

# Sleepwalking...what is your legacy for the Wirral?

By Clare Rainsford

I'm sorry, yes, this is a piece about The Wirral's Local Plan... but before you turn away in disdain, please bear with me.

This is a big deal. This Plan is forever – and it will affect us all...

I am a mother with no track record of militancy. I was quite frankly shocked when I attended one of the Local Plan consultation events. Not because of The Council's Local Plan proposals (I was expecting these).

It was the attendees that surprised me! I saw mainly retirees (good for them), but where were the Mums and Dads that I see at school? Where was the community that I live in, the people that I say hello to when shopping, or going for an evening drink, etc.?

I know people are busy. I nearly missed this opportunity to make a difference. I don't want you to miss this too!

## What do you want your legacy to be?

My concern is that if we are not careful we as 'The Wirral Community' could be sleepwalking into one of the most historic legacy changes for The Wirral. The Local Plan will inherently affect all of us in some form: education, healthcare, employment, leisure, transportation, environment and pollution... Plus the loss of The Wirral's unique character that makes it so special for everyone.

Whether you oppose or agree, or you haven't until now thought about the implications of the Local Plan, I implore you, please just make sure that your voice is heard!

The Council have to formally consider every person's comments. We, after all, as Wirral 'citizens' should be calling the shots and shaping The Wirral for ourselves and our families' futures.

## Where are we now?

Central Government has applied pressure to Wirral Council to produce their Local Plan. This Local Plan must identify how The Wirral will accommodate new housing and employment targets. The housing targets have been set by central Government using a standard formula which has been applied across the UK.

## Number of houses needed?

There is much debate about whether the level of housing units demanded by central Government is appropriate to The Wirral. Currently these figures are being disputed by The Council with Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG).

To meet these targets our Council has identified a large proportion of Green Belt land across The Wirral as areas for potential development. The rationale being that they do not believe that there are sufficient Brownfield development opportunities to meet the Government's targets.

EXISTING WIRRAL GREEN BELT:



Half of the green areas could disappear

## The Plan

There is a huge amount of political manoeuvring going on! Essentially, the Council is currently gathering information from residents across The Wirral, interested parties and statutory consultees to establish whether their proposals should go ahead as identified in The Draft Plan.

## Wirral Green Belt could be slashed by approximately 50%

At the present time, Wirral currently has 45% of land allocated as Green Belt (Council figure provided at the consultation event). In the current Draft Local Plan, 22% of Green Belt has been identified as appropriate for housing development and for further investigation. This means that The Wirral's green space could be reduced to a mere 23%!

## Alternatives to Green Belt?

At this point, the focus seems to be on Peel's Wirral Waters scheme. The aim of this scheme is to regenerate part of the dock areas in Birkenhead. Peel is adamant that they are able to help meet a large proportion of these targets for housing units. However, it is my understanding that they are seeking funding to help support infrastructure costs and need the correct environment to establish a market for the scheme. The Council, as I understand it, has requested that Peel provides evidence to help them substantiate this, to enable a robust response to be provided to the Planning Inspector when The Local Plan is formally evaluated. In other words, there may be a 'get out' to some of the Green Belt allocation for housing, but as yet this has not been formally approved.

Even with Wirral Waters, the Council say that they still have a shortfall of 4,990 housing units. In addition, they are seeking a buffer of 20%, which means they need to allocate space for 7,390 houses.

## Objections to Green Belt allocation for new housing

Objections to The Council allocating Green Belt land for development include (but are not limited to):

1. Local population growth figures do not substantiate the housing targets identified by the Council/DCLG
2. Number of existing empty houses
3. Planning applications that have already been approved but no development has started
4. Planning applications that may be 'stuck in the system'
5. Lack of central Government funding for infrastructure
6. Land values on Green Belt may not be sufficiently profitable to enable developers to build affordable homes – which means more expensive homes are built instead
7. Isolated nature of Green Field sites and access to facilities, e.g. regular public transport, shops, etc.
8. Loss of biodiversity and public amenities, e.g. access to natural habitats, woodland, footpaths and bridleways, etc.
9. Impact on core services: doctors, schools
10. Employment opportunities for new neighbourhoods

## Zone 4 – Ease of build west of The Wirral

In the Plan, the west side of the Wirral has been identified by The Council as Zone 4. This means that the barriers to development are far less obstructive than in Zones 1–3 on The Wirral (see map below). As a result, The Green Belt is still likely to be pursued as it will assist the Council to more readily meet planning targets, while offering developers 'clean' and potentially more profitable sites.

VIABILITY AREAS:



Buildability Zones The Wirral

## Deadline

Responses in any form: bullet points, letters, etc., must be submitted to the Council by the 26th October 2018 before 5pm.

By Email: [localplan@wirral.gov.uk](mailto:localplan@wirral.gov.uk)

By Post: If you wish to write a letter, mark it for the attention of the Forward Planning Manager, address: Wirral Council Economic and Housing Growth, PO Box 290, Brighton Street, Wallasey CH27 9FQ.