

Foreword from Cllr. Steve Foulkes, Leader of the Council.

Wirral is a borough with enormous potential, but I don't have to tell you that it is also a place of sharp contrasts.

It has some of the most affluent wards in the country and some that rate amongst the most deprived. For many of its citizens there is an excellent quality of life, with good leisure facilities, an attractive coastline and countryside, good quality housing, good schools and high levels of employment. For some, the picture is very different, with pockets of high unemployment, low skills levels, poorer quality housing, unacceptable levels of anti-social behaviour and high levels of ill health. Between the most affluent and the most deprived areas there is a stark mortality gap, with those in the most affluent areas living on average over 10 years longer than those in the most deprived areas.

Earnings of workers in Wirral are below the national average, but the average earnings of its residents are above the national average, with numbers of higher skilled workers having to move outside the borough to higher paid centres like Liverpool and Chester to find work that matches their skills, and many young Wirral graduates leaving the region altogether in their search for work. Over the years, we've seen the old shipbuilding and manufacturing base decline and this has not been matched by a rise in businesses large enough to offer significant employment opportunities on Wirral. Meanwhile there are growing numbers of retired and elderly people who require care and support locally as they move into a frailer old age.

A successful economy is fundamental to the borough's future prosperity and to giving everyone a chance to reach their full potential. Growing Wirral's local economy is absolutely essential if we are to achieve the Vision for Wirral we are setting out for you. There are already exciting indicators of sustained development along Wirral's industrial waterfront, but we still have a long way to go.

In the old days, manufacturing operations were fixed because of the geography of where they were, or their closeness to material resources. Today it's very different. We now operate in a global economy where cities (and regions around cities) compete in an international market as companies move their operations around with ease.

Attracting major investment into an area requires a complete quality of life package, not just a decent site. We believe Wirral, with its attractive countryside, its coastline, heritage, cultural and leisure facilities and good schools, has a major part to play in enhancing the investment opportunities as part of the City Region spreading out from Liverpool on one side and Chester on the other.

I believe it is our job as a Council, working together with other public sector agencies, the private sector and the voluntary and community sectors, to make Wirral as attractive a place as possible for potential investors by improving everyone's quality of life. In so doing we shall narrow the economic, health and quality of life gap between the poorest and most affluent of Wirral's people and ensure as well that elderly people are not marginalised or excluded from this process but play their full part with all the residents of Wirral.

I commend this Vision For Wirral to you, and the Corporate Plan which will help us deliver it, and I look forward to hearing your contributions in the future as we move out into the community to discuss these ideas.

