

ECONOMY REGENERATION & HOUSING COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 8 March 2023

Present:

Councillor T Jones (Chair)

Councillors	P Martin	A Hodson
	G Wood	I Lewis
	G Davies	L Rennie
	J Robinson	J Grier
	D Burgess-Joyce	D Mitchell

54 **WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION**

The Chair opened the meeting and reminded everyone that the meeting was being webcast and a copy is retained on the Council's website for two years.

55 **APOLOGIES**

No apologies for absence were received.

56 **MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Members were asked to declare any disclosable pecuniary interests and any other relevant interest and to state the nature of the interest.

No such declarations were made.

57 **MINUTES**

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 26 January 2023 be approved as a correct record.

58 **PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

The Chair indicated that 9 questions had been received.

Sue Percy asked if the Council had a requirement for a volumetric assessment of water needs as part of the submission process for planning applications for new developments. The Chair stated that an answer would be given in writing within 10 working days of the meeting.

Peter Milner asked a question relating to the proposed Active Travel Scheme on Birkenhead Road in Seacombe, he stated that there was already a cycle

lane in place and that it was not heavily used. He felt that by removing parking spaces on the road, it would have an adverse effect on older and less physically able customers of the Soccer Dome business. He queried why the proposal was deemed necessary.

In response, the Chair explained that the current cycle path was not compliant with current design guidance, and that the promenade route was a leisure route and not suitable for year round use as it was not lit. He also noted that the proposed route would provide a key link between Birkenhead, Wallasey and New Brighton that would encourage less car use to key destinations. By way of a supplementary question Peter Milner suggested other sites that would be more suitable for a cycle path and queried why the money for this scheme could not be used on additional cycle paths elsewhere. The Chair stated that he would ask officers to respond in writing.

Piara Miah asked a question relating to the site at 92 Grange Road in Birkenhead and queried how the Council would ensure that any new delivery partners would work collaboratively with the Council to give priority to local jobs, supply chains and with housing offered to those that need it the most.

The Chair responded that the procurement process used required all prospective developers to complete a statement on Social Value. This included local labour recruitment and local supply chain opportunities. He noted that the Draft Birkenhead 2040 Framework set out the potential for over 9,500 new homes over the next 15 years. Prospective developers were required to demonstrate how their proposed housing would contribute to meeting local housing needs.

As a follow-up question, Piara Miah asked how many jobs had been created from this project. The Chair stated that a written answer would be provided.

Frank Brennan asked a question related to the proposed Active Travel Scheme on Birkenhead Road in Seacombe. He was concerned that the proposal would threaten employment opportunities in the vicinity and increase congestion. He queried how the scheme met with the Wirral Local Plan objectives.

The Chair explained that good active travel infrastructure encourages people to move from driving to cycling. He noted again that the current cycle path was not to current standards. There would be no change to the road layout itself so there would be the same capacity for motor vehicles.

Mr Brennan asked a supplemental question querying what consideration had been given to the loss of employment opportunities that the scheme would cause. The Chair stated that a further response would be provided to Mr Brennan in writing.

Becky Biddulph asked a question related to the proposed Active Travel Scheme on Birkenhead Road in Seacombe. She asked what consideration the Council had given to the vulnerable users of the Soccer Dome business on Birkenhead Road and stated that the number of car parking spaces that would be removed due to the scheme would be 24 and not 9.5 as claimed by officers.

The Chair explained that currently there was 354 metres of available parking space on Birkenhead Road and that under the proposed scheme, this would be reduced to 297 metres with a loss of 57 metres, this equated to 9.5 car parking spaces based on a 6 metre average vehicle parking length. He noted that there was free and unrestricted parking available on various streets in the immediate vicinity. He indicated that the Council would be happy to explore the possibility of providing disabled parking bays outside the Soccer Dome and stated that Disabled Badge holders could park on double yellow lines for up to 3 hours where safe to do so and that patrons who wished to load/unload could do so on double yellow lines where it was safe to do so.

Becky Biddulph asked a supplementary question regarding whether being asked to park further away was safe for customers with large groups of children, especially during the winter with dark evenings. The Chair stated that he would ask officer to respond to her in writing.

Sarah Christmas asked a question related to the proposed Active Travel Scheme on Birkenhead Road in Seacombe. She stated she ran a physiotherapy and massage business from the Soccer Dome and asked what consideration had been given to her patients with mobility issues being able to easily access her treatment room.

The Chair responded that the Council would be happy to explore installing disabled parking bays outside of the Soccer Dome and noted that Disabled Badge holders can park on single or double lines for up to 3 hours where it is safe to do so.

As part of her supplemental question, Sarah Christmas noted that most of her patients were not registered as disabled but injured through sport. The Chair noted that he would ask officers to respond in writing.

Alistair Brace submitted a question related to the proposed Active Travel Scheme on Birkenhead Road in Seacombe. Mr Brace was not in attendance and his question was read out by the Lead Principal Lawyer. In the written question Mr Brace asked how the proposed scheme supported the Council's ambitions to offer Brighter Futures, an Inclusive Economy and encourage Active and Healthy Lives as described in the Wirral Plan.

The Chair responded that sustainable travel was at the heart of the Birkenhead 2040 framework. He noted that Seacombe had one of the lowest

car ownership levels in Wirral and therefore provision of safe active travel routes was essential. He noted the physical benefits of active travel compared to journeys by car.

Nicola Porter asked a question related to the proposed Active Travel Scheme on Birkenhead Road in Seacombe. She wished to know how the scheme would benefit her and her children if she could not park close by to the Soccer Dome.

The Chair responded that there were a number of roads near to the Soccer Dome with free and unrestricted parking available. He also noted that as part of the scheme, all existing street lighting would be reviewed and repaired where necessary.

Graham Owen asked a question related to the proposed Active Travel Scheme on Birkenhead Road in Seacombe. He wished to know how the expense of the scheme could be justified while the Council was looking to save money elsewhere.

The Chair responded that the funding for this scheme had been made available by the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority via the Department for Housing and Levelling Up and the European Regional Development Fund. He noted that this funding could only be used for active travel projects and could not be spent on other matters.

As part of a supplementary response, Graham Owen stated that he felt the Council were putting this scheme before the wellbeing and mental health of those that use the Soccer Dome, he asked why this was being done. The Chair responded that he would ask officers to respond in writing.

59 STATEMENTS AND PETITIONS

Statements:

Simon O'Brien, the Liverpool City Region Cycling & Walking Commissioner, delivered a statement supporting the proposed Active Travel Scheme on Birkenhead Road in Seacombe.

A statement from Chris Hargreaves of Peel L&P supporting the proposed Active Travel Scheme on Birkenhead Road in Seacombe was read out by the Lead Principal Lawyer.

A statement from Cllr Paul Stuart expressing concerns regarding the proposed Active Travel Scheme on Birkenhead Road in Seacombe was read out by the Lead Principal Lawyer.

Petitions:

Frank Brennan presented a petition of 733 signatures to the committee which stated that it opposed the proposal to upgrade the existing cycle track along the east side of Birkenhead due to the loss of parking bays along the road.

The Chair thanked Mr Brennan for his petition.

Ben Furfie presented a petition of 455 signatures to the committee which gave support to the proposals to upgrade the cycle path on Birkenhead Road, arguing that the scheme represents a brighter vision for the future of Wirral.

The Chair thanked Mr Furfie for his petition.

60 **QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS**

Cllr Ian Lewis asked a question regarding a motion to relocate the Birkenhead Kennels from the site on Corporation Road that was approved by Council in October 2019. He asked for an update the progress made so far.

The Chair responded that officers had been engaging with the Kennels during the past 12 months and that discussions were ongoing regarding the Master Plan proposals. Efforts would continue to find a suitable alternative site for them.

61 **SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT WORK PACKAGE 7: BIRKENHEAD ROAD - PROPOSED ACTIVE TRAVEL SCHEME**

The Lead Commissioner for Strategic Transport and Technology introduced the report of the Director of Regeneration and Place which considered the objections and expressions of support received regarding the proposed active travel scheme on Birkenhead Road in the Seacombe ward. The report noted that the purpose of the Birkenhead Road scheme was to create an environment that was safe for both pedestrians and cyclists and to help embed walking and cycling as part of new long-term commuting habits.

Members queried whether the funding for this scheme was necessary and if the option to “do nothing” was considered. They were informed that if the scheme was rejected then the funding would be returned to the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority.

Members asked what was going to happen to the trees that would be removed under this scheme and if the trees closest to Seacombe Ferry were due to be removed as there were 11 mature trees on the site presently. It was explained that officers were working with the Council’s Tree Team to see where new trees could be located inline with the Council’s tree strategy. Officer offered to come back to Members with information on the specific trees

that would be moved. The Design and Commissioning Senior Manager confirmed that the trees near the rear car park of Seacombe Ferry would remain under this proposal.

Members queried if there were any figures that would indicate what economic effect increased cycling or walking might have on an area. The Lead Commissioner for Strategic Transport and Technology noted that there were a number of national studies that showed that people walking or cycling were likely to spend more money in an area as they are likely to visit more often.

Members questioned if the consultation process included a contact method other than on-line. They were assured that 360 letters had been sent out to local businesses and letters with details of the consultation and included information on how to contact the Council if they did not wish to use an electronic form of contact.

Councillor J Robinson indicated that she had alternative recommendations to those on the report. The suggested recommendations were shared with Members.

On a motion proposed by Councillor J Robinson and seconded by Councillor P Martin, it was -

Resolved (10:1) – That

In light of the risks identified in Paragraph 7.2 of the report and the concerns raised in terms of the consultation and design, accessibility and impacts on other environmental factors to create the Birkenhead Scheme (removing mature trees), the Director of Regeneration and Place be requested to:

- 1. Seek an extension of time for delivery on this scheme; and**
- 2. Consider other design options, taking into consideration the concerns raised with a view to enable a meaningful consultation to take place (to include residents and local businesses)**

62 DISPOSAL OF THE FORMER MINISTRY OF DEFENCE (MOD) LAND ON OLD HALL ROAD, BROMBOROUGH

The Birkenhead Portfolio Regeneration Lead introduced the report of the Director of Regeneration and Place which set out a route for the disposal of the former Ministry Of Defence (MOD) land on Old Hall Road Bromborough.

It was reported that the land previously formed part of a portfolio of sites that were bound by an option to purchase in favour of the Wirral Growth Company

but under revised arrangements the Council has full unfettered control over the site.

In response to Member questions on the site, assurances were given that the land was no longer considered contaminated, and that surveys to show this would be available to developers. It was also noted that the land had the benefit of outline planning consent and there was a related planning obligation. Subsequent reserved matters approval would be accompanied by further detailed on the planning obligation requirements. Example planning obligation requirements were a minimum of 20% affordable homes, enhancements to open space within the country park as well as provision of cycle ways and footpaths as part of a detailed travel plan along with new bus stops on Old Hall Road and an agreement to enhance biodiversity on site or to make an off-site contribution.

Members sought clarity and were given assurances that by allowing this site to be developed, it would reduce the pressure to build further property elsewhere such as on the green belt.

On a motion by Councillor G Davies and seconded by Councillor P Martin, it was –

Resolved – That

- 1. Policy and Resources Committee be recommended to declare that the former Ministry of Defence, Old Hall Road, Bromborough site is surplus to the Council's requirements and that authority be given to the Director of Regeneration and Place to secure its disposal on the best terms achievable; and**
- 2. Delegated authority be given to the Director of Law and Governance, in consultation with the Director of Regeneration and Place, to secure the associated legal documentation that will be required to finalise the disposal of the site.**

63 REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET / MONITORING FOR QUARTER THREE

The Senior Finance Business Partner presented the report of the Director of Regeneration and Place which provided an overview of budget performance, including progress on the delivery of the 2022-23 saving programme and a summary of reserves to enable the Committee to take ownership of the budgets and provide robust challenge and scrutiny to officers on the performance of those budgets.

Resolved – That:

- 1. The forecast revenue position at Quarter 3 be noted.**
- 2. The progress on delivery of the 2022-23 savings programme at Quarter 3 be noted.**
- 3. The forecast level of reserves at Quarter 3 be noted.**
- 4. The capital forecast position of £30.39m at Quarter 3 be noted.**

64 WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Lead Principal Lawyer introduced the report which reminded members that the Economy, Regeneration and Housing Committee was responsible for proposing and delivering an annual committee work programme. This work programme was to align with the corporate priorities of the Council, in particular the delivery of the key decisions which were within the remit of the Committee.

Resolved - that the content of the Economy, Regeneration and Housing Committee work programme for the remainder of the 2022/23 municipal year be noted

65 FREEPORTS AND MARITIME INNOVATION AND GROWTH PROJECTS

The Head of Economic Growth presented the report of the Director of Regeneration and Place. The report provided Members with an update regarding the status of Liverpool City Region Freeport ('LCR Freeport') and sought authorisation for the Director of Law and Governance to negotiate, finalise and sign the Memorandum of Understanding ('MoU') between the Council, The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA), Liverpool City Region Freeport Governing Body, Halton Borough Council, and St Helens Borough Council. The MoU sets out the terms, principles and practices that will apply to the working relationship between the parties in respect of the delivery and administration of the Liverpool City Region Freeport.

The report also sought approval to establish a Wirral Freeport Investment Fund. The arrangements for Freeports allow for any growth in business rates above an agreed baseline within the designated Freeport Tax Site area to be retained by the Council as Billing Authority over a guaranteed 25-year period and re-invested to stimulate further development. Proposals for funding would be subject to a full and robust appraisal process and considered and decided on a case-by-case basis.

Members queried the finances of the project and the way that funds were allocated. They were provided with a breakdown of Seed Capital funding for the Liverpool City Region and Wirral's share of this.

In response to concerns raised by Members on the possible impacts to Wirral business that fall outside of the Freeport zone, The Head of Economic Growth assured them that the project was trying to attract businesses to invest in vacant property and that any business that was looking to expand would be eligible if they wished to move into the Freeport site.

A further discussion was had regarding assurances that businesses moving into the site would share Wirral's values and targets such as the net-zero target, as well as offering support to the Metro Mayor, employment charter and investment strategy. Members were informed that there were strong gateway policies, and that businesses would have to demonstrate that they meet the criteria for which would include fair employment, net zero targets for the Liverpool City Region as well as the equivalent policies for each local site.

Councillor J Robinson noted that she had a question that related to one of the exempt appendices and therefore on a motion by Councillor P Martin and seconded by Councillor J Robinson, it was –

Resolved – That, under section 100 (A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item of business on the grounds it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined by paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A (as amended) to the Act. The Public Interest test had been applied and favoured exclusion.

On a motion by Councillor D Mitchell and seconded by Councillor P Martin, it was -

Resolved (10:1) – That

- 1. Authority be delegated to the Director of Law and Governance (in consultation with the Director of Regeneration and Place, and the Director of Finance):**
 - (a) to negotiate, finalise and sign the Memorandum of Understanding (substantially in accordance with the draft set out in the exempt Appendix 2 to the report) relating to the terms, principles and practices that will apply to the working relationship between the parties regarding the delivery and administration of the Liverpool City Region Freeport.**

- (b) To negotiate and complete any associated legal documentation which aligns with the principles set out in the proposed Memorandum of Understanding.**
- 2. The Business Case for establishing the Wirral Freeport Investment Fund be endorsed.**
- 3. Policy and Resources Committee be recommended to approve that:**
- (a) the Wirral Freeport Investment Fund is established from 1 April 2023 (or as soon as regulations designate the Wirral Waters Tax Site for business rates retention purposes) and is managed and operated according to the arrangements detailed within this report and accompanying Business Case and the principles set out in the draft Retained Business Rates Strategy which forms a component of the Memorandum of Understanding.**
- (b) growth in business rates above the baseline within the Wirral Freeport Tax Site is held to a ring-fenced reserve which would fund:**
- investment in approved projects and the future repayment of capital borrowing for investments made by the Wirral Freeport Investment Fund;**
 - the annual costs required to resource the administration and management of the Wirral Freeport Investment Fund from financial year 2023/24;**
 - the Council's pro-rata annual contribution to the Liverpool City Region (LCR) Freeport Management Team costs from financial year 2024/25;**

66 LIVERPOOL CITY REGION COMBINED AUTHORITY BROWNFIELD LAND, 92 GRANGE ROAD, BIRKENHEAD

The Chair re-opened the meeting to the public.

The Birkenhead Portfolio Regeneration Lead introduced the report of the Director of Regeneration and Place which set out the activities undertaken to develop and deliver the 92 Grange Road project. It was noted that the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Brownfield Housing Fund was time limited to March 2025 and would support the Council by enabling access to significant funding to support the regeneration of Birkenhead.

Members queried how long the procurement process would take and received a response that it had begun around September 2022 with the deadline for outline scheme proposals to be submitted to the Council ending on 10th March 2023.

On a motion by Councillor D Mitchell and seconded by Councillor G Davies, it was -

DECISION:

Resolved – That

- 1. The current LCRCA Brownfield Land allocation for this project as set out in the exempt appendix 2 be ring fenced for this purpose.**
- 2. The Director of Regeneration and Place be authorised to;**
 - a. Progress the appointment of a delivery partner for the 92 Grange Road, Birkenhead project further to the ongoing mini-tendering process via the Homes England Housing Delivery Partner Dynamic Purchasing System, in consultation with the Director of Law and Governance; and**
 - b. Offer the selected delivery partner deficit funding to support the delivery of the Council’s objectives regarding this site, should the need for such funding be demonstrated and justified.**
- 3. The Director of Law and Governance be authorised to finalise the legal documentation arising out of the implementation of the above recommendations.**

67 FUTURE HIGH STREET FUND PROGRAMME - EUROPA RESIDENTIAL PHASE 1

The Birkenhead Portfolio Regeneration Lead introduced the report of the Director of Regeneration and Place which set out the activities undertaken to develop one element of the Birkenhead Future High Street programme, namely the Europa Residential scheme.

The report noted that the Future High Street Fund (FHSF) was time limited to March 2024 and will support the Council by enabling access to significant funding to support the regeneration of Birkenhead including that of private sector investment.

On a motion by Councillor G Davies and seconded by Councillor P Martin, it was -

Resolved – That

1. The current Future High Street Fund Allocation for this project as set out in the exempt Appendix 2 to the report be ring fenced for this purpose.
2. Policy and Resources Committee be recommended to approve that the Director of Regeneration and Place be authorised to:
 - a. Progress the appointment of a delivery partner for the Europa Residential Phase 1 project further to the ongoing mini-tendering process via the Homes England Housing Delivery Partner Dynamic Purchasing System, In consultation with the Director of Law and Governance; and
 - b. Pursue and accept other avenues of funding and proceed to award of contract in the event that a suitably appraised and acceptable bid exceeds the Future High Street Fund allocation for this project.
3. The Director of Law and Governance be authorised to finalise the legal documentation arising out of the implementation of the above recommendations.

68 **EXEMPT INFORMATION - EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

Resolved – That, under section 100 (A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items of business on the grounds they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined by paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A (as amended) to that Act. The Public Interest test has been applied and favours exclusion.

69 **FREEPORTS AND MARITIME INNOVATION AND GROWTH PROJECTS - EXEMPT APPENDICES**

Resolved – That the exempt appendices be noted.

70 **ITEM OF URGENT BUSINESS - BIRKENHEAD TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION - PROPOSAL TO CONSIDER THE PURCHASE OF A STRATEGIC ACQUISITION**

The Director of Regeneration and Place introduced the report.

Resolved – That the recommendation as detailed in the report be approved.