Gateway 1 Self-Assessment summary – Wirral Council

Introduction

This Gateway 1 self-assessment has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026 'The Regulations' and the Local Plans guidance Gateway 1 for local plans: what you need to do - GOV.UK in the context of the preparation of the Wirral's Local Plan.

Gateway 1 is the first of 3 mandatory gateways that support the preparation of the Local Plan. It is intended to help increase the transparency of the preparation of Wirral's new Local Plan for our local communities and other stakeholders.

Gateway 1 involves self-assessing the Council's readiness to start the plan preparation process and publishing a summary of this self-assessment. The publication of this self-assessment formally marks the start of the 30-month period.

It should be noted that the Planning Inspectorate does not carry out any assessment or provide observations or advice at Gateway 1.

How we got ready to prepare a new local plan

We started preparing a new local plan for Wirral in 2026. We gave notice of our intention to commence preparation of our new local plan and published our local plan timetable on 30th June 2026. We carried out our Scoping Consultation and between 15 July and 28 August 2026 and a Call for Sites between 3 June and 24 July 2026.

The start of the 30-month plan preparation period officially starts on the date that our Gateway 1 self-assessment (this document) is published – 31st October 2026.

Government policy says we should adopt the new plan within 30 months of this date. This is to help ensure we have an up-to-date local plan that responds to the needs of the area and our communities.

This page explains what we did to get ready to meet the 30-month timeframe. It also has links to further information and where you can get updates.

More information on our Local Plan is available on the Council's website Local Plan 2039 Latest News | wirral.gov.uk. It should be noted that Wirral Local Plan 2045 included in the Notice of Intention to Commence is a working title. The revised NPPF published in August 2026 stated that Local Plans should cover a period of no less than 10 years from the point of adoption of the Plan (Policy PM2). In light of this the Council intends to amend the new Local Plan period to 10 years with a revised working title of "Wirral Local Plan 2039". Any formal decisions on the plan period are subject to further review and approval through the plan preparation process.

We published a timetable for preparing the plan

The timetable shows when we expect to carry out the different stages and activities for preparing a plan. It helps us check if and how we can adopt the plan within the 30-month timeframe. We'll keep this updated as we make more progress.

Of key importance within the timetable are the two public consultations. Consultation on proposed Local Plan content and evidence is anticipated for July 2027. Consultation on the proposed Local Plan is anticipated for June 2028.

It's acknowledged that achieving the 30-month timeframe may be challenging and previous plan making processes indicate that the volume of community representations will be very high and appropriate mitigations are in place to manage any risks to the timetable including:

- Proactive engagement with stakeholders and community groups during content and evidence stages.
- Utilising digital software for consultation responses and analysis.
- Ensuring robust governance processes are in place for timely approvals.

We consider that our current 32-month timetable is realistic, whilst recognising that some parts of the process are outside of the Local Planning Authorities control. For example, pre-election period and the Planning Inspectorate's workload which could result in potential delays. We will continue to monitor this position as Local Plan preparation continues.

The timetable can be found here: Local Plan timetable | wirral.gov.uk.

We established project management and governance arrangements

Preparing a Local Plan is a complex process involving key stakeholders across Wirral including elected members, officers, our community and statutory consultees. We have a team of planning officers and have implemented a robust project management approach to support delivery of the plan. A Project Initiation Document (PID) has been prepared to guide delivery of the programme including budget, resource, risk management and decision making, a summary of which can be found on our website Local Plan 2039 | wirral.gov.uk.

A Local Plan Oversight Group consisting of key senior council officers has been established to monitor progress, provide assurance and manage risk. A cross-party Local Plan Member Working Group has been constituted by Economy, Regeneration and Housing Committee to provide assurance that elected members are briefed and engaged throughout the Local Plan making process. Appropriate delegated authority and escalation routes are in place to support timely decision-making and escalation where required. A comprehensive risk register has been developed and is reviewed monthly as a minimum. This enables us to identify emerging issues early and put mitigation measures in place to minimise impacts on programme delivery.

We planned how we'll consult on the plan

Public consultation is essential for the Local Plan to represent the needs of our communities. It must be as easy as possible for people to have their say in a way that works for them, so they can help to influence the way the area develops. By planning this early, we can try to ensure people are aware in advance and can get

involved where they are able from the start of the plan making process.

We have undertaken a scoping consultation to get people's views on what the plan could contain and how we propose to consult on the plan at key stages. We are currently preparing a Draft Engagement Strategy which will set out our approach to involving communities and key stakeholders throughout the plan-making process. This strategy will be informed by government guidance, feedback received in the scoping consultation and an Equality Impact Assessment.

We want as many people as possible to have the opportunity to participate in the plan-making process. To do this our approach will combine digital engagement methods with traditional consultation techniques. Information will continue to be provided through our website, community engagement events and other communication channels (email, social media, local media, printed information at libraries) as the plan progresses.

We began scoping the content of the plan

Scoping includes considering how well the existing plan is working and gathering baseline information about Wirral. This helps to identify our future needs and ambitions. Starting this early means we can begin preparing the new plan with a clear vision, making it quicker and easier to consult on the plan and make decisions about it.

We have started gathering information and evidence to understand the opportunities and challenges facing Wirral and to identify the key issues that the new Local Plan will need to address. A review of the evidence prepared for the current Local Plan adopted in 2025 is underway to determine what information can be updated and where new evidence is required. We have identified and scoped our evidence requirements, and several priority studies are progressing.

The new Local Plan will help guide future housing delivery, economic growth, infrastructure investment, environmental protection and sustainable development across the Borough. It will also support wider Council priorities and align with strategic planning work taking place across the Liverpool City Region.

Using the information gathered, along with the findings of the scoping consultation our next steps are:

- Finalise the Baseline Report for Wirral. This early analysis is helping to identify opportunities and constraints for future growth and has already informed the development of spatial growth options which will be explored further as the plan progresses.
- To advance our draft vision for the Borough and identify measurable outcomes to monitor progress towards our vision. Our information gathering and exploration of available data have prompted early consideration of these.
- Continue to build our evidence base.

We began a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

We're legally required to identify, describe and evaluate likely significant effects on the environment of:

- Implementing the local plan.
- Reasonable alternatives, taking into account the plan's objectives and scope.

This process will consider how community, national and international environmental protection objectives and any other environmental challenges are taken into account in the plan. It will help us to predict significant environmental effects and develop ways of preventing, reducing and offsetting these.

It is important we start this work early and are transparent about how we're doing the assessment when engaging stakeholders and communities.

We have started the SEA process by identifying relevant plans, programmes and environmental objectives that may influence the Local Plan. We have also completed initial scoping and screening work to identify the baseline information needed to understand environmental conditions, trends and constraints across the Borough.

The Council is reviewing existing environmental evidence and preparing the information needed to define the scope of the assessment. This will help ensure that future planning options can be assessed consistently against environmental objectives and that environmental effects are considered alongside social and economic factors.

Specialist environmental work, including sustainability appraisal, habitats assessment and flood risk evidence, forms part of the wider evidence programme supporting the Local Plan. Further detailed assessment work will continue as evidence is prepared and spatial options are developed.

How to stay up to date

You can keep up to date with the Wirral Local Plan and be notified about future consultations by signing up to our Consultation Database.

Paper copies of the documents can be viewed at all main libraries during normal opening hours, which can be viewed on our website here: Find a library | wirral.gov.uk

Keep up to date with our latest news here: www.wirralview.co.uk.

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