

**Wirral Council  
Neighbourhoods**

# **Hilbre Islands Local Nature Reserve**

**Management Plan 2018-2023**



Written and updated by:	Reason for update:	Date:
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Christine Smyth	Green Flag feedback & structural change	2019
Christine Smyth	Green Flag Feedback	25/01/2020
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# 1 INTRODUCTION

This plan is intended to provide a framework for the development and improvement of the Hilbre Islands Local Nature Reserve. If you would like further information or to submit any suggestions please contact:

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This plan (and other information about the Hilbre Islands Local Nature Reserve) can be viewed, downloaded and printed from:

<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/leisure-parks-and-events/parks-and-open-spaces/hilbre-islands-local-nature-reserve>

Many thanks to Margaret Sixsmith and Cynthia Sadler who provided many of the photographs included in this management plan.



## 2 THE WIDER POLICY CONTEXT

Wirral Council's Parks and Countryside is part of Neighbourhoods and managed under the 'Delivery' directorate of Wirral Council.

**The Wirral Plan**, published in June 2015, sets out a series of 20 pledges which the council and its partners will work to achieve by 2020. Full details of the plan can be found at:

<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/sites/default/files/all/About%20the%20council/Wirral%20Council%20Plan%20-%20a%202020%20Vision.pdf>

The plan focuses on three key themes:

- protecting the most vulnerable
- driving economic growth
- improving the local environment

Wirral has a 5 year **Leisure Strategy**. Full details of the strategy can be found at:

<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/sites/default/files/all/About%20the%20council/Wirral%20Plan/Leisure%20Strategy.pdf>

The priorities to be delivered through this strategy and associated plans are:

- Promote and celebrate Wirral's parks, coast and countryside for leisure activities
- Encourage people to take part in sports, leisure and social activities
- Increase pride in Wirral's communities and encourage more residents to volunteer

Wirral's Parks and Countryside has produced a 10 year **Parks and Open Spaces Strategy** that will inform and direct the next 10 years for the service. Full details of the strategy can be found at:

<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/sites/default/files/all/Leisure%20parks%20and%20events/parks%20and%20open%20spaces/Wirral%20Parks%20and%20Open%20Spaces%20Strategy%202014-2024.pdf>

The Strategy sets out how Wirral Parks and Countryside will aim to attract and retain investment in the borough through provision of attractive and well managed parks and open spaces, whilst being accessible; and providing positive and healthy activities for all local people, communities and visitors to enjoy. The service also intends to contribute to the environmental sustainability and biodiversity of Wirral to achieve a good balance by protecting habitats while supporting economic growth.



Parks and Countryside is specifically featured in the Council's Culture Strategy, which has 3 main priorities:

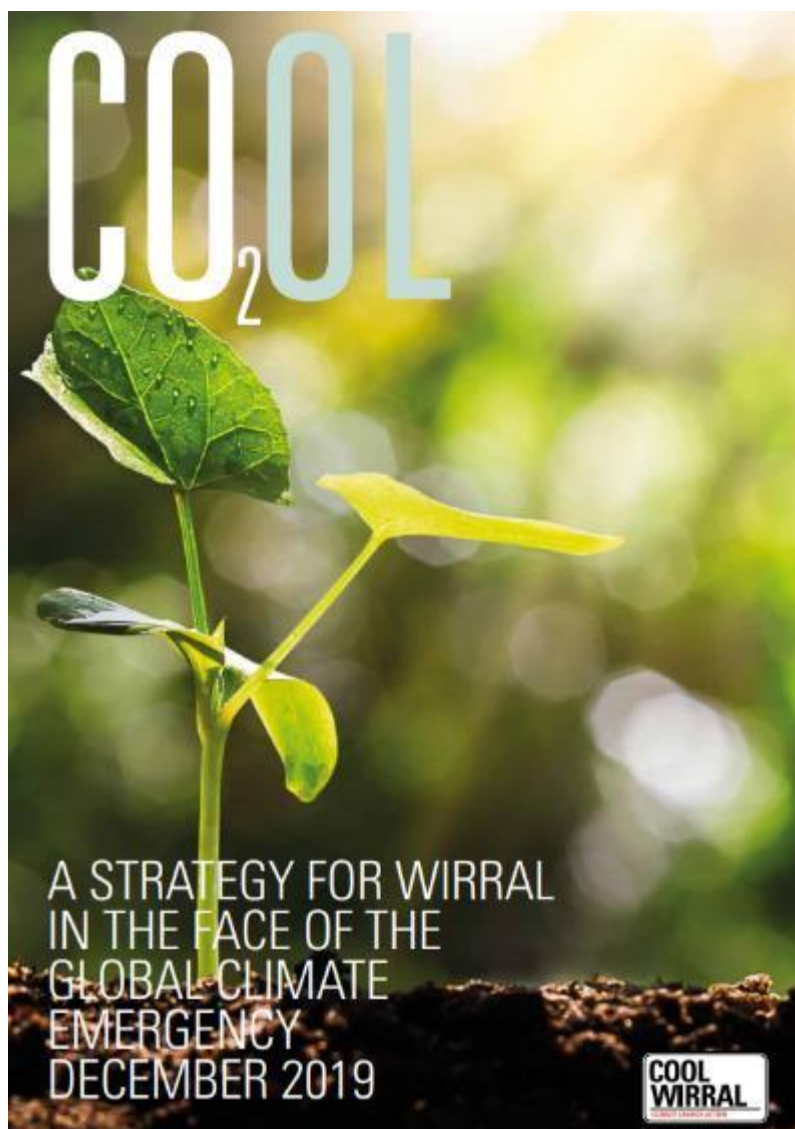
- Promote and celebrate Wirral's parks, coast and countryside for leisure activities
- Encourage people to take part in sports, leisure and social activities
- Increase pride in Wirral's communities and encourage more residents to volunteer

The Cool Wirral Partnership approved the new climate strategy, **Cool 2**, in December 2019. Wirral Council has formally endorsed the new strategy for its own climate emergency action plan. This strategy calls for widespread action in support from all with an interest in Wirral. Full details of the strategy can be found at:

<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/about-council/climate-change-and-sustainability/consultation-new-cool-2-climate-change-strategy>

It considers:

- recent changes in global and national frameworks informed by the latest scientific evidence
- the original Cool 2014-19 strategy and the lessons learnt from efforts to implement it
- local CO2 emissions data
- new tools to help plan emissions reductions in line with the latest scientific evidence
- contributions gathered through several workshops involving partner organisations, schools and members of the public







## Our Values

*'To work for Wirral Council is to be a public servant. We are here to serve our residents, to meet their needs, to protect them and to help them raise and achieve their aspirations.*

*This is the principle our organisation is built upon.*

*We have unrelenting focus on our residents. What they expect, what they need, and what they want underpins every decision we make.'*

- Paul Satoor, Chief Executive

<b>Customer Focused</b>  CUSTOMER FOCUSED	<p>We listen to our customers and acknowledge what they tell us. We let them know we have heard them and take action.</p> <p>We are flexible, open, honest, and respectful with our residents and customers, and always look for ways to make it easier for them to do business with us.</p> <p>We view things from the customer's perspective and focus on what we can do to give them the best possible service.</p>
<b>Accountable</b>  ACCOUNTABLE	<p>We are leaders and take personal responsibility for our work. We act with integrity to be the best we can be.</p> <p>We take ownership and solve problems. If we don't know the answer, we don't stop until we have found the solution.</p> <p>We take pride in doing what we say we are going to do. We are trusted by our colleagues, Members and residents to do a great job.</p>
<b>Professional</b>  PROFESSIONAL	<p>We treat everyone with respect. This includes our colleagues, residents and Members. We are courteous, punctual and communicate effectively to get the best results</p> <p>We provide a professional service that people in Wirral are proud of. We know how our role makes a difference and lead by example.</p> <p>We are positive, honest and value the contributions of others. We build positive and trusting relationships to work together to deliver the best possible service for colleagues, Members and residents.</p> <p>We acknowledge when we are asked something and answer quickly and clearly. We are clear about how we will provide the best possible service.</p>
<b>Ambitious</b>  AMBITIOUS	<p>We aim high in everything we do. We do what we can and learn from experience to get the best for our colleagues, Members and residents.</p> <p>We will challenge, as well as support, each other to try new things and improve what we do. We continually look for better ways of doing things for our colleagues, Members and residents.</p> <p>We have high standards and expectations for ourselves, colleagues, Members and residents. We celebrate when we do well and recognise the achievements of others.</p>

### 3 SITE INFORMATION

#### 3.1 Location and map

**Official site name:** Hilbre Islands Local Nature Reserve (LNR)

**Site address:** Dee Lane, West Kirby, Wirral

**Grid reference:** SJ 185 879

**Ward:** Hoylake and Meols

**Size:** 50.9 ha (120 acres)



..... extent of the Local Nature Reserve boundary

### 3.2 General access:

The only recommended safe crossing point from the mainland to Hilbre LNR is from the top of Dee Lane, West Kirby.

There is good public transport available to Dee lane, bus and train services operate from West Kirby.

#### **Beach access**

There is one only one recommended safe crossing route to the Islands from the beach at Dee Lane situated within a quarter of a mile of the town centre at West Kirby.

Due to the nature of the Islands access is across the sands and is approximately 1km to Little Eye and a further 1.5km to the main Island.

Access for pedestrians around the Islands can be problematic with some soft sand, uneven tracks and gradients.

#### **Safe routes**

The only recommended safe crossing route to Hilbre Island is to start from the slipway at Dee Lane, next to the Marine Lake, walking towards Little Eye, the smallest of the three Islands, keeping it on your right. As soon as you pass Little Eye turn right and continue on the sand passing Middle Eye on your left. Between Middle Eye and Hilbre take the rough track over the rocks towards the south end of Hilbre, or alternatively use the steps to cross over Middle Eye and continue over the rocks and sands to the main island slipway.

Do not cross direct to Hilbre Island, or Middle Eye and do not cross from Hoylake/Red Rocks as there are deep tidal channels on the east side of Hilbre Island and Middle Eye.

Tidal information is displayed on Dee Lane notice board. For weather and tide times visit the council website for the latest sources of information.

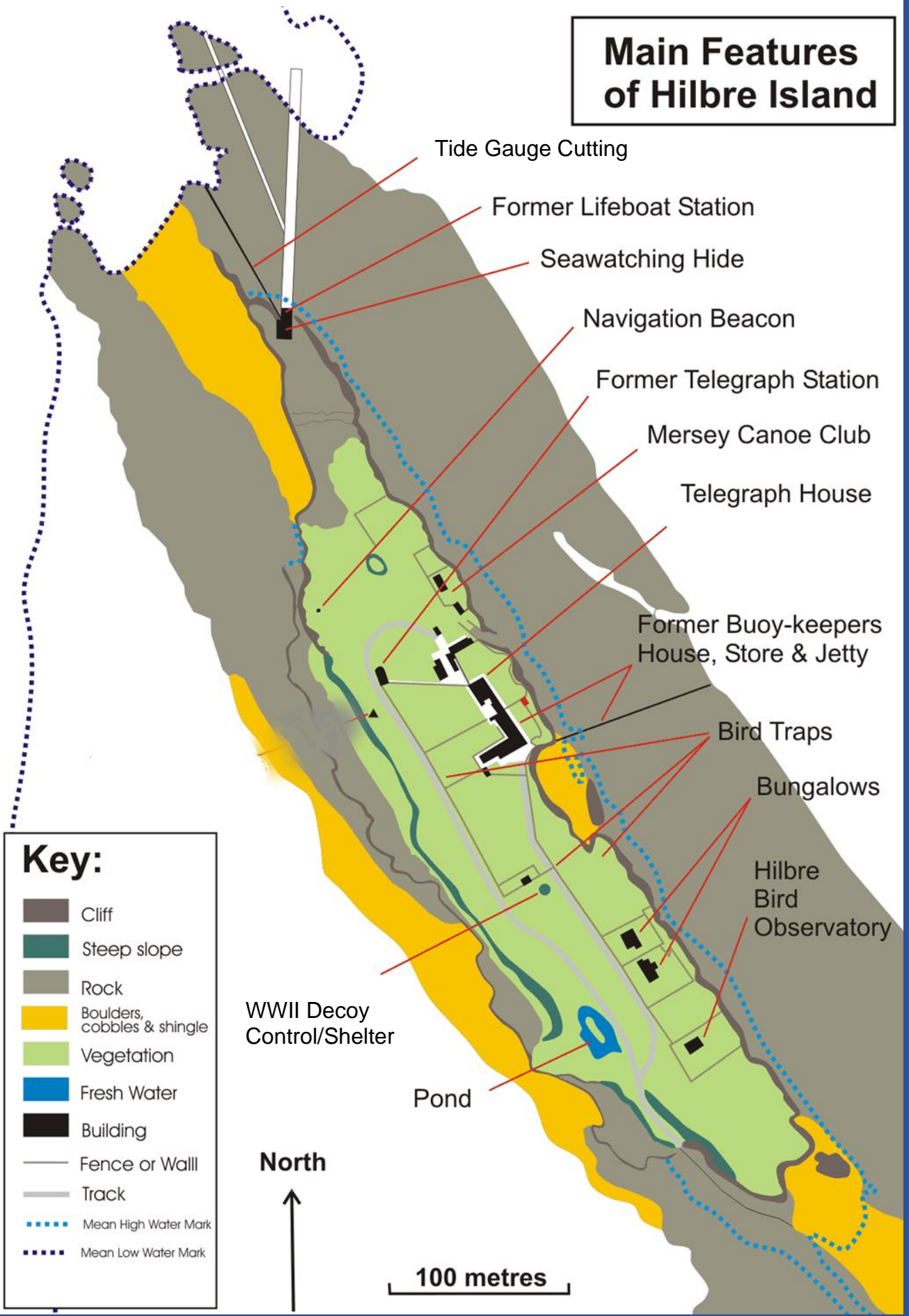


### 3.3 Facilities and main features:

- Natural area with significant wildlife value
- Secluded beaches and rocky shore
- Panoramic views across the River Dee to the North Wales coast and the Wirral coastline
- Telegraph Station Information Centre
- Old Lifeboat Station and Slipway inc. Tide Observatory
- Buoy Master's House Store and Workshop
- Telegraph House
- Composting toilet block
- Day Room with kitchen facility
- Other buildings with private tenants (Canoe Club, Bird Observatory, two private Cottages)
- Navigational aids/structures (Trinity House)



# Main Features of Hilbre Island





Aerial view of Hilbre Island © Ron Thomas Photography

### 3.4 Tenure:

Hilbre Islands LNR and the surrounding foreshores are the freehold property of the Wirral Council. A number of areas and properties on Hilbre Island are leased by the Council to private individuals; the Hilbre Bird Observatory, the Mersey Canoe Club and two private Cottages.

#### Constraints of Tenure

The Metropolitan Borough of Wirral owns the Freehold title to the Hilbre Islands LNR and the tidal foreshore within the Local Nature Reserve. The Hilbre Islands LNR were purchased by Hoylake Urban District Council from the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company on 18<sup>th</sup> December 1945 subject to the following covenants.

*“The purchaser hereby covenants with the Vendor that the Purchaser and its successors in title will henceforth observe and perform the conditions following:*

*Not use nor permit the use of the property for any industrial purposes or for the provision of entertainment by means of swings, roundabouts, sideshows or similar or other amusements of a fairground character;*

*Use, hold and administer the property for recreational purposes to the end that the property may be preserved for the enjoyment of the public under proper control and regulation and for no other purposes whatsoever;*

*Make and enforce or cause to be made and enforced byelaws for the regulation of the property and for the preservation of order and the prevention of nuisance thereon;*

*Not erect nor permit to be erected on the property any buildings or structures except such as may be reasonably necessary to provide facilities for the public for shelter, bathing, boating, refreshment and sanitation, all such buildings or structures to be of suitable permanent construction and of a character unlikely adversely to affect the amenities of the district;*

*Maintain and keep the property including all buildings and structures erected thereon at all times in good order and condition.*

*Provided always that the Purchaser or its successors in title shall not be precluded from temporarily closing the property to the public for such period as it shall think fit for purposes connected with the better preservation of birdlife.”*

The Mersey Docks and Harbour Board at that time retained the right to keep on the islands a survey mark, navigation light (now the responsibility of Trinity House Lighthouse Authority), a Tide Gauge and any necessary buildings in connection with them. The Board also retained the right to visit the islands at any time in order to maintain or repair these facilities.

The foreshore surrounding the northerly part of Hilbre Island approximately north of a straight line between Hilbre Point and the Lighthouse at Point of Ayr is subject to certain Crown reservations. Among other things these reservations effectively give the public *“full and free right to walk or otherwise, pass to and fro over and to fish and bathe upon and to gather seaweed or ware ..... and to land thereon goods and passengers from vessels and boats and to embark there from goods and passengers in vessels and boats.”*

The public originally also had the full and free right to ride (or) drive over this area of foreshore, but this right was withdrawn in 1980 with the consent of the Crown Estate Commissioners. This was to prevent people claiming the right to drive motor vehicles over the foreshore.

The foreshore to the south of a straight line between Hilbre point and the lighthouse at Point of Ayre, (i.e. Bounding the southern end of Hilbre Island and surrounding Middle Eye and Little Eye) is not subject to any Crown reservations or covenants.

A number of areas and properties on Hilbre Island are leased by the Council to private people and associations.

### **3.5 Visitors and main uses**

- Walking
- Bird watching
- Seal watching
- A quiet naturalised area for relaxation
- Photography
- Natural History
- School visits/ an educational resource
- The opportunity to undertake voluntary work
- History



## 3.6 History

The three islands are known today as Hilbre, Middle Eye and Little Eye. They originally formed part of the mainland and became tidal after the last Ice Age ended about 11,500 years ago. In archaeological terms the islands are of great importance as the range of finds shows that there has been a human presence from very early times. Recent surveys on the three Hilbre islands have located a number of probable Mesolithic (Middle Stone Age) sites dated from approximately 5000 BC. These were the first people to visit the islands after the Ice Age. They were hunter-gatherers who used flint tools and lived off fish, shellfish, deer, nuts and berries.

By the Neolithic period (New Stone Age), the stone technology had changed and the first farmers started to settle (approximately 3400 to 2500 BC). There are finds of flints dating to this period from the Hilbre islands. Similarly there have been finds from the Bronze Age, including a bronze socketed axe dated c1800 BC and a human burial dated about 800 BC. There is also evidence of cooking and field boundaries from this time.

The Romans also visited Hilbre and left some objects which were later found, including bronze buckles and pottery. They did not appear to settle as there has been no evidence of any structures. 19<sup>th</sup> century suggestions that a Roman Pharos (lighthouse) was erected on Hilbre has not produced any evidence to support this idea.

Cheshire after the Norman Conquest was controlled by the Earl of Chester and several subordinate barons. The baron who was the Norman feudal overlord of this part of Wirral was Robert of Rhuddlan. Some time prior to 1080 he gave West Kirby and Hilbre to the Abbey of St Evroul in Normandy. In 1140 St Evroul transferred West Kirby and Hilbre to Chester Abbey. A Benedictine cell of two monks was maintained on the island as a dependency of Chester Abbey until its dissolution in 1538.

Stone remains of graves found on Hilbre dating to the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries indicate that there was a religious presence on the island from before 1080 when the island was granted to St Evroul's Abbey. An Anglo-Scandinavian cross head was found on Hilbre dated to the 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> century and a Hiberno-Norse grave slab found on Hilbre was dated to the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

Hilbre's place name did not appear in records until 1140, when recorded as Hildeburgheye, meaning Hildeburgh's Island. As a Saxon personal name, this suggests a connection with an earlier time before the Norman Conquest. There was no English saint called Hildeburgh and the likelihood is that she was a relative of one of the local landowners in Cheshire or North Wales.

Hilbre chapel's dedication appeared in deeds from the 13<sup>th</sup> century as St Mary the Blessed Virgin. The rector of St Bridget's, West Kirby, had renounced his claim over the chapel on Hilbre and his reward was an annual mass on 15<sup>th</sup> August, the Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, in Hilbre's chapel. He established an annual group visit of his parishioners to Hilbre starting in about 1234. The 'pilgrimage' was therefore likely to have been only a local festival, giving the people of West Kirby parish a holy day on Hilbre to hear Mass in the chapel of St Mary the Virgin. Whether the chapel was always open for public prayers is not known, but its disappearance at the Abbey's dissolution suggests that it was more akin to a private oratory for the use of the monastic cell on the island.

The Benedictine cell on Hilbre established by Chester Abbey consisted of two monks and their servants. They maintained fishing boats and monitored the local anchorages and fisheries. They also collected the tithes from West Kirby parish and also ran a farm in Little Meols. After the Reformation, Chester Abbey became the cathedral of a new diocese of Chester which included Hilbre. The Dean and Chapter of Chester Cathedral remained the owners of Hilbre

until 1856 when the islands were sold to the Trustees of the Liverpool Docks, later becoming the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board. The islands were leased to various people over the years.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries Hilbre Island and Hyle Lake became an important anchorage for shipping in the Dee Estuary when the river at Chester was silting up. Trade was mainly to Dublin or Belfast and across the Dee estuary to Welsh ports. Their cargoes included local farm produce and processed leather goods from Wirral, and raw skins, timber and fish from Ireland. Erosion of the sand banks eventually split the protecting Hoyle Bank into two portions, and caused the Lake to disappear rapidly during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Hilbre Island was also used as an embarkation point for shipping troops, horses and equipment to Ireland during Elizabeth I's Irish wars and again during Cromwell's Irish campaign. In 1690 William III travelled from Chester to Hoyle Lake on his way to Ireland to fight the Battle of the Boyne. The local legendary story of 10,000 men camped together on Hilbre could have originated from the total figures of soldiers embarking from Hyle Lake in 1690. There would not have been space for so many men and officers' horses on the islands at one time.

Salt refining took place on Hilbre in the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Rock salt was discovered in Cheshire in 1670. In 1692 there was a scheme to produce salt on Hilbre. It was shipped to Hilbre via the Mersey along with coal from the Lancashire coalfield. The rock salt was boiled in seawater on the island. There are traces of this industry still visible in the north of the island.

A public house on Hilbre was first recorded in 1793 to cater for the crews of the small vessels who used the harbour. A traveller recorded in 1813 the local gossip about the Hilbre innkeeper and his wife that 'their riches have been gained principally by wrecking, for which business their situation here is said to be admirably calculated.'. Hilbre's public house is still remembered locally as The Seagull Inn, a name which never appeared in official records.

Two tall wooden sailing markers were built at opposite ends of Hilbre around 1810. The footings of the northern marker can still be seen as two sets of perpendicular troughs cut into the bare rock. These are mistakenly called monks' graves. In about 1840 these markers were replaced by a new pair of markers, one on Little Eye and one on the shore off Hoyle Lake. Sailing directions of 1840 showed how they should be lined up in the sight of sailors of small craft, to lead the ships into the Hilbre Swash and other safe channels. Rebuilt at least once in the next 100 years, the markers were demolished in World War II to avoid becoming landmarks to enemy aircraft. There are still remains of a base on Little Eye and traces of the other on the shore at low tide between Hilbre and Hoyle Lake.

In 1826 the Trustees of the Liverpool Docks acquired the lease of the islands from Chester Cathedral in order to set up their first semaphore telegraph station for communicating messages from Holyhead to Liverpool. The line of stations ran through Anglesey, Puffin Island, the Great Orme, Llysfaen near Abergele, Foel Nant, Hilbre Island and Bidston Hill to Liverpool. The first station was a wooden structure just north of the present stone building. The first message was sent in 1827.

The stone telegraph building which is there today was built in 1841. It was originally flat roofed with two vertical posts, each bearing four hinged arms. A control system of levers was operated from a bench under the signals which has left marks still visible on the stone floor of the signal room. Rotating sockets in the wide bay window allowed several telescopes to be trained on the neighbouring stations of Foel Nant and Bidston Hill and on the flag signals from ships at sea. The record time for a message to pass from South Stack in Anglesey to the Dock Office in Tower Building, Liverpool, was claimed as 5 minutes. In 1860 the semaphore system was

replaced with an electric cable which remained in use until 1939. A separate house for the Telegraph Keeper was also built in 1841 which later became the residence for the islands' wardens.

By late 1837 Trinity House had installed a buoy-master and his family on the island. His job was to maintain the buoys around Wirral and the Mersey coast. The buoys were towed to the island, lifted with a small crane up the cliff and rolled on trolleys into a lofty store room. Here they were cleaned, painted and repaired before returning to their positions at sea. After severe storm damage, by 1850 Trinity Board had erected a new house with additional store and outbuildings. These buildings have now become the museum. Trinity House removed the buoy-master and his family in 1876.



In 1848 a stone boathouse and launchway were built on Hilbre for the Hoylake No 2 lifeboat where it was possible to launch at any state of the tide. It had become very difficult to launch the Hoylake boat at every state of the tide due to the severe silting in the area of Hoyle Lake. The lifeboat was still operated by the same Hoylake crew, who would walk over to Hilbre to launch the boat at low tide. In 1894 the Royal National Lifeboat Institution took over all the local lifeboats. The Hilbre station closed in July 1939 as the motor boats at Hoyle, New Brighton and Rhyl were now able to ensure the safety of shipping in this part of Liverpool Bay. The Hilbre lifeboat saved 21 lives in 44 launches before its closure.

Lying beside the lifeboat slip there is a deep narrow cutting in the sandstone rock. This is part of the system to measure the depth of the tide along with a wooden ruler to mark the tide depth. It is all connected to a recording system above to provide a record of tide heights and times to predict future tidal cycles. It was decommissioned in 2009.

In 1856 the Dean and Chapter of Chester Cathedral sold the freehold of the three islands to the Trustees of the Liverpool Docks. Two years later they became the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board. Hilbre Island as it appears today is almost completely the creation of the Dock Trustees

and the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board. In addition to the buildings, they also carried out extensive repair work to prevent erosion of the cliffs during the 1890s.

Hilbre was a frequent venue for prizefighting in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The contests usually took place in the early hours of the morning to foil the authorities but the police constables stationed at Frankby and Hoylake had some success in preventing them. The prize fights attracted a lot of interest, being reported as far away as Preston and Birmingham.

There are also stories of cock fighting which were arranged in the deep hollow near to the present Mersey Canoe Club. The organisers made use of steamer boats to bring the audience to Hilbre, and to remove them promptly when the tide ebbed, so as to evade the law.

The island was also popular as an excursion destination in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Visitors would sail to the island for an 'aquatic excursion' before returning to their departure point.

Entrepreneurs made several attempts to set up amusements on Hilbre or on Little Eye. In 1885 there was a proposal to form a Marine Establishment on Hilbre 'for the purposes of recreation, boating and bathing and to connect the same with Hoylake Railway by means of a tramway'. The Dock Board required more detailed information and the request was subsequently dropped. In 1893, Henry Summers proposed to build a pier from West Kirby to Middle Eye with ornamental pavilion buildings. Again, the Dock Board did not approve the plans.

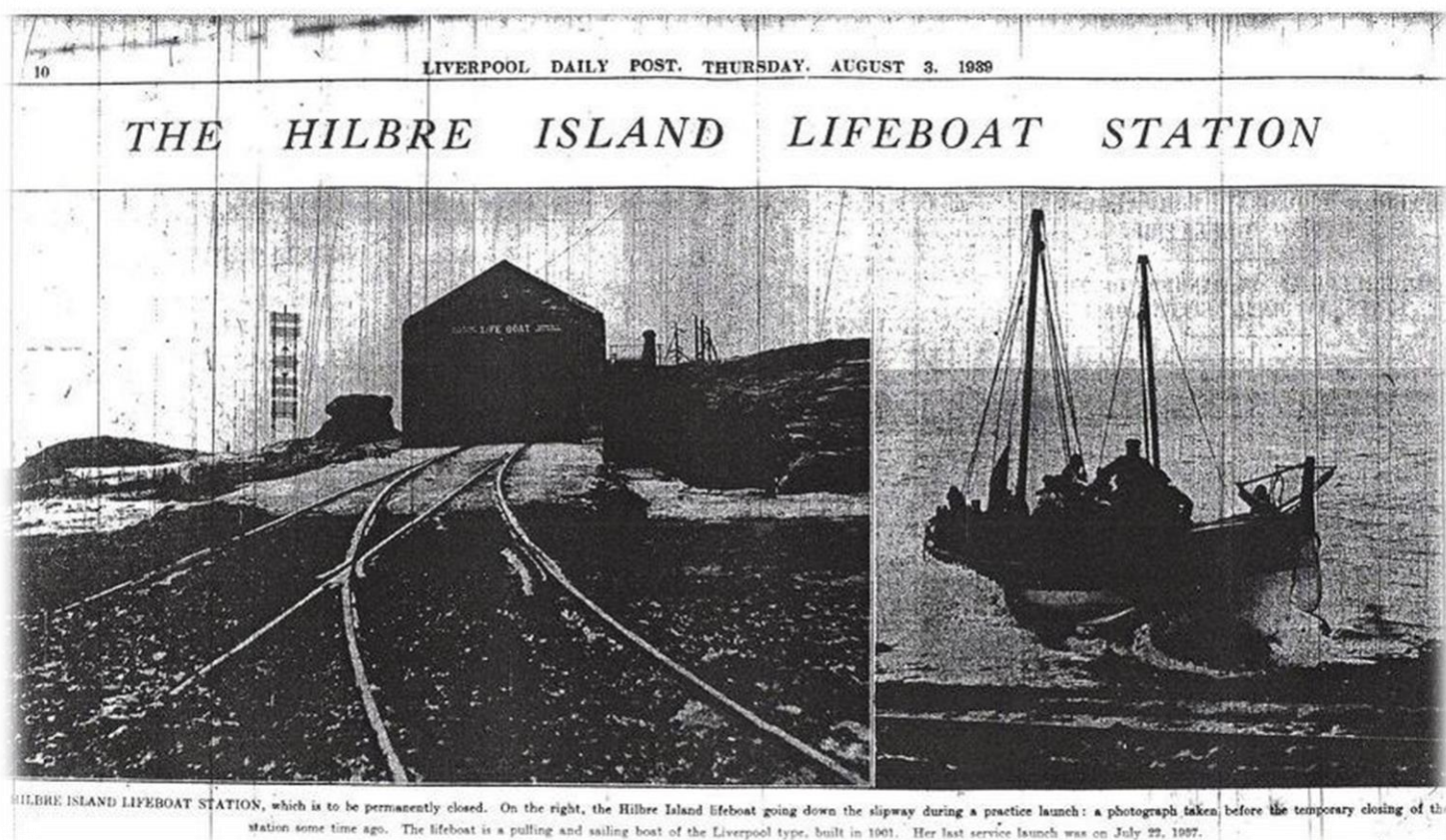
The property built by Trinity House was leased to a succession of individuals after the buoy store was discontinued. By 1881 it was the base for the Hilbre Island Club, established as a club for old bachelors with strict rules, for example no females were allowed except for the wife of the Club caretaker. Later the rules were amended to allow married men. The Club continued until 1931 when new tenants took over the premises. A lease was granted for the construction of a clubhouse for the Mersey Canoe Club in 1897 and leases were also granted for the construction of holiday bungalows in 1896, 1904, 1908 and 1923.

The Dock Board and their various tenants became increasingly concerned at the number of day trippers. August Bank Holiday of 1911 brought 2,000 visitors. There were a number of attempts to prevent public access but the public outcry was such that the Dock Board eventually settled on a method of controlling the number of visitors by issuing tickets that had to be obtained in advance. Even this system was not introduced without local opposition. As an aid to control, iron railings and gates were erected around Hilbre Island and Middle Eye in 1912 and a Dock Board policeman was employed on Sundays and Bank Holidays to enforce regulations.



During the First World War a small group from the Army were placed on Hilbre as part of a plan to defend Liverpool and Birkenhead which were classed as a Defended Port. During the Second World War Hilbre was one of 14 'starfish' sites for Liverpool. These 'starfish' decoys were a series of controlled fires set off in fire baskets during an air raid to imitate an urban area targeted by bombs. It was in use on Hilbre from 1 March 1942 to 8 April 1943. Also in 1942 a 'QL' decoy was added as part of a series of decoys to protect Bootle Docks. This was in use between 2 October 1942 and 1 May 1943. The 'QL' decoy displayed lights to simulate the marshalling yards and factories at the northern end of Bottle docks. This was all operated by the RAF from a control room on Hilbre and the fire baskets and lights were placed on Middle Eye. The control room mound on Hilbre was nicknamed the air raid shelter.

In 1945 Hilbre was sold to Hoylake Urban District Council with a number of covenants designed to safeguard them from undesirable development. In 1974 when local government was reorganised, Hoylake UDC considered handing over the islands to the National Trust. The newly elected Wirral Borough Council, however, placed on record its determination to pursue a policy safeguarding the islands from undesirable development and to preserve and maintain their character for the enjoyment of the public.



A succession of Wardens have lived in Telegraph House to look after the interests of the islands. In 1985 the post of Warden was changed to Countryside Ranger with wider responsibility for the Dee Estuary. In 2010 the Hilbre Island Ranger post was lost as part of a cost cutting exercise and the islands were managed by the Local Area Parks and Countryside team. In 2020, following a restructure within Wirral's Parks and Countryside, the islands are now looked after by a Manager and team of Rangers responsible for Wirral Country Park, Hilbre Islands and Heswall Dales and based at Wirral Country Park.

## 3.7 Landscape

### Geology

The Hilbre Islands LNR consists of a ridge of Bunter sandstone of the Triassic period (180 million - 225 million years old). The ridge continues to the south and is visible at low tide at the Tanskeys, Seldom Seen Rocks and Caldys Blacks on the West Kirby and Caldys foreshore. Around the cliffs of the islands a number of small "faults" can be observed and there are numerous interesting features such as "cross bedding" and "pebble beds". The pebble beds contain trace fossils from a much earlier date (up to 259 million years old), which give geologists an indication of how rocks of the Triassic period were formed. Hilbre Island is the most northerly exposure of pebble beds with these types of fossils.



When the Ice Age ended about 25,000 years ago, the islands were probably attached to the mainland of Wirral. As the climate became warmer and the ice caps continued to melt the sea level rose. The islands were probably separated from the mainland around 5500 BC at about the same time as the British Isles were separated from the continent.

### Geomorphology

The topography of the Hilbre Islands LNR can be attributed to a combination of the underlying geology of the area and the effects over several thousand years of continuous erosion by the sea. The islands themselves consist of low plateaux with a maximum height on the West side of Hilbre Island of 56 feet (17 metres) above mean sea level. The plateau reflects the underlying layers of Bunter sandstone rock, which dip in an easterly direction at an angle of about 10°.

The islands are known from historical and archaeological records to have reduced considerably in size in the last 2,000 years due to erosion by the sea. Bearing in mind that the islands were only separated from the mainland some 7,500 years ago, it seems fair to speculate that the next thousand years could witness the virtual disappearance of the islands. The revetment works of the past 150 years and the construction of the former Lifeboat Station have done much to prevent erosion at the north end of Hilbre Island. However, Little Eye has now been almost completely eroded away.

The process of erosion by the sea creates many features of geomorphologic interest such as cliffs, caves, stacks, wave-cut platforms and small sandy beaches. Much of the erosion is caused by the waves undercutting soft seams in the rock on the west sides of the islands, eventually causing the cliffs to fall. Fresh water draining through the rock to the east sides also gives rise to erosion and cliff falls aided by frost action in severe winters.

## **Meteorology**

There are no reliable weather records for the Hilbre Islands LNR but Meteorological Office records are available from 1945 to 1970 for Ashton Park, West Kirby. Ashton Park has an average annual temperature of 9.9°C ranging from a monthly average of 3.8°C in January to 16.1°C in July and August. It has an average of 4.03 hours sunshine per day ranging from 1.41 hours per day in December to 6.94 hours in June. The average annual rainfall is 29.1 inches (740mm). In relation to the North West of England in general, West Kirby is warmer, sunnier and drier than average. It is also relatively snow and frost free.

As the islands are only two miles or so from Ashton Park, the weather there should be similar. There may be slight differences, however, due to the influence of the sea, which for five hours in twelve surrounds the islands. The temperature of the sea at this part of the coast ranges from 8°C (46°F) in February to 14°C (57°F) in August. In Winter, therefore, temperatures on the islands may be slightly higher than at West Kirby and extremely low temperatures may be less frequent due to the warming influence of the sea. The islands may have a relatively long growing season for plants compared with inland areas but they are exposed to strong winds, sea spray and air-borne salt. These conditions seriously limit the range of plants that can grow on the islands.

## **Hydrology**

Apart from two plastic lined ponds, wells and an artificially created pond of uncertain age on Hilbre Island, the islands probably have little hydrological interest due to their small size.

## **Soils**

The soil on Hilbre Island is, for the most part, a free draining very sandy loam. Although a detailed survey has not been carried out, the distribution of plant species indicates a wide range of pH values. The soil on Middle Eye has been the subject of more detailed study, particularly in relation to pH and conductivity. It consists in part of well drained sandy loam and in part a poor draining much peatier soil. The range of pH is between pH 4.0 and pH 8.4. This variation partly accounts for the great diversity of plant species found in such a relatively small area. The soil on Little Eye is almost pure blown sand with low humus content and a limited range of plant species.

# **3.8 Biology**

## **Flora**

The vegetation of the islands consists of open grassland plant communities that vary according to variations in exposure to the sea and wind, soil characteristics and human interference. The extent to which the land had been grazed in the past is an important factor.

Patches of heath vegetation exists in places comprising species such as Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*) and Common Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*). On the western sides of Hilbre Island and Middle Eye the grassland and heath gives way to cliff-top vegetation characteristic of sub-maritime heaths found in Western Britain. Typical species include Thrift (*Armeria maritima*),

Buck's Horn Plantain (*Plantago coronopus*), Danish Scurvygrass (*Cochlearia danica*) and Rock Sea-spurrey (*Spergularia rupicola*).

Hilbre holds about 10% of the world population (one of only 5 sites) of a Rock Sea Lavender subspecies (*Limonium britannicum* ssp. *celticum*), this is an endemic and a Red Data Book species. Sea spleenwort (*Asplenium marinum*) is a regionally scarce species. Locally important plants such as Field Mouse Ear (*Cerastium arvense*), Slender Trefoil (*Trifolium micranthum*), and Pellitory-of-the-wall (*Parietaria judaica*) are present. Many species of plants, which had been recorded in the past, were found to be absent. These may have been lost due to erosion or grazing but in some cases the plants may have been artificially introduced and may have failed to naturalize.



What the vegetation of the islands would have been like without the influence of man is a matter of speculation. The "native" or "climatic climax" vegetation of the British Isles evolved in the period 5500 BC to 3000 BC following a gradual improvement in climatic conditions after the Ice Age. The climatic climax vegetation of much of mainland Britain was mixed oak woodland. Because of its proximity to the sea, however, the Hilbre area probably would have supported a sub-maritime heath with possibly some scrubby woodland in more sheltered parts. However, since man may have inhabited the Hilbre area since 8000 BC or earlier and the islands were not separated from the mainland until 5500 BC the islands may never have developed a truly "natural" vegetation free from human interference.

The islands are also important for marine life supported by the 38 hectares (95 acres) of tidal rocks. There are very few examples of rocky shore in the long coastline of sand and mud flats of North West England and North Wales. Although species diversity has decreased here this century (partly attributed to an increase in silt deposition and sediment scour around the islands), the Hilbre shore still possesses a great variety of microhabitats such as crevices, gullies, rock pools, vertical faces and overhangs, each of which tends to support a different kind of seaweed community. In all 150 species of algae have been recorded, some of these being regionally, and in one case nationally, rare.

## Fauna

The Hilbre Islands LNR, particularly Little Eye and Middle Eye, are a roost site for internationally important wading birds wintering in the Dee Estuary. The most common species are Knot, Dunlin, Redshank, Turnstone, Sanderling and Oystercatcher. Most of the wading birds feed on the plentiful supply of invertebrates concentrated in the alluvial sediments of the estuary. A few waders, however, notably the purple sandpiper, feed on invertebrates from the seaweed covered rocks surrounding the Hilbre Islands. These islands become particularly important roost sites on high spring tides and in storm conditions when other roost sites in the estuary (beach and saltmarsh) are completely covered. The islands can be carpeted with waders at these times.

The islands are also an important staging post for migrating passerine (i.e. perching) birds during both spring and autumn. These feed on the invertebrate population of the island plateau before setting off on the next leg of their journeys. As with the waders, the main attraction of the islands is probably their strategic position and the fact that the birds are relatively undisturbed.



Despite the large numbers of birds observed on the Hilbre Islands there have only been four species which have nested regularly on the islands in recent years. These are Meadow Pipit, Starling, Linnet and Shelduck. Whilst these species are all fairly common the islands do present an interesting opportunity for the study of isolated breeding colonies. Skylark and Linnet are National Biodiversity Priority species. A detailed study has been made of the House Sparrows on the island.

The islands contain one of the most studied populations of invertebrate fauna in the North West of England. There are over 700 species (mainly insects). The distribution of species is related to the vegetation type, tolerance of sea spray and the incidence of occasional inundation by waves. Some of the species found in the heath and open grassland plant communities are regionally rare but most of those in the paddock and garden areas are locally common. The spider and harvestmen populations are similar to those found on mainland heaths, such as Thurstaston Common, whilst the land molluscs are common or garden varieties.

The only mammals that regularly breed on the islands are field voles. Many other mammals have been observed, having crossed from the mainland, these include rabbits, hedgehogs, foxes, stoats, rats, mice, otters, a grey squirrel and even a fallow deer which was thought to have crossed the River Dee from North Wales.

The Hilbre Islands are of particular interest as a platform from which to observe grey seals, either swimming around the islands or on the West Hoyle Bank to the west of Hilbre Island which the seals have used as a haul-out site for the last 70 years. The colony which numbers over 500 at their annual maximum, spends most of the year around the mouth of the Dee and is considered to be of regional interest. Most return to their breeding grounds in autumn. Rare sightings are made on occasions of common seals and species of porpoises, dolphins and whales. The Dee Estuary is also estimated to support 93 species of fish including the uncommon anadromous fish, Smelt (*Osmerus eperlanus*).

### 3.9 Survey and archaeological work

The Hilbre Bird Observatory was formed in 1957 and is one of several international bird observatories and accredited by the Bird Observatories Council. Their primary purpose is to conduct long-term monitoring of bird populations and migration and individual observatories are located at prime migration points, where a daily census is taken. An integral part of their work is bird ringing, undertaken under license and co-ordinated by the British Trust for Ornithology. This provides data for guiding conservation policies of such bodies as Natural England. The observatories enable and encourage volunteers to participate in scientific studies of birds and the environment and the results are made freely available to researchers and to the public who are welcome to visit Observatories by appointment.

Detailed observations of birds have been made at Hilbre for over 60 years and about 1,000 birds are ringed annually. In all, 223 species have been recorded on the islands. Full details of observations including frequencies of sightings are given in the annual Hilbre Bird Observatory Reports and Chapter 12 of Hilbre, The Cheshire Island edited by J.D. Craggs (1982). The Hilbre Bird Observatory has a fascinating blog with some fantastic images:

<https://hilbrebirdobs.blogspot.com/>



From 2011 a large portion of the island (buildings and topography) has been recorded by Roy Forshaw. A lot of new detail has been noticed such as an early slipway at the north of the island probably predating the Lifeboat Slipway. Other features on the beach include cut outs in the rock where stone blocks supported the rails for a tramway operated by Trinity House. This was used to bring buoys and supplies at low water to the buoy store. What we think were fish traps have also been found on the Hoylake side of the island.

The buildings were also measured and drawn with individual stone bonding showing an interpretation on the various phases of construction using computer aided design software. Image corrected photographs were imported onto the drawing and the stonework and brickwork bonding traced. Blocked in openings, extensions and re use of earlier dressed stone blocks have been shown. (See the image below). Over the centuries dressed stone blocks have been salvaged and reused in other structures and the drawings will be used to identify the various stone types including type of material, masons finish and dimensions. There is a possibility that some of these blocks came from the chapel and monks cell.

The Korec Group provided a Sencefly Swinglet flying drone survey which took detailed plan photographs from the air. This has proved particularly useful in identifying rock cut features on the beach areas which are reproduced to scale in high definition.

At the southern end of the island early field boundaries and excavations into banking have been measured. These boundaries appear on early plans and have yet to be dated accurately. Elsewhere undulations in the ground are more apparent as the grass is shorter.

The salt works remains at the north of the island were measured and aided an application for funding a community archaeology excavation. Dating from the late 1690's the salt works was never modernised and its remains are a valuable record of early salt making.



© Roy Forshaw

In 2016 a Community Dig took place on Hilbre Island. The project, organised by the University of Liverpool in collaboration with The Friends of Hilbre, was built on a previous project in 2006 when evidence of an ancient building was uncovered on the plot of land adjacent to the bird observatory. The post-holes of a rectangular structure were found that may belong to the early medieval period (AD 400-1100). Dwelling houses from this period are rare finds in north-west England, making this a particularly important discovery. Other finds from the 2006 dig included pieces of prehistoric pottery and medieval tile, a testament to the island's longstanding place in the lives of local people.

Sieved soil in the 2016 dig produced a range of finds from the pre-historic (heat-shattered stone) and the partial base of a stoneware tankard dating to the late 17<sup>th</sup> Century along with some flint and a number of heat-shattered stones. This method of heating water was used during the pre-historic period as well as the early medieval period. A small pottery handle was found, probably late medieval or early post-medieval along with the partial base of a tyg (multi-handled drinking cup). This piece probably dates to the late 16<sup>th</sup> or early 17<sup>th</sup> century. It was probably made locally, possibly in Buckley. A strong concentration of cobbles was found in one of the trenches. These stones were probably collected from the beach and transported for use as building material and possibly belongs to the period between AD 400 and 1200. Several test-pits were dug in the northern part of the island to investigate elements of the late 17<sup>th</sup>-mid-18<sup>th</sup> century salt processing works.



© Rob Philpott

Due to the importance of the islands as a prehistoric site it is policy that any excavation work is preceded or accompanied by a representative of the University of Liverpool's Archaeology Department.

### **3.10 Management and summary of the known challenges:**

In 2020 a Wirral Parks and Countryside restructure took place. A Manager was appointed to oversee the day-to-day maintenance and management of Wirral Country Park, Heswall Dales Local Nature Reserve and The Hilbre Islands Local Nature Reserve. Based at Wirral Country Park, the Manager and a team of Rangers (4 full-time permanent and 3 part-time permanent) manage the three sites to meet the Council's aims and objectives. The Rangers wear a distinctive uniform and vehicles are liveried with the Council logo. The Rangers are a very visible and approachable link with the public and management and much of their work is liaising with visitors and user groups. The Rangers are required to respond to incidents, customer comments and reports across all three sites 7 days a week and, as with visitors to the islands, the tide and weather are the most important factors on being able to access the islands. A daily presence on the islands by Council staff is not possible.

#### **Environmental challenges**

- The historic buildings do not meet modern standards regarding access, energy efficiency and conservation.
- Although recreation use on the island provides the opportunity for raising public awareness and appreciation, trampling and ad hoc collection can have an adverse effect, particularly on the more fragile and slow growing species.
- Visitors may not understand the tides and/or safe crossing routes/information.
- Over the last decade, siltation has led to a decrease in diversity around the rocky shore due to the smothering of communities
- Storm surges and tidal action causes erosion to the built and natural landscape of the islands

#### **Financial challenges**

Local authority budget constraints require any expenditure to be justified and expenditure is restricted through the Council's Procurement Policy.

- Erosion to the Islands and its infrastructure
- Balancing nature conservation with visitor access
- Condition of buildings
- Difficulty of access

## 4 GREEN FLAG CRITERIA AND ASSESSMENT

It is the intention of the Parks and Countryside Service that the Islands to continue to achieve high standards as defined by the Green Flag Award Scheme. Further details about the scheme are available at [www.greenflagaward.org.uk](http://www.greenflagaward.org.uk).

The current condition of the islands has been assessed using the Green Flag criteria as follows:

- A welcoming place
- Healthy, safe and secure
- Well maintained and clean
- Environmental Management
- Biodiversity, landscape and heritage
- Community involvement
- Marketing and Communication
- Management

### 4.1 A welcoming place

#### **West Kirby Beach**

The only recommended safe access to the islands is from West Kirby Beach. There is a large three-sided notice board with information on Hilbre at the entrance to the beach at Dee Lane. A public toilet block at the Wirral Sailing Centre on the promenade is open and serviced daily. A small kiosk in private ownership serves ice cream and refreshments. Car parking is free on the main highway and there is a small charge in the adjacent pay and display car park.

#### **Hilbre Island**

Access to the main island is via a slipway / track with a small notice board. The main information point for Hilbre is in the Telegraph Station. The Telegraph Station is a significant feature in itself and contains information on the islands natural and maritime history. The Telegraph Station is open to the public on regular open days, or by arrangement with the Ranger.

### 4.2 Healthy, safe and secure

The Hilbre Islands Local Nature Reserve is covered by Byelaws, made under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, 1949, and in accordance with Section 236 of the Local Government Act, 1972. See Appendix.

Wirral Council operates a 24-hour community helpline, the switchboard can be contacted on: 0151 666 5265.

Wirral's Parks and Countryside are in regular contact with Merseyside Police, the Coastguard, the local RNLi and the RNLi beach patrol during summer.

#### **Dogs**

Dog fouling is not a considerable problem within the islands. There are no bins on the islands and people are asked to take their litter home. The public are asked to keep dogs on leads whilst on the Local Nature Reserve.

#### **The islands at night**

The islands do not have lighting. Visitors are advised to leave the islands before light fades and where safe recommended crossing times are given the latest time to be on the islands is 8pm.

## **Pathways, pedestrian routes**

Visitors are required to keep to the paths to reduce erosion:

- main track/slipway that runs north/south across Hilbre (made up of concrete at southern slipway end then consolidated infill and finally flagstones leading to a concrete base adjacent to the toilets)
- pedestrian path leading from Telegraph Station towards the old Lifeboat Station
- slipway on the eastern side of the island
- steps that lead to the foreshore
- steps leading off the old lifeboat slipway
- metal ladder leading from the slipway
- steps on Middle Eye

## **Lifeguarding**

A lifeguarding service is provided to Wirral Council through a contract with the RNLI. Uniformed lifeguards patrol the entire area daily during the spring and summer season. They are equipped with landrovers, all-terrain vehicles and jet skis. They work closely with the Ranger, Merseyside Police, Merseyside Firebrigade Service, HM Coastguard and local RNLI rescue service to provide cover in case of any emergency.

Additional up-to-date information can be found at: <https://rnli.org/find-my-nearest/lifeguarded-beaches/west-kirby-beach>

## **4.3 Clean and well maintained**

The Hilbre Island Manager and Rangers based at Wirral Country Park are responsible for the day to day management and maintenance of the Hilbre Islands. The Rangers undertake a programme of works and conservation management tasks each year working alongside the Friends of Hilbre and other volunteers to deliver these and other projects in the Action Plan (see appendix). The Rangers carry out regular inspections to identify defects within the islands that present a safety problem for staff and visitors. The following items are appraised under an Annual Site Inspection:

- Paths, steps, ramps, slipways
- Walls, fences, gates
- Buildings and structures
- Furniture – signs, litterbins etc
- Soft landscape – grass, planted areas, water features etc
- Habitat surveys/inspections

An Annual Workplace Inspection is also undertaken and includes the Day Room, Fog Cottage and toilets. Wirral Council's Asset Management is responsible for the maintenance of the buildings on Hilbre. The Rangers assist with logistical issues and undertake an Annual Asbestos Inspection, ensure electrical appliances are PAT tested and undertake minor repair works as and when required. The Rangers undertake litter picking, toilet cleaning, updating the information noticeboards, and advise visitors of tide times and byelaws.

## **4.4 Environmental Management**

There are numerous examples of good practice for sustainability on Hilbre and used to promote sustainability to the public.

There is no mains water, gas, or electricity on Hilbre. Gas is transported to the island by vehicle.

A composting toilet for public use was installed in 2008. Chemical use on the Island is kept to a minimum and chemicals will only be used in exceptional circumstances. Vehicle and mowing equipment are checked for emission levels. Vehicle cleaning takes place at Wirral Country Park where there is an oil separator to stop contaminants being added to the surface water drainage.

There are no litter bins on the islands and visitors are encouraged to take litter home. Litter items collected by volunteers is taken to the mainland and recycled where appropriate in recycling bins available in the supermarket carpark at West Kirby. Litter collected by the Rangers is recycled where appropriate in recycling bins at Wirral Country Park.

## 4.5 Biodiversity, landscape and heritage

### Biodiversity Designations

Hilbre, Middle Eye and Little Eye are included in the Hilbre Islands Local Nature Reserve in the Dee Estuary. The Dee Estuary is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). It has been designated as a Special Protection Area (SPA), and a Special Area for Conservation (SAC), under the European Union's Habitats Directive. It is a Ramsar Site under the Ramsar Convention of Wetlands of International Importance. It is primarily of importance for its assemblage of wintering waders and wildfowl and as a staging post for migrating birds.

The most notable plant species are:

- Rock Sea Lavender (*Limonium britannicum*)
- Sea Spleenwort (*Asplenium marinum*)
- Field Mouse Ear (*Cerastium arvense*)
- Slender Trefoil (*Trifolium micranthum*)
- Pellitory-of-the-wall (*Parietaria judaica*)
- *Chlorococcum submarinum* (microscopic green algae in cave)

The predominant plant associations, stressing the most important species, are:

- Heath plant community comprising Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*) and Common Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*).
- Cliff-top plant community comprising Thrift (*Armeria maritima*), Buck's Horn Plantain (*Plantago coronopus*), Danish Scurvygrass (*Cochlearia danica*) and Rock Sea-spurrey (*Spergularia rupicola*).

The most characteristic and notable species of fauna are:

- |                                                  |                                                                |
|--------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| • Knot ( <i>Calidris canutus</i> )               | • Cormorant ( <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i> )                     |
| • Dunlin ( <i>Calidris alpina</i> )              | • Linnet ( <i>Carduelis cannabina</i> )                        |
| • Redshank ( <i>Tringa totanus</i> )             | • Skylark ( <i>Alauda arvensis</i> )                           |
| • Bar-tailed godwit ( <i>Limosa lapponica</i> )  | • Wren ( <i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i> )                      |
| • Oystercatcher ( <i>Haematopus ostralegus</i> ) | • Mallard ( <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i> )                        |
| • Ringed plover ( <i>Charadrius hiaticula</i> )  | • Pied wagtail ( <i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i> )             |
| • Purple sandpiper ( <i>Calidris maritima</i> )  | • Meadow pipit ( <i>Anthus pratensis</i> )                     |
| • Grey plover ( <i>Pluvialis squatarola</i> )    | • Robin ( <i>Erithacus rubecula</i> )                          |
| • Turnstone ( <i>Arenaria interpres</i> )        | • Swallow ( <i>Hirundo rustica</i> )                           |
| • Curlew ( <i>Numenius arquata</i> )             |                                                                |
| • Sanderling ( <i>Calidris alba</i> )            | • Atlantic Grey seal ( <i>Halichoerus grypus</i> )             |
| • Shelduck ( <i>Tadorna tadorna</i> )            | • Field vole ( <i>Microtus arvalis</i> )                       |
| • Brent goose ( <i>Branta bernicla</i> )         | • Honeycomb reef building worm ( <i>Sabellaria alveolata</i> ) |

## 4.6 Built Heritage

### Listed Buildings

#### Building Name: BUOY MASTER'S HOUSE AND BUOY STORE

Parish: HOYLAKE

District: WIRRAL

County: MERSEYSIDE

LBS Number: 443646

Grade: II

Date Listed: 20/01/1988

Date of Last Amendment: 20/01/1988

NGR: SJ1847688020

#### Listing Text:

SJ 1888 HOYLAKE HILBRE ISLAND

(east side) 8/25 Buoy master's house and buoy store c.1836. Roughcast, with slate roof. L-plan; house of 2 storeys and 3 bays with adjoining one-storey wing to left. Windows are sashed with glazing bars. Central entrance to house has overhead with glazing bars and 4-panel door. Wing for buoy storage etc. now mostly converted to domestic use has gable to end bay with small bell attached. Casement windows to south facade, sashes with glazing bars to north. Entrance with C20 porch and side entrance with paired doors to store in end bay. 2 gable-end stacks to house, small stack to wing.



**Building Name: TELEGRAPH STATION**

Parish: HOYLAKE

District: WIRRAL

County: MERSEYSIDE

LBS Number: 443647

Grade: II

Date Listed: 20/01/1988

Date of Last Amendment: 24/11/2005

NGR: SJ1842188029

**Listing Text:**

SJ 1888 HOYLAKE HILBRE ISLAND

(north west) 8/26 Telegraph - Station

Telegraph Station. 1841. For Liverpool Dock Trustees. Painted stone with slate roof. One storey, with bowed north end. Bowed end has small-paned glazing with 4 brass gimbals for telescopes. East facade has timber platform and elliptical-headed entrance. Hipped south end. Built as part of a relay of 12 stations from Point Lynas to Liverpool transmitting information on merchant ships sailing to Liverpool.

**Landscape**

The islands represent the only natural hard rocky coast within the estuary and are the only examples of this habitat between the limestone cliffs of the Creuddyn Peninsula in North Wales and the sandstone cliffs of St Bees Head in Cumbria. The supporting vegetation i.e. maritime heath land/grassland and hard cliff/ledge vegetation are thus of significant interest. The ecological communities on the islands include two major and largely separate habitats. One is a form of dry maritime heath and grassland on the plateau areas and the other is the tidal rocky shore. They can in turn be sub-divided into numerous micro-habitats where different species of flora and fauna predominate in response to variations in the degree of exposure to sea, salt, wind, trampling and (on the plateau) grazing and cultivation. In both habitats the invertebrate fauna and mollusk populations appear to be closely related to the types of plant communities present. The islands' only resident land mammal, the field vole, is commonly found in rough ungrazed grasslands. To waders and the migrating passerines the islands are primarily a resting place for which purpose

the islands are strategically located and relatively free from human disturbance. The seals that use the West Hoyle Bank as a haul-out site feed on the fish of the Irish Sea and the Dee Estuary. The West Hoyle Bank has probably been selected for the accessibility it affords to their feeding grounds, shelter from the prevailing westerly winds and its relative safety from human interference. It is difficult to determine precisely the human influence on the ecology of the islands; humans have had some influence on the islands for as long as 10,000 years. Man has farmed and grazed the islands with stock for over 1000 years and has visited the islands in large numbers for 100 years. Even those areas that appear at first glance to be “natural” are in fact the result to a certain extent of earlier farming or grazing practices. The building of the Lifeboat Station and extensive revetment work has prevented some parts of Hilbre Island from erosion by the sea. Conversely, by the quarrying of other areas the erosion process has been accelerated. By growing various crops, grazing various animals and gardening, man has influenced the range of plants that grow on the islands. Some species of flora and fauna have been deliberately introduced, whilst others have arrived accidentally. Overgrazing and excessive trampling by visitors in sensitive areas can cause the destruction of vegetation and accelerate erosion, while the disturbance of roosting birds, by recreational users can deplete the birds’ energy reserves and reduce their ability to survive the winter. irral’s Parks and Countryside provide the expertise to maintain and promote the nature conservation interest of the islands in a variety of ways. The ranger provides an annual work programme for volunteers. Interpretation is provided through notice boards, a programme of guided walks and education events. Cheshire Wildlife Trust manage the Red Rocks nature reserve on the nearby shore. They run occasional guided walks to the Islands each year.

#### **Nature Conservation Aims:**

- Control invasive & alien species where they are a threat to the important native species or habitats
- Promote and co-ordinate research on the important habitats and species
- Encourage the spread of the maritime flora (e.g. heather, scurvy grass, thrift and sea plantain)
- Increase floristic diversity in the paddocks
- Propagate heather species on western cliff tops
- Encourage bird life and dragonflies by maintaining open water habitats
- Retain soil and vegetation along cliff-tops
- Maintain shelter for the benefit of perching birds (passerines)
- Maintain field vole population
- Maintain bristly millipede population
- Maintain Montane Heath Bee population
- Maintain maritime heath and grassland communities by control of bracken

## **4.7 Community Involvement**

#### **Partners and stakeholders:**

- Hilbre Islands Management Committee
- The Friends of Hilbre
- Councillors and MPs
- Natural England
- BTO/ Hilbre Island Bird Observatory
- RSPB
- RNLI

### **The Friends of Hilbre**

The Islands have a friends group with a membership of around 150. The group meet on a regular basis and invite council officers and management to attend their meetings. The friends produce leaflets, assist in guided walks and events, staff the Telegraph Station visitor centre, conservation tasks, seal watching events and seek funding opportunities.

The Friends of Hilbre was formed in 2001. Their intention is to help Wirral Council maintain the islands.

- To promote the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment of Hilbre Islands Local Nature Reserve for the benefit of the public
- To provide funds, volunteer help, educational facilities and other related charitable goods and services
- To offer practical help under the guidance of the appropriate officer of the local authority

The Friends group and other partners are involved in management decisions affecting the islands through the Hilbre Islands Management Committee.

## **4.8 Marketing and Information**

The islands are used mainly by the local community who account for about 75% of its use, but other regular visitors come from the Liverpool, Chester and Manchester areas. Peak use is at weekends during the summer, although the Islands are well used throughout the year. The islands have a large catchment area and proved popular, initially attracting over 25,000 visitors per annum in the 1970's. These numbers have since fallen to around 10,000 –15,000.

### **Wirral Parks Survey**

This was undertaken in 2012 to find out what visitors think about their parks, beaches and countryside, and to inform management of Wirral's Parks. Important general information was learned from the survey including the following:

- Peak times for use are afternoons, followed by mornings and evenings. Evening use is greater on weekdays than at weekends. The majority of visits are from half an hour to two hours. Around one in five people visit for more than two hours.
- One sixth of Wirral people visit parks, beaches and open spaces for events. A quarter said more events would encourage them to use these places more.
- Less dog fouling and more and better toilet provision stand out as the top two things that people say would encourage them to use parks, open spaces and beaches more, with 53.7% and 46.5% of responses respectively.
- Almost three quarters of people rate Wirral's parks, beaches and open spaces as having a very good or good standard of cleanliness and being maintained in a very good or good condition.

## Casual visits

The Hilbre Islands are a well-known local landmark and a popular tourist attraction attracting over 10,000 visitors each year from all over the North West and further afield. It is proposed to build on the knowledge learned from the consultation by exploring with Friends groups the possibility of a regular visitor surveys for Hilbre.

## Marketing information:

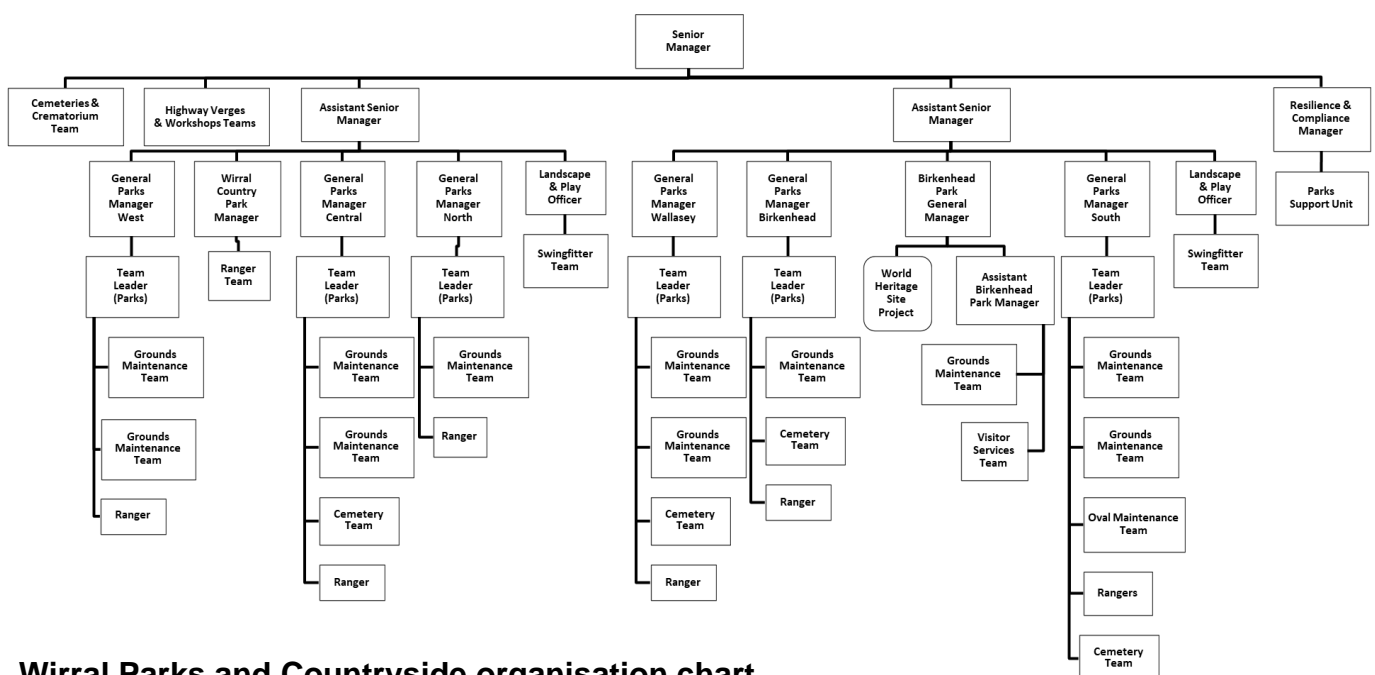
- Wirral Council's Internet website [www.wirral.gov.uk](http://www.wirral.gov.uk)
- Hilbre Bird Observatory website: <http://www.hilbrebirdobs.blogspot.com/>
- Dee Estuary website <http://www.deeestuary.co.uk/>
- Friends of Hilbre website [www.hilbreisland.org.uk](http://www.hilbreisland.org.uk)
- Wirral tourism website <https://www.visitwirral.com/things-to-do/hilbre-islands-p17578>
- Telegraph Station visitor centre
- Noticeboards
- A range of widely available literature, leaflets, booklets etc
- Walks and Talks /events

## 4.9 Management

The Hilbre Islands Manager is responsible for the day to day management and maintenance of the site. Site inspections, practical conservation and other work, including assisting with events and interpretation of the site is undertaken by a team of Rangers based at Wirral Country Park.

Enquiries about the management of the islands should be directed to the Hilbre Island Manager: [wcp@wirral.gov.uk](mailto:wcp@wirral.gov.uk)

The Hilbre Islands LNR has a Management Committee made up of elected members, council officers, Hilbre Bird Observatory, leaseholders and The Friends of Hilbre Islands and other stakeholders.



Wirral Parks and Countryside organisation chart

## 5 APPENDICES

### 5.1 5 Year Action Plan

Action	Target Date	Lead Officer	Resource	Target
<b>1. A Welcoming Place</b>				
Promote events and activities organised by the Ranger, RSPB, Friends of Hilbre, CWT	Annual	Rangers	Parks and Countryside budget/ volunteer labour	2018 2019 2020* 2021 2022 2023
Replace information when it becomes out of date, damaged or worn	Ongoing	Rangers	Parks and Countryside budget/ volunteer labour	2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023
Maintain websites	Ongoing	Digital Marketing/ Comms Team	Parks and Countryside budget/ volunteer labour	2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023
<b>2. Healthy, safe and secure</b>				
Identify risks and undertake risk assessments to guide appropriate action	Ongoing	Manager Rangers	Parks and Countryside budget/ volunteer labour	2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023
Carry out annual recorded site safety check	Annual	Manager Rangers	Parks and Countryside budget	2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023
Display tide and safe crossing information for visitors in the Dee Lane notice board	Ongoing	Rangers	Parks and Countryside budget	2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023
Display safety information on the reserve at main access points.	Ongoing	Rangers/ RNLI	Parks and Countryside budget/ Sport and recreation	2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023
Maintain lifesaving equipment on the island in the Rangers vehicle and RNLI vehicles	Ongoing	Rangers/ RNLI	Parks and Countryside budget/ Sport and recreation	2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023
Provide lifeguard cover on the reserve, every day during the school summer holidays and at weekends from May to September.	Ongoing	RNLI contract	Sport and recreation	2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023

Produce & promote a general code of conduct for visitors to the reserve	2019	Manager Rangers	Parks and Countryside budget	2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023
Produce & circulate a water sports code of conduct	2022	Manager Rangers	My Dee Estuary Project	2022
Maintain asbestos register and ensure compliance	Ongoing	Compliance Team Leader Rangers	Parks and Countryside budget	2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023
Facilitate annual fire safety check and maintenance to fire extinguishers	Annual	Compliance Team Leader Rangers	Parks and Countryside budget	2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023
Investigate filling of cave on the west beach by applying for capital funding	2018	Team Leader	50-70k capital funding Wirral Council	2018
Fill cave and seal with sandstone front	2019	Asset Management/ Contractors	Capital funding	2019
Investigate alternative solution to unstable rock mass on nw corner	2020	Coastal Engineers	Yet to be agreed	2020*
<b>3. Clean and well maintained</b>				
Consult appropriate archaeology experts in advance of major excavations	Ongoing	Rangers & Heritage Officer	Parks and Countryside budget	2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023
Maintain use of buildings that is consistent with the character of Hilbre	As required	Manager	Parks and Countryside budget	2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023
Maintain main track, clifftop fences and existing sea walls	Ongoing	Manager Rangers Coastal Engineers	Parks and Countryside budget/ capital bids where necessary	2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023
Remove litter regularly	Ongoing	Rangers	Parks and Countryside/ volunteer labour	2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023
Carry out annual recorded site safety check	Annual	Manager Rangers	Parks and Countryside	2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023

<b>4. Sustainability</b>				
Review options for energy supply	2019	Management Committee	Parks and Countryside	2019
Check septic tank for leaks	Twice per year	Rangers	Within existing resources	2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023
Keep all vehicle journeys to a minimum	Ongoing	Rangers	Parks and Countryside/ all	2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023
Ensure that visitors to the privately leased buildings on Hilbre do not bring more than one vehicle at a time on to Hilbre and that vehicle journeys are kept to a minimum	Ongoing	Rangers	All	2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023
Recycle as much of the materials brought on the reserve as possible	Ongoing	Rangers	Parks and Countryside/ all	2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023
Encourage visitors to take their litter home	Ongoing	Rangers	Parks and Countryside/ all	2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023
<b>5. Conservation and Heritage</b>				
Undertake species monitoring	Ongoing	Rangers	Parks and Countryside/ all	2018 2019 2020* 2021 2022 2023
Provide wildlife training to RNLI staff	Spring 2019	Rangers	Parks and Countryside	2019
Encourage species monitoring	Each year	Rangers	Parks and Countryside/ volunteer labour	2018 2019 2020* 2021 2022 2023
Provide details of any species recording to the Local Record Centre	On-going	Rangers	Parks and Countryside/ volunteer labour	2018 2019 2020* 2021 2022 2023
Liaise with the HIBO	Ongoing	Rangers	Parks and Countryside	2018 2019 2020

				2021 2022 2023
Investigate sources of funding to assist in the management of biodiversity species and habitats.	On-going	Rangers	Parks and Countryside/ volunteer labour	2018 2019 2020* 2021 2022 2023
Mow areas of long grass adjacent to existing maritime flora on Hilbre and Middle Eye	Every year in May	Rangers	Parks and Countryside/ volunteer labour	2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023
Using seed collected from Hilbre replant as required	Every year in March	Rangers	Parks and Countryside/ volunteer labour	2018 2019 2020* 2021 2022 2023
Seed bare areas	As required	Rangers	Parks and Countryside/ volunteer labour	2018 2019 2020* 2021 2022 2023
Maintain soil retaining walls	On-going	Rangers	Parks and Countryside/ volunteer labour	2018 2019 2020* 2021 2022 2023
Maintain garden fences	On-going	Rangers	Parks and Countryside/ volunteer labour	2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023
Allow some areas of long grass to develop	On-going	Rangers	Within existing Parks and Countryside/ volunteer labour	2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023
Use corrugated sheets or similar to provide an artificial habitat allowing mammal populations to be monitored without trapping.	On-going	Rangers	Parks and Countryside/ volunteer labour	2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023
Undertake seal watching activities to record population numbers	On-going	Rangers	Parks and Countryside/ volunteer labour	2018 2019 2020* 2021 2022 2023
Have autopsies undertaken on dead seals where there is an increase in the number of incidents	On-going	Manager	Parks and Countryside/ volunteer labour	2018 2019 2020* 2021 2022 2023

Monitor the areas of Sea Rush	Every year in June	Rangers	Parks and Countryside/ volunteer labour	2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023
Cut back areas of bracken	Annual	Rangers	Parks and Countryside/ volunteer labour	2018 2019 2020* 2021 2022 2023
<b>6. Community involvement</b>				
Support the Friends of Hilbre on Open Days	Once per month from April to October	Rangers	Parks and Countryside/ volunteer labour	2018 2019 2020* 2021 2022 2023
Develop the use of the buoymasters store as a museum with guided tours	Summer 2019	Team Leader Rangers	Parks and Countryside/ volunteer labour	2019
Liase with user and current non-user groups to enable conservation activities	On-going	Rangers	Parks and Countryside/ volunteer labour	2018 2019 2020* 2021 2022 2023
Provide assistance for volunteers task days and other Friends projects	On-going	Rangers	Parks and Countryside/ volunteer labour	2018 2019 2020* 2021 2022 2023
Attend the Friends of Hilbre Annual General Meeting and other meetings	Once per year	Manager Rangers	Parks and Countryside	2018 2019 2020* 2021 2022 2023
Develop links with local schools to enhance educational opportunities	Ongoing	Rangers	Parks and Countryside	2018 2019 2020* 2021 2022 2023
<b>7. Marketing</b>				
Open the Visitor Centre on busy days and at the request of visiting groups	Annual	Rangers	Parks and Countryside/ volunteer labour	2018 2019 2020* 2021 2022 2023
Produce information leaflets	Ongoing	Manager Rangers	Parks and Countryside/ grant funding	2018 2019 2020* 2021 2022 2023
Organise 'Sunset Walks to Hilbre' events in cooperation with other groups	Once a month April – Sept	Rangers	Parks and Countryside/ volunteer labour	2018 2019 2020* 2021

				2022 2023
Promote events and activities organised by the Friends of Hilbre – open days, seal watching, other events		Manager Rangers	Parks and Countryside	2018 2019 2020* 2021 2022 2023
Reprint Hilbre Information Leaflets when necessary		Manager Ranger	Parks and Countryside/ grant funding	2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023
Improve information provided on Council's internet site for visitors and teachers	2020	Digital Marketing Comms Team	Parks and Countryside	2020*
Build on the knowledge learned from the Wirral Parks Survey by repeat visitor survey	2021	Manager	Parks and Countryside/ volunteer labour	2021*
Create information hub in the slate shed and replace entrance board	Dec 2019	Manager Rangers	Windfarms Energy company grant aid	2019
Investigate purchase of new gazebo for reinstatement of publicity days and merchandise sales on the shore and/or	2020	Rangers	Parks and Countryside/ volunteer labour	2020*
<b>8. Management</b>				
Provide regular updates to the Hilbre Advisory Committee to reflect progress	Every 6 months	Manager Rangers	Parks and Countryside/ volunteer labour	2018 2019 2020* 2021* 2022 2023
Actively seek funding or other resources to maintain buildings and other projects	Ongoing	Manager Rangers	Funding required	2018 2019 2020* 2021 2022 2023
Commission options report from financial and property consultants (Amion and Lambert-Smith-Hampton) to draw out options for the financial management of the islands. The report will inform options appraisal and master plan	2018	Property Services Team Leader	Parks and Countryside revenue funding	2018
Develop vision and master plan for the islands	2019	Manager	Additional funding may be required	2022

\*Not undertaken due to Covid restrictions

## 5.2 Project Bank

These longer-term projects require additional support and funding

PROJECT BANK		
Project	'Ballpark' cost estimate (inc design and contract management fee)	Justification, policy fit and evidence of need with reference to policy document
Investigate use of mobile downloadable information	tbc	Keep up with advances in technology and minimise signage while providing detailed information capable of being interrogated by visitors
Development of Hilbre Islands master plan	2.5k	Options report from financial and property consultants (Amion and Lambert-Smith-Hampton) will inform options appraisal and master plan
Develop the use of the buoy masters store as a museum	1k	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to raise money for the maintenance of the island</li> <li>to provide public access to more of the heritage interest</li> <li>providing volunteer opportunities as guides</li> </ul>
Create information hub in the slate shed and across the main island	5k successful bid 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>grant from energy company</li> </ul>
Seek solution to unstable rock face on NW corner	Unknown yet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to allow continued safe access</li> <li>coastal risk manager to oversee</li> </ul>
Streaming of online events	£500 - 1k	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Will need input from Comms and Digital Marketing</li> </ul>

### 5.3 Hilbre Island Local Nature Reserve Bylaws

In these Byelaws “the Reserve” means the pieces or parcels of land containing in the whole 49 hectares or thereabouts and situated in the Metropolitan Borough of Wirral declared to be managed as a Nature Reserve by the Metropolitan Borough of Wirral.

Throughout these Byelaws the expression “the Council” means the Metropolitan Borough of Wirral.

“Firearm” shall have the same meaning as in Section 57 of the Firearms Act, 1968.

An act necessary to the proper execution of his duty in the Reserve by an officer of the Council or by any person or servant of any person employed by the Council shall not be deemed an offence against these Byelaws.

No person under the age of 16 shall be allowed access to the Reserve unless accompanied by a person aged 16 or over who has been issued with an appropriate permit.

Within the Reserve the following acts are hereby prohibited:

- Taking, molesting or intentionally disturbing, injuring or killing any living creature
- Taking or intentionally disturbing or destroying the eggs, larvae, pupae or other immature stages,
- or the place used for the shelter or protection of any living creature
- Spreading or using any net, or setting or using any lamp or other instrument, or any snare or lure,
- for the taking, injury or destruction of any living creature
- Intentionally removing any material from any area of the Reserve
- Intentionally removing, displacing, damaging or defacing any tree, shrub, plant, fungus or part thereof, or any unfashioned mineral including water
- Intentionally bringing or permitting to be brought into the Reserve any living creature, or the egg
- of any living creature, or any plant, or any seed or any other part of any plant, in such
- circumstances that it is likely that such creature or plant will reproduce or propagate itself, or such
- egg will hatch, or such seed will germinate
- Driving, riding, propelling or leaving any mechanically propelled vehicle (including hovercraft)
- Bringing into or permitting to remain any animal. Provided that this Byelaw shall not apply to any
- dog kept on a lead and under proper control and effectively restrained from injuring or disturbing
- any person, animal or bird or damaging or defacing any tree, shrub, plant, fungus or part thereof

- Erecting, occupying or using any tent, shed, hide, van or other structure
- Lighting any fire, stove, heater, firework or other appliance capable of causing fire or discarding or throwing any lighted match or lighted substance in a manner likely to cause a fire
- Boating, bathing or wading in any water body other than the sea
- Any act which pollutes or is likely to pollute any water
- Intentionally or recklessly removing or displacing any notice board, notice, fence, barrier, post, boardwalk, bridge, hide or other structure
- Being in possession of a firearm, catapult, bow and arrow or a crossbow
- Discharging a firearm, catapult, bow and arrow or a cross bow
- Flying any model aircraft or sailing any model boat in any water body other than the sea
- The use of any apparatus for the transmission, reception, reproduction or amplification of sound
- or images by electrical or mechanical means, except apparatus designed and used to aid
- defective hearing, in such a manner as to cause annoyance to or interfere with the quiet
- enjoyment of the Reserve by any other members of the public or to cause harm to any living
- creature or plant in the Reserve
- Intentionally obstructing any officer of the Council or any person or the servant of any person employed or 44pprox.44ed by the Council in the execution of any works, including research or scientific work connected with the laying out, maintenance or management of the Reserve
- Intentionally leaving items in a place other than a receptacle provided by the Council for deposit of litter or refuse
- Entering at any time any part of the Reserve where notice to keep out has been posted by order of the Council
- Turning out any animal or poultry to feed or graze
- Landing any aircraft except in emergency
- Using any device designed or adapted for detecting or locating any metal or mineral in the Reserve
- Riding any bicycle, tricycle or similar machine elsewhere than in a place indicated by a notice as being available for the purpose.

## 5.4 Statutory protection

### **Fisheries are protected by**

The Marine and Coastal Access Act

Managed nationally by the Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities

Managed locally by NWIFSFA and Dee Harbour Master

Dee Estuary and North Wirral Foreshore Sensitive Marine Area

Wildlife and Countryside Act

Enforcement by Natural England and Merseyside Police

### **Civil Aviation Authority designated Bird Roosts/Bird Sanctuary protected by:**

Civil Aviation Authority

### **Bird roosts are protected by:**

The Hilbre Islands Dee Estuary Site of Special Scientific Interest

Enforcement by Natural England and Merseyside Police

### **The Hilbre Islands and Dee Estuary is protected by:**

Special Protection Area

Special Area for Conservation

International Wetland (Ramsar Site)

The Road Traffic Act

Enforcement by Natural England and Merseyside Police

### **Grade II Listed Buildings are protected by:**

Enforcement by English Heritage And Local Authority and Building Conservation Officer

### **The Local Nature Reserve is protected by:**

Hilbre Island Byelaws

Wildlife and Countryside Act

Enforcement by the Local Authority, Natural England and Merseyside Police

### **The Hilbre Islands Local Geological Site**

#### **UK RIGS Cheshire RIGS**

Enforcement by the Local Authority



## 5.6 Designed or manmade features

Feature	Condition	Comments
<b>The Telegraph Station Interpretive Centre</b>	The Hilbre Island Telegraph Station is a Grade II listed building and appears to be in good condition. The station is used as a visitor information and contains historical artifacts, it is one of the last examples of the Holyhead to Liverpool optical telegraphs. There is a lookout tower attached to the building	<i>Future use to being considered as museum</i>
<b>Telegraph House</b>	Former Ranger's house	The only flushing toilet on the Island
<b>The Buoymasters house</b>	The Buoy-masters house is a two-story building consisting of an entrance hall and hallway from which there are two reception rooms, one pantry with access to the west garden, one kitchen and under stairs storage. Stairs lead from the hallway to the first floor landing. On the first floor, from the central landing there are four bedrooms and one room with an obsolete chemical toilet. The building appears to be structurally sound but is in a poor state of repair and is showing sign of damp	Structural building report carried out in 2011  Refurbishment works identified and costed in 2011  Repairs made in
<b>Buoy Master Store and Workshop</b>	<b>The Buoymasters workshop</b> consists of a large single room with space extending upwards to the roof slates. There is a pair of large entrance doors with a central pillar and a small access door leading to the Buoy-masters store. <b>Buoymasters store</b> – a mostly single story building with loft space accessed via the Buoy-masters workshop and extra two rooms above the kitchen accessed via a bridge from the south garden. The main entrance leads into	Structural building report carried out in 2011  Refurbishment works identified and costed in 2011  Doors replaced in 2014  Structural building report carried out in 2011  Refurbishment works identified and carried out in 2011

Feature	Condition	Comments
<b>Buoy Master Store and Workshop cont.</b>	<p>the 'L'-shaped recreation room and then into</p> <p>The second, central recreation room from which the three bedrooms can be accessed. A corridor from the central recreation room leads into the kitchen and then onto a small bathroom. Access to the outside can be via doors in the corridor, kitchen and bathroom. The access to the outside from the bathroom leads to an outside toilet in a converted pigsty. There is an outside passageway around two and a half sides of the building from the paved area below the south garden to the back of the Buoy-masters house. This passageway gives access to a storeroom next to the Buoy-masters store kitchen and within the retaining wall there is the remains of a cold storage cupboard. One end of the passageway leads to an outside shower room and steps up to the west garden</p>	<p>Essential internal and external repair works carried out in 2013</p> <p>External repairs and improvements carried out in Spring 2014</p> <p>Replacement of windows 2014</p>
<b>Bunkhouse (Old Stable)</b>	<p>The conversion of the bunkhouse into a day/meeting room was completed in 2008 including the fitting of a new heating system and kitchen</p>	<p>Good condition</p> <p>Minor repairs and maintenance work identified and carried out in 2013</p>
<b>Lifeboat Station</b>	<p>The lifeboat station was constructed in 1849. A bird-watching hide has been constructed over the beginning of the old slipway As a sea-watching hide. The building also contains the tide gauge monitoring equipment, which is not accessible to the public</p> <p>Situated in part of the old lifeboat Station, is an</p>	

Feature	Condition	Comments
	automatic tide gauge operated by the Port of Liverpool. This has been in operation for more than 130 years.	
<b>Lifeboat Slipway</b>	The lifeboat slipway has suffered significant storm damage. A number of emergency repairs have been carried out. The slipway has been breached in the centre with a gap of 48pprox. 10metres. The sandstone blocks lie strewn nearby.	Future actions to conserve the slipway are being considered – cement spray has been used in the past and will need renewal when it wears.
<b>Slate Shed</b>	Opposite old stable This is now quite poor and props have been inserted to stabilise the building	Roof and rear window replaced 2016, walls retained in situ without alteration
<b>Goat Shed</b>	Store room attached to the old stable	
<b>Telegraph Pigsty</b>	Attached to goat shed covered and uncovered areas with sandstone trough and ornamental gate	
<b>Fog Cottage</b>	Storage outbuilding, storage in roof, fireplaces and the remaining of 3 out of 15 bunk beds	
<b>Hothouse</b>	One wall remains of the heated greenhouse type building. Includes fire grate	
<b>Boathouse</b>	Brick and sandstone building at the top of telegraph slipway	
<b>Buoymasters Pigsty</b>	Attached to west end of the buoy masters store	
<b>Greenhouse</b>	Wooden framed glasshouse in telegraph house garden east	
<b>Race Viewing Platform</b>	Wooden structure with metal ladder to roof in buoy masters garden – east	
<b>Air Raid Shelter</b>	Buried brick structure with central corridor and two rooms to north and south	
<b>Cart Shed</b>	Three sided sandstone building with No roof	
<b>North Bridge</b>	Solid sandstone crossing point	
<b>Window Bridge</b>	Historic sandstone bridge constructed from windows partly from an old church	

Feature	Condition	Comments
<b>Wind Turbine</b>	2.5 KW turbine with 1.5m2 base	Service and repair identified as turbine not working effectively In a poor condition. Head requires replacement and base needs attention. It has been taken down for safety
<b>Telegraph Walls West</b>		
<b>Telegraph Walls East</b>		Repair works carried out February 2013
<b>Buoy masters Wall East</b>		
<b>Buoy masters passageway walls</b>	Sandstone retaining wall 4949 approx.. 4m high	Repair works carried out February 2013
<b>Telegraph Water Well</b>	Excavated well 4949pprox.. 10 metres deep 1.5metres diameter	Reasonable condition
<b>Stable Water Well</b>	Excavated well 4949pprox.. 1 metre diameter	Reasonable condition
<b>Little Eye Navigation Mast Base</b>	Sandstone and concrete base to now unused mast	
<b>Middle Eye South Steps</b>	Sandstone steps	Reasonable condition
<b>Middle Eye North Steps</b>	Sandstone steps	Reasonable condition
<b>Hilbre West Steps</b>	Wooden and sandstone steps	Reasonable condition
<b>Hilbre South East Steps</b>	Sandstone steps	Reasonable condition
<b>South Slipway and Wall</b>	Concrete and sandstone slipway with sandstone wall on its east side	Reasonable condition
<b>Main Pond and Spoil Heap</b>	Hand dug pond with island and mounded spoil heap – Reasonable	Reasonable condition
<b>WW 2 Concrete Junction Box and additional feature</b>	Concrete block in south beach with old frayed cabling	Reasonable condition
<b>Salt Works – Saltwater Wells and Channels</b>	Excavated wells and sluice gates with associated channels	Reasonable condition
<b>Tide Gauge Bridge</b>	Solid concrete bridge – Victorian?	Reasonable condition
<b>Tide Gauge Cutting</b>	Hand excavated channel	Reasonable condition
<b>Telegraph House steps</b>	Sandstone steps with ornamental gate	Reasonable condition
<b>Jetty Supports</b>	Metal supports for disused wooden jetty	
<b>Original Jetty cutting</b>	Channels cut into sandstone	
<b>Top paddock flag pole</b>	Concrete base with wooden flag pole	Good condition

Feature	Condition	Comments
<b>Niffy Bay bird hide</b>	Wooden structure with 2 doors and one window – Poor	
<b>West side soil retention wall</b>	Low sandstone wall	Reasonable condition
<b>North end Rock Sea Lavender wall</b>	Low sandstone wall	Reasonable condition
<b>Various sea defence walls</b>		Retaining wall on approach road highlighted for repair
<b>Composting Toilets for public use</b>	New facility opened 2008	Good condition, doors replaced in 2013



## 5.6 Response to Green Flag Judge's Feedback

### Green Flag Award 2018

**Name of Site: Hilbre Island**

**Managing Organisation: Wirral**



#### Desk Assessment Feedback (Management Plan and supporting documentation)

Criteria	Strengths	Recommendations	
<b>Presentation</b>	The Management Plan has at the beginning a summary of known challenges to the site. (up front with the challenges) Wirral Council corporate format	Photographs are of a mixed size and quality. Some of the birds are particularly small	
<b>Health, Safety &amp; Security</b>	There is a review council wide of best practices on the control of dogs. There doesn't seem to be a problem of dog fouling. The main problem is ground nesting birds	I wonder if a dog ban during the nesting period is a solution?	Dog control order consultation in 2018 resulted in no dog ban policy for Wirral's beaches
<b>Maintenance of equipment, buildings &amp; landscape</b>	Ranger prepares work for the Friends group that meet once a month on a Wednesday or a week-end. The Ranger has a check list of assessing quality of the landscape features e.g. buildings, paths etc.	I would keep the recent achievements list to the current management plan cycle. I see no need to include achievements dating back to 2011	
<b>Litter, cleanliness, vandalism</b>	Small section in the Plan due to the nature of the site. Visitors are encouraged to take their litter home. (No litter bins on the Island)	None	
<b>Environmental Management</b>	Very keen on this matter, recently installed 2 Composting toilets. No chemicals used on the Island, Vehicle emissions and usage on the	None	
<b>Biodiversity, Landscape and Heritage</b>	Hilbre is a SSSI, SPA, SAC and Ramstar site, so it is a special place and has to be managed with care. There is a Nature Conservation Aim of 12 targets	None	
<b>Community Involvement</b>	A positive involvement in the management decisions via the Hilbre Island Management Committee.	None	

<b>Marketing &amp; Communication</b>	There are various web sites listing the Island- Wirral Council, Hilbre Bird Observatory, Friends group. There are leaflets, noticeboards, walks & talks	This is a Wirral Council matter, but it's probably time to do another visitor survey. (last one was in 2012)	Suggestion noted, would be a project for the future
<b>Overall management</b>	Good to see the Management Plan reviewed and up to date. (Jan 2018)	None	
<b>Additional comments</b>  The Action Plan lists under Conservation & Heritage – Provide wildlife training to RNLI staff. Is this a realistic aspiration?			Ranger can provide training and awareness talk

## Field Assessment Feedback

Criteria	Strengths	Recommendations	
<b>A Welcoming Place</b>	Very comprehensive information about tides and routes to take to the island are displayed in the notice board by the boating lake. Also displayed are event and emergency contact numbers. A similar notice board has been placed on the approach slipway to the island.	None, this site mainly attracts, bird/seal watchers, and people carrying out scientific research and therefore are aware of the restriction and regulation regarding this SSSI site	
<b>Healthy, Safe and Secure</b>	A possibility has been undertaken to keep visitors safe with roped off areas, with notices explaining why. Footpaths have been cut into the grass to guide the public in the right direction. Very good site lines across the footpaths	None	
<b>Well Maintained and Clean</b>	Whilst there are no waste bins on the site we saw no litter or dog fouling. Since my last visit the condition of the builds have improved.	There is still some rendering of external walls to be done (not much), but the team are aware of these points.	
<b>Environmental Management</b>	This is excellent with all the various groups and university's having some input on the management of this site it really does help the council in making the right decisions.	None	
<b>Biodiversity Landscape and Heritage</b>	From the telegraph station to basking seals, from Migrating Birds to beautiful Butterflies, this is an exceptional conservation area, and with the discovery of a new algae on the rocks it is changing and adapting to new conditions.	None	

<b>Community Involvement</b>	There is a very active Friends Group who are enthusiastic about the site, and of course there is a bird recording/ring centre on the island. The public also have regular access to the island if they wish to make the walk across the sands.	None	
<b>Marketing and Communication</b>	The Friends group do produce leaflets and help to keep the notice boards up to date, whilst the rangers produce leaflets arrange events and communicate to the public through local radio, local newspapers and the council's social media channels.	None	
<b>Management</b>	A very dedicated management team and an excellent repo between the rangers and the council departments (This was good to see).	None	
<b>Additional Comments</b>  I have assessed this site before and since my last visit there has been great improvements to the buildings, the toilet block, and in the shelter, it is hoped to provide another information notice board and interpretation Board (Flora and Fauna) in the shelter. The number of sea and small birds you can observe in such a small area is tremendous know wonder it is a magnet for ornithologist, university's and members of the public. The History of the island could be overpowering to a visitor for the first time and every effort is being made to bring it back to the public notice  <b>This is a remarkable, wonderful site and it does deserve the Green Flag.</b>			Many thanks for your kind comments.





# Green Flag Award Mystery Shop Assessment

<b>Name of Site</b>	Hilbre Island Local Nature Reserve		<b>Managing organisation</b>	Wirral Council	
<b>Weather Conditions</b>	Cloudy, moderate wind				
<b>Date of assessment</b>	28/10/19		<b>Time (from – to)</b>	14.30-18.30	
<b>Result: (✓)</b>	<b>Is the site of Green Flag Award Standard?</b> (Green) <span style="color: green;">■</span> Amber <span style="color: orange;">■</span> Red <span style="color: red;">■</span>				
<b>Grading</b>			<b>Comments and Recommendations</b>		
Please mark each section as Green, Amber or Red If there is no evidence or the section is not applicable mark as NG (not graded) and provide an explanation			Comments should be provided to support each grading *Please include photographs to support your grading where applicable **Please refer to Raising the Standard manual if necessary		
<b>A Welcoming Place</b>					
1. Is the site welcoming?	NG	<span style="color: green;">G</span>	<span style="color: orange;">A</span>	<span style="color: red;">R</span>	The
		Y			
2. Is the site easy to find?	NG	<span style="color: green;">G</span>	<span style="color: orange;">A</span>	<span style="color: red;">R</span>	Following signs to the Marine Lake and then directions on the internet provided by the Friends the route to the islands is obvious. The tracks made by the Lifeguard vehicles are also handy and show the best route.
		Y			
3. Is signage in good condition?	NG	<span style="color: green;">G</span>	<span style="color: orange;">A</span>	<span style="color: red;">R</span>	The signage present appeared to be in good order.
		Y			
4. Is the site accessible to all users?	NG	<span style="color: green;">G</span>	<span style="color: orange;">A</span>	<span style="color: red;">R</span>	I suspect that wheelchair users would struggle to reach the site without specialised equipment, would it be possible to hire out a tramper type mobility scooter?
			Y		
<b>Healthy, Safe and Secure</b>					
5. Are facilities on site in good and safe condition?	NG	<span style="color: green;">G</span>	<span style="color: orange;">A</span>	<span style="color: red;">R</span>	The life rings were inaccessible due to vegetation growth, this needs to be cut back.
			Y		
6. Did you feel safe during the visit?	NG	<span style="color: green;">G</span>	<span style="color: orange;">A</span>	<span style="color: red;">R</span>	The number of visitors to the site and the open nature of the site allows good visibility.
		Y			
7. Are dogs being controlled and the site free of dog fouling?	NG	<span style="color: green;">G</span>	<span style="color: orange;">A</span>	<span style="color: red;">R</span>	The beach seems a popular place to walk dogs, however all seemed under control with no fouling spotted.
		Y			
<b>Well Maintained and Clean</b>					
8. Is litter, waste and recycling managed?	NG	<span style="color: green;">G</span>	<span style="color: orange;">A</span>	<span style="color: red;">R</span>	Understandably litter bins are not an option on the islands, however little litter was found save a few bottles of beer on Little Eye in the brick structure.
		Y			



## Green Flag Award – Desk Assessment 2020

**Name of Site: Hilbre Island LNR**

**Managing Organisation: Wirral Council**

### **Desk Assessment Feedback (Management Plan and supporting documentation)**

Criteria	Strengths	Recommendations
<b>Presentation</b>	<p>A good sized Management Plan of 47 pages including Appendices covers period 2018-2023.</p> <p>Attractive cover with ownership details and Green Flag logo.</p> <p>Contents have headers in line with the Green Flag Award criteria.</p> <p>Useful examples of mapping.</p> <p>Facilities and features are listed on page 7.</p>	<p>A key to the map on page 7 would be advantageous. <b>Key in place</b></p>
<b>Health, Safety &amp; Security</b>	<p>Public safety information including safe access routes are displayed on site and on page 6 of the plan, including a diagram</p> <p>There is a 24 hour Community Helpline.</p> <p>Very good Lifeguarding Service is available to deal with emergencies.</p>	<p>Health and Safety concerns have been well addressed</p>
<b>Maintenance of equipment, buildings &amp; landscape</b>	<p>Conservation works are undertaken by the Ranger in conjunction with the Friends Group and other volunteers.</p>	<p>Good to see maintenance operations are conducive to the surrounding.</p>
<b>Litter, cleanliness, vandalism</b>	<p>A composting toilet block is available on site.</p> <p>Dogs are required to be kept on a lead and owners are responsible for clearing any fouling from their animal</p> <p>Visitors are required to remove their own litter and any remnants are cleared by the Friends Group.</p>	<p>Wirral Council are considering the best practice for dog control on the Island. It may be beneficial to bar dogs in order to avoid disturbances to the wildlife. <b>This would require a major change in legislation. Better signage is being put in place.</b></p>

<b>Environmental Management</b>	<p>Wider Policy contains 3 themes which include improving the Local Environment.</p> <p>Further building that would impact on the nature of the site, is not permitted.</p> <p>Good practices of sustainability are described in Section 7.4</p> <p>Litter collections are disposed into the local recycle bins</p> <p>The Dee Estuary which includes the Island, is designated as a SSSI area.</p>	<p>Buildings do not meet current Environmental energy saving standards.</p> <p><b>The buildings are not currently used. Any future use will follow energy saving standards</b></p> <p>Chemical controls are only used in exceptional circumstances but explore every alternative avenue.</p>
<b>Biodiversity, Landscape and Heritage</b>	<p>Good section on the History of the site appears in section 5.</p> <p>Rare and priority species are present on site with some being native to the Island.</p> <p>Species of flora are listed on pages 21 &amp; 22.</p> <p>The Island has two listed buildings which are maintained in accordance with the legal requirements.</p> <p>Nature Conservation Aims are given on page 25.</p>	<p>Biodiversity is the main factor throughout the plan.</p>
<b>Community Involvement</b>	<p>There is a well established Friends Group formed in 2001 to present time.</p> <p>A full list of other active partners are listed in 7.6</p> <p>Information on the history of the site has been acknowledged as having Friends Group input.</p>	<p>Maintain good community relationships.</p>
<b>Marketing &amp; Communication</b>	<p>The site is utilised for school visits and acts as an educational resource.</p> <p>The main marketing point of the site is for nature enthusiasts to observe the wildlife.</p> <p>Visitor and educational information is available at the Telegraph Station.</p> <p>Marketing and Promotion is well covered in section 7.7</p>	<p>The Visitor usage survey from 2006 is well out of date and a new survey would be advantageous.</p> <p><b>2006 Visitor Survey removed and reference to the FGriends of Hilbre assisting with a future visitor survey made</b></p>
<b>Overall management</b>	<p>Management comply with the 10 year Wirral Council Open Space strategy, which is available to download.</p> <p>Management flow diagram on page 29 is useful to define roles and responsibilities.</p> <p>Achievements are listed from 2011 to 2017.</p>	<p>Page 4 refers to the 20 pledges that are contained in the Wider Policy, but it is not clear what those pledges are. <b>A summary has been provided along with a link to the 38 page document</b></p>

#### **Additional comments**

An easy to read document that covers the aspects required for the award.