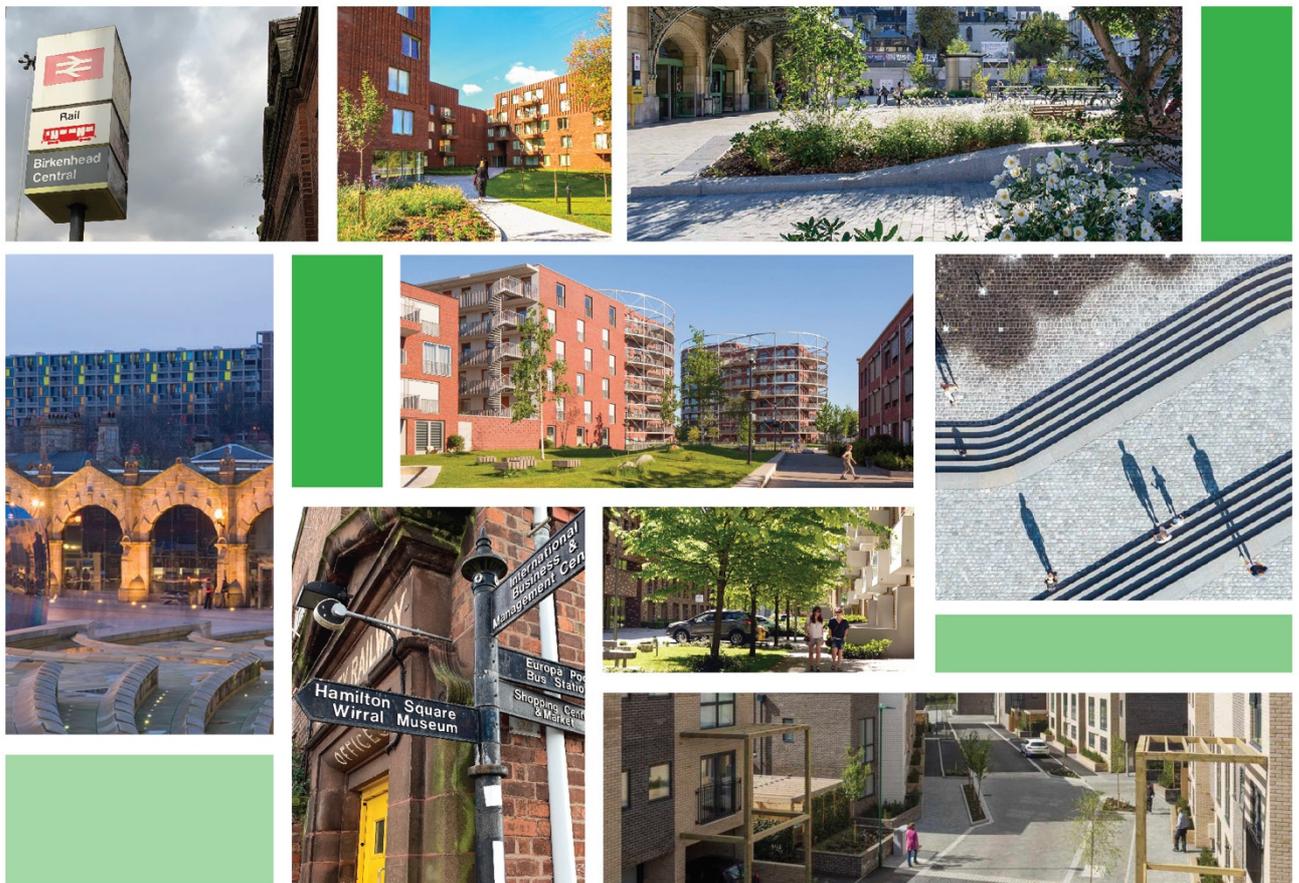


Figure 4: 4: Concept Neighbourhood Framework: St Werburgh's Project Area



-  Adjacent Neighbourhood Framework boundaries
-  Potential future opportunities for redevelopment and/or new development as part of a mixed use central Birkenhead (indicative building footprints)\*
-  Potential future opportunities for intensification, reuse and/or refurbishment of existing buildings\*
-  Development opportunities proposed as part of WGC outline planning application, submitted August 2020 (indicative building footprints)
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-  Existing transport interchanges forming key nodal points and landmarks
-  Focus for main shopping area around Grange Road
-  Strategic pedestrian and cyclist flows to be facilitated and encouraged
-  Key multi-modal routes supporting strategic movement through the centre
-  Opportunities for public realm enhancements to enhance quality of place and legibility of key pedestrian and cyclist links

\*refer to phasing sequence later in Neighbourhood Framework for potential land use composition

**Argyle Approach:** Covering the corridor linking Birkenhead Central Station, Hind Street and Dock Branch Park with the Heritage Heart. Argyle Street and its general environment lacks identity and general quality, beyond the listed buildings at Hamilton Square. It has the potential to become an independent and culture-led hub within the central area; a vibrant corridor, a home for creative activities connecting Hamilton Square and the waterfront, the Dock Branch Park and the town centre.

**Figure 4.5: Argyle Approach Vision**



Figure 4.6: Concept Neighbourhood Framework: Argyle Approach Project Area



- Adjacent Neighbourhood Framework boundaries
  - Potential future opportunities for redevelopment and/or new development as part of a mixed use central Birkenhead (indicative building footprints)\*
  - Potential future opportunities for intensification, reuse and/or refurbishment of existing buildings\*
  - Development opportunities proposed as part of WGC outline planning application, submitted August 2020 (indicative building footprints)
  - Existing buildings retained
- Existing transport interchanges forming key nodal points and landmarks
  - Focus for main shopping area around Grange Road
  - Strategic pedestrian and cyclist flows to be facilitated and encouraged
  - Key multi-modal routes supporting strategic movement through the centre
  - Opportunities for public realm enhancements to enhance quality of place and legibility of key pedestrian and cyclist links

\*refer to phasing sequence later in Neighbourhood Framework for potential land use composition

**Birkenhead Commercial District and Mixed-use Quarter:** A new commercial heart within Birkenhead – a prestigious business address and new home for Council employees, and a wider mixed use zone within the core of the centre. an emerging prestigious commercial and mixed-use core in the heart of Birkenhead. Set in the context of high quality and well-managed public realm and supported by a vibrant mix of uses, enabling a restructured retail offer within the centre covering the currently dysfunctional peripheral retail area.

**Figure 4.7: Commercial District Vision**

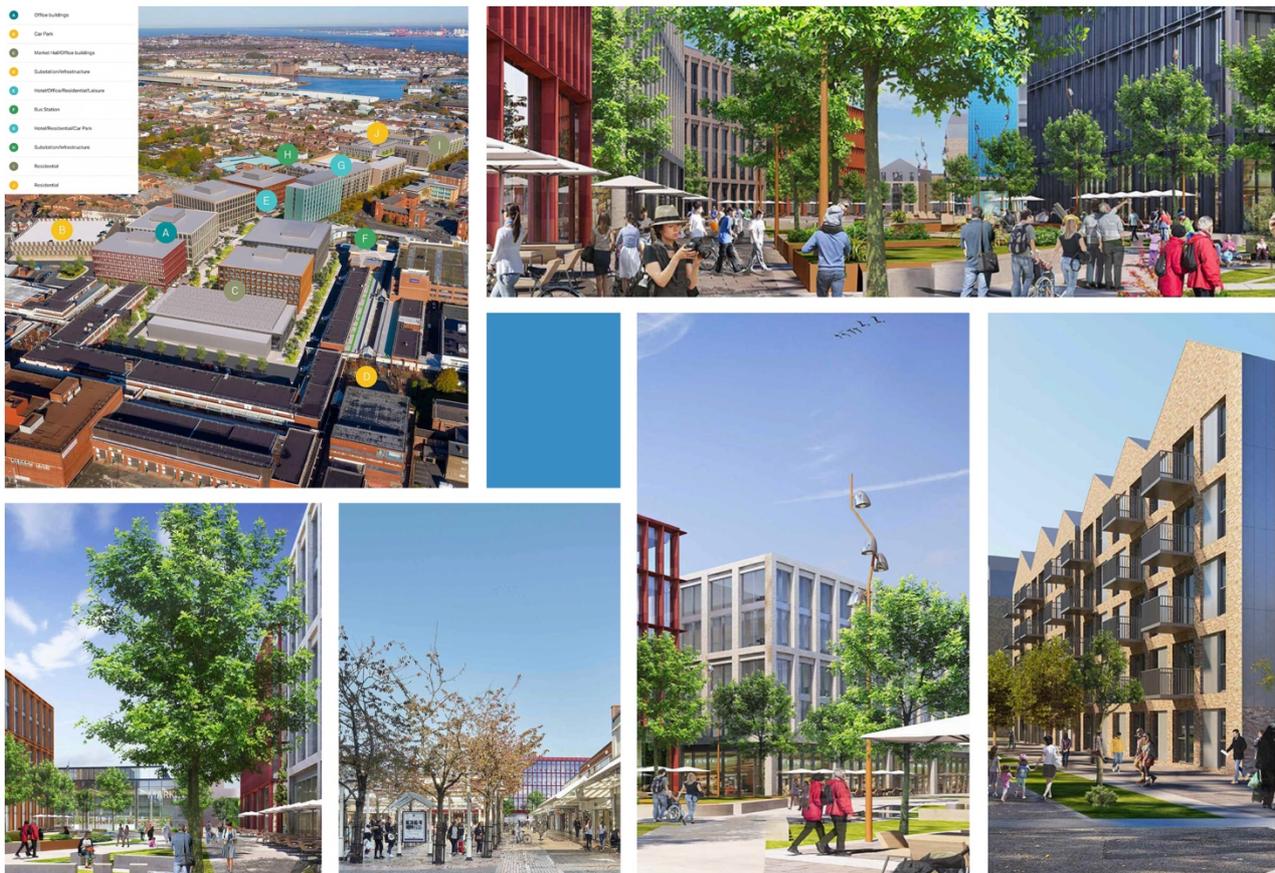
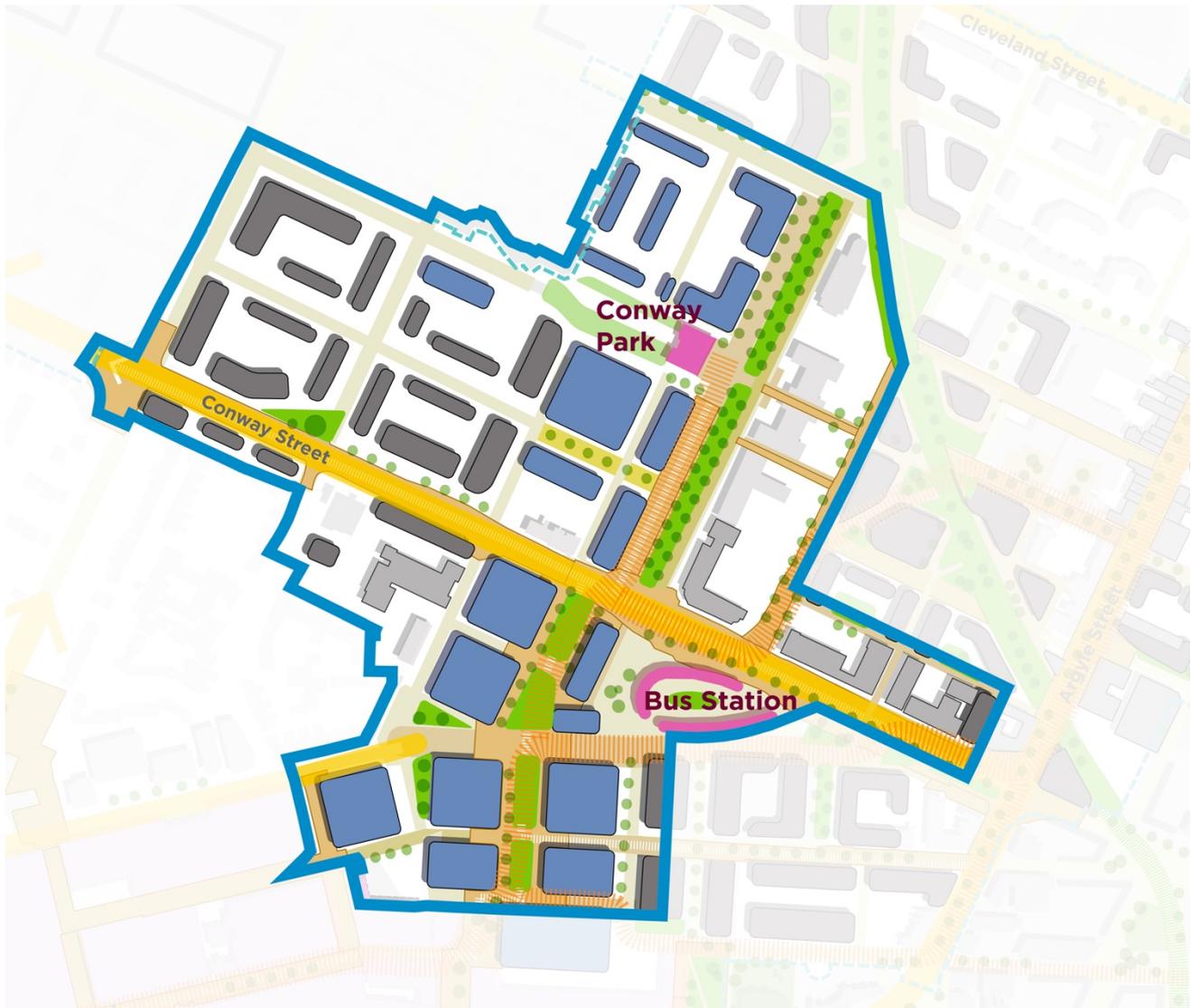


Figure 4.8: Concept Neighbourhood Framework: Commercial District Project Area



- Adjacent Neighbourhood Framework boundaries
  - Potential future opportunities for redevelopment and/or new development as part of a mixed use central Birkenhead (indicative building footprints)\*
  - Potential future opportunities for intensification, reuse and/or refurbishment of existing buildings\*
  - Development opportunities proposed as part of WGC outline planning application, submitted August 2020 (indicative building footprints)
  - Existing buildings retained
- Existing transport interchanges forming key nodal points and landmarks
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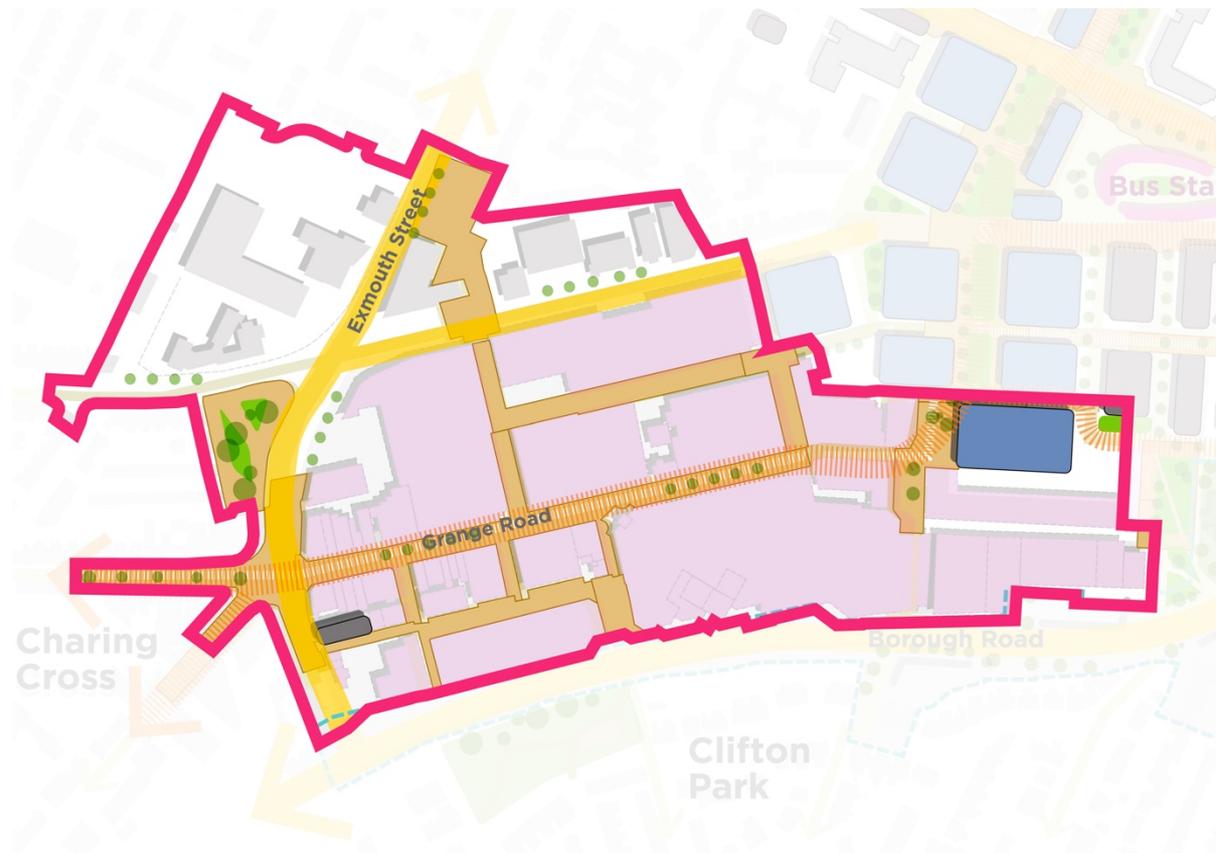
\*refer to phasing sequence later in Neighbourhood Framework for potential land use composition

**Grange Road:** Birkenhead’s main high street (including the pedestrianised and non-pedestrianised extents of Grange Road (crossing the Charing Cross junction)), capturing a traditional outdoors retail environment and the covered Pyramids Shopping Centre, with a comparison retail and supporting retail offer attracting visitors from a wide prosperous catchment, book ended by improvements to Charing Cross and the new Birkenhead Market.

**Figure 4.9: Grange Road Vision**



Figure 4.10: Concept Neighbourhood Framework: Grange Road Project Area



- Adjacent Neighbourhood Framework boundaries
  - Potential future opportunities for redevelopment and/or new development as part of a mixed use central Birkenhead (indicative building footprints)\*
  - Potential future opportunities for intensification, reuse and/or refurbishment of existing buildings\*
  - Development opportunities proposed as part of WGC outline planning application, submitted August 2020 (indicative building footprints)
  - Existing buildings retained
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  - Key multi-modal routes supporting strategic movement through the centre
  - Opportunities for public realm enhancements to enhance quality of place and legibility of key pedestrian and cyclist links

\*refer to phasing sequence later in Neighbourhood Framework for potential land use composition

**Argyle and Conway** : the most prominent intersection of the Laird grid within Central Birkenhead, with the disused former Dock Branch line cutting through its middle – creating an underwhelming, disjointed, and largely forgotten neighbourhood of Birkenhead, predominantly industrial in use and feel, and very much underutilised in nature. This area will be transformed as a new community space and community place in the heart of Birkenhead shaped by a new movement corridor and green space with an emerging cultural and creative offer through the delivery Dock Branch Park.

**Figure 4.11: Argyle and Conway Vision**

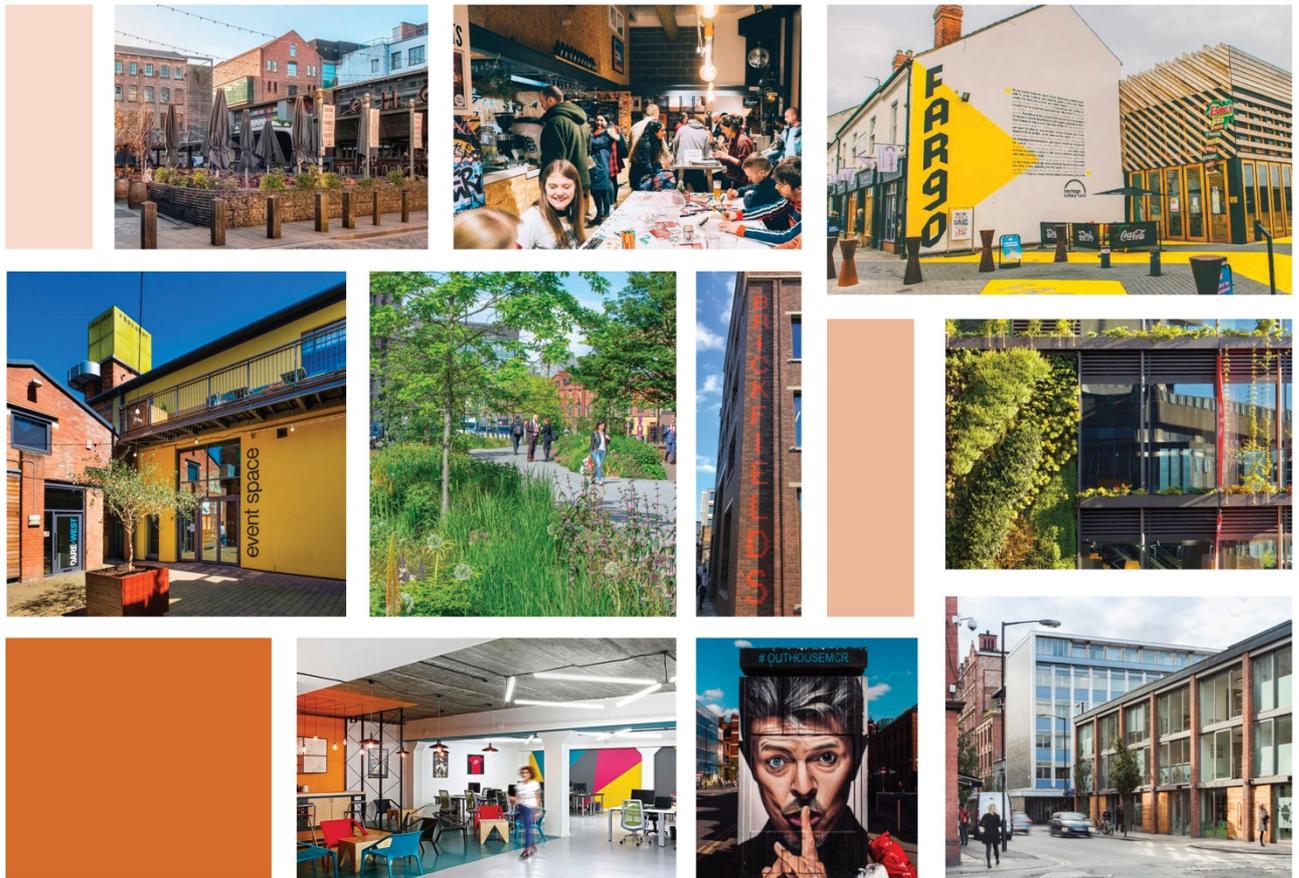


Figure 4.12: Concept Neighbourhood Framework: Argyle and Conway Project Area



- Adjacent Neighbourhood Framework boundaries
  - Potential future opportunities for redevelopment and/or new development as part of a mixed use central Birkenhead (indicative building footprints)\*
  - Potential future opportunities for intensification, reuse and/or refurbishment of existing buildings\*
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  - Existing buildings retained
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\*refer to phasing sequence later in Neighbourhood Framework for potential land use composition

**Hamilton Square:** is Birkenhead's 'Heritage Heart', with key assets including the square itself, Birkenhead Town Hall and the Magistrates' Court, but with little by the way of activity or positive contribution beyond its heritage status. It is essential to bring the square back to its prime with investment in the landscape and public realm, alongside facilitating more vibrancy within the protected buildings including the Town Hall as a key community asset and the re-use and activation of listed buildings via a mix of uses including commercial, residential and food and drink.

**Figure 4.13: Hamilton Square Vision**

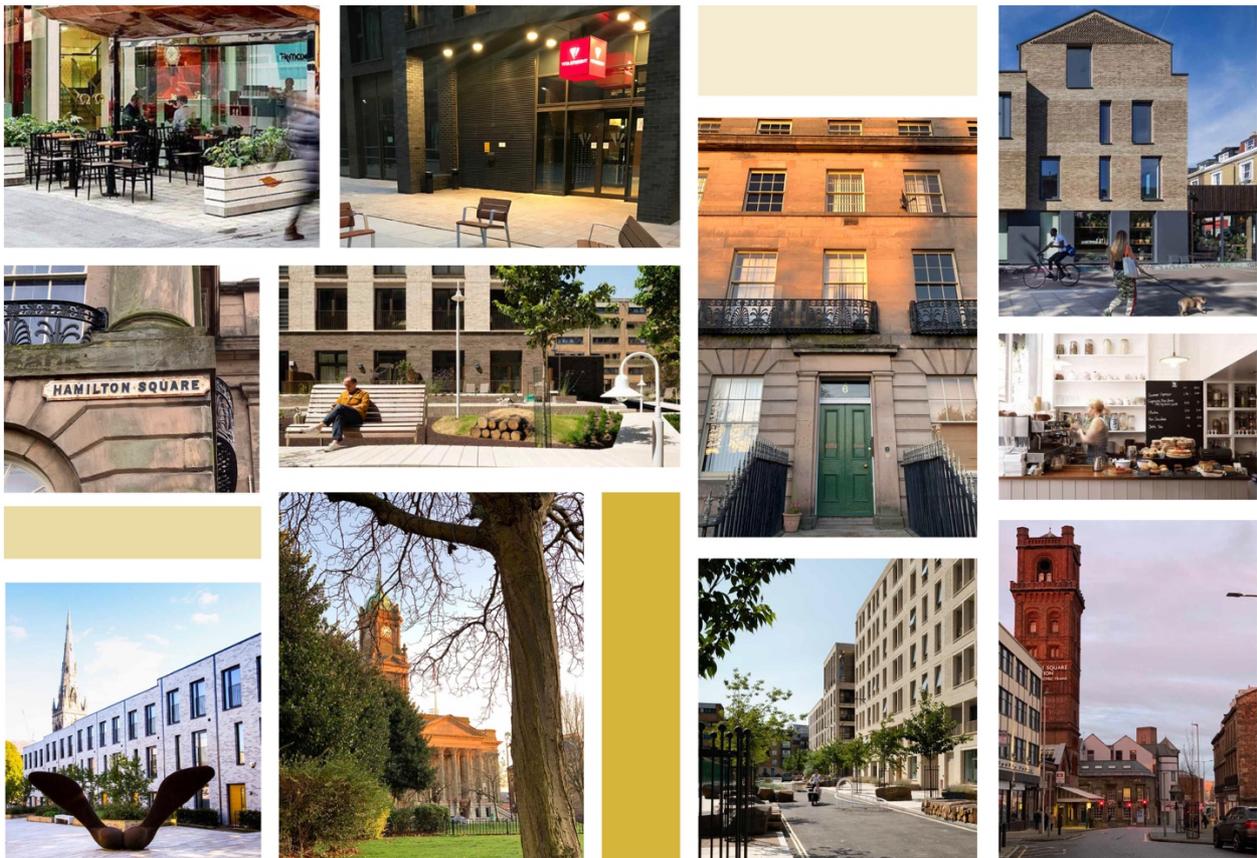


Figure 3.14: Concept Neighbourhood Framework: Hamilton Square Project Area



-  Adjacent Neighbourhood Framework boundaries
-  Potential future opportunities for redevelopment and/or new development as part of a mixed use central Birkenhead (indicative building footprints)\*
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\*refer to phasing sequence later in Neighbourhood Framework for potential land use composition

## Approach to Density

- 4.13 The BRF outlines an overarching approach to density across the regeneration programme. This approach recognises that there needs to be a balanced approach to delivery of new homes across Birkenhead – ensuring family housing delivery alongside higher density. This is fundamental to ensuring that housing needs are met across the plan period.
- 4.14 The BRF is ambitious in this context – it assumes relatively high density for homes, but it includes examples of where this has successfully been delivered. This strategy is intention, to create a vibrancy within the urban area, and to maximise the potential of the brownfield assets identified.
- 4.15 The residential development outputs assumed across the plots identified in the NF have been considered in the context of the BRF approach to density. Development outputs are presented for each plot, including assumed density. These density assumptions are not fixed but do illustrate an assumed balanced cross the programme between apartments and houses.
- 4.16 In line with the BRF, the NF has included a range of densities from 85 dph to 240 dph. These densities have been identified in the BRF as being appropriate across Birkenhead, with the overarching ambition to achieve the noted desired balance between apartments and houses. The specific mix assumed in applying these densities in Central Birkenhead includes:
- 85 dph: predominantly 3 story Contemporary terraced family housing and low-rise apartments
  - 135 dph: higher density 3 and 4 storey multigenerational housing with some ground floor garden space shared courtyard garden and 5 storey apartment blocks
  - 180 dph: higher density stacked housing with private outdoor space e.g patio or balcony and shared courtyard garden and 6 storey apartment blocks
  - 240 dph: minimum 6 storey apartment led with some dual aspect ground floor apartments with outdoor space

## 5. Birkenhead Primary Retail Area

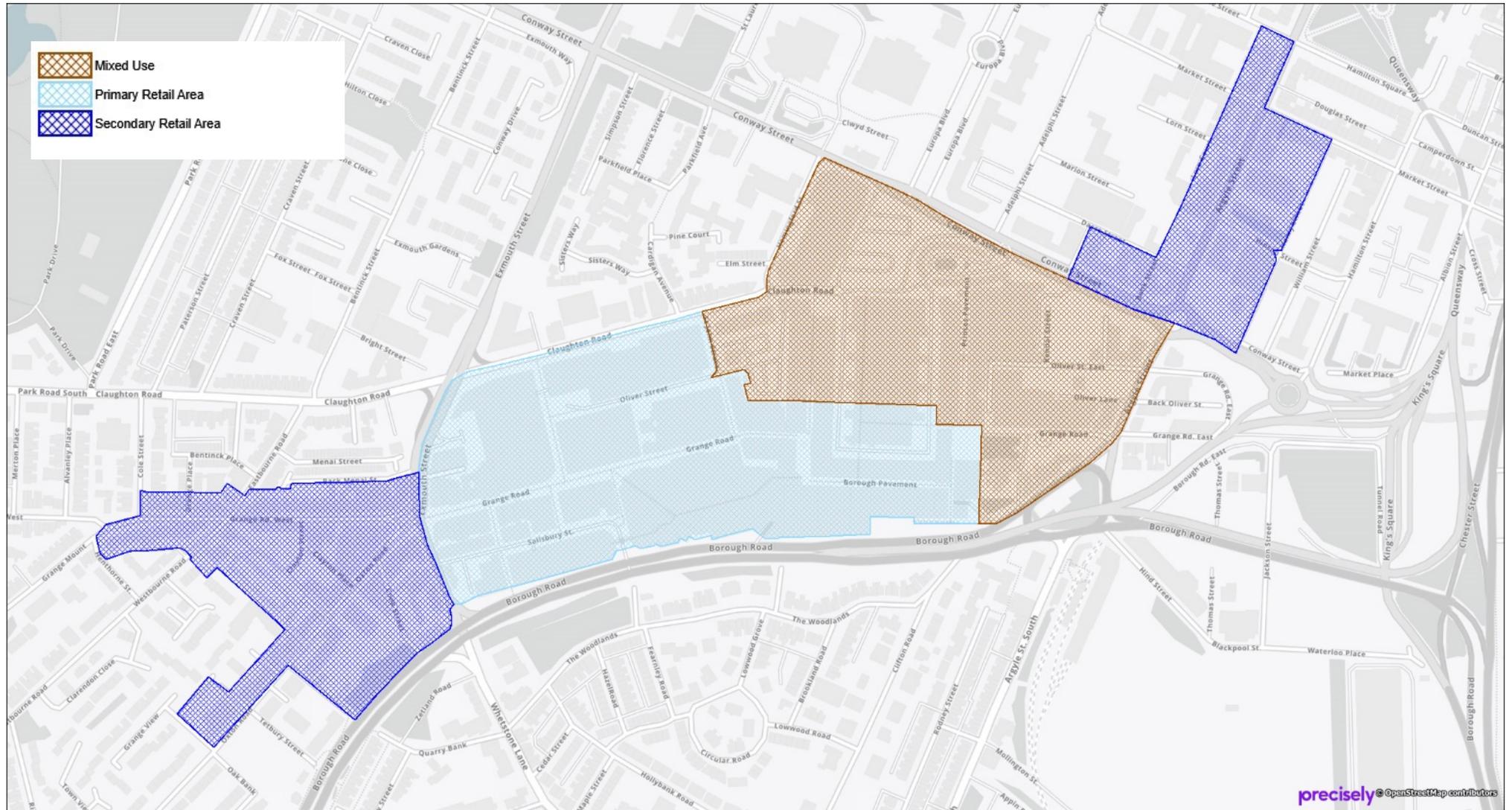
5.1 The NF has considered the most appropriate definition of the Primary Retail Area to be considered through the emerging Wirral Local Plan process. This specifically responds to the town centre strategy captured within the NF, which seeks to ensure the long-term resilience and vibrancy of the centre through:

- Consolidation of existing retail floorspace, concentrating high street comparison retailing on Grange Road and within the covered Pyramids Shopping Centre;
- Diversifying land uses and diversifying retail provision within the town centre to include a greater presence of Food and Beverage and Leisure retailing alongside a great mix of uses including Arts and Community, Commercial Office, and Residential; and
- Recognition of different character areas with the potential to accommodate town centre uses across the NF area including the importance of Grange Road West and Argyle Street in providing an alternative retail offer with aspirations for more a more independent offer in these locations.

5.2 The following image illustrates the suggested boundaries to be considered through the emerging Local Plan, including:

- The proposed Primary Retail Area – Grange Road, the Pyramids, and the new home of Birkenhead Market (proposed). This will be the Borough's main comparison-shopping destination and the primary focus for retail, office, leisure, service, arts, culture and tourist development, community facilities and other main town centre uses of Borough wide significance;
- Proposed Secondary Retail Area – Reflecting the intended slightly different identity than that within the Primary Retail Area, with supported uses still main town centre uses with residential permissible on upper floors within retail and commercial frontages, or as the sole use on 'backland' sites with no street level retail and commercial frontages; and
- Proposed Mixed Use Area – with suggestion across this zone of non-retail uses at ground floor alongside main town centre uses, but all development still requiring active frontages.

Figure 5.1: Proposed Primary Retail Area Boundary



## 6. Delivery and Next Steps

### Introduction

- 6.1 The preceding sections of this report have outlined the context and drivers for change within the Central Birkenhead NF area culminating in a vision and objectives for change and have then set out the option process followed to establish the preferred Neighbourhood Framework option for regeneration.
- 6.2 The NF has identified the need for considerable change over the next 15 years. This includes the potential to deliver just under 2,500 new homes and modernise the commercial offer across retail including a new home for Birkenhead Market, leisure, culture and office uses to truly bring the Central Birkenhead core back to life within a high quality, modern, welcoming, safe and useable public realm and open space network. This includes residential outputs captured within the Commercial District masterplan area.
- 6.3 The NF recognises that future more detailed masterplanning for key project areas including Dock Branch Park and St Werburgh's could identify additional residential units beyond those identified at the NF scale. Any impact of these masterplans on the NF output figures will be noted within the masterplan documents produced.
- 6.4 The remainder of this section sets out further detail on how the NF will be delivered including specific actions required to be progressed by the Council and key partners. These are grouped as follows:
- Overarching actions – being those that address the NF generally; and
  - Key actions by neighbourhood – being those that are required to ensure delivery is achieved in line with or exceeding that set out in this NF.
- 6.5 Successful implementation of the NF requires the progression of the following, in no particular order:
- Infrastructure delivery;
  - Future sub-area masterplanning to be progressed;
  - Additional key actions by neighbourhood;
  - Establishing a robust planning framework;
  - Place management and long-term stewardship;
  - Governance, delivery vehicles and partnerships;
  - Strategic approach to securing funding;
  - Delivery of the catalyst projects;
  - Delivery of supporting actions identified within the Birkenhead 2040 Framework; and

- Monitoring framework.

## Neighbourhood Framework Outputs

6.6 The Neighbourhood Framework includes areas of development, redevelopment and retention of existing buildings. In the case of the latter, key buildings and/or areas are earmarked for improvements to bring buildings back into use or diversify existing use to contribute to the wider strategy for change.

6.7 The Neighbourhood Framework assumes the following headline outputs, detailed in the remainder of this section:

- Just under 1,800 new homes, including 1,125 apartments and 664 houses in addition to residential delivery proposed as part of the WGC Commercial District with potential for as many as 651 additional homes
- Over 56,000 sqm new commercial floorspace, including:
  - Over 3,400 sqm retail floorspace
  - Over 22,000 sqm office or small / flexible business floorspace plus a new 27,870 sqm Commercial District including new accommodation for Wirral Council employees
  - A 2,800sqm New Birkenhead Market hall
- Over 33,000 sqm retained floorspace to be improved and brought back into use for residential and non-residential use as appropriate; and
- Over 48,000 sqm public realm delivery or improvements (including highways works) (see Figure 14 for breakdown).

### Birkenhead Central by Phase

6.8 The NF process has identified a potential phasing plan associated with the Central Birkenhead Neighbourhood Framework. Phasing has been considered across three periods, all building on the baseline, Phase 0, being the existing built landscape of Central Birkenhead:

- Phase 1 is assumed to be captured within a delivery period up to year 5;
- Phase 2 is assumed to be captured from years 6 to 10; and
- Phase 3 is assumed to be captured from years 11 and beyond.

6.9 The Neighbourhood Framework is identified as a programme of change for a 15-year period, but it is recognised due to market forces that the ultimate implementation of change could extend beyond year 15.

- 6.10 The phasing plan is not intended to be a rigid or fixed programme in this context – rather it is a means to understand prioritisation of activities, funding discussions, and public sector intervention, and ensures a clear narrative as to the build-up of change in Central Birkenhead.
- 6.11 The phasing is linked to an understanding of viability and funding requirements. Specifically, the phasing builds up to enable greater viability within later phases – following delivery of the catalyst projects and other early years project delivery. There are instances therefore where sites could be delivered within an earlier phase, where market conditions allow.
- 6.12 This acceleration of delivery would be supported, assuming implementation is in line with the wider ambitions established within the BRF and the Central Birkenhead NF – specifically in relation to the design standards that are expected.
- 6.13 A Central Birkenhead-wide reference plan is included at Appendix 2. The plan illustrates references for development plots and infrastructure projects identified within the NF for Central Birkenhead. Figures 6.1 to 6.6 illustrates these same references, by project area.
- 6.14 The subsequent text considers the residential development potential and supporting infrastructure projects on a phase by phase basis, broken down by project area.

Figure 6.1: Neighbourhood Framework Reference Area: St Werburgh's



Figure 6.2: Neighbourhood Framework Reference Area: Argyle Approach

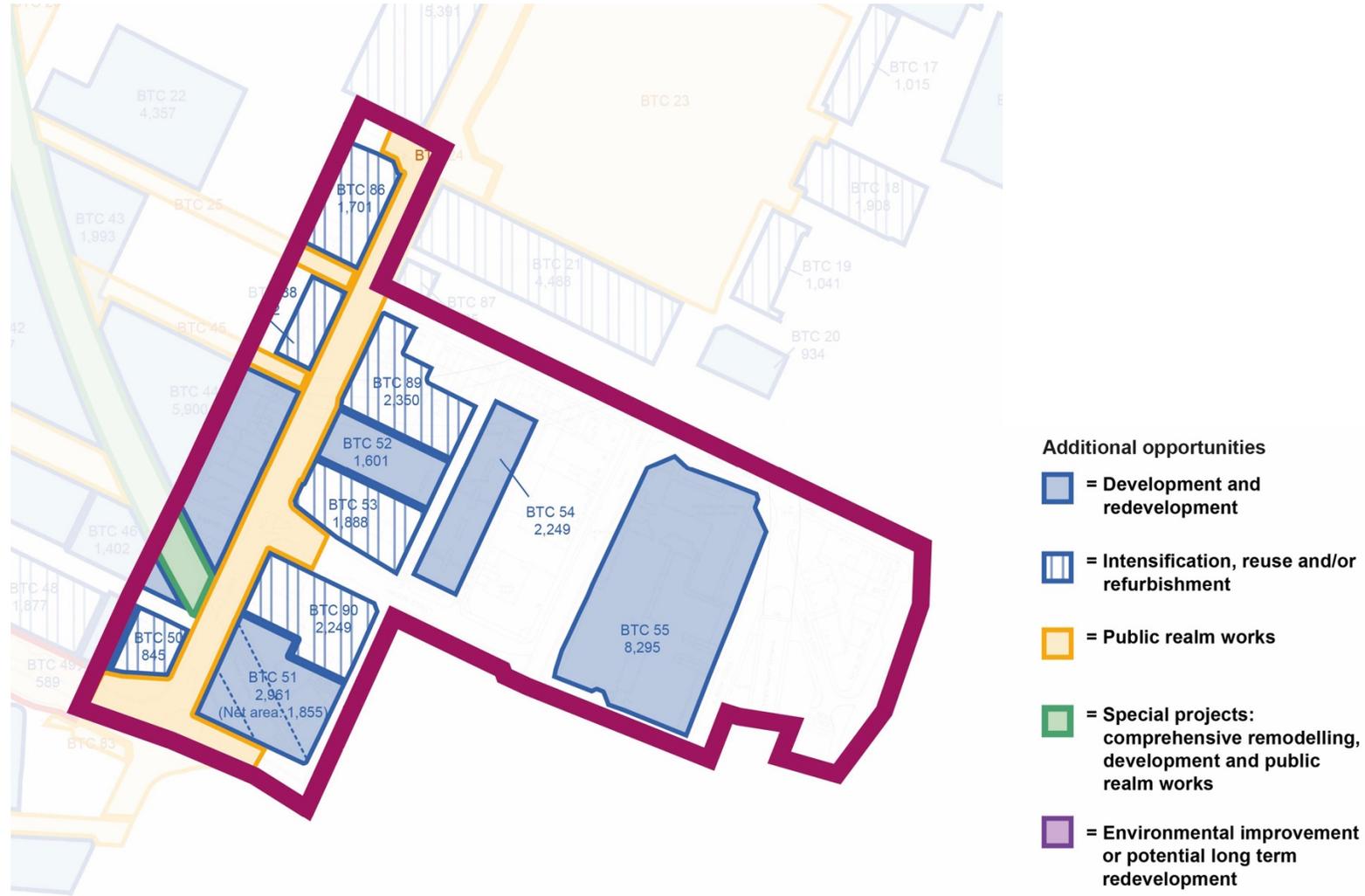


Figure 6.3: Neighbourhood Framework Reference Plan: Commercial District

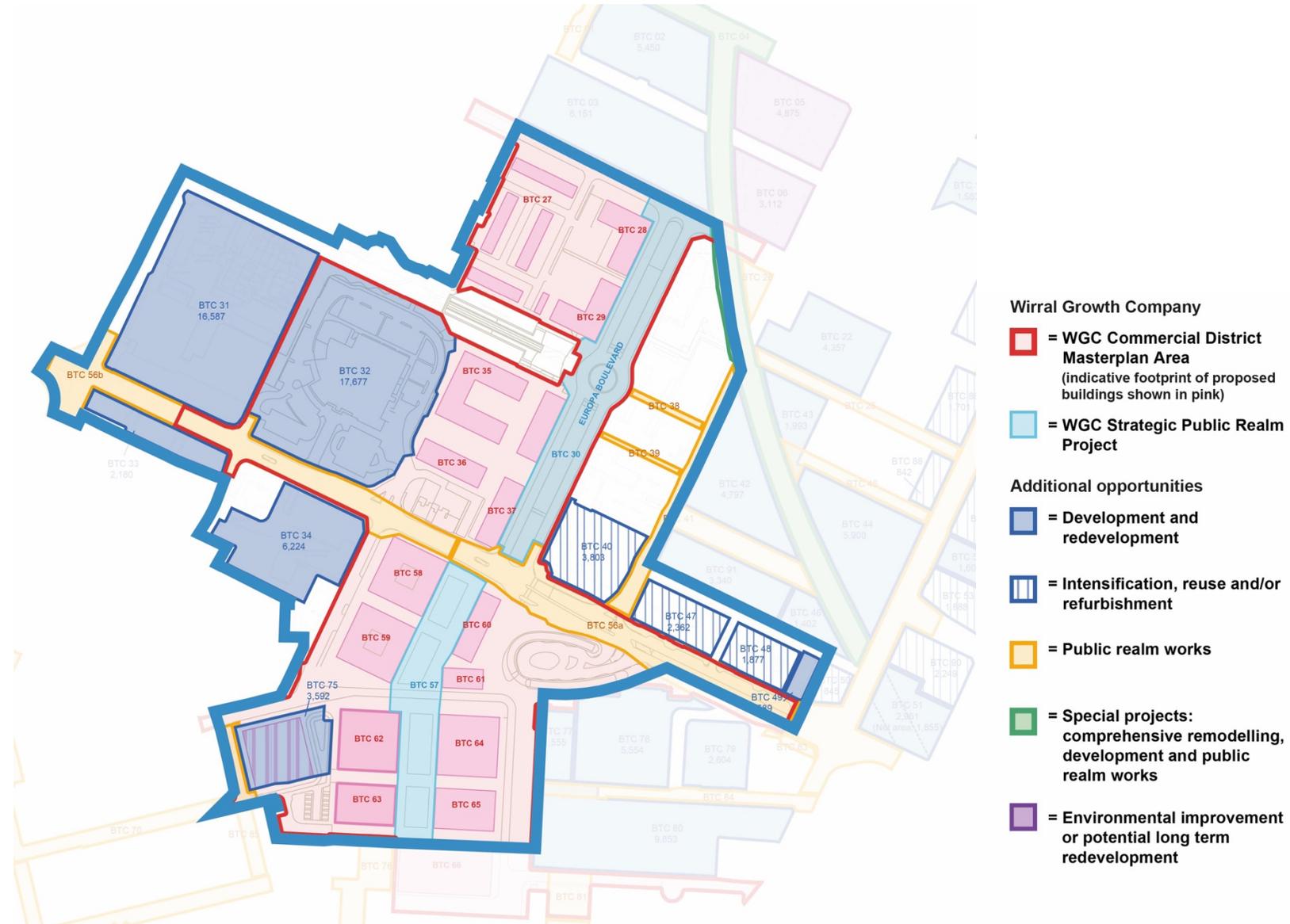


Figure 6.4: Neighbourhood Framework Reference Plan: Grange Road

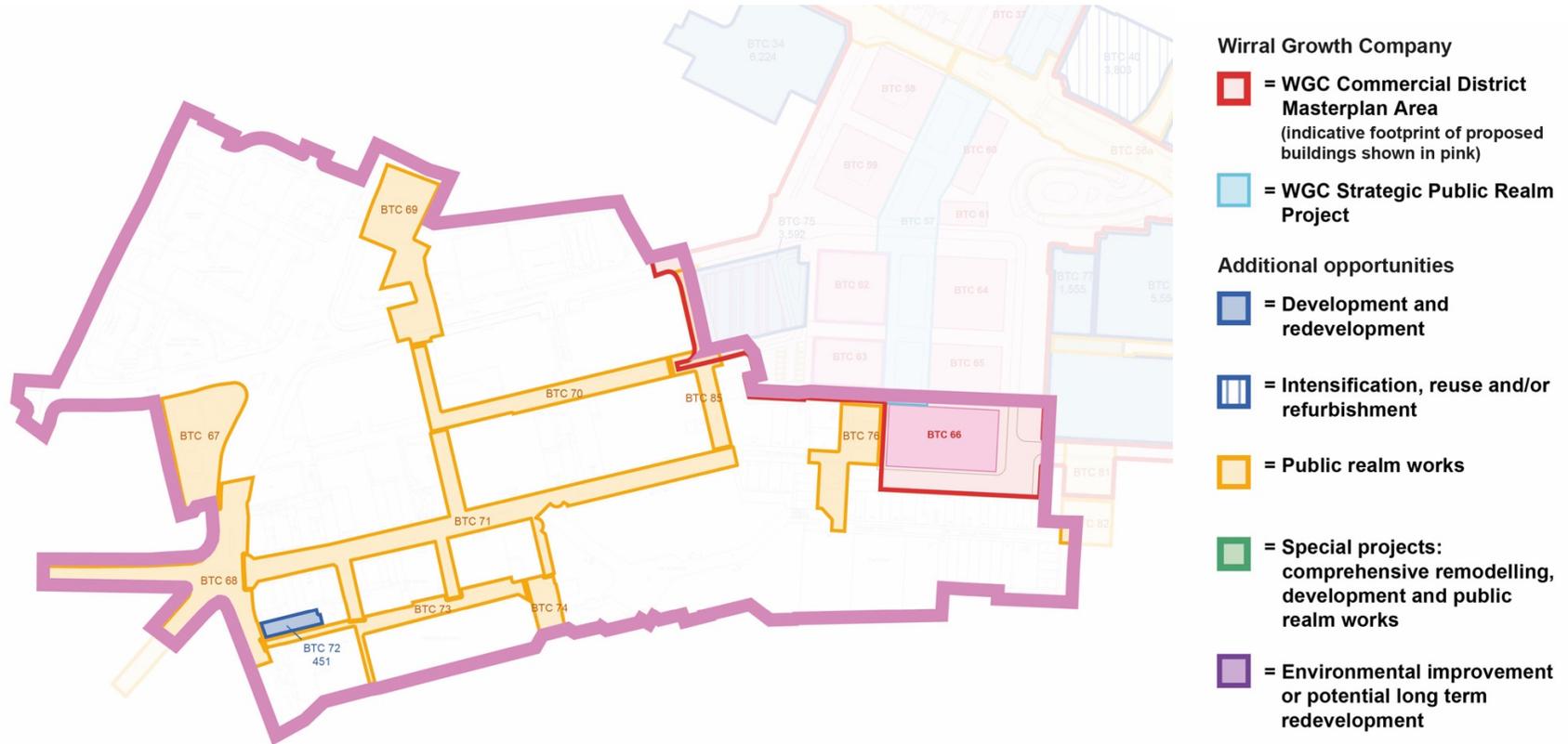


Figure 6.5 Neighbourhood Framework Reference Area: Argyle and Conway

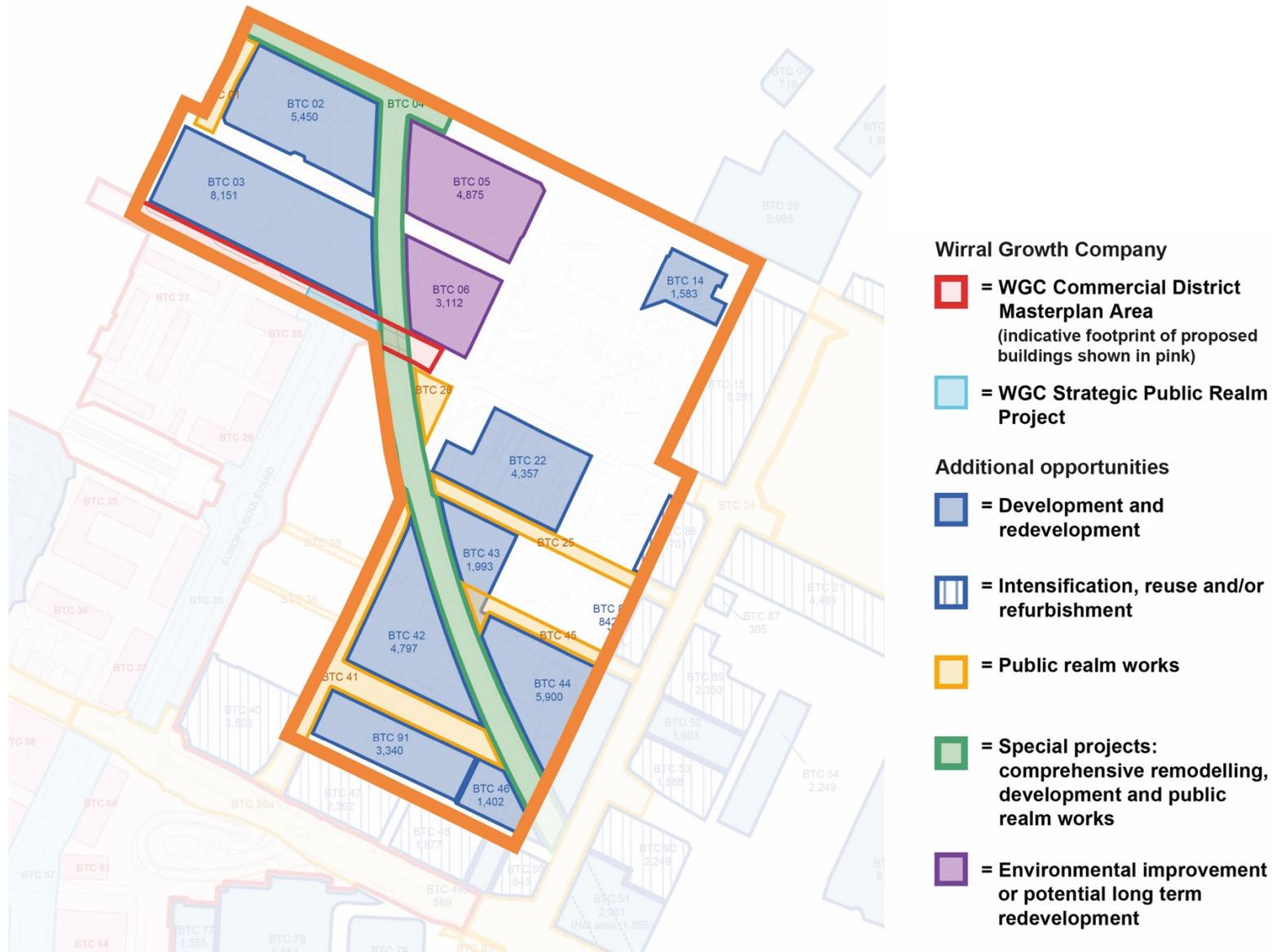


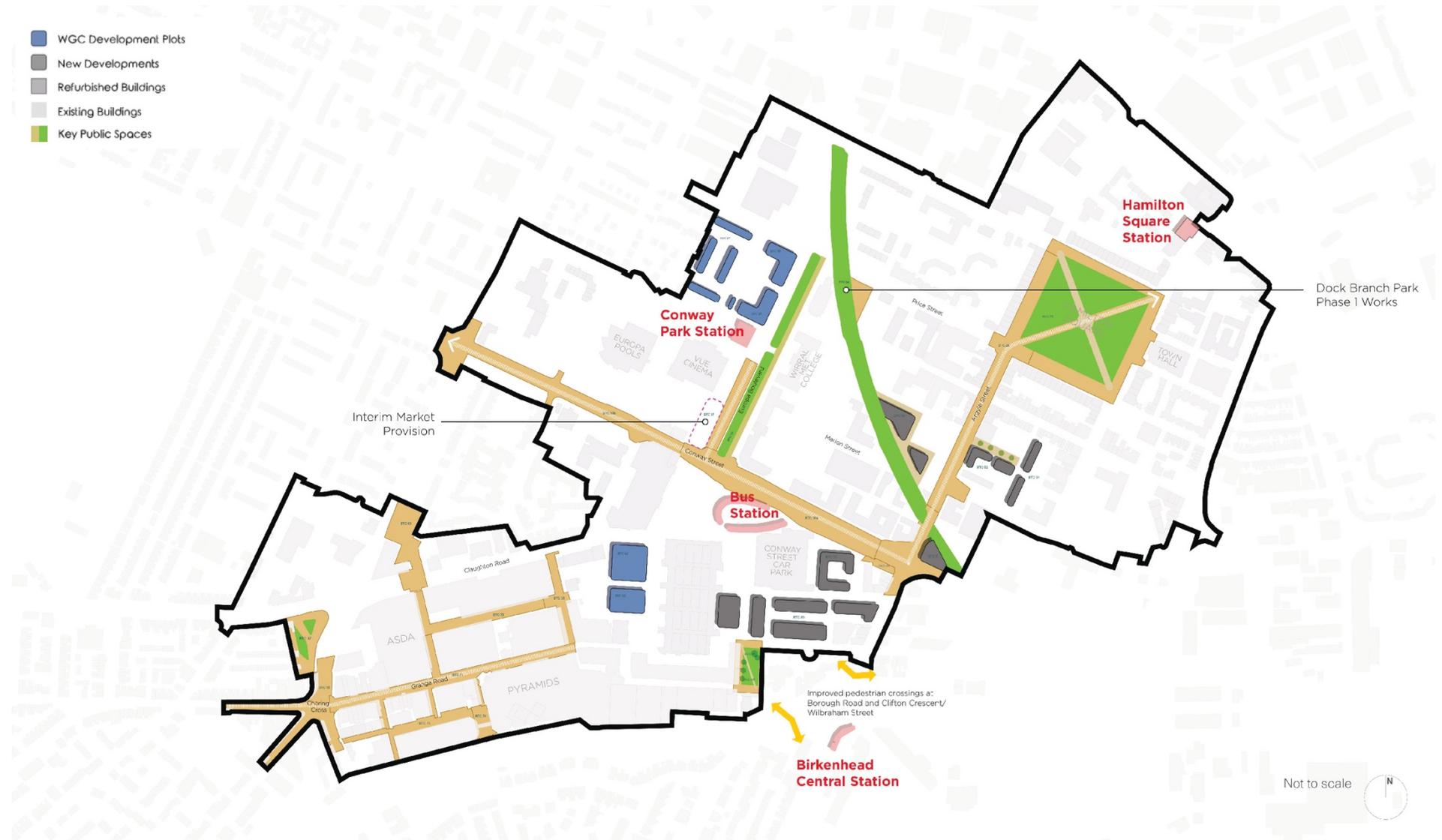
Figure 6.6: Neighbourhood Framework Reference Area: Hamilton Square



**Phase 1: High Street Stabilisation, Place Enhancements, Commencing Catalyst Delivery, Laying the Foundations**

- 6.15 The delivery of Phase 1 of the NF has already begun – and indeed has been in train for some time. With the strategic acquisition of key assets including Birkenhead Market, the former House of Fraser building, the VUE Cinema, Europa Buildings and the establishment of the Wirral Growth Company with the early intention to deliver office space for private investment and to potentially accommodate Wirral Council employees within the Commercial District, the Council's commitment for change in this critical area is without question.
- 6.16 Notwithstanding this progress however, significant further intervention is identified within Phase 1 of the NF to address structural failures and create the right conditions for private sector investment in the future.

Figure 6.8: Phase 1 Central Birkenhead NF



6.17 Key investments and developments unlocked within Phase 1 are identified to include:

*Phase 1 Argyle and Conway:*

6.18 The delivery of the first phase of the Dock Branch Park investment programme –from Argyle Street to Wirral Waters will, when delivered, unlock a completely new neighbourhood within Birkenhead.

6.19 Historically sweeping past this central core within a cutting, the intention to bring the corridor up to grade in part and opening up a subterranean environment where possible, embodies the scale of ambition within Birkenhead not previously imagined.

6.20 Completion of the infrastructure works along the first phase of the corridor, subject to securing funding and finalising the delivery strategy, is envisaged within Phase 1 of the NF (BTC 04).

6.21 The NF recognises the longer-term potential to establish a new residential neighbourhood adjacent to the corridor, benefitting from a unique urban and landscaped setting.

6.22 More detailed masterplanning will be progressed for the corridor, but the Birkenhead 2040 strategy envisages delivery of this new neighbourhood commencing from its northern and southern extents – ensuring strong arrival points to the corridor and setting quality benchmarks for the remainder of the area.

6.23 The northern extent of the corridor falls outside of the NF area but meets Argyle Street at the southern extent of Phase 1, with development potential identified adjacent (BTC 44), including development and investment in retained buildings where appropriate and possible.

6.24 Key residential development plots identified at the Dock Branch Park within Phase 1 are summarised in the following table.

**Table 6.1: Phase 1 Argyle and Conway Potential Residential Trajectory**

Project Reference	Project Description	Assumed Density (DPH)	Phase Output					
				Yr1	Yr2	Yr3	Yr4	Yr5
BTC44	Residential development plot fronting onto Dock Branch Park	240	100				50	50
<b>Total</b>			<b>100</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>

**Table 6.2: Phase 1 Argyle and Conway Infrastructure Delivery**

Project Reference	Project Description
BTC 04	Dock Branch Park Phase 1

*Phase 1 Argyle Approach*

- 6.25 Subject to the success of the Town Deal Fund bid to Central Government, being prepared at the time of writing, the NF recognises that several development opportunities could be accelerated into Phase 1. This includes the ambitions to deliver investment and renewal along the Argyle Approach corridor, contributing to the East-West Cultural Axis, and delivering projects including a creative quarter within this location.

*Phase 1 Commercial District:*

- 6.26 The delivery of the first phase of the Commercial District proposals being progressed by the WGC are fundamental to the long-term sustainability of the high street and Birkenhead's economy.
- 6.27 When fully delivered the Commercial District will deliver the comprehensive redevelopment of the centre, delivering consolidation of the high street, and addressing physical failure within the built environment at the Pavements. Within the mix of uses will be a new home for Birkenhead Market, over 300,000 sq. ft. of Grade A office floorspace, residential development, and supporting uses including leisure and hotel.
- 6.28 Phase 1 sees the commencement of this critical development, including the delivery of 150,000 sq. ft. Grade A office development (on Plot BTC 62 and BTC 63) and a temporary home for Birkenhead Market with proposals to accommodate this on St Werburghs Square for a short period of time, allowing commencement of delivery of its new permanent home on part of the existing market site. It is intended that St Werburgh's Square will form the outdoor element of the new temporary market, with the adjacent vacant former Perfect Homes store housing the indoor market.
- 6.29 Based on the secured funding through the Future High Streets Fund and the completion of a Parking Strategy, the first phase delivery within this area includes new homes at the north of Europa Boulevard on Council owned surface level car parking (BTC 27, BTC 28, BTC 29).
- 6.30 To support the delivery of residential development to the north within Phase 1 intervention is proposed along Europa Boulevard. This includes the proposed closure of the south-western stretch of Europa Boulevard (to Conway Park Station) (BTC 30).
- 6.31 To unlock the Phase 1 Commercial District development, investment is required at Birkenhead Bus Station and Conway Street. This work includes the need to deliver improvements to Birkenhead Bus Station including remodelling of bus laybys on Conway Street to enable commencement of Phase 1 of the Commercial District and improvements to the Europa Crossing over Conway Street as part of the Future High Streets Fund programme (BTC 56a).

**Table 6.3: Phase 1 Commercial District Potential Residential Trajectory**

Project Reference	Project Description	Assumed Density (DPH)	Phase Output					
				Yr1	Yr2	Yr3	Yr4	Yr5
BTC27 - 29	Residential development plot	Per WGC	201		44	157		
<b>Total</b>			<b>201</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>157</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

**Table 6.4: Phase 1 Commercial District Infrastructure Delivery**

Project Reference	Project Description
BTC 30	Europa Road eastern side closure, plant and paint delivery of pedestrianised zone
BTC 56a	First phase Conway Street improvements (Bus Station and Europa Crossing)

*St Werburgh's:*

- 6.32 The delivery of the catalyst projects at Birkenhead Landing and the reconfiguration of the Borough Road gyratory, alongside the emergence of the new Commercial District in Phase 1 shines a spotlight on the connecting spaces between them within Phase 1.
- 6.33 The St Werburgh's area, behind the Listed St Werburgh's church, is in decline as retail contraction continues in the centre.
- 6.34 St Werburgh's is currently a mix of buildings of varying quality and contributions, but its location is key – between the Commercial District and the to be reconfigured Borough Road gyratory (to be addressed through the future flyover removal). In response to this context, St Werburgh's is identified as a key area, with the potential for significant change over the NF period. Given the progression of these adjacent catalyst projects, major change is anticipated in St Werburgh's from Phase 2 onwards.
- 6.35 The NF identifies the need for the comprehensive redevelopment of this area to create a new high quality urban residential neighbourhood – supporting uses into the high street where appropriate and intensifying the use of this poor-quality part of the centre. In the short-term greater footfall will be driven by the temporary relocation of the current market to St Werburghs Square. Residential development in this area must look to all sides to encourage integration and must be supported by the highest quality environment and management to ensure footfall is encouraged to pass through.
- 6.36 The Council has recently acquired the House of Fraser building (part of plot identified as BTC 80) and intends to progress it for delivery through the Phase 1 period.
- 6.37 In finalising the boundaries of proposed Regeneration Areas within the emerging Local Plan the Council should consider whether it is more appropriate to join the St Werburgh's masterplan area with the

adjoining Hind Street masterplan area given the need to ensure close connectivity between both of these areas as a result of the demolition of the flyovers and the redesign of the highway network in this area.

**Table 6.5: Phase 1 St Werburgh's Development Plot Potential Residential Trajectory**

Project Reference	Project Description	Assumed Density (DPH)	Phase Output					
				Yr1	Yr2	Yr3	Yr4	Yr5
BTC80	Residential development - assumed redevelopment of the former House of Fraser building and associated land	135	88				48	40
<b>Total</b>			<b>88</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>40</b>

6.38 Delivered concurrently investment at BTC 80 (the vacant House of Fraser store) and following initial occupation of the public realm in this area in part by the Birkenhead Market whilst its new home is being delivered, the NF assumes improvements to the physical environment across the neighbourhood, supporting the delivery of residential development and ensuring safe, overlooked and positive streets to connect pedestrians into the core of the centre.

6.39 As such it also assumes longer term upgrades to the spaces at BTC 81 and 82 connecting the St Werburgh's Church grounds to the new market with the noted potential to open up this space as a positive setting for the church once it is no longer in use by the interim market.

**Table 6.6: Phase 2 St Werburgh's Infrastructure Delivery**

Project Reference	Project Description
BTC84	Street improvements to integrate and support new development, improving connections to high street, Hind Street and Conway Street, including resurfacing, landscaping as appropriate, street lighting, electric charging and safe cycle parking infrastructure.
BTC81	Square enhancements including resurfacing, lighting, planting and landscaping, wayfinding, appropriate furniture provision.
BTC82	(As for and assumed delivered as contiguous with BTC81)

*Grange Road Stabilisation:*

6.40 It is crucial that stability is delivered across the high street during Phase 1 of the NF - halting decline evident before the COVID-19 pandemic and addressing the further challenges faced as a result.

6.41 It is clear from the changes within the high street and consumer patterns that experience will be key to bringing back into urban centres for spend purposes. Experience in this capacity will be influenced by factors including the quality of the environment, the offer within the high street, the diversity of the uses including retail, leisure, food and drink, culture and arts and community provision, and accessibility.

6.42 The Central NF identifies the need to consolidate the retail offer in Birkenhead to support this process of stabilisation alongside a wider programme of diversification of uses generally across the centre, and investment in the physical realm to improve appearance, accessibility, and function throughout. The delivery of the Commercial District to the east is a key part of the strategy for Grange Road – reducing the retail footprint and generating significant footfall in the centre through the occupation of office floorspace being brought forward. The Commercial District will also see diversification of uses in the town centre, which generate linked trips and greater vibrancy within this core area.

6.43 Grange Road has been identified through the process as needing investment to improve its appearance and experience, including connecting streets and environments to draw pedestrians into this as the retained and strengthened high street of Birkenhead. The strategy also assumes the closure of Grange Road West to vehicles using plant and paint measures and improvements to the crossing at Charing Cross to improve pedestrian and cyclist safety and create a stronger more accessible high street gateway from the west (BTC 67, BTC 68, BTC 69, BTC 70, BTC 71, BTC 73, BTC 74, BTC 85).

*Argyle Approach and Hamilton Square*

6.44 To support the animation and activation of this corridor and the square, the NF assumes implementation of investment within the physical environment of Hamilton Square itself during Phase 1 including considered planting and lighting to bring the space back to life (BTC 23). A planting strategy could include restoring as much original planting as possible. Lighting should both increase safety within the square and accentuate the built heritage on all sides.

6.45 This project forms part of the Town Deal Fund submission to Government. Its delivery during Phase 1 is reliant on securing this funding.

**Table 6.7: Phase 2 Argyle Approach and Hamilton Square Infrastructure Delivery**

Project Reference	Project Description
BTC 23	Hamilton Square planting and lighting scheme

*Infill Residential Development:*

6.46 The NF also recognises some locations where infill development could come forward within early years of the plan, including:

- BTC 79 – where planning permission has been granted for the delivery of 132 apartments;
- BTC 52 – which is a cleared site in use as car parking (privately owned), which is likely to benefit commercially from the delivery of the Dock Branch Park where it meets Argyle Street; and

- BTC 54 – a Council owned car park, which subject to the completion of a Car Parking Strategy for Birkenhead could be released for development.

**Table 6.8 Phase 1 Infill Development Plot Potential Residential Trajectory**

Project Reference	Project Description	Assumed Density (DPH)	Phase Output					
				Yr1	Yr2	Yr3	Yr4	Yr5
BTC79	Residential development plot - planning permission in place	Per Planning Permission	132		132			
BTC52	Infill residential plot, active frontage to Argyle Street	85	10			10		
BTC54	Residential development plot on surface level car park	85	18		18			
<b>Total</b>			<b>160</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

*Strategic Infrastructure Delivery:*

6.47 To enable subsequent phase delivery by creating the right conditions for development and investment, the Central NF identifies the following as key strategic infrastructure projects to be implemented during Phase 1, subject to funding being secured:

- BTC 24 and BTC 83: Improvements to the Argyle Corridor, including (but not limited to):
  - Removal of Argyle / Conway roundabout and replacement with a signalised junction; integrating safer pedestrian and cycle infrastructure and green infrastructure to support the connection of Dock Branch Park from Argyle Street through to the Hind Street development area;
  - Improved street environment from Argyle / Conway junction to Hamilton Square Station including quality pedestrian space, dedicated cycle facilities, tree planting, lighting enhancements and street furniture;
  - Re-surfacing as appropriate;
  - "Paint & planters' interim and long-term formal spill-out and casual dining and socialising spaces within the physical realm where possible to encourage spill out and vibrancy of the corridor; and
  - Potential accommodation of mass transit system subject to progression of Mass Transit Demand Study and subsequent feasibility and design work.
- BTC 56b: Improvements to Conway Street:
  - Improved pedestrian and cycle environment from Argyle / Conway junction to Exmouth Street, including dedicated space, lighting enhancements and prioritisation as appropriate;
  - Delivery of a pedestrian and cycle super-crossing over Conway Street to enhance safety and connectivity between the high street and the wider area;
  - Dedicated bus corridor improvements; and

- Re-surfacing as appropriate.
- **BTC 58 and BTC 71: Charing Cross and Grange Road:**
  - Public realm works to Grange Road to improve the pedestrian experience including lighting, planting, and furniture;
  - Re-configuration of the Charing Cross junction to remove the Grange Road West arm and replace with a new public space and high street spill-out zone, simplification of pedestrian crossings, improved public realm and landscaping; and
  - Delivery of anti-terror measures to enhance safety along Grange Road including restrictions on vehicular access to the route and removal of on-street parking opportunities.
- **Birkenhead Landing:** Although outside of the Central Birkenhead NF area, the delivery of the Birkenhead Landing proposals and specifically the removal of the flyovers and associated decisions around the connecting physical realm at Borough Road including the gyratory is key within Phase 1 to support the development aspirations for St Werburgh's identified within Phase 2.

**Table 6.9: Phase 1 Strategic Infrastructure Delivery**

Project Reference	Project Description
BTC 24 and BTC 83	Argyle Corridor improvements (including Argyle / Conway junction signalisation)
BTC 56b	Completion of Conway Street improvements
BTC 58 and BTC 71	Delivery of improvements to Charing Cross and Grange Road
Birkenhead Landing	Removal of flyovers and reconfiguration of Borough Road gyratory

### Phase 2: New Neighbourhood Establishment

6.48 Phase 2 looks to build on the successful implementation of Phase 1 and sees the continued realisation of the catalyst projects across Central Birkenhead. Where possible, and where quality in design and delivery can be ensured, projects will be accelerated into Phase 1.

Figure 6.9: Phase 2 Central Birkenhead NF



*Phase 2 Commercial District and WGC:*

- 6.49 Phase 2 assumes delivery of redevelopment of a number of Council-owned assets via the Wirral Growth Company, which in turn will be dependent on the successful implementation of the second tranche of office floorspace including a further 150,000 sq. ft. B1a office development within the Commercial District (BTC 64, BTC 65).
- 6.50 Alongside the additional office floorspace, within Phase 2 the new permanent home for Birkenhead Market will be delivered, supported by the creation of new high quality public realm linking to the high street and Pyramids shopping centre potentially including a 'Market Square' (BTC 76) and to the improved Conway Street and Europa Boulevard (BTC 57). Phase 2 could also see the delivery of refurbishment of the Conway Building for residential use subject to availability of funding (BTC47).
- 6.51 Development will be brought forward at the southern end of Europa Boulevard (BTC 37). The nature of this development will be informed by earlier phase delivery at the Commercial District, but the NF assumes it will be residential in nature. Subject to the status of the cinema at that time (whether it remains in the town centre and/or whether it has or will be relocated to a new location within the town centre), the NF assumes the comprehensive redevelopment of this area for residential use within Phase 2 (BTC 37 plus BTC 35 and BTC 36).
- 6.52 In addition, the WGC has the option to redevelop the Hamilton Building on Conway Street – with the NF assuming this takes place in Phase 2 following vacant possession as Council employees are relocated to the new Commercial District. The NF assumes residential redevelopment of the building but with façade retention if possible.

**Table 6.10: Phase 2 Commercial District and WGC**

Project Reference	Project Description	Assumed Density (DPH)	Phase Output					
				Yr6	Yr7	Yr8	Yr9	Yr10
BTC34	Residential redevelopment of Hamilton Building, potential to retain façade	240	70		70			
BTC35 – 37	Commercial District and Mixed-Use Quarter Later Phase Delivery - assumed to be residential development plots	Per WGC	278			139	139	
BTC 47	Refurbishment of Conway Building for residential use	Per WGC	35	35				
<b>Total</b>			<b>348</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>0</b>

**Table 6.11: Phase 2 Commercial District Infrastructure Delivery**

Project Reference	Project Description
BTC 57	High quality public realm link through Commercial District from new market to Conway Street creating boulevard between buildings
BTC 76	Creation of new 'Market Square' facilitating spill out from new market building and direct connection through to the Pyramids Shopping Centre and Grange Road

*Argyle and Conway Development:*

- 6.53 Following successful implementation of the Dock Branch Park project in Phase 1, Phase 2 sees the emergence of a new residential-led mixed-use neighbourhood including the incremental delivery of a series of development plots either under Council control or within private ownership but with varying levels of quality and vibrancy. In reality the delivery of change across this neighbourhood is likely to be incremental in nature, but guided and influenced by robust design guidance and quality benchmarks, with more detail to be provided through subsequent masterplanning of this area in more detail to be progressed by the Council.
- 6.54 At this stage however the NF has identified several development plots anticipated to be delivered within this phase across this new neighbourhood, with explanation provided:
- **BTC 91 and BTC 46:** The NF assumes the comprehensive delivery of development at BTC 91 and 46. At the time of writing the Council have an option to acquire BTC 91 and BTC 46 is being actively marketed for sale. Bringing the sites forward together will enable a better-quality development fronting onto the corridor at its arrival to Argyle Street, and through to the town centre.
  - **BTC 43:** This site is currently a surface level car park which is underutilised. Subject to completion of a Parking Strategy for Birkenhead, this site could be released for development purposes fronting onto the central stretch of the corridor where aspirations for sub-terranean development and a vibrant mix of uses are envisaged. Overlooking of this area by residential development is likely to be important with early development therefore supported.
  - **BTC 02 and BTC 03:** Although currently in use, the NF assumes that the delivery of the corridor itself plus early phase residential delivery to the north (adjacent to the corridor but outside of this NF boundary) and to the south at the northern end of Europa Boulevard (BTC 27, BTC 28 and BTC 29) will influence change on these sites by creating the right conditions for delivery of high quality housing. These plots are considered important within the strategy as the corridor rises to meet Cleveland Street with the potential to spill out the environment into the build realm and create strong overlooking and integration of uses.

Table 6.12: Phase 2 Argyle and Conway Residential Trajectory

Project Reference	Project Description	Assumed Density (DPH)	Phase Output					
				Yr6	Yr7	Yr8	Yr9	Yr10
BTC02	Residential development plot	85	35			35		
BTC03	Residential development plot	85	60			48	12	
BTC91	Residential development plot	85	30		30			
BTC46	Residential development plot	240	24		24			
BTC43	Residential development plot fronting onto Dock Branch Park	240	45		45			
<b>Total</b>			<b>194</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>0</b>

6.55 Delivered concurrently with these development plots, the NF assumes improvements to the physical environment across the neighbourhood, connecting the corridor itself to key other routes including Europa Boulevard, Conway Street and Argyle Street. As such it also assumes the delivery of street improvements at BTC 26, BTC 41, BTC 38, BTC 39, BTC 25 and BTC 45.

Table 6.13: Phase 2 Argyle and Conway Infrastructure Delivery

Project Reference	Project Description
BTC 26	Street improvements to integrate and support new development, improving connections to high street and Dock Branch Park; including resurfacing, landscaping as appropriate, street lighting, electric charging and safe cycle parking infrastructure.
BTC 41	Street improvements to integrate and support new development, improving connections to high street and Dock Branch Park; including resurfacing, landscaping as appropriate, street lighting, electric charging and safe cycle parking infrastructure.
BTC 38	Street improvements to integrate and support new development, improving connections to high street and Dock Branch Park; including resurfacing, landscaping as appropriate, street lighting, electric charging and safe cycle parking infrastructure.
BTC 39	Street improvements to integrate and support new development, improving connections to high street and Dock Branch Park; including resurfacing, landscaping as appropriate, street lighting, electric charging and safe cycle parking infrastructure.
BTC 25	Street improvements to integrate and support new development, improving connections to high street and Dock Branch Park; including resurfacing, landscaping as appropriate, street lighting, electric charging and safe cycle parking infrastructure.
BTC 45	Street improvements to integrate and support new development, improving connections to high street and Dock Branch Park; including resurfacing, landscaping as appropriate, street lighting, electric charging and safe cycle parking infrastructure.

*St Werburgh's:*

6.56 The delivery of the catalyst projects at Birkenhead Landing and the reconfiguration of the Borough Road gyratory, alongside the emergence of the new Commercial District in Phase 1 puts emphasis on the connecting spaces between them during the Phase 2 delivery programme.

- 6.57 St Werburgh's during Phase 2 builds on the delivery of initial development at the former House of Fraser site.
- 6.58 It includes, a multi-storey car park serving the eastern side of the shopping area which is assumed will be redeveloped in the long term with relocation of retailers into the Pyramids (BTC 78) (subject to finalisation of the Car Parking Strategy), and parts of the legacy Pavements Shopping area which will be left isolated by the delivery of the Commercial District adjacent (BTC 77).

**Table 6.14: Phase 2 St Werburgh's Residential Trajectory**

Project Reference	Project Description	Assumed Density (DPH)	Phase Output					
				Yr6	Yr7	Yr8	Yr9	Yr10
BTC77	Mixed-use development plot - assumed leisure at ground and first floors and residential above. Redevelopment of Princes Pavements.	240	46			46		
BTC78	Mixed-use development plot - assumed active ground floor and residential above	240	108				108	
<b>Total</b>			<b>154</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>0</b>

- 6.59 During Phase 2 the NF assumes the delivery of street improvements at BTC 84 to better connect adjacent development plots.

**Table 6.15: Phase 2 St Werburgh's Infrastructure Delivery**

Project Reference	Project Description
BTC84	Street improvements to integrate and support new development, improving connections to high street, Hind Street and Conway Street, including resurfacing, landscaping as appropriate, street lighting, electric charging and safe cycle parking infrastructure.

*Argyle Approach and Hamilton Square:*

- 6.60 The NF envisages more incremental change along the Argyle Corridor and within Hamilton Square than across the other neighbourhoods, but the importance of delivery of investment in this neighbourhood should not be underestimated.
- 6.61 Hamilton Square is the 'Heritage Heart' of Birkenhead and one of its most iconic areas, with a character that demands a much greater level of use and vibrancy in the future. Following investment in the environment of Argyle Street during Phase 1 – important to create a new atmosphere and patronage along its route – Phase 2 sees the corridor brought to life.

- 6.62 The NF envisages the creation of a second 'high street' and commercial offer along Argyle Street connecting the core of the centre and the Dock Branch Park to the Heritage Heart and beyond it the waterfront. The offer along Argyle Street will be distinct from Grange Road, and be underpinned by independents, creatives and business activities to create a vibrant creative corridor, forming part of the wider east-west cultural axis connecting the centre to the waterfront.
- 6.63 Given the character of many of the buildings along Argyle Street and within Hamilton Square itself, the NF envisages a much greater focus on bringing buildings back into use where possible rather than redevelopment within this neighbourhood, and for a mix of uses including commercial, hotel and residential. Key buildings include those identified at BTC 15, BTC 16, BTC 17, BTC 19, BTC 21, BTC 44, BTC 86, BTC 87, and BTC 89.
- 6.64 This includes the identification of Birkenhead Town Hall as an important asset to be brought back into use through investment – assumed for cultural, visitor and community uses subject to further testing and feasibility (BTC 18).
- 6.65 The NF does identify some infill plots for development along the corridor during Phase 2. This includes identified development potential at BTC 51, a site opened up by the Phase 1 Argyle / Conway junction infrastructure works and the filling of Dock Branch Park between Argyle Street and the Hind Street development area, and BTC 09 the Treasury Building within Council ownership.
- 6.66 The trajectory below excludes sites identified for refurbishment given building surveys have not been possible as part of the NF process.

**Table 6.16: Phase 2 Argyle Approach and Hamilton Square Residential Trajectory**

Project Reference	Project Description	Assumed Density (DPH)	Phase Output					
				Yr6	Yr7	Yr8	Yr9	Yr10
BTC09	Residential development plot	85	48	48				
BTC51	Residential development plot	240	49			49		
<b>Total</b>			<b>97</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

*Infill Residential Development:*

- 6.67 The NF also recognises some locations where infill development could come forward within Phase 2, subject to landowners' willingness to deliver, including:
- BTC 22 – given the noted underutilisation of this asset, and the potential impact of Dock Branch Park to encourage landowner investment;
  - BTC 49 – small scale infill site that could be triggered by investment in Conway Street and Conway / Argyle junction;

- BTC 08 – infill development plot that could be triggered by delivery of development and investment at the Treasury Building (BTC 09);
- BTC 14 - infill development plot that could be triggered by delivery of development and investment at the Treasury Building (BTC 09) and investment in Hamilton Square (BTC 23, BTC 15 in particular); and
- BTC 12 – infill development plot that could be triggered by delivery of investment in Hamilton Square (BTC 23, BTC 16 and BTC 17 in particular).

Table 6.17: Phase 2 Infill Development Plot Residential Trajectory

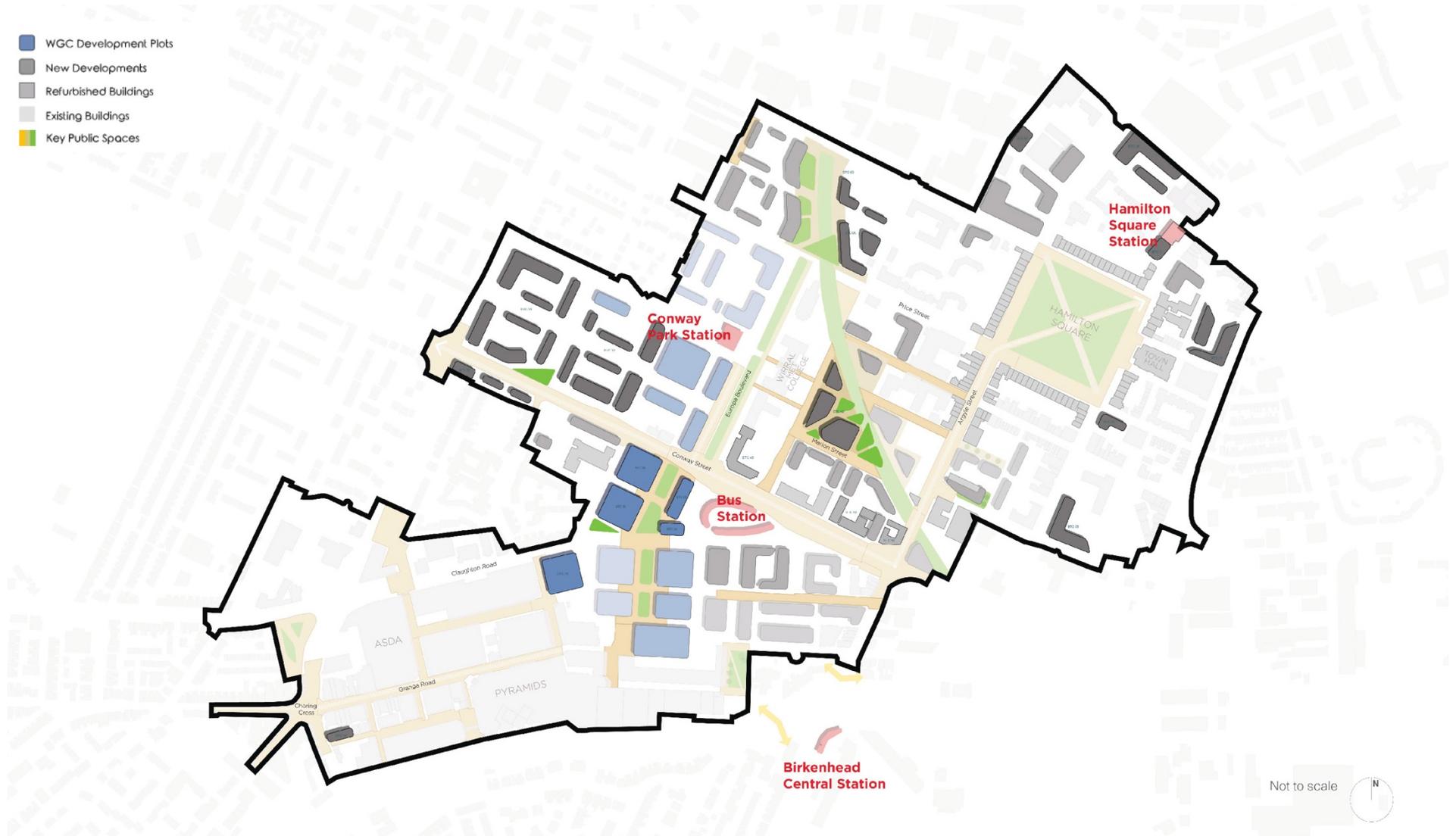
Project Reference	Project Description	Assumed Density (DPH)	Phase Output					
				Yr6	Yr7	Yr8	Yr9	Yr10
BTC22	Mixed-use development plot - residential and office development, assuming reprovision of existing floorspace as part of scheme to modernise existing on-site offer	180	56			56		
BTC49	Infill mixed-use development on infill site, Conway Street	240	4	4				
BTC08	Infill residential plot	85	10				10	
BTC14	Residential development plot	240	36				36	
BTC12	Residential development plot	240	47				47	
<b>Total</b>			<b>153</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>0</b>

### Phase 3: Delivering Central Birkenhead's Full Potential

6.68 Phase 3 sees the completion of the Central Birkenhead NF programme of development and intervention. By this period, it is assumed that the major public sector intervention and support has completed, and market circumstances have developed as a result of earlier intervention to make development viable and led by the private sector. By this stage, all infrastructure projects identified have been delivered.

Figure 6.10: Phase 3 Central Birkenhead NF

- WGC Development Plots
- New Developments
- Refurbished Buildings
- Existing Buildings
- Key Public Spaces



*Commercial District:*

- 6.69 Phase 3 sees the completion of proposals within the identified Commercial District and its wider context along Conway Street. Council assets captured within this neighbourhood have all been released including the Leisure Centre (BTC 32), the Europa Building (which currently houses Mecca Bingo and Wilkinson's) (BTC 58 and BTC 59), the Europa Square Car Park (subject to the completion of a Car Parking Strategy) (BTC 60 and BTC 61), and the former B&M Bargains store (BTC 75).
- 6.70 Plot BTC 75 is delayed until Phase 3 as it is assumed it will be the construction compound for development of the Commercial District core area. The strategy currently assumes the site may be required to meet multi-storey car parking requirements, subject to completion of a Parking Strategy although the NF does aspire for redevelopment in the future for non-parking use.
- 6.71 Beyond the defined Commercial District, but connected, the NF identifies material development potential at BTC 31 and BTC 33 – likely to be unlocked by delivery of development at BTC 32 adjacent, including opportunity to explore comprehensive delivery across the sites.
- 6.72 Given the character of many of the buildings along the eastern end of Conway Street, the NF envisages a much greater focus on bringing buildings back into use where possible rather than redevelopment within this area, and for a mix of uses including commercial and residential. Key buildings include those identified at BTC 40, BTC 47, BTC 48 and BTC 50).
- 6.73 The trajectory below excludes sites identified for refurbishment given building surveys have not been possible as part of the NF process.

**Table 6.18: Commercial District Phase 3 Residential Trajectory**

Project Reference	Project Description	Assumed Density (DPH)	Phase Output					
				Yr11	Yr12	Yr13	Yr14	Yr15
BTC32	Residential development on site of current leisure centre	85	143		48	48	47	
BTC31	Residential development plot	85	134			48	48	38
BTC33	Residential development plot	240	50					50
BTC58-59	Residential development plot	Per WGC	172	86		86		
<b>Total</b>			<b>499</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>88</b>

*Argyle and Conway:*

- 6.74 The NF identifies three important sites likely to be unlocked in Phase 3, rather than any earlier across Dock Branch Park neighbourhood based on their private ownership and/or existing uses that may require more sensitive consideration. The NF does not preclude these sites coming forward sooner, subject to meeting quality design thresholds. This specifically relates to BTC 05, BTC 06 and BTC 42.

6.75 Sites BTC 05 and BTC 06 are existing suburban density residential site of varying quality and mixed ownership including Registered Provider and private following Right to Buy activity which turns its back on the corridor based on its current form and condition. Delivery of redevelopment of these sites is likely to be complex and require land assembly and support for existing residents.

6.76 Site BTC 42 is an existing telephone exchange, with the need to relocate infrastructure to unlock development potential in the future.

**Table 6.19: Argyle and Conway Phase 3 Residential Trajectory**

Project Reference	Project Description	Assumed Density (DPH)	Phase Output					
				Yr11	Yr12	Yr13	Yr14	Yr15
BTC05	Redevelopment for higher density residential fronting onto Dock Branch Park	85	39		39			
BTC06	Redevelopment for higher density residential fronting onto Dock Branch Park	85	25		25			
BTC42	Redevelopment of telephone exchange site	135	46					46
<b>Total</b>			<b>110</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>46</b>

*Infill Residential Development:*

6.77 The NF also recognises some locations where infill development is likely to come forward within Phase 3, following implementation of the wider proposals to create the right conditions to deliver, including those listed below.

**Table 6.20: Infill Development Phase 3 Residential Trajectory**

Project Reference	Project Description	Assumed Density (DPH)	Phase Output					
				Yr11	Yr12	Yr13	Yr14	Yr15
BTC55	Residential development plot	240	189					189
BTC07	Infill residential plot	240	11			11		
BTC10	Residential development plot	85	39			39		
BTC11	Residential development plot, with active ground floor to station frontage	240	18			18		
BTC13	Residential development plot, redevelopment of Birkenhead Police Station	240	91				91	
BTC20	Infill residential plot	85	8			8		
BTC72	Infill residential plot	240	10					10
<b>Total</b>			<b>366</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>199</b>

6.78 In combination and once delivered, these phases will comprise the comprehensive regeneration of Central Birkenhead.

## Infrastructure Delivery

6.79 Appended to this main report is a schedule of infrastructure projects and intended delivery strategy including estimate of budget (subject to more detailed design and cost plans being produced) (Appendix 3).

6.80 The NF recognises the importance of infrastructure delivery – including capital investment in streets, the bus station, the railway stations and their environments, the public realm and landscaping – to support wider aspirations.

6.81 The NF recognises the important role for Wirral Council in taking a leading role in implementing the infrastructure programme – including the use of public funding as a catalyst and noting the dominance of highways infrastructure and associated land which is under Council control. As noted in relation to funding, this includes significant progress made during the NF production where funding has been secured for key projects including £8m for the removal of the Borough Road flyovers.

6.82 There is also an existing maintenance backlog across Central Birkenhead and development proposals will be required to consider how this can be addressed where capital projects won't be delivered and there is likely to be additional detriment. Impact of proposed development on the existing highway network will be tested through the planning application process.

6.83 It also recognises the need to secure strategic funding to enable this programme of works to be implemented on a timely basis. For optimum delivery it is also recognised that land assembly may be required.

6.84 Detailed delivery strategies should be developed and progressed for each infrastructure project identified.

## Sub-Area Neighbourhood masterplanning

6.85 Key sub-areas identified within Central Birkenhead which require more detailed masterplanning are:

- Commercial District (through WGC, subject of current planning application, with the assumption of regular Neighbourhood Framework updates as proposals develop through the joint venture partnership to support future reserved matters applications within the outline area, and additional applications where proposals fall outside);
- Dock Branch Park (masterplanning exercise is underway at the time of writing to support Town Deal Fund submission); and
- St Werburgh's neighbourhood.

6.86 The NF does not preclude private landowners progressing sub-area masterplans as part of the development of proposals for engagement with the Council and other partners but identifies the above as priorities based on scale and nature of change identified within the NF.

## Additional Key Actions by Neighbourhood

6.87 In addition to the general actions identified through the BRF and the more detailed masterplanning noted for each project area, neighbourhood specific Wirral Council actions have been identified to ensure delivery is progressed. These are documented below in no particular order, presented by phase within each neighbourhood. Actions are only identified for Phases 1 and 2, laying the foundation for progression of Phase 3 without the need for further intervention.

### Commercial District and Mixed-use Quarter

6.88 The Council owns the Hamilton Building, the Vue Cinema, Europa Buildings and Europa Pools and therefore to some extent has control over when redevelopment of the sites is delivered.

6.89 Whilst none of these buildings are vacant currently, the NF has identified potential for redevelopment in the future across them all. This includes recognition of the underutilised nature of the Hamilton Building, market challenges associated with the cinema and the Europa Buildings, and known need for significant investment in the Leisure Centre.

6.90 The NF modelling supports the view that Phase 2 delivery of these sites is likely based on viability – and to allow the development to benefit from the first elements of the Commercial District and Mixed-Use Quarter implementation – but it does not prohibit its earlier progression if possible.

6.91 Phase 2 assumes delivery of redevelopment of a number of Council-owned assets via the Wirral Growth Company, which in turn will be dependent on the successful implementation of the second tranche of office floorspace totalling some 150,000sqft B1a office development within the Commercial District – enabling subsidisation of delivery across the identified assets within Phase 2

6.92 Specific actions identified include:

- Secure delivery of WGC Commercial District proposals including determination of live planning application with positive dialogue between parties;
- Confirm future of Europa Pools (Birkenhead Leisure Centre) in the context of the Council's emerging Leisure Strategy including any need to re-provide facility and strategy to secure vacant possession of the existing site;
- Confirm future of Vue Cinema including any need to re-provide and strategy to secure vacant possession of the existing site;
- Permanently decant employees from Hamilton Building into Phase 1 Commercial District to secure vacant possession of the site to enable redevelopment; and
- Secure funding to support delivery of Hamilton Building redevelopment and Conway Building refurbishment and reconfiguration.

## **Grange Road**

- 6.93 The Grange Road neighbourhood will be defined and dominated by the refocused High Street within the town centre – capturing the primary retail shopping area, and the focus of comparison retailing within Birkenhead.
- 6.94 The Council is further aware of other opportunities across the high street emerging as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, as a result of its impact on the high street and retailing. This includes the emergence of distressed retail assets within the centre. The Council has opened engagement on two critical assets within the town centre and has a Confidentiality Agreement (CA) in place including its advisors to undertake due diligence with a view to acquire to enable regeneration of the area and delivery of the preferred option within this NF. These opportunities continue to be progressed by the Council given their significance.
- 6.95 Specific actions identified include:
- Revised Local Plan approach to Primary Retail Area;
  - Action plan and potential masterplan to be produced in partnership with the shopping centre owners and the Birkenhead Business Improvement District;
  - Engagement with owners of Pyramids Shopping Centre to align management approach across the Central Birkenhead area including alignment between the Pyramids and the Commercial District;
  - Development of a support package to facilitate retention and relocation of retailers being displaced from Pavements into Grange Road and the Pyramids; and
  - Secure funding to enable full programme of public realm interventions can be delivered, including acquisition and restructuring of the Pavements Shopping Centre, but also critically Grange Road West and the Charing Cross junction subject of the Future High Streets funding secured from Government.

## **Argyle and Conway**

- 6.96 To ensure that the delivery of the Dock Branch Park is much more than the implementation of an infrastructure project it is imperative that wider leverage is delivered. The corridor will have a profound effect on this core area of Birkenhead – and create a brand-new place with the potential to be a vibrant and exciting residential neighbourhood at the heart of the town centre.
- 6.97 Without wider intervention it can be assumed that landowners would progress to deliver development along the corridor – benefitting from the infrastructure delivery as market value increases. However, this delivery would only be possible at the quality aspired to by the Council once values had increased materially. This risks lower quality development coming forward which could compromise the whole vision for the neighbourhood and ultimately its long-term success.

6.98 Early intervention by the public sector within the area is an opportunity to benefit from value uplift but could also be critical to set benchmarks on key sites to influence delivery by the market in the remainder of the neighbourhood. Key sites have been identified to include (within the Central Birkenhead NF) BTC 44, BTC 46 (in combination with BTC 91), BTC 51 and BTC 02, BTC 03, BTC 05 and BTC 06.

6.99 Specific actions identified include:

- Identify capital funding support for land assembly within key locations identified and progress and implement strategy including progression of Birkenhead Town Deal bid.

### **St Werburgh's**

6.100 The full delivery of the ambition for the St Werburgh's neighbourhood requires the comprehensive redevelopment of several important sites, some of which are currently in use. The ambition for this neighbourhood includes the redevelopment of the former House of Fraser building, and critically connects into the Commercial District through the potential redevelopment of the Princes Pavement parade (outside of the WGC proposals). The closure of Princes Pavements will include the support of retailers into Grange Road East and the Pyramids – to strengthen the future high street of Birkenhead.

6.101 The NF notes the potential important role for the public sector in assembling land within this location – and the phasing plan reflects the potential long-term nature of this assembly process, including the potential need to use Compulsory Purchase Order powers to obtain full control. The market conditions at the time of writing – and the impact of both COVID-19 and Brexit on the high street are not yet fully realised, but the challenges are evident.

6.102 The NF therefore recognises that market conditions may create opportunities for earlier land assembly across this zone – which could therefore enable earlier development across the area. To achieve the greatest value within this location however, the NF acknowledges the importance of the implementation of the Birkenhead Landing catalyst.

6.103 Specific actions identified include:

- Progress with acquisition of remaining Pavements Shopping Centre and multi-storey car park;
- Secure strategic funding to support acquisition and enable early delivery of residential development across neighbourhood through addressing early years viability challenges.

### **Argyle Approach and Hamilton Square**

6.104 The Council are progressing, in partnership with the newly established Town Deal Board, a bid to the Government under the Town Deal Fund. At the time of writing, the Town Deal bid is not finalised, but the delivery of intervention across the Argyle Corridor and within Hamilton Square are being considered in

further detail. Subject to the progression of this bid, and its ultimate success, implementation of the projects identified across these neighbourhoods could be accelerated.

- Develop funding and implementation strategy for key building investment to support external appearance enhancement and internal building reconfiguration;
- Prepare design and secure funding to deliver Hamilton Square enhancements;
- Progress Birkenhead Town Hall feasibility study; and
- Strategic engagement with Arts Council England and National Lottery.

## Establishing a Robust Planning Framework

- 6.105 The BRF has a critical role in the emerging Wirral Local Plan. It forms a key part of the evidence supporting the Local Plan Preferred Urban Intensification spatial option, by identifying the potential scale of brownfield development in Birkenhead. The BRF will be subject to consultation during the early part of 2021 before being finalised and endorsed as the Council's Regeneration Strategy for Birkenhead.
- 6.106 This Neighbourhood Framework is one of a series recommended by the BRF. It has been prepared to provide further detail to the initial neighbourhood vision and spatial concepts set out in the BRF and to provide evidence of potential brownfield housing delivery for the emerging Local Plan.
- 6.107 The Local Plan will set out a series of Regeneration Areas. Each of these Regeneration Areas will have a specific Local Plan policy which will be informed by this Neighbourhood Framework and other NFs. Development proposals within the Regeneration Areas will need to comply with the Local Plan policy. Where appropriate, and as informed by this and other NFs the Local Plan Regeneration Area policies may require further detailed site or sub area masterplans which have been recommended. Development will also have to have to regard to the Birkenhead Design and Public Realm Guide Supplementary Planning Document which the Council is to prepare as part of the delivery strategy for the BRF.

## Place Management and Stewardship

- 6.108 The NF recognises the importance of place management and long term stewardship in ensuring that the benefits of intervention are felt in the long term – and to ensure that early phase development creates and maintains the right conditions to support enhanced viability and conditions for delivery across Central Birkenhead in later development phases.
- 6.109 The NF requires management and stewardship to be considered at the outset of the design process across the Central Birkenhead area – informing physical design, use (formal, informal and meanwhile), and materiality of individual projects and development.
- 6.110 Consideration must be given to the interface between different projects, ensuring a continuous high-quality management regime exists across land ownerships and development boundaries. Engagement with the Birkenhead BID team will be critical as part of the development of management approaches across the centre.
- 6.111 The Council will expect a demonstrable consideration of management to be included within planning applications across the Central Birkenhead area, including within evidence of management having been factored into design evolution captured within Design and Access Statements supporting planning applications. Planning applications will be required to include evidence of place management and stewardship strategy to be applied across development within the Central Birkenhead area.

6.112 On land within its control, the Council will ensure a positive and long term view of management is taken, and will positively engage with all stakeholders and landowners across the area to ensure a seamless relationship between public and private assets and management approaches to ensure a whole-place approach to management is delivered.

## **Governance, Delivery Vehicles and Partnerships**

6.113 There is a significant level of excitement and commitment within the Council and strategic partners to deliver this comprehensive, long-term and strategically important regeneration strategy.

6.114 The Council recognises that the scale and ambition of the LeftBank regeneration programme, covering Birkenhead and the wider urban area reaching from New Ferry to New Brighton, means that it needs to adopt an enhanced, bespoke delivery vehicle model.

6.115 It further recognises the importance of its own role, and the need for clear leadership within the delivery of the NF infrastructure programme and key projects, including the catalyst projects identified in the BRF. The Council will undertake this leadership role to leverage private sector investment and involvement in the delivery programme.

6.116 Wirral Council is in dialogue with the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to explore alternative delivery models for the Birkenhead 2040 and wider LeftBank programme. It is expected this process to take in the region of 18-months to scope and design the right delivery model for the LeftBank programme, including delivery of the interventions captured within this NF. At the time of writing the preferred model for LeftBank is not fixed but will be instrumental in delivering the town centre ambitions. This process will further complement existing resource within the Council – adding additional skills and capabilities, with a specific focus on commercial, delivery and urban design capabilities to enable implementation of the Birkenhead 2040 Framework.

6.117 Since January 2020 Wirral Council has operated a joint steering group with Homes England and the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority to oversee the development and delivery of the LeftBank programme including a senior Homes England Programme Lead in support.

6.118 Within the Council a newly established Regeneration and Place Board provides oversight of the LeftBank and Local Plan programme and co-ordinates the operation of external partnership groups.

6.119 The Council has established a project management hierarchy that will be in place for the duration of the NF programme and indeed across LeftBank. The Council has recently established a new Regeneration and Place Department which brings together regeneration, asset management, strategic transport, planning, housing, and PMO disciplines into a single delivery unit. It is critical that the Council assembles project teams to implement key projects, on a multi-disciplinary basis, including the catalyst projects.

- 6.120 In the Wirral Growth Company, the Council has an established partnership to deliver development relating to assets it owns or acquires in the centre – should it be the preferred method of delivery. The WGC itself can acquire assets to develop out or hold as investment. Under the Wirral Growth Company Partnership Agreement, several sites were identified within an option agreement – which the WGC can draw down once certain thresholds and development principles have been agreed with the Council. Additional assets can be brought into the option agreement – following agreement by both parties. Under the Partnership Agreement it is encouraged that the WGC cross-subsidise unviable development sites through the delivery of higher value developments – this could be a mechanism which is applied to address at least in part the viability gap identified in key development sites across the NF area.
- 6.121 In addition to the WGC, the Council understands the importance of wider partnerships to enable delivery across the NF programme. There is a key role for appropriate developers who share the Council’s vision and ambitions for redevelopment of brownfield land. The Council will be looking to establish a developers’ forum including Registered Providers to deliver the programme.
- 6.122 As has been noted, the Council is exploring a strategic partnership with Homes England. The Council would consider establishing future partnerships with the private sector – on a project by project basis subject to formal procurement– and recognises this does not have to mean establishing Joint Ventures. The Council realises the importance of acting positively within its statutory responsibilities – and will seek to ensure Planning Performance Agreements are in place across all major projects where appropriate and or requested to facilitate these working arrangements.

## Strategic Approach to Securing Funding

- 6.123 Mixed tenure and type residential development is currently not viable within Central Birkenhead – a significant market failure which is prohibiting positive contraction of existing retail provision and the delivery of development on underutilised and vacant sites.
- 6.124 The implementation of the BRF and Central Birkenhead NF will address this market failure – through targeted intervention to create critical mass of development opportunity, requiring high quality design, alongside the delivery of the catalyst projects that will fundamentally change the character and appeal of the central neighbourhoods. The NF preferred option has not been identified based on it being the most viable, but rather being the best strategy for the central neighbourhoods.
- 6.125 Development viability is therefore an important consideration in early phase delivery, and the maximisation of public funding to enable early phase delivery will therefore be key – focused specifically on addressing the viability gap within early phase development. It is crucial that early phase delivery creates the right conditions to ensure development becomes more viable over time, this must include:
- demanding quality in design across both buildings and public realm and ensuring robust long-term management and stewardship across the built realm;

- delivering comprehensive change and creating critical mass – recognising that infill developments won't lift the market; and
  - delivering the catalysts – creating new Central Birkenhead neighbourhoods which, through their own unique identity, command higher values, setting new headlines, and attracting new private sector interest and investment.
- 6.126 The Council are in close dialogue with Homes England and the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority to ensure a long term and strategic approach to funding is established to support the full BRF programme.
- 6.127 The Council have progressed specific dialogue to support early phase delivery of the Central Birkenhead NF programme, including:
- Over £21.5m of infrastructure funding the subject of current Full Business Case development for submission to the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority under the Transforming Cities Fund and Government under the Town Deal Fund, specific to A41 North and Phase 1 of Dock Branch Park;
  - Successful approval of £8m funding from the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority to enable the demolition of the Borough Road flyovers;
  - Successful approval of just under £25m Future High Street Fund allocation by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government in December 2020; and
  - Up to £45m Town Deal Fund sought, with Stage 1 Town Investment Plan submitted to Government in January 2021.
- 6.128 This is in addition to the funding mechanism in place through the Wirral Growth Company – where the Council will support the headlease on 150,000 sq. ft. Grade A B1a office floorspace within Phase 1 of the Commercial District; with the surplus capital from the investment sale potentially available for capital investment in line with the NF programme.

## Securing Catalyst Project Delivery

- 6.129 The Birkenhead 2040 Framework (BRF) identified seven catalyst projects. These catalyst projects are required to be delivered to enable and accelerate delivery of the full ambition and scale of change captured within the BRF. The Central Birkenhead NF has a direct interface with all the catalyst projects identified.
- 6.130 The projects range from development projects to infrastructure delivery projects, and each has its own delivery strategy and critical pathway to success. The projects are at different stages of progression – but all are being progressed meaningfully at the time of writing. The BRF sets out the headlines of the delivery strategy for each of the catalyst projects identified – including lead responsibilities, key partner relationships, next steps and critical pathway to securing delivery. It is critical to the NF that these actions are progressed and the catalyst projects are delivered.

## Delivery of Birkenhead 2040 Supporting Actions

6.131 Within the BRF several critical workstreams are identified to progress developments and strategies to support positive investment (public and private sector) across the Birkenhead urban area. These are set out in the BRF action plan, to give an indication of the breadth of actions required and to inform early actions which need to be implemented as early as possible in the programme. It is critical to the NF that these actions are progressed in line with the action plan within the BRF.

### Other Actions:

6.132 It should be noted that no site surveys relating to land conditions or detailed topography have been undertaken to inform the Central Birkenhead NF. Progression of both on a neighbourhood-wide basis would add considerable confidence to the delivery strategy and viability analysis included herein.

## Monitoring Framework

6.133 SMART KPIs will be used to measure performance against the identified objectives. A table is included at Appendix 4 including proposed KPIs aligned with the NF objectives including proposed method for measurement and frequency. Next Steps

6.134 The BRF provides the overall strategy for the regeneration of the Birkenhead urban area and sets the spatial and infrastructure context for the delivery of strategic development and investment accordingly. It enables the prioritisation of public sector intervention and funding and enables positive engagement with the private sector as delivery partners for the ambitions articulated. It is the prospectus for the transformation of Birkenhead.

6.135 When complete the Framework and its NFs will be approved by the Council as the Regeneration Strategy for Birkenhead The Framework and NFs will be 'live' documents. The Council will keep them under regular review to respond to what may be rapidly changing market and political environments and newly identified opportunities and challenges.

# Contact Details

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