

7. Community Cohesion and Social Infrastructure

Overview

- 7.1 The preceding section has highlighted the extent of social and economic deprivation in areas immediately surrounding the Birkenhead Docks estate. The potential scale of change possible through Wirral Waters inevitably raises major issues and potentially significant changes for the local community and the future provision of social infrastructure. The clear starting point for Wirral Waters is that it must respond to local needs and be of tangible and permanent benefit to the local community, whilst also responding to future needs and creating sustainable communities. The process of facilitating this can be defined as its *community cohesion*.
- 7.2 *Social infrastructure* is the facilities and services provided to and by the community, largely by the public sector. This includes education, health and emergency services. **Social and community infrastructure has been evaluated in a separate paper, located at Appendix 6.** The paper seeks to understand the existing provision and issues that will need to guide the development and delivery of Wirral Waters through future stages of the SRF. The remainder of this section of the main study report concentrates on community cohesion.
- 7.3 There are different ways to consider the process of community cohesion. For Wirral Waters, there is inevitably a major aspect of engaging with community stakeholders through the range of

consultation procedures. Responding to those community needs that are identified will be an intrinsic part of the process, as will establishing working mechanisms to ensure that local benefit is maximised and local needs met.

- 7.4 The process of community cohesion for Wirral Waters has a good starting point. Wirral's system of community networks is one of its unquestionably strong and well developed assets. The **Wirral Voluntary and Community Sectors' Network (WVCSN)** is a prime example of this. It exists to bring together the many voluntary and community groups in Wirral and give them an effective voice in the borough.
- 7.5 The **Wirral Local Strategic Partnership (LSP)** is also well developed, and is administering the Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement. These organisations act as an umbrella to a full range of geographic and subject interests across Wirral.
- 7.6 The **Wirral Community Strategy "Getting Better Together"** demonstrates the level of community activity in Wirral. Community networks cut across a full range of sectors and services, including business services and employment, jobs and skills, health and well being, education and careers, social housing, mobility and transport, culture and leisure, crime and safety. Some of the key groups are set out below.
- 7.7 In bringing forward the Wirral Waters opportunity, community engagement is therefore critical. Peel Holdings, as the lead private

sector organisation promoting Wirral Waters, has embarked on a comprehensive process of consultation with community stakeholders. This began with initial consultation on the concept in 2006, and has evolved through targeted consultation with a number of key stakeholders to gather information and consult on the intended process and strategy. This process of ongoing consultation will gather momentum through 2007/08 with a series of consultations at key stages with a wider audience.

- 7.8 The consultation process is intended to reflect the requirements of the Wirral Statement of Community Involvement, and will involve all groups who are to be consulted on the Wirral Local Development Framework, together with more specific, local consultees in and around the dock estate on more detailed issues relevant to the area.
- 7.9 Over time, the consultation will evolve into regular forums/workshops to discuss Wirral Waters and how it can best be integrated into the local community.
- 7.10 As stated above, one of the key aims for Wirral Waters is to maximise the local regeneration effects i.e. creating local opportunities, to ensure that the social and economic regeneration effects assist the recovery of deprived communities in Inner Wirral and indeed deprived areas elsewhere in the City-Region. Owing to the timescales involved, critical mass of the opportunity, the public sector willingness and private sector commitment and approach, Wirral Waters has the potential to act as a model in the delivery of local benefit. This is explored further below.

Community Networks

- 7.11 Community networks in Wirral have grown over time, largely as a response to the social and economic challenges faced. This has created a wide range of targeted and sophisticated methods of making the most of often limited resources and a legacy of post-industrial neglect.
- 7.12 Local groups are highly engaged with local people and local businesses. The basic systems are therefore in place. It is critical that in taking forward Wirral Waters, these links and networks must be fully utilised. With the potential scale of change that Wirral Waters might bring, it will also be important that community networks can adapt and evolve to make the most of the emerging opportunity.
- 7.13 The part of Inner Wirral around the Dock estate is also fortunate to have a good physical infrastructure of community assets and social infrastructure, as explained in Appendix 6. These exist primarily to manage the difficulties associated with high levels of deprivation in Inner Wirral, for example the Lauries Centre which houses a number of health and community uses in a modern facility.
- 7.14 In consulting on the future Vision, Development Frameworks and spatial masterplans, it will be important that future community infrastructure needs for Wirral Waters are taken into account and planned for comprehensively. The pooling of demands, needs and opportunities may also be appropriate to ensure the delivery of the necessary infrastructure. There may be opportunities for significant

social and community infrastructure to be located within Wirral Waters itself. The following groups and organisations will have relevant input and contribution to make to the processes of both shaping the overall proposals (and making sure that maximum benefit is derived for the local community) and taking forward future solutions for social and community infrastructure.

Wirral Local Strategic Partnership

7.15 The overarching community network is the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), an umbrella for a range of other organisations and responsible for producing the Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) and Local Area Agreements (LAA).

7.16 The Government recently published a practical guide to improve collaborative working between planners and those involved in the LSP (*Planning Together: LSPs and Spatial Planning, DCLG, January 2007*), which emphasises the importance of the LSP and its SCS to the spatial planning process. It acknowledges that planning policy has a key role in delivering the outcomes for local areas, for example in relation to health and well being, combating climate change, safer communities, vibrant and sustainable neighbourhoods, social inclusion and economic development.

7.17 The Wirral Local Strategic Partnership is well established and in 2003 produced its first Community Strategy called "Getting Better Together". A revised version in the form of a Local Area Agreement was

published in 2006. The Community Strategy is reviewed in Section 2 and **Appendix 1**.

7.18 Wirral LSP is made up of members from a wide variety of public, private, voluntary and community sector organisations, including:

- Wirral MBC – lead officers and members;
- Wirral Environment Partnership;
- Thriving Local Economy Group;
- Wirral Learning Partnership;
- Health and Social Care Partnership;
- Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership;
- Strategic Housing Forum;
- Merseytravel;
- Voluntary and Community Sectors Network;
- Greater Merseyside Enterprise;
- North West Development Agency;
- Private Sector Businesses.

Wirral Voluntary and Community Sectors Network

7.19 The Wirral Voluntary and Community Services Network (WVCSN) was set up in 2001 and now has 400+ member groups from across the borough. Through the Network, all groups have the opportunity to contribute to the work of the LSPs work and hence the Community Strategy and LAA.

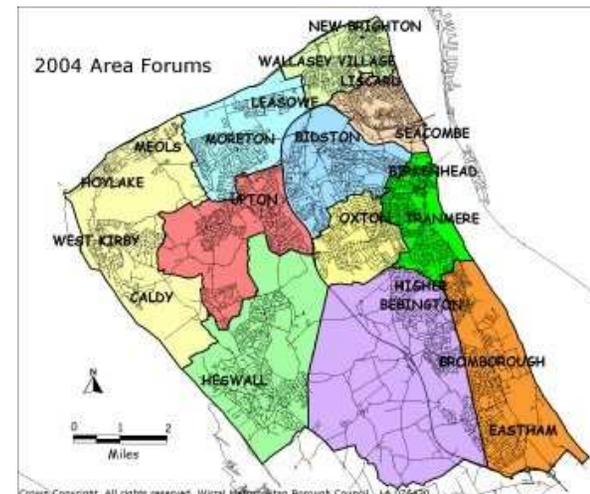
7.20 It cuts across 13 sectors of interest:

- Advice Service & Voluntary Sector Support;
- Black Minority Ethnic;
- Children & Young Peoples;
- Culture, Leisure & Environment;
- Drugs & Alcohol;
- Faith;
- Family Services;
- Health & Social Care;
- Housing & Homelessness;
- Learning & Skills;
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender;
- Older People; and
- Women.

- East Wallasey – the area to the north of the Dock estate, including Seacombe, Poulton and Egremont.

7.22 The Forum boundaries are included at Figure 7.1 below.

Figure 7.1 Forum Boundaries (source Wirral MBC)



Local Area Forums

7.21 Wirral MBC facilitates a number of local Area Forums, which are public meetings held three times a year whereby local people can help to shape services provided by Wirral MBC and its partners. The Forums situated within or close the Wirral Waters area are as follows:

- Bidston, St James & Claughton – most of the Birkenhead Dock estate and land to the south and west lies within this Area Forum.
- Birkenhead, Tranmere & Rockferry – this includes Birkenhead Town Centre and the areas of Rockferry and Tranmere to the south.

7.23 Each Area Forum has produced a Local Plan, which sets out a detailed profile of the area and provides a detailed breakdown of the how the objectives of the Local Area Agreement will be achieved at the Area Forum level. The Local Plans provide a useful insight into the social, economic and environmental issues affecting Wirral Waters, and have informed some of the information in this Baseline Study.

Other Community Groups

7.24 There are hundreds of local groups active in Wirral, all of whom will help shape and define the future of Wirral and within that, the emerging proposals for Wirral Waters. Most groups are identified in the Council's Statement of Community Involvement. It is, however, worth identifying a number of those groups which are considered to be of particular relevance to Wirral Waters:

- Wirral Federation of Tenants and Residents Associations;
- Seacombe Local Area Partnership;
- Birkenhead and Wallasey Youth Forums;
- Friends of Birkenhead Park;
- Bidston Village CAAC;
- Wallasey Civic Society.

Employment and Economic Development

7.25 Some of the key economic development groups are described as "Partners" in Section 2 Catalysts for Change. These are The Mersey Partnership, Mersey Maritime, Mersey Waterfront, English Partnerships, North West Development Agency and Wirral MBC.

7.26 Other groups include:

- **Wirral Direct** – part of Wirral MBC's economic development function, but with a specific function to provide fast, reliable information and

advice to businesses, in order to encourage the growth and development of new and existing businesses in Wirral;

- **Wirral Investment Network (WIN)** – a partnership of public and private sector organisations that aim to encourage the social, economic and environmental prospects of Wirral.
- **Mersey Dee Alliance (MDA)** – the Alliance is comprised of the local authorities of Cheshire, Chester, Ellesmere Port & Neston, Wirral and adjacent authorities in North Wales and, amongst other things, works to promote and enhance travel to work habits/patterns and opportunities, recognising that Wirral also has strong links to the south in addition to links with Liverpool; and
- **Wirral Chamber of Commerce** – established in 1910 to represent and protect the interests of the businesses in Wirral. The Chamber provides training events, lobbying, representations, networking and other services to help Wirral businesses become more effective.

Residential

7.27 **Wirral Homes** is a partnership between Wirral MBC and Registered Social Landlords in Wirral. It enables social housing to be allocated through an organised and fair process. The RSLs participating in Wirral Homes are as follows:

- Arena Housing Association;
- Beechwood & Ballantyne Community Housing Association;

- CDS Housing Association;
- Cosmopolitan Housing Association;
- Leasowe Community Homes;
- Liverpool Housing Trust;
- Maritime Housing Association;
- Riverside Housing;
- Rodney Housing Association;
- Venture Housing Association;
- Wirral Methodist Housing Association; and
- Wirral Partnership Homes.

7.28 **Wirral Partnership Homes** is the largest RSL in Wirral and is committed to a £150m investment programme by 2010. Wirral Partnership Homes has taken over the ownership and management of Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council's 13,100 homes. Future details of the emerging Wirral Waters opportunity will be the subject of consultation with WPH, to ensure complementary activity and investment priorities.

Transport

7.29 Transport interests are highly important and influential in Wirral. Most of Wirral is served by established and regular public transport infrastructure and services, whilst cycle and footpath networks also from strong community representation.

7.30 Merseytravel is the principal organisation, as set out in Section 2 under "Partners". Other groups that represent interests likely to be of relevance to Wirral Waters are as follows:

- Wirral Transport Users Association;
- Wirral Local Transport Partnership
- Merseyside Cycling Campaign;
- Merseyside and West Cheshire Ramblers; and
- Wirral Footpaths and Open Spaces Preservation Society.

Environment and Landscape/Visual

7.31 A number of key agencies and statutory environmental consultees have already been consulted during the initial round of stakeholder engagement. These include Natural England, the Environment Agency and English Heritage. These are national/regional organisations.

7.32 In addition, a number of key local bodies represent Merseyside and Wirral interests. The full list can be found in the Wirral Statement of Community Involvement. Some of the more relevant organisations are listed below:

- Wirral Environmental Partnership;
- Wirral environmental Protection Group;
- Mersey Estuary Conservation Group;
- Bidston & North Birkenhead Environmental Action Group;
- Merseyside Environmental Advisory Service;
- Wirral LA21 Forum; and
- Green agenda.

Education

- 7.33 There is a wide range of education and skills based organisations serving the needs of Wirral. Wirral MBC acts as the **Local Education Authority** (LEA) responsible for the public schooling system.
- 7.34 The Government's **Connexions** service offers advice to 13-19 year olds on a wide range of life choices, principally education but also in relation to work, money, lifestyle, housing, relationships, rights and travel. There are Connexions centres in Birkenhead and Wallasey.
- 7.35 **Wirral Metropolitan College** is the main provider of post-secondary education in Wirral. Two of the three main campuses are based close to Wirral Waters, at Europa Boulevard (Conway Park) and Morpeth Dock (Twelve Quays). The college offers a wide range of courses from Foundation level to Degree.
- 7.36 **Birkenhead Sixth Form College** provides education for 16-19 year olds. The College is located to the west of Birkenhead Park and is therefore a highly important community asset in close proximity to Wirral Waters.

Health and Crime

- 7.37 **Wirral Primary Care Trust** (PCT) was formed on 1 October 2006 through the merging of Bebington and West Wirral PCT and Birkenhead and Wallasey PCT. The Wirral PCT is now responsible for primary NHS functions across the entirety of Wirral. The PCT is based in

St Catherine's Hospital in Tranmere, one of four main hospitals, the other three being:

- Arrowe Park Hospital, Upton;
 - Clatterbridge General Hospital, Bebington;
 - Victoria Central Community Hospital, Wallasey.
- 7.38 **NHS North West** is the Strategic Health Authority guiding the functions of the Wirral PCT.
- 7.39 The **Merseyside Policy Authority** has established the **Wirral Community Relations Unit** to ensure the maintenance and development of links with individual groups and sections of the community. There are four police stations in nearby proximity of the Dock estate:
- Birkenhead Police Station;
 - Well Lane, Birkenhead;
 - Laird Street, Birkenhead; and
 - Manor Road, Wallasey.

Maximising Local Opportunities & Regeneration Effects

- 7.40 Large scale high quality development at Wirral Waters can bring major positive economic impacts in Wirral, the Liverpool City Region and across the North West. It will also clearly have local economic and regeneration impacts and it is important that all partners work to ensure that these local impacts are maximised.

- 7.41 This is a key issue that has been identified by a number of stakeholders during initial consultation i.e. the extent to which the deprived local communities can share in any successes. Any truly successful urban regeneration project will vastly improve social and economic prospects for those people resident in the area.
- 7.42 Given the scale and potential lifetime of development for Wirral Waters, **the** potential benefits to local people in Wirral are immense, and have the clear potential to reverse social and economic deprivation through improved life chances at the heart of a rejuvenated and successful economy.
- 7.43 Stakeholders have referred to some examples in the UK where seemingly major successes have not lifted deprivation statistics locally and the “ripple effect” does not help local communities, which become increasingly marginalised.
- 7.44 To ensure local benefit, much needs to be done and achieved in terms of **training**, education, changing perceptions and attitudes. For example, in relation to labour skills, children in Wirral today could make an entire career out of construction or public realm/landscape for Wirral Waters. Another example would be the training and employment of the long term workless in Wirral Waters’ potential service economy. Further, young entrepreneurs and graduates from Wirral might decide their own area is the place to stay and grow and meet their aspirations, rather than leaving to fulfil ambitions in the elsewhere in region or beyond.
- 7.45 As noted above, Wirral Waters has a good starting in terms of community networks. Based on feedback received by Peel Holdings and Wirral MBC to date, the community also wants Wirral Waters to happen – this is essential in making an opportunity of this scale truly of benefit to the community. Evidently the community will need to adapt and respond. However, this is a long term project and there is time to plan, learn from others and get the local benefit right.
- 7.46 The public sector will need to take an active lead on social infrastructure and community benefit; ensuring the local community can reap benefit – being proactive and ensuring the lasting legacy of Wirral Waters benefits Wirral’s deprived communities first and foremost. The community must be clear and visionary in what it wants to achieve, and Wirral MBC will play the central role in this respect. There will inevitably need to be cross-working in partnership between all “partners”, to establish the necessary mechanisms and projects to ensure local benefit is maximised.
- 7.47 Peel Holdings, as set out in Section 2, will provide the private capital investment and core landholdings for Wirral Waters. This relates not only to buildings, but also the necessary provision of physical infrastructure (see Environmental section regarding services and utilities), transport infrastructure, public realm and landscaping. Grant assistance for improvements will be explored.

7.48 Through setting a number of measures in place and opening stakeholder dialogue from Day One, Wirral Waters can therefore ensure that local benefits are maximised. A number of suggestions are made below and reviewed in further detail in **Appendix 5** in relation to the means of achieving local regeneration benefit. These include developing a strong monitoring and evaluation framework, engaging with present and future workforces, establishing community partnerships or trusts and linking with business support and workforce development provision.

Engaging with and understanding the needs of communities

7.49 Efforts to promote and to maximise the regeneration impact of development at Wirral Waters will flounder without good community engagement. This requires a commitment to regular and open communication with communities and other stakeholders, and ensuring that residents have genuine opportunities to inform the development of the proposals and associated projects. A full and detailed programme of public consultation is to be developed and partners have a strong commitment to community engagement.

7.50 To inform this baseline study, it has also been necessary to consult a number of key stakeholders, many of whom are described as “partners” in *Section 2: Catalysts for Change*. These include the following:

- Wirral MBC;

- The Mersey Partnership;
- North West Development Agency;
- Government Office for the North West;
- NewHeartlands;
- English Partnerships
- Groundwork Wirral;
- Forestry Commission;
- National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside.

7.51 A number of other agencies have also been consulted or are in the process of being consulted. They are Government Office for the North West (GONW), English Heritage (EH), Natural England (NE), the Environment Agency (EA) and the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE).

7.52 Future consultation on the Wirral Waters Framework will be informed by the initial consultation process on the Baseline Study. This is likely to mirror the requirements of the Wirral Statement of Community Involvement and will involve a comprehensive, inclusive, participative approach to community engagement. The consultation process will run throughout the process, including:

- Formulation of the Wirral LDF;
- Refreshing and Expanding the Wirral Waters Vision;
- Masterplanning for areas of Wirral Waters / Strategic Environmental Assessment;

- Planning Applications and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA); and
- Implementation / Built Development.

Developing a strong monitoring and evaluation framework

7.53 The timing, scale and nature of change associated with Wirral Waters will need the development of a **sound monitoring and evaluation strategy and framework**. This will be a commitment to measuring the local impacts of development at Wirral Waters and the extent to which local people share in the costs and benefits of the scheme.

7.54 The precise nature and scope will need to be the subject of detailed discussions between all partners. It will need to employ both *top-down* and *bottom-up* methods, for example to include attitudinal surveys, measuring actual activity and measuring employment created.

Working closely with developers and occupiers

7.55 Partners in Wirral and the wider Liverpool City-Region seek to ensure that the labour market and skills requirements of employers are understood and addressed.

7.56 This will need to be maintained and enhanced as Wirral Waters emerges and becomes developed and occupied. Good employer engagement will be vital to accurately identify skills requirements and opportunities to maximise the impact on communities across Wirral and the wider

City Region. Further ideas about this are provided in **Appendix 5 – Socio-Economic Appraisal**.

Engaging the workforce of today and tomorrow

7.57 Public and private partners will need to work together to ensure that efforts to maximise the employment impact of the scheme are closely linked with wider efforts to maintain young peoples' engagement with the worlds of education and training. Wirral Waters may create a significant number of (labour-market) entry and intermediate level employment opportunities, but also a large volume of higher value, higher paid occupations.

7.58 If local people are to be able to access this higher value added employment (maximising the local socio-economic impact of the development) it is vital that they are able to compete in the labour market for these opportunities.

7.59 This will require a programme of action to help demonstrate to young people of all ages in Wirral and elsewhere the scale and range of economic opportunity around them. This action should encourage young people to maintain their motivation in education and training and to raise their aspirations.

Community Vehicles/Mechanisms

- 7.60 There are a number of potential vehicles or mechanisms through which local economic development and regeneration can be maximised. Some ideas are explored in **Appendix 5 – Socio-Economic Appraisal**.
- 7.61 The emphases, as set out above, are on Peel Holdings and other private sector organisations to provide the private capital, landholdings and expertise, whilst the public sector will bring together the community and identify priorities and means of achieving local benefit. There may also be some potential for public funding, which will be explored, although it is known that public funding in Merseyside is in decline and projects such as this may not attract public subsidies of any major substance.

Recognising the regional significance of Wirral Waters

- 7.62 Wirral Waters has the potential to become a scheme of regional and indeed national/international significance as a major new investment destination. It will represent a major opportunity to provide substantial economic and employment benefits to those deprived communities in close proximity to the site.
- 7.63 However, it must also be recognised that there are many other areas of employment need and deprivation in the Liverpool City Region (particularly within the conurbation core of Greater Merseyside) and Wirral Waters represents a major opportunity to extend opportunity and support regeneration across a wide area.

Linking with business support and workforce development provision

- 7.64 The development of Wirral Waters will not only create employment opportunities for residents of Wirral, the Liverpool City Region and beyond but will also create opportunities for entrepreneurship and business development, particularly through supply-chain opportunities. Working together, public and private sector partners can seek to maximise the economic impact associated with the development within the region by encouraging and supporting firms and entrepreneurs to identify and take advantage of these opportunities.

Learning from elsewhere

- 7.65 Some locations undergoing major programmes of development or redevelopment have put in place a good range of measures to ensure that opportunity is shared by local residents (for example, New East Manchester) whilst others have singularly failed to do so. A number of case studies are set out in **Appendix 5 – Socio-Economic Appraisal**.
- 7.66 As knowledge develops and partnership working becomes more effective, the opportunities for learning from other examples are becoming more apparent, both of what to do, and what not to do. In taking forward the Wirral Waters opportunity, Peel Holdings, its project team and the partners identified are constantly learning and will undoubtedly adapt as lessons become clearer and more relevant.

Wirral Waters as a regeneration exemplar

- 7.67 If the above points are properly captured and advanced as the SRF evolves into Frameworks and Masterplans, Wirral Waters will present an opportunity to set the standard in the 21st century for harnessing private sector investment to achieve urban regeneration in partnership.
- 7.68 The SRF approach, through building upon and adapting CABI and other best practice guidance, is aimed at shaping the proposals through a considered, integrated, well-planned and inclusive approach to planning for major private sector investment within a regeneration area. The legacy of Wirral Waters could therefore stretch far beyond the communities that surround it.