

Extraordinary Council – 19 August 2024

Motions

1. COUNCIL RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION BY MINISTRY OF HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT FOLLOWING THEIR PROPOSED REFORMS TO THE NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK AND OTHER CHANGES TO THE PLANNING SYSTEM.

Proposed by Councillor Jeff Green
Seconded by Councillor Lesley Rennie

On 29 July, Council noted that: ‘Having undertaken the work required to reach this stage of the Local Plan process and to comply with the 2004 Act, Council does not believe that any land designated as Green Belt or Local Green Space in Wirral is required for development.’

At that meeting, Council resolved to instruct the Chief Executive to respond accordingly to any correspondence received including the consultation on changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which was used to prepare our Local Plan in consultation with Group Leaders, and to reassure residents of the Council’s commitment to the Green Belt.

Less than 24 hours later, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government announced proposals to fundamentally change the National Planning Policy Framework and, specifically, the formula used to calculate now-mandatory housing targets.

Council is extremely concerned that the proposed formula, if enacted, would require an increase from 728 dwellings a year, as specified in Wirral’s long-delayed draft Local Plan, to 1,755 dwellings a year. Over the course of a 20-year period Local Plan, this would require Wirral to build 35,100 additional houses and flats, up from 14,560 as agreed by Council on 21 March 2022.

Council believes that such levels of development cannot be delivered on brownfield land alone and is concerned that substantial areas of the Borough’s Green Belt would be required to be released for development if such a massive target were to be delivered.

Council requests the Leader of the Council to write to Wirral’s four Members of Parliament seeking their support for Wirral’s current draft Local Plan and urging them to reject the proposed formula. Council also requests the Leader of the Council shares their responses with all elected Members.

Council instructs the Chief Planning Officer to prepare a response to all 106 questions in the Ministry’s consultation, based on the evidence developed for Wirral’s current draft Local Plan, to be then shared with Group Leaders, prior to submission, by no later than 24 September 2024, and for a copy of that submission to be made available to residents via the Council’s website.

2. RESPONDING TO NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK (NPPF) & STANDARD FORMULA CONSULTATION

Proposed by Councillor Stuart Kelly
Seconded by Councillor Phil Gilchrist

Council notes the statement made to the House of Commons by The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government concerning the proposed revisions to the NPPF and in particular changes to the standard method to calculate local housing need.

Council notes the challenges Government is aiming to respond to including a national housing shortage, high affordability ratios (which on Wirral equate to over 6x the medium salary), and high numbers of people on local waiting lists for housing. However Council believes the proposed standard method of calculation is flawed and has produced national targets which undermine local regeneration priorities.

Council is clear that a well-researched and authoritative response is needed to the consultation announced covering the suggested changes to the National Planning Policy Framework and revised formulae.

Council therefore requests that the Chief Planning Officer produces a response to the consultation taking into account the significant progress that Wirral's draft local plan has made and the important stage that the Council has reached in discussions with the inspectorate on housing delivery and a stepped housing trajectory.

Council recognises the trailblazing significance of the brownfield proposals set out in the draft submission of the Local Plan as published and tested by the submissions made to the enquiry hearings and the full acceptance of the housing numbers set out at the inquiry, and above all, the recognition that there was no need to make inroads into the Green Belt, Urban Green Spaces, and agricultural land.

Council remains of the view that the right balance has been secured and achieved in the draft Local Plan and the aim of securing development on brownfield sites, along with the prospect of the regeneration and renewal that Council is determined to secure for Wirral.
