

Wirral Local Plan: Issues and Options Consultation

Sustainability Appraisal: Interim Note Appraisal of spatial options

December 2019

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1. Introduction

This document sets out interim findings in relation to the Sustainability Appraisal of the Wirral Local Plan. The findings are focused upon an appraisal of the options for the spatial strategy as set out in the issues and options consultation document.

These are high level findings, based upon a more detailed assessment of each option that is ongoing. Given that SA is an iterative process, the findings are subject to change in light of updated evidence, consultation findings and other new information. The purpose at this stage is to help inform the decision making process in relation to the spatial strategy.

The assessments have been undertaken primarily using professional opinion informed by quantitative information, site visits, and technical studies. A summary is provided for each of the 13 SA Objectives that were established during the Scoping Stage of SA.

2. Headline findings / summary

2.1 Air Quality

There are no AQMAs in the Borough, but annual monitoring reveals several locations where air quality has exceeded targets for maximum nitrogen dioxide emissions. Development that could worsen emissions in these areas or expose people to poor air quality should therefore be avoided if possible. Conversely, strategies that promote sustainable modes of travel ought to be supported.

All three options involve employment growth in broadly the same locations, with substantial development land identified near Port Sunlight / Bromborough and also in locations complementing Wirral Waters. These will therefore be likely to act as major attractors of car trips (with potential negative effects in terms of air quality). The extent to which trips are likely to take place along routes which already suffer from poor air quality, and the number of trips being made by car rather than sustainable modes will determine the effects for each option.

Option 1 involves growth in the urban areas within the Borough, with most new residential development identified in the Commercial Core. Development in this location will have very good access to employment land, which would reduce the need to travel to access such opportunities. There are also good public transport links which could mean that additional growth is able to access employment opportunities and other services further afield such as in Liverpool and at Port Sunlight / Bromborough. It is still likely that car trips will be generated though, and this could involve traffic along routes that have been highlighted as being of concern in terms of nitrogen dioxide emissions (for example along the New Ferry Bypass), and the A552. However, the length and number of trips that would need to be made under this option ought to be reduced by virtue of the good connections to services that are available in proposed development locations.

Additional residential sites are located in Mid-Wirral and at West Kirby in particular. These areas are less well-located and may lead to an increase in car trips. However, there are local services and some local job opportunities that could help to limit car travel.

Overall, option 1 involves a strategy that should ensure that growth does not lead to notable increases in emissions from traffic. Though there is substantial growth in areas that experience poorer levels of air quality, there is a good connection between employment and housing opportunities and this should help to promote sustainable modes of travel. Overall, **minor positive effects** are predicted.

Option 2a involves dispersed growth at urban fringe sites across the Borough. This would involve locations that are less well related to employment opportunities, and are likely to be reliant on car trips. Though this could increase emissions along routes toward key employment and retail areas, the implications are unlikely to be significant given the dispersed nature of growth. As such, **minor negative effects** are predicted.

Option 2b involves focused growth in one of two locations. An extension at Heswall would likely involve substantial car trips toward employment opportunities at Port Sunlight and Wirral Waters, which could cause a worsening of air quality along key routes (For example the A552). With this approach though, the majority of new development would be located in an area with low levels of ambient air pollution (which is beneficial in this respect). There is also a train station which could potentially help to offset trips. Overall, **minor negative effects** are predicted.

An extension at Bromborough / Eastham would also be likely to generate substantial car trips, but is well located in regard to employment opportunities. This means that trips would be shorter for some residents, and potentially offers greater ability to use non-car modes of travel. There is also a train station nearby to access locations further afield. Nevertheless, **minor negative effects** are predicted, as car trips are likely to be generated along routes where air quality is being monitored and has been close to exceedance targets.

2.2 Biodiversity

Wirral is unique in comparison to other localities as it has significant biodiversity designations in both coastal and non – coastal environments. It is important to ensure development which happens on the land, does not adversely affect the surrounding coastal environments.

In saying this there are currently no Marine Conservation Zones (MCZ) or National Nature Reserves (NNRs) within the locality. The SSSI's on the land are found within Settlement Areas 4, 7 and 8. The other settlement areas have significant biodiversity designations surrounding the coastline.

There are common elements to each of the spatial options that are likely to generate negative effects with regards to the biodiversity.

Of particular note is that the majority of the employment sites are located in waterside locations, along the River Mersey and Liverpool Bay. The majority of these sites are close to a number of biodiversity assets and are at risk of having negative effects upon these assets

along with species natural habitats. Though development will be required to avoid and mitigate effects and ultimately achieve net gain, the potential for negative effects does exist.

Each option performs differently in relation to impacts upon local settlement areas across the borough, how new development can bring forward local benefits to the green infrastructure and local species

Options 1A promotes urban intensification, by developing urban sites and by increasing densities across all the settlements in Wirral. The locations that option 1A focuses on are mostly waterside locations that fall within the impacts zones for the River Mersey SSSI, and SPA and Ramsar, along with sites in the Liverpool Bay impact zones. The majority of sites are brownfield sites, most of which have limited value, but others that may be rich in species and natural habitats where natural regeneration has occurred. It is anticipated that permanent effects should be avoidable, but it will be important to manage disturbance and pollution that could affect waterside environments. This leaves a question mark over the potential for negative effects.

In terms of functionally-linked land, the HRA concludes that the opportunity sites are likely to offer limited value, and so **neutral effects** in this respect are predicted.

The majority of the remaining housing sites are small – medium in scale and dispersed throughout the borough, which is likely to minimise the opportunities to enhance and connect the green infrastructure network through onsite improvements alone. In this respect, only **minor positive effects** are predicted.

Larger site options may be able to deliver some strategic green infrastructure improvements, which can help with wildlife and biodiversity enhancement. This could be particularly beneficial for more built up areas such as Birkenhead and Wirral Waters.

Options 2a and 2b are less negative with regards to growth impacting on biodiversity in waterside locations. However, there are other locally important habitats present across the Borough that overlap with development opportunity areas. For some locations, a loss of greenfield land could also have potentially significant negative effects in terms of being functionally linked to the European Sites. Both options contain land that could provide this function, and so **significant negative effects** are recorded at this stage in this respect.

For Option 2a additional effects on local wildlife would depend upon the exact sites involved in a dispersed approach. However, the majority of identified parcels that could be involved do not overlap significantly with designated or biodiversity action plan habitats. The most likely issues with this option will relate to disturbance to adjacent habitats, and ensuring that net gain is achieved. Given that the developments are strategic in nature, this ought to be possible. However, a loss of potential functionally linked land will mean that offsite compensation may also need to be secured.

Taking the above factors into account, **minor to significant positive effects** are predicted to reflect the potential to improve ecological value on green belt sites across a number of locations across the borough (not just one such as the urban extensions). However, their use to support Ramsar / SPA / SAC species constitutes potentially significant negative effects. The choice of sites ought to provide some flexibility in avoiding the most sensitive locations and making the best out of opportunities for enhancement.

For Option 2b, development at an extension to Bebington would overlap substantially with some of the boroughs BAPs and ancient woodland. This presents the potential for negative effects upon these biodiversity assets, but given the large scale strategic nature of the site, it is possible that mitigation and enhancement could be secured. There is a question mark relating to this though. The potential for the land to be useful as functionally linked habitat is less likely in this location though, and so the overall effects are predicted to be **neutral effects**.

A development east of Heswall overlaps less dramatically with BAP habitat, and therefore, enhancement is more likely to be achieved. For example, by reducing the developable land on the site and including green spaces and woodland retention on the sites, which could bring forward benefits for local habitats and species. However, a loss of potential functionally linked land will mean that avoidance, mitigation and offsite compensation may also need to be secured.

Taking the above factors into account, **minor positive effects** are predicted to reflect the potential to improve ecological value on green belt sites in this part of the borough. However, the use of such land to support Ramsar / SPA / SAC species constitutes potentially significant negative effects in this location.

2.3 Climate Change Adaptation

Option 1 involves dispersed growth in the urban areas on mostly brownfield land. In this respect, new development is unlikely to substantially alter drainage patterns, as it will not result in wholesale changes in the amount of hardstanding. The majority of sites identified for residential development are within flood zone 1, and so neutral effects are predicted in the main. However, some important sites fall within flood zones 2 and 3 and/or are affected by surface water flooding:

- SHLAA 2068 in Moreton is proposed for housing, and is entirely within flood zone 2 and 3. There is also associated employment uses in this location, but this may be an appropriate use.
- SHLAA 0752 overlaps with significant areas of flood zone 2 and 3.
- Site 4078 is heavily affected by surface water flooding.

These sites will place residents at risk of flooding, and therefore significant negative effects are possible in these locations. Mitigation measures would clearly need to be secured to ensure that development is appropriate.

Overall, **minor negative effects** are predicted with regards to flooding. The majority of new development would be in areas that are not at risk of flooding and would not increase flood risk elsewhere. However, there are some important exceptions where significant flood risk exists.

Development throughout the urban areas should present an opportunity to introduce urban greening measures, which can help with climate change resilience for wildlife and human health. This could be particularly beneficial for more built up areas such as Birkenhead and Wirral Waters, in terms of helping to reduce a potential heat island effect. However, these benefits would be reliant upon such measures being incorporated into new development. Given the lack of space and the intensification involved in the urban areas, it is unclear the

extent to which urban greening will be achieved. Therefore, **uncertain minor positive effects** are predicted.

Option 2a involves dispersed growth on greenfield land. A range of potential sites are identified, with some exhibiting limited risk of flooding, whilst others are intersected by watercourses and therefore parts of the sites fall within flood zone 2 and 3. There are areas of surface water flooding concern on each of the sites also to differing extents. The scale of the sites should mean that where flooding is an issue, it is possible to avoid such areas. There should also be good opportunities to design developments that mimic natural drainage patterns and ensure no net increase in run-off. Consequently, a **neutral effect** is predicted overall for this option.

Option 2b will have similar effects to Option 2b. The potential urban extension to Heswall is at risk of flooding from Prenton Brook, as well as there being pockets of surface water flood risk throughout the site. The strategic nature of development should allow for these areas to be avoided though and for SUDs to be incorporated that ensure no net increase in surface water run-off or flooding. Consequently, a **neutral effect** is predicted overall for this option.

An extension at Bebington exhibits similar characteristics, and therefore the effects would be the same.

For both Green Belt options, a loss of greenfield land could reduce the ecosystem services associated with natural and semi natural land (such as food management, reduction in urban heating, ecological corridors. Therefore, in terms of wider resilience to climate change, the effects are possibly negative. However, this depends upon the extent of enhancement measures that are secured though and whether net gain is actually achieved. Neutral effects are predicted at this stage.

2.4 Climate Change mitigation

The ability to deliver resource efficient and resilient developments ought not to be dependent upon location to a great extent. Therefore, the distribution of homes should have the same effects on emissions from the built environment regardless of location. Development in any location should also provide opportunities to introduce resilience measures such as green infrastructure, green roofs and SUDs. An important factor in achieving sustainable design is the viability of development, as this could make reductions in emissions harder to achieve. Therefore, site options with some constraints could be less likely to lead to lower carbon development. In this respect, Option 1, which involves a lot of brownfield sites (with possible viability issues) could be less likely to achieve higher emissions reductions. Likewise, options that rely upon substantial infrastructure upgrades to be funded through development (such as Option 2b) may also be constrained in this respect.

Location can however, lead to differences in the amount of emissions from transport, and certain locations or types of sites (larger mixed-use with demands for heat) may also be more likely to support decentralised energy schemes. These factors are discussed below with regards to each option. The effects have not been broken down in terms of the settlement areas, as impacts in one area could offset those in another. Therefore, it is more appropriate to discuss the overall implications at a borough level for each option with regards to emissions and resilience. It should also be acknowledged though that the impacts within

the Borough are interlinked with those in surrounding areas, as climate change is a cross boundary issue.

Option 1A promotes urban intensification, by developing urban sites and by increasing densities across all the settlements in Wirral. The locations that option 1A focuses on have good access to jobs, services and public transport. Therefore, new development should be less likely to generate long car trips (and associated emissions). This option would also limit further growth in less accessible locations. Whilst there is no solid evidence to support decentralised energy schemes, the scale of some site options in the commercial Core and Birkenhead, and the higher heat demand in the urban area could make these locations more suitable for such schemes.

Larger site options may also be more appropriate for delivering strategic green infrastructure improvements, which can help with climate change resilience for wildlife and human health. This could be particularly beneficial for more built up areas such as Birkenhead and Wirral Waters, in terms of helping to reduce a potential heat island effect. Consequently, a **minor positive effect** is predicted overall for Option 1a in terms of carbon emissions and adaptation.

Option 1B would still provide for all the Borough's new development to be accommodated within the urban area, in line with Option 1A but could allow the development required to be provided at a lower rate through the early years of the plan period, followed by a higher rate during the later years. Given that the efficiency requirements for new development will increase in the longer term, this ought to mean that the carbon emissions for this approach would be lower over the plan period compared to option 1a.

Option 2A proposes the release of a series of medium to large sized areas of land, which when added together would allow sufficient land to be allocated to meet any residual housing needs within the Plan period.

Depending upon the viability of individual sites, their greenfield nature could possibly present good opportunities to achieve higher standards of efficiency (through higher land values). However, this is an uncertainty. The peripheral nature of the site options is more likely to encourage car trips though, which would lead to a continuation or worsening of current trends with relation to emissions from transport.

The overall picture in terms of emissions is therefore likely to be **neutral** or **minor negative effects**.

A loss of greenfield land will also reduce the ecosystem services associated with natural and semi natural land (such as food management, reduction in urban heating, ecological corridors). Therefore, in terms of resilience, the effects are possibly negative. This depends upon the extent of enhancement measures that are secured though and whether net gain is actually achieved.

The alternative option to dispersed release (**Option 2b**) is to focus development more strategically into a single larger area around an existing settlement. This option still relies on the weakly performing Green Belt areas but groups these together to identify a larger area for urban expansion. An extension at Heswall is thought to be more feasible than one at Bromborough / Eastham.

A large development at Heswall would be at the urban fringe. It is therefore likely to generate car trips, as it would allow relatively good access to the strategic road network. The majority of jobs growth is to the east of the Borough, and so in this respect, the length of trips (and associated emissions) would be expected to increase. The presence of a train station nearby would help to offset this somewhat, but the services are not particularly regular or quick. In terms of local services and facilities, a new well-planned extension should help to provide local access, which can encourage walking and cycling. This too ought to offset an increase in emissions from car based travel. There are no identified options with regards to district heating, though in theory a large scale mixed use development ought to provide better opportunities for such schemes. Overall, a **neutral effect** is predicted. Whilst there may be some reductions in travel due to the provision of local facilities and the presence of a train station nearby, it is also likely that car emissions will continue to be important. It is uncertain whether higher standards of resource efficiency would be achieved, but the requirement for new roads and other social infrastructure to support a comprehensive development would make this less likely. Therefore, at this stage, uncertain effects are predicted.

2.5 Economy and Employment

There are common elements to each of the spatial options that are likely to generate positive effects with regards to the economy and employment.

Of particular note is that the majority of employment land is proposed along Wirral Waters and surrounding areas and along the River Mersey at Port Sunlight / Bromborough and Eastham. These are high quality employment opportunities that are accessible to the most deprived parts of the Borough and tie-in with the wider regeneration ambitions for the Borough and the wider Liverpool sub-region. In this respect, **significant positive effects** are likely to be generated for each option with regards to economic growth, investment and employment.

However, each option performs differently in relation to impacts upon local centres across the borough, how housing is related to new and existing jobs, and how the options could help to address deprivation.

Option 1 promotes a lot of housing growth in urban areas that are in need of regeneration and are suffering from high levels of deprivation. In this respect, the benefits of new affordable homes and associated infrastructure improvements would be most likely to help address inequalities. Option 1 promotes most housing growth the east of the borough and it is therefore accessible to job opportunities and public transport. Growth is managed in the more affluent areas to the west, which helps to support this regeneration-led approach. In this respect, Option 1 is predicted to have **significant positive effects**.

One area where Option 1 could generate negative effects though is a reliance on employment land to deliver housing growth on some sites. If suitable replacements are not provided, this could lead to **minor negative effects** in terms of employment land availability in certain areas. This is unlikely to be a major stumbling block though, especially if a hybrid option was established involving limited greenbelt release should a need arise.

Options 2a and 2b are less positive with regards to tackling regeneration. Firstly, growth is at the periphery of settlement areas, which is less accessible to jobs generally

speaking. Furthermore, growth would be drawn away from the east of the borough in the urban areas and would be placed in more affluent locations such as Heswall, and West Kirby. Whilst this has some benefit in terms of local job provision and local spending it is much less likely to address inequalities. Therefore, only **neutral** or **minor positive effects** would be generated in this respect.

These two options would also be more likely to lead to increased commuting, which is considered a **minor negative effect** in terms of creating an efficient modern economy.

2.6 Health

TO BE COMPLETED

2.7 Heritage

Option 1 involves a range of housing sites in the urban areas of the main settlements across the borough. In some locations, there are limited sensitivities and the sites involved are poor quality. Therefore **neutral effects** are predicted. This applies to most of the development proposed in Heswall (Settlement Area 7), the rural areas (Settlement Area 8), mid Wirral (Settlement Area 6) and Sub-Urban Birkenhead (Settlement Area 5). At West Kirby and Bromborough, there are some local features that could be affected by development, but mitigation ought to ensure that the residual effects are **neutral** too.

In other locations, development is proposed that is close to conservation areas and / or listed buildings. For example, In Wallasey (Settlement Area 1) several sites are identified for intensification which are adjacent to listed buildings (i.e. Wallasey Town Hall). However, the existing site conditions / character of the existing buildings is poor and development is most likely to lead to improvements rather than negative effects. This is also the case in Bebington at the edge of Port Sunlight Conservation Area, where improvements measures ought to help enhance the setting of listed buildings. **Minor to significant positive effects** are predicted to reflect these factors.

The key area where effects are likely is the Commercial Core (Settlement Area 2). There are several large sites proposed in areas that contain multiple listed buildings and overlap with Conservation Areas. Of particular importance are the sites along the River Mersey which form a backdrop to Liverpool and contain listed assets. In this wider area there are also a number of listed buildings. Effects are potentially negative or positive but this is dependent upon design and layout. If buildings are lost or damaged by development, these could be **significant negative effects**. Likewise, development along the River Mersey could negatively affect the character of a prominent listed asset. However, sensitive development could help to better preserve listed buildings and enhance the setting and character of the area should development be sensitively designed. This would be a **significant positive effect**. Given the regeneration-focused approach being promoted by the Plan, it is considered more likely that positive rather than negative effects will be generated, but there is uncertainty at this stage.

Option 2a is more likely to have effects on heritage features that rely upon open countryside. This is because dispersed growth in the Green Belt would involve a loss of open space, which in some locations would be likely to erode the character of small villages and affect the setting of heritage assets. However, there ought to be sufficient flexibility in the choice of sites to ensure that the most sensitive areas can be avoided. The more sensitive locations under this option involve parcels of land at Bromborough and Eastham Settlement Area. Development of some of these could lead to significant negative effects. However, at the lower levels of growth involved, there remains flexibility to ensure that such effects are avoided. Therefore, only **minor negative effects** are predicted for option 2a overall.

Option 2b would have different effects depending upon which urban extension is involved. Common to both approaches though, there would be limited growth in other parts of the borough, and so the effects would be very localised.

A western extension to the east of Heswall is predicted to have minor negative effects. The scale of the site would substantially alter the rural settling of the countryside between the existing urban area of Heswall and the small village of Barnston (which is designated as a Conservation Area). There is a Grade II listed Christ Church at the edge of the settlement and stone boundary walls along the edge of the proposed urban extension site. Development has the potential to alter the setting of both the church, and the edge of the Conservation Area. Retention of important features and landscaping could help to mitigate effects and avoid significant impacts. However, a **minor negative effect** could remain.

An eastern urban extension to the south / south-west of Bebington and Eastham could lead to **significant negative effects** in this location. Several of the parcels of land involved in an urban extension would involve changes to the setting of heritage assets. In combination with one another, and the fact that all of the sites would come forward, the effects would be difficult to mitigate.

For all of the Green Belt options, if development is at the expense of urban regeneration, there are implications for heritage and built environment in those areas. On one hand, it could protect the character of urban areas, but most likely, it would mean that areas stay in a poor condition, and opportunities to enhance the setting of built environments would be fewer.

2.8 Housing

Option 1 proposes enough additional housing sites to meet the locally assessed housing need (using the standard method) of a minimum of 12,000 dwellings net over the plan period (i.e. 800 homes per year). There are additional sites identified also, which is a theoretical supply of approximately 14,800 dwellings (though these potentially have deliverability issues). In the event that all these sites come forward, a **significant positive effect** is likely to occur. This amount of development should however provide sufficient choice and flexibility. The distribution of development is also well correlated in terms of employment opportunities and supporting communities of need in a number of locations.

Option 2a is predicted to have **significant positive effects** in terms of housing delivery as it would also meet objectively assessed needs. However, if this was at the expense of growth

in the urban areas, then the benefits of development for those in greatest need would be reduced.

The issues would be more pronounced for **Option 2b**, as development would be concentrated more into singular locations (and thus the benefits of development would not be felt by a variety of communities). Therefore, only **minor positive effects** are predicted for option 2b.

All three options provide sufficient land to meet objectively assessed housing needs. There is also a degree of flexibility built into each option.

Should the locally assessed housing need be achieved (for the Borough), this would lead to positive effects on housing. However, setting a target in line with the locally assessed housing need figure does not necessarily mean it will be achieved if there are issues of deliverability and phasing. Therefore, at this scale of growth, the potential for significant positive effects could be reduced somewhat unless additional land is released to allow for flexibility.

The distribution of housing is also important to ensure that a wide range of communities benefit from growth, and that development occurs in appropriate, attractive locations. In this respect, option 2b performs less well compared to options 1 and 2a.

2.9 Land and Soil

Option 1 is predicted to have **significant positive effects** as it will lead to the regeneration and use of brownfield land in the urban areas of the Borough. Overlap with agricultural land would be very limited. At a higher scale of growth, the intensification option would need to be supplemented by greenbelt release, but this would not necessarily need to be on best and most agricultural land unless very high levels of growth were pursued (which could then result in minor negative effects).

The Green Belt options assume that there would be much more growth in the countryside and therefore, negative effects are inevitable. The precise nature of effects would depend upon the location of development. However, high level effects can be determined as follows.

Option 2a offers some flexibility in the choice of sites, and therefore a loss of best and most versatile land is possible. However, the weak parcels of land that have been identified as potential sites mostly consist of best and most versatile land, so a degree of negative effects are likely. At the level of growth involved, it is likely that at least 120ha of BAMV land would be affected, with a large amount potentially being Grade 3a (subject to detailed survey to confirm). There would probably be some Grade 2 land involved though. Therefore, a **significant negative effect** is predicted.

The effects for **Option 2b** depend upon the urban extension involved. As the most deliverable option, it is assumed that the western extension would be most likely. This approach would lead to an overlap with approximately 70ha of grade 3 land, which is a **significant negative effect**. The eastern extension would be even more negative, with potentially up to 100ha of Grade 2 land (to be confirmed) affected.

At a higher scale of growth, both greenbelt options would generate further negative effects with regards to agricultural land and offer limited opportunities for the reuse of land in urban

areas (in fact it could discourage investment in such areas). Therefore, the negative effects could be severe for land and soils at very high levels of growth.

2.10 Landscape

Option 1 promotes urban intensification, with the majority of growth focused to the east of the Borough and within the urban areas. A large number of the sites that would be involved for development are previously developed, and a notable proportion of these are also derelict / vacant and/or low quality in terms of the contribution they make to townscape. Redevelopment of these sites is likely to have positive effects on townscape. There would be limited changes to the character of the open countryside, but this a positive effect of the strategy which would reduce pressure for Green Belt land release.

There are a handful of sites on 'green' space in the urban settlements (for example in West Kirby), but development would not be on important recreational land or lead to coalescence between settlements.

Overall, **significant positive effects** are predicted, reflecting these factors.

It will be important to ensure that the character of the River Mersey front is enhanced for any development that occurs along its banks. This will be visible from long distances in Liverpool. Provided that appropriate heights, scale and density are used, then positive rather than negative effects ought to be most likely.

The effects of **Option 2a** will depend upon the exact sites involved. However, there are likely effects of a dispersed approach regardless of which locations are involved. Though the sites that would be involved have all been identified as weak performing in terms of overall green belt contribution, they are all in the countryside outside of the urban area. It is therefore likely that the character of landscapes will be affected negatively. Development is most likely to affect local amenity rather than lead to significant effects in terms of coalescence and the loss of sensitive land. It is also likely that strategic green infrastructure would be involved given the large scale nature of the sites. However, it is considered that a **minor negative effect** would remain. The choice of sites and dispersed nature of development should mean that no significant effects in any one location are likely.

Option 2b focuses growth into one large urban extension, with two possible locations identified. Whilst both consist of land that is considered 'weak' in terms of its contribution to green belt function, the combined effects of releasing all these parcels of land would most likely lead to **significant negative effects** in these two locations. To the west of Heswall, a large scheme could lead to coalescence with Barnston, whilst an extension at Bromborough / Bebington could lead to locally important open space being 'closed off' between Poulton and Brookhurst. For both urban extensions, the strategic nature of development would likely involve substantial roles for green infrastructure and landscaping schemes. Therefore, the potential for mitigation and enhancement of the quality of land is possible. The residual effects may therefore be minor rather than significant. However, at this stage, a precautionary approach is taken, and significant effects are recorded.

Should Green Belt development draw investment away from the urban areas to the east of the borough in particular, then the opportunities to achieve positive effects in these locations

would be diminished also. This is the case for both options 2a and 2b and is a particular weakness of focusing solely or heavily on Green Belt release.

2.11 Population and Communities

Of particular note is that the majority of employment land is proposed along Wirral Waters and surrounding areas and along the River Mersey at Port Sunlight / Bromborough and Eastham. These are high quality employment opportunities that are accessible to the most deprived parts of the Borough and tie-in with the wider regeneration ambitions for the Borough and the wider Liverpool sub-region. In this respect, **significant positive effects** are likely to be generated for each option with regards to population and the community.

However, each option performs differently in relation to impacts upon local centres/settlement areas across the borough, how the growth areas are related to new and existing jobs, health and leisure facilities, green infrastructure links and how the options could help to address overall deprivation.

Option 1 promotes a lot of housing growth in urban areas that are in need of regeneration and are suffering from high levels of deprivation. In this respect, the benefits of associated infrastructure improvements would be most likely to help address inequalities, improving access to new / improved health and leisure opportunities and increasing the housing options for a greater proportion of the population. Option 1 promotes most housing growth the east of the borough and it is therefore accessible to job opportunities and public transport. Growth is managed in the more affluent areas to the west, which helps to support this regeneration-led approach.

There are a number of vacant and poor quality sites involved for option 1. Redevelopment ought to help improve the public realm and could help to improve perceptions of community safety.

Most of the proposed sites are brownfield in nature, and the surrounding areas are urbanised. It will be important to ensure that access to open space and green infrastructure is considered for Option 1 given that there are no immediate links to green infrastructure networks in the countryside.

Taking the above factors into account, option 1 is predicted to have **significant positive effects**.

Options 2a and 2b are less positive with regards to tackling regeneration across the whole borough, as growth mainly focuses on the more affluent areas in the borough. Development would be at the periphery of settlement areas, which is less favourable for the population as this is less accessible to jobs, leisure and health facilities generally speaking. Therefore, **neutral effects** are predicted in terms of addressing inequalities.

However, the strategic nature of developments ought to allow for improvements to be made with regards to social infrastructure. For Option 2a, **minor positive effects** would be generated at several locations across the borough.

For Option 2b, the scale of growth associated with an urban extension would likely support new open space, education and health facilities, which would be beneficial for new communities. The location of the new settlements would also be likely to support good access to green infrastructure and open space. These are **significant positive effects** for new communities, but the benefits in other parts of the borough would be limited.

These two options would also be more likely to lead to increased commuting for work and distance travelled for local services, which is considered a **minor negative effect** in terms of creating rounded communities/services centres which provide the right offering to improve people's quality of life.

2.12 Transport

In general, most of the urban areas in Wirral are covered by some form of transport linkage whether it be cycle routes, roads or rail. The Merseyrail line between Birkenhead and Chester runs along the eastern side of the Wirral, and is close to where more developments are being proposed in these existing urban areas. More development will harness the need for better transport linkages. It is best to place development in areas already serviced by transport infrastructure, to avoid transport upgrade costs in areas where they currently don't exist.

Option 1 proposes higher density development in existing urban areas, mainly focusing on Wirral Waters, Commercial Core and other locations to the east of the Borough. Wirral Waters is planned to include a wide range of local facilities and services, including further enhancements to the already good public transport links. Access to jobs would also be good given the future opportunities in Wirral Waters itself and links to Birkenhead and Liverpool, via public transport and road. Development in the urban area would therefore have excellent accessibility. The scale of some sites at Wirral Waters could also be more likely to support on-site facilities that could benefit new and existing communities.

In the absence of strategic infrastructure improvements this could lead to negative effects with regards to congestion in areas that already suffer. However, the factors discussed above will help to mitigate such effects.

More limited growth is proposed in settlement areas to the middle and west of the borough. These settlement areas exhibit poorer accessibility in terms of access to services and jobs (especially by rail), and in turn increase travel trips by car for a large proportion of the population. Given that growth is limited in these areas, congestion problems are unlikely to be worsened notably here. There are public transport links and local services that will help to promote sustainable travel, but it is likely that a reliance on car travel will remain, which are **neutral effects**.

On balance, **significant positive effects** could be generated as the majority of new development will have excellent accessibility and is well linked to existing and planned employment growth and existing infrastructure. This ought to promote sustainable travel and ensure that growth can be supported.

However, it will be important to ensure that intensified growth in the urban areas to the east of the Borough does not lead to congestion problems. A **minor negative effect** is predicted to reflect the potential for increased traffic on local roads (though this is also

uncertain / dependent upon whether road and bus networks can be enhanced in advance of any development in this area).

Both **Option 2A and 2B** are proposing substantial focused development at the periphery of urban areas. This could have a negative effect on transport as existing transport linkage infrastructure may reach capacity and there could be requirements for infrastructure upgrades in locations that are not currently well connected to the transport network. Furthermore, these locations are generally less well related to public transport and services, and more likely to encourage car use. Consequently, these approaches are less likely to support a shift from car dominance.

Option 2A may have a negative effect on existing transport infrastructure at a number of the Settlement Areas as they will be affected by increases in development, but not necessarily at a high enough scale to fund strategic transport infrastructure or on site improvements to social infrastructure provision such as new schools and health facilities. However, the effects in terms of congestion are less likely to be significant, as development (and thus car trips) would be dispersed. However, the overall picture in terms of car usage would likely be the worst of all three options. The good access afforded by Option 1 would be absent, whilst the strategic opportunities for enhancement associated with large urban extensions would also be less likely. Overall, **minor negative effects** are predicted.

Option 2b will involve the largest focus of growth into new urban extensions. This could create localised pressures on the road network, but the scale of growth ought to allow for improvements to be secured. There should also be associated services supporting such extensions and so it should be possible to achieve walkable developments. With regards to employment opportunities though, the links are less positive. For example, an extension to the east of Heswall would likely result in car dominated commuting patterns, putting pressure on local road networks. If development in this location draws development away from the urban areas near to the Commercial Core, it may also mean that investment in transport improvements measures in those areas is diminished. With this in mind, **minor negative effects** are predicted overall. Whilst this approach could lead to notable effects in certain locations in terms of traffic, the potential for strategic enhancements offset this to an extent.

An extension at Bebington would have similar effects, but this has better connections to new employment opportunities (resulting in shorter and potentially fewer car trips). This location is also likely to generate car trips though, particularly given its good access to A41. A significant increase in traffic in this location could therefore contribute to negative effects on congestion.

2.13 Water resources

The impacts upon water resources will be dependent upon the ability to manage waste water and drainage requirements resulting from new developments. There is an assumption that development can be supported, but this will need to be confirmed with utilities providers regardless of the spatial approach that is taken. At this stage, uncertain effects are predicted for each option in this respect.

With regards to longer term water quality, it is possible that a change in land use from agricultural to residential can reduce the levels of nitrate pollution. In this respect the Green Belt options could have **minor positive effects**, but this carries a degree of uncertainty.

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