



Housing Delivery Action Plan

19 August 2019

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1 Introduction the current position

- 1.1 Wirral Council has produced this Action Plan as a result of under delivery of new housing in the area against the Government's new Housing Delivery Test. The delivery of new homes is a national issue; the Government is committed to improve and support delivery of new homes through their economic and housing growth agendas. Local Planning Authorities are now challenged to be more proactive in increasing the provision of housing to meet the identified needs of their local area. It should be noted, as set out in the National Audit Office's report "Planning for new homes" that not all the factors for providing new homes are in the control of local councils. Landowners, developers, financial institutions all have their part to play in realising the Government's aspirations.
- 1.2 The Government introduced a new Housing Delivery Test (HDT)¹ in November 2018 as part of a revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). It is a mechanism to monitor the local delivery of new homes by measuring net additional dwellings delivered over the previous three years against the local requirement for housing, with results on performance for each local planning authority in England published annually in November (this year the figures were delayed until February 2019).
- 1.3 The consequences of failing the Test are set out in the NPPF. Currently, all authorities with a delivery performance of less than 95% against their housing requirement must prepare an Action Plan in line with national guidance to assess the causes of under delivery and identify actions to increase delivery in future years. A Housing Delivery Test Action Plan is intended to be a practical document, focussed on effective measures aimed at improving delivery within an area.
- 1.4 Where an Action Plan is required, this should be prepared within six months of the test results being published ie. by the end of the following May, or in this case August 2019.
- 1.5 Wirral Council's HDT result was 73%. All local planning authorities with a result of 85% or less need to calculate and apply a 20% land buffer, in addition to the calculation of the local housing requirement. As Wirral's HDT measurement for February 2019 was 73%, the Council will have to complete both a HDT Action Plan and include a 20% land buffer (see Table 1 below).

¹ The methodology for calculating the Housing Delivery Test measurement is set out in the Housing Delivery Test Measurement Rule Book - https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/728523/HDT_Measurement_Rule_Book.pdf

Table 1 – Wirral’s Housing Delivery Test Results (MHCLG, February 2019)

Number of homes required (GSM)			Total number of homes required	Number of homes delivered in Wirral			Total number of homes delivered	HDT Feb 2019	HDT 2019 consequence for Wirral
15-16	16-17	17-18		15-16	16-17	17-18			
695	680	718	2093	489	328	704	1530	73%	Buffer and action plan

- 1.6 As the adopted housing requirement in Wirral is more than five years old (Unitary Development Plan 2000), the Council’s HDT has been assessed against the minimum local housing need required by national policy.

What this Action Plan will do

- 1.7 This HDT Action Plan provides an analysis of the key reasons for the historic under-delivery of new housing against the assessed requirement for new homes and identifies the measures the Council will undertake to seek to increase the delivery of new housing in the Borough.
- 1.8 The Council recognises that delivering housing is a controversial topic, however the Council has a statutory duty to plan for the identified development needs of the Borough. A number of the actions identified within this Action Plan are the sole responsibility of the Council but in order to successfully respond to the challenge of increasing housing delivery the Council needs to work effectively with housing developers, landowners, funding agencies, financial institutions, and members of the public.
- 1.9 The key objectives of this HDT Action Plan are;
- Identify sites that will be coming forward within the next five year period and beyond
 - To gather information on the barriers that are currently preventing additional housing being built
 - To consider other actions the Council can take to ensure more homes are built to meet national requirements

How this fits with the Council’s vision, growth and regeneration ambitions

- 1.10 The Council has an ambitious vision for the growth and regeneration of the Borough which will meet the present and future housing and employment needs of its residents. The paragraphs below provide information on the Council’s strategy.
- 1.11 In response to the direction of the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government dated 28 January 2019, the Council has prepared an effective Local Plan Action Plan to demonstrate:
- the allocation of sufficient land for housing for the whole of Wirral for the Local Plan period;

- adequate and sustainable resourcing and skills to prepare a Local Plan are in place;
 - appropriate governance arrangements are in place to ensure timely Local Plan preparation and decision making;
 - Compliance with relevant Local Plan legislation and national policy, in particular the Duty to Co-operate; and
 - the Local Plan is underpinned by an appropriate and up to date evidence base.
- 1.12 The Local Plan Action Plan can be accessed at:
<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/planning-and-building/local-plans-and-planning-policy/local-plans/core-strategy-local-plan>
- 1.13 The Council is currently reviewing its Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) in order to better understand what sites are deliverable and developable. The result this will heavily inform both this HDT Action Plan and the Local Plan Action Plan and the steps that will need to be taken to improve delivery.
- 1.14 The Council has put in place adequate and sustainable resourcing and skills to prepare the Local Plan. It has a permanent dedicated team of qualified and experienced planning officers to take this work forward and it is commissioned ARUP's and AECOM to support it in delivering the Local Plan to examination in November 2020.
- 1.15 The Council regularly monitors housing delivery and publishes an annual monitoring report (AMR) in December each year. This HDT Action Plan has been prepared using the latest data and information from December 2018. The latest AMR can be viewed at:
<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/planning-and-building/local-plans-and-planning-policy/development-monitoring>
- 1.16 The Council's corporate vision is set out in its 2020 Vision which can be viewed at:
<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/about-council/wirral-plan-2020-vision>
It is currently being reviewed and a new plan is being prepared to 2030.
- 1.17 The Council also has a Housing Strategy which forms part of the Wirral 2020 vision and provides the direction for key areas of future housing provision, which can be viewed at:
<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/about-council/wirral-plan-2020-vision/wirral-plan-strategies>
A new Strategy will be formulated and again aligned to the Councils new plan to 2030.
- 1.18 The Council's Growth Plan is set out in a number of documents, which include the Birkenhead Integrated Regeneration Strategy; the Strategic Regeneration Framework; and the Urban Blueprint for Birkenhead.
- 1.19 The Wirral Growth Plan can be viewed at:
<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/business/regenerating-wirral/wirral-growth-plan>

- 1.20 The Strategic Regeneration Framework can be viewed at:
<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/business/regenerating-wirral/strategic-regeneration-framework>
- 1.21 The Birkenhead Integrated Regeneration Strategy can be viewed at:
<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/sites/default/files/all/planning%20and%20building/Local%20plans%20and%20planning%20policy/Local%20Planning%20Evidence%20Base%20and%20Research/Wirral%20Documents/BirkenheadIntegratedRegenerationStrategy.pdf>

2 What we know about housing delivery in Wirral

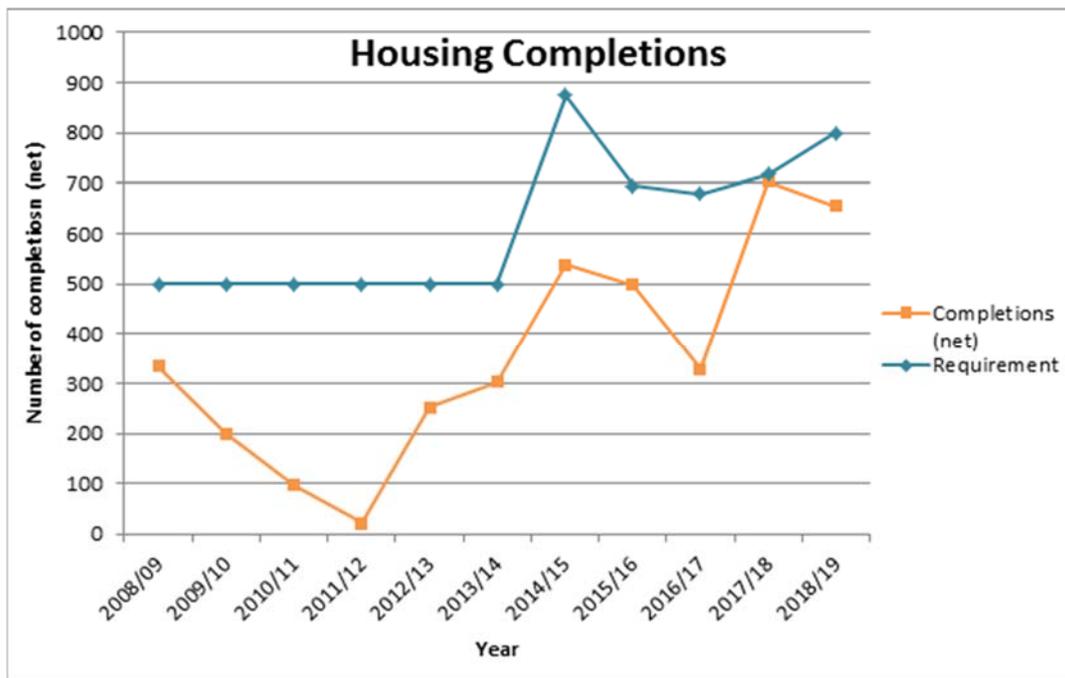
- 2.1 The Council is committed to meeting the housing and employment needs of Wirral residents. The Council's highest corporate priority is to produce a quality Local Plan for Wirral which complies fully with all relevant Local Plan legislation and national policy and meets the timescale set out in the Local Plan Action Plan. The Council will allocate sufficient land in the Local Plan to meet the need for housing for the whole of Wirral for the Plan period to 2035. The Council has determined the minimum number of homes needed by using the standard method in national planning guidance. It does not believe that there are exceptional circumstances which justify an alternative approach.

The Place

- 2.2 The Metropolitan Borough of Wirral forms the northern part of the peninsula between the Dee and Mersey Estuaries, between Liverpool and North Wales. Wirral is bordered to the south by the district of Cheshire West and Chester; to the east by the City of Liverpool and by the southern parts of the Metropolitan Borough of Sefton; and to the west by the Welsh county of Flintshire.
- 2.3 Wirral is a tightly constrained Metropolitan Borough with just under half (45%) of the land area designated as Green Belt. This has been a conscious policy of the Council with the aim of focusing regeneration in the East of the Borough. This area has seen the decline of the traditional heavy engineering sector and as a result has areas of docklands which are vacant and underused alongside a declining town centre in Birkenhead. These characteristics provide an opportunity for transformational regeneration which will not only benefit Wirral but will contribute economically to the Liverpool City Region.
- 2.4 Wirral is also heavily regulated from an environmental perspective with significant areas designated for protection along its coastlines, Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Sites of Biological Importance and is also subject to significant areas liable to flooding along the coast and river corridors. These areas also provide Wirral with a high-quality environment which is one of the Borough's key assets, but which can impact on housing delivery in the areas where these protections exist.
- 2.5 Wirral also has Housing Zone status for Wirral Waters and parts of the Electoral Wards of Rock Ferry, Moreton and Bromborough.

- 2.6 The graph below shows the housing delivery performance over the past ten years. The key feature is that housing delivery has accelerated in the last two years due to the activities of the Council and an improvement in the residential market.
- 2.7 The need for enhanced housing delivery has increased significantly since the revocation of the former Regional Spatial Strategy in May 2013 and the introduction of the National Planning Policy Framework. The reduction in delivery to the low-point in 2011/12 was due to the impacts of the previous national recession.

Figure 1 – Net housing delivery 2008-2018



- 2.8 Wirral’s supply of housing sites currently consists mainly of small sites, fewer than 10 units, with very few sites delivering more than 25+ units. Due to significant viability issues (caused by land values, site conditions and market factors) in the east of the Borough and tight Green Belt boundaries, larger housing schemes often do not come forward in the area, therefore the supply largely relies on smaller schemes, making it difficult to achieve the housing target. There is demand for housing in the west of the Borough but if this was to be allowed it would make regeneration in the east more difficult to achieve.
- 2.9 The latest viability report can be viewed at:
<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/planning-and-building/local-plans-and-planning-policy/community-infrastructure-levy>
- 2.10 An updated viability report will be available alongside the Regulation 18 Local Plan, in November 2019.

3 What we have done to accelerate housing delivery

Creating a Place Directorate

- 3.1 The Council is creating a new Place Directorate to bring a number of Council activities into one place with the sole objective of delivering economic and housing growth to clear timelines, which will be established by September 2019.

Modernising the Planning Service

- 3.2 The Council recognises that the planning service needs to be modernised to facilitate the acceleration of housing permissions and implementation. Key to this are the pre-application, planning process and post approval (discharge of conditions, section 106's and section 278's) stages coupled with a review of the Scheme of Delegation and the functioning of Planning Committee and the engagement of Elected Members.
- 3.3 The Planning Advisory Service has recently completed a three day review of the Council's Development Management service. Their recommendations now being implemented. A Peer Review of the planning service by the LGA has also just been completed recommending a number of further improvements to enable the Council to become even more effective. A number of changes have already been made to the Planning Committee to create a strategic planning function and performance of processing major applications continues to improve and is well above the Government thresholds.
- 3.4 The Council is looking to use Planning Performance Agreements to accelerate planning decisions, and to increase density to achieve a greater supply of housing, where appropriate.

Liverpool City Region Combined Authority

- 3.5 The Council is part of the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority and works actively with other Councils, under the duty to co-operate, to deliver the housing needs of the Region. The Draft Housing Statement for the LCR sets out the housing priorities which in addition to meeting housing need, also underscore the importance of housing standards, quality, and the importance of infrastructure – economic, social and environmental – to delivering housing. Work is currently progressing to identify a pipeline of key priority sites along with the financial resources needed to remove the barriers to development and this will enable the acceleration of housing in the LCR and Wirral.

Strategic Partnerships with funding agencies

- 3.6 Work is underway, with Homes England who have identified Wirral Waters as one of their key priority areas, to build a strategic partnership to deliver residential development in Birkenhead to support the activities of Peel and the Growth Company. It is expected that a formal ask for funding, across a number of sites, to provide infrastructure and other enabling funding, will be made in September 2019. The partnership with Homes England is particularly important as the funding provided will unlock the potential of development and once this starts to happen it will reduce the viability challenges.

Working with Registered Providers (RPs)

- 3.7 RPs have a key role to play in delivering housing in Wirral. Wirral has one of the largest RPs in the North West (Magenta Living) and they have Strategic Partnership status, which gives them greater flexibility in terms of how they can work with the Council. Significant engagement is in place with a range of RPs who are providing a range of tenures to meet housing needs and this is going to be strengthened by the re-envisioning of the Strategic Housing partnership where the RP sector will be working with the Council to enable the delivery of the Vision for Wirral.

Stakeholder Engagement

- 3.8 This is critical to future housing delivery and includes engagement with small and large developers, land promoters, private and public landowners, infrastructure providers and neighbouring authorities with adjoining or cross-boundary sites. Active engagement with stakeholders is helping the Council to identify key relevant local issues and challenges, which are now clearly understood by the Council, and effective solutions are being explored as set out in other parts of this report.

Wirral Waters

- 3.9 Wirral Waters is one of the largest regeneration projects in the UK. It currently has outline planning permission (approved in 2012) in place for up to 13,500 units to be developed over the next 25 years.
- 3.10 In November 2017, Wirral Council submitted a bid to central Government for funding under the Housing Infrastructure Fund – Marginal Viability Fund. The grant agreement was issued by Homes England in February 2019. The grant of £6,004,160 from the Housing Infrastructure Fund has been awarded for allocation by March 2021 in order to unlock residential development. This grant will enable the delivery of a package of infrastructure works including land remediation, public realm works, and utilities provision. Delivery of these works will enable the delivery of 1106 residential units at Wirral Waters including the Wirral Waters One (Legacy) project, the Urban Splash development and the Belong Urban Village. The Council expect that 881 dwellings will be brought forward through these schemes within the next five years.
- 3.11 Full Planning permission has already been granted for Belong and Wirral Waters One has been approved subject to the signing of a section 106 legal agreement; and the Urban Splash application is currently in the planning process.
- 3.12 The Council has strengthened its strategic relationship with Peel Land and Development and is currently working on a fifteen year housing trajectory with a focus on accelerating delivery in the Wirral Waters area.

Beaufort Road, Birkenhead

- 3.13 The Council and Keepmoat Homes have received a grant offer under the Local Authority Accelerated Construction (LACC) programme to address viability issues on this site, designated for residential purposes in the Council's existing Unitary Development Plan, and detailed planning permission for 177 units is expected to be approved in August 2019 with anticipated start of site for remediation works by the end of 2019 with completion of the units delivered in the next five years.

Wirral Growth Company

- 3.14 In April 2019, the Council entered into a joint venture arrangement, with MUSE Developments, to establish the Wirral Growth Company. This Company will accelerate the regeneration of a number of Council assets across Wirral for a mix of commercial and residential purposes.
- 3.15 The first residential schemes are beginning to emerge, with 67 units on land at Foxfield in Moreton coming into the planning process in the Autumn.
- 3.16 Discussions about bringing forward other sites within the context of the Growth Company's Business Plan are underway and these opportunities will also be added to the housing trajectory for the next five years.

Review of designated employment land

- 3.17 A review is being undertaken of employment land for which there is low or no demand, to consider if it can be used for residential purposes. This work will be completed by the end of August 2019. Already, some significant sites (with potential for over 1,000 units) are emerging as strong candidates for new homes and landowners and developers are engaged with the Council at pre-application stage on a number of these sites. It is expected that planning applications will be submitted in September 2019.

Brownfield Register

- 3.18 The Council is working on moving sites to Part 2 of its statutory Brownfield Land Register, which effectively grants planning permission for such sites, to further accelerate the process for delivering new homes on suitable brownfield sites.

Reviewing the remaining Council assets

- 3.19 The Council is reviewing its remaining assets, which will be completed by December 2019, to see if any additional sites can be brought forward for residential development to add to the housing land supply.

Creating the environment for Investment - addressing viability

- 3.20 This is the critical factor in implementing residential schemes in the east of the Borough. The Council has engaged specialist advisors, PNB Paribas, to look at present and future viability and to explore all the ways possible of addressing these issues. This is a multi-faceted approach, not just relating to sites and infrastructure but also creating market confidence, exploring market sectors that are not currently in Wirral and championing digital, green and innovative projects – with commercial, residential, leisure, retail and industrial uses providing a mix to create a ‘new’ place which attracts investment and sustainable development using the natural characteristics of the area, such as the waterfront, coast and countryside.

4 Ensuring it all happens and performance improves

- 4.1 Doing the right things, in the right places at the right time is essential and important to the Council. Delivery of key strategic documents, such as the Local Plan is progressing to agreed timescales and the focus on proactive delivery is demonstrated by the actions already taken.
- 4.2 The Council has a corporate approach to growth and delivery through the Regeneration and Growth Board. This is chaired by the Leader of the Council, involves key Cabinet Members with responsibility for the Local Plan; Jobs and Growth; Finance; Housing and Planning; supported by the Chief Executive and appropriate Directors and Assistant Directors.
- 4.3 The Board strategically considers a number of matters including:
- a) strategic vision
 - b) ways of achieving this (for example direct funding, use of Council assets, bidding for Government funding, resourcing etc) and
 - c) delivery against timescales, with programme management approach subject to performance monitoring.
- 4.4 For the Local Plan, there is a Local Plan Member Advisory Group (consisting of the Group Leaders, Cabinet Members for the Local Plan; and Housing and Planning; and the Chair of Planning Committee) which meets fortnightly to monitor progress of the Local Plan. There is a fortnightly Programme Board to manage the technical details. The Chief Executive is the Senior Responsible Officer for the Local Plan and the Cabinet Member for the Local Plan is the lead Councillor. Regular meetings are held with the Ministry for Communities, Housing and Local Government, which, in addition to discussing Local Plan progress, provide the opportunity for funding discussions for the implementation of the Local Plan in terms of future housing delivery.
- 4.5 The Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee, at each meeting, receives an update report by the Assistant Director for Major Growth Projects and Housing Delivery on the progress of the Local Plan.

- 4.6 As part of the new Place Directorate, the Council will be creating a multi-disciplinary Housing Delivery Team which will specifically focus on housing projects across the Borough, supporting landowners and developers and having the capacity to deal with commercial and financial issues as well as the normal site and infrastructure considerations. This team will be performance focused and tasked with achieving key targets. It will operate commercially in the housing market as an enabler providing solutions to a range of implementation issues.

5 Lead Councillor and Lead Official

- 5.1 The Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning is the Lead Councillor with responsibility for housing delivery in Wirral.
- 5.2 The Senior Responsible Officer, the Lead official, is the Corporate Director for Economic and Housing Growth.
- 5.3 They will provide a monthly report to the Regeneration and Growth Board on the Action Plan.

6 The Action Plan (August 2019 to August 2020)

ACTION	LEAD	TARGET DATE FOR COMPLETION	STATUS	NARRATIVE
Adopt local plan	Assistant Director for Major Growth Projects and Housing Delivery (AD)	Submission November 2020	Green	Regulation 18 to Cabinet November 2019 Regulation to Council December 2019 Regulation 18 Consultation January 2020 Regulation 19 to Council July 2020 Submission of plan November 2020
Strategic Partnership with Homes England	Interim Corporate Director for Economic and Housing Growth (ICD)	September 2019	Green	To agree priorities for future funding
Developers Forum private sector	ICD	October 2019	Green	Six monthly meetings to commence from October 2019
Modernisation of planning service to support housing delivery	ICD	March 2020	Green	Actions set out in Peer Review Action Plan including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • review scheme of delegation

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				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • review Planning Committee structure • Planning Performance Agreements
Partnership Agreements with key developers and Growth Company regarding housing delivery	ICD	September 2019	Green	Work commenced
Members Regeneration Board to oversee Housing Delivery. Performance Management Framework to be developed to monitor and review progress.	ICD	September 2019	Green	Board being established will receive monthly update reports
Multi-disciplinary Housing Delivery Team to be formed	ICD	October 2019	Green	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team formed October 2019 • Three year performance Action Plan November 2019 to March 2022 • Reviewed annually
Implement Place Directorate	ICD	September 2019	Green	To bring together a range of Council services to accelerate the delivery of housing and growth
Re-envisioned strategic housing partnership	ICD	October 2019	Green	To enable the Council to deliver its place and housing objectives