



ACHIEVEMENTS

OF THE NEW FERRY COMMUNITY LAND TRUST
2018-2024

In March 2017, a huge gas explosion, the result of insurance fraud by one individual, obliterated 10 businesses in the already depressed Wirral community of New Ferry. The explosion, the largest explosion on Merseyside since World War 2, injured over 90 people – some seriously – destroying 10 businesses and the same number of homes; and damaging hundreds more residential properties including in the adjacent Port Sunlight Village Conservation Area where residents' homes took over two years to rebuild. In addition, 30 more businesses were unable to access their wrecked buildings and therefore unable to trade and no income for between 4 and 6 months after the disaster.

Even before the devastating explosion, the community of New Ferry – particularly its traditional district centre – had been in serious decline. This was, and still is, a much neglected community with multiple issues, in the worst 10% of areas nationally on the Index of Multiple Deprivation, high levels of unemployment and people on social benefits, lack of working skills, and high levels of sickness including long-term debilitating illnesses. But it has kind people who care about each other, and resilience.

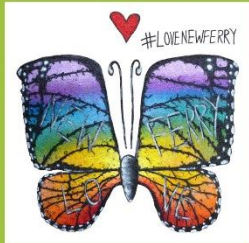
In the immediate aftermath of the explosion, then Prime Minister Theresa May promised that her government would provide whatever help was needed. That “help” never came. And one of the worst examples in the country’s history of what the North-South divide actually means became apparent. Having seen the businesses of Salisbury given financial assistance after losing just 2 weeks’ worth of trade following the poisonings there, and assistance given to residents of Grenfell who lost their homes after the tragic fire there, a delegation of residents and businesses accompanied our MP, Alison McGovern, to visit James Brokenshire, the then Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, in September 2018 to plead for the government to honour its promise to help New Ferry residents who had lost their homes and businesses. But the plea fell on deaf ears¹; the injustice leaving this community feeling abandoned, hopeless.

New Ferry Community Land Trust was born out of that despair, when a group of residents and businesses got together to fight the injustice, to try to do something that would help lift the spirits of the community, and ultimately kick-start the regeneration which New Ferry so badly needed.

¹ [Government slammed for 'cold and heartless' response to New Ferry funding pleas | Wirral Globe](#)



Justice For New Ferry



- * Actions Not Words *
- * Put Victims First *
- * Rebuild the Blast Site *
- * Support Local Traders *



JUSTICE FOR NEW FERRY

One of the first campaigns the CLT board and its Members led on was “Justice for New Ferry”. No help came from government, and even Wirral Council made mistakes in its response to the explosion and how it subsequently dealt with residents and businesses who were victims of the disaster. Wirral Council’s errors led to the government blaming them for the “inaction” in supporting those affected by explosion; whilst the council blamed the government for “unclear rules” surrounding major incidents and how they should have responded. The disagreement helped other agencies learn how to deal with subsequent disasters nationally; but for New Ferry it was too late and the whole fiasco exacerbated the desperate situation.

It took over two years of campaigning. In July 2019, Wirral Council reviewed its own response to the explosion and admitted the mistakes it had made. A compensation payment of £200,000 was finally agreed and eligible residents/businesses affected by the explosion were paid out £1,600 each,² whilst the full report into the Council’s own failings was eventually published in January 2020.³ This would never have happened without our persistence and the victims of the explosion would never have got the justice they deserved.

COMMUNITY LITTER PICKS

From November 2018 onwards, the CLT set up the monthly community litter picks. Initially concentrating on the district centre, the team of regular volunteers (between 10 to 15 turn up each month) have since spread out their clean up area to include the car parks near the centre, New Ferry Park and other patches of ground in the residential areas. Some parents even bring their children along with them. We call them our “Super Little Heroes”.

Each month, the team collects between 50 to 100 kilograms of rubbish, which is collected the following day and removed for free by a local waste company. Local pubs and cafes support the litter picks by donating refreshments for the volunteers. The team advertise their events (usually the last Sunday of every month) on social media, where they also regularly receive much praise from local residents for their efforts.

² BBC News 19 July 2019: [New Ferry gas explosion: Residents and businesses to share £200k payout - BBC News](#)

³ [Enc. 2 for Business Overview and Scrutiny Review into The New Ferry Explosion.pdf \(wirral.gov.uk\)](#)



NF CLT LAND ART



NEW FERRY CLT COMMUNITY
LAND ART WAS ENTERED INTO
THE NATIONAL LAND ART
COMPETITION CREATED TO
CELEBRATE THE TOUR OF
BRITAIN BIKE RACE, 11 SEPT 2019



COMMUNITY LAND ART PROJECT

In September 2019, Wirral hosted the start and finish of stage five of Britain's biggest professional cycle race, the OVO Energy Tour of Britain. For this prestige event, funding was made available through a National Land Art competition to local communities for "an art project" which the cyclists would pass, and the event was to be televised live to the nation. Not willing for the world to see the depressing state of our "abandoned" explosion site, which the cyclists would pass right next to, we applied for and won £1000 of funding.

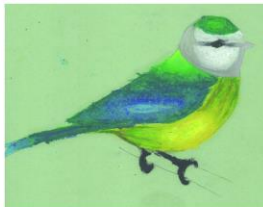
The project we devised was to purchase coloured gravel which would be laid over the foundations of the levelled buildings in the shape of a butterfly, the adopted symbol of the rebuilding of New Ferry and the logo of the Community Land Trust.

A team of volunteers spent several days carefully shovelling the gravel into position so that when the aerial helicopter passed over New Ferry, the shots on television showed our butterfly rather than what had previously resembled a bomb site.

COMMUNITY GARDEN & THE COMMUNITY ART PROJECT

Following the success of the land art installation, the plan was to re-use the gravel for footpaths on an adjacent site where buildings wrecked by the explosion had been demolished. The foundations had all been excavated and the site had been topsoiled. We had hoped to create a temporary community garden on the site until it was redeveloped. This was to include a mural, painted by local schoolchildren on the fence at the back of the site. Unfortunately, the winter weather in 2019 made the soil extremely waterlogged for over 6 months, and – ultimately – there were land ownership issues when the council could not get agreement with some of the owners of the individual terraced plots for us to use their sites. (Several of the owners were refusing to sell their land to the council for future redevelopment, and used their ownership to try to force the council to pay a much higher price to purchase it).

Ultimately, and as a result of the above, the garden was never completed as envisaged. However, we ran the art project: the children produced their designs for the intended mural, and we printed them on long vinyl sheets and erected them on the fencing at the back of the site for everyone to see.





MEL ROBERTS HOUSE – BUILDING REFURBISHMENT PROJECT

In early 2020, New Ferry Community Land Trust was awarded funding as part of the Town Centre Fund by the Office of the Combined Authority for Merseyside. The major part of the project would be for the CLT to purchase one of the empty buildings in New Ferry's district centre, and to refurbish it for both ground floor commercial uses and the upper floors as 4 residential flats. When completed, the rental income was to be used for community purposes including environmental projects and events that would help to sustain the district centre.

Parts of the funding would also be available for the CLT (whose Board were all volunteers working full time in other jobs) to employ two staff – a project co-ordinator and an administrative assistant; whilst there was also an allocation in the budget for events which the CLT could organise to use, in part, to encourage further community volunteers to step forward as well as footfall to the centre which would benefit the businesses.

The building project has not been without its problems. The Covid pandemic delayed the tendering process and the eventual start on site which didn't occur until late autumn 2020 (9 months late!). It also doubled the original cost estimates for the project and made progress extremely slow. Although the ground floor was completed and one of the commercial units let to a local business, Becky's Unique Sewing Boutique, in April 2022, completion of the 4 flats was further delayed by several structural issues within the building coming to light during the refurbishment programme, and more subsequently a significant disagreement with the original building contractor who has now been sacked. These issues are finally being resolved with the assistance of registered social provider Regenda, and the flats should now be completed in early 2025 when we will be able to let them at a time when local people are desperate for accommodation.

The funding for the two staff was exhausted in early 2022 when the building project should have completed, leaving the surviving Board members to continue progressing the project in their own time and dealing with all the delays to, and issues around, the refurbishment project – despite having full time commitments elsewhere.



ALLEYWAYS PROJECT

In early 2020 we launched the first of our programmes to inspire the local community to take more pride in their own environment with the alleyways project where we offered grants of up to £250 to groups of residents who wanted to clean up their back alleys. New Ferry has a significant problem with fly tipping in back alleys. By 2021, two groups of residents had got together and cleared their alleys of tipped rubbish and brightened them up with containers and plants that they purchased with the grant money we gave them.



"NEW FERRY - OUR PATCH" PROGRAMME

As a result of the alleyway programme offer, resident Lisa Woodworth stepped forward and offered to facilitate environmental improvements to small, neglected patches of Council owned land in New Ferry with CLT funding and other funds we were able to get. The "Our Patch" programme has become one of our successful projects with community gardens (colourful plants and other features) now firmly established on 3 sites, a Fairy Grotto on another site, and we planted daffodil bulbs at Shorefields Nature Park.





INSTALLATION AND CONTINUING MAINTENANCE OF PLANTERS

In 2019 our volunteers built timber planters which we placed in the Bebington Road precinct, and in 2021 we managed to get further funding to install bespoke planters on top of the railings along New Chester Road.

We purchase, maintain and water the plants throughout the seasons, encouraging local shops to care for the planters outside their own premises. With just a wheelbarrow and 4 watering cans, it takes one person over two hours to water all of the planters. In long hot summers, they need to do this every two or three days.

2023 was a spectacular year for the planters, with a very wet summer helping the blooms to do better than in previous years.



ORGANISING NEW FERRY'S ANNUAL CHRISTMAS LIGHTS INSTALLATIONS

New Ferry Residents Association (of which our Secretary has been Chair for over 20 years) had traditionally organised the town's Christmas lights since the mid 2000s. Funding for them used to come from the Council's Area Forum funding, but this was withdrawn in 2016 as part of severe budget cutting imposed on the council by the government. With funding an issue, it had been the intention that the CLT would take over responsibility for the lights, which we did from 2021.

The annual repairs needed (for bulb replacements) came from earnings from the summer festivals, whilst – with the flats in our building project not completed and earning an income - we had to find sponsorship to get the lights erected and taken down. This year we managed to attract sponsorship from MY Construction who will be the contractors for Regenda's £20 million redevelopment starting in New Ferry in January 2024.

We have a challenge on our hands in that following the 2023 installation, our Christmas lights are now 20 years old and obsolete, so in 2024 we will need to look at replacing the lights in their entirety.



NEW FERRY MARKETS & MARKETS STRATEGY

Part of our goal is to run events which help to bring in footfall to New Ferry's district centre. In 2019 we started organising periodic street markets in Bebington Road. When the weather was bad, we had the option to run the event inside the nearby Phabulous Community Hub building which has, since January 2022, been purchased for demolition by the council as part of the redevelopment scheme and is now no longer available to us.

We built up a rapport with local independent traders who come to support our markets and have done fairly well here. Although, for logistical reasons we haven't been able to run any markets in 2023, we will be rebuilding them from 2024 when we will also be getting support from a consultant on putting together a more detailed Markets Strategy, and when Wirral Council decide on exactly which site we can run them – since the pedestrian precinct along Bebington Road is to be redesigned and the current plans do not have any room for our markets to be run. This issue will be resolved in 2025.



NEW FERRY ARTS STRATEGY

In 2020/21, our Secretary – in his role as Chair of the Residents Association – obtained funding for two phases of a project which commissioned murals to be painted onto the fronts of several buildings in New Ferry's district centre by a well-known local graffiti artist, Paul Curtis. The project has been very popular and actually brings visitors to New Ferry to see his work.

In the summer of 2022, New Ferry CLT worked with Breaking Ground and a team of artists on an Arts Strategy for New Ferry which canvassed opinion from local residents about what kind of murals could be painted as part of a third phase.

Although the strategy was put together (with funding we obtained with help through Breaking Ground) in 2022, we will be going after funding to implement a possible third phase of murals after 2025.

ANNUAL SUMMER FESTIVALS & QUEEN'S JUBILEE EVENT IN 2022

From 2021, the CLT took over organising the annual summer festivals in New Ferry Park from the Residents Association. We brought in a funfair, stalls, organised a community dog show, entertainers, military vehicles display, and guided tours of Port Sunlight Village. In 2022 we did TWO events, the first in the season to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. We made it extra special by hiring both a Wartime Spitfire aircraft and its opposition, a German Me109 to display on the park; and life-sized dinosaurs! That one day event brought in an estimated 10,000 visitors. The subsequent summer festival followed a similar format over 3 days.



**BANK HOLIDAY
THURSDAY 2ND JUNE 2022
10.30AM TILL 4.30PM**

**BRING YOUR TEDDY AND HAVE
A PICNIC IN THE PARK**

**HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II
PLATINUM JUBILEE**

**THE GREAT NEW FERRY
PARTY IN THE PARK**

NEW FERRY PARK, LONGFELLOW DRIVE, NEW FERRY, WIRRAL CH62 5AZ

Featuring (in the Park): * Funfair * Craft & Gift Stalls * Vintage Buses * WW2 Spitfire
* Live entertainment featuring favourite 1940s/1950s/1960s songs * Donkey Rides * Spiderman
* Inflatable Assault Course * Join the artists from Hazlehurst Studios for creative arts activity
which will be used to develop a new Jubilee Mural for New Ferry * Hog Roast

In the shopping centre: * Pies, sandwiches, wraps at all our lovely food shops and cafes
* Barbecued meats at Baxters * Enjoy a drink at our welcoming pubs (no alcohol will
be on sale in the park)

Don Gentile

The Rum & Cola Girls

**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

**COMMUNITY
FOUNDATION
For Merseyside**

**New Ferry
COMMUNITY
LAND TRUST**





NEW FERRY CLT BOARD MEMBERS as at December 2023

- Margaret Kegg (Chair)
- Margaret Evans (Vice Chair)
- Mark Anthony Craig (Secretary/Treasurer)

BOARD ADVISORS

- Steve Niblock
- Anne Louise Craig
- Callum Edge
- Steve Heappey
- Neil Mitchell (Wirral Borough Council)
- Lee Parker (Wirral Borough Council)
- Jan Richardson

ENVIRONMENTAL CHAMPION

- Lisa Woodworth

VOLUNTEERS - ENVIRONMENTAL WORKS (EW), EVENTS (EV), LITTER PICKS (LP)

- Stewart Finch (EV)
- Sam Jelenski (LP, EW, EV)
- Alex Tomaszewska (LP, EW, EV)
- Jeremy Jelenski (LP)
- Gerry Evans (LP, EW, EV)
- Lloyd Whitby (LP)
- Alfie Whitby (LP)
- Tilly Whitby (LP)
- Sue Percy (LP, EV)
- John Percy (LP)
- Pauline Power (EV)
- Karen Daniels (EW)
- Peter Johnson (EW)
- Emma Sutton (EW)
- Helen Sestan-Burton (LP, EV)
- Toni Varns (LP)
- Janet Withe (LP)
- Joan Nethercote (LP)
- Ben Torr (LP)
- James Coll (LP)
- Peter Lamey (LP)
- Maisie Lamey (LP)
- Mathilda Lamey (LP)
- Lottie Lamey (LP)

