



WELLINGTON ROAD CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL AND MANAGEMENT PLAN

VOLUME 1 – CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

Prepared for Wirral Council by Donald Insall Associates Ltd, Final Draft October 2008

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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 Wellington Road, New Brighton.

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 24 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 region's environmental and cultural assets.

The principles of these documents are further supported by Wirral Metropolitan Borough 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 area's 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 Wellington Road is on the north-west facing shore of New Brighton which itself is located on the north-eastern corner of the Wirral Peninsula. It is part of the larger settlement of Wallasey which includes also Liscard, Egremont, Seacombe and Poulton and is separated from Birkenhead by the docks to the south. To the west lies the lower lying, open land of Wallasey and Leasowe.

1.2 TOPOGRAPHY

- 1.2.1 This area of New Brighton is formed by a series of ‘shelves’ of land rising progressively from north to south. The coastal fringe is a sandy beach, inland from which is the Marine Gardens area, constructed on stabilised sand which was still open shore up to about 100 years ago. Behind this is a line of shallow cliffs, about 20 metres in height formed of red and yellow sandstones. At one point there is a series of north facing eminences called Red Noses and Yellow Noses, reflecting their form and rock colour. Wellington Road runs east-west along the level ground at the top of these shallow cliffs and the land rises further to the south eventually reaching about 50 metres above sea level.

1.3 GENERAL USAGE

- 1.3.1 The Wellington Road Conservation Area is almost entirely residential with the exception of the lifeboat station and a small number of buildings associated with the recreational uses found within King’s Parade Gardens and Marine Park.

1.4 CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARY AND STATUTORY DESIGNATIONS

- 1.4.1 Wellington Road was designated as a conservation area in 1974
- 1.4.2 The form of the conservation area is a long rectangle running approximately east-west. The north boundary follows the line of King’s Parade, which is the main road along the foreshore, although it is set back from the breakwater by a pedestrian promenade and open degraded land. The southern boundary follows the centre line of Wellington Road with one small section cut back so as to take in the late C19th residential development of Marine Park Mansions. The narrow east boundary is the eastern edge of Marine Park abutting Rowson Street, whilst to the west the boundary turns south from King’s Parade to include Red Noses and part of the woodland adjacent to The Cliff.

- 1.4.3 The area includes 9 listed buildings, 10 individual or group Tree Preservation Orders and 3 areas designated as urban greenspace.

2.0 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

2.1 EARLY HISTORY AND ORIGINS OF SURROUNDING AREA

2.1.1 New Brighton did not exist as a separate township in the medieval period, being at that time part of Liscard. The manor of Liscard, which is not mentioned in the Domesday Survey, first occurs in the *feodary* of Halton at the time of Edward I when, under the name of Listark, it was held by Richard de Aston under the barons of Halton. It then passed to the family of Melas or Meolse who had previously been tenants of the Astons. The last of the Meolse family who died without heir in 1739 bequeathed the manor to the Houghs. It was then sold by the executors of that family to John Penketh whose daughter and heiress married John Dennil Maddock. (Mortimer 1847).

2.1.2 The area appears to have remained more or less completely undeveloped until the early C19th, and consisted of sand dunes and heathland. Development in this area of the Wirral began to appear along the Mersey shore and around the ferry landing at Egremont in response to the increased commercial and residential developments in Liverpool opposite.

2.2 19TH CENTURY DEVELOPMENT

2.2.1 The earliest buildings in the north east corner of the Wirral Peninsula appear to have been connected with shipping activity on the Mersey. There is a complex of shifting sandbanks where the river emerges northwards past the land mass of the Wirral and it was found necessary to mark their location to avoid ships coming aground. Perch Rock lighthouse was built in 1827 to succeed a wooden marker pole surmounted with a fan-like timber structure known as 'the perch'. The lighthouse was designed by John Foster Junior, the Liverpool Corporation surveyor of the day.

2.2.2 Just inland of the Lighthouse is Fort Perch Rock, a low sandstone sea fort, built between 1826 and 1829 to designs by Captain John Sykes to protect the entrance to the Mersey. It was equipped with 32 pounder guns on iron traversing platforms. The fort also contained furnaces for heating shot. Although built in the early 19th century, the fort has more of a 16th century appearance.



The lighthouse (l) and Fort Perch Rock

- 2.2.3 With an eye to commercial opportunity, James Atherton, a Liverpool Merchant, in 1830 bought 127 acres of land at the north end of the township of Liscard on which to establish an area of new residential development. The originator of the name ‘New Brighton’ is not clear but it was obviously an attempt to reproduce in the north west the fashionable town of Brighton, Sussex, which had flourished in the Regency period. The town was conceived as ‘The sea-bathing rendezvous *par excellence* of the Lancashire people of note.’

Mortimer writes that Atherton:

‘conceived the magnificent design of founding an extensive watering place in the north east angle of this township (Liscard), and in furtherance of his plan purchased one hundred and seventy acres of that which was then a mere heap of sandhills; but nature so far as regarded scenery and local attractions, had done wonders towards the adaptation of the ground to the purposes of a marine residence. Rising out of the sea by a succession of lofty ridges it offered an inducement for the erection of villas, retreating one above another, without the view from the upper ranges being in the slightest degree intercepted by the houses below them. The convex, semicircular form of the coast, presenting one front to the Mersey and another to the open sea, ranging eastward over the town of Liverpool, Waterloo, Formby, Blackcombe (Blackpool?), and even to the Old Man of Conistone, and westward to the Ormsheads, the Welsh mountains, and a part of Cheshire and Flintshire, embraces a field of vision truly grand and picturesque, to which must be added on the north, all the variety arising from the numerous vessels and craft of every description that are continually passing, as they enter or depart from Liverpool.’

- 2.2.4 The tithe map of about 1840 (Appendix E1) shows a notional grid of streets running eastwards from the Mersey estuary and southwards from the northern shore. Some of the plots had been developed by this time, particularly those along Wellington Road, parallel to the northern shore but much of the land remained vacant. Reference to the award accompanying the map shows that the land was largely open heath, dunes or sandhills. The map shows about 12 new houses in Wellington Road, including Cliff Villa, standing in its own extensive grounds at the western end of the road.

- 2.2.5 The parts of the development which faced the sea seem to have proceeded relatively quickly but the inland plots were taken up more slowly. The Ordnance Survey map of the 1870s (Appendix E2) still shows extensive areas

of vacant land. The development which had then been completed was in three bands – that along the shore on Wellington Road, a parallel band further south and higher up on Montpellier crescent, Albion Street and Church Road, and the houses on the highest land – St James’s Road and St. George’s Mount. St James’s Church on Victoria Road, one of the streets just south of Wellington road is from 1854-6 by George Gilbert Scott.

2.2.6 Towards the end of the 19th century, the development of New Brighton accelerated and was given particular impetus by the arrival of the railways, making the area within easy reach of the Liverpool metropolis. The long planned Mersey railway tunnel opened to trains in 1886 and New Brighton station was opened in 1888. This increased greatly the number of day visitors to the town.

2.2.7 However, it appears that the development was not going according to the original plan. The working classes were colonising a district which had been intended for the exclusive use of members of the bourgeoisie and industrial aristocracy. The local historian Ellison writes rather loftily:

‘A few years later an ugly terrace of cheap lodging houses was built and the sands were disfigured by tawdry sideshows and the like. Degeneration set in quickly and the place slid down the social scale until Sulley could write in 1889: “Along the shore is a narrow, unsafe promenade, called Aquarium Parade, but perhaps better known as ‘Ham & Egg Terrace’, the favourite resort of the Liverpool and Lancashire trippers and roughs.... Here are stationed the eating house and refreshment room keepers, whose constant solicitations to dine early and often are such a nuisance.... With more visitors and fewer trippers, New Brighton would be more flourishing.”



Postcards showing holidaymakers in about 1900

2.2.8 The end of the 19th century saw a boom in the number of visitors to New Brighton. The entrepreneurs of the town responded by increasing the attractions and leisure facilities available. The period of 1897- 1900 saw the construction of the New Brighton Tower, designed by Maxwell and Tuke, who had just completed Blackpool Tower. The New Brighton tower was over 100 feet taller than Blackpool’s and must have formed a striking landmark from both land and sea. The tower boasted a ballroom, gardens, an ‘Old English Fairground’, a theatre seating 3,500, a roller skating arena and a stadium which was used for ‘Wild West’ shows.

2.2.9 At the beginning of the 20th century, however, the town seemed to begin to lose its way. Was it to become a select resort for the wealthy, or a paradise for the working man eager to spend his hard-earned wages on one of his few annual holidays? Those who favoured the former course supported the New Brighton Improvement Association which aimed to build new gardens, to demolish the Ham and Egg Parade and to ban undesirable behaviour. In an effort to improve the standards and quality of the attractions for visitors the local council stepped in to carry out improvements. In 1905 the Ham & Egg Parade was purchased by them and demolished to make way for a new promenade. This was set out on reclaimed land to the west of the approach to the Fort Perch Rock. There was (and still is) a marine lake, the Marine Park with bowls and tennis and further along again the King's Parade Gardens providing further gardens, tennis and bowls areas.

2.2.10 An ironic letter appeared in the Wallasey News in 1912:

'Our aim is to make New Brighton a place of restful gardens and sweet music, a sort of threshold to Paradise, where candidates for celestial glory could come and exercise their embryonic wings.'

2.3 20TH AND 21ST CENTURY CHANGES

2.3.1 Following this major reclamation programme, shown on the OS map from the 1930s (Appendix E5), by which the permanent shoreline was effectively moved northwards by about 150 metres, one of the most significant developments was the construction of the New Brighton Bathing Pool. This was completed in 1934 on land opposite Marine Park. With the increase in popularity of leisure bathing and also swimming as an organised sport, the number of lidos proliferated in the early 20th century and a pool was regarded as a necessary asset for any self-respecting resort.

2.3.2 New Brighton's pool was, at its time, claimed to be 'the largest aquatic stadium in the world.' It was in a classic art deco design with low horizontal lines, sweeping curved corners and an internal south facing sun terrace.



2.3.3 The statistics of the pool are impressive. The actual bathing pool was 100m x 68m (i.e. 16 laps to the mile compared with 64 for today's average leisure pool). The average water depth was 1.5m, extending to 4.5m in the diving

area. The top diving board was 10m above the water, the lower one at 3m. The pool could hold 4000 bathers and some 20,000 spectators. The adjacent marine lake was used as a storage and settlement tank in conjunction with the filtration of the salt water. During the first month of opening 350,000 people were admitted of whom 87,400 were bathers. The pool was the scene for the Miss New Brighton contest which ran for 40 years from 1949.

- 2.3.4 Sadly, the end of the pool came in February 1990 when hurricane winds of over 100 mph caused the sea to surge and undermine the foundations of the north west corner of the pool, causing the upper structure to cave in. With an estimated repair cost of £4 million it was decided that the only option was demolition and the site was cleared by Merseyside Development Corporation in the summer of 1990.



Marine Park Gardens and Mansions viewed across the site of the former pool

- 2.3.5 Within the conservation area, the major early 20th century development was the construction of Portland Court on the site of Ewart House in 1938-39 designed by Herbert Thearle. This is a brick faced, seven storey apartment block with long bands of windows at each level and with concrete balconies at the north and south ends
- 2.3.6 To the west, and immediately outside the conservation area is the Cliff Estate, on the site of Cliff Villa. The apartments here are in two, sixteen storey concrete faced tower blocks.

2.4 ARCHAEOLOGY

- 2.4.1 The Historic Environment Record contains details of a prehistoric flint working site on the promontory known as Red Noses, as well as a historic site associated with the cave at Yellow Noses formerly accessible from Rock Villa. This contains incised dates and initials, the earliest being 1619, but is now sealed. The remaining HER records for the area relate to recent listed and other buildings.

2.5 **HISTORICAL ASSOCIATIONS**

- 2.5.1 Towards the west end of Wellington Road, on a stone pier on the north side of the road is a ceramic plaque commemorating the fact that the inaugural meeting of the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association was held in the adjacent house. Whilst this is not of townscape significance it part of the local distinctiveness and the commemorative plaque should be preserved.

3.0 LANDSCAPE AND VISTAS

3.1 SETTING AND RELATIONSHIP WITH THE SURROUNDING AREA

3.1.1 The setting of Wellington Road is quite open. To the north are the foreshore and the sea; to the west the land simultaneously drops and the coast curves back, so this area, adjoining Leasowe is also open. The ground rises to the south, leading into the main part of the town of New Brighton, whilst to the east there are the buildings of the promenade, giving way to the Mersey shoreline. The buildings to the east, south and west provide some sense of enclosure but views tend to be open and long distance.

3.1.2 The road lies along the north edge of the urban area. So whilst to the south, and to a lesser extent to the east, the land is mainly in residential use, to the north and west the open, lower lying ground reclaimed from the sea is predominantly used for recreational purposes.

3.2 CHARACTER AND RELATIONSHIP OF SPACES

3.2.1 The land within the conservation area is at two main levels – Wellington Road itself at the upper level, with the green areas off King's Parade at the lower level.



King's Parade Gardens in the foreground with Wellington Road houses at the higher level and rising ground behind

3.2.2 The first visual component Wellington Road has a rather open urban character, with substantial properties set back from the street, but also a number of large trees. The buildings generally are of one or two storeys, but Marine Park Mansions, Portland Court, and Cliff Villas are much taller, giving a variety of scale.

- 3.2.3 The lower level recreation areas, which comprise the second component are more or less completely open, and unbroken visually by the north end of Portland Street. They are enclosed on their north edge by a fenced wind break of low trees and shrubs, and to the south by the low cliffs and boundary walls of the Wellington Road properties. Good views are obtained of the whole grouping and variety of the Wellington Road villas and Portland Court from these areas and the open land towards the sea wall
- 3.2.4 The pedestrian and vehicular links between these two main character areas are provided by the three north-south streets of Rowson Street, Atherton Street and Portland Street, all of which climb steadily from about sea level to the head of the inland ridge parallel with the shore.
- 3.2.5 At the east end of the conservation area the third visual component, Marine Park, is a small rectangular late Victorian formal park. It is enclosed by low walls and railings, with wind break shrub planting, wooden fencing and a vestigial shelter on the north. The park contains a pavilion, paths, formal flower beds, a bowling green and tennis courts. The northern part towards Kings Parade is level, whilst the southern part, with geometrically laid out pathways, rises gently to the retaining wall, railings, entrance and viewing platform on Wellington Road.



Marine Park Gardens

3.3 VIEWS AND VISTAS WITHIN THE AREA

- 3.3.1 On Wellington Road the views are largely confined to those along the street itself and along the side streets. West of the Portland Street crossing the view to the west is dominated by the slab of Portland Court and the towers of the Cliff. The properties and their boundary walls generally close off the views out to the sea although the sense of enclosure is less towards the west end beyond Portland Court. From the side streets it is possible to gain elevated views to the north over the Mersey Bay with its shipping lanes across the low lying land behind the sea wall. Views up the side streets attest to the first scarp position of Wellington Road; the second escarpment beyond is dominated by villas and modern developments taking advantage of even more elevated views.



(left) West view along Wellington Road; (right) View down Portland Street and out to sea

3.4 GREEN SPACES AND PLANTING

- 3.4.1 The two principal formal green areas are the Victorian Marine Park and the 1930s King's Parade Gardens. Other green areas are the small wooded area adjacent to The Cliff and the grounds and gardens of individual houses.

Marine Park

- 3.4.2 Marine Park was laid out in the late 19th century to a symmetrical design with a central avenue facing the sea. Following the slope of the land, it rises to the south in a series of terraces. Originally the lower level, as shown on the 1890s map, seems to have been a series of lawns or beds with a formal layout of diagonal paths either side of a central feature – an island bed, statue or fountain. This was all backed on the south side by a formal screen of trees and the enclosing boundary retaining wall and fence.
- 3.4.3 By 1910 a central bandstand had appeared and a shelter is indicated at the west end.
- 3.4.4 The 1930s map shows that the lower part of the park had been reconfigured to its present form. There is a central wooden pavilion; to the west are bowling greens, while to the east are tennis courts.
- 3.4.5 The dense shrub planting on the north and windward side backed by timber fencing and integral shelter, combined with the rise in level, mean that the park is largely invisible from the promenade area, however it relates much better to Wellington Road itself as there is a more open boundary.

King's Parade Gardens and sunken triangular grass area

- 3.4.6 These are shown for the first time on the 1930s map, being on stabilised reclaimed land. They are bounded on the north side by King's Parade itself which is at a slightly higher level and acts as a barrier between the Gardens and

the sea. The Gardens are to the west of Portland Street, and appear sunken but this is probably because the roads have been built up using imported material.



(left) King's Parade Gardens putting green; (right) Open play area and embankment to road

3.4.7 The triangular area to the east of Portland Street is simply grass, more obviously sunken, and bounded on the north by a windbreak belt of shrubs, and on the south by the service road to the Wellington Road properties.

3.4.8 The main part of the Gardens is a D- shaped area in front of Yellow Noses and contains open grass, bowling greens, tennis courts, a putting area and a small modernist entrance pavilion in the centre of the north boundary. The gardens are fenced on the three main sides, with entrances on the north and east.

3.4.9 At the west end of Wellington Road is a small area of semi-natural woodland, formerly part of the grounds of Cliff Villa. This is mainly of sycamore with a fairly open ground layer so that there are a number of walks through.



(left) Woodland near The Cliff;(right) Mature trees in gardens

3.4.10 The gardens of some of the older properties, particularly towards the east end of Wellington Road contain mature trees, mainly sycamore, which are more tolerant of a marine environment.

4.0 TOWNSCAPE AND PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS

4.1 GRAIN, SCALE, REPETITION AND DIVERSITY

4.1.1 Although the conservation area is not large, and contains only a relatively small number of buildings there are four identifiably different forms of development. These are:

- § the four storey terrace,
- § large detached villas,
- § single or two storey villas merged into terraces, and
- § the 1930's apartment block.

4.1.2 The terrace known as Marine Park Mansions dates from the 1890s and is constructed of brick under a slated roof with projecting polygonal sandstone bays and a mock timber framed third floor. The fourth floor rooms are in the roof space and are lit by large north facing dormers (a later alteration). The ground floor level is slightly elevated above the road and the building is set back so there are small paved 'gardens' in front enclosed by railings between brick piers. The terrace presents a very solid face to the road and is not typical of the rest of the street as further properties on this side are half the height and set much further back. The Mansions are built in response to Marine Gardens opposite as the gardens provide an outlook for the apartments and their presence avoids the potential for overlooking which would occur if there were residential properties opposite.



Marine Park Mansions

4.1.3 There are two large mid 19th century detached villas – no 24, next to Marine Park and Redcliffe on the corner of Atherton Street. These present two storeys to Wellington Road but have a lower storey on the north façade. They are set

back approximately 15m from the frontage and stand in their own extensive grounds. Architecturally they are quite different as no. 24 is a late-Regency stucco finished house of classical proportions and detailing, whilst Redcliffe, from 1845 is in Victorian ‘Tudor’ style being of red sandstone with parapets and gables to the roof with multiple clustered chimneys and stone mullioned windows.



24 Wellington Road (l) and Redcliffe

4.1.4 The most unusual features of the street are the two blocks of single storey, or modest two storey stucco villas from about 1835. They appear from the Tithe Map (Appendix E1) to be individual properties which have coalesced as a result of the construction of annexes and infills.

4.1.5 The houses have front gardens enclosed by walls or attractive Gothick style cast iron fences (which are listed) but the properties are relatively open to view. They are set 10 – 15m back from the pavement line, and the frontages are subtly broken up by forward facing gabled wings, bays or conservatories.



28 / 30 Wellington Road (l) and 42 Wellington Road

4.1.6 In complete contrast to the first three types is Portland Court, the seven storey apartment block from 1939. It is a tall, linear block running on a north-south axis at right angles to the street. It has the effect of dividing the development on the north side of Wellington Road into two, separating the few 1830s houses to the west from the majority to the east. Although it has architectural interest as an individual building, to be reviewed later, it does not respect the townscape pattern of the street and disrupts its scale and continuity.



Portland Court

4.2 PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS AND FEATURES

- 4.2.1 Within the conservation area the dominant buildings are Marine Park Mansions and Portland Court, at opposite ends of Wellington Road. The west end of the conservation area is, however dominated by the two blocks of the development known as The Cliff, just outside the conservation area boundary.
- 4.2.2 The principal buildings, and the reason why Wellington Road was designated a conservation area, are the early to mid 19th century buildings on the north side of the road. They form a striking and distinctive group of buildings, very different in character from all others in the locality.
- 4.2.3 The other principal features are Marine Park with its trees and enclosing walls at the east and the sports facilities of King's Parade Gardens.

4.3 BOUNDARIES AND SURFACES

- 4.3.1 Marine Park Gardens are enclosed by cast iron fencing panels over a low brick wall which are well designed and form an attractive but open feature. On the Wellington Road side of the gardens the fence is largely unobstructed and so there are views across the gardens. In one or two places vegetation is beginning to encroach onto the fence and has potential to cause damage and so should be reduced or removed. The gardens have imposing gates and piers facing onto Rowson Street.
- 4.3.2 Many of the 19th century properties on Wellington Road have cast iron decorative fencing, some with accompanying gates of matching design. These are all listed but they are in varying condition.



Fences at Marine Park Gardens (l) and fence to a Regency house

- 4.3.3 Kings Parade Gardens are enclosed by conventional ‘loop top’ fencing which is regularly maintained. However to the west end there is an extent of utilitarian grey diamond mesh fence which detracts from the environment.
- 4.3.4 Some of the older houses have sandstone wall front boundaries, one with brick and ornamental terracotta. Houses and gardens along Portland Street are bounded by high sandstone walls of varying condition, in some cases the walls form the structures of the properties. Occasionally, vehicular access for car parking has been created by the partial demolition of front boundary walls. These have an unfortunate effect on the street scene and disturb the continuity of the front boundaries and pavement surfaces.



Boundary wall in brick and terracotta

- 4.3.5 Road surfaces are mainly standard tarmacadam, some of which has large aggregate rolled in to give some relief from uniformity.
- 4.3.6 Pavements have a more varied palette of materials. The footpath on the north side of Wellington Road which is constructed of large sandstone slabs with the addition

of small granite setts at vehicle crossings, locations of seats and at turnings. There is a small area of patterned brick units in one location. Just outside the conservation area, on the south, and in the area of King's Gardens the pavements are surfaced with concrete slabs, which are in limited areas coloured pink.

5.0 ARCHITECTURE, MATERIALS AND DETAILS

5.1 PROMINENT STYLES

5.1.1 Wellington Road has no one overriding architectural style, but is instead characterised by its particular mix of influences. The 19th century buildings can be broadly split into two categories:

§ Classical / Italianate – These buildings are proportioned loosely according to classical rules and adopt features such as cornices, quoins, pilasters and ground floor rustication. Many of the buildings have an Italianate character created particularly through projecting cornices at eaves level and in their detail around openings. Most roof pitches are relatively low and occasionally behind a parapet. Windows are generally sash type and openings are positioned in a regular rhythm across the façade.



Buildings with 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 Classical / Italianate buildings, roofs are more steeply pitched and elevations have fewer formal proportions and rules of design. Plan forms are generally more complex and buildings are less likely to be symmetrical. Gables with decorative bargeboards 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. Pointed arch windows and hoodmoulds are also quite typical in these dwellings.



Buildings of a vernacular revival or gothic influence

- 5.1.2 The late 19th century architecture of Marine Park Mansions owes a little to the designs of Norman Shaw and others with its prominent stone clad bays and stone balcony with railings over the elaborated porch.
- 5.1.3 Portland Court is a derivative of the 1930s International style with its strong rectilinear form, sweeping lines of windows, plate glass entrance porch, its use of marine views and its minimalist detailing. However the use of brick in such buildings is a northern, perhaps British response and tends to dilute the machine aesthetic of the style. The replacement of the original windows with UPVC windows which have heavy frames dilutes the streamlined style of the horizontal bands of windows.

5.2 KNOWN ARCHITECTS AND DESIGNERS

- 5.2.1 The most notable architect represented in Wellington Road is H L Elmes who designed Redcliffe, no.34 in 1845. Harvey Lonsdale Elmes is most famous for his designs for St. George's Hall Liverpool of 1840 one of the major monuments of neo-classical architecture. His involvement with the construction of the Liverpool building was highly stressful for him and arguably contributed to his early death in Jamaica in 1847. In his short working life he completed a few other designs in the Liverpool area and in London, a number of which have now been demolished, so surviving completed commissions are few.
- 5.2.2 Portland Court, from 1938/9 was designed by Herbert Thearle FRIBA (1904 – 1971), founder of a Liverpool practice which worked mainly in the north west.

Thearle was a friend of Edward Chambre Hardman and appears in a number of photographs by him.

- 5.2.3 Cliff Estate (just west of the conservation area) is by Stephenson, Young and Partners a Manchester based practice and dates from 1962.

5.3 MATERIALS

- 5.3.1 The dominant walling finish seen within the conservation area is coloured render. However other buildings – particularly Marine Park Mansions and Portland Court are in brick, whilst Redcliffe is of red sandstone. The use of white or pale coloured render finish is typical of seaside locations and responds well to the strong light which often prevails. Some darker tones and strongly coloured details can detract from this seaside ethos.

- 5.3.2 A number of buildings have flat roofs, but the predominant material for pitched roofs is Welsh slate, in some cases cut geometrically, or with curves to produce scale-like effects.

- 5.3.3 Cast iron fencing is a characteristic feature of the area.

5.4 TYPICAL FEATURES AND DETAILS

- 5.4.1 For the purposes of the consideration of what is ‘typical’ it is necessary to make certain exclusions from the range of buildings in Wellington Road. Portland Court is a one-off set piece design which has its own qualities and characteristics which are quite different from anything else in the street. Arguably Marine Park Mansions is also a-typical although its forms are closer to those of the majority of the buildings.

- 5.4.2 **Windows:** Many windows have strong vertical proportions, and where there are expanses of windows they are assemblies of tall, narrow units. Other windows whilst retaining this verticality have the more traditional Georgian sash window proportions. Where windows face the sea many extend to floor level and contain French doors. In combination with the tall lights there are also, in many cases small fanlights which occupy quite a small proportion of the overall opening height.

- 5.4.3 Most frames are white painted, though a small number have colours. In a number of cases coloured glass is used in window margins or fanlights.

- 5.4.4 A distinctive feature of the area is the elaboration of window heads. Whilst the majority remain square-headed, there are Italianate arched heads, gothic pointed heads and also four-centre Tudor arch heads. In a number of examples

there are odd numbers of clustered windows with the centre windows higher than those at the sides.

- 5.4.5 **Doors:** Generally of painted wood, quite a number are part glazed with designs reflecting the window patterns described above.
- 5.4.6 **Chimneys:** These are, in many cases quite elaborate and ornamented. The basic form is brick with two or three corbelled courses surmounted by terracotta chimney pots. The next stage of elaboration is that the brickwork is painted. In other cases the brickwork is rendered with elaborate rendered cornice details. Many of the terracotta pots are painted to match (or in a few cases contrast with) the stacks. In one example red terracotta details are left in their natural colour on an otherwise painted stack. In the case of Redcliffe, the chimney stacks are in stone, with extended stone shafts, (now braced with iron stays) generally in clusters so that they are a significant feature of the property.
- 5.4.7 **Roof details:** The roofs themselves are almost all slated. In buildings of Italianate influence they are not steeply pitched and therefore not very prominent. However, none of the roof edges is plain or lacking in architectural treatment. There are simple classical parapets with moulded cornice details to which are added, in some cases moulded plaster friezes. There are projecting Italianate style eaves with exposed (mock) rafter and purlin ends. There are simple cavetto moulded cornices, and in two cases so-called 'tent style' roofs – timber imitations of fabric tent canopies. On the Gothic style properties there are elaborate pierced barge boards with finials and pendants. A number of the properties have slate roofing ornamented to give a fish-scale pattern
- 5.4.8 **Fences and gates:** The use of iron fencing is a particular characteristic of the area. The earliest examples are used to form the street boundary of the Regency houses on Wellington Road. Typically they consist of a series of panels which are bolted together to form a visually continuous screen. They are about 1.2m in height with closely set palings and elaborate, often Gothick details. As is typical of sand-cast panels of this type strength factors require that there is a greater proportion of iron to void than in fences incorporating wrought metal (iron or steel). In some cases the fencing presents a continuous top rail, elsewhere it is topped with a series of decorative finials. In a number of cases the fencing includes matching gates. These fences are all listed.
- 5.4.9 Elsewhere the fencing becomes more open in style, so that the most recent type is that enclosing Kings Parade Gardens with simple steel rod palings and hoop heads.

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 obviously apparent examples and key problems within the conservation area as a way of encouraging an understanding and awareness of these issues.

6.1.2 Appendix D to this document is a plan showing the contribution of individual 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 help understand 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 historic character has been lost beyond economic recovery.
- D: (Blue) – Buildings that detract from the significance or character of the area.

6.2 RECENT DEVELOPMENT

6.2.1 The most significant large scale 20th century developments to have affected the conservation area are:

- § the reclamation of the foreshore and establishment of King's Parade
- § the construction of Portland Court
- § the construction of The Cliff

6.2.2 The establishment of King's Parade enabled the construction of the gardens to the south and hence brought into existence part of the land now designated within the conservation area. Between the 'green band' which these and Marine Park Gardens constitute, and the sea wall itself is a bare and unprepossessing open area, largely devoted to car parking.

- 6.2.3 The vacant site of the former bathing pool detracts from the setting of the conservation area. It is currently open ground, with the middle area sunken, and is used as informal parking. It is screened to a degree by low dense planting on the south but nevertheless weakens the overall character of the area and contributes to the rather bleak and windswept character of the foreshore and promenade.
- 6.2.4 Portland Court, whilst being completely different in physical character from the majority of the buildings in Wellington Road does have its own strong qualities which make it very much a positive addition to the area, whilst being of a different scale from the pre-existing buildings. It is from the age of the great ocean liners and its strong linear form with north and south balconies have something of their aesthetic quality.
- 6.2.5 The same cannot be said of The Cliff, adjoining the conservation area. This development of twin tower blocks with associated garage structures has no architectural merit and has a negative impact on the character of Wellington Road. At sixteen storeys the blocks are more than twice the height of Portland Court and hence dominate the surroundings, even the higher level land to the south. They provide an unfortunate closure to Wellington Road and draw the eye. The block-like forms have no subtlety and are forbidding in appearance. The dark concrete does not pay respect to the light and colour of a sea shore location. Associated with the main towers are low level concrete framed garage blocks which are also negative in their contribution.
- 6.2.6 There appears to be work in progress at Redcliffe on a new dwelling on the ground alongside. This is of a low, pyramidal form. It is not possible at this stage, from the evidence on site to comment on the appropriateness of this scheme but the setting is a particularly sensitive one.

6.3 UNSYMPATHETIC EXTENSIONS

- 6.3.1 Many of the buildings remain 'as built' or have had only modest and relatively sympathetic extensions in the past and in a manner which follows the character of the original construction.
- 6.3.2 The property known as Redcliffe has, however been altered and extended in a very unsympathetic manner. The façade of the property which faces the sea has two flat-roofed additions, one in stone, one in rendered material and both with large 'picture' windows considerably out of proportion with the walls in which they are set. Flat roofed brick extensions and additions to the Wellington Road side along with steel windows adversely affect the appearance of this significant historic building.
- 6.3.3 The property as a whole could be considered 'at risk' as the property appears to be unoccupied and suffering from a lack of maintenance. The property is one of the few remaining residential properties designed by the influential Liverpool architect Harvey Lonsdale Elmes (designer of St George's Hall) and

as such is worthy of repair and restoration to the highest standards. At present its poor condition seriously detracts from the quality of the area and is an unfortunate reflection on the level of respect accorded to one of the most significant architects of the day.

6.3.4 Number 46 Wellington Road has a small single storey side porch which is inappropriate to the design of the property being added to the side of an otherwise symmetrical elevation, and being constructed of non-traditional materials.

Update 03-2009. Work had been progressing during 2008 to refurbish Redcliffe, and permission granted for restoration of certain elements, e.g. the windows. However, after several months of work, which included the full reconstruction of the chimneys, repair work is now in abeyance. This is regrettable, especially since the roof has been stripped of its slate and because its roof was an important feature of the house with its decorative patterning. The Council will do its utmost to see that this important restoration work is carried as far as possible to its conclusion.

6.4 UNSYMPATHETIC ALTERATIONS

6.4.1 The most common type of alteration to property at present seems to be the replacement of traditional timber windows with uPVC equivalents. These changes are detrimental for a number of reasons:

- § Change in the proportion of glazing divisions compromises the overall design integrity
- § UPVC frames are weaker than timber or metal equivalents and therefore require greater thickness to provide adequate strength
- § Fine subdivisions of glazing are not possible in uPVC except by 'stick-on' or other rather basic methods, and there is a general loss of subtlety of detail

6.4.2 There is considerable commercial pressure from those who market replacement glazing to carry out this work. However there is a viable alternative by repairing any defective glazing and inserting a slim profile secondary glazing system.



Varied replacement windows, generally diluting the character of the property

- 6.4.3 Replacing windows which have a strongly vertical system of subdivisions with large ‘picture’ type glazing is heavily detrimental to the character of the properties. The incorporation of fanlights with a strong horizontal orientation is also inappropriate.
- 6.4.4 There also appears to have been a programme of replacement of the windows at Portland Court. It is likely that the original windows were Crittall steel casement windows. These are currently viewed as providing poor thermal performance and needing high maintenance, though both these alleged defects can be remedied. The new windows appear to be uPVC. They have heavy vertical subdivisions and there is a loss of the streamlined effect which slimmer glazing bars would have afforded.



(left) Portland Court showing older steel glazing (bottom left) and newer uPVC units (elsewhere); (right) Marine Park Mansions, showing poorly proportioned dormers and reduced window heights.

- 6.4.5 Alterations have recently been carried out and at the time of writing are still in progress at Marine Park Mansions. Windows have largely been replaced with white

uPVC. In general, the window divisions remain as previously with a simple mid-rail at half the height of the window. In some cases 'fan-lights' have been inserted with less satisfactory visual results. One of the properties has shorter windows set within the original structural openings, making use of uPVC 'boards' to fill the gaps between the lower window heads and the full structural opening. The result is visually obtrusive. At this property also the dormer windows have a strong and unsympathetic horizontal emphasis. Narrow, taller units, with gables would probably have been more satisfactory.

- 6.4.6 Whilst the properties are generally painted in a sympathetic palette of pale colours there are some examples where darker tones and strongly coloured details are discordant. Listed buildings require consent for colour changes from when the building was first listed.

6.5 PUBLIC REALM

- 6.5.1 About 50% of the conservation area, including King's Parade Gardens and Marine Park lies within the public domain. General maintenance standards appear to be commensurate with the standing and status of the spaces, though not of the highest quality. The main deficiency, and this probably is a result of the location, is the standard of the western end of King's Parade Gardens where there is inappropriate fencing and an accumulation of wind blown litter. There is dense windbreak planting around the Gardens but in some cases this is rather thin and could be enhanced.
- 6.5.2 Street surfaces and enclosure are to a good standard, and there are some good quality bus shelters on King's Parade in front of Marine Park.

6.6 LOSS AND DEVELOPMENT PRESSURES

- 6.6.1 The two notable losses from the conservation area took place more than fifty years ago. At the west end of Wellington road on the site of The Cliff was a large property in its own extensive grounds known as Cliff Villa. This appears on the earliest maps and its form is an extended rectangle parallel to the shore with bow fronts at east and west ends. A more modest property known as Ewart House was demolished to make way for Portland Court.
- 6.6.2 There appears to have been no significant recent loss of buildings within the conservation area. Many of the historic buildings are listed and so protected against demolition, and the other older structures are regarded as having sufficient residual value to make conversion and upgrading financially viable.
- 6.6.3 Such development pressures as exist appear to be towards the subdivision of single houses into apartments and the provision of more garaging in the gardens facing the sea. The visibility of these from public areas can be a matter of concern. In the case of the listed Regency properties this has been achieved without unfortunate effects. The unlisted properties (52 and 54) at the west end of Wellington Road have been treated less sympathetically in the recent changes and conversions.

6.7 CHANGES TO THE SETTING OF THE CONSERVATION AREA

- 6.7.1 The adverse effects of the development known as The Cliff have been noted and can hardly be overstated.
- 6.7.2 The fact that the south boundary of the conservation area generally follows the middle of Wellington Road (with the exception of Marine Park Mansions) rather than the rear of the properties on the south side means that this south boundary is visually weak. The 'scene' presented by Wellington Road includes

the front gardens and facades of the properties on both sides and the character of the road is determined as much by what happens to the properties on the south as those on the north.

- 6.7.3 The properties towards the east end on the south side are arguably as good a quality as Marine Park Mansions and could be included within the area. Fortunately, they remain relatively unaltered and so uncompromised by recent interventions.
- 6.7.4 The properties to the west of Portland Street on the south side are more conventional inter-war semi detached houses with less architectural distinction. Apart from the general replacement of windows there are few visually intrusive alterations. Whilst they are unlikely to be candidates for inclusion in the conservation area it would be desirable if special attention could be given to any proposed changes for which planning permission is required so that the overall character is not diluted.
- 6.7.5 The promenade area remains bleak and rather windswept although hard landscape is of a reasonable quality. It is important that the reserved matters on the outline application are of high architectural quality and enhance the area. Car parking needs to be well landscaped in order to reduce its impact on views from the conservation area.