

# Wirral Local Plan 2020-2035

## Issues and Options Consultation

Meeting our development requirements through sustainable regeneration

January 2020

A silhouette of the Wirral town skyline, featuring various buildings and a windmill, set against a dark green background.

#wirrallocalplan



**Contents**

**1 Introduction..... 1**

Wirral: A Brief Introduction..... 1

Purpose of this document..... 3

What happens next?..... 5

The Examination in Public..... 5

The Existing Local Plan for Wirral..... 6

Policy and Legal Requirements..... 7

How do we consult?..... 9

Making your views known..... 9

Document Structure..... 10

**2 Context and Evidence..... 13**

Introduction..... 13

What you told us during the Development Options Review Consultation..... 13

Housing Need..... 15

Settlement Hierarchy..... 18

Economic Need..... 21

Retail and Leisure needs..... 24

Increasing Residential Development Density..... 27

Development Viability..... 28

Delivering Growth Through Regeneration..... 32

Green Belt Assessment..... 38

Evidence base conclusions..... 41

**3 Our Vision and Objectives for Wirral..... 43**

Introduction..... 43

Future Challenges and Opportunities..... 43

Wirral Local Plan Spatial Vision.....	44
Wirral Local Plan Strategic Objectives - Wirral.....	46
<b>4 Strategic Spatial Options.....</b>	<b>51</b>
Introduction.....	51
How many homes do we need to deliver and when?.....	51
Option 1A: Urban Intensification.....	52
Option 1B: Urban Intensification with stepped approach.....	70
Option 2A Dispersed Green Belt Release.....	73
Option 2B Single Urban Extension.....	77
<b>5 Our Homes.....</b>	<b>83</b>
Introduction.....	83
Overall mix of housing.....	83
Affordable Housing Need.....	85
The needs of other groups.....	87
Empty Properties.....	88
Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Show People.....	90
Primarily Residential Areas.....	92
Houses in Multiple Occupation.....	92
<b>6 Our Economy.....</b>	<b>94</b>
Employment.....	94
Protection of Existing Employment Areas.....	101
Town Centres and Retail.....	103
Tourism.....	110
<b>7 Our Physical and Social Infrastructure.....</b>	<b>114</b>
Our approach to infrastructure planning.....	114
Transport.....	116

Utilities.....	118
Communications Infrastructure.....	120
Social Infrastructure.....	121
<b>8 Our Environment.....</b>	<b>124</b>
Climate Change.....	124
Green and Blue Infrastructure.....	127
Open space, sport and recreation.....	132
Local Green Space.....	137
Landscape.....	139
Flood Risk and Coastal Change.....	142
Habitats and Biodiversity.....	146
Healthy communities.....	151
Heritage.....	152
Minerals.....	154
Waste Management.....	156
<b>9 Detailed Local Plan Policies.....</b>	<b>159</b>
<b>10 Other Comments or Questions.....</b>	<b>160</b>
<b>11 Next Steps.....</b>	<b>161</b>

## **Appendices**

Appendix 1.1 List of Evidence Studies.....	1
Appendix 2.1 Strategic Regeneration Sites.....	8
Wirral Waters.....	8
Hind Street.....	20
Woodside Development Area.....	25
Birkenhead Centre.....	29

Appendix 4.1 Proposed Urban Housing Allocation Sites.....	36
Appendix 4.2 Potential Additional Urban Housing Allocation Sites.....	44
Appendix 4.3 Other Suitable but Currently Uncertain Sites.....	46
Appendix 4.4 Current and Future Housing Land Supply.....	49
Appendix 4.5 Wirral Local Plan Housing Trajectory.....	80
Appendix 4.6 Proposed Urban Employment Allocations.....	84
Appendix 4.7 Interim Green Belt Assessment 2019.....	88
Introduction.....	88
How weakly performing parcel were selected for the Green Belt Options.....	88
How the Green Belt Options were refined.....	89
Next steps.....	90
Appendix 5.1 Houses in Multiple Occupation.....	101
Appendix 8.1 Open Space Sites to be Protected.....	104
Appendix 9.1 List of Detailed Development Management Policies to be included in the Draft Final Local Plan.....	120

# 1 Introduction

## Wirral: A Brief Introduction

- 1.1 Wirral is a diverse and exciting place – with an urban core and waterfront environment, whose history has helped to shape the modern world, and suburban towns and villages surrounded by stunning beaches, and open countryside with varied wildlife. With a population of just under 325,000<sup>1</sup> people, the borough of Wirral is a sizeable place – occupying around 60 square miles at the northern end of the wider Wirral Peninsula.
- 1.2 Wirral is bounded to the east by the River Mersey, to the west by the River Dee and to the north by the Irish Sea. Whilst it retains its own distinct ‘over the water’ character, Wirral is also an integral part of the wider Liverpool City Region (LCR). In addition to Wirral, the LCR comprises the City of Liverpool, the Merseyside Metropolitan Boroughs of Knowsley, Sefton and St Helens, and the borough of Halton in Cheshire. Wirral also has close linkages with Ellesmere Port and Chester, located within Cheshire West and Chester to the south.
- 1.3 Water has been key to Wirral’s development over the years, and the establishment of the first ferry links across the Mersey from the Priory in Birkenhead can be traced back as far as 1330. In the 1820s, steam powered boats were introduced into the ferry services, which led to the rapid industrialisation of the Mersey Coast. Wirral’s first railway was built in 1840, and in the 1840s and 1850s the Great Float (now part of the Wirral Waters regeneration project) of the Birkenhead Docks progressively opened. The first fixed link across the Mersey to Liverpool came with the opening of the Mersey Railway Tunnel in 1886, which led to rapid urbanisation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
- 1.4 The eastern side of the Borough has remained the focus for industrial and residential development, and some of the former hamlets and villages of the western side of the Borough have grown into thriving commuter suburbs, following the further expansion of the railways. Green Belt areas of agricultural land, open countryside and land in leisure and recreational use are interspersed between the Borough’s settlements, including areas of special landscape value.
- 1.5 Today, Wirral is at a crossroads. In recent years, the Borough has not always been able to deliver the levels of development which were expected by national policy, to allow the sustainable growth of our communities and economy. To avoid the need for Green Belt release we need to unlock the significant brownfield land resources which exist within our urban areas, particularly in Birkenhead. The Birkenhead Regeneration Framework will seek to demonstrate how the major opportunities presented by the future development of Wirral Waters, Woodside, Hamilton Park, Scott’s Quay, Hind Street and parts of Birkenhead Town Centre, providing thousands of new homes and job opportunities in new mixed use communities, can be delivered.
- 1.6 At the same time, we need to try to protect the natural and historic assets which make Wirral unique, and ensure that we contribute to solving the climate emergency.
- 1.7 Our Wirral Plan: 2025<sup>2</sup> sets out the Council’s ambition for:

1 <https://www.wirralintelligenceservice.org/media/2778/compendium-2019-final.pdf>

2 The Wirral 2025 Plan is a separate document which sets out corporate priorities for service delivery. <https://democracy.wirral.gov.uk/documents/s50062190/WIRRAL%20COUNCIL%20PLAN%202025.pdf>

- A prosperous, inclusive economy where local people can get good jobs and achieve their aspirations;
- A cleaner, greener Borough which celebrates, protects and improves our environment and urgently tackles the environmental emergency;
- Brighter futures for our young people and families – regardless of their background or where they live;
- Safe, vibrant communities where people want to live and raise their families; and
- Services which help people live happy, healthy, independent and active lives, with public services there to support them when they need it.

**1.8** This Local Plan will seek to achieve this ambition by creating opportunities for the Borough to grow, and to achieve a higher quality of living for our residents. The Council will do this by achieving urban regeneration, delivering a sufficient amount of development to meet our needs for new homes and jobs based on brownfield land first, and supporting low carbon and sustainable lifestyles for everyone.



Figure 1.1 Wirral Context



Figure 1.1 Wirral Context

## Purpose of this document

- 1.9** Producing a Local Plan is one of the most important obligations for a local authority. Local Plans set out a long-term vision for how an area will develop in the future, with policies that will shape future development. They address a wide range of issues, from strategic planning matters that affect the whole local authority area right through to finer details on the design of development on individual sites. The Government requires each local planning authority to produce a Local Plan and then review it at least once every five years to ensure that it is up to date.
- 1.10** The Wirral Local Plan will cover a period from 2020 through to 2035 and set out policies and proposals to guide the future development of the Borough over that time. It will set out where future development will take place, and allocate land for housing, employment, mixed-use and other development. It will also seek to protect the most important characteristics of the Borough, by preserving our unique natural and historical assets from development.

- 1.11** In preparing the new Local Plan the Council must consult with local residents to seek their views on the proposed contents of the Plan. This Local Plan Issues and Options document sets out those proposals and is published for consultation under Regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.<sup>3</sup>The details of how to comment are set out in paragraphs 1.46 to 1.49 below. We will respond to all the comments submitted during this consultation process.
- 1.12** We also need to engage with local and regional partners, such as neighbouring local authorities and government agencies.
- 1.13** It is essential that our proposals are based upon evidence about what the economic, social and environmental needs of the Borough are and we have commissioned or updated a number of evidence studies as part of the production of this consultation document. These evidence studies are listed in Appendix 1.1.
- 1.14** This Local Plan Issues and Options consultation document seeks your views on the future direction for development in Wirral. One of the main issues is that we need to deliver enough new homes to meet the nationally prescribed target of 12,000 net new dwellings over the 15-year Local Plan period – equivalent to 800 new homes every year<sup>4</sup>, and 80 hectares of new employment land. These figures have been established through our evidence base.
- 1.15** This consultation particularly focuses on potential strategic spatial options that will allow us to deliver our requirements for housing and employment land. We are also seeking your views on a range of proposed and potential strategic housing and employment allocations across the Borough.
- 1.16** This consultation document therefore sets out a series of Spatial Options as to how the housing and employment requirements could be met within the Borough. The Council's Preferred Option is for Urban Intensification. Details of this option can be found at Chapter 4: Strategic Spatial Options. However, due to having to meet the evidential requirements for deliverability and developability of our development needs over the plan period it is also necessary for us to consult on a range of other options should we not be able meet all our requirements by Urban Intensification alone. These other options would involve release of land for development which is currently designated as Green Belt.
- 1.17** It is important therefore that you express any views you may have on all the potential options set out in this consultation document.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2012/767/contents/made>

<sup>4</sup> This figure is arrived at through a calculation set out in national policy, which adjusts as new information is published while the plan is being prepared; but will be held constant for two years once the final draft Plan has been submitted to the Secretary of State. The current figure of 800 new dwellings per annum is based on data for 2019 and will be adjusted again for the 'Regulation 19' stage taking account of the latest up-to-date information on affordability which is to be published in March 2020. The draft Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2019 anticipates that from 2020 this may become 783 new dwellings per annum.

## What happens next?

- 1.18** The Council will consider all responses received as a result of this consultation process and take them into account in preparing the final draft Local Plan as far as it is possible for us to do so within the confines of national policy and legislation.
- 1.19** The final sites that will be allocated for development will be included in the final draft Local Plan. It is expected that the final draft Local Plan will be published, and representations invited (the Regulation 19 stage) in summer 2020. The final draft Local Plan and all representations received will be submitted for Examination by an Independent Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State. If the Council considers there is a need for significant changes to the final draft Local Plan as a result of representations made at the Regulation 19 stage it may be necessary to further revise the draft Plan. If this happens a further round of public consultation may be necessary.
- 1.20** It should be noted that this Local Plan Issues and Options document does not include the detailed planning policies which will be used to inform decisions on planning applications<sup>5</sup>. This approach is explained in Chapter 9. The detail of the policies will be included in the final draft Local Plan and representations will be able to be made on these at Regulation 19 stage.

## The Examination in Public

- 1.21** An Inspector will be appointed by the Secretary of State to undertake an examination into the ‘soundness’ of the submitted Plan. You can ask to attend the Examination during the Regulation 19 Stage, but it will be up to the Inspector to agree.
- 1.22** The examination process will consider whether the document is ‘sound’, as set out in paragraph 35 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2019 (NPPF), which requires the Plan to be;
- positively prepared – providing a strategy which, as a minimum, seeks to meet the area’s objectively assessed needs; and is informed by agreements with other authorities, so that unmet need from neighbouring areas is accommodated where it is practical to do so and is consistent with achieving sustainable development;
  - justified – an appropriate strategy, taking into account the reasonable alternatives, and based on proportionate evidence;
  - effective – deliverable over the plan period, and based on effective joint working on cross-boundary strategic matters that have been dealt with rather than deferred, as evidenced by the statement of common ground; and
  - consistent with national policy – enabling the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with the policies in the Framework.
- 1.23** The following options are available to an Inspector when submitting their Report to the Council:
- the Inspector can find that the plan is sound and legally compliant as submitted: in these circumstances the Inspector must recommend that the plan is adopted; or
  - the Inspector can find that the plan is unsound and/or legally non-compliant as submitted, but that it is possible to make it sound and legally compliant by making

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<sup>5</sup> With the exception of a draft policy setting out the Council’s preferred policy approach for Homes in Multiple Occupation as set out in Chapter 5 and Appendix 5.1

main modifications to it. In these circumstances the Inspector must recommend the necessary main modifications, if requested to do so by the Council. The main modifications must relate directly to the reasons why the Inspector has found the plan unsound or legally non-compliant. Any main modifications will be published for further representations to be made; or

- the Inspector can find the plan unsound and / or legally non-compliant as submitted, and that it is not possible to make it sound and legally compliant by making main modifications to it. In these circumstances the Inspector must recommend non-adoption of the plan.

**1.24** Once the Council receives the Inspector's final Report recommending adoption the Council will then formally adopt the Plan.

## The Existing Local Plan for Wirral

**1.25** The statutory Development Plan for the Metropolitan Borough of Wirral currently comprises the 'saved' policies in the Unitary Development Plan for Wirral (UDP), adopted by the Council in February 2000 and the Joint Waste Local Plan for Merseyside and Halton, adopted in July 2013; together with Neighbourhood Development Plans for Devonshire Park and Hoylake.

**1.26** In replacing the UDP, the Council originally proposed a two-stage process of Local Plan preparation, initially focused on the preparation of a Core Strategy Local Plan (containing mainly strategic policies, which would only partially replace the Unitary Development Plan) followed by a second stage to produce a site-specific Land Allocations and a Heritage Local Plan. The Council consulted on a Proposed Submission Draft Core Strategy Local Plan in December 2012.

**1.27** However, the Council now intends to produce a single Wirral Local Plan, which will replace the Unitary Development Plan in its entirety. The Wirral Local Plan will include detailed policies including site allocations and development management policies, and a Policies Map to replace the Unitary Development Plan Proposals Map.

**1.28** Public consultation previously took place on a Development Options Review between 3rd September and 26th October 2018. The consultation drew 3,221 responses from 2,989 individual respondents. A report setting out the background and results of the consultation along with three volumes of consultation responses was published on the Council's web site at the end of February 2019 (see also Chapter 2, Paragraphs 2.6 to 2.9). The comments submitted to the Development Options Review have been taken into account in producing this Regulation 18 document.

**1.29** The Development Plan for Wirral will comprise the following documents:

- The Wirral Local Plan and Policies Map;
- The Joint Waste Local Plan for Merseyside and Halton, adopted in July 2013;
- The Spatial Development Strategy for the Liverpool City Region (to be produced by the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, for which initial consultation began in October 2019<sup>6</sup>); and
- Neighbourhood Planning documents, including Neighbourhood Development Plans, prepared by the local community.

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6 <https://www.liverpoolcityregion-ca.gov.uk/metro-mayor-launches-consultation-to-shape-future-development-of-the-liverpool-city-region/>

## Policy and Legal Requirements

- 1.30** The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012<sup>7</sup> sets out the requirements for local authorities for producing and consulting on their Local Plan. There are various stages in the production of a Local Plan and Wirral Council is now at the “Regulation 18” stage, which is the formal public consultation stage on the issues and options. This provides the community and other stakeholders with an opportunity to shape the final contents of the Local Plan based on the current evidence that has been gathered by the Council.
- 1.31** The following paragraphs provide a brief summary of the formal requirements associated with Local Plan making.

### National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

- 1.32** The NPPF sets out the framework for the preparation of a Local Plan. It ensures that plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development, and that plans should positively seek opportunities to meet the development needs of their area.
- 1.33** Paragraph 16 of the NPPF 2019 states that Plans should be prepared positively, with the objective of contributing to sustainable development in a deliverable manner. Plans need to be shaped by early and effective engagement between all stakeholders. Therefore, the Plan needs to be accessible to all, with a clear purpose and policies which are unambiguous to support decision making.
- 1.34** Paragraph 17 of the NPPF 2019 states that Plans must include strategic policies to address each local planning authority’s priorities for the development and use of land in the area.
- 1.35** Both strategic and non-strategic policies should be included in local plans. Strategic policies should set out the overall strategy for the pattern, scale and quality of development making provision for housing; infrastructure; community facilities; and conservation and enhancement of the natural, built and historic environment.
- 1.36** Each chapter in this document includes more detailed references to the NPPF in respect of their specific content.

### Duty to Cooperate (DtC)

- 1.37** Section 33A of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004<sup>8</sup> seeks to maximise effective working on strategic issues by requiring the Council “...to engage constructively, actively and on an ongoing basis...” with certain prescribed bodies, including neighbouring councils and organisations such as the Environment Agency, Natural England and in the case of the Liverpool City Region, Merseytravel.
- 1.38** This “Duty to Cooperate” is a legal requirement which must be addressed in Local Plans, to demonstrate that the emerging plan has also taken account of needs which require a wider level of co-operation over a wider geographical area. For the Liverpool City Region these are currently set out in a Statement of Common Ground<sup>9</sup>. A similar

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2012/767/contents/made>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/5/section/33A>

<sup>9</sup> <https://democracy.wirral.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=4549>

Statement is to be agreed with Cheshire West and Chester Council. A separate initial summary of the Council's collaboration with other relevant bodies is published alongside this document.

### **Sustainability Appraisal (SA)**

- 1.39** The preparation of this Local Plan is being informed by a Sustainability Appraisal process which ensures that all aspects of sustainability have been properly considered, in line with Section 19 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004<sup>10</sup> which requires a local planning authority to carry out a SA for each of the proposals in a plan during its preparation.
- 1.40** A Sustainability Appraisal (SA) considers the economic, environmental, and social effects of a plan. The SA is undertaken from the start of the preparation of a plan to help ensure decisions lead to sustainable development. In March 2019 we published a draft Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report<sup>11</sup>. This identifies baseline information regarding, economic, social and environmental issues within the Borough which will be used in the main SA process.
- 1.41** An Interim Sustainability Appraisal Report (SA)<sup>12</sup> has been published alongside this Local Plan Issues and Options Document. The SA assesses the proposals of this document against the Sustainability Appraisal objectives set out in the Scoping Report.

### **Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA)**

- 1.42** The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017<sup>13</sup> (as amended) and the Conservation of Offshore Marine Habitats and Species Regulations 2017<sup>14</sup> (as amended) require local authorities to undertake assessment of the implications of their plans for internationally important wildlife sites. Internationally important wildlife sites are Special Areas of Conservation (sites designated for habitats and species other than birds), Special Protection Areas (sites designated for birds) and Ramsar sites (wetlands of international importance). There are a number of these sites along the entirety of the Wirral coastline.
- 1.43** This process is often called Habitats Regulations Assessment and consists of two key elements, an initial Assessment of Likely Significant Effects and an Appropriate Assessment, if there is a need to progress to an investigation of adverse effects on integrity.
- 1.44** An Interim Habitats Regulations Assessment<sup>15</sup> for this Local Plan is published alongside this document. This involves a screening Assessment of Likely Significant Effects (ALSE) of the emerging Local Plan on internationally important wildlife sites and identifies the potential implications of the plan options and highlights potential

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10 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/5/section/19>

11 <https://www.wirral.gov.uk/sites/default/files/all/planning%20and%20building/Local%20plans%20and%20planning%20policy/Local%20plans/Core%20strategy%20local%20plan/Sustainability%20Appraisal/Wirral%20Local%20Plan%20Sustainability%20Appraisal%20Scoping%20Report%20March%202019.pdf>

12 <https://www.wirral.gov.uk/planning-and-building/local-plans-and-planning-policy/local-planning-evidence-and-research-reports>

13 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2017/1012/contents/made>

14 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2017/1013/contents/made>

15 <https://www.wirral.gov.uk/planning-and-building/local-plans-and-planning-policy/local-planning-evidence-and-research-reports>

solutions as a basis for discussion with stakeholders, including Natural England, in advance of preparation of the full draft Local Plan. A full Appropriate Assessment will be undertaken on the final Draft Local Plan.

## How do we consult?

- 1.45** A series of walk-in exhibitions have been arranged in different venues across the Borough which members of the community are encouraged to attend (Details are available through the Local Plan Consultation web page <https://wirral-consult.objective.co.uk>.) A number of focus groups have also been arranged to discuss the various options for housing and employment land allocation set out in this document.

## Making your views known

- 1.46** We want to know your views.
- 1.47** This Wirral Local Plan Issues and Options consultation document is available for comment between Monday 27th January 2020 and Monday 23rd March 2020 – a period of eight weeks.
- 1.48** We are particularly interested to hear views on the options for our future development strategy and would also welcome views on other parts of the document as we move towards the finalisation of our new Local Plan.
- 1.49** Copies of this consultation document are available for viewing and inspection using any of the following options:
- Through the Council’s Local Plan website <sup>16</sup>;
  - Through the Council’s Consultation Portal: <https://wirral-consult.objective.co.uk>;
  - Wallasey Town Hall (Monday to Friday between 9:00 and 17:00): <https://www.wirral.gov.uk/about-council/contact-us/council-offices>; and
  - Public Libraries across Wirral (during their normal opening hours): <https://www.wirral.gov.uk/libraries-and-archives/find-library>.

## Interim Sustainability Appraisal and Interim Habitat Regulations Assessment

- 1.50** Copies of the Interim Sustainability Appraisal (SA) and Interim Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) can be viewed and downloaded through the Council’s Local Plan webpage: <https://www.wirral.gov.uk/planning-and-building/local-plans-and-planning-policy/local-planning-evidence-and-research-reports>
- 1.51** They will also be available for viewing and inspection at the above locations.
- 1.52** You can also comment on the SA and HRA through the Council’s online consultation portal: <https://wirral-consult.objective.co.uk>

## Evidence studies

- 1.53** Copies of the evidence studies can be viewed and downloaded using the Council’s Local Plan webpage: <https://www.wirral.gov.uk/planning-and-building/local-plans-and-planning-policy/local-planning-evidence-and-research-reports>
- 1.54** You can also comment on any of the evidence studies through the Council’s online consultation portal: <https://wirral-consult.objective.co.uk>

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.wirral.gov.uk/planning-and-building/local-plans-and-planning-policy/wirral-new-local-plan>

## How to comment on the Local Plan Issues and Options Document

- 1.55** Throughout the document we have set out a series of specific questions which address key issues, options and site proposals. These questions are set out throughout the document in the coloured boxes. You can make your views known through responding to these questions or, if you do not think the questions allow you to give your views, you can use Question 10.1 in Chapter 10 to make your own additional comments.
- 1.56** To make comments on the Local Plan Issues and Options consultation document you should use the Council's new online consultation portal: <https://wirral-consult.objective.co.uk> . A user guide is available on the webpage and you will need to register and provide your name and contact details if you want to make comments. Your comments will be published online but your name and details will not be shown.

**If you are unable to use the Council's online portal you can request a separate questionnaire via email or telephone (see details below).**

- 1.57** If you use the questionnaire to make comments please send to:
- Forward Planning Team, Wallasey Town Hall, Wirral, CH44 8ED; or
  - email: [localplan@wirral.gov.uk](mailto:localplan@wirral.gov.uk) .
  - telephone: 0151 691 8233

**Comments Must Be Received By The Council, In Writing, No Later Than 5pm On Monday 23rd March 2020.**

## Document Structure

- 1.58** This document is broadly split into three parts, set across a number of chapters. It aims to provide an overview of the challenges and requirements which the Council is faced with in preparing for the Local Plan – before setting out how we currently propose to respond in preparing the Local Plan. It then goes on to set out how we currently propose to respond to those challenges in preparing the Local Plan.

### Part One – Introduction and Context

- This Chapter explains the background and purpose of the Local Plan and of this consultation.
- Chapter 2, Context and Evidence, sets out our understanding of the context with regards to the preparation of the Local Plan. It considers the responses we received to the 2018 Development Options Review consultation and our key challenges and opportunities, before setting out the evidence we have collected around a number of different topics and summarising the associated implications for the Local Plan.
- Chapter 3 sets out the challenges and opportunities within Wirral with our proposed vision and objectives for future development in Wirral.

### Part Two – Local Plan Strategic Issues and Options

- Chapter 4 sets out the Spatial Options for the delivery of our development needs.



### Part Three – Local Plan Topic Based Issues and Options

- Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8, set out our current issues, options and proposals across the key themes of Our Homes, Our Economy, Our Social and Physical Infrastructure and Our Environment respectively.
- Chapter 9 explains the proposed list of policies that are currently expected to be included in the Regulation 19 stage of the Local Plan
- Chapter 10 addresses any other comments and questions and
- Chapter 11 sets out the Next Steps in the Wirral Local Plan process.

**1.59** Appendices at the end of the document (numbered with reference to the relevant chapter) set out the following information:

- 1.1 List of Evidence Base Studies
- 2.1 Strategic Sites
- 4.1 Proposed Urban Housing Allocation Sites
- 4.2 Potential Additional Urban Housing Allocation Sites
- 4.3 Other Suitable but Currently Uncertain Sites
- 4.4 Current and Future Housing Land Supply
- 4.5 Wirral Local Plan Housing Trajectory
- 4.6 Proposed Urban Employment Allocations
- 4.7 Interim Green Belt Site Assessment
- 5.1 Draft Housing in Multiple Occupation Policy
- 8.1 Open Space Sites to be Protected
- 9.1 List of Detailed Development Management Policies to be included in the Draft Final Local Plan

## Preferred Approach Boxes

Throughout the document, there are orange coloured boxes like this, to indicate out our proposed preferred and / or alternative approaches to a variety of topics within the Local Plan.

## Questions Boxes

Throughout the document, there are also green coloured boxes like this, to indicate numbered questions which we would like your views on. These questions will relate to the text directly above the box. In order to enable us to efficiently manage and review all the comments received we would be grateful if you could be as concise as possible.

There is a word limit of 300 words for each response, but you can upload other supporting information, if you need to.

Where you do upload supporting information please ensure that the comment you submit to each question summarises the main points made and references the questions number.

*This is particularly important for agents and consultants to note, as your summary is likely to be used to represent yours or your client's position in future reports.*

## Key Aspect Boxes

Throughout the document, there are also blue boxes like this, to indicate a key aspect of a Chapter and the Local Plan.

## 2 Context and Evidence

### Introduction

- 2.1** In order to deliver the aspirations of the Local Plan, it is important to review the work undertaken to date, bring this up to date with new research where necessary, develop a robust understanding of the issues facing Wirral and consider more fully the potential options to address them through the Local Plan.
- 2.2** The most significant areas of research and evidence gathering that have been undertaken enable us to understand demands placed upon us, and how we can appropriately accommodate this demand are set out in Appendix 1.1
- 2.3** The demand for land to build on in Wirral primarily relates to housing and employment. Retail demand can also place significant demands on land, but our research has shown that for the plan period, demand is relatively small scale and can be accommodated within existing and proposed centres and developments.
- 2.4** The demand for land needs to be balanced with other constraints, including Green Belt and wildlife, landscape, heritage and environmental designations. This balance is considered throughout the subsequent sections of this document, through seeking to maximise the potential of existing urban areas.
- 2.5** This section of the document explains this context and covers the following:
- public and stakeholder feedback from the Development Options Review in 2018;
  - our current understanding of our housing needs;
  - our current understanding of our economic development needs;
  - how we can ensure the most appropriate use of land through control of development density, while preserving local character;
  - issues relating to the viability of development in Wirral;
  - outcomes from a re-visiting of the review of the Green Belt; and
  - an overview of our overall development needs and pressures and key messages to be taken forward.

### What you told us during the Development Options Review Consultation

- 2.6** Previous public consultation on a review of Development Options was undertaken between 3rd September and 26th October 2018. It was based upon a recognition that there may be an insufficient amount of land available within Wirral's existing urban areas to meet our identified needs for new homes and new jobs within the next fifteen years and beyond. Consultation took place on four categories of potential new development sites:
- proposed housing allocations: sites within the Borough's existing urban areas which had been assessed within the Council's Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment and concluded to be potentially suitable for the delivery of new homes;
  - proposed employment allocations: sites within the Borough's existing urban areas which had been assessed within the Council's Employment Land and Premises Studies and concluded to be suitable for the delivery of new employment floorspace and jobs;
  - proposed mixed-use allocations: sites within the Borough's existing urban areas which had been assessed within either the Council's Strategic Housing Land

Availability Assessment or Employment Land Studies and concluded to be suitable for the delivery of a mix of new homes and commercial floorspace, for example, including sites in or around existing town centres where some new homes could be provided above or alongside new retail or employment floorspace; and

- Green Belt sites for further investigation: sites currently located within the Borough's Green Belt, which were identified for further investigation to help meet any shortfall in available land within existing urban areas.

**2.7** A total of just over 3,200 responses to the previous Development Options Review Consultation were received. The majority of these were from Wirral residents and a number were also received from local interest groups, technical consultees, neighbouring local authorities and prospective developers. This resulted in a wide array of issues being raised by respondents – a number were supportive of the approach taken by the Council, but many others expressed serious concerns. Some of the key points raised were as follows:

- fundamental objections to the principle of removing land from the Green Belt for development (although a number of comments also supported the necessity of releasing land from the Green Belt to allow Wirral's development needs to be met);
- if new development in the Green Belt is required, the delivery of a single new settlement should be considered rather than a large number of smaller sites;
- the development of brownfield land should be the first priority, with greater emphasis placed on the delivery of major redevelopment at Wirral Waters in particular;
- large numbers of empty homes were not being utilised, which should be brought back into use rather than building new homes;
- the housing targets for Wirral are over-estimated and unnecessarily high – fewer new homes should be built;
- certain areas of Wirral should be protected from new development and should not be required to provide affordable housing (although a number of comments considered that an insufficient amount of new affordable housing was being proposed);
- concern that housing developers were motivated by profit, and not by putting the best interests of the Borough first;
- concern that the health and wellbeing of residents is not being adequately considered by the Council;
- concern that development being proposed would exacerbate the climate emergency and increase CO<sup>2</sup> emissions; and
- fundamental constraints in Wirral's infrastructure networks, making it difficult or impossible to accommodate new development.

**2.8** A wide range of comments were also raised about the merits of individual sites and the estimated development capacity of each. These included concerns around infrastructure capacity close to certain sites and impacts that development would have on issues such as character, wildlife, flood risk and noise in and around certain sites.

- 2.9** We have considered all the comments we received and have set out a summary of our responses to them in our Statement of Response to the Development Options Review<sup>17</sup>. Because of our need to balance competing interests and address the requirements set out in the National Planning Policy Framework we know that we will not have been able to satisfy every respondent. However, we have tried to reflect and respond to the comments received in this Regulation 18 document wherever possible.

## Housing Need

### What is required of us?

- 2.10** One of the most important tasks for the new Local Plan will be to provide for the appropriate number of homes to meet our needs. This is a key component of our vision to ensure that we will overcome any inequalities across the Borough and create sustainable communities and align with the Strategic Objectives set out in Chapter 3.
- 2.11** In order for our Local Plan to be found sound, when it is examined by the independent Inspector at the Examination in Public, it needs to comply with paragraph 35 of the National Planning Policy Framework. This requires the Council to *“provide a strategy which, as a minimum, seeks to meet the area’s objectively assessed needs”*.
- 2.12** The importance of housing delivery has been underlined by the ‘Local Plan Intervention’ letter<sup>18</sup> sent to Wirral Council by the Secretary of State for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) in 2019. This stated *that “Up-to-date plans are essential in providing clarity to communities and developers about where homes should be built and where not, so that development is planned rather than the result of speculative applications”*.
- 2.13** The need for all local authorities to have a Local Plan in place is supported by the Government’s 2017 Housing White Paper. This outlined the Government’s view that not enough homes are being built across the country, resulting in a ‘broken housing market’. Whilst the ‘affordability ratio’, the difference between local earnings and house prices is slightly better in Wirral than the national average<sup>19</sup>, house prices have nevertheless been rising sharply and making local home ownership more and more challenging to achieve<sup>20</sup>.
- 2.14** As a result, in April 2019 the Council responded to MHCLG stating that sufficient land will be allocated in the Local Plan to meet the need for housing for the whole of Wirral for the Plan period 2020-2035<sup>21</sup>. The Local Plan Action Plan, prepared at that time, set out that the Council did not believe that there were any exceptional circumstances that would justify an alternative approach to using the standardised methodology to calculate the Borough’s housing requirements. Further information is set out below.

17 <https://www.wirral.gov.uk/planning-and-building/local-plans-and-planning-policy/local-planning-evidence-and-research-reports-3>

18 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/660232/Letter\\_Local\\_Plan\\_intervention.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/660232/Letter_Local_Plan_intervention.pdf)

19 <https://www.wirralintelligenceservice.org/media/2625/local-insight-wirral-october-profile.pdf>

20 The latest analysis is included in the latest Strategic Housing Market Assessment for Wirral 2019

21 <https://www.wirral.gov.uk/sites/default/files/all/planning%20and%20building/Local%20plans%20and%20planning%20policy/Local%20plans/Core%20strategy%20local%20plan/Action%20Plan/Wirral%20Local%20Plan%20Action%20Plan%20-%20April%202019.pdf>

## What our evidence tells us

- 2.15** Paragraph 60 of the National Planning Policy Framework requires Local Plans to be *“informed by a local housing need assessment, conducted using the standard method in national planning guidance – unless exceptional circumstances justify an alternative approach which also reflects current and future demographic trends and market signals”*.
- 2.16** The standard method is a formula-based approach, with three components, set out in the Government’s national Planning Practice Guidance<sup>22</sup> as:
- Step 1 – Setting the baseline, using the 2014-based housing projections for England. This should be used to establish the average annual household growth over a 10-year period (i.e. from 2019 through to 2029). In Wirral, in 2019, this equated to 700 households per year.
  - Step 2 – Adjust to take account of housing affordability, using median workplace-based affordability ratios. For Wirral, the current ratio is 6.28. For each 1% the ratio is above 4, the average household growth from Step 1 should be increased by 0.25%. The adjustment factor for Wirral is therefore 1.1425 (i.e. 14.25%) – which when added to average household growth increases the figure to 800 homes per annum.
  - Step 3 – Capping the level of increase. For authorities like Wirral where strategic policies for housing are more than five years old, the adjustment factor in Step 2 should be capped at 40%. However, because the adjustment factor in Wirral is already less than 40%, 800 homes per annum is the Council’s established housing requirement.
- 2.17** Whilst it is for neighbouring authorities within the Liverpool City Region to justify their own Local Plans and housing targets based upon individual local circumstances, it is helpful to examine the extent to which our target of 800 homes per annum compares to others established through the standard methodology – which is set out in Table 2.1. The table identifies that as a proportion of overall households, growth of 8.2% sits just below the overall level for the city region at 8.7%.

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22 <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-and-economic-development-needs-assessments>

**Table 2.1 Liverpool City Region housing statistics**

Local authority	Households (2019)	Notional Annual Household Growth	Notional Housing Target 2020-2035	Housing Target as % of 2019 Households
Halton	55,728	254	3,810	6.8%
Knowsley	63,820	251	3,765	5.9%
Liverpool	221,886	1,624	24,360	11.0%
Sefton	122,323	632	9,480	7.7%
St Helens	79,723	460	6,900	8.7%
Wirral	146,132	800	12,000	8.2%
City Region	689,612	4,021	60,315	8.7%

### Implications for the Local Plan

- 2.18** On this basis, the Council needs to ensure that the new Local Plan provides for a minimum requirement of 800 net new homes per annum. This equates to a minimum requirements of 12,000 net new homes across the whole 15-year Plan period.
- 2.19** The Local Plan must also be able to identify a sufficient supply of housing land to meet local housing need which:
- is **'deliverable'** in the first five years following the adoption of the Local Plan; and
  - is **'developable'** within the subsequent years 6 to 15 following the adoption of the Local Plan
- 2.20** The Glossary to the National Planning Policy Framework sets out what is meant by being 'deliverable' and 'developable'<sup>23</sup>:
- **'Deliverable'** sites for housing should be available now, offer a suitable location for development now, and be achievable with a reasonable prospect that housing will be delivered on the site within 5 years;
  - **'Developable'** sites should be in a suitable location for housing development with a reasonable prospect that they will be available and could be viably developed at the point envisaged.
- 2.21** In order to comply with the national Planning Practice Guidance on the calculation of five-year housing land supply, an additional 20% buffer will also need to be applied for the first five years (brought forward from later in the plan period).
- 2.22** The 20% buffer is required because the results of the first Housing Delivery Test (HDT) in 2018 showed that the delivery of new homes in Wirral over the previous 3 years was 73%<sup>24</sup>, below the 85% requirement set by Government (NPPF para 73c and footnote 39) and subsequently results in the need to apply a buffer to improve the prospect of achieving the planned supply.

23 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/810197/NPPF\\_Feb\\_2019\\_revised.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/810197/NPPF_Feb_2019_revised.pdf)

24 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/housing-delivery-test-2018-measurement>

- 2.23** As a result, our housing land supply, including the 20% buffer for the first five years of the plan period would, effectively, need to provide up to 960 homes per annum plus an allowance for demolitions.

### Question 2.1

Do you agree with the Council's calculations using the standard method set out in national Guidance?<sup>25</sup> If not please explain why?

### Question 2.2

Do you think there are exceptional local circumstances to deviate from the standard method for calculating local housing need? If you believe there are exceptional local circumstances, please let us know what they are.

### Question 2.3

Can you suggest an alternative approach that would also comply with national policy?

## Settlement Hierarchy

### Proposed Settlement Hierarchy

- 2.24** The overarching strategy for development in the Borough seeks to focus development within the existing urban area, as the Council believes that this will best support and provide for the most sustainable patterns of development.
- 2.25** This strategy in particular is focused on the two strategic development opportunities of Birkenhead and its immediate hinterland and Wirral Waters, a multi-billion pound private sector-led regeneration investment at the heart of the older urban area within the historic Birkenhead and Wallasey docklands. Both will be the prime focus for the majority of new development and public investment in the Borough across the whole of the Plan period and lie at the heart of the top tier of the Borough's settlement hierarchy, the Urban Conurbation<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-and-economic-development-needs-assessments>

<sup>26</sup> This area has been the focus of long-term public and private sector investment over a number of years, including the former Inner Area Programme, the designation of the Merseyside Development Corporation, the City Challenge Initiative, Single Regeneration Budget, European Structural Funds, Housing Market Renewal and Growth Point funding and was the focus for regeneration and investment in the Secretary of State's former Regional Spatial Strategy to 2021



- 2.26** The importance of this focus, which also mirrors the pattern of physical, social, economic and environmental disparity within the Borough, has been reinforced by a more recent review of facilities and services including, including infrastructure, post offices, supermarket and other retail provision, community facilities, places of worship, leisure facilities, schools, doctor's surgeries and bus and train accessibility.
- 2.27** The review underlines the importance of embedding the continued regeneration of the Urban Conurbation, in the area to the east of the M53 Motorway, within the Local Plan. This should continue to seek to focus development and public, voluntary and private sector investment towards the areas in greatest need of physical, social, economic and environmental renewal, which also function as the areas of greatest importance to future social and economic well-being, in terms of their position within the Borough's settlement hierarchy.
- 2.28** This pro-active, regeneration-focused, policy-led approach will also need to be strongly reflected within policies for increasing development densities to maximise viability, and to ensure the most appropriate patterns of sustainable development across the Borough. This will, in particular, make the most effective use of vacant and underused brownfield land in line with the priorities in national policy.
- 2.29** Although to some extent it is mirrored and reinforced by the settlement hierarchy, the approach to town centres and the retail hierarchy is considered separately in Chapter 6, Table 6.3 of this document, which defines the Borough's retail centres in accordance with specific retail-based priorities set out in the National Planning Policy Framework.
- 2.30** In the Council's view the hierarchy set out in Table 2.2 below best reflects the existing role and function of each the Borough's main settlement areas, by identifying a single major urban area to the east of the M53 Motorway and by taking account of the difference between this area and the more commuter-based urban settlements to the west of the M53.
- 2.31** The Council believes that this approach will also allow the wider strategic importance of the larger urban area on the opposite bank of the river to Liverpool to be more fully recognised, alongside the more secondary role of the urban settlements to the west. This will allow the Borough to contribute positively to the wider vision to promote economic and social growth and revitalisation at the heart of the City Region.

## Our Preferred Approach

Our preferred option is to use the settlement hierarchy set out in Table 2.2, to form the overarching basis of future planning policy. This will:

- encourage increased development and public and private sector investment within the 'Urban Conurbation' as the first priority of the Local Plan before the provision of supporting development; and
- meet locally identified needs, within the remaining surrounding urban settlements, large and small villages and then the single hamlet.

This focused priority will cover all development types including retailing and the provision of public services and will guide the Local Plan's approach to site selection and the prioritisation of investment.

- 2.32** For the avoidance of doubt, the 'Urban Conurbation' is equivalent to the Settlement Areas 1-4 identified in the Proposed Submission Draft Core Strategy published for public consultation in December 2012 and the 'Urban Settlements' to Settlement Areas 5-7 in the Proposed Draft Submission Core Strategy, as many of the Council's monitoring and data collection and evidence base documents still refer to this previous geography.

**Table 2.2 Settlement Hierarchy**

Hierarchy	Township
Urban Conurbation (previously identified as Settlement Areas 1-4)	Bidston, Birkenhead, Bebington, Beechwood, Bromborough, Bromborough Pool, Claughton, Eastham, Egremont, Liscard Mountwood, New Brighton, New Ferry, Noctorum, Oxtun, Port Sunlight, Poulton, Prenton, Raby Mere, Rock Ferry, Rock Park, Seacombe, Spital, Tranmere, Wallasey Village
Urban Settlement (previously identified as Settlement Areas 5-7)	Urban Barnston, Caldy, Gayton, Greasby, Heswall, Hoylake, Irby, Leasowe, Meols, Moreton, Newton, Pensby, Thingwall, Upton West Kirby, Woodchurch
Large Village (previously identified as Settlement Area 8)	Thornton Hough
Small Village (previously identified as Settlement Area 8)	Barnston Village, Brimstage, Frankby, Raby, Saughall Massie, Storeton, Thurstaston
Hamlet (previously identified as Settlement Area 8)	Landican

### Question 2.4

Do you agree with the proposed settlement hierarchy set out in Table 2.2 and an approach based towards focusing investment and regeneration toward the Urban Conurbation to the east of the M53 Motorway? If not, what alternative approach would you consider and why?

### Question 2.5

Do you agree with the settlement definitions and groupings, and if not, what changes would you wish to see and why?

## Economic Need

### What is required of us?

- 2.33** The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development. The approach taken should allow each area to build on its strengths, counter any weaknesses and address the challenges of the future (paragraph 80 refers). NPPF paragraph 81 states that planning policies should:
- set out a clear economic vision and strategy which positively and proactively encourages sustainable economic growth, having regard to Local Industrial Strategies and other local policies for economic development and regeneration;
  - set criteria, or identify strategic sites, for local and inward investment to match the strategy and to meet anticipated needs over the plan period;
  - seek to address potential barriers to investment, such as inadequate infrastructure, services or housing, or a poor environment; and
  - be flexible enough to accommodate needs not anticipated in the plan, allow for new and flexible working practices (such as live-work accommodation), and to enable a rapid response to changes in economic circumstances.
- 2.34** To achieve this, plan-making bodies should take a proactive role in identifying and helping to bring forward land that may be suitable for meeting development needs, using the full range of powers available to them (NPPF paragraph 119 refers).
- 2.35** In Wirral's context, the Borough's unique geography and strategic connectivity should continue to be used to support port-related development and to create opportunities to strengthen the wider functional economic market area, particularly through its extensive passenger rail and cross-river road network and proximity to Chester and North Wales.

- 2.36** To support this, National Planning Practice Guidance for housing and economic needs assessments<sup>27</sup> states that a robust evidence base must be prepared to understand business needs and analyse current market demand, to develop an idea of future employment needs.

### What our evidence tells us

- 2.37** Like many older urban areas, over the last 30 years Wirral has seen a decline in traditional local industries. Targeted regeneration of key growth sectors and sites is therefore critical for the continued economic prosperity of the Borough over the coming plan period.
- 2.38** Evidence from the Strategic Housing and Employment Land Market Assessment (SHELMA) for the City Region (2017) and from the Wirral Employment Land and Premises Study (WELPS) (2017) outlines the Borough's likely future requirements based on forecasts of future employment and growth and the past take-up of land and identifies the importance of being able to accommodate demand in a way that provides a flexible choice of appropriate opportunities for future development, to allow businesses to develop and create local employment.

### Employment Land Need

- 2.39** The SHELMA has assessed and identified the quantity of new employment space that would be needed to be accommodated in Wirral, using two main scenarios consistent with forecasts prepared for the Liverpool City Region Local Enterprise Partnership. The Baseline Scenario identified that up to 6,600 additional FTE jobs could be created in Wirral by 2037, with up to 11,500 FTE jobs created under a Growth Scenario, based on the improved performance of local growth sectors and identified development projects.
- 2.40** An additional margin was also added to the labour demand-derived figures to provide some flexibility to allow for existing vacant floorspace; allow for a margin of error in the forecasts; provide a choice of sites to facilitate competition; and to provide flexibility to allow for delays in sites coming forward. This margin was recommended to be based on 5 years completions trend data, which for Wirral was 23 hectares (Ha) (2012-37). The final total land requirements were derived by adding the margin to the outcomes of the baseline and growth scenario forecasts.
- 2.41** An alternative approach was included, based on projecting forward past gross completions (based on local authority monitoring data) of employment floorspace development for B1, B2, and small scale B8 developments. since 2000. This period was bisected by the 'credit crunch' in 2008, and in their view was representative of a full market cycle. Large scale B8 developments were stripped out. Completions data was recorded in terms of floorspace (sq m) and converted to land area (ha) using consistent plot ratio assumptions from published guidance from the Homes and Communities Agency. As gross completions data was used, it was not necessary to include provision for a 'margin' for this scenario.
- 2.42** Table 2.3 sets out the implications for the accommodation of projected employment growth over the period 2012-2037 based on the Baseline, Growth and Past Completions trend scenarios.

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<sup>27</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-and-economic-development-needs-assessments>

**Table 2.3 LCR SHELMA employment land economic forecasts 2012-2037 (Wirral only)**

SHELMA	Baseline (ha)		Growth (ha)		Past Completions (ha)	
	B2	B1	B2	B1	B2	Small scale B8
B1	B2	B1	B2	B1	B2	Small scale B8
27.6	29.1	33.8	30.1	26.1	89.0	14.5
= 56.7		= 63.9		= 129.6		

**2.43** Small scale B8 requirements were not included under the Baseline or Growth scenarios, as the specific need for storage and distribution (B8) uses could not be easily isolated from sector-based employment forecasts and is assumed to be included under main type of business (B1) and general industrial (B2) uses identified<sup>28</sup>. The potential additional need for sites for large scale B8 logistics use has also been assessed at City Region level but no additional land requirements have so far been identified for Wirral.

**2.44** The WELPS pro-rated the SHELMA calculations for Wirral to a fifteen-year timeframe equivalent to the local plan period (2018-2033 at the time of the WELPS, but now 2020-2035) as shown in Table 2.4 below.

**Table 2.4 WELPS SHELMA-derived fifteen year forecast net employment land requirement**

Scenario	B1	B2	Small scale B8	Total	Margin	Total+ Margin
Baseline scenario (6,600 FTEs)	13.44	6.78	0	20.22	13.8	34.02
Growth scenario	17.1	7.44	0	24.6	13.8	38.4
Past completions	15.66	53.4	8.7	77.76	0	77.76

**2.45** The past completions scenario is believed to be the most appropriate scenario to follow, as it is based on past economic development performance within Wirral.

**2.46** As a sense check the Council has updated the past completions figures to the most recent 5-year time frame to April 2019 as set out in Table 2.5 below:

**Table 2.5 Employment Completion Figures**

Year	B1	B2	Small scale B8	Total Land
2014/15	3.53	3.96	0.36	7.85
2015/16	2.17	1.22	0.28	3.67
2016/17	3.14	2.53	0.02	5.69
2017/18	6.12	0.69	0	6.81
2018/19	0.07	2.28	0.43	2.78

<sup>28</sup> The classification of B1, B2 and B8 uses are based on the types of business and industrial uses identified in the national Use Classes Order 1987 (as amended)

Year	B1	B2	Small scale B8	Total Land
Total	15.03	10.68	1.09	26.8
Annual average	3.006	2.14	0.22	5.36

**2.47** This would result in revised employment land requirement as set out in Table 2.6 below:

**Table 2.6 Employment Land Requirements**

Scenario	B1	B2	Small-scale B8	Total land
Past take up rate	45.09 HA	32.1 HA	3.3 HA	80.4 HA

### Implications for the Local Plan

**2.48** Based on the above evidence, there is a need to allocate a minimum of 80 HA of employment land during the Local Plan period.

**2.49** The Council is seeking to meet its employment needs in the urban area and on brownfield sites. Within the Local Plan, we need to be able to identify a sufficient supply of employment land across the Plan period with a clear economic vision based on a robustly prepared evidence base to be compliant with the National Planning Policy Framework and National Planning Practice Guidance. Employment land supply is discussed in Chapter 6.

#### Question 2.6

Do you agree that the Council should calculate the need for employment land based on the Past Completions approach? If not please provide your reasons.

#### Question 2.7

If the Council were to calculate the need for employment land based on the lower Baseline or Growth scenarios, do you believe that potentially surplus employment land should be re-designated for alternative uses, including, where suitable, new housing development?

## Retail and Leisure needs

### What is required of us?

**2.50** Paragraph 85 of the National Planning Policy Framework states that planning policies should allocate a range of suitable sites in town centres to meet the scale and type of development likely to be needed, looking at least 10 years ahead. Meeting anticipated needs for retail, leisure, office and other main town centre uses over this period should not be compromised by limited site availability, so town centre boundaries should be kept under review where necessary.

## What our evidence tells us

- 2.51** The Wirral Retail and Town Centres Study 2019 prepared by consultants WYG provides an up-to-date objective assessment of retail and leisure development needs in the Borough, together with a clear understanding of retail and leisure provision and potential strategic responses/recommendations. The study is underpinned by a new household survey of 1,100 Wirral households. For the purposes of the survey the Borough was divided into 11 zones which are based on postcode areas grouped around one or more of the existing town centres.

### Capacity for Additional Convenience Goods floorspace

- 2.52** Convenience shopping is on food and everyday items. The 2019 study concludes that, by 2029 (the minimum timeframe identified by the NPPF when allocating sites), after commitments, there will be no need/capacity for additional convenience floorspace in Birkenhead, primarily due to convenience goods stores in Birkenhead under- trading. The findings suggest that there is an over-provision of convenience goods facilities in the town.
- 2.53** In contrast to Birkenhead, existing convenience goods stores in West Kirby are assessed to be over- trading with floorspace capacity of some 1,300sq m net identified over the next 10 years.
- 2.54** There is also identified to be some capacity, albeit limited, for additional convenience goods floorspace in the other three towns of Liscard, Heswall and Moreton.
- 2.55** There is also assessed capacity for additional convenience floorspace in the three district centres in Wirral. For Woodchurch Road (Prenton), primarily due to both the Sainsbury's and Aldi stores overtrading, there is assessed to potential capacity for an additional convenience goods facility. Lower levels of floorspace capacity are identified for the other two district centres of Bromborough Village and Hoylake (less than 500sq m net).

### Capacity for Additional Comparison Goods Floorspace

- 2.56** In relation to comparison (non-food) goods, the 2019 assessment identifies that as the main comparison goods retail destination in Wirral, Birkenhead, after commitments/planning permissions, is assessed to have the greatest level of floorspace requirements by 2029 (1,100sq m net). This requirement is assessed to increase to some 5,600sq m net by 2034.
- 2.57** In terms of the other town centres in Wirral, only limited comparison goods capacity is identified in each over the next 10 years (less than 300sq m net). In the longer term (end of plan period), Liscard is has been assessed to see the largest level of capacity (1,200sq m net) whilst the other towns were assessed to have capacity of less than 800sq m net.
- 2.58** Turning to the district centres, there is only very limited capacity identified in both the next 10 years and plan period. However, comparison goods capacity in Bromborough Village at the end of the plan period is anticipated to be circa 800sqm net.

### Commercial Leisure and Cultural Activities

- 2.59** The Wirral Retail and Town Centre Study 2019 includes a detailed assessment of the commercial leisure needs undertaken for the centres across Wirral. The assessments use data gathered from the household survey to understand how leisure

facilities in Wirral currently meet the needs of the population. The results from this, coupled with the use of national statistics in respect of the typical level of provision for specific types of leisure facilities, and reference to estimated increases in the Study Area population were used to inform judgements in respect of the likely future needs.

- 2.60** Whilst a low proportion of respondents to the household survey wanted to see a new gym facility in their local area, the forecast and outstanding operator requirements indicate that Wirral could potentially accommodate 1-2 additional indoor health & fitness facilities over the next 10 years. We assess that this need should be directed to Birkenhead.
- 2.61** When looking at cinema needs across Wirral, it is considered that the existing provision largely meets the needs of the current population. Large facilities already exist in Birkenhead Town Centre, at New Brighton and at the Croft Retail Park, and there is also an additional smaller bespoke drive-in facility in Birkenhead. Given that a new 2-screen cinema has recently been approved as part of the Beacon Arts Village development in Hoylake, the study concluded that there was not a requirement for any additional new cinema facilities in Wirral in the next 10 years.
- 2.62** For ten-pin bowling, the Study identifies that there are 2 facilities in Wirral that adequately meet the requirements of the population. Accordingly, the study concluded that it was not necessary to plan for a new facility in the Borough at this time but should proposals for such a development come forward it should be judged on its own merits in accordance with town centre policies at the time of submission.
- 2.63** In terms of arts and cultural facilities, the Study identifies that existing provision across Wirral is of a scale appropriate to the size of the Borough and its proximity to the major cultural centre of Liverpool. Consideration should be given to ways of further promoting and improving the marketing of existing facilities and any future proposals for arts and/or cultural development be assessed on its own merit.

#### Summary of needs for town centre uses

- 2.64** The overall quantitative needs to 2029 (the minimum time frame identified by the National Planning Policy Framework when allocating sites) for retail and commercial leisure for the Borough's Town and District centres is summarised in Table 2.7 below:

**Table 2.7 Quantitative Capacity Summary (to 2029)**

Centre	Convenience Goods (sq m net)	Comparison Goods (sq m net)	Health & Fitness (no.)	Cinema Screens (no.)	Bingo (no.)	Tenpin Bowling (no.)
Birkenhead	nil	1,100	1-2	Nil	Nil	Nil
Liscard	300	300	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Heswall	600	200	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Moreton	700	100	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
West Kirby	1,300	100	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Bromborough Village	300	200	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil



Centre	Convenience Goods (sq m net)	Comparison Goods (sq m net)	Health & Fitness (no.)	Cinema Screens (no.)	Bingo (no.)	Tenpin Bowling (no.)
Hoylake	500	30	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Woodchurch Road	1,600	100	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil

## Increasing Residential Development Density

### What is required of us?

- 2.65** The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) places a strong emphasis on achieving appropriate densities and making efficient use of land (NPPF paragraphs 122 and 123 refer). Ensuring that optimal use is made of available land is particularly relevant when there is an existing or anticipated shortage of land for meeting identified housing needs. This should include the use of minimum density standards for city and town centres and other locations that are well served by public transport and the use of minimum density standards should also be considered for other parts of the plan area.
- 2.66** The NPPF also refers to achieving the efficient use of land and the importance of creating safe inclusive places which promote health and well-being whilst securing high standards of design and amenity for existing and future users. NPPF paragraphs 28 and 127 indicate that non-strategic policies should be used to set locally relevant design policies, which are sympathetic to local character and history, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change and establish or maintain a strong sense of place.
- 2.67** The National Design Guide <sup>29</sup> also provides guidance on how density should respond to its context, placing particular emphasis on accessibility, proposed building types and local character and 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.

### What our evidence tells us

- 2.68** In addition to re-considering our housing and employment land supply, to ensure that we are maximising the potential of our urban and brownfield land supply we have commissioned a new study of development density, to ensure that we can support the most sustainable patterns of development and maximise the potential of the most appropriate areas for development across Wirral. The Wirral Housing Density Study will identify the most appropriate broad locations for increasing density, by focusing higher density development around locations where sustainable travel, such as walking, cycling and public transport can most easily be supported.
- 2.69** The outcome of the density study will be a recommendation on how and where higher urban densities will be allowed across the Borough and how policy should be formulated to ensure that an appropriate design-led approach is secured. This will be reflected in more detail as the Local Plan progresses towards Regulation 19.

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-design-guide>

## Implications for the Local Plan

- 2.70** The Council's policies already allow higher density development to be permitted in areas within an easy walking distance of a high frequency public transport service, in and around existing centres and to support viability in areas of greatest need of physical, social, economic or environmental regeneration, subject to the impact on character and local amenity<sup>30</sup>. Proposals for lower densities have, however, not yet been actively discouraged or refused.
- 2.71** A new approach, based on the findings of the Density Study, could pro-actively require new development to be built at a higher density and the Council could, in line with national policy, begin to refuse planning applications which they consider fail to make efficient use of land. An Interim Report has been published for public comment alongside this Local plan Issues and options document.
- 2.72** This approach will ensure that development density is maximised in all settlements in Wirral through appropriately worded policy and that sites coming forward through the planning application process are therefore required to fully address its requirements to ensure the best and most effective use of suitable urban land.

### Question 2.8

Do you agree that densities should be increased whilst maintaining good design to ensure the maximum use of suitable urban land? Are there any particular sites or areas where you believe that this would be most or least appropriate? Please give your reasons.

### Question 2.9

Are there any particular sites or areas where you believe that this would be most or least appropriate? Please give your reasons.

## Development Viability

### What is required of us?

- 2.73** The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that "... *planning policies should identify a sufficient supply and mix of sites, taking into account their availability, suitability and likely economic viability.*" (paragraph 67).
- 2.74** The viability of a site will depend on a range of factors including land remediation costs, building and infrastructure costs, and the costs of any additional local plan policy requirements. These could include affordable housing, education, open space etc, the costs being set against the market value of the development and developer profit expectations. NPPF (Paragraph 34) also makes it clear that Local Plan policy requirements should not undermine the deliverability of the plan.

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<sup>30</sup> Relevant policies were included in the Proposed Submission Draft Core Strategy, which was approved by the Council for the purposes of development management in October 2012 and published for public consultation in December 2012 (Policy CS2 and Policy CS43 refer).

- 2.75** Sites that are unlikely to be ‘deliverable’ or ‘developable’ cannot be included as land allocations in the Local Plan.
- 2.76** The NPPF defines a ‘deliverable’ site as being achievable with a realistic prospect that development will be delivered on the site within 5 years and a ‘developable’ site as a site which could be viably developed at the point envisaged. The National Planning Practice Guidance states that *“a site is considered achievable for development where there is a reasonable prospect that the particular type of development will be developed on the site at a particular point in time. This is essentially a judgement about the economic **viability of a site**, and the capacity of the developer to complete and let or sell the development over a certain period.”*
- 2.77** National Planning Practice Guidance does not require every site to be assessed for viability in plan making suggesting that site typologies can be used. However, it states that in some circumstances more detailed assessment may be necessary for particular areas or key sites critical to delivering the strategic priorities of the plan. This could include, for example, large sites; sites that provide a significant proportion of planned supply, sites that enable or unlock other development sites or sites within priority regeneration areas on which the Council will need to rely, to demonstrate that that the Plan strategy is deliverable.

## What our evidence tells us

### Residential Developments

- 2.78** The ‘Wirral Local Plan Economic Viability Baseline Update’ 2018 undertook a high-level assessment of development viability and identified that the viability of housing development based on a range of typologies varied geographically across the Borough in four broad Zones (Figure 2.1). Its key findings were that market housing development on brownfield land in the lowest value areas (Zone 1) around Birkenhead is generally not viable without adjustment to the level of developers profit or land price or both. Viability in Zone 2 improves (depending upon density and whether site was greenfield or brownfield) whilst in Zones 3 and 4 Market Housing is generally viable.

Figure 2.1 Viability Zones

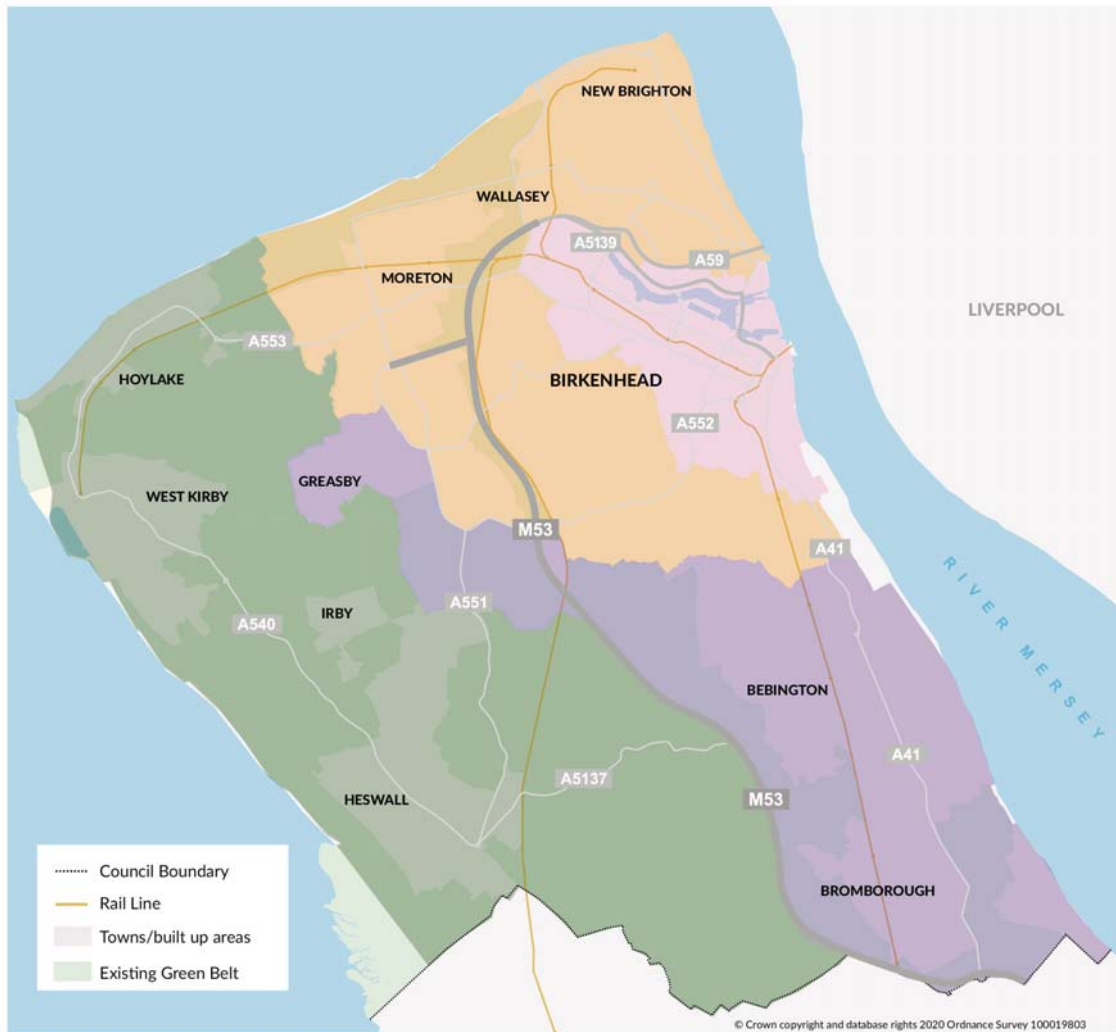


Figure 2.1 Development Viability Zones



**2.79** The study findings indicate that it may be appropriate to consider introducing differing levels of affordable housing requirements within each geographical Zone, to reflect the range of development values and hence viability in each area of the Borough. The study also suggests a test of viability is introduced into the Local Plan’s policy to ensure that development on brownfield sites is not prejudiced due to potential contamination and other abnormal development costs.

### Non-Residential Developments

**2.80** The results for the viability testing for the office and industrial uses suggest that employment development is not currently viable on a speculative basis. The study found that existing planning policy obligations do not place such a burden on new employment development so as to prejudice its future delivery. Issues in relation to

viability arise because rents and capital values for employment uses are still currently at a relatively low level and in comparison, there is a ‘gap’ with build costs. Traditionally in recent years this gap has been met by public sector funding support or in the case of mixed-use schemes cross-subsidised by other more viable forms of development.

- 2.81** Notwithstanding the above, the study advises that is likely that office and industrial development will come forward in Wirral in the future motivated by specific circumstances such as an owner occupier wishing to expand or alternatively with the benefit of public sector funding support. The results of the viability testing for retail development show that development of both convenience and comparison retail is generally viable at the present.

**Implications for the Local Plan**

- 2.82** The Council are undertaking detailed further work to understand viability issues and thresholds across the Borough on strategic sites and will be undertaking specific consultation with developers and stakeholders on this issue as part of the Regulation 18 consultation.
- 2.83** The Council is working with our partners Homes England and the Combined Authority to secure funding to address viability issues and help to accelerate housing delivery on major brownfield sites within the Birkenhead area, supported by an updated regeneration framework for the area.
- 2.84** Viability has been considered when assessing potential sites in line with paragraph 67 of the NPPF. It may therefore be unachievable to deliver some of the sites identified as part of the Council’s housing land availability study (SHLAA) due to viability considerations, which may not be able to be included as proposed allocations unless viability can be overcome by other means.
- 2.85** The latest position, taking account of the findings of the Economic Viability Baseline Update, is set out in the proposed land allocations in Appendices 4.1 and 4.2, and 4.3.

**Question 2.10**

Do you agree with the findings of the Economic Viability Baseline Update 2018? If not, please give your reasons.

**Question 2.11**

Are you aware of any other ways that potential gaps in viability could be addressed in the Local Plan, to bring more urban brownfield sites forward for development?

## Delivering Growth Through Regeneration

- 2.86** At the heart of the Local Plan Vision and strategy and the key to delivering the Preferred Urban Option is the comprehensive regeneration of Birkenhead. Birkenhead is the largest urban conurbation in the Borough and its town centre forms the sub regional centre in the retail hierarchies, outlined in Table 6.3. As is described below there is both a strategic requirement and a strategic opportunity of national significance to realise the regeneration of Birkenhead as an exemplar 'Urban Garden City'.
- 2.87** The National Planning Policy Framework supports the delivery of regeneration, stating that policies need to assist in town centre and estate regeneration in addition to recycling direct and urban land. Our Spatial Vision and Objectives focus our local development needs to urban and brownfield areas.

### What our evidence tells us

- 2.88** There are a range of existing strategies and evidence base which provide the policy context and the supporting justification for the regeneration of Birkenhead:

#### Wirral Waters Vision Statement and Design & Access Statement 2010

- 2.89** These documents were prepared in support of the outline planning application which was granted planning permission for the Wirral Waters strategic mixed-use development area.
- 2.90** The documents set out the Vision for transforming current underused/ vacant dockland into an exemplar world-class mixed-use neighbourhood. Importantly the Vision Statement also emphasises the need to unlock the potential of Wirral waters by complimentary actions to "repopulate" and reconnect Birkenhead through regeneration of several adjoining Partnership neighbourhoods. Essential infrastructure improvements including a mass transit system to connect Wirral Waters and the Partnership Neighbourhoods to the Mersey Rail system each other and Birkenhead Town Centre.

#### The Integrated Regeneration Strategy for Birkenhead and Wirral Waters 2010

- 2.91** The BIRS provides a framework for the integration of the Wirral Waters proposals with the surrounding residential neighbourhoods and Birkenhead Town Centre. It sets out a vision for Birkenhead, informed by stakeholder engagement and baseline analysis, and provides a spatial framework to demonstrate how physical change and development could potentially help address key economic, social and environmental issues in the area. The BIRS sets out eight thematic principles, which are each supported by a set of objectives to guide future development, regeneration and investment in Birkenhead. The eight thematic principles are:
- Achieving Economic Prosperity;
  - Town Centre Restructuring;
  - Take Advantage of the Waterfront;
  - Enhanced Education and Learning Offer;
  - Health and Well Being;
  - A Sustainable Residential Offer;
  - Places, Spaces and Connections; and
  - Sustainable Future.

- 2.92** It provides a series of recommendations including advancing the concept of an education cluster/campus centred around a possible university precinct campus; preparing an integrated masterplan for Birkenhead Town Centre; and developing an East Wirral Transport Study.

### **A Transport Options and Feasibility Study for East Wirral 2017**

- 2.93** This exercise reviewed a range of transport studies completed across Wirral over the past decade in response to the BIRS recommendations and proposed the development of a 'Strategic Transport Framework for East Wirral' in order to identify a priority list of projects to support the regeneration ambitions for East Wirral.

### **Wirral Strategic Transport Framework 2019**

- 2.94** The Council is in the process of finalising a Strategic Transport Framework, to underpin the Strategic Regeneration Framework and align the development of specific transport packages to the Council's regeneration aspirations. The draft Strategic Transport Framework has identified a number of potential schemes to enable growth in Birkenhead Town Centre, the A41 and Wirral Waters.

### **Wirral Retail and Centres Study 2019**

- 2.95** Birkenhead town centre is Wirral's sub-regional centre. The Wirral Retail and Town Centre Study 2019 Health Check for Birkenhead concludes that overall, Birkenhead has reasonable levels of viability and vitality, but considers there to be several issues which are of key concern, including poor environmental quality, diversity of uses below average, a lack of other non-retail main town centre uses, vacancy rate more than double the national average in terms of proportion and nearly double the amount of floorspace; and proximity to larger centres with a wider national and regional draw.

### **A41 Feasibility Study (emerging)**

- 2.96** This transport study seeks to provide an integrated transport plan to support the regeneration proposals across the northern end of the A41/East Wirral Corridor and help the Council to identify which schemes to prioritise for transport investment and business case development.

### **Wirral Waters Gateways Feasibility Study (ongoing)**

- 2.97** This transport study looks specifically at the Gateways to Wirral Waters, to identify existing opportunities/barriers at existing junctions and develop options to secure funding for improvements to the transport network.

### **The Birkenhead Regeneration Framework and Delivery Action Plan Study (ongoing)**

- 2.98** Given the range of strategies, some of which are now increasingly dated, the Council commissioned the Birkenhead Regeneration Framework (BRF) and detailed Delivery Action Plans in November 2019 to guide the regeneration of the Central Birkenhead Area over the next 20 years. The BRF (see Figure 2.2) will provide evidence in support of the Local Plan Preferred Urban Option. Key outputs of the study will be:
- A spatial regeneration vision for Birkenhead;
  - Delivery Action Plans for Birkenhead Town Centre and other priority development sites/ areas;
  - Transport and infrastructure requirements;
  - Evidence for the Local Plan in terms of potential new broad areas for mixed-use regeneration neighbourhoods; and
  - A detailed delivery strategy.

## The Future High Streets Fund

**2.99** The Council has been awarded funding to prepare a business case for a bid of up to £25million for Birkenhead Town Centre. The bid will be closely aligned with the BRF proposals and will be submitted in early 2020.

## Birkenhead Town Deal

**2.100** Birkenhead is one of 100 towns selected nationally to work towards a Town Deal as part of Government's £3.6bn Towns Fund to further improve the ability of towns to realise their growth ambitions.

**2.101** The first stage is the development and convening of a Town Deal Board. The second stage is developing a Town Investment Plan for Birkenhead to enable a business case to apply for up to £25m. The Council will establish a Town Board in early 2020 to develop the bid which will be for the wider Birkenhead area.

## Strategic Sites

**2.102** Appendix 2.1 sets out details of strategic sites / areas which the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment 2019 explains could deliver approximately 5,500 new homes over the Local Plan period based on current evidence as set out in Chapter 4 (see Appendix 2.1 for full details).

**Table 2.8 Strategic Sites Maximum Dwelling Capacity**

Site	Maximum number of dwellings currently identified in SHLAA (2019) to be delivered within plan period 2020 to 2035
Wirral Waters	4,650
Hind Street	580 <sup>i</sup>
Woodside	250 <sup>i</sup>

i Potential significant increase in dwelling capacity to be confirmed through the Birkenhead Regeneration Framework

**2.103** The Council considers that there is potential for significant increases in dwelling capacity at Hind Street and Woodside, which will be confirmed by the Birkenhead Regeneration Framework.

**2.104** In addition, as described in Chapter 4, the Council have identified a number of Broad Locations for Regeneration Growth which could as part of a comprehensive regeneration programme deliver significant numbers of new homes, during the latter part of the Plan period.



## Implications for the Local Plan

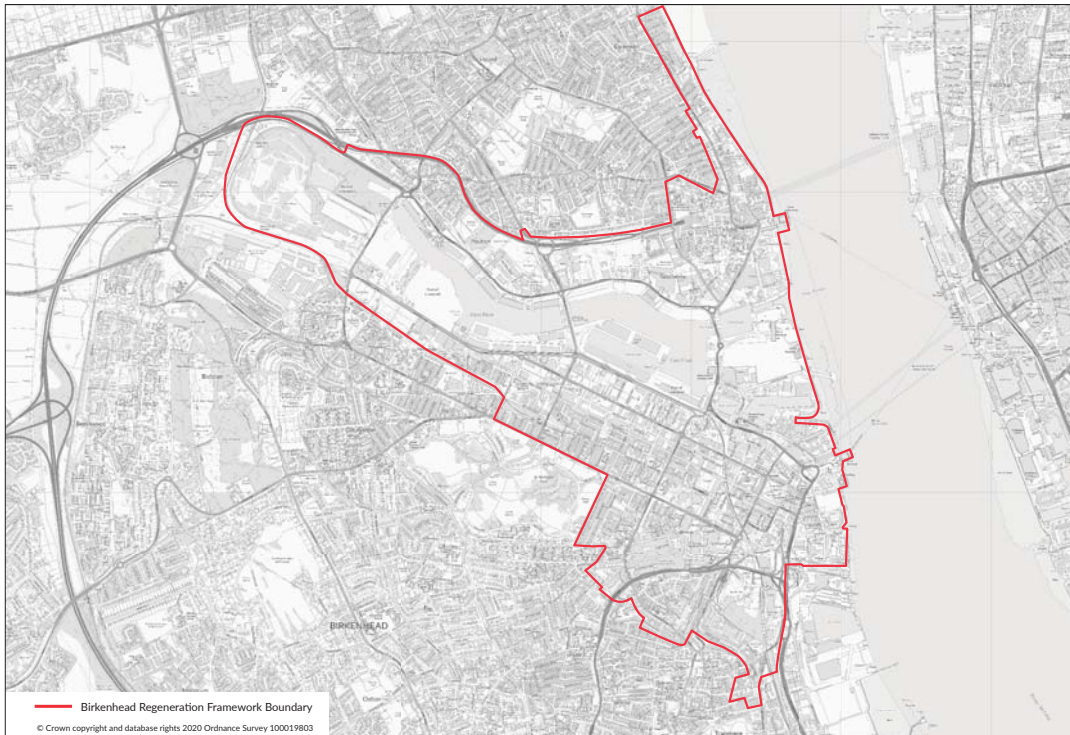
- 2.105** A significant proportion of the Local Plan housing requirement is expected to be delivered on three currently identified strategic sites as set out above. Appendix 2.1 sets out the current and potential housing delivery trajectories for these sites and the further potential for increased capacity which will be confirmed through ongoing studies.
- 2.106** The Council recognises the significant challenges to delivering the scale of regeneration required to meet our housing and employment needs within the existing urban area and is therefore also taking steps to make this ambition a reality by:
- engaging proactively with the Government, Homes England and the Combined Authority to provide additional resources to accelerate brownfield land development and tackle what is a regeneration opportunity of a nationally significant scale;
  - commissioning the Birkenhead Regeneration Framework Study (BRF) in November 2019. The Regeneration of Birkenhead is a key component of the Preferred Urban Intensification Option as set out in Chapter 4. The BRF is intended to consolidate and update previous studies to set out a new comprehensive spatial, infrastructure and investment framework for Birkenhead which will stimulate demand in the area and improve the confidence and performance of the development market. The BRF will provide essential evidence for the next stage of the Local Plan in terms of the quantum of housing that may be delivered on strategic brownfield sites already identified. It will also provide further detail on the potential capacity of other ‘broad Growth Locations’ which could be realised during the Local Plan (as set out in Chapter 4).
  - the Birkenhead Regeneration Framework will also take account of the potentially significant funding for project delivery which may become available through successful bids for Future High Streets Fund and the Town Deal, and other sources of funding which may become available from the Combined Authority and Homes England.
  - the Birkenhead Regeneration Framework will explore the concepts of a ‘Left Bank-Regeneration Zone’ and a ‘Birkenhead Urban Garden City’ and set out the Council’s overall Regeneration Strategy for Birkenhead.
  - undertaking organisational change. To enable the Council to play a vital future part in delivering regeneration and creating high quality new places and ensuring housing delivery a new Place Directorate is being created. As part of this reorganisation a new multidisciplinary project delivery team is being established.
  - establishing a new Housing Delivery Team to work proactively to identify new housing opportunities and to work with developers to understand and overcome obstacles and accelerate suitable development opportunities; and
  - In November 2019 we submitted a bid to the Government to seek funding to undertake works which could lead to the designation of Birkenhead and parts of Seacombe as an Urban Development Corporation (see paragraphs 2.109 to 2.115 below).
- 2.107** If all these actions come together, then the Council is hoping to be able to adopt the preferred Urban Intensification Option (Option 1A), as set out in Chapter 4 as its spatial strategy in the final Draft Local Plan and to deliver all our development needs within urban areas and without Green Belt release in the final draft Local Plan.

## Expression of interest for potential Urban Development Corporation Status

- 2.108** The growth of Liverpool, our close neighbour across the Mersey, in the past decade has shown what can be achieved by a successful comprehensive programme of regeneration. An ambitious vision and a commitment to deliver has harnessed a range of public sector initiatives to provide the catalyst for private sector investment leading to the transformation of Liverpool City Centre.
- 2.109** Faced with the challenges of Climate change and a need to accommodate growth preferably without impacting on our valuable Green Belt the Council wishes to emulate Liverpool's achievement. Based on our work in preparing the Local Plan we recognise that the regeneration opportunities in the eastern part of the Borough are of a national scale and significance. Focussed on Birkenhead, Wirral Waters and the River Corridor between Seacombe and New Brighton the availability of large areas of brownfield land and neighbourhood areas in need of investment and regeneration, together with our rich heritage assets and the attractiveness of waterside development provide us with an opportunity to deliver our development requirements in a uniquely sustainable way.
- 2.110** Our ambition is to develop a regeneration strategy for Birkenhead which will deliver a unique place, perhaps as an 'Urban Garden City'.
- 2.111** We appreciate this is a bold ambition but unless we are bold our achievements will be insufficient to meet the challenges that we face with Climate change and delivering new homes for our current and future population in a sustainable way.
- 2.112** The Council will need the support of key partners such as the Government, Combined Authority and Homes England, our development partners Muse, and the private sector including Peel Holdings, to address implementation barriers and accelerate delivery.
- 2.113** We will explore this ambition with our partners over the next six months and develop a regeneration strategy which is realistic and achievable to embed into the draft Final Local Plan.
- 2.114** As part of this exploration the Council submitted an expression of interest to Government for funding in November 2019 to generate proposals for a new business-backed innovative delivery vehicle including a possible Urban Development Corporation model for Birkenhead which recognises the scale of our opportunities and the challenges we face (see Figure 2.2 below).

**Figure 2.2 Birkenhead Regeneration Framework Boundary**

Birkenhead Regeneration Framework Boundary



## Our Preferred Approach

The Birkenhead Regeneration Framework (BRF) will provide the overall strategy for the regeneration of the Birkenhead Area and set the spatial and infrastructure context for the delivery of strategic development and investment at:

- Wirral Waters;
- Hind Street;
- Birkenhead Town Centre, including the Central Business District; and
- Woodside

Through the BRF and other detailed work relating to strategic sites the Council will seek to maximise the development capacity and where feasible the accelerated delivery of strategic sites to be set out in the draft final Local Plan as explained in Appendix 2.1.

The BRF will explore the concepts of a 'Left Bank- Regeneration Zone' and a 'Birkenhead Urban Garden City' and set out the Council's overall Regeneration Strategy for Birkenhead.

Masterplans will be prepared for New Brighton and Liscard which will inform the Council's wider Regeneration Strategy for the Borough to be included in the draft final Local Plan.

The Council will work with our strategic partners: the Government, Homes England and the Combined Authority to make available sufficient resources to deliver a comprehensive regeneration strategy for Birkenhead to facilitate the delivery of strategic sites and realise the potential of Broad Locations for Growth.

The Council will work with our strategic partners to establish an appropriate Regeneration delivery model for the scale of regeneration required.

### Question 2.12

Do you agree with our proposed approach to enable the positive regeneration and development of Birkenhead to maximise its potential to accommodate a significant proportion of the borough's development needs?

### Question 2.13

Do you agree with the preferred approach for delivering the strategic sites/ development areas through the Local Plan as set out in ?

### Question 2.14

Do you support the establishment of a dedicated delivery model for the Regeneration of Birkenhead?

### Question 2.15

Do you have any alternative ideas for the regeneration of Birkenhead?

## Green Belt Assessment

### What is required of us?

- 2.115** The Green Belt boundary is a policy choice that the Council must make, in line with national policy, in its Local Plan. If we cannot clearly demonstrate that we can accommodate all of the Borough's development needs within the urban area, we may need to consider Green Belt land as an option for accommodating some of our development needs.
- 2.116** Paragraph 134 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out that Green Belt serves five purposes:
- to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
  - to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
  - to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
  - to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
  - to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

- 2.117** Paragraph 136 of the NPPF states that Green Belt boundaries “...*should only be altered where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified through the preparation or updating of plans.*”
- 2.118** Paragraph 137 of the NPPF sets the tests required in order to demonstrate that exceptional circumstances exist – essentially, to fully examine all other reasonable options for meeting identified development needs:
- To make as much use as possible of suitable brownfield sites and underutilised land;
  - To optimise the density of development, including setting out policies which promote an uplift in density in town centres and locations well served by public transport;
  - To undertake discussions with neighbouring authorities around whether they are able to accommodate any of the identified needs for development.
- 2.119** NPPF paragraph 138 states ‘*When drawing up or reviewing Green Belt boundaries, the need to promote sustainable patterns of development should be taken into account. Strategic policy making authorities should consider the consequences for sustainable development of channelling development towards urban areas inside the Green Belt boundary, towards towns and villages inset within the Green Belt or towards locations beyond the outer Green Belt boundary. Where it has been concluded that it is necessary to release Green Belt land for development, plans should give first consideration to land which has been previously-developed and/or is well-served by public transport. They should also set out ways in which the impact of removing land from the Green Belt can be offset through compensatory improvements to the environmental quality and accessibility of remaining Green Belt land.*’

### What our evidence tells us

- 2.120** The existing Green Belt boundary in Wirral has been in place since it was formally established in 1983 through the Merseyside Green Belt Local Plan. It was last amended in February 2000, to include additional land within the M53 Corridor<sup>31</sup>.
- 2.121** The Council’s Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment 2019 (SHLAA) sets out the current position, at April 2019, on the potential delivery of suitable urban sites. Appendix 4.1 in this document shows the sites that could currently be allocated for residential development, in line with the Government’s definition of ‘deliverable’ or ‘developable’ land.
- 2.122** Further work is ongoing, to see if further urban sites can also be brought to delivery within the Plan period and to optimise the density of development on suitable sites (see Appendix 4.2 and 4.3). Whilst previous consultation has identified that Neighbouring Authorities are not able to accommodate any of Wirral’s needs, under the Duty to Cooperate, these discussions are ongoing to establish whether this is still the case. If all these solutions cannot be shown to be sufficient, land within the Green Belt will need to be released and allocated for development.

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31 Unitary Development Plan for Wirral Section 7: Green Belt refers

- 2.123** In September 2018, the Council consulted on a number of sites for further investigation in the Green Belt, as part of a wider Development Options Review. The consultation responses received were many and critical. The Council's work has now therefore been reviewed and replaced by a new independent study undertaken by specialist consultants during 2019.
- 2.124** The 2019 Green Belt Review provides an updated methodology and a finer-grained assessment of the existing Green Belt in Wirral. Parcels of land in the Green Belt have been categorised into different groups according to their contribution to the purposes of including land in the Green Belt. The findings show that:
- No Green Belt parcels make 'no' overall contribution to the Green Belt' and
  - 47 Green Belt parcels make a weak overall contribution to the Green Belt; and
  - 41 Green Belt parcels make a moderate overall contribution.
- 2.125** The Green Belt Review addresses paragraph 136 of the NPPF, in that if the Council needs to identify any Green Belt sites for release, the Council will need to show there are 'exceptional circumstances' that would justify altering Green Belt boundaries.

### Implications for the Local Plan

- 2.126** The Council's preferred option is to identify sufficient 'deliverable' and 'developable' land to meet the Borough's development needs within the existing urban area. If this is not possible, an exceptional circumstances case will need to be set out for development in the Green Belt.
- 2.127** In developing the 'exceptional circumstances' case it will be necessary to look at the need for development and consider whether these needs can be accommodated without incursions into the Green Belt, and should Green Belt development be necessary, to ensure that any impact is minimised.
- 2.128** Lower performing parcels, which currently make a weak overall contribution to the Green Belt, will have the greatest potential (in purely Green Belt terms) to form part of the supply of 'deliverable' or 'developable' sites where exceptional circumstances exist.
- 2.129** The potential options, taking account of the findings of other relevant studies are set out in Chapter 4.

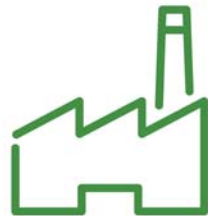
#### Question 2.16

Do you agree with the classification of sites set out within the 2019 Green Belt Review?  
If not, please state your reasons

## Evidence base conclusions

**2.130** This chapter has established the following strategic conclusions and key messages to be taken forward:

- We have to plan for up to 12,000 net new dwellings;
- We have to plan for up to 80ha of new employment land;
- We will seek to maximise development densities on sites within the urban area to make the most efficient use of urban land balanced with high standards of development;
- There are issues with the viability of development in parts of Wirral which will impact on our ability to identify some sites as ‘deliverable’ or ‘developable’ within the Plan period;
- We are continuing to work with neighbouring authorities to establish whether they can accommodate any of Wirral’s development needs;
- The majority of the existing Green Belt makes a moderate or strong contribution to the purposes of including land within the Green Belt but there are areas that currently only make a weak contribution; and
- We will continue to undertake work to ensure that our supply of ‘deliverable’ and ‘developable’ urban land has been thoroughly examined before making any decisions regarding the need to take land out of the existing Green Belt. The future of sites that cannot currently be classified as ‘deliverable’ or ‘developable’, and the implications for local communities and urban regeneration will also need to be taken into account.



**80ha Employment Land**



**12,000 homes**



**Maximise  
Development  
Densities**



**Working with  
Neighbouring  
Authorities**



**Viability Concerns  
around Deliverability  
and Developability**

### Question 2.17

Do you agree with our analysis of the key messages from the evidence we have collected so far? If not, please state what you disagree with and why.



## 3 Our Vision and Objectives for Wirral

### Introduction

- 3.1** This chapter sets out our ambitions for the way in which Wirral will develop in the future. Its three sections set out in turn:
- Wirral’s future challenges and opportunities;
  - Our vision for the future development of the Wirral over the life of the new Local Plan from 2020 to 2035; and
  - The objectives for the Local Plan, which will help us to achieve our vision.

### Future Challenges and Opportunities

- 3.2** While growth and change will present some challenges for our area, it also allows us to respond appropriately to the needs of our economy and our residents. A positive plan for development will allow us to harness opportunities to support the development of Wirral as a more sustainable low carbon borough, which looks to the future whilst still protecting the things which make it a great place today.
- 3.3** The challenges for Wirral are underpinned by the evidence base work which has been carried out to support this Issues and Options consultation document. These challenges range from housing growth and the availability of suitable land for housing, to the availability of funding to address infrastructure pressures or mixed-use regeneration schemes such as Wirral Waters.
- 3.4** Regeneration schemes and development proposals coming forward over the lifetime of the Local Plan can address some of the challenges faced by the Borough through the securing of, for example, developer contributions. These could include improvements to the transport network, public transport, school facilities, open spaces and recreation, health and social care, digital connectivity and the availability of affordable housing.
- 3.5** The following opportunities and challenges are examples of some of the issues affecting Wirral that can be addressed through the delivery of the Local Plan.

#### Challenges:

- The shortage of deliverable and developable urban and brownfield sites on which to bring forward new homes;
- The challenging viability environment which may restrict our ability to deliver the redevelopment of key brownfield sites in east Wirral at the pace we would wish, without significant additional financial assistance for site remediation and infrastructure;
- The ongoing Climate Emergency, which necessitates new ways of working and new ways of delivering development;
- High-level infrastructure capacity constraints, such as the M53, particularly at junctions 4 and 5, the A41 and the Mersey crossings to Liverpool, which may make it more challenging to deliver the Borough’s growth requirements;
- More localised infrastructure constraints such as local highway and school capacity, which may make the delivery of growth more challenging in certain locations;
- The availability of government funding to assist in overcoming constraints to development.

## Opportunities:

- The regeneration of the east of the Borough, with a particular emphasis on Birkenhead, Liscard, New Ferry and New Brighton;
- The ability to return a sizeable number of empty homes around Wirral to a productive residential use;
- Securing the delivery of Wirral Waters; with flagship new educational, retail, leisure and commercial opportunities alongside the delivery of significant new residential communities at the East Float;
- The availability of significant sites and broad areas of urban brownfield land with the potential for major mixed-use development;
- The ability to take positive climate action, including implementing an ambitious tree planting strategy; the delivery of new electric vehicle charging points; energy efficient lighting; combined heat and power in new development and support for a low carbon economy;
- Growth in Wirral's tourism industry; particularly around our outstanding historical and natural assets, with a focus on sustainable tourism approaches and harnessing our proximity to Liverpool.

## Wirral Local Plan Spatial Vision

- 3.6** The Local Plan will seek to address these challenges and to build upon the opportunities, by addressing the issues related to housing and economic growth; working to alleviate social, economic and environmental disparities; ensuring the protection of environmental assets; and securing urban regeneration as part of the wider vision for Wirral and the Liverpool City Region. Underlining all this is our commitment to create a more sustainable and resilient future for local communities, in response to the Climate Emergency.
- 3.7** To support the strategic direction of growth for Wirral, and to address the challenges set out above, we have set out a Spatial Vision which looks beyond the short and medium-term and considers the full 15-year life of the Local Plan.

## **THE SPATIAL VISION FOR WIRRAL: A HEALTHY, SUSTAINABLE AND PROSPEROUS BOROUGH.**

By 2035, Wirral will continue to offer a high quality of life, as an attractive place to live an active, sustainable, productive, safe and healthy lifestyle, to complement the attractiveness of and make a significant contribution to the economic competitiveness of the Liverpool City Region.

In 2035 Wirral will be a sustainable and prosperous Borough with a strong sense of place and identity. It will be a place that people are proud to call home and want to invest in. Significant progress will have to be made in the regeneration of Birkenhead, which is the key development focus of the Plan, providing thousands of new homes to meet our housing needs. The skyline of the river frontage will be changing as the “left bank” of the Mersey becomes a focus for private and public sector investment of regional and national importance to transform brownfield sites and create new green urban mixed-use neighbourhoods and visitor attractions at Wirral Waters and Woodside.

Birkenhead Town Centre will be a vibrant mixed-use area, with a new Central Business District Quarter, perhaps fewer shops to reflect changes in retail opportunities, but with a mix of new homes and businesses and leisure uses. The potential of Wirral Waters and Woodside will be unlocked and maximised by further investment in the Town Centre and adjoining neighbourhoods including Hamilton Park, Scott’s Quay and Hind Street.

Beyond Birkenhead, the regeneration of New Ferry and Liscard, as mixed-use centres, will be completed. The river corridor from Seacombe through to New Brighton will become a focus for renewal and environmental enhancement taking advantage of its waterside setting and dramatic river views, whilst New Brighton will have reinvented itself as a mixed-use river gateway.

New employment opportunities will be provided at Wirral Waters and through mixed-use redevelopment in Birkenhead and along the A41 corridor.

An integrated transport network will reduce reliance on private car travel, giving Wirral residents a variety of sustainable travel choices to meet their travel needs. Active travel will be the mode of choice for short journeys.

Our peninsula, towns, homes, and workplaces will be greener and more sustainable. We will have made major progress towards a Carbon Neutral Peninsula Wirral by implementing spatial elements of the Council’s Climate Change Emergency Plan, including promoting appropriate green energy technologies.

## Wirral Local Plan Strategic Objectives - Wirral

**3.8** The Council proposes 12 strategic objectives to guide the delivery of the Spatial Vision through the Local Plan. The strategic objectives have been categorised under three themed headings which seek to capture the economic, social and environmental objectives of sustainable development, in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework.

### A sustainable peninsula

<b>Strategic Objective 1:</b>	<b>To support sustainable approaches to the location, design, construction, operation and impact of new development.</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To position Wirral to face the future changes and challenges of Climate Change via strategic development location choices and design standards.</li> <li>● To reduce carbon emissions in line with national and local targets.</li> </ul>
<b>Strategic Objective 2:</b>	<b>Realise the potential of our industrial legacy, and our waterside and heritage assets to deliver comprehensive urban regeneration.</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Create a vibrant new mixed-use community at Wirral Waters, providing the catalyst for the wider regeneration of Birkenhead and support the regeneration of surrounding partnership neighbourhoods.</li> <li>● Create at Woodside a vibrant mixed use and cultural riverside quarter.</li> <li>● Revitalise Birkenhead Town Centre as a mixed use focal point for our community, including a new gateway mixed community at Hind Street.</li> <li>● Realise the potential of the river corridor and promenade between Seacombe and New Brighton as a focus for recreation and mixed use riverside living.</li> <li>● Complete the regeneration of New Brighton town centre as a high quality mixed use tourist destination.</li> </ul>
<b>Strategic Objective 3:</b>	<b>Promote sustainable travel, improve accessibility, connectivity, and ease of movement and direct new development to locations which will provide easiest access to existing centres, high-frequency public transport corridors, pedestrian and cycle routes.</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To enable sustainable travel solutions to improve air quality, support behaviour change and reduce congestion</li> <li>● Seek to improve and encourage improvements to public transport, walking and cycling, including access for all sections of the community to work, shopping, health, education, leisure, valued environments and other facilities.</li> <li>● Seek to encourage the implementation of a sustainable and integrated transport strategy making active travel the mode of choice for short journeys.</li> <li>● To reduce reliance on private cars for local journeys where possible, through spatial development choices and well-designed layout of communities.</li> <li>● To support the construction of new road infrastructure only where this is related to achieving sustainable development, environmental enhancement, public transport or road safety benefits.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To support sustainable freight distribution by road, rail and water.</li> <li>• To safeguard land required for new sustainable transport proposals, including active travel, public transport, road and water facilities, from prejudicial development.</li> </ul>
<b>Strategic Objective 4:</b>	<b>Ensure the responsible use of land and natural resources to mitigate and adapt to Climate Change and promote the transition to a low carbon Borough.</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To ensure sustainable resource use by reducing waste, increasing recycling and safeguarding potential minerals reserves.</li> <li>• To promote appropriate renewable energy and green technologies.</li> <li>• To ensure the resilience of infrastructure and vulnerable development to Climate Change.</li> </ul>
<b>Strategic Objective 5:</b>	<b>Protect and improve the quality and accessibility of green space, green infrastructure and nature, whilst protecting and enhancing biodiversity and ensuring that development delivers net environmental gains where possible.</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To protect, conserve and enhance the Borough's natural and historic environment assets, particularly the coast, country parks and heritage assets, through the appropriate management of development pressures and opportunities for access and enjoyment.</li> <li>• To conserve, expand and link natural habitats through habitat creation and improvement to ensure a robust, coherent network of sites that provides wildlife with the opportunity to prosper.</li> <li>• To provide green corridors suitable for active travel/sustainable travel use and improve the health and wellbeing of our residents.</li> </ul>
<b>Strategic Objective 6:</b>	<b>Manage flood risk through a risk-based approach which directs inappropriate development away from high risk coastal, river or surface flooding areas, makes space for water and uses sustainable urban drainage systems.</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Applying the Sequential Test and if the Sequential Test is passed, applying and passing the Exception Test, if required.</li> <li>• Surface water flood risk treated with equal importance to fluvial and tidal flood risk.</li> <li>• Safeguarding land required for current and future flood management.</li> <li>• To require use of sustainable drainage systems and natural flood risk management methods.</li> <li>• To use opportunities offered by new development to reduce the causes and impacts of flooding.</li> <li>• To phase development between and within sites to avoid cumulative flood risk impacts.</li> <li>• To identify where flood risk is expected to increase with Climate Change to ensure that existing and proposed development is sustainable in the long term.</li> </ul>

## A special and healthy place to live

<b>Strategic Objective 7:</b>	<b>Provide sufficient housing to meet identified local housing needs and provide a choice of housing for people at all stages of life and incomes.</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To facilitate sustainable housing provision.</li> <li>● To manage the release of sufficient land for housing to meet the Borough's locally assessed housing needs.</li> <li>● To help meet local need for both affordable and aspirational housing.</li> <li>● To provide housing choices for an ageing population.</li> <li>● To cater for the needs of different communities.</li> </ul>
<b>Strategic Objective 8:</b>	<b>Ensure that high quality new development integrates with and respects our peninsula's distinctive character, natural environment and built heritage, to create vibrant, healthy places and local communities.</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To conserve and enhance the most significant elements of our cultural heritage including designated sites and important elements of historic landscape character.</li> <li>● To achieve new development designed to provide a high quality of built form and public realm which enhances the Borough's distinct natural and historic environmental assets.</li> <li>● To support proposals that cater for longer, healthier, more active and more independent living.</li> <li>● To facilitate provision of accessible, good quality, sustainably managed open space, sport, physical activity, leisure and entertainment and community facilities.</li> <li>● To encourage the use of watercourses and green corridors in providing sport and leisure opportunities, including the support of active travel (walking and cycling).</li> <li>● To help support measures which address issues of obesity.</li> <li>● To help support measures which contribute to good mental health.</li> </ul>
<b>Strategic Objective 9:</b>	<b>Provide and promote essential local infrastructure including emergency services, community, cultural, education, transport, health and leisure facilities, shops, and services all within easy reach of local communities.</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To ensure that essential local services are provided within or on the edge of existing centres as a first preference or locations accessible by a choice of transport.</li> <li>● To ensure that new housing and other development is supported by the necessary physical, social and community infrastructure and facilities.</li> </ul>

<b>Strategic Objective 10:</b>	<b>Tackle social, economic and environmental deprivation, especially in the eastern part of the peninsula, through housing renewal, reducing unemployment, improving skills, education, community and environmental conditions.</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To focus jobs, housing and population growth to areas of greatest need of physical, social economic and environmental regeneration.</li> <li>● To support the re-use and redevelopment of brownfield land</li> </ul>

### A thriving peninsula

<b>Strategic Objective 11:</b>	<b>Provide a range of employment and mixed-use sites to meet assessed needs, provide work opportunities for our residents and foster an environment where our existing businesses and new, innovative start-ups can prosper. To support a competitive and diverse rural and visitor economy.</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To provide a continuous supply of good quality accessible employment land to attract more new businesses.</li> <li>● To help support improvements in workforce skills, a broader economic base and training opportunities to enhance local recruitment.</li> <li>● To provide for the growth and expansion of existing local businesses.</li> <li>● To facilitate a range of sizes and types of employment sites to meet modern business needs.</li> <li>● To provide employment opportunities in locations which best respond to market demands and which will attract inward investment while being consistent with other sustainable development principles of the Local Plan.</li> <li>● To ensure that business locations and centres are accessible by public transport from all areas of the Borough, reducing travel needs where possible.</li> <li>● To ensure the rural economy, including agriculture, can continue to operate, diversify and prosper.</li> <li>● To enable the growth of sustainable tourism balanced with the protection of the Borough's coast and countryside.</li> </ul>
<b>Strategic Objective 12:</b>	<b>Ensure that Birkenhead and the Borough's other town, district and local centres adapt to changing shopping patterns to become a vibrant mixed-use focus for each of our peninsula's communities.</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To ensure the Borough's town, district and local centres maintain their positions within the retail hierarchy.</li> <li>● To support growth of shops, offices, business, leisure, arts, cultural, tourism and residential and employment opportunities to secure an accessible network of vital and viable town centres.</li> </ul>

#### Question 3.1

Do you agree with our proposed Vision?

### Question 3.2

Do you agree with our proposed objectives?

### Question 3.3

Are there any additional objectives you would want to include?



## 4 Strategic Spatial Options

### Introduction

- 4.1** The Local Plan is required to allocate sufficient land to meet the housing and employment requirements outlined in Chapter 2 (Paragraphs 2.18 and 2.48). This Chapter sets out the strategic options that the Council consider appropriate to meet these requirements.
- 4.2** In developing spatial options for the Local Plan the Council is mindful that they must:
- be realistic. This means they must all deliver the quantity of homes and land for employment that has been identified as required for Wirral; and
  - consider all reasonable alternatives to ensure this Local Plan can be considered ‘sound’ as outlined in Chapter 1, Paragraphs 1.21 to 1.22 and summarised below on the flowchart.

### How many homes do we need to deliver and when?

- 4.3** As explained in Chapter 2, Paragraphs 2.10 to 2.23 we need to allocate sufficient housing sites to deliver:
- At least 4,800 homes during the first 5 years of the Local Plan period plus replace any future losses from demolitions estimated at 50 dwellings each year = 5,050 new dwellings<sup>32</sup>; and
  - At least 7,200 homes for the subsequent 6 to 15 year period plus replace any future losses from demolitions = 7,700 new dwellings<sup>33</sup>.
- 4.4** The total Plan requirement is therefore currently to provide for a minimum of 12,000 new dwellings with an allowance for demolitions.
- 4.5** As explained in Chapter 2, paragraphs 2.39 to 2.49, we also need to allocate at least 80 hectares of land for new employment development.
- 4.6** The Council has identified the following reasonable spatial options for meeting our local housing and employment requirements, and they are explained in more detail in the following sections.

### Urban only options

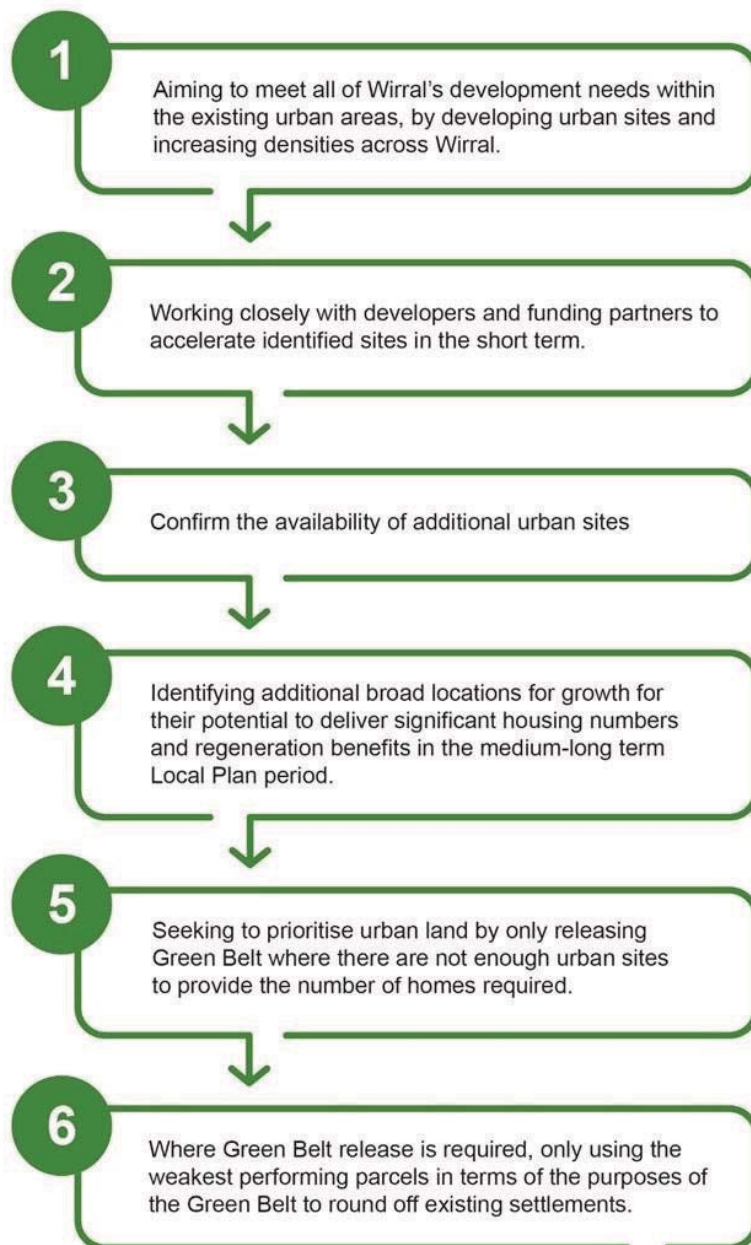
- Option 1A: Urban Intensification (our Preferred Approach); and
- Option 1B: Urban Intensification with stepped delivery;

### Options for meeting any residual development requirements through Green Belt release

- Option 2A: Dispersed Green Belt Release; and
- Option 2B: Urban Expansion.

<sup>32</sup> Allowance also needs to be made for the 20% buffer, brought forward from later in the Plan period, required under the Government’s Housing Delivery Test in line with National Planning Policy Framework paragraph 73.

<sup>33</sup> Broad locations for growth may also be identified for later years, if specific sites cannot be identified at this stage, in line with National Planning Policy Framework, paragraph 67



## Option 1A: Urban Intensification

The option for Urban Intensification plans for all the Borough's development needs to be met within the existing urban areas, by developing urban sites and by increasing densities across all the settlements in Wirral in accordance with our approach to density (set out in Chapter 2, paragraphs 2.65 to 2.72). It also seeks to accelerate delivery, as far as the Council is able, through joint working arrangements with our investment and funding partners.

This is the Council's preferred approach, seeking to prioritise developing brownfield land ahead of any Green Belt release, in line with the National Planning Policy Framework, paragraph 137.

## What are we doing to try to maximise the urban housing supply and to adopt our preferred Urban Intensification option?

- 4.7** The Council will first of all seek to meet its housing needs within the existing urban area, where possible on brownfield sites. The results of the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment for April 2019 (SHLAA) show however, that currently there may not be enough specific, ‘deliverable’ or ‘developable’ sites (see paragraph 2.20) within the urban area and on existing brownfield sites that will be able to provide for the number of new homes required to be delivered within the Plan period<sup>34</sup>.
- 4.8** The Council is currently undertaking further intensive work to seek to increase the supply of deliverable and developable land in the urban areas including:
- undertaking a further comprehensive ‘call for housing and employment sites’, as part of this Regulation 18 consultation;
  - a review of all lapsed and soon to lapse planning permissions;
  - proactively contacting landowners who have not recently contacted the Council to confirm that they are still willing to bring their sites forward for development;
  - undertaking further, more detailed, research on the viability of housing development and how this may best be tackled and addressed;
  - examining whether some employment sites would be better used for housing purposes<sup>35</sup>;
  - commissioning specialist evidence studies to seek additional housing supply through increasing urban density and bringing empty homes back in to use<sup>36</sup>;
  - working proactively with developers and funding partners to accelerate the development of sites;
  - undertaking a comprehensive review of all Council owned land to identify new opportunities for housing;
  - working with our Joint Venture Partner MUSE to deliver an accelerated housing programme through the Wirral Growth Company;
  - seeking to further accelerate housing delivery on large strategic sites, by working with Peel Developments at Wirral Waters and the owners of sites at Hind Street and Woodside;
  - working with Registered Social Landlords to utilise their expertise and resources to bring forward new social rented housing across the Borough, particularly on sites that may not currently be viable for market development;
  - commissioning the preparation of a Regeneration Framework and Delivery Action Plan to identify any further areas of opportunity for housing-led regeneration within and around the central areas of Birkenhead and create a series of high quality ‘green mixed-use urban villages’; and
  - identifying other medium to longer term broad locations for regeneration growth, including the river corridor between Seacombe and New Brighton, and within New Brighton itself (see paragraphs 4.25 to 4.30).

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34 Further information on the existing supply of sites is set out in the sections immediately below

35 The draft findings of the Employment Land Options Study produced by Avison Young in 2019 have been published for public comment alongside this Regulation 18 document and the sites involved have been included in our analysis below.

36 The interim findings of the Wirral Housing Density Study and the Wirral Empty Homes Study 2020 have been published for public comment alongside this Local Plan Issues and Options document and the conclusions on empty homes have been included in our analysis below.

- 4.9** If all these actions come together, then the Council is likely to seek adoption of the preferred Urban Intensification Option (Option 1A) as its spatial strategy for the Local Plan and to deliver all our development needs within urban areas without Green Belt release in the final draft Local Plan (in the next Regulation 19 stage of preparing the Local Plan).

### Question 4.1

Is there anything else that you think the Council could do to ensure that a sufficient urban land supply capable of meeting the Borough's development needs is identified?

## What urban housing sites are we proposing to allocate to deliver this Option?

### Proposed Urban Housing Allocations

- 4.10** The Council are currently proposing to allocate the sites listed in Appendix 4.1 for new housing development within the urban area. They are also shown on Figure 4.1.
- 4.11** The sites have been identified through the preparation of the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment for April 2019 (SHLAA).
- 4.12** They also include sites where planning permission has already been granted but on which development had not yet begun as at April 2019<sup>37</sup>.
- 4.13** They are predominantly previously developed brownfield sites but also include some urban greenfield sites, where they have also been considered to be suitable, available and achievable and have been found to meet the definition of 'deliverable' and 'developable' set out in the Glossary to the National Planning Policy Framework<sup>38</sup>. Three quarters of the sites are below one hectare in size<sup>39</sup>.
- 4.14** They include sites at Wirral Waters and Hind Street; sites identified for development through the Wirral Growth Company, the Council's Affordable Housing Programme, and some longer-term redevelopment sites at Woodside, which are currently not expected to be able to deliver new homes until later in the Plan period.
- 4.15** Together with relevant allowances for net gains from conversions and changes of use, windfalls and empty homes<sup>40</sup> these sites would currently provide for up to 10,300 new dwellings between 2020 and 2035, as shown in Table 4.1 below. <sup>41</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Sites with planning permission proposed for allocation excludes sites where the landowner or developer has subsequently indicated that they no longer intend to implement the permission in response to consultation undertaken during 2019 as part of the preparation of the SHLAA and where no landowner or developer response was obtained excludes sites where the Local Plan Economic Viability Update 2018 indicated that the development proposed would be unviable in the current market

<sup>38</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/810197/NPPF\\_Feb\\_2019\\_revised.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/810197/NPPF_Feb_2019_revised.pdf)

<sup>39</sup> NPPF paragraph 68 requires that at least 10% of the housing requirement should be met on sites no larger than one hectare. This will be confirmed at Regulation 19 stage.

<sup>40</sup> Assumptions about allowances for demolitions, net conversions and changes of use and new build windfalls are set out in the SHLAA 2019 based on information collected as part of the Council's annual monitoring. The allowances for empty homes are taken from the recommendation of the Wirral Empty Homes Study 2020 ( see also Chapter 5, paragraphs 5.19 to 5.29)

<sup>41</sup> Based on the 'deliverable' and 'developable' sites identified in the Council's Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) for April 2019, which has been published for public consultation alongside this Local Plan Issues and Options document

**Table 4.1 Proposed Urban Housing Allocations**

Requirement (Dwellings)	2020-2025	2025-2030	2030-2035	Totals
Local Housing Need	4,000	4,000	4,000	12,000
Demolitions	250	250	250	750
Total Requirement	4,250	4,250	4,250	12,750
Housing Delivery Test Buffer @20%	800	-	-	-
Phased Trajectory	5,050	3,850	3,850	12,750
Proposed Supply				
Existing New-Build Permissions (April 2019)	1,218	178	0	1,396
Deliverable and Developable Sites (April 2019) <sup>42</sup>	1,310	2,490	1,510	5,310
New-Build Windfalls	350	350	350	1,050
Net Conversions and Changes of Use	400	400	400	1,200
Empty Homes	500	450	400	1,350
Total Supply	3,778	3,868	2,660	10,306
Balance <sup>43</sup>	-1,272	18	-1,190	-2,444

42 Further details on each of these sites and on their contribution to the housing trajectory in April 2019 is set out in Appendix 4.4 and Appendix 4.45

43 Phased trajectory against total supply.

Figure 4.1 Proposed Urban Housing Allocations



Figure 4.1 Proposed Urban Housing Allocations

- Proposed Urban Housing Allocations
  - Urban Permissions Not Started in April 2019
- Please see Appendix 4.1 for further details.

### Question 4.2

Do you have any comments on the proposed urban housing allocations set out in Appendix 4.1? Are they deliverable or developable?

*Please note when viewing this document on the consultation portal that you can use the separate 'sites' consultation event to view more information about individual sites and make comments there.*

## Potential intensification and additional urban housing allocations

- 4.16** Further work since April 2019 has identified scope to increase the capacity and re-schedule the delivery of some of the sites identified in the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment 2019 (SHLAA)<sup>44</sup>.
- 4.17** The Council has also identified a number of potential additional urban housing allocations, which the Council expect will be able to meet the tests of being ‘deliverable’ and ‘developable’ within the Plan period, by the time the draft Plan is prepared to be submitted to the Secretary of State.
- 4.18** They include sites where a planning application has already been submitted but not determined or where the landowner or developer has indicated that they intend to develop their site at a faster rate. They also include sites which have been identified as suitable for re-designation as part of the latest review of employment land<sup>45</sup>.
- 4.19** The potential additional urban housing allocations that are expected to be brought forward within the Plan period are listed in Appendix 4.2 and shown on Figure 4.2 below.
- 4.20** Together with relevant allowances for net gains from conversions and changes of use, windfalls and empty homes, the intensification and re-scheduling of ‘deliverable’ and ‘developable’ sites and these potential additional urban housing allocations could provide for up to 14,800 new dwellings between 2020 and 2035, as shown in Table 4.2 below. This would more than meet the housing requirement for the plan period.
- 4.21** The potential additional urban housing allocations would on their own contribute an additional 2,174 dwellings between 2020 and 2035.

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44 The differences in the figures included for each site in the housing trajectory at April 2019 and in the potential future position are set out in Appendix 4.4 and Appendix 4.45

45 The draft findings of the Employment Land Options Study produced by Avison Young in 2019 have been published for public comment alongside this Issues and Options report (see also paragraphs. 6.17 to 6.28). The sites involved (SHLAA 0756, 0769, 1715, 2072, 4012 and 4021) are included in Appendix 4.2 and their contribution to the potential future position is set out in Appendix 4.3 and Appendix 4.4.

**Table 4.2 Potential intensification and additional urban housing allocations**

Requirement (Dwellings)	2020-2025	2025-2030	2030-2035	Totals
Local Housing Need	4,000	4,000	4,000	12,000
Demolitions	250	250	250	750
Total Requirement	4,250	4,250	4,250	12,750
Housing Delivery Test Buffer @20%	800	-	-	-
Phased Trajectory	5,050	3,850	3,850	12,750
Proposed Supply				
Existing New-Build Permissions (April 2019)	1,218	178	0	1,396
Intensification and Re-scheduling of Deliverable and Developable Sites <sup>46</sup>	2,345	3,966	1,360	7,671
Potential Additional Urban Housing Allocations <sup>47</sup>	458	846	870	2,174
New-Build Windfalls	350	350	350	1,050
Net Conversions and Changes of Use	400	400	400	1,200
Empty Homes	500	450	400	1,350
Total Supply	5,271	6,190	3,380	14,841
Balance <sup>48</sup>	221	2,340	-470	2,091

46 Further details on each of these sites and on their contribution to the housing trajectory in April 2019 and to the potential future position is set out in Appendix 4.4 and Appendix 4.5

47 The potential additional urban housing allocations expected to be brought forward within the Plan period and their contribution to the potential future position is set out in Appendix 4.4 and Appendix 4.5

48 Phased trajectory against total supply



Figure 4.2 Potential intensification and additional urban housing allocations



Figure 4.2 Potential Urban Intensification and Additional Urban Housing Allocations

- Proposed Urban Housing Allocations
- Urban Permissions Not Started in April 2019
- Potential Additional Urban Housing Allocations

Please see Appendix 4.2 for further details.

### Question 4.3

Do you have any comments on the potential additional urban housing allocations set out in Appendix 4.2? Will they also be deliverable or developable?

*Please note when viewing this document on the consultation portal that you can use the separate 'sites' consultation event to view more information about individual sites and make comments there.*

## Other Suitable but Currently Uncertain Sites

- 4.22** Other sites identified in the Council's Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment for April 2019 (SHLAA) are still subject to ongoing assessment to determine whether they can be included in the urban land supply<sup>49</sup>.
- 4.23** These sites appear to be suitable for new housing development but would not currently be able to meet the tests of being 'deliverable' and 'developable' within the Plan period unless further information can be provided by the time the draft Plan is prepared to be submitted to the Secretary of State.
- 4.24** These suitable but currently uncertain sites include sites where planning permission has previously been granted but has now lapsed; where the landowner has not recently indicated that they are still willing to take the site forward for development; and sites which have been identified as unviable in the current market.

These suitable but currently uncertain sites are listed in Appendix 4.3 and shown on Figure 4.3 below but have not yet been included in the calculations of the future land supply. If they can be shown to be 'deliverable' or 'developable' within the Plan period, they could contribute an additional 720 new dwellings between 2020 and 2035.

### Question 4.4

Do you have any comments on the other suitable but currently uncertain sites set out in Appendix 4.3?

Are they also deliverable or developable within the Plan period?

*Please note when viewing this document on the consultation portal that you can use the separate 'sites' consultation event to view more information about individual sites and make comments there.*

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<sup>49</sup> This work will be ongoing, until we publish and submit the final draft Plan to the Secretary of State for examination in November 2020

**Figure 4.3 Other Suitable but Currently Uncertain Sites**



Figure 4.3 Other Suitable but Currently Uncertain Sites

■ Other Suitable but Currently Uncertain Sites

Please see Appendix 4.3 for further details.

### Broad Locations for Growth

- 4.25** Paragraph 67 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) allows the Council to identify broad locations for growth, for years 6-10 and, where possible, for years 11-15 of the Plan and Paragraph 23 states that broad locations for development should be indicated on a key diagram.
- 4.26** National Planning Guidance (Paragraph: 018 Reference ID: 3-018-20190722) gives further guidance on the factors that can be considered when assessing the suitability of sites or broad locations for development and states:

“A site or broad location can be considered suitable if it would provide an appropriate location for development when considered against relevant constraints and their potential to be mitigated. When considering constraints, plan-makers may wish to consider the information collected as part of the initial site survey, as well as other relevant information, such as:

- national policy;
- appropriateness and likely market attractiveness for the type of development proposed;
- contribution to regeneration priority areas;
- potential impacts including the effect upon landscapes including landscape features, nature and heritage conservation.

*When using the emerging plan to assess suitability, plan-makers will need to account for potential policy changes or other factors which could impact the suitability of the site / broad location. For example, an emerging site allocation may enable development to come forward. This will have to be reflected in the assessment of achievability.”*

- 4.27** Based on evidence set out in Appendix 2.1 and on pre-application discussions, the Council considers that there is significant potential for housing growth within specific Broad Locations which could be promoted through specific policies of the emerging Local Plan and which would form key parts of the Council’s future regeneration strategy. Whilst the majority of housing delivery in these Broad Locations is likely to be in the latter part of the Plan period some delivery may be within years 6 to 10.
- 4.28** The potential for future housing delivery within these broad location areas is not yet included in the calculations of the future land supply above as further work will be required through the Birkenhead Regeneration Framework and masterplans for Woodside and New Brighton.
- 4.29** The Broad Location areas currently envisaged to be included in the Local Plan are summarised in Table 4.3 and shown at Figure 4.4, which could deliver up to 6,000 dwellings during the Plan period.

**Table 4.3 Proposed Broad Locations for Growth**

	Broad location	Description	High level housing capacity estimate	Estimated Local Plan delivery Timescale	Comments
1	Hind Street (additional capacity at higher density)	Strategic development Site	Approximately 1000 min dwellings capacity mix of apartments, houses. Represents an additional min 450 dwellings on current SHLAA estimates	Majority of housing delivery to be in years 6 to 10 of Local. Part of phase 1 on southern site could deliver by 2025.	Detailed capacity to be confirmed by Masterplan in early 2020

	Broad location	Description	High level housing capacity estimate	Estimated Local Plan delivery Timescale	Comments
2	Woodside (additional capacity at higher capacity)	Strategic Development Site	Approximately 1000 dwellings. Represents an additional min 650 dwellings on current SHLAA estimates	Years 11 to 15. Possible delivery from years 7 onwards	Detailed capacity to be confirmed by Woodside Masterplan
3	Central Birkenhead (including Town Centre)		500 to 1000 dwellings through new build and conversions	500 dwellings to be delivered years 0 to 5, balance years 6 to 10.	Detailed opportunities to be identified through Birkenhead Regeneration Framework.
4	Wirral Waters	Strategic Development Site	1800 additional dwellings on current SHLAA figures based on high level trajectory submitted by Peel	Years 11 to 15	Subject to successful delivery of years 0 to 7 housing and market conditions.
5	Partnership Neighbourhoods				
<p>The Wirral Waters Vision Statement identified ten Partnership Neighbourhoods which should be developed to unlock the potential of Wirral Waters and to help repopulate Birkenhead. The Birkenhead Regeneration Framework will review these Partnership Areas but is likely to prioritise Hamilton Park and Scotts Quay for intervention regeneration as mixed use garden city neighbourhoods. (NB Conway Park Neighbourhood included within Central Birkenhead)</p>					
5a	Hamilton Park	Partnership Neighbourhood	500 to 750 dwellings	Years 11 to 15. Possible delivery from years 8 onwards	Detailed opportunities to be identified through Birkenhead Regeneration Framework.
5b	Scotts Quay	Partnership Neighbourhood	500 to 750 dwellings	Years 11 to 15. Possible delivery from years 8 onwards	

	Broad location	Description	High level housing capacity estimate	Estimated Local Plan delivery Timescale	Comments
6	Seacombe- New Brighton Riverside Corridor	Regeneration Corridor	Approximately 500 to 750 dwellings	Years 11 to 15. Possible delivery from years 8-9 onwards	Subject to detailed Regeneration Framework
7	New Brighton	Masterplan area	Approximately 500 dwellings	Possible delivery from Year 8 onwards	Detailed Opportunities to be identified through a detailed masterplan to be prepared in early 2020.

**4.30** Appropriate housing number estimates (as informed by further evidence including the Birkenhead Regeneration Framework and detailed masterplanning work for Woodside and New Brighton) for these areas will be included in the draft final Local Plan supply for the appropriate Local Plan period.

#### Question 4.5

Do you agree with the Preferred Approach to identify Broad Locations for growth based on regeneration opportunities and priorities in the Local Plan?

#### Question 4.6

Are there any other areas which should be identified as Broad Locations for Growth?

**Figure 4.4 Proposed Broad Locations for Growth**



**Figure 4.4 Proposed Broad Locations for Growth**

- 1 ▲ Hind Street (Additional capacity)
- 2 ▲ Woodside (Additional capacity)
- 3 ▲ Central Birkenhead inc. Town Centre
- 4 ▲ Wirral Waters
- 5a/b ▲ Partnership Neighbourhoods
- 6 ▲ Seacombe Riverside Corridor
- 7 ▲ New Brighton

**4.31** The final list of urban sites to be allocated for new housing development will be updated, subject to the results of public consultation and to reflect any further progress, before they are included in the final draft Local Plan to be submitted to the Secretary of State.

**4.32** In many cases, the number of homes that sites can deliver within the Plan period will depend on a range of factors, some of which are beyond the control or influence of the Council.

- 4.33** All sites require a lead-in period, to work up proposals and identify a developer before a planning application can be submitted and time to bring forward the proposals once a planning application has been approved and some proposals will be further amended before work begins on-site. Once construction has begun, most sites will also take some time to compete, which for larger sites could extend over a couple of years, depending on the number of homes that can be built and sold in the market.
- 4.34** While further work is still ongoing, Table 4.1 and Table 4.2 demonstrate that an urban-only option will be only be realistic, if a significant acceleration and intensification of urban housing development can be achieved and if all the sites listed can be brought to development within the specified time periods. If this cannot be achieved, any shortfall within the Plan period could only currently be made up by releasing land for development from the Green Belt.

### Question 4.7

Are there any other sites within the urban area that you think should be considered for future housing development? Please identify each site and say why you think they would be suitable.

Please also submit these sites through the separate 'Call for Sites' Consultation event and tell us how many homes these sites will deliver and when?

### How much employment land do we need to allocate?

- 4.35** As is explained in paragraph 2.48 there is a need to find at least 80 hectares of employment land, to provide for the likely growth in the local economy<sup>50</sup>.

### What urban employment sites are we proposing to allocate in this Option?

#### Proposed Urban Employment Allocations

- 4.36** The Council is proposing to allocate the sites listed in Appendix 4.6 for new business, general industrial and storage and warehouse uses. They are also shown on Figure 4.5. These will provide up to 105 hectares of employment land and would therefore meet the required amount of employment land.
- 4.37** The sites are all within the existing urban area and are based on the sites recommended to be protected for new employment development in the Wirral Employment Land and Premises Study 2017 (WELPS).
- 4.38** They also take account of the recommendations of the draft Employment Land Options Study (ELOS) 2019, which has been published for consultation alongside this Issues and Options report<sup>51</sup>.
- 4.39** The proposed urban employment allocations are predominantly previously developed brownfield sites but also include some urban greenfield sites, where they have also been considered suitable to accommodate new employment development.

<sup>50</sup> The levels of growth expected to take place in the Wirral economy based on the latest economic forecasts undertaken on behalf of the Liverpool City Region Local Enterprise Partnership, under the Baseline, Growth and Past Trends scenarios are set out in the Liverpool City Region Strategic Housing and Employment Land Market Assessment (SHELMA) 2018


<sup>51</sup> See paras 6.17 to 6.28



**Figure 4.5 Proposed Urban Employment Allocations**



**Figure 4.5 Proposed Urban Employment Allocations**

 Proposed Urban Employment Allocations  
Please see Appendix 4.6 for further details.

**4.40** The proposed urban employment allocations include sites within the Borough’s flagship Wirral International Business Park at Bromborough; the large cleared urban sites at Bidston Dock and Beaufort Road; the ‘Sky City’ site at East Float, which may also include a mixed-use component; the remaining sites within the Dock Estate at Eastham; and some smaller sites within the existing employment areas at Moreton and in and around the Birkenhead and Wallasey docklands.

### Question 4.8

Do you have any comments on proposed urban employment allocations set out in Appendix 4.6? Are they deliverable and developable?

*Please note when viewing this document on the consultation portal that you can use the separate 'sites' consultation event to view more information about individual sites and make comments there.*

### How much employment land will these sites deliver?

- 4.41** The list of proposed urban employment allocations in identifies approximately 105 hectares of land.
- 4.42** While some elements of local need may also be able to be accommodated on small re-development sites within existing employment areas, were they to become available or as part of mixed-use developments, for example, in and around town centres, it is often not suitable to place some types of general industrial uses within a mixed-use or residential setting and separate specific sites need to be set aside for this type of development.

### Question 4.9

Are there any other urban sites which you think should be allocated for future employment development? Please identify each site and say why you think they would be suitable.

### Advantages and Disadvantages of Option 1A: Urban Intensification

- 4.43** The advantages and disadvantages of the approach set out in Option1A: Urban Intensification are set out in Table 4.4 below:

**Table 4.4 Option 1A: Summary of advantages and disadvantages**

Urban Intensification Advantages	Urban Intensification Disadvantages
<p>It meets all of our development needs within the urban area, predominantly using brownfield land. Retains Green Belt as it stands – protecting valuable natural assets and agricultural land</p>	<p>Risk of the plan being found unsound if it relies on an over-optimistic and potentially undeliverable set of circumstances</p>
<p>An urban focus for new development-supports the prioritisation of previously developed land, directing new development to areas of regeneration need and opportunity and need, enabling the creation of attractive new mixed-use communities.</p>	<p>Challenges with meeting the housing target, due to the dependence on a high proportion of brownfield sites with potentially uncertain viability or land contamination issues. Could lead to some delay in providing new homes whilst more complicated brownfield sites are remediated. Reliance on less viable sites could reduce ‘planning gains’, such as the future provision of affordable housing in market housing development</p>
<p>Social, convenience, economic, and environmental benefits of living in places of higher density, supporting high quality urban living</p>	<p>Over-concentration on one type of site in similar types of location Potential for over development and social stress if not controlled through good design, with impacts on local character and environment</p>
<p>More homes would be built close to employment opportunities and existing transport infrastructure.</p>	<p>Over concentration of cars and traffic in intensified areas, with impacts on noise and air pollution</p>
<p>Reduces the potential need for vehicle dependency, supporting active travel with benefits to the environment and climate. Supports investment in existing infrastructure Will safeguard Green Belt land with benefits for agricultural production, Climate Change, biodiversity, landscape and amenity.</p>	

**4.44** The Wirral Local Plan Spatial Options Modelling Report 2019 considers the transport impacts of this option is available alongside this Local Plan Issues and Options consultation document.

**Question 4.10**

Do you agree with our assessment of the advantages and disadvantages of the Urban Intensification Option? Are there any other advantages or disadvantages that you believe we should take into account?

## Option 1B: Urban Intensification with stepped approach

If it can be established that there is enough suitable, available and achievable capacity to meet all of the Borough's future development needs within the existing urban area but that it would not be possible to deliver sufficient homes for the first five years, the Local Plan may be allowed to follow a 'stepped approach'. This would mean the same amount of housing and employment would be delivered in the plan period, but with a lower proportion in the first five years.

- 4.45** National guidance currently states that a stepped approach may be appropriate where there is to be a significant change in the level of housing requirement between emerging and previous policies and / or where strategic sites will have a phased delivery or are likely to be delivered later in the plan period but will need to ensure that identified development needs will still be fully met within the plan period<sup>52</sup>. In Wirral, a large number of homes will be delivered on major sites, including Wirral Waters, which will need to be phased delivery due to the works required to be able to develop the sites resulting in long lead in times, as well as ensuring the market is not 'swamped' with new homes in a small area. This may provide a sufficient basis for a case for a stepped approach, particularly where the alternative requires development in the Green Belt.
- 4.46** Option 1B would therefore represent a variation on the approach to the delivery of Option 1A.
- 4.47** Option 1B would still provide for all the Borough's new development to be accommodated within the urban area, in line with Option 1A but could allow the development required to be provided at a lower rate through the early years of the plan period, followed by a higher rate during the later years. The total housing requirement for the plan period would still be delivered.

### Question 4.11

Do you believe that a 'stepped approach' would be appropriate to apply, to reflect the complicated nature of many of the proposed sites for development and their longer lead in times, provided that this is made up in the later years of the plan period to take account of the need to bring forward brownfield sites?

52 <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-supply-and-delivery> (paragraph 021, 22 July 2019 refers)

## Options requiring Green Belt release

- 4.48** The Council has set out above its preferred option to deliver sufficient land for our development needs with the Borough's existing urban areas. However, if the land identified to meet the total requirement cannot be shown to be 'deliverable' or 'developable' in line with the definitions set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), explained below then some development may be required in the Green Belt.
- 4.49** These options would still include bringing forward as many urban housing and employment sites as possible, and increasing residential densities, as outlined in Option 1A but would require the Council to decide which sites in the Green Belt should be brought forward to meet any shortfalls.

## Potential residual Green Belt development requirements

- 4.50** Table 4.1 above, shows the sites that are currently considered to be 'deliverable' or 'developable' and that if additional urban sites cannot be demonstrated to be 'deliverable' or 'developable' by the time the draft Plan is submitted to the Secretary of State, there could be a shortfall of up to around 2,500 dwellings within the Plan period<sup>53</sup>.
- 4.51** As already noted, work is ongoing to develop the evidence needed to support the delivery of the Urban Intensification option, so it is currently envisaged that this amount of development in the Green Belt is the worst-case scenario. However, it is necessary for the Council to take this contingency into account at the earliest possible stage, so that all the possible alternatives can be properly assessed and consulted on.
- 4.52** The National Planning Policy Framework also requires that we must examine fully all other reasonable options before concluding that exceptional circumstances exist to justify changes to Green Belt boundaries in line with paragraphs 136 and 137 of the National Planning Policy Framework. This will be thoroughly scrutinised by the Planning Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State to examine the Plan before it can be adopted.

## How have we identified potential Green Belt options and sites?

- 4.53** As set out in Chapter 2, paragraphs 2.121 to 2.130 of this document, a revised detailed assessment of land within the existing Green Belt has identified areas that perform strongly, moderately and weakly against the five purposes of the Green Belt set out in national policy<sup>54</sup>.
- 4.54** The approach to identifying potential land for release from the Green Belt for development has utilised the following steps and assumptions:
- excluded land in flood zone 3;
  - excluded land with statutory environmental designations;
  - identified parcels as performing 'weakly' against Green Belt purposes; and

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53 Subject to the response to consultation questions 4.8 and 4.9 above on proposed urban employment allocations, the Council does not currently believe that it will be necessary to take land out of the Green Belt to accommodate new employment development during the Plan period

54 The methodology and findings of the new revised detailed assessment are set out in full in the Green Belt Review Study Arup 2019

- prioritised weakly performing parcels with a known developer or landowner interest (to ensure evidence of developability).

- 4.55** Only where the above steps do not provide sufficient land to meet the identified requirement, would consideration be given to other potential sites. Further engagement with landowners and developers would also need to be undertaken to ensure that only sites that can be shown to be ‘deliverable’ or ‘developable’ within the Plan period are included.
- 4.56** More detailed assessments of the suitability, availability and achievability of the proposed areas of land would also be required before the draft Local Plan was finalised. This would include further, more detailed assessments of transport, environmental, sustainability, heritage and other site constraints, which would also be used to inform the amount of development that would be appropriate within each area.
- 4.57** Further work will be required to determine the boundaries of any parts of the Green Belt to be released. Where there is a significant difference between the areas of a site proposed by a developer or landowner and the parcel identified in the Green Belt Assessment, further considerations will be required. This will consider whether the full parcel is needed and developable or whether a suitable new boundary could be created to protect the retained Green Belt. New boundaries may seek to strengthen existing weak boundaries and / or look for opportunities for suitable ‘rounding off’ of existing urban areas.
- 4.58** It is important to note that under this option not all parts of a weakly performing parcel would be developed for housing, as significant areas of each parcel would also need to be set aside for green infrastructure, landscaping and appropriate social infrastructure. The indicative dwelling capacities of each weakly performing parcel identified below has therefore been estimated using the approach to calculating net developable areas set out in the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment 2019 (SHLAA).
- 4.59** The eventual number of sites (if any) required under this option will depend on the scale of residual need which has not been able to be met within the urban area, subject to the outcome of this consultation and any future further investigations.

### **What are the Options for Green Belt release?**

- 4.60** The pattern of weakly performing parcels offers two main options for delivering the necessary amount of development that may be required. These are:
- 4.61** using a larger number of smaller-medium sized Green Belt areas of land that are well-connected to existing urban areas, spread widely around the Borough, which we have termed ‘Option 2A: Dispersed Green Belt Release’; and /or
- 4.62** A more concentrated approach in which any new development required would be focused on a single larger area, which we have termed ‘Option 2B: Single Urban Extension’.
- 4.63** Both options 2A and 2B would allow for the 2,500 additional homes to be provided, to meet the likely requirements over the Plan period.
- 4.64** A hybrid option in which one or more parts of each option could be selected may also be appropriate depending on the final amount of new development that needs to be accommodated.

- 4.65** The option of a single new large settlement has been discounted because of the existing geography of Wirral, the configuration of the existing urban area, the pattern of strongly, moderately and weakly performing parcels, the scale of the development likely to be required and the absence of an obviously sustainable location, with access by a wide choice of sustainable transport.
- 4.66** Alternative locations for a single urban extension have been considered. Land at Eastham has been considered but not taken further as an option. This is because the constraints on this land means that significant parts would not be suitable for development and therefore releasing this land from the Green Belt would not be appropriate.

## Option 2A Dispersed Green Belt Release

This option proposes the release of a series of small to medium sized areas of land, which when added together would allow sufficient land to be allocated to meet any residual housing needs within the Plan period.

This option spreads development across the Borough, thereby spreading the impacts of new development on existing infrastructure and ensuring that single settlements are not impacted disproportionately. The final number of sites required will depend on the scale of the residual need which has not been able to be met within the urban area.

### Which areas of land are currently suggested for potential release under Option 2A

- 4.67** The areas of land that could potentially be released from the Green Belt under Option 2A are listed in Table 4.5 and shown in Figure 4.6:

**Table 4.5 Green Belt Option 2A: Dispersed Green Belt Release**

Site ref (Figure 4.6)	Green Belt Parcel Review 2019 Reference <sup>i</sup>	Net Developable Area (hectares) <sup>ii</sup>	Estimated Capacity (dwellings)
<b>Bromborough and Eastham</b>			
1	Parcel 4.13 (SP049) South of Mill Park Eastham	20.45	368
<b>Saughall Massie</b>			
2	Parcel 5.8 (SP0005, SHLAA 0740) East of Garden Hey Road, Saughall Massie	1.74	47
3	Parcel 5.9 (SP004, SHLAA 0925) North of Saughall Massie Conservation Area	8.56	193
<b>West Kirby</b>			
4	Parcel 6.15 (SP013, SHLAA 4056) West of Column Road, West Kirby	17.38	261

Site ref (Figure 4.6)	Green Belt Parcel Review 2019 Reference <sup>i</sup>	Net Developable Area (hectares) <sup>ii</sup>	Estimated Capacity (dwellings)
	<b>Heswall</b>		
5	Parcel 7.11 (SP071) Land at Chester Road, Gayton	18.71	337
	<b>Thingwall</b>		
6	Parcel 7.18 (SP061) North of Gill's Lane, Pensby	18.09	326
7	Parcel 7.19 (SP065) West of Lower Thingwall Lane, Thingwall	6.90	155
	<b>Irby</b>		
8	Parcel 7.25 (SP009, SHLAA 1778) West of Sandy Lane, Irby	4.09	92
9	Parcel 7.26 (SP059C, SHLAA 1764) 59 Thurstaston Road, Irby	0.58	16
10	Parcel 7.26 (SP059B, SHLAA 1765) 41 Thurstaston Road, Irby	0.67	18
11	Parcel 7.26 (SP059D, SHLAA 1766) 61 Thurstaston Road, Irby	0.51	14
12	Parcel 7.27 (SP060) South of Thingwall Road, Irby	56.42	1,106

i References are those used by Arup in the Wirral Green Belt Review 2019 (Parcel References). SP references are Wirral Development Options Review work, and the SHLAA references cross reference to the SHLAA itself.

ii The area of the parcel identified less any features to be retained such as woodlands, ponds, river corridors and designated sites and other land that would or could not be developed



Figure 4.6 Dispersed Green Belt Release



Figure 4.6 Option 2A: Dispersed Green Belt Release

Potential Dispersed Green Belt Release

See Table 4.5 for details.

**4.68** The areas of land listed in Table 4.5 and shown on Figure 4.6 have been identified by analysing the weakly performing parcels identified in the Green Belt Review 2019 and by screening them against the existing evidence that has already been collected, which is currently summarised in Appendix 4.7<sup>55</sup>. This currently includes information from:

- environmental screening undertaken by the Merseyside Environmental Advisory Service in 2019;
- Wirral Landscape Character Assessment 2019 and Landscape Sensitivity Assessment 2019;
- Wirral Strategic Flood Risk Assessment 2019;

55 Full copies of the studies referred to can be viewed on the consultation portal or on the Council's website

- Wirral Agricultural Economy and Land Study 2019;
- Transport and Accessibility Review 2019; and
- any further information on constraints from the SHLAA 2019.

**4.69** Further site-specific work would still need to be undertaken, as indicated in Appendix 4.6, before any sites can be confirmed for final inclusion in the Local Plan, if enough 'deliverable' or 'developable' urban sites cannot be identified.

### Question 4.12

Do you have any views on the sites that have been currently identified under the Dispersed Green Belt Release option, shown in Table 4.5 and on Figure 4.6?

*Please note that when viewing this document on the consultation portal you can use the separate 'sites' consultation event to view more information about individual sites identified under Option 2A and make comments there.*

### Question 4.13

Do you think that any of the other weakly performing land identified in the Green Belt Review should be considered for release to meet any residual housing or employment requirements?

### How many new homes could these parcels accommodate?

**4.70** Table 4.5 demonstrates that, if taken together, the areas of land identified under the Dispersed Green Belt Release option could accommodate up to 2,900 new dwellings, with a range of site size of between 14 and 1,100 dwellings.

## Advantages and Disadvantages of Option 2A: Dispersed Green Belt Release

**4.71** The advantages and disadvantages of approach set out for Option 2A: Dispersed Green Belt release are set out in Table 4.6 below:

**Table 4.6 Option 2A: Summary of advantages and disadvantages**

Dispersed Release Advantages	Dispersed Release Disadvantages
Only land with weaker Green Belt contribution and value would be used.	Smaller sites may not be able to support significant improvements to local infrastructure.
Development could strengthen the vitality of a number of existing settlements, help to meet localised housing needs, make use of existing local infrastructure and may support other local improvements	Green Belt lost across a number of locations in the Borough, albeit smaller sites.
Development would only be used to ‘round-off’ the existing settlement patterns.	
The impact of development would be spread across the Borough, rather than being concentrated in one single location.	

**4.72** The Wirral Local plan Spatial Options Modelling Report 2019 considers the transport impacts of this option and is available alongside this Local Plan Issues and Options consultation document.

### Question 4.14

Do you agree with our assessment of the advantages and disadvantages of a dispersed approach to releasing sites from the Green Belt under Option 2A? Are there any other advantages or disadvantages that you believe we should take into account?

## Option 2B Single Urban Extension

The alternative option to dispersed release is to focus development more strategically into a single larger area around an existing settlement. This option still relies on the weakly performing Green Belt areas but groups these together to identify a larger area for urban expansion. The most suitable location would be on land west of Barnston Road, Heswall.

**4.73** The Green Belt Review 2019 identifies that the only areas where these groupings of weakly performing areas could occur at sufficient scale are around Heswall and Eastham. A single urban extension at Eastham has however been discounted because the constraints on this land means that significant parts would not be suitable for

development. The number of sites that would potentially be suitable for development would be too small and too sparsely distributed to form a logical single urban extension of sufficient size<sup>56</sup>.

**4.74** As under Option 2A, the final size of the area to be released will depend on the scale of the residual need which has not been able to be met within the urban area.

### Which areas of land are currently suggested for potential release under Option 2B

**4.75** The parcels of land that could potentially be released under Option 2B are listed in Table 4.7 and shown on Figure 4.7.

**Table 4.7 Green Belt Option 2B: Single Urban Extension**

Green Belt Review 2019 Parcel Reference <sup>i</sup>	Net Developable Area (hectares) <sup>ii</sup>	Estimated Capacity (Dwellings)
<b>West of Barnston Road, Heswall</b>		
Parcels 7.15 and 7.16 (SP062)	107.71	1,938
Parcel 7.17 (SP062A, SHLAA 0884)	17.76	320
Parcel 7.18 (SP061)	18.09	326

i References are those used by Arup in the Wirral Green Belt Review 2019 (Parcel References). SP references are Wirral Development Options Review work, and the SHLAA references cross reference to the SHLAA itself

ii The area of the parcel identified less any features to be retained such as woodlands, ponds, river corridors and designated sites and other land that would or could not be developed

**4.76** This larger area has also been identified by analysing the largest groupings of weakly performing parcels identified in the Green Belt Review 2019 and by screening them against the existing evidence that has already been collected, which is currently summarised in Appendix 4.7.

**4.77** Further site-specific work would, again, still need to be undertaken, as indicated in Appendix 4.7, before any of this larger area could be confirmed for final inclusion in the Local Plan, if enough 'deliverable' or 'developable' urban sites cannot be identified.

<sup>56</sup> The reasons for this conclusion are also based on information included in Appendix 4.7

**Figure 4.7 Single Urban Extension**



**Figure 4.7 Option 2B: Single Urban Extension**

**■** Potential Single Urban Extension Sites  
Please see Table 4.7 for further details.

**How many new homes could this single larger area accommodate?**

**4.78** Table 4.7 demonstrates that the larger area identified under the Single Urban Extension option could also accommodate up to 2,500 new dwellings.

### Question 4.15

Do you have any views on the areas that have been currently identified for the single large scale urban extension, shown in Table 4.7 and on Figure 4.7?

*Please note that when viewing this document on the consultation portal you can use the separate 'sites' consultation event to view more information about individual sites identified under Option 2B and make comments there.*

### Question 4.16

Are there any other areas that you think should be considered for a single large scale urban extension to meet any residual housing or employment requirements?

- 4.79** If you are viewing this document on the consultation portal you can view and make comments on the areas of land identified under Option 2B by clicking on the weblinks in Table 4.7 which will also take you to a larger scale map.

### Advantages and Disadvantages of Option 2B: Single Urban Extension

- 4.80** The advantages and disadvantages of approach set out for Option 2B: Single Urban Extension are set out in Table 4.8. below:

**Table 4.8 Summary of advantages and disadvantages**

Single Urban Extension Advantages	Single Urban Extension Disadvantages
Any impacts would be concentrated within only one area of the Borough A larger site would be better able to plan for and support any necessary improvements to local infrastructure and secure a sustainable pattern of development Provision would make a major contribution to the overall housing need and supply of housing, including affordable housing.	It will take longer to develop homes on a larger site. The impact of construction would be prolonged Comprehensive land assembly may be more difficult to achieve
	Significant investment is likely to be required in supporting necessary infrastructure.
The allocation of a single strategic parcel of land would allow the integrity of the remainder of the Green Belt protected.	

- 4.81** The Wirral Local plan Spatial Options Modelling Report 2019 considers the transport impacts of this option and is available alongside this Local Plan Issues and Options consultation document.

### Question 4.17

Do you agree with our assessment of the advantages and disadvantages of a more concentrated approach to releasing a single urban extension from the Green Belt under Option 2B? Are there any other advantages or disadvantages that you believe we should take into account?

### Question 4.18

Do you agree with our preferred approach to meeting demands in Wirral through Urban Intensification?

### Question 4.19

If it was necessary to supplement urban intensification by releasing land from the Green Belt, would you prefer to see a dispersed release of land, a single larger urban extension, or a hybrid of the two options, and why?

### Question 4.20

Do you have an alternative option you would like to propose that would also meet the housing and employment land requirements for Wirral over the Plan period?

**4.82** A summary of the Spatial Options is shown overleaf.



**Option 1A: Urban Intensification**  
Between 10,300 and 14,800 homes  
within the plan period



**Increasing Densities**  
Potential for increased  
urban area dwellings  
within the plan period



**Birkenhead**  
Potential for 26,000sqm of  
office space with a new civic  
hub, public realm and housing

**Wirral Waters**



Up to **4,500** homes  
within the plan period



Potential for a further  
**9,000** homes beyond



Over **620,000sqm** office, retail,  
hotel, leisure and community space

Only if urban housing supply falls below 12,750



**Option 2A: Green Belt Dispersed**  
Potential for up to 2,900  
dwellings within the plan period



**Option 2B: Green Belt Urban Extension**  
Potential for 2,500 dwellings  
within the plan period



## 5 Our Homes

### Introduction

- 5.1 Chapter 2 (paragraphs 2.18 to 2.23) of this Local Plan Issues and Options document has set out the local housing need for the plan period and how this has been calculated. This concludes that we have to plan for 12,000 net additional homes over the Plan period to 2035.
- 5.2 This chapter therefore considers how the Local Plan will seek to provide for the size, type, and tenure of different housing that has been identified as needed for different groups in the Borough and where it should be located based on the strategic context that has already been set out in the earlier Chapters of this document.
- 5.3 The Council’s principal source of evidence for the policies that will be proposed to be included in the Local Plan under this Chapter, is the Draft Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2020 (SHMA) undertaken by specialist consultancy Arc4, which has been published for public consultation alongside this Local Plan Issues and Options document.

### Overall mix of housing

- 5.4 The overall mix of housing likely to be needed by existing and future households in the Borough is summarised by dwelling type, size and tenure (by percentage of dwellings required) in Table 5.1 below.
- 5.5 The figures are based on a detailed assessment of the relationship between households and dwellings and how this is expected to change over the Plan period to 2035, assuming that 70% of new homes would be for sale in the market and that 30% would be affordable. The overall percentage of the different size and type of properties that will be needed across the Borough as a whole, is set out in the final column.
- 5.6 Table 5.1 Overall Annual Dwelling Mix Based on Standard Method Outputs From 2020 to 2035 (percentage of properties required)<sup>57</sup>

**Table 5.1 Overall Annual Dwelling Mix Based on Standard Method Outputs From 2020 to 2035 (percentage of properties required)**

Dwelling type/size	Tenure		Overall
	Market (70%)	Affordable (30%)	
1-bedroom house	-0.1	-0.1	-0.1
2-bedroom house	0.8	6.8	6.8
3-bedroom house	39.4	34.1	34.1
4 or more-bedroom house	24.5	19.3	19.3
1-bedroom flat	3.0	3.0	3.0
2-bedroom flat	7.6	9.5	9.5
3 or more bedroom flat	6.2	5.5	5.5

57 Draft Wirral Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2020

Dwelling type/size	Tenure		Overall
	Market (70%)	Affordable (30%)	
1-bedroom bungalow	1.6	5.2	5.5
2-bedroom bungalow	16.0	15.1	15.1
3 or more-bedroom bungalow	1.2	1.2	1.2
1-bedroom other	-0.1	0.0	0.0
2-bedroom other	0.0	0.3	0.3
3 or more bedroom other	-0.2	0.1	0.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Dwelling Type	Market (70%)	Affordable (30%)	
House	64.5	49.8	60.1
Flat	18.9	27.7	21.5
Bungalow <sup>58</sup>	16.9	20.3	17.9
Other	-0.3	2.1	0.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Number of bedrooms	Market (70%)	Affordable (30%)	Overall
1	4.4	16.5	8.1
2	24.4	48.7	31.7
3	46.7	27.5	40.9
4	24.4	7.3	19.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Base</b>	<b>548</b>	<b>235</b>	<b>783</b>

58 Or level access accommodation

## Our Preferred Approach

Our preferred approach will be to seek to deliver an appropriate mix of dwelling size and type across the Borough through a Local Plan policy and/or specific site allocations for new housing based on the following dwelling mix:

- 1-bedroom (8%);
- 2-bedroom (32%);
- 3-bedroom (41%);
- four or more-bedroom (19%);
- 60% houses;
- 22% flats;
- 18% bungalows (or level-access accommodation).

The implementation of any policy for dwelling type and mix will need to be assessed and agreed on a case by case basis, based on the location and site characteristics. Applicants, particularly on larger more viable sites, will need to show why they cannot meet these proportions, if they propose to vary from them. The Council may also consider if internal layouts should meet the Nationally Prescribed Technical Space Standards.

The policy will be subject to high-level viability appraisal before being included in the final draft Local Plan and will be implemented through site allocations and through conditions and obligations attached to planning permissions.

### Question 5.1

Do you agree with our preferred approach to seeking to ensure an appropriate mix of dwelling type and size by requiring developers to take account of the proportions set out, while taking account of any site-specific opportunities or constraints, which could also include the need for a higher density of development on appropriate sites? If not, what alternative approach would you suggest and why?

## Affordable Housing Need

- 5.7** The scale of the need for affordable housing has been assessed based on housing register data and a household survey undertaken in late 2019. The assessment takes account of the requirements of The National Planning Policy Framework and National Planning Practice Guidance, balances the current supply of affordable housing with future need and the cost of buying and renting on the open market.
- 5.8** The assessment concludes that for the Plan period, 17.2% of new affordable dwellings should have one-bedroom, 46.8% two-bedrooms, 29.7% three-bedrooms and 6.3% four or more-bedrooms. The Draft SHMA 2020 also recommends an overall split of 60% rented and 40% intermediate tenure. The delivery of these types and sizes of homes would have to be secured through site allocations and through conditions and obligations attached to planning permissions for market housing.

- 5.9** Paragraph 34 of the National Planning Policy Framework states that any contributions expected from development should not undermine the deliverability of the plan.
- 5.10** The Local Plan Economic Viability Baseline Update 2018 tested the viability of providing affordable housing on a range brownfield and greenfield sites in different locations in the Borough at 10%, 20%, 30% and 40%. The findings indicate that it may be necessary to require different levels of affordable housing to be provided on different types of site, in different areas of the Borough, to reflect the range of values and viability in each area of the Borough (see also Chapter 2, paragraphs 2.73 to 2.85).
- 5.11** A final judgement on what will be viable to require and where can only be made once the full range of likely Local Plan requirements have been agreed and assessed and will be included in the draft Local Plan, taking account of any comments submitted, based on the viability assessment to be prepared alongside the draft Local Plan.

## Our Preferred Approach

Our preferred approach will be to seek to achieve up to 30% affordable housing<sup>59</sup> on all schemes of 10 or more dwellings<sup>60</sup>, with the following dwelling mix, on a 60% rented and 40% intermediate basis, unless a high-level viability assessment shows that this would not be viable within a certain type of location or development<sup>61</sup>:

- 17% of new affordable dwellings should have one-bedroom;
- 47% of new affordable dwellings should have two-bedrooms;
- 30% of new affordable dwellings should have three-bedrooms; and
- 6% of new affordable dwellings should have four or more-bedrooms.

Our preferred approach will be to accommodate this requirement as part of the scheme to be developed on each site but in some cases a commuted sum, equivalent to the cost of providing the same affordable requirement off-site, may be appropriate, secured through a legal agreement attached to the planning permission for the development proposed.

The policy will be subject to high-level viability appraisal before being included in the draft final Local Plan and will be secured through site allocations and through conditions and obligations attached to planning permissions.

59 NPPF paragraph 64 states that where major development involving the provision of housing is proposed, planning policies and decisions should expect at least 10% of the homes to be available for affordable home ownership as part of the overall affordable housing contribution from the site unless this would significantly prejudice the ability to meet the identified affordable housing needs of specific groups.

60 NPPF paragraph 63 states that provision of affordable housing should not be sought for residential developments that are not major developments, other than in designated rural areas and that to support the re-use of brownfield land, where vacant buildings are being reused or redeveloped, any affordable housing contribution should be reduced by a proportionate amount equivalent to the existing gross floorspace of the existing buildings.

61 NPPF paragraph 57 states that it will be up to the applicant to demonstrate whether particular circumstances justify the need for a viability assessment at the application stage

## Question 5.2

Do you agree with our preferred approach of seeking to achieve up to 30% affordable housing from all new developments of 10 dwellings or over, subject to viability, based on the mix of size and tenure recommended in the Draft SHMA 2020? If not, what alternative approach would you suggest and why?

### The needs of other groups

- 5.12** The Draft Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2020 (SHMA) also considers the future need for specialist accommodation, the need for residential care institutions and the role of general housing in meeting needs, in particular bungalows and homes that can be adapted to meet a future change in needs.
- 5.13** The number of households in the Borough headed by someone aged 65 or over is expected to increase by 13,579 (+22.4%) by 2035. According to the household survey, the majority of older people (79.1%), 65 and over want to continue to live in their current home with support when needed, with help with repair/maintenance, gardening, cleaning and other practical tasks, which would help people remain in their own home. However, the household survey also points to a need to deliver a range of smaller dwellings (particularly bungalows/level access accommodation) for older people in the general market and for specialist housing provision.
- 5.14** Across the Borough, there are currently around 8,238 units of specialist older persons accommodation. This includes 2,719 units of residential care (C2) dwellings and 5,519 specialist older persons dwellings (C3). It is estimated that an additional 2,799 units of specialist older person (C3) and 1,330 units of residential care (C2) will be required by 2035.
- 5.15** The SHMA does not specify the precise nature of specialist older person dwellings to be built. This is to allow flexibility in delivery and because national guidance currently states that ‘any single development may contain a range of different types of specialist housing’<sup>62</sup>.
- 5.16** The key conclusion is that there needs to be a broader housing offer for older people across the Borough and the SHMA has provided evidence of scale and range of dwellings needed.
- 5.17** In addition, the Draft Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2020 (SHMA) indicates that 22.7% of residents in households are estimated to have a disability and 21.8% of residents in households have their activities limited in some way but only around 9.1% of households live in properties which have either been purpose-built or adapted for someone with an illness or disability. There is also a need for 1,252 wheelchair accessible dwellings.
- 5.18** While some adaptations will continue outside the planning system, with changes only being controlled through Building Regulations, there is an opportunity for the Local Plan to ‘opt in’ to requiring new properties to be provided at a higher standard under the Building Regulations, where there is clear evidence of local need and where it can be shown to be viable to do so.

62 PPG June 2019 Paragraph: 010 Reference ID: 63-010-20190626

## Our Preferred Approach

Based on the evidence of need set out in the Draft Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2020, our Preferred Approach is:

- To continue to encourage the provision of specialist housing for older people on appropriate sites with easy access to local services; and
- To include a policy in the Local Plan to require that all schemes of 10 or more dwellings make suitable provision for M4(3) wheelchair user at 6% and for M4(2) accessible and adaptable dwellings at 20%.

The policy will be subject to high-level viability appraisal before being included in the draft Final Local Plan and will be secured through site allocations and through conditions and obligations attached to planning permissions.

### Question 5.3

Do you agree with our approach to the provision of specialist housing for older people and for ensuring that a proportion of all new homes meet optional accessibility standards? If not, what alternative approach would you suggest could be adopted?

## Empty Properties

### Policy Review

- 5.19** In response to the position outlined in Chapter 2, Housing Needs (paragraphs 2.10 to 2.23) the Council is proposing to include an allowance for the re-use of empty homes as part of the Local Plan's future housing supply over the Plan period.
- 5.20** This is supported by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). For example, NPPF paragraph 117 states that "planning policies and decisions should promote an effective use of land in meeting the need for homes and other uses" and that "strategic policies should set out a clear strategy for accommodating objectively assessed needs, in a way that makes as much use as possible of previously-developed or 'brownfield' land."
- 5.21** Similarly, NPPF paragraph 118 (d) states that policies should "promote and support the development of under-utilised land and buildings, especially if this would help to meet identified needs for housing where land supply is constrained and available sites could be used more effectively" and footnote 45 states that "As part of this approach, plans and decisions should support efforts to identify and bring back into residential use empty homes and other buildings, supported by the use of compulsory purchase powers where appropriate."

## Proposed Future Policy Options

- 5.22** A recent study has confirmed that empty homes can and have formed part of the housing supply elsewhere in the country and that this has been supported by Planning Inspectors at examination in plans that have already been found sound<sup>63</sup>. The study recommends that empty homes in Wirral could in future contribute between 1,125 and 1,425 homes over the Plan period 2020-2035, depending on the option chosen. Three options are being considered, which are summarised below.
- 5.23** Homes that have been vacant for up to 6 months will continue to be considered as normal part of market turnover. Long term empty properties, which have been vacant for over 6 months, will however be considered as having left the market and their return to active use will be counted as additional housing supply.
- 5.24** The Council already has a successful Empty Homes Programme, which includes a range of support to property owners, including grant, which has enabled an average of 197 long term empty dwellings brought back into use annually over the past eight years (see Table 5.2). It is estimated that there is still an estimated stock of 2,097 long term empty homes in Wirral in 2018 (see Table 5.3).

**Table 5.2 Number of Long-Term Empty Properties Brought Back into Use in Wirral**

2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
141	165	150	215	207	238	238	226

**Table 5.3 Total All Long Term Vacant Dwellings in Wirral**

2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
2,941	2,982	2,609	2,495	2,219	2,047	2,208	2,014	1,936	2,097

- 5.25** The Wirral Empty Homes Study 2019, which has been published for consultation alongside this Local Plan Issues and Options document, sets out a number of potential options for including long term empty homes brought back into use as part of the Local Plan housing supply as follows:
- **Option 1:** Assume a static figure of 75 dwellings each year for long-term empty homes brought back into use within each year of the Local Plan. This option has the potential to add 1,125 dwellings over the Plan period.
  - **Option 2:** Assume a higher static figure of 95 empty homes brought back into use within each year of the Plan period. This option has the potential to add 1,425 dwellings over the Plan period.
  - **Option 3:** Assume a tapered delivery of long-term empty homes being brought back in to use, starting with 100 empty homes in the first five years, reducing to 90 empty homes in years 6 to 10 and to 80 empty homes in years 11 to 15. This option has the potential to add 1,350 dwellings over the Plan period.
- 5.26** Option 3 is the option that is recommended to be adopted in the Wirral Local Plan, taking local circumstances and best practice into account.

63 ARUP Empty Homes Study 2020 refers

## Implications for the Local Plan

- 5.27** Bringing empty homes back and maximising the efficient use of the existing dwelling stock into use is a key priority for the Council and the Council will continue to work to bring empty homes back into use throughout the Plan period.
- 5.28** Option 2 is recommended, because the assumed target levels are likely to be realistic and achievable, reflect existing national policy and best practice and the likely availability of financial support and reflect the hope that the number of long-term empty homes will reduce over time.
- 5.29** The number of long-term empty homes returning to use will continue to be subject to annual monitoring and will be reflected in future housing assessments, with any fluctuations in delivery reflected in the allowance for windfalls prior to a Local Plan review.

### Our Preferred Approach

Our preferred approach is to include an allowance for the return of long term empty homes as part of the future housing land supply, which will allow for the tapered delivery set out under Option 3 above, equivalent to 1,350 additional homes over the Plan period.

Our preferred approach will also include a positive policy framework by including a Local Plan policy which will say:

“The Council will support proposals for bringing suitable empty homes and buildings back into residential use. Where changes require planning permission, the Council will work proactively with applicants to progress applications, to ensure that any changes proposed meet the requirements of any other relevant Local Plan policies.”

#### Question 5.4

Do you have any views on our preferred approach for promoting the re-use of empty homes and buildings to provide for additional housing within the Plan period?

#### Question 5.5

Do you think there is anything else that the Council could do to promote the reuse of empty homes within the Local Plan?

## Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Show People

### What is required of us

- 5.30** National policy requires a local plan to consider and address the housing needs of different groups in the community, including the needs of gypsies and travellers and of travelling showpeople.



- 5.31 The Planning Policy for Travellers (PPTS, 2015), cross referenced from the National Planning Policy Framework, now defines a gypsy or traveller as “Persons of nomadic habit of life whatever their race or origin, including such persons who on grounds only of their own or their family’s or dependants’ educational or health needs or old age have ceased to travel temporarily, but excluding members of an organised group of travelling show people or circus people travelling together as such”.
- 5.32 The PPTS now also defines travelling show people as “Members of a group organised for the purposes of holding fairs, circuses or shows (whether or not travelling together as such). This includes such persons who on the grounds of their own or their family’s or dependants’ more localised pattern of trading, educational or health needs or old age have ceased to travel temporarily, but excludes Gypsies and Travellers as defined above”.

**What does the evidence tell us?**

- 5.33 The Wirral Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment 2019 (GTAA), which replaces the previous 2014 Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment for Merseyside and West Lancashire, has sought to understand these needs through engagement with members of the Travelling Community.
- 5.34 The Wirral GTTA found that the main need identified in Wirral was from a single extended family group, some of which have joined Wirral’s housing register for affordable housing in Wirral and therefore recommended that the needs identified should be able to be met through the Council’s general housing policies.
- 5.35 No Travelling Showpeople were identified in Wirral, so there is no current or future need for additional plots.
- 5.36 The Wirral GTAA also did not identify a need for the Council to consider any transit provision at this time due to the number and nature of recorded encampments.
- 5.37 The Wirral GGTA nevertheless recommended that the situation relating to levels of unauthorised encampments by households that meet the new definition of a Traveller should be continually monitored and that, in line with national policy, a criteria-based policy should be put in place for any Gypsy or travelling households that might seek to develop a site in Wirral during the Plan period.

**Implications for the Local Plan**

**Our Preferred Approach**

Based on the findings of the Wirral Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment 2019, our preferred approach is to include a criteria-based policy in the Local Plan similar to the policy already consulted upon as part of the preparation of the previous Core Strategy, which was published in December 2012 and modified in December 2014<sup>64</sup>.

The needs of households who no longer meet the planning definition will be addressed as part of general housing need and through separate Local Plan Policies for housing.

64 Policy CS24 – Gypsies and Travellers, which can be viewed at <https://www.wirral.gov.uk/planning-and-building/local-plans-and-planning-policy/local-plans/core-strategy-local-plan/further> refers

### Question 5.6

Do you agree with our preferred approach to meeting any future housing needs for Gypsies and Travellers, if they arise during the Plan period? If not, what alternative approach do you think we should follow?

## Primarily Residential Areas

- 5.38** The Council has also reviewed the boundaries to the Primarily Residential Areas designated in the previous Unitary Development Plan Proposals Maps, which show the areas where development that would be appropriate within a residential area should be permitted.
- 5.39** The revised boundaries would be shown on the Policies Map prepared to accompany the Local Plan and can be viewed on the Council's website at <https://www.wirral.gov.uk/proposalsmap>
- 5.40** The boundaries will be accompanied by a policy setting out the types of development that will normally be permitted within the Primarily Residential Areas and set criteria for the control of non-residential uses that may come forward within the Area, similar to Policy HS15 in the existing Unitary Development Plan. It may also be supported by policies to implement the findings of the Wirral Housing Density Study mentioned in paragraph 2.68.

### Question 5.7

Do you agree with the boundaries to the Primarily Residential Areas that the Council proposes to include on the new Local Plan Policy Map? If not, please say where they should be revised and why?

## Houses in Multiple Occupation

### What is required of us

- 5.41** The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), paragraph 28 indicates that non-strategic policies should be used by local planning authorities and communities to set out more detailed policies for specific areas, neighbourhoods or types of development.
- 5.42** NPPF, paragraph 127 also indicates that policies and decisions should ensure that developments:
- will function well and add to the overall quality of the area over its lifetime;
  - are sympathetic to local character and history;
  - optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate and mix of development; and
  - should create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users; and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience.

## What our evidence tells us

- 5.43** Houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) can provide cheaper accommodation for people whose housing options are limited. HMOs can also be occupied by the most vulnerable people in society.
- 5.44** Most planning applications are for the conversion of premises that were not built for multiple occupation, and the risk of overcrowding in unsuitable accommodation can be greater than with other types of housing.
- 5.45** HMOs can provide an affordable type of accommodation and contribute to the overall mix of housing types and tenures. However, it is also recognised that high concentrations of HMOs can have adverse impacts on the character and amenity of the area from noise, nuisance and achieving or maintaining a balanced sustainable community.

## Our Preferred Approach

The Council wants to support the provision of housing in multiple occupation in well-designed premises that can achieve safe and healthy living conditions with a high standard of amenity for future occupiers where unacceptable impacts on the neighbour's amenity and the character of the area would be avoided.

Our approach is to include a criteria-based policy in the Local Plan as set out in Appendix 5.1. The policy sets out minimum room sizes and the basic amenities that should be provided.

It also includes similar criteria to Policy HS14 in the current Unitary Development Plan, to protect the character and amenity of the area.

## Question 5.8

Do you agree with the Draft Policy for Houses in Multiple Occupation, which the Council proposes to use in the determination of planning applications as set out in Appendix 5.1? If not, please say how it should be revised and why?

## 6 Our Economy

### Employment

#### What is required of us?

- 6.1** The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development. The approach taken should allow each area to build on its strengths, counter any weaknesses and address the challenges of the future (paragraph 80 refers). Paragraph 81 states that planning policies should:
- “set out a clear economic vision and strategy which positively and proactively encourages sustainable economic growth, having regard to Local Industrial Strategies and other local policies for economic development and regeneration;
  - set criteria, or identify strategic sites, for local and inward investment to match the strategy and to meet anticipated needs over the plan period;
  - seek to address potential barriers to investment, such as inadequate infrastructure, services or housing, or a poor environment; and
  - be flexible enough to accommodate needs not anticipated in the plan, allow for new and flexible working practices (such as live-work accommodation), and to enable a rapid response to changes in economic circumstances.”
- 6.2** To achieve this, plan-making bodies should take a proactive role in identifying and helping to bring forward land that may be suitable for meeting development needs, using the full range of powers available to them. (The National Planning Policy Framework paragraph 119 refers).

#### What our evidence tells us

- 6.3** Chapter 2 (Paragraphs 2.39 to 2.49) identifies the need to find at least 80 hectares of employment land to provide for the likely growth in the Wirral economy based on the latest economic forecasts undertaken on behalf of the Liverpool City Region Local Enterprise Partnership, as set out in the Liverpool City Region Strategic Housing and Employment Land Market Assessment 2018 (SHELMA)
- 6.4** The Wirral Employment Land and Premises Study 2017 (WELPS) considered the Borough’s existing portfolio of available sites, to recommend which sites should be retained and allocated for future employment use in the Local Plan. The Strategic approach to determining Wirral’s employment land demand and supply balance was framed by three key objectives including:
- protect and provide good quality sites suitable for employment uses with the greatest prospect of delivery over the Local Plan period and to respond to areas of strong market demand, principally Bromborough;
  - remove policy protection for employment designations and de-allocate poorer quality sites that don’t meet business needs, and those which have significant deliverability and viability issues; and
  - distinguish between meeting Wirral’s Local Business needs and those strategic requirements generated by the wider Liverpool City Region and Inward Investment.
- 6.5** In total, 93 sites were assessed, covering 237 ha (gross) of land. The recommended employment land supply comprises 41 sites with a combined net developable area of 59.5 ha, as set out in Section 6.2 and summarised in Table 6.1 below. The majority

of the recommended supply relates to 8 retained Employment Development Sites and 26 retained Primarily Industrial Area designations. A further four potential sites were considered suitable employment sites and are recommended to be allocated for industrial B-Class use.

- 6.6** The Borough's employment land supply also consists of three extant planning permissions with a total of 0.2 ha net developable area for B- Class employment use.
- 6.7** Discounted from this recommended employment land supply (but retained in the overall portfolio) were 13 Wirral Waters sites of strategic importance to the wider Liverpool City Region, 12 sites appropriate for mixed use development, and 17 sites safeguarded for long term employment use. The mixed-use sites may contribute additional B-Class employment space within the plan period, but by their very nature the quantum of this cannot be accurately predicted in advance of planning applications being submitted, however they are likely to predominantly provide for B1a/b/c and related uses.

**Table 6.1 Summary of Wirral Employment Land and Premises Study 2017 (WELPS) Employment Land Supply Recommendations**

Employment land portfolio recommendations	No of sites	Gross ha	Net ha
Recommended retained and allocated sites and new allocations	38	85.3	59.4
Employment Development Site – retain designation	8	26.1	23.2
Primarily Industrial Area – retain designation	26	38.7	23.3
Potential site – allocate for B-Class employment	4	20.3	12.9
Extant planning permissions	3	-	0.2
Recommended employment land supply (excluding Green Belt, mixed use, safeguarded and Wirral Waters)	41	85.3	59.5
Mixed use sites	12	17.1	16.3
Employment Development Site – release for mixed use development	5	10.0	9.8
Primarily Industrial Area – release for mixed use development	5	4.9	4.3
Potential site – allocate for mixed use development	2	2.2	2.1
Safeguarded expansion land	17	52.9	38.3
Wirral Waters sites	13	53.2	29.4
Of which B-Class employment	5	26.5	22.3

Employment land portfolio recommendations	No of sites	Gross ha	Net ha
Of which safeguarded for long term employment use	1	2.0	0.0
Of which mixed use development	7	24.7	7.1
Total employment land portfolio	83	208.5	143.6

**6.8** The Wirral Employment Land and Premises Study 2017 (WELPS) assessed the extent to which the recommended supply would meet the needs arising from the Baseline, Growth and Past Completions scenarios (discussed in Chapter two of this document). The results are shown in Table 6.2 below.

**Table 6.2 WELPS Demand and supply balance**

Scenario	B1	B2	Small scale B8	Total	Margin	Total + Margin	Surplus (Total + Margin - Overall portfolio, @ 143.6 ha net)	Total + Margin - Recommended supply @ 59.5 ha net
Baseline scenario (6,600 FTEs)	13.44	6.78	0	20.22	13.8	34.02	+109.6	+25.5
Growth scenario (11,500 FTEs)	17.1	7.44	0	24.6	13.8	38.4	+105.2	+21.1
Past completions	15.66	53.4	8.7	77.76	0	77.76	+65.8	-18.26

**6.9** The Wirral Employment Land and Premises Study 2017 recommended employment land supply of 59.5 hectares would still be able to accommodate the needs arising from the Baseline and Growth scenarios, with a slight surplus of employment land which could be re-allocated to alternative uses within the Plan period.

**6.10** Under the Past Completions scenario there would, however, continue to be a shortfall of approximately 20 hectares within the Plan period, against a total potential need of 80 hectares, which would have to be found from sites elsewhere within the urban area, subject to suitability, viability and infrastructure considerations. However, the Council has commissioned a further assessment of the employment land supply (including the role of Wirral Waters sites, which were excluded from the WELPS recommended employment land supply and the outcome of this review is discussed below.

## Accommodating Growth

- 6.11** The Council is seeking to meet its employment needs in the following areas: Birkenhead & Wallasey and Bromborough & Eastham market areas, as highlighted within the evidence base as these areas have the strongest market demand. There is also a role for existing employment sites and centres such as Moreton and Upton to provide for future employment needs, as well as rural areas in West Wirral to support the ongoing economic sustainability of them. The National Planning Policy Framework places significant importance on making efficient use of land to support economic growth and productivity. Further to this, the framework promotes development of under-utilised land and buildings to meet need.
- 6.12** There is a focus on delivering Use Class B1 and B2 employment developments to meet the current demand within the Borough. There is a significant proportion of small poor-quality sites within Birkenhead and Wallasey, where there is demand from Small and Medium Enterprise (SMEs) for smaller sites. The future employment space should focus on accommodating SMEs wanting modern small Use Class B1 and B2 employment space within Birkenhead.
- 6.13** It is important that future employment growth is directed towards key transport corridors such as the A41 and rail corridor to take advantage of accessibility, connectivity and to provide flexible space for SMEs. Wirral has a significant net out-flow of commuters and therefore there is a challenge to consider the workforce location compared to employment locations within the Wirral<sup>65</sup>.
- 6.14** Furthermore, the Liverpool City Region Large Scale B8 Areas of Search Site Assessment 2019 found that Wirral is not optimally located for distribution uses due to its relatively poor connectivity to the rest of the City Region or to the M6<sup>66</sup>. It is considered that land with good road network access is the most desirable across the existing industrial stock.
- 6.15** The Wirral Employment Land and Premises Study 2017 identified that Wirral currently has approximately 1.45 million sqm of employment floorspace, as of 2017, of which 85% is industrial. In the first five years of the plan period the employment land supply is expected to be predominantly provided by smaller infill sites in the Birkenhead & Wallasey and Bromborough & Eastham market areas. In the medium and longer term most of the employment land supply is expected to be provided in the Bromborough and Eastham market area.
- 6.16** For key market areas the net developable area within Bromborough & Eastham is 39.9 ha over 17 sites, and 16.6ha over 15 sites for Birkenhead & Wallasey during from 2018 to 2033, as stated in the Wirral Employment Land and Premises Study 2017. However, this does not take into account any viability concerns. In addition, Wirral has the second largest amount of available office space within Liverpool City Region, as identified in the Liverpool City Region SHELMA 2018. However, the majority of current supply is second hand and poor-quality stock highlighting a clear regeneration challenge for Birkenhead and Wallasey where most of this stock is situated.

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65 Wirral Employment Land and Premises Study (2017)

66 Avison Young (2019) Employment Land Options Study DRAFT

## Wirral Employment Land Options Study 2019

- 6.17** Wirral Council commissioned the Wirral Employment Land Options Study (ELOS) in 2019 to:
- a review the existing local and sub-regional economic evidence base;
  - b assess key employment sites to determine whether they continue to be suitable and deliverable employment sites having regard to specific site characteristics, constraints, market demand, local economic requirements and trends;
  - c review the thirteen strategic sites at Wirral Waters assessed as part of the WELPS to consider which sites, if any could be reclassified as part of the deliverable employment land supply.
  - d assess the cumulative impact of any sites recommended for release for alternative use on the quantitative and qualitative supply of employment land required to meet the emerging Local Plan requirements; and
  - e subject to (c), provide an assessment of the most suitable location for meeting any shortfall in quantitative and or qualitative supply including Green Belt locations.
- 6.18** The Employment Land Options Study 2019 (ELOS) assessed several sites within the Wirral International Business Park (WIBP) previously assessed in the Wirral Employment Land and Premises Study (December 2017) (WELPS). The ELOS acknowledged that the Strategic Housing and Employment Land Market Assessment identifies strategic potential for employment development within this area for Use Class B8 uses in the future – including potential waterfront access. It also acknowledged that the WELPS identifies the WIBP as being a flagship business location and that large industrial development as being likely to be viable within the Bromborough and Eastham market area.
- 6.19** The Employment Land Options Study 2019 identified a number of constraints which limit the potential for non-employment uses including contamination, adjoining heavy industrial activities (including chemicals and waste activities), and concerns regarding potential viability, sustainability, social infrastructure and amenity provision considered necessary to create sustainable communities. These issues could only be addressed through a future comprehensive masterplan approach. The only exceptions were three sites - (Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment 2019) sites 1713, 1713 and 1730) - the former D1 Oils site, and adjacent expansion land to the east which are being promoted for residential development. None of these sites were recommended in the Wirral Employment Land and Premises Study (2017) for inclusion in the declared employment land supply for allocation in the Local Plan.
- 6.20** While mixed use development would not be envisaged within the Plan period, these three sites are being promoted for a residential-only scheme (c.1250 dwellings) which if progressed would lead to the sites being removed from the employment land portfolio. The Employment Land Options Study 2019 (2019) (ELOS) is supportive of the release of these sites in principle for residential development. In addition, in relation to the former Croda site at the far north of the Wirral International Business Park, the ELOS is supportive of the balance of this site being developed for residential use. The Wirral Employment Land and Premises Study (2017) had already concluded that as the site is under construction and considered to be fully developed it does not form part of the Borough's future employment land supply.



- 6.21** At the southern end of the Wirral International Business Park, the Employment Land Options Study 2019 (ELOS) considered three sites, north and south of Old Hall Road (Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) references 1719 (Riverside Park), 1715 (former MoD tank farm), and 2061 (former Epichem)). The ELOS noted that these sites are known to have been subject of residential interest in recent years – in particular to site 1719 upon which there is notable planning history relating to historic promotion of the site for residential development. The ELOS recognised that if released collectively these sites are likely to have significant residential market appeal. The ELOS site assessment further noted that such release would likely impact upon the employment appeal of adjacent sites – including the business area located immediately between 1715 and 1719. The assessment considered it likely that this additional land would be lost to employment use if sites 1719, and 1715 and/or 2061 were released for residential development.
- 6.22** The Employment Land Options Study 2019 was cognisant of the Liverpool City Region SHELMA 2018 and Wirral Employment Land and Premises Study 2017. analysis, which clearly identifies the Wirral International Business Park (WIBP) as an important established employment location for Wirral. The ELOS recognised that viability for employment development at the southern end of the WIBP is heavily influenced by a requirement to repay monies paid by the public sector to enable historic remediation (to support employment development). The ELOS also noted that work has been undertaken separately in relation to SHLAA site 1715 (former MOD tank farm) to test viability for employment development - which identifies a gap funding requirement for delivery. This has been further tested in terms of its deliverability through the Wirral Growth Company, which has drawn the same conclusion.
- 6.23** Given the noted wider employment supply conclusions resulting from the Wirral Employment Land and Premises Study 2017 (WELPS) process, the Employment Land Options Study 2019 concluded, however, that the Council could consider release of the sites 1715 and 1719 for residential development – subject to addressing constraints relating to Health and Safety Executive restrictions on development in the area. Part of SHLAA site 1715 is required for adjacent business expansion and access (subject to current negotiations), which should be removed from any release, and protected as safeguarded expansion land in the Local Plan.
- 6.24** The Employment Land Options Study 2019 also re-assessed the approach adopted in the Wirral Employment Land and Premises Study 2017 to sites within Wirral Waters, which the WELPS identified as a ‘strategic’ employment land supply for the wider Liverpool City Region, rather than forming part of the declared employment land supply for allocation in the Local Plan (although retained in the overall portfolio of employment land). The ELOS concluded that given the evolution of the Wirral Waters proposals since the WELPS was commissioned, it is no longer necessary to distinguish between strategic requirements and general employment land supply and recommended that sites within Wirral Waters either be reclassified as forming part of the declared employment land supply for allocation in the Local Plan or allocated for mixed use development.
- 6.25** The cumulative impact of the recommendations of the Employment Land Options Study 2019 in relation to the sites in the Wirral International Business Park would be a reduction in the overall portfolio of employment land of 17.5 HA, of which 9.88 HA formed part of the Wirral Employment Land and Premises Study (2017) (WELPS)

recommended employment supply for allocation in the Local Plan. However, the loss of 9.88HA could be offset by the ELOS recommendation that sites in Wirral Waters, totalling 26.37 HA, could now be treated as part of the recommended employment land supply for allocation in the Local Plan.

### **Provisions for Future Employment Growth**

- 6.26** This document contains an interim list of 36 urban sites for proposed allocation for employment B-class uses (listed in Appendix 4.6 as part of the Council's preferred option). Collectively these sites will exceed the required 80 ha Local Plan requirement.
- 6.27** These sites are drawn from the Wirral Employment Land Study 2017 and the more recent Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) for April 2019 and take account of the recent ELOS recommendations as set out above.
- 6.28** A revised employment land supply and set of proposed allocations will be brought forward in the proposed draft Final Local Plan (Regulation 19) later in 2020 taking account of any comments received through this consultation.

### **Implications for the Local Plan**

#### **Our Preferred Approach**

The Council will seek to allocate a minimum of 80ha of employment land with employment growth and economic revitalisation focusing on the key employment areas at Birkenhead, Bromborough and Eastham. Development will be supported in these locations whereby:

- The employment space caters for small and medium sized enterprises for B1 and B2 uses; or
- Significant B1 office development is directed towards existing centres and then to existing employment areas and other locations with easy access to high-frequency public transport corridors.

The proposed release of some employment sites in the Bromborough area for residential development will be balanced out by the inclusion of sites in Wirral Waters as part of the employment land supply for allocation in the Local Plan.

#### **Alternative Approach**

The Council will allocate 80ha of employment land within defined employment zones in sustainable urban locations across the Borough, with a focus on locations around transport hubs and primary road networks, to maximise accessibility, to support local economic need and expansion of existing businesses.

### Question 6.1

Do you agree with our preferred or the alternative approach to meet current and future employment demands in Wirral for everyone in our community?

### Question 6.2

Do you agree with the proposed release of some employment land in Bromborough for housing (as set out in paragraphs 6.21 to 6.24)?

### Question 6.3

Do you agree that strategic employment land at Wirral Waters should be made available for general employment use?

## Protection of Existing Employment Areas

- 6.29** The Council has also reviewed the boundaries to the Primarily Industrial Areas designated on the previous Unitary Development Plan Proposals Maps, which show the areas where development that would be appropriate within an industrial or commercial area should be permitted.
- 6.30** The revised boundaries would be shown on the Policy Map prepared to accompany the Local Plan and can be viewed on the Council’s website. <sup>67</sup>
- 6.31** The boundaries will be accompanied by a policy setting out the types of development that will normally be permitted within the Primarily Industrial Areas, similar to Policy EM8 in the existing Unitary Development Plan<sup>68</sup>. The new policy could also be designed to accommodate a wider range of uses within Primarily Industrial Areas, while safeguarding the needs of existing businesses who, for example, wish to vacate older stock and move into more modern premises, such that the efficient use of the Boroughs employment land portfolio is maximised.

<sup>67</sup> <https://www.wirral.gov.uk/planning-and-building/local-plans-and-planning-policy/wirral-new-local-plan/local-plan/issues-and>

<sup>68</sup> Policy EM8 can be viewed at <https://ww3.wirral.gov.uk/udp/oneudp1.asp?id=EM8>

## Our Preferred Approach

The Council will seek to protect all sites currently in use, or allocated, for employment and resist changes of use to ensure continuation of employment uses for those sites. The Council will specifically seek to protect employment land on:

- land used, or allocated, in strategic employment areas;
- land where there is market demand for employment uses; and
- land allocated for employment in rural areas which meets local needs.

The Council will only consider re-allocating employment sites for other uses where it is demonstrated that there is no reasonable prospect of the site being utilised for employment uses, and it is demonstrated that demand for employment land can be met in a more sustainable location.

### Alternative Approach

The Council will not take forward a policy to protect existing employment land and will let the market determine future use, taking account of tests for sustainable development.

### Question 6.4

Do you agree with the boundaries to the Primarily Industrial Areas that the Council proposes to include on the new Local Plan Policy Map? If not, please say where they should be revised and why?

### Question 6.5

What is your view of providing for a wider range of uses within these areas and which uses do you think should be included?

### Question 6.6

Do you agree with the Council's preferred approach to protect all sites currently in use, or allocated, for employment and resist development change of use to ensure continuation of employment uses for those sites? Or

Do you think that the alternative approach whereby the Council will not take forward a policy to protect existing employment land and will let the market determine future use, taking account of tests for sustainable development should be adopted?

## Town Centres and Retail

### What is required of us?

- 6.32** The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that planning policies should support the role that town centres play at the heart of local communities, by taking a positive approach to their growth, management and adaptation, stating that (Paragraph 85 refers): *“Planning policies should:*
- a define a network and hierarchy of centres and promote their long-term vitality and viability – by allowing them to grow and diversify in a way that can respond to rapid changes in the retail and leisure industries, allows a suitable mix of uses (including housing) and reflects their distinctive characters;*
  - b define the extent of town centres and primary shopping areas, and make clear the range of uses permitted in such locations, as part of a positive strategy for the future of each centre;*
  - c retain and enhance existing markets and, where appropriate, re-introduce or create new ones;*
  - d allocate a range of suitable sites in town centres to meet the scale and type of development likely to be needed, looking at least ten years ahead;*
  - e where suitable and viable town centre sites are not available for town centre uses, allocated appropriate edge of centre sites that are well connected to the town centre. If sufficient edge of centre sites cannot be identified, policies should explain how identified needs can be met in other accessible locations that are well connected to the town centre; and*
  - f recognise that residential development often plays an important role in ensuring the vitality of centres and encourage residential development on appropriate sites*
- 6.33** *Local Planning Authorities should apply the sequential test to support the viability and vitality of town centres by placing existing town centres foremost in both plan making and decision taking...”*

### What our evidence tells us

#### Retail and Centres Study 2019

- 6.34** The Wirral Retail and Centres Study 2019 provides an objective assessment of retail and commercial leisure development needs, together with a clear understanding of existing provision and potential strategic responses/recommendations. The Study is underpinned by a shopping survey of 1,100 households in the Borough and ‘health checks’ of the Borough’s town, district and local centres. The Study is also informed by published data sources including demand/requirements from retail/leisure operators in the defined town centres. The Study supersedes the previous Retail and leisure Study update completed in March 2016 and assesses changes in trends over that period.

#### Shopping Patterns

- 6.35** The findings of the household survey form the basis of an analysis of shopping patterns in the Borough for convenience goods (day to day items such as food) and comparison goods (non-food items such as clothing, furniture and electrical goods).

## Convenience goods

- 6.36** The survey results indicated that less than 6% of all food shopping trips (both main & top-up) are made to stores outside of Wirral. This strong retention rate reflects the good convenience goods provision distributed throughout Wirral and the geography of Wirral as a relatively self-contained peninsula.
- 6.37** The proportion of expenditure in Liscard and Heswall Town Centres, and Bromborough Village and Hoylake District Centres have broadly remained at the same or similar levels. However, the survey results indicate a declining trend in expenditure at Birkenhead Town Centre reducing from 8% in 2016 to 5% in 2019 which may reflect the closure of foodstores including Marks and Spencer and the growth of stores in out of centre locations. This is supported by the indicated increase in market share captured by each of the out-of-centre stores aside from Aldi on Hoylake Road, Moreton.

## Comparison goods

- 6.38** Overall, facilities in Wirral retain 60% of comparison shopping trips, with 19% of trips made to locations outside of the district, and 21% of comparison shopping 'trips' made online.
- 6.39** As with convenience goods, the comparison goods expenditure patterns remain comparable with figures from 2016. Although the retention of spending within Wirral has increased from 68% to 72% this has mainly benefitted out of centre destinations. For example, Croft Retail Park at Bromborough has increased its market share to 18%, 1% higher than Birkenhead. Market shares of the main town and district centres outside Birkenhead are largely unchanged ranging from 1-3%.
- 6.40** Outside of Wirral, the survey results suggest that Liverpool and Chester both now have less of an influence on shopping patterns than 2016 whilst Cheshire Oaks' influence has increased: with Liverpool's, market share has fallen from 18 to 15 per cent, Chester's from 5-2% and Cheshire Oaks increasing from 4-6%.

## Internet

- 6.41** The household survey results identify that books, CDs and DVDs are the most commonly bought items online, alongside small and large electrical goods and toys, games, bicycles and other sporting or recreational goods. Chemist goods and DIY items are the least common comparison goods to be purchased online. For convenience food shopping, between 1% and 8% of respondents from each survey zone did their shopping online. In terms of how items purchased online are received, results show that all convenience goods were received by home delivery, over 89% of comparison goods were home delivered, while purchases of chemist goods were most commonly collected from stores.

## Retail Hierarchy

- 6.42** In drawing up local plans, Paragraph 85 of the NPPF requires that planning policies should define a network and hierarchy of centres. The previous emerging Core Strategy policy (Policy CS25) identifies a hierarchy of retail centres within Wirral. It identifies Birkenhead as a 'Sub-Regional Town Centre and Liscard, Moreton, Heswall and West Kirby as 'Town Centres'. Underneath this, 3 district centres (Bromborough Village, Hoylake and Woodchurch Road) are identified alongside 16 local centres. The Wirral Retail and Centres Study 2019 Study undertook a review of the retail

network and hierarchy, taking into account the evidence gathered through the health checks and household survey. The key conclusions are summarised in the Study sets out a retail hierarchy for Wirral is set out in Table 6.3 below.

**Table 6.3 Retail Hierarchy**

Hierarchy	Retail Centres	2019 Retail Study conclusions
Sub-regional Centre	Birkenhead Town Centre (including Grange Road West, Oxton Road, Europa Boulevard, Argyle Street, Market Street and Hamilton Street)	Birkenhead Town Centre continues to perform as an important town centre. The town centre provides a sub-regional role serving the borough and despite the on-going difficult economic retail climate for town centre comparison goods retailers, has not seen a weakening in its comparison goods market share. It is important for Birkenhead Town Centre to remain a strong sub-regional town centre and for policy to continue to ensure that further potential out-of-centre retail and/or commercial leisure development does not undermine its role in the hierarchy.
Town Centres	Heswall Liscard Moreton West Kirby	The Study finds that all the town centres in the Borough continue to provide town centre retail and service uses and function as town centres.
District Centres	Bromborough Village Hoylake Woodchurch Road / Prenton	The detailed examination of both Bromborough and Woodchurch Road (Prenton) district centres finds that each provide retail and services akin to a district centre. In terms of Hoylake District Centre, whilst the centre does not provide any banks/building societies it provides all the attributes of a district centre and the Study recommends should be retained as a district centre.
Local Centres	Borough Road (Prenton Park) Claughton Village Dacre Hill Eastham Greasby Irby Village Laird Street Lower Bebington New Ferry Oxton Road Seacombe (Poulton Road) New Brighton (Seabank Road) Tranmere Urban Village	The Study found that whilst in varying health, all continue to meet the day to day needs of their local catchment. Accordingly, the Study recommends that the centres are retained as 'Local Centres'.

Hierarchy	Retail Centres	2019 Retail Study conclusions
	Upton Village New Brighton (Victoria Road) Wallasey Village	

**6.43** It should be noted that potential development at Wirral Waters may require the definition of a centre at East Float as part of this hierarchy which will be addressed in the future. The Wirral Retail and Centres Study also includes policy recommendations for each centre, which have informed the policy objectives for the categories of centre outlined below:

## **Proposed planning policy objectives for the Borough's Town, District and Local Centres**

### **Birkenhead**

**6.44** The Borough's main comparison shopping destination and the primary focus for retail, office, leisure, service, arts, culture and tourist development, community facilities and other main town centre uses of Borough wide significance.

**6.45** The Local Plan will have a strong focus on the transformation of Birkenhead Town Centre, supported through the Wirral Growth Company. Birkenhead will be a modern thriving centre with a reconfigured commercial business district, a new and vibrant market and an enhanced public realm, leisure and commercial retail offer.

### **Town Centres**

**6.46** The main objective is to provide for ongoing improvement to the environment and support investment to achieve a mix of uses, with retail as the principal use, to ensure the centres continue to meet the needs of the communities within the catchments that they serve.

**6.47** There will be an emphasis on safeguarding and enhancing the vitality and viability of towns centres and to capture the unique and distinctive qualities of each of the towns.

### **District Centres**

**6.48** The main objective is to provide for ongoing improvement to the environment and support investment to achieve a mix of uses, with retail as the principal use, to ensure the centres will continue to meet the needs of the local communities within the catchments that they serve and to support diversification and specialisation where this can be shown to contribute to the overall vitality of the centre. Development proposals should respond to the needs of the catchment and recognise the need to support the vitality and viability of the district centres.

### **Local Centres**

**6.49** The main objective is to provide for ongoing improvement to the environment, maintain and improve the range of local shopping and service provision where it remains viable and an important service to the local community.

**6.50** To safeguard and enhance the vitality and viability of the local centres as the focus for neighbourhood level shops, services and community facilities to serve everyday needs.



- 6.51** New small-scale retail facilities will be encouraged where they would provide for local everyday needs and promote vitality during the daytime and would not be harmful to the vitality and viability of nearby centres.

### Local Impact Thresholds

- 6.52** In accordance with national planning policy, it is appropriate to identify locally set retail thresholds for the scale of edge-of-centre and out-of-centre development which should be subject to the assessment of the impact criteria set out by paragraph 89 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The NPPF sets a default impact threshold of 2,500sq m gross.
- 6.53** The Wirral Retail and Centres Study 2019 recommends that policy should advocate a tiered approach whereby the threshold applied to planning applications at edge-of-centre and out-of-centre locations varies in relation to the size, role and function of a particular centre. The thresholds should not only apply to new floorspace, but also to changes of use and variations of conditions to remove or amend restrictions on how units operate in practice. In relation to the proposals to amend restrictions to existing retail units, the floorspace threshold should apply to the relevant planning/retail unit as a whole. Table 6.4 presents the recommended thresholds for Birkenhead and the Town and District Centres.

**Table 6.4 Recommended thresholds for retail assessments Birkenhead and the Town and District Centres**

Centre	Total No. of Retail Units	Total Floorspace (sq m gross)	Anchor Stores and sizes (sq m gross)	Recommended Threshold (sq m gross)
<b>Town Centres</b>				
Birkenhead	480	91,334	House of Fraser (6,684sq m) Asda (7,187sq m) TK Maxx (3,317sq m) Wilko (3,809sq m) TJ Hughes (3,409sq m) Next (2,406sq m)	1,500sq m
Liscard	296	32,602	B&M (3,150sq m) Wilko (2,849sq m) Primark (2,492sq m) Tesco Express (209sq m) Iceland (349sq m)	1,250sq m
Moreton	144	9,615	Home Bargains (1,159sq m) Iceland (862sq m) Tesco Express (364sq m)	1,000sq m
Heswall	194	19,590	Tesco (5,621sq m) M&Co (1,776sq m) Aldi (1,624sq m) M&S (1,545sq m)	1,000sq m
West Kirby	171	13,674	Morrisons (4,194sq m)	1,000sq m

Centre	Total No. of Retail Units	Total Floorspace (sq m gross)	Anchor Stores and sizes (sq m gross)	Recommended Threshold (sq m gross)
			Aldi (1,377sq m) M&Co (687sq m)	
<b>District Centres</b>				
Woodchurch Road (Prenton)	64	8,348	Sainsbury's (3,685sq m) Aldi (1,589sq m) Home Bargains (907sq m)	750sq m
Bromborough	92	9,644	Matalan (2,727sq m) Co-op (469sq m)	750sq m
Hoylake	169	6,301	Sainsbury's Local (412sq m)	400sq m

**6.54** Notes: Retail Floorspace/Units = convenience and comparison goods only

**6.55** In relation to local centres the Wirral Retail and Centres Study 2019 recommends that a threshold of 350sq m gross is required taking account of the trading format of smaller convenience goods store format operated by the likes of Co-op, Sainsbury's and Tesco. Such stores generally have a net sales area slightly below the 280sq m net sales area limit for extended Sunday trading and generally have a gross floorspace approaching 400sq m. Whilst of a relatively moderate size, these convenience stores often have a relatively substantial turnover and it is considered necessary for the local planning authority to retain control in respect of the considerations of impacts arising from the implementation of such proposals.

## Implications for the Local Plan

### Our Preferred Approach

Our preferred approach is to focus on promoting the vitality and viability of the hierarchy of centres within newly defined town centre boundaries that will best meet the limited need for retail development, and to carefully consider the potential role of East Float in the future. Primary shopping areas will be defined in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requirements. We will identify local thresholds for impact assessment where necessary.

We propose developing policy to best accommodate and encourage flexible uses in addition to retail that will complement their roles as town centres to maximise their vitality and viability. This will include residential development as well as the NPPF defined town centre uses.

Allocate a suitable range of sites within the defined town centre boundaries to meet defined need over the first ten years of the plan.

#### Question 6.7

Do you agree with our Preferred Approach to meet retail demands in Wirral for everyone in our community? Would you suggest an alternative approach?

#### Question 6.8

Do you agree with our preferred approach to seek to maximise the potential of town centres' vitality and viability including residential development? Would you suggest an alternative approach?

#### Question 6.9

Do you agree with our preferred approach to defining a locally set threshold for retail impact assessments? Would you suggest an alternative approach?

- 6.56** The Council has also re-considered the boundaries to each of the Borough's town and district centres, to take account of changes that have occurred since the Unitary Development Plan was adopted.

- 6.57** The proposed boundaries for each of the centres, which show the areas where development that would be appropriate within a town centre should be permitted, can be viewed on the Council's website<sup>69</sup>.

### Question 6.10

Do you agree with the boundaries to the town centres shown on the Council's website? If not, please say how they should be amended and why.

## Tourism

### What is Required of us

- 6.58** Direct references to tourism/visitor economy in national planning policy are limited to paragraph 83 of the NPPF 'Supporting a Prosperous Rural Economy' which states that planning policies and decisions should enable sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside. The NPPF glossary indicates that culture and tourism development (including theatres museums, galleries and concert halls, hotels and conference facilities) fall within the definition of main town centre uses. As such, these uses should be located in town centres as a first preference.

### What our evidence tells us

- 6.59** Wirral has made significant progress in developing its visitor offer over the last 10 years. Wirral has built its reputation on quality and distinctiveness, receiving a wide range of awards for its beaches, green flag parks as well as its heritage and attractions. Wirral is part of England's Golf Coast, home to 14 golf courses including Royal Liverpool, host of The Open in 2006 and 2014. The renaissance of New Brighton has seen huge increases in day visitors, while Port Sunlight Village and Birkenhead Park continue to demonstrate the depth of international heritage the Wirral has to offer.
- 6.60** The Wirral Visitor Economy Strategy 2017-2020 identifies a number of key priorities:
- Developing Wirral's tourism marketing strategy and positioning the peninsula as an outstanding destination;
  - Generating greater benefit from conferences, business meetings and events;
  - Developing Wirral's tourism assets and experiences to increase competitiveness and attract new visitor markets; and
  - Encouraging sustainable and accessible tourism in Wirral.
- 6.61** There is potential for budget hotel development in Birkenhead, and longer-term potential for additional hotels as the Birkenhead and Wirral Waters regeneration plans are progressed. Potential for the upgrading and development of existing hotels and guest houses; new pub accommodation; holiday cottages and lodges; touring caravan and camping sites; motorhome stopovers; camping pods and glamping in the rural areas of the Borough may be significantly limited by current Green Belt planning policy.

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<sup>69</sup> <https://www.wirral.gov.uk/planning-and-building/local-plans-and-planning-policy/wirral-new-local-plan/local-plan/issues-and>

## Overall Local Plan objectives for tourism and visitor economy

- 6.62** The planning system has an important role in facilitating and promoting the implementation of good quality development, ensuring that the tourism industry can develop and thrive, thereby maximising the economic, social and environmental benefits while at the same time ensuring that these benefits are achieved in the most sustainable manner possible. In Wirral, a growth in sustainable tourism will be focused on the quality of the Borough's natural environment; built heritage; country parks; and coastline, with appropriate visitor facilities at Birkenhead, New Brighton, Leasowe, Hoylake, West Kirby, Thurstaston and along the Mersey coast, managed to avoid harm to European Sites and their supporting habitat.
- 6.63** Tourism investment will be targeted to support regeneration in Birkenhead; provide improvements within the coastal resorts of New Brighton, Hoylake and West Kirby and along the Mersey coastline; and to improve public access to the coast and countryside subject to the protection of European Sites and their supporting habitats.

### Proposed objectives for New Brighton and Wallasey

- to promote the wider regeneration of New Brighton as a mixed use 'River Gateway' and tourist destination with appropriate high-density residential development and additional hotel accommodation, subject to the preparation of a comprehensive masterplan/planning framework, including building heights;
- preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the Conservation Areas at Magazines and Wellington Road and the setting of other designated and un-designated heritage assets, including the listed buildings at Fort Perch Rock and Lighthouse; and
- maintain and enhance the open aspect of the coastline; the national and international importance of the inter-tidal foreshores; and the facilities and open spaces associated with the coastal promenades between Seacombe Ferry and North Wirral Coastal Park.

### Proposed objectives for Birkenhead

- focus regeneration to preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the Conservation Area at Hamilton Square, to secure a long-term mixed-use commercial future for the designated Area; and the setting of other designated and un-designated heritage assets, including the listed buildings and ancient monument at Birkenhead Priory;
- support the regeneration of Birkenhead Town Centre through the Wirral Growth Company, and waterfront regeneration at Woodside; and
- preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the Conservation Areas and Historic Parks and Gardens at Bidston Village; Birkenhead Park; Flaybrick Cemetery; Oxtan Village; Clifton Park; Rock Park and Mountwood and the setting of other designated and un-designated heritage assets.

### Proposed objectives for Bromborough and Eastham

- preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the Conservation Areas at Port Sunlight, Bromborough Pool, Bromborough Village and Eastham Village and the setting of other designated and un-designated heritage assets;

- maintain and enhance the national and international importance of the intertidal foreshores and the wooded, natural and semi-natural character and biodiversity value of the western and southern fringes of the area; and
- secure improved pedestrian and cycle access from the residential and industrial areas, to the north and to and along the Mersey coastline, subject to the impact on coastal nature conservation.

### **Proposed objectives for Hoylake and West Kirby**

- Hoylake and West Kirby function as coastal resorts of regional significance, with provision for formal and informal recreation including golf, water sports and sand yachting. The Neighbourhood Plan for Hoylake (2016) promotes enhancements to the town centre where a new arts centre has recently been approved, while looking to safeguard its distinctive character and sustainable enhancements to the promenade. In West Kirby consideration is being given to the future development and improvement of the concourse, including the fire station, railway station, existing public buildings, car park and bus terminus in a comprehensive manner through the preparation of a masterplan/ planning framework.

### **Proposed objectives for West Wirral**

- maintain and enhance access to the coast and to the major natural and semi-natural open spaces at Heswall Dales, Thurstaston Common, Arrowe Country Park and Wirral Way, while maintaining and enhancing the national and international importance of the foreshore and their value for landscape, biodiversity and earth science.

### **Proposed objectives for Rural Areas**

- preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the Conservation Areas at Barnston, Eastham Village, Frankby, Gayton, Saughall Massie, Thornton Hough and Thurstaston; the setting of other designated and un-designated heritage assets; and the rural character of the smaller settlements at Brimstage, Raby and Storeton;
- conserve, enhance and restore the natural beauty, visual amenity and landscape character of the Area in line with the findings of the Wirral Landscape Character Assessment.
- maintain and enhance the natural and semi-natural character of the undeveloped coastline; the national and international importance of the inter-tidal foreshores and their supporting habitats; and the biodiversity value of local nature reserves, dune systems, lowland heath, woodlands, hedgerows, river corridors, ponds, wetland and farmland habitats, including any linkages with the surrounding urban areas.

## Our Preferred Approach

A growth in sustainable tourism will be focused on the quality of the Borough's natural environment; built heritage; country parks; and coastline, with appropriate visitor facilities at Birkenhead, New Brighton, Leasowe, Hoylake, West Kirby, Thurstaston and along the Mersey coast, managed to avoid harm to European Sites and their supporting habitat.

Tourism investment will be targeted to support regeneration in Birkenhead; provide improvements within the coastal resorts of New Brighton, Hoylake and West Kirby and along the Mersey coastline (supported by the preparation of masterplans where appropriate); and to improve public access to the coast and countryside subject to the protection of European Sites and their supporting habitats.

### Question 6.11

Do you agree with our preferred approach for planning for tourism within Wirral?

## 7 Our Physical and Social Infrastructure

### Our approach to infrastructure planning

#### What is required of us?

- 7.1** Infrastructure is an important thread throughout the National Planning Policy Framework to deliver the three objectives for sustainable development and help combat Climate Change. Whilst infrastructure can often only be thought of as including physical systems such as highways and utilities, it is also important for us to ensure proper provision of social infrastructure such as schools and healthcare provision. Green and Blue Infrastructure is included within the Environment section.
- 7.2** The National Planning Policy Framework identifies the need for early engagement with infrastructure and service providers stating that *“plans should: c) be shaped by early, proportionate and effective engagement between plan makers and ... infrastructure providers and operators ...”*. In addition, Paragraphs 25 and 26 refer to engagement with infrastructure providers and joint working to help determine where additional infrastructure is necessary.
- 7.3** Paragraph 34 of the National Planning Policy Framework covers contributions expected from development stating that *“plans should set out the contributions expected from development. This should include ....., along with other infrastructure (such as that needed for education, health, transport, flood and water management, green and digital infrastructure). Such policies should not undermine the deliverability of the plan”*.
- 7.4** The Council has undertaken a series of stakeholder engagement meetings with internal and external infrastructure and service providers to understand existing deficits and planned works and to help consider the implications for the Strategic Spatial Options (presented in Chapter 4). This work will be used in the preparation of an Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP)
- Stage 1 of the Infrastructure Delivery Plan is published alongside this Local Plan Issues and Options document. This sets out the baseline evidence including an overview of the quality and capacity of the existing infrastructure and consideration of what may be required to support the spatial options set out in Chapter 4.
  - Stage 2 of the Infrastructure Delivery Plan will be published to support the final draft Local plan (Regulation 19 stage) and will set out detailed infrastructure requirements to support the future timely delivery of the final housing and employment site allocations. It will set out responsibilities for providing infrastructure, costs, timing and who will pay, for example through planning obligations or a Community Infrastructure Levy.

#### What our evidence tells us

- 7.5** We have commissioned a number of infrastructure studies, or are working on them with our partners, in order to ensure that we understand what our approach to infrastructure planning needs to be. These studies set out the current levels of infrastructure provision across the Wirral and planned infrastructure improvements across the Borough which are already coming forward, in order to inform us about what levels of infrastructure are likely to be needed to support future growth. These studies include:
- Wirral Local Plan Baseline Modelling Report 2019;



- Draft Wirral Strategic Transport Framework 2019;
- Wirral Waters and A41 Corridor Transport Studies 2018;
- Sustainable Energy Generation Study; and
- Draft Indoor and Built Facilities Study and Draft Indoor Sports Facilities Needs Assessment 2019

**7.6** Further detail about each of these studies is set out in the consideration of different infrastructure categories below. It is clear that the growth we need to provide within the Wirral will need to be supported by new or improved infrastructure.

### Implications for the Local Plan

## Our Preferred Approach

The Council will produce an Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) to provide the evidence that the Local Plan is deliverable in infrastructure terms. It will identify the costs of necessary infrastructure to support development and how these costs can be met including recommendations on the contribution through planning obligations or a Community Infrastructure Levy towards critical, essential or desirable infrastructure that can be borne by developers through viability assessment.

The Council proposes to develop the Infrastructure Delivery Plan in two stages:

Stage 1: The production of an IDP Evidence Base Report for the Borough documenting the physical, social and environmental infrastructure and a schedule of planned infrastructure that may be needed for the proposed options over the next Local Plan period; and

Stage 2: Identification of the infrastructure requirements, costs and funding opportunities for Local Plan site allocations and planned development (once known).

Further stakeholder engagement including liaison with site promoters will be undertaken to assess potential site allocation infrastructure requirement, and studies to assess cumulative impact will be undertaken to produce the final IDP and IDP Schedule.

The IDP Schedule will include the type and location of new infrastructure needed, provider, phasing, cost, funding source any funding gap. The final IDP will provide evidence to enable the Council to identify priority areas for infrastructure provision and protect sites which could be critical in developing infrastructure within the Local Plan.

The Council will need to decide on whether funding will need to be secured through a fixed charge by way of a Community Infrastructure Levy and/or through planning obligations via individual planning applications.

### Question 7.1

Do you agree with our preferred approach for planning for infrastructure within Wirral?  
Do you have a suggested alternative approach?

## Transport

**7.7** The provision of high-quality transport networks is an essential part of the efficient day-to-day functioning of the Wirral – they allow our residents to get where they need to be and ensure that our businesses can bring in the people and goods they need to succeed.

### What is required of us?

**7.8** There are three broad types of transport infrastructure within Wirral – highways, public transport, and active transport (such as walking and cycling). Wirral Council has a role in the provision of these various transport infrastructure types (particularly local road networks and active transport routes such as footpaths), but we are also reliant on a number of other organisations to ensure provision of others. Highways England has responsibility for the operation and management of the M53 motorway through Wirral, and Merseytravel is responsible for the promotion of public transport services and operation of the Queensway and Kingsway road tunnels linking Wirral to Liverpool and the Mersey Ferries service. We also need to work with public transport operators such as Stagecoach, Arriva and Merseyrail.

**7.9** Throughout this plan, we recognise the role that the planning system has in addressing the critical challenge of Climate Change. Whilst we recognise the need for good quality highway provision both to existing areas of the Wirral and to new developments, we know that we need to do a lot more to ensure that public transport and active transport linkages are able to provide genuine alternatives for travel in Wirral.

**7.10** Paragraph 102 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requires transport issues to be considered from the earliest stages of plan-making, to ensure that potential impacts on transport networks can be addressed and that opportunities to promote public transport and active transport are pursued. Paragraph 103 of the NPPF further requires our Local Plan to actively manage patterns of growth to reflect our existing transport infrastructure – with significant new developments being focussed around locations which are (or can) be made sustainable, limiting the need to travel in the first place whilst also ensuring public and active transport provision to provide modal choice. This can help to reduce congestion and emissions, and improve air quality and public health.

### What our evidence tells us

**7.11** A Baseline Wirral Local Plan Modelling Report 2019 has been produced as part of the evidence for considering the need for infrastructure in each of options in the proposed Local Plan. Areas likely to experience exacerbated congestion at junctions in the future include those in the vicinity of Wirral Waters, along the A41 south near to Wirral International Business Park, junctions 4 and 5 of the M53 and existing congestion hotspots on key routes to the M53 including the A552.

**7.12** The development of a Wirral Strategic Transport Framework and transport studies at Wirral Waters, and A41 North have been undertaken, with a further A41 South study planned to identify transport improvement schemes to support sustainable development within and beyond the Local Plan period. Planned improvements to the Merseyrail network and Bidston to Wrexham Line and cycling and walking investment will increase the attractiveness of travel by sustainable modes and electric vehicle charging infrastructure will encourage the use of greener vehicles.

- 7.13** Further transport modelling, air quality assessment and work with stakeholders including Highways England, Merseytravel, public transport operators and Council transport teams will be undertaken to identify any mitigation required. This will include infrastructure to support travel by sustainable modes, and technological advances to reduce the need to travel will be undertaken to support the development of the final Infrastructure Delivery Plan.

**Implications for the Local Plan**

**Our Preferred Approach**

The Council is committed to using the Local Plan to support our transition to a lower carbon economy, and to supporting the Council’s Climate Change Action Plan.

As a result, our preferred approach will be to propose new development in locations which are well supported by existing public transport provision, or where new public and active travel links can be provided to ensure that those developments can be provided with genuine modal choice which reduces reliance on the car.

We will support and where appropriate ensure that existing public transport networks within Wirral are improved. This will ensure that existing urban areas around Wirral are provided with the most attractive possible non-car transport options. We will also support and plan for improvements to the Borough’s highway networks, both to alleviate existing congestion challenges, improve road safety and support new growth. These will particularly be prioritised where evidence shows that these schemes will reduce pollution and/or improve air quality in the vicinity of those locations. Electric vehicle charging infrastructure will also be expected to be provided as part of new development.

**Question 7.2**

Do you agree with our approach to prioritise public and active transport improvements and electric vehicle charging infrastructure provision in new development, and to support the construction of major new roads only where they are related to achieving sustainable development, environmental enhancement, public transport or road safety benefits?

## Utilities

**7.14** Utilities infrastructure is generally unseen and unnoticed by the general public but is essential to the effective and efficient day-to-day functioning of the Borough.

### What is required of us?

**7.15** The Council recognises the requirement to balance the need for an assessment anticipated utility needs based on current usage with developing a local plan that is fit for the future by reducing energy and water consumption and promoting sustainable alternatives.

**7.16** The majority of the Borough's electricity is provided via National Grid's high voltage electricity overhead transmission 275kV line from Capenhurst and underground cables from Liverpool to Prenton. Energy generated by the wind farms in Liverpool Bay also connects to the grid at Birkenhead. Scottish Power Energy Networks (SPEN) operate the 132kV (major), 33kV (primary) and 11 kV (secondary) substations and power lines within Wirral on an interconnected system.

**7.17** The high-pressure gas main for the Borough runs along the M53 Motorway. Cadent are the local distribution network operator, providing gas to existing and new homes and businesses in Wirral.

**7.18** The majority of Wirral's water supply (supplied by United Utilities) is extracted from the River Dee and transferred to Sutton Hall Water Treatment Works, which supplies over 90 per cent of Wirral's water. There are some additional boreholes at Prenton, Grange and Newton to meet localised needs, with reservoirs at Crosshill (Barnston), Gorsehill, Flaybrick, Grange and Prenton.

**7.19** United Utilities (UU) and Dwr Cymru Welsh Water (DCWW) are the water companies responsible for the management of the majority of the drainage networks within the borough. Waste water Treatment Works are located at Birkenhead, Bromborough, Heswall and Meols.

**7.20** Paragraph 16, of the National Planning Policy Framework identifies the need for early engagement with infrastructure and service providers. Paragraph 20 states that strategic policy should make sufficient provision for energy infrastructure.

### What our evidence tells us

**7.21** High level engagement with utility providers has indicated that there would be sufficient capacity within the electricity, gas, and wastewater networks to accommodate the level of growth identified for the Local Plan period without large scale reinforcement being required. There are challenges in providing additional water supply to northern parts of the Wirral as the public water supply to the peninsula only comes from the south. A strategic water supply study for the Wirral is currently being undertaken by United Utilities.

**7.22** Allocated sites as part of the urban intensification option e.g. at Wirral Waters will be carefully planned with United Utilities and lead in times for studies and infrastructure provision considered.

**7.23** The Council is to commission a Renewable Energy Study to inform the Local Plan in early 2020.

- 7.24** Opportunities for sustainable energy generation in Wirral Waters and Birkenhead are currently being investigated through a Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy funded study.
- 7.25** Infrastructure providers operate a first come, first served basis. This means that, in areas with limited capacity, a development site may absorb the existing capacity in a substation the network requiring the next development to contribute towards an upgrade.
- 7.26** Assessment of site allocations and cumulative impact will be undertaken with costs and lead in times for any reinforcement requirements included within the IDP schedule. Further site studies and increased lead in times could be required if Green Belt options were to be progressed where connections will need to be made to utilities at the extremities of the existing networks. Government policy and regulation changes impacting the level of electricity/ gas use and advanced in technology including hydrogen energy will be closely monitored and impacts reassessed as appropriate.

**Implications for the Local Plan**

**Our Preferred Approach**

Through the Local Plan the Council will promote opportunities for reduced reliance on fossil fuels, improved water efficiency and sustainable drainage within new development to support the Council’s Climate Change Action Plan. The Council will work with partners to implement the recommendations of borough wide and Wirral Waters and Birkenhead Sustainable Energy Studies.

Early and continued detailed discussions with utility service providers will be undertaken to identify improvements to utilities infrastructure to support sustainable growth and ensure network resilience on a site by site and cumulative basis.

We will monitor changes to government policy and regulation changes impacting the level of energy use and advancements in technology.

**Question 7.3**

Do you agree with our approach to consider the cumulative impact of development on the utilities networks to ensure resilience, where possible reduce reliance on fossil fuels, improve water efficiency and sustainable drainage and to monitor and respond to future technological advances?

## Communications Infrastructure

- 7.27** Supporting high quality digital infrastructure is a critical part of future proofing our Borough, for its businesses and residents. The provision of full fibre connections and next generation mobile technology has a significant economic and social impact upon local areas and local economies.

### What is required of us?

- 7.28** 98.8% of Wirral can access Superfast Broadband with connectivity speeds of up to 100 mb. Openreach has embarked on a Fibre First programme to deliver ultrafast broadband (speeds of up to 1000 mb direct to premises) across the Borough.
- 7.29** Virgin Media is a private closed network while the network installed by Openreach is an open network which can be used by other providers. As part of Virgin Media's 'Project Lightning' the Wallasey and Leasowe areas are benefitting from installations. There is currently no coverage by Virgin Media in the west of the Borough.
- 7.30** The Council is a strategic partner in a Liverpool City Region initiative to develop a 250km high speed Local Full Fibre Network across the region by 2021.
- 7.31** Ofcom's Infrastructure Report 2018 states that mobile coverage is very good in Wirral, with more than 99% of premises and roads having 2G (voice and low speed data rate), and 3G and 4G (high speed data) mobile network coverage. A 5G service has already been launched in the UK, parts of Birkenhead are currently covered by the Vodafone 5G service.
- 7.32** Paragraph 112 of the National Planning Policy Framework recognises that advanced, high quality and reliable communications infrastructure is essential for economic growth and social well-being. It states that planning policies should: *"support the expansion of electronic communications networks, including next generation mobile technology (such as 5G) and full fibre broadband connections. Policies should set out how high quality digital infrastructure, providing access to services from a range of providers, is expected to be delivered and upgraded over time; and should prioritise full fibre connections to existing and new developments (as these connections will, in almost all cases, provide the optimum solution)."*

### What our evidence tells us

- 7.33** Broadband providers aim to work with developers to provide Fibre to the premises (FTTP) infrastructure to avoid the need for future retrofit. Approximately 9 months' notice is needed from developers (before commencement) to put plans in place for delivering FTTP to new buildings. The Council will continue to liaise with Openreach and Virgin Media as the Local Plan evolves.

## Implications for the Local Plan

### Our Preferred Approach

The Council considers that high quality digital infrastructure is essential infrastructure vital to the delivery of sustainable development.

The Local Plan will seek to support the provision of high-quality digital infrastructure from a range of providers as part of new development and support the expansion of electronic communications networks.

### Question 7.4

Do you agree with our approach to support a choice of digital infrastructure providers for new developments and to support the expansion of electronic communications networks?

## Social Infrastructure

**7.34** Social infrastructure covers a range of services and facilities that meet local and strategic needs and contribute towards a good quality of life including education, health, leisure and cultural and emergency services and facilities. Social infrastructure is a component part of all three of the dimensions (economic, social and environmental) of sustainable development.

### What is required of us?

**7.35** In Wirral Local Education Authority Area there are 3 Early Years Centres; 46 nursery classes attached to primary schools; 90 mainstream primary schools; 21 secondary schools and 12 special schools. In addition to schools Wirral Council runs and maintains 24 libraries, 8 leisure centres, and 4 municipal golf courses. The majority of Community Centres previously in Wirral Council ownership have been transferred to community groups. There is also an extensive network of community groups, activities and services operating from shared spaces and places of worship across the Borough.

**7.36** Wirral Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) commissions services from the following providers:

- Primary Care: 58 GP practices grouped into 5 Primary Care Networks;
- Secondary Care: Wirral University Teaching Hospital NHS Foundation Trust;
- Mental Health: Cheshire and Wirral Partnership NHS Foundation Trust;
- Community: Wirral Community Trust;
- Social Care: Wirral Borough Council; and
- Other providers: pharmacies, dentists and opticians.

**7.37** Paragraph 20 of the National Planning Policy Framework identifies that strategic policies should make sufficient provision for community facilities such as health, education and cultural infrastructure;

- 7.38** Paragraph 34 of the National Planning Policy Framework discusses developer contributions stating that “*Plans should set out the contributions expected from development. This should include setting out infrastructure (such as that needed for education, health, transport, flood and water management, green and digital infrastructure). Such policies should not undermine the deliverability of the plan*”.
- 7.39** Paragraph 94 of the National Planning Policy Framework requires that Local Planning Authorities should give great weight to the need to create, expand or alter schools through the preparation of plans.

### **What our evidence tells us**

- 7.40** Consultation has been undertaken with education, leisure, libraries, youth and adult care and emergency services to assess the ability of existing social and community infrastructure to accommodate growth and to understand plans for future service changes.
- 7.41** School place planning and implications for NHS services are a particularly important part of Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) development. It is considered that there is capacity within existing schools and GP practices to accommodate the overall level of growth planned. Sites will however be considered on an individual and cumulative basis within the final IDP to identify any gaps, areas where there would be increased pressure on existing services, and if additional capacity is required.
- 7.42** An Indoor Sports Facilities Needs Assessment was carried out in 2019 summarising the provision and future requirements to accommodate growth. Recommendations included the need for an additional sports hall and pool facility and investment in existing running track and tennis facilities to maintain quality. There are several leisure centre sites located within areas identified for consideration for redevelopment as part of Wirral Growth Company (WGC) e.g. Central Birkenhead Masterplan area. If affected by development proposals the Council would seek to provide alternative new leisure facilities. Open space, sport and recreation (see Chapter 8, paragraphs 8.32 to 8.47) are also an important aspect of social infrastructure and should be considered accordingly.
- 7.43** In terms of catering for demand as arising from growth for library and community centre provision there are opportunities to introduce library/ community services into new development through outreach opportunities rather than there be a need for new physical capacity.
- 7.44** Initial findings of consultation with the emergency services has suggested, further need for infrastructure as a result of the Local Plan is not necessary but the council will continue to engage with emergency services on site allocation and master planning.



## Implications for the Local Plan

### Our Preferred Approach

Social infrastructure planning will be embedded into the Local Plan site selection and master planning process through early and continued engagement across council departments and service providers. New and / or improved social infrastructure will be required to support new housing development which will be addressed through detail Development Management policies (Appendix 9.1).

The Council will identify the likely school yield for all education phases (0-19) and Special Educational Needs from development based on past trends. An assessment of the capacity within school planning area catchments to accommodate likely pupil requirement will be undertaken and the opportunity for potential school expansion or new school provision reviewed as required. Following DfE Guidance on securing contributions for education. Our approach to developer contributions will be set out within the Local Plan and requirements per site allocation will be identified within the final IDP.

The Council will continue to work with NHS Wirral and engage Primary Care Networks to identify any increased pressure on existing services and the opportunity for potential expansion or new provision as appropriate.

The Council will implement the recommendations of the Indoor Sports Facilities Needs Assessment and Indoor and Built facilities Strategy and work with Wirral Growth Company to identify opportunities for new leisure centre facilities if existing sites are affected by proposals.

### Question 7.5

Do you agree with our approach to work with our partners to undertake capacity assessments of existing social infrastructure, identify needs arising from growth and the opportunity for potential expansion or new provision as appropriate?

## 8 Our Environment

### Climate Change

#### What is required of us?

- 8.1 Addressing Climate Change is recognised as a critical challenge facing the world, our nation and our local community and it is one of the core land use planning principles of the National Planning Policy Framework which underpin both plan-making and decision-taking. To be found sound, our Local Plan will need to reflect this principle.
- 8.2 There is a [statutory duty](#) on local planning authorities through [Section 19\(1A\) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004](#) which requires local planning authorities to include in their Local Plans “policies designed to secure that the development and use of land in the local planning authority’s area contribute to the mitigation of, and adaptation to, Climate Change”.
- 8.3 National policy and guidance also require the Council to [adopt proactive strategies to mitigate and adapt to Climate Change](#) in line with the provisions and objectives of the [Climate Change Act 2008](#) .
- 8.4 The National Planning Policy Framework also states that Local Plans should consider identifying suitable areas for renewable and low carbon energy development. Local planning authorities should also support community-led initiatives for renewable and low carbon energy taken forward through Neighbourhood Planning. The Government has stated that wind farm developments should only be granted planning permission if the site is identified as a "suitable area" and the proposal has the backing of the local community.
- 8.5 The Council is developing a Climate Emergency Action Plan to address the commitments and requirements of the resolution passed in July 2019. The Action Plan will set out the long-term direction for the Council and provide a route map for the changes required to address climate pollution to enable Wirral to become carbon neutral and resilient to unavoidable changes to the climate.

#### What our evidence tells us

- 8.6 The UN’s Paris Agreement on Climate Change, which came into force in 2016, sets a target to limit the unnatural rise in global average temperatures to well below 2°C (above the pre-industrial period). The Paris Agreement, and the latest special report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) that stems from it, demands more stringent targets requiring more urgent action. We now need to limit warming to 1.5°C. The evidence indicates we have already seen 1°C of unnatural warming and could pass the 1.5°C threshold within the life of the new Local Plan. Urgent action is required to address this challenge.
- 8.7 In the UK, the Climate Change Act 2008 sets the legal framework for the UK’s response to Climate Change. It established the independent Climate Change Committee to advise Government on reducing emissions and adapting to Climate Change. In the light of the Paris Agreement and special IPCC report, advice and targets have changed. The UK legal target is now net zero emissions by 2050. Achieving this is technically feasible but will demand far reaching change in energy, transport, the built and natural environment.

**8.8** In the light of the changing picture Wirral Council declared an environment and Climate Emergency in July 2019. In doing so it recognised that there is a need to do more in the face of latest evidence about climate and ecological disruption. The Council already maintains an active climate programme. It supports partnership work through the multi-sector Cool Wirral Partnership. This partnership developed and championed the Wirral Climate Change Strategy – ‘Cool 2014-19’, endorsed by Wirral Council [Wirral Climate Change Strategy 2014-2019](#) . At the council’s request the partnership has developed a new strategy, ‘Cool 2’ to take on board the implications of the Paris Agreement and recent IPCC evidence. A working draft of the new strategy was agreed by the partnership at the end of July 2019. The draft includes two main goals:

- net zero climate damaging pollution from Wirral, to be achieved as early as we practically can and no later than 2041 so that we stay within a local ‘budget’ of 7.7 million tonnes (Mt CO<sub>2</sub>) during the period 2020-2100; and
- a climate resilient Wirral adapted to cope with existing change and unavoidable change that will be experienced during this century.

**8.9** The draft strategy has 11 objectives in support:

- lean energy: To reduce the overall demand for energy in Wirral and make sure as many homes as possible are improved to at least EPC Band C by around 2030;
- clean energy: To generate and/or source all our local energy needs from zero carbon and renewable sources by around 2041;
- clean Travel: A complete transition to fossil fuel free local travel by around 2030;
- wiser decisions: To use resources – materials, land and food - in a sustainable way so that our collective decisions do not add indirectly to the burden of climate damaging pollution in Wirral or elsewhere;
- storing more carbon: To capture more carbon naturally by both increasing tree cover and protecting soils and natural habitats;
- A clear view of climate risk: To identify vulnerabilities in the face of present extreme weather and further, already unavoidable changes in the climate this century;
- Adaptation: To put in place infrastructure, policies and practices that help limit negative impacts from existing and future changes;
- Wider climate understanding: To educate and raise awareness about the climate emergency and about the opportunities and benefits of taking climate action and the risks and threats of inaction across Wirral and make sure we have the right skills in place to do what needs to be done;
- Adequate resourcing: To secure increased investment to match the scale of the challenge;
- Stronger partnerships and networks: To ensure climate action is given the priority it needs and is developed in a co-ordinated way with key organisations, interests and networks involved to provide mutual support;
- Evidence informed action: To build a better picture of where we are at, what needs to be done and the impact of our actions through the collation and examination of the evidence and data available; and
- Engagement work to develop the new Cool 2 strategy highlighted the importance of the new local plan in responding to Climate Change.

- 8.10** The Council recognise that the Local Plan is a key opportunity to influence and implement key elements of the emerging climate strategy through its policies for the development and use of land.
- 8.11** The new Local Plan will cover a period over which we must see significant reduction in greenhouse gas pollution. This will necessitate substantial changes in land uses, buildings and energy and transport infrastructure. It covers a period over which we will experience further impacts from unavoidable changes in the climate necessitating steps to adapt to mitigate these impacts.
- 8.12** To stay within the local carbon budgets that are compatible with the Paris Agreement requires significant reductions in emissions sooner rather than later. The local carbon budget reporting tool used to develop the Cool 2 strategy, based on work by the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change, indicates that if we continue polluting at 2017 levels from 2020 then we would use up the entire Paris compatible local carbon budget in seven years.
- 8.13** Since the Liverpool City Region Renewable Energy Capacity Study (RES) was undertaken in 2011, the policy framework within which renewable energy is operating, has changed substantially as have the falling costs and economics of generation. Some of the policy changes have created uncertainty in the renewable energy sector and has fundamentally altered the risk profile and financial case for investment in some technologies.
- 8.14** Power generation has seen rapid decarbonisation with the rise in renewable generation displacing coal. Decarbonising heat however remains a challenge. Heat networks present one opportunity make progress. Another possibility is substituting natural gas for biogas and hydrogen. A Wirral Heat Mapping and Masterplanning study begun in 2019, funded and supported by the Heat Network Delivery Unit (HNDU) of the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS). The purpose of this project was to identify and evaluate opportunities to develop district heat networks in Wirral. Opportunity mapping pointed to the Birkenhead area as having most potential. BEIS has now commissioned a feasibility study to look in more detail at the opportunity in the Birkenhead area including the Wirral Waters area which will inform the next stage of the Local Plan.

## Implications for the Local Plan

### Our Preferred Approach

The Council is committed to using the Local Plan to meet local climate goals and objectives where this is appropriate and, feasible.

To inform the Local Plan the Council will complete a Climate Change and Renewable energy study in 2020. This is to advise how the Local Plan should best meet its statutory requirements and to provide guidance on how to implement appropriate elements of the Borough's Climate strategy through the Local Plan. This will include the development of a positive strategy to promote the delivery of renewable and low carbon energy and which would incorporate requirements on housing, employment, retail, leisure and tourism development to meet higher standards of energy efficiency.

#### Question 8.1

Do you have any views on our preferred approach to plan for Climate Change in Wirral?

#### Question 8.2

Would you support including additional measures within the Local Plan to plan for Climate Change, including allocating sites for renewable energy or including additional requirements on housing, employment, retail, leisure and tourism developments to meet higher standards of energy efficiency?

#### Question 8.3

Do you think there is anything else that the Council could do to address or plan for Climate Change within the Local Plan?

## Green and Blue Infrastructure

### What is required of us?

- 8.15** In order to meet Government Policy objectives, the Council must have a strategic overview of green assets including public open space for recreation as well as green and blue infrastructure across the Borough. This will determine how appropriately planned development can ensure this critical resource is suitably protected and enhanced.
- 8.16** Paragraph 91 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that *“planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places...through the provision of safe and accessible green infrastructure, sports facilities, local shops, access to healthier food, allotments and layouts that encourage*

walking and cycling.” Paragraph 96 of the NPPF continues that “*planning policies should be based on robust and up-to-date assessments of the need for open space, sport and recreation facilities (including quantitative or qualitative deficits or surpluses) and opportunities for new provision*”.

- 8.17** Paragraph 149 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that “*Plans should take a proactive approach to mitigating and adapting to Climate Change, taking into account the long-term implications for flood risk, coastal change, water supply, biodiversity and landscapes...*” and managing the implications of Climate Change including ensuring the future resilience of communities and infrastructure. Likewise, paragraph 150 of the NPPF states that “*new development should be planned in ways that avoid increased vulnerability to the range of impacts arising from Climate Change*” and that Local Authorities should ensure that risks can be managed through suitable adaptation measures and appropriate planning of green infrastructure.
- 8.18** The National Planning Policy Framework sets out that authorities, when determining planning applications, should expect new development to “*take account of landform, layout, building orientation, massing and landscaping to minimise energy consumption*” (Paragraph 153). In addition, paragraphs 163 and 165 state that “*When determining any planning applications, local planning authorities should ensure that flood risk is not increased elsewhere.*” Guidance sets out that sustainable drainage systems should be incorporated in development unless evidence suggests this would be inappropriate.
- 8.19** Paragraph 171 of the National Planning Policy Framework states that Local Plans need to distinguish between international, national and local designations of sites, taking a strategic approach to maintain and enhance these networks of green infrastructure. Paragraph 174 continues that to protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity plans need to map ecological networks “*and pursue opportunities for securing measurable net gains for biodiversity.*” Similarly, Local Plans also need to protect and enhance landscape character, recognise the benefits from natural and ecosystem services and prevent new and existing development from contributing to soil, air, water and noise pollution or land instability (paragraph 170).

### What our evidence tells us

- 8.20** The Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy will be underpinned by robust, up-to-date evidence both at local and City Region level. The Council has recently updated its evidence base with the Wirral Landscape Character Assessment 2019, the Draft Wirral Open Space Assessment 2019 and the Wirral Strategic Flood Risk Assessment 2019, which have been published for public consultation alongside this Local Plan Issues and Options document.
- 8.21** The Liverpool City Region Ecological Network<sup>70</sup>, prepared by the Merseyside Environmental Advisory Service (MEAS), comprises ecological and biodiversity information on the City Region’s ecological network, identifying opportunities to enable better protection and management of those natural assets and describing opportunities to create new natural assets. This includes defining the City Region’s core biodiversity assets and identifying a series of Nature Improvement Areas, which will be taken into account in the preparation of the Wirral Local Plan. The Council has, in addition,

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70 <http://www.lcreconet.uk/>

determined to undertake an updated Phase One Habitat Survey, to provide a comprehensive picture of habitats, their location and distribution across the Borough as a baseline to further survey work.

- 8.22** The Council will prepare a comprehensive Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy in 2020 which will inform the future approach to maintaining and enhancing the strategic network of green and blue infrastructure across the Borough through the Local Plan. Emphasis will be placed on securing a resilient, coherent network of interconnected landscape, wildlife or ecosystem services. This will include the protection and enhancement of existing environmental assets and the creation of corridors and stepping stones to assist species movement and enable colonisation and adaptation to Climate Change.
- 8.23** The Green Infrastructure Strategy will set out the multiple roles and functions of the Borough's existing green assets but also set out additional infrastructure requirements which will need to be considered when determining what use a particular site can be allocated for. The Green Infrastructure Strategy will identify existing networks of green infrastructure (GI) and help to plan positively for their protection, for the creation of new assets where appropriate or necessary and for the enhancement and management of existing provision.
- 8.24** In accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework, the Council has also undertaken a robust assessment of need for open space, sport and recreation facilities. The Council will also seek to ensure that future development proposals contribute to maintaining and enhancing strategic priorities for green and blue infrastructure as informed by the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy 2020 and Open Space Study 2019.
- 8.25** The implications for local areas will be determined by the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy and included in policies for land allocations and development management. The policies will set out local priorities and characteristics including issues related natural features; trees and woodland; soils and geology; coastal character and influences; landscape and heritage; habitats and species; corridors and linkages; public rights of way; formal and informal recreation; water courses and drainage.
- 8.26** The revised Landscape Character Assessment 2019 will be used to guide development and land management that is sympathetic to the local character and special qualities of the Borough, including encouraging the protection and enhancement of valued landscapes in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework. It is also intended to promote an understanding of how the landscapes of the Borough are changing as a result of a combination of natural, economic and human factors, and how they can be strengthened in response. Appropriate policies will be included, to ensure that its findings are taken into account in land allocations and development management decisions.
- 8.27** A Visitor Management Strategy is currently being prepared to ensure that the local authorities in the Liverpool City Region are able to meet their legal requirements to protect internationally important wildlife sites from the implications of growth. The Strategy will seek to support sustainable housing and tourism development, whilst securing sustainable, long term protection of the internationally important wildlife from recreation impacts through a comprehensive mitigation strategy funded through

developer contributions. It will also identify where cross-authority mitigation measures can help to address any identified impacts from recreation arising from additional housing and other types of development.

- 8.28** The Cool Wirral Partnership has developed a new Climate Change strategy, Cool 2, for Wirral. The strategy considers:
- recent changes in global and national frameworks informed by the latest scientific evidence;
  - the original Cool 2014-19 strategy and the lessons learnt from efforts to implement it;
  - local CO<sup>2</sup> emissions data;
  - new tools to help plan emissions reductions in line with the latest scientific evidence; and
  - contributions gathered through several workshops involving partner organisations, schools and members of the public.
- 8.29** The emerging Wirral Tree Strategy sets out the ambitions and overarching strategic guidance of how to manage trees in the Borough up to 2030 in accordance with the Government's long-term ambition for achieving an average of 12% tree cover across England by 2060 and the 25 year Environmental Plan (December 2018).
- 8.30** Wirral envisages *“an aspirational and bright future for trees in Wirral, in the lifetime of this strategy we will work towards a greater provision of trees, whether on our highways or in the parks and countryside which we manage. We will seek to share the benefit of trees across Wirral. We want to ensure that we create a positive future legacy for trees in Wirral whilst also effectively and safely managing trees in the present. We will work constructively with individuals and groups to deliver this vision on an understanding of shared responsibility”*
- 8.31** The emerging tree strategy will also increase Natural Flood Management solutions for flood mitigation in the borough, including Working with Natural Processes (WwNP) and opportunities for Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDs).



## Implications for the Local Plan

### Our Preferred Approach

#### Green and Blue Infrastructure Standards

The Local Plan will set Borough-wide standards for the quantity, quality and accessibility of parks and gardens; natural and semi-natural greenspace; outdoor sports provision; amenity greenspace; provision for children and young people; and allotments.

The Borough-wide standards will be used to protect and enhance existing provision and facilities and will identify priorities for new provision and improvements. Contributions for new or improved provision resulting from the demands of new development will be sought through developer contributions or through a Community Infrastructure Levy.

#### New Development

Where appropriate, new development will be required to contribute towards the provision, protection and enhancement of green and blue infrastructure, whether on site or through developer contributions. Developers should secure multi-functional benefits to the Borough's identified green and blue network including:

- providing enough good quality, accessible public open space;
- mitigating and adapting to the impacts of Climate Change;
- maintaining and enhancing landscape features;
- sustainable management of surface water and drainage issues
- enhancing ecological networks;
- preserving and enhancing biodiversity and geodiversity assets;
- protecting and enhancing identified green and blue networks; and
- supporting health and wellbeing and enable sustainable patterns of development.

All development proposals and land allocations will be assessed against their contribution to:

- the standards to be set out in the Green and Blue Infrastructure Study 2020;
- the priorities for the particular settlement(s) concerned;
- the delivery of the Council's overall Strategy for Green Infrastructure;
- the delivery of any other related initiatives and strategies; and
- the avoidance and mitigation of an adverse impact on internationally important wildlife.

#### Tree Planting Strategy

In support of the emerging climate strategy the Council is also developing a Tree Strategy as a natural way to store carbon.

The vision for the Tree Strategy is 'In the ten-year span of this strategy we will raise woodland cover in the Borough to at least 10% to boost the benefits of trees and woodlands. We will seek to share these benefits across Wirral. Our planting will be based on "the right tree for the right place" building a strong legacy for our tree stock. For every tree Wirral Council are forced to fell we will net plant at least two more. We will work constructively with individuals and groups to deliver this vision'. The Local Plan is seen as a key mechanism to implement this Strategy.

### Question 8.4

Do you have any views on our preferred approach for planning for Green and Blue Infrastructure within Wirral?

### Question 8.5

Do you have any views as to how the Local Plan should promote tree planting?

### Question 8.6

Do you have any ideas as to where the Council should promote new tree planting as part of its Tree Planting strategy?

## Open space, sport and recreation

### What is required of us?

- 8.32** Chapter 8 of the National Planning Policy Framework deals with promoting healthy and safe communities and states (paragraph 92 refers) that *“To provide the social, recreational and cultural facilities and services the community needs, planning policies and decisions should: a) plan positively for the provision and use of shared spaces, community facilities (such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship) and other local services to enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments....”*
- 8.33** Paragraph 96 of the National Planning Policy Framework states that *“Access to a network of high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and physical activity is important for the health and well-being of communities. Planning policies should be based on robust and up-to-date assessments of the need for open space, sport and recreation facilities (including quantitative or qualitative deficits or surpluses) and opportunities for new provision. Information gained from the assessments should be used to determine what open space, sport and recreational provision is needed, which plans should then seek to accommodate”.*
- 8.34** Paragraph 97 of the National Planning Policy Framework states that *“Existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless:*
- a an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements; or*
  - b the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location; or*
  - c the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the benefits of which clearly outweigh the loss of the current or former use”.*

- 8.35** The Council currently protects open spaces within the urban area either as Urban Greenspace under Policy GR1 – The Protection of Urban Greenspace<sup>71</sup> and Proposal GR2 – Land Designated as Urban Greenspace<sup>72</sup> or as sports facilities under Proposal RE6 – Sports Grounds for Protection from Development<sup>73</sup>, in line with national policy for open space and recreation. Allotments are protected under Policy GR3 – The Protection of Allotments<sup>74</sup> and Proposal GR4 - Allotments to be Protected from Development<sup>75</sup>.
- 8.36** Greenspace can include parks, play areas, playing fields, woodlands, as well as individual trees, hedges, private gardens and other features such as river corridors, road verges, and other smaller amenity areas. Such areas can be of great significance to the character and environment of a neighbourhood, irrespective of their ownership or formal designation as public open space. This significance increases not only in terms of visual amenity but also in terms of the recreational opportunities they may provide.
- 8.37** The Council currently uses two quantifiable measures to assess the local provision of accessible public open space - a minimum standard for overall supply in order to relate the total amount of land available to the number of people resident within an area, and a network analysis in order to relate the location of available land with its accessibility to local people.
- 8.38** The minimum standard for the supply of accessible public open space is currently 2.4 hectares for every thousand people and is normally applied to local areas with a distinct and separate community identity. A local deficiency is indicated where the total area of accessible public open space available to that community, when compared with the total resident population, falls below this standard.
- 8.39** The network analysis is based upon the principle that no part of the Primarily Residential Area should be further than a comfortable walking distance away from a local park or similar space available for public use. The basic network is, therefore, currently defined by drawing 400 metre catchment areas around all accessible public spaces of 1.5 hectares and above, which includes sites within the Green Belt as well as sites within the urban area.
- 8.40** The implications of both these quantifiable measures are taken together in assessing overall deficiencies within an area, priority has always been given to maintaining the basic network of accessible public open space.
- 8.41** In support of this approach, the Council’s existing policies currently require new housing developments of more than 35 dwellings, that would be further away than a 400 metres walking distance from an existing larger open space, to provide additional useable publicly accessible open space at a rate of 60 square metres for every family dwelling and to make specific provision for safe children’s play (Policy GR6 – Greenspace Within New Family Housing Development refers<sup>76</sup>).
- 8.42** There is also an additional requirement to provide for the protection of sports pitches.

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71 Which can be viewed at <https://ww3.wirral.gov.uk/udp/oneudp1.asp?id=GR1>

72 Which can be viewed at <https://ww3.wirral.gov.uk/udp/oneudp1.asp?id=GR2>

73 Which can be viewed at <https://ww3.wirral.gov.uk/udp/oneudp1.asp?id=RE6>

74 Which can be viewed at <https://ww3.wirral.gov.uk/udp/oneudp1.asp?id=GR3>

75 Which can be viewed at <https://ww3.wirral.gov.uk/udp/oneudp1.asp?id=GR4>

76 <https://ww3.wirral.gov.uk/udp/oneudp1.asp?id=GR6>

**8.43** While it is proposed that a similar approach will be followed in the Wirral Local Plan, the Council has sought to update its evidence by completing an up-to-date Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy and by commissioning the Wirral Open Space and Indoor Sports Facilities Needs Assessment.

Figure 8.1 Open Space, Sports and Recreation



Figure 8.1 Existing Open Space in Wirral

Existing Open Space

## What our evidence tells us

- 8.44** The Council approved a revised Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy in November 2017. The accompanying assessment, which was published for public comment during 2018, indicated that:
- there was a particular shortage of football pitches across the Borough, as well as more localised shortfalls for cricket and rugby union and growing demand for hockey; and
  - that demand for bowls and tennis is currently being met, although qualitative improvements for tennis will be required in the future
- 8.45** The Strategy goes on to conclude that there is a need to protect levels of provision; improve quality, where possible, to create additional capacity and, if viable, to create access to school sites or bring some disused sites back into use, if the needs identified were to be fully met<sup>77</sup>.
- 8.46** The Draft Wirral Open Space Assessment 2019 shows that the Borough is generally well-provided with open space against the normal national benchmarks but that there are local deficiencies in certain types of open space within some locations, particularly within the older urban areas. The initial findings of the Assessment and a draft Open Space Standards paper 2020 have been published for public comment alongside this Local Plan Issues and Options document. The existing distribution of open space is shown on Figure 8.1.
- 8.47** The Draft Indoor Sports Facilities needs Assessment 2019 and Indoor and Built Facilities Strategy 2020, which has also been published for public comment alongside this Local Plan Issues and Options consultation document, concludes that Wirral is, again, generally currently well provided with indoor sports facilities but that there is likely to be a need to renew or replace ageing facilities, particularly for swimming, within the Plan period.

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<sup>77</sup> The full reports can be viewed on the Council's website at <https://democracy.wirral.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=4329>

## Implications for the Local Plan

### Our Preferred Approach

The Council has reviewed the open spaces to be protected from development in line with national policy in paragraphs 96 and 97 of the National Planning Policy Framework. The proposed boundaries to each of these sites, which are also listed in Appendix 8, can be viewed on the Council's website<sup>78</sup>. The sites are based on the existing designations in the previous Unitary Development Plan and on the findings of the most recent Open Space Assessment and Playing Pitch Strategy.

The Wirral Local Plan will include revised standards for the provision of open space in line with the recommendations to be contained within the Wirral Open Space Assessment 2019, which new development will also be required to comply with.

Policies to support the continued provision of other sports facilities will also be included in the Local Plan, in line with the findings of the Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy 2016 and the Indoor and Built Facilities Assessment and Strategy 2019.

The Wirral Local Plan will include revised standards for the provision of open space in line with the recommendations to be contained within the Wirral Open Space Assessment 2019, which new development will also be required to comply with. Policies to support the continued provision of other sports facilities will also be included in the Local Plan, in line with the findings of the Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy 2016 and the Indoor and Built Facilities Assessment and Strategy 2019.

#### Question 8.7

Do you have any views on the Council's proposed approach to the provision of open space and sport and recreation facilities?

#### Question 8.8

Do you agree with the list of open spaces identified for protection from development set out in Appendix 8.1 and the boundaries shown on the Council's website? If not, please state how they should be revised and why.

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78 <https://www.wirral.gov.uk/proposalsmap>

## Local Green Space

### What is required of us?

- 8.48** Paragraph 99 of the National Planning Policy Framework states that the designation of land as Local Green Space through local and neighbourhood plans allows communities to identify and protect green areas of particular importance to them. Designating land as Local Green Space should be consistent with the local planning of sustainable development and complement investment in sufficient homes, jobs and other essential services. Local Green Spaces should only be designated when a plan is prepared or updated and be capable of enduring beyond the end of the plan period.
- 8.49** Paragraph 100 states that “*Local Green Space designation should only be used where the green space is:*
- a in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves;*
  - b demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or richness of its wildlife; and*
  - c local in character and is not an extensive tract of land”*
- 8.50** Paragraph 101 states that policies for managing development within a Local Green Space should be consistent with those for Green Belts.
- 8.51** The National Planning Practice Guidance provides further detailed guidance on the designation of Local Green Spaces and states that:
- Local Green Spaces may be designated where those spaces are demonstrably special to the local community, whether in a village or in a neighbourhood in a town or city
  - Local Green Space can only be designated through Local Plans or Neighbourhood Development Plans;
  - designating Local Green Spaces must be consistent with planning for sustainable development in the area and should not be used in a way that undermines this aim of plan making;
  - Local Green Space designation will rarely be appropriate where the land has planning permission for development; and
  - Local Green Space need not be publicly owned or publicly accessible.

### What our evidence tells us

- 8.52** The Council has already received an application to designate a site to the north of Rectory Road, within West Kirby Old Village Conservation Area, as a Local Green Space (See Figure 8.2). The guidelines for designating a site as Local Green Space are set out in national policy, in paragraphs 99 to 101 of the National Planning Policy Framework (February 2019)<sup>79</sup>.

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79 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>

Figure 8.2 Application boundary for Local Green Space Designation in West Kirby

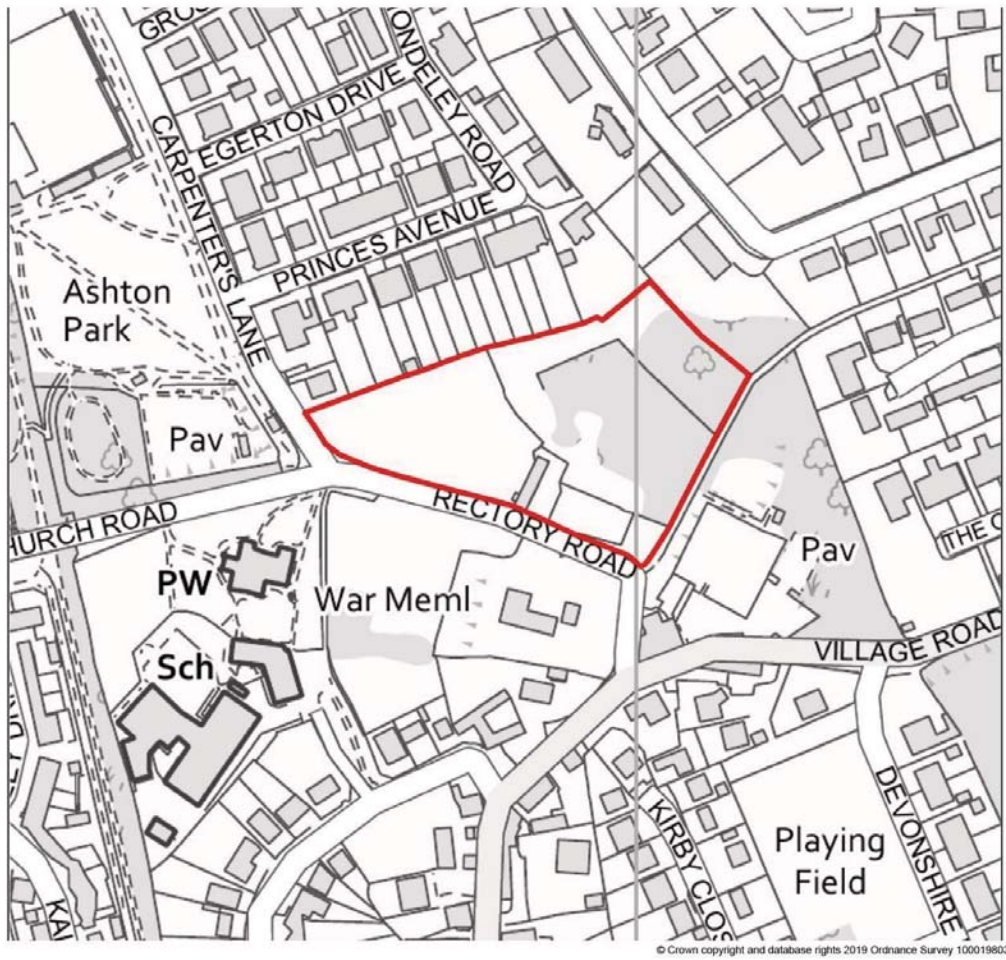


Fig 8.2 Site submitted for designation as local green space. The Glebe, West Kirby

 The Glebe, West Kirby



## Implications for the Local Plan

### Our Preferred Approach

The Council will consider designating sites nominated by local communities which meet the requirements for designation as set out in national policy and guidance

#### Question 8.9

Do you support the designation of ‘the glebe land’ at West Kirby as a Local Green Space?

#### Question 8.10

Are there any other sites which you think should be considered for designation as a Local Green Space?

Please provide a map with a proposed boundary marked on it or provide a clear description of the location of the site so that we can identify it and tell us how you think it meets the criteria set out in paragraph 100 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

## Landscape

### What is required of us?

- 8.53** Chapter 15 of the National Planning Policy Framework deals with conserving and enhancing the natural environment. Paragraph 170 states that *“Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:*
- a protecting and enhancing valued landscapes , sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);*
  - b recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland...”*
- 8.54** Paragraph 127 of the National Planning Policy Framework states that, *“Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments:*
- c are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting , while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities)”.*
- 8.55** Paragraph 180 of the National Planning Policy Framework contains a reference to sensitivity as follows:

- 8.56** *“Planning policies and decisions should also ensure that new development is appropriate for its location taking into account the likely effects (including cumulative effects) of pollution on health, living conditions and the natural environment, as well as the potential sensitivity of the site or the wider area to impacts that could arise from the development ...”*
- 8.57** The National Planning Practice Guidance recognises the role that Landscape Character Assessments play in helping to understand the character and local distinctiveness of the landscape it states that, *“Where landscapes have a particular local value, it is important for policies to identify their special characteristics and be supported by proportionate evidence. Policies may set out criteria against which proposals for development affecting these areas will be assessed. Plans can also include policies to avoid adverse impacts on landscapes and to set out necessary mitigation measures, such as appropriate design principles and visual screening, where necessary. The cumulative impacts of development on the landscape need to be considered carefully.”*

### **What Our Evidence Tells Us**

- 8.58** A Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) and a Landscape Sensitivity Assessment (LSA) were completed in November 2019. The LCA updates the previous LCA undertaken in 2009 and provides detailed descriptions of the Landscape Character Areas within Wirral, highlights key characteristics (both positive and negative) and valued attributes that are of most significance to the particular landscape concerned. It also describes the main physical and cultural influences which have shaped the landscape of Wirral. It is intended to promote an understanding of how the landscapes of the Borough are changing as a result of a combination of natural, economic and human factors and how they can be strengthened in response.
- 8.59** The landscape of Wirral is a mixture of lowland farmland, rocky outcrops covered by heathland and establishing woodland, coastal farmland and recreational areas with extensive views. The landscape classification within the Landscape Character Assessment identified six landscape / seascape character types, each representing a distinct identity and reflecting the range of contrasting landscapes across the borough. These landscape character types have then been sub divided into 13 landscape character areas which are discrete geographic areas that possess the characteristics described for the landscape type but also have a recognisable local identity.
- 8.60** Key landscape issues highlighted in the Landscape Character Assessment 2019 , including Climate Change, which is a major pressure on rural landscapes and is likely to result in increasingly unpredictable weather which could have an impact on the species composition of woodland and hedgerows and other important semi-natural habitats. Agriculture is of considerable significance in terms of its effect on the local landscape in Wirral. However, agricultural changes, particularly related to the viability of traditional small-scale farming, are leading to the diversification of farm-based activities which in turn could lead to a change in traditional field patterns and farming methods.
- 8.61** The Landscape Sensitivity Assessment considers the landscape sensitivity of 53 specific areas of land in the Green Belt that were identified for further investigation in the 2018 Development Options Review. It provides an assessment of the extent to which the character and quality of the landscape of these areas would, in principle, be susceptible to change as a result of the introduction of built development.

- 8.62** To assess landscape sensitivity some of the smaller areas were amalgamated. The amalgamations were undertaken within the spatial framework of the Landscape Character Assessment 2019 to ensure that only areas of consistent landscape character were amalgamated. Each area was then assessed against landscape sensitivity criteria to provide an indication of the relative sensitivity of the landscape to new development. The Landscape Sensitivity Assessment 2019 will need to be extended to include any additional areas identified through public consultation or in the Wirral Green Belt Review 2019 before the final draft Local Plan is prepared.

## Implications for the Local Plan

### Our Preferred Approach

Landscape is a fundamental part of the visual and cultural character of Wirral and its biodiversity. It is important that the Local Plan contains policies which protect and enhance Wirral's most valuable landscapes.

#### Additional Landscape Assessments

To inform the Local Plan and complete the site selection process, additional landscape sensitivity assessments will be required for any additional areas identified through public consultation or in the Wirral Green Belt Review 2019 before the final draft Local Plan is prepared.

A review of the Areas of Special Landscape Value (ASLV) within Wirral is also required following the introduction of the phrase 'valued landscapes' in paragraph 170 of the National Planning Policy Framework. This review will set out the justification for any continued or revised ASLV designations in terms of special character and qualities and where necessary, provide amendments to boundaries and / or allocate new areas, in order to provide evidence to underpin a robust set of up-to-date ASLVs.

#### New Development

The Landscape sensitivity Assessment 2019 provides general guidance for any potential development within each of the landscape areas assessed.

Any new development would therefore need to take this guidance into consideration. Examples of this guidance include:

- Conserving and managing hedgerows as important wildlife habitats and landscape features;
- Conserving, enhancing and managing any other valued habitats that have formed within the area;
- Conserving and reinforcing the network of native hedgerows and seeking to create a stronger landscape structure to integrate development by increasing the presence of hedgerow trees and providing additional native woodland planting;
- Avoiding visually intrusive development on more elevated areas; and
- Protecting and enhancing public rights of way and promoting further opportunities to increase access and enjoyment of the landscape in association with any new development.

It is intended that appropriate policies will be included in the Local Plan, to ensure that the findings of the Landscape Character Assessment 2019 and the Landscape Sensitivity Assessment 2019 are taken into account in land allocations and development management decisions.

### Question 8.11

Do you have any views on our preferred approach for protecting and conserving landscapes within Wirral through the Local Plan?

## Flood Risk and Coastal Change

### What is required of us?

- 8.63** Flood risk is a combination of the likelihood of flooding and the potential consequences arising. It is a critical consideration when assessing suitable locations for future development and should be considered at all stages of the planning process. The National Planning Policy Framework requires strategic policies to make provision for flood risk and coastal change management as part of the overall strategy for the pattern, scale and quality of development (Paragraph 20).
- 8.64** Strategic policies should be informed by a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA), should manage flood risk from all sources and consider cumulative impacts in, or affecting, local areas susceptible to flooding, taking into account the advice from the EA and other relevant flood Risk Management Authorities (RMAs) such as Lead Local Flood Authorities (LLFAs) and Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs) (National Planning Policy Framework, Paragraph 156).
- 8.65** According to the Flood and Water Management Act (FWMA, 2010), RMAs, including LPAs should work together to carry out their flood and coastal erosion risk management functions effectively, efficiently and in collaboration with communities, businesses and infrastructure operators to deliver more effective flood risk management.
- 8.66** Chapter 14 of the National Planning Policy Framework ‘Meeting the challenge of Climate Change, flooding and coastal change’ focuses on planning principles in relation to flood risk and coastal change.
- 8.67** Paragraph 149 of the National Planning Policy Framework states that *“Plans should take a proactive approach to mitigating and adapting to Climate Change, taking into account the long term implications for flood risk, coastal change... Policies should support appropriate measures to ensure the future resilience of communities and infrastructure to Climate Change impacts, such as... making provision for the possible future relocation of vulnerable development and infrastructure”*.
- 8.68** Paragraph 155 of the National Planning Policy Framework recognises that *“inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding should be avoided by directing development away from areas at highest risk (whether existing or future).”* This is supported by Paragraph 157, whereby the NPPF identifies that *“all plans should apply a sequential risk-based approach to the location of development – taking into account the current and future impacts of Climate Change – so as to avoid, where*

*possible, flood risk to people and property.” Where development is necessary in areas at higher risk of flooding, the development should be made safe for its lifetime without increasing flood risk elsewhere (Exception Test).*

- 8.69** Paragraph 158 of the National Planning Policy Framework goes further and states that *“development should not be allocated or permitted if there are reasonably available sites appropriate for the proposed development in areas with a lower risk of flooding.”*
- 8.70** Paragraph 160 of the National Planning Policy Framework details *“the application of the exception test should be informed by a strategic or site specific flood risk assessment, depending on whether it is being applied during plan production or at the application stage. For the exception test to be passed it should be demonstrated that;*
- a the development would provide wider sustainability benefits to the community that outweigh flood risk and;*
  - b the development will be safe for its lifetime taking account of the vulnerability of its users, without increasing flood risk elsewhere and where possible, reducing flood risk overall.”*
- 8.71** Paragraph 163 of the National Planning Policy Framework states *“when determining any planning applications, local planning authorities should ensure that flood risk is not increased elsewhere... development should only be allowed in areas at risk of flooding where... it can be demonstrated that:... the development is appropriately flood resistant and resilient; it incorporates sustainable drainage systems, unless there is clear evidence that it would be inappropriate.”*

## Coastal Change

- 8.72** In relation to coastal change, national policy states that *“plans should reduce risk from coastal change by avoiding inappropriate development in vulnerable areas and not exacerbating the impacts of physical changes to the coast”* (Paragraph 167 of the National Planning Policy Framework)
- 8.73** Paragraph 168 of the National Planning Policy Framework advises that *“development in a coastal change management area will be appropriate only where it is demonstrated that:*
- a it will be safe over its planned lifetime and not have an unacceptable impact on coastal change;*
  - b the character of the coast including designations is not compromised;*
  - c the development provides wider sustainability benefits; and*
  - d the development does not hinder the creation and maintenance of a continuous signed and managed route around the coast”*

## Legislation

- 8.74** The Local Planning Authority and the Lead Local Flood Authority have a responsibility in respect to managing flood risk and in the delivery of the requirements of the Flood Risk Regulations (2009) and the Flood and Water Management Act, 2010. There are clear links between legislation, national policy, statutory documents and assessment of flood risk. The implementation of legislation and policy should aim to provide a comprehensive and planned approach to improving flood risk management within communities.

- 8.75** The Flood and Water Management Act requires the Environment Agency to “develop, maintain, apply and monitor a strategy for flood and coastal erosion risk management in England”. The National Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy (2011), is currently being revised and is anticipated to be published in Spring 2020.

### **What Our Evidence Tells Us**

- 8.76** The updated Level 1 Wirral Strategic Flood Risk Assessment 2019 (SFRA) and the Environment Agency’s Flood Map for Planning and the Risk of Flooding from Surface Water (RoFSW) third edition dataset, provides a more detailed picture of areas susceptible to flood risk across the Borough. The main sources of flood risk within Wirral are from rivers and watercourses (fluvial), the sea (tidal) and surface water runoff and can be viewed in more detail on the Interactive Maps in Appendix A of the SFRA.
- 8.77** The Wirral Strategic Flood Risk Assessment 2019 (SFRA) assesses surface water flooding with equal importance as fluvial and tidal, including possible withdrawal (to sites where high-risk areas cannot be avoided), redesign or relation for sites at significant surface water risk.
- 8.78** Wirral Council is the designated Lead Local Flood Authority and under the Flood and Water Management Act, 2010, and must contribute to the achievement of sustainable development when carrying out flood risk management functions, in accordance with the Wirral Local Flood Risk Management Strategy (LFRMS) which was published in 2016.
- 8.79** The Council should use the assessment not only to determine the variations of risk from all sources of flooding across Wirral, but also to help inform the Sustainability Appraisal, consider opportunities to reduce flood risk to existing communities and developments through better management of surface water, provision for conveyance and storage for flood water.
- 8.80** As a result of Climate Change, (as discussed in Section 10.1.2), the risk of flooding to local communities as a result of Climate Change is expected to rise according the Met Office’s UK Climate Projections 2018 (UCKP18). Therefore, the importance of steering more vulnerable development to areas at low risk of flooding, as stated in the NPPF and the SFRA, is paramount on the peninsula.
- 8.81** The Wirral Water Cycle Study (WCS, 2013) identifies any constraints on housing and employment growth planned for the borough up to the year 2027, that may be imposed upon by the water cycle and details how these can be resolved.
- 8.82** The Wirral Water Cycle Study and Wirral Strategic Flood Risk Assessment 2019 highlight that surface water and sewer flooding is an existing concern in several areas and with Climate change, the capacity of the foul sewer system to accept additional surface water may be limited. New development should therefore manage surface water at source in a sustainable, effective and appropriate way. The SFRA further explains this.
- 8.83** Wirral Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment Report 2011 provides an assessment of local flood risk across the Borough, including information on past floods and the potential consequences of future flood events. The study was updated via Addendum in 2017.

- 8.84** The coastline of Wirral is covered by the North West and North Wales Shoreline Management Plan 2 (SMP2) which provides a large scale assessment of the risks associated with coastal processes and a policy framework to reduce these risks, both to people and the environment, in a sustainable way over the following 100 years. The Wirral Coastal Strategy 2013 supplements the SMP by identifying how the strategic SMP policies might be best implemented locally. The Strategy covers the entire Wirral coastline, which is split into three primary frontages, consistent with natural process behaviour and environmental interests:
- Strategy Frontage West – the River Dee shoreline, from the Borough boundary at Gayton to Red Rocks at Hoylake;
  - Strategy Frontage North – the North Wirral shoreline, from the Red Rocks at Hoylake to Fort Perch Rock at New Brighton; and
  - Strategy Frontage East – the River Mersey shoreline, from Fort Perch Rock at New Brighton to the Borough boundary at Eastham.
- 8.85** The Strategy splits the frontage into 14 ‘Strategy units’ for the purposes of policy implementation, which will need to be reflected in policies within the Local Plan, where relevant.

### Implications for the Local Plan

#### Our Preferred Approach

The Local Plan will support Climate Change adaptation through the management of residual risk by guiding the appropriate location, layout and design of development to take account of flood risk and coastal change and by requiring the use of effective Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) and other flood risk management practices to reduce the impacts of flooding, such as safeguarding land and Natural Flood Management (NFM), as outlined in the Level 1 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment 2019, without having an adverse impact on water quality.

The Local Plan will also provide policies to support the sustainable management of surface water and the maintenance of effective flood defences, land drainage infrastructure and river corridors, and to support improvements to water quality.

#### Question 8.12

What are your views on the Council using a sequential risk-based approach to direct development to areas at lowest risk of flooding?

#### Question 8.13

Do you think there is anything else that the Council could do to address or plan for flood risk and coastal change within the Local Plan?

## Habitats and Biodiversity

### What is required of us?

- 8.86** The Council has a statutory duty to have regard to the purpose of conserving biodiversity and to encourage the management of features of the landscape which are of major importance for wild flora and fauna.
- 8.87** Paragraph 170 of the National Planning Policy Framework in Chapter 15 Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment, states that planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:
- *“protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);*
  - *recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland; and*
  - *minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures”.*
- 8.88** Paragraph 171 of the National Planning Policy Framework states that plans should, *“distinguish between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites; allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value, where consistent with other policies in this Framework; take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure; and plan for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries.”*
- 8.89** Paragraph 174 of the National Planning Policy Framework states that in order to protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity, plans should:
- a *“Identify, map and safeguard components of local wildlife-rich habitats and wider ecological networks, including the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity; wildlife corridors and stepping stones that connect them; and areas identified by national and local partnerships for habitat management, enhancement, restoration or creation; and*
  - b *promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species; and identify and pursue opportunities for securing measurable net gains for biodiversity.”*
- 8.90** Paragraph 175 of the National Planning Policy Framework states that when determining planning applications, local planning authorities should apply the following principles:
- a *“if significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused;*
  - b *development on land within or outside a Site of Special Scientific Interest, and which is likely to have an adverse effect on it (either individually or in combination with other developments), should not normally be permitted. The only exception is where the benefits of the development in the location proposed clearly outweigh*



*both its likely impact on the features of the site that make it of special scientific interest, and any broader impacts on the national network of Sites of Special Scientific Interest;*

- c development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons and a suitable compensation strategy exists; and*
- d development whose primary objective is to conserve or enhance biodiversity should be supported; while opportunities to incorporate biodiversity improvements in and around developments should be encouraged, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity.”*

**8.91** Paragraph 176 of the National Planning Policy Framework states that the following should be given the same protection as habitats sites:

- a “potential Special Protection Areas and possible Special Areas of Conservation;
- b listed or proposed Ramsar sites; and
- c sites identified, or required, as compensatory measures for adverse effects on habitats sites, potential Special Protection Areas, possible Special Areas of Conservation, and listed or proposed Ramsar sites”.

**8.92** Paragraph 177 of the National Planning Policy Framework also states that, *“the presumption in favour of sustainable development does not apply where the plan or project is likely to have a significant effect on a habitats site (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects), unless an appropriate assessment has concluded that the plan or project will not adversely affect the integrity of the habitats site.”*

**8.93** The National Planning Practice Guidance outlines that section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 places a duty on all public authorities in England and Wales to have regard, in the exercise of their functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity. A key purpose of this duty is to embed consideration of biodiversity as an integral part of policy and decision making throughout the public sector, which should be seeking to make a significant contribution to the achievement of the commitments made by government in its 25 Year Environment Plan.

## **What Our Evidence Tells Us**

### **Wirral’s Wildlife**

**8.94** Biodiversity is one of Wirral’s greatest assets. A comprehensive biodiversity audit of the Borough was undertaken in 2009 and more recently the Liverpool City Region Ecological Network was published in 2015. The main features of note within the Borough include:

- The Mersey and Dee Estuaries and North Wirral Foreshore, where tens of thousands of waders and wildfowl spend the winter, including redshank, dunlin, knot, turnstone, curlew teal and pintail;
- Clay cliffs at Thurstaston, which are of considerable geological as well as biological importance;
- Sand dunes at Leasowe and West Kirby, where natterjack toads breed, and which are the home of rare plants such as Mackay’s Horsetail;

- Ancient woods still line the River Dibbin, much of them open to the public, which are home to plants such as wood anemones, bluebells and other flowers. These woods are also important for invertebrates, bats and birds;
- Ponds are a Wirral speciality. They support a wide variety of water plants; and frogs, toads and newts, including the legally protected Great Crested Newt, a species which is declining across Europe; and
- Lowland heathland, especially at Thurstaston Common and Heswall Dales, particularly as at least 80% of the Borough's lowland heathland was destroyed in the last century.
- Small pockets of other wildlife can be found elsewhere. A remnant marsh at Bidston, and new habitats on the former tip; some remaining small traditional hay meadows at Meols and Frankby; butterflies on the goods yard to Bebington railway station (New Ferry Butterfly Park); and special maritime wildlife on the Hilbre Islands.

## Wildlife Designations

- 8.95** Wirral has twelve Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI's) three of which – the Dee and Mersey Estuaries and the Mersey Narrows and North Wirral Foreshore – are also listed as Wetlands of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention and as Special Protection Areas (SPA), under European Habitat Regulations for their bird interest. The Liverpool Bay Special Protection Area was also recently extended to include the Mersey Estuary.
- 8.96** In addition to these, the Dee Estuary and North Wirral Foreshore are designated as a Sensitive Marine Area. The Dee Estuary is also Special Area for Conservation (SAC) under European Habitats Regulations. Significant inland areas of the Borough are functionally-linked to these sites as inland roosting sites for bird species for which the sites are classified and are therefore protected by the Habitats Regulations. The Core count areas used for the Wetland Bird Survey undertaken by the British Trust for Ornithology have been adopted as an indicator of where this functionally-linked land lies in the Borough, but further work is needed to understand the importance and location of these sites in the Borough.
- 8.97** Wirral has five Local Nature Reserves (LNR's) and there are 69 Sites of Biological Importance and 15 Local Geological Sites.
- 8.98** There are ten areas of designated Ancient Woodland within the Borough. All are clustered towards the south-east of the Plan area, at Eastham Woods, Plymyard Dale, Stream Wood, Thornton Wood, Intake Wood, Foxes Wood, Footpath Wood, Marfords Wood, Railway Wood and Patricks Wood.
- 8.99** There are also a broad range and distribution of Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Habitats within the Borough, including:
- Large areas of coastal saltmarsh in the Dee Estuary to the south-west and Mersey Estuary to the south-east of the Plan area;
  - Two notable sites of coastal sand dunes along the northern coast of the Borough;
  - A large mudflat area in the Mersey Estuary, with a smaller mudflat area in the Dee Estuary;
  - Significant clusters of coastal and floodplain grazing marsh in the north of the Borough;
  - A scattering of lowland heathland, mostly towards the western border of the Plan area; and

- A scattering of deciduous woodland throughout the Borough.
- Small, isolated pockets of wood pasture and parkland throughout the area.

**8.100** These designations can be viewed on Figure 8.3.

**Figure 8.3 Environmental Designations and Priority Habitats**



Nature Conservation

### Habitats Regulations Assessment

**8.101** Under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, competent authorities have a legal obligation to consider the impacts of any plan or project that has the potential to have an adverse effect on a European designated site, including the granting of consents or permissions of any such plan or project. This process is assessed under a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA).

**8.102** A Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) was undertaken in 2012 as part of the Wirral Core Strategy Local Plan, concluding that, following amendments that were made in the Submission Draft Core Strategy in response to the 2010 Preferred Options HRA Report, a sufficient policy framework existed to enable the avoidance or mitigation of adverse effects on the European designated sites within Wirral. It was however recommended that, with regard to the issue of loss of off-site supporting habitat, a residual recommendation from the 2010 Preferred Options HRA be considered for action at a strategic district-wide (or Merseyside-wide) scale. The recommendation was to identify all important areas of supporting habitat and to

assess any impacts on these areas, and thereby potential impacts on qualifying species, prior to permitting any future development. It was recognised that a commitment to undertake such an exercise at a district-wide scale prior to permitting future development may not be realistic, and that such matters could be deferred to individual planning applications and their associated environmental investigations.

- 8.103** An interim Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA). report has also been prepared for public consultation alongside the proposals contained within this Local Plan Issues and Options document.

## Implications for the Local Plan

### Our Preferred Approach: Wirral's Biodiversity

The Council will seek to protect and enhance the natural environmental assets of the Borough, including the designated biodiversity and geodiversity sites; priority habitats and species; ancient woodland; and ancient and veteran trees found outside ancient woodland; and wherever possible provide net gains in biodiversity and establish coherent ecological networks.

### Our Preferred Approach: Internationally Important sites:

The Liverpool City Region (LCR) Combined Authority is proposing to prepare a sub-regional Recreation Mitigation Strategy (RMS) which will seek to address the implications of growth across the Liverpool City Region for the City Region's wildlife sites of international importance. It will enable sustainable housing and tourism development within the City Region, whilst securing sustainable, long term protection of the internationally important wildlife sites.

A policy setting out the Council's approach to recreation mitigation will be included in the Local Plan. The policy will need to include a recreation mitigation and avoidance mechanism for Wirral in advance of the LCR-wide study being completed, approved and implemented.

The policy is likely to require that mitigation will be required for recreational disturbance from new residential development within 5km of the coast, through the funding of a strategy which will involve a mix of access management, habitat management and provision of alternative recreational space, to be secured through a legal agreement before planning permission is granted.

In the meantime, Wirral Council will continue to work in collaboration with the LCR Combined Authority to contribute to the delivery of a RMS to address potential damage from increased recreation and visitor pressure on the species and habitats of the designated sites within the Borough on a City Region wide basis.

An updated Habitat Regulations Assessment for the Local Plan is currently being undertaken which will examine whether the forthcoming policy framework will be sufficient to enable the avoidance or mitigation of adverse effects on European designated sites.

### Question 8.14

Do you have any views on the Council's approach to ensuring biodiversity is properly addressed within the Local Plan and that important species and habitats are protected?

## Healthy communities

### What is required of us?

- 8.104** Creating healthy places for our communities is a key element of the Local Plan Spatial Vision for Wirral – “A Healthy, Sustainable and Prosperous Borough” Health is an issue across a number of the strategic objectives but is dealt with specifically in Strategic Objective 7.
- 8.105** Health is also a key theme throughout the National Planning Policy Framework.
- 8.106** Paragraph 91 of the National Planning Policy Framework requires that Planning policies and decisions should “*aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which:*
- a promote social interaction, including opportunities for meetings between people who might not otherwise come into contact with each other – for example through mixed-use developments, strong neighbourhood centres, street layouts that allow for easy pedestrian and cycle connections within and between neighbourhoods, and active street frontages;*
  - b are safe and accessible, so that crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion – for example through the use of clear and legible pedestrian routes, and high quality public space, which encourage the active and continual use of public areas; and*
  - c enable and support healthy lifestyles, especially where this would address identified local health and well-being needs – for example through the provision of safe and accessible green infrastructure, sports facilities, local shops, access to healthier food, allotments and layouts that encourage walking and cycling.”*

### What Our Evidence Tells Us

- 8.107** An Interim Health Impact Assessment for the Local Plan was completed in October 2019 which is intended to inform at an early stage how the Local Plan Policies can best deliver healthy outcomes. The Assessment set out a number of recommendations on how the Local Plan can contribute to health and wellbeing including:
- Neighbourhood design;
  - Housing;
  - Food environment;
  - Natural and sustainable environments/ environmental hazards/ air quality/ noise;
  - Access to and engagement with the natural environment;
  - Adaptation to climate change;
  - Provision of active travel walking and cycling infrastructure/ mobility for all ages;
  - Provision of public transport;
  - Limiting fast food outlets;
  - Arts and culture;

- Reducing alcohol-related harm; and
- Effective engagement of communities in overall plan and future.

## Implications for the Local Plan

- 8.108** The health of our communities can be fundamentally affected by their living environment which the planning system has a key role in creating and controlling. The planning system also has a key role in promoting health and reducing health inequalities, for instance in promoting regeneration and requiring appropriate health and well being infrastructure to be provided to support new development.
- 8.109** The Council’s corporate plans place great emphasis on the importance of improving health and well-being of our community. This will need to be carried through into the Local Plan with all policies which can influence health and well-being being developed having regard to the recommendations of the Interim Health Impact Assessment.

## Our Preferred Approach

Improving health will be a cross cutting theme in the final draft Local Plan and will be addressed in environment, design and infrastructure policies. In addition, a specific policy “Improving Health and addressing health inequalities” will be included in the Plan. This would provide details of when an Health Impact Assessment may be required to be submitted in support of certain types of development.

### Question 8.15

Do you have any views on the Council’s approach to ensuring that new development will take account of health and wellbeing through the Local Plan?

### Question 8.16

Do you think there is anything else that the Council could do to address health and wellbeing within the Local Plan?

## Heritage

### What is required of us?

- 8.110** The Local Planning Authority is required to identify and address strategic priorities for development and use of land through polices in the development plan under Section 19 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. There is also a general duty to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the setting of listed buildings and the desirability preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the conservation area under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Protection is provided for scheduled monuments under the Ancient Monuments & Archaeological Areas Act 1979 and the Historic Buildings & Ancient Monuments Act 1953.

- 8.111** Chapter 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework sets out the Government’s planning policies for Conserving and enhancing the historic environment. Paragraph 185 states “*Plans should set out a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment, including heritage assets most at risk through neglect, decay or other threats. This strategy should take into account:*
- a the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets, and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;*
  - b the wider social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits that conservation of the historic environment can bring;*
  - c the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness; and*
  - d opportunities to draw on the contribution made by the historic environment to the character of a place.”*

### What Our Evidence Tells Us

- 8.112** The Merseyside Historic Environment Record (HER) records details on local archaeological sites and finds, historic buildings and historic landscapes.
- 8.113** The Merseyside Historic Characterisation Project – Wirral Report (2011) contains spatial data in relation to historic landscape character of Wirral.
- 8.114** Wirral's Heritage Strategy will set priorities for capital investment in heritage and heritage assets, to maximise educational, recreational, tourism and regeneration opportunities.
- 8.115** Wirral currently has a large number of historic assets including: 726 entries for groups of listed building, 8 scheduled monuments and 4 registered parks and gardens identified on the National Heritage List for England and 26 Conservation Areas designated at local level. The Heritage at Risk Register records 13 features considered to be at risk within the Borough. Two features are recorded as being at immediate risk of further rapid deterioration or loss of fabric.
- 8.116** Flaybrick Cemetery and Port Sunlight have conservation area management plans dated 2018. Other conservation area appraisals and management plans date from 2007 and will need to be updated. New management plans will also need to be prepared for: Clifton Park, Hamilton Square, Lower Bebington, Meols Drive, Mountwood, the Kings Gap and the Magazines.
- 8.117** A wide variety of historic assets are undesignated can make an important contribution to Wirral’s broader historic character. These features range widely in scope and in scale. Liverpool Museum considers undesignated historic assets to include “the vast majority of non-Scheduled archaeological remains, historic landscapes, buildings of local interest, artwork.”
- 8.118** The Battle of Brunanburh, 937, was a key event in the formation of Britain. Wirral Archaeology have recently presented evidence and archaeological finds which may suggest that the battle took place in central Wirral, although the location is not known with confidence. The Council is supporting the work of Wirral Archaeology by commissioning an independent professional archaeological report to assess these finds, advise on how they are recorded and they may impact on the historical landscape of Wirral. This work is expected to be undertaken in early 2020 and will support further archaeological investigations and surveys to help identify the battle site.

## Our Preferred Approach

The Local Plan will set a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the Borough's heritage assets through the vision, objectives, broad spatial strategy, strategic priorities for settlement areas and policies for:

- Achieving Sustainable Places;
- Protection of Heritage Assets;
- Each designated Conservation Area

### Question 8.17

Do you agree with the Council's approach to how Heritage is dealt with in the Local Plan?

### Question 8.18

Do you agree with the Council's approach to ensuring heritage assets are preserved or enhanced?

## Minerals

### What is Required of us

- 8.119** Chapter 17 of the National Planning Policy Framework deals specifically with minerals and sets out what planning authorities should do when considering proposals for mineral extraction. Paragraph 203 within the chapter states that *"it is essential that there is a sufficient supply of minerals to provide the infrastructure, buildings, energy and goods that the country needs. Since minerals are a finite natural resource, and can only be worked where they are found, best use needs to be made of them to secure their long-term conservation"*.
- 8.120** National Guidance advises that mineral planning authorities should adopt a systematic approach for safeguarding mineral resources; and plan for the steady and adequate supply of minerals in one or more of the following ways:
- designating Specific Sites – where viable resources are known to exist, landowners are supportive of minerals development and the proposal is likely to be acceptable in planning terms. Such sites may also include essential operations associated with mineral extraction;
  - designating Preferred Areas, which are areas of known resources where planning permission might reasonably be anticipated. Such areas may also include essential operations associated with mineral extraction; and/or
  - designating Areas of Search – areas where knowledge of mineral resources may be less certain but within which planning permission may be granted, particularly if there is a potential shortfall in supply.



- 8.121** Other chapters from the National Planning Policy Framework that are of particular relevance to minerals waste include Chapter 13 ‘Protecting Green Belt Land’, Chapter 16 ‘Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment’ and Chapter 16 ‘Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment’. Planning policies and decisions being undertaken for minerals would need to pay due regard to the advice outlined within these chapters.

### What our Evidence Tells Us

- 8.122** The Council have commissioned a new study to undertake a complete review of mineral resources and mineral-related facilities in Wirral with a view to providing advice on future minerals planning policy; and how best to deal with any proposals that may come forward for minerals related development within the plan period.<sup>80</sup>
- 8.123** The Wirral land area extends to 60 square miles, with just under half being open countryside. Approximately 58 percent of this area is used for farming, over half of which is high quality agricultural land. Most of the remaining open land is designated as Green Belt (45%) with a boundary tightly defined by the surrounding urban area.
- 8.124** The Merseyside Mineral Resource Study<sup>81</sup> (MMRS) confirmed, following consultation with the mineral industry, that Wirral has no workable resources for land-won crushed rock, sand and gravel or industrial minerals. Much of the background information contained within the MMRS was taken from the British Geological Survey<sup>82</sup> report 2006, which set out the background to mineral resources on Merseyside. It states that there is very limited current extraction of sand and gravel in Merseyside; most of which is marine dredged and is landed at coastal ports such as the Port of Liverpool.
- 8.125** Much of Wirral is founded on sandstone, which is major aquifer. Wirral does not however have any significant mineral reserves, apart from small amounts of winnable brick clay. The MMRS recommended that only the Carr Lane Brickworks at Moreton should be safeguarded for future mineral extraction.
- 8.126** From 2007 to 2015, marine-won sand and gravel from Liverpool bay was landed at a purpose-built facility at Bromborough Coast. The 2016 North West Regional Aggregate Working Party (NWRWP) Annual Monitoring Report stated that annual landings had been as high as 124,000 tonnes, but also advised that “the facility has now closed”.

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80 The Wirral Local Plan Minerals Report 2019, prepared by RPS, has been published for public consultation alongside this Regulation 18 document

81 The Evidence Base for Minerals Planning in Merseyside Final Report August 2008 (Urban Vison)

82 BGS: Mineral Resource Information in support of National, Regional and Local Planning: Merseyside (2006)

## Implications for the Local Plan

### Our Preferred Approach

It is recommended that the following topics be covered by individual policies in the emerging Local Plan:

- General criteria for minerals development;
- Maintaining the supply of aggregates;
- Safeguarding Mineral Reserves & Infrastructure;
- Use of Secondary and Recycled Aggregates;
- Oil and Gas Exploration; and
- Site restoration.

Proposed draft policies are set out within the Wirral Local Plan Minerals Report 2019, for public consultation.

### Question 8.19

Do you have any views on our preferred approach for planning for minerals within Wirral?

## Waste Management

### What is required of us

**8.127** Wirral Council is the waste planning authority for the Borough. “National Planning Policy for Waste” (October 2014) requires that planned provision should be based on a robust evidence base, joint working and considered alongside other spatial planning concerns recognising the positive contribution that waste management can bring to the development of sustainable communities. Waste planning authorities should prepare Local Plans which identify sufficient opportunities to meet the identified needs of their area for the management of waste streams including driving waste management up the hierarchy, which encourages waste prevention and minimisation, re-use and recycling before treatment and disposal and to minimise landfill to meet European commitments.

### Joint Waste Local Plan for Merseyside and Halton

**8.128** The spatial strategy, criteria for development management and site allocations for new waste management development in Wirral, based on a resource recovery-led strategy and a sub-regional site approach, is set out in a separate, jointly prepared sub-regional Waste Local Plan for Merseyside and Halton, which was adopted in July 2013. The Plan period runs to 2027.

**8.129** The Joint Waste Local Plan identifies three additional sites for new waste management facilities; at Cammell Lairds in Tranmere and at Bidston adjacent to the existing recycling facilities at Wallasey Bridge Road; and areas of search for smaller scale facilities at Poulton and Tranmere, which reflect the scale and pattern of development anticipated in the Local Plan.

**8.130** The delivery of the Joint Waste Local Plan strategy relies upon improved facilities for the minimisation, collection, re-use and recycling of waste on the site where the waste is generated, as an integral part of new development or through improvements to the facilities available at existing sites. Other off-site facilities for new waste management development will normally be expected to be provided in industrial locations away from residential property and other environmentally sensitive land uses, with good access to the Strategic Route Network or water access (wharfage) to encourage transport by water.

**8.131** The Joint Waste Local Plan is also subject to separate annual monitoring<sup>83</sup>

### What our evidence tells us

**8.132** Five Waste Local Plan Implementation and Monitoring Reports have been produced, the latest covering the period from 1st April 2017 to 31st March 2018 issued in April 2019. The reports are prepared by Merseyside Environmental Advisory Service on behalf of the six Liverpool City Region councils. The Monitoring Report also provides more recent contextual information especially where this relates to cross-boundary matters or progress with implementation of planning consents. During the fifth monitoring period, in Merseyside and Halton:

- 4 waste management facilities were consented yielding 80,000tpa capacity;
- this comprised mainly of new capacity at existing sites for composting and small-scale biomass facilities; and
- the 4 consented waste management facilities have the potential to create up to 19 new jobs.

**8.133** In terms of the Waste Hierarchy – 3 recycling facilities were consented and 1 was for ‘other recovery’ (i.e. biomass CHP):

- 75% of waste applications received were on existing waste management sites;
- the recycling rate for the Plan Area has dropped again slightly from 41.1% to 38.9% in 2017-18; and
- all waste applications received propose to use road transportation.

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83 Previous annual monitoring reports can be viewed on the Council’s website at <https://www.wirral.gov.uk/planning-and-building/local-plans-and-planning-policy/local-plans/joint-waste-local-plan-merseyside>

## Implications for the Local Plan

### Our Preferred Approach

Waste policy objectives for Wirral will mainly be delivered through the policies in the Joint Waste Local Plan for Merseyside and Halton, which will continue to remain in force and will not be superseded by the policies in the Wirral Local Plan and through any associated supporting policies for development management set out in the Wirral Local Plan.

Additional guidance on the space that will be necessary to allow safe access for the on-site storage, collection and emptying of containers and on the control of litter will be included in relevant Supplementary Planning Documents.

The Joint Waste Local Plan expires in 2027, mid-way through the Wirral Local Plan period. It is proposed that following completion of the 5th AMR 2018/19, a high-level 5-year review of the Waste Local Plan is undertaken. The review should identify areas which are sufficiently ineffective or out of date to trigger full review.

### Question 8.20

Do you have any views on our preferred approach for planning for waste within Wirral as part of a wider City Region partnership?

## 9 Detailed Local Plan Policies

- 9.1** When we publish the final Draft Local Plan later in 2020 it will include a comprehensive set of 'strategic' and 'local' policies. We have provided the policy direction for strategic policies in this document. Appendix 9.1 provides the proposed list of detailed development management policies or 'local' policies that we propose to include in the draft Final Local Plan when it is published in Summer 2020.
- 9.2** This consultation document does however contain a draft policy on Housing in Multiple Occupation (see Appendix 5.1) which is referred to further in Chapter 5 (also see Question 5.8).

### Question 9.1

Do you have any comments on any of the detailed Policy subjects set out in Appendix 9.1?

### Question 9.2

Are there any additional detailed development management policies you suggest are included?

### Question 9.3

Are there any of the detailed development management Local Plan policies you do not think are needed in the Wirral Local Plan?

## 10 Other Comments or Questions

- 10.1** If you have any comments on any aspect of this Local Plan Issues and Options consultation document or the new Local Plan generally that you feel are not covered by the questions set out elsewhere, please provide your comments here:

### Question 10.1

What section or subject would you like to make a comment on?

What is your comment?

## 11 Next Steps

- 11.1** This Local Plan issues and Options consultation document is the start of the formal engagement stage for the new Wirral Local Plan, which will cover the period from 2020 to 2035. The representations received in response to this consultation will be used to help to finalise our plan.
- 11.2** We invite you to submit any comments you may have on this Wirral Local Plan Issues and Options consultation by 5pm, 23rd March 2020. Please see paragraphs 1.56 to 157 for details of how to submit your comments or visit the [Local Plan Consultation Page](#).
- 11.3** We will publish all comments received on the online consultation portal (names and contact details will not be shown). We will also in due course publish our response to relevant comments made.
- 11.4** We anticipate presenting the draft final Local Plan to be considered by elected Members in July 2020. The draft final Local Plan will then be published under Regulation 19 to enable formal representations to be made. At the same time the Council will also publish the final Sustainability Appraisal and Habitats Regulation Assessment together with any further evidence documents which have been used to help inform the preparation of the Local Plan. All representations received will be passed to the independent Inspector appointed to undertake the 'Examination in Public'.
- 11.5** We currently anticipate submitting the Local Plan to the Secretary of State (Regulation 22) for examination in November 2020, with the examination likely to take place from Spring 2021.
- 11.6** Subject to the Inspector finding that the final Wirral Local plan is "sound" and allowing for a period of modification to the submitted plan, we anticipate that the Wirral Local Plan 2020-2035 will be formally adopted by Spring 2022.





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