

WIRRAL COUNCIL

CABINET – 24 JUNE 2010

REPORT OF THE DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE/DIRECTOR OF
CORPORATE SERVICES

**INTEGRATED REGENERATION STUDY FOR BIRKENHEAD AND WIRRAL
WATERS**

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report presents the findings of the Integrated Regeneration Study for Birkenhead and Wirral Waters (IRS) produced on behalf of the Council by GVA Grimley.
- 1.2 The report sets out the background to the study, the preparation process, including stakeholder engagement and the key findings and recommendations.
- 1.3 The report also explains how the IRS is an important element of the evidence base for Wirral's Core Strategy Development Plan Document and outlines how the key findings of the study will inform a series of guiding principles for Wirral Waters which in turn will shape the consideration of Peel's proposals for Wirral Waters.
- 1.4 The report recommends that the IRS be adopted by the Council as a material consideration; that the findings of the IRS be used to inform the content of the emerging Core Strategy Development Plan Document; that the thematic relationships table linking the IRS and the East Float component of Wirral Waters (appended to this report) be used to inform the consideration of the current planning application by Peel holdings; that the thematic relationships table is taken forward alongside the Core Strategy; and that a further report be brought back to Cabinet on delivery options in due course.

2. Background and Context

- 2.1 The Integrated Regeneration Study for Birkenhead and Wirral Waters (IRS) was commissioned by the Council (Cabinet 5th February 2009, Minute 352 refers). GVA Grimley were appointed in September 2009, following a tender process (reported to Economy and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee 15th September 2009, minute 16 refers).
- 2.2 The timing of the Study is particularly important as the Council is also considering the major economic opportunity for regenerating Wirral at Wirral Waters. Wirral Waters is approaching a key milestone in the determination of the planning application for East Float (W/OUT/2009/06509). Although Wirral Waters is very important to the regeneration of the Borough, it must be integrated with the surrounding

areas, specifically including the HMRI area and Birkenhead Town Centre, which are both critical to the Council and to the wider interests of the Liverpool City Region in terms of the transformation of the sub regional economy. The IRS offers the opportunity to consider the spatial integration of these initiatives and the integration of economic programmes through the Investment Strategy themes of People, Places and Business.

- 2.3 Beyond the Council, there is a need to influence the investment programmes of the Council's partners (including Merseytravel, Registered Social Landlords and NHS Wirral) to ensure that all their programmes benefit the regeneration of the study area. Although the future of several external agencies is currently being reviewed by Government the North West Development Agency (NWDA) and the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA, through the so-called 'Single Conversation') have both requested a comprehensive regeneration study for the study area to provide a framework for their future financial investment decisions.
- 2.4 Whilst the future of agencies such as NWDA and HCA is subject to the new Government's strategy, any resources available for regeneration will need to be focused and prioritised. New funding mechanisms will need to be identified and explored as part of the delivery plan. The Government has announced in its manifesto that it will maintain the goal of ending child poverty in the UK by 2020 and that it will provide incentives for local authorities to deliver sustainable development, including for new homes and businesses. The IRS study area contains some of the highest levels of child poverty in the country and also presents the opportunities to deliver sustainable development through Wirral Waters, the HMRI and surrounding areas.
- 2.5 The IRS aims are as follows:
 - To provide a sound basis for spatial planning across the study area
 - To provide a framework for the integration of the Wirral Waters proposals with the surrounding residential neighbourhoods and Birkenhead Town Centre
 - To guide the investment of external financial resources with the aim of regenerating the study area and reviving failing housing markets
 - To inform the development of the Local Development Framework and guide future planning decisions in the study area
 - To provide a single integrated vision for the regeneration of the study area
- 2.6 The IRS has been through a series of stages (outlined to Cabinet on 14 January 2010). The finalised IRS produced by the consultants is appended to this report.

3. Stakeholder Consultation

- 3.1 Whilst the Study has not been subject to full public consultation (which will be carried out in the context of the Council's Local Development Framework Core Strategy), it has been subject to a series of stakeholder consultations, Steering and Project Group meetings and workshops (listed in the GVA Grimley document appended to this report). The results of this stakeholder consultation, alongside an evidence base which has been used to develop the key findings and options, have been subject to a Sustainability Appraisal consistent with the Council's own Sustainability Appraisal Framework.

4. Key Features and Conclusions

- 4.1 Key components of the IRS, which are outlined in more detail below, include:

- A Vision and Objectives for Birkenhead,
- A Spatial Framework, which is a central element of the IRS
- A delivery and next steps section

Vision and Objectives for Birkenhead (Chapter 3)

- 4.2 The Vision for Birkenhead has been informed by stakeholder engagement and baseline analysis and is set out on pages 21-23 of the IRS. The vision is underpinned by a number of guiding principles and foundations for change: these in turn have informed the development of the Spatial Framework discussed below.

Spatial Framework (Chapters 3 & 4)

- 4.3 The Spatial Framework aims to provide a single, integrated comprehensive spatial plan for Birkenhead to demonstrate how physical change and development could potentially help address key economic, social and environmental issues in the area. The Spatial Framework is based upon a series of eight thematic principles, set out in Chapter 3, which are each supported by a set of objectives to guide future development, regeneration and investment in Birkenhead. The eight thematic principles are:

1. Achieving Economic Prosperity
2. Town Centre Restructuring
3. Take Advantage of the Waterfront
4. Enhanced Education and Learning Offer
5. Health and Well Being
6. A Sustainable Residential Offer
7. Places, Spaces and Connections
8. Sustainable Future

- 4.4 The Spatial Framework itself forms the whole of Chapter 4 of the IRS and sets out ideas and proposals for change that include a 'bottom up' as well as a 'top down' approach, based both on wider concepts that react to large scale, strategic issues and opportunities and on more localised, site specific issues and opportunities.
- 4.5 A detailed baseline analysis of local issues and opportunities has informed the preparation of an Opportunities Area Plan, which provides the foundation to the Spatial Framework, by identifying locations where physical change has the greatest potential.
- 4.6 In spatial terms, the 'big picture' concepts - the overall approach to change - are defined by three central ideas that look to enhance and re-establish key components of Birkenhead:
1. Improving the attractiveness and legibility of key routes and enhancing the overall sense of connectivity through Birkenhead;
 2. Improving the quality of key areas of public realm, and the connectivity between important public open spaces; and
 3. Developing a land use structure that can guide development decision in a way that helps to improve the 'intactness' and coherence of Birkenhead's urban structure
- 4.7 The Spatial Framework includes proposals informed by these three central ideas, represented by Framework Plans for Movement, Public Realm and Land Use, each supported by written strategies.
- 4.8 The Spatial Framework contains 13 Focus Areas defined by similarities in spatial characteristics and common objectives and themes for development and change. Proposed regeneration objectives have been developed for each Focus Area to provide a structure for regeneration activity and a guide for coordinating multi-service delivery and investment moving forward. The Framework includes a synopsis of potential for individual 'Neighbourhood Focus Areas', which can form the starting point for developing detailed planning policy for the Birkenhead area within the emerging Local Development Framework.

A Delivery and Next Steps (Chapter 5)

- 4.9 The delivery and next steps section emphasises the challenges involved in delivering the IRS and identifies that it will require a multi-agency approach using a wide range of skills. It identifies a number of actions to run in parallel with and be co-ordinated alongside the delivery of Wirral Waters by Peel. These actions are to:
- Accelerate the implementation of the HMRI programme in the Birkenhead Priority Neighbourhood

- Advance the concept of an education cluster/campus centred around a possible university precinct campus and re-located Wirral Metropolitan College
- Prepare an integrated masterplan for Birkenhead Town Centre
- Put in place an integrated strategy to tackle the underlying socio-economic problems of the study area
- Develop the East Wirral Traffic Model and Transport Strategy for the Town Centre

4.10 In terms of policy development and engagement, the ongoing preparation of the Core Strategy is seen as key. There is also some examination of potential delivery vehicles. It is noted however that there is declining support nationally for traditional regeneration delivery models such as Urban Development or Regeneration Companies (such as Liverpool Vision) and consequently a new approach to bring together public and private sectors is needed. Noting the development of the Jessica Merseyside Urban Development Fund, GVA recommend consideration be given to setting up a delivery vehicle in the mould of an Urban Regeneration Company which is Council led but slightly removed (arms length) with private investment and a small core team to take work forward. Chester Renaissance is highlighted as a useful comparison. GVA recognise that further work is needed to explore this.

4.11 Finally, in relation to next steps, GVA identify several key actions:

- Feeding the findings into the LDF process (this is discussed further below)
- Update and carry forward the HMRI programme
- Undertake a feasibility study into potential delivery vehicle options
- Prepare a masterplan for Birkenhead Town Centre

5. Planning Policy Implications

5.1 The GVA Grimley report refers to the Strategic Context in which the Study has been prepared. The North West of England Plan - Regional Spatial Strategy to 2021 (RSS) was approved in September 2008 and currently forms part of the development plan, alongside the Unitary Development Plan and the emerging Local Development Framework.

5.2 However, the new Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Rt Hon Eric Pickles MP) has announced that Regional Strategies will be abolished by the Government. Until the abolition is confirmed through statute, the Secretary of State wishes his statement to be a material planning consideration. The exact implications of this change have yet to be clarified, although the Government remains

committed to the principle of local councils' decision making through local planning, without the framework of regional numbers and plans.

- 5.3 It was always intended that the IRS should inform both the Council's determination of Wirral Waters' planning applications and the emerging Local Development Framework Core Strategy. GVA Grimley note that, with the uncertain future for Regional Strategies, a specific study for a key area of the Borough, such as the IRS area would become more valuable. This point has been echoed by Government Office North West in their response on the Council's Core Strategy Spatial Options (to be reported to Cabinet with the Core Strategy Preferred Options in due course):

'it is important that the Council sets out its own vision for the Birkenhead Dock estate as the document (ie Core Strategy) develops, as well as setting out what has happened/been proposed so far. For example, links to the surrounding HMRI area/populace could be stressed. PPS4 considerations will be key, as will the work you are currently undertaking on Birkenhead and Wirral Waters Integrated Regeneration Study. In this respect, it is important the implications of the work (ie IRS) are fed into the document (ie Core Strategy) at an early stage and should not be left too late.'

- 5.4 It is therefore timely for Members to consider carefully the issues raised by the IRS, before they consider the final content of the Local Development Framework Core Strategy at Cabinet and Planning Committee determines the Wirral Waters East Float planning application. Appended to this report is a table which shows the relationship between the themes developed in the IRS, a proposed vision for Wirral Waters and proposed objectives to ensure the delivery of benefits from Wirral Waters. These relationships provide a response to Government Office's advice and a starting point for the consideration of this area in the Local Development Framework and in the determination of the Wirral Waters East Float planning application.
- 5.5 If Members are minded to approve this report and the IRS, this will provide support to the objectives for Wirral Waters and the wider area. In statutory terms, the area of the IRS remains a high priority within RSS, although with its uncertain status, the weight to be applied to this approach may now diminish. What can be taken forward is continuing priority to regeneration within the emerging Core Strategy.
- 5.6 Whilst the Government is likely to review the wide range of Planning Policy Statements produced in the past, they currently carry considerable weight and still focus on sustainable development, following a sequential approach, both spatially (within particularly deprived urban areas) and in terms of the use of brownfield land before greenfield land. The Government, in its Programme for Government 'Freedom Fairness Responsibility' is committed to maintaining Green

Belt, further protecting green areas and giving local councils new powers to stop 'garden grabbing'.

- 5.7 Therefore, whilst RSS will be abolished, it is likely that Wirral Council will be able to develop a planning strategy, informed by the IRS, which could focus regeneration in an area of the Borough, long-recognised as a regeneration priority. The IRS provides an important independent verification of the continuing need for such priority, noting that economic and social circumstances in the IRS area are continuing to decline. Wirral Waters can help to uplift this area but a planning response must be integrated across the wider hinterland.
- 5.8 The conclusions of the IRS will be assimilated into the Core Strategy Preferred Options document currently in preparation in line with Government Office advice and the study itself will form part of the supporting evidence base. As with the other background studies completed to date, the IRS will be available for scrutiny and comment alongside the Preferred Options Report during a six week public consultation process, which is anticipated to take place over the summer.

6. Wirral Waters Alignment

- 6.1 As Members are aware, Peel Holdings' planning application for a major mixed use development at East Float, which comprises the largest part of their Wirral Waters proposals, is to be determined by Planning Committee in the near future. The IRS provides a framework, which sets the Wirral Waters proposals in a wider context and develops linkages with HMRI and Birkenhead Town Centre.
- 6.2 The table appended to this report shows the relationship between the thematic headings and themes developed in the IRS and the Council's proposed vision and objectives for Wirral Waters. This provides a structure and framework for the Wirral Waters development to ensure the benefits from the development are fully realised and integrated in future phases. This provides a response to Government Office North West and ATLAS (the Government funded Advisory Team for Large Applications Service) advice that the IRS can provide a context for determining Wirral Waters planning applications. The vision and objectives can also be carried forward into the Local Development Framework.
- 6.3 Approval of the table appended to this report provides a clear view of the Council's support to the vision and objectives set out. Whilst the IRS cannot have the status of the development plan, it is a material consideration, being a statement of the Council's intent.

7. Financial implications

- 7.1 Cabinet 5th February 2009 (Minute 352) agreed a budget of £120,000 for the Study, to be funded 50:50 by the Housing Market Renewal Initiative and Growth Fund.

8. Staffing implications

- 8.1 The study has been managed by existing staff in the Corporate Services Department.

9. Equal Opportunities/Equality Impact Assessment

- 9.1 The Study has been subject to consultation with key stakeholders and will assist in developing solutions to meeting the housing needs of vulnerable people

10. Community Safety implications

- 10.1 HMRI and the New Growth Point programmes aim to create safer neighbourhoods through creating safer living environments.

11. Local Agenda 21 implications

- 11.1 The level of new development proposed in Birkenhead will see the construction of homes and buildings which are highly energy efficient and more environmentally sustainable than the buildings that they will replace.

12. Planning implications

- 12.1 The purpose of the Study is to provide a co-ordinated update of existing strategies and emerging strategies for Wirral Waters, the Growth Point and Housing Market Renewal Initiatives. Co-ordination of development in this area is central to the achievement of the Council's Investment Strategy objectives. The Study will feed into the Council's Local Development Framework and provide a spatial focus for the areas around the Wirral Waters project, for which Peel Holdings are preparing a Strategy Regeneration Framework, spatial masterplans and have submitted a major planning application (W/OUT/2009/06509), which will be determined by the Council's Planning Committee in due course.
- 12.2 Later phases of this Study will provide for the integration of the Birkenhead spatial masterplans into the Local Development Framework, potentially through the preparation of a series of Area Action Plans.
- 12.3 Regeneration of Birkenhead and south Seacombe is consistent with the existing Regional Spatial Strategy for the North West (although the Government's manifesto and a recent Ministerial Statement referred to elsewhere in this report sets out the Government's intention to abolish

RSS). Regeneration in this area is nevertheless a long-held priority of the Council.

13. Anti-poverty implications

- 13.1 The potential regeneration programmes which this area will benefit from will tackle fuel poverty through energy efficiency and will promote income and wealth via employment creation.

14. Human Rights implications

- 14.1 There are no implications arising directly from this report.

15. Social Inclusion implications

- 15.1 Regeneration in Birkenhead and in Wirral in general, aims to promote greater inclusion of residents, improve socio-economic outcomes for residents and improve neighbourhood sustainability.

16. Local Member Support implications

- 16.1 The wards affected directly by this report are Bidston and St James, Birkenhead and Tranmere and Seacombe.

17. Background Papers

- 17.1 Previous reports on this subject can be found as follows:

Cabinet Report 5th February 2009 seeking approval to commission the study

[http://democracy.wirral.gov.uk/Published/C00000121/M00000355/AI00003378/\\$CABreq090205rep3.docA.ps.pdf](http://democracy.wirral.gov.uk/Published/C00000121/M00000355/AI00003378/$CABreq090205rep3.docA.ps.pdf) Cabinet report, 14 January 2010

Progress report to Cabinet - 14th January 2010-06-10

[http://wir06metrognome.admin.ad.wirral.gov.uk/Published/C00000121/M00000734/\\$\\$ADocPackPublic.pdf](http://wir06metrognome.admin.ad.wirral.gov.uk/Published/C00000121/M00000734/$$ADocPackPublic.pdf)

18. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 18.1 That the Integrated Regeneration Study for Birkenhead and Wirral Waters be adopted by the Council as a material planning consideration in relation to development proposals in the vicinity of the study area;
- 18.2 That the findings of the Integrated Regeneration Study for Birkenhead and Wirral Waters be used to inform the content of the emerging Core Strategy Development Plan Document;
- 18.3 That the thematic relationships table linking the Integrated Regeneration Strategy for Birkenhead and Wirral Waters and the East Float component of Wirral Waters (appended to this report) be used to

inform the consideration of the current planning application by Peel holdings and be taken forward alongside the Core Strategy; and

- 18.4 That a further report be brought back to Cabinet on delivery options In due course.

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