

WIRRAL COUNCIL

CULTURE, TOURISM AND LEISURE OVERVIEW SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 10 SEPTEMBER 2007

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF REGENERATION

LEASOWE COMMON – PETITION

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report has been prepared in response to a petition with 613 signatures requesting that the Council reopen the vehicular access gate to the eastern most part of the Common which was closed in July 2006.

2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

- 2.1 Leasowe Common is part of the North Wirral Coastal Park which is managed by Wirral Council's Parks and Countryside Section, part of the Department of Regeneration. Appendix 1 attached shows the areas discussed in the report.
- 2.2 The common is designated Common Land under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) and activities are regulated under the Commons Act (2006). The common extends for one mile from Parkview Drive in Meols to Oakmere Close in Leasowe. There are three distinct areas of Leasowe Common; sometimes, also or partly, referred to as Meols Common or Moreton Common. The entire site covers 42 acres of which 25.5 acres are within a designated Site of Biological Interest.
- 2.3 Leasowe Common became incorporated into the North Wirral Coastal Park when the park was created in 1986. Since that time there has been a site based Ranger (now at Leasowe Lighthouse adjacent to the common) responsible for the management of the park including day to day maintenance and repair, planning and implementing major management projects and for the enforcement of local byelaws.
- 2.4 There are three surfaced car parks located within the common providing parking for approximately 300 cars. One car park is locked each evening by local residents to stop anti-social behaviour and another has a height barrier restricting access to vehicles lower than 6'6" to reduce the amount of fly-tipping. The third car park was fitted with 'pinch gaps' in 2006 to stop access by large articulated trucks which had been using the car park as a lorry park.
- 2.5 Leasowe Common has, for many years, been misused and has attracted a number of anti-social problems from joy riders, speeding cars, motorbikes, overnight campers with tents and caravans as well as travellers and illegal tradesmen including bouncy castle operators and quad bike hire operating within the grassed areas of the common.

3.0 HISTORY OF SITE MANAGEMENT

- 3.1 In 1998 armour stone was positioned around most of Leasowe Common to stop unauthorised vehicle access onto the grassed areas. This restricted vehicle parking

to the easternmost part of the common situated between the junction of Pasture Road and Leasowe Road, extending east towards Oakmere Close with access through a barrier off Leasowe Road and the designated surfaced car parks.

- 3.2 From 1998 the easternmost part of the grassed area of common was closed to vehicles from 1st October to 31st March each year to protect the site during the winter months and only opened to vehicles for the six months during the summer.
- 3.3 In 2000 16 acres of Leasowe Common were entered into a Stewardship Agreement with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. This agreement requires that parts of the common are cut once per year after the 15th July to manage the grassland as hay meadow. Since 2005 a further area of common has been added to the hay meadow mowing regime.
- 3.4 The easternmost part of the common is cut throughout the summer months on a regular basis and is managed as amenity grassland.
- 3.5 In 2004 Wirral Council's Community Patrol started locking the barrier onto this part of the grassed area of common each evening due to the number of anti-social activities that were taking place, especially during the evenings, including racing cars, youths on motorbikes and quad bikes, overnight campers and large parties, often with barbecues and open fires.
- 3.6 In 2005 the Friends of North Wirral Coastal Park, supported by Wirral Council's Parks and Countryside Section, was awarded a £25,000 Living Spaces Grant to resurface the existing bridleway within the park and to fence off the westernmost part of Leasowe Common to stop unauthorised access by horses and motorbikes.
- 3.7 In July 2006 Leasowe Common was completely closed to vehicles by permanently keeping locked the access barrier off Leasowe Road. This restricted parking to the three surfaced car parks along the length of the common. The decision was made upon the recommendation of Merseyside Police and after a number of incidents involving motor vehicles on the common and was supported by the Friends of North Wirral Coastal Park and the Friends of Leasowe Lighthouse.
- 3.8 At present there is no vehicle access to any grassed areas of Leasowe Common and under the terms of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) there is no public right of vehicle access to common land without permission of the landowner, in this case Wirral Council.
- 3.9 Between January 2005 and the closure of the easternmost part of the common to vehicles in July 2006, Merseyside Police attended 24 incidents of 'inappropriate use of vehicles' on the common. In the same period Wirral Council's Community Patrol recorded attending a total of 60 incidents on the common of which 41 were vehicle related.
- 3.10 In the two months after the common was closed to vehicles Community Patrol attended a further 9 incidents of which two were vehicle related incidents.
- 3.11 There are still some problems with overnight camping and anti-social behaviour including youths riding motorbikes and quad bikes, but generally these are isolated

incidents and as a result the common is being used more by family groups, dog walkers, picnickers etc.

4.0 FUTURE MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

4.1 Merseyside Police requested that Wirral Council, as the landowners and managers, closed the easternmost part of Leasowe Common to vehicles to ease the anti-social behaviour problems that occurred here. Reopening the common to vehicles would be contrary to the advice of Merseyside Police.

5.0 FINANCIAL AND STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There will be no additional resources required to maintain the closure of Leasowe Common to vehicles.

5.2 The cutting of the common is already being undertaken as part of the Parks and Countryside management schedule for the Frankby District.

5.3 The existing surfaced car parks are currently being resurfaced as part of the Wirral Parks and Countryside annual maintenance program.

5.4 Signage has already been improved and further improvements to signage will be paid for from the North Wirral Coastal Park annual budget.

6.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Access for disabled users is available from the car parks adjacent to the common.

7.0 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Closure of the common to vehicles has resulted in a reduction in anti-social behaviour.

8.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Parts of Leasowe Common are designated as a Site of Biological Interest.

9.0 PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are none arising from this report.

10.0 LOCAL MEMBER SUPPORT IMPLICATIONS

10.1 This report will be of interest to the elected members of the Leasowe, Moreton and Saughall Massie ward.

11.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

11.1 Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) Section 38: Vehicular Access over Common Land. Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

12.0 ANTI-POVERTY IMPLICATIONS

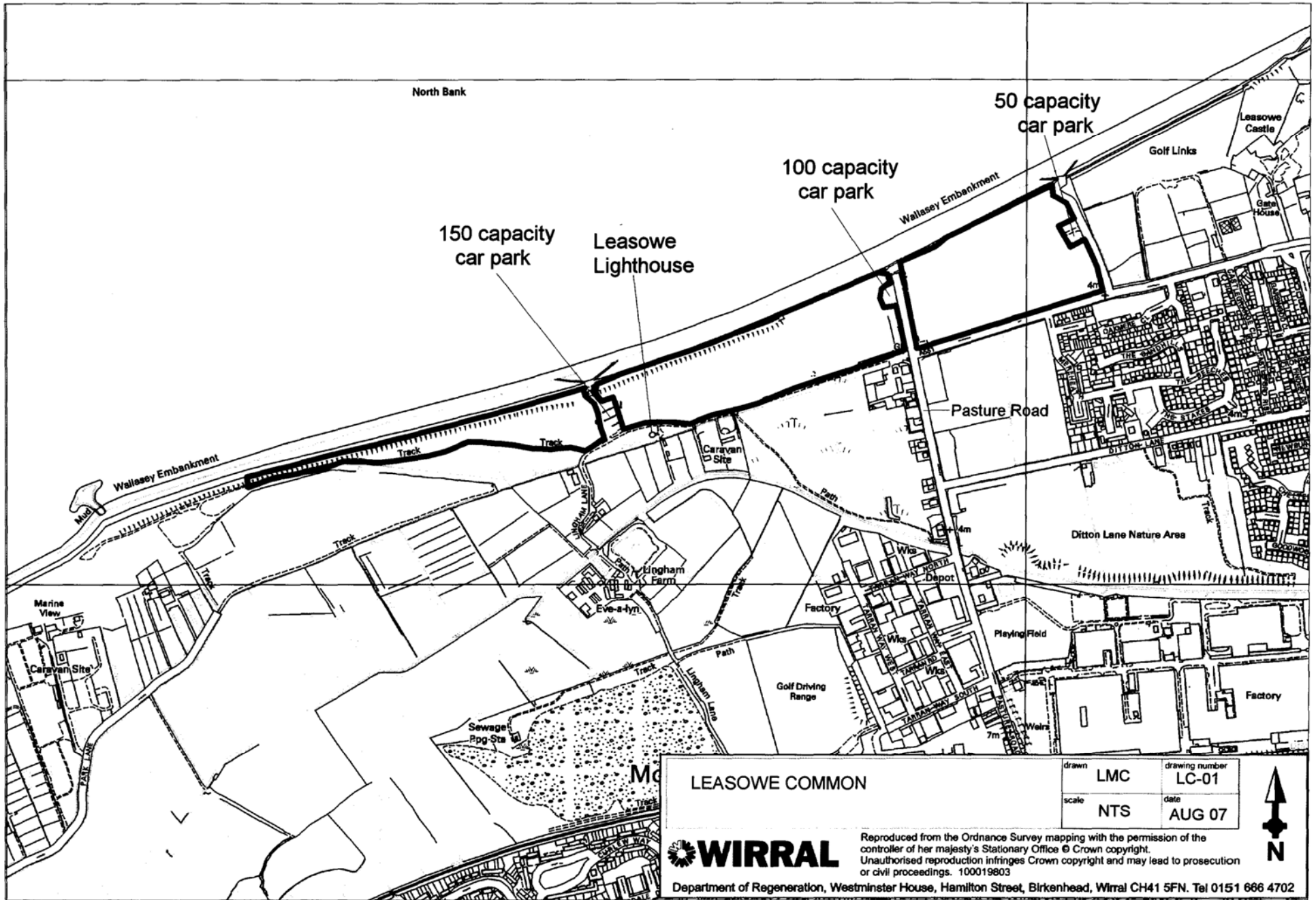
12.1 There are none arising from this report.

13.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

13.1 That the committee confirm the decision to prevent vehicular access to Leasowe Common in the interest of public safety.

Alan Stennard
Director

This report was produced by Roger Calvert who can be contacted on 666 4701.



LEASOWE COMMON

drawn	LMC	drawing number	LC-01
scale	NTS	date	AUG 07

WIRRAL

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