

## **ISSUES AND OBJECTIVES CONSULTATION**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The Borough of Wirral is home to approximately 310,000 people. The Wirral peninsula covers an area of only sixty square miles but within the Borough there is considerable social, economic and environmental diversity. There are sharp contrasts between the east and west of the Borough.

Wirral's natural and built environment is a major asset. Attractive countryside, wildlife habitats of international importance, areas of high quality housing and a considerable built and cultural heritage all contribute to Wirral's sense of place. The Borough has a wide range of leisure opportunities and was host to The Open Golf Championship, in 2006. The community places a high value on the protection of this environment.

There is however a need to widen access to economic opportunity. Levels of economic activity and productivity are low. In certain parts of the Borough there are high levels of worklessness and benefit dependency. Average life expectancy in the east is 10 years below that in the west of the Borough.

A Borough of such strong contrasts inevitably leads to competing demands and community expectations. The Council and its partners are ambitious for economic, environmental and social regeneration. Growing the local economy is identified as the top priority in the Council's Investment Strategy (issued in final form in 2007). The Investment Strategy aims to encourage focused and dynamic development while maintaining and enhancing Wirral's unique character and quality of life. A range of opportunities and challenges are identified under the headings of Infrastructure, Business, Skills and education, People and Jobs and Quality of Life. A number of priority projects and key outcomes are also identified.

The Planning system can play an important role in enabling local communities to meet these challenges, in particular, through the Local Development Framework (LDF). The LDF is a series of planning documents that will provide a blueprint for the future development of the Borough over the next 15-20 years. It will also provide the spatial framework for delivering the aims and objectives of Wirral's Sustainable Community Strategy.

The LDF must be prepared in harmony with national and regional policy. At the regional level the most important are the Regional Spatial Strategy, Regional Economic Strategy and Regional Housing Strategy, soon to be merged into a Single Regional Strategy<sup>1</sup>. At a sub-regional level a key document is the Liverpool City Region Action Plan.

#### **The Core Strategy**

The Core Strategy is a key document within the emerging LDF for Wirral and is being prepared first because it sets the strategic direction for the rest of the LDF. Once adopted, all other Documents within the Framework must be in general conformity with the Core Strategy.

The Core Strategy must be prepared in accordance with national procedures. Community involvement will be secured in line with the commitments set out within

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<sup>1</sup> To be prepared by the North West Development Agency.

the Council's Statement of Community Involvement<sup>2</sup>. These procedures are intended to maximise the opportunity for the public to influence the content of the LDF early in the plan-making process. The Core Strategy must also be in general conformity with the Regional Spatial Strategy for the North West.

The Core Strategy is intended to provide a long term blueprint for the economic, social and environmental transformation of the Borough, taking forward the vision of the Investment Strategy for Wirral and the aims and objectives of the Council's Sustainable Community strategy and other Council policy documents that affect the use of land and buildings. The Core Strategy is not intended to be site-specific: it will only identify the broad locations that will be key in the delivery of the spatial priorities it identifies. The main site-specific elements of the future spatial strategy for the Borough will be contained in a series of site allocation Development Plan Documents to be produced once the Core Strategy has been adopted.

Once adopted, the Core Strategy will form part of the statutory Development Plan for the Borough alongside the Regional Spatial Strategy for the North West and will be used as the basis for determining individual planning applications and for other decisions taken under the Planning Acts.

As it progresses through the various stages of preparation, the Core Strategy will be tested against a number of local social, economic and environmental sustainability objectives - a process called Sustainability Appraisal. The Council has already prepared a [Sustainability Appraisal Framework](#)<sup>3</sup> in order to identify a series of local objectives for the delivery of sustainable development in Wirral. The scope of the sustainability appraisal for the Core Strategy was finalised in July 2007.

The Core Strategy will also be subject to an assessment under the EU Habitats Directive which is intended to ensure the plan will not have a significant impact on the sites of international nature conservation interest around Wirral's coast and beyond.

### **The Issues and Options Report**

This document seeks to draw together the results of initial consultation on the likely content of the first Core Strategy for Wirral. It presents a spatial portrait of the Borough, summary of the policy background, summary baseline trends and key issues for topic areas, such as housing, employment, social inclusion and accessibility, and seeks views on the future options for the direction of the Council's spatial strategy for the Borough to 2025.

### **DEVELOPING A SPATIAL VISION AND OBJECTIVES FOR WIRRAL**

The Core Strategy will look forward for a period of 15 years from the date of adoption, expected to be 2010. It will contain a spatial vision based on a series of strategic objectives and spatial policies. The Core Strategy also needs to be underpinned by a spatial analysis of the characteristics of the Wirral and the key issues and challenges facing the Borough including information gathered from public consultation and Annual Monitoring Reports over the last 3 years.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The Council's Statement of Community Involvement was adopted in December 2006.

<sup>3</sup> The Council's Sustainability Appraisal Framework was published for public consultation between July – September 2005 and formally adopted by the Council on 12<sup>th</sup> July 2006

The Annual Monitoring Reports can be viewed at:  
[http://www.wirral.gov.uk/LGCL/100006/200074/856/content\\_0001673.html](http://www.wirral.gov.uk/LGCL/100006/200074/856/content_0001673.html)

## **A Spatial Portrait of Wirral - what is the Borough like now?**

Wirral is a large metropolitan area, forming the northern part of the peninsula to the west of Liverpool on the opposite bank of the River Mersey, to the north of Ellesmere Port and Neston.

### **Social Context**

Wirral's population has declined from over 355,000 during the 1970s to 310,200 in mid-2007<sup>5</sup>. The population structure is skewed towards older age groups, with a lower proportion of younger adults and a higher proportion of older people than the averages for the rest of England and the North West. The greatest decline is in the 24 years and under age groups. While the number of households continues to rise, household densities are average for Greater Merseyside.

The principal flows of population are out of Wirral to Denbighshire, Flintshire and Chester and into Wirral from Liverpool and from the rest of Greater Merseyside. The largest flows are between Wirral and Liverpool.

Although average household incomes are among the highest in Merseyside, the Borough has a high number of localities<sup>6</sup> falling within the most deprived in England, mainly concentrated in the older urban areas in the east of the Borough. 23% of the population of Wirral are within the bottom 10% of the most deprived super output areas. These localities score poorly across the full range of indicators for income; employment; health and disability; education, skills and training; living environment; and crime and disorder.

Areas of Bidston, Birkenhead, Tranmere, Seacombe, Leasowe and Woodchurch qualify for the national allocation of Working Neighbourhoods Fund directed towards localities with conditions falling within the worst 3% of England.

Wirral has a higher than average proportion of the working age population on key benefits and a quarter of all school children in Wirral qualify for free school meals.

***Consultation Question 1- Do you agree that the above is an accurate reflection of the Borough's social context? If not please say why.***

### **Economic Context**

Key sectors in the local economy include retail and distribution, public administration, education and health. In manufacturing, the Borough is strongest in chemicals and food and drink. The number of tourism-related jobs and spending is also significant. The historical dominance of the port and shipbuilding sectors in the east of the Borough is much reduced, although both have experienced a revival in recent years. Further investment is expected at Eastham in response to proposals to reconfigure the facilities at Ellesmere Port.

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<sup>5</sup> Office of National Statistics (ONS)

<sup>6</sup> Super Output Areas

The North West Development Agency has designated two strategic regional sites in Wirral: at Twelve Quays, Birkenhead and at the Wirral International Business Park, Bromborough. The Birkenhead docks system, part of the Port of Liverpool, including the Twelve Quays roll-on-roll-off ferry terminal; and the entrance to the Manchester Ship Canal, are key regional facilities, providing up to 3,800 jobs<sup>7</sup>. The Birkenhead Docks and the Wirral International Business Park are also identified as Regional Strategic Sites in the North West Competitiveness and Employment ERDF Operational Programme 2007-13.

The Wirral Investment Strategy recognises that the Borough's economic performance, nevertheless, continues to be a major concern. Output per head of population remains below NW and UK averages and is the lowest on Merseyside. Economic activity rates are lower than national and regional benchmarks and levels of worklessness are higher. Wirral also has fewer VAT registered businesses. The stock of modern business premises is also comparatively low. The total number of jobs in Wirral is not sufficient to employ the resident population of working age. Average earnings for jobs located in Wirral are lower than the average earnings of Wirral residents as a whole, leading to a high number of journeys to work to Liverpool, Chester and beyond. Journeys to work also appear to be lengthening over time. These economic indicators are regularly updated within the annual Merseyside Economic Review.

Large areas of the Borough to the east of the M53 Motorway, plus the communities of Leasowe, Upton and Woodchurch, retained Assisted Area status in the national review announced in December 2006<sup>8</sup>. An employment land and premises study should be completed by the end of December 2008. A Merseyside Office study is being undertaken.

Birkenhead is the main retail and service centre for the Borough and has a large covered market, plus the Grange and Pyramids shopping centres, (the latter are in the common ownership). There is a continuing challenge of responding to changes in the retail sector and to competition from nearby Liverpool and Chester, in addition to out of centre development such as Cheshire Oaks to the south of Ellesmere Port.

In addition to Birkenhead there are a network of district centres in the Borough's main settlements of Wallasey, Moreton, Hoylake, West Kirby, Heswall, Bromborough, New Ferry and Prenton. These centres are complemented by a number of local shopping centres and parades. The inner urban area of East Wirral has seen a prolonged programme of public funding of shopfront improvements, enveloping and more substantial contraction and redevelopment, most recently at Tranmere Urban Village and Church Road and previously including New Ferry, Rock Ferry, Seacombe, Laird Street, Victoria Road and Seabank Road, New Brighton.

The Wirral Retail Strategy was completed in 2004 and an updated Study, widened in scope should be completed by the end of November 2008.

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<sup>7</sup> Maritime Sector on Merseyside Economic Impact Study January 2007

<sup>8</sup> To include the former Electoral Wards of Bidston, Birkenhead, Bromborough, Claughton, Eastham, Egerton, Leasowe, Liscard, New Brighton, Oxton, Prenton, Seacombe, Tranmere, Upton and Wallasey

***Consultation Question 2 - Do you agree that the above is an accurate reflection of the Borough's economic context? If not please say why.***

## **Environmental Context**

Wirral is generally perceived as an area of high environmental quality, especially in the west. The Council's Tourism Strategy emphasises the importance of Wirral's countryside and coast.

Wirral has an extensive network of locally identified non-statutory Sites of Biological Importance, twelve nationally designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest, two designated European nature conservation sites and one potential European nature conservation site. There are also twelve locally identified non-statutory sites designated for their importance to earth science.

While these sites cover most of the key habitats identified as priorities within the Wirral Biodiversity Action Plan, there are relatively few within the urban areas of east Wirral and not all aspects of Wirral's biodiversity resource are currently captured by site designations. A biodiversity audit is due for completion by the end of October 2008 along with a review and updating of the guidelines for the selection of local wildlife sites. The Borough has four areas of Special Landscape Value and three areas requiring landscape renewal. Over recent years extensive tree planning by the Forestry Commission and Groundwork has been carried out within the M53 corridor and at Bidston Moss. A landscape character assessment is underway and is due for completion by January 2009.

Wirral also has a significant built heritage, with over 1,850 listed structures, twenty-four designated conservation areas, nine scheduled ancient monuments and four sites on the English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens. A series of conservation area appraisals and action plans are being prepared and new conservation areas considered for designation. A Historic Character Assessment of Wirral's rural areas was completed in 2008. An assessment of the urban areas is still to be completed. Proposals in the Heritage Bill will expand the Borough's responsibility for maintaining and protecting local heritage.

Wirral has not needed to designate an air quality management area, although air conditions are continually monitored. Increasing car ownership and the continuing high level of out-commuting could, however, have major implications for travel generation and long-term air quality. Car ownership is still low in parts of the Borough but increased economic prosperity may see these levels rise.

The Merseyside Local Transport Plan sets out measures to promote more sustainable transport choices, supported by initiatives such as Travelwise.

Water quality within the Dee and Mersey Estuaries and inland watercourses has improved substantially over recent years, mainly due to the continuing programme of capital works undertaken by United Utilities. Wirral's beaches are consistently among the cleanest in the North West.

Levels of waste recycling in Wirral have seen significant recent improvement following the introduction of a new waste contract and the newly constructed recycling and composting facility at Bidston. Participation in recycling varies across

the Borough, with lower participation in higher density areas. No natural containment sites are currently available in Wirral, following the closure of the existing landfill site at Bromborough Dock. A Joint Waste Development Plan Document is being proposed for Merseyside and Halton to provide facilities to better promote facilities for recycling and reprocessing as an alternative to landfill.

***Consultation Question 3 - Do you agree that this is an accurate reflection of the Boroughs environmental context? If not please say why.***

## **Natural Resources**

Extensive low-lying areas, especially in the north of the Borough, are protected by defences from both tidal and fluvial (river) flooding. Much of the coastline is protected from erosion and/or flooding by “hard” defences. Only short stretches of clay cliffs at the Thurstaston and New Ferry shorelines continue to be subject to natural erosion. A Strategic Flood Risk Assessment is in preparation and is due for completion by the end of 2008. The Shoreline Management Plan which includes Wirral’s coastline is also being revised to consider coastal flood and erosion risks for over a 100 year period and is likely to be finalised by mid-2010.

Land quality is generally good and there are significant areas of high-grade agricultural land, particularly in the south and west of the Borough. While progress on urban land reclamation continues through HMRI and the development of the Strategic Regional Sites at 12 Quays and Wirral International Business Park, a number of significant sites in the east of the Borough can only be brought forward for development once ground condition problems have been addressed. A Brownfield Land Strategy is being prepared alongside the other Merseyside Districts in partnership with English Partnerships (soon to become the Homes and Communities Agency). The current position is monitored annually through the National Land Use Database (NLUD).

Much of Wirral is founded on sandstone which is a major aquifer and groundwater provides around 13% of Wirral’s water resources. Wirral does not, however, have any significant mineral reserves, apart from small amounts of winnable brick clay. Reserves of aggregates are very limited and constrained by nature conservation or other considerations. A minerals strategy will report on areas which may need to be safeguarded for possible future extraction.

The Government has identified Liverpool Bay for a significant expansion in offshore wind farm development. The construction of twenty-five turbines has been completed off the coastline at New Brighton and the shore connection to the national grid will take place on the north Wirral coast. The provision of onshore renewable energy schemes has, however, been minimal, to date. There is a need to enhance the evidence base on the local feasibility and potential for renewable and low-carbon technologies, including microgeneration.

***Consultation Question 4 - Do you agree that this is an accurate reflection of the Borough's natural resource context? If not please say why.***

## **Quality of Life**

Wirral is generally seen as offering a high quality of life but there are marked contrasts between different parts of the Borough.

Over 40% of the Borough is open countryside, with much of high landscape quality. The 41km coastline is a special feature, high in value for recreation, nature conservation and tourism. There are also a significant number of leisure and cultural facilities in both urban and rural areas, including areas such as New Brighton, West Kirby, Port Sunlight, the facilities in and around Birkenhead and the Borough's Country Parks. A review of Wirral's culture and leisure services will be taken forward as part of the Council's Strategic Asset Review. The need to maintain local character and distinctiveness in both east and west Wirral is of importance, especially in the lower density residential areas built during the Victorian and Edwardian eras. Although not an environmental protection designation, the Green Belt continues to make an important contribution to Wirral's environmental quality as well as continuing to promote urban regeneration.

Some of the other older urban areas continue to be the subject of a variety of regeneration initiatives. Symptoms of low demand, including high levels of vacancy and unfit housing, led to the designation of the 'Newheartlands' Pathfinder Area in parts of Birkenhead, Bidston, Seacombe, Tranmere and Liscard in April 2002 and additional funding has now been secured in principle for these areas up to 2010. Action has also included Neighbourhood Management and the Empty Property Strategy.

The key housing challenges facing Wirral over the next few years are those of increasing homelessness, affordability and the condition of homes occupied by some of the more vulnerable members of the community. The Strategic Housing Market Assessment completed in 2007 found issues of affordability both in the west of the Borough (where property prices are in excess of 4 times the average house price for the Borough), and in the east, where the impact of HMRI has resulted in house prices increasing at a faster rate than household incomes. The SHMA also concluded that the majority of demand identified is for 2 bed and 4 bed accommodation in all tenures across the borough. The Merseyside Gypsy and Traveller Assessment completed in 2007 shows a need for up to 10 pitches in Wirral.

The Council has for some years sought to restrict house building in west Wirral to support regeneration and development in the east. The requirement for new house building set at regional level has now increased from 160 net new dwellings to 500 dwellings per annum. This figure could increase to 600 net new dwellings per annum as the Growth Point proposals submitted to Government in October 2008 are taken through the development plan process. The Core Strategy will need to show how to accommodate this high figure while retaining regeneration in the east and restraint in the west. The Growth Point identified at the heart of the New Heartlands HMRI Pathfinder in Birkenhead Docks (including Wirral Waters) could accommodate 400 dwellings per annum. If the Growth Point is confirmed, this would take the Borough's Housing Requirement to 600 dwellings per annum leaving up to 200 dwellings per

annum to be found elsewhere in the Borough. A Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment will be prepared to identify the capacity of the Borough to satisfy these requirements.

Disparities in health are closely associated with income and employment based deprivation. There is a significant gap in life expectancy between the poorest and most affluent areas. For the five years between 1999 and 2003, ONS data suggests that there is an 11 year gap in average life expectancy between Birkenhead and Heswall. Wirral has a high number of admissions to hospital for alcohol related conditions. Rates of mental health, drug misuse, diabetes, healthy eating and physically active adults, are poorer than national and regional averages<sup>9</sup>. These indicators are annually updated in the Wirral Health Profile published by the Primary Care Trust.

While educational attainment figures are just above the national average with 60.6% of children achieving five or more A-C GCSEs (national average 59.3%), an east/west disparity persists with children in Birkenhead achieving 49.9% compared with 75.4% for West Wirral.

Wirral has the lowest rate of recorded crime on Merseyside and rates of burglaries, violent crimes, robberies and vehicle crimes continue to fall and are among the lowest in the country. However crime levels in the most deprived wards are disproportionately higher than the overall position for Wirral, with 10% of the Borough accounting for 30% of the crime.

The promotion of sustainable travel can also have a significant impact on local quality of life. The majority of Wirral's residential areas are within 400 metres of a bus stop or railway station and most of new housing continues to be built within 30 minutes public transport time of key facilities such as hospitals, schools etc (this is monitored through the Annual Monitoring Report). The fact that there is still a high dependency on the car for journeys to work suggests that the issue is not one of accessibility but lifestyle choice. Traffic levels have the greatest impact on communities along the busiest routes, particularly along routes to and from the Motorway and Birkenhead. The framework for investment in transport infrastructure is set by the Merseyside Local Transport Plan and monitored through a series of Annual Progress Reports.

***Consultation Question 5 - Do you agree that this is an accurate reflection of the Borough's Quality of Life context? If not please say why.***

## **RESULTS OF PREVIOUS CONSULTATION**

The Council undertook initial consultation as part of the development of the vision and objectives for the Core Strategy during 2005 and 2006. Further consultation will take place when each of the evidence base studies related to the Core Strategy are published.

In March 2005, consultation letters inviting open comment on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats (SWOT) and needs of the Borough were sent to contacts from the Council's Local Development Framework database, as well as to

MPs, Councillors and Area Forum representatives. The result of this SWOT analysis is set out in an initial report of consultation.

In November 2006, two workshops were held to consider the findings of the initial consultation and help to prioritise the issues raised and begin to consider the possible objectives for the Core Strategy and some of the options likely to be available for future development in the Borough. The results of this consultation are contained in the second report of initial consultation.

The workshop participants identified the following key characteristics and issues:

Table 1: Summary of SWOT analysis

<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• local history and heritage and the Victorian and Edwardian legacy;</li> <li>• peninsula coastline and scenery;</li> <li>• other aspects of the natural environment, including the Green Belt, open countryside, open space, parks, green spaces and gardens; and</li> <li>• access to national transport networks.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• inequalities in health, housing, education and environment and the polarisation between east and west;</li> <li>• jobs and investment, loss of young people and graduates, alongside an ageing population;</li> <li>• poor image of the urban environment and town centres and the failure to grasp development opportunities such as New Brighton, Cammell Lairds, Hind Street and Housing Market Renewal;</li> <li>• pollution, particularly from traffic and aircraft; and</li> <li>• limited funds for recreation and open space maintenance.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the promotion of more sustainable development, including issues such as waste minimisation, recycling, renewable energy, energy and water conservation and eco-homes;</li> <li>• brownfield re-development, to protect the Green Belt, the countryside and other green sites;</li> <li>• the promotion of leisure, tourism, coastal recreation and water sports;</li> <li>• re-development in and around Birkenhead, including the Town Centre, Cammell Lairds, Housing Market Renewal and the Docks, including the re-use of the docks rail link; and</li> <li>• improved public transport, tackling the impact of car use and parking, including improvements to the Bidston-Wrexham line.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the loss of local character and distinctiveness, including heritage and open land;</li> <li>• over-development, over-loading local infrastructure, particularly related to the increasing number of flat developments;</li> <li>• anti-social behaviour, mainly drink-related;</li> <li>• climate change and flood risk; and</li> <li>• the impact of traffic growth.</li> </ul>

The principal needs of the Borough were considered to be:

- 1 inward investment, local enterprise and jobs;

- 2 Better public transport, especially in the evening, across the Borough between the radial routes to Birkenhead, and along the Bidston-Wrexham railway line;
- 3 A greater emphasis on the conversion and re-use of existing buildings and the protection of local character and heritage; and
- 4 The control of anti-social behaviour.

Better provision for local services and community facilities, affordable family housing, public toilets and recreation facilities for young people, were also identified as significant needs.

### Consultation with under-represented Groups

Subsequent consultation in 2007 with groups under-represented at the workshops which included people representing the mid-Wirral settlements, younger people, BME groups and disabled people confirmed many of the comments already submitted but also included new comments related to their principal areas of concern:

<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accessibility within Birkenhead Town Centre</li> </ul>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design of housing developments</li> <li>• Physical accessibility of public transport, rail stations and terminals</li> <li>• Need for improvement in pavement finishes</li> <li>• Need for improvement in youth engagement</li> <li>• Need for improvement in leisure facilities</li> <li>• Need for improvement in local play areas and youth facilities</li> <li>• Lack of good quality hotels</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More cycle paths with better linkages</li> <li>• More events and festivals</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shop closures in local estates</li> <li>• Poor relationships with police</li> <li>• Continued pressures on Council budgets and services</li> <li>• Further out-of-town developments</li> <li>• School closures</li> <li>• Flooding in Leasowe</li> <li>• Immigrant labour</li> <li>• Drugs, teen pregnancy, sexual infections</li> </ul>

The principal needs of the Borough are considered to be:

- Affordable, social and special needs housing in local estates
- Multicultural activities and facilities
- Secondary school in Greasby

### **Comments on a Vision for Wirral**

The workshops shared a general consensus that Wirral should seek to be different from Liverpool. Participants considered that the focus of any new vision for Wirral should focus on promoting jobs, leisure and tourism alongside the protection of unique features such as the natural environment, coastline and heritage. Less emphasis should be placed on addressing east-west divisions and more on local distinctiveness, care over the design of new development and meeting identified local needs. The main priorities identified for a strategy were jobs, affordable family housing, meeting local needs, improved design quality, brownfield development, the reuse of existing buildings, improvements to the waterfront and the protection of heritage and open countryside. Measurable targets for delivery were also difficult to identify.

Continued regeneration in and around Birkenhead and the Docks was strongly supported to assist with addressing the underlying problems of the surrounding areas and improve quality of life.

## **REGIONAL PLANNING CONTEXT**

### **The Regional Spatial Strategy**

The North West of England Plan – The Regional Spatial Strategy to 2021 - was issued in September 2008 and forms part of the Development Plan for Wirral.

Policies DP1 – DP9 set out a series of spatial principles which underpin the Strategy. Policy RDF1 indicates in a Merseyside context that the first priority for growth, investment and regeneration should be the regional centre of Liverpool, with the second priority being the inner area surrounding this centre with particular focus on the Housing Market Renewal Area. Policy RDF1 is complemented by a series of sub-regional policies.

In relation to the Liverpool City Region, Policy LCR1 identifies the overall spatial planning priorities, supported by policies LCR 2-5. In relation to Wirral the new RSS effectively divides the Borough into three spatial areas:

- The Inner Area (Policy LCR2) – the first priority for investment in Wirral – is defined by the Newheartlands Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder Area, which includes Wirral Waters, Birkenhead Town Centre, Woodside, Hind Street and Cammell Lairds. This area is identified as a priority for residential development in order to secure a significant increase in population and support major regeneration activity
- The Outer Area (Policy LCR3) – the second priority for investment in Wirral – includes the remainder of the eastern area of Wirral to the east of the M53 Motorway (paragraph 11.9). In this area the focus is on focusing development in established centres, intervening in housing markets where additional restructuring

is required, widening the quality and choice of housing, and addressing worklessness

- The Rural Areas (Policy LCR4) – the lowest priority for investment in Wirral – includes the remainder of Wirral to the west of the M53 Motorway, (paragraph 11.13). In this area the focus is on improving access to services and addressing barriers to affordability and meeting identified local needs

Boundaries for these spatial areas should be defined within the Local Development Framework, as RSS only indicates broad areas.

## **CORPORATE POLICY CONTEXT**

### **The Sustainable Community Strategy**

The Sustainable Community Strategy provides a long term vision that sets out how the statutory agencies, the private sector and the community and voluntary sector (the third sector) will work collectively to improve the quality of life within Wirral. The Community Strategy was originally launched in 2002 as 'Getting Better Together' and was "refreshed" in March 2005. It is currently being reviewed alongside the emerging LDF.

The Council's vision for the Borough, as expressed in the emerging Sustainable Community Strategy (together with the Local Area Agreement and Council's Corporate Plan) is as follows:

### **"Our vision is of a more prosperous and equal Wirral, enabling all communities and people to thrive and achieve their full potential"**

The review of the Sustainable Community Strategy identifies six strategic aims to underpin this vision;

- A Strong local economy for Wirral;
- Safer, stronger communities in all parts of the Borough;
- The best possible health and well-being for all families and individuals;
- Excellent life chances for children and young people
- A high quality living and working environment;
- Sustainable, affordable housing for all.

### **Local Area Agreement**

The Local Area Agreement (LAA) is a contract between central government and local partners. It sets out the delivery plan for key elements of the Sustainable Community Strategy and runs for three years. Wirral is part of the second round of Local Area Agreements and submitted its Partnership Agreement for 2008/9 to 2010/11 to the Communities and Local Government Department at the end of May 2008.

Given the scale of the challenges, the Partnership Agreement restates that preventing and tackling worklessness and related deprivation (including child poverty) are priorities that must cut across strategic policies at a number of levels. A multi agency approach to tackling worklessness and growing the economy has been

recognized by partners across the Local Area Agreement with joint priorities being agreed through the Wirral investment strategy. Activity will focus on the implementation of the full employment and skills plan and the City Region Employment Strategy. In addition work will be undertaken to strategically plan and align activity and resources of all partners to support the delivery of sub-regional and local employment and skills strategies.

### **Wirral's Corporate Plan 2008-2011**

The Council's Corporate Plan identifies the Council's contribution to the delivery of the Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement. The Plan sets out five main objectives:

1. To create more jobs, achieve a prosperous economy and regenerate Wirral
2. To create a clean, pleasant, safe and sustainable environment
3. To improve health and well being for all, ensuring people who require support are full participants in mainstream society
4. To raise the aspirations of young people
5. To create an excellent Council

The Corporate Plan includes a delivery plan which sets out a detailed breakdown of how progress will be made; showing the actions to be taken and the indicators that will be adopted to measure progress.

### **Wirral Investment Strategy**

In 2004 the Council commissioned a review of existing strategies and policies to ensure a strategic and co-ordinated approach to the future economic development of the Borough. The review was informed by research undertaken by GVA Grimley and KPMG to ensure a clear evidence base for the new strategy. Examination by Elected Members and a consultation event with more than 170 business representatives has firmed up and secured support for the Investment Strategy which was issued in final form in 2007. Growing the local economy is identified as the top priority of the Investment Strategy. A range of opportunities and challenges are identified under the headings of Infrastructure, Business, Skills and education, People and Jobs and Quality of Life.

A number of priority projects are listed – Mersey Waterfront Regional Park, Brand New Brighton, West Wirral Developments, Wirral Docklands and Woodside, Wirral Strategic Investment Area, Wirral Strategic Rail and Road Transport and Infrastructure and Birkenhead Town Centre.

The Strategy identifies a number of Key outcomes;

- Raise productivity
- Retain and increase the number of higher value jobs in the Borough
- Encourage innovation and enterprise
- Tackle Skills and employment disparities
- Develop and improve infrastructure

- Develop the future viability of the existing employment space
- Improve the availability of sites and premises for new investment

### **ENHANCING THE EVIDENCE BASE**

The LDF must be based on a robust and agreed evidence base. A number of additional studies have been commissioned to better reflect the spatial planning dimension to the Core Strategy. These include:

- Employment Land and premises,
- Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment
- Strategic Housing Market Needs Assessment
- Merseyside Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment
- Cultural Services Forward Plan incorporating Open Space and Recreation Audit
- Retail, Town Centres and Commercial Leisure
- Strategic Flood Risk Assessment
- Biodiversity Audit
- Landscape Character Assessment
- Social and Community Infrastructure Requirements study
- Wirral Waters evidence base (produced by Peel Holdings)
- Settlement Level Profiles
- Merseyside Minerals Study
- Mersey Heartlands Growth Point Programme of Development

In April 2007, the Council invited consultees to identify any sites or information that they believed ought to be considered or assessed as part of these evidence base studies. It was made clear that the identification of any sites through this consultation process would not in any way imply any future commitment by the Council to allocate these sites for any development purposes proposed. Publication of each Evidence Base study will coincide with 6 weeks public consultation on the findings.

Where available, the findings have been reflected in the following sections and highlighted as appropriate. It is intended that the findings of these studies will inform subsequent stages of preparation of the Core Strategy Development Plan Document. These studies will supplement on-going monitoring undertaken through the Annual Monitoring Report, NLUD, the LTP, Housing Flows Reconciliation, RSS monitoring, national indicator datasets and National Core Output indicators for LDFs.

The Council is also working on detailed area profiles for 7 settlement areas of the Borough including Wallasey, mid-Wirral, West Kirby, Heswall, Bromborough, Birkenhead and the rural areas of the Borough. These profiles will provide a more local dimension to the evidence base.

## **Current and emerging Regeneration Activity**

Key to the delivery of the vision and spatial planning strategy will be the range of regeneration and intervention activities in the Borough: the Core Strategy will play a key role in ensuring that these activities now and in the future contribute to the delivery of the Core Strategy vision and objectives. Equally, future business and other plans for these initiatives should take account of the Core Strategy. The Core Strategy will need to guide and support the delivery of a range of physical regeneration and publicly funded intervention activity in the Borough.

### *Newheartlands*

The Merseyside Housing Market Renewal Initiative Pathfinder – Newheartlands, is a long term regeneration project, to tackle the causes and symptoms of housing market failure, vacancy and decline at the heart of the conurbation. In Wirral, the boundary designated by the Government, in April 2002, includes parts of Bidston, Birkenhead, Liscard, Tranmere and Seacombe<sup>10</sup>.

A Strategy for Inner Wirral was originally published by the Council in January 2004, to inform the Prospectus for the Newheartlands Pathfinder, as a guide to local priorities for action. The Strategy was followed by a series of non-statutory master plans: for North Birkenhead; Church Road, Tranmere; and Fiveways, Rock Ferry, which were adopted by the Council in 2005.

Since 2003, a £43 million programme has been delivered, involving targeted acquisition and clearance and large scale refurbishment and the objectives of the programme continue to have a major influence on policy development across the Borough. The latest Business Plan, for 2008/11, was submitted to the Government in November 2007 and provides for £29.53m to be expended through the HMRI programme to 2011. An additional £45.47million is expected to be drawn down from the Council's Regeneration Capital Programme, Housing Corporation, RSL investment, private sector investment and capital receipts

In relation to Wirral, current intervention activity in Rock Ferry and Tranmere will be completed over the 2008-11 period culminating with the leveraging of £38 million private sector investment in new homes on the Fiveways estate and the £30 million redevelopment of Church Road. This represents the exit strategy for 15 years of area based renewal in the neighbourhood.

In addition the Business Plan indicates that a key element for 2008-11 will be to align the HMR Programme in Birkenhead with the long term intentions of the Wirral Waters scheme and ensuring that HMR makes a full contribution to the local economy harnessing the potential economic benefits of housing led investment. HMR funding will be used to remove the least sustainable stock, create opportunities for new build, undertake further Group Repair and continue with "Living Through Change" to support residents through the process. In Wallasey, HMR funding will be used to complete existing commitments and tackle low demand through a programme of strategic selective clearance.

The objectives of this and later programmes will need to inform the content of the Core Strategy DPD and the site-specific Allocation DPD's.

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<sup>10</sup> The Newheartlands Pathfinder also includes parts of neighbouring local authorities in Sefton and Liverpool

### *Wirral Waters*

Wirral Waters is a major private-sector-led urban regeneration opportunity at the heart of the Newheartlands Pathfinder, based around the extensive Birkenhead Dock Estate, to the north and west of Birkenhead Town Centre which could have the potential to draw in £4.5bn of private sector investment to deliver up to 27,000 new jobs and up to 25,000 new dwellings over a 30 year period. The delivery of the project is supported by an extensive evidence base. To assist this process of regeneration, the Council officially requested that UDP Policy EM10 – Birkenhead and Eastham Dock Estates, should no longer remain in force. The withdrawal of Policy EM10 was confirmed by a Direction issued by the Secretary of State in September 2007<sup>11</sup>.

Work on the conversion of the dockside mills along the East Float is almost complete and a planning application for a new-build residential development on vacant dockland to the west has been recommended for approval subject to a legal agreement. The proposed conversion of the Hydraulic Tower into a hotel and restaurant was granted planning permission in May 2008. Further planning applications are expected to be submitted in early 2009.

A bid for New Growth Point and Eco Town status - Mersey Heartlands was submitted to the Government, in partnership with Liverpool City Council and Peel Holdings, in October 2007<sup>12</sup>. This was shortlisted in July 2008. A Programme of development for the Growth Point was submitted to the Government in October 2008. Public consultation on the emerging proposals was undertaken during October 2008.

The Wirral Waters Strategic Regeneration Framework and the Mersey Heartlands Programme of Development will be used to inform the content of the Core Strategy DPD and the site-specific Allocation DPD's.

### *Woodside Regeneration Area*

The Woodside Regeneration Area is another significant private sector-led regeneration opportunity at the heart of the Newheartlands Pathfinder, based around the waterfront adjacent to Birkenhead Town Centre, between Priory Wharf and Woodside Business Park. A non-statutory master plan for a mixed-use redevelopment including offices, residential and leisure, originally commissioned in May 2004, was approved by the Council in August 2005.

Further work, including a Technical Appendix and a Conservation Area Appraisal, was commissioned in October 2005. Public consultation was undertaken during March 2007. The results of these further studies and of public consultation are expected to be reported in due course.

The Woodside Master Plan will be used to inform the content of the Core Strategy DPD and the site-specific Allocation DPD's.

### *Hind Street Regeneration Area*

The Hind Street Regeneration Area also lies at the heart of the Newheartlands Pathfinder, based upon the redundant land around the gasholders at Hind Street and

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<sup>11</sup> Paragraph 4.14 above refers John – there are no para numbers to refer to?  
<sup>12</sup> Paragraph 5.60 below refers

the former railway land reclaimed and serviced by the Merseyside Development Corporation in the late 1990s, to the south of Birkenhead Town Centre, in Tranmere.

The Council jointly commissioned a regeneration strategy for the Hind Street Regeneration Area in 2001.

Outline planning consent for non-food retail, office, trade sales, restaurant/public house, car showroom and crèche, was recommended for approval in July 2007, subject to notification to the Secretary of State and a legal agreement to secure a revised road link to Birkenhead Town Centre from the A41. The Section 106 agreement is expected to be executed before the end of 2008. The development is expected to be a partnership between the Council, English Partnerships and National Grid.

The Core Strategy DPD and the Town Centres, Retail and Leisure Allocations DPD will need to take account of these proposals, in the event of planning consent being granted.

### *New Brighton*

The initial proposal for a major private sector-led mixed-use, leisure-based re-development on the waterfront at New Brighton was refused planning permission by the Secretary of State in July 2006. The development was revised to address the Secretary of State's concerns and split into two phases.

Planning permission for Phase 1, to the south of Marine Promenade, for the redevelopment and extension of the Floral Pavilion, was granted in October 2006 and is now nearly complete with the Floral Pavilion expected to re-open in late 2008.

An outline planning application for Phase 2, for a smaller scheme to the north of Marine Promenade including a supermarket, hotel and leisure uses, was approved in November 2007 following notification to the Secretary of State. The first of a series of reserved matters applications (covering the public realm works) has now been submitted to the Council.

The Core Strategy DPD and the Town Centres, Retail and Leisure Allocations DPD will need to take account of these proposals.

### *Birkenhead Town Centre*

Birkenhead has seen significant public investment in new public transport infrastructure, at the new central bus station at Europa Square and the new Merseyrail station at Conway Park. The removal of the Conway Street flyover and associated environmental improvements were funded as part of the Government's City Challenge programme.

The Grange and Pyramids shopping centres are now both owned by Warner Estates and some investment has been made in creating a new Food Court in the Pyramids. Proposals for leisure-based development on Europa Boulevard have recently secured planning permission.

The Council is working with a developer to bring forward the development of a food superstore on part of the Oliver Street Car Parks site, intended to address the need for a large supermarket in the Town Centre since the closure of the Asda store in the

1990s. It is also hoped that the new development will also provide uplift to the Grange Road end of the shopping centre.

There has been some success in attracting new office development to the Town centre in and around Europa Boulevard, and a new build scheme close to the Birkenhead tunnel entrance is now also nearing completion. On the edge of the town centre, long-standing proposals to regenerate the Hind Street area of Birkenhead are moving forward: outline planning permission has been granted for a mixed-use development which will include the provision of a new link road between the Rock Retail Park and Central Station Roundabout (the Hind Street scheme referred to above).

The Core Strategy DPD and the Town Centres, Retail and Leisure Allocations DPD will need to take account of these proposals.

#### *Wirral International Business Park*

Wirral International Business Park (WIBP) comprises 336 hectares (830 acres) of industrial and commercial land at Bromborough, adjacent to the River Mersey. The Northwest Regional Development Agency has identified it as a Strategic Regional Investment Site. More than £150m has been invested in WIBP over recent years, with over 50 hectares of land improved and developed. 1,800 of a targeted 3,000 jobs have already been created through attracting new companies to the new business park areas.

The Core Strategy DPD and the Employment Allocations DPD will need to take account of these proposals.

#### *Port Wirral*

Peel holdings have identified potential for further expansion of port and associated facilities at Eastham and alongside the Manchester Ship Canal, linked to potential redevelopment of the existing port facilities in Ellesmere Port.

The Core Strategy DPD and the Employment Allocations DPD will need to take account of these proposals which in the case of Port Wirral has not yet been formally put to Wirral Members.

#### *Cammell Laird*

A large part of the site of the former Cammell Laird shipyard has been reused as a highly successful ship repair activity utilising the graving docks and wet basin. The rest of the site to the south, including the main construction hall is underused and remains a significant regeneration opportunity. Now in the ownership of Peel Holdings, this part of the site may have potential for future deep sea port facilities, although this will need to be confirmed through a port masterplan.

The Core Strategy DPD and the Employment Allocations DPD will need to take account of these proposals.

#### *West Kirby/Hoylake Master Plan*

A non-statutory master plan for the regeneration of Hoylake and West Kirby was approved by the Council in November 2004, as part of the build up to the return of the Open Championship. An initial package of improvements was delivered prior to

the Championship in 2006. Further projects, including re-developments at West Kirby Concourse, West Kirby Sailing School, Thurstaston Visitor Centre and other environmental improvements to the public realm, promenades and open spaces, are ongoing.

The Council and the Mersey Partnership has also been investigating the concept of providing a Golf Resort linked to the Royal Liverpool Golf Course, in the area of open land to the east of the railway. The concept is supported by the North West Development Agency. Further technical work, to identify the optimum location for such a facility, has been undertaken and expressions of interest will be sought from the market in 2008/9.

The Core Strategy DPD and the Town Centres, Retail and Leisure Allocations DPD will need to take account of these proposals

## **EMERGING ISSUES AND CHALLENGES**

Drawing together the findings of the spatial portrait, the initial consultation exercise, emerging evidence base findings and the objectives of the Sustainable Community Strategy a number of emerging issues have been identified, including:-

### **1. Cross-Cutting Issues**

#### **Supporting Urban Regeneration**

Policies encouraging urban regeneration allied with a Green Belt boundary tightly defined around the urban area have been a cornerstone of the Council's planning Strategy for the last 25 years. The Annual Monitoring reports published to date demonstrate that the approach has been successful in securing development on previously developed land - in excess of Regional Targets in the case of housing. A succession of funding streams from Central Government and Europe including City Challenge, Single Regeneration Budget and most recently Housing Market Renewal have been targeted at the built up eastern side of the Borough. Many of the specific problems and challenges identified under the headings below are concentrated in the east of the Borough. There remain significant amounts of vacant and derelict land for example. The Core Strategy will need to balance the ongoing strategic priorities of urban regeneration in the east of the Borough with meeting local needs achieving objectives such as enhancing the tourism offer and maintaining environmental quality elsewhere in Wirral.

#### **Achieving sustainable development**

The UK Sustainable Development Strategy "Securing the Future" published in March 2005, identifies five principles for sustainable development in the UK:

- Living within environmental limits;
- Ensuring a strong, healthy and just society;
- Achieving a sustainable economy;
- Promoting good governance; and
- Using sound science responsibly

The Government has determined that sustainability appraisal must be central to the spatial planning system. The stated purpose of sustainability appraisal is to promote sustainable development through the integration of social, environmental and economic considerations into the preparation of revisions of Regional Spatial Strategies and for new or revised Development Plan Documents and Supplementary Planning Documents. There is also a need to respond to the challenge of climate change.

The Sustainability Appraisal Framework for Wirral provides a method for describing, analysing and comparing the sustainability effects of plans and policies. A series of sustainability objectives has been developed, following public consultation taking into account the relationship between the Core Strategy DPD and the objectives of other plans and programmes, alongside the findings of the baseline information review and the sustainability issues identified in the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping report. These objectives will form the basis of the framework for evaluating the various options for the emerging Core Strategy.

### **Ensuring high quality development across the Borough**

National advice requires positive planning for the achievement of high quality and inclusive design for all development. The Core Strategy therefore needs to promote high quality design, both in the layout of developments and also in terms of individual buildings, for the lifetime of the development. The Core Strategy also needs to ensure that new development is accessible to all.

## **2. A Stronger Economy**

### **Improving economic performance**

Wirral has a relatively small and low value economy. It has the lowest GVA per capita in Merseyside and the North West and represents only 56.7% of the UK average. The slow rate of growth of the economy means that Wirral is falling behind other parts of the city region, the North West and the rest of the UK. There are low levels of entrepreneurial activity in Wirral: the rate of 16 VAT registrations per 10,000 people is just over half the national figure (31), and significantly below the regional figure (26). The Core Strategy will need to include policies which contribute to improvements in the Borough's economic performance.

### **Addressing worklessness**

Unemployment in Wirral increased to 3.6 percent in September 2008. This was above the regional and national levels of 3.0 percent and 2.5 percent respectively. The overall economic activity rate for March 2007 was 75.2% for Wirral, compared to a rate of 73.4% for Merseyside. There is significant variation in economic activity rates within the Borough. Wirral also has a higher than average proportion of people of working age on key benefits compared to the UK and North West average.

### **Reducing out-commuting**

The Borough is a net exporter of workers, with almost three times as many residents travelling outside Wirral to work, compared to the number of people commuting into the Borough for employment. However much of the higher value employment is located outside the Borough - over 40,000 of Wirral's residents (the majority from west Wirral) commute out of the district with over half of these jobs being in the professional sector. As such, despite the economic problems in the Borough the

earnings of Wirral residents are above national figures. Wirral has a healthy representation of graduate level skills, with the number of residents qualified to at least NVQ level 4 equal with the national average.

### **Addressing Low paid and low quality employment**

By contrast the earnings of workers employed in Wirral are below the national average outside the public sector and Wirral's economy is increasingly dependent on small to medium enterprises. Levels of employment in Wirral businesses have fallen. Overall job density in the Borough is low: for every 100 people of working age in the Borough, there are only 61 jobs (2006) compared with a Merseyside average of 73 and a North West average of 80. The Borough has an over-representation of high volume/low value manufacturing and primary industry activities and a lack of dynamic higher-value sectors such as knowledge-based industry. Wirral mirrors the Merseyside sub-region in the percentage of service sector businesses (55 percent), but is under-represented in the Transport & Communications and Banking, Finance and Insurance sectors.

### **Maintaining an adequate supply of immediately available employment land**

Emerging studies have confirmed the short term shortage of readily available, serviced, developable land with road access and utilities in place for modern businesses. The historic annual take up rate of 10.3 ha also suggests that the Borough will face a long term shortfall of suitable developable land. Many older premises are unattractive to the local market and hinder aspirations to strengthen the local economy.

### **Promoting and supporting the tourism economy**

The leisure and tourism industry for Merseyside represent nearly 40% of total employment. There are over 3000 tourism related businesses in Merseyside providing 37,000 jobs. This is expected to further expand as a result of the Liverpool Capital of Culture 2008 programme. The Mersey Partnership has identified hospitality and tourism as a priority growth area for the Merseyside economy. Wirral's Tourism Strategy has identified the countryside and coast as key assets.

### **Supporting the vitality and viability of the Borough's existing town and local centres**

While Birkenhead remains the Borough's largest shopping centre, there are high levels of expenditure leakage to Liverpool and Chester in particular and Birkenhead has lost a number of national retailers in recent years. Survey evidence also suggests that it no longer serves as the shopping centre of choice for all Wirral residents, particularly those in the west of the Borough. Liscard and the other district centres, perform a more local role, but again traditional shopping centres within the inner urban area continue to face problems in terms of an over-supply of shop units and competition from the supermarkets. Ensuring all communities have access to a good choice of local retail and other facilities remains a key challenge. The majority of new retail and leisure floorspace in recent years has occurred in out of centre locations and there are few easily developable opportunities in established centres.

## **3. Housing**

### **Providing a size, type and tenure of housing to meet identified needs.**

The Strategic Housing Market and Needs Assessment [SHMA] has forecast a latent demand for up to 1633 new dwellings per annum with 528 of these units identified as affordable dwellings. The majority of demand identified is for 2 bed and 4 bed accommodation in all tenures across the Borough. Affordability is not limited to the more affluent areas where average property prices are well in excess of 4 times the average house price but is also prevalent in a wide range of neighbourhoods in east Wirral. Specific needs for local areas are set out within the SHMA. Pending the outcome of the Core Strategy, the Council has adopted a target of 40% affordability in all new housing schemes over 15 units subject to a site-specific viability assessment. The Core Strategy will need to rely heavily on the detailed findings of the SHMA to guide the type and pattern of new development.

### **Delivering appropriate specialist housing**

The SHMA identified a high level of special needs for 22% of all households. The majority are physically disabled (13%) whilst frail elderly (4.9%) and those with severe sensory disability (4%) are also significant. A quarter of all households in Wirral contain only older people. These needs are not being adequately met. The changing social profile of an ageing population will require sufficient housing provision that is appropriately designed and suited to their needs. A Gypsy and Traveller study, undertaken at a Merseyside level shows a potential need for up to 10 residential pitches by 2016. Provision may also need to be made for transit pitches across the sub-region. The Core Strategy will need to set out criteria for these various types of provision.

### **Maintaining a continuous supply of deliverable housing sites.**

The requirement for new housing is set by national and, regional policies. The RSS issued in September 2008 suggests a total housing provision in Wirral between 2003 and 2021 of 9,000 dwellings (net of clearance replacement) at an annual average rate of 500 net new dwellings per year. A further 100 dwellings net per annum will effectively be added to this if the new Growth Point at Mersey Heartlands is accepted. The RSS housing requirements are no longer regarded as a ceiling where development proposed is in line with established local priorities.

One of the key issues for the Core strategy will be how the housing requirement is accommodated within Wirral without harming the objectives of Housing Market Renewal, the character of established residential areas and travel patterns whilst continuing to reflect the spatial framework for Wirral set out in RSS. The Council currently restricts new housebuilding outside the Interim Housing Policy Area to direct new housing into identified Regeneration Priority Areas. This has delivered 771 dwellings gross across the Borough for 2007/8. There will be also be a need to test delivery within the proposed Growth Point and consider alternative strategies should actual delivery fall below expected levels. The delivery of 400 dwellings per annum within the Growth Point focus area will be critical if current policies are to be maintained.

### **Maximising the use of previously developed land**

Maximising the use of previously developed land, which includes the conversion of existing buildings, is a national priority, reducing the need to develop on greenfield land. The RSS sets an indicative target of at least 80% of the housing provision to be accommodated on brownfield land and buildings. The protection of local character and heritage are, however, local priorities. The protection of local distinctiveness is a major issue for Wirral people. Despite long term regeneration

initiatives, Wirral still has a high proportion of vacant land and derelict buildings, located mainly in the eastern side of the Borough. This is due largely to poor levels of commercial investment related to a decline in the desirability of this area as a place in which to live, work and invest. The reuse and redevelopment of this land is essential if urban renaissance is to occur.

The character of the older and well established, attractive housing areas that contain aspects of unique heritage such as Edwardian and Victorian properties located outside Conservation Areas has faced particular pressures for redevelopment. The Council's Interim Housing Policy has provided a degree of protection for many of these areas, but there will be a need to consider how best to safeguard the character of these neighbourhoods in future in the light of the need to provide for additional homes in accordance with the spatial priorities of RSS.

### **Securing sustainable design and construction**

National policy requires the planning system to contribute to reducing carbon emissions and apply measures to address climate change and take into account the unavoidable consequences. The Government has introduced the Code for Sustainable Homes, a voluntary standard for design that will become mandatory over time. There is an additional initiative to support Lifetime homes. Only a small number of dwellings in Wirral have so far been built to these new standards. Over the lifetime of the LDF, Wirral will need to contribute to the Government's ambition that all new homes should be zero carbon by 2016 and promote the adoption of BREEAM standards for other developments

## **4. Building Sustainable Communities**

### **Creating Sustainable communities through Housing Market Renewal**

A main priority for the LDF will be to deliver mixed and sustainable communities at the heart of the urban area including a greater mix in the size, type, tenure, quality and affordability of housing, supported by a high quality, accessible environment with modern services including transport, health and education. There is a particular need to reduce the barriers to worklessness and deliver improvements to health. This will include the provision of new facilities within the Mersey Heartlands Growth Point.

### **Tackling nationally significant deprivation**

The national index of multiple deprivation for England continues to show nationally significant deprivation concentrated in the east of the Borough. The wards of Bidston St James, Birkenhead and Tranmere have twice the national average proportion of children living in households where key benefits are claimed. Claimants of key benefits are concentrated within six wards, all of which are located in the eastern half of the Wirral. Almost 20,000 people claim incapacity benefit. Wirral is one of the first Local Authorities to deliver a nationally agreed Local Public Service Agreement to focus on reducing economic inactivity across all benefit recipients, and has seen a fall of 3,000 in the number of Incapacity Benefit Claimants in the three years to April 2007, and a fall of over 700 people claiming Lone Parent benefits. Any spatial policy for the Borough will need to reflect the need to address these issues to tackle income and employment based deprivation.

### **Reducing health inequalities and improving life expectancy**

Wirral has one of the widest variations in terms of health outcomes for its residents of all the Merseyside PCT's. There is a stark mortality gap, with the highest numbers of people suffering from alcohol and smoking related illness, obesity and mental health problems located largely within the east of the Borough. On average those living in the poorest wards are expected to live 11 years less than those living in the most affluent areas of the Borough. The scope for a spatial land-use plan to directly change personal lifestyle choices is limited, but by ensuring that the necessary built infrastructure and health care facilities can be provided and influencing the location and form of development it can provide the framework that could encourage more healthy life choices.

### **Addressing inequalities in skills, education, and training and life chances**

There is a clear link between deprivation and academic attainment. The attainment gap between pupils receiving free school meals and those not receiving free school meals in maintained schools for GCSE attainment of 5 plus GCSEs at grade A\*-C in Wirral was 37.4 percentage points, higher than in the other Merseyside districts. The employment rate in Wirral for people with no qualifications is declining. The lowest qualified are increasingly unlikely to be unemployed. A third of workless people in Wirral have no formal qualifications and three quarters have a low level of qualifications (NVQ2 and below). The scope for a spatial land-use plan to directly influence educational attainment is limited, other than ensuring that the necessary built facilities can be provided in the most appropriate and accessible locations.

### **Reducing crime and anti-social behaviour**

Wirral has the lowest rate of recorded crime on Merseyside and the rates of burglaries, violent crimes, robberies and vehicle crimes continue to fall and are among the lowest in the country. However approximately 30% of all recorded crime on Wirral occurs in 10% of the Borough; these areas broadly correspond with the most deprived areas of the Borough. Much of this is violent crime associated with the night time economy. There has been a fall in residents' fear of crime, but anti-social behaviour remains a significant issue for local people. Anti-social behaviour was still the highest reported incident category reported on Wirral in 2006/7 by a considerable margin: there were 21,994 incidents of Anti-social behaviour and 7,569 recorded incidents of criminal damage, the next highest category. The Core Strategy will set criteria for the design and layout of new development that will reduce the opportunity for crime and anti-social behaviour.

## **5. An Accessible Borough**

### **Reducing dependency on the private car**

The majority of Wirral's residential areas are within 400 metres of a bus stop or railway station and the Merseyside rail network is one of the most heavily used for commuter journeys outside the south east of England. However, there is still a high dependency on the car for journeys to work, some of the main arterial routes in the Borough are carrying large volumes of traffic and car ownership is forecast to rise. There are also declining levels of bus patronage and low levels of walking and cycling. The high level of out-commuting from the Borough has been previously highlighted. The number of new homes that we are required to build could result in thousands of additional commuter trips being made everyday. Initial consultation confirmed that people were concerned about traffic growth and highlighted difficulties travelling between urban areas by public transport as a contributory factor on journeys to work and shop etc. The Core Strategy will need to minimize the need to

use the car, promote alternative modes including walking, cycling and park and ride through the location of new employment and housing development. It could also serve to support the enhancement of existing public transport infrastructure such as the Bidston-Wrexham railway line (Borderlands).

Congestion management, particularly on the section of the A552 (east of M53 J3 to Birkenhead Central), will need particular consideration as this route informs the government's national congestion target. Being one of the eleven Merseyside corridors monitored for traffic growth and person through-put, development on, or in the vicinity of, this corridor will need to be effectively managed to ensure that additional vehicular trips do not significantly impact on journey times.

### **Minimising the environmental impact of transport**

Although Wirral does not have any declared Air Quality Management Areas, increasing car ownership and the continuing high level of out-commuting could have major implications for travel generation and long-term air quality. The road network in the vicinity of the Birkenhead Tunnel has been identified as a location of potential concern. Development which will significantly increase traffic levels on the A41 could potentially give rise to air quality issues. Deprived areas can suffer disproportionately from the impact of transport. Regeneration projects in more central locations could introduce significant levels of new residential development. There remain heavy levels of industrial traffic particularly in the docks and along the A41. Outside the Borough, the continued expansion of Liverpool John Lennon airport has increased the frequency of aircraft flying over Wirral although these are generally Chapter 3 compliant aircraft and the amount of overflights is dependent on wind direction. The number of night flights has reduced significantly in recent years as a result of the contraction in the amount of freight handled at Liverpool. Development at the airport is subject to an Airport Masterplan, adopted in November 2007.

### **Supporting the port and maritime industries**

The Borough's ports are facilities of regional and national significance and have been identified as a key economic driver for the city region. The Mersey waterfront between Birkenhead and Eastham is identified as having the potential to support EC initiatives to encourage the transfer of freight from land to water. Road and rail access to the region's main ports is an important issue, particularly in terms of the potential to reduce unnecessary and unsustainable use of ports in other UK regions such as the east and south-east of England. This could minimise road transport and reduce pressure on ports in the east and south east. There are plans to improve the facilities at Eastham. The Core Strategy will need to provide for the future of the docks as part of the Wirral Waters regeneration proposals, which may include reinstatement of the docks freight link. A Port Masterplan will be prepared, in accordance with Policy RT6 of RSS and consistent with the Core Strategy.

## **6. Environmental Quality And Protection**

### **Safeguarding and enhancing Wirral's natural environment**

Wirral's coastline, countryside, biodiversity, geodiversity and natural beauty are not only intrinsically important but are crucial to the overall image of the Borough. The Council also has a legal duty to provide for the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty and amenity of the Borough. Significant challenges are posed by the close proximity of European nature conservation sites around the majority of Wirral's coast and the need to consider impacts on these of policies and proposals in the

LDF. Provision, protection and enhancement of sites that provide outdoor recreation opportunities close to and accessible by existing communities is an important objective. Some areas of landscape require enhancement. The majority of Wirral's biodiversity and geodiversity sites are located outside the urban area. While the Green Belt provides an element of protection, the Core Strategy will need to make specific provision for protected species and habitats. Not all aspects of Wirral's biodiversity resource are currently captured by site designations. The Core Strategy will have to demonstrate that any proposals will preserve and where appropriate enhance these assets.

### **Protect and enhancing Wirral's urban environment.**

The urban area environment is where the majority of Wirral people live and work. The attractiveness of the urban environment is a key element in most people's quality of life. The urban area is also expected to accommodate the majority of new development over the plan period. Some of the urban area is of limited attractiveness in terms of the environment and amenities it provides. There are relatively few designated nature conservation sites within the urban areas of east Wirral and the role of Greenspace as part of a network of Green Infrastructure has yet to be fully recognised. Opportunities to maximise green infrastructure might also consider less traditional areas such as highway verges which could be enhanced to create wild-flower habitat corridors. Merseyside Local Authorities are considering a proposal for a sub-regional Green Infrastructure Strategy, promoted by the Mersey Forest.

Public consultation has shown that people are most concerned about the landscape, open space maintenance, the quality of design and safeguarding of heritage. Whilst the need for new development is acknowledged, there is also a need to ensure that local distinctiveness and areas of special environmental quality are protected and enhanced. The Core Strategy will need to balance the need for urban regeneration with safeguarding local distinctiveness and securing environmental improvements.

### **Adapting to climate change**

Adaptation to the effects of climate change is a key Government priority. Energy use in homes and businesses along with transport are having a significant impact on the climate through the carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuels. There is currently very limited renewable and low carbon energy production in the Borough. There is however, a need for a better understanding of the feasibility and potential for renewable and low-carbon technologies. The Government has recently relaxed planning rules to promote microgeneration, but the Core Strategy will need to provide a framework for the wider delivery of new renewable technologies.

### **Controlling flood risk**

Parts of the Borough are at risk of flooding both from river (fluvial) and tidal sources. The long term implications of climate change for the future risk and extent of flooding needs to be understood. Periods of high intensity rainfall have also caused problems of sewer flooding in some localities. The Core Strategy will need to ensure that new development is only located in areas which will not increase the likelihood or extent of flooding and that adequate drainage infrastructure is provided. It will also need to include measures to minimize run-off and encourage the incorporation of sustainable urban drainage systems.

### **Sustainable Waste Management**

Reducing the consumption of resources and the generation of waste is a national priority. The amount of household waste collected per capita in Wirral is increasing. The overall pattern of waste management is however changing with the greater emphasis on recycling. Household waste recycling rates in Wirral have improved significantly and are anticipated to increase further. Waste issues will be dealt with in detail in the Joint Merseyside Waste DPD which will provide the framework to deal with the minimisation and management of waste arisings, including provision for separation, recycling and the safe storage of different types of waste. The Core Strategy will however need to reflect this spatial framework for the provision of these new facilities.

### **Control of Pollution and Hazards**

The regime for dealing with contaminated land was introduced through Part IIa of the 1990 Environmental Protection Act. A duty is placed upon the Council to publish an approved Inspection Strategy for contaminated land. The inspection programme concentrated initially on those wards in the east of the Borough where potentially contaminating uses of land were historically located - Seacombe, Birkenhead, Tranmere, Bromborough and Eastham. As the focus of the 1990 Act is on voluntary remediation, much of this is likely to occur as a result of development.

There are no overall quality issues with controlled waters (surface inland waters, groundwater and coastal waters) in the Borough. It will be important that the LDF ensures that development does not result in adverse effects on surface and ground waters. The Core Strategy also has to take account of any locations subject to the Control of Major Accident Hazard Regulations 1999 (COMAH). The Core Strategy should not promote development which might lead to the designation of an Air Quality Management Area in the Borough.

***Consultation question 6: Do you agree that the key issues problems and challenges outlined above accurately reflect those facing the Borough?***

### **A SPATIAL VISION FOR WIRRAL**

Taking account of the Sustainable Community Strategy and the issues raised in the previous section the Spatial Vision for the Wirral Core Strategy is proposed to be as follows:

By 2025 Wirral will be a Borough which offers a high quality of life for all its residents and visitors:

- The Investment Strategy for Wirral will have been implemented
- Wirral's economy will be strengthened and diversified; there will be a wide range of employment sites and premises attractive to existing businesses and inward investors. The Borough will be an attractive location for higher quality, better paying employers, particularly in the knowledge-based sector
- The population of Wirral will be growing, out migration will have been reduced and there will be a better balance of age groups

- Levels of unemployment and worklessness in the Borough will have been significantly reduced and the skills base will have been enhanced
- As a result of Housing Market Renewal and the Mersey Heartlands Growth Point, all parts of the Borough will be seen as attractive places to live, through the promotion of sustainable, mixed communities and the provision of high quality, well designed, zero-carbon, affordable, mixed tenure housing, which will meet the needs of all sectors of the community
- The amount of vacant and derelict land in the older urban areas will have been reduced
- Birkenhead as the Borough's sub-regional centre will have been enhanced and revitalised as the retail and service centre of choice for all the Borough's residents, supported by a network of vital and viable district and local shopping centres
- The major regeneration opportunity at Wirral Waters will have successfully transformed surplus docklands in Birkenhead and Wallasey into vibrant thriving mixed communities with a substantial range of jobs, homes and services
- The Borough will have developed its potential as a tourism destination focusing on the quality of its natural environment, its built heritage and the coastal resorts at New Brighton, West Kirby and Hoylake
- The high levels of deprivation and social and health inequalities found in parts of east Wirral will have been significantly reduced
- All new development will be suitably adapted to the potential impacts associated with climate change and flood risk whilst minimising their own carbon emissions and the consumption of water and other resources. All new residential developments will have been zero carbon from 2016 onwards
- The Borough will have maintained and enhanced a high quality urban and rural environment, including a fully established network of green infrastructure within the urban area and a safeguarded and enhanced biodiversity and geodiversity resource. Maximum use will have been made of previously developed land and buildings and Wirral's built heritage will have been safeguarded and enhanced
- The quantity of waste generated in the Borough will have been reduced through greater levels of waste reduction, re-use and recycling and a large proportion of the waste still generated will be managed and processed as close as possible to the Borough
- Transport and land use will be fully co-ordinated, maximising the use of sustainable transport modes, including bus, rail, walking and cycling with the number and length of individual car journeys minimised

***Consultation Question 7 Do you agree with the spatial vision as set out above?***

## **STRATEGIC POLICY OBJECTIVES**

Taking account of the evidence base, Regional and Corporate Policy contexts, along with the emerging issues and challenges identified for the Borough and the Spatial Vision for the Core Strategy, a series of emerging Strategic Objectives have been developed.

### **A Stronger Economy**

#### **Objective 1**

To improve the performance of and diversify Wirral's economy in line with the Investment Strategy.

#### **Objective 2**

To reduce levels of unemployment and worklessness in the Borough

#### **Objective 3**

To provide a continuous supply of accessible, high quality and readily available employment sites.

#### **Objective 4**

To use local spending and skills to support urban regeneration

#### **Objective 5**

To focus new development within the Borough's existing urban centres

#### **Objective 6**

To develop and support a sustainable tourism and leisure based economy.

#### **Objective 7**

To sustain and enhance the vitality and viability of the Borough's town and district centres.

### **Housing**

#### **Objective 8**

To provide a continuous supply of housing land to meet identified needs.

#### **Objective 9**

To focus new investment to deliver housing market renewal and growth to areas of greatest need at the heart of the older urban areas in east Wirral..

#### **Objective 10**

To meet proven needs for affordable and specialist housing.

#### **Objective 11**

To maximise the use of derelict and vacant previously developed land and buildings while maintaining local character and distinctiveness.

**Objective 12**

To ensure new housing development incorporates sustainable design and construction principles.

**Building Sustainable Communities**

**Objective 13**

To reduce health inequalities and ensure that new development encourages healthier lifestyle choices.

**Objective 14**

To reduce inequalities in skills, education and training.

**Objective 15**

To minimize the opportunities for crime and anti-social behaviour.

**An Accessible Borough**

**Objective 16**

To provide and promote more sustainable, integrated travel options

**Objective 17 To make efficient use of existing transport networks and infrastructure.**

**Objective 18**

To maximize the accessibility of services and jobs especially to areas of greatest need.

**Objective 19**

To support the movement of freight from road to rail and water

**Objective 20**

To minimise the adverse impacts of transport on local communities and the environment.

**Objective 21**

To support the future of port activity and related maritime sectors

**Environmental Quality and Protection**

**Objective 22**

To provide sufficient opportunities for outdoor recreation, sport and to protect and enhance the Borough's natural environment.

**Objective 23**

To protect and enhance the Borough's biodiversity and geological resources.

**Objective 24**

To protect and enhance the character and local distinctiveness of the urban environment.

**Objective 25**

To protect and enhance the Borough's historic environment.

**Objective 26**

To ensure that future development is adapted to the impact of climate change.

**Objective 27**

To minimize the risk of flooding from sea, rivers and rainfall

**Objective 28**

To provide for more sustainable waste management.

**Objective 29**

To maximise public safety and minimise hazards to people and the environment

***Consultation Question 8: do you agree with the above Strategic objectives?***

***Consultation Question 9: Are there any others you would like to suggest?***

***Consultation Question 10: How can we measure success?***

**A FRAMEWORK FOR DELIVERY**

The Core Strategy must be capable of being implemented and providing a robust framework for delivery is an essential element of the plan making process. As the Core Strategy progresses and policies are finalised, it is proposed that a framework for implementation will be drawn up which for each policy will identify the principal implementation route (i.e. through other DPDs/SPDs, planning applications etc), responsibility for implementation and by when, any resource implications and an appropriate target/indicator for measuring progress.

The following table places the LDF/Core Strategy in context with the other key delivery strategies produced by the Council and its partners:

<b>Long Term - 10-15 years</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sustainable Community Strategy,</li> <li>• Local Development Framework,</li> <li>• Regional Spatial Strategy</li> <li>• Regional Housing Strategy</li> <li>• Regional Transport Strategy</li> <li>• Regional Economic Strategy</li> <li>• Housing Strategy for Wirral</li> <li>• Investment Strategy</li> </ul>
<b>Medium Term - 3-5 years</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wirral's Local Area Agreement</li> <li>• Wirral Council Corporate plan,</li> <li>• Local Transport Plan</li> <li>• Primary Care Trust Strategic Commissioning Plan 2008-2013</li> <li>• Primary Care Trust Joint Strategic Needs Assessment</li> <li>• Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy</li> <li>• Children's &amp; Young People's Strategic Plan,</li> <li>• Licensing Strategy</li> <li>• Medium Term Financial Plan</li> </ul>
<b>Short Term – 1 Year</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Priorities for improvement</li> <li>• Council service plans,</li> <li>• Local Area Agreement Action Plans</li> </ul>

### **Engagement with Delivery Stakeholders**

The Council is undertaking a Social and Community Infrastructure Requirements study as part of the evidence base for the Core Strategy. This is intended to ensure that spatial planning policies in the Core Strategy take account of the needs and requirements of other Council Departments and external organisations engaged in the provision of services to the wider community. This will include services provided by the Council for adults and young people as well as services provided by bodies such as:-

- External

Merseyside Police Authority, Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service, Wirral PCT, Wirral Partnership Homes, Wirral CVS, Wirral Community and Voluntary Sector Network, Wirral Local Strategic Partnership, and the utility companies. The initial stage includes a review of the service and business plans for each organisation, to establish the likely infrastructure requirements. This will enable the Council to identify gaps in provision that will need to be addressed as development progresses.

### **Monitoring Arrangements**

Monitoring of the adopted Core Strategy will also be a key element in ensuring that delivery follows the pattern of expectations set out within the Core Strategy. The Annual Monitoring Report is the main opportunity for monitoring delivery and the effectiveness of plan policies. Specifically it looks at:

- How policies are working in practical terms and how they are being implemented (take up and development of sites)
- How plans and policies are affecting agreed indicators.
- How the LDF work programme is progressing (and whether any alterations to it are required) by comparing actual progress achieved in the preparation of individual Local Development Documents against the milestones set out in the Local Development Scheme for Wirral.

The key indicators from the sustainability appraisal process are closely aligned to those in the Annual Monitoring Report to ensure that the impacts of the plan on sustainability can be closely measured.

## **Next Steps**

### **Spatial Options Consultation**

The results of consultation on the Issues and Objectives Document will be used to identify a series of spatial options for the Core Strategy.

The generation of spatial options offers stakeholders the opportunity to influence the key choices about the future development of the Borough, before they are finally confirmed. Consultation will enable the Council to demonstrate that it has identified and evaluated a full range of available potential options and to better assess their likely implications.

The generation and evaluation of spatial options generation will need to comply with national guidance, which indicates that they should represent genuine alternative approaches to governing future development and change in the Borough. Potential options should be “reasonable”, which is generally taken to mean that they should be realistic and genuinely capable of implementation. The spatial options will need to be subject to a full range of appraisals and assessments.

Following Cabinet approval, it is envisaged that a Spatial Options Document, setting out the accompanying appraisals and assessments, will be published for public consultation towards the middle of 2009.

### **Future Stages**

Consultation on the Spatial Options Document will enable the Council to decide upon its Preferred Options. The Preferred Options must, again, be published for public consultation to ensure that the alternative options have been correctly evaluated and to confirm that the Council’s final decisions have been soundly based. The results of consultation on the Preferred Options will then be used to draw up a draft Core Strategy. This is the first time that the public and other stakeholders will have be able to see a complete fully drafted Core Strategy for the Borough.

The draft Core Strategy, which may now include strategic site allocations, will need to be formally published for statutory public consultation accompanied by the evidence base and a full suite of appraisals and assessments to explain the processes carried out to arrive at the conclusions now included within the Strategy.

The comments received can be used by the Council to make any final changes before submitting the Core Strategy to the Secretary of State for public examination by an independent Planning Inspector. Assuming the Inspector concludes that the Core Strategy is

“sound”, on the basis of the evidence submitted and any outstanding representations, the Council would then be able to proceed to adoption.