



## Wirral sets out blueprint for revival

Sep 9 2004

**Liam Murphy takes a close look at some of the schemes that could transform the peninsula - if the finances fall into place**

Daily Post

HUNDREDS of millions of pounds could be invested in Wirral over the next few years as the borough gears up for its busiest period of regeneration ever.

The local authority has already lined up millions in European and government funding and is bidding for more from private and public sources to revitalise the area.

From the controversial £70m Neptune proposals for New Brighton, to the work to redevelop Birkenhead Park and plans for Hoylake and West Kirby, the borough has never seen so many schemes with a strong chance of success.

Cllr Bob Moon, chairman of the council's regeneration committee, said: "If we had been talking 10 years ago we would probably have had two or three projects, but there are so many now.

"But they are based on a steady stream of funding and if one source dries up it can affect the match funding. It's like a house of cards."

David Ball, executive manager of Wirral Waterfront which is heading up the regeneration of large parts of the borough, said: "In the last two to three years we have probably had as much concerted regeneration activity as we have ever had. There is also a feeling of optimism in the private sector."

There are many factors behind this, from the availability of funding from the European Union, the build-up to Liverpool's Capital of Culture year in 2008 and the Open Golf championship in Hoylake in 2006.

But some projects are more likely to happen, or happen in the foreseeable future, than others.

In Birkenhead planning permission has been given for the construction of a new £30m supermarket development in the town centre at the top of Grange Road, creating 450 jobs.

This is almost opposite the new £3m Lauries community centre where building has begun, and nearby up to £15m is expected to be spent on creating a new visitor centre and sprucing up Birkenhead Park.

Nearby, private finance is the key to developments around Oxton Road and Grange Road West, with investors from London backing proposals which should tidy up and improve one of the key gateways into Birkenhead.

Recently tourism consultants said Birkenhead and New Brighton were prime locations for new top-class hotels, with enough trade expected in the region to support them.

Howard Mortimer, head of special initiatives for Wirral Council, described the tourism report as

"illuminating" and said New Brighton was seen as an ideal location following 2008, but Birkenhead was described by the consultants as the priority, although it will depend on private developers being interested enough to commit the funds. The report indicates much of the impetus comes from Capital of Culture.

Mr Mortimer said: "Ultimately we are always bound by the market, no matter how much we might want something, but we are going flat out to make this happen."

Wirral International Business Park, off the A41 near Bromborough, is also seen as something of a jewel in Wirral's crown, with more than 3,000 jobs created since major infrastructure work began there in 1995, with work continuing to attract businesses there.

Among recent successes was cookware maker Meyer, which recently relocated there to build a massive manufacturing site.

Across Wirral work is continuing, with Wirral Waterfront involved in promoting regeneration schemes. These range from the controversial Neptune scheme for New Brighton, redeveloping King Street in Wallasey and the Hoylake and West Kirby Masterplan.

Part of Wirral's tourism strategy is the development of a Viking and Roman heritage centre at Meols, improvements to Leasowe Lighthouse and the Pride in the Promenades project which aims to improve Wirral's Mersey waterfront area.

On the other side of the borough the Thurstaston Visitor Centre and Dee Estuary improvements are also seen as crucial to making the peninsula a more attractive place to visit.

Wirral Council's cabinet member for regeneration, Cllr Pat Hackett, said the plans for the borough were "stunning" and showed the borough's commitment to put Wirral on the tourism map.

He said: "All these plans could not come at a better time - a lot of the funding has a lifespan of three to five years at most and if we do not act now we will miss out on it."

[liammurphy@dailypost.co.uk](mailto:liammurphy@dailypost.co.uk)

**The plans in more detail >>>**

### **1 West Kirby and Hoylake**

Masterplan Despite fears it will not make much impact before the Open, the local authority has a 10-year masterplan for the area. Priorities are the transformation of both town centres and addressing the fading Hoylake promenade.

### **2 New Brighton**

After three years and a host of changes to the original proposals, Neptune's scheme has to be firmed up. It includes a supermarket on the marine lake, and sites for a casino, bars and restaurants and a new open air swimming pool. A pier for ferries could also be built, and the Floral Pavilion theatre revamped.

### **3 Landmark Statue**

An ambitious plan for a statue at the mouth of the Mersey, possibly off New Brighton and act as Merseyside's Statue of Liberty, bringing in tourists and boosting the local economy. Sculptor Tom Murphy came up with a design for a massive statue named Neptune.

#### **4 King Street**

One of the borough's many linear shopping streets which has fallen on hard times, its shops have a vacancy rate of 50%. Four schemes, ranging from tidying up the area to a root and branch redevelopment are being considered at the moment and comments invited from the public.

#### **5 Seacombe Space Port**

The £8m scheme to showcase astronomy is due to open in spring 2005, and is hoped to become a major tourist attraction. A new bus interchange at Seacombe Ferry terminal capable of handling 36 vehicles an hour will also be ready by December. Work has started on the scheme, including secure cycle parking and a 52 space car park.

#### **6 Aluna Project**

The glass art work is a tidal-powered moon clock, measuring around 50 metres wide and rising to six storeys high. Illuminated, it could become a major tourist attraction and tie in with the Spaceport.

#### **7 Twelve Quays**

The Twelve Quays development between Birkenhead and Wallasey overlooks the world-famous Liverpool waterfront, with its Pier Head buildings, and is seen by councillors as one of the prime development areas in the borough.

A scheme by the North West Development Agency to use the area for further industrial units was thrown out by Wirral councillors last year.

Members of the council said they wanted to see more ambition - with an emphasis on residential and tourism. The masterplan is being re-worked.

#### **8 Aquarium**

Wirral's docklands has been proposed as a possible site for a £250m scheme four times the size of the Eden Project to house some of the world's most endangered species.

The National Institute for Research into Aquatic Habitats - Nirah - is behind the 100-acre proposal, which would include huge bio-domes, 200 yards wide and 110ft high, and recreate the climate and freshwater conditions of an Amazonian rainforest and the Mekong River.

#### **9 Woodside**

Plans are being drawn up to be revealed later this year to redevelop this prime site overlooking Liverpool's waterfront. The ferry terminal is already a favourite site for visitors when events take place on the Mersey, and a possible "fifth grace" and new hotel facilities have been suggested.

#### **10 Birkenhead Park**

By next summer a £1m glass pavilion, the main focal piece of the ambitious project, should be completed. The £15m redevelopment of the park will take four years to finish. Formal gardens, exhibition spaces, teaching areas and a cafe will also be created at the new pavilion. When it opened in 1847, Birkenhead was the world's first park established at public expense.

#### **11 Birkenhead, Grange Road**

The £30m new supermarket development will be built on land currently occupied on Catherine Street. The move to develop the Grange shopping centre has already attracted BHS which is considering returning to Birkenhead after a 10-year absence.

#### **12 Wirral International Business Park**

Expansion of the business park is continuing, and since major infrastructure work began there nine years ago more than 3,000 jobs have been created at the site.

With each extra grant from the EU, the park has been expanded.

### **13 Cammell Laird**

A snowdome, retail complex and residential areas, along with a proposed ferry link to Liverpool airport are among the ambitious suggestions, which with the offer of a new home for Liverpool's discarded Fourth Grace, have been put forward by Reddington Finance, the consortium which has taken over the 150-acre ex-shipyard.

### **14 Port Sunlight**

A planning application to build around 100 new homes has been submitted by Port Sunlight Village Trust and Miller Homes on a site in Wharf Street near the historic Port Sunlight village. A vigorous opposition campaign by the Save Port Sunlight group has been launched. The Trust says funds from the new buildings would help maintain the village.

### **15 Lever Faberge**

Continued investment to modernise the plant and facilities at the Unilever factory during the last 10 to 15 years has led to a reduction in the area of land it needs. Wirral Council has been working with the group to turn the surplus land off the A41 into a mixed development site including 250 new homes and light industry.

 [Top](#)

[Print article](#)  [Close window](#) 