



Parkgate Conservation Area

Character Appraisal and Management Plan

February 2008

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Character Appraisal

1. Introduction

National Statutory Framework

- 1.1 The national Civic Amenities Act of 1967 gave Local Planning Authorities (LPA) the power to designate conservation areas. These were defined as 'areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'. Then, in the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, a duty was placed upon LPAs to designate conservation areas and preserve and enhance them.

Local Planning Policy

- 1.2 These documents relate directly to Policy ENV13 of the Borough Local Plan, which states that 'developments within or affecting the setting of conservation areas should preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the particular Conservation Area'. Policy ENV14 refers specifically to Parkgate Conservation Area stating that development proposals within the area should reflect the need to improve elements of the conservation area.
- 1.3 This statement describes the character and appearance of Parkgate Conservation Area and is a material consideration used by the borough council in the determining of relevant planning applications. Householders, residents, planning officers and developers should therefore refer to this guide to ensure that any new development is appropriate to the character of the Conservation Area. This appraisal was approved by Planning Committee on 12 February 2008 and has superseded the Parkgate Conservation Area Appraisal adopted in 1999.

Public Consultation

- 1.4 The Parkgate Society was instrumental in helping produce a draft document, which was made available to all residents and businesses affected by the conservation area designation. The draft document was

then advertised in the local press, and consultees informed in writing of its availability online, at Neston Library or as a hard copy by request. Interested parties were invited to a public consultation evening on Tuesday January 29th 2008, which was attended by about 50 local residents and the local Councillors for the area. All comments received at the consultation evening and throughout the consultation process have been taken into account.

2. Designations

Conservation Area	Designated February 1976
Listed Buildings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 11 Station Road - 12 Station Road - 13 Station Road - 14 Station Road - 15 & 16 Station Road - Rose Cottage, The Parade - Talbot House, The Parade - Prospect House, The Parade - Chapel of Mostyn House School, The Parade - 16 – 19 The Parade - South Cottage, The Parade - 1 & 2 Balcony House, The Parade - The Assembly Room, Holywell Close - Seven Steps, Teal Cottage & The Butchers Shop, The Parade - Church of St Thomas, Mostyn Square - Mostyn Cottage, School Lane - Brockleigh, School Lane - Banastre Cottage, The Parade - Leighton Banastre, The Parade - Maplewood, The Parade - Overdee & Grey Walls, The Parade - Brooke House, The Parade - Pengwern, The Parade - Sawyers Cottage, The Parade
Locally Listed Buildings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Sea Wall, The Parade - Mostyn House School, The Parade - Nicholls Ice Cream Shop, The Parade - 1 – 4 Sandheys

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1 – 6 Holywell Close - Dee Cottages, The Parade - The Watch House, The Parade - WW2 Pill Box, Station Road
Scheduled Ancient Monuments	None
Registered Parks and Gardens	None
Archaeological Priority	
Site of Special Scientific Interest	The Parade overlooks the Dee marshes SSSI, which partly sits within the conservation area
Article 4 Directions	2 Mostyn Square (1986)
Regulation 7 Directions	None
Area of Special County Value (ASCV)	The Neston/Parkgate coastal ASCV adjoins and encroaches into the conservation area around Boathouse Lane
Site of Biological Interest	None
Site of Nature Conservation Value	None
Area of Nature Conservation Value	None
Other	<p>The Dee Estuary (including the marshes) is designated as a European Special Protection Area for the conservation of wild birds and is a candidate site for designation as a Special Area of Conservation. Part of the designated site lies within the conservation area.</p> <p>The conservation area lies within the 'Coastal Zone' as defined on the Ellesmere Port and Neston Borough Local Plan.</p>

3. Summary of Special Interest

3.1 Parkgate was once a major departure point for sailings to Ireland and its coastal location is still a key characteristic (fig. 1). The linear settlement evolved from a single carriageway aligning the Dee, and this road, The Parade, is still the focus of Parkgate. With the exception of the low-lying sea wall, The Parade is entirely undeveloped on its western side, which leaves magnificent panoramic views of the Dee estuary (fig. 2). Glimpses of the view before The Parade is reached, the rustling reeds and the salty sea air, impress upon the visitor the feel of the seaside village it once was. Parkgate is unique as a piece of Cheshire coastline and is even distinctive when viewed over the estuary from the Welsh hills.



Fig. 1 The marsh is a key characteristic of the conservation area



Fig. 2 The only development on the West side of The Parade is the low-lying sea wall

3.2 The high-density Georgian buildings at the south end of The Parade and around the corner into Station Road are among the earliest in Parkgate (fig. 3). The long thin plots and tall buildings create a sense of verticality that, with the narrow weints¹ between buildings, contribute to a lively character that attracts many visitors. The height, black and white finishing and coastal location of these buildings are unusual and they are as much a distinction of Parkgate as the estuary itself. These buildings, the views of the Dee estuary and the unusual ghostly seaside character are vital contributors to a special character, that makes the core of The Parade so appealing to visitors.

¹ Weint = local term for lane

3.3 Away from The Parade the character quickly quietens. Although there is a range of building type, the buildings seem less densely packed and are framed by grass or shrubbery and sandstone walls (fig. 4). Such factors, with the decreased amount of people, contribute to pockets of polite urban tranquillity. This is enhanced by the very valuable openings of green space that help define the periphery of historic Parkgate (fig. 5). Indeed, the conservation area is bounded by qualities of the countryside in several areas: a peaceful bird observatory and open farmland to the north, the wooded gardens, grounds of Mostyn House and cricket club in the east and a bracken-lined footpath in the south.



Fig. 3 Some of the black and white buildings on The Parade are Georgian



Fig. 4 Mews like buildings surrounded by vegetation contribute to a suburban character

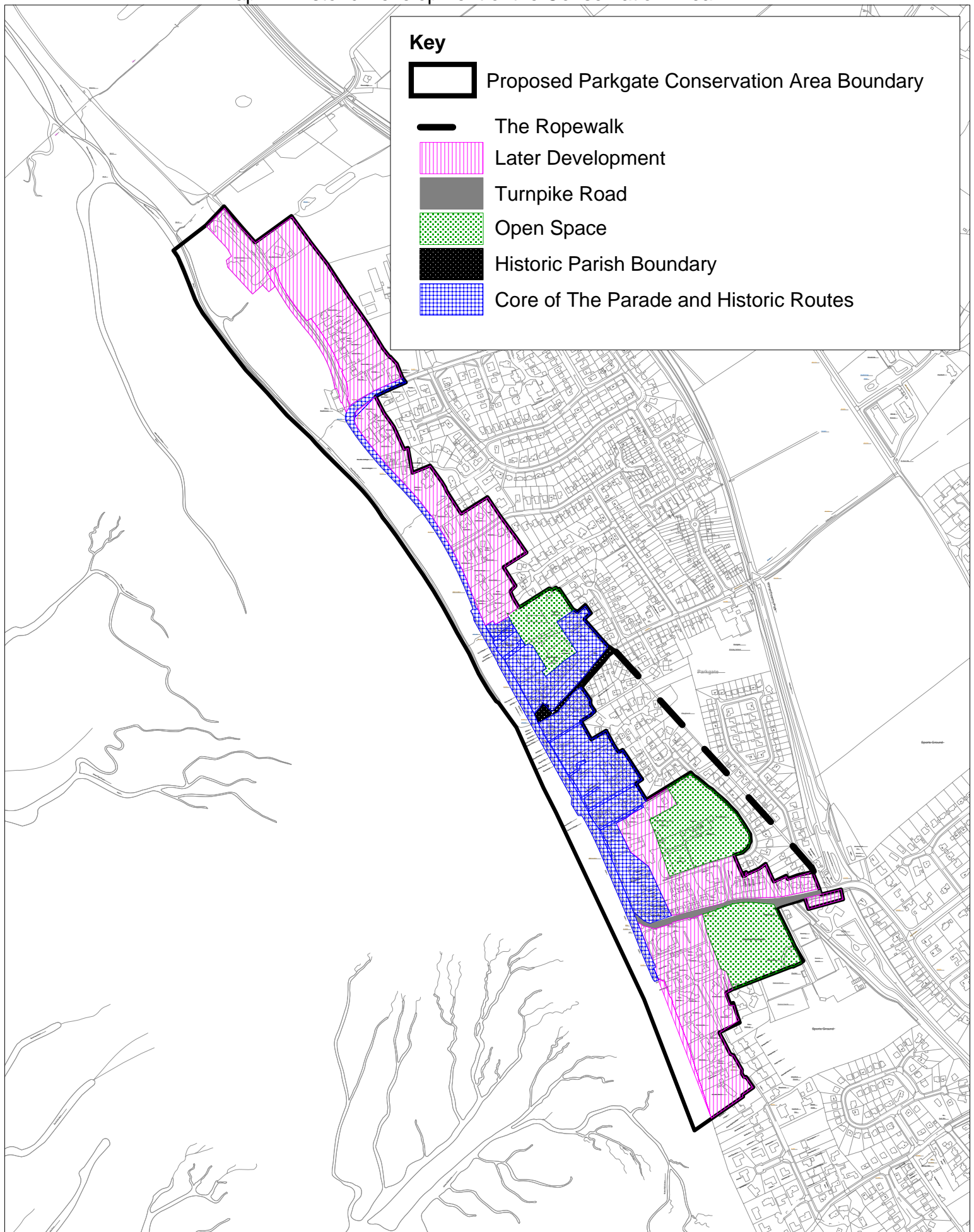
4. Physical Setting

- 4.1 Parkgate is located on the coast of the River Dee on the west of the Wirral peninsular. It lies directly northwest of the urban centre of Neston, an old settlement with an historic port that served the city of Chester until the River Dee began silting up in around 1650. As a result the port was moved further up the river to Parkgate, which is how the settlement began.
- 4.2 Parkgate's historic origins as a port mean it still has a vital connection with the coast. Although the sea only sometimes reaches the sea wall, the linear settlement continues to be bounded by the low-lying marshes of the River Dee. The panoramic view of the Welsh hills over the marshes is a key characteristic of the settlement and its location.

5. Settlement Development (map 1)

- 5.1 The name Parkgate was originally used to describe one of a long line of anchorages along the River Dee. The anchorage was probably so-named because it lay beside Neston Park, a medieval deer park that was enclosed in 1250. The part of the park that bordered the Dee is thought to have developed as today's Parade.
- 5.2 The first map reference to Parkgate is on the 1686 mariners map by Greenville Collins, which depicts a line of small houses at the top of the beach. This probably means that Parkgate had grown from an anchorage into a settlement, which would have taken the form of a single row of houses hugging the top of the beach. Although the earliest surviving buildings are likely to have been at the south end of The Parade, it is unknown where the development of The Parade began. Narrow lanes and weints evolved to access the early building to the south of The Parade, which is referred to as 'the core of The Parade' in this document.
- 5.3 As it extended northwards, the thriving settlement of Parkgate crossed the boundary of two ancient townships, which is today denoted by Mostyn Square and Coastguard Lane. Despite this, the basic linear form of The Parade, accessible via roads in the north (Boathouse Lane) and the south (Moorside Lane), was maintained throughout the early 18th century. In 1787 the route into Parkgate from Neston was changed with the building of the Turnpike Road (now Station Road). In 1814 a second cut, Cheltenham Walk (now known as the Ropewalk), was made inland from The Parade to give visitors somewhere sheltered to walk on windy days.
- 5.4 Shipping at Parkgate began to decline in the early 19th century and building in the settlement slowed. This could be why the area does not seem to have changed much until the late 19th century when new buildings appeared and some older properties were remodelled. In 1923 baths were established to the north of the settlement, which are accessed by North Parade. Most other 20th century development took place on routes that already existed, such as North Parade and Manorial Road.

Map 1 - Historic Development of the Conservation Area.



6. Townscape

Town Plan

- 6.1 The coast almost entirely determined the linear pattern of Parkgate's historic streets (map 1). Providing access to the water, The Parade probably developed first and remains the principal thoroughfare. Long thin burgage² plots extending inland from the main road evolved within the core of The Parade, with highly characteristic weints snaking between them. Tall properties nestle against the seafront boundary of the plots, leaving no room for front gardens and a close building line that contributes to the lively and jumbled character in this part of The Parade (fig. 3).
- 6.2 The areas to the north and south of the core were built up in the 20th century. There are fewer roads leading away from The Parade, and those that exist are wider, emanating a more suburban character. The plots themselves are much larger and the detached houses are surrounded by deep gardens on all sides. Although these buildings are situated quite a distance from the river shore, they too are parallel to the coast and take advantage of the views (fig. 5). The low density of the areas to the north and south of The Parade's core contributes to a feel of relative calm, in comparison to the busier core. At the northern and southern extremities the coastal road tapers down into a footpath, signifying the boundaries of the conservation area (fig. 6 & 22).



Fig. 5 Detached houses align with the coast, taking advantage of the views of the estuary



Fig. 6 Manorial Road tapers down to a footpath

² Burgage = medieval plot shape

Architecture and Buildings

- 6.3 Parkgate's relatively short history means that the oldest buildings in the settlement are Georgian (fig. 4, 7 & 8). These properties are mostly situated on Station Road and within the core of The Parade, and include small fishermen's cottages as well as the grander buildings overlooking the marshes. These tall buildings have a strong vertical character that is emphasised by the close proximity of buildings, the absence of front boundary treatments and the solid appearance of architectural features. The presumption should be in favour of retaining such characteristics.
- 6.4 Important features that should be retained include tall chimneys, steeply pitched slate roofs, sandstone coping, simple black and white detailing to façades, black window casements and tall Georgian style windows. It is beneficial that there are few signs, adverts, canopies or other items of clutter detracting from the character of the buildings. There is on-going pressure throughout the conservation area from those wanting to put up new signage and this needs to be carefully controlled. For more guidance on what might be suitable please see paragraph 6.15.



Fig. 7 Some small Georgian buildings frame the vista of the marshes from Station Road



Fig. 8 More Georgian properties, among the oldest in the conservation area

- 6.5 Black and white fronted buildings are a consistent theme throughout Parkgate. Old, new, grand and humble buildings are decorated with a simple white render and black features. The particularly powerful Mostyn House School was not given its current frontage until 1932.

The black and white is so important to the character of Parkgate that such decoration should be retained and where appropriate, encouraged (fig. 9, 10, 11 & 12). Other colours are entirely inappropriate.



Fig. 9 & 10 Mostyn House School and properties on Manorial Road are decorated in black and white



Fig. 11 & 12 The Boathouse pub and new buildings on The Parade are examples of newer buildings with black and white finishing

- 6.6 As the most obvious break in the fairly continuous line of buildings along The Parade, Mostyn Square is a very important urban space. The pretty domestic-scale buildings that overlook the square are mostly white rendered and are unseen from The Parade (fig. 13). Their quiet contribution is important as it allows Mostyn Square itself, the Church of St Thomas (known locally by the coastal name ‘the fisherman’s chapel’) and the Old School House behind it to dominate. The sandstone boundary walls and surrounding vegetation also contribute to the dominance of the church (fig. 14)



Fig. 13 The pretty bayed cottages overlooking Mostyn Square allow the church to dominate



Fig. 14 The church of St. Thomas, Mostyn Square

- 6.7 The buildings inland from the core of The Parade, including some on Station Road, are less densely planned than those overlooking the Dee. Small mews-like terraces with gardens are the predominant building type (fig. 4 & 15). These display a variety of façade treatments and building materials, although the architecture is broadly historical. The gently sloping roofs are quite prominent from street level because the rooflines are lower and they are covered with red clay tiles. Decorations such as finials³ and bargeboards⁴ to the roofs and visible red brick or sandstone masonry mean the properties have an altogether more ornamental appearance than those nearest the Dee.
- 6.8 North and south of The Parade detached residential dwellings contribute to a more suburban character. With the obvious exception of a small cluster of 18th century listed buildings, the houses are mostly from the 20th century. The architecture tends to blend-in and the most conspicuous building characteristics relate to size and proportion rather than age or features. The 2-storey, detached dwellings have large gardens surrounding them on all sides and the most in keeping are finished with black and white detailing (fig. 5).

³ Finial = a formal ornament at the top of a canopy, gable etc.

⁴ Bargeboard = projecting boards placed against the incline of the gable of a building



Fig. 15 Late 19th century buildings surrounded by vegetation contribute to a polite suburbia

Spaces, Views and Landscape

- 6.9 The view across the Dee taken from the whole of The Parade is a defining characteristic of the conservation area. Both the Station Road and Boathouse Lane approaches into Parkgate focus on vistas of the marshes and Welsh hills (fig. 7 & 16). These important views should not be compromised by development on plots near to either approach road's junction with The Parade. The typical promenade along Parkgate's Parade also benefits from the openness of the estuary and the special views it affords. Although the tide only occasionally comes in, the salty air and blustery winds are reminiscent of the sea and remind the visitor of the village's port history.
- 6.10 Large gardens around the detached properties north of the core soften the townscape and give it a more suburban feel. The better-visited areas of Mostyn Square and the core of The Parade have little vegetation as buildings and hard surfaces dominate the spaces. However, by far the most significant landscape features of these public areas are the views over the marshes.
- 6.11 Behind The Parade, small terraces such as Sandheys are surrounded by gardens and planting, which contribute to a quiet and polite character. Such vegetation provides important visual interest to the pedestrian walking along and accessing The Parade (fig. 17). Other vegetation, such as shrubbery boundary treatments and the wooded gardens behind Deeside Court, is seen throughout the conservation area. It contributes to a tranquil and often Victorian-feeling suburbia

that, enhanced by pockets of open space, contrasts well with the bustle of the Georgian Parade.



Fig. 16 The vista of the marshes is important from Boathouse Lane, a main approach into Parkgate



Fig. 17 All of the lanes leading to The Parade benefit from glimpses of the marsh

6.12 Where it exists, the open space behind The Parade provides a distinctive buffer between the buildings of the conservation area and those further inland. This valuable space, in the form of the wooded gardens, the recreational grounds of Mostyn House School and the Neston Cricket Club, offers an important visual break between the historic coastal areas of Parkgate and later development inland (map 1, fig. 18 & 19). Both the Cricket Club grounds and the field of Mostyn House School are designated as protected urban green spaces in the Local Plan.



Fig. 18 & 19 The grounds of the cricket club and some wooded garden are examples of the open space that signifies the end of coastal Parkgate

6.13 During the 20th century the open space between The Parade and the Ropewalk was eroded by small-scale housing developments at its periphery. These have severed the Ropewalk from The Parade, which is therefore excluded from the conservation area.

Use

- 6.14 The core of The Parade is by far the most visited part of the conservation area, and both people and vehicles crowd the streets on summer weekends. The shops in the buildings provide day-trippers with goods like ice cream, coffee, fish and chips and other seafood. These services, as well as the more specialist shops that take advantage of the unique location, contribute towards the mix of uses that make Parkgate a lively and appealing place.
- 6.15 The conservation area becomes increasingly residential away from the core of The Parade. This means that the leafy areas behind and south of The Parade, and the suburban areas to its north are much more tranquil. They are less visited by both pedestrians and cars, and are free from the clutter that goes with them.

Public Realm

- 6.16 The buildings and character of the conservation area (particularly The Parade) are at risk of becoming cluttered with inappropriate and over dominant signage. When considering the design of signs the following factors should be taken into account:

- Signs should be an integral part of a property's design and should relate to the character of the building and area;
- The use of standardised corporate signs will not be acceptable;
- Traditional style, top-hung signage may be more appropriate;
- Extraneous advertisements relating to specific products or other unrelated matters on buildings will not be acceptable;
- Internally illuminated signs will not be appropriate in Parkgate.

For further advice on the appropriateness of signage in conservation areas, refer to the borough council's Supplementary Planning Guidance document Shop Fronts in Conservation Areas.

- 6.17 The most influential structure in the conservation area is the red sandstone sea wall that has three slipways along it and a section of distinctive railings (fig. 20). People sit on or stand in front of the wall to take advantage of the magnificent views unaware that the wall lies

hidden by the level of the marsh. The pavements adjacent to it are well used by pedestrians.

- 6.18 The wall wraps around a small area of The Parade that juts into the marsh. Known locally as the Donkey Stand (after its late 19th century use), the popular public space has been formalised by seating and interpretation boards (fig. 21). It is important that works to such public areas are undertaken in materials that are sensitive to the granite setts and other good traditional style materials that exist.
- 6.19 Other street furniture such as historic-style lampposts and the lantern outside the Red Lion also make a positive contribution to the street scene. However, some street furniture, particularly traffic signage and applied paint around the core of The Parade and Mostyn Square is untidy and risks harming the special character of the area.



Fig. 20 The sea wall used to be one of the most prominent structures in Parkgate



Fig. 21 The historic donkey stand has been turned into a formal space with street furniture

- 6.20 The old baths to the north of the Parade is a walled area that has become an observation point and car park for people on the Wirral Way (fig. 22). Although a panoramic view of the marshes can be taken, the area is much more peaceful than The Parade. Interpretation panels describe items of interest to the visitor while large shrubs ensure the observation point remains quiet and screened from Boathouse Lane and The Parade. Landscaping and repair works to these areas should be undertaken in materials that suit the rural characteristics of the area.



Fig. 22 The observation point to the north of The Parade leads into a rural footpath

7. Boundary Justification

- 7.1 The boundaries of the original Parkgate Conservation Area designation included the core of The Parade, buildings that align the Dee to the north and south of this core and the green space that separated the coastal area of Parkgate from the more typical suburban sprawl inland. Since the original designation in 1976 (map 2) that green space has been eroded by development, which does not contribute to the unique character of the area. The boundary has therefore been amended to include only the valuable green space (map 1 & 3).
- 7.2 The boundary now envelops the same core, as well as extra coastal development in both the north and the south. These buildings are surrounded by vegetation and contribute to the character of the more polite Parkgate, which is to be found away from the historic core. The amended boundary includes the remaining green space behind the buildings of The Parade but excludes any development that is not considered to contribute to the character of the area (map 3).
- 7.3 Another amendment affects the western boundary. The original designation was not a complete polygon as it was considered that the marshes were important to the character of the area. However, conservation areas should be complete polygons and therefore the designation has been extended into the marshes.

Management Plan

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Guidance published by English Heritage 'identifies the key aspects of good practice that need to be taken into account by local authorities in the management of their conservation areas'. The central piece of advice is that management of the inevitable changes in a conservation area should be underpinned by an understanding of that particular place. This document is therefore best used in conjunction with the Parkgate Conservation Area Character Appraisal.
- 1.2 The character appraisal describes the special character of the area, as the borough council understands it following consultation. It therefore forms an excellent basis for devising management techniques that tackle area-specific issues. The following strategies should be considered when development in the conservation area is considered. They are intended to ensure that changes are based on an understanding of the area and are made sympathetically as a result.

2. Management Strategies

Retention of Existing Buildings

- 2.1 Although there are many factors that contribute to the special character of Parkgate Conservation Area, the existing built fabric is crucial. Policy ENV13 of the borough Local Plan says that 'consent for the demolition of buildings which make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area will not be granted other than in exceptional circumstances'. This policy will be upheld in order to retain the special architectural and historic character of the area.
- 2.2 There should also be an emphasis on the retention of a building use where it contributes to the character of the area. For example, a shop overlooking the Dee attracts customers and contributes to the lively character of the area. Conversions of such properties to residential should be avoided.

Maintenance of Existing Buildings

- 2.3 The black and white buildings of Parkgate are one of the most important aspects of its character and should be retained. The properties in the core of The Parade that overlook the Dee are particularly important and must appear well maintained and cared for. Cumulative minor alterations such as insensitive window replacements, additions such as satellite dishes and the removal of architectural details can all detract from the area's special character.
- 2.4 Many of the minor changes that incrementally harm the character are permitted development rights (PD), even within a conservation area. An Article 4(2) Direction can be applied that would withdraw certain PD rights, particularly on buildings overlooking a public highway. While such a tool is not appropriate throughout the conservation area, it would be useful in the core of The Parade, where the special character is very sensitive. The appropriateness of implementing such a tool in selected parts of the conservation area should be explored.
- 2.5 Care and maintenance is important even where an Article 4(2) Direction is not appropriate. Owners and occupiers of properties in conservation areas should therefore be kept aware of the designation

of special character and the importance of their role in maintaining that character. Information should be used to inform owners of the conservation area boundaries, any additional restrictions and advice on the care of their building.

Design of New Buildings

- 2.6 Large open spaces in the conservation area may always be unsuitable for development. Such sites include the Cricket Club, the grounds of Mostyn House School, and wooded gardens, which are three important green spaces to the east of The Parade. Development of these spaces would harm the character of the conservation area and should be avoided.
- 2.7 Where some development in the conservation area is appropriate, the sensitive design of any new building will be considered very carefully. The borough council will endeavour to consider appropriate ways that any new building could conserve and enhance the character of the conservation area. Considerations will include size and height of buildings, choice of in-keeping materials, spaces between buildings, contribution of vegetation and important views. Where appropriate, the borough council should encourage the submission of development and design briefs.
- 2.8 Where larger schemes are appropriate, it may be possible for the borough council to request developer contributions in the form of Section 106 agreements. Where this is possible, the borough council will endeavour to improve traffic calming schemes and areas of public realm in the conservation area, as highlighted in this management plan.

Traffic Implementation Schemes

- 2.9 The heavy usage of The Parade, particularly around the core, means that several traffic-calming features have appeared. While these are a necessity, a scheme should be designed that considers visual amenity as well as traffic safety requirements.

- 2.10 Traffic calming has also come to dominate Mostyn Square, which is a focal point of The Parade and receives many visitors. Unfortunately a bus stop has come to entirely dominate the space and the hard surfacing and associated road markings greatly influence the area. Such a wide space needs a new focus, which must not disturb the existing built fabric or prevent bus access to the area.
- 2.11 Steps should be taken to provide facilities for cyclists who pass through Parkgate. Routes 56, 70 and 89 all pass through and there is little provision of cycle paths or cycle stands at present.

The Public Realm

- 2.12 Parkgate is a local tourist attraction and has amenities available to serve its visitors. These include benches along The Parade, interpretation panels as well as car parking and important built structures such as the Sea Wall. All of these items need maintaining to ensure that they are safe and do not detract from the character of the conservation area.
- 2.13 The Sea Wall and the salt marsh are very important to the character of the area and should be maintained. The salt marsh is becoming overgrown and hiding the sandstone Sea Wall, which is already in need of repair.

Awareness

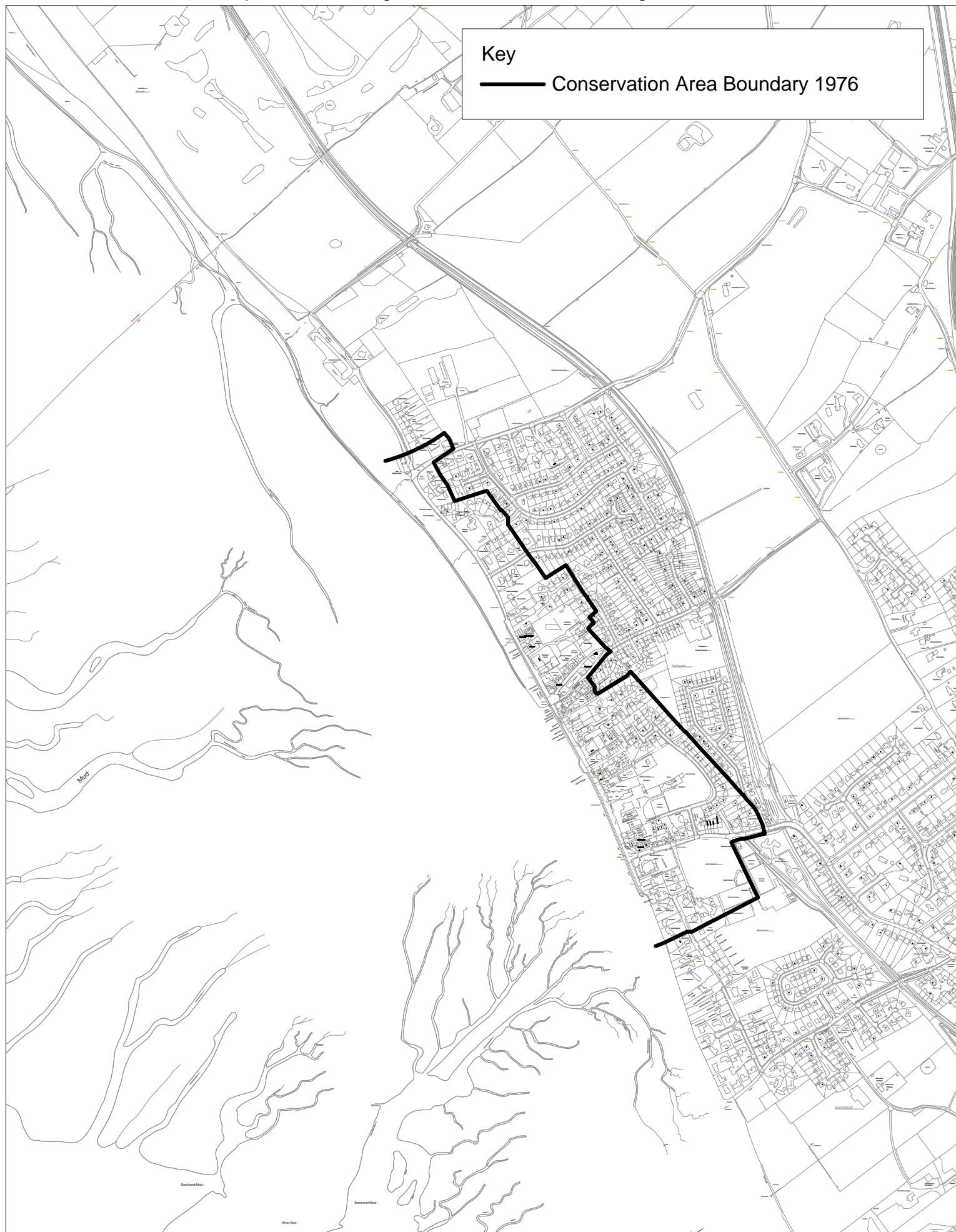
- 2.14 Conservation area designation can only be truly successful when the public and others involved in the upkeep of the built environment are aware of the designation. Relevant stakeholders will be aware of the designation and its connotations, and given the opportunities to comment on this draft document. Advice on appropriate maintenance techniques and useful contacts should also be included.

Monitoring Changes

- 2.15 The only effective way of preventing unwanted changes in the built environment is through monitoring. The borough council will explore the viability of making photographic records of all building elevations

that front onto a public highway in the conservation area. Such records would be used to inform further management programmes, planning decisions and enforcement case where applicable.

Map 2 - 1976 Parkgate Conservation Area Designation



Map 3 - 2008 Conservation Area Designation.

