



# WIRRAL MATTERS

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

Editor: Alan Brack, 47 Lipton Road, Birkenhead L43 8TQ Tel/Fax: 0151 652 5530  
Hon. Secretary: Eric Sanné, 'Clavis', Meols Drive, West Kirby Tel: 0151 632 3119

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## CAMPAIGNS PURSUED WITH RIGOROUS ENERGY

Since our formation in 1928 the Wirral Society has fulfilled a dual role serving also as the Wirral District Committee of the Cheshire Branch of the Council for the Protection of Rural England, better known as, simply, CPRE.

This connection has given us an open door to the great knowledge and expertise of CPRE Headquarters in London. Never a day passes without our receiving a communication of some sort, be it a new publication on some imminent threat to the countryside, a consultation paper on some matter of moment or news of the mounting of a new campaign. In fact, we are constantly in awe at the sheer industry and output of the staff at head office. As examples of what they did last year – as given in the Annual Report – we list a few of the more important issues with which they were occupied. And we have no hesitation in offering our headline as a suitable motto!

**Housing.** The late Government's estimate that there will be a staggering 4.4 million additional households by the year 2016 sparked off a vigorous CPRE campaign for 'brownfield' sites in towns and cities to be cleared and used before more countryside is taken. The Government initially said that 50% of these houses should be built on previously used land but as a result of CPRE's campaign raised this figure to 60% which could save the countryside from 440,000 houses.

**Out-of-town shopping.** The Government's new planning advice on out-of-town shopping developments introduced stricter controls on developments on greenfield sites. This owed much to CPRE's lobbying over many years.

**Advertising controls.** The Government proposed to abolish ASCAs – Areas of Special Control over Advertisements. These cover large areas of the countryside and prevent intrusive outdoor advertising. A powerful coalition of local authorities and amenity groups, led by CPRE, strongly opposed the move and the proposals were

withdrawn.

**Housing design.** Local authorities have not hitherto had the power to refuse planning permission because of the poor design of housing or other developments. Now, thanks to CPRE's *Local attraction* campaign the Government's new planning guidance asserts local authorities' role in rejecting poor design to ensure that misfit housing is a thing of the past.

**Transport.** Damaging road schemes in a number of counties – all the subject of local CPRE campaigns – were dropped in 1996 and CPRE's proposals for integrating the planning of trunk roads and land use were included in the Government's new Transport Green Paper.

**Countryside clutter.** The accumulation of small-scale changes – from telecommunication masts to tourist signs – can have a dramatic impact on the landscape. To resist the rising tide of clutter in rural areas, CPRE launched a new campaign in December with the publication of a booklet on *The Cluttered Countryside*.

The campaign addresses the wide range of small-scale but intrusive developments that litter the countryside. Inappropriate advertisements, road signs, roadside restaurants, telecommunication masts, electricity pylons and ill-sited caravans and farm buildings all cause concern.

Traffic is one of the major generators of clutter. Road signs, traffic-management schemes and over-engineered solutions to traffic problems on country lanes are leading culprits. The privatised utilities, mobile phone and petrol companies, local authorities and the leisure industries all add to it. CPRE continues to protest.

These are merely a few examples of the sort of thing with which CPRE was concerned last year. Flowing from their various campaigns come detailed reports of the problems and what could be done to alleviate them, together with periodical progress reports.

## MATTERS ARISING

Some of the points raised have local significance and we hope our two Wirral local authorities have taken due note, in particular, of their responsibilities over housing design.

Many of the developments in Wirral over the past fifteen years or so leave much to be desired, not least because they more or less look the same. The large national housebuilding firms have a folio of designs for houses which they repeat over and over again so that the country is being blighted by 'sameness'. And together with the monotonous sameness of multiple high

CPRE



Your countryside – your voice

street stores towns are fast losing their individualities and character.

### Housing

More disturbing, however, is the recent news that the Government is (to quote the *Daily Mail*) 'preparing to solve the national housing shortage by authorising a building spree over huge swathes of countryside'.

The present government does not dispute its predecessor's estimate that no less than 4.4 million new homes (the equivalent of thirty-five cities the size of York) will be needed by the year 2016 but they do dispute John Gummer's claim that 75% could be built within town and city boundaries on derelict or reclaimed sites now referred to as 'brownfield' sites. They say that planning restrictions may have to be 'relaxed to allow for the building of up to two million houses in rural areas'. And in a statement that surely caused hackles to rise within CPRE, the Environment Minister, Nicholas Raynford, declared: 'It is simply not acceptable to make people in urban environments live in unacceptable ways just to protect the countryside'.

The greatest need is, of course, in the London and South East where the projection is that the South East will need 807,000 more houses and London 629,000. The UDP estimate for Wirral (up to 2001) is 10,500 and for Ellesmere Port & Neston borough 2,890, the majority to be built in Ellesmere Port.

The national forecast takes into account the way in which the traditional family unit has changed. As a result of the ever-increasing divorce rate many more people are living on their own and it is estimated that around eighty per cent of the 4.4 million extra homes are likely to be occupied by only one person.

### OTHER BUSINESS

A recent CPRE publication deals with *Waste and the Countryside*. The booklet examines the problem of waste disposal in the countryside, explains the national policy for coping with the problem and describes the various techniques available to deal with waste. It is in no way intended to be sensational but some of the facts brought out are shocking.

For example—the amount of waste poured into landfill sites each year could fill enough dumper trucks to stretch from Land's End to John O'Groats and back *ten times*.

We produce over four million tonnes of waste a year which is enough to bury an area four times the size of Bristol under one metre of waste.

Over the past twenty years the number of landfill sites has mushroomed and new sites are still being given the go-ahead at an alarming rate.

In 1989 it was estimated that up to 1,400 closed or active landfill sites were capable of exploding or catching fire.

### Wirral's Waste

Now that Bidston tip has been closed Wirral's waste is being disposed of in the disused Bromborough Dock. On enquiry the Executive Committee has been told that the present waste disposal contract will expire in 2001. The Waste Disposal Authority is said to be alive to the situation and the matter of waste disposal after that date is constantly under review.

### Wind Power

One of CPRE's present concerns is with the impact of wind-power developments on the British countryside (over thirty wind power-stations with 643 turbines in operation so far with a further 85 proposed). The amount of electricity contributed to the National Grid is relatively small and, for those living or working near a so-called wind-farm the noise of the gigantic vanes going round can be very disturbing. They also disturb wildlife and, in many cases, are visually obtrusive.

Following a survey through those local branches with wind farms in their area a joint statement on future wind power development was made to Margaret Beckett, President of the Board of Trade, by CPRE, its sister organisations in Wales and Scotland, the Council for National Parks and The Ramblers Association.

It called for changes in the criteria by which financial subsidies and contracts are awarded for wind-power developments to include a broader range of considerations, including wildlife and landscape impacts. Planning guidance for renewable energy should be revised to recognise wind turbines as *industrial* infrastructure and, as such, accept that they are not appropriate in areas which are normally protected from such development (e.g. upland moorland areas and undeveloped coasts).

### New President

At the conclusion of his five year term as President of CPRE, Jonathon Dimbleby was given a farewell party and presented with two antiquarian books and a commemorative platter specially made by a CPRE London Branch member.

Jonathon Dimbleby has accepted an invitation to be a Vice-President.

The new President is the well-known actress Prunella Scales.

## THE FIGHT TO SAVE 'THE GORSE'

The fight to save 'The Gorse', the precious little greenspace in Upper New Brighton goes on. The campaign team, in collaboration with Groundwork Wirral and after full consultation with local residents' associations, has now drawn up an impressive and well-reasoned plan by which this area adjoining the water tower in Gorsehill Road could be turned into a 'pocket park' for the benefit of the people living round about and the neighbouring local primary schools.

The area, they point out, has been a natural wildlife habitat since the beginning of the century and it is important that this last remaining undeveloped 'lung' in an otherwise overbuilt area should not be developed.

The idea for a pocket park was originally suggested by Dr. Hilary Ash of Cheshire Wildlife and has the backing of thirty-two local residents associations, all four primary schools, New Brighton residents through the New Brighton Action Committee, The Wallasey Civic Society and, of course, The Wirral Society.

It also has the support of Wallasey MP Angela Eagle who is now a junior minister in the Department of the Environment. She has written to Sir Desmond Pitcher, Chairman of North West Water who own the site, and to Ofwat.

The Plan prepared by Groundwork Wirral not only details the advantages which would accrue through saving this 1.25-acre greenspace and possible costs involved but with total honesty also states the cons as well as the pros.

Some of the cons are obvious and are the blights of life today – vandalism, use by drug-takers and other undesirables – and so on but it also mentions the possible loss of immediate income to North West Water shareholders if the site's market value is not realised.

One might reasonably imagine that such a display of candour could touch the heart-strings but the conglomerates, of course, are known more for their hard heads than their soft hearts.

At the time of going to press, we learn that the Conservation Officer of NWW is preparing a report for his board but has given no hint as to what the recommendation will be.

It's fingers crossed time all round.

### WIRRAL MATTERS

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

## AS IT WAS IN THE BEGINNING?

It has long been thought that the person responsible for founding The Wirral Society in 1928 was Miss Joan Royden, daughter of Sir Ernest Royden, the shipowner. Just what prompted her initiative has never been known. It has been presumed that she was inspired by the formation of the Council for the Preservation of Rural England (CPRE) two years earlier and the fact that the new society immediately took on the dual role of the Wirral District Committee of CPRE made this a reasonable presumption.

But now Executive Committee member Lilian Potter has come up with a new theory which seems very credible. It is one which hints at a possible conflict of interest within the Royden family which today's tabloids would have relished. We can imagine what headlines it might have provoked:

RIFT IN THE ROYDEN FAMILY?

SHIPPING MAGNATE'S

GREEN' DAUGHTER SEES RED

NEW SOCIETY SLAMS SHIPOWNER

- and so on.

We have mentioned before that Lilian Potter is busy researching for her PhD thesis and in the course of delving through some old Birkenhead Council records for 1926 she came across this interesting Minute of a meeting of the Finance (Special) Subcommittee on 8th June of that year:

### RESOLVED

*That the proposal of the Estates and Development Committee that application be made to the Ministry of Health for sanction to the borrowing by the Corporation of the sum of £70,440 ... in connection with the proposed purchase by the Corporation of the Royden Estate at Woodchurch, containing an area of about 456 acres; the loan to be repaid within a period of eighty years, be approved.*

In 1926 Sir Ernest Royden had not yet moved his house *Hillbark*, stone by stone and beam by beam, to its present location in Frankby. It was still located in Vyner Road South, Bidston, and, of course, would have enjoyed uninterrupted views right across the fields to the Arrowse Hall Estate (now Arrowse Country Park). Did Royden sell this land knowing that he would be moving to Frankby? And, more to the point, was his daughter so upset at the prospect of seeing all these fertile farm lands disappearing beneath bricks and mortar that she reacted by forming a society for the protection of rural Wirral? It would seem possible.

Proof, or otherwise, might well be hidden in the Society's early minutes and records but they are missing. We are trying to locate them but fear they may have been lost during the last war.

PS: As a matter of interest, many years were to elapse before a single brick was laid at Woodchurch. Building the estate did not begin until 1946.

## QUITE A JUMP

Another initiative, another acronym. These new words formed from the initial letters of other words continue to rain down upon us. The latest is LEAP and, of course, you will want to know what it means.

For some years now the Mersey Basin Campaign (MBC), which we have alluded to from time to time, has been concerned with improving the quality of the waters of the Mersey Estuary. And here we must pause to give credit where credit is due. North West Water has embarked on a £400 million Mersey Basin clean-up programme. That includes £100 million being spent in Wirral. More than £40 million will be spent in the building of a waste water treatment plant in Bromborough. A new access road will be built and ventilation and purification equipment will be installed. The area surrounding the site will be landscaped and a wildlife pond will be built. If planning permission is given work will start on the plant later this year.

The Bromborough project will be followed by the building of a £60 million waste water treatment works at Morpeth Dock next year. These two plants will treat waste water from 260,000 people and industry across Wirral before it is returned to the Mersey. North West Water also has plans to build a new pumping station at Scott's Field, Seacombe.

Over in Liverpool NWW have similarly ended hundreds of years of disposal of untreated waste water into the Estuary with the building of a new treatment works at Sandon Dock and the installation of a new nine foot diameter sewer running for nearly fourteen miles from Seaforth to Dingle.

LEAP, however, is concerned with the lands bordering the Estuary and the initials stand for the Lower Mersey Local Environment Agency Plan.

LEAP, we have been told, is 'a vision' which sees the Lower Mersey area (which includes most of Wirral) as 'a sustainable environment capable of supporting diverse natural species and habitats, providing opportunities for recreational usage and access and one which is valued by local people'.

What is 'sustainable development'? It is defined as 'Development which meets the need of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'.

This splendid vision is, as might be imagined, a somewhat distant prospect. It is seen as a two-stage process. The first stage is the production of a Consultation Report and an open consultation period. The second stage is the production of the Action Plan following the consultation period. The latter will include a programme of action to be undertaken by the Agency (LEAP, that is) and other groups in the area over the next five years. Its implementation will be monitored and annual reports produced.

## SUMMER MEETING

To all those members who did not attend our Summer Meeting in May in Bidston we send our sympathies. You missed at least. Although it took place in the middle of this year's monsoon period the gods smiled on us and after a damp afternoon we enjoyed a dry evening.

It was the biggest attendance we have had for some time and the fact that one of the houses we visited had been the subject of a television programme a few weeks beforehand patently had much to do with it.

After assembling in the Parish Church the party split into smaller groups each led by a Bidston resident we visited some of the 16th/17th century cottages and 16th century Bidston Hall.

The one place people most wanted to see was Church Farm which had been the subject of one of *The House Detectives* series on BBC2 and the owners were only too pleased to let all 80 (yes, eighty) of us tramp through their house and inspect every room to see what the house detectives had discovered. The house is built on thirteen different levels with nooks and crannies abounding and for a couple of hours the owners baited not an eyelid as we saw for ourselves the way in which the house had been originally built and several times altered down the years.

The occupiers of two other cottages and of Bidston Hall were similarly obliging and accommodating and contributed to a most successful Summer Meeting.

We wound up with tea and biscuits in the Church (which now doubles as a community centre).

Our Chairman, Keith Davidson has written to all the householders and to the Vicar, the Reverend Steve Mansfield, expressing our gratitude and the Executive Committee was pleased to approve a donation of £100.00 to the church funds.

## TOAD REPORT

News from the Natterjack Toad front at Red Rocks, Hoylake, is heartening. Jacki Begg of the Cheshire Wildlife Trust who is supervising the operation and who, you may recall, introduced a reinforcement of toadlets from the Ainsdale Reserve last year, says she is very pleased with the way things are going. And whilst no life-size toads have yet to be seen (at the time of going to press) there are very positive signs that all is progressing according to plan.

Natterjack Toads, it seems, like nothing better than to burrow into the sand-dunes where they spend lengthy periods in hiding doing nothing very much. But they leave evidence in the shape of a very distinctive entrance to their burrows and an encouraging number of these have been identified.

'Given the number of burrows we've seen so far,' said Jacki, 'more toadlets than we expected have survived. We are very pleased.'



Who or what is The Woodland Trust whose shining knights have come riding to the rescue of Upton Meadow and, a few years ago, similarly rescued Storeton Woods? It is not only Upton and Greasby residents who have much to thank them for but all in Wirral who are concerned with keeping what open spaces we have left are equally in their debt. Yet this organisation which has saved vast areas of woodland and land on which trees can be planted, from the south of England to the far north of Scotland and in various parts of Wales, is not as well known as it should be.

The Trust now owns and manages 820 woods covering 37,000 acres, some of which were acquired by purchase, others by gift. In the past five years they have, on average, taken into their care and protection a wood a week.

The Woodland Trust is a charity founded in 1972 in the west country by Kenneth Watkins OBE (who sadly died a few weeks

ago) to protect small woods in the countryside. Its rapid growth soon allowed it to take on much larger expanses of woodland and today it can care for woods of any size which need protection.

The Trust's objectives are to bring woods into their ownership and provide free access for the public and the opportunity to enjoy the pleasures of quiet, informal recreation, to safeguard the place of woods in the landscape and to protect woodland habitats for the benefit of wildlife.

In the thirty-six acres of Upton Meadow there is a large copse and two smaller ones and it is the Trust's intention to plant more small areas of woodland as part of their current *Woods on Your Doorstep* campaign to celebrate the Millennium. And in the knowledge that thousands of miles of hedgerow have been lost from the English landscape since World War II they also hoped to create more hedges on the site.

Many of the woodlands the Trust has succeeded in acquiring have been, like Upton Meadow, under a threat of some kind, be it from possible destruction and development, road-building, so-called war games or sheer neglect. They have also re-created woodlands which have been lost over the years through clearance for agriculture and replacement by conifer

planting. In the past ten years the Trust has planted well over a million trees.

The specialist care and management of Trust properties is in the hands of a team of Woodland Officers. Over the years the considerable expertise of the Trust has increasingly been acknowledged by local authorities and Development Corporations and it has been recognised as a suitable recipient for gifts of woodland. In 1992, for example, the Trust was given no less than forty woods in the Warrington and Runcorn area by the Commission for New Towns together with a substantial endowment to fund their management.

The Woodland Trust has received £6.5 million from the National Lottery towards its Millennium Project and Upton Meadow is set to benefit from that.

Simon Mageean, the Regional Woodland Officer who is now responsible for Upton Meadow, is busy drawing up a plan for it after consulting local residents by way of a detailed questionnaire they were invited to complete and from suggestions made at an on-site Open Day.

'Upton Meadow has enormous potential', he said. 'It will become a most important local amenity and our aim is to enhance the site, not radically change it'.

His plan is expected to be ready in September.



#### NEW RULES ON HEDGEROWS CAME INTO FORCE ON 1 JUNE 1997

*Under the  
Hedgerows Regulations 1997  
(SI No. 1160):*

- ❖ It is against the law to remove most countryside hedgerows without permission.
- ❖ To get permission to remove a hedgerow, you must write to your local planning authority.
- ❖ If the authority decide to prohibit removal of an important hedgerow, it must let you know within 6 weeks.
- ❖ If you remove a hedgerow without permission (whether it is important or not) you may face an unlimited fine. You may also have to replace the hedgerow.