

COUNCIL
10 DECEMBER 2018

REPORT OF	Councillor George Davies
CABINET PORTFOLIO	Housing and Planning
CO-ORDINATING CHIEF OFFICER	Brian Bailey – Corporate Director for Housing and Economic Growth

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is an update from the Cabinet Portfolio Holder to Members of the Council on matters relating to his portfolio.

1 GOOD QUALITY HOUSING THAT MEETS RESIDENTS NEEDS

I want to start my update to Members this month with our Local Plan, which Members are aware is incredibly important. The public consultation period is now complete on our Development Options Review. I want to thank every resident who took part. More than 2000 residents have made their views known, either through attending an event, completing a questionnaire or sending us their comments.

Each and every one of these comments will be read, analysed and fully considered as part of this work. Making sure our Local Plan is truly local, underpinned with local knowledge and the views of our local people, could not be more important.

To make sure every Member in this Chamber is absolutely clear on the current position, I think it is important to set out exactly where we are in our discussions with national Government. We believe the target of 803 homes per year, 12,045 over the course of the 15-year Local Plan, is excessive.

We believe most recent projections from the Office of National Statistics, published in September of this year, should be adopted instead. These projections indicate only 488 homes per year are needed in Wirral.

If we are allowed to use the latest ONS figures, then we will be required to release almost no Green Belt land. At the moment, the Government are not allowing us to use this latest number, instead insisting we must continue with the bigger target and therefore bigger Green Belt release.

They set our targets. We must follow national policy. Unless the Government changes their rules, we must release Green Belt land for residential development. It is as simple as that.

We have lobbied Government, we have responded to the consultation they are currently running, and we will continue to do all we can to protect our Green Belt from top-down national housebuilding targets.

We have recently appointed a QC to work with us on this process, to ensure our Local Plan is robust, appropriate and meets the needs of our residents. At

the time of writing, final preparations are being made to the report to the Special Cabinet meeting on 17 December, which will talk about our emerging Local Plan in more detail.

We remain committed to delivering a Local Plan which is fit for Wirral – and delivering it in the timescale we have set out – and I pledge to keep all Members full informed as we continue to consult with local people and work with MHCLG.

While it is clearly important to make sure we provide enough new homes in the future to meet our residents' needs, we must never lose sight of the need to enable our residents now to live in good quality, safe homes. It's also vital we do everything in our power to move brownfield developments forward quickly.

I am pleased that we have made such excellent progress recently in Wirral Waters in particular. The Wirral Waters One development should shortly be considered by Planning Committee. I want to congratulate my Cabinet colleague Cllr Angela Davies for negotiating such an innovative, attractive and commercial deal with the developer to enable 500 new apartments to come forward.

Finally, I think it is important Members are aware of the work we are doing to bring empty homes back into use. Since April 2015 nearly 900 properties that had been neglected or left unoccupied by their owners have been returned to the housing market, many as a result of the help and guidance offered by the council's housing team.

More than 120 empty properties have been brought back into use in just the first two quarters of this year, making a big impact on our Local Plan targets but also enabling more residents to find the kind of homes they need for their families. We are well on track to deliver on our Wirral Plan target by March 2020.