

What is a Local Plan?

A Local Plan is a statutory land-use planning document that sets out how the Borough should be developed over the next 15 years, in line with the requirements of national policy and legislation.

The Local Plan must establish the overall requirement for housing over the plan period and must identify enough land for development to meet this requirement.

The Council's latest Local Plan is being prepared to be submitted to the Secretary of State during 2017.

What is a Strategic Housing Market Assessment?

A Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) is a key piece of evidence required by national planning policy to provide information about the Borough's future housing needs, including the scale, mix and tenure of houses that are likely to be required by different groups of people in the community.

The last Strategic Housing Market Assessment for Wirral was completed in 2010 by Fordham Research and is now out-of-date.

Why is the Council consulting on the Strategic Housing Market Assessment for Wirral?

The Council is consulting on the SHMA (May 2016), so that it can prove that the need for new housing in Wirral has been fully and properly assessed, before the findings of the SHMA are used to determine the amount of new housing that should be provided for in the Council's new Local Plan.

How has the SHMA been prepared?

The SHMA for Wirral has been prepared by independent planning consultants, Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners, in line with Government Planning Practice Guidance.

What is a Housing Market Area?

A Housing Market Area is a geographical area within which people look to buy or rent a home, which may sometimes cross into adjacent council areas.

The SHMA identifies Wirral's Housing Market Area as the whole Borough, with some connections to Liverpool and Cheshire West and Chester.

What data and information has been used to inform the Wirral SHMA?

The Wirral SHMA has used figures from the 2011 Census, national population and household projections and other published datasets alongside a survey of local residents, to gain an understanding of the local housing market and future housing needs in Wirral.

Does the Wirral SHMA make any decisions for the Council?

No. While the SHMA provides the Council with indications of likely levels of affordable and market housing requirements it does not make any decisions for the Council. It only provides the basic information that will help the Council to begin planning for the future direction of growth in the Borough, including the 'objectively assessed housing need' for the area, which must then, following public consultation, be converted into the housing requirement to be included in the Council's Local Plan for future development in the Borough.

What is 'objectively assessed housing need'?

'Objectively assessed housing need' (OAN) is the amount of new housing that a community is likely to need, based on nationally-published population and household projections, taking account of population change, economic growth forecasts and affordable housing needs, before any other policy considerations are applied.

The OAN does not therefore take into account any local constraints to development such as market capacity or environmental designations.

The Council will need to balance the OAN against the level of housing growth that the Council believes is necessary to accommodate economic growth and to deliver wider social and environmental goals, to promote the sustainable development of the Borough.

The final housing requirement to be included in the Local Plan could therefore be higher or lower than the OAN, providing that this can be justified when the Plan is submitted to examination by a Planning Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State.

How has the 'objectively assessed housing need' been calculated?

The guidance states that the latest Government household projections should form the minimum starting point for assessing what the OAN for any area should be. This figure may need to be adjusted upwards when market signals, affordable housing need and employment growth are taken into consideration.

The SHMA for Wirral estimates a total affordable housing need of 1,034 homes per year, based on housing register data. This assumes that households will have a 20% deposit and will not spend more than 3.3 times their gross income on housing costs. The SHMA shows that housing affordability has worsened in Wirral over time and recommends that an upward adjustment may therefore be required in order to improve affordability.

The guidance also states that the OAN must ensure that housing growth will support enough working age people to meet forecasted economic growth. Due to Wirral's increasingly ageing population, a large number of working age people would need to move into Wirral to support the number of jobs estimated in the latest economic forecasts for Wirral (produced by Experian in December 2015).

What is a 'housing requirement'

The 'housing requirement' is the number of new homes that will need to be delivered within Wirral, which will be included in the Council's Local Plan to guide decisions on development over the next 15 years.

How many homes will need to be provided in the future?

The SHMA finds that Wirral's objectively assessed housing need is for between **875** and **1235** new homes per year.

The next stage will be for the Council to consider other factors such as economic aspirations, market capacity and environmental designations before deciding on the final housing requirement to include in the Council's Local Plan.

What is a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment?

A Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) is a technical study that assesses sites that could potentially be brought forward to provide new housing. It is intended to help the Council to decide whether there is an adequate supply of deliverable sites to meet the Borough's identified housing needs.

Why is the Council consulting on the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment for Wirral?

The Council is consulting on the SHLAA (April 2016), so that it can prove that the Borough's future land supply has been fully and properly assessed, before the findings of the SHLAA are taken forward into the Council's new Local Plan.

Why does the Council have to prepare a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment?

A SHLAA is required by national planning policy, set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

Without an adequate supply of deliverable housing land, the Council's new Local Plan will not be considered sound and may be rejected by the Government and the Planning Inspectorate.

Having an up-to-date SHLAA can also help the Council to resist planning applications for housing development in inappropriate locations.

How is a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment produced?

The Wirral SHLAA is produced by Council officers in line with Government Planning Practice Guidance.

It considers sites from a range of sources, including land with expired planning permissions, vacant sites and sites submitted for consideration by landowners and developers.

What does a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment do?

- It identifies potential sites and assesses whether these sites would be developable, how many housing units could be accommodated on them and when they could be delivered.
- It must assess all sites being proposed by landowners, developers and agents, including sites in the Green Belt.
- It highlights the action that would need to be taken if the sites were to be brought forward for housing development, for example where sites are constrained by land ownership or road access issues.
- It helps to show the extent to which new land might be needed to meet Wirral's housing needs.
- It is normally reviewed and updated in April every year.

What does a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment not do?

- The SHLAA does not allocate land for development, grant planning permission for development or mean that any site included will be granted planning permission for housing development.
- It does not prevent other sites, not included in the SHLAA, from coming forward for development.

How will decisions be made on sites in the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment?

The public will be consulted before any site in the SHLAA is included in the new Local Plan for Wirral.

Planning applications will continue to be treated on their merits and will be determined in accordance with planning policies contained within the adopted Development Plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

What do the different categories of site mean?

Each site in the SHLAA has been given a separate score for suitability, availability and viability and has been assigned an overall score with each of these three factors combined. On this basis sites have been placed into the following categories:

- **Category 1** - sites considered to be suitable for housing and which could be delivered within five years
- **Category 2** - sites considered to be developable but which may have some additional constraints which mean that they are more likely to be delivered within a 6-10 year period
- **Category 3** - sites considered not currently developable and subject to constraints which may only make them deliverable within an 11-15 year period

Frequently Asked Questions

About Strategic Housing Market Assessments and Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessments

Only Category 1 Sites form part of the Borough's 'five-year supply' of housing sites, alongside sites which already have permission for new housing development.

What is a 'five year supply'?

The need to identify a 'five year supply' of deliverable housing land is a requirement of national planning policy. There are clear rules for including or not including sites in the five year supply, and a Council's five year supply can be challenged by developers at appeal, if planning permission for their proposals is refused.

To be 'deliverable', sites should be available now, offer a suitable location for development now, and be achievable with a realistic prospect that housing will be delivered on the site within five years and, in particular, that development of the site is viable. Sites with planning permission should be considered deliverable until permission expires, unless there is clear evidence that schemes will not be implemented within five years, for example they will not be viable, there is no longer a demand for the type of units or sites have longer term phasing plans.

Where a 'five year supply' cannot be demonstrated, local planning policies for the supply of housing are considered 'out-of-date' and applications must be considered in the context of the national 'presumption in favour of sustainable development'. In practice, this means that significant weight must be placed on granting planning applications for new housing unless any adverse impact of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the policies in the National Planning Policy Framework or specific policies in the Framework indicate that development should be restricted.

The lack of a five year supply can also have a significant bearing on the outcome of planning appeals, where a developer seeks to challenge refusal of a planning application by the Council.

Is a summary of the SHMA and SHLAA available?

Yes. An Executive Summary is provided at the front of the SHMA.

A summary of the findings of both the SHMA and the SHLAA is also set out within the Background Information to the accompanying Wirral Council Cabinet Report, dated 18 July 2016 (Minute 31 refers).

Will any other data be taken into account as the Local plan is prepared?

Yes. The housing land supply will be subject to continuous monitoring and will need to be adjusted if any sites are added to or taken away from the housing land supply, for example if a new site is identified or if an existing site is used for another purpose. Any more recent population, household or employment projections will also need to be taken into account, if they are published while the Local Plan is being prepared.

The district councils of the Liverpool City Region are also preparing a study that will help to address the cross-boundary issues related to the future provision of housing and

Frequently Asked Questions

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employment across the wider sub-region, which will also need to be taken into account before the final housing requirement for Wirral is agreed.

Where can I find out more information about the SHLAA and SHMA?

You can view the SHMA (May 2016) and SHLAA (April 2016) for Wirral and the accompanying Cabinet Report on our website at:

<http://www.wirral.gov.uk/planning-and-building/local-plans-and-planning-policy/local-plans/core-strategy-local-plan/further-0>

How can I contact the Forward Planning Team?

You can send an e-mail to: forwardplanning@wirral.gov.uk

I don't have access to the internet. Can I write to you instead?

Yes. Letters can be sent to:

The Forward Planning Manager
Wirral Council Regeneration and Planning Service
South Annexe
Wallasey Town Hall
Brighton Street
Wallasey
CH44 8ED

There is also free internet access available at the Council's libraries.

When is the deadline for comments?

Any comments on the SHMA (May 2016) and the SHLAA (April 2016) must be received by the Council at the address above no later than **5pm** on Friday **23 September 2016**.