

Not another one!

The famous words of Brenda from Bristol, responding to a reporter, when told that Theresa May had called a snap general election in 2017.

Since 2018, the Trust has published: the very extensive Conservation Management Plan 2018-2028; the Five-Year Strategic Plan 2019-2024; and now the Strategic Plan 2025-28.

Multiple Plans, lots of suggested action points; the problem has been — very little delivery!

We welcome much of the content of all these plans. In this new plan, we note particularly, the intent to “place residents and our tenants at the centre of decision-making”.

We also note the expressed view that ‘resident representation on the Board of Trustees is essential’.

It is therefore disappointing that there seems to be no place for an independent Port Sunlight Village Residents’ Association in this engagement with residents.



Stop the trucks

The Council Highways Officers have yet again rejected our request for an image-based Unilever deliveries road sign to be installed at the A41/Bolton Road roundabout.

Whilst we acknowledge that Unilever provides a postcode for its Goods Inwards deliveries, many deliveries originate from mainland Europe. The final carrier to Port Sunlight may be at the end of a long chain of sub-

contracting where the goods inwards postcode has been lost.

Significant carriers are Balkan-based, with drivers having limited or no English. The only words they may be able to recognise are ‘Unilever’ and ‘Port Sunlight’.

That is why we believe an image direction sign would make the right route easier to understand quickly across different languages.

NB: Please see further comment on Unilever deliveries in the Cocky Watchman column.

BREAKING NEWS: read the full story in the Birkenhead News covering issues of lorries, speeding and tenants: <https://www.birkenhead.news/complaints-as-speeding-drivers-and-hgvs-keep-driving-through-historic-port-sunlight/>



Ticket to ride

In July 2016, Stagecoach, without consulting residents, the Council or the Trust, re-routed the 38 bus down Central Road/Church Drive. This was followed by a re-routing of the number 2 bus along the same route in the September of that year.

Following much resident opposition, expressed at a well-attended public meeting, Stagecoach withdrew both routes.

In February of this year the Metro Mayor, Steve Rotherham, announced the roll-out of the Liverpool City region’s first publicly-run bus network in nearly 40 years.

The first phase will begin in St Helens in 2026, with Wirral next, before rolling out across all six boroughs by the end of 2027.

If residents are interested in a re-introduction of a public bus service in the village, with perhaps better connections to hospitals for example, please let us know your opinion.

If the desire is strong enough for such a service we can ask to be involved in conversations with the Mayor's office.

Who owns the village?

The answer to that question, according to one long-term resident is “We do! — the residents.” **If only...**

The Port Sunlight Village Trust is responsible for all of the village’s parks, gardens, monuments and memorials, as well as the majority of public buildings and nearly a third of the houses – it is a private landlord for 292 properties. The entire village is a Designated Conservation Area and nearly every building is Grade II listed.

The Trust runs Port Sunlight Museum (including the Edwardian Worker’s Cottage and SoapWorks).

It owns and currently leases out; Hulme Hall, The Lyceum, Bridge Cottage, 23 King George’s Drive, 95-96 Greendale Road (Tudor Rose tea rooms), Gladstone Hall, Lever Club, Port Sunlight Garden Centre, Horticultural Hall, Church Hall, The Fire Engine Station, 93-94 Greendale Road (‘Nettle’ café) and 323 garages.

It also owns The Stables, 33 Boundary Road and the Boys’ Brigade Building, for which, it is seeking commercial uses.

It does not own The Bridge Inn, which is owned and operated by Greene King Inns, nor the former cottage hospital, now The Leverhulme Hotel, which was sold to a hotelier in 2008. Although readers of our first issue will remember that we wondered what the current status of this building is.

Unilever Archives indicate that there are over 900 houses and flats in the village.

Originally, occupancy of the houses was limited to employees of Lever Brothers but in 1979, residents were given the option to buy the properties they rented, from Unilever Merseyside Limited (UML), at a discount to market value.

Port Sunlight Village Trust, set up independently of Unilever, took over the running of the village from UML in April 1999.

The original business strategy of the Trust, contemplated the investment of sales proceeds from the 261 homes transferred to the Trust from UML, all of which were on secured tenancies. Over time it was hoped that this would generate sufficient financial resources which the Trust could utilise in meeting its objectives.

The Trust, duly invested substantial resources built up through the sale of property. In 2003, subsequent failures in equity values forced a fundamental review of this initial strategy and the realisation of a substantial loss in the value of investments.

Following the deterioration in investment values and returns, the Trust did not encourage further property sales.

Thus, the Trust became a private residential landlord, with the result that rental income has become the main source of funding. We believe the role of landlord was not Unilever’s original intention, nor is that outcome reflected in the original charity constitution.

Upon cessation of a secure tenancy, the Trust re-let the properties on an Assured Short-hold tenancy at an open market rental. There remains a significant disparity between open market rentals and rents certified by rent officers under secure tenancies.

In the most recent Trust Report & Accounts, for the year ended 31 March 2024, it was noted that just under 20% of the Trust’s tenants now have secure tenancies.

In the Trust Report & Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2019, it was also noted that

existing secure tenants could purchase their homes at a discount of 10% below the current market value with vacant possession. That statement has not appeared in any subsequent Trust Report & Accounts, so it is not known if that option is still available.

After initial plans were rejected, Osborne Court was completed in 2000 and comprises 40 sheltered apartments with communal facilities. Apartments change hands on the open market.

This was followed in 2003 by Philip Leverhulme Lodge, a block of 10 apartments, again bought and sold on the open market.

Manor Lodge, the former nurses’ home was converted to 7 flats in 2004. Originally intended to be sold but subsequently retained and now let by the Trust.

Particular controversy accompanied plans to develop the open sites on Wharf Street and Water Street, which had never previously been built upon, and to redevelop the bottom of Wood Street.

There was fierce opposition from local residents because of the proposed density of the housing units and the plans for a factory-style complex of urban apartments in three-story blocks.

A public enquiry in 2005 decided that the development would have a harmful effect on the traditional vernacular character of the village.

A separate planning submission in 2007, in the “village vernacular” with gabled, tiled and pitched roofs, porches, bay windows and chimneys, was approved and building began in 2008.

The development on Water Street was named Woodhead Row, consisting of 21 Flats and first lettings took place in October 2009.

A further planning application for 12 town houses on Water/Wharf Street was approved and during 2015/16 the site was piled to ensure the permanency of the planning consent.

During 2023/24 several options for the site were explored, however due to additional constraints and rising costs the future development of the site has been put on hold.

Darcy Court, another controversial development, was built in Wharf Street in 2015/16. It consisted of 58, one or two bedroom flats. It is age-exclusive rental accommodation, managed by Sanctuary Housing.

Hesketh Hall, a former Royal British Legion club, had fallen into serious disrepair when the Trust decided to have it converted into 14 'senior' apartments in 2014.

Flats in Lancaster Close and Lodge Lane are social housing, owned and run by Family Housing Association (Birkenhead & Wirral).

You will note from the Spring 2025 edition of The Port Sunlight Gazette that former Chair of the Trustees, Maggie Sparks, worked for Family Housing in the early nineties when Unilever offered the Association the opportunity to purchase 60 of these flats. According to their website Family Housing now own a total of 64 properties in Port Sunlight.

For our first issue of The Tally Ho in April we delivered to 1,066 addresses.

We believe the residential numbers to be:

The Trust (inc, Manor Lodge, Hesketh Hall & Woodhead Row)	292
Family Housing Association	64
Sanctuary Group	58
Osborne Court	40
Philip Leverhulme Lodge	10

leaving a balance of about 600 properties in private hands.

These will be a mix of owner-occupiers, private tenancies, holiday-homes, with some properties just left empty.

We are not aware of any accurate numbers that offer further clarity to that split.

Sources:

Unilever Archives

PSVT Report & Accounts, Residents Update

Conservation Plan 2018/28, Website & Gazette

Family Housing Association

Sanctuary Group

Editorial

We are the community

In the Trust's 'Have Your Say Survey 2024' respondents were asked to value the statements 'There is a strong sense of community in the village' and 'People look out for each other in the village'.

Results suggested a solid 70% of respondents agreed with both statements. However, here's the thing, only 24% 'strongly agreed', the remainder selected the much weaker 'slightly agreed'.

It is important to remember that residents are the community. A sense of community must arise from within the community itself. It can't be created by the Trust or the Council or any other external agency. They can all help but it's only the residents that can create that sense of belonging. *We would however, like to take a moment to acknowledge the great contribution Claire Bates made in building up the original Community Hub in Bridge Cottage.*

Consider this. We live in a beautiful village. Set in 130 acres of landscaped gardens with tree-lined streets (*thanks to Liam English and the landscaping team for maintaining these to such a high standard, and acknowledging the significance of community engagement*). If this village was in the south-east of England, house prices would reflect their appeal. It is a unique village with historic built heritage. The very low density of the housing is a rare exception.

We would encourage all residents to think about getting involved in our community, even if only in a very small way.

Volunteer; to pick-up litter, help with the landscaping, deliver the newsletter. Don't dump unwanted items in the service road, take it to the tip. Look out for and help your neighbours. Use your skills for the benefit of others.

Maintain the fabric of your property but, those who do undertake repairs to their homes, should do so in a manner compliant with listing rule regulations. If you rent, pressure your landlord to repair.

Come to our meetings, help us create a vision for the village.

Set up an arts group, dance group, hobby group, whatever appeals to you, that might also appeal to others.

Some of the groups that have already been set up can be found on the Trust managed Facebook page: 'Port Sunlight Village Trust in the Community' (*administrator approval required*).

Let's change those slightly agrees to strongly agrees



Thanks to the volunteers and Trust landscape team who have been making big improvements to the borders on Bolton Road

👍 Big shout-out to Laura-Jean Horton who cleared up the broken pieces of a thoughtlessly discarded glass bottle on Bolton Road

We asked Cllr. Bird to find out what became of the Plan to develop a Public Realm Strategy for the village, commissioned in 2021 by the the Trust, in association with the Council. The Planit-IE draft recommendations, were highlighted in the last issue of *The Tally Ho*. Council officers replied that because the report was never published, the Council, had no further knowledge of these recommendations. Perhaps the Trust could update us.

👎 On Tuesday, 18 Mar 25, a Leeds-based carrier attempted delivery to the Unilever Port Sunlight office site. The manifest clearly stated the Wood Street postcode. **The originator of this instruction was Unilever's own national distribution centre at Doncaster.**

Airbnb

Residents have raised the issue of Airbnbs. We estimate there maybe up to a dozen Airbnb-style, short-term let holiday properties in the village.

In 2024, the Sunak government launched a consultation on developing a short-term lets register in England.

A big reason for this was that it was not known where these properties are, who owns them, or whether they adhere to health and safety regulations.

If you let out a property on

Water meters

According to the results from the Trust's 'Have Your Say Survey 2024', only 20% of respondents have a household water meter fitted.

Many properties in the village may still have their water charge assessed using the rateable value.

Water meters are available free of charge, but for many properties in the village, these cannot be fitted because of a shared water supply.

However, this need not prevent you from lowering your charge. If you live in household premises and a meter cannot be installed, an assessed sewerage and water charge is available.

For 25/26 these are (total/year):

Single person	£395.58
Detached	£756.28
Semi-detached	£687.71
Terraced & flats	£550.47
Single pensioner	£376.36
Two pensioner	£523.42

Certain larger properties have additional charges. There are also further discounts for vulnerable groups and those receiving certain types of support.

If any of the above charges are lower than you're currently paying, please consider contacting United Utilities on 0345 072 6065.

Airbnb you currently don't have to register it or have any safety information checked.

The current Labour government is committed to introducing a register. Chris Bryant, the government minister responsible, said in January of this year that "we hope to get [the scheme] up and running this year. We want to make sure that the scheme works and delivers what people want, which is a really strong local visitor economy, but we do not want to undermine local housing strategies."

Please let us know if you have any Airbnb properties near you.

committee

founding chair	Clive Ransom
treasurer	Ian Birbeck
secretary	TBC
communications	Paul Sibbald
tenant liaison	David Foster (co-opted)
heritage	TBC
adviser	Ian Crockett

The Tally Ho

editor	Paul Sibbald
distribution	Residents; PSVT Trustees; local MP; ward Councillors; City Region Mayor's office; Community Policing Team; Unilever & local media

funding

annual membership is £2 per household

thanks to our grant providers

Wirral Together Fund (25/26 pending)

National Lottery Community Fund (pending)

connect with us

email

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✉ thecockywatchman@gmail.com

social

📘 facebook.com/groups/703823424017873/
(administrator approval required)

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We would encourage any village resident to come along to our quarterly meetings. You can raise any points of concern about the village.

There is an Agenda structure but we are an Open Forum. Everyone is entitled to express their opinion.

We do not tolerate any abuse or intimidation at our meetings.

So why not come and see for yourselves

**Our next meeting is on
Tuesday 8th July at
The Bridge Inn
starting at 7pm**