

# WIRRAL COUNCIL

## CABINET

1ST SEPTEMBER 2011

<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>SETTING THE SCENE FOR WIRRAL WATERS – A GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT FRAMEWORK</b>
<b>WARD/S AFFECTED:</b>	<b>SEACOMBE, BIDSTON &amp; ST JAMES, BIRKENHEAD &amp; TRANMERE</b>
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>INTERIM DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE SERVICES</b>
<b>RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER:</b>	<b>COUNCILLOR PHIL DAVIES REGENERATION AND PLANNING STRATEGY</b>
<b>KEY DECISION?</b>	YES

### 1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Forestry Commission, Mersey Forest and Peel Holdings have been discussing the development of a Green Infrastructure Framework for areas around the Wirral Waters site in Inner Wirral. The Framework's objectives include the improvement of the green infrastructure in this area, providing access between Wirral Waters and Birkenhead Town Centre, public transport hubs and existing greenspaces such as Birkenhead Park and Bidston Moss.
- 1.2 The North West Development Agency has made £1.4 million available over 3 years for this project to be delivered by the Forestry Commission, Mersey Forest and Groundwork Merseyside. Wirral Council has an important role to play in steering this investment, with partners. Local communities also have a role in delivery of the projects, including through the use of an Intermediate Labour Market.
- 1.3 This report provides the background to this project and advises Members of the broad implications for ongoing maintenance (although exact details will only become available as individual projects are developed).

### 2.0 RECOMMENDATION/S

- 2.1 That Cabinet endorses the approach to be taken to greening Inner Wirral through the Setting the Scene for Wirral Waters Green Infrastructure Framework project.
- 2.2 That Cabinet agrees to receive further reports on the financial and maintenance implications of individual projects within the Green Infrastructure Framework.

### **3.0 REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 Cabinet is to be made aware of the Setting the Scene for Wirral Waters Green Infrastructure Framework and the benefits that this project can bring for communities around Wirral Waters. Cabinet is also to be made aware that there will be maintenance liabilities arising from the project and that officers will report further to Members on these liabilities as they are clarified.

### **4.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES**

- 4.1 The Forestry Commission and Mersey Forest have been discussing a Green Infrastructure Framework with Peel Holdings for the area of North Birkenhead and South Wallasey outside the Wirral Waters main site, within the Partnership Areas. The objectives of this framework include the need to link Wirral Waters with Birkenhead Town Centre, public transport interchanges (rail and ferry) and existing Green Infrastructure such as Birkenhead Park and Bidston Moss. There is also a need to upgrade the surrounding Partnership Areas to prevent Wirral Waters from becoming isolated in the future, as whilst Wirral Waters is at the heart of the area and will have a catalytic effect, the Partnership Areas are now in need of environmental enhancement in their own right. It is important to carry forward environmental improvements to support the housing improvements brought forward by the Housing Market Renewal Initiative.
- 4.2 The North West Development Agency has now agreed to fund a Setting the Scene for Growth Project over the next three years (2012/13 £400,000, 2013/14 £500,000 and 2014/15 £500,000, total £1.4 million) from the Newlands 2 Programme. Oversight of this project has been transferred with effect from 16<sup>th</sup> July 2011, to the Homes and Communities Agency, as successor body to the North West Development Agency. Members will be aware of the funding secured from Newlands 1 for landscape improvement works at Bidston Moss and Cross Lane, which together provide Green Infrastructure gateways either side of Junction 1 of the M53 Motorway. This Newlands 2 Project provides a suitable next phase of Green Infrastructure improvements at the heart of the Borough. There is potential synergy between this project and other projects funded by the Homes and Communities Agency in the area.
- 4.3 The project will be delivered by Forestry Commission, Mersey Forest and Groundwork Merseyside. Wirral Council is an important part of the Steering Group, alongside those organisations and Peel Holdings.
- 4.4 The project will involve Green Streets (which will have a maintenance liability for the Council), temporary and permanent greening of development sites and vacant land. There is therefore scope for integration with Council programmes (Local Transport Plan sustainable transport programmes, highway maintenance and Housing Market Renewal) and land assets (vacant and development sites), as well as integration with Homes and Communities Agency assets (vacant and development sites) in North Birkenhead.
- 4.5 Whilst funding is limited to £1.4 million over 3 years, it is intended that this will have a catalytic effect and bring forward private sector interest and investment

around Wirral Waters. It is not intended to duplicate any Green Infrastructure funding gained as a result of the Wirral Waters Section 106 legal agreement.

- 4.6 The project is consistent with the Birkenhead and Wirral Waters Integrated Regeneration Strategy (reported to Cabinet 24<sup>th</sup> June 2010, Minute 43 refers) and will contribute to the Green Infrastructure Strategy being prepared by the Council as part of the Local Development Framework Core Strategy (reported to Cabinet 13<sup>th</sup> January 2011, Minute 283 refers).
- 4.7 Mersey Forest evaluates the impact of the £1.4 million work as a net present value of £29.4 million, including £12.7 million Gross Value Added (GVA) contribution and £16.7 million other economic benefits. These benefits are from direct employment in the project and the improved opportunities for economic growth in the local area.
- 4.8 The Project Specification submitted to the Homes and Communities Agency (appended to this report), sets out a number of green infrastructure projects in support of Wirral Waters Early Win development projects. In addition to the Green Streets and temporary landscaping, these green infrastructure projects include the creation of new greenways and greenspaces, better connections for Bidston Moss and the use of Intermediate Labour Markets, providing training and work for people in Birkenhead and Inner Wirral.
- 4.9 It is intended that the projects will be taken forward in 3 phases:

Phase 1 2012/13:

Bidston Dock and Bidston Moss access improvements  
Intermediate Labour Market development

Phase 2 2013/2014

Green Streets and Gateways  
Meanwhile Land Planting (temporary greening of vacant land and development sites)  
Long Term Green Infrastructure (permanent greening)  
International Trade Centre and City Boulevard West  
Northbank and Northside green infrastructure

Phase 3 2014/15

Green Streets and Gateways  
Meanwhile Land Planting  
Long Term Green Infrastructure  
Four Bridges and Hydraulic Tower  
International Trade Centre and City Boulevard West  
Northbank and Northside

## **5.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

- 5.1 The principal risks for the Council are attached to ongoing maintenance of the Green Infrastructure provided through the project. This would include tree maintenance and grass-cutting on Green Streets and potentially ongoing maintenance of landscaped sites, if these are not maintained through the project or by landowners.
- 5.2 However, at this stage, the longer-term cost and resource implications of the Setting the Scene for Wirral Waters Green Infrastructure Framework are not yet fully quantified. As the Framework's Action Plan is developed, further reports will be brought to Cabinet.

## **6.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 6.1 No other options have been considered, as this report sets out a response to proposals that have been developed by the Forestry Commission, Mersey Forest and Peel Holdings, using funds initially provided by the North West Development Agency and now controlled by the Homes and Communities Agency.

## **7.0 CONSULTATION**

- 7.1 This project has been developed with Forestry Commission, Mersey Forest, Groundwork Merseyside and Peel Holdings. Funding has been allocated by North West Development Agency and the Homes and Communities Agency. As individual projects within the Setting the Scene for Wirral Waters are developed, local communities should be consulted on the extent of the works proposed.

## **8.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS**

- 8.1 In addition to consultation on individual projects within the Setting the Scene for Wirral Waters, local community groups could also be involved in the Intermediate Labour Market implementation.

## **9.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS**

- 9.1 The financial implications of this project for the Council are not yet quantified. As individual projects are developed, the ongoing maintenance liability on the Council will be assessed and reported to Cabinet before the projects are agreed.
- 9.2 There are no additional staffing implications identified at this stage. Support for the Steering Group and project development can be provided from within existing staffing resources in the Technical Services and Corporate Services Departments.
- 9.3 In addition to responsibilities for highway assets, the Council owns various parcels of land in the project area. The impact of the project on these land parcels will be assessed as individual projects are developed. Sites intended for built development or disposal would not be permanently landscaped but interim landscaping can often improve the marketability of development sites.

## **10.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report at this stage. The project is promoted by Forestry Commission and is being implemented by Mersey Forest and Groundwork Merseyside. If Wirral landholdings are to be planted, then access to the land will be by way of licence, to be applied in accordance with the Council's Standing Orders.
- 10.2 The improvement of the Council's landholdings does not imply that any uplift in value will be shared with the Forestry Commission and no clawback will be payable to the Homes and Communities Agency as a result of such an increase in value.

## **11.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 There are no specific implications in this report for equal opportunities, including women, ethnic minorities or the elderly.
- 11.2 An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is not required as the proposed Setting the Scene for Wirral Waters Green Infrastructure Framework is being prepared by external organisations.

## **12.0 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS**

- 12.1 Green Infrastructure provision increases urban cooling and absorbs carbon dioxide. The project will therefore result in a net reduction in carbon emissions.

## **13.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

- 13.1 The Council is preparing a Green Infrastructure Strategy for the Borough, as part of the Local Development Framework Core Strategy. The Setting the Scene for Wirral Waters Green Infrastructure Framework will complement the Birkenhead and Wirral Waters Integrated Regeneration Strategy and integrate with the Council's Core Strategy. It will also set an integration framework for a critical area of the Borough, around Wirral Waters.
- 13.2 Individual projects for permanent landscaping may require planning permission if the land is not already greenspace or if engineering operations are necessary. The need for planning permission will be assessed as individual projects are developed.

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## **APPENDICES**

Setting the Scene for Wirral Waters – A Green Infrastructure Framework, Peel Holdings, July 2011

## **REFERENCE MATERIAL**

- (i) Setting the Scene for Wirral Waters – A Green Infrastructure Framework, submitted to Homes and Communities Agency, 16<sup>th</sup> July 2011
- (ii) Birkenhead and Wirral Waters Integrated Regeneration Strategy, June 2010

## **SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)**

<b>Council Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>None</b>	