

Contents

Settlement Area 2 - Commercial Core

1 Settlement Area Policy	2
2 Vision Statement	3
3 Reasoned Justification	3

Core Strategy - Draft Settlement Area Policy for the Commercial Core

1 Settlement Area Policy

Policy CSx.x - Priorities for the Commercial Core of Birkenhead

The overall strategy for Settlement Area 2 will be to:

1. Establish a New City Neighbourhood at East Float and around Birkenhead Town Centre and promote regeneration at Woodside and Hind Street, to act as a catalyst for economic growth, jobs and training and significantly reduce the amount of vacant and under-used previously developed land
2. Safeguard and enhance the role of Birkenhead Town Centre as the Borough's principal focus for retail, office and town centre uses, including services for leisure, entertainment, culture, health and education and other uses of Borough-wide significance that attract large numbers of people
3. Maintain specialist port-related employment and activities, alongside support for the manufacturing, logistics, maritime, offshore and heavy engineering sectors, at West Float, Twelve Quays and along the Tranmere waterfront and as part of the wider 'Superport' proposals
4. Maintain the surrounding hinterlands in Seacombe, Birkenhead, Tranmere and Rock Ferry for small and medium scale industrial and commercial activities and services
5. Support physical improvements and access to employment from within the surrounding areas in Leasowe, Liscard, Seacombe, Bidston, Birkenhead, Tranmere and Rock Ferry and focus regeneration to preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the Conservation Area at Hamilton Square and the setting of other designated heritage assets including Birkenhead Priory
6. Maintain strong transport links and freight connections from the industrial areas and docklands to the M53 Motorway and promote the greater use of rail and water for freight movements
7. Strengthen the provision of public transport to serve the New City Neighbourhood
8. Monitor and manage traffic flows to maximise highway efficiency throughout the Area, manage the impact of transport noise and address air quality issues at Tranmere
9. Establish a linked framework of green infrastructure throughout the Area, with enhanced access to open space in adjoining Areas and to and along the coast between Seacombe Promenade, Twelve Quays, Woodside and Tranmere, with open views of the Liverpool waterfront
10. Minimise tidal, river and other flood risks and address any local limitations in the supply of water and/or disposal of wastewater

2 Vision Statement

Vision Statement

By the end of the plan period, the transformation of the whole of Wirral's Commercial Core will be well underway. A major, mixed-use waterside neighbourhood will be emerging at East Float; a thriving maritime and engineering sector will be centred on Cammell Laird, alongside a sustainable port economy at Twelve Quays and West Float; Birkenhead Town Centre will have an enhanced retail offer, with a strengthened commercial hinterland centred on Hamilton Square, the re-development of Woodside and an extension of the Town Centre towards Hind Street. A framework of green infrastructure and sustainable transport improvements will be being established to integrate the whole of the Area with the surrounding areas.

3 Reasoned Justification

3.1 Settlement Area 2 is the traditional commercial heartland of Wirral, at the heart of the Liverpool City Region conurbation opposite Liverpool City Centre. The Commercial Core, which is the focus for the majority of the Borough's radial transport systems including public transport, is one of the most accessible parts of the Borough, with strong links to Liverpool, Chester and the M53 Motorway. The Area currently provides approximately 16,000 or just under 20% of the Borough's employee jobs⁽¹⁾ and the docks system, including Twelve Quays and the Tranmere Oil Terminal, currently handle over 14 million tonnes of cargo each year.

3.2 The Area has a substantial Victorian heritage based around the historic features of the dock estate; the original grid-iron street layout; Hamilton Square, the largest Grade 1 Listed Victorian Square outside London; and includes Birkenhead Priory, the oldest standing building on Merseyside.

3.3 The Area was home to 1,700 people in mid-2010, of which 1,300 or 71% were of working age. The population, which has remained broadly stable since 2008, has the highest proportion of young adults and the lowest proportion of older age groups in the Borough⁽²⁾. The Area lies at the heart of some of the most concentrated areas of need in Merseyside, where worklessness is over 25% and a high concentration of 16-18 year olds are not in education, employment or training⁽³⁾.

1 Business Register Employment Survey 2010

2 ONS Mid-Year Estimates

3 ONS Index of Multiple Deprivation for England 2010 and DWP Working Age Client Group (May 2010)

Core Strategy - Draft Settlement Area Policy for the Commercial Core

3.4 87 new homes were built within the Area between April 2003 and April 2011, with a further 237 dwellings provided through conversions and changes of use. 228 properties have been demolished as part of public sector regeneration and market renewal activity.

3.5 Social Housing still accounts for over 40% of homes and just under 8% or 109 residential properties were registered as vacant in April 2011⁽⁴⁾. Although densely developed, the Area has the largest proportion of vacant previously developed land in the Borough, with 103 sites totalling 147 hectares registered as vacant⁽⁵⁾ and almost 20% of the 510 hectares set aside for employment uses classified as vacant or under-used⁽⁶⁾.

3.6 The Area could potentially accommodate between 10,399⁽⁷⁾ and 13,789 new homes. Both figures could lead to a significant increase in population of between 21,200 and 28,200 people by 2027. The main opportunities are related to the potential for major, high-density, mixed-use, waterfront developments associated with the New City Neighbourhood at East Float and at Woodside, which would effectively establish a new market for a type of housing not previously provided in Wirral but now firmly established on the other side of the River, along the Liverpool waterfront. Outline planning applications for up to 15,200 new dwellings have already been approved at Wirral Waters, of which up to 9,500 could be developed by 2027. Achieving the higher level by 2027 would require development on other sites currently being considered for employment development⁽⁸⁾.

3.7 The Area could also provide for up to 705,000 square metres of new mixed, high density, commercial floorspace, on vacant and under-used land within the docks, supported by the designation of the Mersey Waters Enterprise Zone; at Woodside (where a Master Plan is in place), Scotts Quay; and at Hind Street, providing up to 21,000 additional jobs at the heart of the urban area. Outline planning applications have already been approved for up to 630,000 square metres of office and ancillary retail, entertainment and leisure floorspace at East Float; a 228,300 square metre trade centre at West Float; and up to 8,400 square metres of mixed, commercial floorspace at Hind Street.

3.8 Birkenhead Town Centre remains the Borough's main comparison goods retailing destination. Vitality and viability has, however, continued to decline when assessed against retail rankings, rental levels, footfall, vacancy rates, retail offer and the quality of the physical environment. The position will continue to be monitored, following the opening of Asda and the sale of the main shopping centres in late 2011, and further reconfiguration and modernisation will continue to be supported throughout

4 Wirral Council Tax Register April 2011 - Total Housing Stock 1,400

5 National Land Use Database April 2010 to be updated to April 2011

6 Employment Land Update April 2011 (forthcoming)

7 sites with planning permission and previously developed sites with no conflicting designation

8 based on SHLAA 2008, which will be updated to April 2011

the plan period⁽⁹⁾. The Centre is also expected to have a continuing role in delivering office-based employment opportunities, including at Europa Boulevard, subject to progress on land assembly, alongside the larger scale opportunities at Wirral Waters and Woodside⁽¹⁰⁾. There is out of centre retailing at Bidston Moss (Tesco and Junction One Retail Park) and on the A41 (Rock Retail Park). Any development proposals at these locations will need to be assessed against Policy CSx.x (criteria for out-of-centre retail development).

3.9 Open space is currently limited to Hamilton Square Gardens, the waterfront walkways between Seacombe Ferry and Woodside, the facilities to the extreme west of the Area at Bidston and within the surrounding Settlement Areas⁽¹¹⁾. The legal agreement associated with the approval of the proposals at Wirral Waters makes provision for developer contributions towards establishing additional green infrastructure and separate grant funding has already been made available for complementary works to begin in the surrounding areas.

3.10 The proximity of the Commercial Core to internationally designated nature conservation sites in the Mersey Estuary means that new industrial and port-related development may require appropriate assessment and mitigation in construction, design and management.

3.11 The western fringes of the Area, associated with the rivers Birket and Fender, are at risk from flooding. The theoretical potential for flooding associated with the dock system and along the Mersey waterfront has not, however, prevented permission from being granted for major development within the Area, subject to flood mitigation conditions. Surface water may require attenuation but infiltration systems may be limited by Environment Agency Source Protection Zones. Further work to consider the level of risk within the dock system has been proposed but separate assessments considering all potential sources of flooding will need to be carried out on a site-specific basis before planning permission will be granted⁽¹²⁾.

3.12 Parts of the Area, particularly around the docks, have low water resource availability, requiring network reinforcement. Sewer network coverage is also limited and affected by pumping stations and the impact on Combined Sewer Overflow discharges. Developers will need to seek clarification from the utilities provider to ensure that appropriate capacity is and can be made available before planning permission will be granted⁽¹³⁾.

3.13 [This list of transport corridors will be replaced by a map in the finalised Publication Draft] The main transport corridors include passenger rail services from Liverpool to New Brighton, West Kirby, Chester and North Wales (via Bidston); the Queensway (Birkenhead) Road Tunnel to Liverpool; A5139 Dock Road, Seacombe

9 Wirral Town Centres, Retail and Commercial Leisure Study 2009

10 Wirral Employment Land and Premises Study 2009

11 Wirral Open Space Assessment 2011 (forthcoming)

12 Wirral Strategic Flood Risk Assessment 2009

13 Wirral Water Cycle Study 2011 (forthcoming)

Core Strategy - Draft Settlement Area Policy for the Commercial Core

to Junction 1 of the M53 Motorway; A554 Woodside to Seacombe Ferry and New Brighton; B5144 Dock Road, Seacombe to Liscard; A5027 Duke Street between Liscard and the Kingsway Road Tunnel, Upton, Woodchurch and Junction 2 of the M53 Motorway; A5088 Wallasey Bridge Road between Bidston and Liscard; A41 Woodside to Eastham and Junction 5 of the M53 Motorway; A5030 Hamilton Square to Wallasey Bridge Road; B5146 Corporation Road; A5029 Tower Road to B1548 Whetstone Lane; A553 Queensway Road Tunnel to Junction 1 of M53 Motorway and Moreton; A552 Canning Street to Woodchurch and Junction 3 of the M53 Motorway; and A5527 Argyle Street (flyover) to A41.

3.14 Other main public transport routes include the Mersey Ferries at Seacombe and Woodside; Claughton Road and Hemingford Street to Birkenhead Bus Station; B5147 Argyle Street South to B5149 Old Chester Road; and B5136 New Chester Road to New Ferry.

3.15 Department for Transport Traffic Master Data highlights existing traffic congestion on routes through Birkenhead Town Centre, the approaches to the road tunnels and cross-dock routes⁽¹⁴⁾. There is little scope to implement major highway infrastructure improvements, so the focus will be on monitoring traffic levels, traffic management measures and minor highway improvements, with enhanced provision for public transport, walking and cycling.

3.16 Traffic noise has been identified as a problem in Birkenhead Town Centre and on road and rail routes towards Bidston and the docks⁽¹⁵⁾. Air quality is also being closely monitored along the A41 at Tranmere.

3.17 There is a limited provision of marked cycle routes within the Area. A small section of National Cycle Network Route 56 runs off-road through Bidston Moss Linear Nature Reserve and is linked to the off-road cycling circuit at Bidston Moss Community Woodland. There is a need to link East Float to Leasowe and Wallasey and provide safe cycle links across the docks.

3.18 Other infrastructure needs will be driven by the need to secure adequate capacity to service the New City Neighbourhood, improve access to Birkenhead Town Centre from the south, and integrate with the surrounding Areas to secure sustainable transport, social, community and green infrastructure⁽¹⁶⁾. Merseytravel have identified the need for rail station and bus interchange improvements, park and ride scheme improvements, the protection of public transport, freight and rail alignments and the need for land at the toll plazas at the Kingsway and Queensway road tunnels. The re-instatement of the docks rail freight link and the potential for greater use of the Bidston-Wrexham 'Borderlands' rail line are also under consideration. There is a need for a long-term maintenance strategy for the cross-dock bridges. Full details of the infrastructure requirements for Settlement Area 2 can be found in Appendix X.

14 Travel in Merseyside 2010

15 DEFRA Noise Action Plan March 2010

16 Birkenhead and Wirral Waters Integrated Regeneration Study 2010