



WIRRAL MATTERS

JOURNAL OF THE WIRRAL SOCIETY
The Wirral Committee of C.P.R.E.

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A HELPING HAND FOR UPTON MEADOW

At a recent meeting of the Society Executive Committee it was decided unanimously to respond to the Save Upton Meadow appeal which has been launched by The Friends of Upton Meadow by pledging the sum of £1,000 to be redeemed if and when the Minister for the Environment gives his permission for the transfer of the land to the Woodland Trust.

Upton Meadow is no Arrowe Park or Birkenhead Park. Just thirty-eight acres of grassy wasteland where the main users are people walking their dogs. But to the Wirral environment Upton Meadow is just as important as any of the established parks. It's not only a green 'lung' between Upton and Greasby but it is another bastion in the long-fought battle against the creeping urbanisation of the Wirral Peninsula.

The plight of Upton Meadow has been mentioned in these columns several times and it has long occupied the minds of the Executive Committee. Over the last twenty years we have consistently expressed our opposition to each and every proposal put forward for developing the land. We vigorously opposed the proposal of the former Merseyside County Council that it should be developed as a (then fashionable) Science Park and of course, we objected to and deplored the sale of nine acres to Sainsbury's. On every possible occasion we have urged that Upton Meadow should be designated as Green Belt land. If the area were to be covered with houses (or anything else) Upton-with-Greasby would become the size of a many a market town.

History

The Meadow was originally part of the Leverhuime Estate which was broken up in the 1950s until just fifty-two acres remained as grassland. Three years ago Wirral Council sold fourteen acres to Sainsbury's for their superstore leaving thirty-eight acres undeveloped. (Sainsbury's seem to have been greedy – or the Council too profligate

– as they were later able to accommodate a McDonald's burgerbar on their carpark. But, as they say, that is another story ...).

The thirty-eight precious acres which remained were immediately looked upon by the cash-starved Council as a realisable asset and plans to dispose of it for housing caused an uproar among Upton and Greasby residents. It resulted in the formation of The Friends of Upton Meadow who have been waging a vigorous campaign to secure it as an open space.

Now that has become a real possibility. The Friends have been working with the Woodland Trust (a national conservation body) and – much to their credit – Wirral Council is now willing to let the Trust acquire the land on a 999 years lease for preservation as a public open space.

There is, however, one small snag. The deal must have the approval of the Minister for the Environment.

There is also the question of raising the money. The Friends have launched an urgent appeal for £50,000 which will be

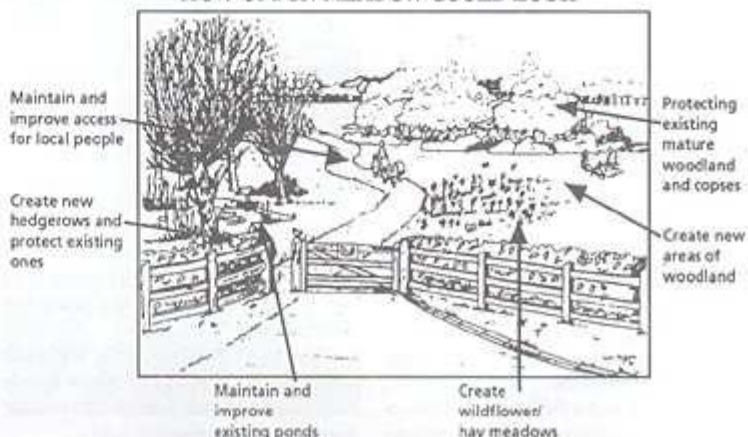
needed by the Woodland Trust but until the Minister makes up his mind they are asking only for pledges to be made which will be called in when – and if – a favourable decision is received.

When the Wirral Society was formed in 1928 one of the main aims was to protect and preserve the rural areas of Wirral. Although the scope of our Constitution was widened a couple of years ago to cover the whole Wirral environment, that original aim is still paramount and the future of Upton Meadow is therefore of great concern. That is why we are gladly putting our money where our mouth is.

Future generations

In telling the local press about our donation, our Chairman, Keith Davidson said: 'Over the years we have seen more and more greenfield sites in Wirral taken for housing, factories and industrial and business parks on the grounds that the developments were essential for public needs. But the public also needs green 'lungs' where good fresh air can be breathed and a visual break in the monotony of houses and buildings can be enjoyed. We owe it to future generations to ensure that the Wirral Peninsula they inherit is not wholly covered with bricks, concrete and tarmac.'

HOW UPTON MEADOW COULD LOOK



SUMMER MEETING

It is becoming apparent that we must review the practice of having an open Summer Meeting. This year we thought we had hit upon a subject and location that members would find attractive – the refurbishment and future plans for the use of redundant Birkenhead Town Hall. But that was not the case. Less than thirty people turned up. It was, of course, a hot and gloriously sunny summer's evening and more than one member has confessed that sitting in the garden with a cooling drink proved too much of a pull.

Those who did make the effort, however, agreed that our host, David Hillhouse, provided a fascinating tour and account of what the future held for the building. The former Council Chamber and Mayor's Parlour have been restored and made available for functions of all kinds – from wed-

dings and wedding receptions to formal luncheons, black tie dinners and full-scale banquets.

A suite of rooms is being furnished to hold material from Cammell Laird's archives (and using panelling from the Cammell Laird boardroom) and a Silver Gallery is being built for the display of the considerable quantity of civic silverware from the former local authorities in Wirral.

The old Assembly Hall has been re-jigged to allow for a greater variety of use. The Hall itself has not been materially altered but clever adjustable seating has been installed which allows for rows of seats on the flat or raked as in a theatre or simply arranged around the walls to keep the floor space free. A moveable platform can increase the size of the stage.

At the rear of the gallery a projection room has been built with up-to-date projectors and sound equipment which allows for the showing of all kinds of films on a large-size screen which has been erected at the

rear of the stage.

Taking advantage of this facility, David Hillhouse treated us to a screening of some old Cammell Laird archive film, including the launch of the Ark Royal by the Queen Mother.

Our grateful thanks go to David Hillhouse and his volunteer projectionist for giving us such an entertaining evening.

The problem with the Summer Meetings – apart from being held when some members are away on holiday – is that we have exhausted all the venues we can think of with some places visited more than once. If any member has any bright ideas please let the Secretary know.

The Committee would also like members' opinions on the question. Should we, perhaps, have the meeting earlier – in May or early June or even April? Should it take an altogether different form? A dinner, say, with a speaker? Or what?

The Committee is feeling desperate – and next summer is not all that far off!

AIMING FOR A TIP-TOP TIP

This headline might look familiar. We used it in our Autumn issue last year when we mentioned the newly-formed Friends of Bidston Moss. Their praiseworthy aim, you may recall, is to see Bidston landfill site – where the tipping of household refuse will cease on 30 September this year – reclaimed and turned into a beautiful public open space.

Our report brought a letter from Mr. Frank Shaw, the chairman of The Friends. The plan, he confirms, is to convert the area into a parkland of wild flowers, grasses, trees and shrubs. "We are committed to catering for the views and proposals from all sections of the community on this imaginative project. It is to be hoped, therefore, that your many readers will accept this invitation to write to us and make us aware of their proposals."

The central idea

An idea of how the area (three times the size of Upton Meadow) might be developed has been suggested in a plan drawn up by the well-known Birkenhead landscape architects, Ainsley Gomon Wood.

The Friends' Newsletter explains: "The central idea is to restore the current site of the sixty year-old municipal waste landfill tip to a 100-acre community parkland for environmentally friendly activities. Extensive areas of woodland would be planted, bird, animal, and wildflower habitats created and a network of graded pathways

established. These would lead to a centre-piece Bidston Beacon at the top which would command views across the Mersey estuary and the Wirral."

As a first step towards restoration the Merseyside Waste Disposal Authority has asked the Groundwork Trust (a national conservation body) to carry out a technical survey of the site to determine what types of vegetation, trees and shrubs the site will support. This, in turn, will decide the final layout.

Hands-on

The Friends of Bidston Moss have also, most commendably, been busy clearing the mile-long footpath which runs round the perimeter of the site and the adjacent Bidston Moss Nature Reserve. Over the years the path had become very neglected, overgrown, liable to flooding, and virtually impassable. Working with the Council under the Parish Paths Partnership scheme the path is now usable again.

The regeneration of Bidston Moss has the support of all local M.P.'s, the major parties on Wirral Borough Council, the Merseyside Waste Disposal Authority and a number of local environmental protection societies.

The Executive Committee has gladly added the support of The Wirral Society and made a donation towards The Friends' immediate expenses.

TAKE A DEEP BREATH

In one way it was good to learn that Wirral Council had failed in its bid for a grant of £150,000 to set up one of the projected monitoring stations being established by the Government to check on air quality. But Liverpool is getting one so why not Wirral? Simply because, you'll be delighted to hear, a survey found that the air we breathe on this side of the Mersey is pretty good and emissions were unlikely to exceed European standards.

Nevertheless, this has proved a disappointment for the Environmental Committee. They wanted to become part of an integrated national monitoring network so that they could supply radio bulletins telling people about the nice quality of Wirral's air.

"It's an appalling thought that in the next thirty to forty years more than one-fifth of Britain will be covered in concrete."

*Jonathan Dimbleby
(President, CPRE)*

in an interview on Classic FM.

PROBLEMS??

IF YOU HEAR OF ANY ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS WHICH NEED TO BE INVESTIGATED PLEASE LET OUR SECRETARY KNOW AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

COMETH THE CABLES!

In our last issue we reported the arrival in Wirral of the underground cable-layers who are installing a fibre-optic cable as part of a national network aimed at giving us more television channels than we need, undefined extra telephone facilities and other technological benefits not yet invented. We suggested, you will recall, that we assist both Wirral and Ellesmere Port & Neston Councils by keeping an eye on the workmanship. A condition of the installation work is that pavements and roads are reinstated exactly or better than they were before they were dug up and special attention is given to avoid damage to trees and tree roots.

But now we hear of a flood of complaints about damage caused by the cable-layers to trees and pavements in Oxton and Wallasey.

The situation was put into perspective in a recent *Country Living* report. It seems that more than 120 franchises have been issued by the Trade and Industry Department covering most of Britain and within three or four years 60,000 miles of trenches will be dug.

Professor Chris Bains said "This could be a greater disaster than the 1987 hurricane or the Dutch Elm disease."

The trenches are being dug by thousands of sub-contracted gangs who are paid by the metre and the cables run just below the pavement which is where most tree roots grow. Most street trees are at risk and it is claimed that one in five of the nation's street trees has already been damaged.

"It takes three or four years for damaged trees to die", the professor went on, "and the entire cable-laying operation could be over before the true horror of the devastation begins to show."

COMETH THE MASTS!

An equally disfiguring threat to the environment comes from the planning applications being made all over the country for the erection of telecommunication masts for the mobile telephone industry. The companies have been told by the Government that their networks must cover ninety per cent of the population by 1999 or their licences could be revoked. So the companies are, for the most part, working feverishly like a man putting in pea-sticks seeking to erect masts on high ground. So far

there is little co-operation between the various firms and, from an environmental protection point of view, it has not helped that the official planning policy guidance for local authorities allows for masts up to fifteen metres (49 feet) high to be erected without consent.

CPRE has called upon the Government to change this. The companies are ruthless in their quest for sites. Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, National Trust land and ancient monuments have counted for naught.

This is not a problem which has manifested itself to any outrageous degree in Wirral – yet. But CPRE have warned that the whole country will be faced with a 'tidal wave' of radio masts before very long.

But it seems we must accept the masts as we have had to accept electricity pylons as a fact of life in this new technological age. At least the fibre-optic cables are underground and out of sight.



We reiterate our plea to all members to be cable-watchers. If you are not happy with the way the cable-laying work is being done in your area tell the local authority at once. For Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council the number to ring is 643 9000. Ask for the Highway Engineer's Department.

If you live in the Ellesmere Port & Neston Council area telephone 356 6789 and also ask to speak to the Highway Engineer's Department.

We have been in touch with both and they say they will be grateful for your calls.



Only a narrow trench but...

CPRE MATTERS

The letter below appeared in the local press recently. It was written by Executive Committee member Bryan Heatley in his capacity as Chairman of the CPRE (Cheshire Branch) Transport Campaign Group and also signed by Arthur Jurgens, the Cheshire Branch Chairman. It is a warning which we hope the Government will heed.

The Cheshire branch of the Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) has looked at Government plans for motorway tolls.

It is our opinion the proposals have all the elements for a potential disaster for the thousands of people in Wirral and Cheshire, whose roads and lanes will suddenly be filled with heavy traffic.

At the Government's own admission, Cheshire is going to find 10-12,000 vehicles diverted onto minor roads and lanes at peak times, plus other side effects.

If you are against motorway tolls, write to your local MP. The Department of Transport must find other ways of financing their plans.

*Arthur Jurgens and Bryan Heatley
Cheshire CPRE*

Although, like many other bodies, the Wirral Society protested vehemently when the plans for a Mid-Wirral motorway were announced we would, paradoxically, doubtless protest vehemently if there was ever a move to close it.

The building of the M53 swallowed up farms and land and although great efforts were made to try and integrate the road it was still a major intrusion into Wirral's small-scale landscape. Yet it has had the ameliorating effect of reducing the amount of traffic on our A and B roads.

So the letter is a timely warning. Traffic has greatly increased since the M53 was built and the estimate of up to 10-12,000 vehicles diverting on to minor roads in Wirral and Cheshire to escape paying a toll is horrifying.

A formal protest is being made to the Department of Transport in the name of the Society but we also endorse the suggestion made in the letter that individual members should also write to their M.P.'s to reinforce the point.

AIR TRAVEL : THE TRUE COST

It is becoming increasingly evident that the true cost of flying is greater than we think. Greater, that is, in terms of damage to the environment and, for many people, to the quality of life. Expansion plans have been

announced for no fewer than eight airports around the country and each of these plans would in some way damage the countryside should they be allowed to go ahead.

For people living in Wirral the threat comes from the massive development plans of both Manchester and Liverpool Airports inasmuch as increased flying activity means increased numbers of aeroplanes flying over our heads. The threat for us is largely one of noise pollution but there is also the remote chance of aeroplanes falling on our heads.

Expanding an airport is not, of course, simply a case of making a runway longer or even building a new one and increasing the size of the terminal buildings. Other enterprises follow in the wake, like warehouses, offices, factories, conference venues, hotels and leisure activities. This generates more road traffic and more local congestion and the inevitable demand for new roads.

CPRE Cheshire Branch have been greatly concerned about the plans put forward by Manchester Airport which would see vast stretches of Cheshire countryside disappear under concrete and tarmac and many good houses swept away. The airport authorities argue they must be ready to meet the demands of the next century. But some say that can be summed up in one word – greed. And can you imagine what your feelings would be if you or your family were to open a letter one morning telling you that your house – the house you and your family may have lived in for thirty or forty years or more – is to be demolished and you must look for somewhere else to live?

The Public Inquiry into Manchester's plans is now over and the CPRE Cheshire Branch was legally represented and made their views known. The Inquiry into Liverpool's plans is proceeding at the time of writing.

CPRE argue that increasing demand for air travel should be managed not met which is an approach now recognised, albeit belatedly, for road transport.

They also say that better use should be made of railways and High Speed trains introduced (as has been done for the Channel Tunnel); air traffic should be seen as just one component of a wider and more integrated transport strategy; pricing policies should be introduced to ensure the cost of air travel better reflects its full economic and environmental costs and airlines should be encouraged to use less crowded airports and less busy times of the day.

MODERN ARITHMETIC

If you think 125 into 2 won't go you're very much mistaken. And proof of that can be seen in what's going on at the junction of Eleanor Road/Upton Road at the top of Ford Hill, Bidston.

Throughout the Wirral Peninsula there are odd delightful corners, twisting lanes and stretches of tree-lined road which all help to give the area its special character. Ford Hill is one of them, winding like a corkscrew over Oxton Ridge to the arboreal splendours of Bidston Hill. A pleasant two hundred yards for the motorist even when held back by a nervous learner driver or an asthmatic, arthritic bus. But people who haven't driven up Ford Hill lately will gasp in astonishment and dismay when they reach the top. Trees have been felled, a site has been cleared and there is a new road layout with a vast roundabout worthy of a major dual-carriage bypass.

It is all part of a new housing development which will see 125 two-, three-, and four-bedroom houses built on land where formerly stood two. Admittedly, they were commodious residences in spacious grounds but few people, house-builders apart, could ever have envisaged that on the same area of land there could one day be a community of – allowing for 2.4 children per family – some 600 persons.

The land has been scheduled for redevelopment for some years and although the fateful day has now come there is something to commend. At least the development is not on a greenfield site and the new road layout and roundabout have been carved out of the site and built at the developer's expense. Or, to put it another way, at the expense of the people who will eventually buy the houses.

What is disappointing, though, is the inevitable loss of some mature trees. From enquiries made by our Secretary, Eric Sanné, we learn that Wirral Council experts carried out a meticulous tree survey, examining and listing every tree on site and many of those allowed to be felled were reaching the end of their days. Unavoidably, some healthy trees had to be sacrificed and, all in all, out of 319 trees within the site boundary 253 (or 79 per cent) have been retained. And when building is completed 130 new trees and additional shrubs will be planted.

But to those of us who have known the area since Eleanor Road was a private road with a notice at the entrance saying NO WHEELED TRAFFIC ON SUNDAYS, it is all very sad.

A.B.

BUFO, WHERE ART THOU?

We regret to report that our support of the diligent work of the Cheshire Wildlife Trust in trying to encourage the love life of the Natterjack Toad (*Bufo calamita*) at Red Rocks, Hoylake, has so far been to no avail. Since we paid for two fresh scrapes to be dug in the sand (the sort of damp marriage-beds these creatures like) at Red Rocks only one lonely lady toad has been seen. Doubtless this love-lorn toad would wooing go if only a *Bufo romeo* appeared on the scene but, to date, not a croak has been heard from any male of the species. One cannot but wonder if the sole, pining lady toad is the only Natterjack left in Wirral.

Wirral Group members of the Wildlife Trust keep an eye on the scrapes in the hope of being able to report a herpetological assignation or, at least, a male croak or two. If any member of the Society spots a toad when passing please let the Secretary have the exciting news. But bear in mind the essential difference between a toad and a frog. Frogs jump but toads crawl. And the Natterjack is smaller than the common toad with a yellow line down its back. What's more, the male has a vocal throat-sac which, when distended, is larger than its head. A Pavarotti of a toad.



A roundabout worthy of a bypass