urban imprint

Density and design study

Stages 1 and 2: Summary report

Wirral Local Plan

December 2019

Project name and number:
19-027: Wirral Local Plan
Document name and revision:
19-027_rpt_001_V4_Stage 1&2
Prepared by:
BP/JG
Reviewed by:
JP/BP/MW/JHB/AF
Proof:
HS
Date of issue:
24th December 2019

Urban Imprint Limited | Company number 8059162 | Registered in England and Wales
Registered Office | 82 Reddish Road | Stockport | SK5 7QU

Contents

Executive summary

1. Executive summary

1.1. This report summarises the approach and findings of stages 1 and 2 of work undertaken by Urban Imprint and Arup on density and design in Wirral. Stages 1 and 2 seek to review the current policy position and approach to housing density in Wirral as well as that taken elsewhere. It therefore sets the broad context for the general approach to density in the emerging Wirral Local Plan.

1.2. This report first sets out the purpose of the study and the methodologies used to set this context. It also presents findings from indicators including the Council's annual statutory Monitoring Reports (AMR); recent past planning permissions and analysis; and existing policies within the existing Unitary Development Plan for Wirral. Collectively these form the baseline conditions for the consideration of future density and design policies to be included in the emerging Local Plan for Wirral.

1.3. The aim of stage 1 of this work is to establish the current approach to delivering (or managing) housing density in Wirral, as well as the context which seeks policies which introduce higher residential densities. It finds that traditionally Wirral Council has taken a fairly conservative approach to density, including a restrictive approach within some existing low density areas, requiring limited densities in identified geographical areas.

1.4. However, in recent years this trend has changed, with higher densities proposed at the Wirral Waters site as well as being more common for a number of small and medium-sized sites that have been granted planning permission. This approach is in part supported by the National Design Guide and the National Planning Policy Framework approach to making efficient use of land.

1.5. Stage 2 then looks to identify key lessons from existing UK policies which have been developed to introduce higher densities. In many cases these are based around the principles of Transit Oriented Development to identify the preferred approach to 'densification' and increasing residential densities. Policies which support both minimum density standards and 'suburban densification' have been examined and have been adopted by many authorities across the country; however, some local authorities have retained a more conservative approach to the provision of increased density.

1.6. What is clear from this work is that a step change in the policy approach to be set out in the new Local Plan will be necessary to ensure that the aspirations of national policy are achieved. The policies studied show clearly that land made available by the Plan can be used more efficiently to deliver higher densities and overall numbers. What the studies also show is that specific densification policies, focused around possible identified density zones could be delivered, to ensure that effective and efficient use is also made of small and medium sites within the urban area.

1.7. The report concludes by setting out the recommended approach for stages 3 and 4 of this workstream which seek to identify specific locations for higher density and provide worked examples of how this could be implemented in practice using local case studies.

Introduction and context

Introduction and context

Introduction and context

2. Purpose of the overall study

2.1. Overall, this study seeks to identify appropriate broad locations and a policy approach for increasing housing density. A key focus is on making the most of existing previously developed areas and those with good access to services and facilities.

2.2. Neither time nor resources exist to assess the ability of the entire Borough to accommodate higher densities, nor would this approach be in line with the way planning decisions are made against national policy context. It is therefore logical to utilise a best practice urban design and transit orientated approach to hone in on those areas most able to accommodate higher densities, and to focus upon how this might be done more effectively. Overall, the aim of the study is to locate development in sustainable locations and to explore ways in which urban intensification and higher densities can maximise the potential that any new residential development provides. This study will help shape the policy-led approach that will achieve this aim through the Wirral Local Plan.

2.3. The National Planning Policy Framework (hereinafter known as the 'Framework') places a strong emphasis upon achieving appropriate densities and making efficient use of land (paragraph 122). Ensuring that optimal use is made of available sites is considered particularly relevant when there has been a shortfall in meeting identified housing need or where areas are particularly constrained. The Framework refers to a balance existing between efficient use of land and the importance of maintaining high standards of design in development. This study therefore has sound urban design principles at its heart when assessing how densities can be increased across Wirral.

2.4. The National Design Guide (published in 2019) provides guidance on how density should respond to its context, placing particular emphasis on accessibility, proposed building types and local character. Walkability and access to services are encouraged through the design of compact forms of development, citing an 800m radius (10-minute walk) as an appropriate walking distance to local facilities. The document also provides a series of good practice examples where high densities have been achieved without compromising liveability and quality of place.

2.5. This density study relies on a wide range of evidence to ensure that it is based on best practice and sound urban design principles. This baseline part of the study reviews the Borough's historic approach to design, density and amenity in conjunction with an analysis of best practice examples of how other authorities have increased densities, both from a design-led and policy-based perspective. These also provide examples of how related considerations such as design and amenity can be balanced with increased density.

2.6. The eventual aim of this study will identify a series of categories within which different types of densification will be appropriate. These will be referred to as 'density zones' and will enable land to be categorised according to its proximity to transit stops, services and facilities. The density appropriate in each category of density zone will vary depending on the characteristics of the geographical area involved. For example, a higher density will be more appropriate on land within existing settlements compared to areas on the periphery of settlements. This

analysis will be map-based using existing GIS datasets relating to the location of key services and facilities such as railway and bus stops, in addition to constraints such as environmental designations and protections and opportunities provided by assets such as public open spaces and recreation facilities.

2.7. In conjunction with data from the 2019 Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA), Annual Monitoring Report (AMR), and consultation under Regulation 18, the outcome of the study will be a recommendation on how and where urban densification may take place and how policy should be formulated to ensure a design-led approach.

3. Wirral context

3.1. In order to understand the approach taken towards density and densification in Wirral, and then to make recommendations for change, where appropriate, it is important that current planning and development context in Wirral is appreciated.

3.2. The current identified local housing need for Wirral is (November 2019) 800 dwellings per annum, equivalent to some 12,000 new homes over the Plan period, which is higher than previous average delivery. Whilst a good deal of Wirral is within existing urban areas, all the land outside this is within the Green Belt.

3.3. This places a strong requirement to ensure that all possible opportunities are utilised for delivering housing growth within existing urban areas. There are some notable differences in character between the three areas of the Borough: 1. the principal urban areas of Birkenhead, 2. the urban areas to the east of Wirral, arranged along the main transport routes, and 3. the larger urban settlements to the west which have the character of large villages.

3.4. Traditionally, many of these have a suburban character, with many communities being built to a medium-low density comprising either late Victorian townhouses or villas arranged along the railway lines or 20th century semi-detached dwellings. This means that whilst many of the areas have a strong urban form, the density is relatively low, at somewhere between 20 and 30 dwellings per hectare (dph). Some areas of higher density terracing within Birkenhead are also evident but these are less prevalent. However, in these locations, traditional densities appear to achieve a density of no more than approximately 50 dph.

Introduction and context

3.5. These relatively low density urban areas are well connected to public transport, including a high frequency rail network and a number of high frequency bus routes. There is also a strong network of retail centres from small shopping precincts to larger 'town centres' and a wider range of social and community infrastructure which offers strong possibilities to explore sustainable development opportunities within these urban areas. In fact, the lower density which characterises many of these areas is surprising given the excellent transport connections and access to community infrastructure.

3.6. The traditional focus of policies in Wirral has been to rely on the delivery of larger, urban brownfield sites, often within Birkenhead and around former dockland sites, many of which have potential as mixed-use developments with high density, allowing other urban areas to retain their existing character and density. The Wirral Waters project, focused on a series of dockland sites at the heart of the older urban area, has demonstrated through recent planning applications and permissions that there is some appetite for high density, mixed use waterfront developments. However, there is also a network of smaller previously developed sites around the edges of many of the retail and commercial cores. The Council has released very few greenfield sites in the past decade, to safeguard the Green Belt and those which have become available have been developed at densities similar to the surrounding lower density suburban areas. Wherever greenfield sites are to be used, it is vital that efficient use of that land is also secured.

3.7. A review of the Council's brownfield register (2018) highlights a wealth of small and medium sites throughout the urban area which may contribute to the delivery of these housing targets. Away from Birkenhead and these town cores, a number of sites identified in SHLAA also offer opportunities to explore the delivery of small and medium sites to come forward within the urban area. The fact that these small and medium sites exist and have been identified in the SHLAA and brownfield register means they can be considered to be developable and deliverable for the purpose of housing supply, and preparing such a positive policy climate for this type of development at higher density has the potential to help towards meeting identified housing need within the existing urban area.

Introduction and context

4. Simplified methodology and focus for this study

4.1. The approach taken for stages 1 and 2 comprises 5 elements. Each of these is set out in detail in the subsequent chapters of this report. These are:

- Studying of national policy and guidance position regarding densification and design through review of the Framework and National Design Guide
- Understanding the contemporary and historical approach to development density in Wirral through local policies currently in operation
- Understanding how this has related to the delivery of housing, and housing densities over the last three years through reviewing housing delivery and supply
- Reviewing recent policy examples for densification elsewhere in the UK and the identification of possible approaches which might be used in Wirral
- Setting out likely next steps in forming approaches and locations for higher densities and suburban densification within Wirral

4.2. This work has been undertaken as an independent assessment and, whilst assistance has been provided by the planning and development officers from Wirral Council, the views and findings are entirely independent. It has been undertaken as a desk-based exercise by qualified and chartered town planners and qualified urban designers.

4.3. Specific field work and study is scheduled for stages 3 and 4 of the wider workstream.

Stage 1-The current approach to density

Stage 1 - The current approach to density

Stage 1- The current approach to density

5. National policy and the attitude towards densification and intensification

The National Planning Policy Framework 2019

5.1. Of particular relevance to this study are Framework chapters 11 and 12, 'making effective use of land' and 'achieving well-designed places'. Chapter 11 identifies that policies and decisions should ensure an effective use of land meeting the need for homes, whilst safeguarding and improving the environment and promoting safe and healthy living conditions. Chapter 12 similarly supports developments which are sympathetic to local character and history, whilst not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change, such as increased densities.

5.2. Significantly with regards to this study, the Framework sets out that, where there is an existing or anticipated shortage of land for meeting identified housing needs, it is crucial that homes are not built at low densities. To achieve this, planning policies should optimise use of land in meeting housing targets, which should include minimum density benchmarks for locations well-served by public transport. These standards should represent a significant uplift in the average density of residential development in these areas, unless it can be shown that there are strong reasons why this would be inappropriate.

5.3. The Framework emphasises that the use of minimum density standards should also be considered for other parts of the plan area and that it may be appropriate to set out a range of densities that reflect the accessibility and potential of different areas, rather than one broad density range.

5.4. The Framework gives substantial weight to the value of using suitable previously developed land within settlements for homes and supports the development of under-utilised land and buildings, especially where land supply for housing is constrained. This specifically includes a reference to converting space above shops or residential premises, and building on or above service yards, car parks, lock-ups and railway infrastructure. In particular, Chapter 11 notes that upward extensions where the development would be consistent with the prevailing height and form of neighbouring properties and the overall street scene, should be allowed provided that they are well designed and comply with local policies and guidance.

5.5. It also stipulates that local planning authorities should support proposals which use retail and employment land for homes in areas of high housing demand, provided this would not undermine key economic sectors or sites or the vitality and viability of town centres, and would be compatible with the Framework. It is therefore worth considering this in line with work being undertaken by others on retail capacity and on reviewing the existing employment sites within Wirral.

5.6. The Framework (paragraph 122) requires developments which seek to make efficient use of land to consider:

a. the identified need for different types of housing and the availability of land suitable for accommodating it

b. local market conditions and viability

Stage 1- The current approach to density

c. the availability and capacity of infrastructure and services – both existing and proposed

d. the desirability of maintaining an area's prevailing character and setting or promoting regeneration and change and,

e. the importance of securing well-designed, attractive, and healthy places

5.7. This study is focused upon setting out the local relationship between these five considerations.

5.8. The Framework, for the first time, places significant weight on the ability of smaller and medium sized sites to deliver housing land supply (paragraph 68). While it is not the role of this study to identify these, the Wirral Brownfield Land Register does highlight that there is a ready supply of these sites within the built-up area and securing their effective use is essential to this study.

The National Design Guide 2019

5.9. The National Planning Policy Framework highlights that creating high quality buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. The purpose of the National Design Guide, published by the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MCHLG) in 2019, is to illustrate how well-designed places that are beautiful, enduring, and successful can be achieved in practice, and will be afforded weight in the decision-making process.

5.10. The Guide identifies 10 clear characteristics signifying the Government's key priorities for well-designed places and contains overlapping principles. The guidance suggests that in cases where the scale/density of a new development is very different to that existing, it may be appropriate to create a new identity rather than scale up the character of an existing place. The Guide therefore supports approaches which establish new character, especially when a place is deemed to have few positive qualities, as well as those which protect and preserve existing character.

5.11. This suggests an appetite for introducing new character as part of larger developments, rather than relying solely on what has gone before in terms of density. The Guide also notes the importance of compact developments in supporting local transport and facilities and the opportunities a site presents should be carefully considered; this may be for delivery of greater density despite the traditional approach in the wider area.

5.12. The Design Guide also places emphasis upon delivering mixed-use places in order to provide for the needs and aspirations of communities. While the focus of this study is upon the delivery of residential units, there may well be some sites across Wirral where delivery of mixed-use development is the most appropriate way to meet housing numbers.

5.13. The Design Guide also recommends using local resources such as schools, nurseries, community facilities, parks, health, and religious or cultural facilities in layouts to promote social interaction and integration, also helping to combat loneliness. The approach to this study accords with this concept, identifying areas with good services and connections as key areas for densification.

Stage 1- The current approach to density

Key matters for consideration

5.14. It is clear that appropriate density and efficient land use is now a cornerstone of the national policy agenda. However, densities of new development should not be the only focus of this work: looking at how existing townscape can contribute is equally important. Clearly, where identified in areas of specific housing need, the use of minimum densities is a sensible and supported policy approach that should be investigated as part of the process.

5.15. In Wirral, where there are a number of smaller, previously developed sites within the urban area, well served by public transport and services. National policy seeks to encourage the efficient use of these types of site to meet local housing growth. It is therefore incumbent upon housing policies for design and density, to have a strong focus upon delivering these types of smaller and medium sized sites.

5.16. The importance of local character is clearly defined within both the Framework and the National Design Guide. The commentary above recognises a tension between retaining the prevailing character and creating new character through density and design approaches. In Wirral, the current approach has markedly focused upon retaining existing character (see the following section) rather than upon the creation or adaptation of character. Flexibility in approach to character should therefore now form an integral part of this policy development process in Wirral.

6. The existing policy approach to density in Wirral

6.1. This section of the report summarises the ways in which housing density has been considered in policy and decisions over the past decades in Wirral. This sets the baseline context for the new Local Plan in terms of how density has been viewed to date and the extent of its influence upon existing development within the Borough.

6.2. The approach towards density within Wirral has been largely shaped by policies within the adopted Unitary Development Plan (UDP). Local decision making and documents such as SHLAA reflect how this has been put into practice as part of wider spatial planning considerations.

6.3. The UDP policies take a cautious approach to density but do seek to encourage the reuse of underutilised land and buildings. Density guidance is also affected by consideration of other policy and designation constraints, such as ecology, heritage, landscape, local amenity and Green Belt. The ways in which these potential constraints have been weighted in decision making is unknown and will be considered within further work. Whether Green Belt should be viewed a constraint is debateable because Green Belt is a land use policy designation and not a constraint similar to an ecological or heritage designation albeit that national policy seeks to preserve the openness of locally designated areas.

6.4. Policies HS1 and HS4 of the UDP identify areas for housing growth grouped by district. UDP Policy HS1 identifies proposed housing allocations and sets out the amount of land and number of units allocated within each. The proposed densities range from 17 dph to 55

Stage 1- The current approach to density

dph. The average density for all sites across the 14 districts is only 29 dph.

6.5. UDP Policy HS5 sets out different design and density guidelines for seven neighbourhoods. Each of these neighbourhoods has some conservation value but not all are designated conservation areas. These neighbourhoods are split into zones within which different densities are considered appropriate. For example, low, medium and high-density zones might be suggested at 10 dph, 25-30 dph and 30-60 dph respectively. Within Policy HS5, higher densities are encouraged only for sheltered housing and nursing homes. All schemes are subject to standard qualities of privacy, access, character and parking.

6.6. The conversion of buildings into flats is encouraged across these UDP policies. The building of new flats is however, not encouraged. In addition, the policies seek to ensure that the sustainability of the location in which flats are proposed is taken into account. Green Belt is also listed as a constraint for this form of development. Flats are encouraged in only one of the neighbourhoods in Policy HS5. These new buildings are, however, limited to only three storeys in height and as a result, the higher density levels, which flats can offer, are not reached.

6.7. Whilst the UDP policies do consider how different densities are appropriate in different areas and how different characteristics and constraints should be taken into account, the policies do little to encourage any densities higher than 55 dph. The true average of what the policies promote is closer to 30 dph with a large proportion of allocated sites seeing a much lower density. Whilst in some parts of the Borough this may be appropriate, this approach is at odds with the overarching strategic aim of repurposing underutilised land and buildings (UDP Policy URN1), as efficient use of land is not being encouraged, particularly within urban areas. This is contrary to the overall approach now being sought by chapters 1 and 10 of the NPPF (2019).

6.8. The 2016 SHLAA methodology is the most up to date publication setting out how Wirral have assessed density in the past and can be used as a guide to the historical approach to density. In the case of the SHLAA, density has been used to determine theoretical yields from new development undertaken on a site by site basis. The actual approach considers many factors carefully, but the density multipliers used are very low, partly due to the conservative nature of existing policies regarding density.

6.9. Whilst there is discussion of densities as high as 50 being used, the SHLAA takes a cautious approach of 30 dph in most cases and 20 dph in conservation areas and on greenfield sites when calculating the potential capacity of the future land supply. These are very low densities in the context of the local character. This is, again, mindful of the UDP policy approach which, as mentioned, predominantly seeks to limit densities to preserve local character.

6.10. In calculating density based upon site area a gross-net ratio has been used. There are three scales of site considered; less than 0.4 hectares; 0.4 – 2 hectares and in excess of 2 hectares; with each scale having a different gross to net ratio to accommodate supporting facilities. These are predominantly to reflect on-site infrastructure and policy requirements, for elements such as open space and take account of other on-site constraints such as trees, woodlands and ponds and arise from the Council's baseline viability study, following consultation with the building industry. The effect is that when yield has been calculated

Stage 1- The current approach to density

on the larger sites, the assumption of a 25% reduction in the useable site area has already been made. While density calculations should take account for space for roads, parks, and other infrastructure, there is potential for this approach should be revisited and explored further.

6.11. The SHLAA assessment also includes a mixed-use factor with a reduction in site area of 50% and 30% to account for development in employment and retail centres respectively. Whilst the incorporation of a mixed- use component appears to be sensible, these percentages are based upon the old UDP 2000 land use designations and seem large. This element also needs to be reviewed in line with employment land and retail requirements and the necessity to identify sufficient urban housing allocations as part of the emerging Local Plan.

6.12. It is therefore likely that density assumptions and the eventual capacity of certain sites is being undervalued in the calculation of the future land supply. The following section considers how this assumption has been borne out with permissions granted over the last 3 years (in the period since these assumptions were first made).

6.13. In terms of compliance with national policy, the approach set out within the UDP and the 2016 SHLAA no longer marry with the overarching aim of making the best and most efficient use of land. This is particularly relevant for Wirral due to the potential shortage in housing supply across the Borough. The Framework seeks to encourage creative solutions to increase density such as the development of underutilised land and solutions such as the conversion of space above retail units for residential use. This guidance is framed within the context of ensuring good design and sensitivity to local character.

6.14. The Wirral approach to date has been cautious and driven primarily by matters of conservation and character and by a desire to not over-estimate the future land supply. As a result, the densities proposed within policy and via the SHLAA have been particularly low. What has been lacking is an allowance for creative solutions which achieve higher densities, particularly on brownfield urban sites and within suburban areas, whilst ensuring appropriate design and response to context and character, as promoted within the Framework.

6.15. One such solution is the increased use of retail and employment land for housing where a shortfall exists. Historically this approach has not been entertained in Wirral but might now be an appropriate option to consider within the emerging Local Plan.

Key matters for consideration

6.16. The approach of the UDP to low- density areas should be reviewed in the light of the potential shortage of viable urban housing land and guidance within the Framework. The densities set out within the UDP are low and miss opportunities for sites within these areas to contribute more significantly to the housing land supply within largely sustainable and accessible locations.

6.17. The emerging Local Plan policies should take a more pragmatic approach to densities across the Borough and encourage creative solutions of densification within existing areas, the use of redundant or allocated employment sites for housing and overall should seek to ensure a more efficient use of particularly urban land.

Stage 1- The current approach to density

6.18. An understanding of how higher densities can be achieved whilst appropriately taking account of local context and character should therefore be sought.

7. The track record for delivering higher densities in Wirral

7.1. As part of this assessment, it was important to establish recent trends in housing delivery outcomes in Wirral and an analysis of data within the Council's annual Monitoring Reports (AMR) was carried out.

7.2. The purpose of this element of the analysis was to establish the recent trends in housebuilding densities across Wirral, considering both greenfield and brownfield sites, as well as large sites (over 0.4 ha) and small sites (under 0.4 ha). Changes of use and conversions to residential have been included alongside new build developments. The findings have also been categorised into sites where development has commenced and those not yet started, as they exhibit different patterns of development and density.

7.3. The analysis of AMRs between 2017-2019 is shown in full in Appendix 2; however, the key findings are summarised here:

- Across the three years studied, higher densities have been achieved on brownfield sites than greenfield, averaging 91 dph versus 21 dph respectively. This suggests that greenfield sites are being used inefficiently.

- Considering the size of sites, smaller sites (under 1 hectare) have delivered higher densities but have been noticeably slower in beginning their development. Larger sites, especially those with the lower density proposals, have been more likely to begin their development.

- In terms of the future housing supply, a very large number of high-density homes

Stage 1- The current approach to density

are potentially expected to come from Wirral Waters, although more recent details and reserved matters applications have seen a much lower density than originally envisaged. In 2019, houses granted outline or full permission at Wirral Waters made up some 67% of these housing numbers. At the time of writing, none of these have yet commenced.

- Outside Wirral Waters, the average density proposed for 2017-2019 (including new builds, change of use and conversions) was closer to 69 dph, although much of this is provided by smaller sites.

- If only new build proposals are considered (i.e. excluding conversions), the average density across the 3 years is far lower at 33 dph, but this also indicates how encouraging changes of use and conversions can assist in the delivering of higher densities.

- If only new developments which have been started are considered, the actual average density being delivered during 2017-19 is approximately 29 dph, which is incredibly low.

7.4. When compared to the densities set out within the adopted UDP there is some difference between policy approach and decision making. Brownfield sites appear to be delivering higher densities than anticipated in the UDP, which sets a maximum density of 55 dph. The average of 21 dph on greenfield sites, however, lower than the average of 30 dph anticipated within the UDP.

Key matters for consideration

7.5. This evidence clearly shows that in the past three years, notwithstanding the policy context at the local level, higher densities have been brought forward in a variety of planning applications. However, the contribution made by smaller sites and conversions towards achieving higher densities is masked by the sheer number of dwellings approved with outline permission at lower densities on larger sites. In fact, the biggest contribution to higher density development is from the smaller sites, particularly from conversions to existing buildings and from smaller sites where higher numbers of units are often required to allow for viability.

7.6. Larger sites have been less effective (if we exempt Wirral Waters) in delivering the higher densities proposed, and the densities delivered on greenfield sites have been typically 21 dwellings per hectare which is considered very low and below the typical existing density of many of the surrounding suburban areas. These sites make up the majority of the delivery from new build properties. If higher density is to be addressed, and land used more efficiently to deliver the identified housing needs then it is to these larger urban sites that we must draw our attention.

7.7. In developing the policies to support the new Local Plan, care needs to be taken to continue to support the role that conversions, extensions and small sites make to the delivery of both units and higher density, while ensuring that larger sites are refocused onto the delivery of higher densities both at outline and reserved matters stages of the planning process. It may be that the policy context for such larger developments, where viability and deliverability is very different to smaller sites, is one of the major drivers for such an approach.

Stage 2:Best practices approach to density

Stage 2: Best practices approach to density

Stage 2-Best practice approaches to density

8. Other policy approaches to density

8.1. This assessment seeks to examine different types of existing and emerging planning policy from England, predominately during the last three years, to examine several different ways in which policies approach the issue of density. The policy reviews below have been arranged in order, beginning with rather 'conservative' approaches to density, to more updated approaches which focus upon targeted areas and higher densities. The final two elements of this study are detailed design-led Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) which have been recently delivered for both an urban and a rural area (Croydon and Essex respectively) and are informative in understanding the possible design approaches to density being used elsewhere.

8.2. The following encompasses four levels of possible density policies:

- A typical policy-led approach to density, found in other nearby local plans
- A specific blanket minimum density policy from Brighton and Hove
- A density policy focused on transport and accessibility; the emerging London Plan
- An integrated urban design and density policy including densification; the Croydon Plan

8.3. Each level is assessed in terms of the main features of the policy approach and its relationship to housing numbers, delivery and overall placemaking, before considering further its benefits and drawbacks. The lessons learnt from this can be used to set out a methodology and policy direction (using the options process) to arrive at appropriate intensification and density policies within the emerging Wirral Local Plan.

Standardised local approach

8.4. The approach to density and intensification in the north-west is perhaps best showcased in the now comprehensive Cheshire West and Chester Development Plan which comprises Strategic Policies (2016) and a Land Allocations and Detailed Policies Document (2019). The term 'density' is used very infrequently, and the word 'intensification' is entirely absent, which is not uncommon in policies drafted during the last 15 years in and around Cheshire, Merseyside, and Greater Manchester.

8.5. In fact, the Cheshire West and Chester Development Plan appears almost restrictive of higher densities and certainly intensification, of existing urban areas. Policies within the Plan have the effect of limiting sub-division of larger plots and back land development, redevelopment of redundant employment sites without significant evidence, and even the town centre regeneration policies (for Northwich and Winsford) lack any consideration of increased densities. As a result, housing need is delivered simply by supplying sufficient sites to meet the identified need using a density multiplier and a 'historic' windfall approach.

8.6. References to density are carried within the general design policies apparently as a response to context, and within specific allocations identifying overall housing numbers and these suggest that densities should 'reflect surrounding context'. There are no maximum or minimum density requirements, although the housing numbers suggested for allocated sites are only

Stage 2-Best practice approaches to density

minimum figures – albeit to suggest otherwise would be in conflict with guidance as it stood at the time of adoption / examination. The onus on the applicant is to ensure that density is commensurate with the surroundings with no specific quantifiable measures given.

Potential Benefits:

- Successfully relates the design and density issues of new applications
- Allows flexibly in approaching density to be determined by the decision maker
- Has the ability to provide detailed guidance on design and density through allocations

Potential Limitations:

- Requires higher densities to be more robustly justified than lower densities thus encouraging lower densities
- Wider policies in the plan discourage urban intensification so leads to a reliance on new 'sites'
- Lacks minimum density tests so doesn't focus sufficiently on efficient use of land as required by the NPPF (2019)
- Standardised blanket density in supply calculations is not locally sensitive

8.7. There are some emerging plans locally which refer to 'making efficient use of land', such as the Cheshire East Site Allocations and Development Management Policies Document (SADPD) and some strong densities indicators in the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework. However, neither have passed examination and cannot as yet form a strong format for how to progress policies in Wirral.

Brighton and Hove City Plan (2016)

8.8. Whilst based in the context of the 'old' National Planning Policy Framework, the City Plan has a very useful Housing Density Policy (CP14). In addition to a series of design criteria, the policy sets out a series of minimum density standards for specific locations in and around the city, including specific high density 'Development Areas' with a net density in excess of 100 dph and elsewhere within the Borough, 50 dph. Of course, this causes some conflict with lower density areas where such a character would be unlikely to be acceptable, such as in conservation areas, and as such the onus then falls upon applicants to justify why they propose a decreased density.

8.9. This approach to identify high density 'development areas' is based upon detailed design work undertaken in these zones including many masterplans with and without developer support. In addition, a high baseline density across the whole city, coupled with a number of sites being available and identified within their SHLAA, allows for some significant contribution to the overall housing numbers, set out in CP1. CP1 also asserts that opportunities for conversions, infill and redevelopment should be encouraged towards this target.

8.10. The Council were able to demonstrate historically higher densities on past planning applications which helped to evidence the densities they achieved as deliverable. Here, 85% of the planning applications had achieved a density of 50 dph or above, which further showed their policy approach. However, in this case, the prevalence of sites, coupled with a latent demand, was instrumental.

Stage 2-Best practice approaches to density

Potential Benefits:

- Clarity for the decision maker with clear minimum density requirements to make efficient use of the land
- Identification of key areas where density and taller buildings would be acceptable to actively encourage higher density zones

Potential Limitations:

- High density areas identified following significant design and master-planning activities associated with the plan development (evidence)
- Higher density overall included potential conflict with lower density characters
- Required significant engagement with local developers / agent on matters of design and in providing a detailed justification of approach
- Relied upon historical higher densities provided across the city as evidence for the ability to achieve the minimum densities

Emerging London Plan (July 2019)

8.11. The emerging London Plan has now been amended following its examination and republished (July 2019). It has a very comprehensive design and density policy (D1 – Form, Character and Capacity for Growth) which is split into a number of smaller sub-policies, which collectively offer guidance for plan making and decision taking. The policy states that decisions about growth and capacity should be made following a review and appreciation of the qualities of different areas, which offers some useful guidance for others seeking to identify areas of higher densities.

8.12. Sub-policy D1A states that higher densities and growth should be focused in areas that already benefit from existing infrastructure (public transport and community services) or where this is planned. Connection and accessibility to these facilitates and services are seen as a key determination factor and reference is made to the longstanding technique of the PTAL ratings (Public Transport Accessibility Level) when making decisions about appropriate locations for high density. The policy identifies that areas closer to public transport should have higher densities.

8.13. Sub-policy D1B focuses on making the optimal use of land, and like the Brighton Plan, sets out a series of clear design criteria, but significantly, states that applications not making the best use of land should be refused. This shifts the decision from the applicant (as in the Brighton and CWaC policies) to the local planning authority. It states the plan should identify local development capacities for sites. It requires a range of different density measures from applicants to ensure there is a complete picture of density measure such as units per hectare, habitable rooms per

Stage 2-Best practice approaches to density

hectare, bedrooms per hectare, bed spaces per hectare, which allows a decision maker to factor in amenity and quality of life.

Potential Benefits:

- Sets out a clear series of indicators for higher density areas (but allows plans and applicants to demonstrate how they have achieved this)
- Includes elements of optimal use of the land on all developments linked to design characters
- Clearly links high quality transport and community infrastructure to the development of higher density areas
- Introduces the opportunity to identify areas for high density where investment in community or transportation infrastructure is to occur
- Considers various measures of density to produce a full picture of the nature of potential development

Potential Limitations:

- Operates on universal London-wide, existing measures, such as PTAL rating
- Relies on local plans and other organisations to identify areas that are to achieve higher density
- Relies on local authorities to make the decision about acceptability and requires them to assess each scheme from scratch rather than rely on the applicant

Croydon Local Plan (2018)

8.14. The Croydon Plan takes a very complicated approach to density and design split across policies SP4 (Urban Design and Local Character) and DM10 (Design and Character). The first elements of policy SP4 are relatively standard, including requirements for developments to respect local character, but the policy goes on to link areas that are suitable for tall buildings and offers support for well-designed tall buildings in the Croydon opportunity area, district centres and areas which are well connected to the opportunity area. A detailed framework has been prepared for the 'development area' which helps to evidence this approach.

8.15. SP4 couples these design criteria and the encouragement of taller buildings with protection of heritage assets which are mapped within the policy explanatory. New development is reminded to enhance these assets, their setting and historical landscape. The plan also identifies key views and panoramas which may be important for the siting of taller buildings.

8.16. DM10 is much more focused on density and optimal use of land. Not only is three-storey minimum height introduced as a policy test, but height, scales and mass are introduced as measures against which decisions about density will be taken. The policy also introduces a direct link to the SPD2 (see assessment below) for extensions and alterations. The policy goes on to include a wider range of measures which ensure high quality placemaking, including the introduction of standards for private amenity spaces.

8.17. Furthermore, sub-policy DM10.11 identifies a series of areas, where scale of development is to have 'focused' intensification with new development significantly larger than that

existing. These include areas directly related to railway stations and neighbourhood centres (shopping). The policy explanatory also refers to five 'character management options' identified across the Borough, ranging from 'respect and protect' where heritage assets are concerned to 'redevelopment' which focuses upon redevelopment of a site with significant new scale; i.e. a change in character.

Potential Benefits:

- Allows for clear identification of the type, location, and nature of urban intensification
- Strongly worded policy links to design, character, and preservation of heritage assets into the policies regarding density
- Allows consideration of increased density, tall buildings, and intensification around key locations as part of a unified approach
- Acknowledges that character can be changed as part of the policy – so that development need not always respond to immediate local context / character

Potential Limitations:

- The policy approach is very complicated and requires some skill to understand and implement
- Requires consideration of the entire Borough and clear identification of areas that can either accommodate changed characters or where the character needs to be preserved – this is a matter of planning judgement

Key considerations:

8.18. The standardised approach to density as set out within aforementioned local authorities in the north west has led to an approach to development which does little to ensure efficient use of land through intensification or higher densities within locations which can be considered sustainable in accessibility terms.

8.19. A review of the approach to density within the Brighton and Hove City Plan (2016), the emerging London Plan and the Croydon Local Plan (2018) provides some lessons which may prove applicable to Wirral. In Brighton and Hove, minimum densities across the City assist in raising the densities proposed as a starting point for negotiation and discussion around density thus promoting a pro-density approach. When combined with the identification of key areas where higher densities through increased building height these policies give clear presumption in favour of schemes which achieve more efficient solutions.

8.20. The emerging London Plan also suggests higher density areas with a strong focus on design, local character and access to public transport. Whilst this approach is based on the existing reliance on PTAL ratings it may succeed in encouraging those promoting development to strive for higher densities. The Croydon approach is perhaps the most comprehensive and relevant for Wirral in that it promotes urban intensification within in areas which meet certain accessibility criteria whilst maintaining strong links to design, character and heritage considerations.

Stage 2-Best practice approaches to density

9. Design guidance and density

9.1. The following sections review two recently published design guidance documents which have a strong approach to density. These two examples go beyond the typical policy led approaches, to present a more integrated approach to urban design and density within the planning context. Of course, as with all supplementary policy documents, both require a parent policy within a Local Plan before they can operate effectively.

9.2. The first of these is the Croydon example, which is linked to the policy identified previously and is useful to set out the approach taken for the more suburban areas of their Borough. Although dealing with a different socio-economic profile, it does offer some insights into a methodology for considering suburban densification.

Croydon Suburban Design Guide (SPD2)

9.3. The guidance is categorised into two broad areas, geographically identified as follows:

- Suburban residential development
- Area of focussed intensification

9.4. This approach does not include the metropolitan or district centres, which are identified as having greater scope for development than the guide allows and are subject to separate policies and strategies.

Suburban Development

9.5. This approach involves the delivery of new homes through conversion or redevelopment of existing properties or new housing built in rear gardens and back-land sites.

9.6. To ensure that any proposals for suburban development do not prejudice the development potential of neighbouring sites, proposals may be required to explain how development on a neighbouring site may be considered following the development of their site.

9.7. This approach includes changes of use and conversions, including suburban blocks with back lands, as well as spaces above shops, presenting opportunities for a change of use, provided this is in keeping with Local Plan policies.

9.8. The guide takes great care to set out how character should be responded to, describing the following approaches:

- Innovative and original: ‘Schemes should use unique solutions that respond to the context of the site through contemporary use of form, materiality and detailing. This may be different from the predominant local character, but must respect existing character and not create any negative impacts on it, and will only be acceptable where there is a demonstration of high-quality design in the proposal’ (p. 32)
- Contemporary reinterpretation: ‘Schemes could seek to create a development that reads as contemporary whilst working with traditional character forms and/or features and materials predominant in an area’ (p. 33)
- Sympathetic and faithful: ‘Schemes should closely relate to the existing surrounding typologies by pursuing a similar form, style, materials and detailing’ (p. 33)

9.9. The guide offers a wealth of best practice approaches.

Stage 2-Best practice approaches to density

9.10. The guide also sets out a number of examples around the incorporation of 3 stories into existing dwellings, or of 3 storey properties within an existing street, setting out how new buildings might introduce 3 stories sensitively and where it might be appropriate to extend existing dwellings upwards. It also recommends consideration of building across boundaries, thereby connecting existing plots to provide greater opportunity for intensification.

9.11. The guide also makes useful reference to stepping massing of residential buildings down hills to provide opportunity for further accommodation. This might be useful where there is variation in topography in areas of Wirral.

Areas of focussed intensification

9.12. Focussed intensification aims to maximise the existing growth capacity through an increase in density of development and a gradual change in character to similar but higher density forms of development. Sites will be redeveloped with a different character to that which currently exists in the local area rather than replicating surrounding low-density development types.

9.13. The guide identifies that new development in these areas may be significantly larger than that already existing. It suggests that developments should:

- Be up to double the predominant height of buildings in the area
- Take the form of character types “Medium-rise block with associated grounds”, “Large buildings with spacing”, or “Large buildings with Continuous frontage line”
- Assume a suburban character with spaces between buildings

9.14. The guide sets out approaches for medium-rise blocks, terraced houses, and cottages, as well as detached homes. This is followed by a series of case studies setting out potential approaches to identified areas. The guidance exemplifies specific scenarios, such as detached dwellings with small plots, or detached dwellings with large plots.

Potential benefits:

- A useful categorisation of the types of densification which might be possible
- Strong best practice examples of each approach
- Creative suggestions for infill development
- The guide’s emphasis upon impact of development on the potential for neighbouring site densification is crucial for delivering this outcome successfully
- The guide has useful categories for how schemes might respond to character, identifying when it is appropriate to be sympathetic and/or innovative

Potential limitations:

- This guide does not consider metropolitan or district centres, whereas it is likely that as part of Wirral Local Plan, densification of the waterfront and inner urban area will need to be considered

Stage 2-Best practice approaches to density

Essex Design Guide

9.15. The Essex design guide is divided into numerous categories but none are specifically designated for densification. It is very detailed, but is not particularly usefully arranged with regard to Wirral.

9.16. The guidance sets out that to ensure a robust urban form, a minimum density of 50 dph, should be achieved, with higher densities if compatible with the surroundings.

9.17. The guide places emphasis upon achieving density through urban extensions rather than existing neighbourhoods, but stresses that density should be a by-product of these types of development and not a driving force.

Potential benefits:

- Support for urban extensions which may be a possibility in Wirral
- Support for a minimum density of 50 dph to achieve a robust/sustainable urban form

Potential limitations:

- The guidance supports density in existing urban areas of a minimum 50 dph but does not make reference to any opportunities to densify suburban areas
- The guide does not suggest that density should be a driving force for development, which will be needed if housing allocation targets are to be met in Wirral

Key considerations

9.18. The Croydon Suburban Design Guide contains guidance on design and density within suburban areas in addition to specified areas of intensification. Other guidance within the document is considered less relevant to Wirral. The categorisation of types of densification certainly is a useful and transferable approach particularly given the way in which it integrates best practise and guidance for sympathetic and contextually responsive design.

9.19. The Essex Design Guide takes a different approach more focused on urban extensions with minimum densities of 50 dph. Whilst urban extensions should be considered an option within Wirral such an approach would need to be supported by a robust approach to densification within existing urban areas to avoid unnecessary encroachment.

Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions and recommendations

10. Conclusions

10.1. The findings of this report suggest that recent development across Wirral has predominantly delivered relatively low densities, making inefficient use of even greenfield sites despite them being given high value by the Local Planning Authority, both past and future. This is not a failure of the planning policy framework but rather, since the introduction of the Framework in 2019, attitudes towards density, character and housing delivery have undergone a step change. Review of the national policy and guidance context suggests that higher densities can and should be delivered in Wirral to support local facilities and more sustainable lifestyles, as well as to protect the Green Belt.

10.2. Larger new build sites are now required to deliver much higher densities and be more clearly justified, to address any shortfalls, if housing targets are to be met. Identified schemes, such as Wirral Waters, cannot solely be relied upon to deliver housing targets and the desired higher densities sought in original outline permissions may not always materialise. A more robust strategy is needed to ensure that density on both larger and strategic sites, both brownfield and greenfield, achieve higher densities. Exploring options such as minimum densities on such sites (the Brighton approach) is strongly indicative, especially for inner urban areas where good access to public transport and other community infrastructure already exists.

10.3. However, when much of the supply that is needed is likely to come from smaller sites and those on the Brownfield Land Register, a simple allocations / strategic sites policy is unlikely to be effective. Exploration of policy examples in the UK for densification provide numerous positive approaches which might be adopted in the Wirral Local Plan and can show how suburban densification may be delivered to high standards and help create thriving communities. Findings suggest that, whilst the approach must be kept straightforward, identifying minimum densities for different areas might be a suitable approach for securing higher densities throughout the Borough.

10.4. The line of action based upon identifying different densities for different zones (such as in the Croydon example) would allow for consideration of local context without stifling innovation and the required delivery of new homes. It would allow higher densities to be targeted upon specific locations, absorbing many policy goals from the Framework. Focusing these zones around accessibility to public transport and community facilities echoes the Croydon and London plans and given the context in Wirral, in areas with high frequency bus and rail connections, appears both sensible and deliverable.

10.5. What is clear from the study, is that a step change is required in delivering higher densities. Existing urban opportunities such as small and medium sites and those in the inner urban core, as well as more effective use of larger sites, and any greenfield land that comes forward, is both necessary and desirable, as opposed to a traditional model of replicating existing densities. The work has clearly demonstrated that densification can be delivered on a number of scales, from large new build sites to upwards extensions and back-land development, all of which should be explored through specific Wirral case studies in successive stages.

10.6. This moves towards a policy approach identifying different zones within the Wirral Local Plan area with a minimum density policy

Conclusions and recommendations

restriction applied within them. These zones will be concentrated near effective access to public transport and community infrastructure.

11. Recommendations and next steps

11.1. As noted in the introduction, this report and its findings should be used to target stages 3 and 4 of the workstream. Stage 3 seeks to identify locations for higher densities, whilst in stage 4 the appropriateness of densities is based upon identifying key case study worked examples. The recommendations for each stage are set out in the following points:

11.2. The recommendations for stage 3 – identification of areas of higher density:

- A variety of pilot density zones should be identified to allow the appropriate density to be varied depending upon local circumstances and access to community infrastructure and public transport
- There should be a focus on making more efficient use of previously developed sites, especially those within urban areas, making sure that larger sites can be delivered to higher densities
- Some of these density zones could concentrate upon the role of suburban areas and areas around the edges of the urban centres and town centres
- Access to public transport, including transport stops within Wirral, could be used as a key indicator for higher density
- In establishing areas for higher densities, existing character may be replaced with the creation of new character, although this would need to be balanced against heritage and environmental considerations

Conclusions and recommendations

11.3. We do not recommend having a policy approach as complicated as that for Croydon, as this would be difficult to implement and monitor, but something more appropriate for local circumstances would be acceptable.

11.4. The recommendations for stage 4 - testing appropriate densities:

- When identifying sites for each of the case studies, a range of sizes and locations should be chosen to ensure that smaller sites are also effectively considered

- At least two sites should be within each of the density zones created by stage 3, with different local characters and density, to allow a sound basis for detailed policy development

- These sites should be used to establish minimum density targets for each of the zones created, and should be identified as areas where a change in character would be acceptable

11.5. Please note that during this stage, testing against heritage and environmental factors may result in the amendment to the density zones established in stage 3.

Appendices

12. Appendix 1: Wirral previous policy approach

URN1 Development and Urban Regeneration Strategic Policy reflects overall strategy of the UDP. Maximising urban land use whilst protecting the urban environment.

This is achieved through repurposing unused land or buildings and extending the use of existing services. Certain types of land or buildings are protected from inappropriate development, including those in approved green belt, ecological or architectural conservation areas and areas of special landscape value.

HS1 Land Allocated for Residential Development Proposal: outlines possible dwellings per district based on available land.

1. Old Birkonians, Noctorum -- 12.90 ha - 250 units *(19 dph)*

2. South of Ditton Lane, Leasowe -- 8.00 ha - 190 units *(23 dph)*

3. Claremount, Reeds Lane, Moreton -- 5.00 ha - 150 units *(30 dph)*

4. North of Rose Brae, Birkenhead -- 2.34 ha - 130 units *(55 dph)*

5. Laird Street Bus Depot, Birkenhead -- 2.57 ha - 100 units *(39 dph)*

6. Land to the east of Fender Farm, Moreton -- 4.06 ha - 90 units *(22 dph)*

7. West of Manor Drive, Moreton -- 2.80 ha - 60 units *(21 dph)*

8. South of Leasowe Hospital, Leasowe - 1.50 ha - 30 units *(20 dph)*

9. W of Tideway, Kings Parade, Wallasey Village -- 1.43 ha - 29 units *(20 dph)*

10. 87-99 St Paul's Road, Seacombe -- 0.40 ha - 20 units *(50 dph)*

11. N of Bus Depot, New Chester Rd, Rock Ferry -- 0.52 ha - 20 units *(38 dph)*

12. SE of Social Centre, Highcroft, Bebington -- 0.40 ha - 15 units *(37.5 dph)*

13. 155-175 Borough Road, Seacombe -- 0.59 ha - 10 units *(17 dph)*

14. Stylewear/ Buxton Road, Rock Ferry -- 0.58 ha - 10 units *(17 dph)*

(average of 29 dph)

Totals -- 43.09 ha - 1,104 units

HS4 Criteria for New Housing Development Policy:

Proposals for new housing development on sites outlined in the Primary Residential Areas Proposals Maps will be permitted subject to the proposal being of a scale that corresponds to the surrounding character – particularly in relation to scale, density and landscaping. New development should not affect access (vehicular and otherwise) to housing, services and amenities. Provision of landscaping and boundary treatment; design features which minimise crime; public open space and children's play areas; provision of private or communal garden space for each dwelling are all encouraged. Separation of habitable rooms and gable end/rear elevation.

Appendices

HS5 Density and Design Guidelines Policy: Adheres to Policy HS4

1. **Noctorum Ridge, Noctorum**
   Zone 1: Low rise development, 10 dwellings p/ha. New purpose built block of flats and conversion into self-contained flats will not be permitted.
   Zone 2: Density 25-30 dwellings p/ha, 2-3 storey houses. 3-storey new build flats will not be permitted. Conversion of existing property will be permitted subject to Policy HS13
   Zone 3: Density range of 30-60 dwellings p/ha for new, purpose-built 3-storey blocks of flats. Higher density sheltered housing and nursing/residential care homes shall be permitted (Check Policy HS7 and Policy HS8). Conversion of existing property into self-contained flats will be permitted subject to Policy HS13.

2. **Mountwood, Prenton**

   Max: 7.5 dwellings p/ha. Plot frontages correspond to those within close proximity. Conversion of existing property into self-contained flats shall not be permitted.

3. **Meols Drive, Hoylake:**
   Max density: 20 dwellings p/ha with plot frontages comparable to surrounding plots.
   Zones 4, 5, and 7: New purpose-built flats will not be permitted.
   Zone 5: Any new development should maintain access to Eddisbury Road and NOT Meols Drive.

   New sheltered housing of a density higher than 20 dwellings p/ha and nursing or residential care homes will be permitted in Zones 1, 2, 3, and 6 subject to Policy HS7 and HS8.

4. **Stanley Road, Hoylake**

   Zone 1: Conversion of existing dwellings into self-contained flats will be permitted.
   Zone 2: Conversion of existing dwellings into self-contained flats will be permitted. Redevelopment of pairs of dwellings to 3-storey blocks of flats and maximum density of 35 dwellings p/h.
   Zone 3: Max: 35 dwellings p/ha.
   Zones 4: Max 25 dwellings p/ha.
   Zone 5: New purpose-built flat development will not be permitted.

   Plot frontages to be comparable to plots within close proximity. New sheltered housing of a density higher than 35 dwellings p/ha and nursing/care homes will be permitted in Zones 2 and 3, subject to Policy HS7 and HS8.

5. **Gayton**
   Zone 1: Small-scale development permitted only.

Appendices

Zone 2: Max density: 7.5 dwellings p/ha. Plot frontages and set-backs should be comparable to those of surrounding plots. Open plan frontages will not be permitted.
Zone 3: Development will only be permitted on plots with frontage/depth comparable to surrounding to plots within close proximity.

6. **Gleneagles Park, Caldy.**
   Only bungalows will be permitted on plots 7-31 and 35-38. Two-storey dwellings will be permitted on all other plots only. Min 6m between it and side boundary and a set-back from the plot frontage of 12m minimum.

7. **Caldy:**
   Zone 1: Max density 2.5 dwellings p/ha.
   Zone 2: Higher densities may be permitted subject to the development, preserving or enhancing the Conservation Area.

HS10: Backland Development Policy

Proposals for the development of between one to three dwellings behind existing dwellings and accessed by a dedicated drive will not be permitted unless the existing frontage is retained with sufficient garden space; development (including entrance) should not cause detrimental change of character of an area, both physical and atmospheric. Proposed access should be of sufficient width (3m) with amenity strips to one or both sides. Access should be properly formed and hard surfaced, maintaining sight lines and visibility. Street scene and highway safety should be maintained.

Proposed dwellings have adequate garden space and adequate vehicle turning/garaging provision.

Proposal otherwise complying with Policy HS4 and HS5.

HS11 – House Extensions Policy:

Proposals for house extensions will be permitted subject to all the following criteria being complied with:

The scale of the extension is to be appropriate to the size of the plot and shouldn't impact on neighbours. Materials/design features should complement those of existing buildings. Dormer windows are restricted to rear of dwelling, not projecting above the ridge nor occupying the full width of the roof. Flat roofs restricted to the rear or side of dwelling – only on single storey buildings.

Where rear extension is single-storey and party boundary on the existing dwelling semi-detached: proposed extension must be a minimum of 3m from the main face of existing houses.

Where rear extension is 2-storey and the existing house semi-detached, the proposed extension is set back at least 2.5 metres from the party boundary.

'Terracing' should be avoided. This is achieved by guaranteeing a 1.5m set back from the common boundary; or at least 1.0m from the front elevation and 1.0 meter from the common boundary; or at least 2.0 metres from the front elevation.

Appendices

Single storey extensions on terraced dwellings allowing an adequate area of amenity space to be retained.

HS13 - Self-contained Flat Conversions Policy:

This policy primarily deals with general internal specifications.

Proposals for the conversion of existing buildings into self-contained flats will be permitted subject to:

- Ensure privacy of neighbours and occupants. Car-parking areas should not overlook habitable room's windows.
- Access is normally provided to individual flats within the main structure of the building. External staircases should not impede on neighbour's privacy. Compliance with HS11.
- Access to rear yards/gardens provided from each flat. Adequate visibility at entrance and exit points and turning points for vehicles. Compliance with HS4 and HS5.
- Where buildings suitable for conversion are on the Green Belt, these will be subject to Green Belt policy. The re-use of buildings shall not have a materially greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt and the purposes of including land in it.
- Character to be maintained when intensifying the use of existing dwellings. Off-street parking should not involve total loss of existing front gardens.

SPD Note 13: Further Guidance on Self-contained Flat Conversions

- Self-contained flat conversions should not impact on local character and should be in proximity to local services and transport.
- Retention of existing buildings - effective use of land and buildings. Compliance with RSS Policy DP1 – Order of Preference: 1) conversion of sound buildings that are worthy of re-use and/or architectural or historical interest 2) the use of previously developed land 3) the use of undeveloped land which does not reduce areas of important open space.
- Demolition of existing sound buildings/buildings of a historical or architectural interest shall not be approved unless the applicant can *provide a justification to show why retention would not be viable.*

SPD2 Designing for Self-contained Flat Development and Conversions (2006):

This SPD provides guidance for the design of self-contained flatted developments and conversions focusing on location, conversions, design and the planning process.

The SPD recommends that developments of this type should be located close to services and facilities and good public transport provision. Higher densities should also be provided when a range of services such as shops, schools, employment, health, leisure and entertainment exist. This guidance is linked to the settlement hierarchy. Schemes of 50dph and above are required to be within 400m of a key town centre or suburban centre.

Appendices

Ensuring a sensitive approach given the context of a neighbourhood is carefully set out for example, ensuring an appropriate transition between two storey residential properties and a new three or four storey flatted development. Design guidance, linked to By Design and guidance relating to designing for all are cited as central to the consideration of proposals.

The conversion of existing buildings into flatted accommodation is encouraged above the use of previously developed land and finally the use of greenfield land.

Adopting CABE recommendations, self-contained flats should:

- relate well to the geography and history of the place and the lie of the land;
- sit happily in the pattern of existing development and routes through and around it;
- respect important views (from public vantage points);
- respect the scale of neighbouring buildings;
- use materials and building methods, which are as high or of higher quality as those used in existing buildings; and
- create new views and juxtapositions, which add to the variety and texture of the setting.

Layout:

New buildings for self-contained flats must be sited with regard to the layout, pattern and use of the spaces between other buildings in the surrounding areas.

Building lines:

Whole facades of infill development that would project beyond the front or rear building line in areas of uniform development will not be permitted. In places with variety of building line, an overall average should be determined.

Privacy and Daylight:

Development should not result in a significant loss of privacy, daylight or sunlight for neighbouring properties. Habitable rooms should be 21m apart. Greater separation at areas where there are differing ridge heights.

External Layout and Landscaping:

Adequate landscaped garden space should be provided for the exclusive use of residents with private access. One third of the whole site should be available as private landscaped communal areas. This excludes driveways, garages, parking, servicing, and bin and cycle stores.

All landscaping proposals are to be submitted for full planning permission. Trees/hedgerows/walls/gate posts/stone paving etc should be retained and safeguarded from damage during development. Where this is not possible, relocation or replacement will be necessary.

Main entrances to be located at front elevation and provide access to individual flats from within the building wherever possible. External staircases will only be permitted when internal staircases are not feasible. External staircases to be installed at the rear of building and should not affect neighbour's privacy.

Appendices

Accessibility:

Special consideration for those with disabilities or people with prams or young children through provision of accessible entrances into and within buildings as well as sensitive siting and layout of parking and pedestrian areas.

Scale, Height and Massing:

A sensitive approach to any change in height is required to ensure that the new development is at a scale proportionate to the surrounding area. All new proposals will be required to either protect or improve the existing roof scape.

The bulk of large buildings may be reduced through variations in the footprint, height and roof form of the building as well as the spacing in relation to neighbouring properties. The design of large buildings as a single block is not likely to be acceptable.

The size and scale of any extension should be subsidiary and not dominate the existing building.

Materials and should reinforce character of surrounding area. Features to be considered include windows, sills, door styles, brickwork, gutters and pipe work, eaves and fascia boards, colour finishes, chimney stacks, external railings, boundary walls including fencing and gates.

Note on feature development: Feature developments are permitted to create a positive contemporary architectural statement but should predominantly match the fabric of buildings elsewhere.

Entrances:

Design of main entrances to be expressed at a scale proportionate to the building as a whole. Large building should have grand entrances on the main frontage seen from public vantage points to give identity.

Frontages: activity is encouraged through provision of frontages and balconies /porches.
Roofscape: Roof elements to be considered from below as well as from distant views.

Energy Efficiency and Waste Disposal:

Use of renewable and recycled materials is encouraged.

Servicing, Parking and Access:

Max: one car parking space per self-contained flat should be provided within the boundary of the site.

Where front gardens are a unifying features of the street scene, hard surfacing for parking and servicing should cover no more than one third of the frontage unless it can be demonstrated that a landscaping scheme would satisfactorily mitigate any impact upon the character and appearance of the street scene.

Layout of parking, service and access should ensure that the amenity of neighbours and occupants is not unduly affected by noise, fumes and overlooking. There should be adequate space for passing and turning within the site. Adequate visibility splays and sight lines are provided at the entrance to the site. Landscaped buffers are recommended between parked cars and

Appendices

boundaries with neighbouring property. Parking bays should be at least 3m from any ground floor window for habitable rooms.

There is convenient access for pedestrians and cyclists: paths should be wide enough to allow two pushchairs to pass. A clear distinction between public and private areas.

UDP Policy TR12: one cycle stand must be provided for each self-contained flat, either within the building or in a secure location externally. Visitor cycle stands should be by the main entrance, well-lit and overlooked.

Bin stores to be contained within the building in a separate location to the cycle storage.

Designing out crime:

SPD: PLANNING OUT CRIME. Promote active fronts/natural surveillance. Discourage places of concealment and areas where non-residents may congregate. Ensure development does not present with a "fortress" image i.e. through installation of fences/gates.

A co-ordinated approach to the design of external lighting should be adopted.

SPD 4 – Parking Standards (2007)

The document recommends how different parallel and perpendicular parking arrangements can be provided. Lower levels of parking may be encouraged in highly accessible areas well served by public transport. This is defined as areas within 400m of a bus stop, railway station or within 400m of existing adequate parking (safely accessible). Guidance is provided on how walking distances should be measured – i.e. not simply 'as the crow flies'. This approach supports higher densities in such locations, in part because it results in less land take for parking.

Appendices

13. Appendix 2: AMR analysis

Density analysis
Annual Monitoring Review: 2017

UC under construction
NS not started

SITE SIZE Average density

		Av density	No. units
New build	Sites over 0.4ha (UC)	26.29	890
New build	Sites over 0.4ha (NS)	17.89	206
New build	Sites under or equal to 0.4ha (UC)	35.56	380
New build	Sites under or equal to 0.4ha (NS)	46.44	608
	Wirral Waters (OUT)	248	13521
	Wirral Waters (Approved)	504	1652

SITE TYPE Average density

		Av density	No. units
	Change of use (UC)	111.6	96
	Change of use (NS)	99.71	385
	Conversions (UC)	77.5	45
	Conversions (NS)	124.46	63
	Greenfield	19.34	549
	Brownfield	90.49	17317

BY WARD Average Density

		Av density	No. units
	Bebington	55.69	20
	Bidston and St James	113.6	13748
	Birkenhead and Tranmere	197.52	361
	Bromborough	50.59	373
	Clatterbridge	13.53	7
	Claughton	59.41	151
	Eastham	31.52	63
	Greasby, Frankby and Irby	23.9	214
	Heswall	16.22	122
	Hoylake and Meols	35.3	52
	Leasowe and Moreton East	36.17	175
	Liscard	102.82	112
	Moreton West and Saughall Massie	32.15	70
	New Brighton	122.7	50
	Oxton	42.05	31
	Pensby and Thingwall	22.47	58
	Prenton	82.68	147
	Rock Ferry	75.06	204
	Seacombe	250.58	1712
	Upton	26.54	32
	Wallasey	68.68	28
	West Kirby and Thurstaston	16.85	67

Density analysis
Annual Monitoring Review 2018

UC under construction
NS not started

SITE SIZE Average density

		Av density	No. units
New build	Sites over 0.4ha (UC)	23.44	989
New build	Sites over 0.4ha (NS)	20.98	527
New build	Sites under or equal to 0.4ha (UC)	32.27	406
New build	Sites under or equal to 0.4ha (NS)	54.05	508
	Wirral Waters (OUT)	248	13521
	Wirral Waters (Approved)	504	1672

SITE TYPE Average density

		Av density	No. units
	Change of use (UC)	72.32	104
	Change of use (NS)	99.39	351
	Conversions (UC)	118.83	73
	Conversions (NS)	127.06	113
	Greenfield	22.13	547
	Brownfield	88.97	17743.80

BY WARD Average Density

		Av density	No. units
	Bebington	83.48	8
	Bidston and St James	104.18	13752
	Birkenhead and Tranmere	139.69	463.8
	Bromborough	51.97	486
	Clatterbridge	26.02	37
	Claughton	45.87	175
	Eastham	37.37	23
	Greasby, Frankby and Irby	22.16	194
	Heswall	18.54	93
	Hoylake and Meols	50.36	96
	Leasowe and Moreton East	40.74	440
	Liscard	82.49	104
	Moreton West and Saughall Massie	55.83	41
	New Brighton	99.41	58
	Oxton	66.33	29
	Pensby and Thingwall	30.55	72
	Prenton	98.79	149
	Rock Ferry	80.95	223
	Seacombe	214.89	1727
	Upton	41.85	31
	Wallasey	53.03	20
	West Kirby and Thurstaston	13.84	68

Density analysis
Annual Monitoring Review: 2019

UC under construction
NS not started

SITE SIZE Average density

		Av density	No. units
New build	Sites over 0.4ha (UC)	25.87	1091
New build	Sites over 0.4ha (NS)	18.17	764
New build	Sites under or equal to 0.4ha (UC)	32.16	387
New build	Sites under or equal to 0.4ha (NS)	60.67	723
	Wirral Waters (OUT)	248	13521
	Wirral Waters (Approved)	504	1672
		148.145	
		34.2175	Excl. WW

SITE TYPE Average density

		Av density	No. units
	Change of use (UC)	85.28	386
	Change of use (NS)	106.32	238
	Conversions (UC)	137.3	84
	Conversions (NS)	100.77	73
	Greenfield	22.92	885
	Brownfield	93.42	18169

BY WARD Average Density

		Av density	No. units
	Bebington	65.75	38
	Bidston and St James	97.05	13652
	Birkenhead and Tranmere	173.72	784
	Bromborough	56.77	426
	Clatterbridge	32.34	27
	Claughton	51.56	217
	Eastham	24.36	288
	Greasby, Frankby and Irby	23.92	198
	Heswall	18.39	74
	Hoylake and Meols	51.4	86
	Leasowe and Moreton East	29.25	433
	Liscard	70.58	208
	Moreton West and Saughall Massie	48.64	47
	New Brighton	98.14	86
	Oxton	45.59	27
	Pensby and Thingwall	36.21	65
	Prenton	49.16	58
	Rock Ferry	109.6	269
	Seacombe	248.29	1779
	Upton	29.35	49
	Wallasey	40.46	34
	West Kirby and Thurstaston	18.7	113

Urban Imprint Limited
16 -18 Park Green
Macclesfield
SK11 7NA

01625 265232
info@urbanimprint.co.uk
www.urbanimprint.co.uk