

# TERRACED HOUSING IN THE LIVERPOOL CITY REGION

The most sustainable  
and attractive option



Merseyside  
Civic  
Society

# Introduction

This is the second of what is to be a series of White Papers that focus upon issues of concern to the Society and its members. A White Paper is intended to serve an agreed statement of the policy of the Society towards the issue concerned. In each case, the production of a Green Paper represents a step towards the publication of a White Paper, a procedure involving a thorough process of consultation with MCS members and affiliated societies, in which comments and suggestions are invited and considered, before the revised Green Paper document is formally approved by the MCS Council and thus adopted as a White Paper.

The Green Paper on which this White Paper is based was prepared by Trevor Skempton, in consultation with MCS Council members and many other interested parties. It was finally approved by the meeting of the MCS Council that took place on 2 August 2016.

It is anticipated that future Green Papers will be devoted to topics likely to include: development density, local listing, materials, an architectural biennial, the cultural visitor economy and transport. In particular, two draft Green Papers are in preparation that are examining the related issues of population growth strategy [reversal of decline] and the historic spatial structures of Liverpool and Birkenhead.

If you have any comments, suggestions, etc relating to future Green Papers, please send them to Dr Peter Brown, Chair MCS, either at the email address: [pjbbrown@liv.ac.uk](mailto:pjbbrown@liv.ac.uk) or by post to MCS, Benson House, 6 Benson Street, Liverpool L1 2ST.



## 1. The Need for a White Paper

**1.1** Following the earlier White Paper on 'Urban Design' [which was adopted as MCS policy in October 2012], the discussions in the 'State of the City' events, and the involvement of some MCS members in the Welsh Streets Public Inquiry, the MCS intends to clarify its position on the future of terraced housing in the Liverpool City Region. A Green Paper was discussed and amended, with the final version being presented to MCS Council on 2 August 2016. Council then approved its conversion to a White Paper, and so confirmed it as formal MCS policy.

**1.2** There is a need to address some common misconceptions about terraced housing. Not only can terraced housing provide comfortable family homes, for people with a variety of requirements and incomes, but it can make the optimum contribution to the development of community life – through the many benefits derived from 'joined-up' buildings, whether traditional or modern. From the flexibility and sophistication of our fine Georgian and Victorian terraces to the best modern examples, we argue that terraced housing is the most sustainable and attractive option for the development of our urban areas, and a postscript by MCS Council member, Dr Rob MacDonald reflects on the 'lived-in experience'.

**1.3** In considering the future of urban terraced housing, two closely-related issues must also be considered: [1] Urban Green Spaces and [2] Urban Structure and Population. Although these are mentioned in this paper, we anticipate that they will be given more detailed consideration in two further Green Papers.

**1.4** Your attention is drawn to our seven specific conclusions, which are now MCS policy, and are listed at the end of the paper, in Section 5.

## 2. 'Joined-up' Buildings, The State of the City and The Welsh Streets

**2.1** The traditional city or town is made of public streets and spaces which are defined and enclosed by 'joined-up' buildings. These can be seen as marking the distinction between that which is 'urban' and that which is 'suburban' – in the former, the public realm and public facilities are of prime importance; in the latter, greater emphasis is given to private space and private transport.

**2.2** 'State of the City 2' was an event held on the 21st June 2014, by Merseyside Civic Society, with support from the Bluecoat, Liverpool Architectural Society and Friends of the Earth Northwest. The overall theme of the discussions was 'Joined-up', with its many structural, social, ecological and environmental implications – including the 'joined-up' architecture of terraced housing. The discussions focussed on existing communities, but there was some attention given to potential innovative and adapted forms of terraced housing.

**2.3** The MCS has expressed its consistent and unequivocal opposition to the Housing Market Renewal Initiative [HMRI] in general, and its application to the inner-city neighbourhoods of Merseyside, and the Welsh Streets in particular. Our 2006 Annual Report said: "Regrettably, however, the dead hand of planning blight continues to drag down entire districts of inner Merseyside in Wirral, Sefton and especially Liverpool, to an extent not seen for a generation. Anfield, Edge Hill, Picton and much of Liverpool 8 have had their recovering housing markets 'seized' by decant and demolition policies that have MCS White Paper 2 3 August 2016 their roots in a different era... The damage to community members left to survive amongst the ruins is acute, hitting the poorest hardest, and demoralising to all who try to promote civic pride."



**2.4** Eight long years later, some members of the MCS Council were prominent in supporting the case put by 'SAVE Britain's Heritage' at the 2014 Public Inquiry into the proposals to demolish most of the houses in the Welsh Streets, and to replace them with a suburban-style development at a much lower density.



Photograph taken by MCS member Sarah-Jane Farr, of the Welsh Streets today, looking towards the Cathedral in the distance.

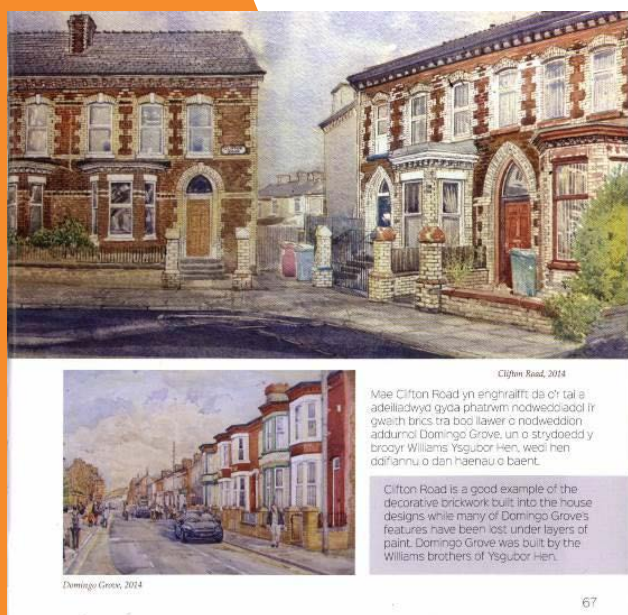
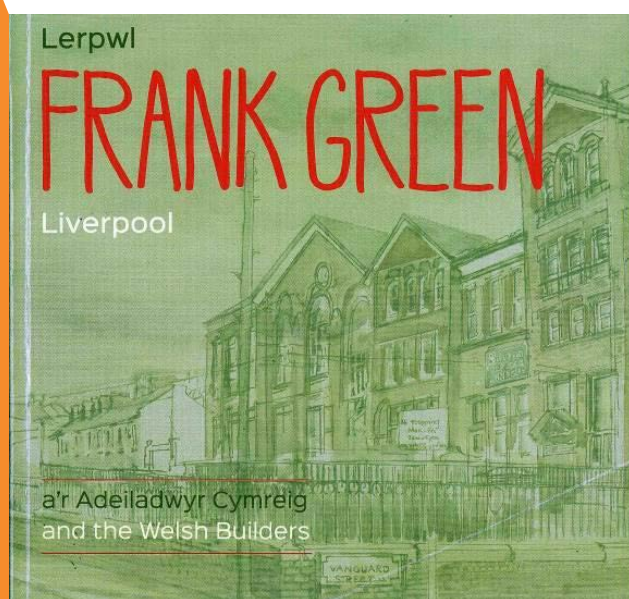


A computer-generated image shows how the streets could be restored. It was presented to the Public Inquiry by SAVE.

**2.5** A concern arising from the Inquiry was the clear implication that Liverpool's terraced housing was intrinsically obsolete. This is a theme that has afflicted this city [more than others] since the post-war clearances, through the 1960s, then the years of the 'Militant' Council's suburban cul-de-sacs, right up to the present day. It reflects a de-facto acceptance of 'managed decline', a suburban antithesis of a once-thriving metropolis of high-densities and 'joined-up' buildings.

**2.6** Something that came to prominence in the Public Inquiry was the impressive history of the Liverpool-Welsh architects and builders. The evidence provided by Dr. Gareth Carr focused on the significance of the architect Richard Owens, who designed the 'Welsh Streets' and had a large practice covering Liverpool and North Wales, designing hundreds of chapels and commercial buildings as well as thousands of houses, from his offices in Westminster Chambers in Dale Street [a building that he also designed]. Those influenced by Owens included the famous Liverpool architect Herbert James Rowse [India Buildings, Philharmonic Hall, etc], who had been apprenticed to the office of Richard Owens and Son. It is also timely and helpful that the story of the Liverpool Welsh architects and builders has been told in a highly-recommended bi-lingual book by the artist Frank Green.

**2.7** An illustrated presentation was given to the MCS by Trevor Skempton on the 28th April 2015, entitled: 'Terraced Housing in Liverpool – A Long-term Future?' – Towards an MCS Green Paper.' The responses to that presentation led eventually to the drafting of this Green Paper, which has now been revised to reflect further consultation, with the inclusion of the examples and illustrations in Paragraph 4.



Images from Frank Green's inspirational book 'Liverpool and the Welsh Builders'

## 3. The Structure of the City, Population and Open Space

**3.1** Sustainable development gives priority to sustainable patterns of movement: walking, cycling and public transport. Liverpool's terraced housing is linked to a radial network of mixed-use commercial thoroughfares, spreading out from the Pier Head. Typically, these radial main streets are faced by three-storey terraces with a commercial ground floor and punctuated by regular landmarks, such as churches, banks and pubs. Terraced streets, typically of two-storey houses, run off them and feed into them on each side. This efficient and sustainable model has been disrupted, in order to accommodate increasing road traffic. However, this structure will need to be cared for, repaired and conserved, if we intend our established urban communities to be safeguarded, sustained and rejuvenated [see Conclusion 5.4].

**3.2** The Birkenhead grid-iron is just as interesting. It was conceived as a grand alternative to perceived 'overcrowding' in Liverpool. The wide straight streets were laid out as part of an ambitious plan, including Birkenhead Park, with the buildings envisaged to be large stone terraces and tenements in the Edinburgh style. However, much of the grid was infilled with two-storey brick terraces, and some has remained undeveloped, although its 'grand' potential remains.

**3.3** It was the high density of urban housing that gave rise to the public urban parks, such as Birkenhead Park [the first municipal park in Britain, closely followed by Princes, Sefton, Newsham and Stanley Parks, as well as numerous smaller examples]. The loss of terraced housing and urban density around these parks challenges the symbiotic relationship between parks and people, and puts the future of these historic parks at risk. This urban context cannot be separated from the parks themselves, a point made in the Welsh Streets Public Inquiry.

**3.4** In the post-war years, planning orthodoxy has insisted on 'zoning', that is separating towns into discrete areas to serve specific functions. This has led to unsustainable transport requirements and has destroyed many of those historic communities, which are based on a rich mix of uses, including 'living over the shop' and being able to walk or catch public transport for most journeys. Such zoning is evident in American cities, and Liverpool seems to have taken up the concept more single-mindedly than any other MCS White Paper 2 5 August 2016 European city, with the inevitable consequence of a hemorrhage of its inner-city population and vitality.

**3.5** The new Urban Design agenda, which promotes higher densities and mixed uses, was embraced by the MCS in its White Paper of 2012. Terraced housing is the particular form of development that characterises Liverpool's surviving urban communities [as in cities such as Leeds and Birmingham, but in contrast to Edinburgh and Glasgow, where the European-style tenement is the usual form]. Whatever the housing form, if a city's main asset is its people, then it follows that the expulsion of these people and hollowing out their communities [by reducing densities from urban to suburban levels] is a form of corporate civic self-harm.

## 4. Some Examples

**4.1. Two areas that might be considered for special protection, to stand as exemplars for communities of terraced housing [see conclusion 5.5].**

### 4.1.1. Walton.

The area in Walton, bounded by Spellow Lane, County Road [both sides], Walton Lane and the railway line. This area includes the Everton Football Ground, the Church of St Luke the Evangelist, Gwladys Street School, and a section of County Road that is representative of Liverpool's traditional 3-storey radial streets. The historic structure of the area is remarkably intact, but there is plenty of evidence of economic stress, and there is uncertainty over the future of Goodison Park.

North Liverpool is home to two of the top-twenty richest football clubs in the World. One [Everton] was a founder-member of the Football League and has played more top-flight games than any other club, and the other [Liverpool] has won more trophies than any other club. Liverpool was formed in 1892, when Everton left Anfield to build a new stadium on the other side of Stanley Park. Their relationship is unique in World football. Their historic grounds attract thousands of international visitors.

Liverpool are in the process of expanding their main stand, but Everton have yet to declare their hand. Everton's ground, Goodison Park, was the World's first major purpose-designed football stadium, and two of Archibald Leitch's original stands are still in place. The ground sits in the middle of a dense network of streets and a landmark church sits between the stands in one corner. In 1966, it was arguably the finest club ground in the World, when it hosted the World Cup Semi-Final. The case for listing the Gwladys Street and Bullens Road Stands and declaring a surrounding Conservation Area seems compelling, and if this could be agreed, as part of a conservation-based ground expansion and development, it would be to the benefit of the club, the local community and the city as a whole.



Organised sport, along with brass bands, libraries and model villages, arose as part of the genesis of modern management. In Saltaire, Yorkshire, the Victorian Mill and surrounding terraced streets are now a World Heritage Site. But is that different to the towering stands of Goodison Park rising out of the streets build by the Welsh builders of Victorian Liverpool? And is it time to raise our sights?

#### 4.1.2. Birkenhead

The Conservation Areas on the Wirral focus on grand set-pieces, pre-industrial settlements, estates of large private villas or the two exemplary model villages of Bromborough Pool and Port Sunlight. The neglect of the fine legacy of Victorian terraced housing has been as bad as in Liverpool, with the discredited HMRI 'New Heartlands Pathfinder' having been particularly active in Tranmere. One area of terraced housing which could be considered as a future exemplar [with either Conservation Area status or comparable protection] is that around Town Road and Crofton Road, from Church Road to Old Chester Road. This network of streets lies between two parks, Victoria Park and Mersey Park, and exemplifies a positive relationship between highdensity housing and public open space.

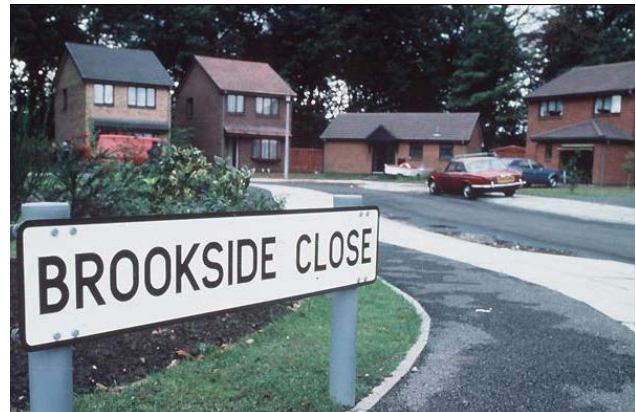


Intact communities of Victorian terraced housing in Walton and Birkenhead [from Google Earth]. Both show the value of tight streets and high-density housing close to parks. These are just two of our historic districts that could become Conservation Areas, and act as exemplars for the protection and enhancement of similar assets. These areas of terraces had evolved from the strict discipline of 'facts before fancy' [described by Dickens in 'Hard Times'] to include features such as bay windows and railings, and a sophisticated approach to urban design, townscape and landscape.

## 4.2. Streetscape and Proportion

The Victorian streets were developed with an eye on proportion, and the correct ratio between building height and street width. These notions, partly derived from Georgian housing, were strengthened by the introduction of regulatory byelaws in the late nineteenth century. However, with the main focus being on avoiding 'overcrowding', no such regulation was applied to the opposite effect, of suburban sprawl and streets that are far too wide to contribute to urban quality.

There are several examples, within the Liverpool City Region, of areas of two-storey terraced housing, developed on street layouts that envisaged something grander. The most obvious example is the 'grid-iron' of Birkenhead. There are other examples in parts of Toxteth and Kirkdale. Over-wide streets produce a feeling of desolation, which is often compounded by the imposition of crude 'traffic calming' measures. The most effective way of calming driver behaviour is the use of more appropriate dimensions and attractive materials. Speed bumps suggest an air of paranoia, which is the antithesis of good design. Where streets are already too wide, we should at least look at such opportunities as narrowing the main carriageway and introducing car parking between street trees.



Those television soap operas, which place an emphasis on community life, are set in joined-up buildings such as those of Coronation Street and Albert Square. It seems to be significant that the [now defunct] Liverpool soap opera, Brookside, which had a very different emphasis, was set in a suburban cul-de-sac.

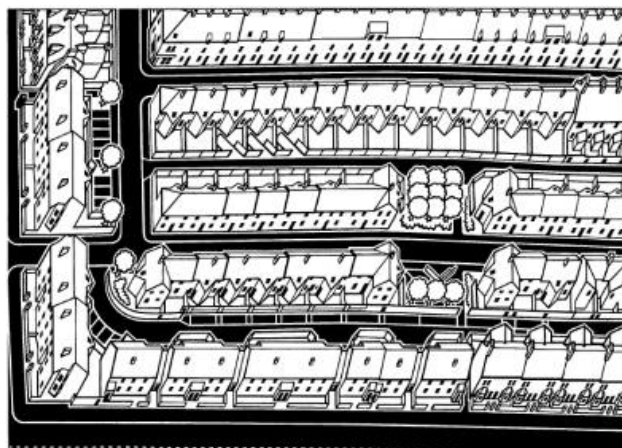


## 4.3. Privacy and Car Parking

**4.3.1.** Policies on privacy and car parking have been driving a suburban agenda – giving priority to the aspirations of some individual private consumers, often at the expense of the complex needs of the community as a whole.

**4.3.2.** In high-density urban solutions, design ingenuity can provide such benefits as private outdoor space which is not overlooked by neighbours. Genuine private space then complements the improvements to the public space made by ‘joined-up buildings’. In high-density streets, traditional devices have developed over time, such as net curtains, balconies and railings, to shield people from unwanted direct outside view. In the Liverpool terraces, ‘outriggers’ and brick walls created some privacy and a sense of enclosure at the back. The small back yards were supplemented by the communal provision of public parks and allotments. It is important that high-density terraced housing is seen as part of an urban system that includes the provision of public parks and green spaces. And vice-versa; the urban parks are directly related to the surrounding high-density communities.

**4.3.3.** In suburban solutions, however, a notional privacy is achieved by distance; for example, planning ‘rules of thumb’ say that windows of habitable rooms facing each other must be 21 metres [70 feet] apart. Thus, when one side of a terraced street 15 metres wide is demolished, the only permissible way to rebuild the other side of the street has been to put blank gable ends against it, or to move the new houses back to form a buffer zone of front gardens, which are then also deep enough to allow parking spaces to be inserted. Such ‘rules of thumb’ are now widely discredited, but are still being applied in Liverpool. We have a ridiculous situation in which bureaucratic planning ‘rules-of-thumb’ are being applied that would make most of the finest historic residential streets in English and European cities obsolete – because they are less than 21 metres wide and have windows facing each other across the street!



These two and three-storey terraces were built on a former bomb-site in the 1980s, to consolidate the long-standing community of Hindpool, in the centre of Barrow-in-Furness. These new ‘double-fronted’ houses had upstairs windows looking to the front, and so avoided the overlooking of back gardens and yards, but they required special permission to face their neighbours across the traditionally narrow street.

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**4.3.4.** The combination of the notion of 'privacy by distance' and a high future allocation of car parking space is the main driver of suburban development. The suburban model reduces density to a level at which most local employment, and local services, are unsustainable. The consequence is centralisation of services in district centres, further isolation and loneliness, and less viable public transport.

**4.3.5.** The official view still seems to persist that working-class communities can, and should be, converted into aspirational consumer-driven dormitory areas, by enforcing a combination of the clearance of high-density terraced streets and a replacement by low-density suburban housing, dependent on remote centralised services and supermarkets. These official attitudes, which partly underpinned the Housing Market Renewal Programme, in effect declare all traditional terraced housing obsolete, and so have put much of the Liverpool City Region's housing under an unacceptable and continuing 'planning blight'..



Much of our Georgian and Victorian housing was built from standardised patterns utilising good quality robust materials and sophisticated details, such as sliding sash windows, as in Rodney Street [left] or in the 'Welsh Streets' [right].



## 4.4. New Terraced Housing and Urban Vision

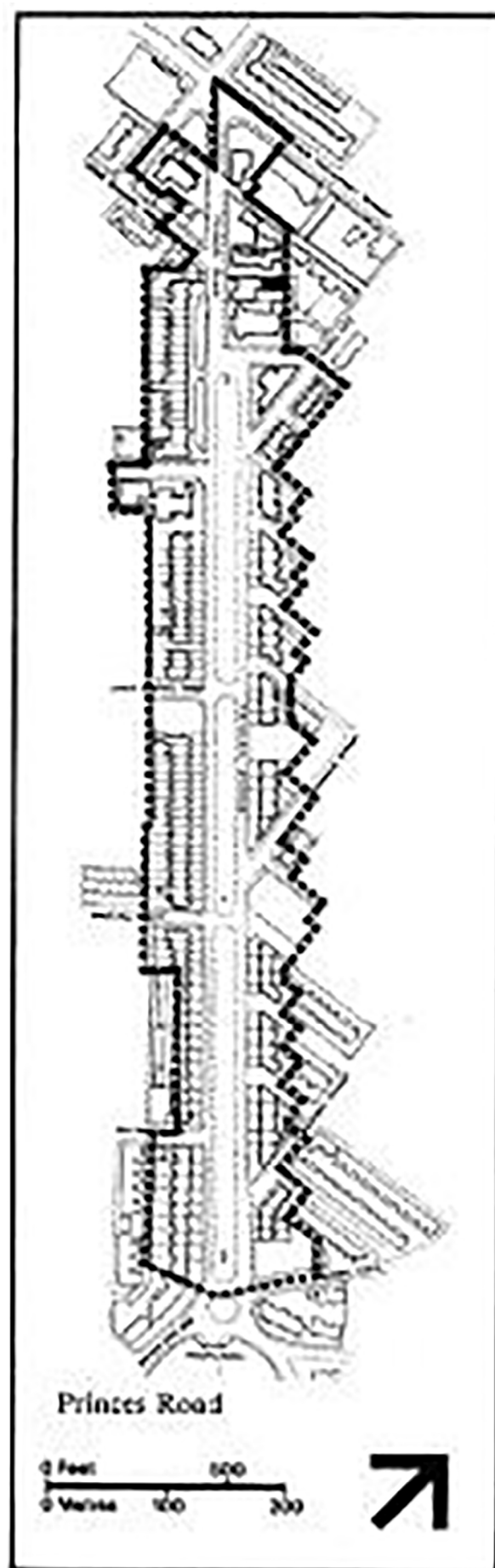
There are some examples of good new terraced housing, although these are spread thinly, as urban fragments. Examples were discussed in 'State of the City', and the MCS welcomes discussion of innovative proposals. However, we have yet to see a modern equivalent of the wide coherent urban vision and consistent quality of Liverpool's historic terraced housing [see conclusion 5.3].

## 4.5. The Edges of our Urban Parks

**4.5.1.** Because some of these park 'edges' are relatively weak, the temptation to develop is understandable. However, no development should be considered until a proper strategic plan for the park and its surrounds has been agreed – with the linked qualities of the park and the adjoining urban communities being the over-riding factors. Development must be smart enough to ensure the improvement of both. In the meantime, there should be no opportunistic selling off of any land.

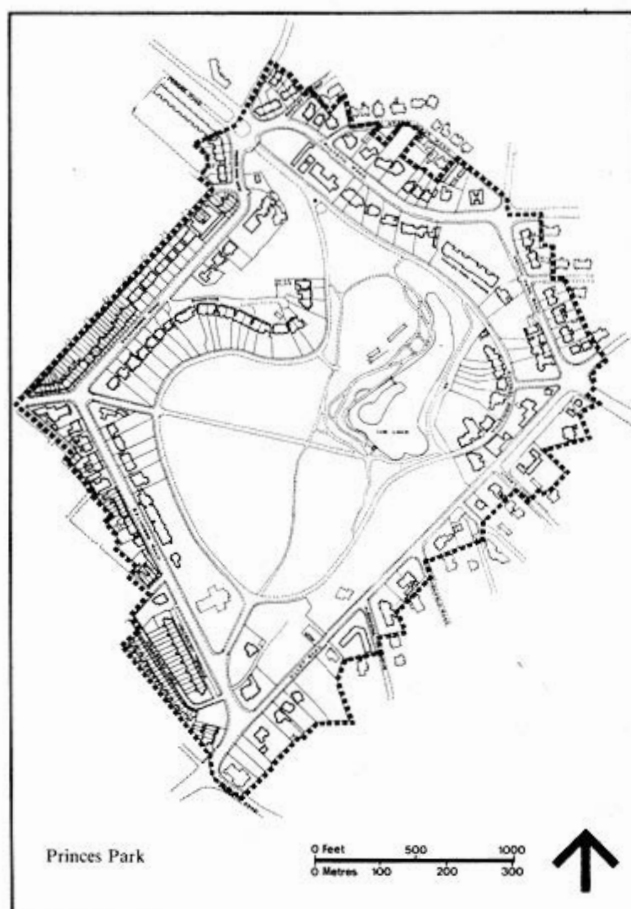
**4.5.2.** For example, the sale of part of Everton Park to allow the building of the new Notre Dame School, before a proper development plan had been agreed, has set an unfortunate precedent. Other land sales seem likely to go ahead based on similar short-term financial expediency. The housing density in such areas needs to be re-established, without threatening any further demolition; of course, this may involve further land transfers, but the overall improvement of quality of the park, and value to the surrounding community, must be the over-riding priority.

The Princes Avenue and Princes Park Conservation Area boundaries are tightly drawn around the grander buildings facing the Avenue [left] and the Park [right], thus excluding the nearby terraced streets and not addressing the vital relationship between park and people. Furthermore, recent planning approval has been given to a large area of car parking [42 spaces] within the back garden just to the South of the left-hand end of the lake. This destroys a part of the green curtilage of the park, is unnecessary [there are better solutions], and sets a worrying precedent.





**4.5.3.** Another example, Sefton Park Meadows, has been even more controversial. The original plan for the park allocated this area for surrounding development [such as large villas or crescents]. The adjoining site [of nondescript low-rise modern housing] demonstrates how the edge of the park should definitely NOT be developed. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that many people don't trust the processes and, with that in mind, it is quite logical for them to argue that no new development should be allowed. However, the test for us should be that any proposed development must make a decisive improvement to the quality and setting of the park. For example, mature trees would be maintained and new buildings of an appropriate [medium-rise] scale would address the edge of the park in accordance with the original intentions. Until or unless this test is passed, we must oppose development on this and all comparable sites [see the picture of Princes Park below, showing the relationship between the park, the villas and the terraced housing; see also conclusion 5.6].



**4.5.4.** Equally worrying is the erosion of the park edges by ill-considered parking schemes. The MCS objected to two recent proposals, on Windermere Terrace in Princes Park and on Ullet Road in Sefton Park. Both involved the unnecessary addition of large paved areas and the removal of trees. We see these as being the thin end of a wedge, in allowing the application of inappropriate suburban-type solutions to the urban edge of these historically valuable urban landscapes.



## 5. Seven Conclusions

### 1

**5.1.** There should be an end to systematic demolition of terraced housing; with conservation, rehabilitation and sympathetic modern infill instead.

Thus the MCS re-states its support for the retention of the Welsh Streets and similar areas that are still under threat, recognising the inherent sustainability of the properties - i.e. the already-expanded carbon footprint in respect of the production and manufacture of the surviving fabric, and the thermal benefits of 'joined up' dwellings. Any re-development proposals must include a requirement to carry out a full survey before assuming that demolition is the only option, in order to dispel the myth that much of our terraced housing was poorly built.

### 2

**5.2.** There should be a systematic drive to restore densities and fill-in gaps, where the inner-city has been hollowed-out by clearance and neglect.

There are many opportunities, not just to provide new buildings, but also new small urban green spaces, to meet specific needs of local communities, and be defined and overlooked by new buildings around them.

### 3

**5.3.** Elsewhere, we look forward to new designs for terraced housing and streets of 'joined-up' buildings, instead of unsustainable suburban models.

The MCS would support ideas for innovative forms of terraced housing and, in some cases, for the sensitive conversion and 'modernisation' of existing houses. An important aspect of 'joined-up' buildings is the retention of densities high enough for local businesses and community facilities to remain viable. We recognise that some suburban developments, including Port Sunlight and some of the ring of development around Queens Drive, are of high design quality, but it is still argued that such low-density developments are an inappropriate general model for urban areas or for public transport nodes and corridors.

### 4

**5.4.** We respect the radial street pattern of Liverpool and the grid-iron in Birkenhead, and seek the consolidation of these characteristic layouts.

The radial routes and the grid-iron provide a coherent historic skeleton to the core of the Liverpool City Region, on both sides of the river. There is a case for a special study and protection of the surviving commercial radial routes, such as County Road, Aigburth Road, Smithdown Road and Kensington. Lessons should be learnt from the recent destruction of Edge Lane and the earlier destruction of Scotland Road, which have produced wastelands and prolonged blight.



**5.5.** We recognise the fundamental relationship between terraced housing and streets, and will campaign for systematic improvements to the public realm, with several new Conservation Areas to act as exemplars.

More terraced housing should be included into new Conservation Areas [or a comparable form of protection] and, within these areas, particular care should be taken to produce and maintain an appropriate streetscape, which could be an exemplar for other neglected areas across the Liverpool City Region.



**5.6.** We recognise the symbiotic link between high-density communities and historic urban parks – and seek to strengthen the enclosing edges.

Development around the parks should follow an agreed masterplan for each urban park and its urban context, recognising the value of ‘joined-up’ buildings and terraced housing in securing urban enclosure and passive supervision of open spaces. However, the MCS is resolutely opposed to opportunistic disposal of land around the parks, which does not take full account of the bigger picture.



**5.7.** Finally, we must recognise that the market can never solve the housing problem; we campaign for a mixed economy, to provide housing for all.

The ‘housing problem’ has been with us for at least 150 years. The conventional market approach requires a housing shortage to keep market values buoyant. But decent housing should be seen as a basic human right. To guarantee decent housing for all requires a strong public sector not-for-profit involvement, with effective long-term planning and management. The main political parties are just tinkering with the market. The MCS and Civic Voice should take a stand on this.



## Postscript: The Terraced House As Lived-In Experience

More than bricks and mortar.

All my Architectural and Sociological Doctoral (1989) research at Liverpool University School of Architecture indicated that the Terraced House and Street is a lived-in experience. In phenomenological and sociological terms it is a 'life world'. In addition to the physicality, people are perhaps more attached to its rituals, use and experiential experiences. The terrace house is much more than bricks, mortar and slates. It's a house of memories; tamper with these memories and you tamper with people's very souls. The house was lived in from the 'cradle to the grave', from birth, bathing, to resting in peace. The fundamental aspect of the relationship of a human being with our territory, is our history.

Having investigated the 'life world' inside the 'Small Bye Law Terraced House between 1913 and 1979', certain themes emerged. The users' attitudes towards the house changed; it was not static, because the 3.5m wide terrace was long-life and loose-fit. The use of space and furniture changed considerably; walls were demolished and open plan through-lounge spaces created with the availability of "I" profile steel beams. The household ritualistic activities of washing, cleaning and bathing changed with the addition of rear extensions. From the tin bath to the new extension. The interior physical fabric and decoration was personalised, modified and changed. Services and technology changed from gas and coal to electricity. From the full coal fired range to the open fireplace. Interior lighting changed from gas lighting to fluorescent strip lighting. The users made significant DIY modifications using newly available materials including hardboard and plywood. History shows that major events had impact on the 'life world' of the small working class terraced houses. We need to remind ourselves that the working class residents of these houses lived through two World Wars and a General Strike. Social and Community Studies reveal that that the surrounding neighbourhoods were also in flux in terms of social class, gentrification and ethnic mix. Attempting to understand the relationship between the 1926 General Strike or The Second World War and the inside of the terraced houses is a basic problem of science in the phenomenological tradition. Dr Robert G MacDonald (1989) Appropriation of Space inside the English Working Class Home, PhD Liverpool University, The School of Architecture. Copyright RGM 2016