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Core Strategy - Draft Settlement Area Policy for Suburban Birkenhead

1 Settlement Area Policy

Policy CSx.x - Priorities for Suburban Birkenhead

The overall strategy for Settlement Area 3 will be to:

1. Maintain attractive residential areas with good access to Birkenhead, Liverpool and the M53 Motorway
2. Support market renewal to reduce the number of vacant properties and previously developed sites in Birkenhead, Tranmere and Rock Ferry
3. Focus additional local improvements in areas of need in Beechwood, Bidston, Claughton, Noctorum, Oxton and Prenton
4. Support integration with the New City Neighbourhood at East Float, while maintaining a clear interface between the residential suburbs and the commercial areas to the north and east in Settlement Area 2
5. Safeguard and enhance the role of Prenton (Woodchurch Road) as the main focus for district-level shops, offices, services and community facilities
6. Safeguard and enhance the role of the local centres at Claughton, Laird Street, Oxton Village, Borough Road (Prenton Park), Tranmere Urban Village and Dacre Hill, as the focus for neighbourhood level shops, services and community facilities to serve everyday needs
7. Maintain North Cheshire Trading Estate for small and medium scale industrial and commercial activities to provide additional local employment
8. Preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the Conservation Areas at Bidston Village; Birkenhead Park; Flaybrick Cemetery; Oxton Village; Clifton Park; Rock Park and Mountwood and the setting of other designated heritage assets
9. Maintain the character of the other older residential areas, particularly along the Noctorum Ridge, including the landscape character of Bidston Hill and the Wirral Ladies Golf Course
10. Maintain the national and international importance of the intertidal foreshore with access to the coast at Rock Park
11. Maintain and improve open space, to increase the number and quality of outdoor sports facilities including sports pitches and natural and semi-natural greenspace with biodiversity value and the amount of available recreational open space
12. Minimise flood risk along the coast at Rock Park, along the Fender Valley and from surface water and address any local limitations on the supply of water and/or disposal of wastewater
13. Monitor and manage traffic flows to maximise highway efficiency and manage the impact of traffic noise along the A552
14. Support greater use of the Bidston-Wrexham 'Borderlands' railway line
15. Maintain the physical separation from the Mid-Wirral settlements of Moreton, Upton and Woodchurch

2 Vision Statement

Vision Statement

By the end of the plan period, suburban Birkenhead will continue to serve as a major commuter settlement, with a revived and restructured housing market with strong links to the New City Neighbourhood at East Float and to other strategic employment opportunities in Liverpool and Bromborough. Major strengths in built heritage and green infrastructure will have been preserved and enhanced.

3 Reasoned Justification

3.1 Settlement Area 3 is a largely densely developed commuter settlement, at the heart of the wider Liverpool City Region conurbation, with strong transport links to Birkenhead, Liverpool and the M53 Motorway.

3.2 The Area contains a substantial Victorian and Edwardian heritage, with examples of early merchant estates and settlements along the Noctorum Ridge, characterised by larger homes in wooded grounds interspersed with natural and semi-natural open space. The Area also contains Birkenhead Park, the first publicly funded municipal park in Britain.

3.3 Conservation Areas have been designated at Bidston Village, originally the ancient parochial centre for the wider area; Birkenhead Park; Flaybrick Cemetery, which contains the graves of many people prominent in the early growth of Birkenhead; the merchant estates at Rock Park, Clifton Park and Mountwood; and the early Victorian commuter settlement at Oxton Hill. The surrounding areas along the Noctorum Ridge are also subject to design and density controls to encourage the retention of existing property and retain the character of large detached properties in extensive grounds. Neighbourhood planning proposals are being prepared for Devonshire Park to maintain the family housing character of the area.

3.4 The Area was home to 83,000 people in mid-2010, of which 52,500 or 63% were of working age. The population has a generally younger age-profile than other Areas of the Borough, with a higher than average proportion of children and young adults and a lower than average proportion of retired people. The population has increased from 82,300 in mid-2008⁽¹⁾ but longer term trends could see the population reduce to 81,500 by 2027⁽²⁾.

3.5 Over half the population lives within an area of greatest need, focused around the more densely developed areas of Beechwood, Bidston, Birkenhead, Tranmere, Rock Ferry and in parts of Claughton, Noctorum, Oxton and Prenton, where

1 based on ONS Mid-Year Estimates

2 based on the national 2008-based population projections

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worklessness is over 25% and a high proportion of 16 to 18 year olds are not in education, employment or training⁽³⁾. The Area provides almost a third of the Borough's Social Housing, accounting for almost a quarter of homes within the Area⁽⁴⁾. There are areas of higher value housing around Mountwood in Prenton⁽⁵⁾.

3.6 1,581 new homes were built within the Area between April 2003 and April 2011, with a further 230 dwellings provided through conversions and changes of use but 1,311 properties had also been demolished, largely as part of public sector funded housing market renewal programmes. Just under 4% or 1,562 residential properties were registered as vacant in April 2011⁽⁶⁾ and 29.48 hectares (110 sites) as vacant previously developed land⁽⁷⁾.

3.7 The Settlement Area could accommodate between 2,663⁽⁸⁾ and 3,026 new homes. Underlying long-term changes in population and households mean that both figures could lead to a further increase in population of between 1,200 and 1,900 people by 2027. The main opportunities to provide new housing are related to completing the development of sites assembled to support market renewal activity in north Birkenhead and Tranmere and a large number of small scale infill sites in Rock Ferry, Tranmere, Oxton and Prenton. Achieving the higher level would involve the development of greenfield land, including sites currently used for recreation⁽⁹⁾.

3.8 The Area currently provides approximately 16,500 jobs⁽¹⁰⁾ and, at just under three quarters, has the highest proportion of residents who remain in Wirral for work. Of the quarter who travelled outside the Borough, over half worked in Liverpool and over a third in Cheshire West and Chester⁽¹¹⁾.

3.9 Outside the major commercial and industrial areas to the immediate north and east, the main employment areas include the district and local centres at Prenton (Woodchurch Road); Claughton Village; Laird Street; Oxton Village; Borough Road (Prenton Park); Tranmere Urban Village and Dacre Hill; Holborn Square and Craven Street, and North Cheshire Trading Estate (30 hectares), at Junction 3 of the M53 Motorway, where the remaining vacant land would provide for up to six years at past rates of development, without the need for any additional infrastructure⁽¹²⁾.

3 DWP Working Age Client Group (May 2010)

4 Wirral Council Tax Register April 2011

5 ONS Index of Multiple Deprivation for England 2010

6 Wirral Council Tax Register April 2011 - Total Housing Stock 42,480

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

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

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

10 Business Register Employment Survey 2010

11 ONS Commute-APS and 2001 Census

12 Wirral Employment Land and Premises Study 2009

3.10 Birkenhead Town Centre lies immediately to the north east but Prenton is the main district-level convenience retail and service centre for the western half of the Settlement Area. An early priority will be to secure the redevelopment of the two vacant sites on Woodchurch Road.

3.11 Re-configuration is needed to re-focus the local centre at Laird Street and reflect the pattern of re-development at Tranmere Urban Village, to respond to wider housing market renewal activity. Elsewhere, the objective will be to improve and safeguard the role of Claughton Village, Borough Road and Dacre Hill as local convenience retail and service centres. In Oxton Village, this will include maintaining the character of the village within the Conservation Area; securing ground floor "town centre" uses on the former HSBC site, at the core of the centre; and safeguarding the evening economy⁽¹³⁾. It is also proposed to relocate the existing local shops at Church Road in Higher Tranmere into a new parade as part of a wider housing market renewal project.

3.12 Although the Area contains major open spaces such as Birkenhead Park, Bidston Hill and Wirral Ladies Golf Course, the majority of open space is already intensively used. There is a shortage of parks and gardens, natural and semi-natural greenspace and outdoor sports facilities across most of the Area and over half the football teams travel to sites outside the Area for home fixtures⁽¹⁴⁾.

3.13 Outside the short section of intertidal foreshore at Rock Park, which is of international importance for nature conservation, land of biodiversity value is limited to the remaining woodland in public spaces and some of the larger gardens in the former merchants estates. A number of important geological sites are also associated with sites on higher ground along the sandstone ridge⁽¹⁵⁾. The extensive area of open land on high ground at Bidston Hill is identified for landscape conservation⁽¹⁶⁾.

3.14 Besides the coast at Rock Park and along the Fender Valley, the main local risk of flooding is from surface water. Attenuation may be required and infiltration systems may be limited by Environment Agency Source Protection Zones. The sewer network is limited by pumping stations and the impact on Combined Sewer Overflow discharges and the western part of the Area has low water resource availability, with pressure issues. Developers will need to seek clarification from the utilities provider to ensure that appropriate capacity is available⁽¹⁷⁾.

3.15 [This list of transport corridors will be replaced by a map in the finalised Publication Draft] The main transport corridors include passenger rail services between Liverpool, West Kirby and New Brighton in the north; Liverpool and Chester in the

13 Wirral Town Centres, Retail and Commercial Leisure Study 2009 and Town District and Local Centre Study and Delivery Framework 2011

14 Wirral Open Space Assessment 2011 (forthcoming)

15 Wirral Schedule of Local Geological Sites 2011

16 Wirral Landscape Character Assessment 2009

17 Wirral Strategic Flood Risk Assessment 2009 and Wirral Water Cycle Study 2011 (forthcoming)

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east; and Liverpool and North Wales (via Bidston) in the west; A41 New Ferry By-Pass; A552 to Junction 3 of the M53 Motorway; A553 Queensway Road Tunnel to Moreton and Junction 1 of the M53 Motorway; A5027 to Upton and Woodchurch, the docks, Liscard and the Kingsway Road Tunnel; A5088 to the Docks Link Road and Wallasey; and A5029 to Twelve Quays. Other main public transport routes include B5147 Argyle Street South, Hinderton Road, B5149 Old Chester Road, B5172 Bedford Road and B5136 New Chester Road.

3.16 Department for Transport Traffic Master Data highlights existing traffic congestion on the A552 between Birkenhead and Junction 3 of the M53 Motorway⁽¹⁸⁾. High levels of traffic noise have also been identified along the same route⁽¹⁹⁾. 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. Opportunities to improve bus services along the A552 are also being considered to help reduce congestion.

3.17 National Cycle Network Route 56, which links Liverpool to Chester, runs along the western edge of the Area, from Wallasey through Bidston Village and Beechwood to Woodchurch. There is also a signed on-street route from Birkenhead to Bidston along Beckwith Street. There is a need to improve cycle linkages throughout the Area, particularly to key destinations or attractions, such as Birkenhead Park.

3.18 Other infrastructure needs will be driven by the need to integrate the New City Neighbourhood in Settlement Area 2, to secure sustainable transport, social, community and green infrastructure. Merseytravel have identified the need for rail station and park and ride improvements and the potential for new rail stations, service enhancements and/or electrification along the Borderlands rail line. Full details of the infrastructure requirements for Settlement Area 3 can be found in Appendix X.

18 Travel in Merseyside 2010

19 DEFRA Noise Action Plan (March 2010)