

Wirral Country Park

Green Heritage Site Conservation Plan

2023 - 2028



A country park of Great Worth for over 50 years

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to Mike Curtis (Wirral History and Heritage Association), Professor Jim Marshall (Wirral Geology and Landscape Project), Chris Hampshire (Friends of Hadlow Road Station) and authors and local historians Chris Michael (also Friends of Cubbins Green) and Dr Stephen J Roberts, for their input, advice and support in the production of this document.

Written/updated by:	Reason for update:	Date:
Josef Hanik	Green Heritage Site Award	December 2022
Josef Hanik	2025 update	May 2025
Josef Hanik	CWAC Update	June 2025

The front cover photograph is of the 'Survivor' by Phil Bews outside the Visitor Centre at Thurstaston. The statue recognises the industrial heritage of the park and the upswept wings were inspired by the wind-sculpted hawthorn bushes on the Dee Cliffs.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Wirral Country Park was created in 1968 and officially opened five years later on 2nd October 1973. It is widely recognised as the first designated 'country park' in Britain and was one of the first linear parks with the Wirral Way (the 'backbone' of the park) following the route of the old 12-mile-long Hooton to West Kirby Railway. It is a long-standing, major leisure and nature conservation resource with an appeal which stretches beyond the local area into the population catchments of Merseyside and the North West region.

The greater part of Wirral Country Park lies within the management of Wirral Council and this section of park is a Natural England designated 'country park' and Green Flag Park. Wirral Council have an appointed Wirral Country Park Manager to oversee the day to day running and development of the section of park within their management area. It is an aspiration of Chester West and Chester Council to achieve designated 'country park' status and a Green Flag Award for the section of park within their management area.

This plan addresses the conservation management of heritage features of the whole of Wirral Country Park within both Wirral Council and Chester West and Chester Council management area and that includes:

- The Wirral Way
- Cubbins Green
- Dawpool Nature Reserve
- Thurstaston Centre
- The Sidings
- Tinker's Dell
- The Dungeon
- Parkgate Old Baths
- The Ropewalk
- Lees Lane
- Neston Cutting
- Hadlow Road Station

The plan is intended to provide information on the park's heritage assists and interpretation of the of the park's history and landscape character. It will also be part of an application for Green Heritage Status recognising the first designated country park in Britain and how these assets are integral to the management of the park by a Wirral Country Park Joint Steering Group. Chapter headings have followed those provided as main guidance for Green Heritage Site Accreditation. If you wish to find out further information about this document or submit any suggestions, please contact the appropriate management authority:

Wirral Parks and Countryside

Wirral Council
Wallasey Town Hall
Brighton Street
Wallasey
CH44 8ED

Cheshire Parks and Countryside

Chester West and Chester Council
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Ellesmere Port
CH65 0BA

2.0 SITE INFORMATION

2.1 Description, Map and Site Designations

Wirral Country Park extends over 12 miles (19.2 kilometres) stretching between West Kirby in Wirral (Merseyside) to Hooton in Cheshire. The total size of the park is 53.54 hectares with 40.23ha managed by Wirral Council and 13.31ha managed by Cheshire West and Chester Council.

The main body of the park includes an area which is designated as a Special Landscape Area and is located within the Wirral Green Belt and Coastal Zone. For many visitors Wirral Country Park and its many access points are a gateway to the beaches, saltmarsh and foreshore of the Dee Estuary. The park is also an important recreational resource, green transport link and wildlife corridor supporting woodland, grassland, freshwater and maritime cliff habitats. It has a fascinating history dating back to the Triassic Era when what is now sandstone bedrock was laid down; to the last period of glaciation when clay- rich deposits were left over much of Merseyside and Cheshire; to today, with coastal erosion and deposition of tidal and salt marsh deposits. Viking placenames and Romano-British finds in adjacent fields, the arrival of the railways and the parks movement all add to the park's rich history.



Map showing the joint management of Wirral Country Park

For nearly 7 miles the park is close to the Dee Estuary turning inland at Neston. There are breaks in the Wirral Way between Davenport Road and Riverbank Road (Lower Heswall), Station Road (Parkgate) and between Station Road and Mellock Lane (Neston). The Wirral Way is part of the National Cycle Network and is well signposted as part of the 35-mile-long Wirral Circular Trail. Part of the Wirral Country

Park path network including existing designated Public Footpaths and sections of the Wirral Way will form part of the Natural England managed England Coast path. The designated areas of special interest within the park are:

- The Dungeon Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and also a site of Special Biological Interest (SBI) including semi-ancient woodland and open running water.
- Dee Cliffs SSSI including maritime grassland and maritime scrub, unimproved grassland and ponds and Tinker's Dell.
- Wirral Way (Thurstaston to Heswall) SBI including scrub, woodland standing water and unimproved grassland.
- Wirral Way (Caldy to Thurstaston and including Cubbins Green) SBI including scrub and unimproved grassland.
- The Dee Estuary (adjacent to the Country Park) SSSI. It is a Special Protection Area and a Special Area for Conservation and therefore a European protected site also known as a Natura 2000 site. It is an internationally designated Ramsar Site.
- The section of park within Wirral Council is within the Dee Coast Area of Special Landscape Value. In 2020 Review and Recommendations of Wirral Local Landscape Designations has recommended that the Dungeon becomes part of a new Local Landscape Designation 'The Central Wirral Sandstone Hills'.

Other areas of special interest (non-designated) within the park are:

- Thurstaston Centre
- The Jump Field
- Dawpool Nature Reserve
- Lees Lane Ponds
- Neston Rock Cutting



Thurstaston Station c. 1909. This photograph was used as part of a series of postcards of the Hooton to West Kirby Railway

2.2 Park History

In 1866 the Hooton to Parkgate Branch Railway, constructed by the Birkenhead Joint Railway Companies, was opened with six trains per day to and from Parkgate and communicating with Birkenhead and Chester. At four and a half miles long the line passed through Willaston, and Neston. Later this section of the railway joined with a line constructed by the local collieries and which provided most of the freight traffic.



Neston Station circa 1900

In 1886, twenty years after the Hooton to Parkgate section was constructed, the line was extended by the London and North Western and Great Western Railway Companies with stations at Heswall, Thurstaston, Caldy and Kirby Park before reaching West Kirby.



West Kirby Joint Station known as 'The Joint' with its single paved platform built on the curve

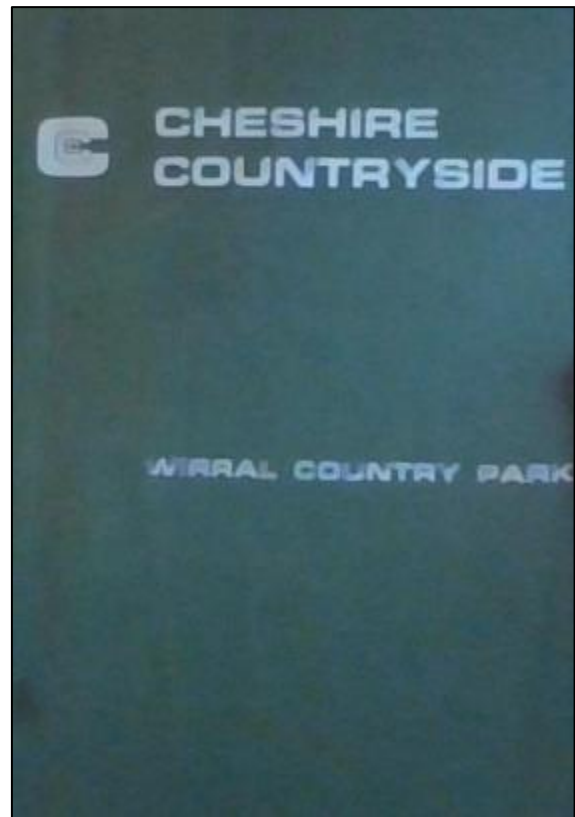
The line should have followed a route closer to where the A540 is but when local Landowner Sir Thomas Henry Ismay (founder of the White Star Line) heard that the railway route would be close to his newly built Dawpool Hall, he immediately travelled to London, got himself voted onto the board of the Great Western Railway and changed the route! Land now occupied by the Thurstaston Caravan Owners Association was acquired by Lever Brothers in 1919 for use as a holiday camp for employees. The camp opened in 1921, with provision for 90 campers in the men's wing and 50 in the ladies. Visitors were housed in army huts with family accommodation added later. The site closed as a holiday camp at the outbreak of the Second World War and was requisitioned by the army. It never reopened and was sold to the Council in the 1950s and became the static caravan site.



Lever Brothers Holiday Camp

Shortly after the outbreak of the Second World War an area of land west of the railway and overlooking the Dee Cliffs became an anti-aircraft battery with guns either aimed at planes that had been on a bombing raid over Liverpool or that were starting a bombing raid and approaching over the Welsh mountains. (One tactic employed to deceive enemy aircraft at night was to light up the Dee Estuary and adjacent land so that it would appear to be Liverpool and the Mersey Estuary). Closure of the line was spread over a period of eight years from 1954 until 1962 pre-dating by nine years the Beeching proposals which recommended a drastic cut in stations and passenger services. (400,000 passengers would have had to use the line annually to pay for itself and during its final year there were only 60,000 who used the service). The last passenger train ran over the lines on 15th September 1956 and the last freight train on 7th May 1962. Over the next few years the tracks, stations and platforms were removed along with most of the ballast and some of the bridges. Land development in the 1960's resulted in sale of some of the former railway for housing and to Liverpool University, but concern about the loss of countryside areas had a strong following and in 1966 Wirral Green Belt Council produced a report, compiled by Captain Laurence Beswick, proposing a 'Wirral Way' that would incorporate the former railway into a scheme for a linear park from West Kirby to Mollington. The 'Railway Route' would provide access from West Kirby to

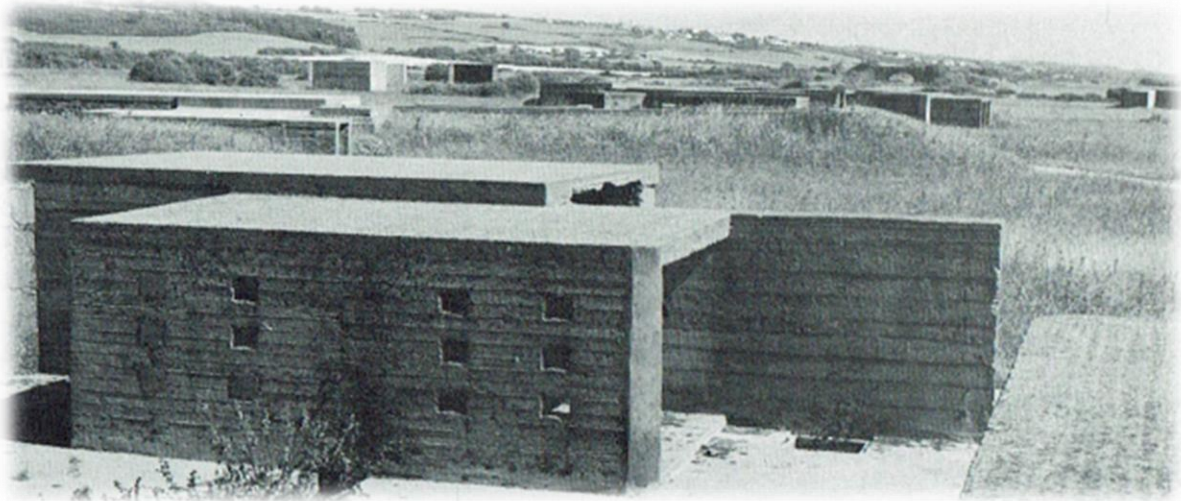
Hooton, followed by a 'Link Route' to Ellesmere Port with the final 'Canal Route' following the towpath along the Shropshire Union Canal. The report stressed the importance of securing land from the railway company owners and included plant surveys and a total 5-year cost for the Wirral Way section (including land acquisition and construction) at £107,950. In 1968 a proposal was accepted by the Countryside Committee of Cheshire County Council and, under the Countryside Act (1968) a draft scheme for the construction of Wirral Country Park was prepared by Cheshire County Council in January 1968 and approved on 3rd April 1968. With the aid of a 75% capital grant from the Countryside Commission the first designated 'country park' in Britain started construction.



The original Wirral Green Belt Council proposal from October 1966 and the final Cheshire Countryside scheme for Wirral Country Park published on 3rd April 1968

Most of the railway infrastructure had been removed from the section of park that followed the route of the old railway and that was now named as the Wirral Way. Most of the station buildings were gone as well as any wooden platforms. Some bridges had been dismantled including the one at Croft Drive, Caldy, and in places, such as Neston Rock Cutting, the old railway line served as a local tipping site. The area at Dawpool was an official tip site and before the Second World War gun emplacements at Thurstaston were broken up residents would also tip rubbish there. The 1968 scheme details the need for the park based on an expected increase in population, an increase in demand for access to countryside areas, and an increase in personal leisure time and to help relieve the pressure on the Snowdonia, Peak District and Lake District National Parks that were designated in the early 1950's. It details work required at 25 sections of the park and includes policy on general management and management structure, toilet and campsite facilities, car parking,

signs and educational facilities and at a cost of between £223,500 and £243,500 with annual maintenance rising from £2,000 each year from purchase of land to £15,000 annually. The first paragraph on Recommendation for Further Development in the Future states: *“The scheme proposed in this report would provide a country park of great worth”*. This is used as part of the existing Wirral Country Park logo recognising the aspirations of the park designers and that it is indeed ‘a park of great worth.



The Second World War gun emplacements at Thurstaston before demolition

Whilst there was a lot of detail in the 1968 scheme document it obviously developed as later plans show the Visitor Centre and Barbecue Site and Thurstaston as a main centre for car parking and information. When it was officially opened on 2nd October 1973 Wirral Country Park had already been open to the public for five years. During that time the Wirral Way had been surfaced and fenced providing a separate horse ride. Directional markers and noticeboards were erected. The first Countryside Rangers were appointed in 1969 and although there were National Park Wardens the Rangers at Wirral Country Park may have been the first Country Park Rangers.



Major Frank White (Rtd) was appointed the first Head Ranger on 25th July 1969

Photographs from 1969 show the AA sponsored 'Drive to Plant a Tree Day' at the park, as well people enjoying the (as yet unsurfaced) Wirral Way. A second car park was created at Caldys and the Second World War gun emplacement was grassed over.



The AA sponsored 'Drive to Plant a Tree Day' at Wirral Country Park in 1969

In 1974, under the Local Government Act of 1972, half of the Wirral Way now fell within the new Metropolitan District of Wirral. It was decided however, that with the operational centre and Visitor Centre at Thurstaston, and to maintain a uniform style of management throughout the whole park, that the newly created Wirral Council would manage the whole park with a yearly contribution from Cheshire Council.



A view from Station Road Bridge at Thurstaston circa 1974

During the 1970's the moorings for Dee Sailing Club were moved from Lower Heswall to Thurstaston and in 1982 the new clubhouse was also moved and built on land at the side of Dawpool Local Nature Reserve within Wirral Country Park. Along with the Caravan Club of Great Britain and Thurstaston Caravan Owners Association annual rent is paid to Wirral Country Park and used to offset maintenance and management costs.

In 1992 Cheshire Council decided that it would prefer to manage the 6 miles of the park within its boundary rather than pay Wirral Council an annual maintenance fee. Thirty years later (and brought together to mark the 50th anniversary of the official opening of the park in 1973) Wirral Council and Cheshire West and Chester Council are working to once again ensure a uniform approach to management throughout the park with coordinated signage and interpretation as well as events and sharing resource information.

The Country Park Accreditation Scheme was started in 2009 by Natural England to address concerns raised about Country Parks and specifically evidence presented by the Countryside Agency to a Select Committee's enquiry into Town and Country Parks in 1999. This led to the Government's 'Rural White Paper' a year later and which was the first report specifically about country parks since the Countryside Commission's 'Advisory Notes on Country Park Plans' published in 1974. The 'Renaissance of Country Parks' described in the Countryside Agency's report continues as we have seen an increase in park users over the last few years, especially a result of 'staycationers' and the Coronavirus pandemic and we are meeting the demands of users, providing new facilities and access for all, and ensuring that this invaluable asset continues to provide our visitors with '*a country park of great worth*'.



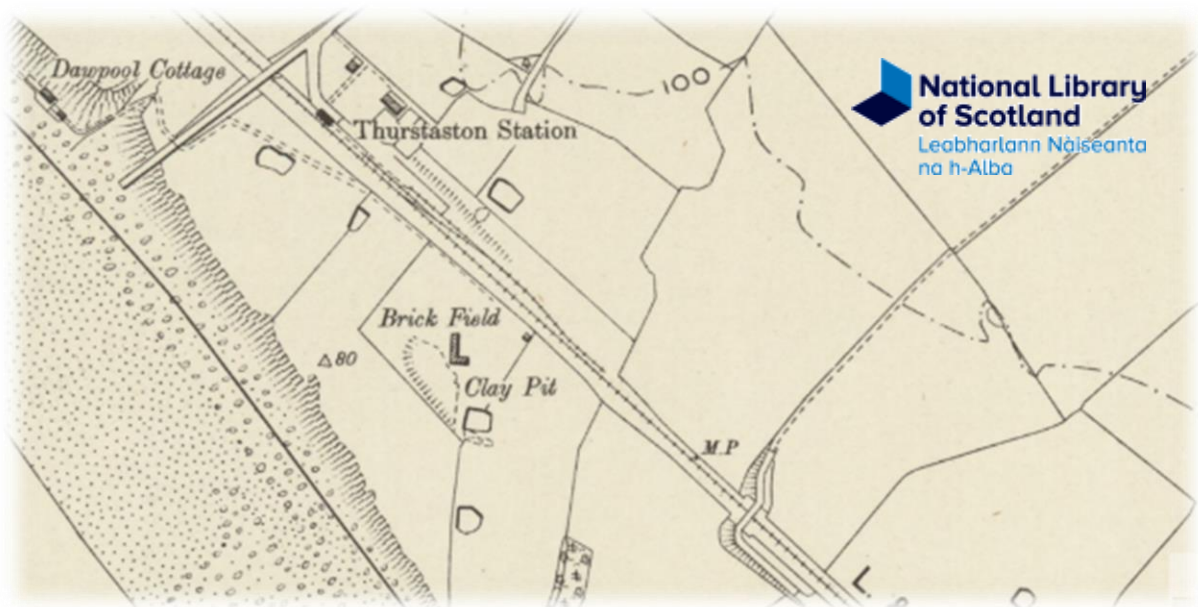
The Visitor Centre with its café and toilets, ponds, barbecue and picnic areas and access to Thurstaston Beach are the focus for many park visitors

3.0 Condition of Historic Features

3.1 Identifying and Recording Historic Features

Most of the man-made structures/features in the park are well-known and are part of either an annual site inspection or Highways inspection undertaken every 2 years. Landscape features are identified by their inclusion in historical records, photographs and other archive material including historic maps. The map record provides a fascinating insight into parts of the park being rich agricultural land. Tithe maps showing field names such as Pea Field may imply that a system of crop rotation was in place and marl pits and lime kilns indicate the need for recurrent soil improvement. The number of farms that existed along west Wirral are indicative of the value of the land for both arable farming on the land closest to the shore and grazing pasture moving up towards the heathland on the west Wirral sandstone ridge. Photographs of agricultural machinery, milk churns and other farm produce being moved by the railway indicate that the late 19th Century and up to the mid 20th Century would have been one of the most productive periods and time of change before the end of the Second World War, an end of petrol rationing and development of the road network. It is the character of the park and its preservation that needs recording, and it is essential that measures are put in place to ensure future management takes these into account. For example, many people may not be aware of the origin of the mounds by the Visitor Centre. Students undertaking field studies to the Dee Cliffs have, on occasion, described the mounds as those typically found in a peri-glacial landscape (drumlins) not knowing about the more recent history and the existence of the anti-aircraft battery at Thurstaston that are buried underneath.

This Heritage Conservation Plan will be a record of the park's historic features and will be updated accordingly.



Cheshire Sheet XXI.NE (Revised: 1897 to 1898) published in 1899 shows the Brick Field next to Clay Pit and a typically shaped marl pit at Thurstaston

3.2 Catalogue of Historic Features along the Wirral Way

Feature and Location	Condition	Notes
Footbridge at Ashton Park	Good	Annual Site Inspection
Vehicle bridge at Church Road	Good	Highways Inspection
Pedestrian access gate at Sandy Lane Bridge	Poor	Needs restoration
Vehicle bridge at Sandy Lane	Good	Highways Inspection
Footbridge at Cubbins Green	Good	Annual Site Inspection (Refurbished 2015)
Disused bridge buttresses at Croft Drive	Fair	Highways Inspection
Footbridge at Caldly (Simon's Bridge)	Good	Highways Inspection
Footbridge at Caldly (Links Bridge)	Good	Highways Inspection
Disused bridge at Dawpool Nature Reserve	Good	Not inspected by Highways
Vehicle bridge at Station Road (Max Kirby Bridge)	Good	Highways Inspection
Railway platforms at Thurstaston	Good	Renovated in 2022
Dungeon Bridge	Good	
Parish boundary marker at Dungeon access	Good	Annual Site Inspection
Gradient marker at Heswall Fields access	Fair	Annual Site Inspection. Needs opening up
Vehicle bridge at Delavor Road	Good	Highways Repaired in 2021
Vehicle bridge at Farr Hall Drive	Good	Highways Inspection
Vehicle bridge at Cottage Lane	Good	Highways Refurbished in 2008
Parish boundary marker at Heswall/Heston	Good	
Footbridge at Backwood Hall	Good	
Road Bridge at Boathouse Lane	Good	Highways Inspection
Moorside Lane Bridge	Good	Highways Inspection
Millennium Footbridge	Good	Graffiti on bridge
Neston Cutting	Good	
Lees Lane Bridge	Good	Highways Inspection
Cuckoo Lane Bridge	Good	Highways Inspection
Cuckoo Lane Gradient Marker	Good	
Damhead Lane Bridge	Good	Highways Inspection
Hadlow Road Crossing	Good	
Hadlow Road Station House, platform, ticket office	Good	Grade 11 Listed
Hadlow Road Signal Box	Good	
Heath Lane Bridge	Good	Highways Inspection
Hooton Station Ticket Office	Fair	Structurally sound needs some restoration



One of two parish boundary markers along the Wirral Way

3.3 Catalogue of Other Historic Landscape Features & Interpretation

Feature and Location	Condition	Notes
Cliffs at Cubbins Green	Good	
Pillbox at Cubbins Green	Poor	
Wirral Way (Max Kirby Bridge) Interpretive Panel	Good	Paid for by WFOSPS
WW2 Anti -Aircraft Battery (Mounds) at Thurstaston	Not visible	
'Survivor' Statue at Thurstaston	Good	Unveiled 26 th May 1989
1973 Opening Memorial at Thurstaston	Fair	Unveiled 2/10/73 Needs repointing
Lime Kiln display and interpretive panel at Thurstaston	Good	
Glacial Erratics display at Thurstaston	Good	
Dee Cliffs at Thurstaston	Good	SSSI
Dee Cliffs interpretive panel at Thurstaston	-	Paid for by Our Dee Estuary
Marl Pit at Thurstaston	Good	
Dee Estuary Interpretive Panel at Thurstaston	Good	Paid for by The Wirral Society
Sandstone gate pillar and field boundaries at Thurstaston	Poor	Needs highlighting
Brick Pits at Thurstaston	Good	Within Dee Cliffs SSSI
Railway sidings at Thurstaston Car Park and Campsite	Good	
Lime Kiln (remains of) at Tinker's Dell	Poor	
Possible ford at the Dungeon	-	J. Hanik Landscape Diploma notes
Dungeon Waterfall	Good	SSSI Earth Science
Ancient Woodland Site at the Dungeon	Poor	
Pill Box at the Ropewalk Car Park	Good	Defence of Britain Archive
Pill Box interpretive panel at the Ropewalk Car Park	Good	

3.4 Merseyside Sites and Monuments Records Office Listings

Feature, Grid Reference and MSMR Number	Notes
Anti-aircraft Battery GR2389 8323 2383/01	
Lime Kiln GR 2305 8394 2382/08	
Hamlet of Dawpool GR 2340 8377 2383/10	
Railway Station GR 2386 8349 2383/13	Platforms refurbished in 2022
Lime Kiln GR 2407 8288 2482/1	

3.5 Defence of Britain Archive Record

Feature, Grid Reference and MSMR Number	Description	Source
Gun Emplacement (removed)	Two Second World War Pillboxes with associated barbed wire obstructions, a gun emplacement and a weapons pit are visible as structures and an earthwork on air photographs centered at SJ 2187 8545	The Historic England Archive EDOBID e43121
Pillbox (extant)	As Above	The Historic England Archive EDOBID e19413
Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery (removed)		E13061
Pillbox Type FW3/24 (extant)	Embrasures and entrance blocked. Type 24 pillbox situated on the S side of Parkgate Road it is covering the road leading from the River dee where an old railway line crosses this road. Hexagonol.	Defence of Britain Archive EDOBID e05237

3.6 Tree Preservation Orders

Wirral Way	REF HK0007A001
Wirral Way	REF HK0024A001
Wirral Way	REF WR0062A001
Dungeon	REF HW0001A001

3.7 Historic England Listing for Hadlow Road Railway Station

Heritage Category: Listed Building

Grade: II

List Entry Number: 1387664

Date first listed: 29-Apr-1999

Statutory Address: HADLOW ROAD RAILWAY STATION, HADLOW ROAD

District: Cheshire West and Chester (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Non Civil Parish

National Grid Reference: SJ 33048 77322

Details NESTON

SJ3377 HADLOW ROAD, Willaston Village 794-1/10/114 (East side)

Hadlow Road Railway Station

Railway station and station house, now museum. Dated 1866; C20 alterations. For the Helsby-Parkgate line of the former Birkenhead, Lancs and Cheshire Junction Railway. Brown brick in Flemish bond with stone plinth and ashlar dressings; cast-iron guttering; slate roof with crocketed cresting and brick stacks on stone plinths with stone cornices and caps.

Exterior

Single-storey, 4-bay station range, with 2-storey gable ended station house at right. Station has pairs of 2 panel doors to openings, front and rear, in doorcases with chamfered pilasters and shouldered arches to door heads under round arches the tympani of which contain roundel, foliage and fruit motifs with the date on the north side only. The arches are surmounted by ogee moulded hoodmoulds. Paired windows with round heads, chamfered mullions and semi-circular arches. Yellow brick dentil course at eaves and cavetto moulded gable coping. Station house has segment headed recessed sashes in pairs, with stone mullions and moulded imposts. 4-panel door under stone lintel with pointed upper surface. Cavetto moulded first floor string courses. Wall mounted gas lamp fixed to left corner and old enamel advertisements fixed to station and house walls. Windows throughout are sashes or 2-pane casements with steeply sloped sills.

Interior

Station waiting room is separated from the ticket office by a half-glazed wooden screen. The ticket office contains fireplace with cast-iron grate. Waiting room contains fireplace. The museum is associated with the Wirral Way Footpath which has replaced the railway line.

3.8 Assessment of Historic Features

When creating Wirral Country Park there was no 'blueprint' to look at, no existing similar areas of public open space with which to compare and contrast and no one to consult other than existing stakeholders and landowners (some of who would have been entirely opposed to a public park on their doorstep!) Much of the railway infrastructure including some bridges had been removed and only the derelict brick platforms at Thurstaston and Hadlow Road and its associated buildings remained. The park was to be a new type of park; a 'country park', that didn't have drinking fountains or bandstands, that didn't have the opportunity for a Capability Brown pastoral-style landscape and that didn't have Joseph Paxton's sinuous

winding paths and water features flowing through a formal urban park landscape. Wirral Country Park was the first of its kind, a linear park following the route of an old railway line, offering people the opportunity to enjoy the countryside on their doorstep. The fact that over 50 years later all the original park remains, that no major alterations have been made to the route, that the buildings that were part of the original plans (other than one of the original Rangers Cottages at Thurstaston) are all still there is a testament to the creators of Wirral Country Park and the managers and management teams since.



The foresight of Wirral Green Belt Council, Cheshire Country Council and the Countryside Commission to create Britain's first country park along a disused railway line has resulted in one of the regions most important assets

In the 1968 park plan there is a chapter on 'The Setting and General Proposals For Development':

In this scheme the principle features of the park are the old railway line on the banks of the Dee Estuary. Subsidiary features enhancing the value of the park are the places of interest which are close to it along its length and the network of public rights of way spanning and surrounding it.

The old railway line would form the main axis of the park. It would be made into a broad grassy footpath and in parts a bridleway linking community centres and providing the main spur for a series of round walks and branch routes to areas of interest. Some deviations must be made for not all of the old line is now available. Further deviations should be avoided for the old track has a special appeal not normally found in country walks. The constantly changing character of the route gives it a unique quality. In addition to the changes between embankment and cutting with their differing landforms views at ground cover, there are changes sometimes quite sudden from the quiet countryside to built up areas. It is because the great variety of views, vistas and surroundings associated with walk are one of its principal attractions that these sallies into built up areas enhance rather than detract from its value.

In a number of places embankments raise the walker well above the normal level of the countryside frequently affording excellent views across the Dee Estuary and the intervening strip of land. There are also excellent views inland towards Caldy Hill, the

Thurstaston National Trust properties, the towns and villages on the high ground and across areas of farmland and Caldy and Heswall golf links.

The cuttings vary in character, some are steep sided, cut through the rock with varying patterns of rock structure exposed. Trees and shrubs and many other plants have grown on a number of these providing a natural canopy. Other cuttings are shallow sided and much more open in character. Again some cuttings provide long vistas while others, curved, entice the walker to find out just what scene is around the corner. In addition to their geological interest some of the cuttings, with a patterned brickwork of the road bridges spanning them, are fascinating as pieces of 19th century railway engineering; industrial archaeology.

The deep cutting through the rock east of Neston, in addition to being most attractive, is of particular interest to geologists, industrial archaeologists and naturalists. The long wide cutting north of Neston is important to the ornithologist and entomologist. The cuttings are particularly suited for walking in bad weather, being sheltered and for the most part dry under foot.

By imaginative landscaping, and control of the centre line of the path, pedestrians and equestrians would be encouraged to make the best possible use of the line and would at the same time be directed away from all from and screened from private property. Natural and planted vegetation on and beside the line would add to the appearance and provide interest for nature lovers. There are some species of flora and fauna of special interest and these should be preserved. It is intended that some bridges and buildings of industrial and archaeological interest would be retained.

The same principle features of the park remain today and are what informs much of the work undertaken, from ensuring that the paths provide good, safe access, that the vistas within the park and across surrounding land are maintained and that the reminders of the park's industrial heritage and it's rich variety of flora and fauna are protected and preserved.



One of the sandstone bridges along the Cheshire West and Chester Council managed sections of the park

4.0 USE AND ENJOYMENT OF HISTORIC FEATURES

4.1 The Wirral Way

The Wirral Way is the backbone of Wirral Country Park and follows the route of the old West Kirby to Hooton Railway. It links all the other parts of Wirral Country Park together and provides a link to other places of interest along the west Wirral peninsula extending into Cheshire. The Wirral Way is part of the National Cycle Network (managed by Sustrans) and cyclists and pedestrians share a path with a separate adjacent horse ride for much of its length. It provides recreational opportunities but is also an important green transport link with railway stations at West Kirby and Hooton. When the park was first opened to the public in 1968 the Wirral Way was unsurfaced. Immediately after opening however the route of the railway was surfaced with limestone, similar to (although finer than) the material that would have been used for ballast to support the railway sleepers.

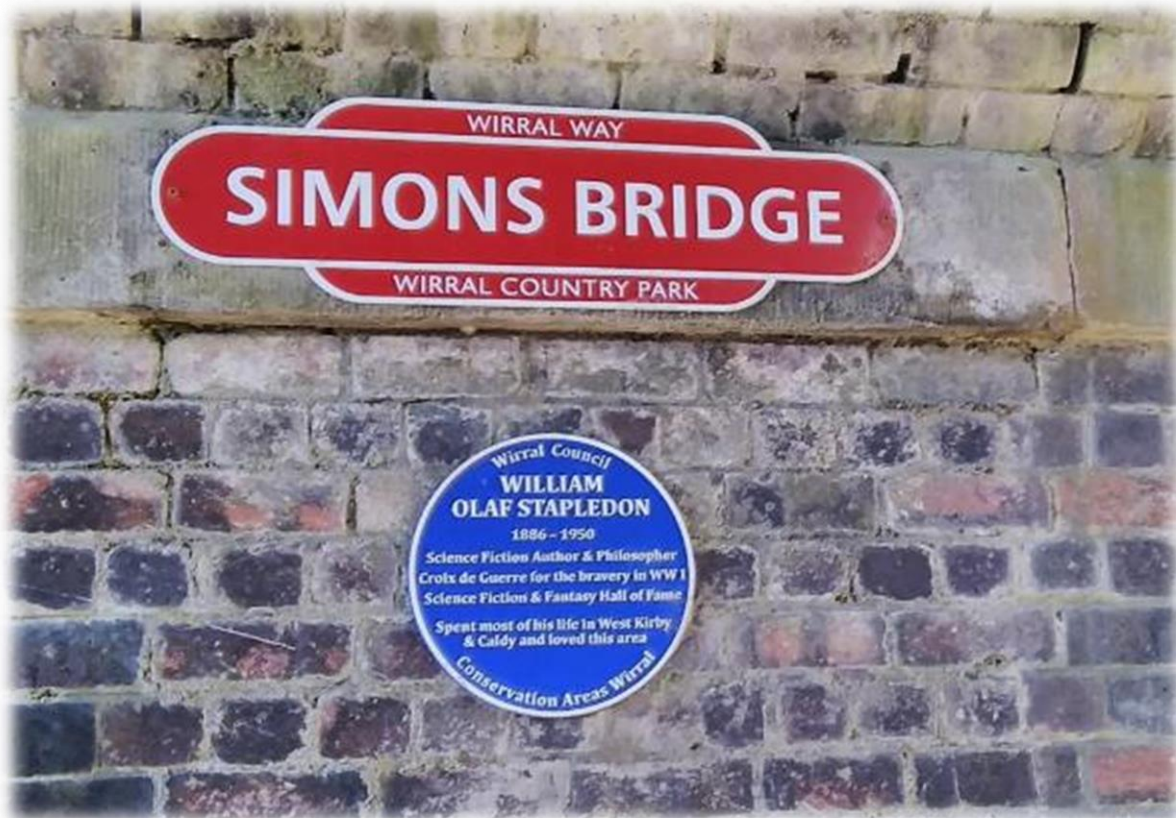


The route of the old railway trackbed shared by pedestrians and cyclists

Today visitor numbers are estimated to be between $\frac{1}{2}$ and $\frac{3}{4}$ million visitors each year. Many visitors include the Thurstaston Centre as part of their visit whether as the start/finish point or to use the toilets, café or to include Thurstaston Beach or a cliff top walk as part of their visit. Some people only use parts of the park for regular visits. Dog walkers for example may use a short section of the Wirral Way two or three times a day. Apart from the large car parks at Thurstaston there are car parks within the park at Caldy, Parkgate Old Baths Site, Lees Lane and Hadlow Road.

There are 12 old railway bridges that cross over the Wirral Way between West Kirby and Hooton and that are used by road transport. The bridges along the Wirral Council managed section are mainly constructed from brick, whilst the bridges along

the Cheshire and Chester Council section are mainly constructed from sandstone. The use of brick for the 1886 railway extension may account for the number of brick pits shown on maps of the era. Most of the bridges are signed, reminding visitors of the old railway. At Simons Bridge there is a Blue Plaque in memory of William Olaf Stapledon a local author who was awarded the Croix de Guerre in the First World War and who would have crossed the bridge when he lived in Caldy.



Bridge sign and Blue Plaque along the Wirral Way

There are further old railway bridges that cross the Wirral Way and used by Caldy Golf Club, Thurstaston Hall Farm and Backford Hall Farm for access. Other bridges provide pedestrian access and there are disused bridges at Dawpool and Croft Drive. At West Kirby the Wirral Way passes through Ashton Park which was opened in 1901. There are access points to Ashton Park along the Wirral Way and there is a very active Friends of Ashton Park group who assist in the management of Ashton Park and who liaise, alongside the West Wirral Area General Parks Manager, with the Wirral Country Park Manager on joint management issues. The Wirral Country Park Rangers work with a number of local residents groups along the Wirral Way to ensure good management of the park. The Wirral Way from Caldy to Heswall is a locally designated Site of Biological Importance or 'Local Wildlife Site'. Recent work to widen the pedestrian/cycle path to accommodate an increase in users has also increased biodiversity by opening up shaded verges. The bridges are also more prominent with vegetation having been cut back. The Wirral Way is a very popular venue for sponsored walks but also popular with ramblers groups and some recent pathway and new access work has been sponsored by the Wirral Footpaths and Open Spaces Preservation Society.

4.2 Cubbins Green

In 1964 the area of land ownership at Caldy was passed to the Council by sisters Eveline and Ivy Cubbin in memory of their parents William and Mary Jane Cubbin and in order to preserve the sea views from their house in adjacent Melloncroft Drive. The conditions of the land transfer were that the land was to be *'kept open and unbuilt upon and henceforth shall be known as Cubbin Green'*. A large memorial plaque (currently in the ownership of a private resident) recognising the donation of land has been restored, reproduced and is currently in storage. Before the southern slipway was built a pillbox stood at the site until the late 1950s. To the north were brickworks, perhaps associated with the construction of the railway. The green provides an important link from the Wirral Way to Caldy Beach and is very popular with picnickers with views across the estuary to the Hilbre Islands and Wales. Caldy Beach is used throughout the year by nearby Avalon School for Beach School sessions. There are several benches and picnic units and the site is crossed by a designated footpath. There is a very active local residents group who undertake amenity and conservation work at Cubbins Green as well as a Friends Group.

<https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/~cmi/cubbins/cubbinsG.html>

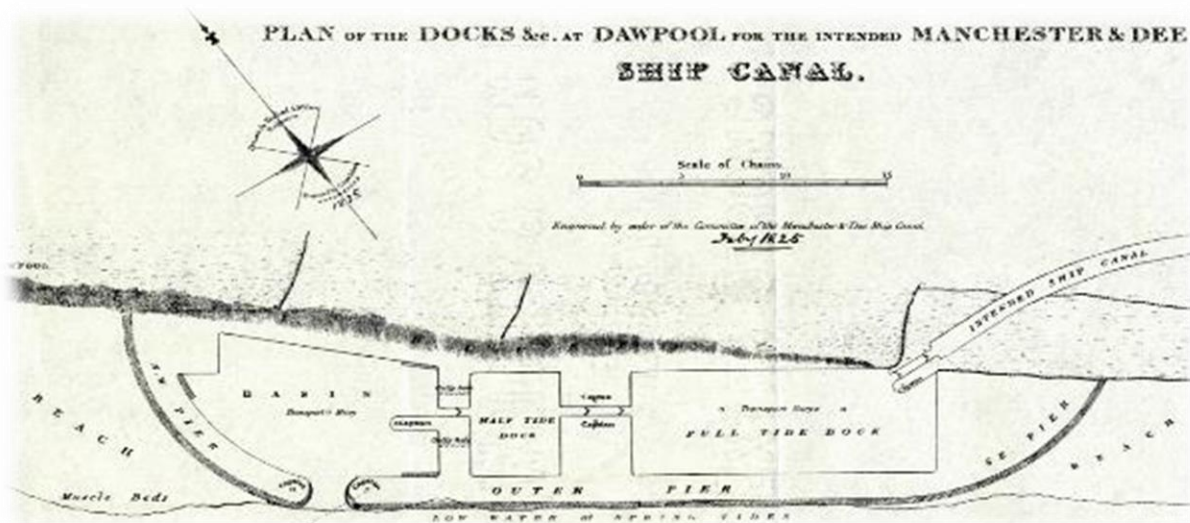


The original Cubbin Memorial Plaque, now restored and copied for display

A 5 year Action Plan was written for Cubbins Green in 2019. The Rangers and the local residents group are working to re-establish the open areas that will also create a fire break between the houses and long grass and shrub areas. 'Woodland glades' are being created and the Wirral Countryside Volunteers have assisted in restoring hedgerows with traditional management techniques. Willow coppicing and pollarding provides material for local community groups to use for sculptures and public events.

4.3 Dawpool Nature Reserve

Covering an old landfill waste site, the reserve is an important link between the Wirral Way and Thurstaston Beach. The site is popular with dog walkers and horseriders who can cross the reserve to access the Wirral Way or Thurstaston Beach and perhaps as part of a circular walk. A bridge that runs under the Wirral Way here is an indicator of access that used to reach as far as the foreshore and the lost port of Dawpool. The original anchorage at Dawpool was known as Redebonke or Red Bank. It grew in importance as the Dee Estuary silted and ships either had to wait for a high tide to carry onto the Port of Chester or discharge their passengers and cargo at Dawpool and allow them to continue their journey overland. In Burdett's Map of 1777 a number of buildings can be seen along the foreshore here and Bryant's Map of 1831 shows the road linking the site to Thurstaston Village. In 1825 plans were drawn up for the Manchester Ship Canal to start at Dawpool so it must have been relatively busy for shipping to be considered.



Plans produced in 1825 showing proposals for Dawpool and the ship canal

A 5 year Action Plan was written for Dawpool Nature Reserve in 2020. Grassland management will provide visitors with colourful wildflower meadows and new surfaced paths will provide access for all. Woodland management will include restoring views across the reserve to the Dee Estuary and Wales.



Looking from Dawpool Nature Reserve over the Dee Estuary to Wales

4.4 The Thurstaston Centre

The park is visited regularly by natural history groups and geologists. The variety of habitats and the exposure of diamiction (also known as glacial till or boulder clay) are some of the best examples in the northwest. About 5,000 schoolchildren visit the site at Thurstaston each year to undertake curriculum studies including activities such as seashore searches and minibeast hunts. In 2022 (the first year since restrictions were lifted after the Coronavirus pandemic) just over 4,500 schoolchildren visited the Thurstaston Centre. The Rangers provide assistance to visiting schools through a booking system that helps with provision of equipment and other resources and which may include a Ranger-led activity. One activity offered is a 'Compare and Contrast;' which may be habitat orientated but can also be a look at the development of Thurstaston Village and surrounding area compared with a more urban landscape. Schools are encouraged to use the Sidings during their day visits as it has access for all with wet rooms and more hand basins for handwashing than in the Visitor Centre. The site is also dog free and not accessible to the general public. Charging schools for day use of the site provides income used to purchase equipment including pond nets, sweep nets, ID charts and equipment used for delivering Forest/Beach Schools taster sessions. The Thurstaston Centre is a popular destination for families with the Visitor Centre café and toilets, close access to Thurstaston Beach and picnic areas and brick barbecue stands. The Wirral Society have sponsored two interpretive boards at the site and all the benches are through public donations.



A school enjoying a pond dipping session by the Visitor Centre

The Thurstaston Centre is a base for the Wirral Rangers. The Visitor Centre includes a Rangers Office and a display area/meeting room. There is a Rangers Yard with a staff and separate volunteer Mess Room, garages and tool and wood stores. Cycle hire is available from the Visitor Centre (Managed by TRACS UK) and the café is managed by Bee Wirral (a Community Interest Company). Monies from lease holders is used to help in running costs of the park. The Wirral Barn Owl Trust have an office within the Rangers Yard and operate a popular live streaming Barn Owl cam.

4.5 The Sidings

As its name implies, this area was a sidings for engines, carriages and goods wagons at Thurstaston. The car park island forms the only remaining reminder of the sidings which would have extended as far as the campsite. The campsite was renamed 'The Sidings' as community events and wedding receptions are also held there as well as group overnight camping and day visits by schools.

4.6 Tinker's Dell

This small, wooded area is within the Dee Cliffs SSSI and provides access to Thurstaston Beach. At the top of Tinker's Dell are the remains of an old lime kiln and at the bottom on the beach are what could be rocks used for ship ballast. Ships probably brought limestone from quarries in north Wales to the lime kiln (another was located at Dawpool) where it was burnt and made into quicklime.

4.7 The Dungeon

Designated a SSSI the Dungeon Waterfall is a significant geological fault zone which locally juxtaposes the massive- bedded Triassic sandstones (Wilmslow Sandstone Formation) with younger Triassic thin-bedded siltstones and mudstones. Salt Pseudomorphs and ripple marks in the latter indicate that they were deposited in ephemeral saline ponds in a very hot arid climate. Historic maps of the site and evidence of old hedgerows indicate that there was once a road that passed below the ancient woodland site. The Wirral Country Park Master Plan includes a proposal to excavate the site. A 5 year Action Plan was written for the Dungeon and agreed with Natural England in 2020. The Action Plan includes a proposal to install an interpretive board showing how the area developed in a history dating back 250ma. The Dungeon is connected to the Wirral Way by a designated Public Footpath. Cycling is not allowed but mountain bikers have made tracks within the site and the small cave is regularly used by overnight campers. Local residents and regular users are very good at reporting local incidents and the Rangers are able to advise cyclists and campers of the park policy and criminal damage to a designated protected site.



Dungeon Waterfall

4.8 Parkgate Old Baths Site

Built in 1923 by Mostyn House School, the baths were mainly intended for pupils' use although the general public were allowed in if they paid. A children's pool was added in 1930 but both relied on the high tides of the Dee Estuary to top them up and the cost of piping freshwater into the pools became too costly. The baths were closed shortly after the end of the Second World War and filled in and became a car park that was improved and incorporated into Wirral Country Park.



Parkgate Open Air Baths

Today the site is popular with birdwatchers with easy parking adjacent to the saltmarsh. The RSPB run hightide birdwatches here and the site is on the route of the Arrowe Country Park to Parkgate 16-mile Circular Walk. Cheshire West and Chester Council working with the Parkgate Society and RSPB have submitted proposals for improving access, interpretation and creation of a new wildflower meadow.



An artist's impression of the new-look Old Baths Site in Parkgate

4.10 Neston Cutting

The Neston Cutting provides superb exposures of Triassic Sandstones (Chester Formation), river deposits with good examples of cross bedding, channel erosion features, slump folds and water escape structures including fossil quicksand! Faults are also visible. The cutting was designed by Thomas Brassey (1805-1870) who was responsible for building much of the world's railways in the 19th century. By 1847, he had built about one-third of the railways in Britain, and by time of his death he had built one in every twenty miles of railway in the world.

Construction would likely have involved the use of 'black powder' explosives to enhance natural joints and fractures but all remaining signs are testament to skilled manual labour and the methods used – pick and chisel marks - and brickwork to shore up sections with weaker geological intervals. An historic inscription on the wall dated 1866 is likely to memorialise the tragic death of a 'navvy' William Jones and which was documented by Liverpool Mercury on 28th May 1866.



This leaflet, one of a series published shortly after the park was opened, provided a detailed history of the railway, the geology and a list of some of the unusual plant and animal species that could be found there. It also explains that the large sewerage pipe was laid before the land was purchased for the park and that the original intention was for the cutting to be used as a refuse tip and filled in.



Neston Cutting

4.10 Lees Lane

Also on the route of the Arrowe Country Park to Parkgate Circular Walk this popular picnic site includes Lees Lane Ponds and Neston Fairy Garden. The ponds are examples of marl pits used by farmers to extract the lime-rich clay for use on arable land. A volunteer/friends group undertakes conservation work under the advice, supervision and support of the Cheshire West and Chester Greenspace Officer.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/leeslaneponds/>

4.11 The Ropewalk

Adjacent to the Ropewalk Car Park is a Pill Box. Several thousand of these structures were built around the country during Second World War and they were used as lookout posts in case of invasion. The pill box has been made visually accessible and is used as a bat hibernacula.



The Second World War Pill Box at The Ropewalk

4.12 Hadlow Road Station

Hadlow Road Station is the only remaining station along the Wirral Way between Hooton and West Kirby and is complete with the Station Master's House and original Waiting Room and Ticket Office. The station was restored and refurbished to recreate the station as it would have looked in 1956 before it closed to passengers. Wilf Wilson (Wirral Country Park Head Ranger 1980 to 1991) acquired the Signal and Signal Box from a scrap yard in Hassall Green near Crewe, and a team of ex-railway engineers re-built it from blueprints that he managed to obtain from British Rail at Lime Street, Liverpool. The Level Crossing Gates (although not original to Hadlow Road Station) were found in an old farm outhouse near Stafford and cost £300 plus transport costs to get them to Willaston. The 1940s K9 telephone kiosk was kindly donated by British Telecom in 1989 following an appeal by Countryside Ranger James Locke. Finally, the sleepers and railway track were obtained from

British Rail at Bebington Station. Following the railway line's closure in 1962, the Station Masters House was used for Wirral Ranger staff accommodation, with other Ranger accommodation provided at Thurstaston. In 1992 the station building was used as an office and base of operations for the Cheshire Countryside Rangers but closed some years later.



Hadlow Road Station, Ticket Office and Waiting Room, Station Masters House and Signal Box

Today the station is managed by Cheshire West and Chester Council and is supported by the very active Friends of Hadlow Road Station (FHRS) who have reinstated and maintain the Grade II listed heritage museum and surrounding area to a very high standard including railway track restoration and refurbishment of old signage and the telephone kiosk. FHRS also manage an on-site pop-up café twice monthly, give talks and provide visitors with information as well as organising events throughout the year at the station including an annual Santa's Grotto; the 100th anniversary of the end of WW1 with other community groups; Queen's Platinum Jubilee, etc.

<https://www.facebook.com/FriendsOfHadlowRoadStation/about>

<http://willastoninwirralresidents.org/friends-of-hadlow-road-station-2/>



One of the many events organised by the Friends of Hadlow Road Station

4.13 Events, Activities and Training

A full and varied public events and activities programme takes place throughout the year. The Wirral Rangers undertake some activities including guided walks and volunteer task days but often work in partnership or alongside other organisers to ensure the success of events. The park hosts the annual Coastal Walk as well as regular athletic races. Junior parkrun takes place every Sunday morning and the Theatre hosts various art and photographic displays as well as various public workshops. Some events promote the historical landscape within the park the legacy of farming practises including crop rotation and 'marling' as well as the current management of the old brick pits as wildlife ponds.



Some of the variety of events that take place at Wirral Country Park

In 2018 Wirral Country Park celebrated 50 years since the creation of the first designated country park in Britain. Old images of the railway and surrounding area were displayed alongside photographs taken during the park's construction between 1968 and 1973 and 35mm slide images of the park were copied and also displayed alongside photographs taken that year by the Hoylake Photographic Society showing how the park had changed. The display is being updated to be exhibited in 2023 as part of the 50th anniversary official opening celebrations. For several years the Cheshire Steamers have visited Wirral Country Park with a static display but have also had engines travel along the Wirral Way from Hadlow Road Station to Thurstaston. They displayed at the park in 2018 and 2022 and will be returning in 2023.

The park's industrial heritage is celebrated through events in the Wirral Walking Festival (organised by Wirral Sports Development each year in May) and Wirral Heritage Open Days (organised by Wirral History and Heritage Association each year in September). In 2022, and as part of the Wirral Heritage Open Days, a local geologist led a guided walk titled 'Holes in the Ground'. The walk looked at the marl pits within the park and the Neston Cutting. In 2022, Wirral Council's Parks and Countryside Section ran a Rangers Career Pathway Training Course with practical sessions held at the park and classroom-based sessions that included looking at 'palimpsests' within the landscape and how to use old maps, plans and photographs to interpret the landscape enabling good future management. The site at Thurstaston is also used for training walk leaders and in 2022 was used by the Our Dee Estuary Project (managed by Cheshire Wildlife Trust and funded by National Lottery) to train their staff and volunteers in interpreting the landscape.

With a choice of on-site cafes, good parking, stunning views across the Dee Estuary and with easy access from Chester and Liverpool, we hope that improvements to the Wirral Country Park Visitor Centre, including updating presentation equipment, will lead to its development as a prime venue for delivering lectures and training.



A talk by the Friends of Hadlow Road Station in the restored Waiting Room

4.14 Interpretation

Alongside the events and activities programme there are several noticeboards throughout the park. Some are to provide visitors with a brief history of the sites whilst others are there to inform about car park opening/closing times or the park's facilities. There are several noticeboards designed specifically to interpret the park's history. Many of the interpretive boards have been funded by external groups such as the Wirral Society and Wirral Footpaths and Open Spaces Preservation Society. The Visitor Centre at Thurstaston provides an indoor space for lectures and for delivering some events and activities. Displays include photographs and memorabilia from the old railway and an interpretation of the areas geology with contribution from the Wirral Geology and Landscape Project and Liverpool University.

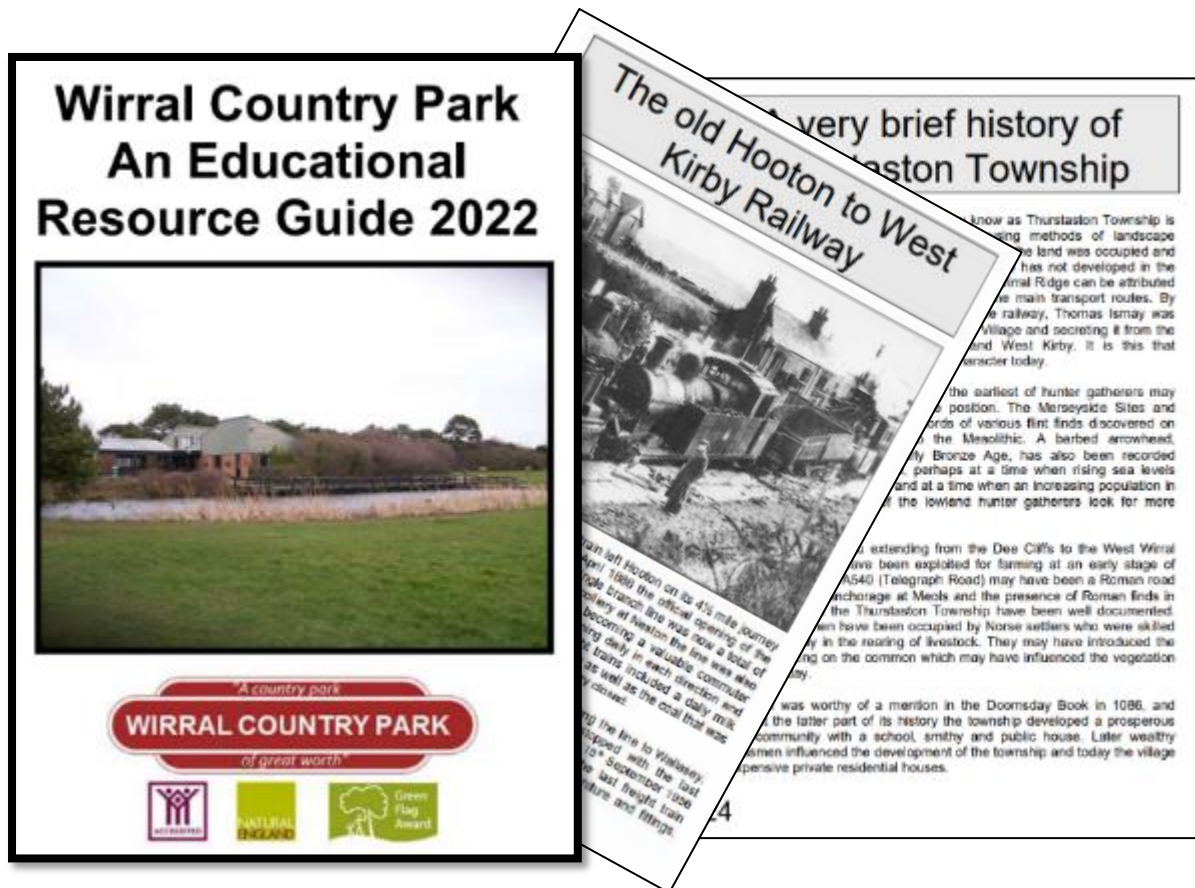


One of the larger interpretive boards at the Thurstaston Centre

One of the 50th anniversary official opening celebrations has been to appoint a local author to write a book about Wirral Country Park including the history of the landscape, development as rich farmland and its industrial heritage before becoming Britain's first designated county park. The research has meant collating and cataloguing existing archive material held at Wirral Country Park and sourcing other archive material. The book research will include recording an oral history of the park with contributions from ex-Rangers and other staff as well as from people who worked on the railway and who lived nearby. The information collated for the book will be used to provide an updated series of information leaflets about the park and its landscape and industrial heritage. Joint working between Wirral Council and Cheshire West and Chester Council has included discussions on uniform signage throughout the park. An audit has been undertaken regarding signage. Signage will need to include the England Coast Path, Sustrans National Cycle Route and with an aspiration to include tourists signposting to destinations and facilities outside the park and that could include cafes, toilets etc. (See 'Signage' in next Chapter).

4.15 Primary Schools, Secondary Schools and Further Education

Whilst the majority of school visits for curriculum studies are focussed on the different habitats within the park, some schools choose to use the site for a 'compare and contrast' activity where the landscape of the park and its surrounding area is compared to the location of the school, often in a more urban environment. The children are taught about the previous land use and landowners and can see old photographs of Thurstaston Village and the Hooton to West Kirby Railway. University students are encouraged to look at the landscape features and create a timeline of their development. Information for visiting groups can be found in the Teacher's Resource Guide and that includes information on how to interpret the park's history.



Free Teachers Packs and a Resource Guide help with field visits and the interpretation of the park's history and heritage

The Rangers play an important role in assisting schools with their visits. A Booking Form is completed by the school/group and a Ranger assigned to assist with delivery of any requested activities. Schools are encouraged to use 'The Sidings' during their visit and most primary and secondary schools include a visit to Thurstaston Beach as part of their visit. University students often visit to study the Dee Cliffs as one of the best examples of post-glacial deposition and erosion in the north-west. More recently studies have included landform and use of the landscape, the agricultural and industrial heritage as well as the park's more recent history as a recreational resource and green transport link. Several universities and colleges have undertaken surveys of park users as part of their studies into recreational management and the development of parks and publicly accessible open green space.

5.0 MAINTAINING HISTORIC CHARACTER & APPEARANCE

5.1 The 50th Anniversary of the Official Opening of Wirral Country Park

In 2023 as part of the 50th anniversary of the official opening of Wirral Country Park in 1973 the park's totem logo used by Wirral Council since 2013 has been incorporated into a full colour banner with the words 'A *country park of great worth for over 50 years*' recognising both the park's official designation in 1968 and the aspirations of Cheshire Council and the Wirral Green Belt Society to create Britain's first 'country park' that would have an enduring legacy. It is also the first time since 1992 that both authorities have shared a logo recognising the joint management of the park. The banner shows the wide range of users alongside the man-made and natural historic features of interest.



In 2022 a Capital Grant was awarded to refurbish the Thurstaston Station platforms and replace existing non-functioning lighting columns as one of the infrastructure projects leading up to the anniversary. The platform refurbishment included installing a white picket fence similar to the one that originally stood at the site and lighting columns were replaced with Victorian/Edwardian style 'gas lanterns' that would have been similar to those when the station was open. Postcards and photographs of the station were used to inform the restoration works.

Trees that obscured the Visitor Centre were removed reinstating the prominence of the facility on the Wirral Way embankment. Some hedgerows were laid to again restore the more open aspect around the Thurstaston Centre. In 2021 the overflow car park off Station Road was refurbished with all-weather surfacing over 3 bays to cater for increased usage. Keeping the hedgerows and some grass bays was to ensure the character of the area was preserved. In 2023 as part of the 50th anniversary of the official opening of Wirral Country Park, hedgerow planting will take place to reinforce the park's boundary. Other infrastructure projects leading up to the anniversary included reinstating the Visitor Centre Pond revetments, perimeter path and bridge. The Cliff Top Path at the Thurstaston Centre was resurfaced and widened and the 'Our Dee Estuary Project' paid for two interpretive boards for the glacial erratics display and for Dawpool Local Nature Reserve.

The 1973 Memorial Stone has been restored and re-dedicated to the '*past, present and future staff and volunteers*' as part of the celebrations in 2023 to mark the 50th anniversary of the official opening of the park. A Capital Bid has been submitted for major infrastructure improvements and to coincide with the 50th anniversary celebrations. A number of events are planned for the anniversary year with projects being coordinated by a Wirral Country Park Joint Steering Group with committee members from both authorities as well as contributions from stakeholder groups.

5.2 The Wirral Way

Some of the original park post and rail fencing has been removed, in particular between the pedestrian/cycle route and horse ride. This has been partly due to costs and resourcing but also in places to ensure access for maintenance and emergency vehicles. Fencing under many of the bridges has been removed providing a more appealing view along the route. Where there is the need and the opportunity, worn or damaged post and rail fencing is reinstated. In 2013 and 2022 8 sections of the Wirral Way between West Kirby and Gayton (totalling over 2 miles) were widened to cater for increasing visitor numbers, to ensure access for maintenance and emergency vehicles and to improve diversity, especially along sections of the park that were not part of the Local Wildlife Site (Site of Biological Importance). No major landscaping work was required and embankments have been retained keeping the original character of the park intact. Sustainable drainage using a combination of permeable piping and French drains actually enhanced the embankments as these are now more prominent with colourful wildflowers and a grass verge rather than being hidden by woody vegetation – mainly self-seeded Sycamore. For the two Wirral Way widening schemes we have retained the original 1968 'Setting and General Proposals For Development' by enhancing the old railway line. At two sections where widening has taken place, pedestrian footbridges from adjacent private properties onto the Wirral Way have been removed. Apart from making maintenance easier and the path safer for users, it has removed non-original features.



The Wirral Way Widening Scheme has enhanced the old railway line, opening up vistas and views including the entire span of the bridges

5.3 The Thurstaston Centre

There are a number of historic features around the Visitor Centre and grasslands extending towards the Dee Cliffs. The recently refurbished station platform with fencing, lighting and associated signage and seating provides the visitor with a story as they arrive. Displays in the Visitor Centre provide more information about the park and its development from the underlying geology and last period of glaciation through to the rich arable farming and grazing and the old Hooton to West Kirby Railway. On-site interpretive boards provide more information about the railway, Dee Cliffs, glacial erratics and lime kilns.



The landscape tells a story going back 250 million years with sandstone gorges and cliffs formed during the last period of glaciation



Re-pointing of brickwork requires careful management alongside species recorded as part of the Local Wildlife Site (Site of Biological Importance)

The Visitor Centre was designed to look like a railway carriage sitting above the old station platform. Views both to and from the centre are being re-established and significant investment is planned for a full refurbishment of the Visitor Centre with new door and window frames, a new and extended wet weather area and improved toilets funded through the Government's Changing Places scheme to ensure full accessibility. More efficient heating and lighting and better insulation is being proposed with funding from the North West Decarbonisation Programme.



The lime kiln display



The Memorial Stone commemorating the official opening of the park on 2nd October 1973 and the contribution made by Cpt Lawrence Beswick

5.4 Hadlow Road Station

Hadlow Road Station is an important historical feature of the old railway line. After some years of neglect Cheshire West and Chester Council and the Friends of Hadlow Road Station have created a vibrant visitor attraction within the country park. Although many of the features are not original to the site they have enhanced the historic character and appearance of the buildings.



The friends group undertaking maintenance of one of the original signs

The friends group meet monthly on site to undertake light gardening including planting, weeding and pruning and maintaining flowerpots and beds. Funding for restoration projects comes from donations and opening a twice monthly pop-up café between 10am and 1pm.



The friends group installing new sleepers along the restored trackbed

In 2022 the Friends of Hadlow Road Station received recognition from the Royal Horticultural Society's Britain in Bloom North West awards. The group won the In Your Neighbourhood, Level 5 (Outstanding) Award and the Heritage Award which was voted the best entry from over 600 nominations across the North-West. The aims of the Society are to:

- Foster the heritage of Hadlow Road Station through historical research, community involvement and environmental activity.
- Facilitate the use of the station as an educational resource.
- Support and encourage the use of the station for promoting the arts and culture.
- Maintain, enhance and conserve the station buildings and the immediate surrounding environment.
- Raise funds solely for use in supporting the purposes described above.

Chris Hampshire, Chair of Friends of Hadlow Road Station, said: *"As Chair of Friends of Hadlow Road Station I am delighted that the group received these 2 prestigious awards. It clearly reflects the significant contribution made by the volunteers covering catering, gardening and light engineering at Hadlow Road Station for the benefit of our community. These prestigious awards are testimony to the dedication and hard work of all the Friends of Hadlow Road Station volunteers who help with the pop-up café, gardening and DIY/light engineering around the station. Receipt of these awards was made possible with the continued support of our loyal customers at our pop-up café and village events, along with very generous donations. The Friends of Hadlow Road Station pop-up café is a community café run by the community, for the community."*

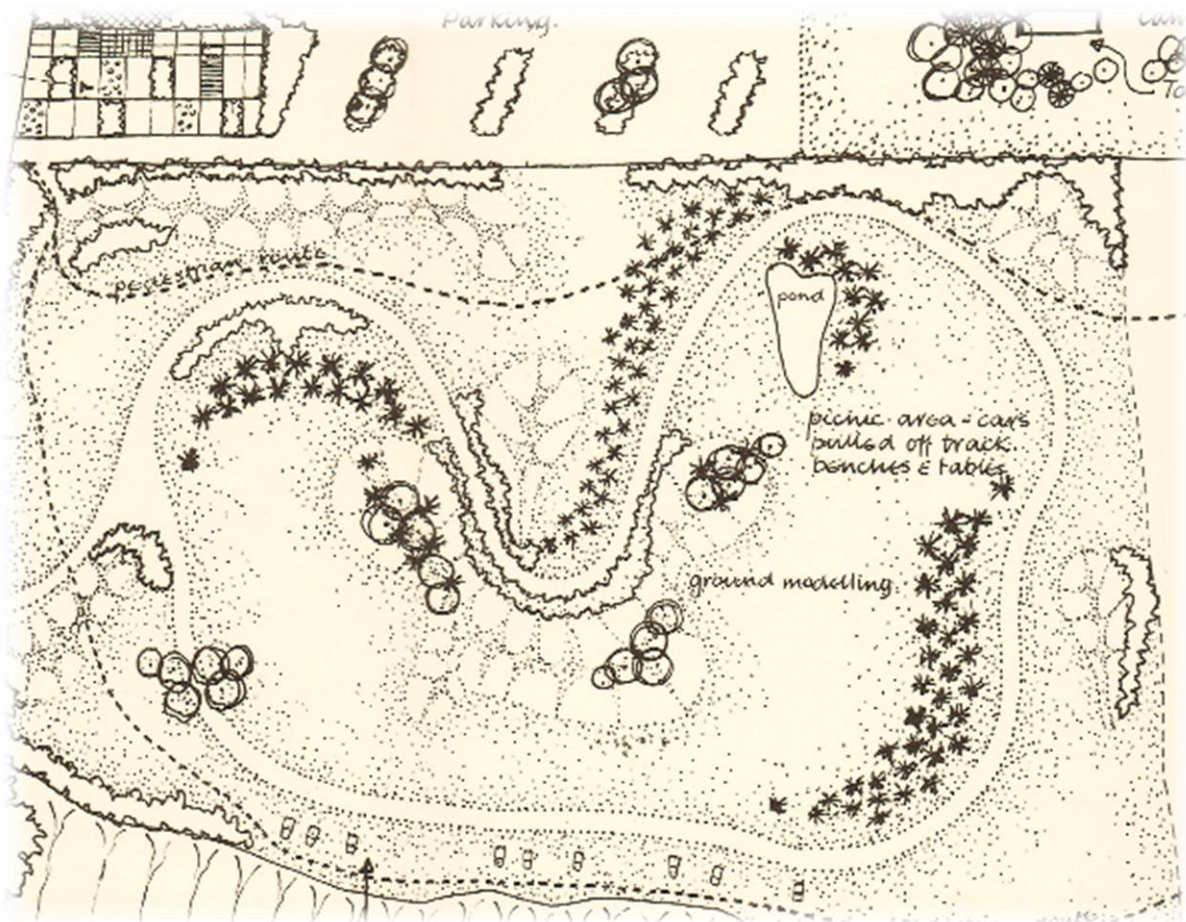


The society thanked Cheshire West & Chester Council for their support in ensuring that Hadlow Road Station remains a 'go to' destination for an increasing number of visitors

6 APPENDIX

6.1 Archives

Old photographs, postcards, maps, leaflets and especially the original park plans have been invaluable in informing of management of the park. Stakeholders including user groups and local residents are often able to source information with regards to specific projects. The 1968 plan has been used to assist in the development of the Thurstaston Centre in recent years. (The idea of a cliff top path with access to the Wirral Way has been achieved in recent years and provision of seating on the old station platform is being considered as part of the 2022 refurbishment).



The original 1998 plan doesn't include a Visitor Centre but shows the landscaping at the gunsite, path network and use of the platform for a 'terraced sitting area'.

In 2022, as part of the lead up to marking of the 50th anniversary of the opening of the park, a book on the history of Wirral Country Park was commissioned by the Wirral Country Park 50th Anniversary Joint Steering Group. Part of the commission was to collate and catalogue archive material.

6.2 Friends and other stakeholder groups

In 2003 a Wirral Country Park Advisory Group was created to assist in widening the Wirral Way between West Kirby and Gayton. The group developed into the Wirral Country Park Friends group and met regularly to discuss park management issues along the section of park managed by Wirral Council. The group however was unable to include fair representation from cycling groups as most of the committee were opposed to cycling on the Wirral Way and often representatives on the committee wouldn't support projects that were a high priority for managers including provision for disabled access, improving visitor facilities at the Visitor Centre or encouraging volunteers to work in the park. When the group disbanded it was decided to allow adjacent residents and stakeholders the opportunity to prioritise their own area of the park a series of 'residents groups' would be established to help in the management of the park. This has ensured a closer working relationship with adjacent homeowners and user groups and has led to increased funding opportunities as well as practical involvement in the park management. Alongside the Wirral Country Park Thursday Task Force Volunteers the following groups and organisations make a contribution towards the management of Wirral Country Park:

- West Kirby in Bloom
- One West Kirby
- Friends of Ashton Park
- York Avenue Residents Group
- Cubbins Green Residents Group
- Friends of Cubbins Green
- Caldy Society
- Thurstaston, Irby and Pensby Society
- Farr Hall Drive Residents Group
- Friends of Lees Lane
- Friends of Hadlow Road Station
- Wirral History and Heritage Association
- Wirral Wildlife
- Cheshire Wildlife Trust
- Wirral Ramblers
- Wirral Footpaths and Open Spaces Preservation Society
- Wirral Rotary
- Wirral Society
- Wirral Geology and Landscape Project
- Wirral Wombles
- Wirral Mencap
- Bee Wirral Community Interest Company
- Flissy's Coffee Shop

6.3 Site Inspections

(West Kirby to Gayton)

As part of their day-to-day role Wirral Rangers are able to identify defects within the park that present a safety problem for staff, users and adjacent residents. Any defects or issues are reported to the Wirral Country Park Manager to take the appropriate action. This may include recording a task on Microsoft Outlook and assigning it to one of the Rangers with a 'completion by' date. The following items may be recorded as having defects:

1. Paths, steps, ramps
2. Walls, fences, gates
3. Buildings
4. Furniture – signs, litterbins etc
5. Soft landscape – grass, planted areas, water features etc
6. Trees (these are also reported to the Tree Risk Officer)

A Site Safety Inspection is undertaken each year by the Wirral Country Park Manager. It is circulated to colleagues within Wirral Council and any non-compliance recorded with actions required.

For bridge inspections Wirral Council's Highways and Infrastructure Team follow the guidance set out in CS450 – 'Inspection of Highway Structures' which is a national standard set out by DfT/Highways England. They are inspected on a 2 yearly cycle (basic visual inspection from ground level) with a more detailed 'Principal Inspection' completed every 6 years. The inspections are completed by competent inspectors and then signed off by a Supervising Engineer. The Principal Inspections are carried out by consultants. A bespoke specification for any works would always take the heritage of the specific structure into account ie. type/colour of mortar, masonry etc. Customers are able to report any faults to the bridges using the Council's website and specifically the following link:

https://my.wirral.gov.uk/service/Bridge_or_structure_problem

Graffiti that could be considered offensive or racist shall be reported as a priority to be removed by the Employer's specialist operator within 24 hours.

Fly-tipping shall be defined as any single quantity of tipped material that cannot be lifted by two members of staff and removed from the site. If tipped material can be lifted by two members of staff, it is deemed to be covered by the litter control clauses of this service requirement.

All instances of fly-tipping however shall be reported to the Wirral Country Park Manager

(Hooton to Gayton)

Cheshire West and Chester council relevant departments have a legal obligation to make all structures, surfaces and areas safe and secure across the full length of the the 6 mile linear section of Wirral Country Park that falls within the authority for all visiting members of the public ,staff and anyone else who should need to be using or working on this site.

This will include a schedule to access the condition to help maintain access points (both vehicular and foot), notice boards, information panels, way marking finger posts, bridge structures, seating and picnic benches, car parks surfaces and associated infrastructure, buildings that are both open to the public or are positioned

on site, steps, ramps, handrails and bins. The departments that cross over with their respective responsibility for the above are Infrastructure and Public Realm and Highways who undertake regular inspection and repairs as and when necessary or if damage has been reported. Vegetation on or near any of these structures or surfaces will be appropriately managed to maintain the longevity and the safety of all users as well as providing clear access along both the horse track and pedestrian routes.

6.4 Green Heritage Site Accreditation

Green Heritage Site Accreditation focusses on a site's heritage conservation and interpretation, recognition of historic features and relevant conservation statements and links with the management plan. Scoring for Green Heritage Site Accreditation places higher emphasis on the conservation, protection, interpretation and use of the designated Heritage Site. The Desk assessment contains 4 categories or scoring, and the site visit contains 10 categories. The categories for scoring during assessment are as follows:

Desk Assessment

- Presentation of Conservation Plan or statement
- Strategic and policy and background
- Community involvement and marketing
- Integration of Heritage Management

Site Visit

- Good conservation standards
- Historic features given prominence
- Historic features integrated into the life of the site
- Information available and evidence that historic features are enjoyed by the public
- Relevance of historic landscape design – integrity understood and interpreted
- Horticultural displays contribute to historic character
- Recognition and appropriateness of historic tree and plant collections
- New and replacement features enhance or conserve the historic character and appearance


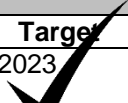
The Wirral Country Park Heritage Conservation Plan provides a concise catalogue of historic features along with a detailed history of the site and the park's development. It details current management with regard to the input of stakeholder groups, events and activities and interpretation of historic features and provides a Action Plan and Project Bank listing current and proposed projects to further enhance the park's history and heritage.

The Wirral Country Park Management Plan (2017 – 2022) produced by Wirral Council and covering the Green Flag section of the park from West Kirby to Gayton) can be found at:

<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/sites/default/files/all/Leisure%20parks%20and%20events/parks%20and%20open%20spaces/Wirral%20Country%20Park%20Management%20Plan%202022.pdf>

6.5 Wirral Country Park Heritage Action Plan

This Action Plan uses the Heritage Site assessment criteria as a focus for the heritage management of the park. It identifies areas requiring action to meet and maintain the Heritage Site standard and takes into account Heritage Site Judging Assessment and with actions that can be undertaken within existing resources or some minimal additional funding.

CONDITION OF HISTORIC FEATURES				
1.0 Good Conservation Standards				
Ref	Action	Target	Resources	Justification
1.1	Publish the Heritage Conservation Plan on the Wirral Council Website next to the Park Management Plan (Wirral Section)	2023	Wirral Country Park Manager	Providing access to conservation heritage policy
1.2	Apply for Green Heritage Site Award Status	Yearly	WCP Manager/CW AC Local Greenspace Officer	Green Heritage Site Accreditation
1.3	Start a catalogue of any work undertaken on historic features detailing materials used	2023 	WCP Manager/CW AC Local Greenspace Officer	Green Heritage Site Accreditation
1.4	Ensure Facilities Management providers are aware of the heritage conservation standards	On-going	WCP Manager/CW AC Local Greenspace Officer	Green Heritage Site Accreditation
1.5	Ensure that Highways Teams notify of works done on the road bridges and that they are aware of their historic importance	On-going	WCP Manager/CW AC Local Greenspace Officer/Highways Teams	Green Heritage Site Accreditation
1.6	Ensure cataloguing of articles of interest and retained by Wirral/Cheshire Archives	On-going	WCP Manager/CW AC Local Greenspace Officer. Cheshire Records Office and Wirral Archives	Council policy Green Heritage Site Accreditation
1.7	Ensure recording of items of interest by Williamson Art Gallery and Museum and Grosvenor Museum	On-going	WCP Manager/CW AC Local Greenspace Officer and museum Curators	Council policy Green Heritage Site Accreditation
2.0 Historic features given prominence				
Ref	Action	Target	Resources	Justification
2.1	Copper plaques from the Memorial Stone to be wall	2023 	WCP Manager	Part of the 50 th Anniversary Celebrations

	mounted at Visitor Centre Foyer			
2.2	Cubbins Green replica plaque to be installed at Cubbins Green	2023 ✓	WCP Manager	Part of the 50 th Anniversary Celebrations and Infrastructure Capital Bid
2.3	Information lecterns to be in place at Thurstaston (Erratics Display and Dawpool)	2023 ✓	Our Dee Estuary Project	Part of the Dee Estuary Project with £3,500 funding allocated
	Wirral Way Bridges to be named and signed	2023	WCP Manager/CW AC Local Greenspace Officer	Green Heritage Site Accreditation Part of the 50 th Anniversary Celebrations
2.4	Signposting to historical features to be incorporated into trail leaflets	2024	WCP Manager/Rangers	Green Heritage Site Accreditation Part of the 50 th Anniversary Celebrations
2.5	Vegetation from around bridges to be cut back to show full width (including buttresses) where possible	On-going	WCP Manager/CW AC Local Greenspace Officer/Highways Teams	Part of the 50 th Anniversary Celebrations and Infrastructure Capital Bid


3.0 Restoration / re-creation of landscape features

Ref	Action	Target	Resources	Justification
3.1	Update Heritage Action Plan annually	Annually	WCP Manager	Green Heritage Site Accreditation
3.2	Inform stakeholders of work being undertaken through social media/other comms	On-going	WCP Manager/CW AC Local Greenspace Officer	Part of the Wirral Country Park Joint Steering Group Actions

USE AND ENJOYMENT OF HISTORIC FEATURES

4.0 Historic features intact and in use

Ref	Action	Target	Resources	Justification
4.1	Re-naming the Campsite to 'The Sidings' to reflect past historic use	2023 ✓	WCP Manager	Green Heritage Site Accreditation
4.2	Provide display cabinets for Chirotherium footprints in the Visitor Centre	2023 ✓	WCP Manager/WC P Budget	Green Heritage Site Accreditation. Part of the 50 th Anniversary Celebrations and Infrastructure Capital Bid
4.3	Continue to provide a pop-up café at Hadlow Road Station	On-going	Friends of Hadlow Road Station	Community involvement
4.4	Provide display cabinet for West Kirby Joint Model Railway in Visitor Centre	2023 ✓	WCP Manager/WC P Budget	Part of the 50 th Anniversary Celebrations
4.5	Undertake a series of walks for the annual Wirral Walking Festival (May) and the Wirral Heritage Open Days (September)	Yearly	WCP Rangers CWAC Health Rangers and volunteer walk leaders	Green Flag – Community involvement. Wirral Geology and Landscape Project remit
4.6	Commission a book about Wirral Country Park, it's history, development and present management	2023 ✓	WCP Joint Steering Group Members and	Part of the 50 th Anniversary Celebrations

			Stakeholders	
4.7	Assist and promote external organisations (eg Wirral Geology Project) with their walks, talks programmes	On-going	Use of Theatre at Visitor Centre	Green Flag – Community involvement
4.8	Produce Historic Interpretive Trail Leaflet for Lees Lane Pond	2023	Friends of Lees Lane and Wirral Geology and Landscape Project	Green Flag – Community involvement Wirral Geology and Landscape Project remit
4.9	Produce Historic Interpretive Trail Leaflet for the Thurstaston Centre	2023	WCP Manager and Wirral Geology and Landscape Project	Green Flag – Community involvement Wirral Geology and Landscape Project remit
5.0 Historic Features integrated into the life of the site				
Ref	Action	Target	Resources	Justification
5.1	Obtain West Kirby Joint railway model (for display in Visitor Centre) see 4.4 above	2023 	WCP Manager	Green Flag – Conservation and heritage
5.2	Update Visitor Centre displays, especially interpreting the Wirral Way	2025	WCP Manager	Green Flag – Conservation and heritage
5.3	Continue to support the Friends of Hadlow Road in their management of the old station house and environs	On-going	CWAC Local Greenspace Officer	Green Flag – Community involvement
5.4	Undertake consultation regarding possible future uses of the old Hooton Ticket Office. Limited restoration may be possible but a site safety inspection will be needed.	2026	CWAC Local Greenspace Officer. Possible 106 monies	Green Flag – Conservation and heritage and Community involvement
5.5	Continue to support the Whistle Stop Café (Bee Wirral CIC) and encourage development	On-going	WCP Manager	Green Flag – Community involvement
5.6	Continue to support TRACs Cycle Hire as an opportunity for visitors to explore the park	On-going	WCP Manager Rangers Volunteers	Green Flag – Community involvement
5.7	Continue to support the Friends of Lees Lane Ponds	On-going	CWAC Local Greenspace Officer	Community involvement
6.0 Information available & evidence that historic features are enjoyed by the public				
Ref	Action	Target	Resources	Justification
6.1	Provide 'historical news' on social media and link with projects whenever possible	On-going	WCP Manager and Rangers	Green Flag – Community involvement Management
6.2	Include Wirral Country Park history walks in the annual Wirral and CWAC Walking Festivals	Yearly	WCP Manager and Rangers	Green Flag – Community involvement
6.3	Attended the Wirral History and Heritage Fair	Yearly	WCP Manager and Rangers	Engagement and feedback

MAINTAINING HISTORIC CHARACTER & APPEARANCE

7.0 Relevance of Historic Landscape design integrity understood and interpreted

Ref	Action	Target	Resources	Justification
7.1	Ensure graffiti is removed	On-going	WCP Manager and CWAC Greenspace Officer	Green Flag Requirement
7.2	Add user information to the WCP Page on the council's website to include Teacher Packs, booking forms	2024 	Corporate Marketing Team Rangers	Green Flag – Community involvement Management

8.0 Horticultural displays contribute to historic character

Ref	Action	Target	Resources	Justification
8.1	Maintain formal planting at Hadlow Road Station	On-going	Friends of Hadlow Road Station	Green Heritage Site Accreditation
8.2	Apply for Royal Horticultural Society's Britain In Bloom North West awards.	Yearly 	Friends of Hadlow Road Station	In Your Neighbourhood Award (Level 5) Outstanding and Heritage Award (2022) Winners
8.3	Introduce formal planting as part of the Thurstaston railway platform restoration	2023 	Whistle Stop Café staff	Green Heritage Site Accreditation

9.0 Recognition and appropriateness of historic tree & plant collections

Ref	Action	Target	Resources	Justification
9.1	Undertake tree survey for notable trees	2025	Tree and Woodland Officers	Wirral Tree and Woodland Management Plan
9.2	Maintain species records for Wirral Way, Dawpool Nature Reserve, Dungeon and Dee Cliffs SSSI	On-going	WCP Manager/Rangers Wirral Wildlife	For SBI designation and SSSI notifications
9.3	Apply for Bees Needs Award	Yearly	WCP Manager	WBC Pollinators Policy

10.0 New and replacement features conserve or enhance the historic character and appearance

Ref	Action	Target	Resources	Justification
10.1	Display original Memorial Stone plaques in Visitor Centre See 2.1	2023 	WCP Manager/WC P Budget	Green Heritage Site Accreditation
10.2	Provide quality replica plaque and matching new plaque for Memorial Stone	2023 	WCP Manager/WC P Budget	Green Heritage Site Accreditation
10.3	Provide period lighting to enhance platform refurb	2023 	WCP Manager/Capital Bid	Green Heritage Site Accreditation

6.6 Wirral Country Park Project Bank

These projects require additional resources and funding outside the scope of the existing day to day resources available to the park.

Project	Cost estimate and Resources Required	Justification, policy fit and evidence of need
New on-site directional signage – to include signposting to park and other local historical features	Estimated at £200k	Will be a joint WBC and CWAC project
New Campsite Site Utility Block Wet Weather Shelter	Project Plan to be drawn up including Refurbishment Survey Project Cost estimated at £12k	Leisure Strategy & Masterplan Included as 2023 Capital Bid for Essential Infrastructure Improvements
New signage from Station Road – to include car parks, Dee Sailing Club, Caravan Sites branded as 'The Thurstaston Centre'	Requires input from Highways Estimated at £2,000	Country Park Status – Information and Interpretation (Current signs out of date)
Improve pedestrian safety between Wirral Country Park and the overflow car park	Requires input from Highways including road markings/traffic calming	Included as 2023 Capital Bid for Essential Infrastructure Improvements
Tinker's Dell stepped access	£50,000 NE consent required	Dependant on route of England Coast Path. Included as 2023 Capital Bid for Essential Infrastructure Improvements
Station Road stepped access	£30,000 (Costed by Wilson's) Plans submitted to Coastal Team. NE consent required	Included as 2023 Capital Bid for Essential Infrastructure Improvements
Visitor Centre refurbishment including replacing rotting door and window frames.	Project Plan to be drawn up including Refurbishment Survey Project Cost estimated at £40k	Included as 2023 Capital Bid for Essential Infrastructure Improvements
New Visitor Centre Bridge	Project Plan to be drawn up by Structural Engineer Project Cost estimated at £25k	Included as 2023 Capital Bid for Essential Infrastructure Improvements
Refurbished Main Car Park, walls and Main Access Points	Project Plan to be drawn up by Landscape Architect Project Cost estimated at £70k	Included as 2023 Capital Bid for Essential Infrastructure Improvements
Barbecue Site, Theatre, Key Access Points all Refurbished for Disabled Access	Project Plan to be drawn up by Wirral Country Park Manager Project Cost estimated at £22k	Included as 2023 Capital Bid for Essential Infrastructure Improvements
Refurbished Garages, Workshop, Wash bay & Fuel Store	Project Plan to be drawn up including Refurbishment Survey Project Cost estimated at £15k	Included as 2023 Capital Bid for Essential Infrastructure Improvements
Regrading 3,500 metres of the Wirral Way Pedestrian/Cycle route	Project Plan to be drawn up by Landscape Architect Project Cost estimated at £80k	Included as 2023 Capital Bid for Essential Infrastructure Improvements
Carry out a structural inspection of the old Hooton Ticket Office. Consider improvements to make it accessible to community groups, as a museum or storage space. Could be a unique hibernacula and 'wildlife building'	Project Plan to be drawn up including Refurbishment Survey Project Cost estimated at a minimum £10k spend and may need to include CCTV at the remote site	Possible 106 funding. CWAC to seek input from the local community regarding future use. Also CWAC discussions with Chester Zoo could result in a unique use for an historic building.



The old Hooton Ticket Office is a great opportunity for some limited restoration and reuse as a community resource, museum/interpretive site.

