

## Appendix 4: Site Assessment Criteria

This appendix sets out the criteria used for assessing the quality and condition of identified and new sites in Wirral. The criteria have been used to rate sites to help inform allocation in the emerging Local Plan.

The criteria reflect the local circumstances in the Wirral. Emphasis is placed on the inherent value of a site above the current conditions but these characteristics are also noted. The assessment criteria have been informed by the discussion of the local market at the inception meeting on Monday 16 January 2017, and the distribution of sites across the Wirral.

Assessments for each criterion have been made based upon the availability of information for each site. The site assessments therefore draw upon as much existing background information as possible. This is primarily information used in the previous 2012 Employment Land and Premises Study, and site specific information on planning history and viability. Information from other technical assessments, such as strategic flood risk analysis, have also been used where available. The site assessments build upon this existing evidence and provide a fresh perspective on an appropriate rating of each site's criterion.

Ratings can reflect a combination of different factors applying to the same criteria. A balanced judgment has to be made on an appropriate overall rating. Ratings are graded in the categories set out below, with Very Good being the highest rating and Very Poor being the lowest. Unless specified, ratings of Good, Average and Poor have been made where the site does not meet the full specification of a Very Good or Very Poor rating but instead meet some of the specification.

- Very Good;
- Good;
- Average;
- Poor; and
- Very Poor.

### Current Land Use, Land Type and Planning Status

Current land uses and land types (greenfield, brownfield and remediated) will be assessed for each site. Any planning designations or policy constraints that could affect development of the site for employment uses have also been identified. These factors may influence the suitability, viability or deliverability of the site for employment uses.

These factors have not been rated so that site assessments are weighted towards the inherent value of the site. It also supports Paragraph 22 of the National Planning Policy Framework. This states that planning policies should avoid long term protection of allocated employment sites “where there is no reasonable prospect of a site being used for that purpose” (§22).

### Strategic Road Access

For the purpose of this assessment strategic road access is prioritised towards access to the motorway network, tunnels to Liverpool, the A41 and main dock roads.

Very Good = within 1km of a junction or access to the M53.

Good = within 1km of access to primary A roads (the A41, A59, A5139, A5030, A554 [between Woodside and Seacombe Ferry Terminal and between Bidston Roundabout and Leasowe Road

only] and A553 [between Birkenhead Tunnel and Bidston Roundabout]) via good unconstrained roads.

Average = within 1km of access to secondary A roads (the A540, A552 or other secondary A roads), via good unconstrained roads.

Poor = within 2km of access to a secondary A roads.

Very Poor = over 2km from secondary A road junction or access, and/or through constrained or local roads, and/or through town centre or residential areas.

### **Local Accessibility**

Very Good = local access: via free moving good roads avoiding residential areas/difficult junctions; unconstrained vehicle access to the site with good visibility/lack of queuing; close access to range of town centre public transport services.

Very Poor = difficult or narrow road access, via residential roads, difficult site access junction, congested local roads; low level, limited range or infrequent public transport services nearby.

This includes determining whether there is a bus stop or interchange within 400m of a site.

### **Proximity to Urban Areas and Access to Labour and Services**

Primary urban areas within the Borough are considered to be:

- 1 Birkenhead;
- 2 Bromborough;
- 3 Wallasey;
- 4 Bebington;
- 5 Heswall;
- 6 Moreton;
- 7 Upton; and
- 8 West Kirby.

Secondary urban areas (Hoylake and Greasby) have also been considered but given less weight than the primary urban areas. Sites located outside the primary and secondary urban areas were rated more poorly.

Very Good = within, or with good access to, a primary urban area offering a wide range of services; and also in close proximity to sizeable residential areas providing local labour supply.

Average = within, or with good access to, a secondary urban area which offers a more limited range of services and/or has a smaller immediate residential population and local labour supply than the primary urban areas.

Very Poor = remote, isolated site outside of the urban boundary with no local services or residential areas nearby.

### **Compatibility of Adjoining Uses**

Good to Very Good = within larger employment area or no incompatible surrounding land uses.

Average = B1 use adjoining residential or other sensitive uses.

Poor to Very Poor = B2 or B8 adjoining residential or other sensitive uses.

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## Developmental and Environmental Constraints

This builds upon previous relevant site appraisals and supporting information where possible. Constraints cover a variety of issues including known abnormalities (such as electricity substations), topography, Green Belt designations and flood risk. The focus of this criterion is to test whether previously identified constraints are still appropriate and to identify potential new constraints wherever possible.

Very Good = generally level site, regular shape, over 3 ha in size; low flood risk (Zone 1); no conservation, topographical or landscape constraints on scale of development; no adverse ground conditions or known abnormal development costs; no other significant constraints on new development.

Very Poor = sloping or uneven site; under 0.2 ha, irregular or narrow shape, other severe constraints; within flood risk Zone 3; conservation, topographical or landscape constraints on scale of development; adverse ground conditions or known abnormal development costs.

## Market Attractiveness

The rating of market attractiveness for each site has been informed by a number of evidence bases, including site visits, secondary data sources on the commercial property market, and consultations with commercial agents and developers.

Very Good = high profile or high quality appearance, managed site; good site/area environment and quality of occupiers; with less than 10% of units vacant; viewed as attractive by agents or occupiers; with evidence of recent investment or development activity, strong demand, units rarely available on the site/area, the area has higher rental or land values compared to the rest of the Borough.

Very Poor = run-down unattractive appearance or location; in an area that attracts lower value uses; with over 25% of vacant space or buildings; vacant units not marketed; no evidence of recent investment; where units remain vacant for lengthy periods; and rentals or land values are low compared to the rest of the Borough.

## Viability

LSH undertook analysis on the (re)development viability for each site based on the relevant market area and site typology, along with site specific details such as past viability assessments and known abnormalities. Site specific viability reports were drawn upon where available, and the 2014 Local Plan & Community Infrastructure Levy Economic Viability Study was used to inform the overall assessment of viability.

The market areas are:

- Wirral Waters and Enterprise Zone;
- Birkenhead and Wallasey;
- Bromborough and Eastham;
- Mid Wirral (Moreton, Upton, Greasby and Woodchurch); and,
- West Wirral and other rural areas.

The site typologies are:

- Small industrial (5,000 sq ft / 465 sq m);
  - Medium industrial (20,000 sq ft / 1,860 sq m);
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- Large industrial (50,000 sq ft / 4,650 sq m);
- Small offices (out of centre / out of town) (2,000 sq ft / 190 sq m);
- Medium offices (out of centre / out of town) (10,000 sq ft / 930 sq m);
- Large offices (out of centre / out of town) (30,000 sq ft / 2,790 sq m); and
- Large urban offices (40,000 sq ft / 3,720 sq m); and
- Large distribution (100,000 sq ft / 9,290 sq m).

Very Good = sites where development is viable in the short term, potentially attracting a component of speculative development and would not need public sector funding to unlock or deliver the site.

Very Poor = sites where development is unviable and unlikely to be viable in the short to medium term, and would require a significant public sector subsidy or funding to attract development and/or unlock and deliver the site.

### **Barriers to Delivery and Timescales**

Factors that would constrain development of the site for employment uses were identified. For example whether the site was occupied when assessed, the need for infrastructure and fragmented ownership. This was informed by the commercial property market review, consultations with stakeholders such as agents, landowners and developers, and site specific information such as viability and known development constraints. Depending on the availability of relevant information the expected timescales for deliverability were assessed. Delivery of sites has been grouped into five year phases for the Local Plan (i.e. 0 to 5 years, 5 to 10 years, 10 to 15 years, and 15 years +).

### **Potential Future Uses**

The potential future use of each site was considered and taken into account any preferred uses identified in previous site assessments. This focused upon the most suitable use for the site within the current market conditions.

### **Overall Site Rating**

Each site is provided with an overall rating from Very Poor to Very Good. This was determined by assessing the rating for each criterion and factor. The overall site rating has been justified with an explanation of the main factors and their weight. Any factors which may make the site unviable or undeliverable will be specified.

The weighting of different criteria will vary from one site to another. For example a site suitable for B8 uses would place most weighting on strategic road access, whereas a site suitable for B1 office uses would place more weight on proximity to urban areas, access to labour and services, and compatibility with adjoining uses.

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