

# Extraordinary Council – 19 August 2024

## Additional Motions

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### **3. COUNCIL RESPONSE TO THE GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION ON PROPOSED NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK CHANGES**

**Proposed by Councillor Paul Stuart**  
**Seconded by Councillor Angie Davies**

Council notes, with concern, the recent Government announcement regarding the National Planning Policy Framework consultation and the potential implications this could pose to Wirral's greenbelt areas of the proposed increased housebuilding targets for Wirral.

Council recognises the pressing need for new homes and understands the challenges of the UK's housing crisis for all local authorities, including Wirral. However, Council believes that protecting our Greenbelt and its regeneration plans should be a priority, ensuring that any new developments are sustainable and do not harm Wirral's Greenbelt.

Council requests the Council Leader to write to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities, and Local Government and the Minister of State for Housing, Planning, and Building Safety. This letter will form part of the Council's response to the Government's consultation, explaining that Wirral Council remains steadfast in its commitment to the unanimous cross-party support for its emerging Brownfield-only local plan. The Council's emerging local plan proposal encompasses the Government's national housebuilding ambitions – prioritising Brownfield land with a plan led by local leaders and residents.

Whilst recognising the need for more housebuilding nationally, Wirral's Draft Local Plan reaffirms the Council's commitment to protecting the Greenbelt from development by facilitating sustainable housing solutions that do not require housebuilding on Wirral's Greenbelt. It encourages innovative housing solutions, such as modular homes and repurposing vacant buildings, to meet housing demands without compromising the natural environment.

Council urges the Government to stand with communities across the Wirral and support Wirral's Brownfield only Draft Local Plan, which has once-in-a-lifetime regeneration for brownfield areas like Seacombe, Liscard, Birkenhead and New Ferry whilst protecting the Greenbelt for everyone who visits, lives and works in Wirral.

Council also requests the Leader of the Council to share any responses with all elected Members.

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## 4. PROPOSED REFORMS TO THE NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK

**Proposed by Councillor Pat Cleary**  
**Seconded by Councillor Gail Jenkinson**

Council notes the government consultation published on 30 July 2024 on proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework and other changes to the planning system including the proposed changes to the methodology for calculating new housing targets. Indicative figures imply an annual target for Wirral of 1,755 new homes, 1,027 or 141% higher than the corresponding figure in the Council's emerging local plan.

Council agrees that such numbers, if confirmed, threaten to fundamentally change Wirral by:

- undermining the unanimously agreed brownfield only policy for new housing and diverting resources away from the regeneration of Wirral's left bank
- increasing urban sprawl with inevitable implications for carbon emissions and biodiversity loss
- posing a fundamental threat to Wirral's green belt and the special character of many communities across Wirral

Council also notes that the proposed reforms

- imply a preference for brownfield land development but do not indicate additional support for brownfield land reclamation and development to help meet the vast increase in housing numbers
- do not prioritise the existence of over a quarter of a million long term empty properties in England or suggest giving local authorities additional powers to bring such properties back into use
- do not address the carbon implications of increased urban sprawl and how this will impact on binding national targets for net zero emissions

and endorses the recent comments made by Claire Holland, housing spokesperson for the Local Government Association; "*While national government can provide useful guidance, it is local councils and communities who know their areas best, so changes to national planning policy should be suitably flexible to allow authorities to make judgement decisions on managing competing demands for uses in their local areas.*"<sup>1</sup>

Council further notes the letter from the Deputy Prime Minister to all local authority leaders on 30 July 2024 and particularly the comments regarding local plans currently at examination:

*"where there is a significant gap between the plan and the new local housing need figure, we will expect authorities to begin a plan immediately in the new system"*

and the significant implications this has for the future of Wirral's Local Plan.

Council reaffirms its commitment to the Birkenhead 2040 Framework and its ambition to fundamentally change the Left Bank of Wirral so that it becomes a place that is more attractive to investment from the private and public sector and therefore addresses market failure in the provision of new housing which significantly contributes to the stark inequalities that exist in Wirral.

Accordingly, Council instructs the Chief Planning Officer when preparing a response to the Government consultation to explicitly address:

- Wirral's unique position given its potential to deliver large scale brownfield only housing and associated regenerative placemaking
- the negative knock-on effects that releasing green belt land would have on achieving successful regeneration and additional housing supply in East Wirral and the borough's ability to achieve net zero targets
- the current situation regarding empty properties in Wirral and the corresponding potential to meet future housing need in the borough.

Sources:

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/urgent-action-needed-ensure-more-housing-built-meet-growing-demand-lga-response>