

NEWSROUND

■ **PLANNING** permission has been granted to turn the former power station site at Westwood Park, Wigan into a flagship business park for the region. Central to the masterplan for the site is a 'green' concept which embraces the natural environment of the site that has flourished since the closure of the power station.

■ **CONSUMER** watchdogs at Wigan Council are urging the public not to buy furniture that is being flogged from the back of a van. Trading Standards officers say they have taken a number of calls from residents who have fallen victim to doorstep conmen selling sub-standard and possibly dangerous furniture.

■ **HIGHER** Folds community centre in Leigh has had a new extension built thanks to the Coalfields Regeneration Trust. The centre now boasts a brand new computer suite for direct learning, and new offices which have freed up the hall for hire for meetings and courses. The rest of the centre has also had a facelift.

■ **TWO** hundred of the borough's most vulnerable residents are to receive vital extra help to find work thanks to a £300,000 investment. Not-for-profit organisation Work Solutions is to deliver the services to residents with serious barriers that prevent them finding jobs. Half will be people who are recovering from mental illness.

■ **WIGAN** Council's youth offending team, which works to reduce anti-social behaviour and prevent re-offending, has been ranked among the best in the country by government inspectors. Youth offending is falling in the borough and inspectors were impressed with the team's approach to restorative justice and services for victims of crime.

What's in a street name?

IF your address happens to be Coal Pit Lane or Cemetery Road, it doesn't take a genius to work how it got its name. But what about Cob Moor Road or Flapper Fold Lane, Eckersley Street or Dicconson Terrace?

Many of the borough's five and a half thousand street names are a rich source of local history, dating from a time when they were nearly always based on local connections.

Then in the 20th century came the idea that naming roads after flowers, trees or lakes added to a property's 'saleability'. Local connections were lost in favour of a pleasant-sounding address.

Now our borough is once again reviving the tradition of naming new roads after local associations. David Heyes is the council's address manager, responsible for maintaining a database of every single address in the borough.

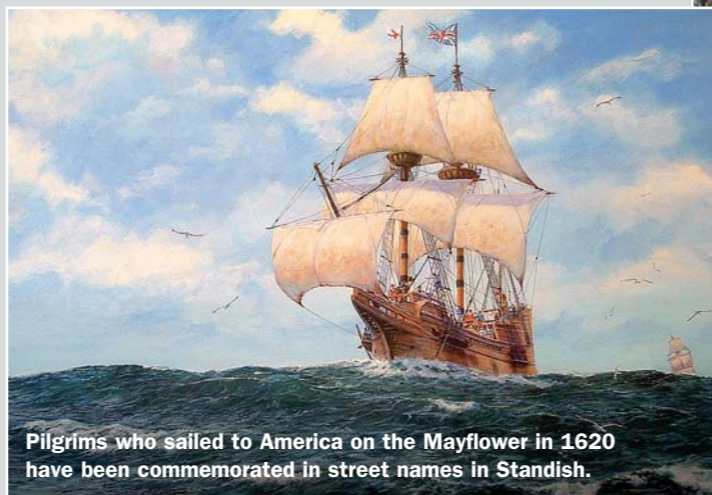
He explains: "We try to avoid single, fairly meaningless names like The Green or The Close."

"We look at history of the site. For example if there was a mill there we'll look at names associated with the workforce or products. We do extensive research."

"Recently we have given the name Crownwood Court to a road next to an old bowling green, and the name Shalefield Gardens on the Gadbury Fold estate, which was a former opencast mine."

"Another example is a new housing estate built near the site of the Maypole Colliery in Abram, which was the scene of a disaster in 1908 where 75 men lost their lives. We thought it appropriate to choose names based on those who died in the disaster."

In Standish, the streets on the Bleachworks development near to Mayflower Cottages have been



Pilgrims who sailed to America on the Mayflower in 1620 have been commemorated in street names in Standish.

named after pilgrims who emigrated on the Mayflower with America's founding father, Myles Standish.

In the past, the origins of a street name have not always been obvious – witness the tiny alley behind All Saints Church in Wigan with the exotic name of King of Prussia Yard – but now the reasons for every new street name are being recorded as they are allocated.

Says Dave: "We are reinforcing the area's local history and geography, and so when future local historians do their research, they will be able to discover why a name was chosen."

Now the council has drawn up a set of guidelines for developers:

- Names must have a connection to the history or geography of the area and not be chosen simply because they sound attractive.

- The name must not exist somewhere else in the borough – something that is vital for ensuring the emergency services don't turn up at the wrong address.

- With few exceptions, streets cannot be named after living people in case today's popular hero turns out to have feet of clay a few years later.

- Advertising names are also

out for obvious reasons, and names are carefully scrutinised for the possibility of unwitting sexual innuendo.

Changing the name of a road is fraught with difficulty. When developers built a new estate extending the existing Corporation Street in Poolstock, they wanted to rename it with something that sounded less municipal.

But as Dave explains: "Any change to the name of a road needs the agreement of all residents and businesses. When people realise how they would all have to change their deeds and pay legal fees, they soon realise it's more trouble than it's worth."

Changing house numbers and names can be contentious too. People can give their house a name but it will not be part of the official address and cannot replace the number.

Dave adds: "A number is a vital sign of where a house is. Ambulance drivers, for example, need to be able to understand where to find it. With just a name there's no way of knowing how far up the street it is."

There is one exception, though... superstitious householders may be allowed to change their house number from allegedly unlucky 13 to 11A.



STREET CRED: Council sign makers Craig Harrison, left, and Paul Butler pictured with some of their latest products.

Inset: a long name for one of Wigan's shortest streets – the obscure title has long puzzled local historians.



Did you know?

- Councils are responsible for naming and numbering all new streets, properties and homes, though the Royal Mail allocates the postcode.

- New plastic street nameplates are often made out of recycled plastic carrier bags.

- In recent years the Wigan borough crest has been added to many new street nameplates, promoting civic pride.

- Once the council has allocated a name or number to a property, the owner is legally obliged to display it.

- In Victorian times, streets were far more likely to be named after military figures, politicians and poets than they are today.

- Edwardians preferred holiday destinations like Ambleside and Lyndhurst.

- Between the wars, many roads were named after trees such as the acacia and elmwood. As suburbs expanded, developers promoted the idea that buyers were moving into a "leafy and pleasant" area.

Single database makes address sense

FOR the past few years, the council has been creating a single database of all addresses in the borough. It's part of a national land and property gazetteer designed to ensure that every house, building or business premise in the country is numbered in a consistent way.

Address manager David Heyes said: "It's a very emotive subject for many people. Traditionally, an Englishman's home is his castle and part of it is his address."

"But we used to have loads of different databases, and the same address could appear in several different ways. While this might seem pretty unimportant, it actually makes a difference – if you have just moved

into a new house and you want goods delivered you don't want to be told that your address doesn't exist."

In today's computerised world, a standard address is vital to simply to shop online, buy concert tickets or car insurance. But the new system is also helping the council become more efficient and offer a better service.

"In the past when people moved into a new house, schools had a problem with requests for a new place" says Dave. "New addresses can be activated on systems in advance of being built and the gazetteer proves it exists."

But it also has a more serious purpose. The local register is a vital link in the national

plan for a unique index of every child, designed to prevent children at risk from slipping between the complex net of agencies.

Already the police and fire are using the new database, which can help them make sure they don't turn up at the wrong address. The new system has also prevented cowboy builders giving false addresses in order to get tipping permits.

Dave and his team offer a 'one stop shop' for addresses, providing information on new houses or sorting out queries with post codes. It's a free service – contact them on 01942 404207 or email da.heyes@wigan.gov.uk