

Birkenhead Regeneration Framework 2040 Consultation Summary Report

August 2021

1. Introduction

1.1 The Birkenhead Regeneration Framework 2040 (the BRF2040) was published for consultation on 23rd March 2021. The regeneration of Birkenhead forms a key part of the council's emerging Local Plan vision and preferred strategy to meet the Borough's development needs through urban intensification within existing built-up areas. The aim of the consultation therefore was to seek views on the proposed regeneration of Birkenhead as set out in the Draft Framework document and to identify key issues to be addressed.

1.2 The consultation ran between 23rd March and 19th May 2021 and in total, the council received technical responses from 31 consultees, as listed in Appendix 1. Responses to the consultation were generally supportive of the vision and objectives presented through the BRF2040. In particular, the overall housing delivery approach, based on the regeneration of Birkenhead was supported, alongside the creation of new green space such as Dock Branch Park and the creation of wildlife corridors. However, concerns were raised which related to matters such as the deliverability and viability of urban regeneration-based housing delivery, the impact of housing development upon dockside industrial uses, and the possible impacts of the proposed approach upon Birkenhead's heritage and habitats located in close proximity to Birkenhead's waterfront development areas.

2. Key Themes

2.1 In general, responses focused on specific areas of interest relative to the consultee. They can be summarised into key themes, as follows:

- Housing and infrastructure delivery;
- Employment;
- Environmental protection and enhancement;
- Design, climate change and housing standards;
- Greenspace, sport and active design;
- Heritage and conservation;
- Education and skills; and
- General points of clarification.

2.2 The sections below focus on each key theme, and a response is provided which explains how the matters arising can be addressed. It should be noted that in total there are approximately 70 comments on the BRF 2040 which will need to be considered against emerging technical work being carried out to support the Wirral Local Plan (such as viability, environmental impact and economic assessments). The consultation also identified the need to check the formatting of the document (including corrections to data, boundaries and wording). In some cases, further engagement with consultees, landowners and the development industry will also be required to further inform approaches to environmental mitigation and dockside industrial uses. However,

overall there were no objections which cannot be resolved or addressed through minor updates and revisions to the BRF 2040.

3. Housing and Infrastructure Delivery

3.1 Three respondents expressed concern regarding the standard housing methodology and the housing requirement for Birkenhead. Respondents requested that the consultation document included a section that explained and justified the need for additional homes in Birkenhead and how upgrades to existing housing stock will be taken into account within the housing numbers. Other responses commented that higher housing numbers are at odds with the government's sustainability objectives.

3.2 The matter of delivering significant housing numbers within the BRF area was also raised as a key concern in relation to viability, the housing market and the scale and complexity of the regeneration aims. Concerns also related to infrastructure delivery, such as the provision of the district heat network, improvements to existing infrastructure such as Birkenhead Park and the delivery of transport schemes.

Council response

3.3 The Council has used the Government's standard method for calculating minimum annual local housing need to determine the need for housing within the Borough. Further explanation of the standard housing methodology approach can be provided within the Introduction to the BRF2040. However, it is not for the BRF2040 to adjust this total need figure.

3.4 In terms of housing and infrastructure delivery, this matter is being further tested and assessed by a number of technical studies including the Wirral Local Plan Infrastructure Delivery Plan, the Local Plan Viability Study and Neighbourhood Frameworks which cover specific neighbourhoods within the BRF area. Together, this ongoing technical work will inform the council's Housing Delivery Strategy – a document which will inform the Wirral Local Plan's housing trajectory. Any changes to the BRF 2040 in relation to housing and infrastructure delivery, will be made following the completion of this technical work.

4. Employment and Economy

4.1 A number of responses queried whether the impact of Covid-19 has been taken into account as part of the overall approach to the retail economy in Birkenhead. Other responses queried the mechanisms available to deliver employment at the Northside employment site. Furthermore, United Molasses Terminals expressed concerns regarding the impact of residential development in the vicinity of dockside industrial land uses.

Council response

4.2 The long term impact of the Covid 19 Pandemic on retailing is as yet uncertain. The Council has commissioned Neighbourhood Frameworks for Northside and Scotts Quay areas which will address these issues. Any updates as a result of this work will be fed into the emerging Local Plan and the update of the BRF2040 as appropriate.

5. Environmental Protection and Enhancement

- 5.1 Natural England, the Marine Management Organisation (MMO), Cheshire Wildlife Trust, CPRE Cheshire and Wirral Green Space Alliance provided responses to the consultation which focused upon the need for regeneration of Birkenhead to focus in more detail on the protection and enhancement of Birkenhead's greenspaces, ecological networks, green and blue infrastructure the area's internationally and nationally protected habitats. Responses also emphasized that the BRF 2040 should incorporate biodiversity net gain, rewilding schemes and includes standards for buildings that incorporate features such as green walls.
- 5.2 Respondents identified that these matters are particularly important given the regeneration objectives for the Waterfront area of Birkenhead, which is located in close proximity to the Liverpool Bay Special Protection Area (SPA), Mersey Narrows and North Wirral Foreshore SPA, Ramsar and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

Council response

- 5.3 The council fully supports the protection and enhancement of Birkenhead's Green and blue infrastructure assets. The draft BRF 2040 does have regard to the Council's emerging Green and Blue Infrastructure study (GBI) and the final Framework will incorporate the recommendations of the final GBI study. Reference will also be made to Biodiversity Net Gain.

6. Design and Climate Change

- 6.1 A number of responses identified that a strong urban design approach would be needed for certain areas within the BRF area. The areas identified through the consultation were Hind Street Urban Village and Bidston Moss. Furthermore, Magenta Living have provided housing standards to address climate change and achieve carbon reduction, and the Cheshire Wildlife Trust highlighted that the BRF 2040 should make reference the Wirral Environment and Climate Change Emergency Policy Statement.

Council response

- 6.2 Urban design, housing and building standards to reduce carbon emissions will be addressed in a number of ways through the emerging Wirral Local Plan and in particular the preparation of the Birkenhead Design Guide and Public Realm Strategy SPD and through the preparation of individual Neighbourhood Frameworks for certain areas included within the BRF.

7. Greenspace, Recreation and Active Design

- 7.1 Although many responses to the BRF2040 welcomed the 'green approach' to regeneration, and the proposal to create a new space at Dock Branch Park, some responses identified that there is a deficit of greenspace in east Wirral that should be addressed. Furthermore, Sport England's response emphasised that further work is required to incorporate active design principles into the context of housing delivery. Furthermore, Sport England commented on the importance of sufficient provision of formal and informal provision of sport and recreation within the Framework area. Finally, responses to the BRF2040 focused on the national and international importance of Birkenhead Park, and it was identified that the impact of development upon the park should be

assessed to ensure that maintenance and improvements to the park would be delivered alongside growth.

Council response

- 7.2 The identification of the need for new greenspace in Birkenhead will be tested through the preparation of the council's Open Space Assessment and Standards and Playing Pitch Strategy evidence base. This will feed into the preparation of the Infrastructure Delivery Plan. Together the technical work focusing on green space, sport and recreation will support the emerging Wirral Local Plan's policy approach to the delivery of green space, through measures such as developer contributions and applications for grant funding. The council will also continue to engage with Sport England to ensure that Active Design measures are incorporated into the emerging Local Plan.

8. Heritage and Conservation

- 8.1 A number of responses to the BRF 2040 were received from Historic England, Heritage Groups and individuals with an interest in the heritage of Birkenhead. Historic England responded with a number of comments on the BRF 2040 text, as well as an overarching response which requested that the framework should focus on the positive role that heritage should have in placemaking. In addition, respondents identified the decline of Clifton Park, which was designated in 2004 as a Conservation Area. The consultation response requested that Clifton Park be added to the policy approach for Hind Street.

9 Council response

- 9.1 The responses received relating to heritage and conservation within Birkenhead will be reviewed to ensure that they can be addressed appropriately either within the final BRF 2040, the emerging Wirral Local Plan, or via the council's Conservation Area Management approach. The importance of Birkenhead's heritage is recognised, and the emerging Wirral Local Plan is being prepared alongside a Heritage Impact Assessment, to ensure that the heritage of Birkenhead is protected and enhanced through both strategic and local (masterplanning) policy approaches. Consideration will be given to the inclusion of the Clifton Park Conservation Area within the BRF 2040 boundary as the document is being finalised.

9. Education and Skills

- 9.1 Wirral Met College provided a range of supportive and constructive responses which emphasised the importance of embedding skills and education into the regeneration of Birkenhead. In particular, the response identified that vocational and technical education, provided by the college should be seen as a valuable opportunity to support the wide scope of industry sectors required to deliver regeneration in the area. Reference was made to the new campus, built within Wirral Waters, which would be dedicated to supporting the built environment. Proposed wording has been provided by the college, to be incorporated into the BRF 2040, where appropriate.

Council response

- 9.2 The final BRF2040 will include a strong reference to the role of vocational and technical education in the regeneration of Birkenhead. The proposed working is useful and will be included where appropriate.

10.General Points of Clarification

10.1 There were a number of responses which identified certain areas of the BRF2040 which may require checking and correcting or further clarification. For example the Wirral Growth company identified that some boundaries mapped were inconsistent with their own plans and masterplan areas. Peel Land and Property have requested a reconsideration of the use of the term 'neighbourhoods' in relation to Wirral Waters and the Irby, Thurstaston and Pensby Amenity Society requested further clarity and labelling on maps within the framework document.

Council response

10.2 Each point of clarification and correction will be reviewed and updated through a revised version of the BRF 2040, where appropriate.

11.Next Steps

11.1 As set out above, the responses to the BRF2040 consultation have been constructive and informative. In general, responses were supportive of the proposed approach to regeneration and housing delivery and many points of clarification will be addressed through the emerging Wirral Local Plan, or through ongoing engagement with statutory consultees and landowners or the development industry.

11.2 The BRF 2040 will be reviewed and updated in light of the consultation responses received, as well as being informed by the technical work and stakeholder engagement which is currently ongoing as part of the preparation of the Local Plan and regeneration delivery.

Appendix 1: List of consultees who submitted a response to the BRF 2040 Consultation

Landowner/Growth Company

- Peel Land and Property
- Barton Willmore o.b.o Wirral Growth Company
- Hind Street Major Landowner Group
- Leverhulme Estate

Industry

- UN Terminals

Education and Skills

- Wirral Met College

Biodiversity, Environment and Greenspace

- Natural England
- Marine Management Organisation (MMO)
- Cheshire Gardens Trust
- Cheshire Wildlife Trust
- CPRE Cheshire and Wirral Green Space Alliance

Heritage and Conservation

- Historic England
- CAW Heritage Group
- Birkenhead Park

Local Land Trusts/Societies

- Irby Thurstaston and Pensby Amenity Society
- Rock Ferry Waterfront Trust

Sport

- Sport England

Carbon Reduction and Design Standards

- Magenta Living

Housing Delivery

- Homes England

Energy and Infrastructure constraints

- National Grid

Individuals x 10