

1. Introduction and Approach

- 1.1 This Draft Baseline Study is prepared on behalf of Peel Holdings regarding the strategic opportunity known as Wirral Waters – focusing upon the strategic landholdings in north Birkenhead, Wirral. It considers the key issues and opportunities relating to the social, economic, environmental, policy and investment context for the Birkenhead Docks estate and its environs – defined through desk based research, site visits and surveys, and meetings with Wirral Council and other key stakeholders over the past 18 months.
- 1.2 This Study is presented as a ‘live’ project - representing a comprehensive ‘snapshot’ in time. As the Wirral Waters proposal is progressed through future Workstages (see A Strategic Regeneration Framework Approach below) across an extended timescale, aspects of this baseline assessment will need to be re-visited, updated and expanded to take account of changing circumstances
- 1.3 The initial draft of the Baseline Study (July 2007) was presented to officers of Wirral Council for review and comment to ensure that the consultants derived maximum benefit from the officer’s detailed knowledge of the Wirral and the issues and challenges which the area faces. Detailed feedback was received on the first draft and amendments were made to all parts of the study to take the Council’s comments and input of information and data into account. A second version of the Baseline Study (March 2008) was provided to Wirral Council in April 2008 and has been endorsed by the

Council’s Cabinet (meeting on 23 July 2008). This version incorporates final minor updates and will be published more widely alongside consultation on the Framework (Stage 3 – see below).

Wirral Waters & the ‘Ocean Gateway’ Concept

- 1.4 Wirral Waters is one of a number of regeneration opportunities being brought forward by Peel Holdings within the ‘Ocean Gateway’ concept. The concept consists of a number of strategic development projects focused along the River Mersey and Manchester Ship Canal corridor, each recognised for their shared capacity to provide an international identity and economic driver for the North West, UK and European regions.
- 1.5 Strategic components are:
- Wirral Waters – *a proposed high quality, high density residential, commercial, leisure and retail development focusing upon the Inner Wirral docks and wharfs;*
 - Liverpool Waters – *a high quality, high density residential, commercial and leisure development focusing upon the ‘Central Docks’ area to the immediate north of Princes Dock and the Pierhead, Liverpool;*

- Cammell Laird – *protecting and securing the long-term future of existing maritime and employment generating port related activities;*
- Liverpool John Lennon Airport – *the growth of the Airport as a key regional driver over the next 25 years, as set out in the Draft Airport Master Plan;*
- Port of Liverpool – *protecting and enhancing operational port activities, including the proposed Post-Panamax facility at Seaforth and the Twelve Quays Ro-Ro facility;*
- Manchester Ship Canal – *protecting and facilitating operational port and shipping activities between the Mersey Estuary and Greater Manchester, including proposals for Port Wirral and Port Salford;*
- Cruise Liner Facility – *supporting the proposed development of a Cruise Liner Facility at Princes Landing Stage/Pier Head, attracting large ocean liners to Liverpool, and exploring the potential for the further development of this market;*
- Mersey Tidal Power – *Peel Holdings, North West Development Agency (NWDA) and Partners are investigating the potential for generating energy from tidal power in the Mersey Estuary; and*

- Superport – *Peel Holdings, NWDA and Partners are exploring the “Superport” concept, which aims to realise benefits through synergies in water, rail, road and air transport, within a wider growth of the City Region.*

1.6 It is recognised that there will be a particularly important relationship between Peel’s proposals for Wirral Waters and those for Liverpool Waters on the opposite bank of the Mersey and that this will need to be borne in mind as detailed proposals for these two major schemes emerge. At the present time, however, proposals for the Liverpool Waters project are at an early stage of formulation. This document relates to Wirral Waters and does not seek to advocate or prejudge the form and content of the Liverpool Waters proposals.

Wirral Waters – Launch of the “Initial Vision”

1.7 The Wirral Waters project was launched through a series of public presentations beginning in September 2006, setting out the ‘Initial Vision’. This articulated the scale of transformational change and investment considered appropriate by Peel Holdings, given the scale of the opportunities presented by the Birkenhead Dock system; the degree of deprivation within Inner Wirral and the Wirral Waterfront, and the consequent regeneration agendas; and the wider ‘Ocean Gateway’ components.

1.8 The ‘Initial Vision’ launch received overwhelmingly positive support and agreement was reached with key parties in respect of:

- the high level of stakeholder support that Wirral Waters represents a major urban regeneration opportunity of national significance in terms of its scale and its location within an area critically in need of investment;
 - the need for a robust and methodical approach to realising the opportunity and addressing the significant issues it raises for Inner Wirral;
 - the need to better understand the strategic context and nature of the opportunity; and
 - the need for an appropriate approach to delivery and implementation, tailored towards the ‘spatial planning’ approach to delivering sustainable development.
- 1.9 In response to these needs, and to build upon early support and enable stakeholders to contribute to the development and delivery of the ‘Initial Vision’, and early consultations, a ‘Strategic Regeneration Framework’ approach has been adopted as the most appropriate process to progress the Wirral Waters project.

A ‘Strategic Regeneration Framework’ Approach

1.10 The Strategic Regeneration Framework (SRF) approach is increasingly recognised as the most appropriate vehicle for delivering the

sustainable regeneration of strategic land parcels and large parts of the urban area.

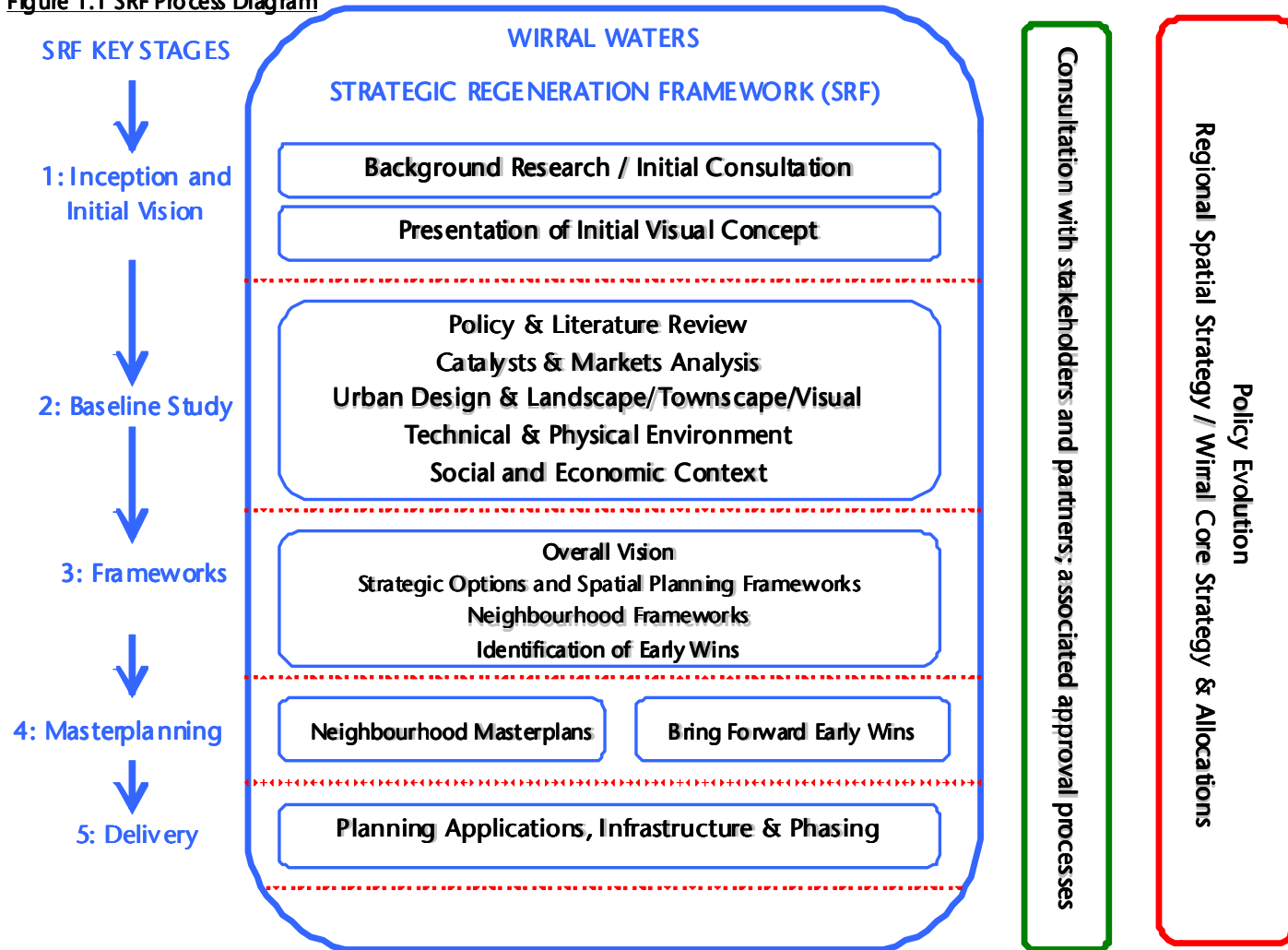
1.11 This approach is promoted by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) as the most appropriate solution for considering large-scale development sites and regeneration initiatives covering wide, complex geographical areas; major extensions to urban areas; and housing market renewal areas, leading to spatial masterplans proposing significant development (*Creating Successful Masterplans – A Guide for Clients: CABE 2004*).

1.12 SRFs are typically a family of documents setting out:

- an analysis of ‘baseline’ data, supporting financial, economic and social policy documents, delivery partners and vehicles;
- the ambitions, needs, objectives and key parameters relating to physical, social, economic and cultural considerations;
- a collective Vision for a wide area, stating clear objectives agreed between key stakeholders, supported by development, design and delivery frameworks;
- more detailed ‘spatial masterplans’ including development and design parameters, and delivery mechanisms for those neighbourhoods identified for significant change; and
- key actions and outputs to be completed by delivery partners.

1.13 To complete these tasks, the Wirral Waters SRF is being progressed through five key Workstages. They are set out in Figure 1.1 below:

Figure 1.1 SRF Process Diagram



- 1.14 The SRF is a particularly good vehicle for taking forward Wirral Waters as it recognises that the initiative is led by the private sector, and respond to the time horizons of the project, estimated at 30-50 years, which are longer than most planning policy documents.
- 1.15 The 'Initial Vision' is regarded as the first key Workstage of the SRF, a vital step in engendering support and confidence. This Baseline Study constitutes the second Workstage (subject to on-going updates).
- 1.16 The Baseline Study and Spatial Planning & Neighbourhood Frameworks (Stages 2 and 3) provide the starting point for the planning and design process, and provide the parameters within which more detailed 'Neighbourhood Masterplans' may be commissioned for key areas of significant change.

Relationship of SRF to Planning Policy

- 1.17 This Baseline Study has included an analysis of key existing policy, legislation and guidance at all levels and in all relevant interest areas. This can be found at Appendix 1. The opportunity to deliver a major urban regeneration project at Birkenhead Docks responds to a vast range of guidance and policy. Section 2 Catalysts for Change draws upon the key influences.
- 1.18 A key point that has emerged from the initial consideration of Wirral Waters is the relationship to statutory planning policy. Owing to the

likely scale, complexity and lifetime of development, Wirral Waters is likely to raise significant spatial planning policy issues. At the time of drafting this Baseline Study, the starting point in terms of the statutory development plan is undergoing significant change through the replacement of the Wirral Unitary Development Plan (UDP) with the Wirral Local Development Framework (LDF). The Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) is also being reviewed.

- 1.19 Although it recognised targeted renewal and regeneration in Inner Wirral, the current UDP did not anticipate a major regeneration opportunity at the dock estate, and originally designated it for port/industrial use only. In response to Peel's proposals, Wirral Council has recognised that the position has changed and has decided that the associated policy (EM10), which protects the land for port related uses only, should not be saved beyond September 2007. Accordingly the dock estate is now undesignated in the adopted UDP.
- 1.20 In the emerging LDF, the overall spatial planning decisions for Wirral will be made through the Wirral Core Strategy Development Plan Document ("the Core Strategy"). This is likely to include a strategic allocation setting out the broad locations, type and quantum of development appropriate at Wirral Waters, to allow the major proposals to be supported through the Core Strategy. In view of the timetable for producing the Core Strategy, it will be important to bring forward some early proposals in advance of the Core Strategy, for those aspects of Wirral Waters that do not raise issues of more

than local significance and are compliant with the existing development plan (the saved UDP and RSS).

- 1.21 The Wirral Waters SRF will be used to inform the emerging Core Strategy for Wirral and will play an important role in providing a flexible Framework, below the statutory development plan, which will be capable of acting as a material consideration in future planning decisions. The weight to be given to the SRF will increase where it is in line with national and development plan policy. The comprehensive and robust nature of the SRF, which will include the testing of reasonable alternatives and which will be based on extensive consultation, will further strengthen the SRF as a material planning consideration.
- 1.22 Owing to ongoing timetable delays in the production of the Core Strategy, it is possible that Wirral Waters may proceed in advance of the Core Strategy, meaning that there may be a requirement to undertake a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA and Sustainability Appraisal (SA) of the project. This is explored further in Section 4 Environment.
- 1.23 Wirral Council and Peel Holdings have also considered the potential use of a special statutory policy vehicle for Wirral Waters, namely an Area Action Plan (AAP). At this time the Council has accepted that it is not appropriate to use an AAP for Wirral Waters until detailed proposals have been brought forward. Whilst the use of an AAP will be kept under review Peel are of the view that the scale, complexity

and time horizons of development – the latter being 2 or 3 times the length of the parent DPDs, Core Strategy and RSS – may render this an unsuitable policy vehicle for the Wirral Waters project.

- 1.24 Once the Core Strategy and Allocations DPDs are adopted, it may be appropriate to consider the use of Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) to set out policy requirements in more detail.

Baseline Study

Purpose, Scope and Structure

- 1.25 This Baseline Study (July 2008) is the culmination of over 18 months of research/analysis/appraisal and the engagement of key stakeholders locally and in the region. It has been informed by meetings and discussions with stakeholders and is intended to be the subject of consultation with, and endorsement by, Wirral Council, as an accurate reflection of the strategic context and full account of prevailing issues.
- 1.26 The Initial Vision shows a major mixed-use (predominantly commercial offices and residential) high rise development at the East Float area of the Docks, centred on the Vittoria Wharf with development cascading down in height to the north and south of East Float. It also shows a major retail and leisure development at Bidston Dock. The Twelve Quays and West Float areas of the Docks are shown to be retained in port use.

1.27 The Initial Vision is grand in scale and opportunity, and received almost universal support amongst stakeholders. As acknowledged above, this was important in generating interest and confidence, testing the appetite for change and commitment, and providing Peel Holdings with the confidence to move forward. It was however recognised that a more comprehensive approach would be needed and that the Initial Vision would need to be tested and appraised as part of the Stage 3 work following the completion of the Baseline Study.

1.28 In considering the “opportunity”, this Baseline Study has looked at the context for the Initial Vision in considerable detail, gathering key information, liaising with key stakeholders and undertaking a thorough appraisal of urban design characterisation, socio-economic issues, environment, transport and relevant policy.

1.29 This Baseline Study provides facts about the current situation, identifies constraints and opportunities within the wider regeneration context and explores the parameters to which proposals for the major transformation of the Docks and their hinterland need to be considered.

1.30 In summary, the **purpose** of this Baseline Study is to set out:

- a factual analysis of the context within which Wirral Waters will emerge, from all key perspectives including spatial planning and

urban design, statutory policy implications, socio-economics, environmental and transport issues;

- an understanding of the issues and opportunities surrounding the Wirral Waterfront and the wider City Region; and
- a reflection of the interests and aspirations of key stakeholders including Wirral Council, North West Development Agency, English Partnership, Merseytravel, The Mersey Partnership and Peel.

1.31 This Baseline Study has identified the key issues and opportunities associated with bringing forward transformational change in Inner Wirral, centred on the Birkenhead Docks system. Each of the key issue areas are set out as distinct chapters.

1.32 As a consequence, the **scope and structure** of this Baseline Report is as follows:

- **Section 2: Catalysts for Change** – appraising key European, national, regional, sub-regional and local policies, legislation and guidance, leading to an understanding of key policy drivers, regeneration catalysts and the roles and objectives of partners;
- **Section 3: Urban Design** – appraising the landscape and urban setting, leading to a characterisation of the docks and wider locality;

- **Section 4: Environment** – appraising the full range of likely environmental issues, including engineering, infrastructure, ecology, landscape/townscape/visual, archaeology and cultural heritage, water issues and an outline of likely environmental assessment requirements;
- **Section 5: Movement & Connections** – appraising strategic and local accessibility, sustainable transport assets and key movements and sources of travel demand in the area;
- **Section 6: Socio-Economics** – appraising key social and economic factors focussing on the need for regeneration in Inner Wirral;
- **Section 7: Community Cohesion and Social Infrastructure** – appraising the need for local social and economic benefits to be realised through an inclusive and joined up approach to regeneration;
- **Section 8: Development Markets** – appraising the residential, commercial, leisure/tourism and retail markets that could feature in a major transformation of the Dock area;
- **Section 9: Emerging Baseline Issues** – summarising preceding sections and appendices to present a full picture of the key issues, the opportunity and its constituent parts.

Baseline Study – Appendices

1.33 Given the scale of research necessary to inform the Baseline Study, it has been necessary to provide separate, supporting Appendices documents. They are:

- **Appendix 1: Policy & Literature Review** – provides an appraisal of key European, national, regional, sub-regional and local policies, legislation and guidance; as summarised in Section 2 of the main Baseline Study document;
- **Appendix 2: Urban Design Appraisal** – presents the full appraisal of urban context and characterisation - as summarised in Section 3;
- **Appendix 3: Landscape, Townscape and Visual Appraisal** – presents a detailed appraisal of landscape, townscape and visual issues associated with introducing new, significant built forms to the dock area – as summarised in Section 4;
- **Appendix 4: Archaeology & Cultural Heritage Appraisal** – presents a detailed appraisal of historic influences of Wirral Waters such as archaeological interests, listed buildings, conservation areas and other assets – as summarised in Section 4; and
- **Appendix 5: Socio-Economic Appraisal** – provides a detailed breakdown of social and economic issues, including a review of some regeneration case studies and consideration of future economic scenarios – as summarised in Section 6; and

- **Appendix 6: Social and Community Infrastructure** – provides an audit of existing facilities, an overview of structural/policy changes affecting provision and identifies associated issues to be addressed through the future SRF stages.

Study Area and Land Ownership

- 1.34 The Initial Vision focused upon showing the nature and scale of the proposals that Peel Holdings aspires to, for East Float and Bidston Dock. The other parts of the Birkenhead Docks, West Float and Twelve Quays were indicated as retained in port use.
- 1.35 Peel Holdings recognises that the scale of the Wirral Waters development could have far reaching regeneration effects for the wider area, and that there is a need for this to integrate with existing areas. It was therefore agreed that the Baseline Study should look beyond the core dock estate to the wider environs.
- 1.36 For the urban design analysis, it has been possible to define a “Study Area”, which is broadly the M53/Kingsway cutting to the north, Bidston Hill to the west, Price Street and the Woodside area to the south and the River Mersey to the east.
- 1.37 For other subject categories/headings, such as socio-economic, transport and environment, the boundaries are less spatially definable, given the scale and complexity of Wirral Waters. It has been necessary to identify certain search areas and influence areas, although these do differ for the various potential effects and issues.
- 1.38 The core estate of Birkenhead Docks is broadly defined as land within the dock perimeter road, and includes Bidston Dock to the west. Peel Holdings, through the acquisition of Mersey Docks and Harbour Company, owns the core dock estate. It also owns the Cammell Laird site, Woodside Business Park and a number of other smaller sites in and around Birkenhead/Wallasey.
- 1.39 A range of other public and private landowners also hold land within the study area, including English Partnerships and Wirral Council.
- 1.40 In discussion with the Council and other stakeholders Peel is keen to establish an agreed framework for development beyond its own ownership, and secure agreement from public and private sector interests, to ensure the delivery of the overall vision for regeneration.

Next Steps

Stage 3 – Spatial Planning and Neighbourhood Frameworks

- 1.41 The ‘Initial Vision’ communicated the scale and aspiration of Peel Holdings, and was an important step in generating interest and understanding the level of support. The Vision and its integral concepts/components now need to be considered in greater detail and tested against the key findings of the Baseline Study. This will be

the purpose of Workstage 3: Spatial Planning and Neighbourhood Frameworks.

- 1.42 This will communicate the overall aspiration and vision for development and regeneration, providing the parameters within which more detailed 'Neighbourhood Masterplans' will be brought forward during Stage 4. The Spatial Planning and Neighbourhood Frameworks will also identify those elements of the opportunity that can be brought forward as "early wins" and those which require a longer time horizon, mainly because they raise significant policy issues or are likely to require particular markets to be developed and explored.
- 1.43 Once agreed as a full and accurate reflection of the context, the Baseline Study will feed into Stage 3. This will include testing strategic options, in order to establish which areas are suitable for which uses and a broad consideration of the quantum of development, together with other key principles as may be definable at this stage.
- 1.44 This will set a framework and brief for the 'Neighbourhood Masterplans' by:
- creating an outline business case, including delivery; and
 - developing the vision – stating and communicating aspirations for Wirral Waters and setting out the individual roles, components,

nature and identities of individual neighbourhoods (taking forward the initial visioning ideas shared by Peel Holdings in the Autumn of 2006).

Stage 4 – Neighbourhood Masterplans

- 1.45 'Neighbourhood Masterplans' will provide more detailed design and development principles focusing upon key areas of change. These are likely to relate to Bidston Dock, West Float, East Float and Twelve Quays and other neighbourhoods. They will provide the basis for the submission of phased planning applications, setting out proposals for buildings, spaces, movement strategy and land use in three dimensions.
- 1.46 The Neighbourhood Masterplans will identify a more detailed delivery and phasing strategy, and infrastructure requirements, which will be supported by financial, economic and social policy documents, together with design rationales, environmental assessments and other supporting information, as appropriate.
- 1.47 It is not yet clear how individual proposals and planning applications will be brought forward. What is clear is that the longevity of the project means that phased submission of planning applications is inevitable. Also, due to the scale and complexity of proposals, an outline Masterplan approach is likely to be desirable in many instances, particularly where end users are not yet known, rather than requiring full detail at the outset.

Stage 5 – Implementation Plan

- 1.48 The final stage of the SRF is the production, agreement and carrying out of a detailed 'Implementation Plan' for the delivery of the Frameworks and Masterplans.
- 1.49 This will include securing necessary approvals through appropriate mechanisms, implementing the various strategies and actions plans that will be needed,, and detailed plans for development, build out and management.