

CABINET

Monday, 13 January 2020

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|-----------------|-------------|-------------------|---------------------------------|
| <u>Present:</u> | Councillor | P Hackett (Chair) | Leader of the Council |
| | Councillors | E Grey | Environment and Climate Change |
| | | C Jones | Adult Care Health and Wellbeing |
| | | T Jones | Regeneration and Growth |
| | | A Leech | The Local Plan |
| | | J McManus | Community Services |
| | | C Spriggs | Culture and Tourism |
| | | T Usher | Children Families and Education |
| | | S Whittingham | Housing and Planning |
| | | J Williamson | Finance and Resources |

77 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors Tony Jones and Tom Usher both declared a personal and prejudicial interest in agenda item No. 2 – Wirral Local Plan – 2020 – 2035: Approval of Issues and Options Document for Public Consultation – (Minute No. 78 refers) by virtue of them being Directors of the Wirral Growth Company. They both informed the Cabinet that they would leave the meeting whilst this item of business was under discussion.

Councillors Tony Jones and Tom Usher left the meeting.

78 WIRRAL LOCAL PLAN - 2020-2035: APPROVAL OF ISSUES AND OPTIONS DOCUMENT FOR PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Councillor Anita Leech introduced a report, which sought approval of an Issues and Options document for public consultation as part of the preparation of the Council's Local Plan for the Borough. In doing so she read out a statement that she had prepared informing that there was now an opportunity to create a blue print for the borough's future prosperity, sustainable development and to improve the lives and chances of those living in the Council's administrative area. The Local Plan would be a key strategic document which would influence how the Council delivered the majority of its services. Councillor Leech also informed that in less than a year the Council had made great progress by moving from the precipice of Government intervention to being on the brink of having a real chance to deliver much needed regeneration to those areas that need it most, to respond to the climate emergency and to provide sustainable options for the future.

Appended to the report were:

- Appendix 1 – Issues and Options Consultation Document;
- Appendix 2 – Issues and Options Appendices;

- Appendix 3 – Sustainability Appraisal Headline Findings Report; and
- Appendix 4 – Habitats Regulations Assessment.

Councillor Leech reported that producing a Local Plan was one of the most important obligations for a local authority. Local Plans set out a long-term vision for how an area would develop in the future, with policies that would shape future development. Councillor Leech informed that they addressed a wide range of issues, from strategic planning matters that affected the whole local authority area right through to finer details on the design of development on individual sites. It was noted that the Government required each local planning authority to produce a Local Plan and then review it at least once every five years to ensure it was up to date.

Councillor Leech told the Cabinet that the Wirral Local Plan would cover a period from 2020 through to 2035 and set out policies and proposals to guide the future development of the Borough over that time. It would set out where future development would take place, and allocate land for housing, employment, mixed-use and other development. The Local Plan would also seek to protect the most important characteristics of the Borough, by preserving our unique natural and historical assets from development.

It was reported that in preparing the new Local Plan the Council must consult with local residents to seek their views on its proposed contents. The Council also had to engage with its local and regional partners, such as neighbouring local authorities and government agencies.

The Local Plan Issues and Options document set out the Council's proposals and the Cabinet noted that it had to be published for consultation under Regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012, which required that:

- (1) "A local planning authority must –
 - (a) Notify each of the bodies or persons specified in paragraph (2) of the subject of a local plan which the local planning authority proposed to prepare, and
 - (b) Invite each of them to make representations to the local planning authority about what a local plan with that subject ought to contain.

- (2) The bodies or persons referred to in paragraph (1) are –
 - (a) such of the specific consultation bodies as the local planning authority consider may have an interest in the subject of the proposed local plan;
 - (b) such of the general consultation bodies as the local planning authority consider appropriate; and

- (c) such residents or other persons carrying on business in the local planning authority's area from which the local planning authority consider it appropriate to invite representations.
- (3) In preparing the local plan, the local planning authority must take into account and representation made to them in response to invitations under paragraph (1)."

The Cabinet was aware that the proposals were based upon evidence about the economic, social and environmental needs of the Borough and a number of evidence studies had been commissioned or updated to inform the production of the Issues and Options document. These evidence studies were listed in Appendix 1.1 of the Issues and Options document.

Councillor Leech reported that the Local Plan Issues and Options consultation document sought views on the future direction for development in Wirral. The Cabinet noted that one of the main issues was that the Council needed to deliver enough new homes to meet the nationally prescribed target of 12,000 net new dwellings over the 15-year Local Plan period – equivalent to 800 new homes every year; and 80 hectares of new employment land. These figures had been established through the evidence base.

The Issues and Options document set out a series of Spatial Options on how housing and employment requirements could be met within the Borough. The Preferred Option was for Urban Intensification. However, to meet the evidential requirements for deliverability and developability of the Council's development needs over the Plan period, it was also necessary to consult on a range of other options should it not be able to meet all of its requirements by Urban Intensification alone. The Cabinet was aware that the other options would involve release of land for development which was currently designated as Green Belt. Therefore, the consultation document set out a total of four options, which were Urban Intensification (Option 1A); Urban Intensification with stepped delivery (Option 1B); Urban Intensification with Dispersed Green Belt Release (Option 2A); and Urban Intensification with a Single Urban Expansion into the Green Belt (Option 2B).

Details of the options were set out in Chapter 4 of the consultation document. The consultation document made it clear that the preferred option was Urban Intensification without Green Belt release and clearly set out what was required in order to achieve that option. It also clarified that in the event that some Green Belt release was required, the solution could be a hybrid of the various options.

The Cabinet noted that a draft policy on Housing in Multiple Occupation was detailed in Appendix 5.1 of the consultation document. Publication of the proposed policy at the Regulation 18 stage would enable the policy to be considered as an emerging planning policy when determining planning applications pending the adoption of the Local Plan. However, as an emerging

policy it could not carry full statutory weight before the Local Plan was adopted. The Cabinet was also aware that the Council remained under threat of intervention by the Secretary of State should it not produce a Local Plan in accordance with the timetable set out in the Council's Action Plan, which was agreed with MHCLG in April 2019. That Action Plan stated that the Regulation 18 consultation would commence in January 2020. The consultation would be in accordance with the Statement of Community Involvement adopted by the Council in 2014, which set out local standards for public involvement in the Council's preparation of policy documents and on planning applications.

The Statement of Community Involvement set out the expected methods of community involvement for a Local Plan at the Regulation 18 stage of the Plan making process, in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012, which included public meetings, focus groups and notification letters. For the Regulation 18 consultation there would also be a website consultation portal available at <https://wirral-consult.objective.co.uk> where anyone who wished to could view and submit comments on the Local Plan Issues and Options document.

In approving the Issues and Options document, Members would not be approving the final draft Local Plan that would be submitted to the Secretary of State. Subject to the Cabinet and Council's approval of the Regulation 18 consultation document, attached to the report, the Council would consider all responses received as a result of the consultation process and take them into account in preparing the final draft Local Plan which would set out the details of how the Council proposed to meet the Borough's development needs and the long-term vision for the development of the Borough. The final site allocations would also be included in the final draft Local Plan.

Councillor Leech reported that it was expected that, subject to the approval of the Issues and Options consultation document, the final draft Local Plan would be presented to the Council meeting in July 2020 for approval and further public representations would then be invited (the Regulation 19 stage). The final draft Local Plan and all representations would then be submitted for Examination by an Independent Planning Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State. This was currently expected to take place in November 2020.

Councillor Leech moved the recommendations set out in the report and they were seconded by Councillor Pat Hackett.

Councillors Pat Hackett, Liz Grey and Janette Williamson then each spoke in support of the recommendations and thanked Councillor Leech and the officers who had worked tirelessly on the Local Plan. The Cabinet noted that there had been successful cross-party working which would result in a high quality strategy being put in place and this would assist the regeneration schemes that would bring about transformation and revitalise Birkenhead. It was important to get it right for

future generations by regenerating the borough and pushing forward a local wealth building strategy.

RESOLVED (Unanimously): That

- (1) the Cabinet recommends the Council to approve the content of the Wirral Local Plan 2020-2035 Issues and Options Report (attached to the report) and its accompanying technical evidence for the purposes of public consultation under Regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012; and**
- (2) the Director of Regeneration and Place be given authority to make non-material amendments to the final text and presentation of the consultation documents before the consultation exercise begins.**