

BIRKENHEAD TOWN CENTRE 2020 VISION – VISION AND STRATEGY REPORT

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report advises of the work carried out in developing the **Birkenhead Town Centre 2020 Vision** and requests the Cabinet to agree the recommendations to enable work to progress.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 The **Birkenhead Town Centre 2020 Vision and Strategy** has been produced in response to comments from the business community in particular, that the town centre's management, promotion and development is being adversely affected by the fragmented and short-term approach to addressing its problems.
- 2.2 It has also been produced as part of the Hamilton Quarter's Succession Strategy as it is a requirement of the North West Development Agency that all Single Regeneration Budget Partnerships put in place, before they terminate, a Succession Strategy for sustaining the regeneration of the area after their lifetime.
- 2.3 In January 2000, the Hamilton Quarter commenced this process in earnest and organised a meeting of its Partners, its Support Groups and the Councillors' Forum to discuss the issues. It became clear that sustaining the economic and environmental regeneration of the Hamilton Quarter would only occur if Birkenhead Town Centre as a whole, prospered as the main economic and commercial centre for the Borough.
- 2.4 As a next stage, therefore, the Hamilton Quarter, widened its consultation by seeking the views of a number of private sector groups and organisations on the state of the town centre at present and what they think should be done to improve it over the next 20 years. The groups involved were:
- o The Birkenhead Town Centre Forum;
 - o Wirral Investment Network's Urban Regeneration and Birkenhead Town Centre groups.
- 2.5 These initial consultations revealed a clear consensus of opinion about the issues of the town centre and what was felt needed to be done, to rectify the perceived problems and provide the framework for further development of the town centre over the next 20 years or so. The main areas of concern were:

- ❑ That there was no agreed vision or strategy to guide its future development and promotion;
- ❑ That there had been a fragmented approach to its development, management and promotion, which was hindering business investment;
- ❑ That it was in danger of falling back as a shopping centre, having lost some key departmental stores in recent years;
- ❑ That there was still a generally negative public perception about the town which was discouraging visitors and shoppers;
- ❑ That there were still many parts of the town centre that were of very poor appearance, which undermined much of the improvement work over the last 10 years.

- 2.6 A report on the results of these initial consultations was considered by the Hamilton Quarter Executive Policy Group in May 2000 and by the Council in July 2000. Both agreed that action was needed to tackle these issues. The Council gave its backing to the setting up of a Steering Group, to be led by the Hamilton Quarter Project Leader, to co-ordinate the preparation of a Vision and Strategy for Birkenhead Town Centre – the **Birkenhead Town Centre 2020 Vision** project – and to organise a wide-ranging public and business consultation exercise. This would show whether the initial concerns and issues raised, were reflected in the views of the population of Wirral as a whole, and the local businesses that have a stake in the future prosperity of the town centre.
- 2.7 The Steering Group consists of representatives from the Council, the Town Centre Forum, the Employment Service, the Hamilton Quarter, Lairdside, and Wirral Waterfront Single Regeneration Budget Partnerships, Pathways, Wirral Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Merseyside Police, and Merseytravel. A local artist was commissioned to work with the group, and Councillor Phil Davies took on the role as spokesperson for the 2020 Vision project.
- 2.8 The Council, Wirral Waterfront Board and the Hamilton Quarter, have contributed funding to this consultation exercise, and to the commissioning of some limited preparatory consultation work. This has been done so that decisions on future programmes and schemes can reflect what the public and local businesses feel is important, and influence the setting of priorities.
- 2.9 A full account of the consultation exercise, and the results to date, can be found in Appendix 1. These have had a major bearing on the content of the **2020 Vision and Strategy** document which the Steering Group has now completed, and which is attached to this report.
- 2.10 The achievement of the Vision will require a partnership between the private, public voluntary and community sectors. The public sector will assist the private sector and complement their investment in the town centre. It is critical that the private sector from the large retailers such as Marks and Spencer, Boots and W.H. Smith etc., to the small individual retailers and property owners endorse the strategy and are fully committed to investing in the town centre. Without such a commitment from the outset, the strategy will not be sustainable and is unlikely to succeed.
- 2.11 The emergence of the Wirral Waterfront Single Regeneration Budget scheme and the new round of Objective One support for the area, provides an opportunity to make a

robust start on the task of securing a comprehensive economic, environmental and cultural regeneration of the town centre, which is at the heart of Wirral's employment corridor.

- 2.12 There are currently Single Regeneration Budget and Objective 1 resources available to tackle some of the issues in part of the town centre. However, it is acknowledged that significant additional resources will be required to implement the strategy and these will be sought from all available resources initially by the Wirral Waterfront Delivery Team. The **Birkenhead Town Centre 2020 Vision and Strategy** can be used as an advocacy document to support bids for financial assistance.
- 2.13 The **2020 Vision and Strategy** document attached to this report is the first part of the process and is intended to provide the strategic framework against which the management, development and promotion of the town centre can take place. It is intended to have a long shelf life, and be a readable, informative and persuasive document which could be published for general consumption. It does not, therefore, set out to provide a full and detailed technical account or justification of the thinking behind the ideas, schemes or concepts it focuses on.
- 2.14 The second part will be the preparation of a detailed **Action Plan and Programme** to translate the Vision into reality. This will focus on addressing the priority issues raised in the consultation process, especially those projects which will really make a demonstrable and quantifiable difference to the commercial market in the town centre. Nevertheless, they must be based on **affordability and deliverability**. The Action Plan will need to be continually monitored, and updated annually, in the same way as the Delivery Plan of a Single Regeneration Budget scheme.
- 2.15 At its meeting on 20 June 2001, the Economic Regeneration and Community Planning Select Committee received a presentation on the Birkenhead Town Centre 2020 Vision and Strategy. The meeting was also attended by the Chair and Secretary of the Birkenhead Town Centre Forum who have been closely involved in the development of the Vision, and support the Vision and Strategy now presented.
- 2.16 The Select Committee discussed the document with interest and in some depth. It recommended that the Cabinet endorse the report and the Vision and Strategy document as a framework to guide the management, development and promotion of the town centre over the next 20 years. Also, that it be used as the basis for compiling an Action Plan and Programme, identifying priority schemes of action, including the commencement of work on the Town Centre Movement Strategy.
- 2.17 The Select Committee also suggested that a report be prepared for the Committee in six months time, to outline the progress made towards implementing the strategy and achieving the Vision.
- 2.18 Since that meeting, the newly-established Birkenhead Town Centre Programme Steering Group has received a presentation on the Vision and Strategy. The group, set up by the Wirral Waterfront Board, includes representation from the local residential community, Merseytravel, Wirral Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Wirral Association for Disability, Birkenhead Market, the Town Centre Forum, the Hamilton Quarter and Council officers.

2.19 It fully endorsed the Vision and Strategy and will oversee the delivery of the project until March 2007, when the Wirral Waterfront project comes to an end.

3. 2020 Vision & Strategy

3.1 The document is designed to send a positive and encouraging message about the town centre, to potential visitors and investors, and provide a framework for a 20 year development programme, against which, implementation programmes and action plans can be prepared.

3.2 **The illustrative plans and drawings are ideas only**, and not intended to be interpreted as firm proposals. Much more detailed consultation with businesses, residents, public authorities and organisations, private owners and developers will be needed before firm proposals can be produced. However, they are designed to stimulate thinking about what the town centre could look like in 20 years time if a concerted and co-ordinated approach to its development and promotion is followed.

3.3 The document's contents are as follows:

Definition of the area: (see attached plan). This is designed to encompass the mix of uses and activities that make up a multi-faceted town centre – shops, office/commercial districts, residential areas, leisure and tourist activities and attractions. Although a boundary is drawn, this should not be treated as sacrosanct as there are attractions beyond it, such as Birkenhead Park, Williamson Art Gallery, and the Historic Warships, which contribute to the town centre experience.

Vision and Strategic Objectives.

A historic summary of the development of the town. The 19th and 20th century saw significant milestones in Birkenhead's evolution. It is important to have an understanding of this before setting out to offer a Vision for the 21st century.

Themes:

a **Shopping:** Most people visit Birkenhead to shop and it is **vital** that this role is strengthened by being able to adapt to the different needs of retailers and the higher expectations of today's customers.

b **Transport:** An effective and integrated transport system is the key to economic prosperity of regional and sub-regional centres:

c **Leisure and tourist economy:** This provides diversity and choice for day or overnight visitors – especially families - to the town centre

d **Cultural development** – providing a vibrancy and local identity to the town centre.

e **Town Centre Environment** – highlighted in the consultation feedback as a major cause for concern.

Development Zones: There are four locations in the town centre which offer significant opportunities for new, quality development to strengthen all aspect of the town centre economy. These are:

a Woodside/Shore Road 'crescent';

- b Railway Corridor/Conway Park;
- c Hind Street Regeneration Zone;
- d Claughton Road/Oliver Street.

❑ **The Quarters**

There are three 'quarters' in the older parts of the town centre, which offer opportunities for developing niche shopping and leisure activities. These are:

- a The **Grange West Quarter** (including Grange Road West and Oxton Road);
- b **Central Quarter** (focused on Argyle Street/Grange Road East/Clifton Crescent);
- c The **Hamilton Quarter** (focused on Argyle Street, Market Street, Hamilton Square and Hamilton Street).

❑ **Gateways and Corridors**

Key approaches to the town centre which inform people's perceptions of the town centre and its investment potential. These are:

- a **New Chester Road/A41** (Green Lane-Chester Street/Tunnel Approaches);
- b **Borough Road** (North Road to Clifton Crescent);
- c **Oxton Road** (Balls Road to Charing Cross);
- d **Canning Street** (Tower Road to Hamilton Street);
- e **Rendel Street/Watson Street** (Tower Road to Borough Road);
- f **Conway Street** (Park Road North to Hamilton Street);
- g **Cleveland Street** (Watson Street to Hamilton Square).

❑ **The Next Steps**

- a The 20 year timescale;
- b Developing an Action Plan and annual implementation programme;
- c Marketing and Promotion;
- d Links with other documents such as the LTP and UDP review.

- 3.4 Over 550 residents took the trouble to contribute to the questionnaire survey, including many from areas outside Birkenhead. Feedback on the outcome of their involvement, with appropriate publicity through the local media, should follow approval of the document. Maintaining public and business interest and positive involvement will be crucial to the success of the 2020 Vision.

4. **Action Plan**

- 4.1 This must be strongly influenced by a detailed understanding of the commercial and retail market: its sub-regional context and the position of Birkenhead in the retail hierarchy. However, it must also be seen to be influenced by the following criteria:

- o What the public and businesses have told us in the consultation exercise;
- o The strategic objectives of the Birkenhead Town Centre 2020 Vision;
- o The strategic objectives of the North West Development Agency;
- o The objectives of the Wirral Waterfront and the SSSDA Implementation Plan;
- o What is achievable in the first five years.

- 4.2 The key issues from the public and business consultation process so far, are detailed in appendix 1. These have been translated into Strategic Objectives which are stated in the 2020 Vision and Strategy document. In essence, the issues raised by the **public** are:

1. Poorly maintained and presented public realm.
2. Lack of quality shops, especially non-food/departmental stores.
3. Feeling that the town centre is not safe, especially at night.
4. People problems – rowdyism.
5. Poor public transport services.
6. Poor environment of some shopping areas and especially around the tunnel approaches.
7. Lack of identity to the town centre.
8. Poor range of leisure attractions and nightlife.
9. Parking issues.
10. The town centre is not attractive and lacks quality open spaces.

4.3 In addition **businesses** in the area, whilst sharing the public's concern over the above issues, also cite the need for:

- o A **Town Centre Manager**, independent of the Council;
- o More **effective promotion** of the town centre to attract customers and visitors;
- o More effort to **remove negative influences** which deter business investment;
- o Everyone to **start working together** to achieve the Vision for the town centre;
- o To **attract more people** into the town centre.

4.4 The **North West Development Agency**, in its recent guidance outlining the expected focus of the Government's post-Single Regeneration Budget regeneration policies, identifies the improvement of town centres as a key target for support.

4.5 The **North West Regional Strategy** highlights the importance of town centre regeneration as well as developing tourism and transport infrastructure, creative industries and providing opportunities for significant new business, commercial and industrial development.

4.6 The main elements of the **2020 Vision and Strategy** accord with the targets outlined in the **Wirral Waterfront bid document**, as follows:

- To continue the sustainable revival of the town centre;
- To unify its currently disparate elements”;
- To recognise that a mix of retail, leisure and recreation activity is needed to ensure the town's vitality and viability”;
- To develop a “Town Centre Management Strategy”, under a Town Centre Manager;
- To pursue a programme of co-ordinated action, encouraging new commercial, retail and office development”;
- To further promote leisure and tourism, building on the Hamilton Quarter and Conway Park initiatives”;
- To improve access, and inter-modal transport links;
- To pursue initiatives designed to address public safety issues;
- To co-ordinate public realm improvement works;
- To carry out improvements to key corridors and gateways to the town centre and tunnel approaches;
- To upgrade urban green spaces;
- To address crime and disorder problems;
- To improve opportunities for cultural activities;

- To accelerate new business starts in high growth sectors such as environmental industries, creative industries, tourism and leisure.

4.7 Birkenhead Town Centre lies within Wirral's Strategic Spatial Development Area (SSDA). The SSDA strategy document and the Delivery Plan set out the aspirations with regard to the town centre.

The vision is "to develop competitive town centre functions and attractive tourism, arts, heritage and cultural industries that capture and retain consumer expenditure and reinforce the image of the SSDA as a competitive investment location."

The SSDA Action Plan sets out the following key objectives and targets for the town centre as follows:-

Objectives:

- Enhance the variety and quality of uses in the town centre by creating new opportunities for investment. As well as raising the profile of the town centre, this will also have the added advantage of enhancing the range of services in a single location, so reducing the need to travel;
- Improve the overall management and marketing of the town centre so enhancing its appearance and image;
- Improving the accessibility of the town centre, particularly by public transport. This refers to travel to and from the town centre and to movement around the town centre. This will facilitate access to employment and leisure opportunities, particularly from Pathways areas, and enhance the quality of the users' experience. This objective links with actions proposed under the Accessibility theme of this IDP, particularly improvements proposed at stations, including Hamilton Square, and other transport interchanges.

Targets:

- To increase Zone A rentals to £100 per sq.ft;
- To raise Birkenhead's retail ranking to 50th out of 460 town centres [currently Birkenhead is 86th];
- To decrease vacancy rates by 6%;
- To increase annual visitor numbers to 2.5m and annual visitor spend to £70m.

It then identifies the following specific projects for the town centre which are summarised below:-

- Town Centre Strategy;
- Town Centre Manager';
- Town Centre Marketing & Promotion;
- Office Development at Conway Park;
- Queensway Court, Conway Street;
- Improvements to Hind Street area.

These projects are set out in more detail on pages 74 – 86 of the SSDA Delivery Plan.

- 4.8 The priorities for action outlined in the Birkenhead Town Centre **2020 Vision and Strategy** document are heavily weighted to address these key areas. But there is an **emphasis on deliverability**. There are opportunities over the next five years, through the various funding regimes which are currently operating, to start to make a difference. **Significant** public expenditure will be needed initially, to make the step change needed to lift the town centre from its current low level of achievement. Unfortunately, existing funding sources will not be sufficient to do this.
- 4.9 Within the Wirral Waterfront area, there will be many demands on the very limited resources available. It is recognised that the town centre has no automatic right to a major tranche of available expenditure. But in the light of its importance to the economy of the employment corridor and the borough as a whole, it is hoped that the Wirral Waterfront Board will give it significant financial support. A number of detailed projects which will begin to change the commercial retail and leisure markets in the town centre, have been included in the SSDA Implementation Plan.
- 4.10 Public expectations are currently high and these need to be translated into some early successes to maintain their interest and involvement. However, every effort must be made not to raise **unrealistic** expectations.
- 4.11 **Private sector investment is essential** to secure sustainable regeneration, and this will be needed in three key areas, which are:

- ❑ **Retail development.** The results of the public consultation process clearly show that the main reason for most visits to the town centre is to shop. However, more quality food and non-food retail development is needed (and indeed retaining the significant stores already here), to attract wealthier residents of the borough and consequently to attract further quality retail development.

However, specialist research may be needed, to determine the retail strength of the town centre and its ability to attract further quality retail development. However, there are signs that the town centre is already attracting retail development interests.

The Council has recently received an approach from developers who claim to have a major food retailer interested in locating on the Oliver Street site, if they can secure a building footprint which can accommodate their standard internal floor layout. However, the required building footprint is larger than the extremities of the car parks and would require additional land either by diverting Claughton Road or demolishing property towards Grange Road.

Such a development would have significant implications for the whole of the town centre in terms of traffic, car parking and transport: the relationship with the rest of the shopping centre, and the ability to attract food retail development to the degraded Hind Street site.

The Company has asked for a 'lock-out agreement' period to enable their design team to work up detailed design proposals in conjunction with the Council's officers.

The Cabinet, at its meeting on 31 May 2001, agreed a nine-month 'lock-out' period, subject to review after three months.

- ❑ **Office/commercial development.** Local Estate Agents have reported a demand for modern office accommodation in the town centre. A number of schemes have already come forward such as Queensway Court on the site of the Drome club, and further development at Europa House. However, they require public sector contributions to complete the funding packages. Financial support for private sector development is subject to the rules relating to State Aid, which have caused problems nationally, of late

- ❑ **Leisure and tourism development.** Research by Mersey Tourism has shown that the tourist economy of Wirral is capable of significant growth, and Birkenhead Town Centre is one of the key locations for further tourist development. Already, the evening economy is starting to develop with new, quality, eating and drinking outlets appearing, especially in the Hamilton Quarter and around Charing Cross. New hotels are also planned.

This is complementing the leisure and heritage attractions developed in the last few years, such as Warner Village Cinemas, the Heritage Tramway, Pacific Road Theatre and Museum, and Wirral Museum. Galleries and creative outlets are also starting to locate in the area. But further private sector-led leisure development is needed, to develop a 'critical mass' of attractions that can then be effectively marketed to secure the full benefits of this increasingly important sector of the economy.

4.12 **Funding from the public sector will be needed to pump prime private sector investment.** This will be focused on five elements:

- a **Feasibility work and special studies**, which will inform decisions on the projects to be pursued in future programmes;

- b **The preparation of Development Briefs and design codes.** These will be needed to provide guidance for the development and enhancement of key locations, i.e. – the four Development Zones, the three Quarters, and the main pedestrian spine route.

- c **Site preparation.** Land remediation works, site aggregation, and the provision of transport and highway infrastructure, which will need to be in place or programmed, to enable quality and imaginative development to take place in a co-ordinated and mutually supportive manner, and

- d **Works in the public realm.** The restoration of the urban grain; development of quality streets and spaces, improved lighting, signage and street furniture, improved security, cleanliness and maintenance are all necessary to produce a town centre that people want to visit and find pleasurable.

- e To **provide gap funding** to complete funding packages for a number of commercial/office developments. Bids have already been lodged to draw down Objective One funding support for office schemes in Conway Park and the Hamilton Quarter.

5. Priority Schemes

5.1 The SSDA Delivery Plan sets out priority schemes for the town centre [see paragraph 4.7 of this report].

5.2 In addition the key schemes which reflect public and business concerns are as follows:

1 **Town Centre Manager.**

The appointment needs to be pursued as a matter of urgency, to co-ordinate the management, promotion and public realm cleaning and maintenance programmes. A funding package involving the Council, Wirral Waterfront, and traders in the shopping centre has been put together, but at present the full private sector contribution has not been secured. The post should be responsible to the funding providers and the Town Centre Programme Steering Group. After three years, the post should be able to become self-financing with funding being generated from a wider range of traders' contributions, and income from fundraising events promoted by the Town Centre Manager.

2 **A Town Centre Environmental Task Force** to focus exclusively on the cleanliness and maintenance of the town centre environment. A Best Value exercise relating to the Street Scene is currently underway. Client input is being provided by Karen Gosney from the Tranmere Urban Village and from Ian Walker, representing the Birkenhead Town Centre 2020 Vision project, the latter is also co-ordinating involvement from special user groups such as Wirral Association for Disability.

Further discussions will take place with the Council's Environmental Protection section, to explore ways of funding and establishing such a team, and introducing a top class, town centre cleaning and maintenance regime. Merseytravel would be involved to ensure improved cleanliness at railway stations and on trains.

To produce an immediate improvement to the appearance of the public realm, action would be focused on the bad state of the public areas, removing graffiti, chewing gum deposits and flyposting, replacing broken paving stones, alleviating ponding on footways, weeding of planted areas, repairing or replacing damaged litter bins, railings and street furniture, removal of redundant street furniture, replacing failed light fittings, providing new signposting and information points.

3 **Improved security and surveillance** in the town centre. A new policing policy was introduced to Wirral at the beginning of April, which is expected to provide significant benefits for the town centre. Close liaison will be maintained with Merseyside Police to monitor the effectiveness of the new arrangements, and with Merseytravel over security on the public transport network.

Opportunities to obtain additional funding to enhance CCTV coverage of the town centre will be explored, particularly for the Woodside and Grange Road West car park areas which are not effectively covered at present. Improved car park security generally, is being pursued by the Borough Engineer and car park owners.

5.3 Further there are **seven** other priority schemes which work needs to start urgently, as a prelude to developing detailed schemes, and in order to deliver the required outputs within the next five years. These are:

- 1 **Town Centre Movement Strategy.** The commissioning of a Town Centre Movement Strategy will look at all aspects of getting to, from, and around the town centre. This would also include further work on the traffic management measures that would need to be put in place should the removal of the remaining flyovers be justified as part of the overall plan. This project is covered more fully in Appendix 2.

Funding for the Movement Strategy is already available from Merseytravel and the Local Transport Plan allocation.

- 2 **The Hind Street/Town station area.** Preparing this severely degraded, largely derelict and unsightly area for development is a top priority because of its prominence at major gateways to the town centre, and the long time period that will be needed to complete site aggregation, land reclamation and the provision of appropriate infrastructure.

The intention is to redevelop the northern part of the area for town centre uses, including food retail, and promote appropriate amendments to the Unitary Development Plan (UDP) land use designations through the forthcoming review process.

Work will need to include addressing the ugly dominance of the gasholders and the flyovers, both of which deter quality inward investment: also, the problems of access through the area for pedestrians and vehicles.

Resources for this area are being sought through the Land Reclamation Strategy, but significant additional public sector resources will need to be allocated, the precise amount being dependent on what remediation and infrastructure works are required, and the extent of property purchase needed to enable comprehensive redevelopment to occur.

- 3 **Woodside/Shore Road area.** These key waterfront sites are currently attracting investment interest and Development Briefs need to be completed urgently, to provide guidance and to maximise the opportunities these unique locations offer.

There are some land use issues to resolve, such as the residential allocation on the Rose Brae site shown in the UDP, and traffic circulation aspects to examine, so that optimum configuration of development sites can be secured.

Initial work can be undertaken by existing staff resources of the Council and existing Single Regeneration Budget teams, although some fees may be involved to cover specialist advice.

- 4 **Public Realm Works.** These include producing a scheme for the proposed main **Pedestrian Spine Route** (Woodside through Hamilton Square to Central Station and Charing Cross/Grange Road West).

The fragmentation and poor quality of much of the town centre has been highlighted as a negative feature in the consultation exercise. There exists a great opportunity to lay out a striking pedestrian-oriented route linking important locations, and designing in public art features, bespoke lighting, street furniture, banners and many other features to uplift the entire area.

A **lead artist** needs to be appointed to work with people and organisations whose works affect the public realm of the town centre. Elements to examine include the development of a **Public Art Strategy**, which would embrace a **'percent for art' policy**. The aim is to ensure that public art is a feature of all aspects of town centre enhancement and development. This will produce local distinctiveness, enliven the whole of the town centre and give it uniqueness, vibrancy, and colour to attract visitors and private sector investment.

It is important to involve local people in its design and implementation. This could include specially designed banners, art screens, beacons and art on blank walls and bridge parapets. The involvement of children and unemployed youngsters in designing and making these features could provide them with a feeling of lasting 'ownership' of the town centre environment, thereby reducing the incidence of vandalism and other misdeeds, which the public consultation has highlighted as a problem in the town centre.

The work should dovetail into the Town Centre Movement Strategy so that the considerations of each can be built into the other to provide mutual benefits. It would also be co-ordinated with a **Town Centre Lighting Strategy**, to explore possibilities of enhanced lighting with particular emphasis on architectural and public realm lighting with the pedestrian in mind.

- 5 The preparation of **Town Centre Design Guidance** for new development across the town centre. This would be tied in with a Wirral-wide design guide which will form part of Supplementary Planning Guidance.
- 6 Prepare **Gateway Corridor Plans** for the main 'gateways' into the town centre:
 - o Oxtun Road;
 - o Conway Street;
 - o Canning Street;
 - o Rendel Street/Watson Street;
 - o New Chester Road;
 - o Borough Road.
- 7 Preparatory work for the **extension of the Heritage Tramway** from the Old Colonial into the town centre at Conway Street. This scheme is **a priority in terms of tourism infrastructure**, to maximise visitor numbers to the venues on the Heritage Trail and maximise the benefits of the investment already expended through Urban Programme, Objective One, the Hamilton Quarter and Merseyside Development Corporation, on the attractions along the Trail.

6. Financial and Staffing Implications

- 6.1 Wirral Waterfront and the current Objective One programme have a relatively short timespan in terms of the 2020 Vision. But as the town centre is highlighted as of strategic importance to the employment corridor, it is assumed that it will be afforded some priority in the allocation of funds over the next 5 years or so.
- 6.2 However, in the light of the intensive competition for funding across the whole of the Wirral Waterfront area, it is inevitable that, despite the strategic importance of the town centre, these resources will need to be augmented by additional public sector resources over a longer time period, in order to deliver the Vision.
- 6.3 There are other constraints which will have a bearing on how packages of funding are put together. For example, Objective One support is not available for housing or retail schemes. However, some complex schemes will offer scope for careful and imaginative packaging of bids to draw down assistance from this source for eligible items such as landscape, building refurbishment, access or commercial elements.
- 6.4 The Council has bid successfully to English Partnerships, for assistance from the Land Reclamation Strategy towards the extension of the heritage tramway from Taylor Street to the shopping centre. This will need to be matched by resources from Wirral Waterfront and Objective One. Other opportunities to draw down money from this source may be possible for reclamation and site assembly in the Hind Street area.
- 6.5 The Local Transport Plan could provide significant financial assistance developing integrated transport schemes. It has already identified £200,000 to carry out the Town Centre Movement Strategy during 2001/02.
- 6.6 Other potential sources of financial assistance are the Crime and Disorder Strategy and the Health Action Zones initiatives. There are expected to be new government initiatives which will provide opportunities to bid for substantial resources for the implementation of the **Birkenhead Town Centre 2020 Vision**. However, continued and increased investment from the private sector is the only long term answer to sustainable regeneration in the town centre. The public sector's input can, and should, only be a temporary element to kick-start the process.
- 6.7 I suggest that, if the Select Committee approves the **2020 Vision and Strategy**, a full report be prepared for consideration at a future meeting, on the financial implications and timescales envisaged for delivering an implementation programme, over the next five years and beyond.

7. Equal Opportunity Implications

- 7.1 The needs of the elderly and people with disabilities have been addressed in many of the schemes outlined above.

8. Human Rights Implications

- 8.1 There are no Human Rights Implications arising from this report.

9. Local Agenda 21

9.1 Many of the schemes are designed to reflect Local Agenda 21 issues and are specifically designed to produce a cleaner, greener, less polluted and more attractive environment within the Town Centre.

10. Community Safety Implications

10.1 The contents of this report do not have Community Safety Implications under the terms of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998.

11. Planning Implications

11.1 Planning Applications and Listed Building Consent applications are submitted as necessary. Some of the schemes outlined in the accompanying report will require changes to the Unitary Development Plan Land Use allocations and will be covered in the forthcoming review of the Unitary Development Plan.

12. Local Member Implications

12.1 Birkenhead Town Centre 2020 Vision project specifically includes areas of the Birkenhead, Tranmere and Claughton wards but will be of significant interest to Members throughout Wirral.

13. Background Papers

13.1 No background papers have been used in the preparation of this report.

14. Recommendations

14.1 That the Cabinet approves the **Birkenhead Town Centre 2020 Vision and Strategy** document as the basis for developing an Action Plan and Implementation programme and to act as a framework for the management, development and promotion of Birkenhead Town Centre.

14.2 That the Cabinet requests the preparation of an Implementation Programme to cover the first five years of the Vision, in line with the SSDA Strategy and Delivery Plan and the 2020 Vision document.

14.3 That the Cabinet agrees the priority schemes outlined in the report and the projects for the Town Centre agreed in the SSDA Delivery Plan and requests the appropriate officers to prepare a more detailed programme and expenditure profile for consideration at a future meeting.

14.4 That the Cabinet acknowledges the availability of funding of up to £200,000 from the Local Transport Plan, to carry out the Birkenhead Town Centre Movement Strategy and urges early commissioning of the study.

14.5 That the Cabinet agrees that the Birkenhead Town Centre Programme Steering Group, set up by the Wirral Waterfront Board, be given the task of overseeing the delivery of the Birkenhead Town Centre 2020 Vision and Strategy.

- 14.6 That the Hamilton Quarter Project Leader be asked to explore ways of providing feedback to the public and businesses that have been involved in the consultation process, and to arrange the production of an appropriate publicity document on the lines of the Vision and Strategy document now approved.
- 14.7 That the Wirral Waterfront Executive Manager explores options for engaging specialist retail and commercial consultants to advise on these aspects of the Town Centre.
- 14.8 That the Wirral Waterfront Executive Manager be authorised to continue negotiations with the North West Development Agency and other appropriate organisations, about drawing down additional funding to deliver the 2020 Vision as outlined, over the course of the next 20 years.
- 14.9 That the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Planning and Economic Development be requested to take account of the Birkenhead Town Centre 2020 Vision and Strategy in the forthcoming review of the Unitary Development Plan.
- 14.10 That a report on the progress with the implementation of the Birkenhead Town Centre 2020 Vision be provided for Select Committee in six months time.

J Wilkie

Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Planning and Economic Development

This report was prepared by Ian Walker, Project Leader for the Hamilton Quarter project, and Co-ordinator of the Birkenhead Town Centre 2020 Vision, who can be reached by telephoning 666 5082.

G:\WORD\REPORTS\IW12JUL1

APPENDIX 1

1 THE CONSULTATION PROCESS AND ANALYSIS

- 1.1 In July 2000, Wirral Council gave its backing to the preparation of a Vision and Strategy for Birkenhead Town Centre – the **Birkenhead Town Centre 2020 Vision** project.
- 1.2 A **Steering Group** was set up in September 2000 to co-ordinate the public and business consultation exercise and to produce a Vision and Strategy for the future development, management and promotion of Birkenhead Town Centre. The group contained representatives from the Council, the Hamilton Quarter, Lairdside and Wirral Waterfront regeneration teams, Merseytravel, Merseyside Police, Wirral Pathways, the Employment Agency, Town Centre Forum and Wirral Chamber of Commerce.
- 1.3 Local marketing and promotions consultants, Vivid Creative Consultancy, were appointed by competitive tender, to run the initial consultation exercise, and a local artist was appointed to visually interpret the ideas coming out of the consultation process.
- 1.4 From early November 2000, extensive consultations took place with various interest groups and the general public: the aim being to find out what they felt were the shortcomings of the town centre, and to give them the chance to suggest what might be done to improve the town centre for the future. Over 550 responses were received and the Strategy and Action Plan is based on their comments and suggestions.
- 1.5 The business consultation exercise was carried out mainly during January and February 2001. The feedback from the work carried out by consultants King Sturge as part of the extended Hind Street Study, has also been used to enable some conclusions to be drawn about the business view of the town centre. These are outlined below.

2. RESULTS OF THE BUSINESS CONSULTATION

- 2.1 Following an analysis of the research and survey information, King Sturge's conclusions are that, between 1997 and 2000, compared with other north-west sub-regional centres, Birkenhead improved as a retail destination, rising to 71st in the Expression Goad hierarchy research, out of a total of 460 main centres canvassed. Although this was an improvement over the 73rd placing in 1997, by 2001, it had slipped back to 86th
- 2.2 The improvement was credited to the environmental enhancement of the Grange Shopping Centre which had a knock-on effect in improved occupancy rates and the improvement of the prime Zone A rentals. Many mid-range and discount retail operators have also improved their representation in Birkenhead. The worsening position may reflect the loss of two major retail outlets – 'Living' and C&A Modes in 1999 and 2000 respectively. The town centre now needs to attract high quality and speciality retailing. This can only be addressed if the town centre raises its profile as a sub-regional centre.
- 2.3 The consultants have examined the potential for the town centre to attract these types of store. They have confirmed in their report that the out-of-region, market perceptions of Birkenhead are that the town is a suburb of Liverpool and, as most retail operators are represented in the city, there is no requirement to provide a store in Birkenhead.

- 2.4 To generate demand from these types of operators, and move the town centre forward as a competing centre, there is a need to demonstrate that Birkenhead has a separate identity, providing different yet competing functions and uses. It needs also, to demonstrate that it has a sufficient quantity of affluent shoppers of the required standing to satisfy the individual retailers' particular requirements.
- 2.5 The key factor which will improve both operators and shoppers' perceptions of the town centre is to achieve lettings to a quality department store and food store and other quality non-food operators.
- 2.6 The consultations already carried out with retail businesses have confirmed that there are a number of retail companies in the non-food sector who are prepared to consider locating a store in Birkenhead, if the right size premises and the right location are available. They have also identified three major food supermarket companies who are interested in locating a foodstore of about 7,000m² the town centre.
- 2.7 Recent developments in the shopping centre have seen existing stores move to larger premises in the town centre, which have been made available by the conversion of the former 'Living' store in Grange Road. This would seem to support the view that the town centre needs to be able to offer larger units, say 1,500–3,000m² to allow existing retailers to expand, and to attract new retail operators requiring that size of store. However, it could also indicate that there is insufficient interest in the town centre from new retailers.
- 2.8 During January and early February, 481 letters were sent out to businesses in the Pyramids and Grange shopping centres, the Hamilton Quarter and the members of the Wirral Chamber of Commerce and Industry, that are located within the town centre. By early May 2001 only 47 had been returned – 32 from Hamilton Quarter businesses and 15 from the rest of the town centre.
- 2.9 Following the availability of an updated database, a further mailshot was sent out in late May to another 214 businesses in the town centre. This has resulted in a further 40 responses.
- 2.10 The most common complaints are the scruffiness of the area, the down market image, feelings that the area is unsafe, poor lighting, not enough people around at night, lack of a recognisable town centre, parking difficulties, high business rates. Many of these concerns coincide with those raised by the public at large.
- 2.11 At present, with less than a 15% response rate, it is not possible to draw firm conclusions. The views of the major companies who are within the town centre, and those not represented, need to be received to provide a less parochial view of the town centre and its problems/opportunities.

3. RESULTS OF THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION

- 3.1 The public consultation exercise set out to obtain feedback from as wide a range of Wirral residents as possible, not just in Birkenhead. Particular efforts were made to obtain responses from traditionally hard to reach groups such as schoolchildren, disabled people, and ethnic minorities. Schools were specifically targeted and large

print questionnaires and a 'Talking Book' facility were used to reach sight-impaired groups. Ethnic minorities were reached through Pathways and other means, and outlying areas reached through presentations to groups in these areas and via the roving exhibition.

3.2 Over 550 responses have been received to date, and these show a high correlation between the issues raised by various groups consulted between January and September 2000, and the members of the public who have returned questionnaires. The key issues raised can be summarised as follows:

3.3 **KI.1 Town Centre Generally**

- o Create a focus to the town centre
- o Improve linkages between parts of the town centre
- o Capitalise on the waterfront/historic areas of the town centre
- o Remove areas of dereliction especially around the tunnel
- o Make it more attractive and safe to walk around
- o Design competition for improving the town centre

3.4 **KI.2 Shopping**

- o To attract the 40% of Wirral's more affluent residents to shop in the town centre to justify quality shopping investment
- o Better quality department stores
- o Wider choice of speciality shops
- o Establish areas for speciality shops – e.g. French Quarter?
- o Better quality and range of clothes shops
- o Good, large foodstore
- o More covered shopping areas
- o Improve shopping environments

3.5 **KI.3 Environment**

- o Remove litter, graffiti etc.
- o Improve pavements/pedestrian areas and provide seating
- o Remove the flyovers
- o Improve area in front of Central Station
- o Remove dereliction of all kinds, especially round the tunnel approaches
- o Improve street cleaning, maintenance and litter collection
- o Improve Oxton Road/Grange Road/Argyle Street areas
- o Provide more and better toilets
- o Improve access/facilities for disabled people
- o Introduce more green spaces
- o Improve approaches to the town – Borough Road, Oxton Road, A41

3.6 **KI.5 Leisure attractions**

- o Provide more attractions for the under 18 age group
- o Ensure museums etc., are open more
- o Improve the quality of eating and drinking places
- o Maximise assets along the waterfront
- o Attract a good theatre
- o Better quality nightlife
- o Broaden the range of events and use Pacific Road/Town Hall more
- o Develop an artists quarter with galleries etc
- o Develop good quality hotel
- o More choice of attractions/facilities (e.g. ice rink, 10-pin bowling)

3.7 **KI.6 Law and Order/Security**

- o Greater police presence, especially at night
- o Improved lighting
- o Improved security in car parks
- o Improved security on public transport
- o Improved security in pubs/clubs/bars
- o Eliminate yobbish behaviour in the town centre generally

3.8 **KI.7 Public Transport**

- o Develop an integrated transport network
- o Improve the operation of the bus station
- o Extend the tram system
- o Develop the electric bus network
- o Park and ride schemes
- o Improve bus services
- o Make public transport cheaper
- o Improve late night transport services
- o Better provision for cyclists and pedestrians.

3.9 **KI.8 Parking and Traffic**

- o Reduce parking charges or make parking free
- o Remove charging for parking at night
- o Improve security in car parks
- o Increase the amount of parking areas
- o Improve traffic circulation and reduce congestion

3.10 **KI.9 Marketing and Promotion**

- o Demonstrate that Birkenhead has a separate identity from Liverpool
- o Promote the good things about the town centre
- o Improve Christmas decorations
- o Advertise events/attractions more
- o Improve publicity, signage and interpretation

3.11 There were many things that people felt were good about the town centre, and these should not be underestimated. The Top Ten good points (in order of popularity) were as follows:

- 1st. Hamilton Square and its historic surroundings;
- 2nd. The Market – seen as a major asset to the town centre;
- 3rd. Good range of shops;
- 4th. The waterfront and Woodside Ferry area;
- 5th. The Pyramids shopping centre;
- 6th. Birkenhead Park;
- 7th. The Bus Station/Conway Park Station;
- 8th. Public transport generally;
- 9th. A compact and interesting shopping area;
- 10th. Warner Village Cinema.

3.12 There were interesting contradictions in the views of what was good and bad about the town centre. This might reflect the age groups that responded, but could reflect aspects of features or facilities that were both good and bad. For example,

- o The bus station was seen by many as a good building, convenient to the shopping area, but by others as a negative feature in that it is too small to cope with demand, cold and draughty (users of Stands 1 and 2 perhaps).
- o There were comments about there being too many cheap shops, sports shops, and lack of variety of shops. Others wanted more cheap shops and, mainly younger people, more clothes shops and sports shops.

3.13 The overall results so far show that the overwhelming number of people find good things to say about the town centre, but there is clearly much still to do to rectify negative aspects which continue to act against the town centre achieving its true potential. These are the elements that the programme of action needs to address.

APPENDIX 2

1 MOVEMENT STRATEGY

- 1.1 The early commissioning of a **Movement Strategy for Birkenhead Town Centre** is vital. It will guide the provision of appropriate highway, footway and transport infrastructure to achieve maximum integration of all forms of transport, following 'green' principles, tackle problems of car parking, traffic congestion, environmental blight, and generally walking or cycling round the town centre. It will follow on from the study recently undertaken by Oscar Faber, into the feasibility of removing the remaining flyovers that link the Borough Road area to the Queensway tunnel and the A41.
- 1.2 Funding for this work has been identified in the Local Transport Plan, and from Merseytravel, and is now available.
- 1.3 Merseytravel have also indicated their intention to commence shortly, a study of 'Corridor G' identified in the Local Transport Plan, which deals with cross-river travel between Wirral and Liverpool City Centre. Discussions are in progress to ensure that the core of the town centre is included within the scope of this study.

Considerations:

- o Growing trend to reduce bus services within the Hamilton Quarter needs to be either reversed or alternative transport links provided.
- o Develop the SMART-eco JUPITER bus network to provide clean bus links around the town centre, to replace the loss of main services through the Hamilton Quarter.
- o Establish 'bus only' lanes along strategic routes (e.g. Argyle Street),
- o Extend bus station
- o Remove bus lane in front of the Market
- o Provide bus layover facilities close to bus station
- o Pending the construction of the tramway extension, develop a new SMART-eco bus lane between Egerton Bridge/Twelve Quays and Conway Park along the proposed tramway route.
- o Examine the provision of park-and-ride locations in the Town Station, Green Lane or Tower Road areas, linking with an extended SMART-eco bus network
- o Complete cycle routes between Woodside and the shopping centre, together with links northwards to Wallasey and southwards to Tranmere.
- o Improve the pedestrian link between Central Station and Grange Road shopping centre
- o Reduce use of Argyle Street as through traffic route by examining the potential for diverting traffic onto alternative routes.
- o Improve local vehicular access between Grange Road West and Oxton Road
- o Examine seriously, the potential for developing a light rail route (or routes) in Wirral, e.g. linking central Birkenhead to East Wallasey, Woodchurch Road/Arrowe Park Hospital, and the Wirral International Business Park. (A Wirral Waterfront Light Rail route)
- o Look at ways of making it easier to walk through the town centre, particularly at points of traffic/vehicular conflict, e.g. Charing Cross, Argyle Street, and Central Station.
- o Improve information about public transport services
- o Develop through ticketing systems which facilitate changes of route or mode without having to purchase new tickets

- o Improve security when travelling by bus or train services, particularly on the vehicles and in the evening.
- o Explore options for removing through traffic from Charing Cross.