

WIRRAL COUNCIL

CABINET

21 JULY 2011

SUBJECT:	TOWN, DISTRICT AND LOCAL CENTRE STUDY AND DELIVERY FRAMEWORK
WARDS AFFECTED:	ALL
REPORT OF:	INTERIM DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE SERVICES
RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	CLLR PHIL DAVIES PLANNING AND REGENERATION
KEY DECISION	NO

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report provides Members with an outline of the Town, District and Local Centre Study and Delivery Framework. The Framework provides a detailed evidence base for each of the Borough's twenty-three centres (excluding Birkenhead) in order to guide future actions to support the sustainability of the centres and to inform the emerging Core Strategy documents.
- 1.2 The Framework will underpin the development of individual centre Action Plans and ensure that they are co-ordinated and deliverable and the report outlines a proposed phased programme for taking the Action Plans forward.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION/S

- 2.1 That Cabinet endorses the use of the Town, District and Local Centre Study and Delivery Framework to inform the Investment Strategy priorities and the development of policies in the Core Strategy and other planning policy documents;
- 2.2 That Cabinet agrees to:
- (i) the Town, District and Local Centre Study and Delivery Framework being included in the Local Development Framework (LDF) evidence base, which shall be used to inform emerging Core Strategy planning documents;
 - (ii) relevant Council officers developing a series of action plans on a phased basis in conjunction with relevant Traders and other interested groups; and

- (iii) the town centres stated below be included in the first phase of action plans (referred to above) that are to be developed:

Liscard, New Ferry and Seacombe (Poulton Rd / Borough Rd), New Brighton (Seabank Rd), Wallasey Village and Irby.

- (iv) the development of a 'Town Centre Traders' Toolkit' to support the setting up and operation of local trader groups.

3.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Cabinet on the 13th January 2011 (Min 278) noted the need to take forward actions to improve the vitality and viability of Wirral's town, district and local centres outside of Birkenhead. Members recommended that a report should be produced by Council Officers to provide a detailed evidence base that could be used to inform both the LDF Core Strategy and also the development of centre specific Action Plans. Cabinet noted that the Town, District and Local Centre Study and Framework will set out realistic options given the reduced level of funding available to intervene and regenerate areas, as well as setting out some long term aspirations which are only likely to come forward in a much more vibrant economy or when funding streams become more readily available.
- 3.2 Cabinet also noted that the work would be progressed using existing Council staff resources and that this would mean that the development of Action Plans would be taken forward on a phased basis through a rolling programme. At Cabinet on the 14th January 2010 (Min 261) Members proposed that six centres should be addressed. These were New Ferry, Seacombe (Poulton Rd / Borough Rd), New Brighton (Seabank Rd), Wallasey Village, Irby and Hoylake. Laird Street was not included as it was noted that clear plans were in place for this centre through the HMRI work.
- 3.3 Members will be aware that Hoylake has been announced as a Neighbourhood Planning Front Runner Pilot area (Cabinet 3rd February 2011). It is suggested that we allow the work with the Hoylake Neighbourhood Planning Front Runner to continue and that a new centre is included in the first phase of Action Plans. It is therefore proposed that Liscard is included in the first phase due to its high vacancy rate and it being the largest town centre after Birkenhead. Work with Hoylake will continue and will link in with the work which has been undertaken in preparing the Town, District and Local Centres Study and Delivery Framework.

4.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

- 4.1 On the 14th January 2010 Cabinet considered a report setting out the findings of the Strategy for Retail, Town Centre and Commercial Leisure produced by Roger Tym and Partners. Members raised a series of issues which required additional work to be undertaken and this was reported to Cabinet on the 13th January 2011 (Min 278). Cabinet agreed that more detailed work was required in order to inform and guide future actions and that an evidence base should be produced that covered the 23 district, town and local centres outside of Birkenhead. This should set out policy options that could be progressed

through the LDF process as well as identifying realistic opportunities for supporting the future sustainability of each of the centres.

- 4.2 It was agreed that the Framework would not address Birkenhead (including Grange Road West/Oxton Road and Argyle Street/Market Street) as detailed work has already taken place as part of the Integrated Regeneration Strategy for Birkenhead and Wirral Waters which has been adopted as a material planning consideration and will inform the Core Strategy. In addition, trading patterns in Birkenhead will change with the opening of the new Asda Superstore later in 2011. A thorough analysis of the impact of the new Asda store and other changes in Birkenhead will be undertaken by officers outside the context of this Framework.
- 4.3 Following the Cabinet recommendation on the 13th January 2011 to progress this work, an internal team of Council staff has undertaken research, surveys, analysis and attended meetings with traders and residents, to produce the evidence base document.
- 4.4 The Town, District and Local Centre Study and Delivery Framework report can be found in the Council's web library within the Corporate Services section and is structured as follows:
 - Section 1&2 sets out the introduction to the report and the structure;
 - Section 3 sets out the background and context to the work including an analysis of national retail trends, shopping patterns in Wirral; and the current 'health' and performance of centres;
 - Section 4 outlines key area of national policy that impact on Wirral's retail centres;
 - Section 5 outlines how the assessment of the 23 centres covered by the framework was carried out and sets out both quantitative and qualitative information relating to each of the centres. It also puts forward short, medium and long term options for possible interventions;
 - Section 6 draws on the individual centres assessment, together with the analysis of national policies, to provide an overall summary of the state of the centres and sets out a number of proposed actions that could support the future sustainability of the centres.

Key Issues

- 4.5 The review of national and local retail trends, policies and practices as well as the individual centre survey and assessment work have resulted in the identification of issues and proposed actions that fall into two key areas:
 - Cross cutting issues that are common to all our town centres which can be addressed through a Borough wide approach, and;
 - The requirement to develop detailed centre specific action plans based on the evidence base set out in the Town, District and Local Centre Study and Delivery Framework.

Borough-wide Issues

- 4.6 There are a number of potential planning policy options identified in the Framework which would help shape the future of the centres and which could be progressed through the LDF process. They are put forward as proposals which would then be included in the LDF consultation process. The options include:
- potential restrictions on the number and distribution of non-retail uses in centres;
 - producing a Supplementary Planning Document on the design and appearance of town centres. This would set out standards for the design of shop fronts and for the conversion of shop units to residential use. It would also address the utilization of upper floor uses in centres.
 - consideration of the future extent of boundaries of some of the centres. Since they were last considered as part of the UDP process, the boundary of some centres now extend beyond their current retail core and the outer edges of these centres are often characterised by vacant units and/ or residential conversions. This would suggest that some centres may be physically too big for their current and future role and that changes to the boundaries of the centres may need to be re-considered in order to promote and secure a long term viable future for them. This would also reflect the findings of national studies that the rise in the number of empty shops is not just a result of the recession, but a reflection of significant overcapacity in the market following changing consumer behaviour such as the growth of internet shopping.
- 4.7 The survey work showed that there is a general concern about the levels of business rates and the impact they may have on the viability of businesses. Business rates are being considered through the Localism Bill and the impact of any changes will need to be considered in full and the impact assessed. There are a number of business rate relief schemes currently in place and there is the option to promote these further through Council communications and increase the uptake of schemes.
- 4.8 Car parking was an issued raised in many areas due to the perceived lack of parking in some areas and the restrictions of on-street parking in others. Whilst this survey work was being undertaken, the “free after three” initiative was launched which allows free parking after 3pm on street and off street in all Council owned car parking areas. As the issue for each area differs depending on the circumstances, it is proposed to consider car parking issues on a case by case basis through the Action Planning process.
- 4.9 From the survey work and through consultation, there is evidence that the number and concentration of non-retail uses in some centres can have a negative impact on the functioning of the centre. A policy approach restricting the proportion and distribution of non-retail uses within the whole of the centre would be appropriate for the majority of centres. Large centres would require additional consideration to identify whether restrictions should be applied to specified frontages and to which Use Classes any restrictions should apply. This work could be done as part of the Action Planning process for each centre and can be shaped by the Townscape Appraisal maps.

4.10 Overall, the updated survey and research work has shown that the broad pattern of the “health” of the Borough’s centres has shown some changes since the Roger Tym (RTP) report. In broad terms the outcome of our assessment work is summarised below:

Healthiest centres	Showing signs of weakness	Major intervention needed
Heswall	Liscard	New Ferry
West Kirby	Bromborough Village	New Brighton (Seabank Road)
Upton Village	Moreton	Laird Street
Tranmere Urban Village (Old Chester Road)	Prenton (Woodchurch Road)	Seacombe (Poulton Road)
Oxton Village	Wallasey Village	
Greasby	Lower Bebington	
Eastham	Irby Village	
	Dacre Hill	
	Hoylake Town Centre	
	Borough Road	
	Victoria Road (New Brighton)	
	Claughton Village	

4.11 Based on the health of the centres, the level and type of intervention required varies. The healthiest centres are likely to require only limited interventions related to policy changes such as shop front design and building on the strengths through appropriate supported marketing.

4.12 Centres showing signs of weakness, may require interventions to tackle issues such as the diversity of the retail offer, level of vacancies and other matters such as the quality of public realm or car parking may require a range of options to be considered. These are likely to be mostly small scale, but which collectively could have a positive impact on the vitality of the centre. Some centres may require boundary changes in the future to help to focus retail activity, although this will be considered in more detail through the Action Plan process.

4.13 A few centres require major intervention and this is in line with the recommendations of the RTP report, which identifies that the key to a sustainable future is an acceptance that a centre maybe physically too big for it current and future role. Significant changes to the boundaries of these centres may be needed to help manage and focus the centre in the future, allowing different uses in the areas outside the boundary and help to regenerate the centre.

Centre Specific Action plans

- 4.14 Having undertaken the survey and assessment work for the Town, District and Local Centres, an evidence base has been produced which in conjunction with the RTP Retail Assessment gives a clear picture of the 23 selected shopping centres across the borough. Building upon this evidence base a series of Actions Plans will be produced. These are likely to include:
- Clustering of non-retail uses and the appropriate policy response;
 - Detailed assessment of upper floor uses;
 - Detailed work on scope for contraction (or expansion) of the centres and how this would be managed;
 - Potential detailed environmental improvements;
 - Traffic management and parking;
 - Centre-specific design and other guidance;
 - Options for the local marketing of the centre and linkage to any Borough wide initiatives.
- 4.15 A key finding from the Framework is that in order to achieve the desired outcomes for each centre, work must be taken forward in conjunction with local trader organisations and groups, as they know how their centres and businesses operate. A large number of centres do not have an existing traders organisation and it is proposed that encouraging centres to set up a traders organisation is really valuable to promoting and sustaining town, district and local centres.
- 4.16 To support this aim it is proposed that a 'Town Centres Traders Toolkit' will be produced which is likely to include:
- Facilitating initial meetings of traders to ascertain interest in setting up a traders group, identifying resources etc;
 - Information on funding sources;
 - Information on future events promoted by the destination marketing team;
 - Access to best practice advice through the Council's membership of the association of town centre management;
 - Signposting key contacts within the Council.
- 4.17 Development of detailed Action Plans would then allow traders, residents and agencies to work together to identify options which they could progress through partnership working. It will be critical for local traders, businesses, residents and relevant partners to be fully involved in this process as many of the solutions will be driven by the private sector. It would therefore be expected that the Action Plans would reflect local circumstances and could range from plans that included long term aspirations to plans that addressed a single short term issue and were taken forward by Traders on a task and finish basis.

5.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 5.1 There are no risks identified at this stage arising directly from this report.

6.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

6.1 The Town, District and Local Centre Study and Delivery Framework has been produced in line with a previous Cabinet recommendation - 13th January 2011.

7.0 CONSULTATION

7.1 An online survey was undertaken to gather views of traders, businesses and the community. Also a series of meetings with existing trader organisations was undertaken. A notification was issued through the Council's Invest Wirral Business forum.

8.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

8.1 The recommendations of this report would involve working closing with existing traders groups and community organisations.

9.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS

9.1 There are no additional staffing requirements arising from the recommendations of this report. The action plans will be produced using in-house staff resources from within the Corporate Services Department and from other departments as required.

9.2 Business Rates is a national scheme locally collected with collections going into a national pool and being redistributed. However the direct relief schemes are predominantly funded locally by the authority and any increase would be a direct cost to the authority.

10.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no legal implications resulting directly from this report

11.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

11.1 The Town, District and Local Centre Study and Delivery Framework sets out potential options going forward. These options will be considered through the LDF process and through the development of Action Plans to ensure they bring about equal opportunities and benefits.

11.2 An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) was carried out in September 2010 in respect of the Consultation on the Preferred Options report for the Local Development Framework.

11.3 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

(a) Is an EIA required?

No

12.0 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

12.1 The Town, District and Local Centre Study and Delivery Framework assesses the accessibility of centres by public transport and by walking to centres, which impacts on the sustainability of centres.

13.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

13.1 The Town Centres, Retail and Commercial Leisure Strategy has been used to inform the content of the emerging Core Strategy Development Plan Document and the preparation of the detailed evidence base for the 23 Town Centres will provide further information for the LDF.

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APPENDICES

Please note that the Town, District and Local Centres Study and Delivery Framework can be found in the web library under Corporate Services as can the following appendices.

Appendix A – Map on uses in centre and a break down of upper floor uses. Maps on accessibility by walking and public transport

Appendix B – Responses from online survey

Appendix C - Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) (September 2010) - Consultation on the Preferred Options report for the Local Development Framework.

REFERENCE MATERIAL

Background papers in connection with this report are kept with the Forward Planning team. The full Town Centre, Retail and Commercial Leisure Strategy is available on the Council's website. Previous reports on this subject can be found as follows:

Cabinet report paper, 14th January 2010 (minute 261)

<http://wir06metrognome.admin.ad.wirral.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CLd=121&MI d=734&Ver=4>

Cabinet report paper 13th January 2011 (minute 278) -

<http://wir06metrognome.admin.ad.wirral.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CI d=121&MI d=3065&Ver=4>

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Cabinet – Local Development Framework Evidence Base – Strategy for Retail, Town Centres and Commercial Leisure	14th January 2010
Cabinet - Town Centre strategy – Next Steps	13th January 2011