



Wirral Core Strategy: Spatial Options

February 2010

**A response from
Wirral Transition Initiatives**

**Transition Village Eastham
Transition Town West Kirby**



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Contact

Dr Paul Fitzpatrick

fitzpatrick.paul@rocketmail.com

0151 342 1426

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Written by Paul Fitzpatrick
in collaboration with
Patrick Cleary and
Margaret Campbell





1 Introduction

The Transition movement¹ started in the UK in 2007 as a local response to the twin and linked prospects of the end of the oil era and climate change. Transition initiatives are community-led, coordinated programmes of action that enable local communities to avoid the worst impacts of these global challenges while building stronger, happier, healthier more inclusive, more self-sufficient communities. This perspective makes us important and representative stakeholders in Wirral's Core Strategy and its spatial applications. We are pleased to have the opportunity to provide this response to Wirral Council's community consultation.

Our approach is distinctive. The work of Transition initiatives is diverse and generally involves: strengthening local self-reliance in basic areas such as food production, energy saving and generation; maximising the use of land and water resources; waste minimisation and management; transport and freight reduction; skill-building and community empowerment and other activities related to local circumstances. The Transition approach favours smaller scale, local action, including economic development to help create resilient communities.

Before we provide more detail we need to offer feedback on three aspects of the consultation process itself which, we think, has significant limitations.

First, in our opinion the Core Strategy Spatial Options report is not ideal in its communication of complex ideas and considerations to the public. It is overly circumspect and convoluted in its arrangement. It is too long. As a consultation document it has a better focus on the spatial planning of Wirral as a whole than it does at community level. This means that it is not easy for local people to understand what it might mean in their local communities. We believe that many people will be put off or unable to offer informed opinions about the spatial options of the strategy, particularly as it affects them.

Second, the use of the Limehouse software has more benefits for the Council's work programme than it has for the people of Wirral. The software may be useful for collecting and assembling data from a potentially large number of sources. We contend that while the Limehouse software might be the current standard consultation method for local authorities it is inherently an exclusive mechanism. It favours those who can use it and are happy with a fairly complex electronic interface. We need to be reassured that the Council will analyse the consultation response and ensure that any deficiencies in the consultation reach will be rectified especially amongst those communities that suffer exclusions in other areas of personal, community and civic life.

Third, from the very first question the software forces users to accept the basic organisation and premises of the proposed strategy options. A consultee's response that does not fit the structure of the strategy options, as presented, is further disadvantaged by being broken down into responses to questions, twenty-two in this case, that reflect the document's structure. Further, the questions can be inappropriately leading - for example Question 3 "Do you agree that these are the most appropriate Spatial Objectives for the Core Strategy to pursue?"

¹ More information about the Transition movement and a list of NW Transition initiatives is provided in Annexe A.



For this reason, in particular, our response is offered in this document and not online. Our view reflects a set of values and principles that have an integrity and coherence that will be lost by being broken down into a structure developed around another view. This also means that should the Council want to convert our response into the Limehouse format we would like to be consulted on how that is to be done by the Council.

Transition values and principles have informed the development of this response to the Wirral Core Strategy Spatial Options report. We have deliberately focused our attention on what we consider to be the key aspects of the document. We have limited our response to the higher order issues. This reflects our reservations about some of the report's fundamentals. As we deal with main issues where we want to see changes in the current Core Strategy Spatial Options we do not generally provide commentary on the current report's details.

2 Wirral Core Strategy Spatial Options: Vision and Values

2.1 Overview

This section contrasts the Vision offered in the Core Strategy Spatial Options report with a Transition Vision. The Transition Vision is peak oil, climate change and people-centred while encompassing economic development. The Council-sponsored Vision, reflecting different values, has, primarily, an economic and physical development focus. We hope that Wirral Council will be able to subscribe to the community values underpinning our Vision and to adopt many of the priorities and elements of the Transition Vision.

2.2 The Vision outlined by the Wirral Core Strategy Spatial Options Report

Wirral 2031

'A. By 2031, Wirral will be a Borough which offers a higher quality of life for all its residents and visitors;

B. The economic objectives of the Investment Strategy for Wirral will have been met; Wirral's economy will be strengthened and diversified; there will be a wide range of employment sites and premises served by modern communications and infrastructure which are attractive to existing businesses and inward investors; the Borough will be an attractive location for higher quality, better paying employers, particularly in the knowledge-based, high technology manufacturing and environmental technology sectors; and will be less dependent on jobs in retailing and public services;

C. Significant employment growth will have been focused on the designated Strategic Regional Sites at Birkenhead in Settlement Area 2; and at Wirral International Business Park in Settlement Area 4;



D. The population will have grown within Settlement Area 1, Settlement Area 2 and Settlement Area 3. Net out-migration from the Borough will have been reduced and there will be a higher proportion of younger age groups within the population as a whole;

E. Levels of unemployment and worklessness will have been significantly reduced and the skills base in Settlement Area 1, Settlement Area 2, Settlement Area 3, Settlement Area 4 and Settlement Area 5 will have been enhanced;

F. As a result of the Newheartlands Housing Market Renewal Initiative and the Mersey Heartlands Growth Point, Settlement Area 1, Settlement Area 2 and Settlement Area 3, will be seen as increasingly attractive places to live, through the promotion of sustainable, affordable, mixed communities and the provision of high quality, well designed, zero-carbon, mixed tenure housing, which will be capable of meeting the needs of all sectors of the community;

G. The amount of vacant and derelict land in the older urban areas of Settlement Area 1, Settlement Area 2, Settlement Area 3 and Settlement Area 4, will have been substantially reduced and used to secure wider social, economic and environmental benefits;

H. Settlement Area 2 will provide an enhanced and revitalised sub-regional centre as the retail, service and cultural centre of choice for all the Borough's residents, supported by a network of vital and viable district and local shopping centres;

I. Settlement Area 2 will be halfway through a long term transformational programme of development, achieving integrated, high density, mixed-use regeneration to re-create sustainable urban communities at the heart of the older urban areas of east Wirral, securing thousands of new jobs and homes through the creation of new living and working markets in a world class environmental setting;

J. The potential of the Borough as a tourism destination will have been further developed by focusing on the quality of the natural environment and built heritage and the regeneration of the coastal resorts of New Brighton, West Kirby and Hoylake and the number of visitors and the proportion of jobs maintained will have increased;

K. The level of disparity in social, economic, environmental and health outcomes found in parts of Settlement Area 1, Settlement Area 2, Settlement Area 3, Settlement Area 4 and Settlement Area 5, will have been significantly reduced;

L. All new development will be suitably adapted to the potential impacts of climate change and flood risk, maximising energy efficiency and minimising carbon emissions and the consumption of water and other resources. Secure renewable, decentralised and low carbon sources of energy of an appropriate scale for Wirral will have been developed. All new residential developments will have been zero carbon from 2016 onwards and the Borough's total carbon emissions will have been cut by 60% by 2025;

M. The Borough will have maintained and enhanced a high quality urban and rural environment, with a fully established network of high quality green infrastructure including enhanced and safeguarded biodiversity and geodiversity resources. Local distinctiveness and heritage will be highly valued and supported by local controls over the design and character of new development;



N. The quantity of waste generated in the Borough and the proportion going to landfill will have been minimised through the promotion of sustainable waste management and a higher proportion of waste generated will be re-used, recycled or re-processed, locally or within the wider sub-region;

O. Transport and land use will have been co-ordinated to promote the most sustainable transport choices, to increase the number and proportion of journeys undertaken by public transport, walking and cycling; reduce the number and length of individual car journeys; and increase the amount of freight moved by rail and water; and

P. Public safety and crime prevention will be high priorities in the design and location of new development.'

2.3 The Transition Vision

Transition Vision

We offer a Vision that does not attempt to respond to the specific, geographic, spatial detail in the report. However, our Vision applies to the borough at all spatial levels.

The quality of life for the people of the Wirral will be excellent and fulfilling. Wirral will produce far less carbon and its people will live within limits presented by responsible environmental stewardship, declining oil supplies and climate change. By 2031 the Wirral will be a better place to live, learn, work, visit and invest, and where:

- our CO2 emissions are low in all sectors and areas of economic, social and domestic activity: business and industry, the public sector, domestic and housing, leisure and road transport;
- we have robust energy security facilitated by an extensive network of local micro-generated renewable energy producers. The average community-owned renewable energy company produces at least half of local energy requirements to meet locally devised plans for community energy security;
- the transport infrastructure has been radically transformed to reflect CO2 commitments and declining oil availability with public transport, bicycles and walking primary modes of transport.
- there are jobs for all in a highly productive, well-skilled economy which comprises a resilient blend of international, national, regional and local companies, businesses and social enterprises and where the environmentally sustainable economic superstructure is knowledge based and there are well-established networks of locally resilient food, goods and services providers in the private, community and public sectors;
- Wirral people of every age and from every community and minority are happy, with a strong sense of well-being, a positive view of the future and a sense of security in their own and their families' lives. This is engendered by high levels of physical and mental health, community cohesion, achievement of intellectual and skills potential, participation in civic life and enjoyment of arts, creative, cultural activities and sports.



- a thriving, well-resourced voluntary and community sector is involved in services and activities that contribute to community security in all its dimensions and provides volunteering and paid opportunities for local people;
- people have a good choice of high-quality, affordable and low-carbon homes in attractive green neighbourhoods in established communities with gardens or allotments in the immediate neighbourhood to grow food;
- businesses and homes will be connected to high-quality digital communications to facilitate home-working and provide access to leisure, on-line learning/ training, social networking and participation in local civic life, including democratic processes;
- all homes will be within a short walk or bike ride of well integrated, sustainable public transport and schools/ local multi-use centres providing quality school education, life skills and training, arts, culture, healthy living and sports venues for people of all ages;
- public facilities are set within, and are linked by, greenspace, including areas managed for wildlife. They are safely and readily accessible and a short distance from homes by foot and bicycle. Networked green and wildlife greenspace and water bodies/ wet areas reduce local temperatures in the warmest months of the year.
- local distinctiveness is valued and expressed through food, produce, cultural activities and celebrations. It is sustained physically through careful attention to locally relevant built form, massing, detailing and materials that contribute to energy efficiency. Local ecological character is expressed through greenspace and water bodies where biodiversity has increased and is increasing.
- we carefully look after our natural and built environments and heritage artefacts in a rolling programme of enhancement and maintenance. The natural and built environments are integrated to provide rich and rewarding environmental experiences and contact with nature and its rhythms and cycles.
- The Wirral coastline, the sea and coastal settlements are managed and developed with new recognition of their particular local, regional and international roles. New marine spatial plans recognise Wirral's contribution to a more robust framework for the development of renewable energy generation programmes.

2.4 Core Strategy: Spatial Options Values

The Core Strategy Spatial Options report does not record the values on which its Vision is based. It describes how the Vision was developed from a 2004 Audit and Analysis report prepared by a firm of chartered property surveyors and a firm of accountants. This was supplemented by the Wirral Investment Strategy, Employment for All: a Full Employment Strategy for Wirral; Embracing Change: an Enterprise Strategy for Wirral and the Wirral Employment and Investment Framework.

Together these provide substantial impetus towards a Core Strategy that, we argue, does not adequately balance economic development with other, less well investigated, and some might argue, more important concerns. There is an unquestioning assumption of economic growth which pays insufficient regard to: global resources limitations; the need for a rapid shift in our carbon performance commercially, industrially, socially and domestically; the



need to deal with the causes and impact of climate change and shifts in the balance of economic power across the world.

Wirral Sustainable Communities Strategy covers 'crime and community safety, health and wellbeing, life chances for children and young people, living and working environments and housing'. Yet its first aim is to deliver 'a strong economy for Wirral'. It demonstrates 'how the local statutory agencies, private sector and community and voluntary sector will work together to harness the goals of the Investment Strategy.' We take this to mean that this cross-sector partnership's first priority is to deliver economic goals. Health, community, environment, culture, education are given secondary importance. Their priority pales in comparison to economic development.

This concerns us. We believe that the financial rewards of economic development are only partly the means to our ends. They are not an end in themselves. We want our strategy-makers to remember that the ends to which we aspire, our priorities, lie with what we care about. This includes: our families and friends and their health and wellbeing; the state of the planet and human conflict; our human relationships; our cultural lives and physical activities; our engagement with the natural world and its rhythms and cycles; the quality of our living environment; our sense of personal and community engagement and security; our intellectual and spiritual fulfilment and the satisfaction of knowing that we are not compromising the future generations here and elsewhere because of the lifestyles we lead and other personal concerns. This is the core of our lives.

Building resilience into all the systems that we need to support community life is the key Transition principle. We believe that action at a local, community level using principles that reflect naturally resilient ecosystems, is critical to building low carbon, energy efficient human settlements. Alongside energy and food the inter-connected social, economic, cultural and technical components of healthy, functional communities also need to be made more resilient. Systems that are able to resist sudden shock show: diversity within and between themselves; have a modular structure that absorbs damage to the extent that the whole is not compromised and have feedback mechanisms so that we hear about developing problems before they become too big.

Transition initiatives use and value:

- community action;
- stakeholder involvement;
- partnership working;
- networking and making links;
- well informed communities (fostering support and engagement);
- the resourcefulness and creativity of ordinary people;
- positive outlooks and optimism linked to:
- a capacity to define a shared vision of the future;
- planned steps to achieve realistic goals;
- diversity (in every domain);
- distinctiveness (in every domain);
- local knowledge (in every domain);
- community responsibility;
- cohesion and collective responsiveness;
- enrichment through engagement;
- respect for nature and natural systems;
- the natural goodwill in everyone;
- and the shared celebration of success.



3 Transition implications for the Core Strategy

We see a number of important issues that we think should be addressed within the Core Strategy. The list of implications given below illustrates our key points and our approach. It is not exhaustive in providing a Transition translation of the Core Strategy Spatial Options. We would like to see the Transition approach run through all aspects of the Core Strategy.

1 We are looking for a more complete, rounded, flexible, responsive, resilient strategy. If it is really a 'Core' Strategy let it really reflect our core concerns. While we need and enjoy financial security we have other wider and deeper concerns. If the Core Strategy has single-minded, growth-oriented economic development as its dominant strand it will be less sustainable and less likely to provide fulfilling lives for the people of Wirral. We propose that a more locally-focussed Transition approach to economic, social and environmental development, associated with more local self-reliance, would help build sustainable, cohesive, happy communities.

2 The current strategy does not address the issue of peak oil. To do so would strengthen the case for a speedy readjustment of current lifestyles and business culture in light of the prospect of rapidly rising energy prices and the decline of oil supplies. This concern has been given added credence by a recently published report from the UK Industry Task Force². The absence of a strategic response to peak oil is a major gap in the current version of the strategy. We hope that it will be properly addressed in the final version.

3 We note that the (draft) Regional Strategy, RS2010, identifies a low carbon economy and addressing climate change issues as the overarching and first of four development strands.³ In contrast the Wirral Core Strategy Spatial Vision (p81) places the first climate change consideration 12th out of 16 points. The Transition view is that peak oil and climate change-related vision elements need to be at the top of the Vision where it is identified as a principal foundation on which much of the rest of the Vision is based. Importantly, elevating climate change concerns requires the appropriate follow-through into policies and programmes of action. Sometimes public Visions use lofty words that sound right with little, subsequent related action.

4 The Strategy does not follow climate change concerns through in sufficient detail and depth of commitment. Climate change, not to mention peak oil, is not accorded sufficient weight within the report. For example, the recurrent reference to promoting more sustainable patterns of journeys to work is not reflected in the Vision or its delivery. The envisioned prospect of significant employment growth in the International Business Park in Bromborough, for example, cannot be seen as a credible response to climate change. What will the Strategy do to persuade people not to use cars and to use public transport - running additional bus routes past the Park will not be a sufficient incentive?

² The Oil Crunch: a wake-up call for the UK economy. Second report of the UK Industry Task Force on Peak Oil and Energy Security (ITPOES); February 2010: www.peakoiltaskforce.net (last accessed 15 February 2010)

³ The four Regional Strategy strands are Low carbon economy/ climate change, economy, people and infrastructure. RS2010 Regional Strategy for England's Northwest. Part 1 the High level Strategic Framework: Consultation Document, January 2010



5 Generating employment local to where people live, instead of developing isolated employment areas would have benefits all round: a richer work environment and the prospect of people walking and biking safely to work with attendant health benefits. Core Strategy Spatial Vision Points C and O stand in contradiction of each other.

6 The NW Transition Network provided a response to the RS2010 consultation.⁴ We have expressed strong concerns about the emphasis on the potential for new commercial exploitation of green technology markets as what seems to be an alternative to a cross-sectoral, root and branch approach to developing low carbon and climate change responses. Similarly, we would not like to see climate change sidelined as a cross-cutting objective for a "business-as-usual" Core Strategy which has tokenistic carbon and climate change responses.

7 If Wirral is to reflect the RS2010 we believe that the Core Strategy should set out in detail how Wirral will become a low-carbon peninsula with a robust and effective response to climate change as the lead driver. There is no reason why Wirral should not set the pace in this respect.

8 We agree with the general grouping of the eight settlement areas described in the report. We think they work best where they are discrete areas and are not contiguous. Where settlement areas physically join it is more likely that self-identifying communities will cross the notional boundaries as expressed on the maps. This is important from a Transition view because community-led action is one of the pillars of the Transition approach. We ask that care is taken, in refining the boundaries to ensure that subsequent initiatives and investments do not split communities. This applies to the urban and rural Wirral communities.

9 The Core Strategy Spatial Options report is not strong in its description of the delivery of the future strategy. We would like to see it developed and delivered with a very strong local focus, providing the framework for local communities to develop local resilience in all its areas of community activity, employment, services and provisions. The Core Strategy needs to recognise the value and scale of the potential impact of local community action as beneficial in itself and as a powerful agency of change when aggregated⁵.

10 The green infrastructure is addressed by the Core Strategy Spatial Options report. We welcome this strategic view and hope that it is further developed and given enhanced priority to reflect the Northwest Green Infrastructure Prospectus' central concern that it is treated as a critical infrastructure, including, for example, protecting land with agricultural and horticultural use potential. Further, we would like to see an integrated approach that links the Core Strategy's green infrastructure agenda with the strategic vision of the NW Green Infrastructure Prospectus and the use of locally customised Sustainability Checklists for Developments.

⁴ The Transition response to the RS2010 represented the position of twelve NW Transition initiatives.

⁵ Mass Localism: a way to help small communities solve big social challenges [including climate change]: NESTA; (Feb 2010) www.nesta.org.uk/library/documents/MassLocalism_Feb2010.pdf (last accessed 23 February 2010).



11 We question the nature and validity of the Wirral Waters development. While we are sure that the Council and the developer's will ensure that the development will be built to the best environmental standards (perhaps BREEAM plus) we are not convinced about the impact of a mixed-use development of this scale. Tall buildings' environmental performance and impact is now questionable after recent research. Much of inner Birkenhead's housing and commercial districts need to be revitalised yet Wirral Waters looks likely to shift the centre of gravity of Birkenhead further away from the current centre. The prospect of anything but 'value' developers, there, looks unlikely. The result will be further deterioration in the living environment of inner Birkenhead people while thousands of new residents in Wirral Waters will put further demands on the Birkenhead infrastructures. While we acknowledge the value of eye-catching development we would prefer to see it associated with more, local, smaller developments where the investment creates and retains economic benefits in a local area and, perhaps particularly, in disadvantaged areas.

12 We would like the Council to consider whether supported Transition initiatives in the most disadvantaged areas of the east of Wirral might be useful as an additional, or new mechanism for promoting social, economic and environmental change in some of the most hard-pressed communities.

13 Comparison shopping is identified as a problem in the Retail Strategy. Wirral leaks wealth. The Strategy's response relies on new floorspace. The former Bidston Dock is identified as a potential development area to provide comparison shopping outlets and retain up to 10% of the revenue lost to outside the borough. Again, we cannot help but see no effort here to develop in an environmentally responsible manner. Such a venture would, almost certainly, we suggest, in that location, be mostly used by car-borne shoppers. Not only are the problems of car use exacerbated but investment is diverted to a site mostly detached from a host community. In the short or long term some of these disused industrial, commercial and port-related areas have scope for other uses such as green infrastructure and even community horticulture given Wirral's chronic shortage of allotments and low resilience in terms of local food supply.

14 The leakage of expenditure on such basic commodities as food is not addressed. According to the Retail Strategy nine superstores in the Overall Catchment Area (OCA) account for 64% of the aggregate convenience goods expenditure of the OCA residents. Most of that money will be lost to the local economy. Additionally, the energy profligacy of the food transport miles, and its damaging climate impacts, are not acknowledged. The Transition approach is to seek and promote local sources, including local production, for those goods and produce where this feasible. As well as reducing negative climate impacts this approach reduces oil dependency and increases local resilience. The Transition approach generally produces a win-win situation with, for example, beneficial environmental, health and wellbeing outcomes.



Annexe A

The Transition movement

The Transition movement started in the UK in 2007 as a local response to the twin and linked prospects of the end of the oil era and climate change. Transition initiatives are community-led coordinated programmes of action that enable local communities to avoid the worst impacts of the coming global changes while building stronger, happier, healthier more inclusive, more self-sufficient communities.

Oil and gas reserves will pass their peak global yields in the near future then decline. The reduced availability and eventual loss of oil will be felt sharply both as a fuel for transport and heating, in oil-dependent food production and as the raw material of many other developed-world consumer products. The climate change associated with global and growing fossil fuel use will have serious, negative impacts on most communities across the globe.

Transition initiatives centre on communities in different types of settlement, from a small community, a village or city district to whole towns and cities. The work that different initiatives do relates directly to types of areas and communities they work within. The development of local responses and locally relevant programmes is both a defining characteristic and an important strength of the movement. However, all Transition initiatives are united in their core activities and the principles and values that underpin them.

The Transition approach emulates the efficiency of ecological systems. Biosystems such as forests, river systems and food chains operate with a waste-free internal use of energy and materials. In combination with each other they form complex networks that are resilient and mutually supportive. Transition initiatives mirror these characteristics at a local level.

There are now approximately 500 Transition initiatives around the world with some 200 Transition initiatives in the UK and around 25 in the Northwest, some in the early stages of formation. The Transition Network provides operational standards to ensure that initiatives with official "Transition" designation are sufficiently developed to work effectively in their community settings. The network provides significant support, training and information for members between whom there is much exchange and mutual support.

In the Northwest Transition initiatives are found across the geographical spread - north, south, east and west. The movement is growing in a bottom-up, sustainable way. A list of Northwest Transition initiatives is given on the next page. There are others in initiation and development stages.



NW Transition initiatives

Altringham, Hale & Bowden
Bolton
Cheadle Hulme
Chester
Clitheroe
Crewe
Eastham

Kendal
Kingsley
Lancaster
Leyland
Liverpool South
Macclesfield
Manchester

South Ribble
Southport
Stockport
Warrington
West Kirby
Wigan
Wilmslow

