

Potted History of Knowsley

When Local Government was formalised in 1894 Knowsley was the western half of Whiston RDC with two small urban districts at the centre: - Huyton UDC (mainly round the "Village") and Prescott UDC – an ancient township famous for clock and watch making and the home of the BICC in the 20th century.

Much of the land was owned by the Stanley family who backed the right side at Bosworth as a result of which all the land forfeited by the Yorkists was given to Sir Thomas Stanley, who was further rewarded by the Earldom of Derby. In the late thirties the 17th Earl (Edward George Villiers) left his estate to his son Major Edward Stanley who died in 1938, so the estate reverted back to him and the estate was faced with double death duties, which could only be found by selling land. The main buyer was Liverpool Corporation, who acquired 1700 acres outside the city for £185,000, including Huyton, Kirby, Halewood and Cantril Farm. Most of this land was farmed land. They commenced building houses just before the Second World War in Huyton (Knowsley Lane). After the war they built further dwellings in Huyton, then Kirby in the fifties, Halewood in the first half of the sixties and Cantril Farm in the second half.

In the late forties Liverpool Corporation promoted a Bill to incorporate all these areas into the city. This Bill was opposed by Lancashire County Council and the County Clerk (Sir Robert Adcock) assured Parliament that Lancashire could and would provide all necessary services without the need for incorporation. It was a very expensive promise much to the detriment of the rest of the County, but there were 16 other County Boroughs all waiting to see the outcome of the Bill before launching their own Bills for expansions, which would have decimated the County. The outcome was that the Bill was withdrawn and an agreement reached between Lancashire and Liverpool, whereby Lancashire would accept 150,000 overspill at Huyton, Kirby, Halewood, Cantril Farm and Formby. (Though this never later happened, I wonder why?)

At the same time Whiston RDC bought most of Knowsley Village for £10,000 (Land for 300 houses, 46 existing houses, the village hall and shop and the recreation ground. The land was needed to rehouse the residents of the M.A.P estate (Ministry of Aircraft Production) which had been built during the war to rehouse the workers in the factories on the Kirby Industrial Estate. The estate is now part of the Knowsley Industrial

Estate (South). At the same time Lord Derby received planning consent for the private estates West of Ormskirk Road.

In 1958 the parish of Kirby was created an urban district, and Mr W Byron the Deputy Clerk of Whiston RDC became the first and only Clerk and that's when I succeed him, and returned to the area. In the late fifties in response to the Duncan Sandy's Circular 49, Lancashire prepared the Merseyside and South East Lancashire Green Belt, which was approved after a lengthy Public Inquiry, which I attended where relevant. In the plan the northern Boundary of the Green Belt in Whiston was the Railway Line- (Rainhill to Huyton). In the late sixties Huyton UDE applied to build the Lickers Lane Estate, between the existing dwellings, the railway line, Cumber Lane and Lickers Lane, to house overspill from the Liverpool properties in the Urban District. The application was refused, and on appeal the inspector supported that decision on Green Belt grounds. However following a civic dinner at Huyton attended by the M.P Harold Wilson, who was Prime minister at the time, and Richard Crossman, who was minister of Housing and Local Government, the inspectors recommendation was overruled and permission was granted, despite it being a major breach of the Green Belt.

In 1972 Derek Barnes applied to build from Cumber Lane northwards to Old Lane and Stoney Lane in Rainhill, which would have had the effect of joining Whiston to Rainhill. This application was also refused on Green Belt grounds and after a two and a half day hearing in 1973, the appeal was rejected.

In 1971 the Maud Report was published which recommended a Metropolitan County, for Merseyside comprising four Districts- Liverpool, Wirral, Sefton and 11c which was what is now Knowsley and St Helens. After many joint meetings of both members and officers of 11c it was clear that there was a complete division of culture of the two areas, so Harold Wilson arranged a meeting at the House of Commons with the Minister who was taking the Local Government Bill through the House (Graham Page M.P for Crosby) at which it was agreed to split 11c in half. The Western half comprised the Urban Districts of Huyton, Kirkby and Prescott and five parishes of Whiston RDC – Knowsley, Whiston, Cronton, Tarbock and Halewood, whilst the Eastern half was based on St Helens with four small Urban Districts Billington, Winstanley Haydock, Newton and Rainford plus four parishes – Windle, Eccleston, Rainhill and

Bold .The quid pro quo was Labour agreed to split Bury and Rochdale. On the return journey several names were suggested for the new authority- Bickford,Huyby,Kirton but Whiston's leader suggested Knowsley as the parish touched all three urbans and this was accepted.

In the early seventies, Liverpool proposed to export a further 22,000 population to Halewood, and in preparation for this Whiston constructed a new sewages system and extended the sewage works. However the City treasurer Mr J Salt stopped the scheme by pointing out that by exporting population they were reducing the Rate Support Grant and building new houses was adversely affecting the Housing Revenue Account.

In 1974 the Borough Treasurer and I negotiated a deal with the Liverpool officers to transfer the 26,500 houses owned by Liverpool in the Borough on the basis of outstanding debt, which was a very good deal indeed. However with the 12,500 dwellings owned by ~~the~~ ^{the} authorities, it meant that the Borough owned two thirds of the dwellings in the Borough and the element of choice came into play for the first time leading to difficulties to let properties remaining vacant and being vandalised, with the cost of repairs being excessive. This was very much the case with Cantril Farm.

Following the riots in 1981 Michael Heseltine, Secretary of State for the Environment was sent to Merseyside, and did a tour of the borough in 1982 resulting in (at his suggestion and with his support) the transfer of the Cantril Farm Estate to Stockbridge Village Trust Ltd for seven and a half million pounds (D.V.S. valuation). The trust is now Villages Housing Association. The council has recently spent twenty-five million pounds on improving the central area, so this is now one of the most attractive estates in the Borough.

Subsequently the council formed K.H.T (Knowsley Housing Trust) and transferred the remainder of its housing stock to that organisation, and that remains the position today.