

Parkgate Society

‘Our Vision for Parkgate’

The Context

Parkgate is Cheshire’s only coastal resort: its character was established in the Georgian period. The village lies within the parish of Neston, and takes its name from the former Neston Park, where deer were kept for hunting in the middle ages. In the early 1600s, after the sale of this park land, an anchorage was established here for merchant ships and the packet boats sailing for Dublin; at the same time a fishing village grew up on the shore; then in the 18th century the area also became a fashionable resort for sea bathing – people paraded along the seafront, and along Cheltenham Walk (now The Ropewalk), when the weather was inclement. Today’s visitors still like to parade along the sea wall, although the sea has long gone, except at very high tides, when it can still lap against the wall; however, they now come for the marvellous views, which Turner painted, and, of course, for the famous ice cream.

In recent years there has been a general consensus that the village, in particular the much visited Parade, has suffered from neglect; there is a perception that its appearance has not had the level of public investment which other parts of the district have enjoyed in recent years. Some of the Georgian buildings have gone and others have shown signs of lack of maintenance. It was hoped that the establishment of a conservation area in the 1970s would help maintain the character of the village, but keeping it tidy and attractive depends on community involvement.

The Parkgate Society was formed as a conservation society in 1972, and now pledges to try and match fund its own resources with other funding towards the upkeep of this historical coastal village. To this end we keep an eye on local planning applications and encourage local businesses and private residents to take a pride in the appearance of their premises; we publish books and guides, and hold monthly members’ meetings. We have promoted ‘Our Vision for Parkgate’ in collaboration with the local authorities in order to identify areas of improvement which will benefit local residents and visitors alike, bearing in mind the importance of the visitor economy to the area.

Our Aims

The aims enshrined in ‘our vision’ are as follows:

- (a) To promote the conservation of the historic character of the village, its buildings etc;
- (b) To promote knowledge about and awareness of Parkgate’s historic past;
- (c) To promote Parkgate as an attractive place for both residents and visitors;
- (d) To promote efforts to keep Parkgate tidy; and
- (e) To prepare Parkgate for entry in the Cheshire Community Pride competition.

It is our view that the Conservation Area should have a unified appearance with appropriate heritage style street lighting and street furniture, with information boards explaining historical background, etc. We have established a team of volunteers – the Society’s Community Spirit Team – to act as a task force, to carry out litter picking, weeding communal areas and trimming back vegetative growth, flower planting, etc. We promote our aims and views, where appropriate, through our links with Neston Town

Council and with Cheshire West & Chester Council (CWaC). Details are set out in the attached schedule of work.

SCHEDULE

In order to achieve our vision, we have identified specific areas of the village for work to be undertaken either by the Society or by the Council working with us. Improvements have already been carried out at the Donkey Stand and gateway signage installed in Station Road and Boathouse Lane. Our further recommendations relate mainly to the Conservation Area and concentrate in particular on The Parade and the general first impressions that visitors get as they travel along the old sea front. We begin our journey near the Old Quay, at the south end of the Parade.

The South End of The Parade:-

Parkgate's former Custom House and other Georgian buildings once stood here on part of the site now occupied by The Old Quay. The slipway here is currently heavily overgrown with vegetation, which obscures the nature and purpose of the structure and detracts from the appeal of the location. This could be improved by the removal of a certain amount of the marsh and other growth. The nearby sea wall steps need to be cleared and cleaned where necessary. The small traffic island does not add to the attractiveness of the area, but it performs particular functions, so the scope for using this space as some sort of flower garden is limited. The bank in front of The Old Quay could be made more attractive. There are currently two bench seats in this area, with the potential for more.

ACTIONS: the Society to identify the potential for additional seating in this area and to seek sponsorship for these benches; and also for planter troughs with flowers; also for flower planting on the bank in front of The Old Quay; the Community Spirit Team to address problems of vegetative growth – weed slipway and tidy – sea wall steps.

The Donkey Stand:- First Priority – Work Completed

In the mid-18th century Parkgate's first Assembly Rooms stood here on what was then the shore; the building later became a seawater bathing house; following its demolition and the subsequent introduction of public holidays the site then became a place for donkey hire. This area looked un-cared for and was considered to be our priority for improvement; it required complete re-paving and re-furbishing with new benches and interpretation boards. It was decided that the new paved surface should make use of the existing cobbles or setts.

The main work was completed by CWaC in early December 2013 in time for the switch-on of a new Christmas tree and lights supplied by the Town Council; the interpretation boards were installed in July 2014.

Mostyn Square:-

This area was named after the Welsh family who owned Parkgate until 1849. It is important, as it is the geographical centre of the village, but there is very little evidence here of the Georgian period. The 'Fishermen's Church' was built as a non-conformist chapel in 1843; it has recently been re-furbished after a period of closure, and is once again open for worship and community use. The possibilities for the upgrading of this space are limited by its use as a bus turning area. The former bus shelter has been demolished, the old gateway to the Churchyard has been re-opened, a new gate is now in place and the street light has been re-positioned with a new conservation, heritage type light. Attention has been given to problems of tree growth in the churchyard. The pavement in front of the restored entrance is in need of attention, and we have suggested that it be paved using surplus stone from the Donkey Stand project. The public toilets have been re-furbished, and part of that building is now unused; the consequent reduction in capacity has resulted in the public frequently asking to use toilet facilities in the local shops. Alternative uses for this space have been considered, but we have supported

the Parkgate Traders in their request for the use of these premises to be monitored by CWaC with a view to assessing the demand for additional toilet facilities and the times of availability, before an alternative use for the vacant space is chosen. The car-park area to the rear of the toilet block is suffering from the effects of vegetative growth, and needs some attention.

ACTIONS: the Society to discuss with CW&C matters relating to the toilet block and improving the Square itself; the Community Spirit Team to address problems of vegetative growth in the car park.

The Middle Slip:-

This location was once used by local fishermen to land their boats and unload their catches, with donkey carts collecting shellfish for transfer to the railway. This area needs to be made more attractive and presentable. The slipway has been cleared of weeds and marsh, ready for an old boat to be placed on the slipway, secured permanently and made suitable for planting displays. A boat has now been acquired and is currently being made ready. We think that a historical information board should also be installed here, describing the former fishing industry and also the background to the nearby Old Watch House, which in the past was used to house Customs officers. Consideration should be given to incorporating the hatched area of roadway into the pedestrian area to improve the safety of pedestrians at this location.

ACTIONS: the Society to arrange for the boat to be installed on weeded slipway (Hilbre Society), secure it (CWaC), install lining (PS) and plant (Marsh Nurseries); also (with CWaC) design and commission the historical interpretation board; take forward with CWaC the proposal for realignment of the road and increase the size of the pedestrian area.

The Boathouse Slip:-

A shipbuilder's yard existed on the shore near here during the 18th century, and ferry boats sailed from a landing stage adjacent to the Pengwern Arms (forerunner of the Boathouse) to Flint and Bagillt until the middle of the 19th century. The encroachment of the marsh has affected the slipway, which now requires weeding and clearing; it is still required to provide access to the marsh for maintenance vehicles. A further historical interpretation board could be installed here, describing the shipbuilding industry and the former ferry service which once operated from here.

ACTIONS: the Society (in collaboration with CWaC) to design and commission a historical information board for installation here; the Community Spirit Team to undertake weeding of some of the slipway.

The Old Baths Site:-

The Old Baths is a significant site, now providing parking for walkers and bird watchers who use the area for their hobby. This area was the site of open air baths that were constructed and opened in 1923 for the use of pupils of Mostyn House School: the public were also admitted, and came in great numbers from a wide area. The silting up of the estuary between the wars led to their final closure in about 1950, when it became no longer possible to obtain the water supply from the river. The area is currently part of the Wirral Way Country Park with maintenance the responsibility of the Wirral rangers. The private road and the sea wall between the Boathouse and the Old Baths area are suffering from weed growth and the area is in general need of tidying up.

ACTIONS: the Society to consider the condition of the public information boards at this location and whether there is a case for renewal/refurbishment; the Community Spirit Team to address problems of vegetative growth, in particular weeding of the road and wall from the Boathouse to the Old Baths site.

The Sea Wall:-

The sea wall between the Old Quay and the Boathouse was constructed in phases between about 1800 and 1840. It was not built for shipping to tie up here, but as a promenade for the fashionable visitors who came to Parkgate for the sea-bathing and to enjoy the sea air, both of which were felt to be healthy and, indeed, curative. The wall also helps to support the roadway. We are concerned that the state of the wall is being damaged by the relentless growth of vegetation caused by the silting up of the estuary. The ownership of the wall is currently unknown, but the local council (CWaC) have confirmed that they will take responsibility for its maintenance. A survey of the state of the wall is to be carried out by CWaC with a view to determining what essential work needs to be carried out to stabilise the structure, following which the Society's team of volunteers will be able to carry out periodic weed clearance, as necessary.

ACTIONS: the Society to press the Council to undertake its survey and maintenance work; the Community Spirit Team to keep the state of the wall under observation and arrange further weeding as appropriate in the light of the findings of the survey.

The Parade:-

The Parade forms the spine of the village, the only through route for traffic; virtually all its significant historic buildings are situated here on the landward side, or are accessed from here. On the other side is the open marsh with wide vistas extending from the Point of Ayr and Hilbre Island via Halkyn Mountain and Moel Famau to Connah's Quay and Queensferry. It is a place where visitors flock to take in the air while they stroll its length, observe the birdlife, enjoy an ice-cream or just relax on the public seating, just as did their fashionable ancestors in the late Georgian and Victorian eras. The historic ambience is compromised to an extent by more recent developments, and we feel that opportunity should be taken in terms of street furniture to acknowledge the past; this would be the use of finger posts to give visitors directions to particular locations, and the replacement of the existing concrete street lights by heritage posts with capacity for hanging baskets. The area in front of the Mostyn House apartments is neglected; this could be converted into pavement or additional car parking spaces. The provision of additional seating and information boards has been referred to elsewhere.

ACTIONS: the Society to discuss with CWaC the need for new street lighting and furniture, including seating, and to design and commission further interpretation boards; also to press for the area adjacent to the Mostyn House apartments to be paved or made available for car-parking.

The Station Road Car Park:-

The most controversial issue in Parkgate is the problem of car parking: there is just not enough of it, so congestion is an everyday occurrence on The Parade. There is, however, an under-used facility at the Wirral Way car park in Station Road, barely 200m from The Parade. The reason this area is under-used is that it is tucked away out of sight and deemed by locals to be unsafe because of this. Opening up the area and redesigning the parking area to increase capacity, plus the provision of picnic tables, ought to change the ambience of the area and make it more inviting for people to gather here and park in safety during their visits to Parkgate. The Council (CWaC) are looking into ways of implementing this as a local priority.

ACTIONS: the Society to support and advise the Council on the drafting of plans to develop this area as a user-friendly car park with picnic tables and information point.

Other Areas:-

For local residents other areas of the village are just as important to them as those parts where visitors are concentrated. With council maintenance budgets under pressure work schedules are reduced, litter appears to multiply and weeds have the opportunity to prosper. Our Community Spirit Team is keeping these areas under observation and taking action, as appropriate, to ensure that this natural growth is kept under control.

ACTIONS: the society's Community Spirit Team to advise on problem areas and, where appropriate, carry out litter picks and trimming/weeding of inappropriate vegetative growth.

These ideas have been formulated by the Parkgate Society as a vision of work required to bring the old seafront of the ancient port of Parkgate up to standard for local residents and the many tourists who visit Parkgate, because of its history and because of its views and the interesting bird life on the protected marshes, which have ASCV and SSSI status.

If you wish to make any comments on this 'Vision', or would like to highlight a particular issue with the Parkgate Society, please contact the Secretary on 0151-336-1069 or email enquiries@parkgatesociety.co.uk.

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