

WIRRAL COUNCIL

CABINET

1ST SEPTEMBER 2011

SUBJECT:	LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK FOR WIRRAL - LOCAL GEOLOGICAL SITES UPDATE
WARD/S AFFECTED:	BEBINGTON BIDSTON & ST. JAMES BROMBOROUGH GREASBY, FRANKBY & IRBY HOYLAKE & MEOLS NEW BRIGHTON PENSBY & THINGWALL WEST KIRBY & THURSTASTON
REPORT OF:	INTERIM DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE SERVICES
RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	COUNCILLOR PHIL DAVIES
KEY DECISION?	NO

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise Cabinet of the proposed changes to the schedule of Sites of Local Importance for Earth Science identified since the adoption of the Wirral Unitary Development Plan in 2000. It recommends that Cabinet recommends to Council that it formally adopts the revised schedule of Local Geological Sites as a material consideration for use by Planning Committee in the determination of individual planning applications.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION/S

2.1 That Cabinet recommends to Council that the revised schedule of Local Geological Sites, attached to this report, is be adopted as a material consideration for use by Planning Committee in the determination of individual planning applications and is used to form part of the evidence base for the emerging Local Development Framework for Wirral.

3.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

3.1 The Wirral Unitary Development Plan (UDP) identifies a list of Sites of Local Importance for Earth Science in Proposal NC11. This list was agreed by the Cheshire RIGS (Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological

Sites) Group following a review of an initial list of Sites of Local Geological Importance published by Merseyside County Council in 1983. Since the adoption of the UDP in 2000 the Cheshire RIGS Group has continued to review Wirral's geological and geomorphological sites.

- 3.2 The role of the Cheshire RIGS Group, in reviewing earth science sites, is similar to that of the Wirral Local Wildlife Sites Partnership in reviewing Sites of Biological Importance. Cabinet considered a report on the update of Sites of Biological Importance on the 13th January 2011 (Minute 282) and Council resolved that a revised schedule of Sites of Biological Importance be adopted as a material consideration for use by Planning Committee in the determination of planning applications on the 14th February 2011 (Minute 82).
- 3.3 This report identifies the proposed changes put forward by the Cheshire RIGS Group and sets out a revised schedule of Local Geological Sites for formal adoption by Council. The revised schedule of sites will then become a material consideration for use by Planning Committee in the determination of planning applications and will form part of the evidence base for the emerging Local Development Framework (LDF) for Wirral which will replace the UDP.

4.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

- 4.1 In most areas of the country, local authorities, working with other local partners, have set up systems of locally valued non-statutory sites. There are in the region of 35,000 Local Sites across the country that together contribute significantly to delivering both UK and Local Biodiversity and Geodiversity Action Plan targets and complement nationally and internationally designated geological and wildlife sites. In many areas local Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites (RIGS) Groups have been established to bring together local interest and expertise to help identify valuable local sites. These are typically exposed areas of rock in road cuttings and elsewhere, former quarries and similar locations where there is an opportunity to study the geology of the local area.
- 4.2 National policy is set out in Planning Policy Statement 9: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation. It states that Local Sites have a fundamental role to play in meeting overall national targets; contributing to the quality of life and the well-being of the community; supporting research and education; and requires criteria-based policies to be included in local development documents against which proposals for any development on, or affecting, such sites will be judged. Development Plan policies and planning decisions should be based upon up-to-date information about the environmental characteristics of their areas.

DEFRA Guidance

- 4.3 In 2006 the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) published Local Sites – Guidance on their Identification, Selection and Management, which aimed to promote a transparent and consistent approach to the operation of local sites systems for biodiversity and geological

conservation. A key recommendation in the guidance was the establishment of local partnerships to manage local sites systems.

- 4.4 Cabinet considered a report on the implications of the DEFRA guidance on the 12th December 2007 (Minute 398). This report focussed on the identification, selection and management of local wildlife sites and endorsed the establishment of the Wirral Local Wildlife Sites Partnership. The report did however acknowledge that the process for identifying and assessing geological and geomorphological sites in Wirral, through the Cheshire RIGS Group, appeared well placed to meet the requirement of the DEFRA guidance.
- 4.5 The Guidance also highlights the wide range of different terms used to describe sites of local importance for biodiversity and geological conservation and recommends the use of the generic term “Local Sites”. These can be subdivided to distinguish between “Local Biological Sites” and Local Geological Sites”.

Wirral Sites of Local Importance for Earth Science

- 4.6 A list of Sites of Geological Importance for Merseyside was originally produced in 1983 by the Keeper of Geology at Merseyside County Museum, in consultation with local geological societies, for inclusion in the Merseyside Structure Plan. The Wirral & Cheshire RIGS Group, co-ordinated by the Cheshire Wildlife Trust, reviewed these sites in accordance with national guidelines for the identification of Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological sites (RIGS) issued by English Nature (now Natural England). This led to the formal designation of 12 Sites of Local Importance for Earth Science under Proposal NC11 – Sites of Local Importance for Earth Science of the Wirral Unitary Development Plan (UDP), which was adopted in February 2000. The associated reasoned justification states that “sites not currently identified under the Proposal NC11 list, but which can be shown to meet the criteria specified, will also be subject to protection under Policy NC10”. Policy NC10 – The Protection of Sites of Importance for Earth Science, sets out the Council’s approach to the protection of sites which can be demonstrated to have special local value for earth science conservation.

Review of Sites

Cheshire RIGS Group

- 4.7 In 2002 the Cheshire Wildlife Trust withdrew from the co-ordination of the Wirral & Cheshire RIGS Group and a new partnership, known as Cheshire RIGS Group, was convened. This group has continued to review sites of geological and geomorphological importance in Wirral. The sites are selected on a local basis according to the following nationally agreed criteria for the selection of Regionally Important Geological Geomorphological Site (RIGS) using the standardised recording, assessing, designation and notification procedures produced by The Association of UKRIGS – (the umbrella body for UK RIGS groups):

- The value of a site for educational purposes in life-long learning
- The value of a site for study by both amateur and professional earth scientists
- The historical value of a site in terms of important advances in earth science knowledge, events or human exploitation
- The aesthetic value of a site in the landscape, particularly in relation to promoting public awareness and appreciation of earth sciences.

4.8 The local sites schedule is intended to be a comprehensive rather than representative list, including all sites meeting the selection criteria. Since the adoption of the Wirral UDP, the Cheshire RIGS Group has agreed a number of proposed changes to the original schedule of sites, including the identification of additional sites, the modification of site boundaries and the de-selection of two of the sites. Given the requirement for development plans and planning decisions to be based on up-to-date information, it is proposed that a definitive schedule of Local Geological Sites be produced, incorporating all of the following changes. The numbering of new sites follows on from the original schedule with the deleted site number not being reassigned to avoid confusion.

New Local Geological Sites

4.9 It is proposed that the following 4 sites should be added to the schedule of Local Geological Sites. These sites have been surveyed by a qualified geologist on behalf of Cheshire RIGS Group and found to meet the criteria for selection:

- New Site No. 14 - Boundary Road, Bidston
- New Site No. 15 - Lower Flaybrick Road, Bidston
- New Site No. 16 - Arrowe Brook, Woodchurch
- New Site No. 17 - Flaybrick Cemetery, Bidston

De-selection/ Deletion of Sites

4.10 It is proposed that two sites at Dee Cliffs, Caldy (UDP Site No. 9) and at The Beacons, Heswall (UDP Site No. 12) be removed from the schedule of sites as they no longer meet the RIGS selection criteria. Reassessment of the Dee Cliffs site has found that the majority of the glacial deposits in the cliffs are no longer visible, having been obscured by coastal defences and the outcrop no longer contains any geological interest. Reassessment of The Beacons site has found that there is poor exposure and that the outcrop no longer contains any geological interest.

Modified Boundaries

4.11 It is proposed that a number of alterations be made to the boundary of the Caldy Hill site (UDP Site No. 7). An additional small area of geological interest has been identified between All Saints Church and Caldy Road. Despite this being physically separate from the existing site, it is considered part of the Caldy Hill Local Geological Site. The original boundary has also been

amended to include the remaining area of the National Trust property at Caldby Hill which was previously not shown on the UDP Proposals Map.

- 4.12 The original UDP schedule includes Thurstaston Hill and Telegraph Road Cutting as a single site (No. 8). It is proposed that this site be split into two separate Local Geological Sites - Thurstaston Common Local Geological Site (New Site No. 8) and Telegraph Road Cutting Local Geological Site (New Site No. 13). It is also proposed that the boundary of the Thurstaston Common site be redefined to remove areas that have no geological interest.
- 4.13 It is proposed that the boundary of the Bidston Hill site (UDP Site No. 11) is amended to remove a small area of the original site that has no geological interest.
- 4.14 Site plans for the proposed new Local Geological Sites and the modified site boundaries are attached as an Appendix to this report.

Conclusion

- 4.15 Local Geological Sites provide protection for areas which can be demonstrated to have local importance for geological interest. Local Geological Sites schedules are intended to be comprehensive rather than representative and all areas which meet the selection criteria for designation should be included. Wirral's local sites, known as Sites of Local Importance for Earth Science, were formally designated in the Wirral Unitary Development Plan (UDP) adopted in 2000. The UDP states that sites not identified in the document, but which are found to meet the criteria for selection should be afforded the same level of protection.
- 4.16 This report identifies a series of proposed amendments to the schedule of sites included in the Wirral UDP. These amendments have been agreed by the Cheshire RIGS Group and are based on the most up-to-date specialist site survey information.
- 4.17 The formal approval of the revised schedule of Local Geological Sites, as they will now be known, as a material consideration for use by Planning Committee will ensure planning decisions are based upon the most up-to-date information on local geological/ geomorphological value.
- 4.18 The revised schedule of Local Geological Sites is attached as an Appendix to this report.

5.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 5.1 Failure to formally agree the proposed changes to the schedule of Local Geological Sites, as recommended by the Cheshire RIGS Group, would potentially leave important local sites unprotected through the planning system.

6.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 6.1 None.

7.0 CONSULTATION

- 7.1 The current schedule of Sites of Local Importance for Earth Science was subject to full public consultation through the UDP process. The proposed amendments to the schedule, with the exception of Dee Cliffs, Lower Flaybrick, Arrowe Brook and Flaybrick Cemetery, have also been subject to formal public consultation during the preparation of the First Deposit Draft Alteration to the UDP in 2004. Two responses were received, both objecting to the proposed deletion of The Beacons, Heswall but the review process was abandoned before the Alterations could be adopted.
- 7.2 The proposed new sites at Lower Flaybrick, Arrowe Brook and Flaybrick Cemetery are all in Council ownership. The Parks and Countryside Service, who manage these sites, have been consulted and approve of their designation.

8.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

- 8.1 The Cheshire RIGS Group is a local interest group open to all and has been pivotal in identifying the proposed changes in this report.

9.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS

- 9.1 There are no resource implications arising directly from this report.

10.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The revised schedule of sites will become a material consideration for use by Planning Committee in the determination of planning applications and will form part of the evidence base for the emerging Local Development Framework (LDF) for Wirral which will replace the UDP.

11.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 There are no equalities implications arising directly from this report.
- 11.2 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)
(a) Is an EIA required? No

12.0 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 There are no carbon reduction implications arising directly from this report.

13.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1 Planning Policy Statement 9 Biodiversity and Geological Conservation states that development plan policies and planning decisions should be based upon up-to-date information about the environmental characteristics of their areas.
- 13.2 The Local Geological Site designations overlay rather than override or replace the existing designations and allocations shown on the Unitary Development Plan Proposals Map – a site can, for example, be designated as both Green Belt and as a Local Geological Site. The tables below identify the

UDP designations which will sit alongside the Local Geological Site designation.

- 13.3 The new sites proposed for inclusion in the Local Geological Sites schedule, listed in paragraph 4.9 above, are designated in the UDP as follows:

No.	Site Name	UDP Designation/Allocation
14	Boundary Road, Bidston	Urban Greenspace
15	Lower Flaybrick Road, Bidston	Primarily Residential Area
16	Arrowe Brook, Woodchurch	Site of Biological Importance (Site No. 36) Countryside Recreation Site
17	Flaybrick Cemetery, Bidston	Urban Greenspace Conservation Area

- 13.4 The sites proposed for deletion from the Local Geological Sites schedule, listed in paragraph 4.10 above, are designated in the UDP as follows:

No.	Site Name	UDP Designation/Allocation
9	Dee Cliffs, Caldy	Green Belt Site of International Importance for Nature Conservation (Site No. 1) Site of National Importance for Nature Conservation (Site No. 1) Area of Special Landscape Value
12	The Beacons, Heswall	Urban Greenspace Site of Biological Importance (Site No. 21)

- 13.5 The sites where boundary alterations are proposed, as listed in paragraphs 4.11 – 4.13 above, are designated in the UDP as follows:

No.	Site Name	UDP Designation/Allocation
7	Caldy Hill	Urban Greenspace Site of Biological Importance (Site Nos. 3 & 4) Area of Special Landscape Value Density and Design Guidelines (part) Conservation Area (part) Primarily Residential Area (small part)
8	Thurstaston Common	Green Belt Site of National Importance for Nature Conservation (Site No. 8) Area of Special Landscape Value
11	Bidston Hill	Urban Greenspace Area of Special Landscape Value Site of Biological Importance (Site No. 57) Conservation Area (small part)
13	Telegraph Road Cutting	Green Belt

	Area of Special Landscape Value
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13.6 As can be seen from the tables above, the overwhelming majority of sites are already subject to designations which place significant restrictions on development.

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APPENDICES

Site Plans – Wirral Local Geological Sites
 Revised Schedule of Wirral Local Geological Sites 2011

REFERENCE MATERIAL

Local Development Framework for Wirral – Sites of Biological Importance Update, (Cabinet Report 13th January 2011) can be viewed at www.wir06metrognome.admin.ad.wirral.gov.uk/mgConvert2PDF.aspx?ID=17200

Planning Policy Statement 9: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation, (OPDM 2005) can be viewed at www.communities.gov.uk/documents/planningandbuilding/pdf/147408.pdf

Local Sites – Guidance on their Identification, Selection and Management, (DEFRA 2006) can be viewed at www.archive.defra.gov.uk/rural/documents/protected/localsites.pdf

Local Wildlife Sites – Implications of New DEFRA Guidance, (Cabinet Report 12th December 2007) can be viewed at www.democracy.wirral.gov.uk/CeListDocuments.aspx?MID=1115&RD=Agenda&DF=12q%2f12%2f2007&A=1&R=0#10

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
None	