

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK FOR WIRRAL – EVIDENCE BASE – APPOINTMENT OF CONSULTANTS TO CARRY OUT A WATER CYCLE STUDY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to seek Cabinet approval to commission external consultants to carry out a Scoping and Outline Stage Water Cycle Study for Wirral and Liverpool. Cabinet is asked to agree that Wirral will be the commissioning authority and the study will be jointly funded to a maximum cost of £50,000, to be divided between Wirral Council and Liverpool City Council on a 50:50 split basis.

The study is necessary to provide an up-to-date evidence base for the preparation of the Core Strategy Development Plan Document, future site-specific land allocations and to comply with the conditions of the designation of the Mersey Heartlands New Growth Point. External consultants are required because of the specialist nature of the commission. A joint approach with Liverpool City Council is proposed to achieve economies through joint commissioning and because the City Council is a partner in the Mersey Heartlands New Growth Point. The Study will assess the available physical and environmental capacity in water supply and wastewater infrastructure. It will also identify wider impacts relating to flooding and wildlife habitats, together with recommendations to resolve any constraints and an evaluation of the implications for future growth.

1 Background

- 1.1 In July 2008, Liverpool City Council and Wirral Council were successful in achieving New Growth Point Status, securing £200,000 grant funding for 2008/09, £2,466,176 for 2009/10 and £2,300,609 for 2010/11. This funding has been used to support housing delivery and to restructure failing housing markets in the Housing Market Renewal Area, in accordance with a joint Programme of Development agreed with Government in December 2008.
- 1.2 When designating Mersey Heartlands as a Growth Point, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) attached a number of conditions that the partnership must fulfil. These are aimed at ensuring that the additional development is brought forward sustainably and is realistic in terms of infrastructure.
- 1.3 The following Growth Point condition sets out the requirements for a Water Cycle Study:

“Complete a holistic Water Cycle Study for the Growth Point area to include determining whether any infrastructure or capacity upgrades will be necessary, that there are no detrimental impacts on designated bathing waters and also to ensure that the cumulative impacts of growth do not push the United Utilities integrated Water Resource Zone into deficit. Wirral Borough Council must work closely with the Environment Agency and water companies on the investment implications arising from the study’s findings, and ensure the study’s findings inform Local Development Documents.”

- 1.4 The Water Cycle Study will not only be used in support of the Growth Point Programme but also to support the Council's Local Development Framework Core Strategy. A robust evidence base is essential to the Core Strategy to demonstrate that the Council has determined the capacity of the area to accommodate new development and that all the strategy and development options available to the Council have been fully assessed. This is a key part of the test of soundness that will be considered by an Independent Planning inspector appointed by the Secretary of State before the Core Strategy for Wirral can be adopted.
- 1.5 The Water Cycle Study will inform and guide the Council's delivery of the emerging Investment Strategy, the Growth Point Programme of Development and the consideration of major planning applications. The proposed Water Cycle Study will also form an essential part of the evidence base for future site-specific land allocations.
- 1.6 The Council is also preparing a Strategic Local Flood Risk Management Plan and Surface Water Management Plan, which will address flooding and drainage issues, including flooding from the sea, rivers, sewers, groundwater and other watercourses. The Water Cycle Study will be used to inform the Strategic Local Flood Risk Management Plan and Surface Water Management Plan, both of which are statutory requirements under the Flood and Water Act 2010.

2 Water Cycle Study

- 2.1 A Water Cycle Study is a study of the available physical and environmental capacity in water supply, wastewater infrastructure and the wider water environment. It is undertaken to ensure that new development can be supplied with the required water services in the most sustainable way, and that disposal of waste water can be achieved without a detrimental impact on the environment.
- 2.2 It would also provide a water-based comparative assessment of development locations to feed into the Core Strategy.
- 2.3 A Water Cycle Study will, for example, consider when and where new water provision and treatment infrastructure would be required to facilitate new development; and assess the likely environmental and ecological impacts of future growth, to ensure that new development will comply with current and future legislative requirements.
- 2.4 Generally, Water Cycle Studies are carried out in three stages:
 - **Scoping Study** – Determines the study area; gathers all existing relevant data and studies; identifies the key issues with respect to the water environment and infrastructure and determines key stakeholders.
 - **Outline Study** – Determines the environmental capacity for changes to the natural water cycle; determines capacity in water infrastructure; considers outline options for new infrastructure.
 - **Detailed Study** – Assesses requirements for new infrastructure, including where and when it is needed and how much it will cost to provide; provides guidance on funding and developer contributions and provides evidence for any water-related policy requirements.
- 2.5 A detailed study may not be necessary, if the Scoping Study and Outline Study have not identified any significant environmental risks or major infrastructure needs. Therefore, it is proposed initially to commission the Scoping and Outline stages only, with an option to proceed to a Detailed Study only if required.

- 2.6 The recent Habitats Regulations Assessment of the Preferred Options for the Core Strategy has already identified that water-related issues could have a potentially significant effect on European Sites (Cabinet, 23 September 2010, Item 8 refers).

3 Timetable

- 3.1 Subject to commencing the study early in December 2010, it is expected that the study will be completed by April 2011.

4 Procurement

- 4.1 Following discussions with the Council's Corporate Procurement Unit, the recommended procurement route is via a 'Request for Quotation'. The Corporate Procurement Unit will provide support throughout the process, with advice and guidance.
- 4.2 Wirral Council is the commissioning authority. The contract will be with Wirral Council and subject to its financial regulations and standing orders.

5 Financial Implications

- 5.1 Cabinet on 22nd July 2010 (Minute 89 refers) received a report indicating that a Water Cycle Study requiring specialist consultancy would need to be undertaken before a draft Core Strategy could be prepared.
- 5.2 Procuring external consultancy support to produce a Water Cycle Study for Wirral and Liverpool is estimated to cost up to £50,000. The maximum of £50,000 will be jointly funded between Wirral Council and Liverpool City Council on a 50:50 split basis. This cost will be met from existing resources, involving the use of Investment Strategy funding allocated to Strategic Development.

6 Staffing Implications

- 6.1 There are no staffing implications arising directly out of this report. The management of the commission will be led by officers in the Forward Planning and Investment Strategy teams and supported by officers from the Coast Protection and Drainage and Development teams, as part of the Steering Group.
- 6.2 The use of external consultants is required because the necessary capacity and specialist technical expertise to carry out this work is not available within the Council.

7 Equal Opportunities Implications

- 7.1 There are no implications for equal opportunities arising directly from this report.

8 Community Safety Implications

- 8.1 There are no community safety implications arising directly out of this report. The Water Cycle Study is, however, expected to include a review of the existing Flood Risk Assessment evidence base and surface water systems, which will seek to protect and improve community safety.

9 Local Agenda 21 Implications

- 9.1 The Water Cycle Study will provide the evidence base for setting policy and encouraging more water-sustainable forms of development. Encouraging development with higher water efficiency standards will contribute towards Local Agenda 21 priorities

10 Planning Implications

10.1 The Water Cycle Study will be a key part of the evidence base for the emerging Local Development Framework, including the Core Strategy Development Plan Document which, once adopted, will form part of the statutory Development Plan for Wirral alongside the remaining parts of the Council's Unitary Development Plan (which have not been replaced by the Core Strategy).

10.2 The Water Cycle Study will also have implications for the determination of individual planning applications and other decisions under the Planning Acts.

11 Anti-Poverty Implications

11.1 There are no anti-poverty implications arising directly from this report.

12 Human Rights Implications

12.1 There are no human rights implications arising from this report.

13 Social Inclusion Implications

13.1 There are no social inclusion implications arising directly from this report.

14 Local Member Support Implications

14.1 There are no specific Ward Member implications arising from this report.

15 Background Papers

15.1 Planning Policy Statement 12 - Local Spatial Planning (CLG, June 2008) can be viewed at: <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/planningandbuilding/pdf/pps12lsp.pdf>

15.2 Planning Policy Statement 25 – Development and Flood Risk (CLG, March 2010) can be viewed at: <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/planningandbuilding/pdf/planningpolicystatement25.pdf>

15.3 Wirral Council – Local Development Framework for Wirral – Core Strategy Development Plan Document – Preferred Options Report (Cabinet 22 July 2010) can be viewed at [http://democracy.wirral.gov.uk/Published/C00000121/M00003058/AI00009579/\\$LDFDraftPreferredOptionsCabRep22Jul10.docA.ps.pdf](http://democracy.wirral.gov.uk/Published/C00000121/M00003058/AI00009579/$LDFDraftPreferredOptionsCabRep22Jul10.docA.ps.pdf)

15.4 The Core Strategy Preferred Options Habitats Regulations Assessment can be viewed at: <http://democracy.wirral.gov.uk/ecCatDisplay.aspx?sch=doc&cat=13057&path=12848>

RECOMMENDATION

That Cabinet agrees to the commissioning of a joint Water Cycle Study with Liverpool City Council, on the terms set out in this report.

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This report has been prepared by the Forward Planning Section who can be contacted on 691 8218.