

BIRKENHEAD PARK CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL AND MANAGEMENT PLAN

PART 1 – CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

Prepared for Wirral Council by Donald Insall Associates Ltd 2007 – Wirral Council 2009

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PREFACE

Background to the Study

This report has been prepared by Donald Insall Associates Ltd on behalf of Wirral Council. Its purpose is to clarify the designation of the Conservation Area, which will protect and enhance the character of the historic core of Birkenhead Park.

Scope and Structure of the Study

The scope of this Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan is based on the guidelines published by English Heritage ('Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals' and 'Guidance on the Management of Conservation Areas', both dated February 2006) and represents a factual and objective analysis. In accordance with the guidelines, the following framework has been used as the basis for this analysis:-

- Location and population
- Origins and development of the settlement
- Prevailing or former uses and their influence on plan form or building type
- Archaeological significance
- Architectural and historic qualities of buildings
- Contribution made by key unlisted buildings
- Character and relationship of spaces
- Prevalent and traditional building materials
- Local details
- Contribution made by green spaces, trees, hedges, etc
- Setting of the Conservation Area and its relationship with the surrounding landscape
- Extent of loss, intrusion or damage
- Existence of any neutral areas

The document has been structured to encompass these areas of study and concludes with recommendations for the Conservation Area boundary and other matters such as provision of Article 4 Directions.

Existing Designations, Legal Framework for Conservation Areas and the Powers of the Local Authority

Since the 1967 Civic Amenities Act local authorities have been empowered to designate as Conservation Areas those areas within their districts which were considered 'special'. The subsequent Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act of 1990 consolidated those powers and defined Conservation Areas as:-

"areas of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance".

Such areas are diverse. They may be large or small; residential or commercial; civic or industrial; old or relatively modern. They may represent social ideals or civic pride. They may be specifically designed or speculatively produced; modest or grand. They may contain Listed Buildings of architectural or historic interest or may simply have local historic association. However, common to all will be an identifiable environmental quality which should be protected from unsympathetic redevelopment or alteration.

Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council has declared 25 Conservation Areas throughout the Borough reflecting the variety of building styles and environments exhibited within its borders.

The content of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 is clarified by national Planning Policy Guidance (PPG15): Planning and the Historic Environment and is supported by more recent Regional Planning Guidance for the North West (RPG13), which identifies as a key objective the need to ensure active management of the regions environmental and cultural assets.

The principles of these documents are further supported by Wirral Council's local Heritage Conservation policies contained within its Unitary Development Plan.

This legislation and policy framework enables the authority to exercise greater control over development within Conservation Areas and, where appropriate, this may be supplemented by the use of 'Article 4 Directions' to remove permitted development rights. In this way, minor changes, such as window replacement or loft conversions, which may be cumulatively detrimental, can be controlled.

National policy stipulates that local authorities have a duty to review, from time to time, their regions to ensure that places of special architectural or historic interest are being protected. The boundaries of existing Conservation Areas may be revised, new areas may be designated and those areas which have been eroded to the extent that their special character has been lost may be de-designated.

Whilst the Council recognises that, for Conservation Areas to remain 'live' and responsive to a changing society, changes must and will occur, it nevertheless undertakes to ensure that all changes make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of its Conservation Areas and do not result in any serious loss of character or features.

Planning legislation supports the authority in this by increasing its control over development. It does this in the following ways:

- Buildings and structures may not be demolished without formal consent from the Council (Conservation Area Consent).
- Trees are protected and all work to them requires consent from the Council.
- New development is expected to reflect the quality of design and construction of the surrounding area and should make a positive contribution to the area's character.

- Local planning authorities may, if necessary, exercise even greater control by removing the basic permitted development rights of householders.
- Under section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, the Council has a legal obligation to ensure that "special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance" of the area when formulating decisions on planning applications.

The first step to protecting the inherent qualities of a Conservation Area is having a thorough understanding of its character and Planning Policy Guidance PPG15 advises that "the definition of an area's special interest should derive from an assessment of the elements that contribute to (and detract from) it".

This should then underpin local policies for the areas protection. Such a definition requires a thorough appraisal of the area to assess the contribution of each element (e.g. buildings, boundaries, trees, surfaces, etc.) to the areas overall character. PPG15 notes that "the more clearly the special architectural or historic interest that justifies designation is defined and recorded; the sounder will be the basis for local plan policies and development control decisions".

Whilst an appraisal aims to identify the essential elements which give an area its character, it is not intended as a detailed evaluation of each building and feature. Therefore any buildings, features and details may still have importance even though not specifically referred to in the document and any omissions do not indicate lack of merit or interest.

PART 1 – CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

1.0 LOCATION

1.1 GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION

1.1.1 Birkenhead Park is located approximately 1 mile to the north-west of Birkenhead town centre on the Wirral Peninsular. It also abuts the settlements of Oxton and Claughton and it is near to the historic village of Bidston.

1.2 TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

1.2.1 Birkenhead Park Conservation Area slopes gently down towards the docks to the north-east. Within the landscaped area the land undulates with artificial mounds and valleys, particularly around the lake areas. The highest point of the park, at the junction between Park Road West and Egerton Road is at 25m above sea level and the lowest, near the Grand Entrance, at 5-10 metres. The area covering the historical township of Birkenhead is thought to be built on bunter pebble beds overlain with boulder clay, although keuper sandstone is the predominant geologically within the township of Claughton, which is to the south-west of the conservation area.



The Boat House and Swiss Bridge

1.3 GENERAL USAGE

- 1.3.1 The most significant use within the conservation area is the public park, which covers around 2/3 of the land. Much of the rest is residential, consisting of a mix of private individual houses, flats and homes for the elderly. Also within the area are sports facilities, medical centres, day centres and social clubs.

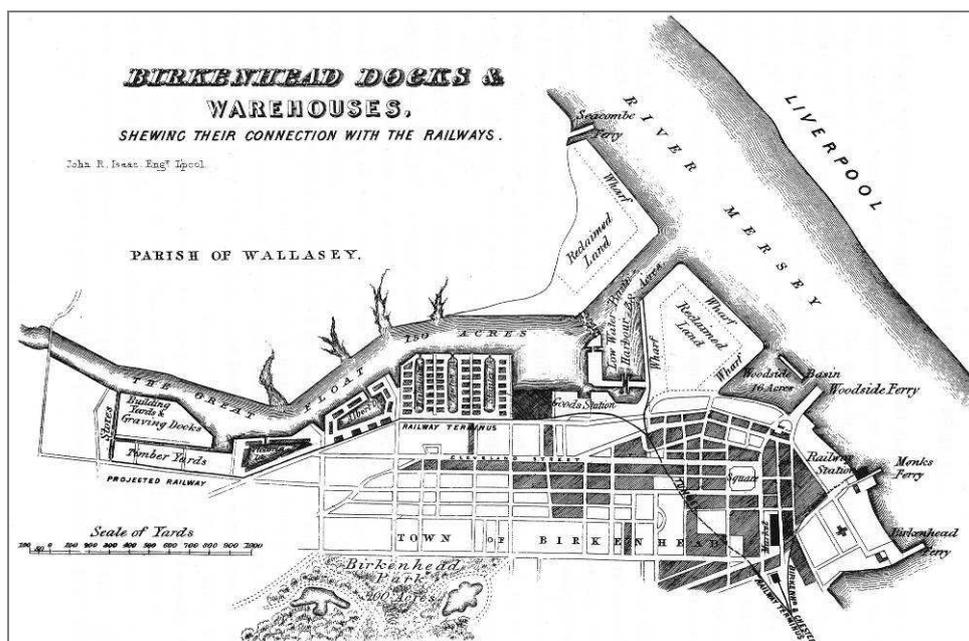
1.4 CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARY

- 1.4.1 The Birkenhead Park Conservation Area is approximately 0.9 miles in length and 0.5 miles in width. The boundary almost exactly follows the original extent of the park scheme, running along the inner edge of Park Road North, East, South and West around its perimeter. The Park is a grade I listed landscape, of international significance.

2.0 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

2.1 EARLY HISTORY AND ORIGINS OF SURROUNDING AREA

- 2.1.1 Before the 19th century Birkenhead had been a small settlement, with a population of around 100. Although the name Birkenhead is of Viking origin, the town itself has relatively little of historical interest before the 19th century; the two notable exceptions being Birkenhead Priory, dating back to the 13th century and the river ferry crossing to Liverpool.
- 2.1.2 During the 1820s, 1830s and early 1840s, Birkenhead grew from a small village to a burgeoning town. Its rise in fortunes being given impetus by its location on the River Mersey and its proximity to the expanding seaport and mercantile centre of Liverpool. Between 1800 and 1830 the population rose from 109 to 2,500. In 1817 a steam ferry service commenced, allowing easy access to Liverpool.
- 2.1.3 In 1824, William Laird, an industrialist who had established an engineering works and shipyard in the growing town, commissioned architect Gillespie Graham to set out grand plans for expansion. Roadways were constructed to a gridiron plan with the intention that new development should be to a grand scale and buildings faced in stone. This vision began to be realised in the building of Hamilton Square which commenced in 1825 and eventually completed around the end of the 1830s. A Town and Market Hall was constructed in 1833-5 (later to be replaced by the present Town Hall in 1883). Much of the wealth of the town came from industries connected with the river. In 1824 Lairds established a boiler works and shipbuilding yard with the main dock complex opening in 1847.



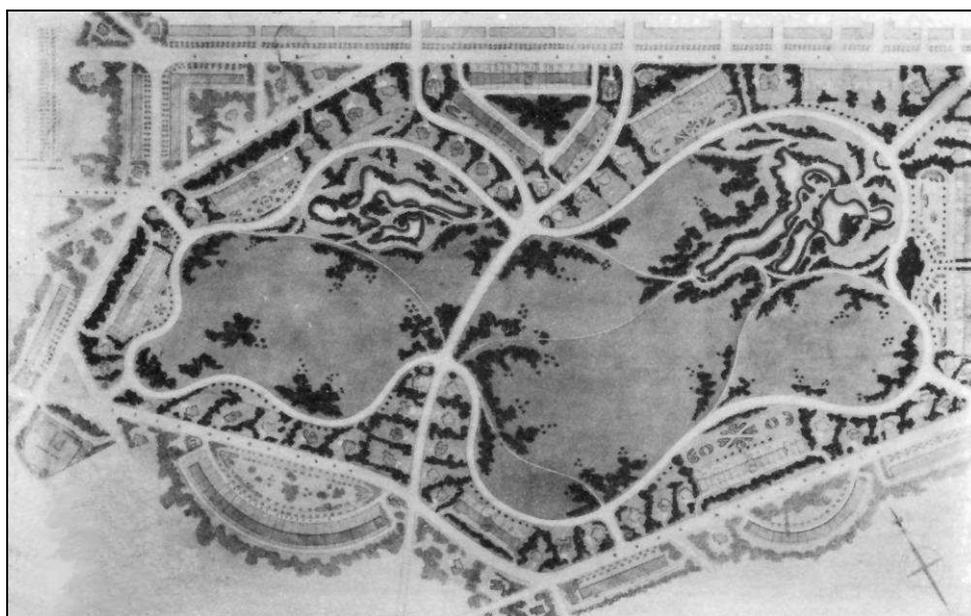
A plan of 19th century Birkenhead, showing the stark contrast between the grid pattern of Town of Birkenhead with the curving lines within the Park

2.2 19TH CENTURY DEVELOPMENT

- 2.2.1 In the 1830s competition between opposing ferry companies brought down the cost of crossing the Mersey and the introduction of steam ferries increased the speed and frequency of the service. Also at this time, work began on the railway line connecting Birkenhead with Chester which was opened in 1840. These improvements to transport links made Birkenhead an attractive place to live for many merchants and businessmen working in Liverpool or connected with the newly established businesses in the town.
- 2.2.2 To supervise the growth and expansion an Act of Parliament was passed in 1833 to establish the Birkenhead Improvement Commission. Many of the commissioners were local merchants and businessmen. A further act was passed in 1841 to supply Birkenhead with gas and water. The following year, in 1842, the intention of the commissioners to purchase land for the construction of a public park and cemetery was announced. In 1843 a further act was passed giving the commissioners of Birkenhead the jurisdiction over the township of Cloughton-cum-Grange and part of Oxtan. Further clauses within the act gave them powers to purchase lands for the improvement of the town, which included the building of houses and the formation of a park, which were commenced immediately. The principal driver of the project was Sir William Jackson, chairman of the Improvement Committee who was also responsible for laying out much of the housing in Birkenhead. He built his residence, Manor House, near to the current Birkenhead Park Conservation Area in Cloughton.
- 2.2.3 At that time, land was still relatively cheap as development had not yet reached the area. The Commissioners of Birkenhead purchased 226 acres, of which 125 were to be allocated for public use. The remainder was to be sold

for the erection of detached villas and terraces and by fixing the rental value of the dwellings at a high standard the respectability of appearance and regularity of design would be ensured. The owners of the houses were to be required to set them at a distance of 25 yards back from the roads and at 60 yards from each other.

- 2.2.4 Joseph Paxton, who was at that time famed as being the landscape designer for the Duke of Devonshire was commissioned to prepare a design for the park. In 1844 Paxton submitted a plan showing landscaped parkland set within an outer belt of housing. The peripheral land was to be divided into 32 plots, which were to be sold off for private development – giving a total of 212 houses. It was the intention that the selling off of these plots of land would help to recoup the expenditure of the construction of the park and its surrounding infrastructure. The works for the landscaping were pushed on with reportedly a thousand men being constantly employed. Paxton was assisted by Edward Kemp and John Robertson (whom he had worked with previously) with local architect Lewis Hornblower commissioned to supervise the building works and design some of the built elements.



The original design for the park layout

- 2.2.5 In 1845 an auction was held for the purpose of selling off the plots of land. However, it was not an entire success, with over half remaining unsold. This reflected the downturn in the economic situation. Paxton was instructed to prepare a further plan of the unsold land that would reconsider how best to maximise the income whilst retaining the beauty of the park. A second sale yielded similar results with many plots again unsold. It was subsequently concluded that the longer terraces that had originally been intended were not popular and therefore the plans were again revised, this time by Kemp and Hornblower, to provide shorter terraces and more villas. Remaining plots were either sold off by estate agents or eventually absorbed into the public area of the Park.

2.2.6 Unlike any other of or before its time, Birkenhead Park had not been laid out by a wealthy land owner with the majority of the general public excluded from experiencing its benefits. It had many of the features of such landscapes; groves, fountains, ornamental lakes, gardens etc. A serpentine drive was laid out, marking the boundary between the public park and the surrounding area allocated for building. The 3 mile drive was provided for equestrian and carriage exercise. The surface of the area had originally been flat and exposed. To combat the effects of the strong prevailing winds and to add visual interest, the clay dug out for the 8 acres of lakes was used to form varied artificial hills. There were originally intended to be 9 lodges around the periphery of the park, although only 7 were ever drawn in detail and 5 subsequently constructed. All of the lodges were to be united in their use of light Storeton stone as their primary building material but were all of distinctly different architectural styles. The Grand Entrance was built on the most prominent position on the main road from Birkenhead. It was built to the classical Ionic order surmounted with a balustrade. Between the arched openings linking the two buildings either side of the entrance were railings and gates ornamented with the armour of the ancient priory. The characters of the other lodges were gothic, Norman, Italianate (with campanile to afford views across the park) and castellated.

2.2.7 The idea of bringing the benefits of the countryside back to the people working in industrial towns and cities was revolutionary and Birkenhead Park was the first of its kind in the world, built by public money for the benefit of all to achieve this. In its early years the ways in which the park was enjoyed were generally in passive activities, with people simply content to perambulate and promenade, meeting friends and enjoying the landscape.



An illustration of the Boat House and Swiss Bridge at the opening ceremony

2.2.8 The Park was officially opened on 5th April 1847. The work had been completed several months previously, but the formal ceremony delayed so as

to coincide with the opening of the new dock complex. Cricket permitted from the time of the park's opening in 1847, but other organised sports were relatively slow to follow. The following shows an indication of the rate of the introduction of sports:

- 1853 – curling allowed on the upper park lake
- 1854 – Cricket club permitted to play quoits
- 1857 – permit system put in place for fishing in the lower lake
- 1858 – plot of land allocated for archery
- 1861 – plot of land set aside for football (previously prohibited)

2.2.9 Improvements and additions continued to be made in the following years and decades to both the park and its surroundings. In 1849 a camera obscura was built affording views across the park for people at ground level. From around 1848 horse buses ran between Woodside and Oxton and later in 1860 the first tramway in Europe was introduced on a similar route, but with the park as its destination.

2.2.10 Following its construction, Birkenhead Park had a worldwide impact on the design of parks and the provision of public amenities. Its most famous and documented influence was on the design of Central Park in New York. The advice of Edward Kemp was sought on the initial ideas for the park and one of the appointed designers, Frederick Law Olmsted visited Birkenhead Park in 1850. A number of Central Park's features can be seen as direct or indirect references to Birkenhead, including the hierarchy of roads, driveways and pedestrian paths.

2.3 20TH AND 21ST CENTURY CHANGES

2.3.1 In many of the decades of the 20th century there were additions and alterations to the facilities within the park as tastes and the popularity of activities grew or declined. In 1921, a palm house constructed in the upper park and in 1929 a new bandstand built. The old one was dismantled and re-erected in Mersey Park in Tranmere.

2.3.2 During the Second World War, one of the ways in which the civilian population was encouraged to help the war effort was to produce home-grown food. As part of this programme, Birkenhead Town Council voted in March 1941 to convert nearly all of the upper half of Birkenhead Park into allotments. Great lengths of railings and objects such as a pair of Russian cannons were melted down for scrap metal.

2.3.3 During the 1960s and 70s there was a decline in investment and council interest in the park. Vandalism and malicious damage increased and many of the features fell into disrepair. The glass houses were demolished in 1971 and the Swiss Bridge isolated and boarded up in 1972. Also during the 1970s Dutch elm disease had a major impact resulting in the removal of all of the elms. In response to these problems, the Friends of Birkenhead Park

was formed in 1976. With the positive momentum and encouragement from the Friends, a lake improvement scheme was undertaken in the same year and the park designated a conservation area in 1977.

2.3.4 By the 1990s a number of isolated schemes were undertaken. A new cricket pavilion was built in 1993 and lengths of the outer perimeter railings were restored in 1995/6 and replica gate posts on Ashville Road installed.

2.3.5 In 1997 planning and development work began on a major repairs, restoration and improvement project. In 2002 a Heritage Lottery Fund was awarded to the park of £7.4million, instigated in partnership with the Friends, which was supported by grants from the other funding partners, European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and Wirral Waterfront (SRB6), of £2m and £245,000 respectively. The following works have been carried out subsequently as part of, or alongside the main park restoration project:

- Construction of a new Park Pavilion
- Employment of a Park Manager
- Drainage restoration
- Lake restoration, Upper Park
- Bank restoration, Upper Park
- Work to mounds, trees and vegetation throughout the park
- Refurbishment to the depot
- Repair/refurbishment of Grand Lodge
- Repair / restoration of the Swiss bridge
- Construction of 2 new 'rustic' bridges
- Repair / restoration of the boathouse
- Repairs to the rockwork
- Demolitions, incl. lavatory block & 'changing room' in Education's sports field
- Works to the Figure of Eight Lake
- Work to footpaths in the Lower Park
- Kerbs in the Lower Park
- St. Mary's pavilion & cricket terracing
- Works to the Pedestrian entrances
- Works to the Boothby Ground
- Provision of a new performance area
- Works to the conservatory site
- Provision of new fencing, including estate fencing, and ornamental fencing and coping.
- Works to the carriage drive, outer paths and footpaths
- Provision of furniture and signage



The new Pavilion

2.4 ARCHAEOLOGY

- 2.4.1 There are records of a Bronze Age socketed axe-head found during the excavations for the new bandstand in 1929.
- 2.4.2 It was reported that possible burial mounds of Norse or even prehistoric origin were dug up and removed in corporation mud-carts in 1892. Their location was believed to be between the plantations to the left of the old refreshment room.

3.0 LANDSCAPE AND VISTAS

3.1 SETTING AND RELATIONSHIP WITH THE SURROUNDING AREA

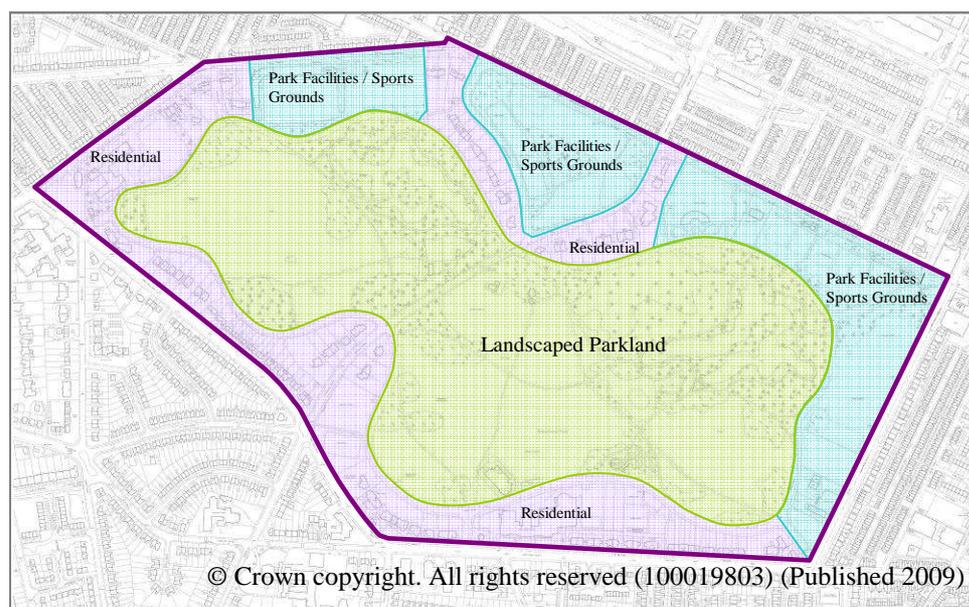
3.1.1 Birkenhead Park is surrounded by residential areas. To the north and east the predominantly open parkland abutting Park Road North and Park Road East is in stark contrast to the dense 19th century terraced housing laid out in a rigid grid pattern. The buildings to the west and south are considerably more varied. There are short terraces of housing, but these are set back from the road with front gardens. Much of the housing in these areas is semi-detached, although grids and patterns of development are regularly broken up with larger houses, villas, schools and care homes.

3.1.2 The northern edge of the park runs parallel to the docks. Most of the housing built between the docks and the park would have been workers' housing. This is in contrast to the other side of the park which would have had the villas of the opulent merchants and businessmen. This contrast in the social status of areas around the park remains in existence today, although to a lesser extent. Although many of the villas within Cloughton have subsequently been demolished and replaced with simple modern housing, the area, particularly around Oxton, is one of the most wealthy areas on east Wirral; this is reflected by the existence of the independent schools.

3.2 CHARACTER AND RELATIONSHIP OF SPACES

3.2.1 The land within the park can broadly be split into 3 different types:

- Landscaped Parkland – the originally intended public park with very few buildings.
- Park Facilities / Sports Grounds – public and semi-public areas – essentially open ground but with buildings and structures providing public or sports facilities. Although much of these areas is landscaped, they are not part of the originally intended parkland and therefore do not have the same level of landscaping or planting.
- Residential – areas of housing and facilities such as schools. Very little public land. Areas divided into individually owned plots.



Plan showing different uses of the land within the park.

- 3.2.2 The area of housing and sports facilities acts as a buffer both visually and in terms of blocking traffic noise to the inner landscaped park. The original or early buildings within the conservation area are set within large gardens and therefore are not visually obtrusive onto the park as they are screened by trees.
- 3.2.3 The curved nature of Park Drive and landscaped pathways means that features within the park are rarely linked by a direct route. This philosophy of landscape design was intended to encourage leisurely ‘perambulations’ and a sense of intrigue and surprise on coming across certain structures and areas. Some of the routes across the park cut through the residential ‘belt’ and are linked to the outside road with a formal entrance with gate posts.
- 3.2.4 Buildings within the park are almost all designed to be double fronted with an almost equal level of detail on both the road and park facing elevations. The relationship of buildings to the park has changed, however, within its recent history as security concerns has led to the installation of high fences which has altered this unusual characteristic.

3.3 VIEWS AND VISTAS WITHIN THE AREA

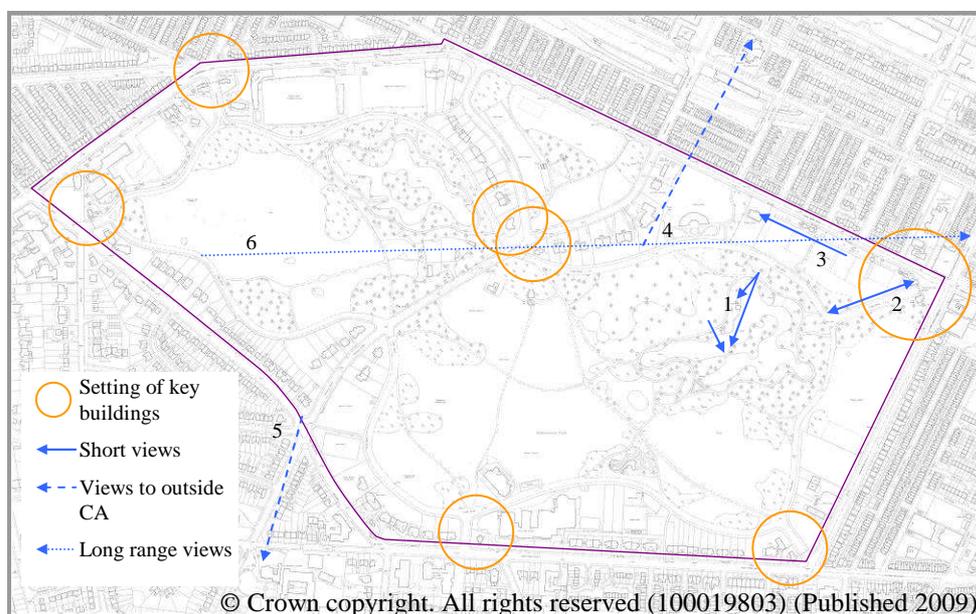
- 3.3.1 Most views and vistas within the park are short range, around the immediate setting of particular features. This would have been the intention of the original design, creating intrigue and suspense instead of the grandeur and awe created by an axial formal layout. The sweeping curves of the Park Drive and footpaths means that only relatively short distances are generally seen at one time. Although there are areas of open grassland, dense swathes of trees generally obscure most structures and buildings from view. Where

buildings are visible, it tends only to be their roofscapes that are seen, except for a limited number of higher buildings. From higher ground the taller buildings in Liverpool are sometimes seen.



View across park towards Liverpool Anglican Cathedral with Hamilton Square Station building further to the foreground.

3.3.2 The map below shows some of the key views within and out of the conservation area:



1. Views of structures around Lower Park lake; 2. Vista between the Grand Entrance and the Jackson Memorial; 3. View across bowling greens towards side of Royden House; 4. Views of spire of St Ann's Church; 5. Views to large former mansion on hill, particularly 'Outwood', now part of St Anselm's College; 6. Long range views to Liverpool

3.3.3 Although the lodges and grand entrance are not seen from a long distance away (as they are of a similar scale and sit along the same building line as

most adjacent buildings), views towards them from within their immediate setting are particularly important as they are critical to the public's perception of the park from its boundary.

3.3.4 On one of the artificial mounds within the park a 'camera lucida' was installed in the 19th century to allow people beneath it to have a view of whole park. This feature has been subsequently been lost.

3.3.5 The setting of the lakes and associated structures (e.g. the Boathouse and Swiss Bridge) are key elements of the landscaped composition, and the views and vistas thus create vital interest within the park interior.

3.4 GREEN SPACES AND PLANTING

3.4.1 The three different types of land described in 3.2.1 can also be used to illustrate the different landscaping characters within the conservation area:

- Landscaped Parkland – Areas of trees, shrubs and grass. Almost all publicly accessible. Landscape designed to create 'picturesque' 'natural' views. Higher density of trees and planting around three areas of water. Some of open areas are used for cricket and for school sporting activities.
- Park Facilities / Sports Grounds – Varied quality and degrees of planting, depending of use of land. These areas are generally open with trees around their circumferences.
- Residential – Most of the larger plots (associated with the 19th century houses) have mature trees and shrubs in both their back and front gardens and with smaller trees and shrubs along their side boundaries. .

3.4.2 The trees and mature shrubs alongside or near the boundaries of houses that face onto roads are critical to the character of the streetscapes, views across the park and character of the conservation area as a whole. The abundance of trees within front gardens in particular is a feature that sets Birkenhead Park apart from most areas in the vicinity. The planting frames the elevations of houses, and in many cases allows only a glimpse of the buildings upper floors. This is particularly important around Park Drive, where the screening of buildings around the perimeter is critical in creating the green oasis without the feeling of being within a built-up area.

3.4.3 The trees and in most instances hedges enhance the setting of a building, however, if planting is allowed to become overgrown, it may hide historic buildings which are key to the visual setting of the park. This has happened in the case of both of the Norman Lodges, which are barely visible from the road.

4.0 TOWNSCAPE AND PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS

4.1 GRAIN, SCALE, REPETITION AND DIVERSITY

- 4.1.1 As part of the agreement during the sale of plots at the time of the construction of the park, it was a requirement that all houses were to be set back from the enclosing roads by 20 yards (18.2m) and at 60 yards (54.9m) from each other. In reality, the buildings were set back at between 10 and 20metres from the road, but their spacing was considerably less than the planned 50m. Despite this, the housing plots around Birkenhead Park are considerably more spacious than the vast majority of built up areas on the Wirral. The large size of the park-facing gardens and the generous lateral spacing is particularly important to allow adequate room for trees and planting which are critical to the character of the area. Whilst the distance to the road varies according to the street, the building line is almost always consistent, without buildings projecting in front of each other.
- 4.1.2 Most buildings are of each 2 or 3 storeys, but with generous proportions and floor to ceiling heights making them much taller than their modern counterparts. The size and massing of buildings is important as whilst they have impact and of a grand scale, they are of a comparable height to the parks mature trees, so there are not unduly visible across the park.



The scale of the historic buildings allows only their roofscapes to be glimpsed over the treetops from limited open areas of the park.

- 4.1.3 All of the original buildings in the conservation area (built within the first 2 or 3 decades of the park's completion) are individual with no direct repetition seen. However, buildings are united by their common materials and similar detailing, possibly as many of them many have been designed by the same architect. The later 19th century / early 20th century buildings have a greater degree of repetition. In these instances the same floor plan was often used with different decoration and features applied to the facades.

4.2 PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS AND FEATURES

4.2.1 The Grand Entrance gateway structure and the 5 other lodges are critical to the park as they represent the image of the park from its outer boundary and entice visitors in. Within the park itself, the most important structures are those which are seen within conceived views and vistas. Of greatest note are the Boat House and Swiss Bridge.

4.3 BOUNDARIES AND SURFACES

4.3.1 The outer perimeter of Birkenhead Park (along the Park Roads) and along Ashville Road appear to have originally had low sandstone walls with high, vertical railings and decorative strolled stays. To the outer perimeter of Park Drive the railings appear to have been generally fixed directly into the earth, without a wall. In both of these cases the current boundary condition is mixed, which long sections missing or replaced with poor quality railings or fencing. It is thought that some of the railings were removed and melted down as part of the war effort. The details of the existing boundaries are outlined further in the appendix to this document.

4.3.2 Around the lakes and other features within the landscaped park, there are estate railings that have been installed as part of the recent works. It is understood that these are similar to the original railings in this location although there is no evidence of this available during the writing of this report. These railings are of a high quality and their unity and the consistency of their colour enhances the appearance of the park.

4.3.3 To each entrance to the park and driveways to individual houses, there would have been tall sandstone gateposts. Some of the original gateposts remain but others have been lost altogether or replaced in reconstituted stone. The gateposts in the park are also covered further within the appendix.



(Left) Original gatepost; (middle) new estate railings and gate around the Lower Park lake; (right) original railings and repaired plinth wall.

4.3.4 There are a number of different surfaces to paths and driveways in the Conservation Area. Pavements around the perimeter would have originally had stone slabs as their surface, but a great number of these have been lost and replaced with either concrete paving or asphalt. Most pedestrian

pathways within the park have a fine compacted gravel finish. All roads are of a modern tarmac finish. Many of the original / early stone kerbs remain, but some have been replaced with modern concrete alternatives. There are some limited areas, such as at the entrance to private driveways or at the lodges, where setts are used as a feature surface. This enhances the setting of the neighbouring buildings and improves the appearance of the streetscene as a whole.



(Left) setts to the front of the Grand Entrance; (middle) compacted gravel to the footpaths within the park; (right) setts and stone slabs to a driveway entrance

5.0 ARCHITECTURE, MATERIALS AND DETAILS

5.1 PROMINENT STYLES

5.1.1 Birkenhead Park has no one overriding architectural style, but is instead characterised by its particular mix of influences. This is epitomised in the design of the lodges each with its own form inspired by a past architectural period. The 19th century buildings can be broadly split, however, into two categories, although there are overlapping elements:

- Classical / Italianate – More associated with the buildings built during the mid 19th century. These buildings are proportioned loosely according to classical rules and adopt features such as cornices and quoins. Many of the buildings have an Italianate character created through particularly projecting cornices at eaves level and in their detail are their openings. Most roof pitches are relatively low and are often behind a parapet. All windows are sash windows and openings are positioned in a regular rhythm across the façade.



Buildings of a classical or Italianate influence

- Vernacular Revival / Gothic – Buildings with details derived from other traditional building types. Influences include Gothic, Jacobean, Elizabethan and Medieval building periods. In contrast to the Italianate buildings, roofs are more steeply pitched and without formal proportions and design rules used. Plan forms are generally more complex and buildings are less likely to be symmetrical. Buildings have a range of different window types and sizes. Gables and dormers are used regularly as features in the design of buildings, and like openings, are shaped to reflect the style of the building. Chimneys are typically more prominent on buildings of these styles.



Buildings of a vernacular revival or gothic influence

5.2 KNOWN ARCHITECTS AND DESIGNERS

- 5.2.1 Park of Birkenhead Park's significance is from the wealth of influential 19th century designers that worked on it. The most famous, Sir Joseph Paxton (1803 – 1865), who designed the layout, initially served as a gardener for the Duke of Devonshire at Chatsworth for 32 years, eventually becoming head gardener. During that time he realised many ambitious schemes such as the Great Conservatory, Emperor Fountain and the famous cascade of 1843. His most renowned work was the Crystal Palace of 1854.
- 5.2.2 The landscaping works in the park were watched over by Edward Kemp, another of Paxton's assistants. Edward Kemp (1817-1891) was a well-known garden and landscape designer responsible for the design of Stanley Park in Liverpool and a number of larger cemeteries, including examples in Liverpool and Manchester. He trained under Paxton at both Chatsworth and Birkenhead Park, making him well respected in the field of landscape design. He laid out the original landscaping of Birkdale Park near Southport shortly after completing the work at Birkenhead in 1848. As Park Superintendent and assistant to Paxton, Kemp watched over the day-to-day construction of the work. He had free accommodation in the Italian Lodge. During his work in Birkenhead, he had numerous commissions for private gardens. In 1859 he commissioned a modest villa, 74 Park Road West. Kemp later went on to design nearby Flaybrick Cemetery in 1861 as well as other projects in the north-west. He continued his role as Park Superintendent for a total of 46 years until his death in 1891

- 5.2.3 John Robertson of Derby was Paxton's architectural assistant between 1839 and 1845. He is probably best remembered for the model village of Edensor at Chatsworth but also probably worked at Prince's Park in Liverpool. He is believed to have designed the lodges at Birkenhead Park.
- 5.2.4 Lewis Hornblower was first involved with Birkenhead Park during a competition in 1843 to design the terraces of houses as featured on the Paxton plan. He was subsequently employed to supervise the building works (as Paxton lived in Chatsworth) and he also designed many of the principal features such as the Swiss Bridge, Boathouse and Grand Entrance. He was a well known personality in Liverpool and Birkenhead and was a freemason with a large circle of friends. At the end of his contract in 1847, Hornblower established his own business in Birkenhead and later Liverpool. In 1867 he drew upon his experiences in Birkenhead to co-produce a design for Sefton Park in Liverpool.
- 5.2.5 Architect Walter Scott is thought to have designed a large number of the earlier private houses in Birkenhead Park. The following buildings may be attributed to him: Canon Mount, 74 & 94 Park Road South, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 57, 59 and 61 Ashville Road and 4-5 Cavendish Road. Although Scott was known to have been a prolific building designer in and around Birkenhead, there seem to be few buildings definitively attributed to him. However nearby Clifton Park (also a conservation area) was laid out by developer Captain William Sharp to a design by Scott around 1840. He is also reputed to have designed most of the early houses. Like Birkenhead Park, the area was intended as an opulent suburb for the wealthy of Birkenhead, providing a more spacious residential environment compared to Hamilton Square and the earlier terraces in the town. The Market Cross (near the tunnel entrance on Cross and Market Streets) in Birkenhead, General Hospital (1862-3), Park Road North and the main building of Birkenhead School (1871) are examples of his larger buildings. His churches include Christ Church, Kings Road, Higher Bebington (1857-9) and an old octagonal church (1861) on the site of the Methodist Church in Tranmere. Other works include Wroxhall Abbey, Irewell Bank and Boughton Hall. Scott's buildings in Birkenhead Park and Clifton Park are characterised by their robust, solid appearance and opulent detailing, but stylistically he was apparently happy to adopt a variety of influenced, using both Italianate and Gothic styles readily.
- 5.2.6 The wealth of influential designers and architects who have worked on the park further adds to its significance and international importance.

5.3 MATERIALS

- 5.3.1 Most of the earliest buildings built within Birkenhead Park Conservation Area are constructed of a buff (probably Storeton) stone with welsh slate roofs. A few of the earlier buildings and the majority of buildings after about 1860 are constructed of red or buff brick, although most of these buildings

have stone details such as dressings and in particular gate posts. Some of the brick buildings have polychromatic details such as at their eaves or around openings or diaper patterns on plain parts of the façade. Red plain clay tiles are used on buildings dating from around the turn of the 20th century. All historical windows and doors are of painted timber. Some of the more ornamented buildings have roofs with fishscale slates. Cast iron was used in the 19th century for metalwork. Occasionally elaborate cast ironwork is seen over bay windows or as a support to canopies. Render is seen generally only on buildings dating from around the late 19th century onwards.



Ornamental cast ironwork and fishscale slates

5.4 TYPICAL FEATURES AND DETAILS

- 5.4.1 **Windows** within the Birkenhead Park Conservation Area often have an exceptional level of architectural detail and are critical to the architectural character and proportions of the historic buildings. The majority of 19th century buildings would have originally have had vertical sliding sash windows. The detail of the glazing and in the surrounding helps give the building its individual character. The varied shape of window heads is a particular characteristic of Birkenhead Park Conservation Area. Windows can have semi-circular arched, straight sided pointed arched, four-centred arched and segmental arched heads. Window surrounds can be simply of a contrasting material (i.e. stone / polychromatic where buildings are of brick) or carved stonework for decoration used in the form of shouldered architraves, entablatures / pediments on brackets or hoodmoulds. Almost all sashes are broken up into smaller panes with glazing bars. The configuration of the glazing bars adds further interest, with various arches also used in the shape of the uppermost panes.
- 5.4.2 The size and configuration of the windows generally varies within the building itself, varying according to the use and hierarchy of the floor or room. Windows are often grouped in pairs or tripartite compositions.
- 5.4.3 With the exception of small windows in the upper storeys, or within dormers or less prominent positions, most other windows that are not sashes are part of a gothic or Jacobean styled buildings. In these instances windows are set well back behind deep carved stone mullions and transoms. The windows themselves are designed to have minimal visual impact, with attention

instead drawn towards the often highly decorative surrounds. They can be simple sashes, casements or fixed lights. In some cases fairly elaborate tracery is seen.

- 5.4.4 Buildings constructed in the early decades of the 20th century generally seem to have originally had timber casement windows, often with leaded opening upper panes.



Windows within Birkenhead Park Conservation Area

- 5.4.5 **Doors and principal entrances** into buildings are often also elaborate. Most of the higher status buildings have covered entranceways in the forms of the vestibule with arched openings or a simpler projecting entablature supported on columns. The gothic or Jacobean influenced buildings often have porches but with steeply pitched roofs, generally set behind a parapet. These porches can be opened or enclosed

- 5.4.6 As with the windows, door openings often have carved stone details to their surrounds or hoodmoulds. They are also often arched, most commonly four-centred. The doors themselves would have been timber painted panelled, almost certainly without glazing, although some have a fanlight above. Many of the doors are shaped to fit the openings and some have carved decoration.

- 5.4.7 Most of the principal entrances into the older buildings within Birkenhead Park have a number of steps leading up to the door. This was presumably to elevate the building to make it appear more important. These steps are generally of stone and often have attractive carved stone or cast iron balustrades.



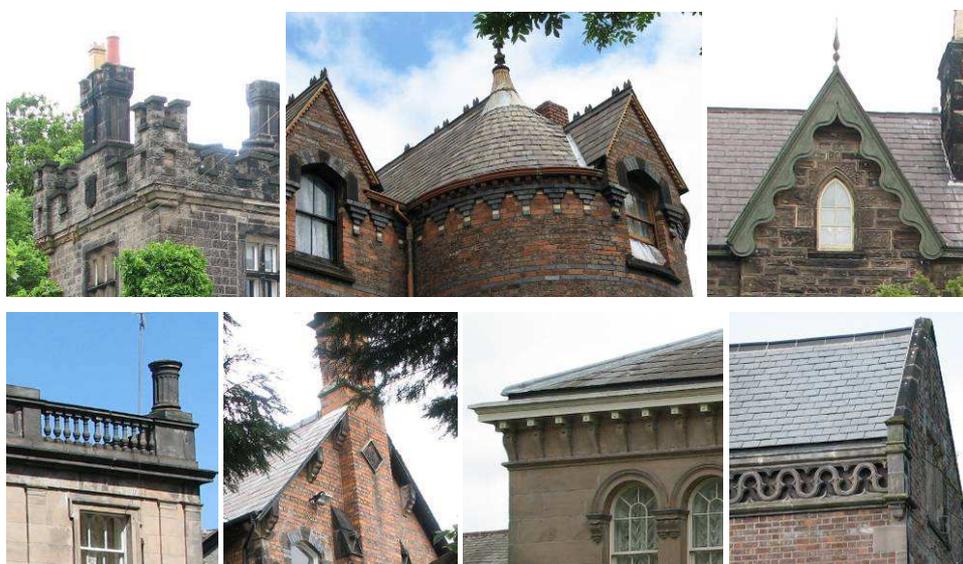
Doors and porches within the Conservation Area

- 5.4.8 Chimneys are important to the conservation area as they add interest and variety to the roofscape seen down the street or across the park over the treetops. Most are quite simple, being of a rectilinear plan form, however, they are elegantly proportioned and are finished with a projecting stone band.
- 5.4.9 Some of the chimneys on the more decorative houses are more elaborate, with individual shaped flues sitting on a combined base.
- 5.4.10 Many of the chimneys within the conservation area have been raised in height, possibly as the original configuration was not adequate to disperse smoke or due to a generic problem with upper areas of stonework.
- 5.4.11 Buildings within the conservation area have a higher than usual number of flues, indicating the number of rooms heated. The large number of chimney pots on buildings is part of their special character.



5.4.12 As with chimneys, eaves, gables and verge details add interest and variety to the roofscape seen down the street or across the park over the treetops. There is little consistency in the formation and style of these features, although they are united in the historic buildings in their quality of detail and opulence of materials, proportions and craftsmanship. To the more classical or Italianate buildings generous cornices are often seen, sometimes including a cast iron gutter to form the uppermost part of the profile. In other instances a parapet wall is used, hiding the slate roof behind and any rainwater disposal, which can be ornamented with crenellations, a carved stone balustrade or be more plain in form.

5.4.13 Carved timber or stone brackets are used widely to support and ornament eaves and verge details. Equally seen on some of the slightly later brick buildings are eaves details featuring rows of canted or dog-toothed bricks, often of a contrasting colour to the rest of the elevation.



Eaves, gable and verge details in the conservation area

6.0 NEGATIVE FACTORS

6.1 OVERVIEW

6.1.1 A study of this nature cannot attempt to highlight every part of the built environment that has a detrimental impact on the character or setting of the conservation area; instead this report summarises the most apparent of examples and key problems within the conservation area as a way of encouraging an understanding and awareness of these issues.

6.1.2 Appended to this document is a plan showing the contribution of buildings to the character of the conservation area. The plan was produced as a tool to gain an understanding of the significance of different parts of the area and to inform as to the appropriateness of the boundary. This plan categorizes each building, or group of buildings into the following groupings:

- A: (Red) – Buildings that are critical to the character of the area: typically these may be landmark buildings and / or buildings with most of their original character retained
- B: (Yellow) – Buildings that contribute positively to the character of the conservation area: buildings may have some alterations but original character is still prominent
- C: (Green) – Neutral - Either modern buildings of little interest or buildings where character has been lost beyond economic redemption.
- D: (Blue) – Buildings that detract from the significance or character of the area.

6.2 RECENT DEVELOPMENT

6.2.1 There have been few buildings built within the conservation area boundary within the past couple of decades. However, where there have been new buildings commercial pressure has often resulted in them being of a greater volume than their neighbours. In the cases of Heyberry Court and Blair Court, the new buildings are highly visible from the landscaped park, changing its setting.



Modern buildings within the conservation area. The left-hand photo is of Heyberry Court and illustrates its considerable visual impact on the park

6.3 UNSYMPATHETIC EXTENSIONS

6.3.1 There are relatively few unsympathetic extensions within the conservation area. The size of many of the earlier buildings perhaps means that they are big enough to generally meeting the user's requirements. However, where a building is extended it is likely to have a greater impact than in many other areas due to the dual aspect of most buildings. The most unsympathetic of extensions are likely to be those that confuse the original form of the building and lessen the overall perception of quality. Good extensions would either use the materials and detailing of the original building or be of a modern design and construction that is of a high quality but adequately contrasting to the original.

6.4 UNSYMPATHETIC ALTERATIONS

6.4.1 There have been significant changes to the original fabric of a number of the late 19th century buildings, which although are not of the quality of the earlier park buildings, contribute to the character of the conservation area, particularly when in good condition. These changes include:

- Replacing original windows, within modern designs and materials such as UPVC
- Changing roof coverings to concrete tiles or replica slates
- Rendering over originally exposed brick or stonework
- Reduction to / changes to / loss of chimneys
- Inappropriate colour schemes – e.g. to the lodge at Cannon Hill.



(Left) photograph showing the detrimental effect replacing roof coverings can have on the appearance of a pair of buildings and the awkward detail it results in at the join; (right) a late 19th century building that is barely recognisable as such as a result of changes including the installation of UPVC casement windows, the rendering of the front façade and the use as concrete pantiles as a roof covering.

- 6.4.2 In particular there have been changes to listed buildings which are particularly detrimental to their significance. Examples include the installation of UPVC windows into the 20-30 Park Road South terrace and the removal of their gate piers. There are also additions such as fire escapes onto the elevations of these buildings.
- 6.4.3 Many of the most unsympathetic of alterations are associated with historic buildings that have been converted to other uses. Converting a single dwelling for multiple-occupancy, unless very carefully considered, results in a number of changes that are detrimental to the appearance of the building and therefore have a knock-on effect on the streetscape. For instance, many of these buildings have a number of additional waste pipes and ventilation grills on their elevation for the large number of bathrooms. There are also often multiple satellite dishes on the facades. Works that generally effect the external landscaping are generally associated with cars or refuse collection. Often the front garden is sacrificed for car parking and often the large shared bins are highly obtrusive.



The effects of multiple occupancy on the park-facing side of Roden House. There are additional waste pipes, vent pipes through the roof, a number of satellite dishes and signage on the building.

- 6.4.4 Fences or modern railings to boundaries change the character of the area and the setting of a building. This is particularly noticeable in the cases of the lodges, where modern fencing with concrete posts is particularly obtrusive to the setting of the listed buildings, which were intended to be visible from 3 sides.

- 6.4.5 Poor quality repairs can have an impact on the character of the conservation area. These can include cementitious pointing and repairs to stonework and temporary waterproofing measured to roof coverings.



(Left) The photograph shows an example of a particularly poor quality repair that is severely detrimental to the appearance of a listed building. The bitumen used to adhere the felt over the ridge (in itself detrimental to the building) has dripped down over the slate, almost certainly cause irreparable damage. (Right) Excessive and probably unnecessary mortar repairs of the face of the stonework.

- 6.4.6 The need to provide security to buildings, particularly within the park areas, is an issue that currently affects the appearance of the conservation area. Shutters are used on many structures, such as the bowling and cricket pavilions. These are particularly obtrusive during non-opening hours, but there is still a metal box above and around windows even when fully opening, often obscuring details around the opening. In some instances windows have been blocked up. To boundaries there is often installed high security fencing, which is generally left unpainted. This adversely affects the perception of quality and safety in the park.

6.5 PUBLIC REALM

- 6.5.1 Standard street signage, safety measures such as railings at crossings, bus stops and sheltered are generally installed on the roads around park, which do not respect or understand its international significance. Similarly, standard concrete paving slabs, tarmac surfacing and concrete kerbstones have all been installed in the conservation area in the recent past.



Standard concrete slab paving, bus stop and unpainted galvanised railings, all compromising the setting of the conservation area and detracting from key architectural elements.

6.6 LOSS AND DEVELOPMENT PRESSURES

- 6.6.1 Appendix E illustrates the 19th century buildings that have been subsequently lost. The losses are not significant, with most of the 19th century buildings still in existence today. A few of the larger villas on Park Road West have been replaced with smaller detached or semi-detached housing or flats, in the case of Blair Athol. In the early decades of the 20th century, the Park High School replaced a large villa (Beechfield) and its extensive grounds. The Royal British Legion Club building on Park Road West originally had an identical or similar pair, adjacent. A few of the smaller structures within the park itself have been removed or replaced. In 2006, the former Great Western Social Club building, also on Park Road West, was demolished. This building was shown on the 1870s map and therefore was one of the earlier park buildings.
- 6.6.2 Although the current council policy restricting residential development on the Wirral to areas within designated zones effectively prohibits new housing within the Birkenhead Park Conservation Area, there potentially remains the pressure to convert existing buildings into flats or even replace older buildings with new residential developments that yield a higher value. In both of these instances, the results, unless very carefully managed are likely to be detrimental the character of the area, for the reasons described in previous sections.
- 6.6.3 Whilst the area within Park Drive is likely to remain sacrosanct as a landscaped park, the other areas within the perimeter that are used for recreational purposes, or may be in private ownership may have a greater level of threat from development pressures in the future, which may need to be resisted if the visual character of these areas a green spaces is to be preserved. There are a few, fairly small, vacant sites in the conservation area for which a future use has not as yet been determined.

7.0 SUMMARY OF SPECIAL CHARACTER

7.1 The following is a list of features that are part of Birkenhead Park Conservation Area's special character:

- Landscape, structures and buildings by highly influential / well respected designers Paxton, Kemp, Hornblower and Scott.
- Revolutionary concept – the first park to be built by public money for the benefit of all.
- Design subsequently had a worldwide influence – for instance, having a direct impact on the design of Central Park, New York.
- Design of park to encourage 'perambulations' and an escape from the surrounding built-up areas, with trees screening most buildings.
- Sense of intrigue and suspense created by sweeping curve of paths and driveways.
- Higher intensity of planting around man-made lakes.
- Original buildings within generous plots, allowing plenty of space for trees and planting.
- Grand scale of original buildings, but height limited so that they are not unduly visible from the park.
- High quality cast iron railings and sandstone walls around much of perimeter.
- Areas of stone setts to driveways and hard landscaped areas.
- Mixture of architectural styles.
- Earliest buildings generally built of buff sandstone with slate roofs.
- Other and later buildings of red of buff brick. Mixture of slate and plain clay tile roofs.
- Mixture of sash and casement windows, depending on style of parent building.
- Elaborate porches and door / window surrounds and decoration – mostly of carved stone but some of polychromatic brickwork.
- Elegant chimneys.
- Decorative eaves, gables and verge details.
- Many listed buildings and terraces, several unlisted buildings of high quality and with relevance to the historic development of the park.