



ECONOMY REGENERATION & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Monday, 22 November 2021

REPORT TITLE:	WIRRAL ECONOMIC STRATEGY 2021 - 2026
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF REGENERATION AND PLACE

REPORT SUMMARY

This report provides Economy, Regeneration & Development Committee with details of a new Economic Strategy for Wirral.

The Wirral Plan: A 2020 Vision set out a shared partnership vision to improve outcomes for Wirral residents, supported by a Growth Plan which translated Wirral's ambitions for economic growth into a clear direction of travel. Over the five years of the Growth Plan, significant progress has been made in positioning Wirral as a place to live, work, visit and invest.

A new strategy, a Wirral Plan 2021 - 2026, has been developed to build on the success of the Wirral Plan: A 2020 Vision, to provide a set of goals and objectives for the Council and its partners to work to over the next five years.

Alongside this, the Birkenhead 2040 Framework is being developed to support a transformational regeneration programme along the 'Left Bank' of the River Mersey stretching from New Brighton to Bromborough, with a particular focus on the creation of a sustainable, waterfront urban garden community in Birkenhead. This is one of the largest and most ambitious regeneration programmes in the UK with the potential to create up to 20,000 new homes over the next 20 years through a radical re-use of neglected and brownfield sites, underpinned by the emerging Local Plan.

Since March 2020, the local and national economy have experienced significant changes and a new economic strategy is needed to reflect these changes and to provide a framework for economic growth over the next five years, in support of the Wirral Plan and Local Plan.

The Wirral Economic Strategy 2021 - 2026 sets out the Council's priorities for inclusive economic growth. The Strategy identifies the current challenges and opportunities and sets out the building blocks to secure inclusive growth in the long term, with a focus on ensuring that local residents and businesses benefit. The Strategy also recognises the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Wirral's economy and sets out how resilience can be supported going forward.

The proposals contained in this report directly support the following key themes within the Wirral Plan 2021 - 2026:

- A thriving and inclusive economy, creating jobs and opportunities for all
- A clean-energy, sustainable borough, leading the way in tackling the environment crisis
- Brighter futures for all regardless of their background
- Safe and pleasant communities that our residents are proud of
- Healthy and active lives for all, with the right care, at the right time

This matter affects all wards in the Borough.

This is a key decision owing to the significance in terms of the effect on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards in the Borough.

RECOMMENDATION

Economy, Regeneration and Development Committee is recommended to approve the Wirral Economic Strategy 2021 - 2026, as set out in Appendix 1 to this report.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 1.1 To support the long term inclusive economic growth of the Borough and meet the objectives of the Wirral Plan 2026.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 Do not approve the strategy – the option of not developing an economic strategy for the Borough has been considered. This option has been rejected as it would be challenging to meet the inclusive economic growth priorities of the Wirral Plan 2021 - 2026 without a clear economic strategy supported by an action plan and performance monitoring framework.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Sub-Regional Context

- 3.1 The Liverpool City Region (LCR) Combined Authority Corporate Plan 2021-2024 sets out a vision for a fairer, stronger, cleaner City Region where nobody is left behind.
- 3.2 The LCR Local Industrial Strategy seeks to deliver a competitive, clean and inclusive City Region. The Local Industrial Strategy builds upon its predecessor, The Liverpool City Region Growth Strategy: Building our Future, which established the sub-regional strengths in advanced manufacturing, creative, financial and professional services, health and life sciences, low carbon energy, maritime and logistics sectors and the visitor economy.
- 3.3 The Covid-19 pandemic has required a re-focus towards economic recovery and resilience. The LCR Building Back Better Economic Recovery Plan has therefore been produced to provide a stimulus for recovery for the City Region in the short-term, based on a pipeline of programmes and projects, and the priorities of the Local Industrial Strategy are being re-framed into a new Plan for Prosperity, which will set out the long-term economic framework for the City Region. The emerging LCR Plan for Prosperity seeks to maximise innovation across the business base; turn people's potential into prosperity; create thriving and resilient places; and ensure integrated infrastructure for a connected City Region.

Local Context

- 3.4 The Wirral Plan 2021 - 2026 sets out the Council's vision to secure the best possible future for our residents. The Plan sets out the following objectives:
- A thriving and inclusive economy, creating jobs and opportunities for all;
 - A clean-energy, sustainable borough, leading the way in tackling the environment crisis;
 - Brighter futures for all regardless of their background;
 - Safe and pleasant communities that our residents are proud of; and

- Healthy and active lives for all, with the right care, at the right time

3.5 The Wirral Community Wealth Building Strategy 2020-2025 supports the latest Wirral Plan and sets out three strategic objectives: democratic economy; generative economy; and financial resilience. The three strategic objectives will be delivered across the following five pillars of the community wealth building:

- Plural ownership – residents in Wirral have a say on the wealth generated by their communities;
- Land and assets – Council land and assets are used to build community wealth, including ways in which Council assets can be used for the benefit of the local community;
- Making financial power work for local places – wealth that exists in Wirral is harnessed to increase investment in local communities;
- Workforce – residents of Wirral are employed in secure, well-paid jobs with progression of opportunities and good terms and conditions; and.
- Procurement – procurement practices of Wirral's anchor institutions are used to build the wealth of local communities.

3.6 The objectives of community wealth building are embedded in the Economic Strategy as a key working principle. Priorities include promoting good work/fair work, the use of local labour, the purchasing power of anchor institutions, and community sector ownership.

3.7 Wirral Council has declared an environment and climate emergency and has signed up to the Cool Wirral 2 Strategy as part of the Cool Wirral Partnership. This sets Wirral on the path to achieve two main goals:

- To stay within a local emissions 'budget' of 7.7 million tonnes (Mt) of CO₂ between 2020-2100 and to reach 'net zero' pollution as early as possible before 2041
- To ensure a climate resilient Wirral adapted to cope with existing change and further unavoidable disruption this century

3.8 The Cool Wirral 2 Strategy is supported by the Council's Environmental and Climate Change Action Plan. The objectives of sustainability are embedded in the Economic Strategy as a key working principle. Priorities include promoting active travel, the decarbonisation of buildings; and encouraging a behavioural shift.

3.9 The Economic Strategy also reflects the transformational regeneration programme along the 'Left Bank' of the River Mersey stretching from New Brighton to Bromborough, with a particular focus on the creation of a sustainable, waterfront urban garden community in Birkenhead, underpinned by the Birkenhead 2040 Framework and Local Plan. It seeks to maximise the opportunities of the regeneration programme and ensure local people benefit from growth.

Wirral Economic Strategy to 2026

3.10 Over the last five years, significant progress has been made in positioning Wirral as a place to live, work, visit and invest. The Wirral Plan: A 2020 Vision set out a shared partnership vision to improve outcomes for Wirral residents, supported by a Growth

Plan which translated Wirral's ambitions for economic growth into a clear direction of travel. Over the five years of the Growth Plan, just under 5,000 jobs were created or safeguarded; the employment rate in Wirral increased by 15 per cent; £257m of investment into Wirral was secured; the Borough's GVA per head increased by almost 25 per cent to £15,456; and the number of net new business increased by over 1,300.

- 3.11 Since March 2020, the local and national economy have experienced significant changes and a new economic strategy is needed to reflect these changes and to provide a framework for economic growth over the next five years, in support of the Wirral Plan and Local Plan.
- 3.12 The Council commissioned Hatch Consulting in June 2021 to work with the Council to develop a new Wirral Economic Strategy to 2026. The Economic Strategy identifies the current challenges and opportunities and sets out the building blocks to secure inclusive growth in the long term, with a focus on ensuring that local residents and businesses benefit. The Strategy also recognises the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Wirral's economy and sets out how resilience can be supported going forward.
- 3.13 A summary of the Wirral Economic Strategy is provided below. A copy of the final document is available to view in Appendix 1 to this report.

The Story of Wirral's Economy

- 3.14 The Borough of Wirral covers an area of sixty square miles and its peninsula setting, bounded by the Rivers Mersey and Dee and Irish Sea, has strongly influenced its historic and current economic role. The borough's population stands at around 320,000 and almost two thirds of the borough's population live within the predominately built-up urban areas to the east of the M53 motorway. The east of the borough is also the focus for most industry whereas many of the hamlets and villages on the Dee side of the peninsula have developed into popular and vibrant commuter settlements. The Borough is an integral part of the Liverpool City Region. Wirral is also a key part of the Mersey Dee Alliance which is a successful partnership that supports strategic economic growth across North East Wales, West Cheshire and Wirral.
- 3.15 There are significant economic disparities between the east and west of the borough, and the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the depth of some of our economic challenges. Many residents face multiple barriers to gaining and sustaining employment, including a lack of opportunity, limited access to affordable transport, poor mental health, addiction and debt issues. According to the Index of Multiple Deprivation, 25 per cent of the borough of Wirral falls within the 10 per cent most deprived areas of the country with the majority of these locations in the east of the borough in Birkenhead, Bidston, Seacombe and Rock Ferry.
- 3.16 Many of these places also provide us with the potential for large scale place-based regeneration and the opportunity to address the unacceptable levels of inequality and deprivation that currently exist. The Left Bank is one of the UK's largest regeneration projects capitalising on its significant brownfield land assets and town centre renewal. Over the next 15-20 years we need to fundamentally strengthen the physical fabric of the Left Bank settlements and make significant social progress through local wealth

building, reducing the large disparities between east and west and triggering a step-change in the quality of life for those in the most deprived communities.

- 3.17 Through all of our strategies we recognise that we have an established presence in key growth sectors including maritime, advanced manufacturing and the visitor economy. We have also made impressive progress with the growing creative and digital industry focused in the Left Bank regeneration area. It is vital that this Economic Strategy supports these sectors to grow, innovate and to provide the right conditions for our business base to expand. We must also capitalise on our unique heritage assets and our coastal and rural offer to boost Wirral's status as a visitor destination.
- 3.18 We recognise that one of the most important factors for a successful economy is an effective transport system. Wirral is a well-connected borough and forms a vital part of both the Liverpool City Region and the Mersey Dee Alliance economic area. Despite this, a lack of 'last mile' sustainable transport options acts as a barrier to employment and education. We need to ensure that local residents and businesses benefit from improved access to employment and training opportunities.
- 3.19 We have made a commitment with our partners to tackle climate change and this Economic Strategy identifies ways we can embed sustainability into our large-scale regeneration programme and how we can equip local residents and businesses with the skills to take up opportunities within the fast-growing low carbon economy.
- 3.20 Birkenhead 2040 and the Local Plan set out the spatial priorities for the borough, with a focus on the transformational proposals at Left Bank. This Economic Strategy must build upon the significant progress made throughout the previous Growth Plan period in developing partnerships in health, education and skills, as well as with investors and developers, to set out how everybody can benefit from growth through a partnership approach.

Vision and Objectives

- 3.21 The Economic Strategy sets out the following vision for the Borough:

Vibrant places, where communities and businesses thrive and people choose to live, work and visit. A rebalanced borough that stands out for its achievements on fairness, reducing inequalities and building local wealth. A borough that is celebrated for delivering new and big ideas, working jointly with others and for prioritising environmental sustainability.

- 3.22 The vision is supported by three priority objectives:

- **Thriving Businesses** – supporting local business growth, attracting inward investment and maximising our sector strengths;
- **Vibrant Places** – creating distinctive, well-connected places for people to live, work and visit; and
- **Inclusive Economy** - ensuring residents across the Borough have access to learning and employment opportunities and reducing the significant disparities between the east and west of the Borough.

- 3.23 The Strategy includes three embedded working principles, which have informed the priority objectives and actions in the Economic Strategy:

- **Community Wealth Building** - ensuring everyone can contribute to and benefit from growth, building a fairer and more cohesive Borough;
- **Prioritising Sustainability** - ensuring growth protects and enhances our built and natural environment, while responding to the global climate emergency; and
- **Openness and Collaboration** - providing a well-networked economy that is known for joined-up working and for being open-minded and inclusive.

Actions and Performance Monitoring

- 3.24 The Economic Strategy sets out a series of actions against each of the priority objectives and working principles. These actions will be used to inform the development of programmes and projects which deliver the Strategy's objectives. The actions are supported by a number of 'output measures' to evaluate their effectiveness and will be reviewed internally through our Regeneration Programme Management performance framework.
- 3.25 The Strategy also sets out a series of high-level 'impact measures', which reflect the five key Wirral Plan 2026 measures against the Inclusive Economy strand. These will be reported in line with the reporting timetable for the Wirral Plan. These impact measures are the broader effects of implementing the activities and are affected by a number of factors.
- 3.26 The overall performance framework for our Economic Strategy will be subject to an independent annual review and evaluation to test the effectiveness of our detailed annual action plans and the overall progress against the Wirral Plan.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The total cost of the Economic Strategy was £33,099, funded through the Regeneration & Place Directorate's existing revenue budget.
- 4.2 The approval of the Economic Strategy has no direct financial implications. The Economic Strategy sets out a series of actions to support inclusive economic growth, which includes some options which may require public sector support. Any future proposals which would have financial implications for the Council would be subject to a separate decision(s).

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The economic development strategy is not a statutory document and as such there is no legal requirement to produce one. However it is best practice to have such a plan. As schemes/projects are developed, the legal implications will be identified as part of the project plan.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

- 6.1 The delivery of the Economic Strategy will be co-ordinated by existing staff resource, mainly from the Regeneration & Place Directorate but supported by staff from across

the Council. Every effort will be made to seek partner resource to support the delivery of the Strategy.

- 6.2 The effective implementation of the Economic Strategy may require additional resources which will be identified as the detailed action plans are developed.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

Table 7.1 – Risk Register

Risk	Identified Mitigation Measures
Failure to secure stakeholder buy-in	Ensure key stakeholders are engaged from outset; establish clear engagement strategy/structure; monitor and manage feedback from stakeholders.
Failure to deliver desired outcomes/outputs	Set clear milestones for projects; carry out regular project progress meetings; monitor and manage delivery of outputs.
Failure to secure future funding to deliver programmes	Ensure funding applications are based on robust business case; ensure project outcomes and outputs meet funding requirement; make provision for contingency budget to reduce impact; ensure governance structures are in place to monitor and respond to any new funding opportunities. Look to partners to deliver outputs/programmes

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

- 8.1 A draft Wirral Economic Strategy Framework document was subject to public consultation hosted on the Council's Have Your Say website between 25 August and 22 September 2021. A survey was available for completion and the option to respond via e-mail or request the document in an alternative format was provided. The Council also hosted two on-line stakeholder workshops with Hatch via MS Teams on 1 September and 2 September 2021.
- 8.2 The Council engaged the Wirral Youth Voice and Wirral SEND Youth Voice on the draft Framework document.
- 8.3 58 responses were received to the survey via Have Your Say and an additional 7 responses were received via e-mail. Comments were generally supportive of the strategy, however, a number of respondents felt that the 'competitive business' and 'highly performing' wording did not capture what the Council is trying to achieve through its Community Wealth Building ambitions.
- 8.4 Feedback from the stakeholder workshops highlighted the need to make the strategy more specific to Wirral, to emphasise the significant disparities that exist between different parts of the Borough, and to promote independent businesses.
- 8.5 All feedback has been used to inform the final Economic Strategy and a Report of Consultation has been produced.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Wirral Council has a legal requirement to make sure its policies, and the way it carries out its work, do not discriminate against anyone. An Equality Impact Assessment is a tool to help council services identify steps they can take to ensure equality for anyone who might be affected by a particular policy, decision or activity.
- 9.2 An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out and it is considered that the Economic Strategy will have a positive impact on protected groups. The Strategy seeks to reduce inequalities across the Borough to ensure that disadvantaged groups benefit from economic growth.
- 9.3 A copy of the EIA can be viewed at:
<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/equality-impact-assessments/equality-impact-assessments-2021>

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The Economic Strategy supports the Cool 2 Strategy and the Council's Environment and Climate Change Action Plan. The Strategy identifies a number of actions under the 'Sustainability' working principle which seek to decarbonise buildings; promote active travel; support the provision of low carbon infrastructure; and encourage a shift in people's behaviour. These actions will be used to develop and monitor projects and programmes to support the sustainability working principle.

11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 The objectives of community wealth building are embedded in the Economic Strategy as a key working principle. Priorities include promoting good work/fair work, the use of local labour, the purchasing power of anchor institutions, and community sector ownership. These actions will be used to develop and monitor projects and programmes to support the community wealth building working principle.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Wirral Economic Strategy 2021 – 2026

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Wirral Plan 2021-2026
Wirral Economic Strategy Report of Consultation
Wirral Economic Strategy Evidence Base

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Wirral Plan 2021-2026 (Council, Minute 24 refers)	6 September 2021
Wirral Plan 2021-2026 (Policy & Resource Committee, Minute 34 refers)	28 July 2021