

## **The Wirral Society – Chairman’s Report to 2014 Annual General Meeting**

I am pleased to present this Report on behalf of your Executive Committee, summarising some of the Society’s activities in this, its 85<sup>th</sup> year.

**March 2013 – February 2014** Your Committee has again continued to work on the Society’s behalf over this past year to cover issues that would affect both the peninsula overall and in specific areas.

### **Casework**

#### **Planning Issues affecting the Peninsula**

**National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF):** There had been no discernable impact of this new Policy on the peninsula during this period. However, we continued to be concerned because of the lack of clarity in terms for the interpretation of the legislation “sustainable development”, especially in respect of the protection of the countryside, notably the Green Belt, and also the renewed pressure for building in gardens. We therefore maintained close touch with CPRE, which we found to be of much help and encouragement to the Society.

It is good to record that whilst CPRE had to dispense with its Regional Officers, including Andy Yuille, we have still been able to access his advice, when this has been needed, through CPRE Cheshire Branch.

In regard to the NPPF, I have had a meeting with both Alison McGovern MP and Esther McVey MP, at which I was able to express the Society’s concerns over the weaknesses of this legislation.

**Planning initiatives:** The Society has been consulted on, and responded to, these during the period

- Wirral Council’s Local Development Framework (LDF) – Draft Final Core Strategy
- Wirral Council’s Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment:
- Merseyside Waste Strategy

**Wirral Council Building Moratorium:** It was disappointing, but not unexpected, that the Council was forced to abandon its freeze on multiple building in the west and north of the Borough. It was established in order to direct focus on the much-needed re-generation via the Government assisted Housing Improvement Renewal Initiative (HMRI) centring on Birkenhead, Seacombe, Tranmere and Rock Ferry. This has led to a rise in the number of applications for “infill housing”, e.g. back gardens.

#### **Planning issues at a local level**

**Neighbourhood Plans:** The Society kept a close watch on how the four ‘Vanguard’ areas are progressing on developing their plans, but were not

satisfied their terms of reference were being met in all cases. The matter was raised with senior Council officers. It is still unclear. One must wonder what role Councillors would take if Neighbourhoods each developed and ran their own plans.

**Planning Applications:** The Society has commented on many Applications in this year.

**Industrialisation of Wirral's land and seascape by Wind Turbines – Extension to Burbo Bank Wind Installation, Liverpool Bay:** Whilst the Society decided not to be party to the consultations set up by the company promoting this project, we sought clarification, without success, on various issues. The committee thus decided it would progress these matters, once the Planning Application was lodged.

**Greenfield, Flintshire:** The Society had objected to the earlier Application to construct two large wind turbines near to the dock, which we considered was too close to the River Dee SSSI, and would industrialise the mouth of the estuary which, if approved, would set an undesirable precedent.

**Willaston - Leahurst:** - Liverpool University similarly withdrew its Application, but we anticipated a revised Application in due course.

**Proposed Green Belt development at Blacon:** The Society continued to work with Chester District CPRE to oppose a major Outline Application to erect a student village on Green Belt agricultural land which would include accommodation for some 2,300 Chester University students. We pleased to note it was refused, although by a small margin, so a further Application was expected. When it came, this was also refused by an overwhelming majority in October '13. The Society has also worked with our Chester colleagues on the more general concerns generated by Chester West's proposal to release some land in the Cheshire Green Belt for housing.

**Proposed Affordable housing - Carr Lane, Hoylake:** An Application to build affordable housing on Green Belt land at the former Ellerman Lines playing field was rejected by Council and was upheld at the subsequent Appeal to the Planning Inspectorate. (March 2013) This is a case of much significance with Green Belt being considered of greater value than Affordable Housing.

**Proposed Major housing development at Ledsham Road, Great Sutton.** The Society had objected last year to Cheshire West over the Outline Application by Redrow for the 1<sup>st</sup> Phase of this major development comprising 145 houses on this greenfield site, as this was prime agricultural land.

## Historic Buildings at Risk in the Wirral Peninsula –

The Society has continued to maintain contact with local Councils, especially Wirral, which is seeking new uses for redundant buildings.

**Mostyn House, Parkgate & Burton Manor** – Since the closure of these educational establishments, the future of the buildings has been the cause of much concern to the Society. The Committee has been doing all it can during the year to support local societies in their efforts to see the buildings are put to the best possible use.

**Bird Cottage, Limekiln Lane, Wallasey:-** It was good that one of Wallasey's oldest buildings, which was at risk from dilapidation, had been bought by an architect and was to be restored.

**Pensby Hotel:** This building was under threat of demolition. Whilst the Society felt this was not necessarily one of Wirral's best buildings, it argued it was still representative of the well-built 'Road-Houses' of the 1930s. We are therefore pleased the Application was withdrawn.

**Birkenhead Priory:** The Society was also pleased to note that the current phase of restoration is complete. The January W Victor Smith lecture was presented by Alf Plant and Peter Gommon of Ainsley Gommon Architects. They gave an excellent, illustrated presentation of their work on one of Wirral's oldest and most important buildings.

### Initiatives

We continue to meet with a senior officer of Wirral Council who has been willing to act as a central point of contact over planning and regeneration issues. It is hoped a similar arrangement can be agreed with Cheshire West Council in due course. A number of issues have been raised, including

**Retrospective Planning Applications:** The Society had expressed concern at the large number of Applications which were being made to Wirral Council, after development has begun. The Council had already identified this as a serious issue and it has been successfully reducing the backlog during the period.

### 'Eyesores'

**The 'Streetscene':** The Society continues to try and support the local Councils in their work to prosecute illegal advertising on public and private land and property by reporting instances of such material being posted. It is somewhat encouraging that there continues to be significantly fewer problems in this direction.

**Former Champion Spark Plugs factory:** The Committee has been pressing Wirral Council to help resolve the problem of the untidiness of this site. Whilst the situation there has improved during the year, much still remains to be done to improve the area.

**Former Elf garage, A540 – Burton:** The Society tried to establish, without success, the ownership of this derelict building. It then asked the Council to follow this up, but it had thus far also been unsuccessful.

**Accident Signage on ‘Red-Routes’ – A540:** The Society complained to Cheshire West Council about the plethora of this signage on the A540. We were pleased to report last year, that the Cheshire Road ‘Safety Partnership’ has found insufficient evidence to continue to display accident signage on these main roads and has sanctioned their removal. We are pleased to report the signage has now been removed.

**Illegal fly-tipping – Merseyrail - Park Station embankment:** Efforts were made during this year to try and get Network Rail to clear this embankment of rubbish. Whilst the company was agreeable to deal with the problem, little changed during this period.

### Other Initiatives

**Local Nature Partnerships:** The Coalition Government introduced legislation to create these bodies, which would oversee nature-related initiatives. The Society indicated its interest in how these bodies would operate and sought advice from Wirral Wildlife on the progress of the two partnerships to be established for the peninsula.

**Unauthorised destruction of woodland at Noctorum:** The Society had taken a lead role in seeking to ensure that the perpetrators of the felling of these statutorily-protected trees were brought to account. Wirral Council had assured us earlier that it was keen to take follow-up action. We are pleased to report that this is being pursued.

**Tree planting to mark the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee:** The Committee had hoped to finalise arrangements for a planting scheme which would have been located close to the entrance of Clatterbridge Hospital. Whilst the idea was still current, the costing of the scheme was proving an obstacle to progress.

### Other Activities

**Summer Meeting:** We held a most interesting and well attended Summer Meeting in June when we visited Burton Manor Gardens. They are in good

condition and are being carefully preserved and maintained by the Burton Manor Gardens Friends' Group.

**Victor Smith Lectures:** It's good to report again, that the lectures have been well supported, which continue to make the evenings especially pleasurable occasions. The Committee is again most grateful for this support to Lilian Potter for her organisation and to Wallasey Golf Club for again making its splendid clubhouse available for these events this year. The combined lecture and 'Hot-Pot' supper was held at 'The Heatherlands' at Irby and was also a great success.

**Conservation Area Forum:** The Society had been approached by representatives from several of Wirral's Conservation Areas to form a Forum to press for the interests of the Borough's 25 Conservation Areas. This support was agreed in principle.

### **Awards**

**Keith Davidson Award:** - This Society Award is made for outstanding individual or group achievement in protecting or enhancing the Wirral's environment. In this year, the Society was delighted to make two awards. They were made to The Friends of Storeton Woods and to Miss Susan Nicholson of the Bromborough Society.

**Civic Design Award:** This Award has been recently introduced to recognise outstanding restorations or new buildings in the peninsula. The Award in this year was made in recognition of the fine restoration of the 'Fishermen's Church', St Thomas's in Parkgate.

**CPRE Award for hedgerow maintenance:** It was encouraging to be able to make awards to three Wirral farmers for the high standard they each set in maintaining their hedgerows.

### **Society Support**

**Subscribing members:** We are most grateful to you for continuing to subscribe to the Society's work. We are keen to increase our membership, if at all possible. Could I ask if you would encourage anyone you know, who might be interested in our work, to join the Society? We have copies of a Leaflet and Application Form available for this purpose. Please contact Avril Wilmshurst, who will provide you with what you need.

## **Executive Committee**

**Committee members** – May I, on your behalf, thank all the Committee members for their commitment and hard work during this year. My sincere thanks go to Graham Gladden and Joanna McIlhatton who have left the Committee. Joanna has left the area and we wish her well in her new home. Dr Gladden, although not now on the Committee, is willing to act as a consultant whenever we feel he could help.

## **Wirral Society Representation**

The Committee is grateful to the following members for representing us on various other groups during this period -

Alec Potter	<b><i>(Bidston Conservation Area Committee)</i></b>
Yvonne Sanné	<b><i>(CPRE Cheshire Branch Executive)</i></b>
David Casement	<b><i>(Wirral Tree Wardens)</i></b>
Neil Parry	<b><i>(CPRE Cheshire Branch Planning Forum and Wirral Coastal Partnership-WCP)</i></b>
Diana Lane	<b><i>(Dee Estuary Conservation Group &amp; WCP)</i></b>

Thanks also go to others for attending ‘one-off’ meetings and staffing events on behalf of the Society, notably the Wirral History and Heritage Fair.

## **Publicity & Membership**

**‘Wirral Matters’** - Our grateful thanks, yet again, go to Judith Railton, who has put so much effort into preparing the most interesting editions this past year. We also thank former committee member, Jim Hunter, for his topical cartoons.

**Web-site:** We are pleased to say our site continues to attract much interest and our thanks again go to Nick Lauro and to Neil Parry.

**Membership:** We’re again thank Avril Wilmshurst, for her work in maintaining our membership records.

That concludes my report for this period. Thank you again for all for your support.

Rod Tann  
Chairman