

# WIRRAL COUNCIL

## DELEGATED DECISION

<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>SEFTON LOCAL PLAN – CONSULTATION ON PUBLICATION DRAFT LOCAL PLAN</b>
<b>WARD/S AFFECTED:</b>	<b>ALL</b>
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>STRATEGIC DIRECTOR REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT</b>
<b>RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER:</b>	<b>COUNCILLOR PAT HACKETT - ECONOMY</b>
<b>KEY DECISION?</b>	<b>NO</b>

### 1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of the Publication Draft Sefton Local Plan, prepared following previous public consultation. The deadline for comment is 27 March 2015.
- 1.2 This report summarises the issues and challenges that Sefton Council has had to consider in developing their Local Plan, reports on the responses to the previous comments submitted by Wirral Council and recommends that Wirral Council supports the intention of Sefton Council to provide for their own needs, subject to the additional clarifications set out in section 3.0 of this report.

### 2.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

- 2.1 The Sefton Local Plan was published on 30 January 2015, to allow any final representations to be made prior to the Plan being examined by an independent Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State. The deadline for representations to be received is 27 March 2015.
- 2.2 This final stage of statutory consultation follows previous consultation in 2009, to identify the key issues for the future of the Borough; in 2011, to consider three options for the overall level of development; and in 2013, to identify a preferred policy option. The consultation documents can be viewed at: <http://www.sefton.gov.uk/localplan>
- 2.3 The Sefton Local Plan establishes the amount and location of development that will be permitted in Sefton to 2030; provides a policy framework for making future planning decisions; identifies priorities for investment in employment, housing and infrastructure; and allocates a number of sites for development, including land in the existing Merseyside Green Belt.
- 2.4 A more detailed summary of the Sefton Local Plan is attached as an Appendix to this report.

#### **Spatial Strategy**

- 2.5 The Sefton Local Plan sets out the spatial challenges that Sefton faces to meet the need for homes, jobs and associated infrastructure and a high quality living environment and concedes that these cannot all be met within the existing built-up area.

2.6 The Plan, in particular, highlights the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requirement to “proactively drive and support sustainable economic development to deliver the homes, business and industrial units, infrastructure and thriving local places that the country needs” (NPPF, paragraph 17); the emphasis on meeting objectively assessed needs unless there would be significant adverse impacts (NPPF, paragraph 14); and the requirements to “boost significantly the supply of housing” and ensure that their Local Plan “meets the full, objectively assessed needs for market and affordable housing” (NPPF, paragraph 47).

### **Housing Need**

2.7 Sefton Council’s housing requirement, based on an objective assessment of need undertaken by Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners, is for a minimum of 11,070 new dwellings between 2012 and 2030, which will be met at the following average annual rates:

2012-2017: 500 dwellings per annum

2017-2030: 660 dwellings per annum

2.8 The levels of development envisaged reflect a significant number of demolitions prior to 2017 and the lead-in time required on a number of larger, allocated, greenfield sites.

2.9 The housing requirement will be met from the following sources:

1. sites allocated for housing within the Local Plan (which account for approximately two-thirds of the total supply)
2. dwellings which have already been completed since 1 April 2012;
3. sites which already have planning permission for housing;
4. small sites (less than 1 hectare) identified in the most recent Sefton Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment; and
5. unanticipated ‘windfall’ sites.

2.10 The sites allocated for housing include sites currently within the Green Belt, which have been allocated because Sefton does not have sufficient suitable and available urban land to meet the objectively assessed need for housing and employment development and because adjoining authorities, including Wirral, are unable to help meet Sefton’s needs. Sefton Council considers that these factors, when taken together, constitute the ‘exceptional circumstances’ necessary to change the boundaries of the Green Belt in Sefton, in line with national policy.

2.11 Sefton has chosen a housing requirement figure at the lower end of the recommended range of objectively assessed need, at 615 dwellings per annum. Whilst this would fully meet the Borough’s demographic requirements, it would see the number of jobs able to be supported by the indigenous workforce declining. Sefton does not however believe that a housing requirement figure embracing a full economic growth option, of closer to 800 dwellings per annum, would be right for Sefton, because of:

- Sefton’s role within the wider City Region;
- its key and longstanding residential/commuter function;
- the fact that more people travel out of the Borough to work than travel in; and
- the Borough’s significant environmental constraints.

2.12 The approach to affordable housing, subject to site-specific viability, will require developments of 15 or more dwellings in Bootle and Netherton to provide 15 per cent affordable housing (to comprise 50 per cent social/affordable rent and 50 per cent intermediate). Developments in the rest of the Borough will be required to provide 30 per cent affordable housing. The Local Plan also highlights the increasing importance of extra care and specialist housing and allows for affordable housing contributions to be substituted for extra care/specialist housing where appropriate.

### **Employment Need**

2.13 Sefton's employment land requirement over the Plan period is 84.5 hectares. At least 30 hectares of this cannot be accommodated within the existing urban area and three of the five identified Strategic Employment Locations are located on land currently in the Green Belt.

2.14 The Plan does not identify any new sites for retail or other development outside the urban areas, with a focus on existing town and local centres.

### **Assessing Potential Development Sites**

2.15 A site assessment process was carried out to identify which areas of land would be most suited to accommodating new development, including a review of land in the Green Belt, which was carried out jointly with the adjoining councils for Knowsley and West Lancashire.

2.16 All sites were assessed against a number of factors, including constraints such as flood risk, ecology and heritage, to make sure they had the least impact, including on the Green Belt.

2.17 In response to local concerns, a separate study assessed the quality of agricultural land where development was likely to be proposed. Around a third of Sefton's agricultural land is classified as 'best and most versatile' (falling within national Agricultural Land Classification Grades 1, 2 and 3a).

2.18 As there was not enough suitable land in Sefton of poorer agricultural quality to meet the objectively assessed need for housing and employment, which was also often subject to other constraints, the majority of allocated sites are on higher quality agricultural land.

### **Pattern of Development**

2.19 A key objective of the Plan is "to meet the diverse needs for homes, jobs, services and facilities, as close to where they arise as is possible" and the suggested approach to the distribution of new development is a balance of:

1. first, identifying sites within the urban area;
2. then identifying additional land in the Green Belt, using a site selection methodology to identify sites that would:
  - cause least harm to the purposes of the Green Belt;
  - have the fewest constraints; and
  - provide the most benefits; and

3. achieving a good distribution of sites across Sefton.

2.20 The potential development sites have also been subject to a wide-ranging sustainability appraisal, to ensure that only the most appropriate sites have been selected to accommodate new development.

### **Provision for Early Review**

2.21 Sefton Council has indicated the intention to review the Local Plan, to take account of any future sub-regional studies, for example, related to port expansion and housing markets, should these imply the need for any new land allocations or a significantly different housing requirement.

### **Conclusions**

2.22 There is no indication that any of these policies will have any significant impact on Wirral.

2.23 As Sefton Council are proposing to provide for their own needs for housing and employment within their own Borough boundary, without any significant cross-boundary implications for Wirral, it is therefore recommended that the approach to providing for future development set out within the Publication Draft Local Plan is supported, subject to some further clarification over a couple of points raised in response to previous consultations, as set out in section 3.0 below.

## **3.0 RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION ON THE SEFTON LOCAL PLAN PREFERRED OPTION**

3.1 Wirral Council formally submitted comments on the Sefton Local Plan Preferred Option in September 2013. The response indicated that the emerging Preferred Option would have no significant implications for Wirral subject to comments on the following issues:

3.2 **Green Belt** – clarification over the wording of the Green Belt policy has been addressed in Policy M7 - Sefton's Green Belt, which now states that the extent of the Green Belt is defined on the Policy Map and highlights the role of the review of the Green Belt in the preparation of the Local Plan. The previous reference to a sub-regional review of the Merseyside Green Belt, which included Wirral, has now been removed.

3.3 **Provision for Cross Boundary Infrastructure** – the suggestion that provision should be made for developer contributions to be used to contribute to the provision of joint cross boundary infrastructure, has not been taken forward.

3.4 It is therefore recommended that Policy IN1 - Infrastructure and Developer Contributions or its supporting text is amended to allow developer contributions to be used to support cross-boundary infrastructure, if required within the Plan period.

3.5 **Impacts on Centres in Adjoining Authorities** – the suggestion that the impact on the vitality and viability of existing centres should include centres in adjacent authorities has been accepted and included in Policy ED2 - Development in Town Centres, District Centres, Local Centres and Local Shopping Parades and Outside Defined Centres.

- 3.6 **Impacts on Amenity of Adjacent Communities** – the requests for clarification that policies for the port and maritime zone, for minerals and for pollution and hazards also apply to cross river communities in Wirral have not been taken forward (although the principle has been accepted in some of the supporting documentation).
- 3.7 It is therefore recommended that Policy ED1 - The Port and Maritime Zone; Policy NH8 - Minerals; and Policy EQ4 - Pollution and Hazards or their supporting texts are amended to make it clear that potential impacts on neighbouring authority areas would also be considered.
- 3.8 **Nature Conservation** – the suggestion that reference should be made to the potential for cross boundary partnership working to address the impact on designated European Sites has only partly been taken forward. The supporting text to Policy NH1 - Environmental Assets only refers to partnership working to manage recreational pressure on the Sefton Coast, although the Implementation and Monitoring section highlights the future need for a more formal framework or strategy for monitoring and managing recreational access across the City Region.
- 3.9 It is therefore recommended that Policy NH1 - Environmental Assets or its supporting text are amended to also refer to managing visitor pressure at other internationally important nature sites within the City Region.
- 3.10 **Seaforth Nature Reserve** – the suggestion that the port and maritime policy should consider the potential impact on designated European sites has only been applied to Seaforth Nature Reserve.
- 3.11 It is therefore recommended that Policy ED1 - The Port and Maritime Zone, is further amended to require all port-related proposals to demonstrate no likely significant effects on internationally important nature sites.
- 3.12 **Southport Seafront** – the need to restrict development that could have an adverse effect on the adjacent internationally important site has now been addressed in Policy ED8 - Southport Seafront and the accompanying Habitats Regulations Assessment has not identified any further implications.

#### **4.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

- 4.1 The main risk is that the Sefton Local Plan will be examined and adopted without taking the comments of Wirral Council into account.

#### **5.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 5.1 The only alternative is not to make a formal response to the consultation exercise.

#### **6.0 CONSULTATION**

- 6.1 The Publication Draft Local Plan has been made available for statutory public consultation for eight weeks, between 30 January and 27 March 2015.

#### **7.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS**

- 7.1 There are no implications for Wirral's voluntary, community and faith groups arising directly from this report.

## **8.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS**

8.1 There are no resource implications arising directly from this report, unless the Council decides that it wishes to present additional evidence at the public examination of the Sefton Local Plan.

## **9.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 Wirral Council is under a legal duty to cooperate with Sefton Council on the preparation of statutory land use planning policies.

## **10.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 Sefton Council have prepared a Local Plan Equality Impact Assessment - <http://www.sefton.gov.uk/media/536694/EqIA-Local-Plan-for-web.pdf>

## **11.0 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS**

11.1 Sefton's corporate priorities include supporting a low carbon economy. An objective of the Sefton Local Plan is to respond to the challenge of climate change, by encouraging the best use of resources and assets.

## **12.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

12.1 The planning implications for Wirral are set out within the main body of this report.

## **13.0 RECOMMENDATION**

13.1 **It is recommended that Sefton Council is informed that Wirral Council supports the intention of Sefton Council to provide for their own needs as set out within the Publication Draft Local Plan, subject to the additional clarifications set out in Section 3.0 of this report.**

## **14.0 REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION**

14.1 To allow a formal response to be submitted to Sefton Council on their Local Plan consultation and meet the Council's statutory duty to cooperate with Sefton Council on the preparation of land use planning policies.

**REPORT AUTHOR:** Peter Cushion  
*Senior Planning Officer*  
telephone: (0151) 691 8223  
email: [petercushion@wirral.gov.uk](mailto:petercushion@wirral.gov.uk)

## **APPENDICES**

Sefton Local Plan Preferred Options - Summary Overview

## **REFERENCE MATERIAL**

[Sefton Publication Draft Local Plan](#) and supporting documents

**SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)**

<b>Council Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
Delegated Report – A Local Plan for Sefton – Consultation on Preferred Options	19 September 2013
Delegated Report - Sefton Council Core Strategy - Development Options Consultation	28 July 2011