



MEOLS DRIVE CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

A Report for Metropolitan Borough of Wirral by Donald Insall Associates Ltd

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

This report has been prepared by Donald Insall Associates on behalf of Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council. Its purpose is to advise on the creation of a Conservation Area, which would protect and enhance the character of the area around Meols Drive and the Royal Liverpool Golf Club. It has been a concern that development pressures are threatening and eroding the aesthetic and historical qualities of the area. The designation of a Conservation Area would provide the Local Planning Authority with additional powers to protect and enhance the areas special characteristics. The preservation of a quality environment would also support Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council's tourism and leisure objectives, particularly in light of the Open Golf Championship coming to the golf course in 2006.



St Andrews Church

1.2 Scope and Structure

The scope of this Conservation Area Appraisal is based on the guidance published by English Heritage and is presented under the following section headings:

2. Location of Study Area.
3. Historical Development.
4. Character Zones.
5. Townscape and Key building.
6. Architecture and Materials.
7. Landscape and Vistas.
8. Negative Factors and Opportunities for Enhancement .
9. Recommended Conservation Areas Boundary.

The Appraisal is supported by the following Appendices:

- A. Historical Plans and Building Age Survey.
- B. Building Evaluation Survey.

2.0 LOCATION

2.1 Location Context (See Plan No. 1)

The study area is located within the north west corner of the Wirral Peninsula between the two urban centres of Hoylake and West Kirby. Both are old settlements which grew as commuter towns during the later 19th and early 20th century, serving the commercial centres of Liverpool and Birkenhead. Hoylake is situated on the North Wirral coast facing the Irish Sea and West Kirby centre lies some 1.5 miles to the South with a promenade frontage overlooking the Dee estuary to the west. The area studied lies between these two town centres and contains two major components: Meols Drive and adjacent residential roads, and the Royal Liverpool Golf Course.



West Kirby Grammar School for Girls

2.2 Study Area Boundary (See Plan No. 2)

The study area is approximately triangular in shape. To the north it is bounded by Stanley Road which leads from Hoylake Town Centre westwards towards Red Rocks point where the coastline turns from west to north facing. The eastern part of Stanley Road is part of the present Kings Gap Conservation Area for which a conservation area appraisal has been previously prepared by Wirral Borough Council. To the west of the study area, the Golf Course is bounded by the coastline of the Dee Estuary and to the east the residential area is bounded by the railway line which leads to Birkenhead and Liverpool. The areas southern limit is Lingdale Road which is off the West Kirby end of Meols Drive. It should be noted that the area that has been studied is slightly more extensive than the area recommended for Conservation Areas Status.

3.0 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

3.1 Early History

Before about 1700 the area now known as Hoylake was principally used as an embarkation point and according to history, William III boarded his ship from there to Ireland, travelling down the road now known as Kings Gap. From the 18th century its use as an anchorage began to decline as the River Dee became difficult to navigate and Liverpool grew and prospered.

3.2 A 'Resort'

Hoylake's second fame came as a health resort during the time when the medical profession began to advise of the health benefits of sea bathing. In 1792, land owner Sir John Stanley built the Royal Hotel to accommodate these visitors. The area's recreational use was furthered by the laying out of a race-course which existed from 1840 – 1876. This was located on open land south of the present location of Stanley Road. Towards the end of this period the first 9 hole golf course was established, adjacent to the racecourse. With the ending of horseracing the golf course quickly expanded with the first Amateur Championship being played in 1885.

3.3 The Advent of the Railway

Perhaps the greatest event critical to Hoylake's future growth was the passing of an act in 1863 that brought about the extension of a railway from Birkenhead to the new terminus in Hoylake. The further extension to West Kirby was opened in 1878. In 1888 connection was made to the new railway under the Mersey to Liverpool thus providing links to one of the countries most important ports and commercial centres. These rail links provided the impetus for the rapid expansion of both Hoylake and West Kirby as late Victorian suburbs. Hoylake grew to absorb the two nearby 'townships' of Hoose and Little Meols.



West Kirby Residential School

3.4 A Late Victorian and Early 20th Century Suburb

Following the advent of the railway the population of Hoylake and West Kirby grew from 3,722 in 1881 to 14,009 in 1911. During this period the area gained much of

its character for which it is now known. Meols Drive, which began to be developed with housing in the 1890s, linked the two townships.. Generally, the initial development consisted of large villas backing onto the Golf Course with slightly smaller detached, semi-detached or terraced houses on the Eastern side of Meols Drive towards the Hoylake Station. The present Club House opened in 1894. The Golf Club is thought to be the second oldest in England.

To support this growing population and the areas growing reputation as a health resort, public and service buildings were erected. These include Lees School (recently demolished), The Children's Convalescent Home (now a Residential School), St Andrews Church, the Hoylake Chapel, the Town Hall, shops, banks and fire station.



Development of Meols Drive in 1894. The existing Conservative Club is on the left of the image.

Houses continued to be built as the 20th century progressed. The area very quickly became a fashionable suburb, providing the latest styles of housing to wealthy people, wishing to escape the bustling and polluted urban areas of Liverpool and Birkenhead for a healthier lifestyle. In terms of building style, the late Victorian villas were characterised by the 'Cheshire style' of timber framing, red brick, and terracotta frequently used by John Douglas, a prominent local architect, who designed many of Chester's most famous buildings. John Douglas in the capacity of his firm Douglas and Minshull may have actually designed some of the houses on Meols Drive as their work can be seen in both Hoylake Chapel and St Andrews Church. During the years between 1900 and 1910 there was a gradual move towards designs more inspired by the Arts and Crafts Movement. Many of the houses of this period are reminiscent of houses seen in the Garden Cities and Suburbs of Letchworth and Hampstead a few years previously. Particular features of these houses were inspired by the ideal of returning to methods of traditional craftsmanship.



The Children's Convalescent Home (now West Kirby Residential School), in the early years after it was built.

Alongside the houses being built around 1910 was the West Kirby Grammar School for Girls on Graham Road in 1912. Slightly later, came most of the housing on Eddisbury Road, predominantly built between the 1st and 2nd World Wars. These were characterised by a return to greater symmetry, simplified detailing and browner shades of building materials. The rebuilt Hoylake Station (c.1938) is, however, of completely different character and is very contemporary for its period adopting the style of the 'modern movement'.

3.5 Later 20th Century Developments

Following the 2nd World War no large scale development took place in the area for some twenty years. The 1970s saw the demolition of the Royal Hotel and its replacement with housing. Recent decades have also seen the loss of some of the large buildings on the west side of Meols Drive as their extensive grounds have become more valuable as higher density housing developments.

Although the vast majority of the buildings in the area are now of no more than about 100 years old, they are of generally of considerable quality and the area presents an important example of a wealth late Victorian and Edwardian suburb.

3.6 The Royal Liverpool Golf Course

The Royal Liverpool Golf Club is the second oldest in England (coming after the Royal North Devon, which is just a few years its senior) and has maintained its royal links since 1871. The Duke of York is currently the patron. The club was instrumental in establishing the game of golf in England and for many years shared equal status with St Andrews. The course is internationally revered amongst golfers and attracts visitors from all over the world. The Royal Liverpool Golf Club remains one of the finest and most prestigious in the country. It has achieved world status by hosting, throughout its long history, the Open Championship 10 times and the Amateur Championship 18 times. The course is due to bring the public spotlight

back to the Wirral in 2006 when the club will again host the British Open Championship.

The course is particularly interesting in that it has retained various features from both the natural landscape and the previous uses of the land. A continuous low mound around the practice ground, marks the location of part of the old race track and many of the holes in the southern end on the course utilise the form of the sand dunes.

4.0 CHARACTER ZONES

4.1 Overview

The area comprises the following character zones: (See Plan No. 3)

Zone A: Meols Drive and Subsidiary Residential Roads

This zone includes the residential properties on Meols drive together with the more minor residential roads to which it is linked. Whilst all have a similar general character, each has particular variations in relation to plot size, building size, building line and style. They also exhibit varying degrees of negative features and issues.

Meols Drive is the area's principal thoroughfare. A wide roadway lined with trees in grass verges. The large residences which characterise the area were constructed between 1871 and 1909 generally to an 'arts and crafts' style which is often highly decorative.

Graham and Eddisbury Road comprise Edwardian housing in an arts and craft style. Those properties on the west side of Graham Road are of a scale which match the size and character of the Meols Drive houses whilst those to the east are smaller. Between Meols Drive and Eddisbury Road's west side is a Tennis Club.

Lingdale Road has large late Victorian detached houses. Those to the North side back onto the golf course and contribute to its boundary setting.

Drumond Road has some pleasant Victorian / Edwardian villas and short terraces which face out the railway line and Municipal Golf Course but they are of varied scale, and the road has a different character to Meols Drive.

Zone B: Hoylake 'Gateway'

This zone forms the entrance to Hoylake town centre and the roundabout marks the northern entrance to Meols Drive. It contains former civic buildings, dating from the early 20th century when Hoylake became the administrative centre for the urban district. Also within this zone are the former Fire Station, Railway Station and two church buildings.

Zone C: West Kirby Gateway

At the Southern end of Meols Drive and Graham Road is a substantial group of educational and church buildings which form part of, and mark the entrance to, the West Kirby centre.

Zone D: Stanley Road

Stanley Road runs along the Northern boundary of the Golf Course. Its Eastern end falls within the Kings Gap Conservation Area. On its South side is a substantial undeveloped section which forms part of the Golf Course. Further to the West on its South side is a fine group of 'arts and crafts' detached houses. The North side of Stanley Road has a mixed range of properties of varying ages.

Zone E: The Golf Course

This is an historic 'links' Golf Course. Along its seaward side, the area is characterised by hillocks which were former sand dunes. The Northern part of the site, once a race course, is now flat. Typically for a 'links,' the course offers a wide, open landscape which has little tree cover, except for some small coppice areas at its edges. Of particular significance is the skyline of the surrounding developments, where the early buildings retain their varied roof lines and garden trees provide a charming backdrop to the course. The newer developments are more dominating and have less visual interest.

5.0 TOWNSCAPE AND KEY BUILDINGS

5.1 Meols Drive Zone

On the west side of the road, the properties are set well back within their spacious building plots, the buildings being closer to the golf course at their rear than to Meols Drive. The house frontages are often obscured from the road by trees and shrubberies in the long front gardens. The houses on the East side of Meols Drive are set further forward within their plot and with their front elevations visible from the road. To the West, the continuity of the residential frontage was always interrupted by the former Lees School on either side of which were areas of underdeveloped land. Parts of this land and other sites of earlier properties now demolished have now been developed with flats and new housing which break with the established pattern. The east side of Meols Drive has not been affected in this way with the most noticeable interruption to the frontage being the Tennis Courts but, established during the 1920s, these should be regarded as part of the areas historic form.

Despite more recent developments (since the 1970s), Meols Drive retains its own strong character with vistas along the road of sandstone and brick garden walls, well kept hedging and wide variety of trees shrubs in almost every garden. The grand houses have interesting roofscapes with elaborate chimneys rising above steeply

pitched tiled roofs with gables, hip and dormers. Each late nineteenth and early twentieth century building exhibits its own unique details, yet, linked by common design approaches, building lines and boundary features, they sit happily with their neighbours.

The most prominent building on the West side of Meols Drive is the Royal Liverpool Golf Club, constructed in 1894. It has a varied roof line and presents multi-gabled elevations of red brick and render. Its interior is equally as impressive, if not more so than its exterior and its panelled rooms and grand hallway and staircase are still as originally created.



79 Meols Drive (left), 85/87 Meols drive (right)

Many of the Meols Drive houses are fine examples of their age and style. Five in particular are noteworthy: 4 Meols Drive (162) is a garden cottage that formerly part of a grand property now demolished. 79 Meols Drive (92) and 85/87 Meols Drive (90) are contrasting in style, but are both particularly good examples of Arts and Crafts architecture, 79 using the skills of parquetry for its first floor panels and 85/87 as a vernacular building with details borrowed from traditional Cheshire design. Numbers 51 and 53 (41/42) are both fine chalet style houses characterised by their highly decorative timber balconies.

5.2 Hoylake Gateway Zone

The former civic buildings present a prominent building group at the north end of Meols Drive at the roundabout junction with Kings Gap. The curved corner buildings are in red pressed brick with decorative fiancé work over the principle entrance. Two stories in height with tall first floor window gables and brick pilasters, they are built to a Jacobean style. Other buildings including the fire station in the group are not identical but have stylistic and material similarities.

Opposite the former Civic buildings is Hoylake Chapel which stands prominently on the corner of Station Road and Meols Drive. The existing church was built in 1906 to a design by Douglas and Minshull. The building was originally topped by a spire, however this was destroyed in the war and not replaced.

The first building on the south side up Kings Gap is the Christian Science Church. Constructed some 30 years ago, this is one 'modern' building in the area which has not sought to integrate by adopting local 'historic detailing'. It is a competent building of its period and perhaps because of this, adds more to the architectural interest and quality of the area than some other more recent buildings.

5.3 West Kirby Gateway

As Meols Drive and Graham Road approach West Kirby, the residential property begins to merge with buildings related more to the towns' centre. West Kirby Girls School on Graham Road is solid institutional building dating from 1912. Styled in a Jacobean mould, it is in dark brickwork with red pressed brick and faience details to windows and buttress below a roofline relieved by dormers, pediment, castellated tower and roof turret.

At the nearby junction with Meols Drive, the West Kirby Residential School, (formerly a Children's Convalescent Home), again is in red pressed brick and 17th century in style. St Andrews Church stands at the entrance to Meols Drive. A late Victorian gothic building with steep pitched slate roof and spire, it forms a major landmark. It was begun in 1889 and completed in 1909. The work was carried out over two phases, the first designed by Douglas and Fordham and the second by Douglas and Minshull. The church is constructed from red Cheshire sandstone with a slate roof.

5.4 Stanley Road

Stanley Road lacks some of the grandeur of Meols Drive but has its own distinct character. Heading towards the sea the left hand side quickly opens up to reveal the golf course. The north side has a mixed range of building quality, types and ages. Further towards the seaward end of the road on the south side is fine group of well preserved early 20th century housing forming an attractive skyline to the golf course. Proceeding down the road towards the sea one final surprise awaits; a splendid Arts and Crafts house called Red Rocks, now used as a nursing home, but very much retaining its original character.

6.0 ARCHITECTURE AND MATERIALS

6.1 Typical features

The residential properties that make up the greater part of the Meols Drive and Stanley Road Zones span a period of approximately 40 years from the 1890s to the 1930s. During that time architectural expression moves from late 'Victorian Tudor' to the closely related an 'arts and craft style'. Building detailing is generally characterised by the following features:

- The high quality and variety of materials, typically red brick, timber framing, pebbledashing, stone dressings, small clay roof tiles, welsh slates, timbre windows and leaded windows
- The high quality of detailing and craftsmanship.
- The variety of design between houses. Buildings on Meols Drive are generally individual and houses on the subsidiary roads are generally at least always variants on a theme.
- The high level of detail, whilst unusually avoiding excessive ornamentation. The later houses built in the 1930s, although much simpler in style, still have strong details such as the arched door openings.
- Consistency of size and massing within a street. Generally neighbouring houses are of a similar height and floor area.
- Generous gardens well planted with trees and shrubs. Very few houses have sacrificed their gardens for car parking. Most houses are at least partially screened on all sides by trees and hedging.
- Original walls to perimeter. Generally of sandstone to western side of Meols Drive and red brick to the east. Most have original gateposts and timber gates also remaining.
- Interesting roofscape. The skyline of the area is characterised by the steeply pitched roofs frequently punctuated with hips, gables, dormers, turrets and highly decorative chimneys.



House on Stanley Road

- The most prominent public buildings within the Hoylake and West Kirby gateway zones are characterised by the use of red pressed brick and detailing evoking stylistic features of the early 17th century ‘Jacobean period’.



No. 53 Meols Drive

7.0 LANDSCAPE AND VISTAS

7.1 A Strategic Landscape

In addition to its localised architectural character, the area has strategic importance and qualities in relation to the wider landscape and townscape of north west Wirral.

Topographically it forms the north west corner of the Wirral Peninsular. Red Rocks, at the west end of Stanley Road, is the point at which the Wirral’s western shoreline turns from the Dee estuary through ninety degrees to face the Irish Sea. The 270 degree views from this point take in the west and north Wirral shorelines and extend along the North Wales and Lancashire coasts. The Golf Course, dunes, and sands across to Hilbre Island provide a landscape and seascape of defining significance to Wirral and are important within the context of the North West’s Irish Sea coastline.

Wirral has not evolved through the outward spread of a single urban settlement. The peninsula’s urban areas have grown in the 19th and 20th centuries with separate identities. The distinction and separation between these ‘townships’ is crucial to the special urban and landscape character of Wirral. The ‘study area’ fulfils a key role in this respect, as together, the golf course and the spacious layout of the tree lined

Meols Drive provide a zone of separation between the urban centres of Hoylake and West Kirby.



Red Rocks

7.2 The Golf Course

The views looking inland from the golf course are defined by The prominent club house building and the surrounding rears of the houses on Meols Drive, Stanley Road and the Kings Gap with their tall ornamented chimneys, pitched roofs and densely planted gardens. In places it is also possible to see beyond this first line of buildings to the spires of the areas churches and to Grange Hall in the distance. Many of these vistas are still much as they were in the early 20th century and retain the original setting to the golf course. Particularly evocative is the scale and massing of the individual houses Stanley and Lingdale Roads with their pitched roofs of varying heights and chimneys of which are highlighted in silhouette. However, at the southern end of the course more recent developments of flats and houses commenced in the 1960s have intruded and eroded the historic character.

From the low dunes which bound then western boundary of the course are views across the sands of the Dee estuary towards Hilbre Islands and the Welsh Hills and coastline.

The overall feel of the space is of a low lying flat landscape of wide horizons. This give skylines a particular significance. It is thought Turner possibly came to the area to paint the particularly spectacular sunsets now often seen across the golf course from the clubhouse.



View from Course towards Pinfold Lane housing.

8.0 NEGATIVE FACTORS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCEMENT

8.1 Overview

There are a number of issues common to the residential zones of the study area. These are outlined in general in terms under the following headings:

Pressure to replace existing housing and develop vacant plots with new developments high densities.

Quality of late 20th century developments

Alteration to historic detailing and materials

Unsympathetic extensions to historic properties

Erosion of historic setting of golf course

8.2 **Pressure to replace existing housing and develop vacant plots with new developments high densities.**

The effect of the dramatic increase in property values in recent years has created a situation whereby the value of a single house on a large plot is significantly less than the value of the plot with planning approval for a residential development at higher density. This effect was reinforced by government Planning Guidance (PPG3) which advised Local Authorities to increase residential densities for new development. A significant proportion of the older properties on the west side of Meols Drive are on

plots which individually or combined could accommodate blocks of apartments. Their value is further enhanced by the golf course outlook from which they benefit. The loss of older buildings and the construction of new developments at higher densities would further erode the historic character both of Meols Drive and the setting of the golf course. The robustness of very recent Regional Planning Guidance, which urges the restriction of new development in West Wirral, to resist these development pressures and the extent to which the guidance will benefit the preservation of the area's character remains to be tested.



The new Leas Park housing development

If demolition and new building to higher densities were to continue unchecked, the long term effect would be to lose the historic spacious character of Meols Drive. Also, eroded would be the separation that Meols Drive currently provides between the urban areas of West Kirby and Hoylake.

8.3 Quality of late 20th century developments

New residential developments that have been constructed within the study area post the 1960s cannot generally be seen to have preserved or enhanced its historic character. This is particularly evident on the west side of Meols Drive. Many of the large single houses fill much of the width of their plots but are relatively narrow in depth. They are typically hidden from the road being set to the rear of the plot behind long verdant front gardens. Almost inevitably, new flat development results in rooflines which have less interest, greater building volume and mass than single dwellings and the loss of frontage lawns and trees to parking and garaging, thus further eroding the area's character.

The recent development of individual houses on part of the site of the former Lees school has produced buildings that exhibit high quality of materials and detailing derived from characteristic styles but the density of the layout and the open plan front gardens produces a significantly different effect to the spacious early 20th century form.

8.4 Unsympathetic extensions to historic properties

Unsympathetic new extensions to historic properties do not generally stand out as a major issue or threat area to the area character. The older buildings are of a design scale and robustness that can absorb minor change without significant loss of character. Particular exceptions are extensions of two stories which have not been designed in keeping or with reference the original. Examples of such do exist on the west side of Meols Drive. Having effectively two public faces, the road and the golf course, any ill considered extension in this area are particularly noticeable.

8.5 Alteration to historic detailing and materials

The maintenance of the original materials are of great importance to the area's historic buildings. There are many examples where these have been changed to the detriment of the individual house design and ultimately to the character of the area. Clay 'heather' coloured roof tiles have been replaced by concrete tiles, original windows by UPVC double glazing. The list is extensive. While the area generally retains sufficient properties which are relatively unaltered for a strong authentic character to still exist, this will be an issue of concern for the future. The future preservation of the architectural character of the buildings that give the area its particular distinctiveness is in the hands of individual owners. Awareness and understanding are obviously a key issues in this respect.

8.6 Erosion and enhancement of the historic setting of golf course

The post 1960/70 developments surrounding the golf course have led to some erosion of its historic character. Particular blocks of flats are unduly prominent when viewed from the links and the roof lines of new buildings lack the interest of the old. The impact of these buildings could be mitigated by perimeter tree planting in strategic locations.

The boundary fences of houses backing onto the golf course have an impact on its immediate setting. This is variable in appearance and there is much scope for enhancement. Where concrete posts have been used these tend to stand out and are obtrusive. Here again planting along the perimeter of the golf course could improve its appearance.

9.0 RECOMMENDED CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARY

9.1 Summary justification

Although residential areas dating from the late 19th and early 20th centuries are not uncommon within Wirral, Meols Drive is special because of its particular architectural quality and its spacious tree lined character. It provides fine examples of wealthy late Victorian and Edwardian suburban housing. It is also of wider significance in that it provides an element of separation between the two centres of West Kirby and Hoylake. At either end of Meols Drive are 'gateways' to the two urban areas within which are located community buildings and churches of some distinction.

The Royal Liverpool Golf Course is significant for its landscape contribution to the north west corner of the Wirral peninsula and because of its historical associations with the early development and organisation of the game of golf. These associations are given expression in the grand and remarkably intact historic club house and also in the layout of the links course which also embodies features from earlier land uses.

Meols Drive and the golf course are linked both historically and physically. The one constructed to take advantage both of the other and the surrounding landscape and seascape. The golf course and the surrounding housing on Meols Drive, Stanley Road and Lingdale Roads provide the setting for the each other and are mutually dependent.

The loss of historic properties which contribute either to the character of Meols Drive or to the setting of the golf course would erode the area's historic significance and townscape value. Conservation Area status would provide the Local Planning Authority with powers to control such demolition and promote the area's preservation and enhancement.

9.2 The proposed boundary

The recommended boundary is indicated on Plan No. 2. Meols Drive and the golf course form the core of the area. The south side of Stanley Road and the North Side of Lingdale Road are included because they contribute directly to the setting of the golf course. Grahame Road is included as it provides the setting of the community and church buildings within the West Kirby 'gateway zone'. The Hoylake 'gateway zone' is bounded by Albert Road the, rear of properties on Station Road, Market Street and Hoylake Station.