

MAKING OUR HERITAGE MATTER



WIRRAL'S HERITAGE STRATEGY

2011-2014

2013 Revision



Technical Services Department

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Executive Summary

This is an updated version of the first heritage strategy, produced in 2011 by Wirral Council and its partners. Its purpose remains to set out a comprehensive and integrated heritage framework for Wirral borough, which will form the basis for heritage activities in the short and medium terms and establish principles to be followed in the longer term. It has been developed with the help of national and regional strategic organisations and many local groups and stakeholders and seeks to encompass their concerns, views and aspirations. Its success continues to depend on working in partnership, brokering new relationships and actively working across sectors to meet heritage objectives.

However, since the Strategy was first produced, there have been a number of significant changes in national and regional strategies and policies; these have been included in the updated document. There have also been unprecedented changes in the Council's financial position, resulting in the need to cut around a third of its net budget over the next three years. Inevitably, this will have serious consequences for the delivery of key actions within the Strategy's Action Plan. Nevertheless, even if some actions may not be achievable in the near future, they should not be forgotten, but remain aspirations to be taken forward when feasible.

The strategy is in two parts. The main body of the document explores the strategic context for heritage in Wirral. Section 1 defines what we mean by 'heritage' and sets a series of objectives to support the overall vision:

'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'.

Section 2 provides a historic overview of the borough and identifies the tremendous wealth of heritage assets and resources which have survived from that long history and which now contribute to the physical and social identity of Wirral. It looks at the wide range of heritage activities already taking place throughout the borough and identifies those organisations from all sectors who are currently delivering them. It assesses the value of heritage and how it contributes to economic regeneration and tourism.

Section 3 explores the wider context, and demonstrates how the strategy will respond to, interact with, and support those priorities and themes which currently drive heritage at national, regional at local levels.

Section 4 identifies key issues and proposed actions for five thematic areas:

- **Stewardship and Protection** – conserving Wirral's heritage for future generations;

- **Regeneration** – using heritage as a driver for economic development, inward investment and supporting sustainable communities;
- **Learning** – maximising the role of heritage in supporting education, training and life-long learning;
- **Participation** – ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to access, enjoy and participate in heritage;
- **Celebration** – recognising and utilising the part heritage can play in promoting local identity, social cohesion and civic and community pride.

The final section deals with how the strategy will be implemented through more 'joined-up' cross-departmental working within the Council; by building on existing external partnerships and forging new ones. It looks at criteria for determining priorities, which will assist the Council in prioritising its own projects and inform decisions on which external projects should be taken forward. Finally, it proposes a process of monitoring, evaluation and review which includes and engages local people.

The second part of the document is the **Action Plan** which expands on the actions identified in the main strategy. It has been updated to record progress during 2011 – 2012. It is envisaged that the Action Plan will continue to be an evolving and 'living' document, regularly updated as targets are achieved and new initiatives are fed into it.

1.0 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 borough, which will form the basis for heritage activities in the short and medium terms and establish principles to be followed in the longer term.

The strategy reflects 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 has been developed in consultation with many of these organisations and seeks to reflect their views. The aim has been to produce a strategy which is agreed and accepted by the whole community and will be used by everyone 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.

However, a heritage strategy should not be and cannot be prescriptive. As public sector funding pressures bite further, the importance of widening participation in heritage will rise. Encouraging greater community participation and ownership of initiatives will be key and it may not be that all actions can be predetermined, but that innovation and community driven initiatives can be stimulated and allowed to flourish. The challenge will be to create the conditions that support such initiatives and enable them to happen.

The geographical area covered by this strategy is that of Wirral borough and does not include south Wirral which is administered by Cheshire West and Chester Council. However, it does recognise that heritage cannot be confined within local authority boundaries and that the historic and cultural identity of Wirral borough is inextricably linked to the history of the whole Wirral peninsula.

1.2 Who is the Strategy for?

Heritage in its widest sense touches all our lives, in ways which are both obvious and tangible, but also in ways which we often fail to recognise or appreciate. A person may never have any desire to visit a museum or engage in heritage activity, but will agree that a well maintained and attractive historic environment has a positive impact on their quality of life. Young people consulted on the development of this strategy initially expressed no interest in heritage, it was 'boring' and not for them. Yet their interest in and knowledge of the history of local football clubs was both passionate and impressive; they had just never thought of this as 'heritage'.

This strategy is not just a document for Wirral Council, but for the whole community. It has been developed with the help of very many local organisations and individuals and seeks to encompass their views, concerns and aspirations. Its success will depend on working in partnership, brokering new relationships and actively working across sectors to meet heritage objectives.

At times when financial resources are increasingly limited, it is more than ever important that the Council and its many partners have a clear vision and understanding of how heritage activity is to be delivered within the borough, establish priorities for action and define how these are to be achieved. This clarity should assist in targeting funding and funding applications towards those actions which have been identified as having greatest need.

1.3 How the Strategy has been developed

A priority in developing this strategy has been to engage local people throughout the process. In the spring of 2011 an initial consultation draft was sent to over 200 local organisations, including local history societies, community groups, healthcare providers, multi-cultural and disability groups, as well as national and regional strategic partners. Copies were available in museums, libraries and a whole range of community venues and the document was promoted through the Wirral History and Heritage Association. In July 2011 a community consultation day, held in Birkenhead Town Hall, attracted representatives from some 50 societies, who took part in a series of lively workshop sessions and discussions on every aspect of the strategy. They also helped to develop and test criteria for prioritising heritage projects

and initiatives. A second highly creative consultation exercise for young people took place in the same month and provided new and an imaginative perspectives on the meaning of heritage and how they would like to be engaged. Wherever possible, the strategy has tried to embrace the views of partners and local people and it is intended that this process of local engagement will continue through the monitoring, evaluation and implementation process.

1.4 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.

1.5 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 east and the Roman city of Chester to the south. 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. Similarly, the character of many areas of high heritage value is in danger of being eroded through unsympathetic and inappropriate development, proliferation of unsympathetic building materials and intrusive signs. 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 long term 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, management and protection of heritage assets, including buildings, conservation areas, 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 can be enjoyed and understood by the widest possible audience, including those who have traditionally been excluded from heritage activity.

2.0 HERITAGE IN WIRRAL

2.1 Historic overview: the story of Wirral

The Metropolitan Borough of Wirral occupies the northern half of the Wirral peninsula, bounded to the west by the Dee, to the east by the Mersey and to the north by the waters of Liverpool Bay. Throughout most of its history its character has been shaped by its coast and countryside, the inhabitants gaining their livelihood mainly from the land or the sea.

The earliest evidence of human activity comes from Greasby and Thurstaston, where archaeological finds include concentrations of small worked stones or microliths, evidence of hunter-gatherers of the mesolithic or Middle Stone Age period.

Settled farming began in the neolithic or New Stone Age period when the environmental record shows woodland was being cleared to make way for agriculture. This process of clearance and enclosure continued through the Bronze and Iron Ages; traces of agricultural settlements from these times have been excavated at Irby.

The one exception to this pattern is Meols, where over 4000 artefacts and nearly 1000 coins and tokens have been recovered from the eroding shore. The finds, mainly made in the 19th century, date from the prehistoric, Roman, medieval and post medieval periods and are an indication that in the past Meols was a major coastal trading site with links to places as far away as mainland Europe and the Mediterranean.

At the time of the Roman conquest, in AD 43, Wirral lay within the territory of the Cornovii, a British tribe, probably friendly towards the Romans. The harbour at Meols would appear to have been used for both military and trading purposes even before the establishment of the legionary fortress at

Chester in the later 70s. A road leading north from Chester, sections of which have been identified, runs in the direction of Meols.

As well as roads, there is evidence of settlement in the Roman period. At Irby a Romano British farmstead has been excavated while a skeleton found during 19th century work on the Leasowe embankment, has been shown to be Roman in date, the only one of its kind from Merseyside.

Little is known of Wirral in the early post Roman years. At Landican a possible early Christian site is suggested by the place name 'Llan-tegan', the church of St Decan, while the circular churchyard at Overchurch is probably the source of a decorated runic stone, dating from c 800. The presence of Saxons in Wirral, from the late 7th century onwards, is evidenced by place names. The elements '*ham*' meaning 'homestead' and '*tun*' a 'farmstead' are indications of their settlement.

In about 902, groups of Norsemen, expelled from Ireland, arrived in north Wirral. Again place names are evidence of where they lived. Villages like Irby, Frankby and West Kirby, have endings derived from the Old Norse word '*byr*', meaning 'farmstead' or 'settlement'. '*Thingwall*' comes from the Old Norse '*þing-vollr*' or 'meeting place' whilst the name Meols derives from '*melr*', the Norse word for sand-hills.

Many academics believe that the Battle of Brunanburh, fought in 937 between the Saxon king, Athelstan and the allied forces of the Scots and Norsemen, took place near Bromborough. Athelstan's victory consolidated the boundary between England and Scotland and confirmed England as a unified kingdom.

By the 10th and 11th centuries life seems to have become more settled. Several places, including Bromborough, West Kirby and Woodchurch have remnants of sculptured crosses dating from this period, while from West Kirby and Bidston come carved hogback grave markers.

Domesday Book records over twenty manors in north Wirral, with one large manor, Eastham, embracing most of the Mersey shore. In 1093 the moated manor house at Irby was granted to the monks of Chester abbey which also acquired the moated court house at Bromborough Pool.

In the mid-12th century, a Norman baron, Hamo de Massey, founded a small Benedictine priory dedicated to St Mary and St James on the isolated headland that now forms Birkenhead. In the 14th century the priory was granted the right to operate a ferry across the Mersey. The present day priory remains are the oldest standing structures on Merseyside. Other medieval buildings in Wirral include a number of parish churches, Storeton Hall and the tower house at Brimstage.

Farming continued as the principle occupation of the population though maritime activities, including fishing and seafaring were important along the coast. As early as the 14th century, silting in the Dee caused the increased use of small anchorages along the Wirral shore. That at the 'Redbank' or Dawpool was used to unload cargoes such as Spanish wine and iron. Of more significance was the Hoyle or Hyle Lake, a deep water channel, sheltered by sandbanks, off what is now Hoylake. In 1690 this 'lake' was the main point of embarkation for King William III's expedition to Ireland. It was also used by ships waiting to sail into Liverpool.

As the volume of shipping increased there was a need for lights and beacons. In 1763 pairs of lighthouses were built at Hoylake and Leasowe. In 1771 the lower light at Leasowe was threatened by the sea and replaced by a light on Bidston Hill. At Perch Rock, the lighthouse, begun in 1827, replaced a wooden pole or perch, used to warn shipping of rocks at the Mersey's mouth; while at West Kirby the Column, erected in 1840, acted as a landmark to shipping, replacing a windmill, blown down in the great storm of the previous year.

On Bidston Hill a series of flagpoles were used to inform Liverpool ship-owners of the imminent arrival of their ships while semaphore stations on Bidston Hill and Hilbre formed part of a communications system linking Liverpool with Holyhead. In 1866 the Liverpool Observatory moved to Bidston Hill and was later joined by the Tidal Institute which predicted the tides for the D-Day landings.

Lifeboats also provided a service. A lifeboat station was established at Hoylake in 1803, with two further stations opened in subsequent years, one on Hilbre and one at New Brighton. The Hilbre station closed in 1939 but the other two are still active today.

Sea bathing had become popular in late Georgian times and in 1792 the Royal Hotel opened at Hoylake, while in 1830 James Atherton purchased a large area of sand hills, founding the seaside resort of New Brighton establishing a pattern of catering for visitors that still persists today.

The main catalysts for change were improvements in transport. A regular steam ferry service from Liverpool was instigated to Eastham in 1816 and to Tranmere in 1817. The road from Chester to Birkenhead was turnpiked in the 1830s and in 1840 a railway line opened between Birkenhead, Chester, Crewe and London.

With improved transport links, Wirral underwent major economic, social and demographic changes. Industry began to develop on the west bank of the Mersey while the area's fresh air, open countryside and wide sea views made

it an attractive place for Liverpool merchants and business men to make their homes.

In 1824 the Scotsman, William Laird, born in Greenock, established a boiler works on Wallasey Pool. In partnership with his son John, he soon diversified, founding what was to become one of the greatest shipbuilding enterprises in the world. In the 1850s the Laird shipyards transferred to the Mersey shore and in 1903 they amalgamated with Cammell, the Sheffield steel producer. Over the years the company would produce some of the navy's greatest ships, as well as the *Ma Robert*, the first steel hulled ship ever built, the Confederate raider '*Alabama*' and liners like the *Mauretania*.

The first few streets of Birkenhead were laid out by the lord of the manor, Francis Richard Price. Then in 1825, at the behest of William Laird, the great Scottish architect, James Gillespie Graham, produced a plan for a modern new town, with a gridiron pattern of streets, a range of fine late Georgian buildings and the imposing Hamilton Square. The town grew, with a market, theatres and music halls, the first tramway in Europe and the world's first publicly funded park – Birkenhead Park – which played a key role in the development of the parks movement and became a model for parks design including Central Park, New York.

The first of Birkenhead's docks, the Morpeth and Egerton Docks, opened in 1847. The Birkenhead Emigrant Depot, an important base for migrants bound for Australia, followed in 1852 as did Brassey & Co.'s Canada Works, which built much of the equipment, including locomotives and bridges, for the Grand Trunk Railway of Canada.

In 1857 an Act of Parliament brought the Birkenhead and Liverpool docks under the single ownership of the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company and it was under the company that the dock system developed. Until the 1960s the docks were in constant operation, with dozens of quays and warehouses, criss-crossed with freight lines. Many passenger and freight lines worked out of Birkenhead including Alfred Holt and the Ellerman, Clan and City Lines.

Although only a fraction of the dock system is now involved in traditional port activity, the legacy of buildings and dock structures is still impressive. Among these are the hydraulic tower, designed by Jesse Hartley and based on the Palazzo della Signoria in Florence and the Grain Warehouses, on the Dock Road, built in the 1860s to receive wheat, maize and barley from all over the world.

Though Wallasey Pool was the initial focus of development, industry soon spread along the Mersey shore. Price's Patent Candle Company, owned by the Wilson family, was already flourishing when in 1853 it purchased land for a new works on the tidal inlet of Bromborough Pool. The village the Wilsons

built for their workers, many of whom had moved up from London, is an early example of a model industrial village, predating Port Sunlight by over three decades.(The Candleworks went on to become Price's Chemicals, then Unichema.)

Port Sunlight Village, itself, was the vision of the Victorian entrepreneur and philanthropist, William Hesketh Lever. Laid out to provide accommodation for the workers in his soap factory, the model village, with its architect designed housing, gardens and green spaces was a pioneer in the Garden City Movement and is now of international standing. Within the village the renowned Lady Lever Art Gallery provides a permanent home of Lord Lever's outstanding art collection.

In contrast to the industrial settlements of the Mersey shore, New Brighton, served by both the ferry and the railway, developed as one of the most popular seaside resorts in the north. Its attractions included its Pier and Promenade, the New Brighton Tower (once the tallest in Britain), the Tower Ballroom and the now demolished open air bathing pool, one of the biggest in the world. Sadly, as with many former 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 two sides of the peninsula. 'Deeside Wirral' has retained its affluence, with well-to-do communities such as Heswall, West Kirby and Hoylake interspersed with open rural areas and pretty villages. To the east the dense urban and industrial belt fronting the Mersey has not fared so well. Decline began 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 Council is targeting its regeneration efforts, focussing inward investment on areas like Birkenhead Park, New Brighton and the Docks. The opening of Birkenhead Park Visitors Centre and New Brighton's rebuilt Floral Pavilion, with its theatre and conference centre, are examples of regeneration at work.

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.

2.2.1 Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas

Wirral contains over 1,900 Listed Buildings and 25 Conservation Areas, including Port Sunlight and Hamilton Square, both of which are of national importance. A number of old village centres like Bidston, Bromborough and

West Kirby are also designated as well as high quality suburbs, such as those within Oxton, Prenton and Hoylake. Within the borough, there are 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.

2.2.2 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. Small open spaces, both urban and rural, may not contain structures but they can be crucial to local distinctiveness and sense of place. Whilst many of these are not protected by statute, they are frequently 'local landmarks', held with great affection by the local community.

War memorials have a special significance to local people and the historic importance of Wirral's war memorials has been recognised by the granting of listed status to three sites. The monuments at Eastham and New Brighton are now listed Grade II, while Hoylake and West Kirby's memorial at Grange Hill is listed Grade II*.

2.2.3 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 Court House moated site; Grange Beacon; Irby Hall moated site; New Hall; the former churchyard at Overchurch; St. Barnabas Cross, Bromborough; the standing cross at Holy Church, Woodchurch and Storeton Hall.

2.2.4 Historic parks and cemeteries

Wirral is fortunate that all our towns have public parks and green spaces, many of which are over a hundred years old. These areas are historic public assets that have developed into community spaces, greatly valued by local people and visitors alike. The borough is particularly 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 Flaybrick Memorial Gardens, a cemetery of European significance.

2.2.5 Natural landscapes, shorelines and wildlife, including special habitats and species

The Wirral peninsula is a place of exceptional natural beauty; residents and visitors alike benefit from our outstanding coast and countryside resource.

Wirral has a great variety of species, habitats, landscapes and geological features and this is reflected in the substantial numbers and types of sites that are designated for their wildlife value.

Wirral's coast has attracted a total of six international designations for nature conservation focussed on the Dee Estuary, the Mersey Estuary and the North Wirral Foreshore. These areas are internationally renowned for the large numbers of wildfowl and wading birds they support, and it is important to work within legislative requirements to avoid potential negative impacts of human activities.

There are 12 Sites of Special Scientific Interest including Dibbinsdale, Heswall Dales and Thurstaston Common. These national designations carry with them a statutory responsibility for management. There are a further 70 local wildlife sites (Sites of Biological Importance).

We have five Local Nature Reserves and three Country Parks: Arrowe Park, Eastham Country Park and Wirral Country Park (including the Wirral Way).

Alongside designations for nature conservation there are 3 geological Sites of Special Scientific Interest: Thurstaston Common, The Dungeon and the Dee Cliffs. There are also 15 local geology sites.

Hilbre Island is the subject of a current consultation and is soon to be designated as a Marine Conservation Zone - to protect blue mussel beds and marine peat and clay exposures which provide shelter for a diverse range of marine flora and fauna.

The Council's Parks and Countryside Service manages many of these special places. There is often a careful balance to be struck between the benefit of wildlife and social and economic uses. It is crucial that these resources are passed on to future generations with their interest and beauty intact.

Despite being densely populated Wirral is home to numerous rare and protected species. Some have the highest level of legal protection such as bats, water voles and great-crested newts. Others may not be nationally rare, but need protection because they are declining or uncommon in our area – for example common lizards and common toads.

2.2.6 Museums, galleries and heritage venues

Wirral Council is currently responsible for two accredited museum venues, Birkenhead Priory and the Williamson Art Gallery and Museum. These

contain a significant collection of objects dating from prehistoric times to the present day. Birkenhead Priory, founded in c.1150 is the oldest standing building on Merseyside. The entire site is a Scheduled Ancient Monument which includes structures listed as Grade I, Grade II* and Grade II. The chapter house is consecrated as an Anglican place of worship and above, the former scriptorium is now a chapel dedicated to the training ship HMS *Conway*. Adjacent to the Priory, St Mary's clock tower is all that remains of Birkenhead's first parish church. Within the tower a series of named plaques commemorate those who died in the loss of the ill-fated submarine, *Thetis*. A small museum tells the history of the site and its buildings.

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. Like the Priory it is accredited under the Museums, Libraries and Archive Council (MLA) Museum Accreditation Scheme and has a VAQAS (Visitor Attractions Quality Assurance Scheme) Award. The collections, some of which are of national importance, include 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).

Both the Priory and the Williamson are currently benefitting from major capital investment. The Council is investing around £730,000 in improvements to the Priory, which is on English Heritage's Heritage at Risk Register. A further £1.3 million will go to the development and refurbishment of the Williamson, including enhancements to visitor facilities and the creation of more flexible spaces for performance, education and family learning.

In 2009, the Council made the decision to dispose of a number of buildings, which included museums sites. Discussions are currently underway about the future delivery of Wirral Transport Museum and the Heritage Tramway. The lease on Shore Road Pumping Station, housing the 'Giant Grasshopper' pump, has been returned to Network Rail and the building is no longer open to the public. Wirral Museum in Birkenhead Town Hall has closed and the Council's Asset Management Team is developing alternative uses within Council ownership for this iconic building. The Town Hall is open for special functions.

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 fascinating and diverse museum displays.

The community sector has played a significant role in opening up heritage buildings to the public. The restored Hilbre Telegraph Station Lookout is run

by the Friends of Hilbre, as an interpretation centre for the islands. The Friends of Leaseowe Lighthouse have been instrumental in developing the oldest brick built lighthouse in the country as visitor and educational facility, with guided tours, special events and displays about the lighthouse and the Wirral coastline. The Charles Dawson Brown Museum, attached to St Bridget's Church in West Kirby, is currently undergoing a complete refurbishment for the redisplay of its collection of Anglo-Scandinavian and other carved stones and items connected with the history of West Kirby.

Three other independent heritage attractions have recently opened thanks to the drive and enthusiasm of local people. The Hoylake Lifeboat Museum, housed in the town's former Victorian lifeboat station, celebrates local maritime history and the activities of the lifeboat services in the North West. The Wilfred Owen Story and Gallery in Birkenhead, is the first permanent centre in the North West to commemorate the life and works of the First World War poet Wilfred Owen, who lived on Wirral during his formative years. As well as the exhibitions, the gallery runs art shows, poetry and music performances and a range of community activities.

The New Brighton Heritage and Information Centre, has been created by the New Brighton Community Partnership, to provide the local community and visitors with information about the area's history and information about local events, attractions and activities. The Centre also hosts events, exhibitions and presentations, highlighting New Brighton's past, present and future, to encourage local people to learn about and participate in heritage.

The Mersey Ferries are a major paid-for visitor attraction in Merseyside and play a key role in the life of Liverpool, Wirral and the River Mersey. Mersey Ferries also operate two visitor attractions on Wirral; the U-Boat Story at Woodside Ferry Terminal and Spaceport at Seacombe Ferry Terminal. The U-Boat Story has U-534 which is the only WW2 German U-Boat in the UK and one of only four that survive in preservation anywhere else in the world. Merseytravel has a catalogued collection of historical artefacts relating to the U-Boat and also a collection relating to the Mersey Tunnels, Mersey Ferries and other public transport (buses, trams, trains etc.). A replica of the *Resurgam*, the world's first mechanically powered submarine, is also displayed outside Woodside Ferry Terminal.

2.2.7 Archives and local collections

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. The

borough's local history collections are held by Wirral Archives and three libraries; Birkenhead, Bebington and Wallasey.

Other historic collections within the borough include the Port Sunlight archive collections relating to the development and history of Port Sunlight village, which are held in the Port Sunlight Museum Collections Study Centre. The Unilever Archives, also located in Port Sunlight, form one of the most important collections of business records in the world and are designated of national importance.

2.2.8 Sporting History

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.

Tranmere Rovers Football Club was founded in 1884 and its most famous player William Ralph 'Dixie' Dean scored 60 league goals in the 1927 – 1928 season. Birkenhead Park Cricket Club was formed in 1846 and its club house is reputed to be the oldest surviving cricket pavilion in the country.

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 Stade Olympique de Colombes in Paris, whilst Woodside Ferry Terminal was used for embarkation scenes set in Dover.

2.2.9 People

Wirral's history is marked by a remarkable range of individuals, including William and John Laird; Thomas Brassey, the great railway engineer and William Hesketh Lever.

Sporting greats include the versatile sportswoman Lottie Dodd, five times Wimbledon tennis champion, a golfer and hockey player and silver medallist in archery at the Olympics. Others include the great footballer, Dixie Dean, who began his career with Tranmere Rovers, the 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. Malcolm Lowry, the acclaimed poet and novelist was born in New Brighton. Sir Patrick Abercrombie the pioneering town planner was a former resident of Oxton. The artist Philip Wilson Steer was born in Birkenhead as was the artist and cartoonist, Norman Thelwell.

Wirral is well represented in the world of stage film and television, with many well-known names coming from the area, Patricia Routledge, Glenda Jackson, the James Bond actor Daniel Craig, Paul O’Grady and John Peel.

2.2.10 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 has suggested a strong Scandinavian influence in the DNA of some old Wirral families, demonstrating that the Vikings left a genetic legacy which survives and continues today.

During the American Civil War, Wirral had significant links with both the northern and southern states. In consequence it is only the second place outside the USA to have been accorded the status of an American Civil War Heritage Site by the Civil War Preservation Trust. The Argyle Rooms in Birkenhead were an important meeting place for the anti-slavery lobby. The notorious Confederate ship, the CSS *Alabama* and the blockade runner, *Denbigh* were built at the Laird’s yard in the 1860s. 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.

2.2.11 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 publicly funded park in the world.
- 1856 – Birkenhead became the first unincorporated borough to adopt the Public Libraries Act and open a public lending library.

- 1859 – The *Ma Robert*, the world's first ever steel hulled steam paddle ship, built by Lairds for Dr Livingstone's expedition up the Zambesi.
- 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.
- 1886 – The Mersey Railway 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..
- 1900 – 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.
- 1920 – The first all-welded ship in the world, the *Fulgar*, was built at Cammell Laird.
- 1929 – The Boy Scouts held their 'Coming of Age' Jamboree at Arrowe Park to celebrate 21 years since the movement's foundation.
- 1934 – The Queensway Tunnel was opened and held the record as the world's underwater tunnel for 24 years.
- 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.

2.3.1 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 Champion as an advocate for 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 two museum venues: Birkenhead Priory and the Williamson Art Gallery and Museum. It delivers 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.
- 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.
- The Children Young People's Department, through its Youth Education and Humanities Team has delivered a wide range of heritage activities in partnership with a many of external partners and other Council Departments.
- 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.

- Wirral has no dedicated Archaeological Service. Until April 2011, advice was provided through the Merseyside Archaeological Advisory Service within National Museums Liverpool, which was jointly funded by all five Merseyside authorities and also hosted the Historic Environment Record (HER). Archaeological advice in the planning process is now being provided through the relevant planning departments, but Wirral Council is currently negotiating with external archaeological organisations about providing a new HER and archaeological service for the borough.
- Wirral Parks and Countryside Service manages a wide range of land including coast, local parks, country parks, cemeteries, playing fields, golf courses and green spaces throughout the borough including outstanding landscapes and natural habitats. The Service delivers a wide range of educational and interpretative activities including walks, trails and other activities relating to heritage and the natural environment.
- Wirral's Forward Planning team is responsible for developing planning policy for Wirral, which has a significant impact on heritage. The emerging Local Development Framework includes a Biodiversity Audit, a Landscape Assessment and a Green Infrastructure Strategy as part of its evidence base.
- The Highways Service is responsible for maintenance of the public realm - excluding parks and open spaces - and has an important role in managing street scenes within conservation areas. Street Scene is also responsible for naming new streets and actively encourages street names which reflect the history and heritage of a particular area.
- 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.

2.3.2 National and regional heritage organisations

The National Trust does not have any historic properties on Wirral, but does own Heswall Fields, part of Caldy 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 provides advice on the most significant listed buildings and on monuments and gives general advice on maintaining the historic built environment. English Heritage's current strategic priority is to tackle Heritage at Risk (HAR) and provides funding for buildings, sites and monuments on the Heritage at Risk register.

Until 2011 English Heritage also co-ordinated and promoted national Heritage Open Days (HODs), but from 2012 this role has been undertaken by the National Trust, Civic Voice and the Heritage Alliance. The active organisation of the Wirral open days programme will continue to be delivered by local volunteers through 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, despite some successes, has fared less well than other authorities in attracting HLF funding, particularly under the Your Heritage and Young Roots programmes. HLF funding will be revised and the application process simplified from February 2013 and Council officers and the Wirral History and Heritage Association will be actively promoting these new HLF strands; encouraging local organisations to apply for appropriate funding.

2.3.3 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, conservation area partnerships and special interest groups – from transport history to the American Civil War. Their work is diverse and wide-ranging and includes commenting on planning applications and the development process; organising events, and activities; research and publications; campaigning and undertaking voluntary work.

The Wirral History and Heritage Association (WHHA) has been supported by the Council to represent over 90 local societies and act 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 Heritage at Risk and the development of a Local List.

2.3.4 Friends groups

Many of Wirral's parks, cemeteries and countryside areas have Friends Groups, comprised mainly of local residents who are keen to get involved or simply have their say in the management of their local park or green space. The Parks and Countryside Service is currently supported by 46 voluntary Friends Groups, who are closely involved in the protection of parks and green spaces, as well as organising events, activities and practical voluntary work.

Both the Williamson Art Gallery & Museum and Wirral Archives Service also have active friends groups to support their work.

2.3.5 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.

2.3.6 Partnership working

Partnership working is fundamental to the heritage sector and important partnerships have been forged to co-ordinate and deliver a range of initiatives, including partnerships with neighbouring local authorities.

The Museums Service has strong links with National Museums Liverpool (NML) and there have been successful collaborations with both the Lady Lever and the Walker Art Galleries. The Service also works closely with the Cheshire Museums Forum, the strategic body for the provision of museums services in the region and has used Renaissance funding to support the delivery of literacy projects for secondary schools.

The Conservation and Design Team is supported by the Conservation Area Forum and emerging Conservation Area Partnerships in its efforts to protect and enhance the character of Conservation Areas. The Parks and Countryside Service has especially strong links with the Friends Groups. It also works closely with partners and other land-owners through the

Biodiversity and Local Sites Partnership such as the RSPB, the Wildlife Trusts and the National Trust, to ensure that our land is managed in the most appropriate way for the purpose of conserving habitats and species.

The Wirral Attractions Partnership represents and promotes tourism and heritage attractions throughout Wirral. The Wirral Coastal Partnership brings together all sectors to champion and support a range of initiatives to the benefit of Wirral's coastline.

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.

2.4.1 Formal and informal learning

Through its Museums Services, 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. In recent years, lack of facilities and staff have meant that educational activities at both sites have been restricted, but major improvements and new ways of service delivery should mean that during 2013, both sites start to achieve their full educational and learning potential.

The Youth Education and Cultural Services Humanities Team have a long track record of working with Humanities Subject Leaders in schools, to ensure that local heritage makes a significant contribution to the school curriculum. A range of learning packs has been produced for every area of the borough, to support the local dimension of the school curriculum. This has also involved work with the Birkenhead Park Education Officers and support for the development of learning materials on the Park and engagement with local schools. From September 2011, Wirral no longer maintains a specialist Humanities Team and new approaches will need to be adopted to ensure that heritage education continues to be delivered in local schools.

The Parks and Countryside service, often in partnership with Friends Groups, is another major provider of learning services, including school visits and voluntary activity projects.

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 popular

workshops on family and local history topics, gives talks in schools and hosts group visits or workshops for local history societies, adult education groups and other informal groups interested in historical topics.

2.4.2 Community outreach

The appointment of a Heritage Officer in March 2010 has provided new opportunities to extend heritage activities into 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, offer advice on funding and project development and devise new and creative means for people to engage in Wirral's heritage.

2.4.3 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, to sixty in 2011 and 78 in 2012. 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. There is also growing evidence that Heritage Open Days now bring attract increasing numbers of visitors from outside the borough and make a direct contribution to our visitor economy.

2.4.4 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 and Heritage Open Days. Individual communities also organise a range of celebratory events, such as the popular Secret Gardens of Oxton and the Mersey Pirate Muster in New Brighton. The designation of themed years, such as the 2012 'Year of Coast and Countryside' gives the opportunity to promote different aspects of heritage through walks, talks and special events. 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. Viking and Norse re-enactments are popular and the living history group Wirhalh Skip Felag (Wirral Vikings) are particularly active around the borough. A recent innovation is the annual St Olave Wirral Viking Walk, from Neston to Chester, commemorating St Olave the 'Viking Saint' and celebrating Wirral's links with the Vikings.

2.4.5 Community drama and performance

There are numerous examples of Council services, community organisations and professional artists using drama to interpret Wirral's history, although this is usually dependant upon obtaining external funding. For instance, the Youth

Education Team, the Museum Service and other partners have successfully delivered a range of Heritage Lottery funded drama projects such as '*Flaybrick – their Past Our Future*' and '*Tranmere Rovers Remembered*', both of which were showcased regionally. The Parks and Countryside Service have used community performance 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. '*Their Past Our Future*' was a young people's project exploring the lives of local World War II veterans and creating a musical drama, which was performed in Birkenhead Library in 2011. The Wirral Youth Theatre has a strong track record of developing creative heritage-based performance and there are a number of independent organisations specialising in community drama projects.

2.4.6 Walks, talks and tours

Most Wirral parks and countryside spaces offer a regular programme of walks and related activities, and these are supplemented by walks led by volunteers from Friends Groups and local societies. For example Wirral's Parks and Countryside Service offer a joint annual events programme with the Dee Estuary Voluntary Wardens and RSPB to deliver a regular and long-standing programme of bird watching events.

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.

2.4.7 Community archaeology

Community archaeology enables local people to work alongside professional archaeologists and discover more about archaeological sites through investigation, fieldwork and recording. A number of successful projects have been conducted within the borough, for instance the 2007 community excavation at Leasowe Lighthouse and Meols, led by the Field Archaeology Unit of National Museums Liverpool. Local community groups, like Wirral Archaeology, offer a wealth of practical and local knowledge, and support professional units around the country on research, geophysical surveys and public engagement projects.

2.4.8 Interpretative trails (on-site and self guiding)

In recent years a number of interpretative trails have been created, exploring different aspects of Wirral's history and heritage. 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.

The Wirral Circular Trail is a 35 mile sign-posted route taking in the coastline, the history, the heritage and the countryside of the Wirral peninsula. Funding from the European Regional Development Fund and the Local Cycle Plan was secured through the Rights of Way Development Plan, to create a walking and cycle trail, linking the public rights of way network with other routes around Wirral. The trail is supported by a free high-quality interpretative guide, which is also available on-line. The Council has also produced The Wirral Nature Guide to the coastline.

The Council's Tourism and Destination Marketing Service has produced a number of self-guided trail leaflets, highlighting aspects of Wirral's heritage. A leaflet exploring the borough's many links with Titanic was brought out to coincide with the centenary of the sinking of the liner in April 2012. Another leaflet promoted the story of the Beatles on Wirral.

Many local societies and friends groups have produced trails, leaflets and publications, many of which are also available on-line. These are invaluable guides to local history throughout the borough. Local people have also been involved in raising funds for interpretative panels, such as the Friends of Meols Park who have facilitated a Viking panel in the park and are now seeking funding for a Viking statue and associated community programme. There is strong support for commemorative panels, celebrating major events and achievements. A panel commemorating the Second World War Cockleshell Heroes has recently been unveiled at Woodside and there are aspirations to erect a panel dedicated to the sinking of HMS Birkenhead.

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. Heritage makes a vital contribution to tourism, the environment, jobs, skills and the economy. It motivates people to travel in order to quench their thirst for knowledge, to reinforce their place in history and contextualise a place geographically and socially. In doing so, they spend considerable amounts of money to the benefit of the place and, hopefully, heritage. Heritage is not a luxury or a pleasant recreational pastime, but an integral part of our future.

Heritage and particularly heritage tourism have never been more important to the national and local economy. According to the Heritage Lottery Fund's

2010 document *Investing in Success: Heritage and the Tourism Economy*, the size of the heritage-tourism sector is in excess of £12.4 billion a year and supports an estimated 195,000 full-time jobs – this makes the sector bigger than the advertising, car or film industries. As people increasingly choose to stay in the UK rather than holiday abroad, heritage attractions have helped to increase visitor numbers as a crucial part of the national tourism offer. Recent statistics released by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, reveal that 74% of adults said that they had visited a heritage site over the past year and 51% had visited a museum or gallery; significant increases since the last survey in 2005 – 06.

The latest statistics reveal that Wirral's visitor economy is worth over £280 million, an increase of 13% over the last five years and employs the equivalent of over 4,000 jobs. The borough benefits mainly from repeat visits and heritage adds value to the wider tourist offer. The 2011 Ipsos Mori Poll showed that while coast/countryside and quality food were the most important considerations for planning short breaks (both 84%), the third highest consideration was cultural sights, attractions and experiences at 78%, up from 66% in 2006. Nearly half visitors surveyed said that their most popular activity was to visit an attraction, including Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight Museum, Spaceport at Seacombe and the U-Boat Story at Woodside. Mersey Ferries continue to be one of the most popular attractions on Merseyside.

Just as heritage-based tourism is vital to the national economy, heritage has even wider benefits. Each year English Heritage's *Heritage Counts* report assesses the state of the country's historic environment and provides evidence of the social and economic impact. The 2010 report found that every £1 of investment in the historic environment generates £1.6 of additional economic activity over a 10 year period. One in four businesses agrees that the historic environment is an important factor in deciding where to locate – the same as for good road access.

The importance of conserving our natural heritage and biological diversity is becoming increasingly recognised. The natural world is an integral part of our cultural heritage and identity. It is important in defining local character and distinctiveness. It affects the quality of life of the people of Wirral, contributing to our health and wellbeing. A good quality natural environment has a positive impact on house prices and makes high density housing more liveable. Our green infrastructure as a whole also provides 'ecosystem services' such as carbon sequestration, flood prevention, maintenance of water quality, micro-climate control and even pollination for our crops.

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. The new Marine Point development in the old seaside resort of New Brighton is an excellent example of regeneration working well within the historic environment. 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. The key challenge will be to maintain the local distinctiveness of these areas through a co-ordinated approach to heritage management and regeneration.

3.0 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.

3.1 The national and regional context

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) 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.

However, there are substantial and continuing cuts in DCMS budgets and, as a consequence, cuts in funding to local authorities and cuts in the amount of grant-aid available from organisations like Natural England and English Heritage. Regional Development Agencies (RDAs), which were significant investors in heritage, have been abolished. The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) and the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) are no longer stand-alone bodies.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) is the main governmental department with responsibility for the natural environment. Under their umbrella lie several agencies including the Environment Agency, Natural England and the Forestry Commission. To achieve DEFRA's vision for a more integrated large scale 'landscape' approach to nature conservation, Wirral will need to work with these agencies through Regional

and Local Biodiversity Partnerships for Cheshire and North Merseyside, and through emerging Local Nature Partnerships.

The government's Big Society initiative, which aims to encourage peoples' active engagement in society, is very relevant to the heritage sector, where community participation, volunteering and local activism is traditionally strong. However, whilst there will be more opportunities for greater local empowerment and decision making, there is a real challenge to ensure that a broad and diverse spectrum of local people and communities are actively involved.

A number of significant changes were made to the planning system in 2012. The government's planning policy is now set out in a single unified document, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). A key aim of the NPPF is to simplify the planning system and make it more accessible whilst promoting sustainable growth. This and the Localism Act of 2012 and other policy innovations, are intended to devolve planning decisions to a more local level, giving local communities greater ability to shape development in their areas. This new decentralised approach to planning and other decision making will inevitably have significant implications for Wirral's historic built environment.

3.1.1 English Heritage (EH)

English Heritage's strategic priorities are set out in their Corporate Plan 2011 - 2015 and the National Heritage Protection Plan (NHPP) 2011 - 2015. The Corporate Plan, sets out the context of EH's work over the next four years against a background of very substantial reductions in funding and resources. The implications for local authorities are that EH will primarily focus on buildings and structures on the Heritage at Risk register (eleven in Wirral borough); that there will be fewer grants for buildings and that Conservation Area partnership schemes are suspended.

The National Heritage Protection Plan provides a framework for more effective preservation of the historic environment. The Plan aims to ensure that, while helping to deliver a positive and sustainable economic growth, England's heritage is not needlessly at risk of damage, erosion or loss; is experienced, understood and enjoyed by visitors and local communities; and continues to provide memorable places where people live and work. 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.

3.1.2 Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF)

Heritage Lottery Fund's Strategic Framework 2013 – 2018, "*A Lasting Difference for Heritage and People*", aims to provide clarity about how HLF will deploy its resources over the next five years, whilst retaining flexibility to respond to emerging needs. The budget for new awards has more than doubled, from £180 million to £375 million per year. Around 75% of HLF funding will be through open programmes for any aspect of heritage and about 25% through targeted programmes to meet particular identified themes.

HLF assesses potential projects, large and small against a series of outcome. These are:

- **Heritage Outcomes** - with HLF investment, heritage will be: better managed; in better condition, better interpreted and explained; identified/recorded.
- **Outcomes for Individuals** - with HLF investment, people will have: learnt about heritage; developed skills; changed their attitudes and/or behaviour; had an enjoyable experience; volunteered time.
- **Outcomes for Community/Society** - with HLF investment: environmental impacts will be reduced; more people and a wider range of people will have engaged in heritage; organisations will be more resilient; local economies will be boosted; local areas/communities will be a better place to live, work or visit.

3.1.3 Arts Council England

In May 2012 most of the functions of the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council were transferred to Arts Council England, which now has the role to champion, develop and invest in museums and libraries. Their vision document "*Culture, Knowledge and Understanding: Great Museums and Libraries for Everyone*" has five main aims: excellence is thriving and celebrated; more people experience and are inspired by museums and libraries; museums and libraries are sustainable, resilient and innovative; the leadership and workforce in museums and libraries are diverse and highly skilled; every child and young person has the opportunity to experience the richness of museums and libraries.

3.1.4 The Heritage Alliance (THA)

The Heritage Alliance represents the independent heritage sector. Its membership includes 88 national and regional organisations like the National Trust, Council for British Archaeology, Campaign to Protect Rural England, the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, as well as many smaller and more specialised heritage groups. Its overall mission is to champion a

strong and prominent independent heritage sector and to be the voice of the independent heritage movement.

3.1.5 Civic Voice

Civic Voice is the national charity for the civic movement in England, which aims to make places more attractive, enjoyable and distinctive and to promote civic pride. Civic Voice, together with the National Trust and the Heritage Alliance are the national co-ordinators for Heritage Open Days.

3.2 The Local Context

3.2.1 Wirral Corporate Plan

Heritage in its widest context can support and contribute to Wirral Council's Corporate Plan objectives in many ways. Engagement with heritage can contribute to the quality of life and health and well-being agendas; promote educational attainment and raise the aspirations of young people; and support the development of those living in areas of multiple-deprivation. It makes a significant contribution to the cultural and leisure offer of the borough, for both residents and visitors. It also contributes to the Destination Marketing of Wirral as a business and visitor location. Finally, Wirral's heritage can be used to raise the profile of the borough in a positive way, promoting a sense of identity, a sense of community and a sense of civic pride.

3.2.2 Local strategies.

The heritage strategy will relate to the emerging Local Development Framework (LDF) in respect of the borough's natural environment and heritage assets, local distinctiveness and design within the historic environment. It will also support the strategic priorities of tourism and destination marketing in respect of promoting the heritage aspects of Wirral's tourism and visitor offer. The strategy actively supports the aims and objectives of the Strategic Framework for Wirral's Museums Service 2011 – 16, the Wirral Archives Service Plan and the emerging Parks and Countryside Service Plan.

4.0 MAKING OUR HERITAGE MATTER: KEY ISSUES AND PROPOSED ACTIONS

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 buildings in a Conservation Area are unsympathetically altered they are unlikely to be restored or 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, conservation areas, landscapes, archives and collections and their stewardship is therefore fundamental to this strategy. However, this does not prohibit change. It does not mean that a Listed Building cannot be altered or added to – rather that its significance is fully understood with the most important elements given the most protection. Above all is the need to find a sustainable future for our heritage, maintaining the key parts of the past for future generations.

4.1.1 Built environment

The Council has a statutory duty to ensure the proper protection of all Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas in the borough. However, with over 1,900 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.

Most Conservation Areas now have an adopted Management Plan and Conservation Area Partnerships made up of local residents are being formed. The success of Conservation Areas depends on the joint commitment of the Council and local people, working together to preserve and enhance the character of each area. Conservation Areas are periodically reviewed to ensure that these places of special interest are being protected, and the Council consults with local people about the revision of existing Conservation Area boundaries and the designation of new areas. Conservation Area designation is currently being proposed for Lower Bebington, Storeton, Noctorum, Raby, Landican and Brimstage.

ACTION: Ensure that all the Conservation Areas within the borough have a formally adopted Management Plan and a cycle of appraisals as part of the process.

ACTION: Continue to review all existing Conservation Areas and to designate new Conservation Areas as appropriate.

A particular issue of concern is the incremental erosion of the character of Conservation Areas, through the small scale alterations to dwelling houses which are normally possible through the exercise of 'permitted development rights', granted to householders by the Government, under the General Development Planning Order. Article 4 Directions are a potentially useful means of protecting the original character of groups of unlisted buildings in Conservation Areas, as they trigger the necessity for planning permission for relatively minor alterations to the external appearance of buildings. However, they tend to work best where property owners 'buy into' the concept, where character properties prove to be a sound financial investment and where local groups can assist in making a case for application. Article 4 Directions are resource intensive, take a long time to establish and their success is heavily dependent upon policing and enforcement. However, the Council will work with local residents to monitor changes in residential areas within Conservation Areas and would consider the application of Article 4 Directions, if the character of those streets appears threatened by uncontrolled change.

ACTION: Recognise the importance of retaining the character of Conservation Areas and take appropriate measures, including the application of Article 4 Directions to limit the impact of small-scale changes.

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.

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

More than half local authorities nationally now maintain a non-statutory Local List of buildings and structures deemed to have local significance and value. Local heritage listing is promoted as good practice by English Heritage because although heritage

assets included within a Local List do not benefit from any additional planning controls, inclusion should ensure that heritage issues become a 'material consideration' in the determination of a planning application affecting the property. Inclusion on a Local List can flag up the significance of a building early in the planning process, giving more time for appropriate options to be considered.

English Heritage issued a '*Good Practice Guide for Local Heritage Listing*' in May 2012. This emphasises that the local listing process is an important way for local communities, working in partnership with the local authority, to identify those assets which they value as distinctive within the local environment. Community involvement is a key element throughout the local listing process, from identifying the selection criteria to undertaking surveys and recording heritage assets. Within Wirral, there is strong community support to engage in local listing and considerable skill and expertise could be offered to support the process.

ACTION: Explore the practicalities of compiling a non-statutory 'Local List' and support the work of local organisations and individuals in identifying buildings of local interest or merit.

Statues, monuments, art-works and memorials all make a significant contribution to the character of the local environment and need to be maintained in good condition. The War Memorial in Port Sunlight, the second largest in the country in terms of bronze statuary, has recently been conserved to a very high standard by the Port Sunlight Heritage Trust. The Council has successfully applied for 'spot-listing' for a number of war memorials and has an ongoing programme of cleaning, repair and re-inscription in preparation for the 75th anniversary of the outbreak of World War II and the centenary of the outbreak of World War I in 2014.

ACTION: Continue to take a pro-active approach to the conservation and maintenance to the borough's war memorials.

It should not be forgotten that most of the historic building stock in the borough is owned by private individuals or private companies, using their own resources to keep a building in good shape and in use. It is incumbent on building owners to be aware of the threat of incipient decay and act promptly to head off problems. The value of maintenance cannot be overstated; once decay becomes obvious, major repairs will be required and these equate to major costs, disruption and the avoidable loss of historic fabric. The Council

pro-actively encourages owners of buildings and historic sites to undertake repairs and works with local communities to raise awareness of building maintenance issues. Whilst education undoubtedly has a part to play, eventually in the small minority of cases where private owners are unable or unwilling to act, the Planning Authority may have no alternative but to use its statutory powers.

ACTION: Work pro-actively with private owners to encourage regular repairs and maintenance and, where appropriate take enforcement action to safeguard neglected buildings.

4.1.2 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, churches and places of worship. There are currently eleven such sites in Wirral, mostly in private ownership.

- **Storeton Hall, Bebington:** Grade II* Listed: condition - fair (private ownership);
- **Fort Perch Rock, New Brighton:** Grade II* Listed: condition - poor (private ownership);
- **Birkenhead Priory:** Scheduled Ancient Monument: condition – major localised problems, but currently subject to a major scheme of repair;
- **Bromborough Court House Moated Site and Fishponds:** Scheduled Ancient Monument; condition – significant localised problems (private ownership);
- **Thornton Manor, Bebington:** Registered Park and Garden Grade II*; condition – major localised problems (private ownership);
- **Flaybrick Memorial Gardens (Flaybrick Cemetery), Bidston:** Registered Park and Garden Grade II* – very bad;
- **Hamilton Square, Birkenhead:** Conservation Area; condition – very bad (private ownership with the exception of Birkenhead Town Hall and central gardens);
- **Rock Park, Rock Ferry:** Conservation Area; condition – poor (private ownership).
- **St Andrew's Church, Bebington:** Grade I; condition – very bad;

- **St. James Church, New Brighton:** Grade II; condition – very bad;
- **Christ Church, Port Sunlight:** Grade II*; condition - poor

English Heritage requires local authorities to consider sites At Risk as priorities for action. Wirral Council has recently invested heavily in the restoration and improvement of Birkenhead Priory. Clifton Park in Tranmere has been removed from the HAR thanks to concerted enforcement action, while discussions with English Heritage over the future for Flaybrick Cemetery are ongoing.

ACTION: 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.

4.1.3 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, which has plans for significant community engagement and involvement.

ACTION: 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 features and fabric are preserved.

4.1.4 Heritage Crime

Heritage crime is increasingly a major issue nationally and one which local authorities and the police are recognising and trying to tackle together. An estimated 700,000 listed buildings were affected by theft or vandalism to their fabric last year, costing their owners many millions of pounds. The biggest single threat is from metal theft, with churches being most vulnerable. As many as three in eight churches suffered from heritage crime last year – one Wirral church has lead stolen from the roof on four separate occasions.

There are a number of national initiatives to tackle this problem, including the Alliance to Reduce Crime Against Heritage (ARCH); a voluntary network which takes forward a range of initiatives to galvanise local action. Council officers have been in discussion with Merseyside Police as to how best to report and respond to crimes against heritage assets and are working with a post-graduate student who is researching the scale of the problem on Wirral.

4.1.5 Archaeology

Archaeological remains are finite by their very nature and any intervention or excavation is not repeatable or reversible. Therefore it is important that all archaeological projects of whatever size or complexity are supervised by professional archaeologists who are active and current members of the Institute for Archaeologists. The Council is not able to support projects where the observance of professional standards is not demonstrably adhered to.

This is not to say that amateur archaeologists should be constrained or excluded. On the contrary, the Council encourages community archaeology and aims to work in partnership with local groups in order to secure appropriate levels of observance of professional standards. There is plenty of scope for amateurs and volunteers to work alongside professional archaeologists and this remains the basis for undertaking community projects that involve archaeological excavation.

The withdrawal of funding from the Merseyside Archaeological Service has meant that Wirral Council, like the other four Merseyside authorities, has had to find new ways of acquiring specialist archaeological advice; including advice on a range of development and planning issues. English Heritage requires that any advice obtained must be of a suitable professional level. An external provider of archaeological services has now been identified and the new arrangements start during 2013.

ACTION: Ensure that Wirral Council promotes the highest standards in archaeology and is able to secure the best possible specialist archaeological advice on development and planning issues.

ACTION: Actively encourage professionally led community archaeology projects as a means of furthering our knowledge of the history of the borough.

4.1.6 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.

ACTION: Take appropriate measures to ensure that Wirral's historic buildings and archaeological sites are adequately recorded and that where appropriate, these records be made publicly accessible.

Good quality information is needed to inform the effective management of wildlife habitats and species. Historically, wildlife recording has depended to a large extent on amateur naturalists, but increasingly information is becoming available from consultants working on development projects. Biological data collection is co-ordinated in our region by Cheshire Wildlife Trust and the Biological Records Centres for Cheshire and Merseyside.

ACTION: Work with Biological Records Centres and Local Biodiversity Partnerships to enable data collection and the voluntary recording of wildlife on Wirral, and ensure the best information is used to inform the management of our natural heritage.

4.1.7 Historic parks, cemeteries and natural heritage

Wirral possesses a range of historic parks, cemeteries and open spaces of national regional and local significance. Some parks and open spaces are strongly historic in character through their buildings and structures and because of their uniqueness: Birkenhead Park because of its role in the parks movement and Flaybrick Cemetery because of its fabric and historical connections with Birkenhead and its people. Others reveal heritage through

lay-out, planting schemes and surviving buildings, fixtures and structures. In addition to their intrinsic heritage value, they form high quality open spaces for public enjoyment. All these parks and open spaces also have nature conservation value, whether designated or undesignated, which needs protecting and managing to different degrees.

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.

ACTION: Identify funding for the restoration of Flaybrick Memorial Gardens and new end use for the chapels.

ACTION: Ensure the significance of historic parks and cemeteries and the historic buildings, features and structures within them are recognised and understood and that their importance is reflected in plans and management strategies.

ACTION: Produce a partnership plan with Friends Groups, environmental groups and other stakeholders to ensure that the views of heritage groups are properly represented in the emerging Parks and Countryside Service Plan.

4.1.8 Natural heritage

There are still a number of designated and non-designated sites where Wirral's habitats and species are at risk from factors such as recreation use, invasive species, lack of management or inappropriate management. All of Wirral's parks and open spaces, designated or not hold nature value, whether a grass verge, town park or countryside site.

ACTION: Ensure the importance of natural heritage and Biodiversity is recognised and understood and that this is reflected in all Parks Management Plans.

ACTION: Work with Natural England, the Wirral Biodiversity and Local Sites Partnership and other partners in the public, private the voluntary sectors to manage all Wirral's designated nature sites towards favourable condition.

4.1.9 Community involvement in the historic environment

Local people currently take an active role in shaping, protecting and understanding their local natural, built and historic environments through civic and amenity societies, friends groups and community organisations. The importance of their roles will increase as the aspirations for the Big Society and the implications of Localism come to have a major impact on how the historic environment is managed. The new emphasis on decentralisation and local empowerment will bring opportunities for the voluntary heritage sector but also new challenges. Many community groups simply do not have the organisational capacity or skills to fully engage in the process. The Council will need to offer leadership and vision to support neighbourhood groups, assist with capacity building and funding applications and, most importantly, manage expectations, so that local communities have a clear understanding about what can and cannot be achieved through Localism.

ACTION: Work in partnership with local communities and neighbourhoods so that that they have the knowledge, skills and capacity to engage effectively in the planning process.

4.1.10 Archives and collections

Within Wirral there are significant museum and archive collections, ranging from major collections of international and national importance, to those which tell the stories of our local heritage. The challenge is to ensure that all collections, including documents, artefacts, art, memorabilia and memories are preserved, conserved and made accessible. Whilst the major collections are those held by Wirral Council, National Galleries Liverpool, Port Sunlight Heritage Trust and the Unilever Archives, there are many smaller collections in private ownership or owned by local societies or trusts.

- **Archives and Local History Collections**

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.

ACTION: Increase access to the borough's important archive collections by a continued programme of adding catalogues and digital images to the Wirral Archives web-site.

Wirral Library Service also has important local history and family history collections, maintained by Birkenhead, Bebington and Wallasey libraries. These are extremely valued by local residents. However, the fact that so much research material is scattered across the borough and not always easily accessible has been recognised as an issue. The Library Service Strategy 2012 – 2015 '*A New Chapter*' advocates developing closer links with the Archive Service to provide a more cohesive and effective local and family history reference facility. This will include reviewing access to reference facilities in liaison with local interest groups, partner agencies and the Archive Service to develop a strategy for the storage and retrieval of original documents, which develops efficiencies whilst retaining public accessibility.

- **Museum collections**

The Wirral Museums collection is largely housed in The Williamson Art Gallery and Museum. The Fine Art collection is of particular note, with 18th and 19th century watercolour paintings and drawings by regionally and locally important artists and the work of the 19th century Birkenhead artist Philip Wilson Steer. There is an impressive collection of maritime models and pictures, particularly vessels built by Cammell Laird and its predecessor shipyards, and the Mersey Ferries. The ceramics collection includes the nationally important Della Robbia pottery made in Birkenhead, Liverpool porcelain and Seacombe pottery. There are smaller social history and archaeological collections and the Civic Silver.

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. Particular successes in recent years include 'A Textile Dynasty: Arthur H Lee I Sons,

Birkenhead', which won the national Museums & Heritage Award in 2010 as the 'Industry's Favourite'; a smaller exhibition, 'Above the Clouds: Mallory and Irvine and the Quest for Everest' was highly commended in the same awards.

Collaborations with National Museums Liverpool (NML), the Cheshire West & Cheshire Museums Service and other regional museums and galleries are regular and frequent. The 'Albert Lipczinski' exhibition, displayed from July to October 2011, was an international collaboration with the Polish National Museum in Gdansk. It was specifically planned to complement the 'Art in Revolution' exhibition held at the Walker Art Gallery, which featured works by Lipczinski alongside those of international artists like van Gough, Matisse and Gauguin, who were all displayed in a groundbreaking exhibition held in Liverpool in 1911. 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 Williamson and the Walker galleries.

ACTION: Continue to develop exhibitions with National Museums Liverpool and other partners, complimenting the Museum Service's own collections with other public and private collections, to create exhibitions of regional and national significance.

2013 promises to be one of new opportunities for the Museum Service as the major improvements to the Williamson start to impact upon service delivery. These include new and re-designed galleries; learning spaces; shop and cafe facilities. The intention is to markedly increase visitor numbers and broaden the visitor base and also to maximise income streams. New creative learning programmes and special initiatives are intended to bring larger and more diverse audiences into the building. Similarly, the Council's investment in restoration and repairs at the Priory, has given the opportunity to use capital moneys as potential 'match' for a major Heritage Fund Application for improved access and interpretation.

Hand in hand in with new and improved facilities will come new ways of working and the Museum Service's Business Plan proposes new and more flexible structures, with stronger emphasis on formal, informal and family learning. By making better use of skills and talents within the service, it is hoped to free up time for the professional museums staff to concentrate on developing the collections to meet the needs of Accreditation and to tackle the backlog in documentation which has accrued over many years, with a view to this being completed by 2016.

ACTION: Implement the Museums Service restructure, to facilitate more effective care and display of collections, documentation and exhibitions.

ACTION: Purchase new documentation software and complete documentation so that the complete collection is recorded.

4.2 REGENERATION – using 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. Large heritage assets such as Hamilton Square, Port Sunlight, the docklands and coast are key to creating prestige environments that help to drive inward investment.

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. Early initiatives will include the restoration of the Grade II Listed Hydraulic Tower and its conversion to a landmark 'beacon' educational, cultural and tourism hub. The Wirral Street Car project proposes to exploit Birkenhead's pioneering 'first' in having the earliest street tramway in Europe by, extending the existing historic street car infrastructure to connect early stages of development within Wirral Waters with existing rail, ferry and bus stations and services.

ACTION: 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 assets within regeneration projects.

The new Mersey Ferries landing stage at Liverpool's Pier Head has the potential to bring significant tourism opportunities across the water. Merseytravel will be actively encouraged to explore the potential for new ferry terminals and ferry services to Wirral.

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 Mersey 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.

ACTION: Ensure that major long-term developments such as Wirral Waters and the Mersey Coastal Park maximise the opportunities to conserve, enhance and promote key heritage assets and also consider the local character of the area.

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.

ACTION: Work with communities to ensure that regeneration proposals at Hoylake, West Kirby and Deeside, reflect and interpret local heritage and the natural environment.

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.

ACTION: Identify a funding package which will deliver the visitor and interpretation centre at Thurstaston.

Maintaining a high quality historic environment where people want to live is vital to the economy of Wirral. Attractive historic suburbs both in the west and east of the borough can contribute to the regeneration process by attracting and retaining families with high spending power whom might otherwise be tempted to live and perhaps, work elsewhere. The need to protect, manage and enhance residential areas of historic value will become increasingly important if major regeneration proposals like Wirral Waters successfully generate large numbers of well paid jobs for people with families.

ACTION: Work with local residents and Conservation Area Partnerships to retain the special character of historic suburbs.

Over the next few years, the borough is uniquely placed to maximise its heritage tourism potential. The current financial climate has meant a significant rise in day trips and visits to sites of historic interest and natural beauty. Plans are already underway for 'Wirral Remembers' a partnership programme of events commemorating centenary of the Great War and the Open Golf Championship in 2014 means that the eyes of the world will be on Wirral. Within this context there are significant opportunities to capitalise on a wealth of heritage assets which have national and international appeal such as stunning landscapes, coast, parks and wildlife sites; our Viking and American Civil War heritage; Cammell Laird and maritime connections; Wilfred Owen links, and a long and distinguished sporting history. Heritage is vital to the visitor experience and it is important to bring it to life with good interpretation to tell its stories and make it relevant and accessible to everyone. It is crucial

that the visitor experience and the opportunities for all kinds of public involvement at heritage sites continue to improve and increase.

ACTION: Maximise opportunities to promote heritage as part of Wirral's wider tourism offer and ensure that that the importance of the borough's historic and natural environments are reflected in destination marketing strategies.

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

Heritage makes a vital contribution to learning for all ages; our historic buildings, museums, archaeological sites, artefacts and archives can all be used to provide stimulating and imaginative learning opportunities. Maximising educational and training opportunities across the borough is a key Council objective and heritage has the potential to make a significant contribution to corporate goals. 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.

ACTION: Work across Council departments, particularly those promoting community development and the interests of young and elderly people, to utilise heritage learning programmes to deliver strategic and corporate objectives.

However, there is still much more that can be done. The Museums Service, through its Business Plan, is currently refocusing its work to place greater emphasis on formal, informal and family learning. As the result of a management review, the existing education officer role will be redefined. The roles will be to develop and deliver cross-curricular and key skills programmes and to respond pro-actively to topic work undertaken in schools. The existing Engagement Programme will be progressively broadened, with strands encompassing family learning, vulnerable children and young people, elders' engagement and volunteer development.

ACTION: Refocus the museum staffing structure to achieve a stronger emphasis on formal and informal learning and community engagement.

ACTION: Develop and implement an Informal Learning Strategy, identifying potential partners and with an underpinning funding strategy.

Schools are responsible for teaching history as a core subject in the national curriculum. The importance of history and local history in a well rounded education has been highlighted in 2011 Ofsted Report *'History for All'* which showed that local history in particular has the power to bring abstract principles and distant events alive for children, stimulating minds and imaginations and improving learning.

The English Baccalaureate, introduced in 2011, recognises qualifications in geography or history within its humanities element. This provides a tremendous opportunity to strengthen heritage work in schools, as the history GCSE now contains a significant British/local history element. The Primary Curriculum is currently under review, but it is likely that there will be a far more flexible curriculum; pupils will still study history but topics may not be so prescriptive giving opportunities to explore heritage themes in more exciting and creative ways.

Heritage education has been successfully delivered over many years by the Council's Youth Education and Cultural Service Humanities Team, working with Humanities Subject Leaders in local schools. However, the Council no longer maintains a specialist Humanities Team, although most secondary and primary schools continue to have access to support networks. Changes in staffing structures will require new and creative approaches to delivering heritage education in schools. There will be a need for more joined up working with other Council departments and external partners, but also opportunities to build on successes of the past.

Strategies need to be devised to tackle some of the key barriers to schools who are unable to access heritage sites and activities. The lack of access to free or cheap transport is of particular concern. There is a need to improve communications so that information about heritage sites and activities is specifically targeted at the right person in each school. More needs to be done to get teachers out of the classroom and to pro-actively demonstrate that cross-curricular heritage-base projects not just deliver key educational targets, but give an added value which far exceeds the extra effort involved.

Recent changes to the National Curriculum have brought new opportunities for schools to utilise heritage in the classroom. The English Baccalaureate, introduced in 2011, recognises qualifications in geography or history within its humanities element. This provides a tremendous opportunity to strengthen heritage work in schools, as the history GCSE now contains a significant

British/local history element. The Primary Curriculum is currently under review, but it is likely that there will be a far more flexible curriculum; pupils will still study history but topics may not be so prescriptive giving opportunities to explore heritage themes in more exciting and creative ways.

ACTION: Work across Council departments and with schools and external partners to ensure that heritage, natural history and local history continue to be taught in local schools and are embedded into cross-curricular work.

ACTION: Work towards achieving the 'Learning Outside the Classroom' accredited standard for all education offered by the Parks and Countryside Service.

One way to support learning in schools could be make greater use of the community and voluntary sector. Members of local history, archaeology and civic societies have a wealth of local knowledge which could be shared with children and young people. A number are already working with local schools and there is real enthusiasm to do more. However, such activity is usually done on an ad hoc basis. It is not always easy for the community sector to forge links with the education sector, while issues of child protection and insurance can be barriers to voluntary work in schools. In their turn, most teachers are probably unaware of the pool of expertise on their doorsteps and how this could be utilised to help deliver National Curriculum themes. One solution might be for the Council to hold a data-base of those wishing to work in schools, assist with legal issues and act as broker between schools and community volunteers.

ACTION: Work with the community sector to establish links with schools and provide the necessary support for them to work with pupils and students.

The Council provides opportunities for vocational training and placements within the museums and archives sectors. The Museums Service has been developing links with Initial Teacher Training providers, to create learning outside the classroom placements and promote the museum sites as learning destinations for trainee teachers to inform their future practice. The Council has been taking some measures to address the 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 pro-actively supported. Discussions have been held with Wirral Met to develop courses on craft skills, with students

visiting and learning from current restoration schemes. The Port Sunlight Village Trust has initiated a programme of workshops demonstrating the approved methods of repair and restoration of historic buildings and such a scheme could be extended to other Conservation Areas within the borough.

The Friends of Birkenhead Park are applying to the Heritage Lottery Fund's 'Skills for the Future' programme for a major heritage skills development programme. If successful, this will include general heritage skills (volunteer management, community engagement, learning programme development, interpretation, oral history, research and local history), but will also embrace practical skills relating to the built environment (stone masonry, wall construction, lead working, cast iron moulding and production) and natural heritage (horticulture).

ACTION: Recognise the heritage skills deficit and explore the possibilities of bringing together education, training and learning organisations, to consider skills development in the heritage sector, particularly traditional craft and construction skills.

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. Across the borough, the Council and its partners deliver or support a wide range of community outreach activities and are seeking 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 importance of heritage in linking a range of social agendas needs to be recognised and exploited. The Museums Service has developed a Community Engagement Plan, to support the development of projects that target specific groups with different social needs, including Looked After Children, isolated elders and young carers. A wider 'Health and Heritage' programme of activity is being developed with a range of partners and will include reminiscence and inter-generational work in the community.

ACTION: The Museums Service to identify external funding to implement a Community Engagement Plan that will increase the number of community engagement projects by 50% year on year for the next three years.

ACTION: Work with partners to develop a 'Heritage and Health' programme and identify funding options by March 2012.

If widening participation and access is to be meaningful, there needs to be a far more pro-active approach to engaging excluded groups, including black and ethnic minorities, isolated elders and people with disabilities. In doing this, there may be a need to challenge traditional definitions of heritage and recognise that there will be diverse and conflicting and sometimes controversial meanings. Stronger links need to be forged with community groups and the voluntary sector, 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. A Community Engagement Plan for the Heritage Strategy has now been developed and work to involve a wider range of local organisations and communities will take place during 2013.

ACTION: Prioritise targeting heritage and outreach activity towards excluded groups and work with them to devise projects which directly meet their physical, intellectual and cultural needs.

The majority of people who are currently 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 giving them more support to develop their work and explore new ways of delivering 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.

ACTION: Continue to support the work of the voluntary and community heritage sector by helping with skills

development and funding advice, so that they can maximise their work within local communities.

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

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.

ACTION: Support Wirral History and Heritage Association in organising Wirral's Heritage Open Days and encourage the development of a longer and more varied cultural programme.

Understanding is crucial to the enjoyment of heritage and local people are engaged in a wide range of initiatives to interpret their history. A number of Friends Groups manage heritage buildings for interpretative and educational use, while others provide interpretative programmes through walks, trails and participatory activities. The Charles Dawson Brown Groups have well advanced plans to upgrade and redisplay their museum attached to St Bridget's Church in West Kirby. Leasowe Lighthouse has transferred to community management. Other community-led projects include the Hoylake Lifeboat Museum, the Wilfred Own Story in Birkenhead and the New Brighton Heritage and Information Centre.

ACTION: Actively encourage wider participation in heritage and the interpretation of Wirral's history, through supporting the work of community led initiatives.

ACTION: Continue to work with community groups and partners to provide a varied, high quality events programme through the Parks and Countryside Service.

Wirral has some excellent interpretative trails, which are highly regarded by local people and visitors. There are imaginative proposals for further large-scale interpretative projects with community input, in the redevelopment of

Hoyleke Parade and in the North Wirral Coastal Park. There is strong community support for the interpretation of Wirral's Viking heritage, World War II history and historic docklands, amongst other themes. The borough's historic parks and cemeteries would greatly benefit from enhanced on-site interpretation. Given the number of famous people with Wirral connections, there is real scope to upgrade and extend the 'Blue Plaque' programme. However, within the borough, there are interpretive panels, commemorative plaques and other signage which are in poor condition due to vandalism or old age. Implementing new interpretative projects will be dependent on funding and there is a need to review existing interpretation, identify new opportunities and establish a framework for future development and investment.

ACTION: Compile an audit of current interpretative provision and develop a heritage interpretation strategy for the borough.

The rapid developments in new technologies, particularly Smartphones and other mobile internet-accessible devices, have created new opportunities for interpretation and engagement, which are already being used in heritage attractions and sites around the country. Their use will be particularly important if new and younger audiences are to be attracted to heritage. Virtual tours and interpretation would be particularly useful at sites like Birkenhead Priory, where the location of traditional interpretation panels is problematic because the site is a Scheduled Ancient Monument and all the buildings are listed.

ACTION: Develop a programme to implement the use of new technologies to interpret museums sites and explore the potential for wider applications across the borough.

With so much activity taking place on Wirral, it is vital that there is an integrated and joined up approach to promoting heritage (whether as information, volunteering opportunities, planning, events, tourism etc.). Co-ordination could be improved by an enhanced heritage section on the Council's web-site, with clear links to the Wirral History and Heritage Association's web-site, plus links to other local and regional organisations, including English Heritage, National Museums Liverpool, Merseytravel and other heritage providers. Consideration should also be given to promoting heritage through social networking sites (this was seen as a priority by the young people consulted in the development of this strategy) and will inevitably be an important route for the future.

ACTION: Explore the potential to further promote heritage and heritage activity through the Council's web-site, by and enhance heritage section for heritage, bringing together information about all the authority's heritage based services and providing links to other heritage organisations.

4.5 CELEBRATION – recognising and utilising the part heritage can play in promoting 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 programme 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. An excellent opportunity was the designation of 2012 as 'Year of Coast and Countryside', celebrating Wirral's natural environment, engaging local people in community activities and bringing the borough's attractions to the attention of a wider audience. There will be different themes in future years.

Tidy Britain's prestigious Green Flag award celebrates and promotes heritage in our parks and open spaces. Green Flags have been awarded to 14 of Wirral's parks to date. In addition, Birkenhead Park has gained a Green Flag Heritage Award and Tam O'Shanter Farm has attained a Green Flag Community Award.

The aspiration to achieve UNESCO World Heritage Site status for Port Sunlight and Birkenhead Park should be supported and pursued.

ACTION: Work with partners to promote initiatives which celebrate and raise the profile of Wirral's heritage and promote a positive image of the borough.

ACTION: Increase the number of Wirral's Parks achieving the Green Flag standard.

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 engagement 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, a sandstone wall, an ancient tree or hedgerow, 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.

ACTION: Support local communities in celebrating those aspects of their local heritage which are important to them and create opportunities for them to get involved activities which help shape the future of their area.

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. As well being a vital tool in understanding our recent past, oral history projects can explore sensitive topics such as prejudice, fear and division, often as a way of challenging stereotypes. Reminiscence work with older people encourages a sense of self-worth and confidence whilst inter-generational work brings younger and older people together, breaking down barriers and encouraging understanding.

ACTION: Ensure that individual and collective memories are captured and celebrated through supporting reminiscence and recording projects.

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.

ACTION: Explore the potential for training volunteer ‘Heritage Ambassadors’ to promote heritage throughout the borough.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it is essential to strengthen cross-cultural links between heritage and other sectors – the arts, sports, libraries, theatre, music etc. – as heritage is stronger when seen as part of a wider cultural offer and can make a greater contribution to sense of place, identity and quality of life.

ACTION: Work more closely with other sectors to ensure that heritage is an integral part of Wirral’s wider cultural offer.

5.0 IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGY

5.1 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.

5.2 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, deliver and protect 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.

5.3 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 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** – is there environmental, economic, organisational capacity?
- **Current Council Priority** – if all relevant criteria are fulfilled is this a project the Council would wish to consider as a priority?

By assessing potential projects against these criteria, using a simple assessment matrix (see below), it is possible to identify those proposals that have most chance of success and to prioritise accordingly.

Project	Description	Lead/ Partners	Strategic Fit	Community Need	Meets Heritage Objectives	Funding	Skills	Timescale	Sustainability	Current Council Priority

5.4 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 an evolving and 'living' document. It is important that local people are kept informed of progress and feel included in this process.

Within the Council there are many services and people involved in heritage issues. Each has their own perspective where heritage cuts across their core responsibilities. Implementation of this strategy will need a co-ordinated approach to all aspects of heritage, working across different departments and services.

The Council has now convened a Heritage Steering Group, composed of officers and key elected members, to drive the strategy forward. This meets quarterly and reports annually to the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The officers represent all services with direct or indirect responsibility for heritage issues (e.g. Museums, Archives, Heritage, Parks and Countryside, Conservation, Education, Libraries, Regeneration and Destination Marketing). There is also the potential to invite external members representing different areas of expertise and influence, such as the independent museum/attractions sector, civic movement, friends groups, community education, ethnic minority representation and special needs.

As well as championing the heritage strategy and ensuring a co-ordinated approach to delivery, this group is tasked with promoting heritage in its widest sense and ensuring that the Council, partners and community work together towards common objectives.

5.5 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: Action Plan – Progress 2011 - 2012

Timescale: S = short (within 1 year); M = medium (2 -3 years); L = long (3 years and over); OG = ongoing

Strategy Themes:

- A. Stewardship and Protection – conserving Wirral’s heritage for future generations.
- B. Regeneration – using heritage as a driver for economic development, inward investment and supporting sustainable communities.
- C. Learning – maximising the role of heritage in supporting education, training and life-long learning.
- D. Participation – ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to access, enjoy and participate in heritage.
- E. Celebration – recognising and utilising the part heritage can play in promoting local identity, social cohesion and civic and community pride.

	Action Area	Time-scale	Lead	Support/Partners	Financial and staffing Implications	Progress 2011 - 2012
	STEWARDSHIP AND PROTECTION					
1.	Ensure that all the Conservation Areas within the borough have a formally adopted Management Plan and a cycle of appraisals as part of the process.	M/OG	Conservation & Design Team	Conservation Area Forum/Conservation Partnerships	Currently within existing resources; has staff implications	Oxton CA Management Plan adopted.
2.	Continue to review all existing Conservation Areas and to designate new Conservation Areas as appropriate.	O/G	Conservation & Design Team	English Heritage, local residents	Currently within existing resources; has staff implications.	Lower Bebington Conservation Area appraisal drafted.
3	Recognise the importance of retaining the character of Conservation Areas and take appropriate measures, including the application of Article 4 Directions, to limit the impact of small-scale changes.	OG	Conservation & Design Team/ Planning Enforcement Team	Conservation Area Forum	Currently within existing resources, but recognising that enforcement will be an additional burden of officer time.	Article 4 Direction for Oxton in preparation.
4	Ensure that as many as possible of the borough’s historic buildings, sites and structures are statutorily protected through the listing process.	OG	Conservation & Design Team Parks and Countryside Service and Asset Management	Conservation Area Forum, WHHA, local amenity societies, Friends Groups, English Heritage, War Memorials Trust.	Currently within existing resources, but needs voluntary and community input.	Listing achieved for St Joseph’s Upton, St Joseph’s Tranmere, St Anne’s rock Ferry, Crows Foot Inn Raby and Vineyard Farmhouse. Application for Pensby Hotel rejected.

			(historic structures within parks and cemeteries) Senior Architectural Assistant (War Memorials)			West Kirby war memorial listed.
5	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.	S	Conservation and Design Team/Heritage Outreach Officer	WHHA, local amenity societies	Feasibility currently within existing resources but reliant on volunteer and community support.	Scoping document completed with view to committee report. Local volunteers identified.
6	Continue to take a pro-active approach to the conservation and maintenance to the borough's war memorials.	2014	Asset Management	Civic societies, English Heritage, War Memorials Trust	Currently within existing resources	Programme of cleaning, repair and re-inscription of war memorials on going and on target for 2014 World War 1 commemorations.
7	Work pro-actively with private owners to encourage regular repairs and maintenance and, where appropriate, take enforcement action to safeguard neglected buildings.	OG	Conservation & Design Team, Enforcement Team		Currently within existing resources	Workshop for private owners held as part of Heritage Support Initiative.
8	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.	OG	Conservation & Design Team, Regeneration Teams	English Heritage, Heritage Lottery Fund, Architectural Heritage Fund.	Currently within existing resources; English Heritage funding is available for buildings and sites on the HAR register.	Ongoing meetings with EH to resolve problem buildings/sites. Capital programme of repairs to Birkenhead Priory nearing completion. Brief for landscape restoration scheme for Flaybrick prepared. Actively exploring opportunities to manage buildings/sites with regional building preservation Trusts.

9	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 features and fabric are preserved.	OG	Conservation & Design Team, Regeneration Teams	Individual churches and places of worship; Wirral Churches Together; English Heritage; Churches Tourism Association	Currently within existing resources. A priority within HLF funding streams, should external funding be considered.	Working with police and other agencies to launch 'Heritage Crime' initiative to tackle issues of lead theft and other damage to churches and religious buildings.
10	Ensure Wirral Council promotes the highest standards in archaeology and is able to secure the best possible archaeological advice on development and planning issues.	S	Conservation & Design; planning teams		Funding identified.	A new provider of professional archaeological advice has been identified.
11	Actively encourage professionally led community archaeology projects as a means of furthering our knowledge of the history of the borough.	OG	Conservation & Design Team/Heritage Officer	Universities, NML, archaeological societies, community groups.	Professional advice within current resources. Community excavations dependant upon attracting external funding.	Successful community excavation undertaken at Tam O'Shanter. Discussions about community excavation at Hilbre in hand.
12	Take appropriate measures to ensure that Wirral's historic buildings and archaeological sites are adequately recorded and that, where appropriate, these records are made publicly accessible.	OG	Conservation & Design Team	Wirral Archives, NML, archaeological societies, universities, civic and amenity societies.	Currently within existing resources.	Vineyard Cruck Barn fully recorded. Discussions in hand to release Wirral's Historic Environment Record back to the borough.
13	Work with Biological Records Centres and Local Biodiversity Partnerships to enable data collection and the voluntary recording of wildlife on Wirral, and ensure the best information is used to inform the management of our natural heritage.	OG	Parks and Countryside Service	Biological Records Centres, Wildlife Trusts, Liverpool Museums Service, Local Biodiversity Partnerships	Currently within existing resources.	Taking part in the establishment of Local Nature Partnerships for Cheshire Region and Merseyside Region.
14	Identify funding for the restoration of Flaybrick Memorial Gardens and new end use for the chapels.	S/M	Parks and Parks and Countryside Service	English Heritage, Heritage Lottery Fund, Friends of Flaybrick	Project supported in principle by both EH and HLF; potential for major external funding bid.	Consultancy brief prepared; on-going discussions with English Heritage.

15	Ensure that the significance of historic parks, gardens, landscapes and cemeteries are recognised and understood and that their importance is reflected in management strategies and action plans.	S/M	Parks and Countryside Service	HLF EH Friends of Parks	Currently within existing resources	Green and Open Space Strategy being prepared in 2013 and will include heritage value.
15	Produce a partnership plan with Friends Groups, environmental groups and other stakeholders to ensure that the views of heritage groups are properly represented in the emerging Parks and Countryside Service Plan.	S/M	Parks and Countryside Service	All partners and stakeholders	Currently within existing resources	Green and Open Space Strategy being prepared in 2013 will include engagement with heritage stakeholders.
17	Ensure the importance of natural heritage and biodiversity is recognised and understood and that this is reflected in all Parks Management Plans.	S/M	Parks and Countryside Service	All partners and stakeholders	Currently within existing resources	Reflected in current site management plans and their review.
18	Work with Natural England, the Wirral Biodiversity and Local Sites Partnership and other partners in the public, private and voluntary sectors to manage all Wirral's designated nature sites towards favourable condition.	M/L	Parks and Countryside Service	Natural England, Wildlife Trust, Biodiversity and Local Sites Partnership	Some additional funding will need to be identified to continue the programme.	10-year Higher Level Stewardship Agreements entered into for Heswall Dales, Caldly Hill and Thurstaston Common.
19	Work in partnership with local communities and neighbourhoods so that they have the knowledge skills and capacity to engage effectively in the planning process.	S/M	Conservation & Design Team; Planning Teams; Engagement Teams	Community groups, amenity societies	Cost implications will need to be assessed within the context of new planning legislation.	Training opportunities disseminated to local groups through the WHHA network.
20	Increase access to Wirral's archive collections through programmes of digitisation and greater on-line access.		Wirral Archives	North West Digital Preservation Trust.	Within existing resources but external funding sources will be explored.	Member of North West Digitization Consortium, which is in process of arranging to digitize school log books.

21	Continue to develop exhibitions with NML and other partners, complementing the Museum Service's own collections with other public and private collections, to create exhibitions of regional and national significance	M	Wirral Museums Service	National Museums Liverpool, Cheshire West and Cheshire Museums Service, regional and national museums services	Currently within existing resources but external funding sources will be explored.	Negotiations taking place for a joint exhibition project in 2015.
	Implement the Museums Service restructure, to facilitate more effective care and display of collections.	S/M	Museums Service	HR, Senior Management Team	Currently within existing resources although external funding will be sought to fund additional project staff.	Restructure currently on hold in light of wider changes within the Council.
22	Purchase new documentation software and complete documentation of the Museum's collections.	S/M	Museums Service	Insurance Team	Currently within existing resources with a contribution from the Risk Management Fund.	Documentation completed by April 2012; retrospective documentation completed by April 2016. Discussions ongoing about the most appropriate software.
3	REGENERATION					
23	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.	OG	Planning Division, Inward Investment team	Civic and amenity societies.	Currently within existing resources	Ongoing
24	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 and also consider the local character of the area.	OG	Strategic Investment	Conservation/ Planning/ Regeneration teams.	Within existing resources.	Ongoing

25	Work with communities to ensure that the Hoylake, West Kirby, Deeside and the Mersey Coast regeneration proposals reflect and interpret local heritage.	M	Regeneration Teams	Planning and Conservation teams; local community groups including local civic societies	Funding packages to be identified.	Ongoing
26	Identify a funding package which will deliver the visitor interpretation centre at Thurstaston.	M	Regeneration Teams	Parks and Countryside Service Parks Development Friends of Thurstaston	Review current position and explore funding potential	No action as funding not yet identified.
27	Work with local residents and Conservation Area Partnerships to retain the special character of historic suburbs.	OG	Conservation and Design Team	Conservation Area Partnerships	Currently within existing resources	To be achieved by greater emphasis on Article 4 Directions and potentially Local Listing.
	Maximise opportunities to promote heritage as part of Wirral's wider tourism offer and ensure that the importance of the borough's historic and natural environments are reflected in destination marketing strategies.	OG	Destination Marketing	Wirral Tourism Business Network, Wirral Attractions Partnership. Wirral Coastal Partnership, Wirral History and Heritage Association, Merseyside Local Enterprise Partnership.	Currently within existing resources but success will be dependant upon partnership working.	Year of Coast and Countryside promoted natural heritage and heritage assets. Themed leaflets eg Titanic and Beatles trails also promoted heritage. The Wirral Circular Trail, explores many sites of heritage interest around the Wirral coast.
5	LEARNING					
28	Work across Council departments, particularly those promoting community development and the interests of young and elderly people, to utilise heritage learning programmes to deliver strategic and corporate objectives.	OG	Museums Service (Engagement Manager); CYPD, Older Peoples' Services	Learning Officers, Schools, Colleges Universities, Housing Associations, Child minders	Currently within existing resources	Work has started on this via the Heritage Strategy Officers Group.
29	Refocus the Museum Service structure to achieve a stronger emphasis on formal and informal learning and community engagement.	S	Museums Service	HR, Senior Management Team	Short-term restructure within existing resources; additional posts dependent upon external funding.	Appointment of Learning Officers on hold pending wider restructure of services.

30	Develop and implement an Informal Learning Strategy with an underpinning funding strategy.	S	Museums Service	Wirral Lifelong Learning Team	Initially within existing resources	Dependant upon appointment of Learning Officers.
31	Work across Council Departments and with schools and external partners to ensure that heritage, natural history and local history continue to be taught in local schools and are embedded into cross-curricular work.	M	Museums Service, CYPD	Schools	Currently within existing resources but dependant upon restructure of Museum Service.	Dependant upon appointment of Learning Officers.
32	Work towards achieving the 'Learning Outside the Classroom' accredited standard for all education offered by the Parks and Countryside Service.	OG	Parks and Countryside Service	Schools	No major cost implications but dependant upon staffing resources.	Ongoing
33	Work with the community sector to establish links with schools and provide the necessary support for them to work with pupils and students.	OG	Heritage Officer, Museums Service	Local societies and voluntary heritage sector	Currently within existing resources but dependant upon staff time.	Ongoing
34	Recognise the deficit heritage skills and explore the possibilities of bringing together education, training and learning organisations to consider skills development in the heritage sector, particularly traditional craft and construction skills.	M	Heritage Officer, Conservation Officer Friends of Birkenhead Park	Colleges and Higher Education establishments	Initially within existing resources – strong potential for HLF funding.	Discussions with Wirral Met to develop courses on craft skills; students visiting major restoration projects eg Birkenhead Priory. Friends of Birkenhead Park are applying to the HLF 'Skills for the Future' programme for a project to develop a wide range of heritage skills locally.
5	PARTICIPATION					
35	Implement the Museums Service Community Engagement Programme.	M	Museums Service	Wirral Methodist Housing Association, Barnardos, Cultural Inclusion Officer	Funding Plan in preparation.	Stage 1 of HLF bid successful; stage 2 in development. Intended submission. June 2013.
36	Work with partners to develop a 'Heritage and Health' programme and identify funding options.	S	Heritage Officer	PCTs, Age Concern, health practitioners, MENCAP	Resources to be identified as part of the programme development.	Some scoping work done with the Merseyside 'Access to Heritage' Group, but funding yet to be identified.

						Archive Service has delivered workshops in residential home for those with Alzheimers and to the Stroke Association.
37	Prioritise targeting heritage and outreach activity towards excluded groups and work with them to devise projects which directly meet their physical, intellectual and cultural needs.	OG	Museums Service, Heritage Officer, Archives Service	Local history societies	Currently within existing resources, with potential project support from Heritage Lottery Fund.	Community Engagement Plan to target 'hard-to-reach' groups has been prepared.
38	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.	OG	Heritage Officer, Museums Service, Parks and Countryside Service.	WHHA, Friends Groups, civic and amenity societies.	Currently within existing resources.	Actively working with Civic Voice to promote best practice in the community heritage sector.
39	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.	OG	Wirral History and Heritage Association	Heritage Officer, Museums Service (Principal Museums Officer), WHHA member organisations.	Within existing resources/ possible HLF bid	New website under preparation and will be live by early 2013.
40	Support Wirral History and Heritage Association in organising Wirral's Heritage Open Days and encourage the development of a longer and more varied cultural programme.	OG	Wirral History & Heritage Association.	Heritage Officer; building owners, local volunteers	Currently within existing resources. WHHA actively seeking external funding/sponsorship for 2013.	Events rose from 60 in 2011 to 78 in 2012 and included living history demonstrations and special family activities.
41	Actively encourage wider participation in heritage and the interpretation of Wirral's history, through supporting the work of community led initiatives.	M	Heritage Officer	Community Groups, Friends Groups, Hoylake Lifeboat Museum, Wilfred Owen Story, New Brighton Heritage Centre, Charles Dawson Brown Museum.	Support currently within existing resources; communities identify their own external funding streams.	Council support in facilitating and promoting community initiatives.

42	Continue to work with community groups and partners to provide a varied, high quality events programme through the Parks and Countryside Service.	OG	Parks and Countryside Service	Community Groups, Friends Groups, Heritage Groups, Environmental Groups, Wildlife Trust, RSPB, other Partners and Stakeholders	Currently within existing resources	Ongoing.
43	Compile an audit of current interpretative provision and develop a heritage interpretation strategy for the borough.	M	Heritage Officer, Museums Service, Parks and Countryside Service, Destination Marketing Team.	Community Groups, Friends Groups	Requires staff time.	No action taken.
44	Develop a programme to implement the use of new technologies to interpret museum sites and explore the potential for wider application across the borough.	L	Museums Service		Currently within existing resources/ if supported by successful HLF bid.	Phase 1 HLF bid to include interpretation achieved for Priory site.
45	Explore the potential to further promote heritage and heritage activity through an enhanced website.	S	Museums Service/Finance Department/ Corporate Marketing	All Council services with a responsibility for heritage	Currently within existing resources	Work in progress – linked to redesign of Museum web-pages.
1	CELEBRATION					
46	Work with partners to promote initiatives which celebrate and raise the profile of Wirral's heritage and promote a positive image of the borough.	OG	Principal Museums Officer/Tourism and Destination Marketing	Engagement Manager/ Audience Development Manager	Currently within existing resources; dependant upon strong partnership working.	Wirral Heritage Open Days now one of the biggest in country. New borough-wide initiatives like the 'Wirral Remembers' World War 1 commemorative programme being developed.
47	Increase the number of Wirral's Parks achieving the Green Flag standard.	OG	Parks and Countryside Service	Friends Groups, other partners and stakeholders	Currently within existing resources.	Number of Green Flag parks has increased from 12 to 14 in 2012.

48	Support local communities in celebrating those aspects of their local heritage which are important to them and create opportunities for them to get involved in activities which help shape the future of their area.		Heritage Officer/Conservation & Design Team/Museum Service	Local communities	Currently within existing resources but will be increasingly dependant upon partnership working.	WHA now runs one of the largest community-led heritage initiatives in the country and mentors the development of other local community groups.
49	Ensure that individual and collective memories are captured and celebrated through supporting reminiscence and recording projects.	S/OG	Heritage Officer/Wirral Archives/Library Service	Community groups, local/family history societies, schools and youth groups.	Dependant upon individual projects securing external funding.	Community reminiscence projects being developed in Hoylake and New Brighton.
50	Explore the potential for training volunteer 'Heritage Ambassadors' to promote heritage throughout the borough.	S	Heritage Officer	Museums Service, Destination Marketing/Archives, community groups.	Scheme currently being costed and a number of potential external funders have been identified.	Working with Blackpool Heritage Ambassadors to draw up final scheme.
51	Work more closely with other sectors to ensure that heritage is an integral part of Wirral's wider cultural offer.	OG	Wirral Attractions Partnership	Museums Service, Archives, Tourism/Libraries	Currently within existing resources.	Heritage Strategy Working Group bringing different cultural sectors together.