

REPORT TITLE:	DRAFT INDICATIVE SITE DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR THE FORMER HOUSE OF FRASER SITE & PART OF PRINCES PAVEMENT & GRANGE ROAD, BIRKENHEAD
REPORT OF:	HEAD OF REGENERATION DELIVERY

REPORT SUMMARY

This report sets out a proposal to enter into a draft indicative Site Development Plan which would involve Wirral Growth Company LLP bringing forward the development of the site of the Former House of Fraser Store and part of Princes Pavement and a site on Grange Road, Birkenhead and with retail units at the southern end of Princes Pavement project which would be for predominately affordable residential use.

The proposals would enable the implementation of the initial stages of design development as set out in the Wirral Growth Company draft Indicative Site Development Plan attached to this report. The initial phases of work are to complete design to RIBA stage 1 to allow viability and planning assessment to be undertaken together with the proposals being tested with potential funders and development partners. Further papers will be brought to this committee for review and approval of future work stages once this initial phase is completed.

The former House of Fraser property and adjacent car park was acquired in 2021 by Wirral Borough Council using financial assistance towards from the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA) Brownfield Housing Land Fund. This announcement set out that the Council had secured a requested grant allocation of (£2.1m). This funding is conditional upon the delivery of a minimum 84 residential units and time limited to a start on site no later than March 2025.

Town centre regeneration is a long-standing priority for the Council and is reflected in the Wirral Council Plan 2023-2027 through the requirement to deliver inclusive economic growth, working for a prosperous, inclusive economy where local people can get good jobs and achieve their aspirations.

This matter affects the wards of Birkenhead and Tranmere. This is not a Key Decision.

Appendix 1 of this report is exempt from publication pursuant to paragraph 3 of part 1 of Schedule 12 A of the Local Government Act 1972 (Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)) because it contains or refers to information relating to the financial and business affairs of Muse, Wirral Growth Company and the Council and the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

RECOMMENDATION

The Assistant Director Property & Regeneration Investment is recommended to approve:

- (1) the draft Indicative Site Development Plan for the former House of Fraser site and part of Princes Pavement and Grange Road site, Birkenhead; and
- (2) that the Council shall proceed with legal agreements necessary to enable Wirral Growth Company LLP to proceed with the RIBA Stage 1 Design process, soft market testing and review of the soft market testing exercise as part of the proposals set out in the draft indicative Site Development Plan as a pre-requisite to any decision to proceed to RIBA Stage 2 and beyond.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1.1 The former House of Fraser site forms a critical part of Birkenhead Town Centre regeneration. Since the Council notified Wirral Growth Company LLP (WGC) in April 2024 that it did not intend to proceed with the proposed Market Hall on this site an alternative scheme is needed to meet the requirements of the £2m of Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA) Brownfield Land Fund that is held by the Council and bring much needed affordable residential development to the town centre;
- 1.2 The LCRCA Brownfield Housing Land Fund is time limited to the end of March 2025 and will support the Council by enabling access to significant funding to support the regeneration of Birkenhead including that of private sector investment. The grant requires a minimum of 84 residential units to be delivered with a start on site no later than March 2025 failing which there is a risk that the LCRCA will seek clawback of the sum.
- 1.3 The Council's ownership of Princes Pavement and Grange Road as part of The Grange Shopping Centre has also facilitated the inclusion of part of this ownership within the development proposals to increase density of development and start to implement the wider regeneration strategy for Birkenhead Town Centre.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 Do nothing. This would result in the potential clawback of the Brownfield Land Grant and not bring forward wider regeneration benefits. The Brownfield Housing Land Fund process has been lengthy and protracted, taking 3 years to date. Despite these delays the original spend profile and project completion date of March 2025 remains, so it is imperative to avoid further delay and commence activity to develop and deliver the projects.
- 2.2 Seek to identify an alternative delivery partner via a competitive process that can bring forward suitable proposals within the very restricted timetable linked to grant funding. This would result in delays that are likely to take the Council past the grant drop-dead date. The use of WGC as the Council's re-procured delivery partner will better meet the timetable.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 The former House of Fraser site is situated at the heart of Birkenhead town centre and is a key location in respect of enabling any future redevelopment of the town centre to take place. The former department store has recently been demolished by WGC and it also includes a car park with 86 spaces and a rear service yard. This site is key to enabling the comprehensive regeneration of Birkenhead town centre which is a strategic priority for the Council.

- 3.2 The acquisition of the site, by the Council, in December 2020 increased the Council's holdings and influence over the town centre. The site occupies a prime gateway at the entrance to the emerging central business district of Birkenhead, in close proximity to the retail core (The Grange and Pyramids) now predominantly owned by Wirral Borough Council.
- 3.3 The Council's acquisition of the site enhanced its existing portfolio, giving it the ability to exercise control of the future use and development of the site which in turn could influence the wider regeneration of the town centre area. This was further supplemented in summer 2023 with the Council's acquisition of the wider Grange / Pyramids shopping centre part of which (the southern end of Princes Pavements forms part of the Draft Indicative Site Development Plan).
- 3.4 Accelerated residential development within Birkenhead Town Centre will provide new homes and bring added diversification in the town centre, increasing and enhancing its catchment. This will also contribute to the maturing of the local housing market making later phases of development more viable and support early brownfield residential delivery which is critical to the Council's emerging Local Plan.
- 3.5 The emerging Birkenhead Town Centre and adjacent St Werburgh's Masterplans make provision for the delivery of large numbers of high-quality residential uses in the town centre as part of a right sizing of the historic over provision of retail space in the vicinity as shopping trends have changed. They also set out the need to redefine the key thoroughfare of Grange Road, complimented by opening up new north / south routes to Conway Street / Borough Road as part of a reintroduction of the former grid layout in parts of the town centre to greatly increase aspect and accessibility for occupants and visitors alike.
- 3.6 The Wirral Growth Company Joint Venture Board has approved the draft Indicative Site Development Plan as set out at exempt Appendix 1 to this report. What is left is for the Council, and Muse to approve the draft. In order to be able to proceed with the recommendations within this report (if approved) WGC would:
 - i. Appoint the design team and other consultants to complete design work to RIBA Stage 1;
 - ii. Test projects costs and viability, engage in pre-application meetings with the Council's Planning team;
 - iii. Meet with key stakeholders and the grant providers LCRCA and Homes England to ensure the project meets their business needs for grant funding support and to test the level of that support;
 - iv. Undertake soft market testing of the proposals with funders and developers;
 - v. Update WGC JV Board when workstreams are complete to allow consideration to be given to further investment to commit to Detailed Design and submission of Planning application subject and

submission of Planning application subject to the subsequent approval of the Council.

3.7 The proposed timetable for the project is set out below:

Actions	Timescales	Milestones
Begin RIBA Stage 1 Design		July 2024
Soft Market Testing		July 2024
Review of Soft Market Testing Exercise before potential proceeding with RIBA Stage 2		September 2024
Submit Planning Application		November 2024
Planning committee approval		January 2025
Judicial Review period	6 weeks	Feb-March 2025
Legal Unconditional Date	Upon satisfaction of items above	May 2025
Contractor Mobilisation	4 weeks	June 2025
Start on Site		July 2025
Project Completion	24 months	September 2027

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4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The Council was awarded £2.1m from the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Brownfield Housing Land Grant Fund and this was used to acquire the site.

4.2 The Council's grant funding agreement with LCRCA sets out that the project must deliver sufficient progress on the project by 31st March 2025.

4.3 RIBA 1 costs are being covered by WGC reserves initially and the RIBA 1 fees will not exceed £122,976.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Director of Law and Corporate Services will, complete any legal documentation required to embody the recommendations within this report.
- 5.2 The Partnership Agreement (as Varied) between the Council provides that there are progressive iterations of the Site Development Plan which need to be approved by the WGC Joint Venture Board and then separately Muse and the Council. These are as follows:
- Draft Indicative SDP –
 - Approved Indicative SDP; and
 - Draft Formal SDP which becomes the Adopted SDP once WGC, the Council and Muse approve it.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

- 6.1 The project will be managed by existing staff from within the Place and Investment Team, within the Regeneration and Place Directorate. This resource can be supplemented using external consultancy resources where necessary.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 7.1 A programme Risk Register has been developed as well as individual Risk Registers for each of the individual projects including that of the Grange Road project. These are updated throughout the project lifecycle in order to assist the Council in identifying, controlling and managing risk. These are reported within the Council's Corporate Risk Management structure.
- 7.2 As outlined elsewhere within this report the redevelopment of this site on Grange Road has been subject to delay and taken more than 2 years to date. However, the final date for spend and delivery has not been extended and remains March 2025. To mitigate any risk of not delivering and spending within this timescale it is recommended that the proposals within this report are endorsed.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

- 8.1 The Grange Road project supports and adds value to the previous Birkenhead Town Centre consultation conducted by Wirral Growth Company in 2021.
- 8.2 Stakeholders will shortly (summer 2024) be re consulted on a masterplan for the St Werburgh's area (which includes the Grange Road site) and a new/refreshed masterplan for Birkenhead town centre more broadly following the recent acquisition by the Council of the Grange Road / Pyramids shopping centre and associated assets.

8.3 As the Grange Road project is developed further, proposals will also go through engagement and consultation as part of the statutory planning process.

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 A copy of the EIA for Wirral's Economic Strategy, which has been checked and is still valid, can be viewed at:

<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/equality-impact-assessments/equality-impact-assessments-2021-0#overlay-context=communities-and-neighbourhoods/equality-impact-assessments/equality-impact-assessments-2021>

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The content and recommendations contained within this report are expected to reduce the emissions of greenhouse gases. This will include, as appropriate, energy efficient buildings within new developments; infrastructure improvements to reduce car dominance and create a safer environment for road users and pedestrians, and environmental and climate considerations within the Council's Social Value strategy to be used within the procurement of a delivery partner.

11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS

11.1 Regeneration of Birkenhead is the backbone of the Birkenhead 2040 Framework and emerging Local Plan. In this context this FHSF project is part of a wider regeneration programme to deliver a prosperous, inclusive economy to benefit local residents and communities.

11.2 Community Wealth Building reorganises local economies to be fairer and stops wealth flowing out of communities. The principles of the Brownfield Housing Land Grant to facilitate a diversified and mixed-use town centre, with a wider catchment of people living and working in the area and a major transformation of Birkenhead market to make it more appealing, sustainable and fit for modern market trading conditions will support economic, social and health outcomes, the community and many small and medium enterprises.

11.3 Within the context of the Brownfield Land Grant programme Council land and assets are being used as a base to build community wealth, revitalising the town centre and maximising opportunities for local people. Future procurement exercises will build the wealth of our local communities where we will strive to maximise social value activity through the creation of local

employment/training opportunities and local labour / spend to maximise the Wirral pound.

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APPENDICES

1. Wirral Growth Company indicative Draft Site Development Plan for the former House of Fraser and part of Princes Pavement and Grange Road site, Birkenhead

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

Suite of legal documentation relating to Wirral Growth Company (exempt)
Wirral Growth Company Partnership Business Plan.

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Policy & Resources Committee Acquisition of Former House of Fraser Building – 92 Grange Road, Birkenhead	18 th December 2020
Policy & Resources Committee Birkenhead New Market Development	10 th November 2021

Terms of Reference

Part 3 Section C – Overview and Scheme of Delegations of Authority to Officers

The decision is not reserved to a Committee or Sub-Committee and the Director is satisfied that paragraphs 2(a) to 2(c) apply.