



# WIRRAL MATTERS

NEWS FROM THE WIRRAL SOCIETY • FOUNDED 1928  
THE WIRRAL COMMITTEE OF THE CAMPAIGN TO PROTECT RURAL ENGLAND (CPRE)

President : Professor John Tarn OBE DL

## Planning Matters

**Of course it does!** And the Government are well aware of it. As we have previously reported, someone came up with the idea that there should be a North West Regional Assembly and they - not local authorities - would have the biggest say on all future planning proposals. This, as would be expected, caused an outcry and one of the loudest voices crying "Shame!" was that of CPRE. And, being CPRE, they proceeded to reinforce their opposition with reasoned argument and suggested amendments.

The Government's proposed changes to the planning laws are embodied in the *Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill* now under consideration in the House of Lords. Its origins lie in the problems encountered in finding development sites in England's overcrowded southeast, not only for housing but also for airport runway extensions and the like. The Government wants to streamline the process and cut out the long-winded deliberations that the present system brings, albeit in a proper democratic way.

### Ominous proposal

One ominous proposal is that the Unitary Development Plans (UDPs) drawn up by the Unitary Authorities (such as Wirral Metropolitan Borough) and Structure Plans devised by County Councils (such as Cheshire CC) should be abolished. CPRE immediately protested on the grounds that abolition would open up a serious gap in the planning system, making it less democratic. Communities and elected politicians would thus be left with very little say and virtually no control over their own precious patch of her Majesty's realm.

The new proposal is that strategic plans - to be known as Regional Spatial Strategies (nothing to do with the moon or Mars, it seems) - should be devised on a regional rather than local basis. After months of campaigning by CPRE and other interested bodies, the Government has, to some extent, relented. In January it announced that its Bill would be amended to give county councils and unitary authorities a legal duty to be involved in regional planning. But - and a big BUT - county councils and unitary authorities would only be involved when their own services were affected.

CPRE, of course, have not accepted this lying down and are currently trying to secure further amendments as the Bill progresses through the House of Lords.

### Regional Planning Guidance

Whilst we await the outcome nationally, a change has taken place in the way Wirral Council will consider planning applications for the immediate future. The new thinking stems from the provisions of Regional Planning Guidance No 13 (RPG 13) which was issued last year and the pressure for development in parts of east Wirral coupled with the need to hasten regeneration in parts of west Wirral. The dividing line between the two areas is, for the most part, the line of the M53.

### How it affects Wirral

RPG13 asks local authorities first, to reduce significantly the number of new dwellings it approves each year and, secondly, that priority be given to approving development

plans which contribute towards areas in need of regeneration, which, in Wirral's case, would mainly be east of the M53.

There is great pressure from developers wanting to build on comparatively small sites, especially in west Wirral which, if allowed, could harm the character of particular areas.

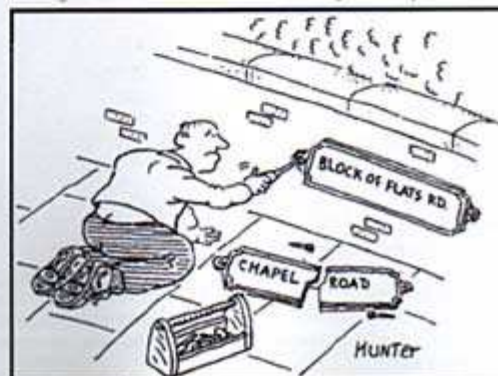
There have been heavy demands for planning permission for the demolition of large Victorian and Edwardian houses with large gardens and redevelopment of the sites with blocks of flats and/or multiple smaller houses. This is not a problem unique to Wirral. All over the country blocks of flats are growing like dandelions in a neglected lawn and the urban scene is rapidly changing. It does not require the help of a computer to see that a block of, say, twelve flats on the site of a former Victorian villa is more profitable than erecting a couple of houses on the same site.

It follows that while developers can follow this profitable course there is less interest in regenerating areas of small houses in heavily built-up areas.

### The way ahead

RPG13 sets out the path which local authorities should follow when considering planning applications. They must first consider whether a building is sound and worthy of re-use or, in the case of empty buildings, whether they are capable of conversion. Secondly, in the case of previously developed land, its accessibility by public transport, walking or cycling must be taken into account. Thirdly, in the case of previously underdeveloped land, its location to important open spaces, its location relative to houses, jobs and other services and again, accessibility by public transport, walking or cycling must all be considered.

Wirral Borough Council has already identified a supply of available building land sufficient for the next 10 years. It has, therefore, agreed to placing an embargo on applications for multiple dwellings on sites on west Wirral. In allowing redevelopment on a phased basis all these restraints will be taken into consideration, together with further stringent Council conditions. Policies for east Wirral are also being developed. Although these restraints are described as 'interim' they will be incorporated into the revised UDP which will go on deposit in the near future.



## Matters of Moment

**A new Church Centre for St. Peter's Church, Heswall,** has been proposed and the initial plans are the cause for some concern. St. Peter's, of course, is the focal point of Lower Heswall Village Conservation Area and it is felt that the plans do not do it justice. They envisage a low-height, pre-fabricated building with a flat roof which can be 'hidden' behind the surrounding sandstone wall. We have expressed our view that any new building in this area should be compatible with its surroundings. At the time of going to press, no formal planning application has been made.

**A proposed plan to erect 13 homes on a site in Eleanor Road, Bidston,** which was denied by Wirral Council is now the subject of an appeal by the applicant to the Secretary of State. The plans not only contravened the Development Brief for Eleanor Road but has come up against the Council's new policy of restricting multiple developments.

**Port Sunlight** is to see a major change if reported plans for an additional 100 apartments and houses are approved. The development is a joint venture between Miller Homes and the Port Sunlight Village trust, the body which now controls the village.

An assessment of the village houses found that a sum in excess of £7 million was needed to refurbish them. Although the village always looks band-box fresh some of the houses are now over 100 years old and urgently in need of structural repair. The income generated from this new development will go towards restoration.

**A new-style advertising device** has suddenly begun to mushroom on Wirral's roundabouts and wayside grass verges which the Executive Committee consider could be a dangerous hazard. Since they are intended to attract the eye of the motorist they are an obvious distraction and that is to be deplored. But even more deplorable is that they are being erected with the approval of the Council. Indeed, these mini-hoardings proudly bear Wirral Council's insignia and the Council receives a fee for allowing them to be erected.

But is the money they generate so great that it couldn't be refused? We have consulted the chief motoring organisations and RosPA and all agree that they could be a distraction.

We have made our view known to the Council Highway Engineers Department.

**Riverside Footpath.** Last time we reported on the claim that the Ro-Ro terminal at Twelve Quays illegally cut through an established footpath along the banks of the Mersey we were told that a decision by the Secretary of State (aka the Deputy Prime Minister) would be with us by the end of last year. After an enquiry by Ben Chapman MP - at the request of Barry Lello, Chairman of The Wirral Footpaths and Open Spaces Society (and a Society member) we now learn that we can expect one by the end of March.

'The sheer weight of evidence that a footpath existed there for many years means that the decision must go in our favour' said Graham Handley who started the campaign three years ago.

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## In Memory of Eric

Those members and friends who attended the last two Victor Smith Lectures will have noted with pleasure that our speakers were using a microphone and amplification equipment.

In the past, some folk seated in the back rows found the acoustics of the room a little difficult. Microphone and loudspeakers were suggested and those used in the recent lectures by Professor Tam and Mr John Millar were experimental. In these cases, the equipment was generously loaned to us by the Wallasey History Society to whom we are most grateful.

The experiment was a great success and the Committee decided that we should go ahead and purchase our own.

Learning of this, Mrs Yvonne Sanné, wife of Eric, our late Secretary, most generously offered to defray the cost as a lasting and practical memorial to her husband.

Eric was not only the Society's Secretary but was also our representative on the Cheshire Branch Committee of CPRE. In fact, he served for three years as the Cheshire Branch Chairman and at CPRE's 75th Anniversary Garden Party in Windsor Great Park he and Yvonne had the honour and pleasure of meeting the Queen.

Yvonne always took a keen interest in all Eric's activities and knowing that we were having difficulty in finding someone to take his place on the Branch committee she most kindly offered to take on the job herself despite the need to travel to meetings at CPRE Cheshire's headquarters in Middlewich and elsewhere in Cheshire. We gratefully accepted her offer and immediately co-opted her to the Executive Committee.

Our Chairman, Rod Tann, said: "The microphone and speakers will be a great boon. They are an unusual but highly practical memorial and constant reminder of the long service Eric gave to the Society. We are most grateful to Yvonne for her great generosity."



## Extended by Public Demand - Yet Again!

We learn from Colin Simpson, in charge of The Williamson Art Gallery, that our 75th Anniversary Exhibition of pictures of Wirral painted over those 75 years has been such an outstanding success that he has decided to let it remain for a few weeks longer.

The paintings, taken out of the Gallery's reserve stock, many of which were donated or bequeathed, have for the most part, not been shown to the Wirral public before. That is what so many people have found intriguing. Comparing the 'Then' with the 'Now' has proved fascinating to folk who were born in, or have lived in Wirral for a long time.

There is also wonderful bonus for anyone visiting the Gallery at the moment - and until Sunday 18th April - in the shape of the brilliant Norman Thelwell exhibition. One of Britain's best known artists, who was published all over the world. He did over 1500 drawings and contributed no less than 60 front covers for *Punch* magazine. Norman Thelwell was born in Tranmere but sadly, he died a few weeks ago as his exhibition was being mounted in the gallery.

The Gallery is open every day except Monday 10am - 5pm

## The Anniversary Tree



*An historic moment: Our President  
and a job well done*

The day was chilly, the rain clouds were gathering but for the short time it took for our Chairman, Rod Tann, to say a few words and invite our President, Professor John Tarn, to take up a spade and plant the Hop-Hornbeam, our 75th Anniversary tree, on a site in Flaybrick Memorial Gardens the elements were kind to us. The seven foot-tall sapling was planted in a spot adjacent to Flaybrick's chapels.

The disused, vandalised chapels are currently safeguarded by a ring of tall railings. The famous landmark steeple was declared to be dangerous a few years ago and has been reduced in height. Plans have been made for restoration of the chapels - and the steeple - and a secular use has been found for the building. Approaches have been made for funding to the Heritage Lottery Fund who have reacted favourably. All being well, it is hoped that restoration work will begin within the next two years.

When fully restored and the protective railings are removed our special tree will be in a commanding position.

## Star Quality

*Twinkle, twinkle, little star,  
How I wonder where you are!  
Up above the world so high  
Invisible to the naked eye.*

In the Summer 1994 issue of this newsletter we bowdlerised the old nursery rhyme to draw attention to CPRE's campaign that year against light pollution. They had complained to the Government that the light from road and street lamps, neon signs, large buildings, sport clubs and the like meant that Britain's skies at night were almost permanently black with not a twinkling little star to be seen other than out at sea or in the open countryside.

It was not exclusively a CPRE campaign. The cudgels had been taken up in 1991 by the British Astronomical Society (BAA) and the International Dark Skies Association (IDSA) acting in concert. They had proposed that excess lighting should be avoided, that all unnecessary night-time lighting, together with advertising lighting and sports floodlights, should be extinguished at 11pm or midnight to reduce the total sky-glow in the pre-dawn hours. They were backed by the Institute of Lighting Engineers who made the nation's lighting engineers aware of the problem.

Twelve years later, in autumn last year, a committee of the House of Commons announced that light pollution was getting worse, energy was being wasted and people were being deprived of sleep and many were being denied a sight of the stars.

The result is that the Government will be issuing guidance on light pollution as an annex to the Planning Bill currently being considered by the House of Lords.

A spokesman for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister said: 'It will send a clear signal to, local planning authorities that they should take the issue of light pollution as seriously as they do other types of pollution when considering planning applications.'

Whether light pollution should be made a statutory nuisance is still under consideration.



*- and members who witnessed the event*

*Photos: Courtesy Nic Harding*

## Joy for Joy

It's one of Wirral's best known landmarks. It can be seen from miles around. It is even marked on the official mariners' chart for Liverpool Bay and to sailors returning from the North Atlantic convoys during world War II it was a symbol of safety and an indication they would soon be home. They called it 'The Dome of Home.'

It is the great, green dome of SS Peter and Paul Church which soars over New Brighton as the famous tower did in days gone by. And, a couple of years ago Wallasey Civic Society had reason to be concerned about its future.

The church had, for some reason, become the subject of a feasibility study by the Diocesan Committee in Shrewsbury which was exploring its viability as a parish church and as a building although it is well-attended and financially sound. People became worried about its future and rumours abounded. The church is such an outstanding feature of New Brighton and Wirral that the Civic Society decided that the church, with its unique character and historic associations with New Brighton deserved to be listed and protected.

But getting any building listed is easier said than done. The Civic Society were fortunate, however, in having a Secretary of its Planning Advisory Committee, a chartered architect - in the person of Joy Hockey.

Joy (who is also on the Society Executive Committee) approached the Listed Buildings Division of the Department of Culture, Media and Sports. A month later, they replied, saying they would seek the advice of English Heritage and would be pleased to receive any additional information backing up the claim. That is where her professional experience and expertise proved valuable.

She began by relating the interesting history of the church.

The first Roman Catholic place of worship in New Brighton was a small mission erected in 1879. This led to the building, two years later, of a small Gothic-style brick church in - appropriately - Hope Street. But the dream of Father Mullins, the parish priest, was to have something far grander - a church of real significance.

He had trained for the priesthood in Portugal and had become enamoured with the great Renaissance-style churches of Europe, particularly the great Basilica of the Sacred Heart in Lisbon which boldly stands on a hill overlooking the River Tagus. He imagined a similar basilica towering above New Brighton, overlooking the River Mersey.

To this end, he acquired a site in Atherton Street. It was on Wallasey's highest point, 170 feet above sea level.

The church which was ultimately built on the site and completed in 1935 was not quite as grandiose as Father Mullins envisaged. He wanted it large enough to hold a congregation of a thousand but had to settle for six hundred. But the grandeur of his dream was mostly realised with the

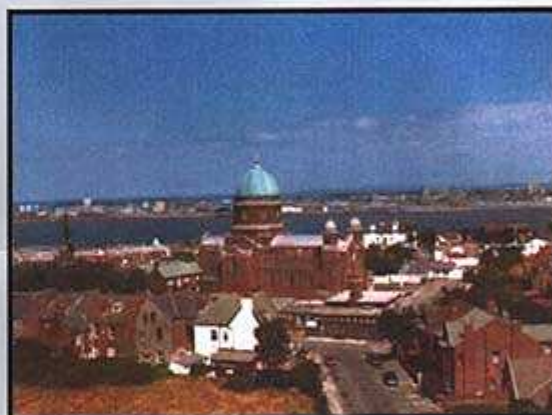
The reasoned case for listing then had to be made. The church's architectural value had to be clearly explained and its importance to the community spelt out. Supporting documents had to be furnished, together with plans, charts, photographs, maps, a description of the site and most importantly - a reasoned justification for its listing.

All this Joy Hockey did and the resulting file looks like a thesis for a degree.

The decision came in a letter dated 23 December 2003, exactly one year after the initial application. She had won the day. SS Peter and Paul was to be listed Grade 2.

'It was a wonderful Christmas present,' said Joy. 'I couldn't have asked for anything better.'

At all times, of course, she pursued the matter in the name of the Wallasey Civic Society. 'But all praise must go to Joy,' said Terry Edgar, the Civic Society chairman. 'It was all her own work and it's a tremendous achievement. We're delighted.'



Looming large: SS Peter and Paul Church, New Brighton

### SUMMER MEETING

A chance to inspect  
New Brighton Lifeboat Station  
and view the original New Brighton villas in  
Wellington Road Conservation Area  
followed by  
A visit to St. James Church, a very fine example of  
Victorian architecture, designed by  
Sir George Gilbert Scott

Saturday 3 July 2004  
Meet at the Lifeboat Station  
at 2pm  
Car Park right opposite  
No tickets required - just turn up

**Editor:** Alan Brack 47 Upton Road, Claughton. Tel/Fax: 0151 652 5530  
**Hon. Secretary:** David Casement 5 Cornwall Drive, Prenton Tel/Fax: 0151 608 3039  
**www.wirralociety.19.co.uk**

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