

Hilbre Islands Local Nature Reserve **Management Committee Meeting on 24th November 2006**

Rangers Report May 2006 – November 2006

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This is the six monthly 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.
- Continued close liaison with English Nature over several management issues.
- North Wales hang-gliding and Paragliding Club are no longer pursuing a licence agreement with Wirral Council to launch and land at Leasowe Common. Regulating this activity in the estuary (low flying/unauthorized landing) will therefore be difficult although a second club (CuNim) may be interested in agreeing to a licence or a permit scheme.
- Civil Aviation Authority has requested a minimum flying height restriction for all aircraft including fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters within a 1 nautical mile radius of the centre of the main island which covers part of the West Hoyle Bank and Red Rocks. The area will be denoted on the next reprint of the Civil Aviation Authority maps.
- Visitor numbers were monitored during the golf open championship. Safety information ref. recommended crossing times and recommended crossing routes posted at beach access points provided information for those wishing to visit Hilbre and the closure of the West Kirby railway station kept visitor numbers down.

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

- The central path on Middle Eye has been strimmed to a width of 2 meters in preparation for the delineation of the path using metal pins and rope.
- Larger walls are now able to be built to protect vulnerable plant communities on the west side of Hilbre due to newly acquired expertise within the Friends group.

- Sheep are continuing to be used to control growth of grasses in specific areas. Two sheep 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 was found by the Ranger on the beach near Middle Eye with a large fishing hook attached to a length of line embedded in its lip. The Rangers and Dog Wardens carried out a rescue and the seal was taken to an RSPCA hospital. The seal was treated and a release by the Ranger, Dog Warden and RSPCA staff.

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

- Bracken was removed (by hand pulling) from various areas around the nature reserve.

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

- Proudman Observatory continue with world leading research using equipment based on the main island.
- Blue Planet Aquarium (Ellesmere Port) have expressed an interest in undertaking field research on Hermit Crabs around the reserve.

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.

- Dates have been set in November to continue the archaeological dig within the Gazebo site.
- A local builder has made a site visit to the Buoymasters complex of buildings in order to accurately cost the restoration work needed. On his recommendation, a further visit with specialist contractors is planned.
- A Probation Service representative has undertaken a site visit in order to survey the removal of pebble-dashed rendering on the Buoymasters complex of buildings as part of the renovation.

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

- Plans are being drawn up to change the present bunkhouse to a dayroom which can be used by school groups, volunteer groups and can be used as a meeting room, kitchen area/mess room and wet weather facility. This project is being led by the Special Initiatives Team.

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

- Contractors have repaired the damaged fences around the top paddock.
- ‘Star Design’ are designing a weatherproof noticeboard to replace the main slipway noticeboard damaged by arsonists during the summer.

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

- Friends of Hilbre and have continued to waterproofed the Telegraph Station windows and paint various buildings, both internally and externally.

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 on Middle Eye 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.

- A large bank of batteries has been replaced by a small photo voltaic cell and a small storage battery to provide power for the Mersey Docks and Harbor tide gauge.

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.

- Contractors (NATSOL www.natsol.co.uk) have been contacted with reference to building composting toilets for public use on Hilbre and to look at providing similar facilities for the Buoymaster’s complex of buildings. A site visit with NATSOL and Wirral Council, including the Conservation Officer and Building Inspector, has been arranged for 14th November. Separate male and combined female/disabled facilities are being considered.
- Litter picking undertaken regularly by Rangers, friends 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 Rangers staffed the Telegraph Station Visitor Centre on a regular basis during the summer.
- A dedicated seal watching group, consisting of members of the Friends of Hilbre, has been trained and is operating on various occasions including Telegraph Station Visitor Centre open days.
- Visitor figures have been collated for January to September 2006. These are booked groups only and do not take into account individuals, families or groups which have not booked. 129 group visits recorded to Hilbre through permit scheme. (A total of 3185 individuals).
- The Dee Estuary Voluntary Wardens and Rangers have moved the yellow marker buoys from their summer positions to their winter positions. These provide protection for roosting birds on Little Eye and mainland areas over higher tides.
- Wirral Tourism Section, Press Officers and consultancy group (Creative Concerns) were given a tour of Wirral's Coast, including Hilbre, by the Rangers to look at how 'branding' the coast can include sensitive ecological sites in promotional material without compromising the integrity of the site.

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

- Parks and Countryside Section Mobile Information Unit (MIU) being staffed by Friends of Hilbre once a month at West Kirby Marine Lake. A further 8 bookings for 2007 have been made.
- 5 Sunset Evening Walks to Hilbre were undertaken by Rangers and proved popular with the public.
- The 3 children's 'Rock Pools around Hilbre' events advertised in the Wirral Parks and Countryside Events and Activities Newsletter Summer 2006 Edition proved popular.
- The BBC filmed part of their Coast series on Hilbre which was aired for the first time on the 2nd of November.

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.

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.

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

3.1 A site visit may identify a need for 'change of use' for Objectives 2.3 & 3.4 and possibly Planning Permission to build a new building to house the proposed composting toilets.

4.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The Hilbre Islands are a Local Nature Reserve, a Site of Special Scientific Interest, Ramsar Site, a Special Protection Area and a candidate Special Area of Conservation and make 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
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