



# WIRRAL MATTERS

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

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## A SITE NOT TO BE MISSED

**What is to become of the former Leas School site in Meols Drive, West Kirby?**

That is a question which local residents and most people who have seen it lying idle have been asking ever since the school closed down in 1989. Not unexpectedly it has been eagerly eyed by itchy-palmed developers who view any land lying idle as pure gold waiting to be mined. But the site is in the Wirral Council Green Belt area and designated as such in the Council's Unitary Development Plan. The only possible development which at one time stood any chance of success was for a nursing home provided it would have extensive grounds. And indeed an application for a nursing home together with some sheltered housing for the elderly and private residential development was lodged (and refused and a subsequent appeal dismissed) two years prior to the school's demise.

A plan for the building of a 101-bedroomed hotel with leisure facilities also failed but a subsequent outline application for the erection of a nursing home was approved by the Council. The applicant, however, had difficulties in marketing the site even with the planning approval. In March 1996 the developer lodged a detailed planning application for the erection of a 62-bedroom nursing home, 47 close-care apartments and 10 close-care bungalows. This was approved but by that time the great nationwide nursing home bonanza was fading and it became clear that the project would not be viable. The developer went into liquidation and the seventeen acre site passed into the hands of a Receiver appointed by the bank.

Towards the end of last year a planning application was made for the erection of nineteen detached houses and though this violated the Council's own Unitary

Development Plan (UDP) it gained approval. What prompted them to take this course is not known. Maybe they felt that since the nursing home approval was still extant it might rear its head again and a top-class housing development would be the better option.

This was certainly the feeling of the Meols Drive Residents Association who voiced their support for the plan.

It was not an option which the Wirral Society could support. Green Belt is Green Belt and precious. It should not be violated in any way. The site could be cleaned up and suitably managed as a permanent open space. And that open space, we feel, should be used as playing fields for the nearby West Kirby Grammar School for Girls.

### Crowded and cramped

In the entrance hall of West Kirby Grammar School is a small low table bearing a vase of flowers, a small gilt trophy and a framed certificate which really deserves hanging in a prominent place with a bright spot light shining on it. This is what it says:

The Secretary of State for Education  
and Employment  
congratulates  
WEST KIRBY GRAMMAR SCHOOL  
FOR GIRLS  
for recognition in  
Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools  
Annual Report for 1996  
as an  
OUTSTANDINGLY SUCCESSFUL  
SCHOOL

The school was established in Graham Road, originally as a private school, and the present

buildings were erected in 1913.

Almost every year since has seen a rise in the number of pupils. When Ofsted inspectors paid a visit in 1995 the number of girls in the school was 1,159. This year has the figure at 1,268 and clearly the school is bursting at the seams. It is hemmed in by housing and during school hours, and sometimes in the evenings, the patient residents of Graham Road have to put up with long lines of cars parked on both sides of the none-too-wide road. Various additional classroom buildings have been squeezed into this land-locked site yet, crowded and cramped as it is, the school somehow copes and, patently, copes extremely well. Except, that is, in the matter of PE and outdoor games.

For a school of this size one would expect to see a sportsfield of several acres, allowing pupils of all ages to benefit from regular sporting exercise. But not here. West Kirby Grammar School's 'sportsfield' consists of a single bumpy hockey pitch on the opposite side of the road – and that's all. For any other sporting activities they have to make use of a local authority open space on the other side of the railway line. It is an area used extensively for football, dog walking and golf practice.

As far back as 1988 Her Majesty's Inspectors drew attention to the lack of facilities for physical education. "Less than satisfactory", they said. In 1995 the Ofsted Inspectors commented that "the standards of performance in hockey, although very good, are achieved despite a lack of facilities on a field that is small and uneven in places." They added that "the playing field belonging to the local authority is also used, primarily in the summer for athletics, but dog fouling on the pitches is a health and safety issue."

Yet, just three minutes walk away on the

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other side of Meals Drive, is the 17-acre Leas School site which, if the Education Authority, were to display some initiative, would solve this problem at a stroke.

The Wirral Society feels strongly that this Green Belt site could not be put to better use. We suggest the present hockey pitch opposite the school could become a car-park for teachers' cars so giving Graham Road back to its residents. Alternatively, the land could be sold for in-fill housing (developers would be queuing up) and the sum realised would go towards the purchase of the Leas School site.

### Housing plan

The current situation is that the planning application for the building of nineteen houses on the site has been 'called in' by the Secretary of State for the Environment and this will result in the holding of a Public Inquiry on 22/23 July. This will give all those who oppose the planning application the chance to voice their objections.

If the application is rejected then we earnestly hope that the Education Authority

will seize the opportunity and somehow find the resources to buy the land. It is an opportunity not to be missed.

The Education Authority should also look to the future. West Kirby Grammar School has long passed the point where it needs to be replaced with larger premises. The Leas School site is big enough to accommodate a new school, staff car-park and playing fields. Not to acquire the site if it becomes available would be very short-sighted. To say that there is no money available and let the chance go by would be a weak and negative response.

The prospect of building on the site has, of course, enhanced its value. We believe that a valuation of the site should be undertaken by the District Valuer based on its use for school activity. And that, we believe, would be a value within the local authority's capabilities to raise.

The School's Parent Association has urged all parents to let their Member of Parliament and local councillors know their views and we hope they will do so.

We rest our case – and look forward to the Public Inquiry.



*West Kirby Grammar School*

## LORRIES AND COUNTRY LANES

CPRE has been waging a campaign against lorries which are increasingly making use of country lanes – lanes made centuries ago for the farmer, the ox-cart, the traveller on foot and the lone horseman. Lanes not much wider than the gargantuan warehouses on wheels that now roar through the British countryside at all hours of the day every day.

Motorways were built to take these juggernauts away from unsuitably narrow roads but now many try to avoid possible 'gridlocks' by resorting to rural byways. They damage the verges, they ruin the road surfaces, and, much to the point, they endanger life and limb.

The campaign has been well received but CPRE never complain about the misuse of the countryside without offering practical solutions.

Pointing out that the majority of road fatalities are in accidents on rural roads they want to see the speed limit on country roads reduced from 60 mph to 40 mph with a 20 mph limit in country villages. Speed cameras can do much to enforce such limits.

Lilli Matson, CPRE's Head of Transport, said: "We'd like to see a new category of country road where walkers, cyclists and horses have priority over cars which would have to give way to them. And we'd like to see networks of these 'quiet lanes' in many parts of the country."

As always CPRE has been putting its views and ideas directly to the officials of the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions and they eagerly await the Government White Paper on Transport due out shortly.

## BIDSTON LIGHTHOUSE

How many people living out of sight of the famous windmill on Bidston Hill know that this historic mound also boasts a lighthouse?

The first lighthouse on the hill was erected in 1771 and lasted for nearly a hundred years. Following the building of the Observatory in 1886 a new lighthouse was erected in 1872-3. As an aid to mariners it had a much shorter active life than its predecessor. Its light was extinguished in July 1908 and it has remained defunct ever since.

Over the years the lighthouse has suffered some damage but now John Jakeman, the Wirral Ranger for Bidston Hill, has come up with the idea of having it restored and made accessible to guided parties to enjoy the views of Wirral in all directions and of the great panorama of the Mersey and Dee Estuaries and Liverpool Bay.

We feel the idea is highly commendable. It is a Listed building which should be kept in good order and this would be putting it to good use.

The snag, of course, is that restoration will require funding and we realise that the sum required – £50,000 or more, at a rough guess – will not be coming from official sources. Nevertheless, we feel that this is not an insurmountable problem and one well worth pursuing.



## NEW COMMITTEE MEMBER

The Executive Committee has been pleased to welcome to its ranks Gilbert Pendleton of Cady who has been co-opted to act as our Education Officer.

Gilbert is a retired schoolmaster who spent thirteen years on the staff of Liverpool College before emigrating to the warmer clime of South Africa where he spent twelve months teaching at a college in Cape Town. He then moved to New Zealand and spent twenty-seven years at Tauranga College in North Island where he was Head of Science. He returned home on retirement four years ago.

For some years the Society has offered an annual prize of £50 to each of several Wirral schools to encourage the study of the environment and its many aspects. Of late those schools have not taken advantage of the award but we still firmly believe that if the Wirral environment is to continue to be protected the key lies in catching the interest and imagination of the rising generation.

This is the objective which we have laid at the feet of Gilbert and one which, we are delighted to say, he has been pleased to accept.

## CAUSE FOR CONCERN IN CALDY

Two recent plans for housing development in Caldy have led to protests from local residents and The Caldy Society. After careful consideration in both cases the Wirral Society has given its full support to the protesters and lodged formal objections to the schemes with the Director of Planning, Wirral Borough Council.

The first criticises the design of houses for the intended development of the land adjoining the Gleneagles Park development by Alfred McAlpine Homes Limited. The other is an attempt by the Governors of Calday Grange Grammar School to generate funds to enable more accommodation and a car park to be built within the curtilage of the school by selling off four acres of their present sportsfield for housing and with some of the money replacing it by buying ten acres of Green Belt land in Telegraph Road.

### Gleneagles Park

Following the first Gleneagles Park development there was criticism of the low standard of design of the houses which paid no heed to the original conditions laid down by the Caldy Estates Company. Hopes of an improvement with this latest development were raised with the news that McAlpine's would be employing a firm of Manchester architects to prepare the designs. Alas, they too have ignored Caldy's special character and, by their own statement, have simply reproduced copies of a scheme they have carried out in mid-Cheshire. This may well represent the character of that area but they are quite out of sympathy with Caldy.

The proposed designs contain gable-panels, garage doors and other details which are totally out of keeping with Caldy. There should be an increase in cement-rendered houses in the plans and those which are to be constructed in brick should reflect the brownish colour more usual to the area and not the red brick it is proposed to use. Similarly, the proposed use of blue-black slate on all the roofs would be an intrusion in an area where brown roofs are the norm.

The Unitary Development Plan states that "wherever physically possible the dwelling on each plot should have a maximum of six metres between it and the side boundary and the building line should be generous, at generally not less than twelve metres." The proposed plans allow in some cases for only five metres between the house and the boundary with a building line of only four metres.

We agree with the architects' comments that at times it is necessary to vary the building line in certain positions to produce

interest and greater modelling but in this case it would seem that this has been exploited to produce a higher density. In that respect, we believe that the density should be no more than forty houses, not forty-two as proposed.

We understand that the Planning Department have specified that the development should include a link with the Wirral Way. This, we believe, would be a most undesirable step to take and have pointed out to the Planning Department that there is already easy access to the Wirral Way at nearby Croft Drive. To create another giving access into a tightly planned and high cost development of this type is asking for trouble. In reality it would become an easy two-way escape route for thieves and vandals.

There has been close co-operation between the Society and the Caldy Society over this matter and we acknowledge their hard work in examining schemes submitted by a number of would-be developers.

### Calday Grange Grammar School

There is no doubt that had the Governors of Calday Grange Grammar School asked the local education authority (as they may well have done) for the money to expand the school buildings they would have been told that none is available. The plan they have devised to generate funding is certainly an ingenious one but it has not found favour with local residents nor can the Society endorse a scheme which in any way imperils the Wirral Green Belt.

The school already owns some land in the area of Telegraph Road in question but this is greatly under-used with activities taking place only for a few hours on Thursdays and now and again on Saturdays. They are now asking for a further ten acres to allow for a sportsfield, a car park for fifty-two cars and coaches and permission to build a new pavilion.

The pavilion planned will not be a modest traditional timber-clad school cricket pavilion. This one will measure 19m x 19m (or 3,886 square feet). To put that into perspective a large bungalow occupies around 2,700 square feet and residents of the houses in Telegraph Road behind which the land lies are wondering what the school has in mind. The cars in the car park and the coaches will bring noise and pollution but what will the future of the large pavilion hold? Will it eventually be licensed? Let for parties, weddings and other functions? They are reasonable fears since its size is way beyond the school's needs if present usage of the field is anything to go by.

The Society sympathises with the local residents and the intrusion into Green Belt land and has lodged a formal objection to the scheme with the Director of Planning,

## GOING TO TOWN With CPRE and the Civic Trust

The nation's two leading rural and urban conservation and improvement groups – CPRE and its urban counterpart The Civic Trust – have joined forces in a campaign to show the opportunities for improving the quality of urban living for the benefit of both town and country.

The opening shots were fired recently with the launch of a booklet *Going to Town* published under the banners of both organisations. The attractively produced and well illustrated publication shows how, with imagination and determination, cities and towns which are suffering the blight of redundant industrial buildings and empty disfiguring sites can be so transformed that they become attractive places in which to live, so changing the deep-rooted attitude that city and town centres are for working in; suburbs and the countryside are for living in.

To that end the Plan of Action urges the Government to publish a new urban Planning Policy Guidance note (chiefly for the guidance of planning officers and planning committees) making urban renewal a top priority and setting out a clear strategy for making better use of land and buildings.

As just one example of what can be done with good buildings no longer needed for their original use *Going to Town* points to Concert Square off Bold Street in Liverpool where a former chemical laboratory has been stylishly converted into apartments, cafe bars, a nursery and a photographic studio.

The Government's aim, say the authors, should be a comprehensive renaissance of urban Britain. To that end, it should publish an Urban White Paper "to clarify its vision and integrate urban policy across the whole of Government." New Whitehall machinery should be created to co-ordinate national programmes and ensure the Government leads by example. It should legislate quickly for financial incentives and levies to encourage high-quality renewal and new building in urban areas. Businesses engaged in the urban regeneration industry should be recognised and supported and they (the Government) should champion the potential of multicultural, creative, leisure and communications industries to act as 'economic drivers'.

*Going to Town* offers the Government plenty of advice and pertinent suggestions to follow and it will be interesting to see the official reaction to it.

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Since every day for the past twenty years an average of three hundred people a day have moved out from major English cities to start new lives in country towns and villages it is certainly time to try and reverse the trend.

To quote from the booklet:

Six hundred square kilometres (148,000 acres) of land lie unused in urban England. Across the country on average two hundred houses fall empty every week, and the number of dwellings unfit for habitation now exceeds 1.5 million. There are almost as many empty houses in England as there are houses in the whole of East Anglia. Not to recognise the value of this vast resource would be to commit a deed of negligence which future generations would list among this century's greatest acts of folly.

England's towns and cities can, and should, be places where people of all ages and incomes can enjoy safe, happy and fulfilled lives, where business can flourish, and from which few would want to 'escape'. This is the nation's true Millennium challenge. The opportunity exists. For the sake of city and countryside alike, we cannot afford to let it pass.



## QUESTION TIME

The Executive Committee was pleased to welcome to its March meeting Mr. Stephen Hesford, Member of Parliament for Wirral West, who had asked for an opportunity of finding out and discussion matters affecting the Wirral Environment. Mr. Hesford is a former member of CPRE, Trafford District.

There was a lively discussion and Mr. Hesford was made aware of the detail of some of the problems currently engaging the Committee's attention, in particular, the former Leas School site in Meols Drive, West Kirby.

## FLY (by night) TIPPING

In our Winter issue we mentioned the increased amount of fly-tipping reported all over the country following the introduction of the Landfill Tax. Our information at the time was that this was not a problem in Wirral. We were misinformed. Our report prompted a letter from Mr. J.L. Lester, Head of Parks and Open Spaces for Wirral Borough. There is a problem, he wrote, with the regular dumping of builders' rubble on the small car park on Telegraph Road for visitors to Thurstaston Common. "So far", he said "we have been unable to trace those responsible and any assistance from members of the Society who may observe actual tipping or anything suspicious would be very helpful."

Before we went to press with this issue we checked to see if this was still a problem. It is. A spokesman for Mr. Lester said tipping still went on there. But there is an even worse problem with the illegal tipping of rubble on the access road to the Observatory (Proudman Oceanographic Laboratory) in Bidston. "In both cases", he said, "we're talking about 5-10 ton lorry loads at a time."

Any information should be passed to Wirral Country Park Visitor Centre, Station Road, Thurstaston, telephone number 648 4371.

"The biggest threat to our countryside is the silence of those who love it."

Prunella Scales  
President CPRE



The Wirral Society has become a member of The Merseyside Environmental Trust (MET).

Founded in 1984 this alliance of public, private and voluntary sector agencies and private individuals is concerned with the improvement of the outdoor environment in the erstwhile Merseyside County area.

The Trust is supported by large national firms, local businesses, local authorities, both universities, colleges and schools, Groundwork Trusts, voluntary organisations and private individuals, all with a common interest in improving the area's environment.

The Trust was set up following the highly successful Green Towns & Cities Congress which was held in Liverpool in July 1984 and attended by six hundred delegates from the UK and USA.

The idea for the Congress came from the Olmsted Society, the American parks association which takes its name from Frederick Olmsted, the man whose visit to Birkenhead Park in 1850 inspired his career as a landscape architect and ultimately his design for Central Park, New York, and other American public parks.

MET organises an annual Environment Week on Merseyside which supports and draws attention to local groups and runs a small Project Grant Fund. It assists schools in the development of environmental activities including work within their grounds, provides a free enquiry service and environmental information centre, holds public meetings, such as the threat to open spaces and services the needs of member groups. Its activities are reported in MetMail, its bi-monthly newsletter.

MET is a registered charity supported by a grant from the Department of the Environment which allows for a paid headquarters staff of four with an office in Department of Civic Design in the University of Liverpool.

### WIRRAL MATTERS

is sponsored by UML Limited as part of their Wirral Community programme.

### APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

To: Mrs. A. Platt, Membership Secretary, The Wirral Society  
21 Latchford Road, Gayton, Wirral L69 3RN.

- \* I wish to apply for membership of The Wirral Society and enclose my cheque/P.O. for £5.00 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 £17.50 (Please make cheque payable to CPRE)

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

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

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