



# WIRRAL MATTERS

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

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## PLANNING MATTERS

The Society has now received a copy of the draft of the Wirral Unitary Development Plan (the UDP), albeit very late due to an unfortunate mix-up over the correct postal address. It is a formidable but most impressive document and we congratulate the Wirral Council's Department of Planning and Economic Development on their achievement.

This is a Draft Plan and when the public and interested organisations have made their comments on it will be revised. This second draft will be placed "on deposit" at which stage further public comment may lead to formal objections and a possible public local inquiry if any objections cannot be resolved.

After this stage it can be adopted by the Council as the Statutory Development Plan for the Metropolitan Borough of Wirral up to the year 2001.

Because of the delay in receiving the UDP the Society has, so far, only been able to make comments on some of the more important aspects. In the report which follows limitations of space preclude quoting in full but the words in Roman typeface are taken from, or are a precis of, the actual words of the UDP. The Society's comments are in italics.

### Urban Regeneration

Whilst pointing out that urban regeneration in Wirral is already influenced by such bodies as the Merseyside Development Corporation, the Merseyside Task Force, City Challenge and other initiatives – all to

the area's advantage – it declares that the guiding principles for planning include the concentration of new buildings and investment within the urban area, a restraint on building at the fringe of the built-up area with priority being given to derelict or vacant sites within the urban area.

Existing parks, greenspaces, leisure and tourist attractions will be enhanced and



newly developed where appropriate.

*The Society welcomes this statement wholeheartedly.*

### Priority Areas

The Priority Areas for urban renewal (which have remained unchanged since the 1970's) comprise the existing Urban Area and the outer Council estates of Leasowe, Beechwood, Noctorum and Woodchurch.

*It is regrettable that the Council did not heed the Society's objections when these large estates were planned. If they had been incorporated at the time into a planned programme of urban regeneration the task now facing us would not have been so massive and Wirral would be a far more attractive place with more green areas for leisure. Yet, in spite of this policy, we are still having to*

*fight against proposals to develop housing on Upton Meadow.*

### Target Areas

If resources are spread too thinly there is a danger that any action taken would be insufficient, ineffective and possibly wasteful. Priority will therefore be given to a number of designated Neighbourhood Renewal Area (NRAs). Within the priority areas a number of special area renewal initiatives will be implemented in the following areas: 1. Central and North Birkenhead 2. Beechwood 3. New Ferry and Rock Ferry 4. Seacombe 5. New Brighton 6. (when resources permit) Upper Tranmere.

*It is interesting to note that what is probably the worst area of all, Lower Tranmere, is not referred to. Maybe this is because the Council feel it has deteriorated so badly it should concentrate on the less problematic areas first, turning their attention to the worst areas when inroads have been made.*

### Economy and Employment

The revitalisation of local economy is a fundamental part of Wirral urban regeneration. One of the main objectives of the UDP is to ensure that further new investment and growth can be accommodated by providing for a balance of new advance units, land for expansion and sites suitable for a full range of purpose-built schemes.

*The Society is disturbed about the possible ambiguity in this section of the UDP. Whilst it goes on to state that such sites should not lie within the Green Belt and should contribute towards urban regeneration it also adds that sites should have "good access to the main highway network and be within or immediately adjacent to an existing industrial area."*

*Such phraseology can lead to different interpretations and we have asked the Council to amend the wording. We believe that to avoid loopholes*

**In view of the length of the report and comment on Wirral Borough Council's Unitary Development Plan we have combined the Autumn and Winter issues to bring you 8 pages of news and views.**

policies should be clear and unambiguous. Whilst economic vitalisation is very important it should not affect the very future of Wirral. In the past important firms have been wooed into Wirral to the detriment of our environment on the grounds that if we did not bend they would go elsewhere. This must not be allowed to happen again.

The text goes on to identify over 200 hectares of land (about 500 acres - Ed.) currently available and adds "there is no need for new sites outside the existing built-up area."

We have asked the Council to incorporate this sentence into the policy wording.

The UDP recognises that there are very few sites within the borough which would be suitable for special industries and defines two general areas which could be considered as acceptable. One is fronting the Mersey at Bromborough, the other comprises the bulk storage complex at Eastham allied with the dock facilities at the entrance to the Manchester Ship Canal.

Existing industrial and commercial uses which create a nuisance to local residents or which detract from the appearance, development potential or regeneration of a wider area will be asked to improve or the Council will seek to relocate.

Environmental improvement of the attractiveness and efficiency of existing commerce and industry will be sought subject to the availability of resources.

All new investment is to use the latest anti-pollution technology as a pre-requisite for planning approval.

The Society welcomes these aims and the stated intention to promote environmental improvements to the existing Carr Lane Industrial Estate in Hoylake, the Cross Lane Industrial Estate in Wallasey and the Tarran Industrial Estate in Moreton.

Through lack of attention to detail, lack of proper architectural control and lack of landscaping these estates have developed into unattractive, haphazard industrial areas. The Society hopes that the planning authorities will exercise proper control in future.

## Housing

The provision of new dwellings is one of the most important issues for the UDP. The need arises from the formation of new households and the replacement of older, substandard dwellings.

The Government has defined a need for 9500 new dwellings in Wirral for the period 1986-2001. This figure takes into account urban regeneration and the constraints of the Green Belt.

The Society believes that this figure needs to be seriously challenged. There are considerable pressures from the housebuilding groups for the Government to err on the high side but with a target of 630 new houses a year for five consecutive years

the area administered by the Wirral Borough Council we will soon be overrun.

We believe that for the next 9 years as many new houses as possible should be constructed within the existing built-up areas in place of property which is obsolete. We do not wish to see our heritage of good dwellings replaced for the sake of it but there are considerable numbers which are architecturally and constructionally substandard.

In allocating land or granting planning permission for housing development the local planning authority will have regard to the need to: (i) make full use of land within the urban areas (ii) bring into use neglected, unused or derelict land (iii) protect the following types of land - the best and most versatile agricultural land and viable farm holdings; areas of special landscape value; sites of ecological or nature conservation interest; sites identified as greenspace; sites in recreational use; sites in the approved Green Belt, (iv) protect listed buildings, buildings of architectural or historic interest and conservation areas.

We believe this wording is too vague to prevent floods of applications for housing development outside the urban areas. Immediately there arises an argument about farm land of which there are large areas in Wirral which may not be the "best" nor "viable". We know much of it will soon become obsolete because of EC policy but we feel strongly that it should remain as open space or be used for recreational purposes.

This dangerous policy must be changed, at least until we know the housing numbers which the urban areas will be capable of creating. The lobby for new housing will always take the easy way out by seeking green-field site development. This must be rigorously controlled and any further development outside the urban areas must be stopped completely.

## Design and Density Controls

The Local Planning Authority should be sensitive to the effect which new housing can have on an area. On sites within the existing residential area proposals for new housing will be subject to the normal criteria for new development. However, the

Council has identified a number of areas where further controls may be necessary to retain their special character. These are Noctorum Ridge, Mountwood (Prenton), Meols Drive, Stanley Road (Hoylake), Gayton and Gleneagles Park, Caldy.

The Society welcomes this policy but feels that the word 'may' should read 'will'. After the encouraging and well-designed estate in Barton Hey Drive near to Caldy shore the low standard of design and layout which has since been allowed is appalling.

## Green Belt

Wirral's Green Belt, as approved by the Secretary of State in December 1983, has been incorporated into the UDP with the addition of the M53 corridor.

We are disturbed about two aspects of allowable development within the Green Belt areas, namely "Cemeteries" and "Institutions standing in extensive grounds."

We cannot understand the need for these two groups to be considered as being "appropriate development to a rural area." What is meant by "institution" and what are "extensive grounds"? The wording is too vague and we have asked the Council to delete these two items.

We are also disturbed about the policy which makes it possible for the controlled storage of caravans in the Green Belt during the winter provided they are not obtrusive.

We believe that caravans when not in use should be stored on some of the large tracts of unused industrial land and in redundant buildings in the urban area.

## Urban Greenspace

The UDP recognises that a policy restraining new development at the edge of the urban areas inevitably leads to pressure to develop open land within the urban area. Open land often makes a positive contribution to the image and character of an area and to the quality of environment enjoyed by the local residents and protected.



Another 9,500 houses ?

Whilst we welcome this statement the UDP unfortunately then goes on to list 49 sites where the Council feels that development could possibly take place provided certain criteria are satisfied. We realise that this is in the nature of last resort and wonder why they have bothered to publish such a list at all. It includes, inter alia, several old-established allotment sites and playing fields, New Brighton Rugby Club ground at Leasowe, New Brighton Cricket Club ground at Liscard, Caldby Hill and Goose Green, Meols.

We believe that listing these sites is a detrimental step which will only be of great assistance to would-be developers. We have therefore asked the Council to delete the list and include only those areas which are not to be developed.

We also welcome the declaration that the Council will continue to review the provision of Greenspace and will resist development in areas where such spaces are deficient. Especially pleasing is the statement that 15 Greenspaces are being considered for upgrading to Neighbourhood Park status.

### New Developments

The UDP points out that the Council has a legal duty to conserve the natural beauty and amenity of the area and to provide for improvements to the physical environment. Landscaping is one of the five provisions to be addressed within any detailed planning application and the Council has powers to ensure that adequate provision is made for the preservation and planting of trees and their proper long-term maintenance.

Proposals for new housing will need to demonstrate that adequate provision will be made for Greenspace as part of the overall design of the development.

The Society applauds these policies and will watch their application with great interest.

### Open Land & Environment

This section deals with the presumption against the demolition of listed structures, the presumption against any proposal which fails to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of Conservation Areas and the encouragement of the preservation or enhancement of buildings of architectural or historic interest not listed. It also deals with the protection of known archaeological sites.

These policies are warmly welcomed. A very important aspect of this Section is the continuation of the policy of reclaiming derelict land and disused urban land for industry, housing and commercial development.

The Council will undertake environmental improvements and will provide landscaping to create woodland, greenspace, wildlife habitat and/or amenity open space on prominent sites throughout the

borough.

We have written to the Council to applaud this policy and have asked them to apply it immediately to Upton Meadow.

### The Estuaries

This section deals with policies framed to protect both the Dee and Mersey estuaries against any development which would have a detrimental effect on wildlife and nature conservation interests. Regard will be paid to proposals which will enhance tourism and the recreational potential of the estuaries and permission will not be given to any development which would prejudice the operation of commercial sea fisheries.

The proposals for the construction of a Mersey barrage will be carefully evaluated.

We are disappointed to note that there is no mention within this section of powers which would enable the Council to react quickly and effectively against such problems as the highly commercialised cockling activity which is currently being pursued on the shores of the Dee to the detriment of the estuary and the peace of those people living nearby. We have written to the Council to ask that the necessary policy be included in the UDP.

Copies of the Unitary Development Plan may be seen in all Wirral Borough libraries and Information Offices and in the Department of Planning and Economic Development, Municipal Offices, Town Hall, Wallasey. Copies may also be purchased from the Planning Department price £20 each.

If any member who examines the Plan has any particular observations to make please tell the Secretary.

## STOP PRESS . . .

As we go to press a reply has been received from the Department of Planning and Economic Development in reply to our comments.

**Housing Needs:** The Department could not support a reduction in the Strategic Guidance figure below 9,500 new houses.

They do not agree with the Society's contention that the policies covering the allocation of land and the granting of planning permission for housing is too vague. They say: "In terms of farmland there is only a minimal amount of actively farmed land outside the Green Belt. Consequently the re-use of farmland deemed surplus by EEC policies will have to conform to Green Belt policies."

**Urban Greenspace:** There have been a number of submissions raising concerns about these policies as stated. They are unlikely to be included in the deposit version of the UDP in their current form. Options being considered include a revised list of local greenspaces subject to a

more protective policy or deletion of the proposal as the Society suggests and reliance on a single list.

**Cockling:** The Council's powers in this matter are very limited. The National Rivers Authority (Welsh Region) is the Sea Fisheries Committee for the Dee Estuary and has the responsibility of enforcing the by-laws relating to the cockle fishery.

Wirral Council's only "control" over shell fisheries is as landowner and part manager of the Dee Estuary SSSI and these responsibilities are outside the Planning Act.

The Department of Leisure Services & Tourism has instigated a system of foreshore vehicle access permits in an attempt to control intensity of activity on the foreshore.

## ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS NOW DUE

Unless paid by Standing Order or through the CPRE all annual subscriptions are due for renewal on 1 January.

Cheques or postal orders for £4 should be made payable to The Wirral Society and sent to Peter Bowler, Hon. Treasurer, The Wirral Society c/o Blease Lloyd & Co., 56 Hamilton Street, Birkenhead L41 5HZ.

(Those members who joined the Society in the latter part of the year will not be expected to renew their subscriptions until 1 January, 1994).

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## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Society's constitution states that the annual general meeting shall be held on a date decided by the Executive Committee. Of late this has been in November but a number of logistical reasons has forced its postponement to early in the New Year.

All members will be notified of the date and place as soon as arrangements can be made.

# BURNING ISSUE

*Much hot air has been expended over the past couple of years and fierce passions have been roused over a proposal to build an incinerator at Bidston which would generate heat and electricity from burning waste.*

Each person living in Wirral produces over one tonne of waste every year which we expect the authorities to get rid of for us. They can do two things – burn it or bury it. Recycling the small fraction of the rubbish that we put in our bins that is recyclable would require us to subsidise it and, anyway, the materials will only last for a couple of cycles before becoming waste permanently.

We should view our wastes as a resource that it would be irresponsible to bury in the ground. Much of it is packaging from food and other consumables which when it has done its valuable job of preventing waste by protecting and preserving its former contents can be put to use to generate heat and power to keep us warm and operate all those machines which have become essential to our modern lifestyle.

The plastic bottles that keep down the price of cooking oils, detergents, cosmetics and so on may be thought of as having been borrowed for a cycle or two from a natural fuel, oil, and properly complete their life cycle by becoming a fuel again. It does not make any sense to bury them in the ground.

## Burning wastes

There are several reasons why burning wastes to recover the energy in them – which is considerable – is beneficial to the environment (or 'green' in modern parlance). Most of these reasons are concerned with the output of 'greenhouse' gases.

The influential Watt Committee on Energy has pointed out that the great majority of municipal waste, by weight, is biodegradable and, therefore, part of the natural carbon cycle. It follows that if it is used as a fuel very little carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) is being put into the atmosphere – it would go there anyway as part of the natural cycle.

Assuming that the energy recovered displaces some that would be obtained by burning fossil fuels – which do add to the amount of natural CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere – this can only be beneficial. Now, if we add to that the considerable amount of energy spent on them to extract and refine them and transport them to the boiler, and that the production and use of that energy will have caused its quota of pollution, it will be

*Geoff Lovam, M.Inst.E., M.I.W.M., an Energy from Waste and Waste Disposal Consultant, is a member of the Society's Executive Committee. For the benefit of members we have asked him to explain the problem.*

seen that wastes are indeed a 'green' fuel.

Another reason why burning waste is benign is that in the alternative disposal method – landfill – the bacteria which decompose the refuse soon use up the available oxygen and being no longer able to convert the carbon to CO<sub>2</sub> convert it instead to CH<sub>4</sub> or Methane. Methane is some 27 times more harmful than carbon dioxide as a 'greenhouse' gas. Even if the methane is extracted and utilised, as it is at the Bidston landfill, it is only possible to use about half of it; the other half will still go into the atmosphere.

## Why the fuss ?

So, why all the fuss and protest about the Bidston Incinerator Proposal? After all, countries such as Switzerland, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden which are regarded as being much more environmentally conscious than the UK have virtually banned landfill and regard wastes as a resource from the energy should be recovered. Incinerators are built in those countries in the cities – which is where the waste is and where the energy is needed. Zurich has two, Paris three large ones, Copenhagen has one, so has Rotterdam – the list is endless. Even London has one and another under construction.

## What's in the smoke ?

Protestors say they do not know what will be coming out of the chimney. But her Majesty's Inspectorate of Pollution will. The major pollutants, sulphur, chlorine, nitrous oxide and dust, will be constantly monitored and recorded. The minor pollutants, lead, cadmium, zinc, mercury, arsenic and dioxins, will be monitored periodically and the emission of these substances is very strictly limited by EC legislation with which incinerators fitted with modern flue gas-cleaning equipment will have no difficulty in conforming.

It may be noted that the limits in the EC legislation controlling the emissions from power stations – which put out many thousands of times the volume of flue gas put

out by incinerators – for exactly the same pollutants are considerably less severe!

## Dioxins

The bogey word 'dioxins' has been bandied about, sometimes by people who don't even know what they are. They are not an issue. They are a micro-pollutant that is rigidly controlled (many consider to a ridiculous degree) and should be viewed in the same light as any other pollutant.

No country considers dioxins emitted by incinerators to be a health risk even without modern combustion control and flue gas cleaning.

This rare but ubiquitous substance (Man has been living with it ever since he learnt to use fire) has been shown to be as toxic to some laboratory animals as the insecticide parathion (that is, it is very but not uniquely toxic). Guinea pigs are very sensitive to it but hamsters are almost 2000 times less sensitive.

Some quite extensive experimental research in the USA indicated that humans were considerably less sensitive than animals. In fact, through industrial accidents and handling herbicides many thousands of people have been exposed to high levels of dioxins without suffering any permanent consequences.

## Seveso 1976

Probably the biggest exposure was at Seveso in 1976 when some 37,000 people were exposed to considerable amounts. Yet only a relatively small number of them showed transient effects such as the skin disorder chloracne (184 cases – 164 of them children under the age of 15), headaches and digestive upsets. No long-term effects such as birth defects and chromosomal damage have been identified. Earlier incidents have not shown any deaths from cancer above the normal rate.

To put the incinerator emissions into perspective a Danish professor calculated that all the incinerators in Denmark would have to burn at full load for 1,000 years to produce the amount of dioxins released in the Seveso accident.

## Chapter and verse

The dioxin debate has been closed except for an American or two who try to keep it going for academic – dare one say commercial? – reasons.

If anyone wants chapter and verse on all this I can provide it.

I hope I have been able to show not only that the incinerator project does not pose any sort of danger but that it is environmentally beneficial and should be welcomed by the people of Wirral.

# HILL BARK: WHAT NOW ?

The Executive Committee was disappointed that the planning application for converting Hill Bark into a country house hotel was defeated at a meeting of the full Wirral Council despite being recommended for approval by the planning sub-committee and the Council's planning officers.

Those who were so vociferously against the plan seemed to have been grossly misled, ill-informed and bereft of any suggestion for a viable alternative use.

The Officers of the Society examined the plans, discussed their implications with the would-be developer and visited the site. The proposed extension which was absolutely necessary to make the venture viable was not, as was described in a prominent paper to one local newspaper, "an ugly modern addition" nor would it have increased the size of the house by fifty per cent as was reported.

The extension would have increased the size by less than twenty per cent and the architect had been at pains to make sure that it would tone in with the black and white mock Tudor original. Moreover, it would have been at the north end of the house which is already disfigured by ugly fire escapes and almost out of sight from the adjoining park.

Over the course of the last eighteen months the developer had consulted all the appropriate Council departments - Estates, Planning, Conservation, Building, Traffic, and Leisure Services. All those officers had recommended approval.

A specialist firm of traffic consultants had, in conjunction with the Borough Engineer's Department, advised on the effects of extra vehicles and the proposed car parking would have been amongst trees on a natural surface - not tarmac - in an area unseen from the park and house which, at the moment, is totally overgrown and has long been inaccessible. The maximum amount of Green Belt land at risk was less than two-thirds of an acre. The Council's Trees Officer had also welcomed the plan and had identified trees which were dead or dying and needed removal.

The aspect of the plan which commended itself most to the Society's officers was the undertaking by the developer to restore all fittings and decoration to their original condition wherever possible and spend a

lot of money undoing the alterations made when the house was an old peoples' home.

The proposed use would also have brought the house into public use for the first time since it was built.

What will happen to it now? The opponents of the scheme have not come up with any constructive ideas. It has been reported that upkeep is costing the Council £2000 a month and that nearly £100,000 has been spent on the house since 1989. That state of affairs cannot continue indefinitely so what is to become of this beautiful Grade II Listed building? We understand it is not insured. Will it go the same way as the vandal-wrecked, Grade II Listed chapels in Flaybrick Hill Cemetery?

*(For the record, the name of the house is Hill Bark (two words), not Hillbark - Ed.)*

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*Flaybrick Cemetery chapel today:  
Hill Bark tomorrow ?*

## LATE NEWS:

A second Labour move to reinstate the sale of Hill Bark to Dayglobe Leisure for an hotel and leisure scheme was defeated at a Wirral Council meeting. The house will now be re-marketed on the basis of the original planning brief which limits the area of development to the perimeter fence.

*Those who care  
for and enjoy  
England's  
countryside  
have noticed it  
disappearing at  
an alarming rate.  
But what seems  
to be happening  
in front of our  
eyes has not been  
borne out by  
Government  
statistics.  
CPRE's new  
figures confirm  
what most of  
us have long  
suspected - that  
our countryside  
is being steadily  
eaten away  
by new roads,  
tourist  
developments,  
factories,  
quarries and  
house building  
at a faster  
rate than the  
Government  
claims.*

## NOW READ ON !

The tree which moves some  
to tears of joy is in the eyes of  
others only a green thing that  
stands in the way.

- William Blake

## THE LOST LAND

Since 1945 an area of English countryside nearly the size of Derbyshire, County Durham and Cheshire combined has been lost to new roads, new factories, houses, quarries and other developments.

That is the shocking conclusion reached in a report called *The Lost Land* compiled and written for the CPRE by Geoffrey Sinclair of Environment Information Services.

Current rates of urbanisation, he alleges, are more than double the rate claimed by Government departments.

The author claims that Government countryside and planning policies are based on inaccurate statistics. No less than 14.9 per cent of England is now urbanised, a figure much higher than any suggested by Government statistics which have failed to account for a total area of urbanisation equal to the size of Greater London.

The woodland statistics issued by the Forestry Commission are similarly unreliable. Detailed analysis shows there has been more afforestation and more broadleaf woodland loss than previously thought. Terrible losses of native woodland have occurred due to forest clearance, conifer conversion and urbanisation.

The total area of England's farmland has declined since 1945 by 445,000 hectares (more than 1,100,000 acres).

The area of English moorland (rough grazing land) has fallen by a similar amount. The loss has mainly been to agricultural 'improvements' and afforestation.

'The unique beauty of our upland areas,' says the report, 'have frequently been replaced by fields and alien coniferous forests. Although this loss has now been slowed to a trickle it is essential that remaining moorland is properly managed and not overgrazed.'

And new government figures are still wrong, the report alleges. A new system of recording land use changes adopted in 1985 still does not provide an accurate picture. For example, it shows a net loss in the area of forestry and open land, completely going against figures from all other sources (including the Forestry Commission) and contrary to what is known to be happening.

If urbanisation continues at the current rate, an area of countryside the size of Leicestershire, Northamptonshire and Bedfordshire combined will be lost by the middle of the next century. By 2075 the total urban area would equal 18 Greater Londons.

The CPRE is calling upon the Government to recognise the significance of the report and acknowledge flaws in the official figures, to issue revised guidance to local authorities and undertake a fundamental review of the sustainability (in terms of their impact on the countryside) of housing, transport and mineral policies. It is also asking that data collection on and the analysis of land use change be improved and woodland protection be strengthened and environmentally friendly forestry encouraged.

The Wirral Society chairman, Keith Davidson, comments: 'Geoffrey Sinclair and the CPRE staff are to be congratulated. Such work shows the importance of CPRE to the work of conservancy as the professional expertise needed to produce such a document can only be provided by a very large organisation.'

Whilst this is extremely disturbing news for England as a whole it reinforces the belief of the Wirral Society that within our own increasingly urbanised Wirral very strong measures are needed to ensure that this rate of urbanisation is drastically slowed and, if possible, reversed.'

The 80-page report can be obtained from the CPRE price £10 inc. P. & P. Cheques and postal orders should be made out to CPRE and addressed to **The Lost Land, CPRE, FREEPOST, London SW1 0BR.**

In tandem with the publication of *The Lost Land* the CPRE's new president, Jonathan Dimbleby, has launched an appeal for £50,000 towards the CPRE's on-going 'Campaign for the Countryside'.



Andy Wilson, CPRE's Senior Policy Campaigner (above), responsible for the commissioning and publishing of 'The Lost Land' report, was shocked by its findings 'I honestly didn't expect our research to come up with such alarming figures for how England's land has changed' he said. 'It is amazing that successive Governments have produced such inaccurate accounts of the impact we have had on our beautiful countryside. CPRE must now ensure that our report is acknowledged and its conclusions properly acted upon.' (See page 7, column 3).



How much 'Lost Land' in Wirral?

A visitor strolling through the noble woods of Ferney complimented Voltaire on the splendid growth of his trees. 'Ay', he replied, 'they have nothing else to do', and walked on without another word.

# MATTERS ARISING

The following letter has been received from Dr. C.G. Taylor of Willaston:

Dear Editor,

As a past member of the Committee of the Wirral Society I should like to congratulate you and the Society on its new journal WIRRAL MATTERS.

However, I was disturbed by the tone of one article in the Spring issue, namely 'No Way for Bikes'. As a member of the Cyclists' Touring Club who have been pressing for cyclists to use the Wirral Way ever since it was opened I felt that your attitude to a proposal by the Department of Leisure Services that cycling should be allowed on the bridleway was wholly negative.

First I should point out that the word "Bridleway" is defined in England and Wales as a route for the use of walkers, cyclists and horseriders whilst prohibiting cyclists. Occasionally, during and immediately following rain, the horse-ride on the Way is unsuitable for cyclists because of its bad state but most sections of it at most times are rideable by cyclists. Under dry conditions horse-riders and cyclists should be compatible as they are on true bridleways.

In fact the horse-ride on the Way is grossly underused, especially following the decline of horse-riding due to the recent depression. During a traverse of most of the Way from Caldy to Willaston on a fine Sunday last Autumn, my wife and I counted only three horses! It seems unfair to reserve one half of the Way for such a small number of horses.

I feel that the Society could make a positive contribution to the debate on the use of the Wirral Way if they proposed that cyclists be allowed to use the footpath and/or horse-ride as appropriate. If it is thought to be necessary, waymarking for cyclists could be introduced at very little cost and parts of the horse-ride could be adapted to accommodate cyclists.

It would be difficult, costly and unnecessary to create a new cycleway parallel to the existing two routes on the Way, something the Society seems to imply with its Ring of Wirral proposals.

In answer to your question "Should cyclists be allowed on the Wirral Way?" the answer is emphatically "yes". I should like to see a commitment by the Society to this end.

Passing to an even more important environmental matter, the Society is no doubt aware of the proposed A550 Improvement

Scheme, from Queensferry to Hooton. Many residents of Hooton and Willaston are deeply concerned about the impact that this scheme would have on their immediate surroundings. An action committee, South Wirral Against the Highway Extension (SWATHE), has been formed with the object of forcing a public enquiry, ideally leading to the adoption of cheaper and less damaging schemes for routing traffic between North Wales and Liverpool.

Letters are being sent by residents of Hooton and Willaston to our local MPs, to the Secretary of State for Transport and to the Manchester division of the Department of Transport.

I hope the Wirral Society is concerning itself with these new highway proposals. An objection by the Society to the scheme would be welcomed by those of us living in the areas likely to be affected by it.

Yours sincerely,

Colin Taylor

## Food for thought

Of Wirral's 24 miles of coastline all but 5 miles are protected by encasement in concrete or rock armour. The majority of the remainder, Wirral's 'natural' coastline, is protected by legislation in recognition of its biological importance.

The clay cliffs at Thurston are slowly eroding. If this is stopped in an effort to 'protect' them what will actually be protected? The land at the top of the cliff will be protected from further erosion, but a lot more will be destroyed. The cliffs will slump to a stable slope and vegetate over, resulting in a loss of the rare plant communities present (Bee Orchids, etc.). The cliffs will then cease to be cliffs but become grassy slopes encased in rock armour.

Is this what we want?

The impact of such protection goes further still. A coast that is eroding is providing sediment for another coastline downstream. If the erosion is stopped then so is the sediment supply and so the next bit of coast starts to erode.

In other words attempts to stop erosion usually only result in the movement of the problem to somewhere else.

Adam King  
Senior Range, Coast  
Wirral Countryside Newsletter

## ALL THE BEST !

The Chief Planning Officers of both Wirral Council and Ellesmere Port and Neston Councils will each be receiving a Christmas present from The Wirral Society.

We are giving each of them a copy of *The Lost Land*.

With the book will go our best wishes, of course, but also – and more to the point – our hopes for the future.

The Executive Committee feels strongly that this is a publication which should be required reading for all concerned with planning and development matters – including councillors on planning sub-committees. But when we suggested this we were told that the financial constraints on spending by council departments would not allow for the purchase of such extras. Hence our gift.

Among other things they will learn that ...

**14.9%** of England is now urbanised.

Since 1945 the total urban area has grown by **700,000** hectares.

The current rate of urbanisation is **11,000** hectares a year (or an area nearly the size of Exeter, Norwich and Oxford combined).

The total area of England's farmland has declined since 1945 by **445,000** hectares – by far the greater part of it to urban use. The amount of moorland (rough grazing land) in England has fallen by **440,000** hectares in the last 45 years. This is equivalent to 28% of the total and is mainly due to agricultural 'improvements' and afforestation. The unique beauty and wildness of our upland areas have frequently been replaced by fields and alien coniferous forests.

## STOP PRESS . . .

### BURNING ISSUE

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As we go to press it is reported that an independent survey made for Wirral Borough Council on the revised proposals of Bybrook Waste and Power alleges that there would be an increase rather than a reduction in the landfill requirements of waste in Wirral. To be profitable, said a spokesman, the plant would need to burn 220,000 tons a year and waste would have to be imported to fulfil this requirement.

More than 13,000 people in North Wirral and Wallasey have signed a petition objecting to the project.

The Society's Executive Committee will be seeking further information before reaching a decision.

A public Inquiry will be held in February.

### More food for thought

I imagine that most people when going round some historic house are overcome with the thought that they walk upon floors, touch walls and doors, see galleries and chambers which people generations back knew intimately . . .

But what is Britain, taken as a whole, if it is not a great house upon whose floor our forbears in their millions have walked and looked and touched and left their mark? It is an historic house. Every acre has some secret to reveal. But like all historic houses it needs to be looked after, cherished, and permanent changes made only after deep consideration. The island is our one and only enduring asset, our home, and there is nowhere else to go. Nobody is going to rehouse us if we make a mess of this one.

*Sir Colin Buchanan  
former President of the CPRE  
in his book  
No Way to the Airport  
(Longman 1981)*

### THE OFFICERS AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

WISH ALL MEMBERS

A VERY HAPPY CHRISTMAS

&

A TROUBLE-FREE NEW YEAR

### A WORD TO NON-MEMBERS . . .

There are many thousands of people in Wirral who take pleasure in the countryside for recreation; many more who merely desire a pleasant place in which to live.

The Wirral Peninsula, we believe, fulfils both criteria but we also realise that such a unique place needs protecting.

On 22 May 1928 a public meeting was called at St. Michael's Church Institute, Claughton, 'to organise action to protect Wirral from disfigurement or injury'. That led to the formation of The Wirral Society and we have been active ever since in pursuit of that aim.

The Society is affiliated to the national conservation body, The Council for the Preservation of Rural England (the famous CPRE) and, uniquely, we also fulfil the role of Wirral District Committee of the Cheshire Area of the CPRE.

The Society's Executive Committee meets once a month (currently in The St. John Church Centre, Meols) to discuss planning applications which may affect Wirral's heritage, including threats to the Green Belt, open spaces, old buildings and wildlife.

This work depends to a very large extent

on feedback from members who act as the eyes and ears of the Society and who constantly watch for such threats in their local community.

Two annual meetings of members are held - the first in summer at a place of interest in Wirral, the second is autumn (or, sometimes, a little later) when the annual formal business is conducted and a guest speaker is invited.

Our new-style printed newsletter - WIRRAL MATTERS - is sent to all members, planning officers, councillors of both Wirral and Ellesmere Port and Neston councils local Members of Parliament, the local press and others who might be interested, four times a year.

Most of Wirral's villages have an amenity or conservation society and many are affiliated to the Wirral Society and send a delegate to our Committee Meetings.

Our annual subscription is deliberately kept low and is currently only £4 a year - for it goes without saying that the more members we have the more influential we become.

You'll find an Application for Membership form below. We look forward to hearing from you.

### APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

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

- I wish to apply for membership of The Wirral Society and enclose my cheque/P.O. for £4.00 by way of annual subscription.
- or
- I wish to apply for joint membership of The Wirral Society and the CPRE and enclose my cheque/P.O. for £15.00.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone No: \_\_\_\_\_ \*Delete as necessary