

ECONOMY REGENERATION & HOUSING COMMITTEE**Wednesday 12th MARCH 2025**

REPORT TITLE:	ADOPTION OF BIRKENHEAD CENTRAL MASTERPLAN AND NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK, AND ST WERBURGH'S QUARTER MASTERPLAN
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF REGENERATION AND PLACE

REPORT SUMMARY

The Council has been developing its regeneration strategy for Wirral Left Bank for a number of years. The Birkenhead 2040 Framework was endorsed by this Committee as the interim regeneration strategy for Wirral in March 2022. This document sets out that delivery of the Birkenhead 2040 Framework will be supported by more detailed Neighbourhood Frameworks and Masterplans setting out the regeneration objectives and strategies for specific areas. Policy WS6.3 of the emerging Local Plan also requires Masterplans to be approved for specified areas to ensure that development is coordinated at neighbourhood level and comprehensively planned.

Two of these documents are detailed in this report, both of which are recommended for adoption:

1. Birkenhead Central Masterplan and Neighbourhood Development Framework, and;
2. St Werburgh's Quarter (Birkenhead) Masterplan

The adopted Masterplans will, if approved, be a material consideration in the consideration of any planning applications submitted within the masterplan boundary. The Masterplans are a dynamic long-term planning document that offers a vision and theoretical layout to 'guide' future regeneration and growth within a neighbourhood, making the connection between buildings, social settings, and their surrounding environments.

Wirral Working Together – A Council Plan 2023 - 2027 sets out the Council's vision to secure the best possible future for our residents. The Neighbourhood Frameworks and Masterplans supports the delivery of the key themes:

- Early help for children and families
- Promoting independence and healthier lives
- People focussed regeneration
- Protect our environment
- Safe, resilient and engaged communities

This matter affects all wards.

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 within the Borough.

RECOMMENDATION/S

The Economy, Regeneration and Housing Committee is recommended to approve the adoption of the following documents as the Council's approved dynamic long-term planning and regeneration strategy for the relevant areas:

1. Birkenhead Central Masterplan and Neighbourhood Development Framework; and
2. St Werburgh's Quarter (Birkenhead) Masterplan

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 1.1 The proposals within this report are intended to ensure that the Masterplans are duly adopted as the dynamic long-term planning document that offers a vision and potential layout to 'guide' future regeneration and growth within each of the two neighbourhoods and to be used as material considerations in the determination of planning applications where appropriate.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 The Masterplans were developed to better inform the regeneration delivery strategy for the Wirral Left Bank and support the Local Plan and the Council's brownfield only housing strategy. The only other option would be to not take the Masterplans through an approval process, but this would undermine the importance of these documents in outlining the Council's regeneration strategy and would not meet the requirements of the Local Plan.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Context

- 3.1 Masterplan areas are defined in the emerging Local Plan in policy WS6 Criteria D-I. Masterplan areas are areas where significant change is expected and a co-ordinated and comprehensive approach to development is required. Neighbourhood Frameworks complement the Masterplans and set out the regeneration objectives and potential housing delivery within each area. Masterplans and neighbourhood frameworks are planning documents and should be in place before development in the area can be approved. The masterplans are essential to underpinning the Council's brownfield first housing strategy. They set out a clear approach to the regeneration strategy for the Left Bank and underpin the approach to housing delivery in the area.
- 3.2 The work on masterplans and neighbourhood frameworks has helped support and inform the evidence base for the Local Plan. The documents specifically support the housing numbers that have been attributed to the "other developable areas" or non-allocated sites in regeneration areas in the Local Plan. It should be noted that masterplans set out a long-term vision of how development could be delivered within these areas. Flexibility has been built into each masterplan to help respond to social, economic and/or environmental changes over time.
- 3.3 The principal objective of the masterplans is to provide a framework that will facilitate the regeneration of Birkenhead town centre and deliver the vision. The documents contain advice and guidance on how the area can be developed comprehensively, in a phased and coordinated way, and how the necessary infrastructure can be provided on a phased basis.
- 3.4 The Birkenhead Central Masterplan covers Grange Road Primary Shopping area and 2 masterplan areas of Birkenhead Commercial Mixed Use Masterplan area and Charing Cross Quarter Masterplan Area. All are within Birkenhead Central

Regeneration area and are either the heart of the primary shopping area, or its periphery and areas of influence. The St Werburgh's Masterplan lies to the east of Central Birkenhead and has been identified in the Local plan as an area of change. Details of both masterplans are set out below.

Birkenhead Central Masterplan and Neighbourhood Framework

- 3.5 The Birkenhead Central Masterplan and Neighbourhood Framework has been prepared in accordance with Policy RA4 - Central Birkenhead Regeneration Area and other relevant policies of the Wirral Local Plan Submission Draft (May 2022) and specific areas come under:
- Grange Road Primary Shopping Area (WS11.3-TC-SA2.1)
 - Birkenhead Commercial District Mixed Use Quarter (MPA-RA4.1)
 - Charing Cross Quarter (MPA-RA4.2)
- 3.6 The Masterplan vision aims to re-establish Birkenhead town centre as the capital of Wirral and a mixed use, vibrant and diverse place to be proud of, leveraging its rich heritage and excellent public transport that becomes the top destination for Wirral residents to live, shop, relax, dine, work, and play. This inclusive, aspirational neighbourhood will enhance health, wellbeing, and economic sustainability for all.
- 3.7 The vision for Birkenhead town centre includes:
- A new, highly visible town centre leisure offer, drawing people into the heart of the town;
 - A concentrated and strong retail/leisure mix where convenience, fashion and lifestyle retail is well catered for, family focussed chain and independent cafes and restaurants are supported, along with the introduction of a revitalised market;
 - A place which has a strong sense of identity and whose offer is complementary to, rather than competing with, Liverpool, Cheshire Oaks or Chester;
 - A place that is safe with active street frontages and permeability for pedestrians to prioritise streets and squares;
 - New public realm for a place that promotes walking and cycling, and access to employment and open green space. The introduction of a new Health and Well-Being Hub;
 - New homes to meet the needs of a range of people;
 - Opportunities to generate new and adaptive creative workspace and employment opportunities;
 - A place which capitalises on the rich tapestry of local heritage assets and the re-use of historic buildings for creative purposes;
 - Transforming Borough Road into a place that is active and green, bring new biodiversity and wellbeing benefits and removing the feeling of it being a barrier to access the retail area.
- 3.8 The Masterplan and Neighbourhood Framework sets out a number of development principles that will help to achieve this vision including:
- Consolidating the retail core to a tighter footprint which connects from the bus station to Borough Road, Charing Cross to Argyle Street;
 - Enhancing, improving the quality of the high street to Grange Road including new active retail frontage;

- Creating a more permeable town centre with views into the town from key external streets such as Conway Street and Borough Road;
- Providing a mix of new town centre homes and two key leisure assets;
- New enhanced and connected public realm, and highways adaptations to improve walking and cycling; and
- Re-development potential to create a new residential neighbourhood that integrates with existing housing and connects to local rail and bus stations.

3.9 Policy RA4 notes that the Central Birkenhead Regeneration Area will be developed as a new commercial office quarter with new residential led mixed use neighbourhoods which will provide approximately 1450 new dwellings. The following sites are allocated for residential use within the Central Birkenhead Regeneration Area to support the delivery of the development and regeneration strategy set out in Policy WS 1.

- Site at Hemingworth Street, Birkenhead – 1.38 hectares
- Site south of Conway Park Station, Birkenhead – 1.24 hectares
- Sites north of Conway Park Station, Birkenhead – 1.43 hectares
- Other developable areas.

3.10 The following documents are appended to this report:

- Appendix 1 Birkenhead Central Masterplan and Neighbourhood Framework
- Appendix 2 Birkenhead Central Masterplan (executive summary)
- Appendix 3 Birkenhead Central Masterplan Consultation Report by Placed
- Appendix 4 Birkenhead Central Masterplan 'Have your Say' Consultation Report
- Appendix 5 Combined Birkenhead Central and St Werburgh's Quarter Masterplan Consultation Submissions Analysis Report

St Werburgh's Quarter Masterplan

3.11 The St Werburgh's area of Birkenhead is covered within a separate masterplan to that of Birkenhead Central. The St Werburgh's Masterplan sets a context for a new creative independent quarter with living, retail and leisure uses bridging the change in context from the Town Centre to Argyle Street leading onto Hamilton Square and the waterfront. It provides a key role in increasing leisure and residential opportunities at the east end of Grange Road and connecting the town centre to a wider movement circuit around periphery of the central area.

3.12 The St Werburgh's Masterplan has a direct influence on the Birkenhead Central Masterplan, with key principals of the St Werburgh's Masterplan also now contained within the sister masterplan of Birkenhead Central. The St Werburgh's Masterplan was developed in advance of the Birkenhead Central Masterplan. Following an initial consultation where people were asked to tell the Council about their views on the opportunity for a dramatic transformation of the town centre and the adjoining St Werburgh's area, the feedback was used to create a vision for Birkenhead and a draft Masterplan for St Werburgh's was developed. The later acquisition of the Pyramids and Grange shopping centre estate by the Council meant a review of the St Werburgh's document was required incorporating the new building ownership and the Council's aspiration for redevelopment of the wider town centre. As a result, the St Werburgh's Masterplan has been subject to further consultation. Comments received as a result of the consultations have been reflected in the updated

masterplan. Further details about the two previous consultations can be found in section 8 of this report.

- 3.13 The Masterplan has been prepared in accordance with Policy RA5 Hind Street and St Werburgh's Regeneration Area and other relevant policies of the Wirral Local Plan Submission Draft (May 2022). Policy RA5 notes that a new gateway residential mixed-use quarter will be developed at St Werburgh's, to the north of Borough Road and Borough Road East.
- 3.14 The vision for St Werburgh's Masterplan area is to establish a distinctive and creative space in Birkenhead, making it a destination in its own right as a unique place to live, work, shop and enjoy leisure time. This area will serve as a notable arrival point to the town while also linking to Argyle Street and the distinctive Hamilton Square Conservation Area. The vision includes:
- A new creative, mixed-use regeneration area planned at a key arrival point from Birkenhead Central Station, flowing from and extending to Argyle Street;
 - A unique place that serves as both a gateway to the town's retail core and a hub where independent businesses and creative industries combine, supported by new residential units;
 - A newly reinstated market, fully integrated into St Werburgh's area;
 - A place with strong wider visual connections to Birkenhead & the surrounding areas, providing vistas to and from Liverpool;
 - A place that celebrates Birkenhead's heritage and history while balancing these with opportunities for new landmark developments to serve as catalysts for change;
 - A place that acknowledges the importance of Birkenhead Priory and improves the ability for pedestrians and cyclists to connect from the retail core to the waterfront; and
 - Capitalise on the location within the growing active travel networks locally and providing high quality, safe and convenient pedestrian and cycling links.
- 3.15 The Masterplan sets out a number of development principles that will help to achieve this vision including:
- Densifying the town centre with a mixed-use environment and new arrival space from the bus station which also serves as a new market square to the new market;
 - Creating a more permeable town centre with views into the town from key external streets such as Conway Street, Borough Road and Argyle Street;
 - Respond to the listed building context around St Werburgh's, Conway Street and Argyle Street;
 - Capitalising upon key view corridor considerations with framing of view to Birkenhead Priory;
 - Introducing active ground floor uses which activates the new external streets and spaces;
 - Introducing a mix of new town centre homes;
 - New enhanced public realm with a family focus with enlarged St Werburgh's square and a new Central Square, an arrival space connecting Birkenhead Central Station with new public realm, and active and green edge to the town centre; and

- Appropriate arrangements for a new highway network to accommodate changes arising from the removal of the Borough Road (A5227).

The following documents are appended to this report:

Appendix 6 St Werburgh's Quarter Masterplan

Appendix 7 St Werburgh's Quarter Masterplan (executive summary)

Appendix 8 St Werburgh's Quarter Masterplan Consultation Report by Placed

Appendix 9 St Werburgh's Quarter Masterplan 'Have your Say' Consultation Report

Two plans, one place

- 3.16 The Birkenhead Central and the St Werburgh's Masterplans provide strategic guidance and a holistic approach to future development in order to maximise the environmental, economic and social potential across the town centre. Whilst they have been prepared as separate documents, if approved, they will be utilised as one plan to coordinate delivery across the area.
- 3.17 Development is already underway in both masterplan area where funding has been secured. This includes the acquisition and demolition of the former House of Fraser, public realm works at Grange Road and Conway Street and the installation of a new primary substation to provide for the future power needs of the town centre.
- 3.18 On 13 September 2023, Policy and Resources Committee resolved to accept an invitation to participate in the DLUHC Simplification Pilot. This pilot streamlines the delivery of 3 growth funds overseen by it, namely the Town Deal, the Future High Streets Fund (FHSF) and the Council's Levelling Up Round 1 (LUF1) allocation which currently deliver various regeneration programmes in Wirral up to a value of £72m. The Birkenhead Central and St Werburgh's Masterplans are supported by this allocation to the sum of £28m. Additional funding has been secured for the adjacent areas including Hind Street enabling works and removal of flyovers supporting connectivity to the masterplan areas. The masterplans will be used to support funding applications to government funding streams. However, they will also act as a guide for current and future developers and investors.
- 3.19 The recommendation is to adopt the Birkenhead Central Masterplan and Neighbourhood Framework and the St Werburgh's Quarter Masterplan.

Other Masterplans

- 3.20 At its meeting of 16 July 2024 this Committee resolved that:
1. The Cleveland Street Neighbourhood Masterplan be adopted as the Council's approved planning strategy for the area;
 2. The Northside Neighbourhood Framework be approved as the Council's approved regeneration strategy for the area;
 3. The Scott's Quay Neighbourhood Framework be withdrawn and the Director of Regeneration and Place be authorised to continue to work with Stakeholders to develop a regeneration strategy for the area;

4. The Dock Branch Neighbourhood Masterplan be adopted as the Council's approved planning strategy for the area; and
5. The New Brighton Marine Promenade Masterplan be adopted as the Council's approved planning strategy for the area.

In addition, at its meeting of 4 December 2024 this Committee resolved that the Woodside and Wallasey Town Hall Quarter Masterplans be adopted as the Council's approved planning strategy for those areas.

3.21 The Local Plan identifies a requirement for the further following masterplans:

- West Kirby – Consultation on a draft West Kirby Concourse Masterplan is scheduled for Winter 2024/25, and a report is expected to be brought to this during the first half of 2025. It should be noted that this Masterplan does not include a requirement for housing in the Local Plan.
- Wirral Waters – Bidston Dock – to provide for a mixed-use development scheme.

Birkenhead 2040 Framework

3.22 The Birkenhead 2040 Framework is a 20-year strategy that defines the vision and ambition for the transformational regeneration of Birkenhead. The document has been adopted by the Council as its Interim Regeneration Strategy for Birkenhead and provides a comprehensive regeneration framework for Birkenhead as a low carbon, sustainable waterfront garden 'city'. Eight of the eleven Regeneration Areas lie within the Birkenhead 2040 area. Each of the Regeneration Areas has a specific policy approach included within Part 4 of the Local Plan. Following the development of the masterplans and neighbourhood frameworks, work will commence to update the Birkenhead 2040 Framework to reflect any changes.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no further costs associated with the development of these documents post adoption. The delivery of the proposals within the masterplans will require public investment to address viability issues and other constraints. Officers will continue to work closely with funding bodies, primarily Homes England and the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, to secure the funding required to deliver.
- 4.2 Costs to be incurred when delivering masterplan activity will be subject to the Council's decision-making process and approval will be sought, and funding confirmed, prior to expenditure occurrence.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The purpose behind the seeking of Members' approval to the Masterplans is to provide weight to the documents as points of reference in programme planning for the various regeneration projects within their scope. The documents will provide strong supporting evidence for future grant applications to the government and public bodies. Members' endorsement will give the documents weight to support the emerging Local Plan.

5.2 The Masterplans will be a material consideration in the determination of planning applications. It will be expected that any future planning applications within this area accord both with the guidance and strategies contained within this document, with National Planning Policy, and the emerging Local Plan.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

6.1 There are no significant impacts in terms of staffing, ICT or assets in relation to the adoption of the masterplan documents. Adoption of the masterplan documents does not affect directly employed staff. Resourcing linked to the delivery of the Masterplans is referenced in Section 7.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

7.1 The process of approving Masterplans does not in itself present any significant risks. However, in relation to their subsequent delivery the following key risks have been identified:

- Resourcing delivery – the staff resource required to deliver the proposals set out within the masterplans is significant. This is mitigated by the additional resources for regeneration delivery secured at Policy & Resources Committee of 20th March 2024; and
- Securing external funding to deliver – the funding required to deliver the proposals set out within the masterplans is significant. The Council has an excellent track record in securing external funding and has robust programme and project management arrangements in place to support the development of the necessary business cases and funding applications.

7.2 Key regeneration risks are detailed within the Directorate Risk Register and are regularly reviewed at the Regeneration & Place Departmental Management Team.

7.3 The Masterplans do not provide a blueprint for exact development but are long-term planning documents that offer a vision and theoretical layout to 'guide' future regeneration and growth. There is potential for reputational risk should delivery not be precisely as set out in the masterplans. However, this can be managed through effective ongoing communications. As sites come forward for development the Council will undertake further consultation.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

8.1 In developing the masterplans the Council has sought to engage as fully as possible with residents and key stakeholders. Consultation was undertaken in phases to ensure that people's feedback was integrated into the full process of producing the masterplans, enabling collective co-production, and ensuring community need is factored in.

8.2 Three phases of consultation were undertaken for the St Werburgh's masterplan. Phase 1, between 12 December 2022 to 18 January 2023, gathered views on the opportunity for a dramatic transformation, using the feedback to create a vision and draft masterplan. Phase 2, between 6 September to 1 November 2023, asked more detailed questions about the evolving plans for the future of this area. After Phase 2,

the acquisition of the Pyramids and Grange shopping centre estate by the Council meant a review of the St Werburgh's document was required and a new draft masterplan was developed in line with new building ownership and the Council's aspiration for redevelopment of the wider town centre. In Phase 3, between 4 October and 29 November 2024, feedback was gathered on the final draft masterplan.

- 8.3 Two phases of consultation were undertaken for the Birkenhead Town Centre masterplan. Phase 1, between 12 December 2022 to 18 January 2023 gathered feedback to create a vision and draft masterplan. In Phase 2, between 4 October and 29 November 2024, feedback was gathered on the final draft masterplan.
- 8.4 In the final phase of each consultation respondents were asked a series of questions and given the opportunity to record their opinions through conversation or free-text input online. Information from this final phase has been collated and analysed against the masterplans. The analysis has shown key themes and priorities, offering direction for further detailed workstreams as the programme of regeneration progresses. The breadth and flexibility of the masterplan accommodates the comments and suggestions garnered from the consultation.
- 8.5 Different methods of engagement were used to ensure the process is inclusive and accessible. This was undertaken online via the Have Your Say platform and through in-person drop-in sessions, presentations and walking tours carried out by Placed at BirkenEd's Place in Birkenhead (see appendices 3, 4, 8 and 9 for full reports on these consultations).
- 8.6 The Council also consulted directly with key stakeholders in the area and those organisations engaged in the local plan process (see appendix 5 for a summary of these written responses).
- 8.7 The Wirral Regeneration Partnership, the board who oversee delivery of regeneration programme, have had oversight of the masterplans as they have developed, as part of the context for the business plan proposed for the next 5 years which they are considering.
- 8.8 It is important to note that the public consultation is not representative of the overall population but provides information the opinion of those residents who participated. The public consultations carried out by Placed and via the Have Your Say platform engaged with 317 people in-person and 98 people online. Respondents came from a diverse cross-section of local communities, including residents, council officers, market traders, and young people (see appendices 5 for a summary of consultation responses).
- 8.9 The Council has reviewed and considered all responses received throughout the process of developing the masterplans. Aside from minor drafting changes no significant changes have been made to the draft masterplans as a result of the consultation. The masterplans as drafted are considered flexible enough to accommodate appropriate future changes and further consultation will be undertaken as necessary as detailed proposals are brought forward.

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 comprehensive Equality Impact Assessment was undertaken in relation to the Local Plan, of which the Masterplans form part, which can be viewed at: <https://www.wirral.gov.uk/files/wirral-local-plan-eia-pre-submission.pdf/download?inline>. This EIA has been reviewed and remains valid for this report.

10.0 ENVIRONMENT, BIODIVERSITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The Masterplans are premised on the concept of creating low carbon neighbourhoods with energy efficient homes and densities that encourage walking, cycling and the use of public transport rather than the car. Improved landscaping and public spaces will create the opportunity for biodiversity net gain.

11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 Delivery of the Masterplans will generate a significant number of jobs in the construction process itself, and the new neighbourhoods will provide opportunities for new jobs and social interaction.

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APPENDICES

Please note that due to the number and size of the appendices for this report, they have been published separately as a supplement to the main agenda pack:

Appendix 1	Birkenhead Central Masterplan (full document)
Appendix 2	Birkenhead Central Masterplan (executive summary)
Appendix 3	Birkenhead Central Masterplan Consultation Report by Placed
Appendix 4	Birkenhead Central Masterplan 'Have your Say' Consultation Report
Appendix 5	Combined Birkenhead Central and St Werburgh's Quarter Masterplan Consultation Submissions Analysis Report
Appendix 6	St Werburgh's Quarter Masterplan (full report)
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BACKGROUND PAPERS

Wirral Working Together – A Council Plan for 2023-2027

Birkenhead 2040 Framework

Wirral Local Plan 2021 – 2017 Submission Draft May 2022

TERMS OF REFERENCE

This report is being considered by the Economy, Regeneration & Housing Committee in accordance with 4.2 (g) of its Terms of Reference, overseeing the progress of major projects (including major building, infrastructure or other projects involving the erection or significant alteration of major permanent structures or landmarks) undertaken by the Council directly or as enabler, funder or joint enterprise partner, including but not limited to the Wirral Growth Company LLP.

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
ECONOMY REGENERATION AND HOUSING COMMITTEE: NEIGHBOURHOOD FRAMEWORKS & MASTERPLANS APPROVAL PROCESS	6 th December 2023
POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE: REGENERATION DELIVERY RESOURCING	20 th March 2024
ECONOMY REGENERATION AND HOUSING COMMITTEE: ADOPTION OF NEIGHBOURHOOD FRAMEWORKS & MASTERPLANS (CLEVELAND STREET NEIGHBOURHOOD, NORTHSIDE, DOCK BRANCH NEIGHBOURHOOD, NEW BRIGHTON MARINE PROMENADE)	16 th July 2024
ECONOMY REGENERATION AND HOUSING COMMITTEE: ADOPTION OF MASTERPLANS (WOODSIDE AND WALLASEY TOWN HALL QUARTER)	4 th December 2024