



WIRRAL METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

PLANNING AND COMPULSORY PURCHASE ACT 2004

CORE STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT PLAN DOCUMENT

SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL SCOPING REPORT

JULY 2007

[blank for copying]

CONTENTS

<u>1</u>	<u>Non-Technical Summary</u>	5
<u>2</u>	<u>Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment</u>	7
<u>3</u>	<u>The Proposed Core Strategy Development Plan Document</u>	11
<u>4</u>	<u>Stage A - Setting the Context, Baseline and Scope</u>	14
<u>5</u>	<u>Habitats Regulations Assessment</u>	27
<u>6</u>	<u>The Next Steps</u>	28
<u>7</u>	<u>Appendices</u>	29

[blank for copying]

1 NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

- 1.1 This document is part of the preparation of a Core Strategy Development Plan Document for Wirral. It marks the start of an ongoing sustainability appraisal process to promote sustainable development by integrating social, environmental and economic considerations into the preparation of the Core Strategy DPD.
- 1.2 The document has been informed by the Sustainability Appraisal Framework for Wirral, adopted in July 2006, and takes account of the need to prepare an environmental report under the European Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive. It has been prepared following public consultation.
- 1.3 There are five main stages to the sustainability appraisal process. This document reports on the completion of the first stage – setting the context, establishing the baseline and deciding on the scope of the appraisal – and is concerned with the first five tasks of a sustainability appraisal:
 - Task A1: A review of relevant plans, policies and programmes;
 - Task A2: The collection of baseline information on the present state of the Borough and the identification of any gaps in available data;
 - Task A3: The identification of sustainability issues and problems;
 - Task A4: The development of a framework for the sustainability appraisal; and
 - Task A5: Consultation on the proposed scope of the appraisal.
- 1.4 Four further stages are still to be completed and a full diagram of the process is included in Section 1 of this report.
- 1.5 Section 2 outlines the background to the sustainability appraisal and strategic environmental appraisal processes, explains why the Core Strategy has to be subject to an appraisal, and explains the role of this report - which is intended to set out how the sustainability appraisal of the Core Strategy will be undertaken and the baseline information that will be used in the appraisal process.
- 1.6 Section 3 outlines the background to the Core Strategy and the key milestones in its preparation.
- 1.7 Section 4 details the work carried out so far, relating to Stage A of the appraisal process:
 - Task A1: The results of the review of relevant plans, programmes and strategies is summarised in Appendix 1, to identify the key objectives of the plan and any specific implications for the emerging Core Strategy.

- Task A2: The details of the baseline information that has been collected is set out in Appendix 2, linked to a series of sustainability objectives and the indicators that will be used to measure them... Problems with data collection have been highlighted.
- Task A3: The sustainability issues and problems emerging from the completion of the first two tasks are presented alongside a short commentary, grouped under the general headings of social inclusion; sustainable consumption and production; environmental protection and enhancement; natural resources; and quality of life.
- Task A4: The sustainability objectives, indicators and decision criteria that will form the heart of the appraisal, are set out in Appendix 3, again, grouped under general headings identified in Task A3, and a matrix, to assess the compatibility of the sustainability objectives, is set out in Appendix 4.
- Task A5: The results of the consultation undertaken on the proposed content of the Scoping Report and the changes made to the final document are recorded in Appendix 5.
- 1.8 Section 5 briefly outlines the background to the separate assessment of the likely impact of the Core Strategy on designated European Sites required under the European Habitats Directive, which will be carried out in parallel with the sustainability appraisal process.
- 1.9 Section 6 summarises the next Tasks in the sustainability appraisal of the emerging Core Strategy Development Plan Document.

2 SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL AND STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

2.1 Section 19 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that Local Development Documents, which consist of Development Plan Documents (DPDs) and Supplementary Plan Documents (SPDs) must now be subject to a sustainability appraisal (SA) incorporating strategic environmental assessment (SEA).

Sustainability Appraisal

2.2 Sustainability Appraisal is a tool used to assess the impact of plan policies from an environmental, economic and social perspective. It is intended to provide a systematic process through which the performance of a plan can be tested against the objectives of sustainable development. This process should ensure that planning decisions are made in line with the principles of sustainable development.

2.3 The UK Sustainable Development Strategy "Securing the Future" published in March 2005, identifies five UK principles for sustainable development:

- Living within environmental limits;
- Ensuring a strong, healthy and just society;
- Achieving a sustainable economy;
- Promoting good governance; and
- Using sound science responsibly.

2.4 Shared priorities for UK action are identified as:

- Sustainable consumption and production;
- Climate change and energy;
- Natural resource protection and environmental enhancement; and
- Sustainable communities.

2.5 Guidance issued by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) in November 2005¹ indicates that sustainability appraisal must be central to the spatial planning system. The stated purpose of sustainability appraisal is to promote sustainable development through the integration of social, environmental and economic considerations into

¹ Sustainability Appraisal of Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Development Documents. ODPM, November 2005.

the preparation of revisions of Regional Spatial Strategies and for new or revised Development Plan Documents and Supplementary Planning Documents.

Strategic Environmental Assessment

- 2.6 Sustainability appraisals must also, where appropriate, incorporate the requirements of the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive (the SEA Directive)². The SEA Directive requires that a formal assessment is undertaken of plans and programmes which are likely to have significant effects on the environment. This has been transposed into UK law through the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (the SEA Regulations).
- 2.7 The purpose of the SEA Directive is to provide a high level of protection of the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation of plans and programmes. National advice indicates the requirements of the SEA Directive can be incorporated within the sustainability appraisal process, so long as the aspects of the process intended to ensure compliance are clearly identified in the documentation.
- 2.8 In August 2005, the Council consulted the four consultation bodies³ on the scope of the environmental report for the Core Strategy, which has to be prepared under the requirements of the SEA Directive and the SEA Regulations. Following this consultation, the Council formally determined in July 2006 that the Core Strategy DPD is likely to have significant environmental effects and that an additional environmental report should be prepared as part of the sustainability appraisal (Executive Board, 12 July 2006, Minute 114 refers).

Sustainability Appraisal Framework for Wirral

- 2.9 The Council has adopted an overarching Sustainability Appraisal Framework, to identify the sustainability issues, objectives and indicators relevant to Wirral, to inform the preparation of sustainability appraisals for individual Development Plan Documents, such as the Core Strategy. This Scoping Report draws on the adopted Sustainability Appraisal Framework for Wirral, to identify the specific context and baseline information needed to provide a starting point from which to appraise the likely effects of the emerging Core Strategy DPD.

² European Directive 2001/42/EC “on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment” (the Strategic Environmental Assessment or ‘SEA Directive’)

³ English Nature, English Heritage, the Countryside Agency and the Environment Agency
Local Development Framework for Wirral
Core Strategy DPD - Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report
July 2007

Figure 1 below (extracted from the ODPM November 2005 Guidance) sets out the requirements for undertaking SA of DPDs and indicates how the stages in the planning process correlate with the stages of undertaking a SA.

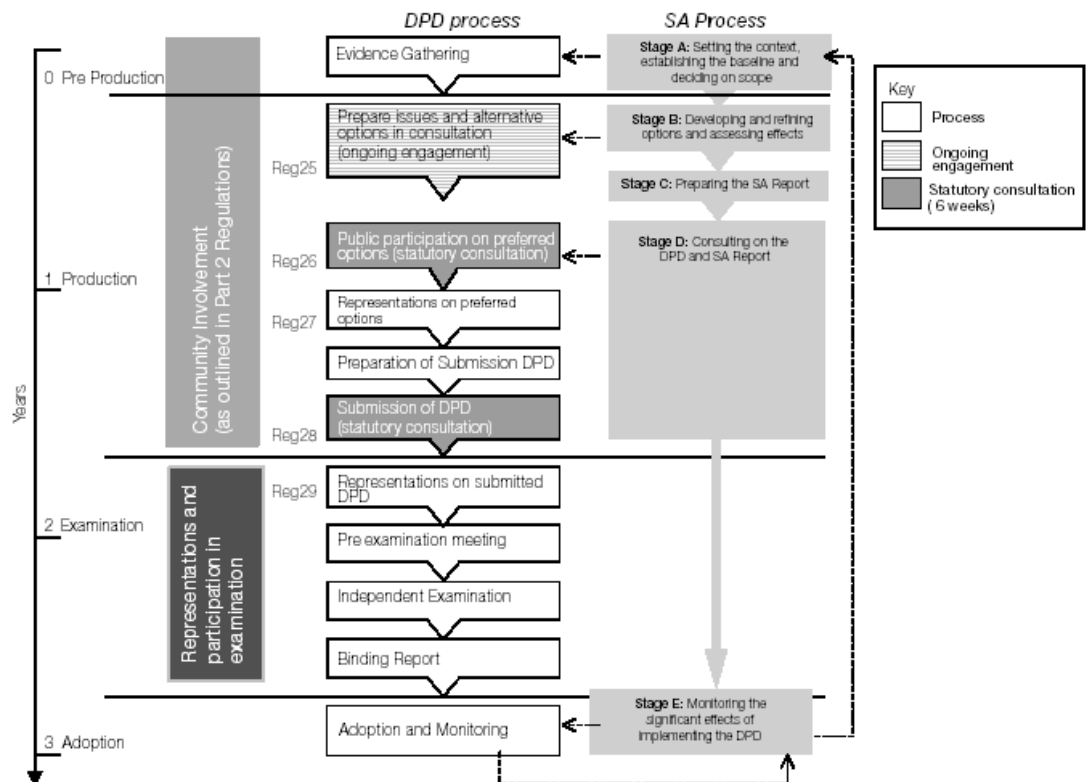


Figure 2 below (extracted from the ODPM guidance) sets out the SA process and stages linked in with the stages of DPD production.

<p>DPD Stage 1: Pre-production – Evidence Gathering</p> <p>SA stages and tasks</p> <p>Stage A: Setting the context and objectives, establishing the baseline and deciding on the scope</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A1: Identifying other relevant policies, plans and programmes, and sustainability objectives. ● A2: Collecting baseline information. ● A3: Identifying sustainability issues and problems. ● A4: Developing the SA framework. ● A5: Consulting on the scope of the SA.
<p>DPD Stage 2: Production</p> <p>SA stages and tasks</p> <p>Stage B: Developing and refining options and assessing effects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● B1: Testing the DPD objectives against the SA framework. ● B2: Developing the DPD options. ● B3: Predicting the effects the DPD. ● B4: Evaluating the effects of the DPD. ● B5: Considering ways of mitigating adverse effects and maximising beneficial effects. ● B6: Proposing measures to monitor the significant effects of implementing the DPDs. <p>Stage C: Preparing the Sustainability Appraisal Report</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● C1: Preparing the SA Report. <p>Stage D: Consulting on the preferred options of the DPD and SA Report</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● D1: Public participation on the preferred options of the DPD and the SA Report. ● D2(i): Appraising significant changes.
<p>DPD Stage 3: Examination</p> <p>SA stages and tasks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● D2(ii): Appraising significant changes resulting from representations.
<p>DPD Stage 4: Adoption and monitoring</p> <p>SA stages and tasks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● D3: Making decisions and providing information. <p>Stage E: Monitoring the significant effects of implementing the DPD</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● E1: Finalising aims and methods for monitoring. ● E2: Responding to adverse effects.

3 THE PROPOSED CORE STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT PLAN DOCUMENT

3.1 The Core Strategy is a key document within the Local Development Framework. It is intended to set the longer-term vision, objectives and spatial strategy for the Borough. The Core Strategy will not be site-specific, but will influence the content of all the other documents to be prepared as part of the Local Development Framework for Wirral, including site-specific land allocations.

3.2 The final objectives for the Core Strategy will need to be confirmed through public consultation but the types of issue that the Core Strategy will need to address, to integrate environmental and sustainability objectives, are likely to include:

- The future distribution of new dwellings across the Borough, including areas of growth and restraint;
- The future distribution of employment development, including retail and tourism;
- The promotion of Housing Market Renewal;
- Measures to promote the phasing of new development in support of social, economic and environmental objectives and the use of previously developed land;
- The identification of Action Areas for significant areas of change or regeneration;
- Measures to support social inclusion and equality of opportunity;
- Safeguard and enhance opportunities to participate in sport and physical activity
- Measures to enhance Wirral's cultural facilities
- A strategy to reduce the need to travel and to support more sustainable travel choices;
- Measures to address flood risk in river washlands and in low lying coastal areas
- responding to the challenges of climate change - reducing the climate change impact of new development and other activities and planning for the effects of climate change on the Borough.
- Measures to protect the Green Belt and other special designations to prevent inappropriate development;
- Measures to conserve and enhance local biodiversity;
- Preserving and enhancing the historic environment;

- Maintaining and strengthening local distinctiveness and sense of place.
 - Measures to promote good design and crime prevention;
 - Proposals for the delivery of sub-regional strategies for minerals and waste; and
 - Support for the achievement of other identified sub-regional priorities.
 - Safeguarding and enhancing landscape character and visual amenity and promoting opportunities for recreation and enjoyment of the countryside
 - Identification of measures to ensure provision of efficient transport networks
 - Measures to improve accessibility
 - Measures to encourage sustainable design and construction and energy efficiency
 - The development of renewable energy sources in the Borough, supporting the achievement of regional and sub-regional renewable energy targets.
- 3.3 The principal objective of the Core Strategy will be to promote sustainable development in accordance with national and regional policies and the Wirral Community Strategy.
- 3.4 The Core Strategy will form part of the statutory Development Plan for Wirral alongside the Regional Spatial Strategy for the North West, and will be used to guide future decisions on individual planning applications. Once adopted, the Core Strategy will replace the policies of the Unitary Development Plan for Wirral, adopted in February 2000, that dealt with strategic and Borough-wide policy issues. Approval of the content of the Core Strategy is the responsibility of full Council.

Key Milestones

- 3.5 Initial consultation on the Core Strategy began in October 2005. Letters inviting open comment on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats and needs of the Borough were sent to 415 contacts from the Council's Local Development Framework database, as well as to MPs, Councillors and Area Forum representatives. A series of workshops were held in November 2006, to consider the findings of the initial consultation, prioritise the issues raised and consider the possible objectives for the Core Strategy.
- 3.6 The remaining key milestones for the Core Strategy are set out in the Local Development Scheme for Wirral. The key milestones set out in the Scheme approved by the Secretary of State on 24 April 2007, which will come into effect in July 2007, are:

- Consultation on Issues and Options – September 2007
- Consultation on Preferred Options – March 2008
- Submission to the Secretary of State – October 2008
- Pre-Examination Meeting – February 2009
- Public Examination – April 2009
- Inspectors Report – September 2009
- Adoption – October 2009

4 STAGE A - SETTING THE CONTEXT, BASELINE AND SCOPE

4.1 The SEA Directive sets out the following requirements:

The Environmental Report should provide information on [inter alia]:

- *the “relationship [of the plan or programme] with other relevant plans and programmes” (Annex I(a))*
- *“the environmental protection objectives, established at international, [European] Community or [national] level, which are relevant to the plan or programme and the way those objectives and any environmental considerations have been taken into account during its preparation” (Annex I (e))*
- *“relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan or programme” and “the environmental characteristics of the areas likely to be significantly affected” (Annex I (b), (c))*
- *“any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan or programme including, in particular, those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance, such as areas designated pursuant to Directives 79/409/EEC and 92/43/EEC” (Annex I (d))*
- *“...the authorities... which, by reason of their specific environmental responsibilities, are likely to be concerned by the environmental effects of implementing plans and programmes ... shall be consulted when deciding on the scope and level of detail of the information which must be included in the environmental report” (Article 5.4 and 6.3).*

Task A1 - Identifying Relevant Policies, Plans and Programmes

4.2 Other relevant policies, plans and programmes at international, regional and local level that may influence the Core Strategy, with implications of a social, environmental and economic nature, will need to be identified. The relationship between relevant policies and the Core Strategy will need to be clearly set out and the implications for the emerging Core Strategy identified.

4.3 The appraisal must also be consistent with the requirements of:

- Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (HMSO 2004, Chapter 5);
- Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) Regulations 2004 (HMSO, SI 2004, No.2204);
- The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (HMSO, SI 2004, No.1633);

- National guidance on the Sustainability Appraisal of Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Development Frameworks (ODPM, November 2005);
 - SEA Directive: Guidance for Planning Authorities (ODPM 2003);
 - The Practical Guide to the SEA Directive (ODPM, September 2005); and
 - Securing the Future: The UK Sustainable Development Strategy (March 2005).
- 4.4 There are a considerable number of policies, plans and programmes that are relevant to the Core Strategy DPD.. The plans and programmes that have been identified as particularly relevant to Wirral, as listed in the Sustainability Appraisal Framework for Wirral, include:
- The Sustainable Communities Plan;
 - The Northern Way Growth Strategy;
 - The Regional Spatial Strategy;
 - The Regional Housing Strategy;
 - The Regional Economic Strategy;
 - NW Climate Change Action Plan;
 - The NW Plan for Sport and Physical Activity;
 - Action for Sustainability;
 - Merseyside Local Transport Plan;
 - Wirral Community Strategy; and
 - Wirral Housing Strategy.
- 4.5 A number of these strategies, such as the Local Transport Plan, perform an overarching role, co-ordinating and directing a number of other more detailed lower level strategies.
- 4.6 The review of relevant international, European, national, regional and local documents undertaken as part of the sustainability appraisal for the Core Strategy DPD is summarised in Appendix 1. Each of the plans, policies and programmes listed have been reviewed to record the key objectives of relevance to the Core Strategy DPD and any relevant targets and indicators, alongside their implications for the emerging Core Strategy DPD.
- 4.7 Appendix 1 is also intended to address the requirements of the SEA Directive, which requires an environmental report to provide information on the “relationship of the plan or programme with other relevant plans and programmes” (Annex 1(a)).

Task A2 – Collecting Baseline Information

- 4.8 Baseline information provides the basis for predicting and monitoring effects and helps to identify sustainability issues and alternative ways of dealing with them.
- 4.9 The Sustainability Appraisal Framework for Wirral sets out a detailed review of available baseline data to provide a picture of Wirral prior to the preparation of the Local Development Framework. The baseline review is considered to provide a reasonable basis for the sustainability appraisal of the Core Strategy DPD, given that the Core Strategy has a Borough-wide focus.
- 4.10 The data collected is intended to relate as closely as possible to the indicators adopted for the sustainability objectives discussed under Task 4, below. Detailed baseline information for each sustainability objective and proposed indicator is presented in Appendix 2 and the available data is presented in the form of graphs, charts and tables.
- 4.11 The baseline review is also intended to address the requirements of the SEA Directive to “identify the relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan or programme” and to identify “the environmental characteristics of the area likely to be affected” (Annexe 1(b)(c)).

Data Gaps and Limitations

- 4.12 Ideally, all the baseline information would relate to a common timeframe. Unfortunately, this is not the case. The baseline information presented, nevertheless, represents the most up-to-date information that was available during the period of collection. In some cases, time-series data, which would better enable trends to be identified has not been available.
- 4.13 A number of the indicators do not have any associated baseline information, because it has not been possible to establish the most appropriate target, figures or data sources. It is important that the choice of indicators is not simply guided by the immediate availability of data. It is, therefore, intended that Appendix 2, in particular, should be treated as “work in progress” which will be added to and amended as new sources of baseline information are identified at each stage of the appraisal process.

Task A3 - Identifying Sustainability Issues and Problems

- 4.14 Identifying the problems and issues for local sustainability is an opportunity to define the key social, environmental and economic issues for the emerging Development Plan Document. The principal local sustainability issues have been identified from the review of baseline information and are summarised under the following five headings:

Social Inclusion Sustainability Issues

- 4.15 Wirral's Population has declined from over 350,000 during the 1970's to 313,800 in mid-2003. The population structure is skewed towards older age groups. The pace of decline appears to have slowed over recent years and the population is now expected to grow by 2.8% by 2028. The working age population is still however, expected to fall, with implications for future wealth creation.
- 4.16 In terms of migration, the most significant recent flows are out of Wirral to Denbighshire, Flintshire and Chester and into Wirral from Liverpool and the rest of Greater Merseyside. The largest flows are between Wirral and Liverpool. There is a consistent loss of people between 16-24 years of age seeking employment and higher education.
- 4.17 In terms of social conditions, the Borough falls within the worst 50 of the 354 English local authorities and has a high number of localities that fall within the worst 25% of English "Super Output Areas". These localities, mainly concentrated in the older urban areas in the east of the Borough score very poorly across the full range of indicators for income; employment; health and disability; education, skills and training; living environment; and crime and disorder. Symptoms of low demand, including high levels of vacancy and unfit housing, led to the designation of the "NewHeartlands" Pathfinder Area, in April 2002, in parts of Birkenhead, Bidston, Seacombe, Tranmere and Liscard
- 4.18 Specific sustainability issues for local social inclusion are:
1. The need to promote cohesive and sustainable communities (a key theme of the Wirral Community Strategy);
 2. Recognising different values and needs within the community;
 3. Population stabilisation across Merseyside with population growth in Liverpool (a recognised sub-regional priority in the Regional Spatial Strategy);
 4. Tackling local inequalities including health, education employment and transport inaccessibility to provide access and equity (a key objective of the Wirral Community Strategy);
 5. Tackling the problems of poor and empty housing, particularly in deprived areas; and
 6. The provision of affordable high quality homes and high quality housing services (a key theme of the Wirral Community Strategy).

Sustainable Consumption and Production Sustainability Issues

- 4.19 Wirral has two strategic regional sites: at Twelve Quays and at the Wirral International Business Park. Major local facilities include the Birkenhead Docks system, part of the Port of Liverpool, including the

Twelve Quays roll-on-roll-off ferry terminal; and the entrance to the Manchester Ship Canal. Peel Holdings have recently announced plans for the long-term redevelopment of significant parts of Birkenhead docks. Wirral is also home to international companies such as Lever Faberge.

- 4.20 Key sectors in the local economy include retail and distribution, public administration and business services. In manufacturing, the Borough is strongest in chemicals and food and drink, which are regional target sectors. The number of tourism-related jobs is also significant. The promotion of tourism is a corporate priority.
- 4.21 The Borough's economic performance, nevertheless, continues to be a major concern. Although having grown strongly since 1995, the Borough's economic output per head of population is still below the UK average. Wirral also has fewer VAT registered businesses than many areas and a lower rate of business formation.
- 4.22 Although the total number of jobs in Wirral has grown from 98,500 in 1971 to 101,300 today, this is still not adequate to fully employ the working age population. Average earnings for jobs located in Wirral are also lower than the average weekly earnings of Wirral residents as a whole. These two factors continue to lead to a high number of journeys to work to Liverpool, Chester and beyond.
- 4.23 While Wirral is home to a higher than average proportion of managers and professional people, national indices continue to reveal a high concentration of income and employment deprivation in eastern areas of the Borough. Although registered unemployment, at 3.2%, is now well below the 19% peak of September 1985, economic activity rates are still lower than regional and national benchmarks.
- 4.24 Specific sustainability issues for local sustainable consumption and production are:
1. Securing increased sustainable economic growth, productivity and diversification (a key theme in the Wirral Community Strategy);
 2. Seek to attract high GVA jobs to the Borough;
 3. Support key sectors of the economy such as the Port of Liverpool;
 4. Ensure equality of access to education and training;
 5. Provision of a range of attractive sites and premises for new and existing businesses, appropriately located to reduce conflicts;
 6. Reduce distances between residences and workplaces, healthcare, education, shopping and leisure;
 7. Need to further encourage tourism; and

8. Reducing the level of worklessness (a key objective of the Wirral Community Strategy and Access Strategy).

Environmental Protection and Enhancement Sustainability Issues

- 4.25 Wirral is an area of generally high environmental quality. The protection and improvement of the environment is a corporate priority and is a key objective of the Wirral Community Strategy.
- 4.26 Wirral has an extensive network of locally identified non-statutory Sites of Biological Importance, together with twelve Sites of Special Scientific Interest, two designated European nature conservation sites and two potential European nature conservation sites. These designations cover most of the key habitats identified as priorities within the Wirral Biodiversity Action Plan. The Borough's coastline is of special importance for nature conservation.
- 4.27 There are, however, relatively few designated sites within the urban areas of east Wirral and not all aspects of Wirral's biodiversity resource are currently captured by site designations. There are also twelve locally identified non-statutory sites designated for their importance to earth science.
- 4.28 Wirral falls within two of the Countryside Agency's Countryside Character Areas: Character Area 59 (Wirral), reflecting the more rural character of the Borough west of the M53 - and Character Area 58 (Merseyside Conurbation) – reflecting the more urban influence east of the Motorway. No landscape character assessments are in place for the Borough, although a historical landscape character assessment for Cheshire (including Wirral) is underway.
- 4.29 Wirral has a significant built heritage, with over 1,850 listed structures, twenty-two designated conservation areas, nine scheduled ancient monuments and four sites on the English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens.
- 4.30 No air quality management areas are currently designated in Wirral, although the continuing high level of out-commuting has major implications for travel generation and long-term air quality. Car ownership is still at low levels in some parts of the Borough and increased economic prosperity may see these levels rise, with further implications for congestion and air quality.
- 4.31 Water quality within the Dee and Mersey Estuaries and inland watercourses continues to improve, largely due to the ongoing programme of capital works undertaken by United Utilities. Wirral's beaches are also consistently among the cleanest in the North West. There is an active boat- and shore-based fishery on Wirral, along with some processing and transport activity.

4.32 Specific sustainability issues for local environmental protection and enhancement are:

1. Secure continued protection and enhancement of the Borough's townscapes, natural environment, landscapes, visual amenity of the wider countryside and biodiversity particularly where degraded and/or not covered by existing designations. Maintain and strengthen local distinctiveness, sense of place;
2. safeguard tranquil areas;
3. To preserve, protect and enhance sites, features and areas of archaeological, historical and cultural heritage importance;
4. support for local production and services to meet local needs;
5. Reduce single occupancy car use and dependency;
6. Improve public and non-motorised forms of transport and infrastructure;
7. Ensure that water quality is safeguarded and enhanced;
8. Ensure reduction of waste arisings and continued development of sustainable waste management systems, encourage further re-use, recycling and recovery of waste; and
9. Increase participation rates in waste minimisation and recycling.

Natural Resources Sustainability Issues

4.33 Levels of waste recycling remain low at around 10%, some way short of national targets, although the commissioning of a new Materials Recycling Facility at Bidston will result in a significant improvement. The existing landfill site at Bromborough Dock has recently closed and no other containment sites are currently available.

4.34 Wirral has no significant mineral reserves, apart from small amounts of winnable brick clay. Reserves of aggregates are very limited and generally constrained by nature conservation or other considerations.

4.35 Much of Wirral is founded on sandstone, which is a major aquifer and groundwater provides around 13% of Wirral's water resources.

4.36 Extensive low-lying areas, especially in the north of the Borough, are protected by defences from both tidal and fluvial (river) flooding. While much of the coastline is protected from erosion and/or flooding by "hard" defences, a short stretch of the clay cliffs at the Thurstaston and New Ferry Shorelines continue to be subject to natural erosion processes, the continuation of which is central to their nature conservation value.

- 4.37 Land quality is generally good and there are significant areas of high-grade agricultural land, particularly in the south and west of the Borough. While major progress has been made on urban land reclamation, particularly in Bromborough, a number of significant sites in the east of the Borough can only be brought forward for development once contamination or other ground condition problems have been addressed.
- 4.38 The Government has identified Liverpool Bay for a significant expansion in offshore wind farm development. The construction of twenty-five turbines has started off the coast of New Brighton and the shore connection to the national grid will take place on the North Wirral Coast. There is, however, little provision of onshore renewable energy schemes.
- 4.39 Specific sustainability issues for local natural resources are:
1. Minimise the number of properties at risk of flooding;
 2. Promote more sustainable drainage systems where appropriate;
 3. Control activities that contribute to climate change;
 4. Planning for the impacts arising from climate change;
 5. Continue to focus development on previously developed land;
 6. Ongoing need to remediate potentially contaminated land;
 7. Derelict land targeted for development may offer unique habitats and biodiversity value;
 8. Need to identify opportunities for sustainable/renewable energy generation, both stand-alone and incorporated within development proposals and maximising energy efficiency/conservation within new and existing buildings;
 9. Maximise opportunities for the incorporation of sustainable design and construction generally in new proposals;
 10. The protection of soil quality; and
 11. Management of demand for potable (drinking) water.

Quality of Life Sustainability Issues

- 4.40 Wirral generally offers a very high quality of life: 45% of the Borough is open countryside, with much of high landscape quality. The coast is a special feature of Wirral. There are also a significant number of leisure and cultural facilities in both urban and rural areas.

- 4.41 The need to maintain local character and distinctiveness and promote high quality design is a major local concern, especially in the lower density residential areas built during the Victorian and Edwardian eras. Although not an environmental protection designation, the Green Belt has made an important contribution to Wirral's environmental quality and plays a significant role in supporting other sustainability and planning objectives such as urban regeneration. Provision, protection and enhancement of sites that provide outdoor recreation opportunities close to and accessible by existing communities is an important objective.
- 4.42 Some of the urban area, is of limited attractiveness in terms of the environment and amenities.
- 4.43 Issues related to the prevention of crime and the promotion of sustainable travel choices will also have a significant impact on local quality of life. The promotion of safer communities is a key theme of the Wirral Community Strategy.
- 4.44 Specific sustainability issues for local quality of life are:
1. Need for continued enhancement of urban environmental quality;
 2. Need for production of a landscape strategy to protect and enhance the wider countryside including wildlife corridors;
 3. Reduce crime and disorder; and
 4. Maximise opportunities to reduce crime through good design.

Task A4 – Developing the Sustainability Appraisal Framework

Sustainability Objectives

- 4.45 The Sustainability Appraisal Framework for Wirral provides a method for describing, analysing and comparing the sustainability effects of plans and policies. A series of sustainability objectives has been developed, taking into account the relationship between the Core Strategy DPD and the objectives of other plans and programmes, alongside the findings of the baseline information review and the sustainability issues identified above. These objectives will form the basis of the framework for evaluating the various options for emerging Core Strategy.
- 4.46 The following objectives have been confirmed, following public consultation, to guide the sustainability appraisal of the Core Strategy DPD:

Social Inclusion

1. To promote a balanced population structure
2. To reduce the incidence of multiple deprivation
3. To promote the accessibility of services and facilities to all sectors of society
4. To meet identified local housing needs and promote housing market renewal
5. To promote inclusive, healthy communities

Sustainable Consumption and Production

6. To promote improved economic performance
7. To provide for employment growth and business creation
8. To reduce worklessness and income deprivation
9. To promote the vitality and viability of town centres
10. To maximise provision for high quality tourism

Environmental Protection and Enhancement

11. To maintain and improve biodiversity and natural habitats
12. To minimise pollution to land, water or air (including noise pollution)
13. To preserve, protect and enhance sites, features and areas of archaeological, historical and cultural heritage importance.
14. To provide for the separation of incompatible land uses
15. To reduce the impact of traffic intrusion in residential areas

Natural Resources

16. To maximise the use of previously developed urban land
17. To minimise reliance on non-renewable energy sources
18. To promote sustainable drainage and water conservation
19. To minimise waste generation and maximise recycling
20. To minimise the impact of flooding and other natural hazards including climate change

Quality of Life

21. To conserve and enhance the character and quality of the Borough's landscapes and townscapes, maintaining and strengthening local distinctiveness and sense of place.
 22. To achieve high quality and sustainable design for buildings, spaces and the public realm sensitive to the locality
 23. To maximise opportunities for culture, sport and leisure
 24. To promote sustainable travel choices and reduce the need to travel
 25. To minimise opportunities for crime and anti-social behaviour
- 4.47 The policies and proposals of the emerging Core Strategy DPD will need to be appraised against each of these local objectives. To aid consideration, a series of design criteria have also been devised, to indicate the types of question that should be asked when carrying out the sustainability appraisal. No weighting will be attached to any of the objectives. The only intention is to inform the decision-making process by identifying areas where the intended policies and proposals may perform weakly in terms of the promotion of sustainable development.
- 4.48 Although the local sustainability objectives and decision criteria have been presented under a number of separate headings, the Core Strategy sustainability appraisal report will provide an integrated assessment, seeking to optimise the benefits across all the relevant objectives. Any cumulative interrelationships will, therefore, also need to be directly identified and addressed as part of the sustainability appraisal process.
- 4.49 The local sustainability objectives have also been used to identify a series of indicators against which progress can be measured over the longer term. The Council has, wherever possible, sought to select indicators that will enable comparison with national and regional data. Preference has, however, been given to indicators that can be reported at local level and which will continue to allow long-term trends to be identified. Particular regard has been had to the indicators developed at a Merseyside sub-regional level in compiling the finalised list.
- 4.50 Each indicator has, additionally, been subject to a SMARTE test, to determine whether they are Specific, Measurable, Appropriate, Realistic, Time Bound and based on Existing information. The indicators will be used to assess progress towards meeting the local objectives for sustainable development as part of the Council's on-going monitoring requirements.
- 4.51 Tables presenting the local sustainability objectives, alongside their relevant decision criteria and indicators, are set out in Appendix 3.

- 4.52 The local sustainability objectives have been tested to ensure that they are as compatible with each other as possible and the results of this test are presented in the form of a matrix in Appendix 4.
- 4.53 It is intended that the objectives, decision criteria and indicators should be broadly consistent across all the sustainability appraisals undertaken as part of the Local Development Framework. The framework for this sustainability appraisal may, however, need to be reviewed in the light of new or updated baseline information, changes to wider sustainability issues or objectives and/or feedback from consultation arising from later stages of the plan making process.

Task A5 – Consulting on the Scope of the Sustainability Appraisal

- 4.54 National guidance requires the Council to consult with the public and with key stakeholders on the scope of the sustainability appraisal to be carried out for each Local Development Document, with a balance between those concerned with social, economic and environmental issues.
- 4.55 The SEA Directive also requires that the statutory environmental consultation bodies designated in the SEA Regulations are consulted on the scope and level of detail on the information to be contained in a proposed environmental report. The four consultation bodies identified in the SEA Regulations are:
- The Environment Agency
 - English Nature
 - Countryside Agency⁴
 - English Heritage
- 4.56 The Council consulted on the content of a draft Scoping Report between 31 July and 22 September 2006. All the individuals and organisations registered on the Council's Local Development Framework database were notified of the consultation and copies of the documentation were made available for public inspection, free of charge, at Council offices, 24 public libraries and on the Council's website. Consultees were invited to address the series of questions set out in the draft Scoping Report and to make any other observations that they thought would be relevant.
- 4.57 Representations were received from 32 individuals or organisations. The content of these representations, together with the Council's response, are summarised in Appendix 5.

⁴ English Nature and the Countryside Agency have since been amalgamated into a single body under the new name of Natural England

4.58 The content of this final Scoping Report and the Council's responses to public consultation have also been independently reviewed by the Council's Sustainability Appraisal Panel, which includes representatives from a range of environmental, social and economic interests. The comments of the Panel and the Council's responses are set out in Appendix 6.

5 HABITATS REGULATIONS ASSESSMENT

- 5.1 The European Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) is implemented in UK law by the Conservation (Natural Habitats & c) Regulations 1994, (the Habitats Regulations) which also apply to areas classified under the European Wild Birds Directive (79/409/EEC). The Habitats Directive aims to protect a network of designated sites across Europe that have rare or important habitats and species in order to safeguard biodiversity. This has given rise to the network of Special Protection Areas (SPAs) under the EU Birds Directive and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) under the Habitats Directive. Together, these sites form part of the Natura 2000 network identified under Article 3(1) of the Habitats Directive.
- 5.2 The Habitats Regulations, require authorities to ensure that all the activities they regulate will have no adverse effect on the integrity of any of the Natura 2000 sites. Regulation 48 of the Habitats Regulations requires the competent authority to assess the possible effects of proposals on, or potentially affecting, any Natura 2000 sites. This includes screening for potential impacts on European sites. Where significant effects seem likely, the plan or project proposed must be subject to an appropriate assessment of its implications for the European site(s). The competent authority shall agree to the plan or project only after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the European site concerned (Regulation 48(5)). The assessment process is referred to as a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA).
- 5.3 A recent ruling by the European Court of Justice confirmed that the requirements to carry out HRA apply to land use plans. The Government had indicated that revisions to the Habitats Regulations, which transpose this requirement into UK law, would come into force in September 2006, but these have yet to be issued. Guidance on undertaking HRA as part of the plan-making process will be issued separately, but is still awaited.
- 5.4 The draft guidance emphasises that HRA and sustainability appraisal are two separate processes each with their own legal requirements. While HRA can be undertaken in conjunction with a sustainability appraisal - utilising common baseline information, for example – the outputs of both processes must be clearly distinguishable and must be reported on separately. As a result, the Council now proposes to report on the findings of the initial HRA screening exercise for the Core Strategy separately.

6 THE NEXT STEPS

- 6.1 Stage B in the sustainability appraisal process involves assessing the various options put forward for the emerging Core Strategy against the local sustainability objectives set out in Appendix 3.
- 6.2 More specifically, the ODPM guidance indicates that Stage B should include:
 - Task B1: Testing the Core Strategy DPD objectives against the SA framework established at Stage A;
 - Task B2: Developing the Core Strategy DPD options;
 - Task B3: Predicting the effects of the Core Strategy DPD;
 - Task B4: Evaluating the effects of the Core Strategy DPD;
 - Task B5: Considering ways of mitigating adverse effects and maximising beneficial effects; and
 - Task B6: Proposing measures to monitor the significant effects of implementing the Core Strategy DPD.
- 6.3 The assessments required under these tasks will be undertaken on the basis of professional judgement and will be informed by evidence obtained from the baseline review and from the identification of sustainability issues and objectives.
- 6.4 Each reasonable plan option, including the 'do nothing' option or the 'business as usual' option will be subject to appraisal. The findings of the options appraisal will be documented in an Interim Sustainability Appraisal Report. This Interim Report will be made available for public consultation alongside the Issues and Options Report for the Core Strategy DPD.
- 6.5 The Council's Preferred Options will also need to be subject to sustainability appraisal, which will again be made available for public consultation. The findings from these appraisals will be documented in a final Sustainability Appraisal Report, which will be submitted to the Secretary of State for public examination alongside the Council's final Core Strategy Development Plan Document.

7 APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Review of Policies , Plans and Programmes

Appendix 2 – Baseline Review

Appendix 3 – Sustainability Objectives, Decision Criteria and Indicators

Appendix 4 – Sustainability Objectives Compatibility Matrix

Appendix 5 – Report of Consultation (Stage A)

Appendix 6 – Report of the Sustainability Appraisal Panel (March 2007)

Appendix 7 – Glossary

[blank for copying]