

14. LANDSCAPE

PART ONE POLICY

POLICY LAN1 - PRINCIPLES FOR LANDSCAPE

IN CONSIDERING PROPOSALS FOR DEVELOPMENT, THE LOCAL PLANNING AUTHORITY WILL HAVE REGARD TO THE VISUAL IMPACT UPON THE LOCAL AND WIDER LANDSCAPE AND WILL IN PARTICULAR:

- (i) PROTECT LANDSCAPES OF SPECIAL CHARACTER, IDENTIFIED AS AREAS OF SPECIAL LANDSCAPE VALUE; AND**
- (ii) PROMOTE THE IMPROVEMENT AND ENHANCEMENT OF DAMAGED LANDSCAPES, IDENTIFIED AS AREAS REQUIRING LANDSCAPE RENEWAL.**

PROPOSALS WILL NOT BE PERMITTED WHERE THEIR VISUAL IMPACT WOULD BE INAPPROPRIATE, IN TERMS OF THE CHARACTER, APPEARANCE AND LANDSCAPE SETTING OF THE SURROUNDING AREA.

POLICY LAN1 - REASONED JUSTIFICATION

- 14.1 The Wirral landscape, based upon the formal landscapes created by former large country estates and rural areas, natural coastal scenery, and wooded slopes related to Wirral's sandstone ridges, forms an essential part of the peninsula's natural beauty. The landscape is not, however, important in terms of visual values alone. Landscape quality also has special significance for the general image of the Borough and especially in terms of the promotion of tourism and the attraction of new investment.
- 14.2 The Local Planning Authority has a legal duty to provide for the conservation of the natural beauty and amenity of the Borough and to provide for improvements to the physical environment. Policies for landscape conservation and landscape renewal make an essential contribution to fulfilling this responsibility. Policy LAN1, therefore, sets out the general approach the Local Planning Authority will apply in order to regulate the impact of development upon the landscape.
- 14.3 National planning policy indicates that the countryside should be protected for its own sake, and the Local Planning Authority is required to highlight particularly important features of the countryside which should be taken into account in planning decisions. Policy LAN1, therefore, requires special attention to be given to preserving the character and appearance of landscapes which are considered to be amongst the most outstanding within the Borough, and to upgrading landscapes which are considered to be the amongst the worst. Within these identified areas, landscape conservation and landscape renewal will be considered to be a priority.

- 14.4 Policy LAN1 does not, however, only apply to these specially identified areas. It also extends to all proposals which are likely to have an impact upon the character and appearance of the local and wider landscape. Neither does Policy LAN1 only include proposals located outside the urban area. Even within the urban area development proposals can often introduce intrusive features which can be visible across a wide area, detract from an adjacent area of high landscape quality or lead to an erosion of the characteristic landscape setting of the urban area itself. Indeed, in areas such as Noctorum, Mountwood, south Heswall and Poulton/ Spital, the character of the urban area forms an important part of the attractiveness of the wider landscape.
- 14.5 Policy LAN1, therefore, provides for proposals which would be intrusive within the local or wider landscape or which are otherwise poorly integrated within the setting of the area to be refused. This will also be held to apply to proposals which fail to provide adequate landscaping or which would result in the loss or erosion of existing landscape features without making appropriate replacement provision.

Policy LA1 - Protection for Areas of Special Landscape Value

The Local Planning Authority will protect the character and appearance of areas designated as Areas of Special Landscape Value from the adverse effects of development and will not permit proposals which would:

- (i) introduce new intrusive development within an otherwise open setting, especially along a prominent skyline or along the undeveloped coast; or**
- (ii) result in the loss or erosion of distinctive landscape features, such as woodlands, hedges or trees, without appropriate replacement provision; and**
- (iii) other proposals which, in terms of their siting, scale, form and external appearance, would detract from the appearance of the Area or intrude within important views into or out of the Area.**

Proposals for public utilities, telecommunications apparatus, the working of minerals or landfilling of waste, may be permitted where they would not cause unacceptable impact.

POLICY LA1 - REASONED JUSTIFICATION

- 14.6 National planning policy guidance indicates that it is for local authorities to determine the more specific policies that reflect the different types of countryside found in their areas. Policy LA1, therefore, sets out the criteria that the Local Planning Authority will apply to proposals located within areas which are identified as Areas of Special Landscape Value (ASLVs).

- 14.7 ASLV's are primarily designated for their scenic importance within the Borough. They represent outstanding landmarks and other characteristic landscapes which make a prominent or positive contribution to the distinctive image and attractiveness of the peninsula. The impact of new development upon their visual quality, therefore, merits careful consideration.
- 14.8 The primary objective of Policy LA1 is to ensure that landscape considerations are given special priority when considering new proposals which may affect an ASLV. Policy LA1 does not, however, exclude new development altogether. Instead, it seeks to regulate new development to ensure that the landscape framework and distinctive character of the locality continue to be protected. Policy LA1, therefore, only restricts proposals which would be inappropriate, visually intrusive, or which would lead to the loss or destruction of characteristic elements of the landscape. These controls will also apply to agricultural permitted development, subject to Policy AG3.
- 14.9 Intrusive public utilities, such as electricity pylons and overhead power cables, insensitively located telecommunications apparatus and other activities, such as large scale excavation and the landfilling of waste, can be especially destructive to landscape character. They are, therefore, specifically identified within Policy LA1 as uses which require special control within an ASLV.
- 14.10 Where, for example, in exceptional circumstances, technical and operational considerations dictate that otherwise intrusive development *must* be located within an ASLV, the Local Planning Authority will be concerned to minimise the environmental impact of such development. This will involve careful consideration of the precise siting, design, and screening of the proposals and of other mitigating measures, in order to offset as much harm to the landscape as can be realistically achieved in each case.

Proposal LA2 - Areas of Special Landscape Value

The following areas are identified as Areas of Special Landscape Value. Their boundaries are shown on the Proposals Map. Development proposals within these areas will be regulated in accordance with Policy LA1:

1. **Bidston Hill**
2. **Dee Coast, including Heswall Dales, Thurstaston Common and Royden Park**
3. **Caldy Hill, including Stapledon Wood**
4. **Thornton Hough**

PROPOSAL LA2 - REASONED JUSTIFICATION

- 14.11 Policy LA1 provides for the protection of the character and visual appearance of Areas of Special Landscape Value. Proposal LA2, therefore, lists those areas to which Policy LA1 applies. Proposal LA2 also reflects the Local

Planning Authority's approach to use ASLV designation sparingly and only to landscapes of outstanding value within a Borough-wide context.

- 14.12 The Dee Coastline ASLV, including Caldy Hill and the Thornton Hough ASLV, were originally designated as heritage landscapes within the Merseyside Structure Plan, which was approved in November 1980. They were considered to represent outstanding landscapes of County-wide significance which merited special protection in order to minimise the potential for damage from new development. These areas still make an important and positive contribution to the distinctive attractiveness of the peninsula. Proposal LA1, therefore, continues the level of control already established within statutory development plan policy, by identifying them for protection, subject to Policy LA1.
- 14.13 Bidston Hill is the only ASLV not previously identified within the Merseyside Structure Plan. It is a distinctive ridge of high ground, clothed in woodland, visually prominent across a wide area, which rises above Bidston Moss and the M53 Motorway, in stark contrast to the extensive, lowland plains of north Wirral. It is the northern outcrop of a wooded, sandstone ridge which continues through to Noctorum, Mountwood and Storeton. In addition to its considerable archaeological and historic associations and the fine views it offers of the rest of the Borough it is also undoubtedly a feature of considerable importance within the Wirral landscape meriting protection under Policy LA1.

Policy LA3 - Priorities for Areas Requiring Landscape Renewal

Within areas designated for landscape renewal, proposals which will secure positive improvements to the visual appearance of the area will be permitted where the nature of the proposals would be appropriate to the general character of the area and especially where they contribute to the achievement of the following objectives:

- (i) the screening, removal or enhancement of existing intrusive features;**
- (ii) the re-establishment of appropriate landscape features and boundary treatment; and**
- (iii) the beneficial use of under-used open land, appropriate with other designations within the area.**

Proposals which would introduce additional intrusive development or which would lead to a further loss of landscape features will not be permitted.

POLICY LA3 - REASONED JUSTIFICATION

- 14.14 National planning policy guidance indicates that it is for local planning authorities to determine the more specific policies that reflect the different types of countryside found in their areas. Policy LA3, therefore, sets out the

criteria that the Local Planning Authority will apply to proposals located within areas which are identified as Areas Requiring Landscape Renewal (ARLRs).

- 14.15 ARLRs are areas of degraded landscape which detract from the image and attractiveness of the Borough. They are of heightened importance where they occur as extensive tracts of under-utilised land in prominent locations, easily visible from major thoroughfares and especially where they have potential to become considerable environmental assets. The primary objective of Policy LA3 is, therefore, to ensure that the need to renew the landscape is given special priority when considering applications for new uses within ARLRs.
- 14.16 While many initiatives for environmental improvement can be carried out without reference to planning powers, it is important that planning policies ease the way by establishing the land-use priorities within each ARLR. National planning policy guidance, for example, states that planning policies for areas requiring landscape renewal should seek to secure environmental improvements, allow for beneficial land-uses to be reintroduced and promote opportunities for increased public access and the provision of additional amenity for local residents. Policy LA3, therefore, seeks to reflect these concerns by restricting proposals which would lead to further damage to the visual appearance of an ARLR and by providing for new uses that will contribute towards the wider objective of landscape renewal.
- 14.17 To be acceptable under Policy LA3, proposals must also be appropriate to the general characteristics of the area concerned. For example, the Local Planning Authority will wish to differentiate between areas where the existing landscape structure no longer exists and an entirely new landscape structure needs to be established, and areas where an original landscape structure can still be recognised and merely needs to be redefined and enhanced. The significance of adjacent land-uses will also be a material consideration.
- 14.18 The Local Planning Authority may also, where appropriate, wish to consider opportunities for landscape enhancement as part of "planning gains" associated with adjacent developments, for example, by allowing greenspace contributions under Policy GR6 to be redirected to land outside the area to be developed. However, the need for landscape renewal will not be held to justify any relaxation of national Green Belt controls or policies related to other designations set out within the UDP.

Proposal LA4 - Areas Requiring Landscape Renewal

The following areas are identified as Areas Requiring Landscape Renewal. Their boundaries are shown on the Proposals Map. Development proposals within these areas will be regulated in accordance with Policy LA3:

1. **The M53 Corridor and Bidston Moss**
2. **North Wirral Plain (Moreton)**
3. **North Wirral Plain (Hoylake)**

PROPOSAL LA4 - REASONED JUSTIFICATION

- 14.19 Policy LA3 provides for landscape renewal and improvements to the visual appearance of areas identified as Areas Requiring Landscape Renewal (ARLRs). Proposal LA4, therefore, lists those areas to which Policy LA3 applies. All the ARLRs listed under Proposal LA4 were identified in the Merseyside Structure Plan, which was approved in November 1980, as areas of degraded landscape. While some progress has been made towards the aim of landscape renewal, achievements have been limited. They, therefore, still merit special consideration under Policy LA3.
- 14.20 The M53 Corridor, largely delineated by the floodplain of the Fender Valley, suffers from use as an urban services corridor. It contains two major landfill sites, the motorway, in flyover for most of its length, three major motorway junctions, the Bidston-Wrexham railway line, intrusive electricity pylons and overhead power lines, the route of the high pressure gas main and forms the final separation between the major urban areas of Wallasey and Birkenhead and the mid-Wirral settlements of Leasowe, Moreton, Greasby, Upton and Woodchurch. Remaining open land is predominantly characterised by "horsiculture".
- 14.21 Planning aims for the M53 Corridor ARLR should primarily relate to the area's role as Green Belt, maximising recreational potential wherever possible, and should relate to physical and visual improvements involving the planting of embankments and underused ground, the restoration of the landscape of formerly landfilled sites, the promotion of nature conservation, especially within the significant areas of wetland habitat in the north of the Corridor area, and the promotion of better footpath and bridleway linkages throughout the area.
- 14.22 North Wirral Plain in Moreton, is a low-lying, under-used, remnant agricultural and horticultural area situated to the rear of coastal embankments and partly within the floodplain of the River Birket. It also contains the pumping station and screening works for the North Wirral long-sea-outfall and is scarred by activities related to clay extraction and waste disposal. Highway access is poor and the area is isolated by the Liverpool to West Kirby railway line. However, its coastal location, proximity to Moreton, Meols, the North Wirral Coastal Park and local caravan sites, offers considerable recreational potential.
- 14.23 Planning aims for the North Wirral Plain ARLR in Moreton should involve limited provision for active sport, in order to serve the residential areas of north Moreton and Meols, but predominantly provide for quiet recreational use, in keeping with the coastal setting and with the nature conservation value

of the area. Passive, water-based recreation may be especially suitable given the area's liability to flood but other improvements should, wherever possible, include the re-introduction of hedgelines and trees.

- 14.24 The North Wirral Plain in Hoylake, is another poorly accessed but extensive, low-lying area in the upper Birket Valley with a damaged landscape structure. Used for waste disposal in the past but restored to essentially rough ground, the area has continued to be subject to uncertainty arising from proposals for additional landfilling. Playing pitches and a waste transfer station delineate the urban edge and further inland a former RAF camp has been returned to agricultural use. However, while access for vehicles throughout the area is poor, provision for access by foot is generally good and could be further improved.
- 14.25 Planning aims for the North Wirral Plain ARLR in Hoylake are not radical. The area has low wildlife interest, agricultural use is more extensive and scope for diversification of land-use will be limited. There is, however, some scope for enhancing passive recreational use in the area, allied to improvements in the footpath network and for the reintroduction of hedges and trees where appropriate. The retention of remaining ponds within the area will also be a priority.

Policy LA5 - Criteria for Horse Shelters and Stables

Proposals for horse shelters and stables for non-commercial purposes will be permitted where all the following criteria can be satisfied:

- (i) the development would not be intrusive within the local landscape nor prejudicial to nature conservation interests;
- (ii) the development is appropriate to a rural setting, in terms of its scale, design, materials and external appearance; and
- (iii) at least 0.4 hectares of grazing land for each horse is available at the same location.

When granting consent, the Local Planning Authority may impose a condition requiring a specific and identified area of land to be available at all times for the use of horses to be housed in the development proposed.

POLICY LA5 - REASONED JUSTIFICATION

- 14.26 Wirral has an exceptionally large horse population and the latest surveys available to the British Horse Society indicate that there is a higher concentration of horses in Wirral than in most other parts of the Country. The riding of horses and other related equestrian activities are also increasingly popular.

- 14.27 While facilities for horses, used for agricultural purposes do not normally require planning permission, facilities for the keeping of horses for purposes not directly related to farming require formal planning consent. Such uses are appropriate to be located within the Green Belt. However, the Local Planning Authority considers it is necessary to control the scale and impact of horse-related development, especially in order to prevent the erection of discordant, urban-type structures and a proliferation of poorly located stables, shelters and other related small buildings throughout an otherwise open landscape. Policy LA5, therefore, specifically provides for horse-related development to be sited in order that its visual impact can be minimised and to be constructed of materials appropriate to a rural setting.
- 14.28 Policy LA5 also specifically requires an area of open land to be set aside for the use of horses to be housed in the development proposed. This requirement not only serves to prevent over-grazing and to promote animal welfare, it also limits the number of buildings permitted within the open countryside and helps to ensure that a predominantly open aspect is retained within Green Belt areas. It is expressed as a minimum standard of 0.4 hectares for every horse, which is the metric equivalent to the one acre standard endorsed by the British Horse Society.

Policy LA6 - Criteria for Advertisements Outside the Urban Area

The Local Planning Authority will regulate advertisements outside the urban area in order to prevent the unsightly proliferation of signs, adverts, hoardings and other associated structures and to secure the continued preservation of the character of Wirral's rural areas.

In assessing applications, the Local Planning Authority will have particular regard to:

- (i) the visual effect of the proposal on its surroundings;**
- (ii) the local characteristics of the neighbourhood, including its landscape setting; and**
- (iii) the siting of the proposal, in terms of its position in relation to the public highway.**

POLICY LA6 - REASONED JUSTIFICATION

- 14.29 All outdoor advertisements affect the appearance of the building, structure or place where they are displayed and are, therefore, subject to specific regulations related to their impact on "amenity" and "public safety". This is especially important within rural areas, where the impact of an advertisement upon its surroundings can be especially significant and the character and appearance of the area can be easily spoiled by a poorly designed or insensitively placed advert. This potential for harm must, however, be balanced against the need for rural businesses to advertise their services and

products.

- 14.30 While large poster hoardings are especially out of place outside urban commercial locations, it is difficult to be prescriptive about other forms of external advertising without being unduly restrictive. Policy LA6, therefore, sets out the general principles of care and restraint that will be exercised by the Local Planning Authority in operating advert controls in such areas. These principles predominantly relate to the preservation of rural character. Policy LA6 is, therefore, designed to avoid proliferation and to ensure that outdoor advertisements outside the urban area are in harmony with their immediate setting, in terms of local land contours, landscape character and other background features.

Policy LA7 - Criteria for Development at the Urban Fringe

When considering new development at the edge of the urban area or in other locations which would be clearly visible from the open countryside, the Local Planning Authority will pay special regard to the visual impact of the proposals and will require that:

- (i) new buildings are sited, designed and landscaped, in order to minimise visual intrusion;**
- (ii) proposals for boundary treatment are appropriate, in terms of the character of the surrounding landscape; and**
- (iii) prominent features within the landscape framework of the area are retained and enhanced.**

POLICY LA7 - REASONED JUSTIFICATION

- 14.31 Policy LAN1 provides for the visual impact of new development to be regulated in terms of its potential impact upon the local landscape. Visual impact can be especially significant at the urban edge where new buildings can often be intrusive and can dominate views across a wide area of open land. National planning policy indicates that the visual amenities of the Green Belt should not be injured by proposals for development which are within or conspicuous from the Green Belt. Policy LA7, therefore, sets out the criteria the Local Planning Authority will normally apply in order to soften the interface between urban townscape and to protect the setting of the open countryside.
- 14.32 In practice, the objective of Policy LA7 can often be achieved through the careful siting and design of buildings, appropriate landscaping, and through the choice of appropriate boundary treatments. However, the retention of existing landscape features and the location and design of open space can also be significant. Policy LA7 should, therefore, wherever possible, be considered in conjunction with measures required to meet other policies within the UDP.

14.33 Relevant examples include: the requirement to set aside adequate land for landscaping or as accessible public open space, in Policy GR5 and Policy GR6, which can be found in Section 8 of the UDP; the requirement to minimise disturbance and nuisance to agricultural uses, in Policy AG1, which can be found in Section 12; and the requirement to provide a "buffer zone" to prevent damage to sites of nature conservation value, in Policy NC5, which can be found in Section 13 of the Plan.