

## 1.0

## INTRODUCTION

The Port Sunlight Village Trust commissioned Byrom Clark Roberts, Conservation Architects, together with Bureau Veritas, Landscape Consultants, to carry out a Conservation & Management Plan of Port Sunlight Village in February 2006.

The Village extends over an area of approximately 140 acres and contains 930 structures (houses and public buildings) of which almost all are Listed Grade II, as buildings of Special Architectural & Historic Interest.<sup>1</sup> Surveys were undertaken over the summer months of 2006 and consisted of Descriptive and Condition Notes, together with photographs, taken of every identifiable building within the boundaries of the Conservation Area, defining the Village. See Appendix for the Village Site Plan and the confines of the Conservation Area.

Bureau Veritas, Landscape Consultants, together with Fiona Green, Landscape Historian, were appointed in April 2006 to undertake the analysis of existing designed landscape and to compile an assessment of the historic development of the Village through the various phases of construction from 1888 onwards.

The Conservation & Management Plan was commissioned by the Port Sunlight Village Trust, with financial support from Wirral Borough Council and English Heritage. The briefing document for the Plan is included in the Appendix.

The Plan is required to help prepare and inform the following issues:

- To provide a long-term Management Strategy for the Village.
- To help develop a Maintenance Plan for ongoing restoration.
- To help inform the Trust regarding Design Approaches for New Development within the Village.

The briefing document required the Plan Report to include the following:-

The landscape, houses and principal buildings within Port Sunlight Village taking into account the following factors:

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<sup>1</sup> Cottages Nos. 14-16 Bolton Road are Un-Listed. These were rebuilt due to bomb damage c.1950.

- The Village is almost in its entirety in a Conservation Area.
- Almost every building is Grade II Listed.
- Two parts of the landscape are registered.
- The bronze statues and War Memorial (for which separate Conservation Plans will be produced, but not included within this Report).
- The resources of the Trust were made available to both Byrom Clark Roberts and Bureau Veritas during the production of the Plan and Report. This included previous Condition Surveys and most particularly historic archive material obtained by the Trust, including copies of Architect's plans for nearly every building within Port Sunlight Village and copies of old plans and maps of the Village in its various stages of development.
- In addition access was also possible, via the Trust, to the Lever Archives.

As part of the Conservation & Management Plan, a public consultation exercise was arranged for residents of the Village. This was held at Hulme Hall in October 2006. This consisted of a presentation, together with group exercises and a questionnaire.

Following the completion of the Survey Reports and the public consultation exercise, Byrom Clark Roberts and Bureau Veritas met with Lionel Bolland, Chief Executive of PSVT together with representatives of English Heritage and Wirral Borough Council, in January 2007 to discuss the progress of the Report and to agree a format for its production. This was to include a Database for the Condition Survey which would enable properties to be identified by a variety of 'search factors' e.g. condition, defect, address, date & architect/ designer.

It was agreed that the Report should not be purely an 'academic exercise', but that it should be capable of giving easy reference to any or all of the properties within the Village and should be capable of amendment and revision by the Trust as necessary. In short, it should be a 'working document' with the ability to be updated as and when restoration and repair works are completed.

For the purposes of the Report, architectural issues regarding the buildings are dealt with separately from the landscape and landscape history elements.

The sections produced by Bureau Veritas, consisting of characterisation areas of the whole of the Village, together with the Landscape History Analysis prepared by Fiona Green, are included in Volume 2 of this Report. This includes an Assessment of Significance of the different areas within the Village and proposed Management Policies concerning landscape issues.

Issues regarding the buildings (houses and public buildings) are complicated by several factors:

- The diversity of construction, materials and architectural styles;
- The differing ownership of the buildings;
- The differing conditions and standards of maintenance of the buildings.

It is not intended to replicate the various architectural histories on Port Sunlight Village and its conception, especially the work of its founder William Hesketh Lever. However, various excellent publications have been referred to and are included in the bibliography. Special mention must be made of the publication by Edward Hubbard and Michael Shippobottom "*A Guide to Port Sunlight Village*" which is an excellent and authoritative guide to the development of the Village, including an excellent section on architectural styles.

In 1980 UML made the decision to offer properties within Port Sunlight Village for sale on the open market. Following this decision, currently only 255 properties are now owned by the Port Sunlight Village Trust (conveyed from UML) out of a total of 930 residential units<sup>2</sup>. Therefore since 1980 over 70% of the residential accommodation within the Village has become privately owned.

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<sup>2</sup> Total numbers of apartments are unknown since some properties have been converted/sub-divided.

The existing reference system used by the Trust has been retained in the Report. The buildings have been combined together into groups, relating to their construction as detached, semi-detached or terraced units. The reference system for each property relates to the individual architects who are given a numerical reference. The second alphabetic reference relates to the number of individual projects by the same architect.

There are a total of twenty-nine architects who have carried out work at Port Sunlight Village. Some have produced only a single project, in which case only the number reference is given for that building, whereas other firms, such as Grayson & Ould, have completed 59 projects (totalling 209 houses and including several principal public buildings). Two documents have been produced as part of the survey process, firstly a Survey Note on each of the separate residential blocks, and secondly a tabulated Database, listing the condition of each of the blocks and allowing properties to be grouped/ sorted by condition, specific faults/ defects, address or specific architect. This database (referred to as The Condition Report) is the initial reference document and is intended to be used as an initial “*search tool*” so that specific properties can be identified by given search criteria. Once properties have been identified then the specific “Survey Notes” can be referred to for more detailed and expansive comment.

The Survey Notes contain a brief description of each housing unit, together with comments on specific materials and significant features. An overall assessment of the condition of the property is also stated. Where there are several different cottages within one unit, then the assessment may include reference to a specific cottage which is in worse condition than its neighbours. Finally a section is added describing “*Risks*” to the condition and overall significance of the property. These largely consist of maintenance issues, but also describe inappropriate repairs or replacement of original features which are considered “*unsympathetic*”.

We are grateful for the assistance of Lionel Bolland, Chief Executive of the Port Sunlight Village Trust, together with Margaret Williams, Historical Research Officer for the Trust. We are also grateful for the assistance provided by the Landscape Management Division of PSVT regarding landscape maintenance regimes.

## 2.0

## ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The purpose of any evaluation or assessment of significance is to bring attention to key features of an object or heritage asset that are fundamental to the character of that object. Whilst many of the individual houses and public buildings within Port Sunlight are highly significant in their own way, all these individual buildings help to contribute towards the overall significance of Port Sunlight as a whole. Whilst it could be argued that some cottages are more significant than others, for the purposes of this exercise this has not been considered: instead all are equally valuable and to be valued as intrinsic elements of the whole, since any diminution of a single building will impact negatively on the whole Village. The significant elements within the individual blocks have been described in the Survey Notes. Issues of significance for the Village in total are a matter for debate and ongoing discussion but, for the purposes of this Report, we would consider the following issues to be prominent.

**The Contribution of William Hesketh Lever**

Despite the significance of the architecture and environment of the Village, the brilliance of William Hesketh Lever (first Viscount Leverhulme) has to be acknowledged as fundamental to the foundation of Port Sunlight Village, together with the adjacent Port Sunlight Works and the creation of Lever Brothers (later Unilever) as a global multi national company <sup>3</sup>.

Lever was a phenomenon. He was a restless spirit who appears to have never been content with any stable condition, but was always seeking improvements, both at Port Sunlight, and within all the various houses he owned.

*“He tried to take account of each hour of the day – indeed each quarter of an hour – and to employ profitably in self improvement every available moment”.* <sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> A summary of Lever’s life and achievements are included in the Appendix. We would also refer to the autobiography of Lever by WP Jolly. Unfortunately the publication *“Lord Leverhulme by His Son”* is no longer in print and we are grateful for the supply of an archive copy by the Port Sunlight Village Trust, together with a copy of the WL George Report on Port Sunlight of 1910.

<sup>4</sup> Jolly W.P. ‘Lord Leverhulme, a biography’ Constable, London 1976 p8.

*“Whatever practical reasons dictated his frequent changes of home, he loved the challenge of a new house and rarely failed to put in hand extensive improvements as soon as he was in... when the improvements were completed and he could see no scope for major reconstruction or development he was restless for a new challenge”.<sup>5</sup>*

Both Jolly and the second Viscount Leverhulme testify to the fact that Lever had ambitions on becoming an architect, but these were frustrated by his father who insisted that he left school and enter the family grocery business.

*“It was galling for him to see left behind Jonathan Simpson (his life long friend) who went on to bring credit to himself and the school by qualifying as an architect”.<sup>6</sup>*

As a result, Lever took opportunity to involve himself extensively in the planning and detailed construction of the Village at Port Sunlight. Indeed, he took personal credit for devising much of the spatial planning within the Village while on a cruising holiday in 1892.

*“There can be little doubt that Lever took delight in planning and building his Village, from pouring over the details with the architects to expounding upon its beauties to national and international audiences”.<sup>7</sup>*

Despite the initial motivation for the establishment of the Village being purely economic; as a source of accommodation for his manual labourers, this appears to have changed over the first 10 years so that Lever could say in the company magazine *“Progress”* of September 1902 *“...as an object lesson in social betterment Port Sunlight has no equal anywhere;...it was an ideal garden city, and was undoubted proof that the housing problem could be solved even by private enterprise”.<sup>8</sup>*

Not only did Port Sunlight become an architectural *“play thing”* for Lever to satisfy his creative desires but also became a *“model settlement”* where he could expound his beliefs & visions for utopian living.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., Jolly p16-17.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., Jolly p7.

<sup>7</sup> Sellars S *“Sunlighters – The Story of a Village”* Page 12.

<sup>8</sup> Progress Magazine No. 36 September 1902 (Volume 3) Page 321.

His inspiration for this may have been William Morris with his expounding of the “*happy worker*” who, as a result of his contentment produces “*good work*”. Initially it is likely that he merely wished to create a village environment that would attract workers to his enterprise. It must be remembered that the initial site was little more than a salt marsh and was in a remote part of the Wirral away from the major settlements of Liverpool and Birkenhead. However, his social experiments at Port Sunlight had a major effect, both on the lives of the inhabitants and on society as a whole.

When elected as an MP for Birkenhead in 1906,<sup>9</sup> he was instrumental in introducing Old Age Pensions, firstly via a private members bill (which ran out of time) and later through government legislation by Lord George. However, the tedium of Westminster frustrated him and he was keen to stand down at the first opportunity. However, he continued to be a major political figure within the Liberal Party and was knighted for his efforts in 1911.

*“ Whatever the demerits of autocracy it was undeniably swift acting. When an idea came into Lever’s head....he knew that if he so decreed it would be implemented within weeks or even days ”.*<sup>10</sup>

Lever was a self-seeking publicist and used American methods for marketing his products to great effect. He could not conceivably have been described as “*shy*” but had a strong sense of self-belief which might have been interpreted as arrogance. He was happy to accept ideas if he agreed with them, but seldom accepted unsolicited criticism.<sup>11</sup>

However, at the same time he could be incredibly generous and kind and appears to have been genuinely concerned about the health and welfare of his workers.

*“ Lever went to some pains to show an interest in all the societies and clubs (within Port Sunlight) ”.*<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> He stood for parliament on three occasions in un-winnable seats for the Liberal party, probably out of principle rather than any desire to actually win. Unfortunately he was successful in the Liberal landslide of 1906 and reluctantly took up his seat in Westminster.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., Jolly page 70.

<sup>11</sup> “Jolly mentions a comment by Lever in reply to a suggestion from one of his staff for possible improvements. I am always glad to have your free expression of opinion on all matters that I may discuss with you but until I do discuss a matter with you..... it is not within your province to lay your views before me.....”. Jolly page 30.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., Jolly page 79.

Another instance which showed his *“generosity of spirit”* regarded the vote of Village residents to apply for a licence to serve alcohol at the Bridge Inn in 1904. Lever had absolute power over the lives and affairs of the residents in the Village and could have vetoed this vote but, instead, chose to accept the *“will of the people”*.

He was a character in conflict with himself. Whilst seeking beauty in art he was highly critical of his architects who, in his opinion, were wasteful and profligate in their designs. He valued economy as a virtue.

*“However liberal, Levers carefully formulated ideas and public speeches about management – labour relations, the day to day working decisions he made in his office remained strongly conservative”.*<sup>13</sup>

Lever made contributions to a new Village settlement at Thornton Hough and the beginnings of a utopian settlement based on the fishing and fish processing industry in the Western Isles of Lewis and Harris. Unfortunately his death in 1925 prevented him from completing his tasks in Scotland. However, his legacy can be found, via Unilever, in all corners of the world. By 1900 he had factories in Switzerland, Germany, Canada, USA, Holland and Australia.

*“Lever was a compound of paradoxes. An uncompromising autocrat and a zealous reformer. An acquisitive man who gave away several fortunes. A demanding employer obsessively concerned with his work as well being. A visionary resolved to make all his dreams reality”.*<sup>14</sup>

### Port Sunlight as a Social Experiment

Port Sunlight was noteworthy within 20 years of its foundation. It was the subject of much academic debate culminating in a significant study by W.L. George in 1909<sup>15</sup>. This was only due to its architectural styles or fashions though these were significant. What was of profound interest to George and others was how Port Sunlight combined both environmental and social reforms to create an ‘ideal society’.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., Jolly page 94.

<sup>14</sup> George R Robinson and Edmond Williams *“Port Sunlight – The First Hundred Years 1888-1988”* Lever Brothers, Port Sunlight 1988. p2.

<sup>15</sup> WL George labour and housing at Port Sunlight, Alston Rivers, London 1909.

Port Sunlight has been described as a ‘model village’ and, as such, is a culmination of the earlier pioneering settlements at Saltaire and New Lanark (two of the most prominent examples). Lever would also have been aware of more local examples in his home town of Bolton; at Barrow Bridge and Egerton. Most of these earlier ‘model villages’ had advanced social facilities such as schools and institutes. However, the social institutions Lever provided, coupled with the size and extent of the settlement at Port Sunlight, were on a previously unheard of scale.

In addition to schooling for all children within the Village, Lever provided “Further Education and Training’ Facilities for all his workers who wished to *“better themselves”*. From July 1908 he announced that no employee under 18 would be engaged within his factory unless they had achieved a specified educational standard in school. Existing employees between the ages of 14-18 were obliged to attend evening classes to gain the required standard.

He was instrumental in establishing Old Age Pensions and, before the state legislation of 1909, he instituted provisions for his own workers at Port Sunlight.

From 1907 he provided a Hospital within the Village which gave free healthcare to all his workers and their families. Indeed it became a common event for ill relatives of workers to move into Port Sunlight from outside the Village in order to benefit from this healthcare.

In almost every case the *“Port Sunlight Experiment”* produced exceptional social results.

*“These (results) show what a physical revolution has been worked in the Children....by good food, good housing, open spaces, exercise and regular employment of the parents. It is not too much to call it a revolution...”*<sup>16</sup>

This may come as no surprise to us today, who understand the necessity of proper hygiene, diet and healthcare, combined with good educational standards. With the establishment of The Welfare State<sup>17</sup> it is remarkable how many of the innovations that Lever introduced have now been adopted nationwide.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., George p160

The social study by W.L George (1909), as previously mentioned, recorded some of the facts already resulting from the development of Port Sunlight in less than twenty years of existence. Most notably George mentions that the death rate per 1000 of the population was almost exactly half that of Liverpool on the opposite side of the Mersey.

*“In Port Sunlight.....conditions are so different from those of the immediate neighbourhood that it is almost possible to identify the inhabitants, and even more possible to identify the children”.*<sup>18</sup>

*“We are driven to agree with the common judgement of these social students, and to accept the Village as the nearest approach to ideal conditions”.*<sup>19</sup>

Still further:

*“.....the founder of the Village may well rejoice in his work and pride himself on a practical achievement unequalled in the annals of industrial utopias”.*<sup>20</sup>

Despite all his incredible and varied works around the world, Lever remained extremely proud of his achievements at Port Sunlight.

*“ There can be no doubt that Lever took delight in planning and building his village, from poring over details with the Architects to expounding upon its beauties to national and international audiences.”*<sup>21</sup>

### **The Quality of Architecture & Art at Port Sunlight**

Port Sunlight is often considered to be a part of The Garden City Movement and to be representative of the influence of Ebenezer Howard. Despite Levers commitment to the Garden City Movement<sup>22</sup>, the origins of Port Sunlight clearly lie in the tradition of the industrial ‘model village’.

Howard considered Port Sunlight to be an ‘exceptional development’ and was clearly influenced by the place, however the design was clearly Levers own and Howard had no direct involvement in the planning or development of the Village.

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<sup>17</sup> Introduced by the Labour government of 1945-50 under Clement Attlee.

<sup>18</sup> George W.L. ‘Labour & Housing at Port Sunlight’, Alston Rivers, London, 1909. p177.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., George pp 191

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., George pp 210

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., Sellars pp 12

<sup>22</sup> Port Sunlight was the venue for a conference of the Garden City Movement in 1902 hosted by Lever.

Later developments in the Village, notably the classical formality of the Diamond, may have been influenced by the axial layouts of the Garden City Movement at Letchworth Garden Village. However it remains the subject of academic debate as to 'who influenced whom'<sup>23</sup>. However what began as a practical development to house workers in a remote tidal inlet on the Mersey Estuary soon became a 'grand social experiment' where Lever could indulge his passions for Architecture and Social Engineering.

Though there were some larger semi-detached and detached houses for more senior workers, the vast majority of buildings were constructed for ordinary workers.

*"The cottage home is the unit of a nation, and therefore the more we can raise the comfort and happiness of home life, the more we shall raise the standard of efficiency for the whole nation".*<sup>24</sup>

The density of development at Port Sunlight is also very low, at approximately 9.no houses per acre. However, this very low density was probably as much a consequence of the poor existing ground conditions, around the tidal inlet, which affected most of the central part of the site (before being infilled from 1910 onwards). This 'Inlet' covered an area of over 25 acres and was originally intended to act as landscaped fingers between the various blocks of housing located on the higher ground around the perimeter of the site. The early layout prior to 1910 was free flowing and more "*organic*" in its conception. It both followed and reflected the existing site and ground conditions. The only remnants of this early landscape that survive is the area that now forms "*The Dell*".

The fruit developments in the 'Village' occurred at the Southern end of Bolton Road with Greendale Road and the end of Wood Street close to the factory.

Plans (plates 20-26) show the rapid development of the Village firstly around 'The Dell' and then forming the perimeter blocks along New Chester Road, Bebington Road and the main frontage of Greendale Road west of Bolton Road.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Interestingly, the prominent Garden City Designers, Barry Parker & Raymond Unwin have not completed any projects at Port Sunlight.

<sup>24</sup> W.H Lever at the International Housing Conference, August 1907.

<sup>25</sup> See Appendix B regarding the Sequential Development of the Village.

The area of the central part of the Inlet can be seen in the green swathe of landscape running from Bolton Road to the North of Christ Church, up to the site of the Cottage Hospital, and into the two arms extending to either side of the hospital site (North towards New Chester Road and South towards the Lady Lever Art Gallery). However, the infilling of the Inlet, together with the introduction of the classical formality of “*The Diamond*” has all but obliterated the earlier irregularity of the Village around the free-flowing forms of the Inlet. The formal axial design known as ‘The Diamond’<sup>26</sup> was the result of an open architectural competition in 1910, which was won by Ernest Prestwich, a third year architectural student at Liverpool University.<sup>27</sup>

Church Road Primary School was constructed before the inlet was infilled and this accounts for the sunken playground level which remains today at the original lower ground level. The Sunlight Lodge Cottage Hospital was built on raised ground overlooking ‘the Pool’ (the early name referred to the inlet) but this has now lost the picturesque view that Lever intended.

Outwardly the buildings at Port Sunlight show great decoration and ornamentation while the internal elevations to the courtyards can be strikingly stark and utilitarian. This is an important architectural feature of the development at Port Sunlight, where Lever concentrated the quality of construction and detailing to the front ‘main’ elevations, while the rear courtyard elevations, which were not on public view, were treated in a more utilitarian fashion (which obviously pleased Lever’s sense of “*economy*”). At times this duality of appearance can appear almost ‘theatrical’.

As an example 11-17 Greendale Road (by Wilson & Talbot) externally resembles the Elizabethan ‘Kenyon Peel Hall’ (now demolished), but the rear elevations are quite plain. Only a stone flagged roof is shared with the grandeur of the ‘public’ elevation facing Greendale Road.

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<sup>26</sup> Interestingly earlier plans of the area before the later design by Prestwich still refer to this area as ‘The Diamond’ due to the shape formed by the inlet. The name has survived in the new axial layout.

<sup>27</sup> However, as Fiona Green surmises, there is a strong influence of the Landscape Architect T.H Mawson in the axial plan, together with the semi-circular churchyard around Christ Church, with radial paths leading towards the adjacent principal routes.

This contrast between the ‘public’ and ‘private’ faces of the buildings echoes Levers own desire for the public face of the Village to reinforce the image he was building of his own company. Though no references were ever made by Lever concerning the use of Port Sunlight for marketing purposes, there is no doubt that the reputation of the Village was instrumental in enhancing the ‘Sunlight’ brand.

To accommodate the duality between the public and private/utilitarian functions of the housing, Lever devised a courtyard form with housing blocks forming ‘beads’ around a perimeter, with all the external ‘public’ facades looking outward.

The internal ‘plain’ facades overlook an internal courtyard which houses rear gardens, yards and allotments. This form of layout has come to be termed as a ‘superblock’ because of its extensive size.

There are only usually two access points into the internal court of each ‘superblock’; as a result only the outward public elevations are usually visible to the visitor. None of the superblocks are identical; different areas often being constructed by various designers in a deliberate attempt to introduce variety.

The use of corner housing blocks also helps to contain the privacy of the internal courtyard areas and also to ‘turn the corner’ at road intersections very successfully.

Whether by accident or design, the tidal inlet prevented a more uniform grid pattern of development and forced large areas of the Village to be devoted to open space. Lever was quick to expound the virtues of low density and the extensive use of landscape is a significant and important element at Port Sunlight.

*“The planning of the houses themselves has been most carefully thought out, and it is interesting to analyse this part of the scheme because it is here that the Garden City idea most strongly appears”.*<sup>28</sup>

W.L George also recognised the importance of the landscape setting to the building.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., George pp 64

*“The Port Sunlight secret lies in the tree and shrub, but still more in the broad meadow; the houses are generally built on one side of the road only and overlook broad spaces of grass or belts of trees. This increases the feeling of privacy.....”*<sup>29</sup>

There are some variations in style and notably some ‘classical’ elements introduced to some blocks, particularly those to the corner of Bolton Road with Corniche Road, but overall the effective style is an *“English cottage vernacular”* using traditional materials of Cheshire red brick with combinations of stucco, harling render, stone dressings and *“black and white”* half timber frame. Tudor spiral chimneys combined with ‘four-centred’ perpendicular arches in various areas give a *“mock Tudor”* effect. This was to become much copied by builder-developers in the expanding suburbs of the inter-war years. As a result some of the startling ‘originality’ of these buildings has been diluted by modern repetition.

There can be no doubt that the combination of largely two-storey buildings with pitched roofs and a variety of styles and finishes creates a comfortable and *“cosy”* environment which some observers have loosely termed *“Olde English”* but which, in reality, never existed in any period of our history.

There can also be no doubt that Lever was instrumental in the creation of this largely artificial environment and that it reflected his own desires and aspirations for his workers and society as a whole.

*“Altering the face of nature was with him a passion. He was never happier than when seated in front of a plan with a drawing board, ruler and t-square ready to hand. Architecture was always an absorbing study for him.....”*<sup>30</sup>

The contribution of Lever towards the architecture and layout of Port Sunlight is confirmed by his son as follows:

*“With him it was never a case of leaving everything to the architect and settling the bill when the work was finished. Expert advice he wisely sought and freely acknowledged, but the plan and layout of Port Sunlight were his own, and so, in the main, were the plans of the works and the buildings in the Village, and in many cases of the houses also. The architects he*

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., George pp 71.

<sup>30</sup> William Hulme Lever ‘Leverhulme by his Son’, Allen & Unwin, London, 1928. pp86.

*employed all looked upon him as unique amongst their clients. He did not employ them – he collaborated with them”.<sup>31</sup>*

Sculpture and works of art within the landscape also make a very important contribution to the environment within Port Sunlight. The principal works are as follows:

- The War Memorial by Goscombe John.
- The Lever Memorial.
- The Dolphin Pool.
- The Lever Mausoleum at Christ Church also by Goscombe John.
- The Bridge over The Dell

The War Memorial is particularly significant. It is one of the largest such monuments in the country and the quality and number of bronze statues in the composition known as “*defence of the home*” make this monument particularly noteworthy. The location of the memorial punctuates the crossing point of The Diamond with The Causeway and acts as a natural “*pivot*” around which rotates the axial plan designed by Ernest Prestwich in 1910.

The importance of the buildings within the landscape should not be underestimated. Lever proposed lower density as a key factor in the successful environment achieved at Port Sunlight. However this is only one of a number of important factors which help to create the very special environment achieved at Port Sunlight. In summary these are:

- The high quality of external landscaping generally and specifically to the 2.no listed landscape areas of The Dell and the Diamond.
- The sense of containment and enclosure gained within the Village by closing off open vistas and the inward emphasis formed by the perimeter ‘superblocks’ which effectively isolate any connection with the surrounding area.
- The use of prominent public buildings and features to act as focal points, particularly within the axial plan of The Diamond.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., W.H Lever, pp 86.

However some issues of concern regarding the layout of housing & landscape remain. Less successful is the relationship of the housing along Wood Street opposite Levers factory. Here the size of the factory cannot be easily reduced to match the small domestic scale of the housing.

The termination of the axis of Bridge Street eastward towards the factory has been destroyed with the closure of the former factory entrance at this point. Thus the dramatic axis formed by Bridge Street leaping over the Dell with its beautiful Bridge is met... with a blank wall.

The junction between the differing layouts of the earlier village around the Dell and the later axis of The Diamond have not been happily reconciled, particularly to the rear of Hulme Hall. In the same way the rear spaces surrounding the Art Gallery, along Lower Road, betray the later insertion of this huge neoclassical building.

## 3.0

**RISKS TO SIGNIFICANCE**

As previously mentioned all the buildings within Port Sunlight Village have been assessed for their condition. The houses have been grouped into 'development blocks' relating to their physical associations as a single development. The numbering for these blocks relates to the individual Architect as explained earlier. There are 196 no. separate 'residential blocks' (varying in size from single houses to multiple groups of 18 no. ) with 926 houses in total.

There are 17 no. public buildings. The Condition Survey Database identifies each individual block and describes its condition in outline and makes reference to certain 'conditions' that have been noted. The Survey Notes describe each 'development block' or 'public building' in more detail and identify each individual house, where necessary, regarding any specific condition.

Observations have also been made about the overall condition of the blocks. This is summarised as follows:

|                |                |                  |
|----------------|----------------|------------------|
| All Poor       | 2 no.          | ( 1 % )          |
| Poor & Fair    | 18 no.         | ( 9.5 % )        |
| All Fair       | 68 no.         | ( 35 % )         |
| Fair & Good    | 16 no.         | ( 8 % )          |
| All Good       | 89 no.         | ( 45 % )         |
| All conditions | 3 no.          | ( 1.5 % )        |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>196 no.</b> | <b>( 100 % )</b> |

This reveals that overall the condition of the housing is largely 'fair' and/or 'good' with a very small number of the blocks having houses in 'poor' condition.

Regarding the public buildings the overall conditions is as follows:

|              |               |                  |
|--------------|---------------|------------------|
| Poor         | 5 no.         | ( 29 % )         |
| Fair         | 3 no.         | ( 18 % )         |
| Good         | 9 no.         | ( 53 % )         |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>17 no.</b> | <b>( 100 % )</b> |

Regarding the public buildings nearly 30% are in poor condition. These are Hesketh Hall, The Lyceum, The Cottage Hospital, The Port Sunlight Railway Station and The Church Hall (off Bridge Street).

This Condition Survey is a changing “*picture*” as maintenance and repair work is being carried out continuously within the Village. In particular the Trust has a renovation and restoration programme being applied to the properties in its care (approximately 255 no.) and the Condition Database will need to be regularly updated to reflect these ongoing works. Several common faults have emerged as a result of the Condition Survey and these have been recorded in separate filtered columns in the database. The entry categories are as follows:

- Masonry/brickwork repairs
- Render/other repairs
- Raking out/re-pointing
- Joinery repairs – windows
- Joinery repairs – other
- UPVC windows
- UPVC conservatory
- UPVC rainwater goods
- Redecoration
- Satellite dishes and TV aerials
- Trailing wires and services
- Cleaning out gutters and RWP repairs
- Roof repairs
- Chimney repairs
- Structural issues
- Paths/external works
- Garden wall/enclosure repairs.

The Condition Database allows all the ‘public buildings and ‘residential blocks’ to be sorted by individual condition or by a combination of factors e.g. Architects name, address. The database is intended to be maintained so that it can act as an ongoing management tool, in both assessing the changing condition of the properties and helping to target repair works more effectively.

As a result of this survey work several issues can be identified as “*key risk factors*” affecting the Village and its overall significance.

### **Inappropriate Repairs & Replacement Work**

While most residents and building owners are maintaining their properties in a reasonable condition, as evident from the high proportion of properties either in fair or good condition, there appears to be a 'lack of knowledge' generally regarding suitable repair methods and appropriate materials for works to these significant Listed Buildings.

The survey has brought to light a large number of properties with UPVC windows, which are not appropriate for Listed Buildings. Currently 53 no. blocks are recorded as having UPVC replacement windows to one or more houses. This is over 25% of the total number of residential blocks. Most of these replacement windows are combined to the rear elevations, but some have "*crept*" onto the main frontages. There appears to be a general belief that only the front elevations "*matter*" and that any alteration, however inappropriate, can be carried out to the rear elevations with impunity.

The items highlighted in the condition survey which are considered inappropriate for works to Listed Buildings are:

- UPVC windows.
- UPVC conservatories.
- UPVC rainwater goods.
- Satellite dishes with or without trailing cables.

Where these material alterations have occurred, then some form of enforcement action may need to be considered, in order to prevent the loss of original features and the consequential dilution of significance as a result. This "gradual erosion" of original features will eventually result in the loss of quality and distinctiveness which is an important characteristic of Port Sunlight.

In the residents' defence, it must be stated that some of the existing inappropriate alterations appear to date from the period when UML were responsible for the maintenance and repair of the properties.

However, there does need to be a process of education and information made available to residents and property owners concerning appropriate standards of maintenance and repair. There are also issues regarding poor quality of workmanship where necessary works have been carried out, but that the required standards appropriate for a Listed Building have not been applied.

Other issues relating to inappropriate repairs and maintenance are as follows:

- Re-pointing with cement mortar which, over time, will damage the original softer brickwork.
- Replacement of original window and door patterns with modern units which do not replicate the earlier fenestration pattern or design.

The Port Sunlight Village Trust are well placed to provide assistance to owners and residents, so that they can obtain help and advice regarding appropriate repair methods and materials. It would also assist if the Trust were to compile a list of 'approved contractors and craftsmen' who have carried out works to a sufficiently high standard within the Village or can provide suitable references. This would help to ensure that shoddy and poor quality workmanship is avoided.

### **Lack of Maintenance**

From the survey over half of the residential blocks within the Village are suffering from poor decoration (54%). Nearly as many are also requiring joinery repairs to windows, doors, fascias and bargeboards (41%).

Owners should be encouraged to regularly maintain their buildings and paintwork should be renewed on average every 5 years (possibly more frequently on a south facing elevation).

Other significant factors are the number of redundant TV aerials and trailing wires affecting many properties. We would question why it is not possible for an aerial installer to take down the old installations at the same time as he is erecting any new equipment.

Again, a list of approved installers could be compiled by the Trust and these firms could be asked to include the removal of redundant equipment as part of their services. Nearly half of all the residential blocks (46%) within the Village are affected by trailing wires and/or redundant aerials.

Further, 99 no. blocks within the Village have satellite dishes of some kind. This is just over 50%. Obviously not all the houses within a block have a satellite dish but the appearance of the whole block is affected.

Some satellite dishes are mounted on the principal front elevations, depending on the orientation of the property. We noted that there are some good examples where a satellite dish has been fixed to a freestanding pole in the rear garden or yard. This practice should be encouraged.

It is an inevitable consequence that a lack of maintenance will lead to an accelerating deterioration of condition, resulting in the loss of original features. The byword should be to maintain "*a little and often*" so as to keep the overall condition stable.

Regarding lack of maintenance, a further factor is the growing number of conservatories fixed to the rear of properties. Our survey counted 19.no blocks (9.7% of the total) containing one or more rear conservatory structures, most of which are uPVC in construction.

The problem with these structures is largely the difficulty of gaining access for maintenance to first floor windows, eaves, gutters and roofing. We would suggest that any conservatories erected in future should be capable of taking maintenance access, such as scaffold board supports. A timber structure to a conservatory can be sufficiently designed to take maintenance load and can also have brackets added to take scaffold boards as necessary. We understand that this is not always possible with UPVC structures. We would suggest that good examples are highlighted by the Trust as part of the general process of informing and 'assisting' residents.

### Environment & Infrastructure

While the preservation of the buildings themselves is of obvious importance in maintaining the significance of Port Sunlight, this work must go *“hand in hand”* with the preservation of the landscape and the *“setting”* of the buildings. See recommendations by Bureau Veritas in the Landscape Section of the Conservation & Management Plan.

In the same way that the dilution of original features can occur on buildings, so this has been occurring gradually within the landscaping around the buildings. Paving to the houses has been replaced with concrete paths. Over 39 no. blocks with 219 houses (20 %) are noted as having poor quality paths and external works which are affecting the setting of the buildings. The restoration of paths in cobble or sett paving would greatly improve the appearance of many of the buildings.

Another factor, illustrated by Bureau Veritas, is the re-introduction of original railings. It is unclear when these were removed or *“lost”*. However the railings were an important element in defining the curtilage of many of the properties.

In the same way, the replacement of original street furniture with inappropriate utilitarian fittings needs to be reversed. Care should be taken to retain any existing historic elements that remain within the hard landscaping, and for inappropriate modern fittings to be replaced with fittings that match, as closely as possible, the original patterns

Roadways and road crossings originally had stone setts or paviers which were an attractive element; having a greater texture than smooth tarmacadam. Many of these surfaces have been covered by tarmacadam, possibly to aid simplicity and economy of maintenance. These surfaces should be restored as part of an agreed strategy of improvements with the Local Authority Highways Department.

A further factor revealed in the survey was the extent of damage to rear yard and boundary walls. 35.no blocks (17% of the total) were noted to have yard walls and outbuildings in poor condition.

Building owners must be encouraged to maintain these structures to the same condition as the housing.

Views out from the Village are also a significant “*risk factor*” and can easily be overlooked. The setting of the Village as a whole is influenced by any surrounding developments on peripheral sites. The view of the existing Civic Amenity Site at Bromborough Dock, to the Eastern end of Bolton Road, is a significant and unfortunate intrusion into the heart of the Village. Ways should be found, in conjunction with the Local Authority, to provide screening to this waste site from within the Village.

In the same way, the Local Planning Authority should be aware of the impact of peripheral development around the edge of Port Sunlight Village. This is particularly significant along Bebington Road where any new development should be considered very carefully, particularly when viewed along existing roads from within the centre of the Village.

### **The Redundancy of Public Buildings**

As the social demographic profile of Port Sunlight has changed over the years, so the use of the various public buildings has also needed to change. This appears to have been a process that has been ongoing since the Village was constructed. An example would be Hulme Hall, which has undergone several transformations since its original construction as the Ladies Dining Hall. At one time Lever used the building to house his art collection before the construction of the Lady Lever Art Gallery. It now works well as a meetings venue. Of the other buildings which have found new uses these are as follows:

- The Gladstone Hall, formerly the Mens Dining Hall, then a communal Village Hall and now The Gladstone Theatre.
- The Ladies Social Club, which is now the offices of the Port Sunlight Village Trust and houses the ‘Sunlight Vision’ Exhibition.
- The Bolton Road Post Office, which is now a tea room.
- The Fire Engine Station, which is now offices.

However, there are several buildings which require appropriate new uses to be found as follows:

- The Technical Institute, Hesketh Hall, is currently redundant and in very poor condition. Its previous use as a social club for the Royal British Legion could act as a model for its conversion into a new leisure facility. Its location on New Chester Road is well sited to serve Bebington, Bromborough and New Ferry.
- The Lyceum, which began life as the Village School and Church, appears under-used and in poor condition. Part of the building is used by the Unilever Archives. There are plans to convert part of the building into additional commercial offices. This would have the benefit of bringing in more commercial activity into the Village.
- The Girls Hostel, which became a library and bank and formerly housed the Trust's offices to the first floor. Now that the Trust have 'quit' the building, a new use needs to be found for the upper floors. It would appear to be appropriate to convert this accommodation into residential flats/apartments or into commercial offices.
- The Cottage Hospital has been vacant for a number of years and is now in very poor condition. I understand that plans are well progressed for the conversion of this building into a small Hotel with restaurant. This would be a positive addition to the Village.

The Village Trust does have a policy in place regarding redundant buildings, to *"find a sustainable future use that does not compromise the buildings or other aspects of Village life"*.

However, it may be necessary for urgent stabilisation works to be done to some buildings, particularly Hesketh Hall, to prevent further significant damage and decay. This work would need to be done prior to any agreements for redevelopment and may require resources/ grant aid currently unavailable to the Trust.

### The Challenge of 'Change'

Change, in some way, has always been occurring within the Village and will continue to occur. It would appear beneficial to have more commercial activity brought into the Village. As the Factory has become less dominant in the lives of residents, there is a danger that the Village will become a “*dormitory settlement*” serving only to provide sleeping accommodation for workers in outlying areas.

Regarding the ‘social changes’ that have already occurred within the Village, it would be a worthwhile investment for the Village Trust to commission a Social Study, in order to better understand the changes that have occurred to the residential population over time and to assess how future changes may affect the Village and its structures.

One inevitable impact of the modern age has been the increase in demand for car parking and garage spaces. The Trust has already overseen the construction of new garage units to the centres of some super blocks. As the demand for previous allotments reduces so new and appropriate uses need to be found for former allotments within the super blocks, and garage units would appear to be an acceptable use.

The Public Consultation Exercise revealed tensions between existing older residents and young people “*invading*” the Village from outside areas. It is noticeable that the Village has very few facilities for young people. There is no playground or space where they can congregate safely. At the public meeting the suggestion of providing more facilities for young people, including a playground, was very strongly resisted. The impression given was that young people should not be attracted into the Village and should be “*encouraged to leave*”. Many of the residents at the consultation event confessed to being “*threatened*” by the presence of young people in the Village.

Port Sunlight was envisaged by William Hesketh Lever as a “*complete society*” encompassing all ages. We would hope that, as the Village continues to develop and adapt to the needs of society, so some way can be found to provide for all sectors within society.

It has been reported to us that the Church Drive School, though successful and over-subscribed, largely caters for children and families from outside the Village. It has also been reported that the number of young families with children, living in the village, is very low as a proportion of the population compared to surrounding areas. These statements do need to be verified by further study. If true, they present a disturbing imbalance within the Village weighted towards older people and those without children.

If Port Sunlight is to avoid being classed as a “*Retirement Village*” then it must seek ways to incorporate new developments which cater for families with children and younger couples/single people. There should also be an element of more “*affordable housing*”, possibly using ‘shared equity’ models to encourage people into home ownership who would otherwise be unable to afford a property within the Village.

As previously stated, change is inevitable within the Village, but the challenge of the Port Sunlight Village Trust, together with other stakeholders, is to effectively manage this change. This requires co-ordinated action from all groups with a vested interest in the sustainable future of Port Sunlight Village.

While we would not recommend restricting appropriate new development within the Village, the architectural treatment of new buildings needs to be considered very carefully. Briefly we would recommend the following factors:

- Buildings should pre-dominantly be domestic in size and scale; of two storeys with any third floors within attic type roofs.
- The decorative scale should be small with a ‘cottage’ aesthetic formed by multi-pane windows, raised and fielded panels to doors and screens, and prominent oversailing eaves with painted timber fascias, soffits and verge/ barge boards.
- Materials should reflect the pallet of finishes commonly used within the village; namely soft red Cheshire facing bricks with red sandstone dressings, painted render (smooth & harling ‘wet dash’) to walls with red/ brindle clay plain tiles to roofs.

- A variety of materials can be used to walls with differing finishes adding prominence to bays and advancing wings. All Materials must be of the highest quality available.
- Decorative features should be extensive with a variety of small detail work; such as carved barge boards, timber pilasters to door & window surrounds, clay tile dressings to walls and half timber work notably to gables and bay windows.
- Doors & windows should be in painted softwood. Colours should replicate those used in the restricted pallet of paints used on the original buildings. Modern 'jet black' and 'Brilliant White' should be avoided.
- Chimneys & roofscape are an important feature within the settlement. Modern developments should replicate chimneys which could be used for passive stack ventilation if not for real fires/ flues. Roofs should be at 45 degrees pitch. Rainwater goods should be painted cast iron.
- Design in both plan and elevation should reflect the irregularity of the Arts & Crafts, with deliberate misalignment to avoid symmetry.
- The positioning of buildings in relation to the highway is of crucial importance. Entrance elevations should be prominent and ornate and should face the highway with an expanse of green sward as a foreground. There should be no curtilage parking to the highway or front elevations; with all drives and parking areas consigned to rear parking and garage courts. A single path in stone flags or tiles should lead to each front door, which should have a porch. Paths should run across the front of the property at a discreet distance of 5m or more.
- New developments should replicate the duality of the original housing, with the formation of a utility area within a rear courtyard. The backs or rear elevations of properties should be more functional with less ornamentation and decoration.
- Entrances into rear parking courts should be concealed and views into these areas should be restricted as much as possible, to maintain the prominence of the front 'principal elevations'.

## 4.0

## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Port Sunlight is a *“special place”* and its significance results from a number of factors, which all combine together to create an individual and unique environment, which provides pleasure and delight at all levels of perception.

The Architectural Historian finds fascination in the history of the development, as the last great *“model Village”* and from the *“arts and crafts”* buildings by many noteworthy Architects.

The Social Historian will find pleasure in the *“Port Sunlight experiment”* and the social innovations introduced by Lever which produced an early example of the Welfare State. However, most of us will find pleasure in the beauty of the buildings and landscape.

The *“principal risk”* to this environment arises largely from inadequate or inappropriate maintenance and repair of both the buildings and landscape.

The Port Sunlight Village Trust is the ideal vehicle to help reverse this decline and to assist the many private owners/ residents and The Family Housing Association (which also is a significant landlord) to be better informed and equipped to maintain their buildings more effectively. Indeed the Trust is already embarking on this task and should be helped and encouraged to do so.

The Trust, as the largest property holder, has also been acting as a good example to other property owners, by embarking on an ongoing cycle of building repairs and maintenance to all its properties. It has also purchased additional properties, particularly nos. 17-21 Bolton Road, which were suffering from poor quality conversion, and has carried out a commendable restoration in order to save this prominent building and return it to something approaching its original appearance and condition.

We would encourage the Trust to continue in its endeavours, and to assist local residents by setting up an information library of 'appropriate maintenance and repair techniques' and to establish a database of suitably experienced tradesmen who can carry out conservation repair work to an acceptable standard. These tradesmen need to submit an application with references to the Trust in order to be considered for inclusion on any recommended list. Advice on costs would also be beneficial; to assist owners on the possible financial burden of repairs so that they can budget. Group tenders could also be of benefit where several owners could take advantage of shared competitive tender rates for repetitive items.

We would also encourage the Trust to seek ways of offering financial assistance, as a grants 'fund holder' to many private residents, in order to carry out repair and maintenance work or the reinstatement of original features following inappropriate alterations.

The Trust, together with the Local Authority Wirral Borough Council, needs to establish an action group/ working party to consider how best to carry out appropriate "*enforcement action*" regarding unauthorised alterations, particularly the introduction of UPVC windows to these Grade II Listed buildings. It is to be hoped that a combination of "*enforcement*" and "*encouragement*" with grant aid will prove to be effective in reversing the decline in quality and the deteriorating condition of many of the existing buildings in the Village.

Once repairs have been done, the Trust needs to record this work by amending the entries in the Condition Database. If the Database is to be an effective maintenance and management tool then it will need to be maintained and updated regularly. This task should fall naturally to the Trust who should keep control of this resource and copy it to other interested parties.

Regarding the Public Buildings, the Trust has inherited a heavy burden and there are challenges regarding appropriate new uses for several buildings, most notably Hesketh Hall, The Cottage Hospital and The Lyceum. External help will be required to help stabilise these buildings prior to their long-term redevelopment. This is an urgent task in order to avoid further decay and loss of fabric.

Port Sunlight was a distinctive place and worthy of comment even as early as 1909 when W.L. George completed his epic study. Much that was distinctive at that time remains in place today. It is regrettable that, over time, the founding relationship between the Factory and the Village has been lost. It would be of enormous benefit if some link between the two could be re-established and that the old doors opposite Bridge Street could be re-opened.

Port Sunlight was a pioneer in its use of architecture, planning, landscape and social engineering, and these areas are the principal reasons for its significance. However, the influence of its charismatic founder should not be under-estimated. The village is a reflection of the unique and whimsical character of William Hesketh Lever. His beneficial dictatorship has resulted in a very personal and intimate creation. His uncomplicated vision of the 'perfect society' at Port Sunlight is still an inspiration and a delight to everyone fortunate to see it today.

*".. if this be in truth a newer England then let us hope that the movement begun at Port Sunlight will not slacken."*<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., George. p180.