

Sustainability Appraisal for the Wirral Local Plan (2021-2037)



Non-Technical Summary

April 2022

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 **WIRRAL**



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Contents

Introduction	2
Scoping Summary	3
Summary of Spatial Strategy	5
Appraisal of The Plan	10
Strategic Objectives	10
Mitigation and Monitoring	12



Introduction

This is a Non-Technical Summary document which concisely summarises the sustainability appraisal for the Wirral Local Plan (2021-2037). The Local Plan sets out the Borough's spatial strategy in relation to housing and employment growth, with locally specific policies and site allocations which will help to shape the Borough's built environment. Once adopted, the Plan will replace the saved policies of the Unitary Development Plan (2000) which will help to shape the borough's built and natural environments.

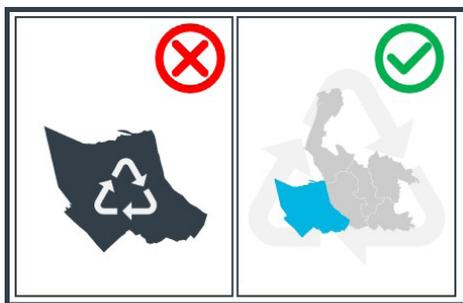
Wirral is a constituent local authority in the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, together with Halton, Knowsley, Liverpool, Sefton and St Helens. The Combined Authority is in the process of producing a Spatial Development Strategy which will set out a strategic direction for development within the City Region in the longer term.



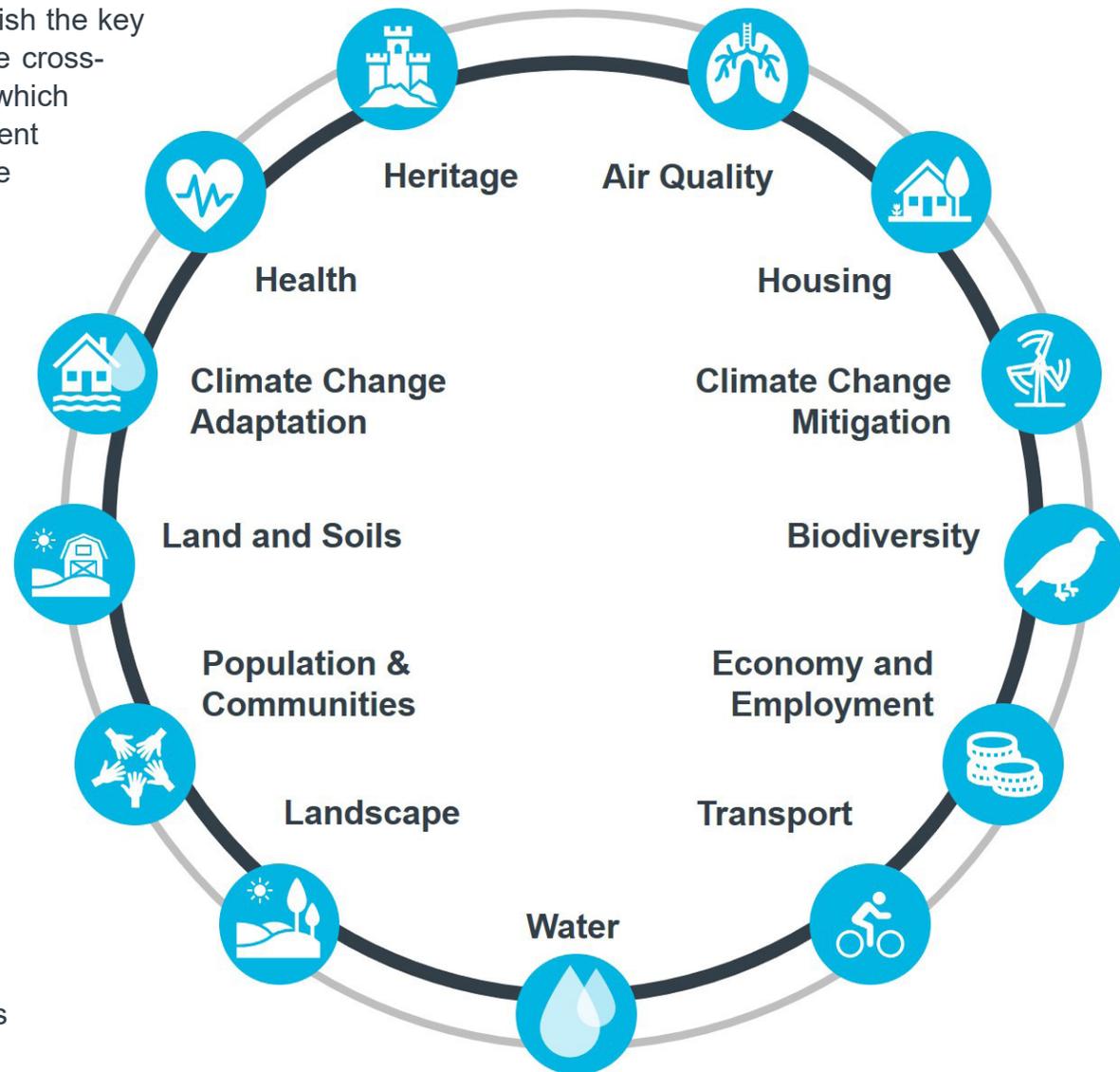
Scoping Summary

A scoping exercise was carried out in order to establish the key sustainability issues and objectives for the area. The cross-cutting topics reflect broad areas of sustainability which could be significantly affected by the Plan. The adjacent diagram shows the sustainability topics which have been 'scoped in' for consideration within this sustainability appraisal.

It should be noted that 'waste' has been scoped out as a discrete theme. Waste planning for Wirral is undertaken at a sub-regional level, and the emerging Local Plan will not affect the adopted Joint Waste Local Plan for Merseyside and Halton (2013) which will remain as part of the Wirral Development Plan once the Local Plan is adopted.



The following page details the key sustainability issues which have been evidenced in Wirral.



Scoping Key Issues

Scoping Key Issues



Air Quality

- Decreasing pollution levels and no AQMAs declared
- Traffic hotspot related air quality issues



Biodiversity

- A range of international, national and locally designated biodiversity assets
- Ramsar, Special Protection Areas, Special Areas of Conservation, Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Locally Designated Sites of Biological Importance, Coastal and Non-Coastal BAP Priority Habitats



Climate Change Adaptation

- Flood risk from fluvial and coastal sources
- Importance of protections from coastal flood risk from tidal flood defences alongside natural protections
- Likely increased flood risk as a result of climate change



Climate Change Mitigation

- Importance of retaining lower than regionally and nationally average CO2 emission rates
- Importance of offshore wind and opportunities for low carbon energy on buildings
- Importance of Wirral Waters using green infrastructure to assist with climate change mitigation



Economy and Employment

- Decline of traditional industries and the importance of maritime industries as a key growth area
- Anticipated employment opportunities at the nationally significant Wirral Waters redevelopment
- Key commuting and connectivity between Wirral and Liverpool and Cheshire
- Importance of SMEs, start-up and small business supported by necessary skills



Health

- There are a range of green or open spaces within the Borough, however connectivity is problematic in places
- Uneven distribution of health deprivation across the Borough
- Uneven access and take-up of healthcare provisions and green infrastructure across the Borough



Heritage

- There is a variety of designated heritage assets, including 8 Scheduled Monuments, 26 Conservation Areas and at least 722 nationally listed buildings.
- There are 14 heritage assets identified as at risk
- The Wirral Waters project offers opportunities to enhance the significance, understanding and appreciation of the Borough's industrial heritage



Housing

- 2021 Strategic Housing Market Assessment identified a need of 779 dwellings per annum uplifted to 785 dwellings per annum to support economic growth for the Borough.
- Affordable housing need of 374 homes per annum
- There is evidence to support delivery of accommodation for older people and those with disabilities.
- The Wirral Waters and wider Birkenhead area regeneration offers a strategic long term opportunity for substantial brownfield housing delivery and 13,000 units have outline permission already.



Land and Soils

- Importance of Grade 2 and 3 agricultural land outside of urban areas
- Importance of brownfield development opportunities
- Limited mineral extraction in the Borough, with potential deposits heavily constrained.



Landscape

- 46% of the Borough is with the Green Belt
- Two distinct National Character Areas, the Wirral NCA and the Merseyside Conurbation NCA.
- There is diversity of local character in the Borough.



Population & Communities

- A range of community needs derived from a blend of affluent and deprived communities
- Ageing population which could lead to pressures on linked services and facilities over the plan period.



Transport

- Evidence of car dependency
- Good internal and external connectivity
- Transport corridor of strategic roads and rail in the east of the Borough
- Well connected areas are home to a concentration of services, employment and infrastructure which provide a sustainable location for growth
- Limited east-west connectivity
- Potential plan-period congestion issues on the A41 corridor
- Opportunities to unlock increases to the already regionally high rates of rail commuting and further sustainable travel opportunities



Water

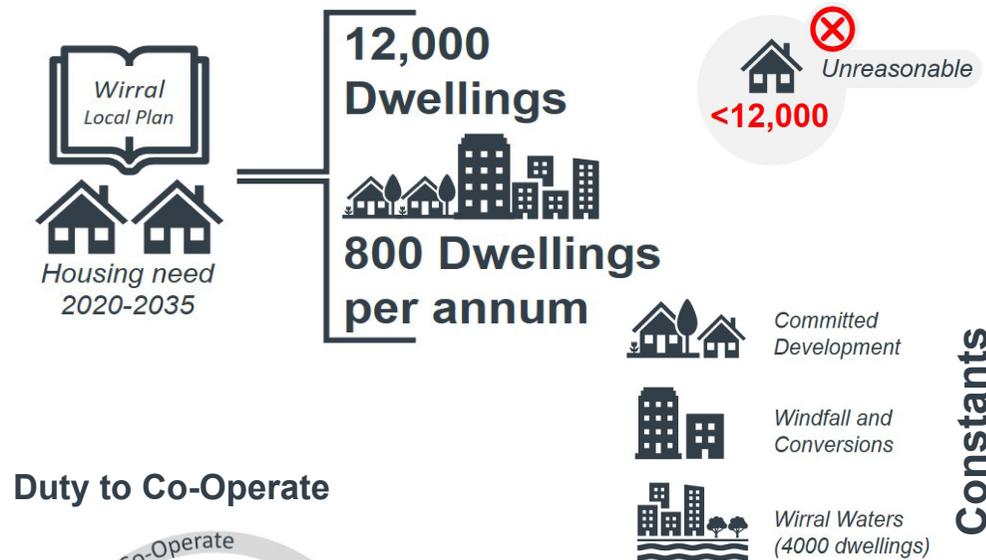
- The Borough falls within United Utilities largest water resource zone (Integrated Water Resource Zone)
- The aquifer beneath the Wirral peninsula is approaching abstraction capacity, raising the importance of efficiency in new homes

Summary of Spatial Strategy

Housing Strategy

An Issues and Options document was prepared by the Council in order to seek views from relevant stakeholders on strategic matters facing the Borough of Wirral. The Government's standardised methodology highlighted the need for 12,000 homes to be delivered over the Plan period; any options which would not meet this need were considered unreasonable.

The strategic options for delivering the housing need has a number of constant factors (committed development, windfall/conversions and Wirral Waters), these form a part of each strategy. The housing options which were appraised therefore aim to meet the residual need and will be explored over the following pages.



Duty to Co-Operate



A Statement of Common Ground has determined that within the Liverpool City Region there is no unmet housing need to be redistributed. Engagement with the Liverpool City Region districts and Cheshire West and Chester Council are ongoing.

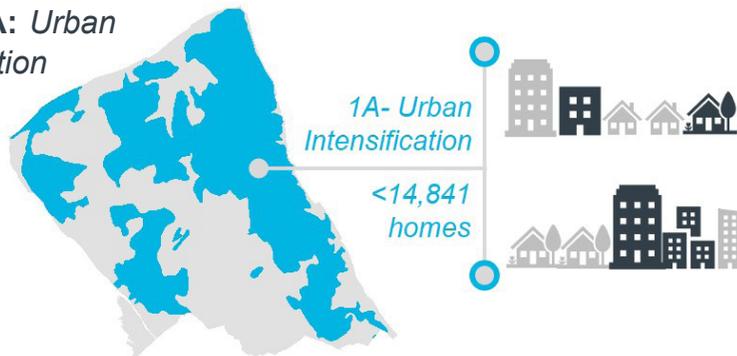
Housing Delivery Strategy

As illustrated by the diagrams (below), there were two key approaches which underpinned the spatial options for housing delivery in Wirral at issues and options stage.



Option 1 adopted a principle of urban intensification; this would avoid the need for Green Belt release whilst helping with regeneration across Wirral's urban area.

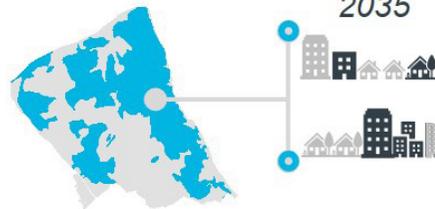
Option 1A: Urban Intensification



Option 1B: Urban Intensification with timeframe weighting



This approach would lead to the same scale and distribution of growth as seen in Option 1A, however much of the development would be delivered later in the Plan Period.



Option 2 considered the release of some limited Green Belt land alongside some urban intensification. This was to account for potential deliverability issues which could arise on sites within the urban area.

Option 2A: Dispersed Green Belt Release

The release of a series of small to medium sized pieces of land in order to meet the residual housing need.



Option 2B: Urban Expansion

A strategic focus on one larger area of Green Belt release around an existing settlement. A choice of two broad locations were identified.

The Council later determined that the Eastham option was **unreasonable**.



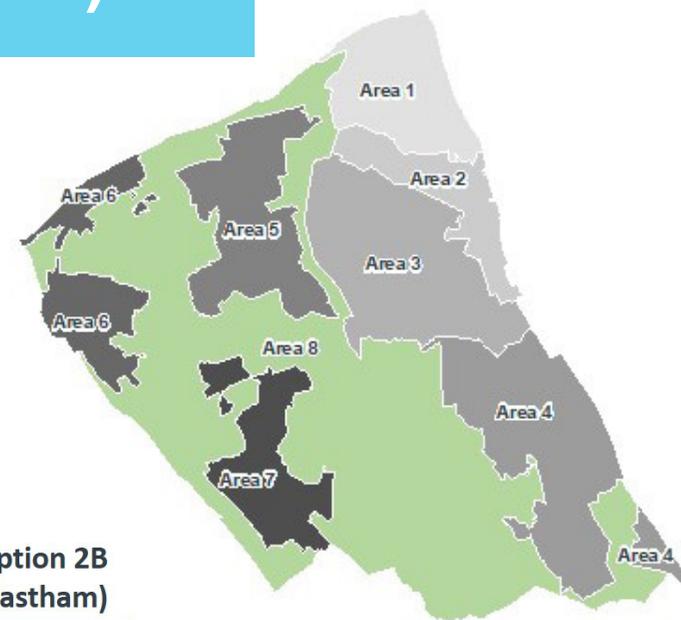
Note- for Option 2 (Green Belt release), there was an initial sifting of sites which had significant constraints and a preferential release of Green Belt land which performed weakly or had developer interest.

Graphics for indicative purposes only.

Options Appraisal (issues and options)

This chapter presents the findings of the appraisal of the housing options, assessing them against the established Sustainability Appraisal Framework at issues and options stage.

The appraisal was carried out according to a structure which considers the eight settlement areas identified across Wirral (right).



Likely to generate the most positive effects

		Likely to generate the most positive effects				Option 2B (Heswall)		Option 2B (Eastham)			
		Option 1A		Option 1B		Option 2A		Option 2B (Heswall)		Option 2B (Eastham)	
	Air Quality	x	+	x	+	x	x	x	x		
	Biodiversity	x?	+	x	+	xx?	+++	xx?	+	x	+
	Climate Change Adaptation	x	+	x	+	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Climate Change Mitigation	+		+++		x	-	-	-	-	-
	Economy and Employment	x	++	x	++	x	+	x	+	x	+++
	Health	x?	+++	x?	+++	x?		x	+	x	+
	Heritage	xx	+++	xx	+++	x	+	x	+	xx	+
	Housing	++		x	++	++		+		+	
	Land and Soils	x	++	x	++	xx		xx		xx	
	Landscape	++		++		x	+	xx?	+	xx?	+
	Population and Communities	++		++		x	+	x	+	x	+
	Transport	++		++		x		x		x	
	Water Resources	?		?		+?		+?		+?	

The adjacent graphic gives an indication as to the likely effects of the housing options for each sustainability topic.

Options Appraisal (pre-submission)

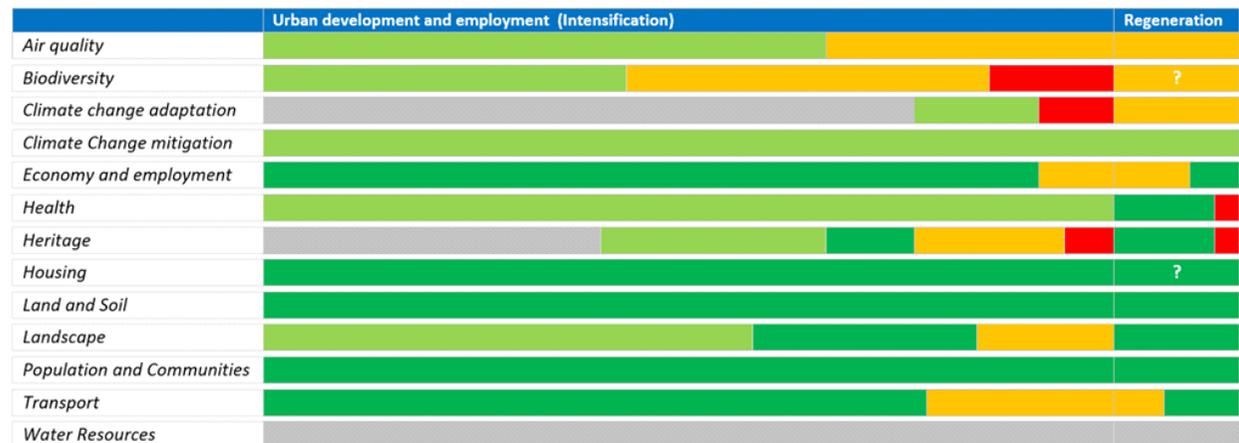
Following consultation at the issues and options stage, the Council worked up a preferred approach. This approach built upon Option 1a urban intensification, but additional sites were identified to provide a contingency for any sites that might experience delivery issues.

At pre-submission stage, a total supply of 16,322 dwellings was identified, focused in the urban areas. This is higher than identified at issues and options stage.

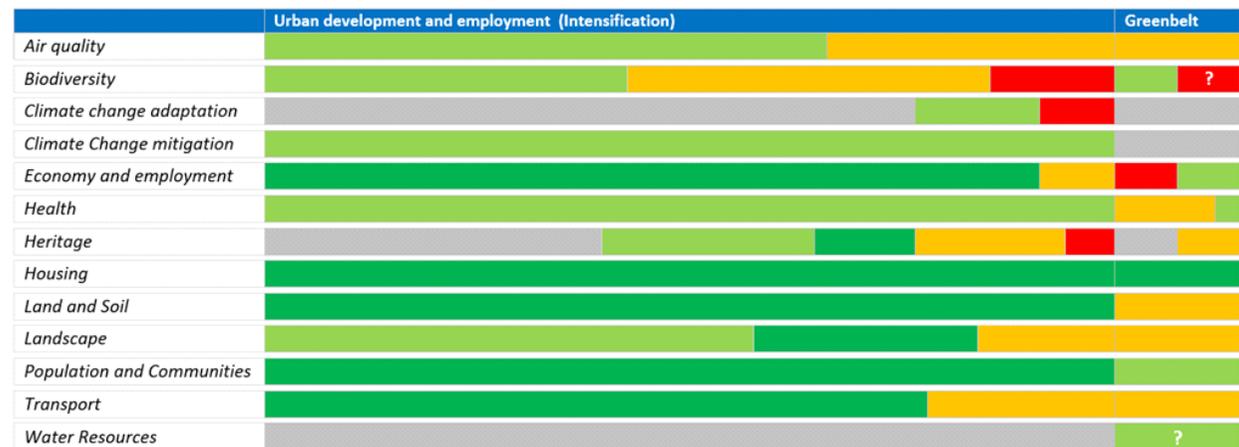
When re-considering what reasonable alternatives there may be to the strategy at this stage, the Council considered that Green Belt release was no longer reasonable or necessary. However, a high level appraisal was undertaken for completeness to demonstrate the effects of partial green belt release compared to the preferred approach.

The effects profile diagrams show that both approaches perform very similarly in terms of effects in the urban areas, which is to be expected given that both involve a large amount of regeneration. However, residual growth in the Green Belt would be less favourable in terms of a range of environmental factors. It would also potentially reduce some of the benefits of regeneration in areas of need.

Option A: Urban Intensification and Broad Locations for Regeneration (effects profile)



Option B: Urban Intensification and Green Belt release (effects profile)

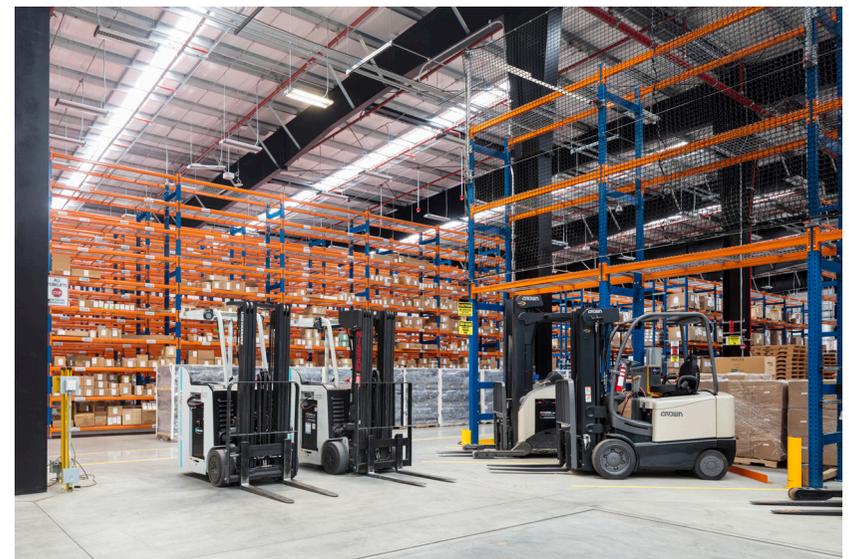


Employment Strategy

The Council relied upon an employment land study to calculate identified needs of 52.9ha of employment land in B class uses. In planning to meet these needs, the Council explored different options with regards to the supply of employment land, however, only one alternative was deemed to be reasonable (the preferred approach).

Rejected alternatives are listed below:

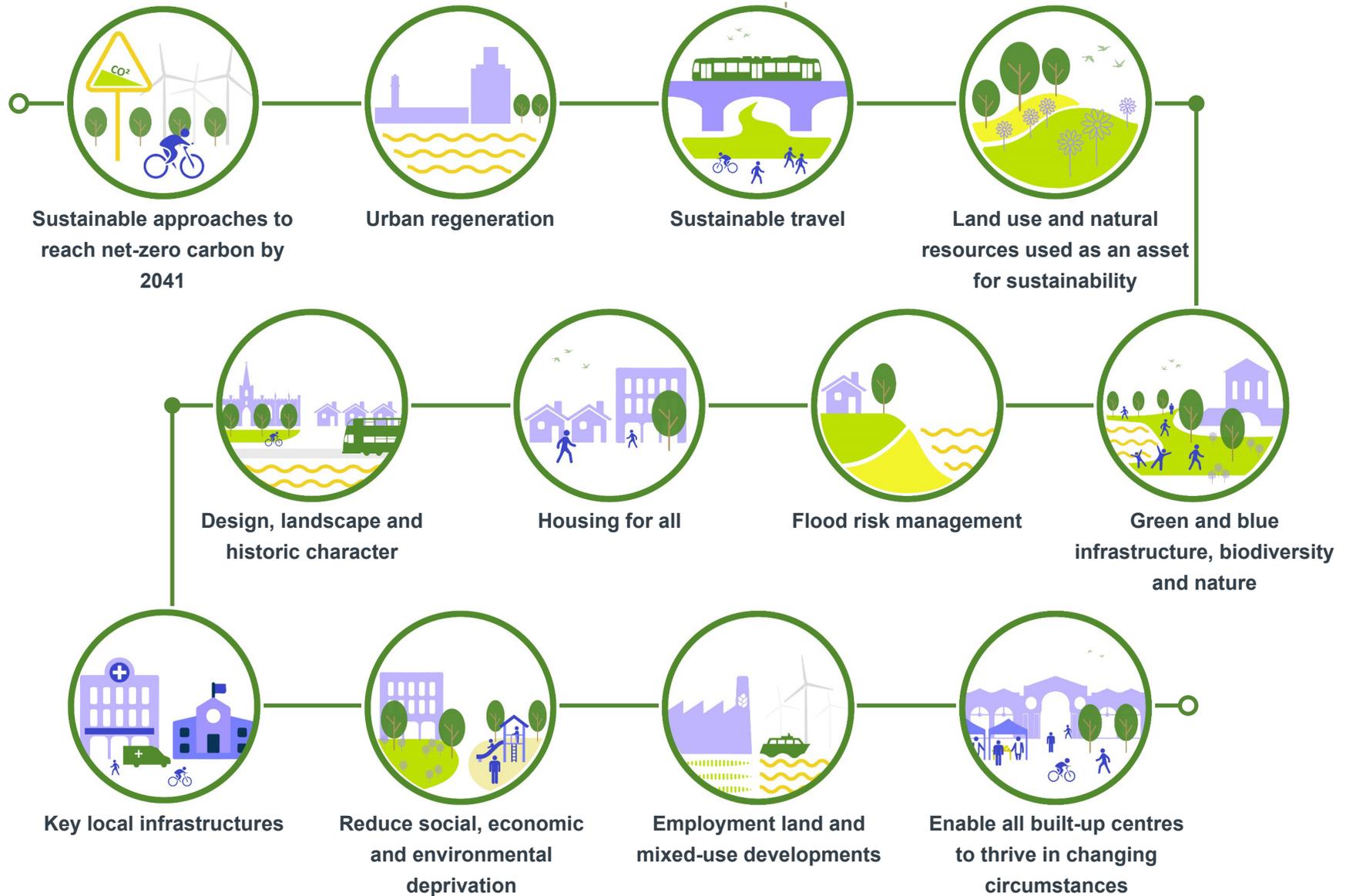
- Plan for significantly less employment land than assessed needs – **Not NPPF compliant and would slow growth in Wirral.**
- Plan for significantly more employment land than assessed needs – **Is not necessary and could result in Green Belt release.**
- To meet employment growth wholly or in part through release of land in the Green Belt – **There is sufficient land within existing industrial areas in the urban area.**
- To retain all sites assessed in the Wirral Employment Land and premises study for employment use - **Sufficient employment land supply has been identified to meet the preferred employment growth option without the contribution of ‘good quality’ sites in the Bromborough area.**



Appraisal of The Plan

The Plan seeks to cover the following key objectives, with the strategy and policies within the Plan emanating from these aims.

Strategic Objectives



Plan Appraisal

This chapter presents the findings of the appraisal of the Wirral Local Plan (2021-2037), assessing it against the established Sustainability Appraisal Framework.

The adjacent graphic gives an indication as to the likely effects of the plan for each sustainability topic.

	Plan Effects	Summary of Effects
Air Quality		Minor positive effects will arise due to growth being accessibly located with support for sustainable travel options, including electric vehicles. That said, an urban focus may lead to some minor negative effects linked to a increase in vehicle journeys in a densely populated area.
Biodiversity		Minor positive effects reflecting the potential for biodiversity enhancement. Alongside this, there are potential minor negative effects due to growth in close proximity to sensitive environments.
Climate Change Adaptation		Some allocations are at risk of flooding, however policy ensures that designs take account for this to mitigate any risk. Therefore, minor positive effects are predicted.
Climate Change Mitigation		Carbon emissions reductions through sustainable travel, built-form, renewable energy generation and green technologies. Overall, this constitutes significant positive effects.
Economy and Employment		Significant positive effects due to a net gain in employment land alongside housing growth in areas which show the potential for regeneration. Additional focus on the visitor, green and port-related economies.
Health		Significant positive effects associated with new and enhanced community infrastructures, regeneration and inclusivity with high quality homes, accessibility and the importance of open, green, natural space for communities. Conversely, some communities may see detrimental effects relating to development, including traffic and pressures on facilities, which are minor negative effects.
Heritage		A regeneration based approach could lead to significant positive effects in terms of finding productive use for heritage assets and improving the built environment. There could be some minor negative effects in some locations which are unavoidable though.
Housing		Significant positive effects as the Plan will deliver an increase in housing with an appropriate mix of types and tenures. Affordability, accessibility and regeneration are key focuses which aim to reduce deprivation.
Land and Soils		Significant positive effects are recorded as there will be reuse of brownfield land and protection of agricultural land and Green Belt.
Landscape		The majority of development is focused on brownfield sites in urban areas, with added policy focus on increasing green infrastructure in urban areas, which is a significant positive effect. The Plan also seeks to protect and enhance character across Wirral.
Population and Communities		A focus on providing employment, training, regeneration, community infrastructures and an improved and networked transport system will lead to significant positive effects in areas of greatest need.
Transport		The Plan focuses development to reduce the need to travel and provide improved sustainable transport options which will give rise to significant positive effects in the main. Conversely, the large increase in population is expected to lead to increased traffic volumes on the roads, which are minor negative effects for some locations.
Water Resources		It is likely that there is sufficient existing capacity to cope with the population increase, and developments will provide sufficient water management infrastructures, therefore, neutral effects are predicted.



Mitigation and Monitoring

Mitigation

The Sustainability Appraisal (SA) of the Wirral Local Plan (2021-2037) has been an iterative process, in which proposals for mitigation and enhancement have been considered at different stages. Draft versions of each plan policy have been appraised through the SA process, and recommendations were made for improvements before the policies were finalised in the Plan.

The Council made several direct changes to the policies in response to the recommendations. This led to a more positive outcome with regards to the following sustainability topics:

- Employment
- Access to open space
- Biodiversity
- Social inclusion
- Climate change
- Heritage
- Housing
- Accessibility
- Minerals
- Social inclusion
- Climate change

Monitoring

Identifying a framework of monitoring measures is a requirement of the SEA Regulations. At this stage, a range of indicators have been drafted, and these will be finalised once the Plan is Adopted.

It is important to monitor the predicted effects in a sustainability appraisal as it provides a check on the accuracy of predicted effects and allows for unforeseen effects to be identified. Consequently, action to be taken as necessary (either to address unforeseen negative effects, or to take action where positive effects are not arising as foreseen).

Monitoring measures need to be related to the predicted effects as closely as possible to ensure that trends can be accurately tracked. However, there are limiting factors such as the availability of data collection sources and the practicality of gathering data regularly. It is therefore helpful to draw upon existing monitoring activities where appropriate, and to understand who will be responsible for collecting data. These factors will be explored prior to the monitoring measures being finalised.



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