

PART 3:

# Public Realm





The University of Liverpool Campus with the Georgian quarter, the Anglican Cathedral and the new Women's Hospital in the foreground



## 3:1 Public Realm

In which we describe the public realm in the Knowledge Quarter, the extent to which it is enclosed by buildings, the ease of movement through the area and the quality of the design and maintenance of the spaces.

**A**fter having looked at the buildings, their scale, quality and uses we now deal with the public spaces within the Knowledge Quarter. The Public Realm plan on the facing page shows the entire public realm of the area - everywhere that the public have access: the streets, squares, public spaces as well as landscaping and surface parking. These areas are shown in black, while the white relates to private, non-accessible spaces.

In a traditional urban area the public realm does two things. The first is that it creates a large number of routes for people to walk through the town (permeability). On the other hand it takes up only a small part of the land area. This means that the public realm is contained by the public 'fronts' of buildings, and the private 'backs' face into the courtyards. This makes for an attractive public realm because the backs of buildings are often unattractive. It also helps security because the backs also tend to be more vulnerable.

There are a further three aspects that make up a good quality public realm that we deal with in turn:

- Definition of space and the clarity of public and private areas;
- The ease with which people can get around; and
- The quality of public space design, materials and management.



**Definition of space**

Public spaces are defined by continuous building lines. Successful streets and places are characterised by a clear distinction between private and public areas. The public realm plan shows that for Liverpool's traditional areas, such as Canning Street, Kensington Fields, Ropewalks and China Town and the Commercial District around Water Street, the public areas are relatively well-defined. It is easy to make out the numerous routes of varying size (and therefore function) through these areas. Public spaces, such as St. James' Garden, Derby Square or Monument Place on London Road, which stand out clearly.

There are, however, areas within and adjacent to the Knowledge Quarter where the quality of the public realm decreases significantly. These are areas where it is not possible to easily identify streets and public spaces on the public realm plan. Buildings are surrounded by large surface car parks and unallocated, non-distinct open land, often where clearance has taken place. While the south western part of the Knowledge Quarter is well-defined by mainly Georgian housing, it is the entire eastern and northern area of the Liverpool University Campus, where the public realm breaks down. It is mainly around the Royal Hospital and

where the Holford Plan has been implemented that there is almost no offer of animation or enclosure to the public realm. For example Crown Street is surrounded by university properties that seem to bear no relation at all to this important street, which is a high profile public transport route. Furthermore, buildings like the Life Science Building, the Chadwick Tower & Laboratory, the Donnan Laboratories and the Business School are surrounded by open space, surface car parks, roads and footpaths. In these areas it is not possible to 'read' the street network or indeed recognise open spaces.

Further north, the Islington corridor is a vehicle-dominated environment. Wide and busy carriage ways with no buildings and active uses fronting onto them combined with large, raised areas of open space create an unpleasant environment for pedestrians and cyclists. As already described in the Urban Form section this is one of the Shatter Zones within the study area. Other areas within the Knowledge Quarter where the public realm breaks down include Copperas Hill, Great George Street/ Great George Place and Upper Parliament Street around the Women's Hospital.



### Ease of movement

The second aspect of good public space is movement. This is partly covered in the access section. However, in terms of urban design we are concerned with 'permeability'. This relates to the number of routes that there are for movement around the Knowledge Quarter and to its neighbouring areas. How easy it is to move around the Knowledge Quarter? The extent of the public realm might be expected to lead to very good permeability. However, this could be limited by highways and fences and in general it tends to be the more traditional places with smaller public realms that are easier and more pleasant to move around.

The ease of movement varies greatly within the Knowledge Quarter, depending on the structure of particular areas as already described in previous sections. Islington and London Road, the Redbrick University, the Georgian quarter, the intimate streets between Rodney and Hope Street are very permeable, offering different types of streets to move around the area although their quality varies greatly.

The LJMU City Campus is cut off from the rest of the Knowledge Quarter by the flyover and the highways crossing of Byrom Street/Great Crosshall - Hunter Street. Here pedestrians are pushed onto bridges, which connect the pleasant Civic Forum environment with Marybone, which has become a 'hinterland'. The area is dominated by heavy traffic and creates a hostile environment for pedestrians and cyclists especially in the morning and evening rush hour.

A number of key pedestrian desire lines are severed within the Liverpool University Campus and at the interface with its surrounding areas.

**Left:** Monument Place on London Road **middle:** The flyover and pedestrian bridges create an unfriendly environment for pedestrians and cyclists. **below:** Crown Street is an important traffic route but lacks a built edge with active frontages.



### Public realm quality and severance

There are a number of good quality spaces within the study area. Hope Street with its two cathedrals, the Georgian area and the Redbrick University provide good quality spaces, which are well-designed and feel pleasant to be in. Detailed attention has been paid to the choice of material and its consistency within a certain area. For example, in the Canning Street conservation area newly restored wrought ironwork now greatly enhances a 19th century terrace and around Abercromby Square fragments of the original York stone paving and setts laid by the old Liverpool Corporation do still exist and add to the square's unique character. A detailed analysis of the public realm has been undertaken and is dealt with in section 3.2.





► The public realm plan shows private areas in white and all spaces accessible to the public in black.



## 3:2 Quality of the Public Realm

In which we describe the patchy nature of the public realm of the area by looking at its identity, the use of materials, sense of safety and public art.

**G**ood urban design provides a sense of wellbeing and amenity by making streets not only places that function well – in terms of traffic, parking, servicing, pedestrian movement etc... but which are also beautiful places to spend time. Good quality public spaces are therefore:

- Lively and pleasant to use;
- Safe and secure;
- Uncluttered and easily maintained, carefully detailed and with integrated public art and functional elements;
- Well lit with attractive lighting;
- Suited to the needs of everyone, including the disabled and elderly people; and
- enhanced with attractive and robust planting appropriate to the locality.

The public realm needs to create spaces that are comfortable to use rather than either cramped and overcrowded or too open and windswept. It should be easy and pleasant to move around by a variety of means. It should not be dominated by traffic nor be cluttered with street furniture and its detailed design should be simple and practical but also beautiful. The Knowledge Quarter varies greatly in these respects. While the conservation areas provide a generally high-quality realm, the quality is low in the northern and eastern parts of the study area.

### Identity and Sense of Place

Place making should respond to the existing natural and developed features of the environmental context. A place that enhances the distinctive local landscape, sense of place and history whilst providing a quality living environment will establish a rich environmental character unique to its locality. A responsive context analysis will identify:

- Distinctive landscapes;
- Natural features;
- Locally distinctive built form;
- Streets patterns which respond to the context;
- Special spaces of natural or cultural significance;
- Building materials; and
- Local culture and traditions.

The two impressive cathedrals linked by Hope Street create a strong sense of place. Numerous cultural and tourist destination add to its identity. This is supported by a good quality design of the public space, which is described in more detail below. Some Georgian terraces on Falkner Street have recently been refurbished and are now home to small shops and cafe's/bars adding to the local identity. Canning Street is one of only a few Georgian areas of this size in England to remain untouched and preserved, for most of them have been remodelled since Victorian times.

The quality of the realm is low in areas which are inconsistent in terms of building age and built form, which are poor in terms of architectural

design and which are poorly maintained and looked after. These areas are mainly used for industry/works, warehouses and wholesalers or surface parking. Local identity has been replaced by large structures that don't relate to their environment or has fallen victim to clearance and highway planning. Areas of poor identity and sense of place include the lower parts of Brownlow Hill and Mount Pleasant, Mount Vernon and Kempston Street.

### Materials

Paving materials and public realm design are fundamental to perceptions of environmental quality. Pavement treatments vary widely across the Knowledge Quarter. The recently installed York stone and granite public realm along Hope Street, between Upper Duke Street and Mount Pleasant, sets a standard of excellence. Quality natural materials and widened pavements assert a high priority for pedestrians relative to vehicular traffic. Key crossing points are reinforced with crossings and configured as 'shared spaces', emphasising the primacy of people on foot. Cluttered street furniture is kept to a minimum.

A handful of streets have kept their cobbled setts exposed. The western section of Falkner Street, between Catherine Street and Hope Street, demonstrates the powerful contribution to townscape quality that exposed natural stone materials make. Other cobbled surfaces are found in minor back streets, as shown on the plan on the next page. They include Back Canning Street in the Georgian quarter, Baltimore Street and South



► Clockwise from top left: Banksy Cat Mural on Duke Street; Falkner Street; Metropolitan Cathedral steps and cafe; and piece of public art on Seymour Street

Hunter Street in the LJMU Mount Pleasant Campus and Greek Street off London Road.

York stone pavement flags provide a comfortable, visually delightful context for adjacent buildings. The southern 'conservation core' retains a considerable amount of original historic York stone pavement flags, which do much to enhance the positive townscape impact of adjacent blocks of Georgian and Victorian townhouses. Away from this core, fragments of the natural stone pavement that was once universal in Liverpool can be found in other parts of the Knowledge Quarter, such as short stretches of Grove Street, Myrtle Street and Mount Pleasant.

However, the predominant surface treatment for pavements within the Knowledge Quarter is concrete flagstones. This is acceptable, though not ideal in certain locations, but does not do justice to the setting of architectural assets such as the townhouses along Rodney Street.

### Safety and security

The form and fabric of a place define the living environment and establish a hierarchy of both, public and private spaces providing clarity of function and movement. Therefore a good public realm ensures that:

- Streets, footpaths and open spaces are overlooked by buildings;
- Public and private space are clearly distinguished;
- Gaps in the line of buildings are being avoided;
- Streets and other spaces are enclosed by buildings and trees of a scale that feels comfortable and appropriate to the character of the space; and
- No leftover spaces are unused and uncared for.

This is partly covered in the Urban Form and Public Realm sections. Places that feel safe and comfortable to be in include:



- Monument Place
- Hope Street and Cathedral Steps
- Abercromby Square
- University Square
- Renshaw Street

Places within the study area that lack a sense of safety relate mainly to streets, such as Grove Street, Crown Street, Prescott Street around the Royal Hospital, Copperas Hill around Russell/ Seymour and Norton Street and the Islington corridor, which carry a lot of traffic and have little or no active frontages.

### Public Art

Public art helps create a sense of place and local identity. Pieces of public art in the study area include:

- John King - A Case History on Hope Street;
- Banksy - Rat mural covering the derelict Whitehouse Pub;
- Tracey Emin - 'Roman Standard' sculpture outside the Oratory;
- Jacob Epstein - Liverpool Resurgent, Sculpture on Lewis's Department Store;
- Dame Elisabeth Frink - Risen Christ sculpture above the Anglican Cathedral West Door;
- Barbara Hepworth - Sculpture outside University Senate House, Abercromby Square; and
- George Herbert Tyson Smith - Sculpture from former Gerrard Gardens Tenement, Hunter Street, and bronze reliefs on Cenotaph, Lime Street.

### Street furniture & lighting

There is no bespoke palette of street furniture covering the Knowledge Quarter. Hardman Street, Monument Place/London Road, Renshaw Street, Canning, Hope Street and both university estates have each been subject to discrete programmes of intervention over the last ten to twenty years.

Hope Street sets the standard, its freedom from railings and clutter demonstrating that 'less is more'. Integrated lighting and sculptured benches blend contemporary design with the historic setting. The University is installing new seating areas along its central spine route.

Recently improved Renshaw Street has imaginative though uncomfortable modern benches. Berry Street attempts to reference its China town setting. Monument Place includes relatively recent benches and planters, as does Hardman Street, but both schemes have suffered poor maintenance. Canning benefited from sympathetic restoration of Victorian cast-iron street lamps in the 1980s.

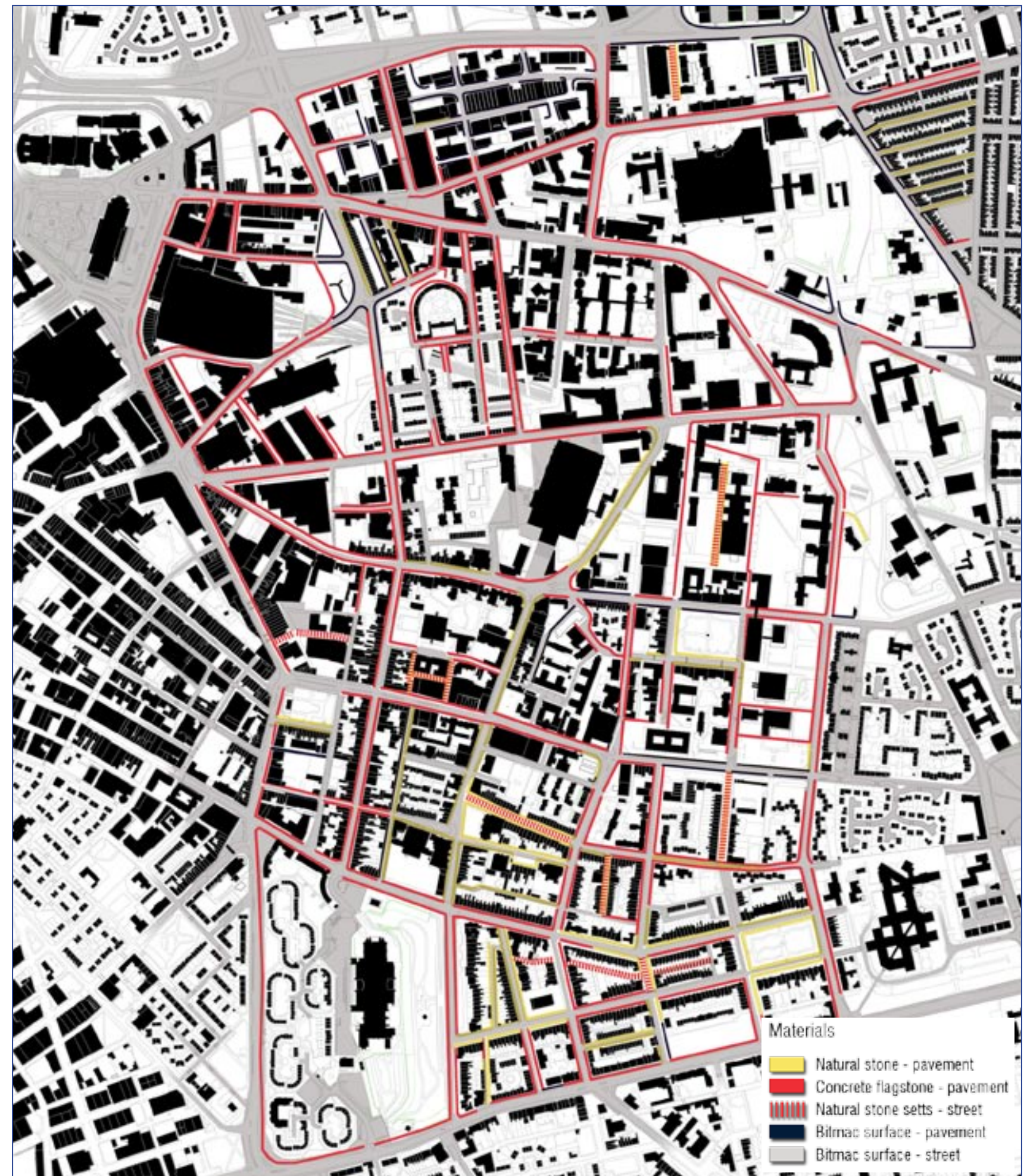
Otherwise, street furniture is of the most basic statutory standard. Visual clutter and a rash of guard railings are rife, suggesting a lack of co-ordination in the area's civic design.

Lighting is an important element when looking at the quality of the public realm. It relates to safety and design. Well lit places feel safe to move around or stay in the evenings. Lighting can be used to highlight prominent buildings or other landmarks, such as public art of high architectural quality thus enhancing the sense of place.

Liverpool Vision is leading the 'City of Light' project, which aims to illuminate 30 of Liverpool's most prominent landmarks. The area of focus is around the Cultural Quarter and the Waterfront. Landmarks already illuminated include:

- Walker Art Gallery;
- Liverpool Museum;
- Central Library;
- Steeple Fountain; and
- St Georges Hall.

The Knowledge Quarter would benefit from a lighting strategy, with Hope Street as a best practice example praised by CABE for its high quality streetscape design.



► Audit of surface treatment



## 3:3 Open Spaces

In which we describe the network of public squares and parks within the Knowledge Quarter as well as the less well-used landscape areas and surface car parks.



Open spaces form an important part of the public realm – particularly squares, parks, gardens and landscaped areas. These spaces are important to the appearance and functioning of the city. They create places of public assembly and entertainment as well as informal spaces to meet and relax, to sit out on a street café or to sun bathe in the summer, contributing to a full and satisfying city lifestyle. Open spaces are also important in creating a sense of space, allowing planting to soften the urban environment, to provide colour, shelter and shade as well as reducing many forms of pollution.

### Parks and Public squares

Although the area is densely developed it contains several fine open spaces. St. James's Gardens and Falkner Square (both lie just outside the study area) have Green Flag status, and Abercromby Square is also a very well maintained public garden. The gardens adjacent to the LJMU Aldham Roberts library are a tranquil

refuge from the busy city, as is the quadrangle behind the University's Victoria Building.

These assets offer essential opportunities for reflection and interaction, but are not well integrated with the movement network in terms of their legibility or accessibility. The largest space, St. James's Gardens, is difficult to reach and as a result is underused and can often feel isolated and insecure. The squares and garden quadrangles are somewhat disconnected from the life of the wider city, although they are well used by occupants of surrounding buildings. The overall quantity of open space is fair, but its function is in need of expansion.

### Green spaces

Some of the open space within or immediately adjacent to the study area is less attractive and useful. This includes grassed areas around major junctions and major roads such as Islington and Upper Parliament Street as well as the grass surrounding the social housing blocks on the

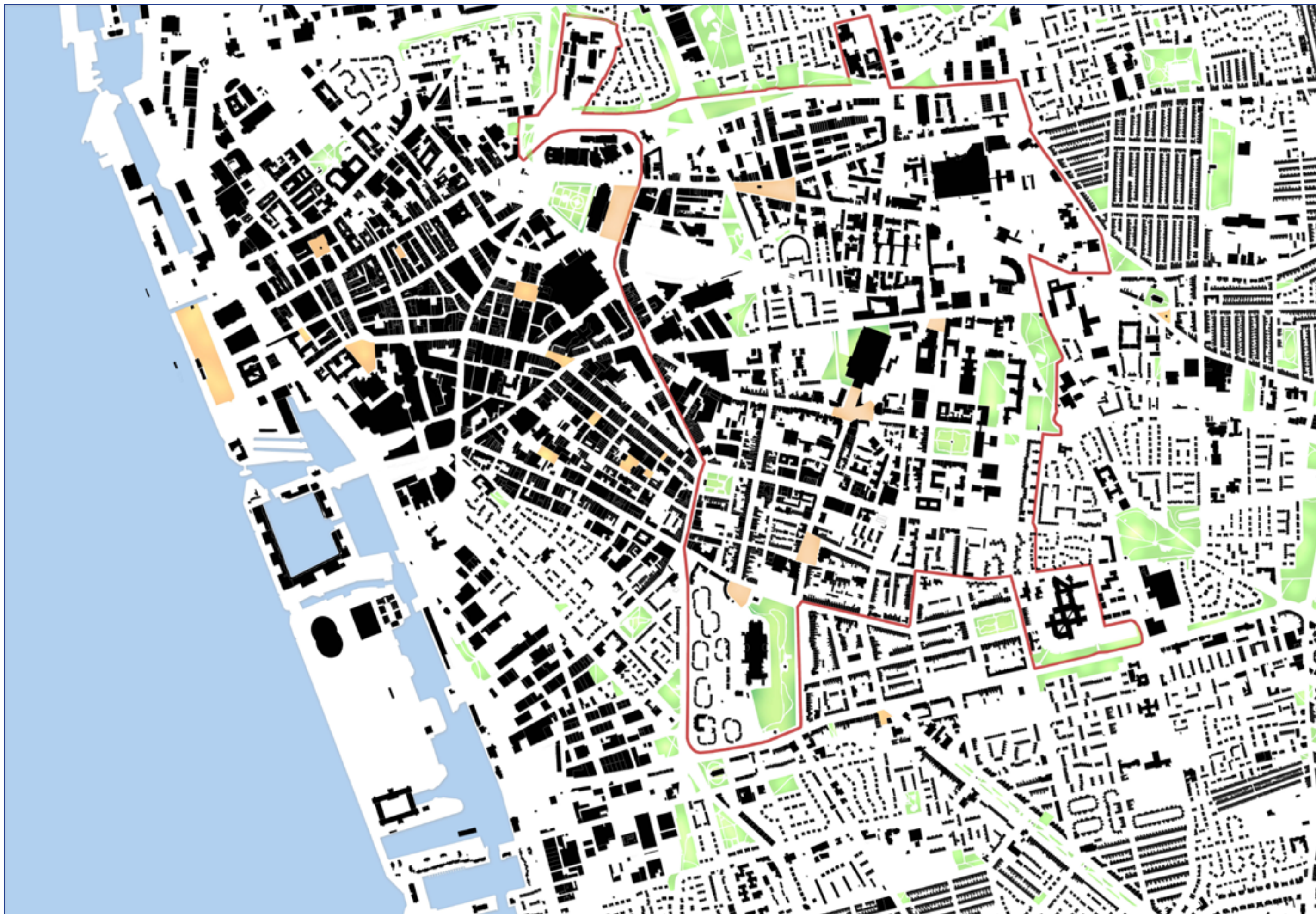
estates north of the Islington corridor. This can be attractive, however, it covers large areas and generally has little or no function.

### Surface parking

The other main element of the public realm is surface car parking. The plan on page 41 shows that surface parking takes up a significant part of the public realm within the Knowledge Quarter much of which creates a poor quality environment. This includes the Royal Hospital complex, the eastern and northern part of the Liverpool University Campus and much of Islington.

► Far left: Huskisson Monument at St James Cemetery; left: the Islington Corridor; middle: Abercromby Square; right: Monument Place





► Open space plan: the green colour highlights 'green spaces'; brown indicates the 'urban places'.



## 3:4 Street Hierarchy

► Islington



In which we describe the hierarchy of high streets, secondary streets, local streets and boulevards in the area.

**A**n important element of the street network is the street hierarchy based on the importance of different streets. Traditional urban areas have at least a three level hierarchy: high streets or primary streets (shown in dark brown on the plan opposite), secondary streets (light brown) and residential or tertiary streets (shown in green). High streets take through-traffic and tend to be where the main shops are concentrated; they also have larger buildings with active frontages. Secondary streets carry traffic into different neighbourhoods and also have a good range of shops but are smaller and also include buildings without active frontages. Tertiary or residential streets make up the rest of the area and are less mixed use in character.

Very often though, we need to add high volume traffic routes to this hierarchy - sometimes charitably called boulevards (shown in blue on the plan). These roads have replaced high streets as the main routes for through traffic but have few active frontages. They often come in form of wide dual carriageways and tend to create barriers for pedestrian movement. As we are also concerned with permeability of a place we have added cul-de-sacs as a separate category to the road hierarchy. These show up in yellow on the plan.

### Boulevards

The plan to the right shows the street hierarchy for Liverpool's inner city area based on the five levels discussed above. It shows that a boulevard (Islington) runs along the northern boundary of the Knowledge Quarter and carries on to the waterfront, making a sharp right turn to continue from Islington along Leeds Street. This boulevard then carries on along the waterfront down to Parliament Street where its character and size changes and it becomes a primary route. These boulevards carry a lot of traffic and in places do not cater for any users other than cars and buses. It also encircles the Civic Forum and access to it is only possible via several pedestrian crossings or through pedestrian tunnels. This part of town is particularly precious but heavy with traffic, which is having a negative impact on the quality of the historic open spaces and the public realm, which is otherwise very popular with tourists and residents.

### Primary roads

There are a great number of primary roads within the city centre area, among them Upper Parliament Street, Princes Park Road, Park Road/Great George Street/Renshaw Street, Kensington, Edge Lane and Prescott Street/London Road. Within the study area London Road fulfils the traditional role of carrying a lot of traffic while offering active frontages with a good mix of uses. Mount Pleasant, Brownlow Hill and Hardman Street are also primary routes though these are more inconsistent and weaker in terms of their townscape and mix of uses (mainly leisure). Other routes, which fall into the primary routes category still carry through-traffic but have lost their appeal and function as main high streets due to the clearance of its built edges. Examples include Great George Street/Place, Hall Lane and Grove Street/Crown Street.

### Secondary streets

It is the secondary routes, which have fallen victim to rigorous remodelling in the past decades. There are a few remnants, which can be made out from the plan but which mostly have lost their role of distributing traffic into neighbourhoods and providing some shops as they are now often cut off by newer development or are lacking built edges. Examples include Crown Street, Myrtle Street, Paddington and Smithdown Lane. This is dealt with in great detail in section 'Internal Connectivity' later in this document.

### Tertiary roads and cul-de-sacs

A healthy street network should have a lot of tertiary or residential streets shown in green on the plan. These are the streets, which connect neighbourhoods internally. In the past decades these residential streets have often been replaced by cul-de-sac developments, which are served off either primary roads or indeed boulevards. Examples include residential areas along Islington in the north or around Upper Parliament Street to the south both just outside the study area.

Within the Knowledge Quarter the number of tertiary roads has gone down drastically since the implementation of the Holford Plan. It is within the campus area that there are only a few routes left that carry local traffic and which as a result feels cut off from the rest of the area.

### Pedestrianised high streets

The western end of Bold Street together with a number of streets around Church Street and Williamson Square have been pedestrianised. This is where the main shopping area is, soon to be extended with the completion of the L1 Paradise Street retail development. The current shopping area is well served by bus stations on Elliot Street and Hood Street and Merseyrail Central Station is just at the bottom of Bold Street. The new bus station at Canning Place has been completed recently and will also serve this core shopping area.



