



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

Things to Come?

If all the developments currently in the pipeline should ever come to fruition - both nationally and locally - the Wirral Peninsula is in for some very dramatic changes.

To start with, there is a proposal to build a gigantic wind farm, with 200 huge turbines covering an area of 80 square miles, 14 miles off the Wirral shore in Liverpool Bay. Ignoring for a moment the debate on whether they would add enough continuous power to cater for 500,000 homes (as claimed), there are concerns about the damaging effect it would have on the view from the shores of west Wirral and deep concern about the effect they will have on the tens of thousands of seabirds which annually fly into the feeding ground of the Dee and Mersey estuaries. How they might affect the shipping route to Liverpool is also a factor to be concerned about.

New Brighton

Then there is the much-trumpeted plan to regenerate, reinvigorate and generally refurbish the New Brighton seafront. This, as members will know, has caused a great rumpus and divided the residents into two opposing factions - those who believe that the proposal to build an incongruous giant superstore and a block of flats in the middle of the promenade is worth putting up with in return for a promise of other facilities deemed proper to making the town a proper 'resort' again and those who think the plan is a total abomination to be vigorously opposed.

Port Sunlight

There is also the hooah raging in Port Sunlight where the Village Trust want to develop some spare land on the edge of the village which many folk declare will be totally out of sympathy with William Hesketh Lever's lovely creation - a creation which many believe merits World Heritage Site status.

Bidston Hill

And what is to become of historic Bidston Observatory and what is the future of Bidston Hill itself is another thorny problem. We have well documented the dilemma caused by the move of the staff to Liverpool leaving the Observatory and the Proudman Laboratory building vacant.

Wirral Council seem content to allow the Proudman building to be sold, demolished and redeveloped with a large estate of houses and flats. But as they no longer own the buildings they have shown no interest whatsoever in trying to save the famous, historic and Grade II Listed Observatory - yet they claim to be the guardian of Wirral's heritage.

A Wirral businessman has shown great interest in converting the laboratory building into a hotel and restaurant. It would seem to be an ideal solution but the Council are trying to persuade him to erect a hotel in West Kirby. Such a hotel would certainly be filled for the week or two of The Open Championship in Hoylake but it is highly questionable whether it would be a viable proposition once the golfing gala is finished.

Dark cloud?

Then there is the suggestion that the infamous 'Cloud' recently blown away by Liverpool could, instead, be built on the Cammel Laird site. Will it be built instead of the proposed snowdome (whatever that is) and ski slope, or as well as?

Or will it be the first of three so-called 'iconic' structures on the banks of the Mersey shouting yah-boo at Liverpool's famous Three Graces? It was recently reported that Wirral Council is looking into the possibility of having an 'iconic' (today's in word) building or two erected somewhere near Woodside, apparently in the belief that since we enjoy the best view of the Liverpool waterfront we ought to have something that Liverpudlians can look at.

Unexpected threats

There is also the threat to the eastern half of the Peninsula following the ban on new developments on the western side. It was hoped that this move would direct the thoughts of developers towards building on the many brownfield sites available east of the M53. But developers do not seem particularly interested in building small houses and small blocks of flats on derelict sites in less affluent areas. Undeterred, they have been seeking out large houses with large gardens and tempting the owners to sell, offering huge sums of money, in one case, we've been told, by as much as twice the current market value.

This ruse is worrying the Oxtou Society which is now trying to extend the boundaries of the Oxtou Conservation Area to include more of the larger Victorian houses in the hope of frustrating would-be developers there.

Thornton Hough

The residents of Thornton Hough are - at the time of writing - living with the dreaded threat of having 40-ton lorries charging through their quiet gem of a village several times a day in each direction. They will come from the new Aldi distribution depot which is being built on the former Marconi site on the Chester High Road.

Wirral Council is reportedly trying to forestall the threat by seeking authority to place a weight restriction on the roads into and out of the village.

This is a formidable list but a slight break in the clouds that hover over us is the imaginative proposal by sculptor Tom Murphy for a reclining figure of Neptune, on a monumental scale comparable with New York's Statue of Liberty, to be built somewhere near the mouth of the Mersey. As the Tides rise and fall so would Neptune dramatically sink and rise again.

There is also the Aluna Project, designed by Laura Williams. She, too, has the Wirral shores of the Mersey in mind as a site for her gigantic six storey-high, all glass, tidal-powered Moon clock.

Wirral Council would like to build one or the other, if not both, if only it could find the millions to do so.

They would really be iconic - and something for Liverpool folk to see and the world to wonder at.

Matters of Moment

• **Wirral Council's Unitary Development Plan (UDP)** has been revised and the first draft has been issued for public consultation and comment. It was published at the end of July and any objections had to be lodged not later than the 3rd September.

Four weeks is, in normal circumstances, a ridiculously short time in which to peruse and consider a document which is 400 pages in length and has taken at least two years to produce. But to issue it at the beginning of the main holiday month and expect responses to be submitted by the end of that month was most unreasonable.

The Executive Committee devoted their August meeting to discussing some of its aspects and, once again, we were privileged to have the guidance of planning consultant John Wesenrafft. In the event, with John's help, we just able to meet the deadline and we are very grateful to him.

• **The right to walk unhindered beside the River Mersey** from Woodside to Seacombe is still a matter in the hands of the Secretary of State for the Environment. A decision was expected at the end of last year, then March, and at the time of going to press there has still been no word.

It is hard to believe that the mandarins of the Environment Department are still considering the pros and cons and can only conjecture that the problem has not yet risen to the top of their in-tray.

Ah, well. As the old proverb says : *With the trowel of patience we dig out the roots of truth.*

• **Wirral Council's entry into the field of roundabout and roadside verge advertising** continues to proliferate. Our protest that these mini-boards could be a hazard to motorists have been rejected although our fears are shared by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA). Not only that but the Highways Director claims that they have been so successful from a revenue point of view that the scheme is being extended to cover car parks and other suitable places.

• **The neglected state of cast-iron street nameplates and signpost throughout Wirral borough** were brought to the attention of the Director of Highways and Engineering Services when he met Society representatives some weeks ago. It was something which his department had not considered, he admitted, and promised quick action where the Society could bring examples to his notice.

Our subsequent research, however, has revealed that nearly all cast-iron artefacts - nameplates, signposts, mileposts, railings and the like - in the Council's care need urgent attention. Some street nameplates are almost indecipherable, others are hanging off their supports and make the borough look shabby - see picture below.



Wirral Council's Draft UDP

The Society has always tried to take an especial interest in proposals for change which have strategic implications for the peninsula.

During the last few years we have been able to make detailed comments on such reports as Wirral Council's Unitary Development Plan (UDP) issues and the implementation by the Council of the Regional Planning Guidance (RPG) as it affected future housing in the Borough.

The latest important document to reach us for comment is the First Deposit Draft Alterations to the Wirral UDP. The UDP is the Borough's sole planning document and sets out the framework for its planning policies. We have been very fortunate once again in having expert guidance from a retired planner who specialises in such matters, in helping us analyse the document, otherwise we would never have been able to deal with it properly in the short time allocated for consultation.

The document covers the period 2002 - 2016, and runs to some 400 pages, which in itself presents a major task in analysis. It is, however, well laid out and the proposed changes are clear for the most part. We are only asked to make comments on those sections that are being altered. The present consultation is the first of two but it was the main opportunity to secure changes to the plan without needing to go to Public Inquiry.

The Society has been most encouraged by the main changes proposed which reflect the Regional Planning Guidance regeneration strategies that the Society has previously supported. Notably, they include

- the introduction of a programme of significantly reduced numbers of dwellings in the Borough.
- the concentration of new development on the east side of the Borough to support regeneration.
- using the so-called 'sequential' approach; i.e. where land has to be released for development, the most sensitive land is released last.
- the upholding of the Wirral Green Belt.
- Improving the attractiveness and viability of urban parts of Wirral Borough.

In addition, it is proposed that in new developments, applicants should pay closer attention to the design, character and distinguishing features of the surrounding area. The Society is seeking clarification as to whether this policy will apply to the whole of the Borough and the means by which this will be done.

It is also good to note that the Borough proposes to emphasise its support for business developments that are highly accessible by various means of transport other than cars and lorries.

We are pleased to see the Borough is resolved to strictly phase the rate of new developments over the 14 year period of the UDP's life. However, the Society is concerned that the Council has, in recent years, already granted so many planning permissions for development (which it no longer has any effective control over) that it will have difficulty in managing how those targets are met. The Draft Plan does not seem to adequately recognise this as an issue, so the Society has asked the Council to spell out more clearly in the plan exactly how those targets can be achieved. We are also concerned that the Council is continuing to grant Planning Permissions, both for multiple dwellings and also for the building of new houses on land that had previously been thought important enough to be designated Urban Greenspace. This is despite the fact that it has already approved the equivalent of a 10 year land supply for new dwellings, as required by Government.

We have also questioned the references in the Plan to the

way in which the formal calculations are done, which, as it stands, appears to allow the premature release of more land for development.

The Society welcomes the proposal to stop the development of dwellings in gardens, except where an existing dwelling is demolished, but it is seeking clarification that dwellings will only be demolished as a last resort. We have made the point that this should also apply to the Proudman Building at Bidston Observatory where no fewer than 85 houses are proposed; a proposal we have objected to most strongly.

We note with pleasure the inclusion of the new Conservation Areas at Meols Drive, West Kirby and The Kings Gap, Hoylake, the Listing of four historic parks and gardens, and a further protection to areas of mature conservation and biodiversity.

The Society also welcomes the proposal to reduce levels of light pollution in sensitive areas of the Borough; however, we note that no reference is made to any intention to insist on the use of focussed lighting units more generally throughout the Borough.

Rod Tann

W. Victor Smith Memorial Lectures - 2005

Advance notice for members who buy their next year's diary early.

Tuesday 25 January	<i>Wirral - How it was: How it Is</i> Rod Tann Chairman, The Wirral Society
Tuesday 22 February	<i>Talking Horse Sense</i> Professor D.C.Knottenbelt University of Liverpool Department Of Veterinary Science, Leahurst.



What's it to be then - swimming with the dolphins or supermarket shopping in New Brighton?

Held to Ransom

People passing the building work which is going on in Meols Drive, Hoylake, on the site of The Priory - for many years the local Job Centre - may well have been puzzled by this notice which is prominently displayed and also by the careful way the workmen watch where they are treading.

No Trespassing by Order of the Court

On 7th May 2004 it was ordered in the High Court of Justice that Gleeson Homes Ltd. whether acting by its officers, servants or agents, must not trespass on to this one metre strip of land and that the boundaries hereon must be maintained and any other person known to trespass hereon shall be liable to similar court action.

You have been warned
Keep Off

It seems that the developer has fallen foul of an old property-selling trick. When selling the site the owner had retained possession of two one metre-wide strips either side of the Job Centre garden and Gleeson's men had been unaware of this and so had been caught trespassing. A prosecution followed and Gleeson's were fined and the notices ordered to be erected.

The strips are known in the trade, not surprisingly, as Ransom Strips - defined as 'narrow strips of land separating the land for sale from the highway or otherwise restricting the site, by owners who wish to control or profit from future development.'

Our sympathies are with the developer though it is hard to understand why the restriction was not picked up when the site changed hands. *Caveat emptor*.

F-A-U-L-T!

One would have expected that someone whose career has depended on keeping precisely to the rules might have known better. But Boris Becker, the tennis player, met his match recently when he came up against the local planning authority at his home in Majorca

It seems he has a luxurious villa on the island which, he felt, needed an extension. And extend it he did - without first getting permission - to three times its size. The authorities were not pleased and served him an ace in the form of an order to pull the entire house down. After negotiation he was allowed to retain half. He was also fined £145,000

Summer Meeting

The Summer Meeting this year attracted around 30 brave souls who made their way to one of the peninsula's windiest spots on a day when the wind was strong enough to make the seagulls fly backwards. But it was a pleasantly warm wind and entirely appropriate for the occasion. We were visiting the Lifeboat Station at New Brighton.

Phil and Joy Hockey were our hosts and since both of them have long been closely involved with the lifeboat in one way or another. Phil, a retired Liverpool pilot, is a former crew member of the lifeboat and Joy has been involved as all crew members' wives become involved. But, of course, Joy is the fount of all knowledge on all things New Brighton and was able to tell us - in great detail - the history of the lifeboat station. Phil then explained how the station operates and gave us a run-down on the present boat and its predecessors.

The New Brighton boat is, by far, the busiest of the Wirral-based boats and had been called out on no fewer than 38 occasions up to the time we were there in July and is expected to rise to 100 by the end of the year.

From the Lifeboat Station the party moved a few yards along the prom to view the splendid houses in Wellington Road Conservation Area.

These are the first houses built as part of the plan by James Atherton, a retired builder from Everton, who envisaged establishing an exclusive seaside resort, fine enough to rival those on the south coast. Once again, Joy - whose clear voice successfully mastered the blustery winds - told us who built the houses, how much they cost originally and who first lived in them. Had anyone asked she would doubtless have been able to say what size shoes they wore.

Phil and Joy, however, live in a fascinating house of their own just around the corner and enjoy magnificent views from their garden across the mouth of the Mersey and Liverpool Bay. We know that because the whole party was invited inside to see it for themselves. Not only that we were then allowed to explore her daughter's interesting house across the road and the first house in Wellington Road which Phil and Joy are currently renovating and turning into two flats. Named 'Marine Villa' it was built 1840 for William Rowson, who was James Atherton's son-in-law.

The tour ended with a visit to St. James' Church where tea was served and where the redoubtable Joy pointed out the features of the church which was designed by Sir George Gilbert Scott in 1854.

It was a most unusual and fascinating afternoon and our thanks go to Joy and Phil for making all the arrangements and being such splendid hosts.



New Brighton Lifeboat

Stop Press

Wind Farms As with most folk in Wirral the Society Committee has viewed with some concern the possibility of seeing Liverpool Bay and other coastal waters turned into a 'forest' of massive windmills. They have been pleased to note that this concern is shared with Mr Ben Chapman MP and that he has voiced his doubts in Parliament. We have written to him to say that the Society fully supports him in this matter.

M6 Widening CPRE Cheshire Branch is greatly alarmed by the recent announcement by the Transport Minister that a new 50 mile-long toll road is being planned to run close to the M6 from North Cheshire to Birmingham. This would swallow up hundreds of acres of Cheshire countryside and farmland. The Branch is girding its loins to mount a vigorous campaign in opposition and will shortly be asking for members' help.

Editor: Alan Brack 47 Upton Road, Claughton. CH43 8TQ Tel/Fax: 0151 652 5530
Hon. Secretary: David Casement 5 Cornwall Drive, Prenton. CH43 0RW Tel/Fax: 0151 608 3039
Membership Secretary: Mrs Audrey Platt, 21 Latchford Road, Gayton, CH60 3RN Tel: 0151 342 5522

www.wirralociety.f9.co.uk

Printed by: Hil-y-Gem Computer Printing Tel/Fax: 0151 625 7509
e-mail: hil-y-gem.diamond@virgin.net
www.hillegem.co.uk or hillegem.com