

# CABINET

Monday, 23 July 2018

Present: Councillor P Davies (Chair) Leader of the Council

|             |               |                      |
|-------------|---------------|----------------------|
| Councillors | A Davies      | Jobs & Growth        |
|             | G Davies      | Housing & Planning   |
|             | C Jones       | Adult Care & Health  |
|             | B Mooney      | Children & Families  |
|             | M Patrick     | Environment          |
|             | P Stuart      | Law & Order          |
|             | J Williamson  | Finance & Resources  |
|             | S Whittingham | Highways & Transport |

Apologies: Councillors P Brightmore Leisure and Recreation

## 16 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Stuart Whittingham declared a personal and prejudicial interest in Item No. 2 on the agenda – Core Strategy Local Plan – Review of Development Options by virtue of him being a Board member of Magenta Living. (Minute No. 17 refers.) He indicated that he would leave the meeting room whilst this item of business was under consideration.

## 17 CORE STRATEGY LOCAL PLAN - REVIEW OF DEVELOPMENT OPTIONS



**Councillor George Davies, Cabinet Member - Housing & Planning (and Deputy Leader of the Council), said:**

*“Wirral must have a Local Plan. It is a legal duty, and the policy which guides and determines how our Borough can be developed in the coming years. It is crucial our Local Plan is designed based on the unique needs and character of our Borough, and the needs of our residents.”*

*“The Government have set Wirral a target, which means we must make enough land available to allow for 12,000 new homes to be built in Wirral by 2035. We know, and so do Government ministers, that we do not have enough brownfield or urban land to enable housebuilding of this scale.”*

*“This is why we will be talking to residents through an extensive programme of community consultation over the coming weeks. We are legally obliged to review our Green Belt land and, while making any of those sites available for development will be our last resort, it has been made unequivocally clear to us that if we do not do it, it will be taken out of our hands.”*

*“Wirral is blessed with a stunning environment – miles of coastline, beautiful countryside and large areas of open green space. 46% of Wirral is currently classed as Green Belt. We will meet our statutory obligations, we will develop a Local Plan which meets residents’ needs, but we must and will do everything we can to protect the special character of Wirral. This consultation is vital, and I hope every Wirral resident is able to get involved and make their voice heard.”*

Councillor George Davies introduced a report which set out the results of the review of development options approved by the Cabinet before deciding on the sites that would be included for development in the Council’s Local Plan. Appended to the report were:

- Appendix 1 – Sites Recommended for Consultation for New Housing Development.
- Appendix 2 – Maps of Housing Sites.
- Appendix 3 – Sites Recommended for Consultation for New Employment and Mixed Uses.
- Appendix 4 – Maps of Employment Sites

The Cabinet noted that the review had taken account of:

- the Council’s latest review of local housing needs (Strategic Housing Market Assessment, SHMA, May 2016), which was reported to the Cabinet in July 2016 and made the subject to public consultation in August 2016).
- the latest review of housing and employment needs for the City Region prepared by the Combined Authority (SHELMA, March 2018), which was the subject to public consultation in October 2017.
- The Government’s proposed new method for calculating local housing needs (published for consultation in September 2017).

- a review of the available urban housing land supply at April 2018 (SHLAA, for which a methodology was the subject to public consultation in July 2017).
- the publication of the Council's first Brownfield Land Register in December 2017, following the public consultation and the neighbour notification in October 2017.
- a Playing Pitch Strategy Update (published in November 2017 and approved by the Council in December 2017).
- an Employment Land and Premises Study Update (Wirral ELPS, December 2017, reported to the Cabinet in March 2018).
- the findings arising from an initial review of the Green Belt (for which a methodology was subject to public consultation in October 2017).
- an update to the Council's assessment of development viability for April 2018.
- the emerging review of the National Planning Policy Framework and its associated guidance.

The Cabinet also noted that the review had concluded that there was a continued shortage of land for development within the urban area to meet the needs of the local population and the economy, and that it would not currently be possible to meet these needs within Wirral without using land within the existing Green Belt, and the sites that could potentially be considered suitable for release from the Green Belt through the Local Plan had been identified.

The report, therefore, concluded that the sites detailed in its Appendices be published for public consultation, for six weeks, alongside the more detailed findings of the review in September 2018, to avoid the summer holidays, before being included in an initial draft Local Plan to be reported to the Cabinet in December 2018.

Councillor George Davies reported that the consultation would enable the Council to demonstrate that a full range of available alternatives had been properly considered and consulted upon, in line with the requirements of national policy and legislation, before any final decision was taken on the content of the Borough's Core Strategy Local Plan. The Cabinet noted that the results of the consultation would be used to inform that final decision and to inform a sustainability appraisal and the assessment of their likely environmental impacts.

The timetable would remain in line with the Local Development Scheme approved by the Council in March 2018 (Minute No. 133 refers), which was currently being monitored by the Secretary of State.

The Cabinet was aware that the decision to propose amendments to the Local Plan was a key decision and the final decision on the sites to be included in the Local Plan would require a resolution of the Council.

Councillor George Davies informed that the final decision on the sites to be included in the Local Plan could support the delivery of the Wirral Plan pledge for good quality housing which met the needs of local residents and Wirral Plan Housing Strategy objectives to build more homes to meet the Council's economic growth ambitions and improve the quality of Wirral's housing offer for its residents. It could support the delivery of the Wirral Plan pledges to drive economic growth, create greater job opportunities, increase inward investment and provide assets and buildings that would be fit for purpose.

The final decision on the sites to be included in the Local Plan could also support the delivery of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy and an increase in income through New Homes Bonus, Council Tax and Business Rates.

The option of not preparing an up-to-date Local Plan would mean that the Council would have to continue to rely on the Unitary Development Plan adopted in February 2000. It may also incur financial penalties and the intervention of the Secretary of State.

Alternative options for urban and other previously developed sites would be subject to public consultation as part of the publication of the Wirral Employment Land and Premises Study Update December 2017 and the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment Update April 2018.

Alternative options for land within the Green Belt would also be subject to public consultation as part of the publication of the findings of the officer's Initial Review of the Green Belt.

Councillor George Davies informed that a Local Plan gave direction and certainty about the future development of the Borough and, if done properly, could protect open spaces, safeguard the character of its towns and villages and encourage urban and brownfield development.

The Local Plan had to meet a housing target set by Central Government as part of its National Housing Strategy and the National Planning Policy Framework. The Government had established a target of 800 new homes in Wirral every year for 15 years – a total of 12,000 new houses by 2035.

The Wirral Local Plan had to identify sufficient "suitable available and deliverable" land and sites to enable this target to be met. Cabinet Members had argued with

Government Ministers who had acknowledged that Wirral did not have enough brownfield sites to meet this target but they remained adamant so the Council would have to review the Green Belt land in the Borough.

Councillor George Davies reported that Government targets did not take into consideration the reality of the environment. Wirral was a peninsula, bordered on three sides by water, and 46% of Wirral's land was designated as Green Belt. Government targets did not recognise the housing needs of the Borough. He was clear that every brownfield option would be explored first.

A list of brownfield sites had been drawn up and it was considered that approximately 3000 new homes could be accommodated across the lifetime of the Plan. Councillor Davies informed that he had written to land owners and developers with current planning permissions urging them to start building. He had written to the Peel Group (owners of the Wirral Waters site) seeking an explanation on why it was not building any homes when it had planning permission in place to build 13,500. This inactivity on the UK's largest planning approved brownfield site was directly linked to the need for the Council to consult on releasing some Green Belt land.

The report detailed the opportunities residents and businesses on the Wirral had to make their opinions known and Councillor Davies informed that their comments would be a formal part of the Local Plan process.

Councillor Angie Davies endorsed the report and echoed Councillor George Davies' concerns about forcing top down targets on a Borough like Wirral. She considered that it was the Council that should decide what Wirral's housing needs were and how to meet them. Councillor Davies also informed that next week the Wirral Growth Company (the Council's joint venture with Muse Developments) would share its outline ideas to regenerate Birkenhead Town Centre and these would include plans to build new homes there. The Growth Company would play its part in helping to develop the homes Wirral needed. She considered it a shame that a private enterprise the size of Peel, did not demonstrate the same commitment.

Councillor Janette Williamson agreed that the Council was in the best position to determine a Local Plan that meets local needs. She considered it a disgrace that Peel had not built any of the new homes they had received planning consent to build.

Councillor Bernie Mooney added her support to the report and also urged Peel to start building, not just because Wirral residents needed the new homes they had been promised, but for the social and economic benefits this could bring. She informed that if the 13,500 homes were built on the Wirral Waters site, they could employ hundreds of local people in construction, use local firms in its supply chain and by building the shops, restaurants and businesses this development was

supposed to have, offer job and training opportunities to people across Birkenhead and Wallasey, areas of high social and economic deprivation.

Councillor Paul Stuart referred to the housing needs problem across the country. More social housing was needed. He considered that Peel Holdings should step up to the plate, develop the land and provide the housing needed on Wirral. He also informed that Peel Holdings had offered to meet Members in private to update them but he considered that such a meeting should be held in public.

Councillor Phil Davies also supported the report and urged local residents to take advantage of the consultation to shape the Local Plan which must be submitted to the Secretary of State for approval in the New Year. He was determined to develop a Local Plan and would complete this challenging task. He informed that he was surprised that a Government which, turned its back on the social and economic impacts of its policies, was so animated and passionate about pushing Boroughs like Wirral to build on its Green Belt. Councillor Davies referred to Angela Eagle MP and Alison McGovern MP's timely contributions to this debate and for urging Peel Holdings to build or hand back the land.

Councillor Phil Davies reminded the Cabinet that the Government had not provided any help to rebuild New Ferry and had undermined the Council's ability to deliver social housing and through years of inactivity and avoiding any intervention had created even greater inequalities in the housing market, most visible in the rising numbers of homeless people in major cities and towns.

**RESOLVED: That**

- (1) the results of the review of development needs and options set out in the report be noted;**
- (2) the sites identified in Appendices 1 to 6 of the report be published for public and stakeholder consultation, including the notification of neighbours, in line with the Council's adopted Statement of Community Involvement;**
- (3) the consultation be accompanied by copies of the relevant background reports related to the Employment Land and Premises Study Update December 2017; Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment Update April 2018; Viability Study Update 2018, revised assessment of Broad Spatial Options; and the officers' initial Review of the Green Belt; and**
- (4) the results of the consultation be reported to the Cabinet at its meeting in December 2018.**