



WIRRAL MATTERS

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The Wirral Committee of C.P.R.E.

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WIRRAL UDP – THE INSPECTOR'S REPORT

In our Winter 1994/95 issue our acting Planning Liaison Officer, **GEOFF LORAM**, contributed a plain language summary of the necessarily complex Unitary Development Plan (UDP) of Wirral Borough Council. This laid down the Council's proposed planning guidelines for the borough up to the year 2001. Its snail-like progress since then is a good illustration of the workings of the democratic process where every 'i' is dotted and every 't' is crossed and then rechecked. Unfortunately, this means that the UDP when it is finally approved will be virtually retrospective!

In 1994, after due consideration of objections and suggestions for improvement, the plan was amended and the 'Deposit Draft' was issued. A period was then allowed for further public comment and the Society took the opportunity of making a number of suggestions.

If there had been no objections at that stage the draft would have been adopted but, inevitably, there were – notably from developers wanting to build in the proposed Green Belt. This meant there had to be a Public Inquiry before an Inspector appointed by the Department of the Environment.

To this end, the Council, after considering all the objections, many of which were administrative and legalistic in nature, produced 'Alterations to the Deposit Draft' for the Inspector's consideration. That worthy, after many months of earnest deliberation, published his 'Recommendations' in July of this year. In these he examines each objection and answers it in one of three ways: In many cases the objections are not upheld and the relevant clauses in the UDP agreed to.

Others are covered by the agreed Alterations and, in a few cases, the Inspector agrees with an objection which the Council had not accepted and recommends a change to the Plan.

These Recommendations are being examined by a Council panel set up for the purposes. The Council does not have to accept the Inspector's recommendations but will have to have cogent reasons for not doing so if the decision is challenged in the High Court. When the panel has finished all its deliberations a final set of 'Modifications to the Deposit Draft' will be published which will include the Alterations and those of the Inspector's Recommendations that have been adopted.



There is a six week period in which they can be challenged – but only on points of law – and then the Council publishes its 'Disposition to Adopt the UDP' after which the Plan acquires statutory force. Finally, sometime next summer, the final version of the Plan will be available for the public to consult. Your scribe will be looking forward to that day as, in the interim, ascertaining the exact status of any planning application vis-a-vis the Plan is a laborious process.

Housing provision



So much for the procedures, what of the changes to the Plan that the Inspector has recommended? The major ones are those which most concern the Society and have to deal with housing provision and its relationship with the Green Belt. The nub of the matter is how the housing provision is viewed, it is characterised as having two strands, 'need' and 'demand'. The former is the number

of dwellings that the Council, working within Government guidelines, calculates is needed to supply the Borough's internal need to provide additional housing to meet pressures from new household formation within the existing population. The latter is stable and the increased household formation stems from the increase in single parent families and more old people living longer and fewer being looked after by the younger generation. The trends of these changes, on which the Government based its guidelines, are now about a decade old and are about to be reassessed following a recent survey. It seems entirely reasonable to expect them to have decreased rather than increased or remained the same. Either way, it also seems eminently sensible

to see what the new survey shows before coming to a decision to alter the Council's assessment, with which the

Government agreed. The 'demand' element can be equated as a combination of people wanting to move 'up-market' – either as regards housing standard or area – and people wanting to move into the Borough from outside. For the purposes of the UDP the Council assessed the housing requirement for the Plan period – 1986 to 2001 – to be 7,740, mostly on a 'need' basis. The Government increased this figure to 9,500 to allow for a greater demand for people who wanted to move from Liverpool into Wirral. (They did the same for Sefton). The Council noted in its Reasoned Justification for its Housing policy in the Plan that 'in reality, demand for new house has been buoyant in Liverpool and higher than expected in Knowsley. St. Helens and Knowsley have made large allowances in their housing supply figures over and above Strategic Guidance and can consequently accommodate more of Merseyside's new housing needs than expected'. The Secretary of State recognised that

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'constraints in Sefton and Wirral would make it more difficult to satisfy much higher demands than the Strategic Guidance figures'. Despite that categorical statement the Inspector has decided that he knows better and that the figure should be increased again to 10,500 but, despite a considerable amount of verbiage, he does not give any cogent reasons for doing so. Indeed in one place appears to contradict himself in his efforts to make out a case which is purely to further increase the provision for the 'demand' element. His recommendation appears to be based entirely on his own personal opinion as nowhere does he cite any other authority for changing a figure which was set by the Government.

The objections to the Plan which the Inspector's recommendations address come solely from building developers or the owners of property who would like to sell it for development. None of these folk are exactly unbiased when it comes to assessing housing requirements! The Inspector seems to have leant over backwards to include their desire for financial gain saying 'opportunities should be found to satisfy all parts of the housing market.' The Wirral Society would argue that the housing market as such has nothing to do with the planning issues under consideration, that phrase has strayed in from the developers' objections. The Society hopes that the Council will stand by its original, carefully considered decisions and conclude that the Inspector has not made any logical or coherent case for amending those decisions.



The Green Belt

The Deposit Draft of the Plan proposed significant addition to the Green Belt in the area of the M53 corridor. This area, which extends from the existing Green Belt south of Wallasey Golf Links to the existing Green Belt south of Woodchurch, was not included in the Merseyside Green Belt because, at the time when that was determined there was a requirement that the Green Belt should be of adequate landscape quality. That requirement no longer applies and the corridor can now be given *de jure* Green Belt status rather than the *de facto* status it was accorded under the Merseyside Plan. The Inspector accepted this addition but recommended excluding from it the former Old Birkonians rugby ground – bounded by schools on the north and south sides and by the Fender and Noctorum Way on the west and east sides – and Fender Farm at Moreton. He makes a well balanced assessment of the pros and cons of the proposed Green Belt boundaries and acknowledges that these areas legitimately form part of the optimum Green Belt. He concedes that there is a conflict between the optimum Green Belt and the minimum but concludes that the Council must accept the minimum to be able to meet the need,

as he sees it (his words), for land to be made available for new housing. If this concept of his is not accepted, then the argument for excluding these areas from the Green Belt falls to the ground. An application for outline consent for housing development on the Old Birkonians site has already been made and, although it will not be considered until the panel has adjudicated on the Inspector's Recommendations, the Society has entered an objection along the lines set out above.



Bidston Hill and Bidston Village

The Deposit Draft proposed that Bidston Hill and Bidston Village should be included in the Green Belt extension. The Inspector disagreed with the proposal recalling that the Inspector for the original Merseyside Green Belt (i.e. the existing one) had also disagreed with it. He argued that geographically it did not make sense (and it is difficult to claim that it does) and he pointed out that Bidston Hill was well protected under other policies as was Bidston Village which was a conservation area. He suggested that the area between Bidston Hill, the village and the Tesco site – which formed part of the proposed Green Belt extension – should be designated Urban Green Space. Since the end result would be almost as strict a control of development in that area as that imposed by Green Belt designation, the Society accepts the Inspector's arguments.



The Society would not wish to be seen as unduly critical of the Inspector who resisted many more objections from the developers who sought many other encroachments on the Green Belt.

The Future

So by next summer the Wirral will have a settled framework for its planning that will last it until the end of 2001. It has been a long time in the making but we think the end result is very good and the Director of Planning and Economic Development and his staff are to be congratulated on it. They will soon be starting on the preparatory work for next revision but this will be a much simpler task than all the detailed work they had to put in to get the UDP into its final polished state. We wish them well. One question mark is already beginning to form on the horizon. If the Green Belt is now considered sacrosanct there will be virtually no new land available in the Wirral for housing development. The Society would probably say that such a situation has to be accepted but the developers are unlikely to agree. So while we can relax for a year or two we must be alert when the draft revisions are first published. Your scribe sincerely hopes that it will be a task for his successor!

THE THREAT TO MAYER HALL



In our Autumn issue last year we reported on the dangers facing Bebington's historic Mayer Hall. Unused for several years other than for the temporary storage of Council papers it was greatly in need of refurbishment which the cash-strapped local authority were unable to carry out. Since it had been declared unsafe for public use the only foreseeable recourse was demolition. Hints and rumours that this course might be imminent so alarmed members of The Joseph Mayer Trust that they launched a campaign to save it and The Wirral Society was pleased to offer its support. After talks with Wirral Council officials, however, the Trust agreed to try and find resources to take it over from the Council on a ninety-nine year lease at a peppercorn rent. But first they had to raise £60,000 for its restoration.

The Trust established a separate Mayer Hall Trust and set about seeking charitable status with a view to making a Lottery bid for a grant. But recently events have taken a most positive turn. A number of welfare societies occupying Council accommodation elsewhere in Bebington were suddenly displaced and the Council had to find a suitable alternative venue. So – guess what! – they were sent to Mayer Hall. The Council did essential repairs and a quick redecoration of the ground floor and, much to the delight of the Joseph Mayer Trust, the immediate threat has been lifted.

This only puts the hall 'in remission' and the newly-formed Mayer Hall Trust will continue to pursue its quest for help from the Lottery.



The Joseph Mayer Trust was set up in 1878 by Joseph Mayer himself to provide long-term income for a regular series of free public lectures (on any subject other than politics and religion). And so generous was the original endowment that the lectures have continued to be given without a break, even for the two world wars, right up to the present day.

The 119th season began in September and October's lecture on Wednesday the 15th will be 'A Voyage of Discovery into Antarctica' by Polly Machin. On Wednesday, 19th November Bryan Garner will give a talk on 'Egypt through 5,000 years'.

The lectures are given in the Civic Suite on the ground floor of Bebington Civic Centre commencing at 8.00 p.m. Doors open 7.30 p.m.

Further information from Mr Gordon Favager, telephone 0151 645 6593.

FLAYBRICK MATTERS

Did you know there is such an organisation as The National Federation of Cemetery Friends? It seems that throughout the UK there are no less than twenty-six cemeteries enjoying the benefit of a 'Friends' support group. This, of course, includes the Friends of Flaybrick.

The National Federation recently held its Annual General Meeting in Edinburgh and Steve Tittley, the Wirral Ranger based at Flaybrick, attended.

Steve is one of a very rare breed, a Ranger appointed solely to oversee a cemetery. He met only one other at the AGM.

The Friends of Flaybricks' latest Newsletter reports that the work on restoring and enhancing the cemetery grounds (now the Flaybrick Memorial Gardens, of course) goes on. The four guided tours during the summer months were a great success and local schools are making increasing use of the gardens for educational purposes. In July Wallasey Artists Association brought along their easels and paints and found inspiration there and the number of casual visitors has increased significantly in recent months and some folk who came to seek out old family graves now return regularly to tend them.

As part of BT Environment Week six hundred wildflower plants were purchased and planted to help establish a summer-flowering meadow. The Friends were assisted by volunteers from the nearby Crossways Tenants Association who made sure they were well watered during the first few weeks.

The area is already attracting a large number of butterflies, moths, hover-flies and other insects. A recent collection at a day-care centre raised £80.00 which was donated to Flaybrick and used to purchase a Ginko Biloba (Maidenhair) tree. A suitable plaque in recognition of the donation will be installed.

Anyone who wishes to purchase a tree and plaque in someone's memory in Flaybrick should contact Mr. G.N. Graham at Landican Cemetery Office, telephone 0151 677 2361.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Sixty-Eighth Annual General Meeting of the Wirral Society

will be held on

TUESDAY, 21st OCTOBER 1997

at

THE HEATHERLANDS RESTAURANT THURSTASTON

at 7.30 p.m.

*Following the business of the meeting a hot-pot supper will be served
at a cost of £6.25 per head (inc. coffee)*

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After supper Mr. MALCOLM INGHAM, Wirral Council's well-known Wildlife Officer, will tell us, with the aid of some fascinating slides, about THE WORK OF THE WIRRAL WILDLIFE REHABILITATION UNIT which he established at Thurstaston in the Wirral Country Park fifteen years ago.

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The meeting is open to all members, relatives and friends but to help with the catering, please complete the form below (or use plain paper) and send to the Hon. Secretary with your cheque not later than Friday, 17th October.

To: Eric Sanné, Hon. Secretary, The Wirral Society
'Clavis', Meols Drive, West Kirby, Wirral L48 5DB.

Please order _____ suppers for myself and guest(s) for which I enclose
cheque (made payable to the Wirral Society) for £ _____.

Tel. No: _____ Signed: _____

COMMITTEE MATTERS

We are delighted to report that our Secretary, Eric Sanné, has been elected as a Vice-Chairman of CPRE Cheshire Branch, an appointment which will lead to the Chairmanship in 1998.

Eric is the Society's representative on the Committee, travelling to the Cheshire Branch headquarters in Middlewich each month for the Committee Meetings.

"As far as we know", said Keith Davidson, "this is the first time a member of the Wirral Society has been honoured in this way. It is a most timely appointment since, in 1998, The Wirral Society will not only be

celebrating its 70th anniversary but also its 70th year in the role of the Wirral District Committee of CPRE."

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We have been pleased to welcome on to the Executive Committee as a co-opted member Mrs. Audrey Platt of Gayton. Audrey, who is Wallasey-born, has recently returned to live in Wirral after many years in Hampshire. We are delighted to report that she has volunteered to take on the vital job of Membership Secretary.

WIND OF CHANGE

We never dreamt that we would ever see wind turbines in this part of the world. Mountain tops is where they operate. Or is it? Well, no. Anywhere where the wind blows strongly enough will do. And the wind blows hard at the mouth of the Mersey Estuary. Soon residents of New Brighton and visitors will be able to gaze at six of these monster electricity-generating 'windmills' whirring and whining away along the wall of Seaforth Dock.

This is a joint venture between the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company and a company called Wind Cluster Limited. They sought planning permission to build them from Sefton Council two years ago but this was refused. The applicants appealed against the decision and this led to a Public Inquiry. The Inspector's recommendation was that the appeal should be allowed because he believed there would be no noise pollution or harm to the environment.

He may well be right. The turbines will each be 150 feet high and turbines en masse in so-called 'wind farms' do make a loud whining noise which must get on the nerves of anyone living or working within earshot. In this case, where there will be only six turbines their height and the sounds of everyday life (except at night, perhaps) could tone down or even obliterate any noise.

A New Brighton councillor has complained that he was never consulted and that he will do all he can to prevent the project going ahead. It will be interesting to see the nature of his protest. They will not be heard in New Brighton and it is very debateable whether they would constitute visual pollution. On the contrary, for people walking on the prom and for those who just sit in their cars to watch the passing scene might it not be an added attraction?

CPRE MATTERS

Some random observations from CPRE's *Contract for the Countryside*:

Town and country

Many of the pressures of the countryside are the result of the decline in our towns and cities and the waste of urban land and buildings. With a new commitment to improving the urban environment we can encourage builders to use already developed sites and make towns more attractive places to live.

Planning

The 'planning process' can seem dense and forbidding, but it offers the controls essential for a healthy landscape, and a real opportunity for people to get involved in shaping the changes that are happening in their area. With better planning we can secure the development we need in ways that place less pressure on the environment.

Forests, trees and woods

England is one of the least wooded countries in Europe. Trees play a vital part in our rural and urban landscape and woodland planting can improve the countryside, provide jobs and expand opportunities for recreation and enjoyment.

Hedgerows, dry stone walls and ponds

Every year we lose 18,000 kms of hedgerows through removal and neglect. 96% of England's dry stone walls are in need of attention and almost one million ponds have disappeared this century. Yet these are the threads that bind together much of the tapestry of the English landscape.

Tranquillity

Tranquil countryside is disappearing across much of England. Tranquil areas, where

you can "get away from it all", have shrunk by an area almost the size of Wales since the 1960's.

Clutter

To safeguard beauty it is necessary to fight ugliness - not just in open countryside but in village high streets, on the edges of towns and along road sides.

Water

The way we use and manage water is damaging the landscape. Water levels are falling in many rivers, ponds, aquifers and lakes and we take too little account of the pressure on resources from new development.

Access and leisure

The countryside offers a place for fresh air, spiritual refreshment and physical recreation. Yet the increasing demands of leisure are threatening the very qualities which make the countryside special.

Wildlife

Much of our wildlife is in decline. Not just the rare and endangered species are of concern, but common wildlife and habitats are under threat. Without the sound of the skylark or the glory of the bluebell woods our countryside would be an impoverished place.

Energy

From the scarring of the countryside by power stations and pylons to the release of greenhouse gases and the disposal of radioactive waste, it is clear that the way we produce and use energy has high environmental costs.

The living countryside

The countryside needs people and jobs as well as beautiful landscapes and wildlife. Development and change should be sensitive to their needs and must protect the quality of rural life. New building too often harms the countryside without helping to meet its economic or social needs.

Greening government

Some of the most important decisions affecting the countryside are made within one mile of Westminster. The countryside needs to be part of the thinking of all Government Departments when they are making decisions on spending policy and legislation. Local authorities also need to consider the countryside implications of everything they do.

Design

Buildings make a great contribution to the beauty and diversity of the countryside. Yet throughout the country insensitively designed new development has been leaching the distinctiveness from rural areas.

WIRRAL MATTERS

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