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MOVE AHEAD

BIRKENHEAD

# It's time for a fresh start

Birkenhead was built to work. Industrious, inventive, inspiring, it's a town of world firsts and listed buildings. Of parks and poetry, and passionate people.

It's the town that built Liverpool, quarried the stone to clad the Empire State Building, launched the world's biggest ships. If ever a town was built on rock solid foundations,

it's Birkenhead. It's time to recapture that spirit and rekindle the energy and ambition that put Birkenhead on the map. We're starting a conversation about how we revive and re-imagine the town.

It's about how we make the most of what's unique and special about Birkenhead, how we nurture the energy and creativity of our people and how we

create a vibrant and attractive place to live, invest and do business.

Move Ahead Birkenhead starts with a real plan for how we kick start this next chapter – an exciting proposal for a new leisure destination at Europa Boulevard – but this is bigger than a single scheme. We want to open a conversation about what happens next.

It's a conversation that involves everyone who lives, does business, visits or simply cares about the town.

Because we believe it's high time we learned from our past – and looked to the future.

**Five big opportunities** Turn to pages 2 & 3



# It's about five big ideas which bring five huge opportunities



## It's about Edge

Birkenhead has something that towns and cities across the world would envy – a waterfront.

Waterfronts give places an edge and a recognisable visual identity and signature. They are places where people want to live, visit and gather. They are a magnet for investment and a catalyst for change and regeneration.

### Opportunity

Let's give Liverpool something to look at.

*How do we create a new destination and community at Woodside that gives Birkenhead a waterfront to be proud of?*



## It's about Heritage

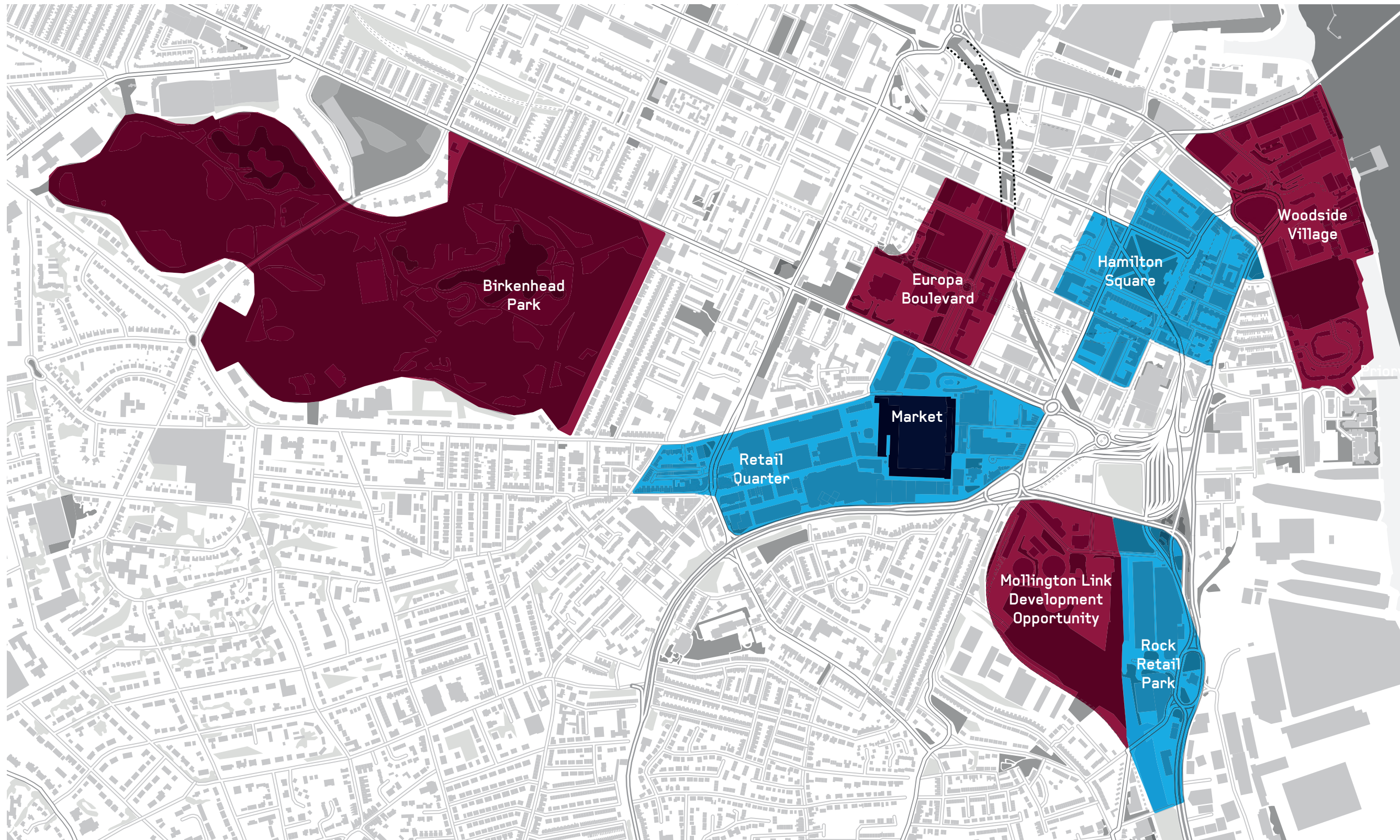
We boast some exceptional and beautiful buildings and spaces. These assets need to be cherished and their potential fully realised.

History and heritage are not just about the past. They are essential foundations for a future vision. We need to rethink these precious spaces and buildings so they can be celebrated, accessed and enjoyed – becoming the special places that define Birkenhead's identity and appeal.

### Opportunity

Hamilton Square, creating a world-class public space.

*How can we create new life and vibrancy at Hamilton Square as a focal point for a new vision for Birkenhead?*



## The bigger picture

Europa Boulevard – Providing new leisure centre and pool, hotel and restaurant cluster to create vibrant leisure destination. Expanding town centre and creating strategic route north to Wirral Waters.

Market and Retail Quarter – Opportunity to expand and rethink Birkenhead Market as catalyst for renewal of the retail offer with proposed investment in Pyramid Centre.

Hamilton Square – Potential to build on the area's unique architectural heritage to create a world-class public square, residential and cultural quarter.

Woodside Village – Chance to link and rethink development opportunities to create an iconic new landmark for Birkenhead waterfront.

Birkenhead Park – World-class park and one of the key assets that could be major draw to make Birkenhead one of region's most attractive new residential destinations.

Mollington Link Development Opportunity – Presents a chance to link New Chester Road to Central Station and the Town Centre, and open up new site for housing, shops and leisure



## It's about People

Places are made by people. One of the best ways a city centre can improve is when it works hard to become a place where people want to live.

New developments and residential conversions are beginning to happen in Birkenhead, but we need more people to support the shops, leisure and cultural facilities that make up a vibrant town centre.

### Opportunity

Making CH41 the region's most popular residential postcode. *How do we make Birkenhead town centre and waterfront a more attractive and affordable place to live?*

## It's about Character

Attractive places do their best to show they're not like everywhere else. They focus on the things that make them special.

Once upon a time Birkenhead's identity was built on things that people knew and recognised – its industry, its buildings and its market. Birkenhead Market attracted people from across Merseyside, North

Wales and beyond. It underpinned the town centre economy and its wider retail offer. Surrounded by successful and established retail centres, Birkenhead needs to find an identity and offer that's unique and original.

### Opportunity

Re-inventing Birkenhead Market.

*How do we create the region's number one market as a catalyst to transform Birkenhead's appeal as a shopping destination?*



## It's about Connections

Birkenhead is served by one of the UK's busiest rail networks. We are connected to tunnels, motorways and ferries and yet people complain that it's sometimes easier to bypass the town centre than it is to actually access it.

Our shopping, civic and waterfront areas are disconnected and somehow add up to less

than the sum of the parts. Making the most of our assets, increasing vibrancy and attracting more people are all about movement and better connections.

### Opportunity

Better connections for Birkenhead.

*What new infrastructure, roads or public transport improvements do we need to make it easier to access and use Birkenhead town centre?*



# ‘Birkenhead can become a real asset to the Wirral’

**Steve Parry**, Managing Director of Ion Developments, explains the approach being explored in Birkenhead and how it can be a real asset to the Wirral

**Places are about people, aren't they - not just the fabric of the masterplan?**

Regeneration schemes are often thought to be about the development of new shiny buildings and the removal of derelict or underperforming spaces. However, you can develop as many new buildings as you like but these will fail unless what is provided captures the imagination and support of local people as well as potentially new visitors to the area.



Ion Developments' managing director Steve Parry

Places are about people and whilst end users might be similar in different locations a good development should reflect the tone of an existing location if we are to avoid the homogenous feel that you find on every out of town retail park. People are migrating back to town centres because they have a real sense of place, they have accessibility and they are real places. Our role is to see if we can bring new facilities to an area without losing that sense of place.

There is often a lot of talk about developers imposing projects on an area particularly where a strong sense of place exists with its own underlying quality but a good development should take the best of what

exists in a community and build on this to produce a new environment which has a real sense of place. In order to develop buildings, we need to ensure that they will be commercially successful and to be commercially successful they need to appeal to as many customers/visitors as possible and provide something that people want.

The most important part of my job is to look at developments from a non-professional point of view and test whether what we are proposing makes common sense to the man on the street. Often designers can get carried away with the cleverness of their design or the purity of their concept but this can sometimes result in a development which is impractical or unattractive to the public and therefore could be a commercial failure.

**This isn't about a back-to-the-drawing-board re-imagining of the town. Is it more about reconnecting with the stuff that's been there all along? It's spirit? Tenacity? Industriousness? Returning a sense of ownership to the people who use it?**

I have on my desk a copy of the outline plan for the County Borough of Birkenhead which was produced in 1947 by the famous architect and town planner, Professor Charles Riley. This document is a fascinating insight on Birkenhead at that time and describes the problems of the area and the aspirations for the town in the future. This was very much "blue sky" thinking which envisaged the development of large areas of new housing in the Conway Street/Price Street areas, much of which was never delivered. What was delivered was the Woodchurch Estate!

The days of back-to-the-drawing-board masterplans are long gone, certainly for towns like Birkenhead which need a series of interventions which could transform what already exists. Birkenhead has many attributes but these are not currently being exploited and the fact is that much of the population of the Wirral do not use Birkenhead Town Centre for shopping or leisure activities and indeed many of the people of Birkenhead itself visit the town centre infrequently.

Birkenhead does have a particular feel to it based upon the river, the ship yard, the park, etc. which makes it a distinctive place which is very different from Liverpool but is also very different from the rest of the Wirral. The 1947 Riley plan makes a few interesting



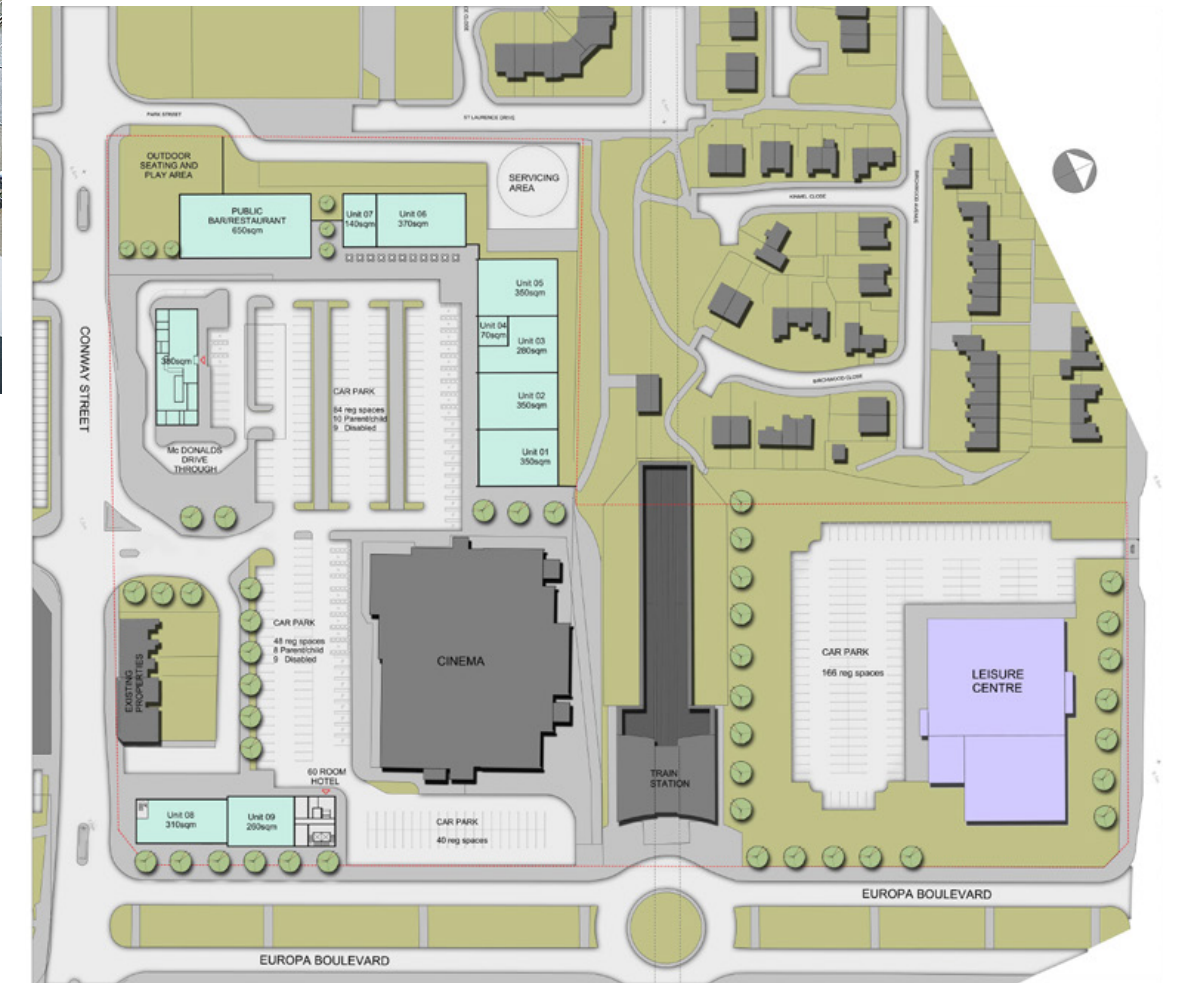
## It's about getting started

There are things missing in Birkenhead Town Centre and Europa Boulevard is an opportunity to provide one of them. Ion Developments have been working with Wirral Council to rethink this area and create a new leisure destination and restaurant offer in the heart of Birkenhead town centre.

By relocating Europa pool and creating a new leisure centre and pool, we can make space for a cluster of family restaurants around the Vue Cinema. Creating a vibrant and popular evening leisure destination is something that Birkenhead urgently needs and is the starting point for a much more comprehensive and radical vision to renew and transform the town.

**The new leisure destination expands the town centre across Europa Boulevard towards Conway Park station creating a new strategic connection north towards Wirral Waters.**

Clockwise from main picture, an artist's impression of how the leisure quarter could look; the new pool and sports centre, a map of the development, and an artist's impression of the restaurant cluster around the existing Vue Cinema.



comments which are perhaps even truer today. For example, it said the town has a high percentage of unemployment and that a more balanced local economy is needed and that "the shopping centre in Birkenhead has suffered greatly through its proximity to Liverpool and that for similar reasons it loses the possibility of serving its natural hinterland of Wirral".

Based upon the above the town may be in a similar position to nearly 70 years ago, but I believe that the wholesale approach adopted in that plan is both unnecessary and indeed unviable and that a series of separate phases of development which build upon the existing benefits of the town will be far more successful within a much shorter timescale.

The people of Birkenhead are pretty resilient

and pretty cynical but have a begrudging loyalty to the town and are often its worst critics. What always seems to pervade in Birkenhead is a sense of humour and that is a major part of the character of the people and the place. Birkenhead needs to become a real asset for the Wirral which everyone uses at some time as an alternative to the draw of Liverpool City Centre.

**When you look at a project like this, it must be quite daunting. Where do you start? What is the catalyst that informs everything else?**

I don't find looking at a project like this particularly daunting but you do need to believe that what you're doing is achievable and right. Changing the hearts and minds of people is just as important as the physical

development of an area and often it is only when new buildings are developed and older ones refurbished that such a change can take place. Ironically standalone projects in regeneration areas can often present a higher risk to a developer than undertaking a larger phased scheme as there is always a risk that a small scheme may not be successful in convincing both occupiers and users that the location has changed.

There is not a single formula for achieving successful development as there are so many strands to bring together such as occupier demand, planning, site conditions and of course the general economic climate. What works today may not be deliverable in the future and perhaps the most important constraint in development is timing.

**Can towns still have a sense of place? And if so, how do you draw that out of them, and preserve it?**

Towns need to have a sense of place – that is what they are for. Increasingly people wish to spend their time in environments that do have an urban grain, one that is not necessarily particularly pretty but has a sense of identity and has variety and interest.

All town centres have been impacted on by the growth in out of town retail parks and Birkenhead has suffered from both the facilities in Liverpool City Centre and the developments in Bromborough and Cheshire Oaks. That said, I am convinced that given the right offers for both retail and leisure in Birkenhead Town Centre, people will return particularly if the environment is attractive

and facilities such as public transport and car parking are available. One of the challenges is to create connections between its principal assets such as Woodside, Hamilton Square, Argyle Street, the Shopping Centre, Charing Cross and Oxtown Road which, over the years, have become disjointed elements of the town.

Few towns have the physical attributes of Woodside and Hamilton Square which are sadly underutilised. Both need repopulating by day and night.

**What's your favourite Birkenhead experience?**

I have lots of memories of the town from when I was very young including trips to the Old Market and Woodside, going to the

Sarsaparilla bar (was it Bob Martin's?) on Conway Street, not to mention nights out to the Sir James Club and Atmosphere.

**What is it about being a developer that most excites you - and in your experience, how does this project rate: amongst having the most potential?**

The really interesting bit is seeing the potential of a location and then coming up with ideas for a development based on that initial vision and then hopefully seeing a successful completed scheme and hearing from people that they use and like what we have developed.

I see Birkenhead as a whole as having fantastic potential – the key is getting the people of the Wirral behind it.





Hamilton Square, above, can once again be the jewel in the crown of Birkenhead.

## There is beauty in our midst

When did you last take the time to really look at Hamilton Square? It is, by far, one of the most beautiful town squares in Britain. And it's right here: the jewel in the crown of Birkenhead's elegant new town plan.

With its soaring town hall and rows of dignified townhouses, the square is second only to Trafalgar Square in London for having the most Grade I listed buildings in one place. In its heyday, it was the address to have. Like all great town squares, it was the focus of the town's business – a vibrant place of hustle and bustle.

But Hamilton Square, today, is a sad shadow of its former glory. We believe the historic built environment isn't a museum. It is our duty to protect it, yes, but to restore it to its rightful place – at the heart of a reinvigorated town centre. Town squares still have a major role to play as decompression zones: places where we can pause, relax and socialise.



### Case study Queen Square, Bristol

Queen Square is the largest Georgian residential square in England, but in 1936 the city ploughed a dual carriageway right through its heart. In 1996 a major regeneration scheme removed the dual carriageway and the bus routes around it. The original 1817 design was reinstated, with gravel paths, new seating, lighting and tree planting to create a magnificent public space, a place where people want to work, live and play.

# Let's capitalise on our undervalued assets

## Birkenhead Market

has always been the beating heart of the town... can we make it even better?

Chosen as one of the very first Marks and Spencer Penny Bazaars (back in 1840), Birkenhead Market traded successfully for the best part of two centuries.

Through the years, it's been the starting point for many of the town's best-loved businesses. The country produce, the glistening fish, the handbags and gladrags. If we wanted it, the market had it.

Which is probably why, today, shoppers flock here from near and far. Even, whisper it, Rhyl...

The town has shifted around it, super-markets have come and gone (and come again!), and it was even engulfed in flames.

But Birkenhead Market has beaten off all competition, and we're determined to keep it that way.

In Birkenhead, we know that a good market is as much about grabbing a deal as it is catching up on the gossip. Our families have their favourite stores. Their Saturday morning rituals.

These days, cities around the world are beginning to realise how placing a market at the heart of things is the smart thing to do.

But it's something we always knew. Because, unlike many other towns, we never turned our back on our market. How many towns can boast two centuries of continuous trade? Birkenhead can.

From Sheffield to San Francisco, Bury to Bilbao – markets have brought life, character and business back to the heart of their retail offer.

We know how to do this. We're already doing it. But we think we can make it better. By building on two hundred years of trading, Birkenhead can be a modern market town to be proud of.



### Case study Altrincham Market

Altrincham, one of the country's few genuinely planned market towns, got into trading way back in 1290. But, by the 1980s, the town's market was a neglected, little-used reminder of the past. Bar owners, Nick and Jenny Thomson thought they could do better. After extensive talks with their Council, they were given the chance to prove it.

"Altrincham needed to reinvent itself as a modern market town," Nick recalls. "The town I lived in wasn't fit for purpose. It had the highest retail vacancy rate in the north. The market was dying. We needed a place where people could meet, be warm and get fed," Jenny says of her idea to reimagine the market hall as a thriving food hub. "This place sold toilet rolls and knickers," she says. "Last week, we fed 7,000 people!"

The hall is ringed by bright new businesses - pizza, sausage makers, bread and ale. Outside, in the covered market, traditional traders ply their wares alongside new made-in-Altrincham start-ups.

They started on Sundays with the food court - now open five days a week, into the evening.

They've injected 19 new businesses, 73 permanent new jobs and a turnover of £3.5 million a year into the local economy. For the price of, what? "Less than half of what it'd cost to build a new Lidl!"

Birkenhead Market has been trading for two centuries

## 'We need to show that we care about this place'

"When we bought the pub from Cains Brewery five years ago, we initially wanted to bring our barber's shop here, but we knew that what Birkenhead lacked was a real ale pub," says Gallagher's Pub's Frank Gallagher.

"We thought the town was ready for a place that sold the sort of craft ales and premium lagers you could get in Liverpool. We took a punt, and we were proved right," he says of his bar (run with partner Sue) – an instant hit, and now CAMRA award-winning favourite for locals and travelling beer fans.

"This area has always been a meeting point to go to Liverpool, like Wetherspoons and, previously, Rinty Monaghan's before it. We wanted to capture that crowd before they went and spent their money over the water," Frank says.



Gallagher's has been a hit since opening five years ago.

So what happens next? How does Gallagher's plan for its second five years? For Frank it's simple: Birkenhead needs to turn its riverside advantage into the complete package. A real destination again.

"Birkenhead grew from the river," he says. "You just have to take a leaf out of Liverpool's book to see the potential we're wasting."

Instead, Frank points to the industrial estate and sewage works occupying prime position opposite Liverpool's resurgent Pier Head. Wasted opportunity after wasted opportunity.

"I want people to come off the ferry into Woodside Village – a real hub of activity, with great signage, and a trail of local businesses and heritage sites to explore, all the way into town," he says.

"If we don't capture people, they're gone – straight down the A41 on the fastest route out of here.

"Little things can make a big difference, and give the impression that we really care about this place," he says, with a final thought. "And let's get the tram route extended."

### Case study Liverpool waterfront

You don't have to look far to see an example of what happens when a city returns to the water. So successfully has it reinvented itself over the past thirty years, that it's hard to remember Liverpool without its waterfront. But at the beginning of the 1980s, Albert Dock was a silted up no-man's-land. It was Michael Heseltine, Thatcher's Secretary of State for the Environment sent to a city still smouldering after the Toxteth riots, who was the catalyst for the Mersey Basin Campaign: a 25-year project to work with a myriad of different stakeholders. Now, Liverpool waterfront is the jewel in the crown of the city's resurgent tourist offer: and is home to as many popular new attractions as it is to swanky new office developments and desirable residential addresses.



### What we're wondering...

Birkenhead doesn't have the Three Graces. But it has something that towns and cities across the world would envy – a waterfront with a terrific view. A view of a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Waterfronts give places an edge. They are places where people want to live, visit and gather. They are a magnet for investment and a catalyst for change and regeneration.

Can Woodside become a place for pop-up markets? Start-up enterprises? Heritage trails, and desirable new apartment villages? Can it be the bo-ho, arty alter-ego to Liverpool? A South Bank on

the Mersey? A place for a Sunday market and stroll?

How can we begin to re-imagine Woodside, better connect its sites, and realise the potential for major redevelopment?

How can we create a waterfront that is busy, accessible and enjoyed by people and visitors?

What kind of development and what kind of architecture do we want to see here? And how do we bring the kind of life and visual appeal to the Woodside area that will not only underpin the future of the ferry, but will attract more people to renewed and regenerated Birkenhead?



# Dutch masters who are turning their eyes to our homeland

Why one of the world's most exciting new urbanists believes in Birkenhead. We speak to Rotterdam's **MVRDV Architects**

**For Dutch-based architecture and urbanism practice, MVRDV, finding solutions to some of the world's knottier urban problems is what they do best.**

By creating innovative ways in which we all can live, work and contribute to the place we call home, the practice has helped reimagine, and re-energise de-industrialised neighbourhoods around the globe. Places like Birkenhead. Along the way, they've helped kick-start some of the most exciting second acts for once-neglected corners of our cities. But it's not about plonking a flashy new building on the waterfront, winning an award and vanishing – MVRDV is much more interested in how people live in places.

"It's all about the individual; about building a sustainable community. One that works," says MVRDV's Jan Knikker. "It's about collaboration. Cities are the heart of our societies. We approach urban challenges by asking how can we offer a high quality of life for their residents and users."

To that end, their Market Hall in Rotterdam saw a soaring arch of apartments sweep over a vibrant new market; an unorthodox solution, yes, but an audaciously brilliant one. A multi-use space, the development crystallised everything MVRDV holds dear – a sustainable combination of retail, living, leisure and local produce. It acted like a roadmap for the region's future, and now this formerly unwanted corner of the port city has most definitely got its groove back.

In partnership with Austin-Smith: Lord, the practice has started to take a look at the place we call home. And they're intrigued by what they've found here.

"It's like a rough diamond," Jan laughs, down the line from his Rotterdam HQ, "but, absolutely we can see the great potential here. You have some incredibly beautiful spaces and

buildings, and they're very well connected to each other and to Liverpool."

But, presented with such a daunting regeneration opportunity, where would MVRDV start, we wonder?

"It's not about coming in with a flashy new building and then leaving," Jan says. "We're much more interested in placemaking, in long-term solutions. About seeing the effect the urban landscape, the public realm, and the architecture has on its inhabitants."

It's why the practice is celebrated for its innovative approach to multi-use buildings and places: and why, Birkenhead, Jan believes, presents such an exciting possibility..

"It just oozes potential, the sheer beauty of Hamilton Square, the wonderful view over to Liverpool's skyline. You could do so many great things here. The good thing about having a lot of space is that you don't have to find use for everything right now – just start with a few good initiatives."

Such as?  
"It's about giving people a destination, an environment in which they feel they can make a difference," he says. "Food markets, allotments, festivals, art. If things start to happen in these run down spaces, they become attractive again. Then others start to see the attraction, and it's easier to get more serious long-term developments off the ground. Tiny interventions can lead to massive change

Bureaucracy needs to be cut right back. You need to foster a can-do attitude."

With the best urban planning, Jan says, the balance has to be right: bottom up, citizen-led change should work alongside top down, and every new planning proposal has to be rigorously challenged. "Empty plots are so valuable in terms of an area's future. If you get it wrong, as Birkenhead has by the waterfront, you're stuck with that decision for a generation. And there is a lot of that here."

So it's not about saying yes to the first multi-million pound development on the table. We have to be way more discerning than that?

"Exactly," Jan says. "Building a huge supermarket will attract shoppers, but will it attract people who want to live next door? We need to make a place where people feel proud to live, and that will stop people in their tracks when they get off the ferry or the train."



**"Birkenhead just oozes potential, you could do so many great things here"**



Clockwise from main picture, MVRDV's market hall design for Rotterdam; the architects' restructuring of a large 70s urban block in Montparnasse; MVRDV's masterplan proposal for Bastide-Niel Bordeaux; and the firm's design for the new Cultural Cluster in the centre of Zaanstad.

## Architects plot route to create a more well connected town

Birkenhead is well served by its transport network. Rail, road, ferry, bus – there's a diversity of options that not many places can boast.

But are these transport modes working together well enough to serve the best interests of the town?

Richard Cronin of Austin-Smith: Lord architects will be looking at how Birkenhead can make best use of its transport assets to facilitate the success of the proposed redevelopment and the town centre in general.

"Initially we need to take a holistic view; to look at how we have got where we are and any fundamental changes that are required to unlock Birkenhead's potential. Birkenhead is fantastically well placed in terms of transport, but the car's dominance has had a detrimental effect in terms of movement.

"For example, the flyovers were built as a response to the need to get people to the tunnel entrance, but that has created barriers at ground level. And while the movement to the tunnel has been speeded up, what that has also done is speed up access



Birkenhead Bus Station

to the economy and leisure attractions of Liverpool, so that connectivity under the Mersey has been a drain."

But the existence of the various transport connections presents Birkenhead with an excellent starting point.

"This is where we have an opportunity for Birkenhead because the infrastructure is already in place. What it needs someone to zoom out and see the bigger picture, then bring all the elements together. This is what Chester is doing with their Gateway scheme, but it has required them to take a long term view.

"If there was a better offer in Birkenhead then the opportunity to access the Wirral, Chester and North Wales markets is huge.

"At the moment it's too easy to go anywhere by car, but the most successful places are those that have good transport infrastructure at their heart, and the more modes of transport the better. You have to make journeys seamless and natural for people."





Nigel and Simon Buckmaster of Wards fishmongers at Birkenhead Market.

## Market traders going the extra mile to beat bargain stores

There is a new breed of market trader in Birkenhead – one that defiantly shows this place has a future at the heart of the town.

Since 1927, Wards has been serving the good people of the parish with just-landed fish. Today, Nigel and Simon Buckmaster are the fourth generation of the family – one of only four remaining fishmongers on Merseyside.

On any given market day, there'll always be a hubbub of activity around their spic-and-span stall – now with a huge crab and lobster tank, and bewildering variety of game meats, tubes of Stornoway black pudding and freshly made sauces. But it's all about the fish. And, for Nigel, it's all about the service too.

“For a long time, markets were all about a race to the bottom – about grabbing a bargain, getting stuff on the cheap. You can't do that any more.

“The high street's become the market, with its Home Bargains and Poundlands. Now it's about going the extra mile, helping your customers learn how to cook, giving them the very best produce.

“You'll see if you look around, the busiest stalls are like industrial units. There's a shop front, where staff engage with their customers, but often, at the back, they've a thriving online business too.

“People don't come to Birkenhead to browse all day – why would they when there's Liverpool ONE? But they do come to destination shops, places like ours and a handful of others in the market,” he says.

But one thing is clear: the market is too big.

“It was built for a different era. We need to slim back, and focus on quality,” he says. “I don't buy that talk of Birkenhead being poor. People here are canny with their money, but it's about quality, not price. We've grown as a business by going up in quality, not down.”

# ‘It’s time to dream big to bring back magic’

Talk of regeneration is in the air. But haven't we been here before? We talk to Wirral Council Leader **Phil Davies** and ask him: what's different this time around?

**Birkenhead is back in the news; people are talking about the town's regeneration potential as part of the Northern Powerhouse, do you share that optimism?**

Not only do I and my council colleagues share that optimism and sense of potential, in many respects we are pushing and driving it! Wirral has a great history and Birkenhead, in particular, has a strong heritage of innovation and firsts.

The original ferry across the Mersey was a King's Charter 800 years ago to the monks at Birkenhead Priory, Birkenhead Park was the world's first publicly-funded park, the first submarine was built here, first public trams, first public library outside a major city and first School of Art outside of London.



Wirral Borough Council Leader Phil Davies.

The town is probably most famous as a seaport and for shipbuilding, and the return of Cammell Lairds to the Birkenhead waterfront in the last decade was a real “feel-good” moment for the town. Since returning, they have gone from strength-to-strength and re-established this side of the Mersey as an important centre for maritime engineering. So it's easy to see why UK and international investors, looking at the opportunities behind the Northern Powerhouse brand, see Birkenhead, and the wider Wirral, very favourably.

**When you talk about Birkenhead's next chapter, are you talking more about 'evolution' than 'revolution'?**

Yes, I think that is probably correct. Clearly the waterfront – the view over the UNESCO World Heritage skyline of our sister city Liverpool – is an obvious regeneration opportunity. Connecting the waterfront to Hamilton Square is another opportunity. To bring this architectural gem back as the heart of downtown



‘Let's make some noise about the talent on our doorstep’

Champion of local music, Bido Lito Editor and Liverpool International Festival of Psychedelia Director, Craig G Pennington says it's time to shout about what makes us great.

“On Wirral we have a fabulous opportunity. We have an opportunity to put life back into the heart of our community, providing hope, aspiration and careers for our young people,” he says.

“We have an opportunity to celebrate our creative past, while providing an invaluable platform for the dreamers of our future. We have an opportunity to present world class experiences to people from around the globe, enriching the lives of the people who call Wirral home.

“We have an opportunity to put one of the assets that has made us great in decades gone by, at the heart of our vision for the future. We can do all of this with our music. People think about many different things when they talk about music and they have very different ideas about what music cultures and industries can do for a town or region. At present, Wirral is missing out.

“There isn't a venue dedicated to new music in the borough. For a place that gave the world artists such as Orchestral Manoeuvres In The Dark, Elvis Costello, The Coral and Forest Swords this is a saddening truth and a missed opportunity.

“Music venues are the maternity ward of music cultures. They provide a context for talent to develop, infrastructure to grow, local start-ups to blossom and they stimulate local economies. They can be used as beacon developments to encourage investment, a project base for new ideas and provide a focal point to stimulate related industries.”

Birkenhead is a key goal. But there is also a touch of revolution as well. We are already attracting new investment in low carbon and clean energy solutions, Unilever – based in historic Port Sunlight – have their Advanced Manufacturing Centre under construction and new digital industries in customer services and logistics have headquarters in the town. So there is a real opportunity to blend existing advantages in maritime industries, our fast-growing tourism and visitor economy, as well as attracting new industries that tap into our excellent schools and colleges.

**The Council is seeking new investment – but what role do existing businesses and organisations play in Birkenhead's future?**

The council, the City Region Combined

Authority and other partners are taking the lead on attracting inward investment, but Wirral's business community are the engine behind both the economic growth we seek, and the social improvements we believe it will deliver. But it is Wirral businesses that will create the jobs, pay the wages, build the houses, offices and new infrastructure which regeneration will achieve. That is why it's important all parties work collaboratively towards the same objectives.

This may be what is different about the way we are approaching this opportunity to redevelop Birkenhead than, perhaps, previous efforts. Rather than a series of one-off schemes, there is an emerging vision for the whole of Birkenhead. We are looking at how to connect the water with the historic town centre and the shopping district.

We are incorporating into our plans the developments on and around Wirral Waters, along the A41, and across the docks and floats to Wallasey.

**Some might say this public consultation is simply box ticking; how would you respond to that?**

Residents nowadays expect to be more involved in the big decisions that affect them. We are constantly consulting with residents, businesses, service providers and users to shape better outcomes, so I think residents are becoming more familiar, and comfortable, with these kind of consultation exercises. Gathering the ambitions of local residents, asking questions and finding out what would attract people from across the wider Wirral to re-engage with Birkenhead; discovering what visitors and businesses think brand

Birkenhead stands for; is really vital in delivering growth.

**Crystal ball time; talk to us about your vision for Birkenhead, 2020?**

We first set out the shape of that vision in our Wirral Plan last Summer. We identified 20 pledges that were about making Wirral residents happier, healthier and wealthier by 2020. I am a Labour politician, a Labour leader of the council and, therefore, am driven by improving the lives of residents.

I am optimistic about the future and think if we can deliver regeneration on the scale we are contemplating, by 2020 we can have made some significant progress in repositioning Birkenhead and Wirral in the Liverpool City Region, across the Northern Powerhouse and in delivering better outcomes for our residents.

If we look at the experience of other places that have already trodden the regeneration path we know that it is a long-term project, and that successful regeneration projects have a magnetic effect on future investment.

But we know they start because a large-scale intervention or catalyst occurs – the Olympics in East London, Commonwealth Games in Manchester, The Capital of Culture in Liverpool – the list goes on.

But many, if not all of these schemes, had doubters who said it couldn't be done – but it was because the will of the people made it happen. There is a great quote I was reminded of in discussions with my team when we were talking about our ambition: “Dream big dreams. Small dreams have no magic.”

That seems very appropriate don't you think?

## The future starts here, says college principal

Sue Higginson, Principal at Wirral Met, believes the college has the skills, and the determination to play a crucial role in our town's next chapter.

“Wirral Met College has been providing education and training for the Wirral community for over 165 years,” she says. “The need to ensure that people are equipped with skills for work is the same now as it was when we opened. But technology has changed our world considerably – opening up opportunities for Wirral to play its part in the Global economy too.

“Our new Wirral Waters Campus is the first new building in the UK Enterprise Zone, and it's dedicated to developing the education and skills for construction and the built environment. We're equipping local young people with the skills to help shape this future vision of Birkenhead, and beyond.

“Our other College campuses in 12 Quays, Conway Park and the Oval provide pathways to learning for careers in every sector skills area, for young people and adults who are embarking upon training or retraining for a successful career.



Wirral Met College's new Wirral Waters Campus.

“Collaboration is key. We work alongside hundreds of employers, because we know that regeneration – building a prosperous future for everyone who lives and works here – relies on great partnerships.

“We're determined to play a key role in supporting the regeneration of Birkenhead by continuing our work with employers, schools and our partner universities, to ensure that the range of skills we support really meets the needs of our community as it looks towards a brighter future.

“It's absolutely essential that our College is part of this journey to design and create this vision for our local community.

“We support the Local Authority in attracting future investment, too. As one of the largest employers in Wirral, we employ hundreds of local people who, in turn, support thousands of local students to gain the education and training they need to build a successful future.

“It's an exciting time. We're all looking forward to playing our part in making Wirral a great place to live, learn and work.”



MOVE AHEAD

BIRKENHEAD

## Public Exhibition

Don't miss the opportunity to find out more about the proposals for Birkenhead by visiting our public exhibition. There will be representatives of the developers in attendance to listen to your views and answer any questions you may have. We look forward to seeing you there.

## Where?

The Exhibition will be housed in a unit in The Pyramids Shopping Centre (150 Borough Rd, Birkenhead, CH41 2RA) opposite Select and close to the food court.

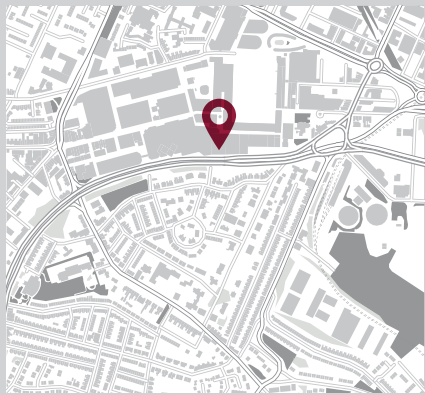
## When?

Thursday,  
February 25th – 10am - 6pm

Friday,  
February 26th – 10am - 6pm

Saturday,  
February 27th – 10am - 5pm

## How to find us



Join the conversation and follow us online at...



/moveaheadbirkenhead



@mabirkenhead

[www.moveaheadbirkenhead.com](http://www.moveaheadbirkenhead.com)

# Have your say

## Europa Boulevard

We're proposing to build a new pool and leisure centre at Europa Boulevard to make space for a new hotel, leisure and restaurant cluster around the Vue Cinema. This will provide an evening destination with a family leisure offer that is currently missing in Birkenhead. It also expands the town centre and begins to create a strategic link north to Wirral Waters.

### Do you agree with this proposal?

- ☐ Agree strongly ☐ Agree  
☐ Don't know ☐ Disagree ☐ Disagree strongly

Comment

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## Woodside

We think that it's time we gave Liverpool something to look at and cashed in on the potential of our outstanding waterfront assets. Woodside can become an attractive and popular waterfront quarter, a vibrant new residential area and a gateway to a transformed wider town centre.

### Do you agree with this proposal?

- ☐ Agree strongly ☐ Agree  
☐ Don't know ☐ Disagree ☐ Disagree strongly

Comment

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## Hamilton Quarter

Hamilton Square is an architectural gem and should be the centerpiece of a dynamic heritage quarter. We believe Birkenhead needs to reimagine and reconnect this area and encourage new commercial and cultural activity to bring the area to life and stimulate further investment in the town centre.

### Do you agree with this proposal?

- ☐ Agree strongly ☐ Agree  
☐ Don't know ☐ Disagree ☐ Disagree strongly

Comment

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## Thank you

Name  Email

Address

Once completed, these questionnaires can either be handed in when you visit the exhibition or posted to:

Fabrik Studio, Suite 3, Church House, 1 Hanover Street, Liverpool L1 3DN.

## Market and retail area

We believe Birkenhead needs to find a distinctive identity by focusing on what it does best and what it does differently. We see Birkenhead Market as a unique asset and opportunity to create an offer that is different to surrounding centres. A renewed and expanded market could be the destination that the town needs to underpin its retail offer, and bring more and new shoppers to the town.

### Do you agree with this proposal?

- ☐ Agree strongly ☐ Agree  
☐ Don't know ☐ Disagree ☐ Disagree strongly

Comment

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## Making Birkenhead a better place to live.

We believe that people are the key to successful regeneration. Birkenhead's closeness to Liverpool City Centre and the quality of potential sites creates an opportunity to make the town centre a highly attractive residential location.

### Do you agree with this proposal?

- ☐ Agree strongly ☐ Agree  
☐ Don't know ☐ Disagree ☐ Disagree strongly

Comment

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## Making better connections

Birkenhead town centre is well served by trains, tunnels, motorways and ferries but it often feels disconnected and hard to access. We think radical and imaginative solutions are needed to remove barriers, improve road and pedestrian connections and make better use of our public transport infrastructure to help the town centre fulfil its potential.

### Do you agree with this proposal?

- ☐ Agree strongly ☐ Agree  
☐ Don't know ☐ Disagree ☐ Disagree strongly

Comment

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Move Ahead Birkenhead is a collaboration between ION Developments (formerly Neptune Developments) and their design partners to reimagine Birkenhead town centre through an inclusive conversation with residents, businesses and stakeholders. Move Ahead Birkenhead is an open and ongoing project that will continue to

engage and recruit stakeholders and delivery partners with a shared objective to deliver a positive vision for the town.

**ION** are an established development and urban regeneration company with an extensive portfolio of successful projects across the UK. ION are preferred developers for the Europa Boulevard site and part of the design

and development team formulating longer-term ideas for Birkenhead town centre along with partners:

**ION**<sup>o</sup>  
DEVELOPMENTS