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Core Strategy - Draft Settlement Area Policy for the Rural Areas

1 Settlement Area Policy

Policy CSx.x - Priorities for the Rural Areas

The overall strategy for Settlement Area 8 will be to:

1. Preserve the openness and rural character of the Area and the separation and distinctiveness of the urban and rural settlements
2. Maximise the beneficial and productive use of best and most versatile agricultural land for food production
3. Maintain the social and economic contribution of existing key facilities such as schools, hospitals, village shops and public houses
4. Preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the Conservation Areas at Eastham Village, Barnston, Thornton Hough, Thurstaston, Frankby, Saughall Massie and Gayton; the setting of other designated heritage assets; and the rural character of the smaller settlements at Storeton, Raby and Brimstage
5. Conserve, enhance and restore the visual and landscape character of the Area in line with the findings of the Wirral Landscape Character Assessment and Cheshire Historic Landscape Characterisation
6. Maintain the natural and semi-natural character of the undeveloped coastline; the national and international importance of the inter-tidal foreshores; and the biodiversity value of local nature reserves, dune systems, lowland heath, woodlands, river corridors, ponds, wetland and farmland habitats
7. Minimise the visual and operational impact of urban services
8. Maintain access to the major open spaces and country parks at Eastham Country Park, Arrowe Country Park, North Wirral Coastal Park, Royden Park, Wirral Country Park, Dibbinsdale Local Nature Reserve and Thurstaston Common for leisure, recreation and tourism, especially those which provide for needs from within adjoining Settlement Areas
9. Monitor and manage traffic flows to maximise highway efficiency at Arrowe Park, Barnston and Clatterbridge
10. Support greater use of the Bidston-Wrexham 'Borderlands' railway line including provision for park and ride at Bidston
11. Minimise tidal, river and other flood risks associated with the river corridors and the low-lying North Wirral coastal plain; address any local limitations on the supply of water and/or the disposal of wastewater; and take account of the capacity of the North Wirral Wastewater Treatment Works

2 Vision Statement

Vision Statement

By the end of the plan period, the distinctive landscape character, heritage value and environmental quality of the rural areas will have been maintained, supported by predominantly open land uses including agriculture, local food production and unobtrusive facilities for countryside recreation.

3 Reasoned Justification

3.1 Settlement Area 8 is defined by the current Green Belt boundary.

3.2 The countryside and coast plays a dominant part in the Borough's character and attractiveness. The Area is rich in heritage, biodiversity and landscape character, alongside extensive provision for public and private recreation including large scale country parks, golf courses, playing fields and public rights of way, providing for urban as well as rural needs, including a large number of facilities of Borough-wide significance. The character of large parts of the area is highly dependent on the land management approaches of the large mainly agricultural landholding estates.

3.3 The Rural Area was home to 5,700 people in mid-2010, of which 3,500 or 60% were of working age. The Area has a higher than average proportion of older adults and people of retirement age and the highest average household size in the Borough. The largest settlement, at Thornton Hough had approximately 800 people. The majority of the other settlements have fewer than 100. The population has remained broadly stable since mid-2008⁽¹⁾.

3.4 Only 4% of the population lived within an area of greatest need and over 40% live within areas of higher value housing⁽²⁾. Social Housing accounts for just over 3% of homes within the Area⁽³⁾.

3.5 Only 69 new homes were built within the Area between April 2003 and April 2011, with a further 41 dwellings provided through conversions and changes of use. Only 14 properties were demolished. Just under 4% or 107 residential properties were registered as vacant in April 2011⁽⁴⁾ and 12 sites (covering almost 43 hectares) were registered as vacant previously developed land, most of which were related to urban facilities in the Green Belt⁽⁵⁾.

1 based on ONS Mid-Year Estimates

2 ONS Index of Multiple Deprivation for England 2010

3 Wirral Council Tax Register 2011 - Total Housing Stock 2,700

4 Wirral Council Tax Register 2011

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

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3.6 The Settlement Area could accommodate between 57⁽⁶⁾ and 305 new homes. Underlying long-term changes in population and households mean that the lower figure could lead to a loss in population of up to 200 people, while the higher figure could lead to a gain of up to 400 people by 2027.

3.7 The main opportunities to provide new housing are related to small developments within the designated Infill Villages at Barnston, Eastham Village, Thornton Hough, Raby and Storeton. Achieving the higher level of development would involve large scale re-developments at Major Developed Sites such as the Wirral Metropolitan College Campus at Carlett Park⁽⁷⁾. The Major Developed Site at Clatterbridge Hospital could attract new employment in medical services and bio-sciences⁽⁸⁾.

3.8 The Area currently provides approximately 14,000 jobs⁽⁹⁾, mainly provided by major urban facilities such as the hospitals at Arrowe Park, Clatterbridge and Thingwall and facilities such as schools and colleges⁽¹⁰⁾. Changes in the pattern of agricultural tenancies are expected to lead to fewer but larger holdings over time.

3.9 The Merseyside Rural Economic Strategy identified the need for the continued evolution of 'Rural Destinations' as a strategic priority for Wirral, to keep pace with an increasingly competitive market place⁽¹¹⁾. There are already proposals for a replacement visitor centre at Wirral Country Park, a coastal interpretation centre at Leasowe Lighthouse and a Golf Resort at Hoylake.

3.10 The Settlement Area is subject to significant environmental constraints. The Wirral Landscape Assessment divides the Area into 13 separate character areas, of which six require some form of enhancement. The M53 Corridor is specifically identified for landscape restoration⁽¹²⁾. Just under 40% of the Area is of Agricultural Land Quality Grade 3a or above and just over 11% is subject to nature conservation or earth science designations. The landscape is also of historic significance and all the main rural settlements, with the exception of Brimstage, Raby and Storeton, are Conservation Areas⁽¹³⁾.

3.11 Large parts of the Area are at significant risk from flooding and act as functional flood plain, particularly in the north of the Borough and along the M53 Corridor⁽¹⁴⁾. Water supply and disposal infrastructure has limited capacity to support additional development and the northern parts of the Area are also subject to the limitations

6 sites with planning permission and previously developed sites without any conflicting designation

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

8 Wirral Employment Land and Premises Study 2009

9 Business Register Employment Survey 2010

10 Economic Strategy for Rural Merseyside Wirral Summary 2009

11 Green Zone 2025: An Economic Strategy for Rural Merseyside (2009)

12 Wirral Landscape Character Assessment 2009

13 Cheshire Heritage Landscape Characterisation 2008

14 Wirral Strategic Flood Risk Assessment 2009

associated with the North Wirral Wastewater Treatment Works at Meols. Surface water may require attenuation and infiltration systems may be limited by Environment Agency Source Protection Zones⁽¹⁵⁾.

3.12 [This list of transport corridors will be replaced by a map in the finalised publication draft] The main transport corridors provide important cross-Borough routes and include the M53 Motorway between Chester and the Kingsway Road Tunnel; A5137 between Heswall and Clatterbridge; A551 between Thingwall and Heswall; A540 Telegraph Road Caldy and Heswall and Heswall and the Borough boundary; B5139 between Greasby and West Kirby; Saughall Massie Road; A553 between Moreton and Hoylake and rail lines between Birkenhead and West Kirby and between Bidston and Prenton and Prenton and Heswall.

3.13 Department for Transport Traffic Master Data highlights existing traffic congestion at Arroe Park, Barnston and Junction 4 of the M53 Motorway at Clatterbridge⁽¹⁶⁾. 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.

3.14 National Cycle Network Route 56, which links Liverpool to Chester, mainly runs along the quieter roads across the Area from Woodchurch, linking the villages of Landican, Storeton, Brimstage and Thornton Hough. The Wirral Way also runs through the Area between West Kirby and Hooton in adjoining Cheshire West and Chester. Other off-road routes run between Leasowe, Moreton and Meols; West Kirby and Hoylake; Saughall Massie and Three Lanes End; Upton, Greasby and Woodchurch through Arroe Park to Thingwall; Limbo Lane in Irby; and from Woodchurch to Barnston Road. Other public rights of way cross the area between the main settlements.

3.15 Key urban services, including gas, water and electricity transmission lines, wastewater treatment works and the Bidston-Wrexham 'Borderlands' railway, also run through the Area. Merseytravel have identified the need for park and ride facilities at Bidston rail station and passenger service enhancements and/or electrification the Borderlands rail line. Full details of the infrastructure requirements for Settlement Area 8 can be found in Appendix X.

15 Wirral Water Cycle Study 2011 (forthcoming)

16 Travel in Merseyside 2010