

Hilbre Islands Local Nature Reserve
Management Committee Meeting on 13th April 2007

Rangers Report November 2006 – April 2007

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This is the Ranger Report for the Hilbre Islands Local Nature Reserve. Members are asked to note the contents of this report and to discuss any issues raised. This report is based around the Hilbre Islands Draft Management Plan (2003).

2.0 PROJECT UPDATE

2.1 The following projects are grouped under the appropriate objectives within the Hilbre Islands Draft Management Plan (2003).

Objective 1.1 Maintain and enhance the level of statutory protection for the site.

- Continued liaison with Wirral Peninsula Canoe Club and local sailing clubs and the Dee Sea Kayaking Group (DSKG). Information provided by the Hilbre Ranger is now available on the web via the DSKG and a simplified map, drawn up in partnership between Wirral Council Rangers and the Hilbre Bird Observatory, is to be provided to reduce bird disturbance during the winter months.
- Continued close liaison with Natural England over several management issues.

Objective 1.2 Maintain and enhance the important habitats and associated plant and animal communities.

- The central path on Middle Eye is to be mown by Wirral Council grounds maintenance staff throughout the summer to encourage the use of the central path as apposed to the West cliff path. This, together with the metal pins and rope delineation, will help to alleviate the trampling pressure over the summer months.
- Larger walls have now been built to protect vulnerable plant communities on the west side of Hilbre using the newly acquired expertise within the Friends of Hilbre.
- Sheep are continuing to be used to control growth of grasses in specific areas. Three rams are being used at present and monitoring is ongoing.

Objective 1.3 Maintain and enhance the populations of the important species of the reserve.

- Monitoring of important species is ongoing.
- A Common seal, which was found in a field a number of miles inland, was brought to Hilbre for release after convalescing at the RSPCA centre at Stapely. The release undertaken in

partnership between Wirral Council Rangers and the RSPCA and was filmed by an RSPCA film crew. Footage was shown on both the regional and national news channels.

Objective 1.4 Control invasive and alien species where they are a threat to the important native species.

- Wirral Council Pest Control attended Hilbre on two separate occasions as rats had been seen on the island. Since poison was placed inside the building containing sheep feed and after the feed was placed in a secure metal bin, the rats have not been seen.

Objective 1.5 Promote and co-ordinate research on the important habitats and species and to monitor changes on a systematic basis.

- The three Heligoland bird traps are being repaired by the Hilbre Bird Observatory. The green plastic meshing is being replaced by less obtrusive chicken wire.
- Moth surveys were carried out by the Hilbre Bird Observatory over the winter months.

Objective 2.1 Maintain the natural unspoilt nature of Hilbre.

Objective 2.2 Protect and where appropriate restore the Historic and Archaeological interest of Hilbre.

- The archaeological dig within the Gazebo site is ongoing.
- Following the storms at the start of the year, damage occurred to all the buildings on Hilbre. A roofer has assessed the damage and a programme of repairs has been started.

Objective 2.3 Maintain current use of the existing buildings so long as it is consistent with the character of Hilbre.

- Preparations have been begun for the conversion of the present bunkhouse into a day/meeting room.
- Wirral Council gas fitters have begun the process of fitting the heating system into the day/meeting room.
- Wirral Council gas fitters have acquired and begun the process of plumbing in the gas cooker and gas fridge in the single story bouymasters building.
- Wirral Council gas fitters have begun the process of plumbing the water into the kitchen and bathroom of the single story bouymasters building.

Objective 2.4 Maintain fences, seats, tracks, and signs to a high visual standard.

- A new sign has been acquired for to replace the damaged sign located at the bottom of the South slipway on Hilbre.

- Fences, gates and gateposts were damaged during the storms at the start of the year. There is an ongoing repair and replacement programme.

Objective 2.5 Improve visual amenity by repair or removal of derelict structures.

- Friends of Hilbre in partnership with Wirral Council Rangers have undertaken ongoing repairs to Telegraph and Buoymasters buildings.

Objective 2.6 Minimise the erosion by the sea where appropriate without spoiling the character of the site.

- Monitoring of the concrete capping on the leading edge of the damaged lifeboat station slipway is ongoing.
- A section of cliff in the North East bay of middle eye and the South West cliff of Hilbre was eroded by extreme wave action during a storm. Continued monitoring is taking place.

Objective 3.1 Minimise the use of energy and maximize energy efficiency and the contribution of energy from renewable sources.

- Diesel fuel use, as backup for the wind turbine, is decreasing and monitoring of this is ongoing.

Objective 3.2 Reduce all forms of pollution, including noise, air and marine.

Objective 3.3 Reduce the environmental impact of motor vehicles.

- Vehicle use was kept to a minimum.

Objective 3.4 Minimise the production of and environmental impact of waste and litter, and encourage re-use and recycling of materials where practicable.

- NATSOL (www.natsol.co.uk) composting toilet units have been purchased in preparation for installation on Hilbre. Delivery is planned for the 16th of April 2007.
- Litter picking was undertaken regularly by Wirral Council Rangers, Friends of Hilbre and other volunteers.

Objective 4.1 To encourage public use of the reserve that draws on and is consistent with its natural character with minimal disturbance of its wildlife.

- Friends of Hilbre and Wirral Council Rangers staffed the Telegraph Station Visitor Centre on a regular basis.

- A second training session for the Friends of Hilbre seal watching group has taken place allowing more members of the Friends group to enhance the island experience for visitors.
- Visitor figures have been collated for November 2006 to March 2007. These are booked groups only and do not take into account individuals, families or groups which have not booked. 12 group visits recorded to Hilbre through permit scheme. (A total of 154 individuals).
- The Dee Estuary Voluntary Wardens and Wirral Council Rangers have moved the yellow marker buoys from their winter positions to their summer positions. This allows an area free of steerable kites, providing a safer route for the public to access the island.
- Display cabinets have been built and are ready for installation into the Telegraph Lookout Information Centre. These will increase storage, enable artifacts to be displayed and will allow the Friends of Hilbre P.C. and flat screen to be installed.
- A German film crew recorded on Hilbre and donated £50 to the Friends of Hilbre.

Objective 4.2 To promote greater understanding of the value and importance of the reserve.

- Parks and Countryside Section Mobile Information Unit being staffed by Friends of Hilbre at West Kirby Marine Lake had to be cancelled for safety reasons due to excessive winds.
- Friends of Hilbre took their mobile displays to various venues around Wirral including the Wirral Heritage Fair at Wirral Museum.

Objective 4.3 To ensure the safety of the public and keep all risks to an acceptable level.

- Safe crossing information updated daily in Dee Lane notice board.
- New methods of displaying safe crossing information in the notice board have been discussed. A method of displaying more than one days crossing information is to be devised as unusually prolonged and excessive weather conditions at the start of the year did not allow times to be changed over a number of days.
- The Wirral Council Ranger for Hilbre attended a refresher first aid course.
- One Hilbre Land Rover was replaced with a newer Land Rover by Wirral Council Transport Section.

Objective 4.4 To promote voluntary and community involvement in Hilbre.

- Continued close liaison between the Friends of Hilbre, other volunteer groups and the Hilbre Island Ranger.
- Friends of Hilbre staffing Mobile Information Unit at West Kirby and Telegraph Station Open Days as well as undertaking regular task days on the islands..

3.0 FINANCIAL AND STAFFING IMPLICATIONS, EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS, PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

4.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The Hilbre Islands are a Local Nature Reserve within the Dee Estuary Site of Special Scientific Interest, Ramsar Site, Special Protection Area, candidate Special Area of Conservation and is a Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Site making an important contribution to Wirral's biodiversity.

5.0 LOCAL MEMBER SUPPORT IMPLICATIONS

5.1 This report may be of particular interest to members in the Hoylake, Meols and West Kirby and Thurstaston wards.

6.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

6.1 None have been used in the preparation of this report.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 That this report is accepted by the Hilbre Islands Management Committee.

David Cavanagh
Ranger – Hilbre Island