

HILBRE ISLANDS LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

RANGER REPORT FEB 2005 – JULY 2005

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is the Annual Ranger Report for the Hilbre Islands LNR. A number of issues are raised for discussion and members are asked to note its contents. The report is structured on Hilbre Islands LNR Management Plan.

2. PROJECT UPDATE

The following projects are grouped under the appropriate objectives, numbered consistent with the management plan.

1.1 Maintain and enhance the level of statutory protection for the reserve.

- An 'alcohol free zone' sign is being provided for the notice board on the south slipway of Hilbre. The enforcement of this rule has encouraged more visits by the police, which has been welcomed by visitors to the islands.
- The yellow marker buoys have been moved to their summer position. They are positioned in a 'v' shape from the north west corner of the Marine Lake car park, outwards to the south side of Little Eye, and from the north side of Little Eye back to nearest corner of the vegetation adjacent to the sand dunes. Within this 'v', which is the main route to Hilbre and a very small percentage of the beach area as a whole, steerable kites are not allowed.

1.2 Maintain and enhance the important habitats of the reserve.

- Soil retaining walls have been lengthened along the west cliffs.
- Older soil retaining walls have been maintained.
- Distinctive paths have been mown on Hilbre to encourage the public away from sensitive areas.

1.3 Maintain and enhance the important species of the reserve.

1.4 Control invasive & alien species where they are a threat to the important native species or habitats.

- A Hedgehog was removed from the island and released on the mainland.
- Bracken pulling and cutting has been done in some areas on the island. This is to discourage bracken growth and to encourage the spread of grasses and wild flowers native to Hilbre.
- The invasive plant Alexanders has been removed or cut back extensively around Hilbre.

1.5 Promote and co-ordinate research on the important habitats and species.

- Ongoing monitoring of important bird, mammal and invertebrate species has been carried out, mainly by members of Hilbre Bird Observatory. The results will be published in their annual report.
- Two students from John Moors University are staying in the bunkhouse for a month each. As well as providing extra security and assistance for the ranger they will be carrying out environmental studies/projects. Copies of the resulting reports will be kept in the rangers office on Hilbre and will be available to any interested parties.

1.6 Protect the geological importance of Hilbre.

2.1 Maintain the natural unspoilt nature of Hilbre.

2.2 Protect the historic and archaeological interest of Hilbre.

- The repairs to the lifeboat slipway are being constantly monitored. The repairs are holding up well at present.
- The Mersey Waterfront Regional Park bid is progressing well and there is wide reaching and positive backing from groups associated with Hilbre. The Hilbre bid will be put forward as part of a co-ordinated, extensive bid for the whole of the Wirral coastline.
- A request has been put forwards by Liverpool Museum to do a geophysical survey of all three islands within the reserve. A date will be set for the latter part of 2005.

2.3 Maintain use of the existing buildings that is consistent with the character of Hilbre.

- Repairs to the buoymasters complex caused by winter storms are ongoing.

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

- The storm damage, which had occurred to fences at various sites around the island, proved to be more extensive than was first thought. Fencing contractors have provided quotes and will be repairing sections of fencing in early autumn when the work will cause less disruption to visitors.
- Funding has been gained by donation for the provision of two new bench seats for the picnic area outside the Telegraph Station Lookout Interpretative Centre. They will be of a similar design to the benches already on Hilbre. This donation is from the Wirral Footpath and Open Space Preservation Society.

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

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

- Quotes are still being sought for repairs to damage to the sea wall at the south end of shell bay.

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

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

- Extra solar panels have been fitted, with the existing panels, onto a purpose built frame sited in the Rangers garden.

3.3 Reduce the environmental impact of motor vehicles.

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

- Litter has been removed from the island on a regular basis.

4.1 To encourage responsible use of the reserve that that draw on, and are consistent with, its natural character.

- During the nesting period, and whilst the young birds are fledging dog walkers are encouraged to keep their dogs on a short lead. They are happy to comply whilst on the islands.

- The public are also encouraged not to walk through areas of long grass during the nesting and fledging period.

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

- The reprinted Hilbre leaflet is again available. It is proving very popular with visitors to the reserve.
- The webcam, sighted on the tower on Hilbre, is proving popular with 3,346 hits since mid January.
- Continuing in-house Ranger training relating to Hilbre has been carried out.
- Tide gauge maintenance regime was as usual.

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

- Lighthouse maintenance was carried out as usual.

4.4 To promote voluntary and community involvement in Hilbre.

- Groups such as Guides and the Wirral Countryside Volunteers and have stayed in the bunkhouse overnight and have carried out environmental work on the reserve. The Friends of Hilbre continue to do environmental, public relation and fundraising on and for the reserve.

3.0 FINANCIAL AND STAFFING, EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS, PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

3.1 There are none arising from this report.

4.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Hilbre Islands are a Local Nature Reserve, a Site of Special Scientific Interest, a 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 The report may be of particular interest to members in the Hoylake & Meols, and West Kirby & Thurstaston Wards.

6.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 That the report be noted.

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