

Formby Civic News

The Newsletter of the Formby Civic Society
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The Civic Society Initiative

A personal view from the Chairman

As many of our members will know, the Civic Trust (CT) has ceased to exist. The Formby Civic Society was linked to the CT because we felt that the Trust was a nationally organisation with a reputation that could champion the views of local civic societies when it was consulted by government bodies over important issues such as planning and the conservation of the built and natural environment. However, over the years the CT had become too remote from the hundreds of local Civic Societies and faith in its effectiveness withered somewhat. In my view the CT had become too centralised.

The demise of the CT has led to new attempts to repair what potentially is seen by many local societies an essential channel through which their needs were at least listened to. An important attempt is needed to meet the many problems that appear to be pressing national and regional decision making upon local communities. For example planning decisions on where to build and how to build new developments and the siting of nuclear power stations could be taken away from local planners and politicians

The Civic Society Initiative (CSI) was set up by the National Trust, the Campaign to Protect Rural England, the Royal Institute of British Architects and English Heritage, among others; it is led by Tony Burton, on a year's secondment from the National Trust, where he is Director of Strategy and External Affairs. Its headquarters are in Liverpool It has

produced a very readable report called *Own the Future*. It starts with a view of civic societies as they are now and, from the findings of a comprehensive survey, projects what desirable changes might be possible by 2015.

Over seven hundred civic societies expressed an interest in the CSI and 563 completed the questionnaire of whom 448 were members of civic societies. Outside London the biggest response came from Yorkshire and Humberside and the North West.

There are clearly some negative perceptions of civic societies that do not come as a surprise to me. The worst of these are that Civic Societies are seen as 'fragmented, parochial and unprofessional', or 'an organisation of intelligent crumbles' and 'deficient in a common voice'. Perhaps more positively it sees societies as a 'vastly untapped resource'. Even the last comment implies that societies are under achieving.

Now I come to the key question: how does Formby Civic Society come out of the CSI? Our priorities and activities fit neatly with the survey findings. These are involvement in planning activities (thanks to Desmond), conservation areas, lectures and public events, Newsletter (thanks to Reg), local partnerships and a website. Like most societies we are an ageing group and we have problems, shared across the movement, with recruitment of new members, especially younger members. About 80% members of societies surveyed were in the age bracket 56 to 75. Members were also seen to be reluctant to take on committee duties. From all of this we clearly need advice on how to recruit more members; how to involve schools and the young; Continued p2



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For further information please see our website:-
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Planning Matters by Desmond Brennan

The Council has recently made the decision to undertake a review of green belt land in order to identify land suitable for housing and employment development. This decision has been prompted by the results of the recent *Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment* (SHLAA) and the *Employment Land and Premises Study* surveys which show there is not sufficient land available within the existing built-up areas within the Borough to meet anticipated development needs to 2027.

The government, in setting targets for house building in the next 15 years, has included a requirement that Local Authorities (LAs) ensure that the necessary land is available. In keeping with this policy, the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) for the NW of England 2008 specifies the number of houses to be built by each LA in the region and it is the responsibility of each LA to make sure there is sufficient land available for that purpose; for Sefton MBC, the figure is 500 units per year. Currently, our LA is engaged in the exacting task of drafting its Core Strategy, which will replace its Unitary Development Plan (UDP) 2006, and the target date for its adoption is March, 2011. The UDP sets out the policies against

which all planning matters are assessed; it states that the Green Belt will not be reviewed before 2011.

However, to be approved by the Secretary of State, the draft Core

Strategy must conform to the requirements of the RSS, including its projections for new development land, which is why this targeted Green Belt review is to be undertaken immediately. Before describing in more detail the land reviews which have taken place, and are yet to be completed, a summary account of the purpose of green belt is appropriate, given the exceptional amount of green belt land there is in and adjacent to the borough and, especially, its significance to the character of Formby.



A small area of Formby's Green Belt.

Government policy on green belt land is set out in the Department of Communities and Local Government document *Planning Policy Guidance 2: Green belts*. The principal attributes of green belt are *openness* and *permanence*. Green belts exist to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas, to prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another, to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment, to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns, and to assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land. Although green belt may often be valuable agricultural or forestry land, or beautiful open countryside offering opportunities for recreation and sport, it needs to be remembered that the quality of the landscape is not relevant to the inclusion of land within green belt or its continued protection; the preservation of the principle attributes of green belt has precedence. That is not to say that no development within green belt is permissible; however, any such development would be strictly controlled and, where it would harm green belt attributes, it would not be allowed unless it could be demonstrated there was a substantial compensating benefit.

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how to take an active role in national lobbying with collaboration with national agencies.

I therefore think that we should keep in contact with Peter Colley's initiative to rationalise and improve the CS movement in the north-west. If it achieves its ideals the CSI will help to coordinate existing national groups such as the CPRE, the RIBA, National Heritage and the NT and provide more natural links with these for local civic societies. Of course the details of how this will be financed and set up have to be worked out. Societies have to be willing to share

some of the costs and have the funds to do this.

As I said at the beginning of this high speed run through the CSI and its objectives, this is a personal view but as a society we have not yet fully discussed the issues and the values behind the initiative. Can or should we march behind the war cry of *Own our future?* Do we have any option? We need feedback from members urgently.

R. Derricott.

Wildlife Notes by Dr Phil Smith

July 2009



The weather hit the headlines again this month, which started with a short heatwave, soon followed by cool, unsettled conditions rather like the last two July's. Temperatures around 31°C on 2nd prompted an invasion of rare dragonflies from the continent. Having received a message that two **Lesser Emperors** had been seen at Brockholes Nature Reserve near Preston, I called in to check Sands Lake at Ainsdale and was amazed to find several **Red-veined Darters** zooming about, including a pair egg-laying. This insect was last seen in our region during the warm summer of 2006 when up to eight appeared on the Crosby Marina boating lake. My highest count at Sands Lake was of six males and the pair but one or two males remained until at least the 20th, often sunning themselves on the boardwalk. The lake also held six other species of dragonflies during this period but less desirable were three **Red-eared Terrapins**, no doubt released pets. These can play havoc with our native wildlife, even eating young waterbirds; not good news for the brood of **Tufted Ducks** present at the time. Another unexpected sighting was a **Banded Demoiselle** at Freshfield Dune Heath Nature Reserve on the 1st, only the second record for the Sefton duneland.

I don't usually do much bird-watching in July but Seaforth Nature Reserve was an attraction, with a spectacular flock of up to 1300 **Common Terns**, many said to be failed breeders from the Dee colony at Shotton. From time to time, they were joined by a few **Arctic, Sand-**

wich and **Little Terns** but, most notably, by up to seven **Roseate Terns**, now a rare bird in Britain. I saw one on a couple of occasions. Also roosting at Seaforth at high-tide were up to 10,000 **Knot**, a summering flock of presumably immature birds which had decided not to make the long flight back to Greenland and Arctic Canada. They made a dramatic grey carpet, sprinkled with a few red highlights, these being individuals that had moulted into their superb summer plumage.

Several days were taken up with a survey of **Tubular Water-dropwort** for the Botanical Society of the British Isles' Threatened Plants Project. This wetland species is rapidly declining nationally but we still have five colonies in dune-slacks, ditches and scrapes. The plant seems mostly dependent on sites where the ground surface has been lowered by digging to create wetter conditions. This study will be written up for eventual publication.

Following their dramatic invasion from North Africa, the **Painted Lady**

"we eventually saw and photographed several of these well-camouflaged insects, which are unique to a handful of coastal sites"

butterflies have now bred and I saw the first fresh individual during a dragonfly walk at Mere Sands Wood Nature Reserve on 18th. By the last week of the month, they were numerous, especially on the dunes where they could be seen nectaring with **Six-spot Burnet** moths on **Sea Holly** and other favoured flowers.

The month ended with the exciting news of a possibly new plant for South Lancashire found by the National Trust biological survey team. This was **Small Nightshade** (*Solanum triflorum*), a very rare member of the tomato family which is native to western North America. I

went to see it on 30th, finding about 15 sprawling plants on the disturbed sand of a rabbit warren. It certainly appears to be correctly identified and I spent some time photographing it and taking detailed notes, before sending a small amount of material to the vice-county recorder to have it confirmed.

August 2009

August is usually a good month for colourful butterflies and dragonflies on our duneland but the unsettled weather meant that numbers were lower than hoped for. Nevertheless, there were plenty of **Painted Ladies** about, the progeny of the spectacular immigration at the end of May. They were joined by **Peacocks**, the occasional **Comma, Red Admiral** and even a few **Small Tortoisells**, a species which has been having a bad time in recent years, due it is thought to the effects of a parasitic fly. These insects could be seen nectaring on flowering **Water Mint** in wet-slacks throughout the dunes, often accompanied by the **Common Blue**, described in Victorian times by E.R. Beattie as "*the little butterfly gleaming azure in the sun*".

Dragonflies were also disappointing during August, though I manage to find eight different kinds on a tour of some Birkdale Sandhills scrapes on 22nd, including 10 **Ruddy Darters**, our only nationally notable species. A male Ruddy Darter appeared for the first time at Freshfield Dune Heath Nature Reserve on one of the ponds dug three years ago. These ponds are already proving a rich habitat for aquatic fauna and flora, about 15 of the 20 species of dragonflies and damselflies recorded on the Sefton Coast having been seen there.

A dozen hardy souls joined Richard Burkmar and Graham Jones on the evening of 21st to see one of Britain's rarest moths, the fabled **Sandhill Rustic**. Searching Birkdale Green Beach with torches, we eventually saw and photographed several of these well-camouflaged insects, which are unique to a handful of

Wildlife Notes - continued

of coastal sites in North Wales and Northwest England. A few days later, Richard and Graham found another flourishing colony on embryo dunes at Southport, opposite the Marine Lake. This is now the most northerly known population in Britain.

On 29th, I led a well-attended guided walk for the recently formed West Lancashire Wildlife group to Cabin Hill NNR. We were able to enjoy the best display of **Grass-of-Parnassus** on the coast and the rich diversity of plants that have colonised a dune-slack that was cleared of dense willow scrub in 2005. No less than 140 different plants have been recorded in this slack since 2006, 28 being new to the reserve. I always like to finish on



The 'Devil's Hole'

a "high note" so we climbed up to the Devil's Hole, a huge blow-out just north of the reserve which originated during the Second World War. The floor of the blow-out reached the water-table some years ago and now supports interesting dune-slack vegetation, including many orchids.

The second half of the month was largely devoted to a major survey of one of the country's most rapidly declining plants, the **Field Gentian** (*Gentianella campestris*). Although widespread in Scotland, it is now said to be very rare indeed in England south of the Lake District and adjacent Pennines. However, Ainsdale Sand Dunes National Nature Reserve supports great drifts of these splendid purple-blue flowers and, belying national trends, they seem to be increasing and especially in the Dune Restoration Area where scrub and pine trees were removed in the 1990s. By the end of the month, Patricia Lock-

wood and I had counted and mapped over 35,000 gentians and we hadn't even got to the best area.

September 2009

In August's notes, I mentioned the **Field Gentian** survey that Patricia Lockwood and I had started on Ainsdale Sand Dunes National Nature Reserve. Because of its recent decline, this beautiful wild flower has been highlighted by the Botanical Society of the British Isles as a "threatened plant". We knew there were large numbers in the NNR but no-one had ever counted them. In the event, helped on several occasions by Dr Mary Dean, it took us 20 visits to complete our, often exhausting, search of 88ha of open dunes. We mapped over 350 sites containing Field Gentians, the final total being an extraordinary 140,700 plants (and we must have missed lots!). Most of them were found in dry-slacks or around the fringes of wet-slacks and nearly all were in vegetation that was heavily rabbit-grazed and also fenced for winter-grazing by sheep. The greatest concentrations of gentians were in the so-called Dune Restoration Area where pine trees and scrub were removed in the early 1990s. Thus, two large slacks here supported 47,000 and 31,000 plants. We also found thousands of the related **Autumn Gentian** (*Gentianella amarella*), which is more common nationally.

The only other place in southern Britain with flourishing populations of Field Gentian is the New Forest, where recent counts suggest high tens-of-thousands. The plant is still widespread in Scotland but I understand the biggest concentrations are only of a few thousands. It seems then that Ainsdale NNR is the best site in Britain for this species, which is also red-listed as endangered in many European countries.

As a welcome break from gentian spotting, Pat and I visited the Devil's Hole, Ravenmeols, on the 12th to record the vegetation colonising the floor of this double blow-out

that began to form in the early 1940s. We identified 67 plants in the northern basin, which has been flooding in wet winters since the early 1990s, and 30 in the southern hollow, which held water for the first time in 2008. Ten of the plants are regionally or nationally notable, including **Grass-of-Parnassus**, **Blunt-flowered Rush** and two species of orchid. Most of these have appeared since the last survey five years ago when only 16 plants were found. The Devil's Hole is important as one of very few examples on the coast of a recently formed dune-slack created by wind-blow, most of the dune system being so overgrown that such features are now rare.

September is usually a good month for grasshoppers and crickets. Although we have only four kinds (three grasshoppers, one groundhopper and one bush-cricket), they can be abundant locally and make attractive, if challenging, subjects for close-up photography. I spent an entertaining hour on 20th with **Short-winged Coneheads** at Tagg's Island Birkdale. These 2cm-long bush-crickets first appeared in our region as recently as 2002 and are always alert to danger, dodging behind plant stems when the camera lens approaches. With patience, however, it is possible to get pictures.

I also took my camera on 14th when Trevor Davenport phoned to say he had caught a **Convolvulus Hawk-moth** in his Freshfield moth-trap. This great rarity is one of the largest British insects and was a new tick for me. We managed to unfurl its four-



A Short-winged Conehead

inch proboscis and give it a drink of sugar-water. This had the desired effect, as it flew away shortly afterwards.

The Devil's Hole by Dr Phil Smith



A popular recreational attraction for generations of local children and a spectacular viewpoint for walkers in the Ravenmeols Sandhills Local Nature Reserve, the Devil's Hole blow-out is the largest feature of its type on the Sefton Coast. Blow-outs form when a sand-dune's protective cover of vegetation is damaged; sand is then blown down-wind and an arm-chair-shaped hollow develops. This may deepen until the water-table is reached, when the sand is then too wet to blow.

Aerial photos, including ones taken by the Luftwaffe, show that the Devil's Hole (the origin of the name is obscure) began to form in the early 1940s, perhaps as a result of military activity. Two adjacent blow-outs rapidly increased in size and then merged, a 1995 dissertation by S. Read showing that they grew in an easterly direction at an average rate of 4.5 m per year, reaching a total

area of 2.55 ha by 1993.

In about 1991, the northern basin began to flood in wet winters, particularly deep flooding occurring in 2008, when the southern blow-out held water for the first time. By the early

1990s, small "proto-dunes" had begun to form in the floor of the northern basin.

Sand from the blow-outs has invaded a small pine plantation to the east, killing some of the trees. However, there is no risk to coastal defence or property and the minimal damage caused is more than offset by the scientific value of this feature, both from a geographic and wildlife standpoint.

From 1993 onwards, the presence of standing water in some springs attracted Natterjack Toads to spawn though, due to the rapid drying out of the shallow pools, breeding was recorded as successful only in 2006 and 2008.

Another "flag-ship" species for the Sefton Coast, the Northern Dune Tiger Beetle, can be found on the bare sand slopes of the Devil's Hole in

sunny weather during the spring and summer.

Patricia Lockwood and I recorded the plant-life of the two basins in September 2009, comparing our results with a previous study I did in 2004. We listed 70 different higher plants, a big increase from only 16 five years earlier. Ten of the plants are regionally or nationally notable, including two orchids: Marsh Helleborine and Early Marsh-orchid. We were especially pleased to find Blunt-flowered Rush, as this is known from only four other sites on the Sefton Coast.

The sparse but diverse vegetation is maintained by rabbit-grazing and is typical of the early stages of dune-slack formation, where seasonal flooding within dune-hollows produces a characteristic habitat type. These young plant communities (National Vegetation Classification code nos. SD13 and SD14), are now rare on the Sefton Coast, due to the over-stabilised nature of the dunes. In their comprehensive 2004 survey of the dune system, Peter Gateley and Pauline Michell showed that the combined areas of SD13 and SD14 had declined from 8.1 to 0.4 ha since 1988. Based on satellite imagery from "Google Earth", the young dune-slacks at the Devil's Hole now cover about 0.5ha. Although this seems a relatively small area, it represents a significant addition to this rare vegetation type in the sand-dunes.

It will be interesting to see how the Devil's Hole develops. No doubt it will continue to provide a visual treat for visitors and a fascinating place for the wildlife enthusiast for many years to come.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to Michelle Newton for measuring the slack areas and to Peter Gateley for providing data from his vegetation survey. Reg Yorke kindly drew my attention to the Luftwaffe photographs and Peter Gahan provided details of Natterjack breeding.

Digitising Formby's Past by Tony Bonney

I have now almost completed the digitising of the FCS records and thought this was a good opportunity to offer to our members a free service of copying your old photographs of Formby buildings, views etc. that would be of historic value to our archive. Sadly many of these "treasures" have, in the past, just been dumped or thrown away not realising their value to the history of our village.

I will, by prior arrangement, collect the photographs, slides or video and return them the same day with a free copy of the images on a CD/DVD, which you will be able to play on your computer or DVD player and pass on to your descendants. If you have any material that could be of interest to the Society please phone me on 01704 872862.

Sefton Coast Landscape Partnership Scheme

Working hard towards November Deadline! By Will Moody



Partnership working hard for Heritage Lottery bid....

The various interest groups and land-owners that work in partnership to care for Sefton coast are currently putting the finishing touches to an application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for up to £1.1 million to complete a series of projects across the coast.

The Sefton Coast Landscape Partnership Scheme (LPS) will aim to manage and develop the unique landscape of Sefton's natural coast. It will inform and involve local and visiting people in its past and future landscape and culture, by improving public communication and physical access.

By November, the LPS officer and team will present the Heritage Lottery Fund with a detailed "stage two" plan of the 19 projects. If this bid is successful, partners will begin the programme of projects aiming to protect and promote the culture, heritage, history, landscape and nature of Sefton coast. The subsequent four years will then see a team of staff working with partners to deliver the programme, aiming to maximise public inclusion in the coast and its management.

Success at Sefton Coastal Forum:

The end of June was time for the Sefton Coast Partnership annual fo-

rum and the hot topic of this year's debate was the Landscape Partnership Scheme! The forum was a chance for public consultation about the projects, with information stands and a series of speeches and workshops, some of which included on site visits.

This process meant we were able to include more people in the planning, resulting in some useful public feedback, which is being reviewed and considered in the scheme. Thanks to everyone who took part!

Will Moody, Landscape Partnership Scheme managing officer stated

"The Landscape Partnership staff and volunteers are currently working very hard towards our October deadline. We are on target, receiving all relevant information from the partners, and are confident of bid success."

Saving Sefton Dune Heath!

Over the last few months, the partnership has been developing its plans to protect the nationally rare landscape of the Sefton dune heath. Found on the Freshfield side of Woodvale Aerodrome, these colourful, open landscapes are dominated by gorse in late spring and heather in autumn. They are home to an unusual mix of flora and fauna, including the rare sand lizard. They are unique to sand dune environments and are therefore protected as Priority Habitats for conservation under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (1994).

Dune heath often forms where previous users have abandoned the land: in Sefton's case on areas of agricultural or golfing land. Therefore, continued human management is needed to prevent natural progression towards invasion by scrub in these environments.

Partners in the scheme who are charged with protecting the dune

heath, including the Lancashire Wildlife Trust who protect the Freshfield site, are therefore planning ways to use funding to trial heathland management techniques. Any successful scrub removal techniques will be implemented on various sites to protect this rare resource.

Saving the Sand Lizard!

Sefton coast is home to the nationally rare Sand Lizard, a reptile protected under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. Recorded numbers of this local treasure have risen seven fold in the last 40 years, and numbers in the Sefton area have been estimated at around 1200-1500 population (Hardaker in press, survey 2008).

However its geographical spread on Sefton coast is somewhat limited, with populations living in the fractured locations that suite the Lizard's habitat needs of vegetation for shelter and open slopes of sand for basking.



The Sand Lizard

The Sand Lizard has therefore been added to the Landscape Partnership Scheme as an important consideration in its landscape projects. A re-introduction programme has been added to the agenda, using funding to encourage sand lizards to move into the relatively unpopulated sites of Freshfield Dune Heath and into Hightown dunes.

The Freshfield/Formby area can already boast a strong population of the Common Lizard, but reportings of Sand Lizards in the same region have been minimal. .

Some of the species are known residents of the railway corridor 2km north of the Freshfield Dune Heath site, but with further introduction to the edges of the Woodvale airfield, the populations could link up. This would increase the number of colonies, a buffer against environmental conditions. Freshfield Dune Heath and Hightown dunes boast a combination of the sandy slopes, on which the lizards like to bask and lay eggs, and vegetation, such as gorse and



Steps back in the past!

heather, in which they shelter. There are hopes that this scheme will encourage a coast wide stronghold to develop, able to move between the north and south.

Archaeological Adventures on Sefton Coast!

There have been lots of plans made for the archaeological projects in the scheme, with a series of sites of potential exploration now designated. It is hoped that the scheme can gather a series of volunteers, who can be trained to find and study traces of the coast's military and cultural past.

This team will then be able to continue the excellent work already completed by Gordon Roberts and our coasts' archaeologists on the ancient footprints being exposed with erosion on the beach between Formby and Ainsdale. Profiling of the footprints is vital, before deposits are eroded along with the beds they were deposited in.

The scheme has been designed to allow volunteer and trained archaeologists to complete a series of ground surveys at sites of historical interest across Sefton. These will

include a study of lost settlements such as Formby and Argameols, where sand and sea encroachment left these areas abandoned around the 15th century. There will also be studies of culturally valuable sites, such as the eel fishery at Sniggery Wood and the Formby Lifeboat Station still evident on the beach today.

A proportion of the project has been designed to re-discover and explore the effects of wartime on the landscape of Sefton, looking at "Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen". Reg Yorke, member of the task group for Archaeology and History in the scheme, has created a detailed plan of the scars and remnants of the first, second and cold war on the Sefton coast. Sites that will be explored through the LPS include the firing walls of Harington Barracks at



Above; Altcar Rifle Range: One of the only remaining sites of Sefton's military activity during wartime

Albert Road, the Stella Maris radar building in Ravenmeols, the Starfish Decoy control centre at Range Lane and HMS Charlotte at the site of the Ainsdale Lido.

A presentation detailing the wartime sites that will be studied in the scheme was played at this year's Southport airshow as a way of promoting the LPS to visiting and local public. There was a keen level of interest displayed by those who inquired about the military history of the area, an encouraging sign for the level of public participation in the implementation stage of the scheme. The LPS plans to put such informa-

tive videos on its website when up and running.



Celebrating a Local Delicacy!

Final details are also being compiled towards the Formby Asparagus trail, designated through LPS! A circular route has been designed through the National Trust land between Victoria Road and Lifeboat Road where asparagus farming once took place. The trail will take in the original fields of cultivation, with their relic furrows, and the remaining structures from the industry, such as Aindow's farm.

The footpath will be designed using special materials to ensure both continued protection of these sites of historical interest and maximum access for people of all abilities. The route will be lined with interpretive boards, displaying information collected from the memories of those involved in the industry.

There are hopes that there will be a chance to run learning programmes linked to the industry, host events celebrating asparagus farming, and to design leaflets and maybe even a book detailing memories of asparagus growing and its associated cultures.

Photo Credits: Dave McAleavy (Sefton Coast and Countryside), John Gramauskis (Sefton Coast and Countryside)

Planning Matters - continued from p2

4NW (the successor body to the NW Regional Assembly) is currently developing its new RSS, but it is known that a review of green belt will not be part of the process. That leaves the Council with a difficulty, because only the regional authority has the power to release green belt land. The Council's solution is that it will identify green belt land that it judges suitable for development and, in doing so, it will take care to use a methodology that has been agreed with all the relevant authorities in the region. That way, when the regional review eventually takes place, the completed Sefton review will remain relevant. The hope is that there is sufficient urban land available for development in the next five years, so there will be no necessity to use green belt land, by which time the regional review should have taken place; however, the fact that Sefton has designated development land for the next fifteen years should allow the Core Strategy to meet the "soundness" test for that particular policy.

To return to the SHLAA, this was a consultative exercise relating to the report of the Council's consultants; the Council planners will produce a further report based on respondents' views and their own judgements. The intention is to estimate how much land will be available in each of the successive five yearly intervals for the next fifteen years. The sites under review were identified by means of an earlier call to the public to suggest possible sites, an aerial photographic survey in 2003 and planning officers' extensive knowledge of the area. The result was that the survey included many completely unsuitable sites, e.g. modest areas of community green space associated with a small development. Such sites were always assessed as unsuitable and then excluded from further consideration, but many people, including ourselves, were made anxious that these sites could ever have been considered in the first place, given they are manifestly so unsuitable. We were puzzled that the site of the former Holy Trin-

ity School was not included, and, because the future of this site is so important to the Village, we made enquiries about it; we were assured that any proposals for the site would be dealt with separately and be the subject of a separate consultation. We had a number of concerns about the methodology of the exercise. One was an attempt to quantify the suitability for development of each site. The site was assessed on seventeen attributes (e.g. "Is the site in active use?", "Is the owner/developer willing to sell?") to each of which was assigned a percentage score, the total score is then intended as a measure of "quality". We thought the scoring system was arbitrary, e.g. willingness to sell got only 5%, but location in a strong residential market got 10%, and we were concerned that this attempt at quantification might give rise to an unwarranted claim to accuracy and reliability. Fortunately, another component of the assessment was a descriptive account of a site's characteristics, which mostly we thought were fair and well done; we urged that final decisions should be based on these descriptions. Many

"the survey included many completely unsuitable sites, e.g. modest areas of community green space associated with a small development".

green belt sites were assessed, but all were excluded from further consideration to await the review of the entire Sefton Green Belt. I am grateful to the members of the Society's Amenities and Planning Subgroup who invested a considerable amount of time in examining the SHLAA, including finally an entire afternoon when we sat together to look at assessments of special concern on a site by site basis; the results of our deliberations have been presented to the Council.

Finally, I conclude with an account of a two specially interesting planning applications. Particularly relevant in connection with the preceding

paragraph was the application for outline planning for the erection of three houses in the rear gardens of 73 and 75 Kirklake Road. One of the objects of the SHLAA is to identify just such sites as these, which are classed as brown field (we would much prefer the term was restricted to developable industrial land). Public opinion was divided on the merits of the case; indeed, it was called in by a local Councillor, so it went before Planning Committee, rather than being decided by officers exercising delegated powers. People were concerned by the environmental impact of such development and the loss of fine large gardens. We took a different view. We accept that it is not possible to build houses without adverse environmental consequences and the best we can do is to minimise the harm; we prefer infill to loss of green field land, especially in the Green Belt. Indeed, if owners wish to sell their land for development and the essential planning policy requirements are met (viz. the density is satisfactory, with adequate rear gardens, minimum distances between facing windows of neighbouring properties are observed and there is no overlooking, there is an acceptable presence in the street scene with easy and safe access, tree preservation orders are respected and there is conformity to settlement character), nothing can be done to block such applications. It was on this basis that we all agreed that we should make no representation on this particular application, which has been approved.

The other case is for 43 and 43A Freshfield Road. Diligent readers of these reports will know that there have already been two recent applications for this site, which currently is occupied by a fine Victorian house. The first was for two detached houses, which we opposed and was refused, and the second was for two semidetached houses, which we did not like but had reluctantly to conclude could not be successfully opposed; this second application was approved.

There then followed an appeal against the refusal of the first application which was dismissed after a Public Hearing in which we participated. At that Hearing, the appellant declared that, if his appeal were dismissed, he would build according to the second proposal, but instead he has submitted yet another application. This third proposal is for what in essence are two detached dwellings disguised as semidetached by means of a façade infill of the narrow gap between them from ground level to the eave-line. In our view, such an approach does not reach the standard of coherent high quality design required by Policy and we have urged

that the application be refused. The proposal also includes two large basements to serve as garages and we have asked that there should be an hydrological survey to assess the risks to neighbouring properties and infrastructure.

“For an account of the other planning applications on which we have made representations to the Council, please see the Society’s website”

We have had two volunteers to assist in the reappraisal of the Green

Lane Conservation Area, as described in the last issue of the *Newsletter*. This work will start rather sooner than anticipated; indeed it is about to commence. It is an excellent opportunity for the Society to contribute to the preservation of this neighbourhood and to enhance the Society’s reputation at the same time.

So I conclude with a renewed appeal for members (or others!) with historical or planning interests, or just a sense of place (but otherwise with no special expertise), to offer their services to help

Formby Museum by Peter Lucas



The Museum was first opened in 1978 in the rear room of Formby Library, now the Reference Library. It filled almost all the space and highlights included objects and photographs of local interest that had been donated by local people and well wishers, but also some significant items on short term loan.

Over the years, it has proved difficult to organise frequent changes of the displays. Joy West, who looked after the displays for a number of years,

was able to obtain some assistance from the Museum at the Botanic Gardens from time to time. Unfortunately, this depended very much on the enthusiasm of the frequently changing incumbents of that Mu-

seum and attitudes to security of the displays once they were at the Library.

Pressure for more space for the Reference section of the Library and increasing provision of computer terminals has now left us with just two display cases. Whilst these have their virtues, they also limit what can be exhibited and the manner in which it can be displayed.

If we are to be able to justify the retention of the space, the Civic Society needs to find more modern ways of attracting peoples’ attention to the items of historical interest we have in our collection and to the extension of it. There need to be much better ways of making it accessible for the amusement and education of our children and grandchildren.

We are seeking members and friends who may be able to help in finding new ways of presenting our collection and a safe secure place in which to keep those items not on display to prevent the from deterioration and becoming lost or mislaid.



The Merseyside Civic Society by David Massey

In its century or so of existence (albeit under different names) MCS has both responded to the issues of the moment, while retaining a core of enduring concern – seeking to bring together interest groups with the neighbourhoods and local governments of what in 1913 was already being called ‘Mersey City’ to work together on their common interests in town planning, housing, transport, greenspace and the natural and built heritage. Over the years, as issues, membership, resources and local institutional structures have fluctuated, the Society has had to re-invent itself several times and use different means to achieve its aims.

MCS itself was established in 1938, taking over the activities of the Liverpool City Guild, which had itself been formed in 1909 through the amalgamation of the open spaces branch of the Liverpool Kyrle Society, the Trees Preservation and Open Spaces Association and the City Beautiful Society. Among the early issues for the Guild were the controversy over the location of the statue of King Edward VII (still an issue today, as visitors to Pier Head may reflect), smoke abatement (today’s air quality management issues), public advertising (consider the recent invasion of moving image advertising into Clayton Square) and extending parks and open spaces (the problems today being more one of development

threats and scarce resources for maintenance) However, the Guild’s most practical contribution lay in promoting town planning among Liverpool’s outlying townships, leading to the city’s boundary extension in 1913.

The transition from the Liverpool City Guild to Merseyside Civic Society in 1938 came following of *The Future of Merseyside: Town and Country Planning Schemes* by W. G. Holford and W. A. Eden. The change of name reflected the earlier recognition of the significance of the city-region for those concerned with the built environment, providing the Society with its continuing three-fold levels of interest in Liverpool city centre, the city of Liverpool and the wider area and the relationships between them. Then as now, MCS sought to engage with the public issues of the day and to work with other local amenity organisations, civic societies and local governments over shared concerns.

The newly-established Society, whose general aim was ‘to stimulate civic pride, interest and responsibility’, subsequently played a role in promoting discussions, organising public meetings, publications, and, in cooperation with local media, promoting a wide-ranging competition on post World War II reconstruction. Subsequent activities, for example, included sponsoring the fountain by

Richard Huws (1967) in Beetham Plaza, opposing the development of the Albert Dock and its buildings as offices and the demolition of The Lyceum (at the foot of Bold Street), running a campaign to draw attention to the architectural gems hidden ‘Beneath the grime ...’, and advocating the retention of quality landscapes and additional barrier planting on the new suburb to be developed in the grounds of Croxteth Hall.

More recently MCS has been involved in commenting on the different proposals for guided bus/trolley ways and tramways through the city centre, making Design Awards to promote good architectural design, advocating changes to proposals for widening Edge Lane and inappropriate housing renewal projects and organising open meetings to consider pre-application development proposals for major projects. Alongside these special activities the Society continues to network with other cognate bodies on shared interests, to comment on public policies (e.g. heritage protection resources after European Capital of Culture 2008) and planning proposals (e.g. Local Development Framework Core Strategies). A regular programme of open meetings on current issues (e.g. ‘Local Listing’ for neighbourhood buildings, and, the Mersey Superport proposal) is organised together with occasional site visits.

Art Group Report by Barbara Mossop

The Group had a very successful day painting at the Marina, Rufford on 20 September. The weather was glorious. The trees were just starting to change colour and there were lots of canal barges, either moored, or travelling along the canal and going through the lock. In fact

there were plenty things for us to paint. We were even able to eat outside the restaurant (pity about the wasps!)

We are proposing to go to the West Lancashire Art Exhibition being held in New Longton Village Hall on Sunday 8th November. The professional artists are present at their stands and are pleased to talk about their work. They tend not to be the usual artists

who exhibit at our local exhibitions.

We do not meet in December but our annual get together is arranged to take place on 16 January 2010, 10am - 12 noon, at Lydiate Hall Farm, when we will discuss our future programme.

Please let the Art Representative know if you wish to attend, at least one week in advance.

Red Squirrel Conservation in Northern England - A Review*

Why has this review been produced?

In June 2008, an independent consultancy team headed by Central Science Laboratories was asked to review all the work that had been done over the last three years to protect the red squirrel in its last strongholds in the North of England.

The aim of the review is to assess the impact on red squirrel populations in the North of England of every organisation involved in developing and delivering conservation policies and activities.

The Review Group partners who commissioned the review are Natural England (who chaired the panel); the Forestry Commission; Save Our Squirrels; The Red Squirrel Protection Partnership; The European Squirrel Initiative; and local red squirrel groups across the North of England, represented by Northern Red Squirrels.

Who carried out the review?

As well as the experts from the Central Science Laboratories, the review team included staff from the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust; and internationally renowned squirrel experts Professor John Gurnell from Queen Mary University of London, and Professor Steve Rushton and Dr Peter Lurz from Newcastle University.

Over a hundred interviews were undertaken with individuals and organisations across the North of England, and with partner organisations in Scotland

What were the findings of the review?

The Review team looked at all rele-

vant activities undertaken by the Review Group partners since January 2006, critically assessed their approaches, and the impact of these on existing red squirrel populations.

The report confirms that red squirrels are still widely found throughout the North of England, and that the work carried out by the various organisations has played a significant role in ensuring that people can still see these mammals across Cumbria, Northumberland, North Merseyside and North Yorkshire

This report gives a good deal of assurance about the work that has already been undertaken to protect red squirrels in Northern England.

However, the Review also provides a robust and objective assessment of some aspects of red squirrel conservation work and offers expert and timely advice for future work programmes. Control of grey squirrels is identified as a core part of any future strategy for red squirrel conservation.

Key messages

The Review partners agree that Key Messages arising from the report are -

Grey squirrel control plays a central role in red squirrel conservation.

To be effective conservation needs to be carefully targeted, sustainably delivered and objectively monitored

Organisations involved in red squirrel conservation need to work together Activity needs to be deliverable and evidence-based.

Issues regarding the monitoring of impacts of red squirrel conservation work need to be addressed and there needs to be objective and standardised recording of activity

Adequate resources are needed for red squirrel conservation.

Organisations involved in this work need to be better organised and coordinated, better resourced and better at measuring what has been achieved.

Does the review show that killing grey squirrels is effective in protecting red squirrels?

The review highlights a number of problems that need to be addressed. But is quite clear that grey squirrel control is **the most critical component** of any future red squirrel conservation strategy.

To address the deficiencies of the current strategy, the review makes a number of recommendations to ensure that grey squirrel control is delivered in a more structured and effective way and that sufficient data are collected to allow the impact of that control to be measured.

Whilst the review was unable to assess the overall effectiveness of current control activity, it did refer to two examples, Anglesey and Whin-fell, where effective grey control has had a positive impact on red squirrel populations.

What happens next?

With the leadership of the statutory agencies (ie Natural England and Forestry Commission) the Partners will continue to work together, and with others, to develop a framework for the future of squirrel conservation in Northern England drawing on the findings and recommendations of the review. This will be done ensuring particularly close links with the Red Squirrels in South Scotland project so that a coordinated approach is ensured.

* *Natural England*

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‘Formby and Freshfield through Time’

This new book, being published by Amberley, provides an intriguing glimpse of the rapidly changing face of our pleasant coastal community.

With its roots deep in the Middle Ages, change and progress has been rapid in the last century. Reg and Barbara Yorke have drawn on this society’s vast pictorial archive to show both the great changes that have taken place but also something of our environmental setting.

All profits from the sale of the book will come to the Society

Amberley have now produced several books based on this formula, using very advanced publishing and printing technology to do justice to the subject. In the meantime - if you see a man with a camera standing in the middle of the road apparently oblivious to the traffic, please be patient, he is a historian at work!

For further information see our website

www.formbycivicsociety.org.uk

FUTURE PROGRAMME

General Meetings

Friday 27th November, *The Sefton Coast Landscape Partnership*. Dave McAleavy and Will Moody

Friday 29th January, *The Merseyside Probation Trust*, Kathy Skelton Aksay

Friday 26th February, *Liverpool Building Conservation*, Wendy Morgan, and Lorraine Ward, Principle Conservation Officers,

History Group Meetings

Thursday 10th December, *Formby-by-the-Sea*, Reg Yorke,

Thursday 14th January, *Archive Evening*.

Thursday 11th February *Fishing at Formby*, Andrea Lewis
