

Formby Civic News

The Newsletter of the Formby Civic Society
Registered Charity No 516789



May 2007

Formby Village Opinions.



Chapel Lane Saturday lunchtime

Preparatory to preparing its Parish Plan Formby Parish Council invited the Formby Civic Society to help contribute to the Village Heritage component of the Plan. In order to help formulate our response we recently requested members' opinions on what best 'encapsulates' Formby and should be protected or developed.....

People like:- the 'ambience' and pleasant environment created by the wide pavements, and mature trees on both sides of Chapel Lane; the community activities, shops and services of value to the community, the cafes (some open air) and other meeting places. This compact, traditional street scene has a somewhat 'Continental' pavement atmosphere, with its bustle of people and cars and limited through traffic but it is still a 'village' where you invariably meet friends. There are seats and attractive displays outside some of the small shops which have old-type shop fronts.

There is a good selection and balance of mainly 'conservative' non-trendy individually owned shops, with some specialist traders.

The main supermarket not too intrusive (but some people think there are too many charity shops). It is good that some

older traditional buildings have been retained and not demolished and keep traditional signage. People like the occasional 'events' and Parades, the charity book stalls on Saturday mornings, public events like Dickensian Day, the Christmas lights switch-on, Nativity Play and Remembrance Procession, Good Friday 'Witness' and the annual Open Air Art Exhibition.

The new Swimming pool and environs is particularly welcomed. People like the architecture of the Old Post Office and the older banks.

What people don't like:- Too many Estate Agents and charity Shops. The 'alleys' or 'ginnels' to and from the main street are neglected and need improving. Pedestrian flow is restricted by traffic.

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'Planning Matters' by Desmond Brennan, (Amenities Secretary)

This, my first report as amenities secretary, covers the short period since the AGM. First, however, I want to pay tribute to my predecessor in the post. Ray Derricott served a remarkable five years as amenities secretary and, for much of that time, it took a great deal more effort to come by information than it does today; nor, for most of it, did he have the benefit of the Amenities & Planning Subgroup to support him, as I will have. However, I suspect he may well look back on those years as a relatively relaxed time, now that he is the Society's Chairman – every good wish to him in that responsibility

The Environment Agency has just published the scoping report for the Crossens-Alt Catchment Flood Protection Plan. It is a consultative document setting out in detail what is known about the relevant characteristics of Crossens-Alt flood plain. It does not add any new information about current developments relating to the renovation of the Altmouth pumping station, but it is a very interesting document; it is available on the Agency's website.

I have now been able to ask all the Civic Societies and a generous sample of Parish Councils in Sefton if they were consulted by the Council prior to its drawing up the new *Local Checklist* of information to be provided with a planning application for it to be validated, as recommended by the government; none reported that it had. Notwithstanding this information, and our own earlier unsuccessful attempts to ensure consultation took place, the Planning and Economic Regeneration Director persists in maintaining that these bodies (including the Society) were consulted; however, the putative letter of consultation is to be "reissued" and we are promised that retrospective consultation will be possible, since the government has put back the date of implementation from April to October.

I have had correspondence with officers concerning the Planning Depart-

ment's recent introduction of the term *notification period* to denote what has been traditionally known as the *consultation period*. We believe the term *notification period* is unhelpful, even misleading. Someone inexperienced in planning matters, and most people examining the details of an application on the Planning Department's website will be doing so for the first time, will not immediately understand that they must submit their comments by *end of notification period*, whereas by *end of consultation period* makes that information self-evident. Further, I have also looked at a generous sample of other Councils' websites, and none uses the term *notification period* when indicating the period during which the public are invited to submit comments on an application. The Council's Senior Solicitor has reminded us that the Council has no statutory obligation to *consult* with owners and occupiers. At the time the Statement of Community Involvement was being consulted upon last year, the Society made representations, which had they been adopted, would have obliged the Council to consult more widely on planning applications, but we failed to influence the final document (our representations were made at Secretary of State level). The Assistant Director has written to confirm that the new usage will continue.

It is pleasing to be able to report that The Planning Inspectorate has dismissed the appeal to redevelop Old Town Court. We were especially happy that the Inspector specifically endorsed our point that the satisfactory storage of waste bins should be integral to the design of a scheme of this kind (we had argued that the cabin for housing the wheelie bins and its location were unsatisfactory – the officers had not criticised either). We believe that poor arrangements for the storage and collection of waste can blight the amenity not only of the occupiers of multiple units of accommodation, but of neighbours also.

Currently, we are finalizing our sub-

mission to the Planning Inspectorate urging dismissal of Orange's appeal against the unanimous refusal by Planning Committee of their application for a phone mast and equipment cabinets adjacent to Barclays Bank, fronting Halsall Lane. We will argue that the units would be an eyesore and an impediment to pedestrian movement, that they would damage the attractiveness of the Village just when everyone involved is endeavouring to improve it, that the perception of the mast as a health hazard might cause some potential customers, especially those with children, to avoid the area to the detriment of businesses in the affected area, that Orange have not been sufficiently diligent in seeking suitable alternative sites, and that a precedent was set by the dismissal in 2005 of the appeal by O2 for a mast at Duke Street Park on the grounds that the harm to visual amenity and Council planning policy outweighed the benefit to the community of improved coverage by the network. I have written to the management of the leading stores and banks in the affected area; I have also coordinated a Declaration of Opposition to the appeal which to date has been signed by twenty-five proprietors or managers of businesses in the vicinity of the proposed mast; the Declaration will be submitted to the Inspectorate as evidence that the owners of businesses fear their commercial interests would be damaged by the presence of the mast. A particular difficulty we face with this appeal is that Council officers recommended to Planning Committee that the original planning application be approved. This means that, when they present the Council's defence of its refusal to the Inspectorate, the officers will be restricted to the terms of the refusal as specified by Planning Committee; they will not be able to argue the full scope of the case in their professional capacity, because they have already declared themselves to be in agreement with Orange. It is up to others to make the case urging dismissal of the appeal as comprehensively as they can, and the Society will be doing just that!

Spring Wildlife Notes by Dr Phil Smith

...Spring has certainly sprung, with weeks of sunny, often warm and dry weather – too dry for some of our wildlife, especially the **Natterjack Toad** which likes it damp and needs water for breeding. Many of the dune-slacks are already drying up but my first monitoring visit to Birkdale Green Beach on 14th April was rewarded with a good count of 64 spawn strings. Most will soon be lost to the drought but that is not unusual. The Natterjack chooses such shallow water in which to spawn that it only breeds really successfully about one year in four or five. Its tadpoles need high water temperatures to develop, hence the need for shallow water which warms up quickly in the sun.

Lots of insects have come out earlier than usual, including two of our nationally rare species, the **Vernal Bee** and the **Northern Dune Tiger Beetle**. A bit like a small Honey Bee, the Vernal Bee is active from late March to early May, the female collecting pollen from Creeping Willow catkins and storing it in tunnels dug into south-facing dune slopes. As is the case in most bees, this species is “solitary” in contrast to the Bumble Bees and Honey Bees which are truly social insects. In practice, Vernal Bees lives in loose colonies, sometimes numbering into the hundreds and are widespread on the Sefton Coast from Crosby Coastal Park to Queen’s Jubilee Nature Trail.

We have nearly the entire British population of the **Northern Dune Tiger Beetle**, its only other locality being at Drigg in Cumbria. Feroocious predators, the purplish-brown adults start emerging in April and need very high temperatures for their active life-style. You can find them running about and flying short distances on patches of bare sand in the dunes near the sea – but only on sunny days. I counted as many as nine together in one blow-out at Ainsdale Local Nature Reserve on 19th April.

Another interesting sighting the following day at Birkdale Green Beach

was of two male **Ruby Tiger** moths fluttering around a female, half hidden in the grass. Like many moths, the female emits a chemical scent or pheromone which attracts males over considerable distances. But, although this is a fairly common dune species, I have never seen this behaviour before in Ruby Tiger.

Duneland flowers are now easier to find, the tiny dune annuals of many different species being joined by the glorious blue **Heath Dog Violet** (*Viola canina*); its leaves are the food of one of our most important butterflies, the Dark Green Fritillary.

By late April, woodlands are looking their best with sheets of spring blooms, as at Firwood, Formby. However, all is not as it seems, for the glorious display of **Bluebells** consists entirely of a hybrid garden-escape, while the accompanying pale-pink flowers are another alien, **Pink Purslane** (*Montia sibirica*) from western North America.

Summer migrant birds are now pouring in with, first, **Chiffchaffs**, and then **Willow Warblers** and **Blackcaps** singing from local copses and hedgerows. An unexpected songster was the **Siberian Chiffchaff** heard and photographed at Wicks Lane Lake, Formby in early April. **Sand Martins**, **House Martins** and **Swallows** have been moving north, the latter arriving to nest on mossland farms. By the middle of the month, **Reed** and **Sedge Warblers** were being reported at Marshside and I was pleased to find two **Reed Warblers** singing in the reed-bed at Tagg’s Island, Birkdale on 20th April. Winter birds were still around, however, with a surprisingly large, though not unprecedented, flock of 1700 **Pink-footed Geese** at Crossens Marsh on the previous day. The usual passage of **Little Gulls** (just about my favourite bird) at Crosby Marine Lake was about two weeks early, peaking at the beginning of April. However, nothing could prepare a few lucky birders for an immature **White-tailed Eagle** which appeared over the Dee and

Wirral on 6th April and was even seen distantly from Crosby. The old adage “anything can turn up” never rang more true!

Formby Village Opinions Contd.

Some think there should be no parking at all in the Village Centre and it has been suggested that disabled Parking should be transferred to the adjacent car parks. More shops should have rear delivery.

Some think there are one or two ‘out of place’ buildings (Iceland) and the present Post office block is rather poor in design (but all right in content). The section of pavement which floods should be sorted out. And the toilet facilities need updating. Information points need improving, the notice boards are a disgrace! The ‘grotty’ concrete planters should be replaced with attractive large, square wooden boxes nicely planted. The bus stop should be in Sumner Road and not the main street; ‘Disability’ parking in Chapel Lane should be restricted. Some think that crossing the road is dangerous.

Modern, shiny, common plastic shop fascias should be banned in favour of tasteful traditional ones. There is no need for excessive “cheap and nasty” shop signs and flashing signs should be forbidden! The public signs (eg traffic, directions, etc) should be reviewed and renewed – there are a few too many!

When a shop closes it should be left in a clean and tidy condition. Looking at an empty shop with discarded furniture and uncollected mail is an eyesore. Street furniture is below average. There is too much bureaucracy in allowing activities. Finally we need a Community Centre situated near the village centre which would provide a central meeting place.

The Barker Review of Land Use Planning - *Should we be worried?*

The short answer to the question is “Yes, very.” Since the Review was published in December, 2006, there has been a highly critical response from individuals and bodies concerned with planning matters – even some of the developers, whom it is intended to help, are worried by it. *The Civic Trust* and especially the *Campaign for the Protection of Rural England* (see their publication *Deconstructing Barker*) have given excellent closely argued critiques of the document, which show it to be seriously flawed; its supporting evidence is unable to bear the weight of its far reaching recommendations. It will help to understand how this major review could dismay so many who have experience of the planning process and who have thought deeply about its principles, if we examine its provenance and the background of its author.

Nominally, the Review was commissioned by the Chancellor, Gordon Brown, and the Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott, but few have any doubts that its terms of reference and their interpretation originated in the Treasury (our Chairman’s representations on the Review to government were responded to by The Chief Secretary to the Treasury!). The Review’s remit was to consider planning policy as a means to deliver economic growth and prosperity while improving efficiency and speed, increasing flexibility, transparency and predictability, and its use to deliver sustainable economic objectives and communities. All worthy intentions, appropriately interpreted, and surely what the *Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004* is all about; the act originated in the *Office of the Deputy Prime Minister*, which has since become the *Department for Communities and Local Government*, under Ruth Kelly. The new act is a root and branch reform of planning policy and administration, involving

the creation by each Local Planning Authority (LPA) of a set of inter-related planning policy documents aimed at integrating considerations wider than conventional planning matters and extending beyond the LPA’s geographic area of responsibility, and balancing the wider and long term community interests against the immediate commercial interests of the developer when these differ. The Act is nothing short of a revolution in planning; its implementation has been engaging the energies of LPAs and planning professionals throughout England and Wales and has cost many millions of pounds to set up. Many of the instruments of the Act are still in the course of creation, and none of its measures has yet been put to the test of time. So a major review of planning policy when it is currently in such a state of transition, driven by a government department without direct experience of planning policy, occasioned anxieties that it might be motivated by principles

“its supporting evidence is unable to bear the weight of its far reaching recommendations”

very different from those which had been embodied in planning policy since 1947, when the *Town and Country Planning Act* passed into law, anxieties which were intensified by the knowledge that it was to be conducted by an economist, not a person with first hand experience of resolving the dilemmas that so characterise the creation of planning policy. Kate Barker is serving the last year of a second term as an external member of the *Monetary Policy Committee*, the body that advises the Bank of England on the setting of its interest rate. For approximately nine years, she was Chief Economist at Ford Europe and, thereafter, Chief Economic Advisor at the CBI for

approximately seven years. Immediately prior to this present review, she was asked by the government to conduct an enquiry into British housing and her report, *Review of UK Housing Supply*, was published in 2004 (she is now a board member of the *Housing Corporation*); work on the present review was commenced in December 2005. In the event, the fears that the recommendations of this hasty Review would be narrowly focussed on short term commercial interests have been realised.

The difference in philosophy of the Barker approach to planning and that embodied in the 2004 Act is probably best symbolised by their different attitudes to the documentation. Barker recommends that the approximately 800 pages of the government’s Planning Policy Guides (PPGs) and Planning Policy Statements (PPSs) be reduced to fewer than 200. No one would argue that the PPGs and PPSs are perfect; they still too much reflect the different approaches of different ministers. Even so, these key documents do attempt to identify the complexities of the different interests at stake and to arrive at mechanisms for striking a balance between them. Brevity of exposition would mean a lack of clarity and the consequential uncertainty about policy would be an impediment to development.

Above all, developers need to know what is permitted, not only in the present, but especially in the long term. Brevity of formulation will not remove the problems; instead of their being the responsibility of ministers, they would be resolved in the courts, and a less efficient, more expensive and ill suited place for the purpose would be hard to imagine. Uncertainty in policy can be expected to result in all kinds of perverse speculative outcomes. Another symbolic indicator of the Barker approach is her recommendation that a developer should be required to pro-

The Barker Review, contd.

developer should be required to provide less information with their planning application. Any one who has had seriously to engage with such an application knows that adequate information is essential; without it, sound evaluation and decision making are not possible and too often, even now, adequate information is not available to interested parties. It is alarming that what to many is self-evidently an essential requirement should come under attack.

Key Barker themes are the fostering of *efficiency* and *growth* by facilitating development, with the implication that the 2004 Act inhibits both, despite the fact that the Act is still in its infancy, so there is no evidence that it does. Strangely, for such central concepts, the Review does not enlarge on their meaning. For Barker, efficiency is limited to the advantage of the developer and is to be measured by the extent to which the planning process has enabled the developer to grow a more profitable business. The Review does not seek to put in place tests to ensure that the long term cost to the wider community of a development does not outweigh its advantages to the developer and to the local community which might also enjoy its benefits. More

subtly, the Review does not address the difficult question of how much damage it is permissible to inflict on a local community for the sake of the greater good. Existing planning policy seeks to engage with just such difficult dilemmas, although, even under the new Act, the system is still

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biased in favour of the developer. Barker treats growth just as superficially; the assumption is made that growth is always good. The Review plays lip-service to environmental problems, but it does not properly acknowledge the enormous impact that climate change is going to have on planning policy, whereas the 2004 Act to some extent provides the means to do so. Barker would have performed a great service had she examined how planning policy could enhance prosperity while still limiting the environmental damage that we know from past experience conventional growth is likely to cause.

Most people would agree that the regeneration that has taken place in some of Britain’s major cities during the last couple of decades has been, for the most part, of commendable quality. When we look at what has been done in Liverpool and compare it with the lamentable quality of development in the decades immediate post WW2, we must conclude that current planning policy, flawed as it may be, is not doing too bad a job; the same is true of Manchester and many similar cities. Barker, if translated into government policy would set the clock back and give primacy to short term gain for narrow interests at the cost of blighting the environment of whole communities for many years, as happened when planning policy was relatively rudimentary and gave only an uncertain steer as to what got built and where.

We must hope the torrent of well informed and rational criticism that has been poured onto the Review will limit the extent to which its recommendations are embodied in the forthcoming White Paper on planning policy.

Desmond Brennan

ACCESS TO THE COAST

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CRoW) provided a right of access on foot to mountain, moorland, heath and common land; generally it’s been regarded as a success. Here in Formby we have barely noticed the legal change but now there’s a growing demand for a general right of access to coastal areas, as in France, Scotland, Portugal and Denmark. The government has pledged to improve access to the English coast but the

long-awaited consultation paper on the options keeps being delayed.

Here, of course, we have got used to local authorities, private owners and the National Trust all owning land along the coast and you might think that access rights couldn’t change. You may be right but NT, for one, is unhappy about allowing the public to roam at will – rare plants and animals being just one explanation. The

coastline and foreshores of Britain are a legal lottery, a muddle of complex ownerships with impermanent rights and informal agreements. An automatic right of access to it should not be taken for granted - without clear legal definition, the right of access to the coast can be, and frequently has been, withdrawn. One consultation document we’ll need to keep an eye on, when it eventually appears. **David Willis**

Annual General Meeting

The top posts changed at the Society's AGM in April, with Reg Yorke standing down from the position of Chairman, being replaced by Ray Derricott, formerly Amenities Secretary. Reg isn't being lost to FCS, however, as he was nominated as Vice-Chair, following the resignation of John Turner from that role. John previously also held down the Programme secretary's duties, now he'll continue only with that. Ray in turn is being replaced by Des Brennan who has been very active as deputy to Ray on planning matters. Others continued in their previous roles: the two Barbaras (Yorke and Mossop) representing the History and Art

groups respectively, Mike Belshaw as Treasurer and David Willis as Secretary. Tony Bonney was welcomed on to the committee, to join existing members Dru Haydon, Alan Burton and John Houston.

During the course of the evening Elsie Winthorpe was created an Honorary Life Member for her sterling work for the Society over many years and then rather to their surprise the same honour was given by the new Chairman, Ray Derricott, to Reg and Barbara Yorke.

David Willis



Elsie Winthorpe receives her Honorary Life Membership Certificate.

Chairman's Report to AGM by Dr R. A. Yorke

Activities;

Summer Programme. This included a most enjoyable series of Summer Wildlife walks organised by John Houston to Altcar Rifle Range on 24 May, Ainsdale Sand Dunes NNR on 12th July, and Freshfield Dune Heath, August, 2nd.

On Saturday 24th June, the annual Open-air Art Exhibition, organised by Barbara Mossop and Art Group Members was held in Chapel Lane.

On two hot Sunday afternoons in July, as a contribution to National Archaeology Week, Barbara organised two well attended visits to the Old Lifeboat Station

On Saturday 9th September, the History Group organised a Heritage Open Day; at Formby Hall Dovecote. On Tuesday 5th September David Willis organised a enjoyable summer outing to Halifax, Shibden Hall and Halifax Town Hall.

Winter Programme. This very important element of the Society's activities has supplied us with a rich mix of speakers and topics, organised

as previously with great success and efficiency by Dr John Turner. Whilst all being of general interest, most have also had some local or regional significance and often topicality. There was only one change from the

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published programme, on 23rd March when keeping to the intended topic of the 'built environment', we used the evening in conjunction with Formby Parish Council Chair Mike Coles and Councillor Sean Brady to discuss and share ideas on the development of the Village Centre, using as a starting point the replies to a questionnaire distributed in the February Newsletter. This evening successfully departed from our usual meeting format to include a period of small-group discussion. Both we and the Parish Council felt this had been a useful occasion. (*A summary of our conclusions appear on page 1*). The special Science Week Meeting was an informative and entertaining account

of the 'Search for Absolute Zero' provided with great brio and use of liquid Nitrogen by physicist Dominic Rigby.

A Report on The History Group programme follows but here we need to give our thanks to John Turner for his successful efforts to obtain an excellent sound system installed in the class-rooms at the Ravenmeols Community Centre.

An Information stall was organised by Alan Burton and the Fund-raising and Publicity Sub-Group as a contribution to Dickensian day Saturday December 2nd 2006

Our now well established and well attended Annual Dinner was held at the Tree-Tops Restaurant in March when we had the pleasure of Lord Ronnie and Lady Fearn as our Guests of Honour.

Issues.

Important local issues which will be referred to in greater detail in the Amenity Secretary's report include important Planning Issues such as the Barracuda application in Browns Lane; The Lower Alt Flood Allevia-

Chairman's Report continued

The Barracuda application in Brows Lane; The Lower Alt Flood Alleviation Scheme and more recently the application for conversion of the corner property at the Beacons to a large licensed restaurant. The Society is concerned that the character of Formby Village centre is now tending to become over commercialised

The Society has since 1953 endeavoured to promote high standards of planning and architecture in the area. to preserve the identity of Formby and safeguard its amenities. A recent survey of our members shows quite clearly that what residents value most about The Village Centre Unfortunately outside commercial interests are now applying considerable pressure to change our traditional village centre. In particular we feel that we don't need any more late-opening, licensed, fast-food outlets! In our view the increasing number of licensed premises in and around the Village are more than are needed by local residents and are contributing to the increasing incidence of night-time behavioural disturbance. Our recent survey highlights the need to stop developers altering Formby Village beyond all recognition.

We are equally concerned about the future of the Green Belt particularly to the East and South of Formby, where a large amount of prime agricultural land was recently sold. Our anxieties which are increased by the views expressed in the recent Barker Report are shared by CPRE with whom are maintaining close contact

On our seaward boundary we have some concerns about the effects of increasing Visitor impact on the fragile dune system and coastal environment. This is not only in respect of environmental tranquillity, a concern we again share with CPRE but also the actual physical impact of increas-

ing numbers of visitors and traffic. This impact has recently been felt most at Freshfield and we are now seeking a change in the signs erected



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by Sefton in recent years which tend to erroneously indicate that Victoria Road IS Formby Point. Misleading traffic signage is also an issue of joint concern with Formby Parish Council.

Another issue of common interest is the future of the now disused Holy Trinity School Building. Finally we have set in motion an attempt to have the eastward extension of Lunt's Lane path (Little Altcar) and the adjoining walk along the west bank of Downholland Brook to Altcar Road recognised as a Public Right of Way.

.Developments and achievements

Communications. We have tried to improve our communications both internally with members and externally during the year. Formby Civic News has increased its content and now uses full colour on the outside pages. This particularly benefits photo reproduction and we hope attractiveness. The website now carries photo-images and further visual improvement are imminent. Also we now have a new section devoted to local wildlife contributed by member

and wild life expert Dr Phil Smith. This will consist of a monthly update on the website which will be collated and reproduced quarterly in the Newsletter. A recent addition to the website is a 'Virtual Walk' round Formby point developed in conjunction with Countryside and referred to in more detail in the History Group report. We hope that a published version of a similar route will appear later this year as a 'Heritage Trail' in conjunction with Sefton CVS. The Society successfully applied for a free BT Community Connections computer which arrived on March 1st This will be of particular value to the History Group archive digitisation programme but will also assist other aspects of Society Communications and information retrieval.

Under this heading I would particularly like to thank the Amenity Secretary, the Assistant Amenities Secretary, Desmond Brennan and the newly established Planning Group Planning Group for their excellent and untiring work during the year. Their work has produced some notable successes. This has been achieved with the help of the local community, particularly their elected representatives on the Formby Parish Council. It has given us great pleasure to develop a useful working relationship with the Council during the first four years of its existence and we will look forward to continuing this. We hope to re-publish an up-dated version of 'Seven Formby Walks' originally written by David Addison some years ago. An account of 'Formby Asparagus' has also had a limited pilot and we are now looking at sources of funding for wider publication. During the year we were pleased to learn that Brenda Lindsay our founder Hon Secretary who died last year had left the society a £1,500 Bequest in her will. It has given us much pleasure to think that after all her work for the Society in its early days she continued to support us to the very end.

AGM; Chairman's Report; Continued

Committees, Groups and sub-groups.

We have from the beginning of the Society had a number of 'Special Interest Groups'. These have over the years been reduced in number and now there are just two - the History Group and the Art Group. In my Report last year I suggested the re-formation of a Environmental/Wildlife Group to continue the tradition of the Natural History Group formerly lead by Gladys Bevan. I have not had a lot of support for this but the idea is not "dead and

buried". I am still interested to hear from members who might be willing to help organise such a group.

In addition the Committee now has administrative Sub-groups on Amenities and Planning, Membership and Fundraising, Communications, and Strategy.

Summer programme 2007.

Details for this are now being finalised. (See back page).

Some personal remarks.

In concluding this, my last report as

Chairman I wish to thank the Officers, members of the Committee and indeed members of the Society for their considerable help and support, not only during the last year but during the entire three years I have had the privilege of serving as Chairman. I would particularly like to record my sincere thanks for all the help I have been given not only from the officers and committee but if I may say so, also from my predecessor as Chairman. It has been a privilege to have Chaired such a commendable organisation as the Formby Civic Society.

Treasure's Report by Mike Belshaw

The accounts are once again in two parts, firstly the Millennium Fund Account, and then the accounts for the normal activities of the Society. There has been no change in the Millennium Account other than the addition of £202 building society interest; the balance in the Account is to pay for the publication of both the Millennium Walk booklet and the 2004 Coastal Conference proceedings.

The Society has benefitted this year from a very generous bequest of £1,500 from the late Brenda Lindsay former Hon. Secretary and Life Member. We have also received a grant of £300 from Formby Parish Council for work on our archive material, and £180 from BT towards expenses in connection with the computer provided under BT's Community Awards scheme. This donation income has helped produce the record surplus of £2,768 for the year; without it our surplus would be a much more modest £788.

General income is down on the previous year, with reduced surpluses on various activities; notelet sales continue at a lower rate but since their introduction have produced a profit for the Society of £600, with about one-third of the stock still to sell. Total expenditure is very similar to

the previous year, but we have had to pay our insurance premium and civic trust subscription twice this financial year as payment was brought forward from April to March.

The Lindsay legacy plus approximately £1,300 has been transferred from our current account into the interest-paying Bonus Saver Account with the NatWest Bank, so reducing the balance in the current account to £537 (prior to the arrival of members' subscriptions for 2007) but giving us interest of £45. The reserves in the Yorkshire Building Society remain unaltered other than with the addition of £184 of interest.

During the forthcoming year your committee will be considering how best to make use of the Brenda Lindsay bequest. Further development of the website is likely, as is the probability of new projection equipment for meetings. Routine costs are of course likely to gradually increase, and we are essentially dependent on maintaining a healthy membership as subscriptions are our major income. We are grateful to members eligible for income tax who gift-aid their contributions.

Finally, I would express my thanks to our auditor, John Kershaw, for an

efficient audit of the account

SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR MEMBERS NOT PAYING BY BANK STANDING ORDER

If you have not yet paid your subscription for 2007, the Treasurer would be grateful to receive it as soon as possible. The current rates are £10 for an individual and £15 for a family/couple. Please complete the payment slip enclosed and send with your cheque to: Mr M Belshaw, 38 Graburn Road, Formby, L37 3PB. *Please note that members who haven't paid by June 30 will, according to the Society's Constitution, be struck off the membership register.*

Amenity Secretary' Report by Ray Derricott

The past year has seen considerable changes in the way the Society approaches issues related to Amenities. Until the last twelve months I had found the role of the Amenities Secretary too dependent on one individual and too remote from members of the Committee and from members in general. In 2006 -2007 our system, in my opinion, has been enhanced and become more accountable. During 2006 we made the decision to operate through a Planning and Amenities subgroup. The members of this subgroup are myself, Desmond Brennan, Dru Haydon and our Chairman, Dr. Reg Yorke. We have set down principles and operating procedures that we have followed during the last six months. This has meant that planning applications, access issues, matters of a wider community concern and general environmental proposals have been discussed by the subgroup who, in turn, have brought as proposals for action to the Committee and through the Newsletter and the AGM put them to the Society's general membership. This has added a considerable burden of work for members of the subgroup but we believe that this is a significant move forward and has resulted in Formby Civic Society being seen as an effective and fair minded association that always takes a community perspective and whose views have to be taken on board by the officers of Sefton MBC, elected local politicians, and the Planning Inspectorate. It is worth noting that we have been approached by more individuals and groups for advice on community and specific matters than was the case in my first three years as Amenities Secretary. I believe that our approach is effective and is working towards the fundamental aims of the Society - to preserve what we value in our community and to ensure that development is for the better

At this stage I must make reference to the role played by Dr Desmond Brennan who has become, in a relatively short time, as fully informed as any layman can expect to become, on planning regulations and the working

of the Planning Inspectorate. Desmond's correspondence and discussions with public and civil servants, near and far, have become well known by members of the Planning subgroup and, through the Newsletter, to interested Society members. I am greatly appreciative of the time and ability that Desmond has devoted to this work. Long may he continue to contribute his efforts for the Society and the community in general.

On general issues related to the planning procedures we have spent time trying to make sure that Planning Officers operate under a clearly understood set of procedures. In planning as in other areas of local (and central) government it is the paid public officers who have the training and information that gives them a perceived power base in decision making. We have tried to make sure that all planning proposals that have a wider public interest are not delegated to the Officers but are put forward to the elected members of the Planning Committee. Where possible

"we have spent time trying to make sure that Planning Officers operate under a clearly understood set of procedures"

we have given advice to local individuals who have the right to talk to the Planning Committee for five minutes about issues on which they have support from neighbours or other interested parties. This year we were involved in presentations to the Planning Committee over the Phone Mast at the corner of Chapel Lane, the proposal to convert a small semi-detached house into one for multi-occupation and recently about the proposal to open a 'restaurant' at the Beacons in Formby Village. We are at the moment concerned about lapses by Planning Officers about the validation of proposals and the process of consultation (planners prefer the term 'notification') and the timing

of Officers' recommendations to the Planning Committee. Desmond Brennan is well informed about this issue and interested members are invited to talk to him about this.

The Council has now published a new *Local Checklist* which is to be applied to planning proposals. At the beginning of the year, the Chairman wrote three letters to the Director of Planning in an attempt to have put in place a consultative process as recommended by the Government Department responsible for local government, but without success. The Chairman's third letter has not yet been answered. We are surprised and concerned therefore to read in a recent report to the Planning Committee by the Director of Planning the claim that Parish Councils and Civic Societies were consulted in the preparation of the Checklist. Our Society was certainly not consulted. The matter is being further investigated before we write our fourth letter.

Another unsatisfactory situation we have been dealing with concerns data relating to planning decisions which have been appealed to the Planning Inspectorate. We have discovered major discrepancies between the Council's data and those of the Inspectorate. The matter is important, because if too many of the Council's planning decisions are reversed at appeal, the Council's Planning Delivery Grant is reduced; last year, the Council lost nearly £60,000 for this reason. Final resolution of the matter is being delayed for want of a response from the Planning Department.

On a third general issue we are monitoring plans to cope with Flood Protection for the Lower Alt. Desmond Brennan has engaged in extensive conversation and e-mail correspondence on this issue with Mr. Peter Crews, the Project Engineer who has just retired.

Amenity Secretary's ReportContinued

When Mr. Crew's replacement has had time to settle into his new role we will continue to probe the exact nature of the scheme to refurbish the Alt pumping station and the plan to establish a flood pool at Lunt Meadows.

We consider that involvement in the above general issues is crucial in pursuing the Society's objectives in attempting to maintain some continuing quality in the environment in which the people of Formby live. Of course, we also have to scrutinise and take appropriate action in responding to the very many of proposals that appear every week in Sefton's planning lists. As usual we have had some success and some disappointments in responding to these lists. For example, we have had some success in resisting the growth of high brick walls that often appear without planning permission. We have been successful by presenting arguments to both the Council and the Inspectorate in preventing the continuing existence of an inappropriate wooden fence in front of a listed building in Green Lane. The Council agreed with us that a high solid brick wall that was proposed to replace the refused wooden one was also inappropriate. With brick walls we have also had some success in parts of Victoria Road and elsewhere. As mentioned above we have played a part in the refusal of a retrospective proposal to change the use of a semi-detached house into a multi-occupied property. We have continued our campaign to scrutinise proposals that pay little or no attention to the access for delivery and refuse collection and it has featured strongly in our submission to the Planning Inspectorate resisting the application to redevelop Old Town Court and a neighbouring property.. Perhaps our biggest disappointment was in the recent approval of the establishment of a restaurant at the Beacons. This will add to the almost twenty food and drink outlets within a short distance of this development. Again We objected because of the problems of delivery in School Lane or on the main route into or out

of Formby at the roundabout; we pointed out the problems of storage of waste inside and outside the building; we objected to the possibility of noise a late hours and possible anti-social behaviour; we pointed out the disturbance to nearby, well established business and its inappropriate siting opposite the War Memorial. DB addressed the Planning Committee on these issues. The approval of this proposal does concede as a condition our main point that the public are to be confined to the ground floor, so reducing the number of customers from 175 to 58. However, it is an-

The legalisation of Wicks Path continues. I reported the lack of action on this at the last three meetings of the Statutory Consultation Group called the Mersey Local Access Forum. I wrote to the Legal Director on 19 January and I was thanked for my 'recent' correspondence in a letter at the end of March. I am now in touch with the solicitor who is following this up. The future of the path has been with the Legal Department for two years. To be included in the Access Strategy and therefore in a new definitive map of access and rights of way this has to be settled by Novem-



(Above) Wicks Lane Path—as it used to be.....Photo M. Sibley

other example of the over-provision of such outlets and the imbalance it imposes on the Village. We cannot win them all! The whole case demonstrates that Formby needs a Parish Plan. As many of you who attended the Society's March General Meeting will know, we are collaborating with the Parish Council on this. It is a slow business and before an agreed plan is in place there is likely to be more unwanted development. The Restaurant at the Beacons is yet another example of the creeping development from an A1 to A3 establishments, with the danger of further erosion of operating conditions via the Licensing Authority.

ber 2007. I believe that the hold up is due to lack of a decision by the National Trust.

I could write more but this Report is already too long. From this Report I hope to have made the point that the role of the Amenities Secretary has widened and is an important part of the core of the work of the Civic Society. With your support we will continue this. I have to thank my colleagues, Dru, Desmond and Reg for their support and understanding. Finally, we are still looking for an additional member of the subgroup. Do not be afraid to volunteer because you will get a great amount of support from other members of the group.

History Group Report; Barbara Yorke

The History Group is a 'special interest' group of Formby Civic Society Members established "to encourage the study of Local History of the area by arranging meetings and keeping relevant publications, books, maps, archives, historical artefacts, photographs and pictures accessible for study and research by members, authorised students and scholars and (by special arrangement with the Secretary), members of the public".

The History Group arranged a series of monthly Meetings for Members, (open to the public) between September and April.

The Programme included:

Talks on "The Botanic Gardens Museum" Elizabeth Royles,; "Lancashire Halls" David Brazendale, "The Rathbone Family, from Welfare to Politics". Brenda Murray, Formby Cottages – a look at some of our ceramic models. "Formby – Portrait of a Community" Alex Watson, (Talk and DVD). "The Cunard Line" Kevin Bargaen, and finally a 'Members' Evening'

The Formby Cottages meeting was particularly well attended, devoted to a presentation and display of half of our ceramic cottage collection. Some of these beautifully made authentically detailed models have previously been featured in the FCS Display cases in the Duke Street Library but this was the first time such a large number had been on view at the same time with opportunity to compare them with the appropriate Sibley drawing and a recent photograph. The publicity for the meeting happily resulted in the unexpected gift of a further six similar high quality cottage models by the same maker, A Reeves to the Society.

The meeting on the making of a DVD, 'Portrait of a Community' by the Formby Photographic Group was based mainly on still photographs and Video made in the 1980s. Perhaps this Society should be thinking of a similar venture? It is an advantage that when the occasion (and speaker)

needs it we now have the newly installed Amplification System in the class-rooms.

Finally Members Evening on April 12th provided no less than four contributions from members. These included an account of the history of Sundials from Jack Bromiley, a short description of some Society-related Newspaper cuttings by Pat McGregor, a talk and PowerPoint presentation on 'Archaic Heads' by the Chairman and finally an account of John Newton the former seafarer and composer of 'Amazing Grace' by Mr Mike Brian.

Heritage Open Day at Formby Hall Dovecote, held on Saturday 9th September 2006 was the first occasion that this locally unique early 18th century building has been officially open to the public and the Formby Civic Society were very grateful to the Hall's resident owner Mr. Mike McComb for allowing it to be viewed with the aid of the Civic Trust and English Heritage.

During a pleasant sunny day over 88 people enjoyed the splendid opportunity

"we are very grateful for the £300 financial support which Formby Parish Council have provided to make a start"

to see the building. In addition visitors were given a specially prepared explanatory leaflet and had an opportunity to look at a photographic display on the history of dovecotes and their importance in earlier times

It was explained that any well run manor house would have its fish-pond, its dovecote and its rabbit warren and Formby was no exception. Most similar country houses have now lost them but Formby's is in prime condition and visitors thought that it was well the visit. Many visitors took the opportunity to help the Civic Society with a survey of the building's structural details. This information not previously recorded

will be filed with other historical information held in the Societies archives and a copy sent to the Merseyside Sites and Monuments Record Office. This exercise usefully adds to our background knowledge of the history and archaeology of the area. The society is very grateful to Mr McComb for making it possible.

Historical Archive.

Our Archive conservation needs have been established with the kind help of Nicky Lewis from Liverpool (now National) Conservation Centre who spent a day looking at our archives and has prepared a report for our guidance. The Conservation Centre is supplying materials needed at lower cost than normal suppliers. First orders have been received.. This is not going to be a quick exercise. It will take much time and effort and we are very grateful for the £300 financial support which Formby Parish Council have provided to make a start.

In the meantime new member Tony Bonney has made very good progress with an ambitious programme of scanning and digitising our *photo-archive* starting with the Sibley Transparency Collection; over 2000 high quality 35 mm slides of local houses, cottages, street scenes and landscapes photographed between 1950 – 1980. He has also scanned about 270 mounted black and white prints including the Formby Lifeboat Collection. We have also installed the 1845 Tithe Map schedule (again with about 2500 entries), created from our card index by Joseph Fielding last year. Also the Sibley Drawings Index (about 700 items) created by Alan Burton

The technical requirements of a *document archive* index are also to be considered by a small subcommittee including John Turner, Desmond Brennan, the Chairman and myself.

New Computer.

This and other work for the Society has been assisted by our successful application for a free Computer pack-

History Group Report continued

application for a free Computer package from BT Community Connections which arrived on 1st March, now installed and loaded with appropriate MS Office 2007 software and our important data-bases installed. Following this we need to install a Historical Document Data base. We are already discussing the format of this which in all probability will be based on the format of the Archive Filing system started by Ted Turner prior to his unfortunate early demise some years ago. The computer data base will however be much more easily searched than the present paper-based system.

National Archaeology Week.

We have been invited to contribute again to National Archaeology Week, which this year is to be 12th – 22nd July. The Society's contribution will be focussed on the two old Tide Poles situated in the inter-tidal zone at Formby Point which were originally read by the Formby Lifeboat Keeper from the Lifeboat Station. Long after the boat had been decommissioned the readings continued until the 1970's and we have found that the actual records still exist. This will be an opportunity to examine and consider the history and function of the two old tide-poles which still survive and Professor Philip Woodworth of the Proudman Oceanographic Laboratory will join us to explain the pioneering development of Tide Measurement and prediction on the River Mersey.

The Chairman attended a Committee Meeting of the Lancashire Local History Federation at the County Record Office in Preston to discuss arrangements and proposed programme for the 'At Home' Conference to be organised by this Society at Formby Hall Golf Club next October. Details now are available and we recommend that those who wish to attend should send in their applications as soon as possible.

800 Anniversary of Liverpool's Charter

As a Merseyside Local History Group we are pleased to support the Liverpool Heritage Forum, whose Chairman Adrian Pearce spoke to a General Meeting of the Society recently in their celebration of the 800 Anniversary of Liverpool's Charter and the run-up to 'Capital of Culture' year. We have offered to write accounts of two 'Local Hero's of shared interest; William Hutchinson, Former Liverpool Dockmaster who is credited with having established Britain's First Lifeboat Station here at Formby by 1776. Also Thomas Fresh, Liverpool's first 'Inspector of Nuisances', the founder of Freshfield and a key figure in the development of Asparagus cultivation here.

We continue to deal with a steady stream of historical enquiries from different parts of the country. Two recent enquiries happened to be about the Eccles family. In one of these the enquirer said she was "gob-smacked" by the information we had been able to provide and is going to visit us personally in a few months time. In the other case the people concerned have joined the society even though

"We continue to deal with a steady stream of historical enquiries from different parts of the country."

they live in Surrey!

Formby Point Interactive Map.

This web site based prototype has been developed in partnership with *Countryscape* using their technical expertise to develop a virtual 'heritage walk' over the dunes at Formby Point. This coastal landscape has been settled and used for agriculture at least since the Iron Age: the route depicted on the web-viewer guides visitors past the material traces of several features that have been lost to dunes over the centuries, such as our 19th century lifeboat station and the original Formby Chapel. Other objects of interest include of

course the visible footprints of neolithic humans and extinct animals preserved in silt deposits on the beach. Every feature of interest is highlighted, and is described and illustrated with text and images in an information panel.

Future Plans.

Heritage Trail.

Finally we are cooperating with Sefton CVS in the description of a Heritage Trail around Formby Point, which will be published by the CVS late this year.

The History Group has not in the past had a sub-committee but has from time to time set up small working groups to undertake specific projects. It has also from time to time enlisted the help of individual volunteers. It may now be an opportune time to establish a small committee to assist with the work of the Group, particularly the planned work on Society Archives. Volunteers to help with these activities who have already offered to help will shortly be contacted.

Proposed Asparagus Trail.

Unfortunately this has not as yet come to fruition. A booklet has been prepared and we still hope that our long term plans will materialise perhaps with finance from another source.

The Future Programme will also include A Lancashire Local History Federation 'At Home' meeting to be hosted by this Society on Saturday 6th October 2007 and to be held at Formby Hall Golf Club.

Further details and booking form are enclosed. We hope to have good support from our own members on this unique occasion during which there will also be a display of some of our historical material and a Local History bookstall.

Art Group Report by Barbara Mossop

During the past year members of the Group have had the opportunity to visit Galleries and Exhibitions, go sketching together, try their hand at life drawing in Liverpool and exhibit in our annual Art Exhibition, which only takes place each year because of the enthusiasm of a very small Committee.

The National Wildlife Exhibition, held during very hot weather last July, was as ever well worth a visit. We also had an interesting visit to Alston Hall near Preston, where we had expected to see an exhibition in a gallery there but in fact most of it was displayed along a winding staircase. We were impressed by the number of Courses available at the Hall which had the venue been nearer to Formby no doubt we would have considered taking part in in the future. Whilst at the Hall we also had a look round the grounds but, as it was a dull damp day, did not feel inspired to stay to paint and instead set off for home, stopping for lunch on the way.

One new innovation, life drawing in Liverpool at the Liver Sketching

Club is to be repeated as few members were able to go on the original date set. Although we had discussed a suitable date last summer to go out sketching at Tarleton Boatyard, when the day came, only a very small number of people were available which was disappointing. We are hoping to visit the Magpie Gallery, Little Crosby and the Victorian School House, Southport as mentioned in the last Newsletter, in the next few days. The Group met together for a meal in January, this time at The Grapes, Formby.

Our next meeting to discuss our future programme will take place very shortly. The Group is run by a small Committee, my role as Representative being to report back their decisions to the Civic Society Committee when they meet. When I became Art Group Representative a couple of years ago, having stood down as Art Secretary, I thought it was just to be a stopgap. To date no one has come forward either to be Art Secretary, or to take over as Representative. As I have now been on the Committee for about 16 years and, in

fact, today's new Chairman will be the sixth I have seen in office since becoming Secretary, I am now asking members of the Group to come forward in the next few months to lead the group, or else our next Exhibition, to be held on Saturday 30th June could after more than 50 years cease to exist; as would the Group.

The Exhibition held at the end of June last year was enjoyed by all the members who helped in any way. The members who took part on the day all liked talking to Formby shoppers, some of whom visit us every year. Sales did not match those of the previous year, which had been exceptionally successful. The Civic Society had a table at the Exhibition so that members of the public could discuss Formby matters with Committee Members and also purchase the Society's literature. This year the Exhibition will take place on Saturday 30th June and we look forward to seeing some of you there during the day.

Secretary's Notebook; by David Willis

GREENER THAN THOU? In recent months we have seen several planning applications for installation of roof-mounted wind turbines. With promises of a 30 per cent reduction in your electricity bill and a government grant of £500 bringing the price down to about £1000, on the face of it this looks like a big step forward in affordable small-scale renewable electricity generation. However there are charges that manufacturers base performance estimates on unrealistic assumptions about the wind conditions at roof level in urban areas. It seems that actual output may be only 10% - 25% of what the manufacturers claim, perhaps as low as 50 kWh/year. In short, 'micro wind' has carbon savings that are so tiny as to be insignificant. The money would be better spent elsewhere, such as a photovoltaic system; it will also be far less controversial with your

neighbours!

WALK FORMBY You may recall from the last issue of 'Newsletter' that the Society intends to re-issue a booklet of walks around Formby. Several members are helping out with walking the routes to bring the guidance up to date. Each ramble contains background information about locations and historical detail; the next stage in producing the booklet will be to update that information also. We would appreciate help from any member with some spare time to check out some of the details – this part of the work is definitely home-based, so no need of walking boots or rucksack! Please contact David Willis on 878994 or E-mail at secretary@formbycivicsociety.org.uk

THE PLAN FOR PLANNING

Hard on the heels of Kate Barker's Review of Land Use Planning, CPRE has launched a major campaign to influence the Government's forthcoming Planning White Paper. CPRE's concern is that the 'Barker Review' poses a real threat to the planning system and, if implemented, her proposals could undermine quality of life and jeopardise affordable housing projects. The recommended widespread review of Green Belt boundaries could present the biggest single challenge to Green Belt policy since World War II. Green Belts have never been entirely sacrosanct but they're still one of the most effective and popular ways of preventing urban sprawl. A coalition of leading environmental and social organisations, including CPRE and the Civic Trust, have re-launched a website www.planningdisaster.co.uk in response to these concerns.

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The Newsletter of the Formby Civic Society Registered Charity No 516789

VISIT TO COASTGUARD STATION

2.30 p.m. on Thursday 13 September.

This afternoon visit is courtesy of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) - what we use to know as HM Coastguard. It is to the Liverpool Maritime Rescue Sub-centre at Hall Road West at Crosby.

Our visit to the maritime rescue centre will, hopefully, coincide with duty on watch of Society member, Ian Jackson, who will be our guide. Ian will give us an introduction to what HM Coastguard do, and how they do it, followed by a DVD/Video presentation of about ¾ hour. There will be opportunity for a half hour or so in the Ops Room, depending upon how busy they are, and time for final 'Q & A's'.

The visit is likely to last 1½ - 2 hours. Meet at 2.30 p.m. on Thursday 13 September at Liverpool Maritime Rescue Sub-centre, Hall Road West, Crosby, L23 8SY.

Because of possible space limitations please notify if you wish to attend by returning the BOOKING SLIP TO: David Willis, 5 Phillips Close,

Summer Programme 2007

8th June - *Asparagus Feast*, Freshfield Hotel. This event is Cancelled.

Wednesday 20th June; 7pm Visit to new *Squirrel Reserve Lifeboat Road*. Meet at 'Save our Squirrels' interpretation board in the Lifeboat Road car park, (on the right as you drive in). To be lead by Sally Orritt;

Saturday 30th June - *Open-Air Art Exhibition*, Formby Village

Wednesday 4th July 7pm - *Visit to the Ravenmeols Local Nature Reserve* with Ranger Billy Hazelden - Meet at the information board at the Lifeboat Road Car Park. The walk will include a look at the old Promenade -which has recently been cleared of sand

Sunday 22nd July 10 am - *Tidepole Event; National Archaeology Week*. Meet by Notice-board Lifeboat Road Car Park To be lead by Reg and Barbara Yorke and Professor Woodworth of the University of Liverpool Proudman Oceanographic Laboratory.

20th September - *Summer Outing to Beetham Village*; details to be announced

13th September 2007 2.30 p.m. Visit to Hall Road Coastguard Station. (Details above).
