

DRAFT WIRRAL HERITAGE STRATEGY 2011 - 2016

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Part 1: STRATEGY

1. INTRODUCTION

1. 1 Why Have a Heritage Strategy for Wirral?

Wirral's heritage is distinctive, diverse and in some cases, world class. Ranging from unique historic and natural landscapes, through outstanding model villages, to the vast complex of 19th century dockland structures, heritage provides the context for our everyday lives. It underpins the borough's national, regional and local identity and makes a significant contribution to our quality of life. It provides recreation and employment, contributes to the local and regional economy and can be a force in regeneration, tourism and sustainable development. Heritage is not just about the past. It impacts on all who live in, work in or visit Wirral today.

Most of all heritage is about people. It is about people learning from and enjoying this special place. It is about people caring for and looking after those things of value which we have inherited from previous generations and ensuring that they are safeguarded for the future.

The purpose of this strategy is to set out a comprehensive and integrated heritage framework for Wirral, which will form the basis for heritage activities in the short and medium terms and establish principles to be followed in the longer term. This strategy will also establish priorities for capital investment in heritage and heritage assets, to maximise educational, recreational, tourism and regeneration opportunities.

The strategy will reflect the great interest local people have in their heritage, as demonstrated by the large numbers of groups, societies and individuals who actively engage with Wirral's heritage. It is hoped that following consultation, the strategy will be agreed and accepted by the whole community and will be used as a 'living' document to guide heritage activity throughout the borough.

An important element of the strategy will be to provide an overview of Wirral's heritage by identifying those key heritage assets and resources which have value at local, national and even international levels. Within this context of understanding the significance of the borough's heritage, the strategy will be better placed to provide a clear direction for the management, promotion and celebration of that heritage. It will identify the wide array of projects across the borough which are, or will be, seeking heritage funding. By establishing clear priorities based on deliverability, phasing and strategic

influence, clashes of interest should be avoided and likelihood of success increased.

1.2 Who is the strategy for?

- **Those investing in and/or seeking funding for heritage projects**

By giving an overview of the strategic priorities of Wirral, the strategy will enable project developers to focus applications on appropriate funders and help them to address the key questions funding bodies are asking. By working within this strategic framework, Wirral projects will be more likely to obtain funding at a time of diminishing financial resources.

- **Partners and stakeholders.**

The delivery of this strategy will require a partnership approach between Wirral Council, its partners and key stakeholders. By clearly defining the roles and responsibilities of each group and developing a more joined up and holistic approach to the management and further development of the borough's heritage, there will be far more scope to successfully deliver the challenges ahead.

- **Funding partners.**

By giving a firm steer on the priorities for Wirral in heritage investment and clearly demonstrating how these relate to their own priorities and strategic objectives, the strategy should improve the quality of the funding bids received from the borough.

- **Local heritage and community groups**

The strategy will not only give local interest groups an opportunity to feed into the overall framework and priorities for heritage development on Wirral, but will also establish key criteria for local project development. In this way local groups will be able to develop their smaller projects and funding bids, in line with strategic and funders' priorities.

1.3 Definition and Scope

The definition of heritage is very broad and can mean different things to different people and organisations. Wirral's heritage assets include historic buildings, museum and archives collections and natural and man-made landscapes; but also less tangible aspects like our traditions, legends and memories. In fact it could be said that heritage consists of all those things we value that have been inherited from previous generations and which we wish to protect to hand over to our children or share with others.

This strategy will focus on heritage in its widest context, for it is the sum total of all these elements which has forged the special character of Wirral and all who live here.

While the value of some heritage is recognised and protected by government designation, much of our heritage does not enjoy statutory protection. Whilst the Council has a duty to safeguard heritage assets such as listed buildings, conservation areas, museum collections and archives, there is increasing recognition of the importance of 'local' heritage to our communities, and an increasing pressure for local people to take a more pro-active role in the protection and enhancement of that heritage. This strategy will define statutory responsibilities, but will also explore the ways in which residents and communities can be empowered to enhance the understanding and management of heritage at a local level.

1.4 Vision, Aims and Objectives

Wirral's heritage is a tremendous asset, but the contribution heritage makes to our quality of life, the regeneration of our communities and the local economy can sometimes be overlooked. Too often, Wirral's heritage is overshadowed by the great maritime city of Liverpool to the west and the Roman city of Chester to the east. Yet Wirral has an outstandingly diverse heritage stretching back over 8,000 years of human occupation. The borough abounds with sites, buildings and landscapes reflecting almost every period of history, most of which are accessible to the public for leisure learning and enjoyment. However, the picture is not all rosy. Throughout the borough there are buildings and sites of historic interest which are at risk through neglect, changing patterns of use or threat of redevelopment. The challenge over the next few years will be to understand the scale of the problem and to work with partner organisations to find new and innovative solutions to safeguard this important heritage.

The vision underpinning this strategy is to protect, enhance and use Wirral's heritage for the benefit of local people and the local economy. It aims to emphasise the value of heritage in both social and economic terms. Our heritage can be a tremendous source of community pride and life-long

learning. Equally, heritage has a significant and growing role as an economic driver in regeneration projects and our tourism offer.

Central to the achievement of this vision will be the way we all work together to achieve our objectives. The Council, strategic partners, private sector and local people all need to work together, pooling experience, knowledge and skills. With a shared vision, increased understanding and appreciation of heritage issues and a clearly defined framework for action, Wirral will be well placed to maximise its heritage assets for the good of the social and economic life of the whole community.

The aim of the Wirral heritage strategy is:

“To ensure that Wirral's heritage is protected, managed, enhanced and used to meet the educational, recreational and sustainable needs of local people, visitors and potential investors to the borough”.

The strategy objectives are:

- To promote, celebrate and communicate the value of the heritage of Wirral as a source of national significance and local civic and community pride;
- To identify, recognise and give an understanding of Wirral's heritage, which will inform future management and development;
- To actively promote the role and opportunities presented by heritage in terms of the wider regeneration, economic and tourism development of the borough and to provide a framework for investment;
- To ensure the highest standards of stewardship and protection of heritage assets, including buildings, natural or man-made landscapes and art and historical collections;
- To promote community participation in heritage and to maximise the contribution heritage makes to education, lifelong learning and social development;
- To ensure that Wirral's heritage is widely accessible and to develop positive strategies for ensuring that heritage is enjoyed and understood by the widest possible audience, particularly those who have traditionally been excluded from heritage activity.

2 HERITAGE IN WIRRAL

2. 1 Historic Overview : the Story of Wirral

From earliest times, the character of Wirral has been defined by the fact that it is a peninsula, surrounded by the Mersey to the north, the Dee to the south and the Irish Sea to the west. Although 'not quite' an island, the proximity of the sea and two major rivers have shaped its identity for over 8,000 years. The earliest evidence of human activity is of Stone Age flint manufacture at Greasby. During the Neolithic period, the peninsula was heavily forested, with evidence of settlement sites along the thirty miles of coastline, notably at Meols, which became an important centre for international trade with links to the Mediterranean.

By the time of the Roman invasion in AD 43, Wirral was occupied by a Celtic tribe called the Cornovii. The legionary fortress of Deva (Chester) was established around AD 71 and the Romans introduced a network of roads in Wirral although only a few stretches have been found. The principal route was probably between the fortress and the trading post at Meols. Pre-Norman settlement is evidenced in place-names, with Viking names such as Thingwall and Thurstaton. Sites at Woodchurch, Overchurch, Landican and Storeton are of Saxon and early Christian origin. Many academics believe Storeton Ridge to be the site of the Battle of Brunanburg, fought in 937 between Athelstan, king of England and the allied armies of the Scots, the king of Strathclyde and the Norse king of Dublin. The English victory consolidated the boundary between England and Scotland and confirmed England as a unified kingdom.

In 1150, the Norman baron Hamo de Massey founded a small Benedictine priory dedicated to St Mary and St James. The site was an isolated headland on the banks of the Mersey at what is now Birkenhead. The monks soon operated the first ferry across the Mersey. The present day remains of the Priory are the oldest standing buildings on Merseyside.

Long before the Port of Liverpool gained ascendancy in the 1780s, the ports of Wirral were thriving; Shotwick and Parkgate now in Cheshire, Dawpool near Thurstaton and Meols in Wirral. Meols is now seen as one of the most important coastal trading sites in North West England, with a history stretching back from Neolithic times to the 18th century. However, during the early 19th century, storms and high tides progressively destroyed signs of settlement and the port of Meols is now two miles west, under the Irish Sea. Happily, thousands of artefacts have been found and survive in many museum collections.

Until the early 19th century Wirral was very sparsely populated, with an agrarian economy centred on small communities living in hamlets and villages. This began to change dramatically as the industrial revolution gained momentum, bringing to Wirral William Laird in the 1820s, Price in the 1830s and William Hesketh Lever in the 1880s. Laird and Lever changed Wirral forever and became world famous names.

Price established the first factory in Wirral – Price's Candleworks in Bromborough Pool – and to house his workforce built the second oldest industrial village in Britain. The Candleworks went on to become Price's Chemicals, then Unichema. William Laird from Glasgow together with his son John, founded one of the greatest shipyards in the world with commissions from across the globe. Some of the Royal Navy's greatest ships were built here, whilst other vessels like the Confederate raider 'Alabama', wrote themselves into the history books. Laird effectively founded the modern town of Birkenhead, which was characterised by its imposing Hamilton Square and Argyle Street, its theatres and music halls, fine late Georgian buildings, the first tramway in Europe and the world's first public park – Birkenhead Park – which played a key role in the development of the parks movement worldwide and a model for parks design including Central Park, New York.

The other great Victorian entrepreneur and philanthropist was William Hesketh Lever, whose legacy to Wirral has been a mighty industrial giant producing soaps, detergents and many other products which are sold world-wide; an exquisite model village at Port Sunlight; and the renowned Lady Lever Art Gallery built as the permanent home of Lord Lever's outstanding art collection.

Birkenhead's first docks, the Morpeth and Egerton Docks were built by Laird in 1847. Ten years later the Mersey Docks and Harbours Act brought together the Liverpool and Birkenhead docks under one ownership. As with most of the Liverpool docks of this period, the engineer was Jesse Hartley, an admirer of Italianate architecture, evidence of which can still be seen today. The hydraulic tower in the centre of Birkenhead docks was inspired by the Medici Palace, now the Uffizi in Florence. The Birkenhead and Wallasey docks, once known as the 'Granary of Britain', were built to receive wheat, maize and barley from all over the world, particularly the USA. Until the 1960s the entire dock system was in constant operation, with dozens of quays and warehouses, criss-crossed with freight lines. Many liner and freight lines worked out of Birkenhead including Brocklebank, Harrison and the Pacific Steam Navigation Company. Although only a fraction of the dock systems now work in traditional port activity, the legacy of buildings and dock structures is still impressive.

In contrast to the industrial conurbations around Birkenhead, Tranmere and Wallasey, New Brighton grew to become one of Britain's best loved resort towns. Essentially an Edwardian town, it became known as the 'Playground of the North', a popular resort for working people to enjoy their well earned week off. They were drawn by what was once the tallest tower in Britain with its famous ballroom, New Brighton Pier and a massive outdoor swimming pool, once the biggest in the world. Sadly, as with many old resort towns, competition from package holidays, lack of investment and social change,

meant that by the 1980s New Brighton had lost much of what made it special and thus its attractions waned.

The recent history of Wirral has been one of mixed fortunes, which has exacerbated the social and economic contrasts between the north and south of the peninsula. To the south 'Deeside Wirral' has retained its affluence with well-to-do towns such as Heswall, West Kirby and Hoylake interspersed with open rural areas and pretty villages. On the northern side, the dense urban and industrial belt fronting the Mersey has not fared as well. Towns such as New Brighton, Wallasey and the Docks, Birkenhead and Bromborough began to decline in the 1950s, resulting in physical deterioration, lack of investment, rising unemployment and a whole range of deprivation problems. It is against this background that Wirral has targeted its massive regeneration effort, resulting in many millions of pounds of inward investment to date and giving key historic areas like Hamilton Square in Birkenhead and the run-down resort of New Brighton new leases of life.

2.2 Heritage Assets and Resources

Heritage assets are all those things that survive from Wirral's history and which now contribute to the physical and social identity of the borough.

• Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas

Wirral contains over 1,700 Listed Buildings and 25 Conservation Areas, including Port Sunlight and Hamilton Square, both of which are of national importance. There are also many other buildings and structures which although not designated, make a significant contribution to the character of the built environment. As well as individual buildings, the borough has two early model villages of outstanding quality and survival, important complexes of industrial buildings and one of the largest collection of 19th century dockland structures in the country.

• Public Realm

Street furniture, historic street surfaces, public art, statues and war memorials all have impact on the quality of the local environment. Even small architectural details like railings, shop canopies and historic boundary walls add interest and identity to our towns and villages. Whilst many of these are not protected by statute, they are frequently 'local landmarks', held with great affection by the local community.

• Archaeological Sites

Above and below ground archaeological remains are a significant part of Wirral's heritage. There are nine Scheduled Ancient Monuments

(SAMs) of national importance within the borough. These are: Birkenhead Priory; Bromborough Hall moated site; Grange Beacon; Irby Hall moated site; New Hall; Overchurch site; St. Barnabas Cross; the standing cross at Holy Church, Woodchurch and Storeton Hall. Additionally, Wirral has numerous sites reflecting its Saxon and Viking heritage, notably at Meols and Greasby. There is evidence that the Battle of Brunanburh of 937 may have been fought on Wirral, but as the site has not yet been positively identified it is not a Designated Battlefield.

- **Historic Parks and Cemeteries**

Wirral is noted for its Victorian parks and cemeteries, including the recently restored Birkenhead Park, the only public park to be listed Grade I on English Heritage's National Register of Historic Parks and Gardens. Also included are Thornton Manor, Port Sunlight and also Flybrick Memorial Gardens, a cemetery of European significance.

- **Natural landscapes, shorelines and wildlife, including special habitats and species**

The Wirral peninsula is a region of exceptional natural beauty and benefits from one of the most outstanding coastlines in the North West. Within the borough there are 12 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) including the Mersey and Dee estuaries which are also designated European RAMSAR sites of international significance. There are over 70 Sites of Biological Importance (SBIs) and 15 Regionally Important Geological Sites. The coastline is particularly noted for bird-life and the Dee Estuary and Mersey Estuary have been adopted as Marine Protected Areas by Natural England. There are over 1,500 hectares of public open space including Arrowe Country Park, Eastham Country Park and Wirral Country Park – the first designated country park in Britain.

- **Museums, galleries and collections**

Wirral Council is responsible for two accredited museums and a substantial collection of many thousands of objects dating from prehistoric times to the present day.

Birkenhead Priory, founded in 1150 is the oldest standing building on Merseyside. It is Grade II* and Grade II listed and also a Scheduled Ancient Monument. The site includes the surviving tower of St. Mary's, Birkenhead's first parish church. The Chapter House is consecrated as an Anglican Church and above is a chapel dedicated to HMS Conway. A small museum tells the history of the site and building.

The Grade II listed Williamson Art Gallery and Museum opened in 1928 and houses the vast majority of the borough's collection of art and history. This includes a large collection of ship models, focusing on Cammell Laird built vessels and important collections of ceramics from Birkenhead's Della Robbia Pottery (1894 – 1906).

Discussions are continuing about the future of Wirral Transport Museum and the trams, Shore Road Pumping Station and Birkenhead Town Hall, which is now closed to the public.

Wirral is also home to the renowned Lady Lever Art Gallery in Port Sunlight, run by National Museums Liverpool and the Port Sunlight Museum, managed through the Port Sunlight Heritage Trust. Fort Perch Rock in New Brighton is a privately owned early 19th century gun emplacement with museum displays. The Charles Dawson Brown Museum attached to St Bridget's Church in West Kirby, has displays of Viking and other carved stones. There are currently plans to extend the premises and redisplay the collection.

Wirral's archives collection, housed in the Cheshire Lines Building in Birkenhead, covers almost five miles of shelving and contains thousands of historic records relating to the history of the borough. Some date back as far as the 15th century, but the majority are of the 18th and 19th centuries and include the extensive collections of Cammell Laird Shipbuilders.

- **Sport and entertainment**

There is a long history of sport in the borough, which is particularly noted for sailing and golf. The internationally famous Royal Liverpool golf course in Hoylake has an extraordinary claim on golfing heritage. The Liverpool Golf Club was formed in 1869, granted the title 'Royal' in 1871 and was at the forefront of the development of amateur golf, hosting the first ever Amateur Championships in 1885 and the first English Amateur Championship in 1926. It has hosted the Open Championships on 11 occasions, most recently in 2006 and will do so again in 2014. Wallasey Golf Club has been an Open Championship qualifier golf course on a number of occasions and is world renowned as being the home of the Stableford scoring system.

In more recent times, Wirral played host to the British film industry. In 1981, scenes from the film *Chariots of Fire* were filmed in Wirral, with the Oval Sports Centre in Bebington representing the Colombes Olympis Stadium in Paris, whilst Woodside ferry terminal was used for embarkation scenes set in Dover.

- **People**

Wirral's history is marked by a remarkable range of notable people, including three of Victorian England's most significant industrialists and philanthropists, William and John Laird and William Hesketh Lever. Thomas Brassey of Birkenhead was involved in the building of many of the world's great railways, including those in France, Austria, Italy, Canada, Moldova, the Crimea, Canada and the UK. Much of the Canadian railway infrastructure was built in Birkenhead and shipped to Canada.

Wirral's sporting greats include the Wimbledon champion Lotte Dodd, cricketer Sir Ian Botham and the Olympic cyclist Chris Boardman. Birkenhead was the birthplace of the mountaineer George Leigh Mallory, who when asked why he wanted to climb Everest gave the immortal reply "because it is there". He disappeared on Everest in June 1924 with his Birkenhead born colleague Andrew "Sandy" Irvine.

Wilfred Owen the First World War poet spent his formative years in Birkenhead and attended the Birkenhead Institute. Wirral is well represented in the world of stage film and television, with many well-known names coming from here including James Bond actor Daniel Craig, Patricia Routledge, Glenda Jackson and Paul O'Grady.

- **International Links**

With its long maritime history and proximity to the Port of Liverpool, Wirral has strong connections with countries throughout the world. The Peninsula's Viking heritage has resulted in particularly close links being developed with Scandinavia. Indeed, recent research led by Professor Stephen Harding of Nottingham University, has revealed a strong Scandinavian influence in the DNA of old Wirral families, demonstrating that the Vikings settled on Wirral in large numbers and left a genetic legacy which survives and continues today.

Due to the numerous links with the American Civil War, Wirral is only the second place outside the USA to have been accorded American Civil War Heritage Site status by the Civil War Preservation Trust. The American Civil War Round Table (UK), in conjunction with the Trust, has produced the Wirral Civil War Heritage Trail, celebrating all the known Civil War sites on Wirral. Two of the War's most famous Confederate Navy ships, the CSS *Alabama* and the CSS *Shenandoah* were built at the Laird Bothers shipyard in the 1860s, while other places of international significance include the Argyle Rooms in Birkenhead, an important meeting place for the anti-slavery lobby.

- **Innovation**

Given its size and location, Wirral can boast a remarkable number of historical 'firsts', many of which put the Peninsula and its people at the cutting edge of technological, industrial, sporting and cultural innovation. These include:

- 1847 – Birkenhead Park opened as the first public park in the world
- 1856 – Birkenhead became the first unincorporated borough to adopt the Public Libraries Act and Birkenhead Public Library opened. It was the world's first public lending library.
- 1860 - The world's first ever steel vessel was built by Cammell Laird. The *Ma Roberts* was constructed for Dr Livingstone's Zambesi expedition to Africa.
- 1860 – An American, George Francis Train, inaugurated the first street railway, with horse drawn trams running between Woodside and Birkenhead Park.
- 1862 – The first British tramcar factory opened in Cleveland Street, Birkenhead.
- 1879 – The *Resurgam*, built in Birkenhead was the world's first steam powered working submarine.
- 1885 – The 1st Amateur Golf Championship was held at the Royal Golf Club in Hoylake.
- 1888 – The Mersey rail tunnel opened. It was the first underwater rail tunnel in the world.
- 1894 - The Della Robbia Pottery was founded in Birkenhead and became an important part of the Art Nouveau movement in Britain.
- 1897 – New Brighton Tower was completed. Standing at 621 feet it was the country's highest tower, beating Blackpool Tower by over 100 feet.
- 1908 – The Boy Scout movement was inaugurated by Sir Robert Baden-Powell in the YMCA building in Grange Road, Birkenhead. The first world Scout Jamboree was held in Arrowe Park in 1924.
- 1920 – The first all-welded ship in the world, the *Fulgar*, was built at Cammell Laird.

- 1931 – The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association was founded in Wallasey.
- 1962 – The world's first scheduled passenger hovercraft service was inaugurated between Wallasey and Rhyl in North Wales.

2.3 Heritage Involves Us All

The conservation, protection, interpretation and promotion of heritage is not just the responsibility of national and local government; throughout Wirral a whole range of different organisations and individuals are actively engaged in heritage and in delivering heritage activity at many levels.

- **The Council**

Wirral Council currently has the responsibility of delivering a range of statutory and non-statutory heritage and heritage related services. Increasingly this is achieved through partnership with national, regional and local bodies. The Council provides strategic lead for initiatives which impact on heritage and have appointed a Heritage Tsar to champion heritage issues. Elected members have and will increasingly have an important part to play in local heritage. They 'know their patch' and are ideally placed to identify and promote issues which their local communities regard as important.

The Council services whose work currently has a heritage focus include:

- The Museums Service which is responsible for the provision of two local museums and galleries and for delivering a wide range of learning, outreach and cultural activities to many different audiences.
- Wirral Archive Service acquires and maintains records with any material link to Wirral and its collections can be used to research all aspects of local history, including social, economic, industrial, administrative and family history. The two main aims of the service are access – making the records accessible to all – and outreach – informing everyone about the collections..
- The Conservation and Design Team is responsible for Listed Buildings within Wirral as well as the preservation and enhancement of Conservation Areas and other historic spaces. Urban Design is an integral part of the planning process and the team works with developers, architects and stakeholders to ensure that new developments enrich the existing environment and create buildings and spaces that are attractive, stimulating and sustainable. The Council's Core Strategy will underline the importance of the protection of local distinctiveness.

- Wirral has no dedicated Archaeological Service, but together with the other four Merseyside districts, will seek to work with National Museums Liverpool to ensure that the Merseyside Historic Environment Record (HER) is maintained, updated and produced in an easily accessible electronic version.
- The Parks and Countryside Service has responsibility for the management and maintenance of historic parks and cemeteries and delivers a wide range of educational and interpretative activities including walks, trails and other activities relating to heritage.
- Birkenhead, Bebington and Wallasey libraries have local history collections and give access to a wealth of on-line resources for family and local history. Libraries are well used as bases for talks, workshops and short courses on topics of local heritage interest. The Service has worked with a range of partners to deliver creative research, reminiscence and community projects.
- Although not having direct responsibility for heritage conservation, maintenance or presentation, the Regeneration and Destination Marketing services have a key role to play in attracting inward investment for projects which enhance and interpret the historic environment, promote the borough's heritage and attract visitors. By providing advice and support on external funding applications, particularly the National Lottery, the Council has assisted many local organisations in developing and delivering a wide range of heritage-based projects.
- **National and regional heritage organisations**

The National Trust does not have any historic properties on Wirral, but does own Heswall Fields, part of Caldby Hill and part of Thurstaston Common and small areas of woodland at Harrock Hill, Irby and Irby Common. There are no English Heritage sites within the borough, but as the government's statutory advisor on the historic environment, English Heritage works in close partnership with the Council, advising on key buildings and strategies and providing funding support towards conservation and development plans. English Heritage also co-ordinates and promotes national Heritage Open Days (HODs), although the active organisation of the Wirral open days programme is delivered by volunteers through the Wirral History and Heritage Association, with support from the Council.

The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) uses money from the National Lottery to grant- assist a wide range of projects involving local, regional and national heritage. With the notable exception of the £7.4 million grant towards the £11.4 million refurbishment of Birkenhead Park, the

Heritage Lottery Fund recognises that Wirral has fared less well than other authorities in attracting HLF funding, particularly under the Your Heritage and Young Roots (aimed at young people ages 13 to 25) programmes. Council officers and the Wirral History and Heritage Association are now actively promoting these HLF strands and encouraging local organisations to apply for appropriate funding.

- **Community groups, organisations and societies**

The great interest local people have in their heritage is reflected in the number and variety of organisations engaging in heritage and delivering heritage activities. These include civic and local history societies, family history groups, friends groups and special interest groups – ranging from transport history to the American Civil War.

The Wirral History and Heritage Association (WHHA) represents over 70 local societies and acts as an umbrella group for networking, dissemination of information and engaging local groups in common issues. Its mission is “to work with Wirral Council to establish and implement a heritage, history and cultural strategy for Wirral, to make the past part of our future – and to create a cycle of understanding, valuing, caring and enjoyment for all residents of Wirral”.

The WHHA hosts a web-site promoting local heritage activities and disseminating information. It also organises special events, including Wirral’s Heritage Open Days and the popular annual Local History Fair. Additionally, the association is working with the Council to support a range of heritage initiatives, including Buildings at Risk and the development of a Local List.

- **Friends groups**

Wirral parks and countryside spaces are supported by 36 voluntary Friends Groups, comprised mainly of local residents who are keen to get involved or have their say in the management of local green spaces. Many of these groups organise a wealth of heritage-based events, including conservation work, walks, trails, performance, re-enactments and family activities. Both the Williamson Art Gallery and Wirral Archives have active friends groups to support their work.

- **Individuals**

There are a number of local people with a strong interest in and knowledge of the borough. These people contribute to the widening appreciation of local heritage through research, giving lectures and talks, collecting evidence and producing publications.

2.4 Heritage Activity in Wirral

Throughout Wirral there are many opportunities for people to engage with and participate in heritage activities. Whilst some services are provided by the Council, much of the heritage activity in the borough is organised and delivered by local voluntary groups and organisations.

- **Formal and informal learning**

Through its Arts and Museums service, the Council has established strong links with many local schools and colleges. The Williamson Art Gallery and Birkenhead Priory provide opportunities for curriculum based learning for school groups, including sessions based on literacy and numeracy as well as historical events. Both museums offer informal learning activities, including family learning, special activities, talks and workshops. However, given the current physical restriction of each venue and staffing limitations, it has not yet been possible to fully exploit the educational or learning potential of either site.

The Parks and Countryside service, often in partnership with Friends Groups, has been another major provider of learning services. For example in 2009-10, there were 27 school visits to Birkenhead Park involving over 900 local children and Wirral country Park offers over 4,748 hours of voluntary activity projects each year.

Local library staff and staff from the Wirral Archives service provide taster sessions on researching local and family history using original books, maps and documents as well as ICT resources. The Archives Service holds Saturday morning workshops on family and local history topics, aims to work with two schools each month and hosts group visits or workshops for local history societies, adult education groups and other informal groups interested in historical topics.

- **Community outreach**

The appointment of a Heritage Outreach Officer in March 2010, has provided new opportunities to extend heritage activities in local communities and engage new audiences in local history and heritage. Working with local organisations, mainly through the Wirral History and Heritage Association, the post is intended to grow capacity, advise on funding and project development and devise new and creative means to engage in Wirral's heritage.

- **Heritage Open Days**

Since first participating in Heritage Open Days (HODs) in 2007, Wirral's programme has grown from strength to strength. Now organised locally by Wirral History and Heritage Association, there were ten

events in 2009, growing to forty three in 2010. Feedback has shown that Heritage Open Days provide an excellent opportunity to build on the enthusiasm and knowledge of local groups and bring heritage to the attention of a wider audience.

- **Festivals, fairs and re-enactments**

Wirral has a number of large-scale festivals including the Food and Drink Festival, Wirral Festival of Transport in Birkenhead Park, the Bus and Tram Festival based around Pacific Road and Heritage Open Days. Individual communities also organise a range of celebratory events, such as the Scarecrow Festival now held at Eastham. The Wirral History and Heritage Association hold a very successful annual Local History Fair, which brings together local history groups and enthusiasts from throughout the borough. There is a tradition of Viking and Norse re-enactments on Wirral and the living history group Wirhalh Skip Felag (Wirral Vikings) are particularly active around the borough. The annual St Olave Wirral Viking Walk, from Neston to Chester, commemorates St Olave the 'Viking Saint' and celebrates Wirral's links with the Vikings.

- **Community drama and performance**

There are numerous examples of Council services and community organisations using drama to interpret Wirral's history, although this is usually dependant upon obtaining external funding. For instance, the Parks and Countryside Service has worked with a range of partners to research, script and create musical performances to tell the stories of various sites including Flaybrick Memorial Gardens and Bidston Hill. As part of the Bidston Windmill Project, young people created a historically based musical trail around Bidston Hill and also puppet safaris exploring the site. Birkenhead Reference Library recently worked with drama professionals and young people to research the history of the library, especially during World War 2. The young people then wrote a musical drama based on their findings, which was performed in the library in 2011.

- **Walks, talks and tours**

Most Wirral parks and countryside spaces offer a regular programme of walks and related activities through the Ranger service, and these are supplemented by walks led by volunteers from Friends Groups and local societies. Nearly all history and heritage groups have a talk or lecture programme during the winter months, and organise site visits and special interest tours for their members. Individually these activities are relatively small scale, but together they give many thousands of

local people the opportunity to participate in heritage and are probably the most popular form of heritage engagement for local people.

- **Community archaeology**

Community archaeology has been successfully conducted within the borough, notably through the 2007 community excavation at Leasowe Lighthouse and Meols led by the Field Archaeology Unit of National Museums Liverpool. Community archaeology enables local people to work alongside professional archaeologists and discover more about important archaeological sites through investigation, fieldwork and recording.

- **Interpretative trails (on-site and self guiding)**

The Wirral Maritime Trail from Eastham to New Brighton has helped to highlight Wirral's coastal history in this area through a series of plaques telling the stories of places of interest and the people who lived there. A proposal to develop Hoylake Promenade with a series of interpretative artworks is being developed, although this will now be subject to the need to stabilize the sea defence wall and roadway, hopefully in time for the 2014 Open Golf Championships to be held at the Royal Liverpool.

There are also aspirations to link the existing Wirral Maritime Trail with the proposed Hoylake Promenade improvements, through the creation of a series of interpretative artworks along the four mile length of the North Wirral Coastal Park. This would bring together community groups from Meols, Leasowe and Wallasey in celebration of the rich and diverse maritime heritage of North Wirral.

The Council has produced a range of trails and interpretative leaflets, while many local history societies and community groups have produced local trails which are available as leaflets and on-line.

2.5 The Value of Wirral's Heritage

Heritage can provide a key driving force in both economic regeneration and tourism. Historic buildings, places, events and activities and a high quality environment are all prerequisite to maximising economic development potential, projecting a positive image and attracting jobs, investment and tourism. Each year English Heritage's national *Heritage Counts* report assesses the state of the country's historic environment and provides evidence of the wider social and economic role for heritage. In 2010 the report explored the economic impact of heritage and found that:

- £1 of investment in the historic environment generates £1.6 of additional economic activity over a 10 year period.
- One in four businesses agree that the historic environment is an important factor in deciding where to locate – surprisingly, the same as for good road access.
- Heritage tourism is a vital economic sector, directly generating £7.4 billion of GDP nationally and supporting 195,000 jobs.

In Wirral, the importance of heritage as a driver for regeneration was demonstrated in the Single Regeneration Budget initiatives of the 1990s. Citylands, Lairdside, New Wallasey, Wirral Waterfront and, particularly, the Hamilton Quarter – all had significant heritage, conservation, cultural and tourism elements within their schemes. Current regeneration programmes – Wirral Waters, Woodside and the regeneration of Hoylake, West Kirby and Deeside Wirral - have the potential to bring significant investment into the borough and have a strong heritage focus.

3 HERITAGE AND THE WIDER CONTEXT

The heritage strategy for Wirral must respond to, interact with and support the priorities and themes which currently drive heritage at national, regional and local levels. However, at a time when government and regional policies and agendas are in transition, the strategy will need to adopt a flexible approach, which can adapt and evolve to accommodate new approaches to heritage delivery.

Central Government – the department for Culture, Media and Sport has overall responsibility for heritage policy in England. While priorities and policies for culture and heritage are currently being reviewed, the government recognises that culture and heritage support a range of policy priorities including, but not limited to, economic growth, health and well-being and building stronger and safer communities. The government is pressing local authorities to develop different approaches to providing local cultural and heritage services by linking more efficiently with other key service priorities such as adult social care, health, children and young people and economic development.

Planning legislation is currently under review. Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 5 – Planning and the Historic Environment was issued in early 2010, but is likely to be replaced by a National Policy Framework by April 2012. The Localism Bill aims to devolve planning decisions to a more local level, giving local communities greater ability to shape development in their areas.

English Heritage – the English Heritage Corporate Plan and strategic priorities are under review. However, the interim National Protection Plan 2010, sets out a framework for more effective protection of the historic environment. It is underpinned by four main themes: understanding heritage; valuing heritage; caring for heritage and enjoying heritage. A key element of the Plan is local empowerment; enabling owners, local groups, communities and individuals to take a more active role in protecting their heritage, by providing them with access to expert advice, technical support and, in some circumstances, financial assistance.

Heritage Lottery Fund – HLF has clear priorities for those applying to its grants programmes. Applicants must demonstrate that:

- Projects help people to learn about their own and other peoples' heritage.

Additionally projects must meet one or both of the following criteria:

- Conserve the UK's diverse heritage for future generations to experience and enjoy.
- Help more people, and a wider range of people, to take an active part in making decisions about heritage.

Heritage Lottery funded projects need to demonstrate clear social and educational benefits. Capital projects have to include a clearly defined time limited programme of public engagement activities which go beyond core and on-going activities for the project.

Museums, Libraries and Archives Council – some of MLA's functions will soon be transferred to Arts Council England and the strategic direction for the sector is uncertain. However, the priority of ensuring that museums, libraries and archives are widely used as a key resource for creativity, life-long learning and skills development and that they make an increasing contribution to local economies and communities is unlikely to change

4 KEY ISSUES

4.1 Stewardship and Protection – Conserving Wirral's Heritage for Future Generations

The fragile nature of our heritage should not be underplayed. Once a historic building is demolished or unsympathetically altered it cannot be replaced. Similarly, historic artefacts and collections need to be carefully managed if they are to be preserved for the future. The effective preservation of historic structures, landscapes, archives and

collections and their stewardship is therefore fundamental to this strategy.

The Historic Environment

Built Environment

The Council has a statutory duty to ensure the proper protection of all Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas in the borough. Each Conservation Area has an adopted Management Plan and a Conservation Area Partnership made up of local residents. However, with over 1,700 listed structures and 25 conservation areas, maintaining these buildings and places is increasingly difficult, particularly in the current economic climate. Many buildings which are deemed important today, such as our stock of Victorian industrial buildings, were not necessarily built to last and their progressive deterioration, coupled with the difficulty in finding appropriate new uses, poses a significant challenge.

As well as those buildings protected by statute, Wirral has very many other buildings which are of historic significance and are very important to local people. Wirral's buildings were last surveyed for listing in 1992 and there are notable omissions, particularly dockland structures which have been poorly recorded. A number of good unlisted buildings outside Conservation Areas have been demolished. Whilst the whole issue of listing is currently under review nationally, there is still scope to increase the number of submissions for 'spot-listing', either by the Council or by local people, to ensure that the quality of vulnerable buildings and structures is recognised and they are preserved.

Both central government and English Heritage are advocating that local authorities compile and maintain a non-statutory 'Local List' of buildings of merit, with buildings submitted according to agreed criteria, in full consultation with the public and formally adopted. Wirral History and Heritage Association is currently compiling its own list of 'Buildings of Merit at Risk'. Whether a formal list adopted by the Council, or a list compiled by local people, the issue is certain to raise interest in those sites and buildings of local value and increase pressures to ensure that they are not put at risk through demolition, massive alterations or redevelopment.

Heritage at Risk

English Heritage's *Heritage at Risk Register* lists the most vulnerable historic sites in the country. As well as buildings, it now includes

Conservation Areas, archaeological sites and historic parks, gardens and cemeteries. There are ten such sites in Wirral:

- Storeton Hall, Bebington: Grade II Listed; condition - very bad
- Fort Perch Rock, New Brighton: Grade II* Listed; condition - poor
- Birkenhead Priory: Scheduled Ancient Monument; condition - deteriorating (but currently subject to a scheme of repair)
- Bromborough Court House Moated Site and Fishponds: Scheduled Ancient Monument; condition – significant localised problems
- Site of Church and Churchyard, Overchurch: Scheduled Ancient Monument; condition – major localised problems
- Thornton Manor, Bebington: Registered Park and Garden Grade II; condition – major localised problems
- Clifton Park, Tranmere: Conservation Area; condition – very bad
- Flaybrick Cemetery, Bidston: Conservation Area; condition – very bad
- Hamilton Square, Birkenhead: Conservation Area; condition – very bad
- Rock Park, Rock Ferry: Conservation Area; condition – poor

The government's Planning Policy Statement 5 for the first time requires local authorities to seriously consider how the condition of sites at risk within their areas will be addressed.

Churches and Places of Worship

Wirral has a wealth of churches and other places of worship, many of which are listed or in conservation areas. They make a tremendous contribution to the historic environment and many are local landmarks. While some remain solely active in religious life, others have also acquired new social uses that benefit the widest cross section of society. Responsibility for their care falls almost entirely on the shoulders of volunteers and for many congregations the burden of maintenance can be heavy. When religious buildings are no longer used, the problems of finding new uses can be difficult, leaving empty buildings vulnerable to deterioration and vandalism. The challenge is to work with congregations, church and other religious authorities to help them to adapt to the evolving needs of worshippers and the wider

community, to ensure that their historic fabric and features are preserved.

A good example of such a project is Oxton Congregational Church. This imposing Victorian Gothic Grade II Listed church is an important landmark at the 'gateway' to Oxton village. Having been derelict for many years, it has now been restored by the Wirral Christian Centre, who have plans for significant community engagement and involvement.

Historic Parks, Gardens and Cemeteries

Wirral possesses a wide range of historic landscapes, graveyards, parks and gardens of national regional and local significance. In addition to their intrinsic heritage importance, they often also provide a setting for historic buildings and structures and form high quality open spaces for public enjoyment. However, maintenance of these key heritage assets is a major issue, particularly in the cases of historic structures such as chapels, lodges and other buildings which have long fallen out of use and into disrepair. In some cases, such as Royden Park and Rake Lane Cemetery, historic buildings have been successfully put to new uses but the chapels in Flaybrick Memorial Gardens are, for example, completely derelict and the whole cemetery, which is on the Heritage at Risk Register, is in need of major refurbishment. Heritage also reveals itself in less obvious ways, such as traditional lay-out, walks, railings, boundary walls and fittings which are valued by local people. All these parks and open spaces also have nature value, whether designated or undesignated, which needs protecting and managing to different degrees.

Recording

The recording and proper identification of our heritage is essential in ensuring that it is properly protected and is vital to help develop knowledge and understanding of the historic environment. Sadly, Wirral's built heritage is not well recorded and there are significant gaps in our understanding of many buildings, and in some cases their true historic significance may not be appreciated. In particular, there has never been a comprehensive survey of the docklands buildings and structures, which make such an important contribution to the historic character of north Wirral.

An historic characterisation of Wirral's rural areas was completed by Cheshire County Council in 2007. The characterisation of Wirral's urban areas, carried out by the Merseyside Archaeological Service, has not yet reported.

Archives

Wirral Archives Service moved to its present office in Cheshire Lines in 2008. The Service aims to attract a wide and diverse group of users, from family historians and school parties to academics and enthusiastic members of the public, who have an interest in archives. The Service and its research facility are used by Wirral residents and enquirers from all over the world.

The Archives Service has a pro-active collections policy, actively seeking out collections to ensure their survival and that the archives reflect the social history of Wirral in the widest possible way. It is also actively addressing the need to respond to the growing challenge of managing digital information so that it is accessible now and remains discoverable in the future. It is also working towards comprehensive on-line access to archives through improved cataloguing and digitisation. A service priority is to identify funding to catalogue the nationally important Cammell Laird collection and make it available on-line.

The immediate challenges confronting the service are to tackle the backlog of uncatalogued collections and increase the amount of resources available on-line, using existing resources. There is also a need to identify adequate funding in order to identify adequate funding in order to digitize collections that have been identified as a priority.

Museum Collections

Wirral Museums Service operates from two sites, Birkenhead Priory and the Williamson Art Gallery & Museum. The collections, housed in the Williamson largely comprise:

- Fine art – particularly 18th and 19th century watercolours; work by regionally and locally important artists; the work of Phillip Steer (born 1860 in Birkenhead).
- Maritime models and pictures – notably vessels built at Cammell Laird and Mersey ferries.
- Ceramics – most noteworthy is the nationally important Della Robbia Pottery made in Birkenhead 1894 – 1906.

- Arthur H. Lee & Sons – a fascinating and unusually complete record of Lee's 'Tapestry Works', which operated in Birkenhead 1908 – 1970.
- Social history and archaeological collections and Civic Silver.

As in so many other museums, there is a backlog in documenting collections and a plan has been drawn up to complete this work by April 2012. Collection details are published and interpreted in a variety of ways and a booklet linked to *A Textile Dynasty* the story of the Lee Tapestry Works is currently underway. In addition to its prime responsibility to preserve and exhibit the collections within its care, the Museums Service produces a regular and varied exhibition programme which both uses and complements its own collections. Collaborations with National Museums Liverpool (NML), the Cheshire West and Cheshire Museums Service and other regional museums and galleries are regular and frequent. There are plans to work with NML and other partners on a major exhibition on the 19th century Liverpool School of Artists, largely based on the collections in the Williamson and the Walker Art Gallery.

4.2 REGENERATION - heritage as a driver for economic development, inward investment and supporting sustainable communities

The historic environment can play a significant role in helping regenerate communities. Investing in heritage can make a real difference to the appearance of local areas, provide opportunities for businesses and give local people new confidence and pride in their surroundings. However, they are complex projects, resource intensive and the benefits may not be apparent for many years. The challenge is to ensure that heritage is firmly embedded into regeneration proposals

Wirral's experience over the past twenty years has demonstrated the importance of heritage as driver for economic and social regeneration. Since 1988, several hundred millions of pounds of inward investment have been attracted to Wirral and heritage has made a notable contribution to this success. Current regeneration proposals have important implications for the conservation, enhancement and interpretation of historic buildings and sites. Wirral Waters, a thirty year, £4.5 billion mixed use development by Peel Holdings at Birkenhead and Wallasey docks, identifies heritage as part of its cultural offer. Beginning with the restoration of the Grade II Listed Hydraulic Tower and its conversion to commercial use, listed buildings will be refurbished and brought back to use; and there are exciting opportunities for imaginative interpretation and public art.

The Mersey Coastal Park Strategy is promoting a regeneration vision for East Wirral, built upon the principle of opening up access to the coast and harnessing the economic potential of the waterfront. It covers some 6.5km of coastline between Rock Ferry and Eastham Country Park and will include the following 'signature' projects which, once linked, will create a unique visitor and tourist attraction:

- Rock Ferry Waterfront Regeneration Scheme
- Rock Park Esplanade and Conservation Area
- Shorefields Community Park
- Bromborough Dock Landfill Site
- Wirral International Business Park
- Eastham Country Park

Heritage ideals have been firmly embedded into the Coastal Park Strategy from the outset. The Rock Park Conservation Area is regarded by the Secretary of State as a one of the three most important conservation areas on the Wirral and is also on the English Heritage 'Heritage at Risk' Register.

Other heritage assets along this stretch of coastline which are recognised in the Coastal Park Strategy are Bromborough Dock and its place in the physical, economic and social development of Port Sunlight; Shorefields Community Nature Park which has links to the SS Great Eastern; archaeology at Shodwell (a possible origin of the Bromborough Ferry and key historical features in Eastham Country Park.

Heritage is also central to regeneration proposals for Hoylake, West Kirby and Deeside Wirral. Improvements to the Hoylake and Meols promenade and seafront could include high quality interpretation. This would focus on the history of the lost port of Meols, a site of national archaeological importance, and tell the story of 'Hoyle Lake' which gave the town its name. This large sea water lake offered safe anchorage for many vessels for hundreds of years and was an embarkation point for armies crossing to Ireland.

Within Wirral Country Park, the aim is to deliver a new £3 million visitor centre at Thurstaston. As well as reflecting the importance of bird life across the Dee coast, this would give the opportunity to interpret the history of the area. Included would be the story of Dawpool – one of Wirral's old ports – and Dawpool Hall, home of the Ismay family, founders of the White Star Line and owners of the Titanic

4.3 LEARNING – the role of heritage in supporting education, training and life-long learning

Heritage makes a vital contribution to learning at all ages and our historic buildings, archaeological sites, artefacts and archives can all be used to provide stimulating and imaginative learning opportunities. The Council's Museums and Archives services already have programmes of formal and informal education in place and there are opportunities for student placements, volunteering and training. There is recognition that learning about heritage not only offers personal fulfilment and pleasure, but can contribute to a whole range of social agendas such as literacy and numeracy, health and well being, citizenship and skills development.

However, there is still much more that can be done. The Museum service is currently expanding family learning opportunities and hopes to appoint a dedicated officer in the near future. Other Council services, such as adult and children's services need to be aware of the role heritage learning can play in delivering their objectives. There needs to be closer partnership working with the voluntary sector and community groups, utilising heritage learning to help meet their targets in new and creative ways.

There is a national shortage of specialist craft skills across the heritage sector. Traditional building and craft skills, which were historically handed on through the apprenticeship system, will wither and die unless they are proactively supported. Other authorities nationally have successfully developed links with colleges and higher education institutions to provide much needed vocational training and there are also national programmes which could be promoted.

4.4 PARTICIPATION – ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to access, enjoy and participate in heritage

Getting people involved in heritage is central to this strategy. Whilst a great many people already enjoy heritage through visits to museums or historic sites, or by attending a lecture or talk organised by a local group, there is a need to create opportunities to engage with a wider and more diverse audience. Access to heritage should be more inclusive, with more community engagement and programmes of activity specifically targeted at people who, for social, cultural or physical reasons are currently unable or unwilling to participate. The Museum Service is already working on a number of outreach initiatives, including reminiscence and inter-generational projects and is actively looking for ways to widen opportunities for all. However, more needs to be done to promote understanding of the social benefits of heritage;

that heritage is not elitist but can be enjoyed by all ages and sections of society.

The majority of people who are actively involved in heritage are members of local societies. Their contribution to delivering heritage activity throughout the borough is invaluable and fully recognised by the Council. However, there is scope for developing their work, by raising awareness of funding sources, assisting with applications and encouraging them to explore new and innovative ways of promoting and exploring their heritage interests. Membership of most local groups and societies tends to be older people and they should be encouraged to look at ways of attracting younger people, to ensure that activities are sustained. The Council supports the Wirral History and Heritage Association as the 'umbrella' organisation which represents and gives voice to local history and amenity societies. The profile of WHHA needs to be raised, so that there is greater understanding of its aims and objectives and there needs to be greater engagement with local groups so that all feel included in its work.

Heritage Open Days provide the ideal opportunity for local groups to come together in celebration of Wirral's heritage and attract new audiences. Over the past few years WHHA has massively expanded the HODs programme, which is now a major event in Wirral's cultural calendar. WHHA intends to further develop HODs by extending the length of the programme and adding a range of cultural activities to create a 'festival' of heritage. If successful, this will attract a wider and more diverse cross-section of the community and raise the profile of Wirral as a 'heritage' borough.

Understanding is crucial to the enjoyment of heritage and local people are engaged in a number of initiatives to interpret their history. The Charles Dawson Brown Groups have well advanced plans to upgrade and redisplay their museum attached to St Bridget's Church in West Kirby. Other community-led proposals include establishing a Lifeboat museum in the old Hoylake Lifeboat Station and there are aspirations to commission a Viking statue and interpretation centre in Meols. The proposals for imaginative interpretation in the redevelopment of Hoylake Parade and within the North Wirral Coastal Park, will provide exciting opportunities for local children and communities to actively input into the creative interpretative process and, in doing so, learn more about their heritage.

There is real scope to expand interpretation throughout the borough and in particular, to explore the way new technologies can be used. Heritage interpretation can also be linked to many other agendas, for instance promoting healthy 'heritage walks' and heritage cycle routes.

Given the number of famous people with Wirral connections, consideration could be given to upgrading and extending the 'Blue Plaque' programme.

If widening participation and access is to be meaningful, there needs to be a special focus on excluded groups, including black and ethnic minorities, isolated elders and people with disabilities. This will only be achieved by forging stronger links with community groups and the voluntary sector and exploring new and imaginative ways to support activities which are directly relevant to the needs of each group. The work of existing groups such as the Black Environment Network and the Merseyside Access to Heritage Group could be channelled into Wirral.

4.5 CELEBRATION – maximising the role heritage plays in engendering local identity, social cohesion and civic and community pride

The heritage of Wirral gives us much to be proud of and celebrate. Generally local people value their inheritance from the past. They believe that Wirral has a distinctive character and identity which makes it very different from other places. By celebrating our heritage, raising its profile locally and nationally and giving people a more active role we can strengthen this sense of pride and ownership throughout our communities.

A positive image of Wirral's heritage can be promoted by developing initiatives more widely across the borough. The Heritage Open Days initiative has achieved much in showing that Wirral is a place to enjoy and explore heritage, but more can be done to promote our heritage assets to a wider local, regional and national audience.

Pride comes from a sense of ownership. If people feel involved with their local heritage there is more chance that they will respect and care for it. This can be achieved by greater levels of consultation and participation by and with local people. We need to recognise and build on the work already being undertaken within communities and celebrate achievements, both large and small.

For many people, heritage is not just about museums, great historic buildings or heritage sites, but about those things which they value within their local area. This could be a statue or local landmark, an old cinema or pub – or past events which have had helped to shape the identity of their community. By challenging 'traditional' perceptions of heritage and encouraging people to celebrate their own local heritage and cultural identity there are real opportunities to increase community involvement and local pride.

Much of the past is not documented; the stories and memories of people living in Wirral are a vital part of our heritage, to be valued and celebrated. By capturing these individual and collective memories through reminiscence and recording projects, social and community history can be brought to life, giving new meaning to dry and inanimate structural remains.

Many local people are already active in promoting Wirral's heritage and more could be done to capture this enthusiasm and expertise. Other authorities have successfully appointed 'Heritage Ambassadors', volunteers who have been trained to present and interpret local heritage to a wide range of audiences and promote community pride in the history of the borough.

5. Making Heritage Matter: Recommendations for Action

5.1 Stewardship and Protection – conserving Wirral's heritage for future generations

Action 1 – Champion the value of heritage and the retention and enhancement of the historic environment as an essential part of successful and sustainable development.

Action 2 – Ensure that as many as possible of the borough's historic buildings, sites and structures are statutorily protected through the listing process.

Action 3 – Ensure that all Conservation Areas within the borough have a formally adopted Management Plan.

Action 4 – Explore the practicalities of compiling a non-statutory 'Local List' for Wirral and support the work of local organisations and individuals in identifying buildings of local interest and merit.

Action 5 – Continue to work with English Heritage and property/site owners to seek creative solutions and funding packages for buildings and sites on the 'Heritage at Risk' register to ensure their long term sustainability.

Action 6 – Support churches, congregations and other religious authorities to help them adapt religious buildings to meet the needs of both worshippers and the wider community, whilst ensuring that their historic fabric and features are preserved.

Action 7 – Actively explore alternative community-led means of restoring and managing historic buildings through the establishment of charitable Building Preservation Trusts.

Action 8 – Ensure that the significance of historic parks, gardens, landscapes and cemeteries are recognised and understood and that their importance is reflected in plans and management strategies.

Action 9 - Take appropriate measures to ensure that Wirral's historic buildings and archaeology are adequately recorded.

Action 10 - Increase access to the borough's important archive collections by continually adding catalogues and digital images to the Archives Service web-site.

Action 11 – Clear the documentation backlog of museums collections by 2012.

5.2 – Regeneration - heritage as a driver for economic development, inward investment and supporting sustainable communities

Action 1 – Ensure that developers and investors are made fully aware of the importance of Wirral's heritage and the social and economic benefits of retaining and enhancing heritage within regeneration projects.

Action 2 – Ensure that major long-term developments such as Wirral Waters and the Mersey Coastal Park Strategy maximise the opportunities to conserve, enhance and promote key heritage assets

Action 3 – Work with communities to ensure that regeneration proposals at Hoylake, West Kirby, Deeside and the Mersey Coast regeneration proposals reflect and interpret local heritage.

Action 4 – Identify a funding package which will deliver the visitor and interpretation centre at Thurstaston.

Action 5 – Raise the profile of heritage as a visitor attraction and explore opportunities to promote Wirral as a heritage destination.

5.3 Learning – the role of heritage in supporting education, training and life-long learning

Action 1 – Strengthen links between the Council, education bodies and heritage providers to ensure local heritage makes a significant contribution to the formal school curriculum and to life-long, community and family learning programmes, to promote educational attainment across the borough.

Action 2 – Pursue the appointment of a Learning Officer to facilitate family and informal learning opportunities at the Williamson Art Gallery and Birkenhead Priory.

Action 3 – Develop a range of learning packages which link heritage into different areas of the the national curriculum, including literacy, numeracy and citizenship.

Action 4 – Work closely across Council departments, particularly those promoting community development and the interests of young and elderly people, using heritage learning to deliver a range of corporate objectives.

Action 5 – Address the skills deficit by bringing together education, training and learning organisations to consider skill development in the heritage sector, particularly traditional craft skills.

5.4 Participation – ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to access, enjoy and participate in heritage

Action 1 – Continue to support the work of local history, heritage and amenity groups through helping with skills development and funding advice so that they can maximise their work within local communities.

Action 2 – Maintain and regularly update an audit of heritage activities throughout the borough, to identify gaps and areas where additional support is needed.

Action 3 – Help to develop the profile of the Wirral History and Heritage Association as an independent networking organisation which is recognised and supported by local societies throughout the borough.

Action 4 – Support Wirral History and Heritage Society in organising Wirral's Heritage Open Days and encourage the development of a longer and more varied cultural programme.

Action 5 – Support community-led heritage initiatives which are realistic, achievable and which contribute to the delivery of corporate objectives and the heritage strategy.

Action 6 – Review existing heritage interpretation throughout the borough and identify new opportunities for creative interpretation, including web-based and virtual solutions.

Action 7 – Build inter-generational links within communities by bringing together older people, community organisations, schools and young people to explore family, local and community history.

Action 8 – Specifically target heritage and outreach activity towards excluded groups and work with them to devise projects which directly meet their physical, intellectual and cultural needs.

Action 9 – Support and encourage community archaeology projects which enable local people to work alongside professional archaeologists, are appropriately recorded and which contribute to regional and local research priorities.

Action – 10 Actively explore ways to engage non-traditional users with museum collections.

5.5 Celebration – maximising the role heritage plays in engendering local identity, social cohesion and civic and community pride

Action 1 – Work with partners to promote and celebrate Wirral's heritage, to increase tourism and improve the image of the borough.

Action 2 – Increase the number of borough-wide participatory heritage initiatives.

Action 3 – Encourage communities to celebrate those aspects of their local heritage which are important to them.

Action 4 - Ensure that individual and collective memories are captured and celebrated through supporting reminiscence and recording projects.

Action 5 – Explore the potential of training volunteer 'Heritage Ambassadors' to promote heritage throughout the borough.

6. Implementing the Strategy

6.1 Working in partnership

The heritage resource is by its nature very fragmented and involves a wide ranging and diverse group of organisations, agencies, individuals and volunteer groups. A partnership approach to delivering this strategy will be vital to its success. Through collaborative working, there will be a greater potential for community impact, local empowerment and raising profile. As well as building on existing partnerships, it is important that we identify new public and private sector partnerships, particularly funding partners. In order to benefit from external funding, it is essential to develop a good understanding of existing and future funding opportunities and the criteria and priorities of different funders.

As well as working with external agencies, it is important that heritage is recognised by the Council as a shared, cross-cutting issue that affects the Council as a whole and spans most, if not all, service areas. Heritage needs to be regarded as an issue which affects everyone's life and can be used to help deliver a wide range of council policies.

6.2 Community engagement

The hard work of numerous volunteer groups has played a significant role in Wirral's heritage. The voluntary sector has significant public value by harnessing community energy, giving local people a feeling of ownership and saving money. However, to successfully deliver this strategy, there will need to be even wider community engagement, which may require developing skills, knowledge and a greater understanding of heritage issues. This will be increasingly important if local people are to be empowered to manage and deliver heritage projects. The arts sector already has a strong track record in skills development and capacity building at community level and this model could be used to train local volunteers and heritage groups, so that they can build on and extend the work they already do within the community.

6.3 Establishing priorities

Most heritage projects will require some element of external funding and it is essential to understand the priorities and criteria which heritage funding bids would be expected to meet in order to be successful. Inevitably there will be variations according to the size and nature of the project, but consideration of these criteria should assist those developing heritage projects to understand the basis upon which applications for funding will be assessed. It will also assist the Council in prioritising its own projects and inform decisions on which external projects to support. At a time when resources are increasingly limited, the aim is to assist projects to become more focussed, reduce competition for the same funds and generate more benefit to the people and the economy of Wirral. These criteria will include:

- Strategic fit – defined by how well the project links to other relevant national, regional and local strategies and meets the Council's own corporate objectives.
- Community need – defined by demonstrating that there is a genuine local demand or need for the project.
- Heritage objectives – defined by demonstrating that the project meets more one or more of the objectives of this strategy.

- Funding – availability of appropriate funding sources and /or match.
- Skills – are there skills within the organisation or its partners to manage the project?
- Timescale – will the project be delivered within the short, medium or longer term?
- Sustainability – environmental, economic, organisational capacity.
- Current Council Priority – based on availability of match, funding sources, legal requirements.

6.4 Monitoring, evaluation and review

The heritage strategy and its action plan will be regularly monitored and updated to ensure that targets are achieved and that new initiatives are fed into the forward strategic planning process.

6.5 Celebrating and promoting achievement

This strategy is not just a document for Wirral Council but for the whole community. Just as its success will depend on working in partnership, it will be equally important for everyone involved in Wirral's heritage to celebrate achievements in delivering projects or meeting key milestones. By promoting best practice, disseminating achievement and keeping local people informed of progress, the strategy will clearly demonstrate the commitment the people of Wirral have towards their heritage and their determination to safeguard it for future generations.

Appendix 1: Detailed Action Plan 2011 – 2016

Appendix 2: Identified Heritage Projects 2001 – 2006

