



WIRRAL MATTERS

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

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TRANMERE'S QUEST

It is as well to be reminded from time to time that this Wirral Peninsula with which we are so concerned is not all green fields, leafy country lanes and heather-clad common with views over the Welsh hills. Over on the Mersey banks of the peninsula things are rather different.

For some time now the Executive Committee has been conscious of the fact that the main thrust of its deliberations seems to be centred on problems arising in West Wirral. Towards rectifying this imbalance the Committee was pleased to welcome to a recent meeting Mr. Barrie Bradburn (until recently Managing Editor of The Wirral News Group) and Mr. Scve Dennett representing CITIZEN'S QUEST, a community-based project initiated by residents of Tranmere which has gained the support of Wirral Borough Council. It has also attracted four secondees from the private sector.

The aim of the initiative is to highlight the immense problems of the Tranmere area and prevent (in their words) 'an irretrievable state of decline and social malaise.'

Ancient history

Mr. Bradburn reminded the Committee that Tranmere was once much larger and more important than Birkenhead with a history going back to pre-Norman times. In the 19th century it grew from a rural village into a thriving mixed suburb of villas and cottages and then gradually became built-up and industrialised with the arrival of the industrial revolution. With the collapse of industry and the disappearance of the shipyards the rot began to set in.

The problems

The plight of Tranmere and what the residents want to see done have been clearly set out in a smart, glossy, professionally pro-

duced brochure called 'In Search of a Better Future' from which the following extracts are taken -

We want you to share our sad view of Tranmere. To understand that pride in what was one of the town's most vibrant neighbourhoods is being crushed despite our efforts.

Around us Wirral is being improved dramatically under the City Challenge and the Merseyside Development Corporation's programme but we are 'the forgotten people.'

The local authority has given us the opportunity to play a major part in transforming our lives and environment. Already, working parties and public meetings have heard our voices - and now we want action.

We intend to remain in Tranmere and ensure its regeneration in a spirit of consultation, partnership and co-operation - to become a proud community again.

We desperately need your help to achieve and secure our future.

Poor environment

The general environment is poor with many derelict and vacant buildings. Provision of well-maintained open spaces is severely limited. There has been little development in the past 10 years, the area accounting for just 3 per cent of the Borough's planning applications.

Leisure facilities are minimal and of low standard. Many households have no car making access difficult to places outside the area.

Streets which used to be our meeting places and play areas are now too dangerous because of parked vehicles and passing traffic. Pavement parking and traffic noise are a real problem. Some streets and footpaths are badly in need of repair and renovation.

Our two main parks are victims of vandalism, neglect and unimaginative use. Street and park lighting is poor. Lack of it encourages crime and damage. Vandalism is stimulated by the neglect and shabby appearance of Tranmere.

Many of our shopping areas are run-down and give us no encouragement to visit. Derelict or vacant units are to be found on all of the four main thoroughfares.

We suffer from a high level of crime, particularly thefts from houses and cars. Public spaces and recreational areas are targets for vandalism and graffiti.

Parks

Our main parks would be restyled and refurbished. Lighting, vandalism-proof where possible, would provide greater security and attraction. Our suggestions include: new landscaping, tree and flower planting, more garden sections, better play areas, an urban

(turn to page 2, column 3)



Tranmere - in search of a better future.

PLANNING MATTERS

Our Planning Liaison Officer reports –

A rough appraisal of the planning applications received by both Wirral Borough Council and Ellesmere Port & Neston Council in recent months shows a continuing predominance of schemes for domestic alterations and extensions over other types of submissions.

This possibly reflects a decision by homeowners to stay where they are and build extra accommodation to their existing home rather than venture into the current difficult housing market.

Applications for the building of new houses have been few and mostly consist of 'in-fill' schemes. Unfortunately, these can often give rise to objections from owners of adjoining properties who suffer loss of amenity of some sort as a consequence.

Such objections are understandable and in many cases very necessary and may result in schemes being more closely scrutinised by Council officials although this cannot always be guaranteed.

Noticeable by their small numbers are applications in the commercial and industrial field which reflects the uncertainty with which business views the economic outlook.

Liverpool Bay Gas and Oil Strike: Whilst Hamilton Bros. Oil and Gas have been given planning permission for the building of a gas terminal at the Point of Ayr the Government has not yet issued a licence for drilling and planning permission is still awaited for the building of a gas-fired power station at Connah's Quay on which the whole project hinges.

Grave matter: The oddest planning application to have been made in Wirral recently caught the eye of the national press. A retired officer of the Parachute Regiment has sought planning consent for himself and his wife to be buried in a plot of land which he owns adjacent to their bungalow in Ness.

It has, of course, long been customary for the aristocracy and landed gentry to be buried or entombed in a mausoleum on their own property but this is rather different. It is understood it is the first such planning application to be made in England.

The applicant is setting up a trust to safeguard and maintain the land in future years and when quizzed by reporters about his reasons for taking this step he replied: 'I would much prefer it to a crowded cemetery where I don't know many people.'

*H. Bryan Tweed, FRICS
Planning Liaison Officer*



Church Farm: sympathetic development – or left as it is?

Church Farm, Bidston Village:

Eric Sanné, the Society's representative on the Bidston Village Conservation Area Advisory Committee, reports that a planning application has been made by a local architect in respect of the outbuildings of Church Farm.

Church Farm itself is a 17th century listed building of both historical and architectural interest and was the largest farmhouse in the village. Not least in interest are its mullioned windows which are scattered haphazardly across its face as though the building made up his mind as he went along.

Internally the house has thirteen different floor levels. Some sources suggest that it once housed monks (an outpost of Birkenhead Priory perhaps?) and it is said to have underground passages or cells.

The house was restored some years ago but the outbuildings are in a poor state of repair and planning permission has been sought to convert them into eight dwellings – done elsewhere in Wirral, notably at Cally cross-roads and Frankby – and, in addition, erect nine houses on the periphery. The additional houses would be built in a style to match the other buildings.

We understand that some local residents have objected to the scheme and want to see no change whatsoever despite the general air of dilapidation while others feel the proposed change would be a vast improvement.

Church Farm ceased to be a farm, of course, when the erstwhile Birkenhead Corporation compulsorily purchased its land to erect the inglorious Ford Estate.

Our representative would be pleased to receive members' comments.

It is the job of every single man, woman and child in the country to be an arm of the Department of Heritage.

Not only should we protect our national birthright against those who wish to take it away – whether they are developers or vandals or chief constables or punishment freaks or hunt saboteurs or reorganisers or ramblers or rapists – but we should be permanently conscious, day by day, that everything we do has among its intended consequences that our heritage is protected, our environment improved.

**Auberon Waugh in
The Daily Telegraph**

(continued from page 1)

adventure centre, litter squads, secure bicycle parking, wardens on patrol, creation of a Ranger Service to manage, maintain and encourage local involvement in the enhanced areas and facilities.

Depressed, Neglected, Forgotten... these are the words most used in our consultation forums. The people of Tranmere seek change to bring... **Renewal, Revival, Security.**

The Chairman assured the visitors of the Society's sympathy with the area's plight. Most of the myriad problems are outside the scope of the Society but now that contact has been established we would help in any way we could.

LANDSCAPE – OR SANDSCAPE ?

A Threat to Cheshire's Countryside

In our Summer issue last year we reported the great concern of the Cheshire Branch of the CPRE over the ever-increasing demand for sand and gravel for the construction industry. The long-term prospects, said Geoffrey Budenberg, the Branch Chairman, were alarming and Cheshire stood to lose an area of countryside the size of Crewe.

So great is the concern that the CPRE recently held a seminar in Middlewich to discuss the whole question of mineral extraction. The main speaker at the meeting was Ben Plowden, the Minerals Officer from CPRE's London headquarters, and subsequently Geoffrey Budenberg was interviewed on the Northwest Tonight television programme which gave an excellent account of the problem.

The seminar was also attended by the Wirral Society's Chairman, Keith Davidson, and the Secretary, Eric Sanné.

Keith Davidson writes –

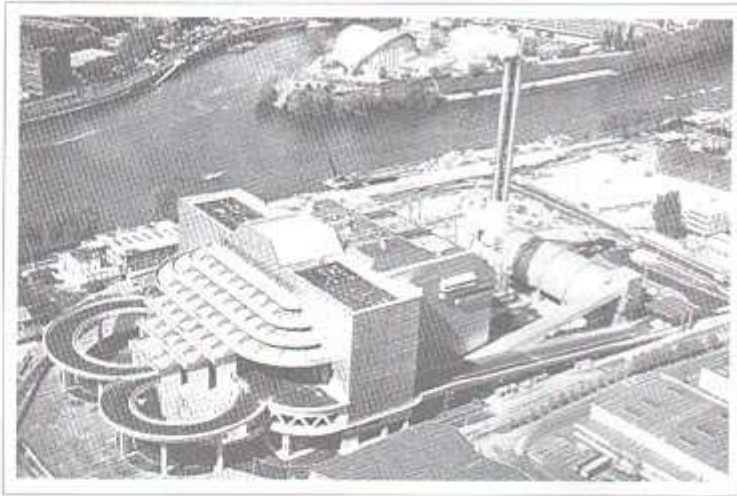
The Wirral Society expressed the view that some of the pressure on Cheshire in this respect could be relieved if a greater quantity of sand were dredged from the mouth of the Dee and from Liverpool Bay.

Provided that the existing mineral-handling docks of the Mersey were used the effect upon Wirral would be minimal and it is possible that some slight effect upon the rate of deposit of silt could also be achieved.

It was confirmed during the seminar that the ratio of estuarial to land-based mineral extraction was far lower in Cheshire than in other parts of the country. We also expressed the view that government figures for aggregate need might well be flawed as they may not have taken into account the full measure of the recession in the build-

BURNING ISSUE

THE CASE AGAINST



The proposed Bidston incinerator would be one-third the capacity of this one in Paris.

The proposal to build a modern waste incinerator at Bidston has evoked much opposition, in particular from the Wirral Environmental Protection Group. In our last issue Executive Committee member Geoff Loram, M.Inst.E., MIWM, a waste disposal consultant, explained why he believes burning waste is the only practical solution to a very serious growing problem.

At a recent meeting of the Society's executive committee Dr. Vyvyan Howard, MB, Ch.B., Ph.D., a senior lecturer in the Department of Fetal and Infant Pathology at Liverpool University and a founder-member of WEPG, with two colleagues were invited to give their reasons for being so opposed to the idea. Dr. Howard was also invited to put his case in writing for the benefit of Wirral Society members. This is a précis of his report.

induce cancer there are other effects such as reduction in immune response and hormonal upsets. With these low dosage effects there are no differences between man and animals.

Furans have been shown to impair brain development in the unborn child. One study has shown that children who had been exposed to significant doses of furans while in the womb suffered from lower IQ's, hyperactivity and delayed development of normal co-ordination, perception and memory.

In addition to these findings there is strong evidence that failure of reproduction of a number of species of birds, fish and mammals in the Great Lakes System is directly attributable to organo-chlorine pollutants including furans. This has led to a complete moratorium on waste incineration in Ontario.

Heavy metals

Municipal solid waste contains significant amounts of toxic heavy metals. These are present in batteries and pigments, e.g. in paints and plastics. These chemical elements are not destroyed by the incineration process and therefore must appear either in the gases or the ash. They include cadmium which is the most toxic pollutant in the atmosphere and is associated with thickening of the arteries, bronchitis and hypertension, mercury which is extremely toxic to the kidneys and the developing brain and is impossible to trap with filters and lead which can lead to brain damage in young children.

Waste-derived fuel is known to contain high levels of lead and cadmium.

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from the original as it
had been cut-out!**

Monitoring

We are assured that all incinerator plants will comply with EC regulations and that emissions will be 'monitored'. The trouble is that there is no known method for continuously monitoring the presence of dioxins and furans. There are also no plans or adequate techniques available for monitoring heavy metal emissions from the Bidston plant.

Ash problem

For every 3 tonnes of municipal solid waste incinerated 1 tonne of ash remains. This comes from two sources - fly ash from the pollution control devices and bottom ash from the incineration chamber. The more effective the pollution control devices are in cleaning the gases, the more toxic the ash will be.

Dust particles coming from the incinerator ash are of a size that, if they are inhaled, they will be carried deep down into the lungs where they are trapped and taken into the body. These particles contain toxic heavy metals and in the incinerator are a major site of dioxin formation. If the ash is simply put into landfill the dust that blows into our local environment will be a major health hazard.

It is noticeable that incinerator developers rarely mention the ash problem but it is not difficult to know why - they have no satisfactory solution!

Sensible

Incineration is a method of waste dispersion. Any first year chemistry pupil can tell you that you don't 'get rid' of materials by setting fire to them. If the Bidston incinerator goes ahead it will burn 205,000 tonnes of waste. This will leave 70,000 tonnes of toxic ash. 135,900 tonnes will therefore have to come out of the stack as gases and particles. At this point control of what happens to this 'landfill in the sky' is lost and is totally at the mercy of the elements.

And because the developers need to make a profit they will have to import waste into Wirral! This will actually lead to an increase for landfill requirement of 40%.

NFFO

Incinerators such as the one at Bidston are only financially viable because of a Government subsidy called the Non-Fossil Fuel Obligation (NFFO). This is gathered as a surcharge on all our electricity bills. Any incinerator operator who gets a licence to operate with an NFFO subsidy is guaranteed three times the economic rate per unit of electricity generated. Without the subsidy the cost of incineration becomes prohibitive.

Solution ?

Measures must be taken at Government and local levels to reduce the amount of waste being produced.

We make waste by mixing everything in our bins. The putrescibles with the clean, the recyclable with the compostible. In places where domestic separation of waste into different bins has been introduced compliance rates have been high. At this stage the toxic components can be kept out of the waste stream. Once they are removed they are at least under some form of environmental control. It may be that the manufacturer will have to recycle them.

Useful articles such as furniture, tools, bicycles, etc. which are often thrown on to the tip could go to a repair centre where senior citizens can pass on their expertise to the young. The repaired items can be resold and the centre run at a profit. Does it sound far-fetched? I can tell you that is already happening in Europe and the USA.

Of course it is no use simply separating recyclable materials without developing markets in which to sell them. This takes imagination and drive which seems to be lacking in so many local authorities but while this incinerator would create less than 20 jobs a properly conceived and managed recycling and re-use scheme would probably create between 300 - 400 new jobs and also contribute to the local economy. We all know that this has to come eventually and is simply common sense.

In our previous issue it was stated that the public inquiry was due to take place in February. We subsequently learned that this referred to the original planning application which was withdrawn. At the time of going to press the second, revised application is still with the Wirral Council planning officers and no date for an inquiry has yet been set.

The Chairman writes -

Although this important subject is still being debated by the Committee we were pleased to hear the views of Dr. Howard on the dangers of dioxins and organo-chlorine products.

The Society is grateful to Dr. Colin Taylor, a former member of the Committee, who kindly attended the meeting and who was able to debate at the very high technical level which resulted from Dr. Howard's comments.

It is certain that when the Wirral Society was formed 64 years ago its founder-members could not have dreamed that it would one day become involved in such detailed micro-biological and organo-chemical subjects as a part of our attempt to monitor matters affecting the peninsula.

OUR NEXT ISSUE
WILL CONTAIN
A REPORT ON THE
ANNUAL
GENERAL
MEETING

THE WIRRAL SOCIETY
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