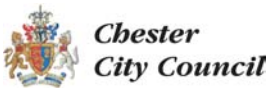


West Cheshire/North East Wales Sub-Regional Spatial Strategy and Strategic Environmental Assessment Process Report



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government



2006 - 2021

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I- Introduction

North East Wales and West Cheshire is thriving, but a buoyant economy is accompanied by its own challenges.

The West Cheshire \ North East Wales Sub Regional Spatial Strategy provides a non-statutory framework for greater cross-border co-operation and development between North East Wales and West Cheshire over the next 15 years. This Strategy marks the first major contribution towards implementing the Wales Spatial Plan and the North West Plan (- Submitted Draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the North West of England) at the sub regional level¹.

It will support integrated spatial policy and development at a local level on both sides of the border., as such it is an excellent example of cross border co-operation between a range of agencies delivering tangible benefits for the people who live and work in the area.

The sub-region encompasses a core area of Chester and Ellesmere Port and Neston in England, together with Flintshire and Wrexham in North Wales. A 'wider reference area' has also been identified. This includes Denbighshire, the Wirral and the Frodsham-Helsby sub-area of Vale Royal, Warrington and Halton.

The work undertaken represents a significant step forward in cross-border co-operation, the Strategy follows six years of work by a partnership of organisations and local authorities within the sub-region, including:

- Welsh Assembly Government (including the former Welsh Development Agency);
- North West Regional Assembly;
- Cheshire County Council;
- Chester City Council;
- Denbighshire County Council;

¹ At the time of finalising this sub regional spatial strategy (Autumn 2006), the Examination in Public of the Submitted Draft RSS for North West England was about to start, as a consequence of the RSS process it is recognised that the sub regional spatial strategy may need to be reviewed at a future date

- Ellesmere Port and Neston Borough Council;
- Flintshire County Council;
- Merseyside Policy Unit; and
- Wrexham County Borough Council.

Education & Learning Wales (ELWa) were also closely involved in its preparation².

The Strategy has evolved from a report undertaken by GVA Grimley³ that was published in 2004, which assessed the economic, planning, housing and transport issues facing the sub-region. It also highlighted the issues to be overcome in ensuring the sub-region developed in a sustainable way. This was then developed into a draft strategy by Hyder Consulting, and PriceWaterhouseCoopers during 2005⁴.

In line with statutory requirements, the preparation of the Sub-Regional Spatial Strategy has been accompanied by a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), and Appropriate Assessment under the EU Habitats Directive⁵, which have been used both to appraise and to inform the preparation and development of the strategy.

The final version of the strategy has also taken account of the outcomes of a public consultation exercise which took place in early 2006.

A key test of how successful the sub region will be in achieving its ambitions will be the extent to which spatial development of the sub region adopts the principles of sustainable development. These are set out, in the UK Sustainable Development Strategy⁶, as being to achieve the twin goals of living within environmental limits, and ensuring a strong, healthy and just society, by means of achieving a sustainable economy, promoting good governance and using sound science responsibly. Four shared priorities for UK action flow from this:

² NWDA is not a member of the Steering Group and is therefore not party to this report, although it has attended a number of steering group meetings as an observer

³ “West Cheshire - North East Wales Sub Regional Study”, GVA Grimley, 2004

⁴ “Draft West Cheshire / North East Wales Sub Regional Strategy”, Hyder Consulting, and PriceWaterhouseCoopers, 2005

⁵ European Communities (1992) Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (“Habitats Directive”) see http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/nature/nature_conservation/eu_nature_legislation/habitats_directive/index_en.htm

⁶ “Securing the Future – delivering UK Sustainable Development Strategy” Defra, 2005

- Sustainable production and consumption;
- Climate change and energy;
- Natural resource protection and environmental enhancement; and
- Sustainable communities.

Sustainable development is at the heart of the strategy. This is in part driven by the wealth of natural and built heritage within the sub region. The need to protect and enhance this is paramount, and principally includes the protection of important internationally designated nature conservation sites, but also biodiversity at the local scale, locally distinctive landscapes, built heritage, Welsh culture and distinctiveness, and resource use. The sub-region also needs to recognise the effects of our changing planet, for example through the need to accommodate flooding and impacts of climate change, and reducing global impacts of climate change through reduction of carbon dioxide emissions, and living within environmental limits.

Within this context the sub regional spatial strategy sets out a broad vision that has been developed for the sub-region,

“The West Cheshire and North East Wales sub-region will be an area able to compete successfully in the regional, national and global marketplace, where the area’s special characteristics are pursued to the benefit of both the sub-region and the Liverpool city-region, where the strengths of individual centres are recognised and enhanced within environmental limits, where the desire to pursue economic growth is intertwined with the need to realise social inclusivity and facilitate environmental protection and enhancement in order to achieve the ultimate goal of sustainable development, where the distinctiveness of the local environment is appreciated and conserved, and where quality of life of the residents of the sub-region is paramount.”

The broad spatial planning principles underpinning the Sub-Regional Spatial Strategy are to:

- Create a clear identity for the sub-region whilst safeguarding the distinctive characteristics within it,
- Strengthen existing settlements and communities and help combat social exclusion;

- Ensure that, where feasible, the essential infrastructure and the community facilities required to support and complement new developments are provided through obligations placed upon the developers of land with higher value uses;
- Reduce the need to travel within the sub-region through the careful location of housing, employment, and retail;
- Enhance the external competitiveness of the sub-region by building on existing successes and identifying future opportunities to widen the economic base;
- Further develop the skills base of the labour force;
- Take proactive steps to improve the environment through the redevelopment of brownfield sites and major environmental improvements along the Dee Estuary
- Protect and enhance the environmental assets of the sub-region, including the natural, built and coastal environments;
- Promote and develop an integrated transport system for the sub-region, and connecting into the wider area., with an important role for public transport
- Give attention to rural regeneration where this is needed

The Sub-Regional Spatial Strategy is supported by a more detailed framework of principles, relating to key areas such as housing, the economy, the environment, transport and leisure and tourism. The main spatial strands of the Strategy are:

- Supporting the existing strategic centres within the sub-region;
- Focusing on areas in need of regeneration;
- Enhancing links between areas of opportunity and areas of need; and
- Placing emphasis on existing and future roles of settlements and centres within the sub-region.

The framework of principles will enable the implementation of the Strategy at various levels – regional, sub-regional and at local level. A Framework for Joint Action accompanies the Strategy and provides further information on implementation, monitoring and delivery. This framework will provide a means for ongoing research and studies that will feed into a rolling delivery of the strategy and more importantly help to facilitate the cross-border working proposed herein. A key aspect of this will be the creation of sub-committees to the steering group which will have responsibilities for progressing integrated approaches to, for example, housing allocations, waste management and environmental management.

The sub regional spatial strategy covers a wide range of issues, which will be of relevance both across different themes and locations, therefore it is important that it is read as a whole.

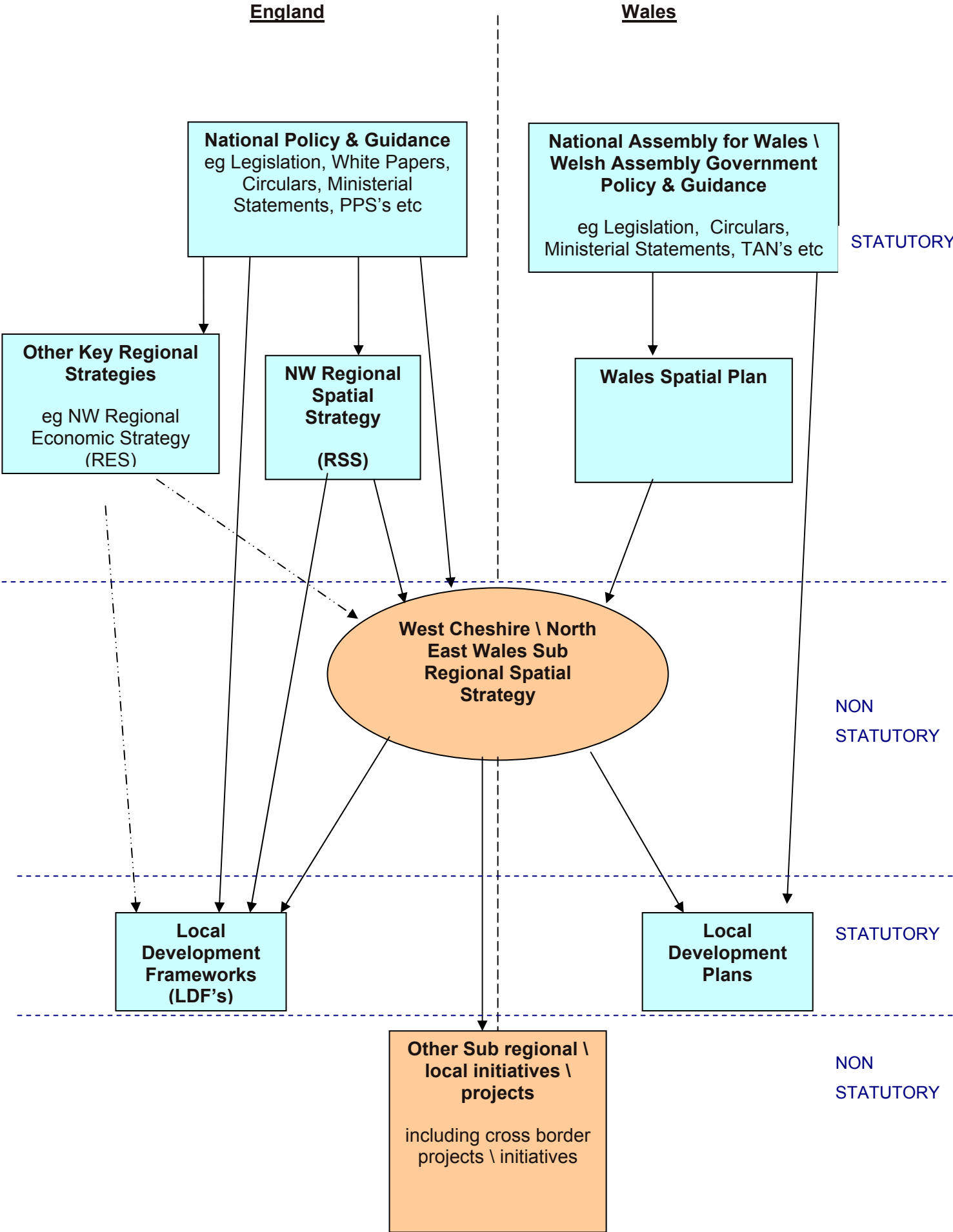
The development of the strategy has provided an input into the development of the Wales Spatial Plan⁷ and the North West Plan⁸ (– Submitted Draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the North West of England). Future reviews and changes in content to either of these documents will necessitate the need to review the sub regional spatial strategy, in addition to any review instigated as an outcome of it monitoring and implementation. In addition Provided it is in conformity with the North West Plan (North West RSS) or Wales Spatial Plan, it will form part of each authority's evidence base and could be used in support of individual policies in Local Development Frameworks and Local Development Plans (in England and Wales respectively).

It should be noted that this strategy does not allocate specific sites for development as a Local Development Framework or Local Development Plan might, but instead provides integrated, guiding spatial principles for development at the sub-regional level, that should be considered when preparing development plans ant the local authority level.

⁷ “Wales Spatial Plan”, National Assembly of Wales, 2004

⁸ “The North West Plan - Submitted Draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the North West of England”, North West Regional Assembly , 2006

Diagram 1 - Policy Relationships



II- The Policy and Strategic Context

The Sub-Regional Spatial Strategy sits within a framework provided by the Wales Spatial Plan and Regional Spatial Strategy for the North West of England (RSS13RPG13) (formerly called Regional Planning Guidance 13))⁹, both of which are statutory documents. While the objectives of this regional framework are a critical starting point in the preparation of the Sub-Regional Spatial Strategy, the aim of the Strategy is both to inform the new emerging Regional Spatial Strategy for the North West of England and subsequent reviews of the Wales Spatial Plan, and also take account of the wording of both these higher level documents. The preparation of the Strategy has also been mindful of the emerging 'Northern Way' City Regions (in particular the Liverpool and Manchester City Regions), the North West Regional Economic Strategy documents¹⁰, and the North Wales Economic Development Strategy¹¹.

The strategic objectives of the Wales Spatial Plan include building sustainable communities, valuing the environment, increasing and spreading prosperity and achieving sustainable accessibility. The Wales Spatial Plan also provides strategic direction for individual spatial areas of Wales, including North East Wales – Border and Coast. The plan also emphasises the need to give appropriate and sympathetic consideration to the employment and regeneration needs of the rural hinterland, otherwise there are likely to be increased issues relating to commuting, eg climate change, air quality, congestion etc.

The vision for North East Wales is – ‘an area harnessing the economic drivers on both sides of the border, reducing inequalities and improving the quality of its natural and physical assets’. In essence, the aim of the plan for North East Wales is to widen the effective catchment for jobs, to link areas in need of regeneration to areas of strong economic demand but high environmental pressures.

⁹ “RPG13 Regional Planning Guidance for the North West “, GONW, March 2003.

¹⁰ Northwest Regional Economic Strategy 2006-2009”, Northwest Regional Development Agency 2005

¹¹ ”A Winning North Wales - the North Wales Development Strategy”, North Wales Economic Forum 2004

More specifically, it proposes that:

- An effective integrated transport system is essential to the continued good performance of the area;
- The area will operate in a way that maintains and enhances the facility of international gateways and corridors;
- Constructive cross-border relationships will continue to play a fundamentally important role in the success of the area and will be fostered;
- Deeside will continue to be an important location for major employment generating investment;
- The wider area's tourism offer should be expanded to capture higher values, reflecting the high quality environment and its heritage;
- Wrexham should be promoted as a main regional centre with a complementary function to Chester with other centres being developed in ways which provide a network of appropriate services; and
- Areas of potential conflict between environmental issues and development aspirations need to be identified with the aim to develop win-win situations. Areas of environmental quality can represent opportunities as well as possible constraints.

The current Regional Spatial Strategy for the North West (RSS13) sets out key themes relating to the achievement of greater economic competitiveness and growth together with social progress, sustaining and reviving the region's rural communities and the rural economy, ensuring a better image for the region and high environmental and design quality, and creating an accessible region, with an efficient and fully integrated transport system. Policy SD5 highlights the need for cross-border working and study in the North east Wales-West Cheshire area. The following policies of the spatial development framework are relevant to the sub region: SD2 (North West Metropolitan Area); SD3 (Key towns and cities outside the North West Metropolitan Area) and SD4 (Maintaining Urban Form and Setting and the treatment of North Cheshire. This has then been developed as part of the ongoing process to prepare Regional Spatial Strategy for North West England, through a number of policies including a specific one for the sub region LCR4. The submitted Draft RSS will be the subject of an Examination in Public in Autumn 2006 \ Winter 2007, and when the final version of RSS is published in late 2007, this sub regional strategy will need to be reviewed to take account of its final wording.

EU regional policy

EU regional policy is important for the sub-region in two main respects:

- It provides a framework under which public sector aid and incentives can be offered to private sector organisations, but it also restricts; and
- It raises the question of what can be done by way of aid and incentives in particular areas of West Cheshire/North East Wales.

Changes in the designation of the Assisted Areas in the sub-region have resulted in the loss of regional grant status in major towns like Wrexham and its key employment centres. The EU has already announced that the areas within the UK that have Tier 2 Assisted Area status will be reduced significantly past 2006 – partly as a reflection of the new accession countries to the EU and the need to promote economic development there. This will undoubtedly have an impact on parts of the sub-region, notably Wrexham and Ellesmere Port. (In summer 2006, work has been ongoing by Government to produce a new Assisted Areas map for post 2006)

The West Cheshire/North East Wales sub-region is not likely to escape the national curtailment of areas with Assisted Area status. This could affect not just the investor appeal – especially if areas close to its borders retain such status – but also the ability of public sector organisations to take intervening actions to promote economic growth and development.

In relation to the EU programme period 2007-2013, Denbighshire will continue to fall within a Tier 1 Assisted Area (at least initially) and will benefit from ‘convergence’ funding as part of the West Wales and the Valleys area.

Strategic context

The GVA Grimley study provided the main evidence base for the strategy. This included a SWOT analysis (see Table 1) for the sub-region which highlighted a number of key factors relevant to the future. If no intervening actions are taken, they could significantly influence (and constrain) the future development of the sub-region. Of special relevance are:

- The central economic importance of Chester and Wrexham;
- The sharp contrast in the distribution (and growth prospects) of manufacturing and service industries;
- The tightening of the labour market and the related skills issue;
- The insufficient supply of residential land to meet projected demand, compounded by a lack of affordable housing; and
- The high environmental quality of the sub-region, including a number of designated sites of international importance, which afford protection and enhancement

SWOT analysis of the sub-region

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Well connected to the national and international motorway and trunk road networks including Euroroute 22, providing access to airports and ports, and rail accessibility to the principal urban settlements; ○ Sub-region is part of a dynamic growth corridor from Dublin to Sweden, as part of the Trans-European network; ○ Major regional centres: City of Chester – major city centre offering ‘gild-edged profile’ in terms of economic and tourism offer and administrative centre for Cheshire, Wrexham – major regional retail centre and the principal urban centre in North Wales; ○ Internationally significant nature conservation area at the Dee Estuary, with nationally important designations at Mersey Estuary and Clwydian Range; ○ Population growth across the sub-region (particularly in Flintshire and Wrexham) with stable population projected in 2021 – providing a ‘critical mass’ of population, particularly of those of working age (25 to 64); ○ Extremely buoyant housing market across the sub-region in terms of average values and declining vacancy rates; ○ Good variation in the supply of house types across the sub-region – particularly High demand for new-build detached and apartments; ○ Generally an extremely successful and prosperous area epitomised by low unemployment, increasing economic activity and rising average GDP; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Heavy peak-time congestion at junction of M56/M53 and in A55/A483 junction; ○ Links to south have issues, eg A51 !links to the M6 ○ Environmental constraints including fluvial flooding affecting the environs of the Dee Estuary, extending from Deeside into Chester; and compounding effect of green belt coverage around Chester; ○ Coastal and fluvial flooding issues are very evident ○ Declining population in Ellesmere Port and Neston, with projected population decline to 2021 in Chester, Ellesmere Port and Neston and Wirral; ○ Chester and Ellesmere Port and Neston experiencing significant net out-migration; ○ Average house prices in Chester are more than six times the average income for Chester residents; house price increases have been highest in Flintshire and Wrexham; ○ Tenure becoming increasingly dominated by the owner-occupier sector across the sub-region – decreasing social housing stock exacerbating problems of affordability; ○ Insufficient supply of residential land to meet projected demand, particularly in Flintshire; ○ Pockets of deprivation and unemployment evident across the sub-region, with particular concentrations in Ellesmere Port and Wrexham (and parts of Wirral and Denbighshire); ○ Gender differentials in employment prospects – over one-third of male employment is concentrated in manufacturing, whilst female

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sector strengths in automotive, chemical engineering and tourism/retail and (secondary) financial services, food and aerospace; ○ A strong dichotomy within the Core Study Area whereby the bulk of industrial activity is located in Flintshire, Wrexham and Ellesmere Port and Neston and by contrast, almost one-half of all business activity in the service economy is concentrated in Chester; ○ Large supply of employment land, particularly in Ellesmere Port and Neston, Flintshire and Wrexham; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ employment is concentrated in those sectors which are expected to grow (services); ○ High incidence of churning taking place in terms of business registrations and de-registrations; ○ Growing mismatch of qualified students meeting the requirements of the target sectors (particularly manufacturing); ○ Particular weakness is that the supply of employment land is constrained by site readiness and the quality of sites available, particularly in Flintshire, Wrexham and Chester.

Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Opportunity to increase transport accessibility to key ports (Mostyn, Holyhead and Twelve Quays) and airports (in particular Manchester) ○ Proposals to improve the rail network within the sub-region – particularly potential electrification of part of Wrexham-Bidston line and Shotton Chord, which would link the Wrexham Bidston line with the North West Coast line; ○ Opportunity to co-ordinate and enhance bus demand responsive transport service across the sub-region; ○ To increase joint-working in those cross border target sectors, through the development of a cross border cluster/sector strategy; ○ With the sub-region at (almost) full employment, the emphasis should be in reducing economic inactivity, which invariably is linked to areas of deprivation, addressing this requires a long term regeneration strategy; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Continuation of decline in population in English districts undermines the housing market, the delivery of key public services and the vitality and viability of urban centres; ○ Continuing trend of net in-migration in Flintshire (in particular), Wrexham (from English authorities) and Denbighshire leads to loss of local identity; ○ Threat to housing market renewal initiative in Wirral from increasing rate of net out-migration; ○ Lack of affordable housing in the sub-region is projected to increase with over-heating markets, particularly in Chester; ○ With business de-registrations increasing and registrations remaining static then this points to a potential net decline in stock, which appears to be impacting on the retail sector in particular; ○ Long term change (1994 – 2002) in business stock in financial sector has remained static in the core

Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Requirement for a more co-ordinated approach to addressing the skills supply mismatch; ○ Opportunity for key agencies to co-ordinate their approach to bringing forward employment sites for development across the sub-region to meet the needs of the cross border target sectors – delivering sites for high level services in the short term in Ellesmere Port and Wrexham where short term constraints in Chester exist: and delivering sites for mainstream and high tech manufacturing in Ellesmere Port, where short term constraints in Flintshire and Wrexham exist; ○ Opportunity for a co-ordinated approach to bring forward range of sites in the medium term and long term to meet the needs of the cross border target sectors (inc. inter alia, Saughton Camp, Warren Hall, Northern Gateway (Deeside)). Opportunity to promote environmental enhancements and living within environmental limits being at the heart of the sub-region’s development ○ Opportunity to link to Liverpool’s European Capital of Culture status in 2008 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ study area, yet has grown by over a fifth in the wider reference area; ○ With the economy at (almost) full employment and with economic activity being particularly concentrated in the most deprived areas, then this points to an extremely tight labour market – this will inevitably be a barrier to future economic growth opportunities and will lead to increasing travel to work journeys; ○ Area has a high concentration of manufacturing with specialist skill requirements, yet the education system is delaying the introduction of skilled employees and the flow of new labour is increasingly being met by young /unqualified people; ○ Degree of economic exposure evident, particularly in the manufacturing sectors, where a small number of very large companies account for almost all employment/output and a degree of global exposure in the financial services sector.

Table 1 Adapted from GVA Grimley

Key issues

At a more detailed level, the consultation process revealed the need to integrate the identified issues of economy, housing, the environment, social inclusion, and travel and movement. These elements are interrelated and conflicts can occur between them which need to be addressed.

The economy

Key economic priorities to be addressed are:

- Improving the business infrastructure, particularly transport links within and around the region;
- Expanding the training and skills programmes;
- Raising the quality of the property offer, especially to meet the changing requirements of industry and commerce and the general move towards a service sector economy;
- Changing the focus of the tourism/retail offer towards adding value and quality;
- Strengthening links between business and education (both schools and higher education institutions);
- Increasing the availability of ripe, quality employment sites to match the economic priorities: and giving increased emphasis to the role of micro-businesses, indigenous growth and local supply networks.

With some notable exceptions like Chester, there is an overall problem of low perception of the sub-region as an investment location. This is reinforced by the relatively weak investment yields evident in many parts of the sub-region. All of this impacts on the ability to attract private investment. However, as Deeside has demonstrated, viable development – without grant support – can be achieved with the right strategy and the right product for the marketplace.

Drivers of future investment and key location factors

A key element of the new Sub-Regional Spatial Strategy is to identify the drivers of future investment and, where relevant to the declared economic objectives and priorities of the sub-region, to suggest measures and actions which should be taken to address them.

Recent trends and current market evidence suggest:

- That ‘new’ greenfield inward investments are likely to be much smaller in scale than in the past couple of decades – and most of these investments are likely to be in the service sector.

- Prospects for new large-scale manufacturing investments face tough competition from other parts of the UK, mainland Europe, and the rapidly-growing economies of China and India.
- There are likely to be both significant opportunities and challenges for attracting re-investments (in both the manufacturing and service sectors).
- As competition increases, the sub-region must inevitably focus increasingly on higher value added activities and services.
- The investor offer – both for attracting new ‘greenfield’ investments and for harnessing re-investments – must be increasingly upgraded to reflect the new market conditions. This applies especially to the regeneration areas within the sub-region.
- There will be an increasing need to encourage investment and job opportunities from indigenous companies and firms within the sub-region, but again recognising that, especially for the larger scale investments, competition with other parts of the UK and other countries is often involved.

A recent report¹² by leading economic forecasters Cambridge Econometrics on the North West’s economy reinforces this analysis by predicting that:

- The most dynamic business sector to be business services over 2005-2015;
- By 2015 financial and business services is forecast to account for nearly one fifth of the region’s output and becoming the principal source of economic growth;
- In the long-term further restructuring will be necessary in manufacturing, leading to the loss of a considerable number of jobs;
- Some parts of services are increasingly under competitive pressure from less expensive labour abroad and this is likely to curb employment growth.

¹² “Business Forecasts Northwest” Northwest Regional Development Agency, May 2005

From a Welsh perspective, the forecasters highlighted Wales’ persistent lagging in the UK in GVA growth and the disparities between the Welsh regions. Fastest growing sectors are predicted to be financial and business services and transport and communications.

Key location factors

For both inward and indigenous investors, market experience and evidence highlights the significance of a relatively small number of key location factors which tend to drive and influence investment decisions in particular sectors of economic activity (see Table 2 below). For each of these, it should be noted that the value of the physical environment should also be a key locational factor, not only in terms of creating a high quality investment offer, but also in terms of protecting particularly sensitive environments and accommodating the impacts of climate change, for example flooding.

Of special relevance to the future strategy are the relatively high value added activities that tend to be concentrated in:

- Emerging industries;
- High tech manufacturing; and
- High level services.

	Groupings of Economic Activities	Key common requirements
1.	<p>“Emerging Industries”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media/Multi-media • Biotechnology • Nanotechnology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High propensity to cluster • Access to leading technologies and an innovative environment • Presence of Universities, researchers and skilled labour • Susceptible to catalyst initiatives and Government support • Prestige locations in a quality environment • Excellent infrastructure and accessibility to customers/markets

	Groupings of Economic Activities	Key common requirements
2.	“High Tech Manufacturing” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Semiconductors • Telecoms equipment • Pharmaceutical & fine chemicals • Advanced materials • Aerospace 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing skill base vital • Access to large and growing markets and key customers • Track record in attracting high tech manufacturing • Sensitive to differences in operating costs and tax/incentives • High quality communications • Fast track, purpose-built premises with full Government support
3.	“High Level Services” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IT services and software • HQ functions • R & D • Financial and business services • Telecoms services • Publishing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate skills availability • Rapid market access • Propensity to cluster in IT & Software, HQ and R&D • Low operating costs becoming increasingly important • Access to advanced technologies & University research for R&D • High quality facilities in a prestige location for HQ functions • Wide variety of countries, but concentration within countries
4.	“Mainstream Manufacturing” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electronics & Office Machines • Plastics and Rubber • Automotive assembly and components • Medical Devices • Textiles and Food processing • Wood & paper products/packing • Mechanical engineering 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality market, labour & supplier access • Operational cost sensitivity • Increasing requirement for an educated and skilled workforce • High quality infrastructure and logistics is essential • Prefer high quality locations with a good track record in industry • Favourable regulations governing labour laws, operating, etc • Can be sensitive to grants and other incentives • Shift to high quality emerging markets with large markets Less well suited to environmentally sensitive locations
5.	“Office Services” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Call centres & shared service centres • Back office 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate labour availability vital • Increasingly cost sensitive • Multi-lingual language skills often critical • Access to customer (internal as well as external) can be important

	Groupings of Economic Activities	Key common requirements
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government agencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good quality ICT and physical infrastructure is also a requirement Prestige locations not essential; can be grants sensitive Can be influenced by IPA initiatives to support the sector
6	“General Services” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transport logistics and distribution Printing Healthcare support services Trade centres/building services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Market (customer) access critical Infrastructure and logistics also critical for distribution activities Skilled labour availability is important Cost sensitive Purpose built facilities and large sites is also important
7.	“Leisure and Tourism” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hotels Attractions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Market (customer) access and growth potential is critical Labour availability is also a consideration, including language skills Regulations governing construction and operation Infrastructure quality and logistics Quality and attractiveness of the environment (rural or urban)
8.	“Processing Industries” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paper and pump Mineral products Forestry products Major foodstuffs Oils processing Extractive Industries Steel and Aluminium 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accessibility to large growth markets and key customers Adjacent to natural resources Good quality road, rail and port infrastructure and logistics Low operating costs Appropriate labour force Presence of related and supporting industries Pro-business regulations Substantial and reliable water and power requirements Less well suited to environmentally sensitive locations

Table 2 Adapted from PricewaterhouseCoopers

Housing

Existing links between housing and employment are relatively poor in the sub-region. This is a relationship that needs to be emphasised, with journeys to work a key consideration in the location of future developments.

There are opportunities from a market demand and sustainability perspective for identifying a smaller number of larger, strategic mixed-use locations, or at least housing sites closely related to strategic employment sites, within the sub-region for housing and employment growth. This would be in line with the recent housing consultation paper by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister of pursuing a more market-led approach to planning and development¹³, although it should be noted that this consultation paper is applicable only to England and has been a cause for considerable debate since its publication.

Housing affordability is an issue across the sub-region and is the result of the rapid increase in house prices relative to household incomes, exacerbated by increased demand for housing in certain areas and changing lifestyle needs. Emerging housing demand studies for the North West (including research undertaken by Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners in 2005¹⁴) have shown that Chester suffers particularly in terms of levels of housing need, in particular with regard to affordability. However, it is important to note that affordability problems are not solely confined to Chester, and are present throughout the sub-region to varying degrees. Both Ellesmere Port and Wrexham experience significant affordability problems, as a result partly of the impact of the dynamics of the Chester housing market, and spreading demand for housing outside of the immediate Chester area into the wider sub-region, leading to rapidly increasing property prices.

The environment

The natural environment should be viewed as a considerable asset for the sub-region in terms of ecological, landscape character, recreation and tourism interest.

¹³ Draft PPS3 – Consultation Paper on a New Planning Policy Statement 3 (PPS3)- Housing” ODPM December 2005

¹⁴ “North West Household Growth Estimates Study” prepared by Nathaniel Lichfield & Partners for North West Regional Assembly, 2005

The sub-region includes significant areas protected by green belt and green barrier designations, and by national and international environmental protection designations. These include an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, eight Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) or possible SACs and four Special Protection Areas (SPAs) or potential SPAs and three Ramsar sites or proposed Ramsar sites, in addition to a large number of further national and local key environmental designations. The internationally designated nature conservation sites within issues for the sub-region are illustrated below and include:

- Alyn Valley Woods/Coedwigoedd Dyffryn Alun SAC
- Berwyn and South Clwyd Mountains/ Berwyn a Mynyddoedd de Clwyd SAC
- Berwyn SPA
- Deeside and Buckley Newt Sites SAC
- Halkyn Mountain/Mynydd Helygain SAC
- River Dee and Bala Lake/Afon Dyfrdwy a Llyn Tegid SAC
- Dee Estuary/ Aber Dyfrdwy possible SAC (pSAC), SPA, potential SPA (pSPA), Ramsar and proposed Ramsar (pRamsar) site
- Mersey Narrows and North Wirral Foreshore pSPA
- Mersey Estuary SPA and Ramsar site
- Midland Meres and Mosses Ramsar Phase 2
- Fenn's, Whixall, Bettisfield, Wem and Cadney Mosses SAC
Johnstown Newt Sites SAC

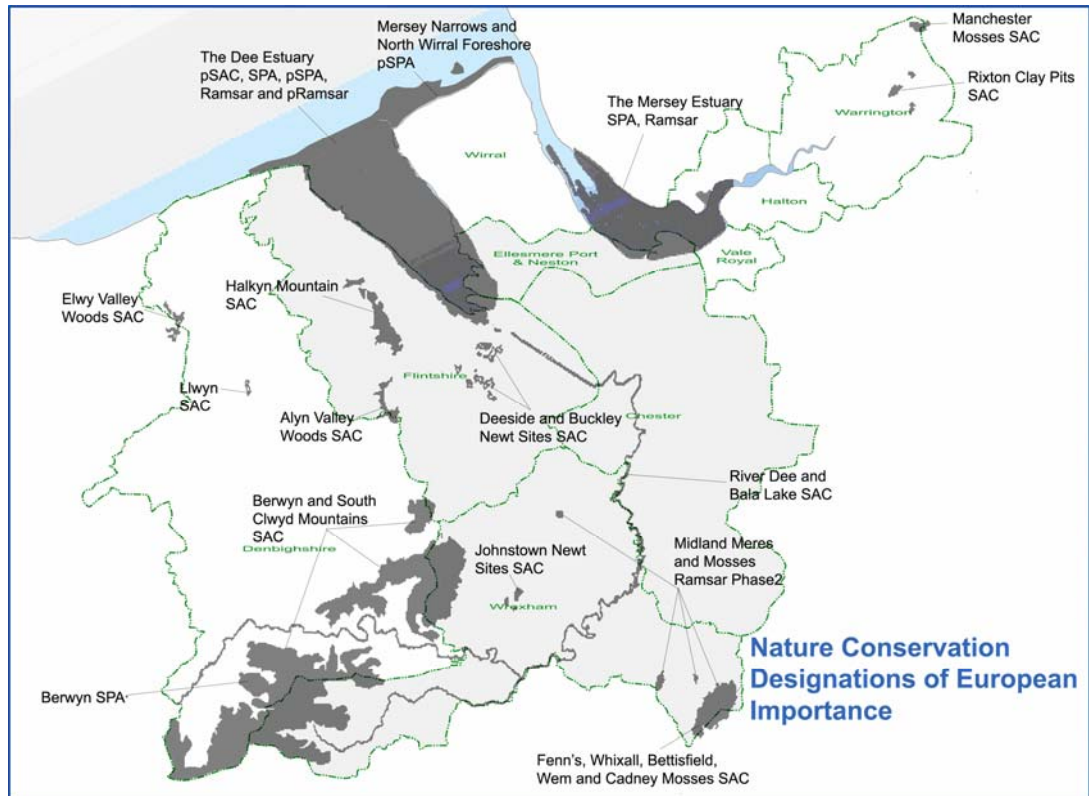


Diagram 2

The key is to live within our environmental limits. This will affect factors such as accommodating flood-risk, the protection of the coastal/marine zone, climate change; biodiversity and habitat loss,; deterioration of built and archaeological heritage and the decline of local distinctiveness, including Welsh language and culture. Development threats to environmental assets are diverse and derive from, for example, direct physical loss, pollution, landscape impact, habitat fragmentation and climate change. Spatial decisions will affect transport and commuting activity and environmental considerations such as brownfield land use and contaminated land, strategic flood risk, water resources management, waste management, and relationships with social well-being must be accounted for. Transport and communications links have a strong role to play in living within environmental limits. This is discussed further below.

Social inclusion

The sub-region includes areas in need of physical and economic regeneration, including pockets of deprivation within areas otherwise perceived as affluent such as Chester. The sub-region is also in close proximity to areas of very high deprivation in Merseyside, in particular Birkenhead.

The key to better social inclusion is a fundamental improvement in the investor offer and appeal of the disadvantaged areas – rather than just broad community regeneration measures. Targeted and focused interventions have worked well in areas like Speke and demonstrate the value of combining specific investment measures (e.g. Estuary Business Park) with wider measures to improve the environment and infrastructure. An important element of the strategy is to choose particular locations/sites to act as growth points in the regeneration areas.

Within this context, the rural hinterland plays an important role in servicing the strategic centres and the needs of these rural areas with respect to social issues, should not be overlooked.

Travel and movement

Whilst connections within and beyond the sub-region are good, the issue is one of increasing traffic congestion at key junctions and the capacity and service level of the local rail network.

There is a need to improve transport and accessibility within the sub-region so that labour can more easily move between areas of need and areas of opportunity and that goods can easily reach markets. Spatial planning decisions can reduce the need to travel. Analysis of travel patterns, flows and journey distances, can produce measures based on demand management, such as car park pricing and availability, or availability of public transport. These themes are explored further within the Framework for Joint Action.

Better integration of transport systems is required to facilitate this, particularly rail and bus networks. Accessibility by public transport must be a key criterion for choosing future development sites, and increased emphasis should be placed on developing new and improved public transport links, rather than just relying on existing network links.

The West Cheshire North East Wales Sub-Region has a relatively good highway network of motorways and dual carriageway A roads linking the major centres of population and links to the M6 motorway and thus to the conurbations in the north west and west North West and West Midlands. While the main network links (M53, M56, A55, A483, A548 and A550) are generally satisfactory, there are capacity hotspots – namely, congestion at key junctions which need to be addressed. There are access issues with regard to important traffic generators such as Wrexham Industrial Estate and Mostyn Dock, and also concerns about the capacity of the A483 to cater for significant new development. [Note that promotion of expansion at Mostyn, has the potential to put pressure on the integrity of the Dee Estuary pSAC, SPA and Ramsar site. The provisions of ENV2 ensure that any expansion would be conditional upon the Appropriate Assessment requirements being fulfilled]. There is a need to ensure that investment to provide adequate capacity on key highway routes is sufficient to cope with the growth in economic prosperity of the sub-region, not constrain it, and that improvement proposals should be implemented where necessary.

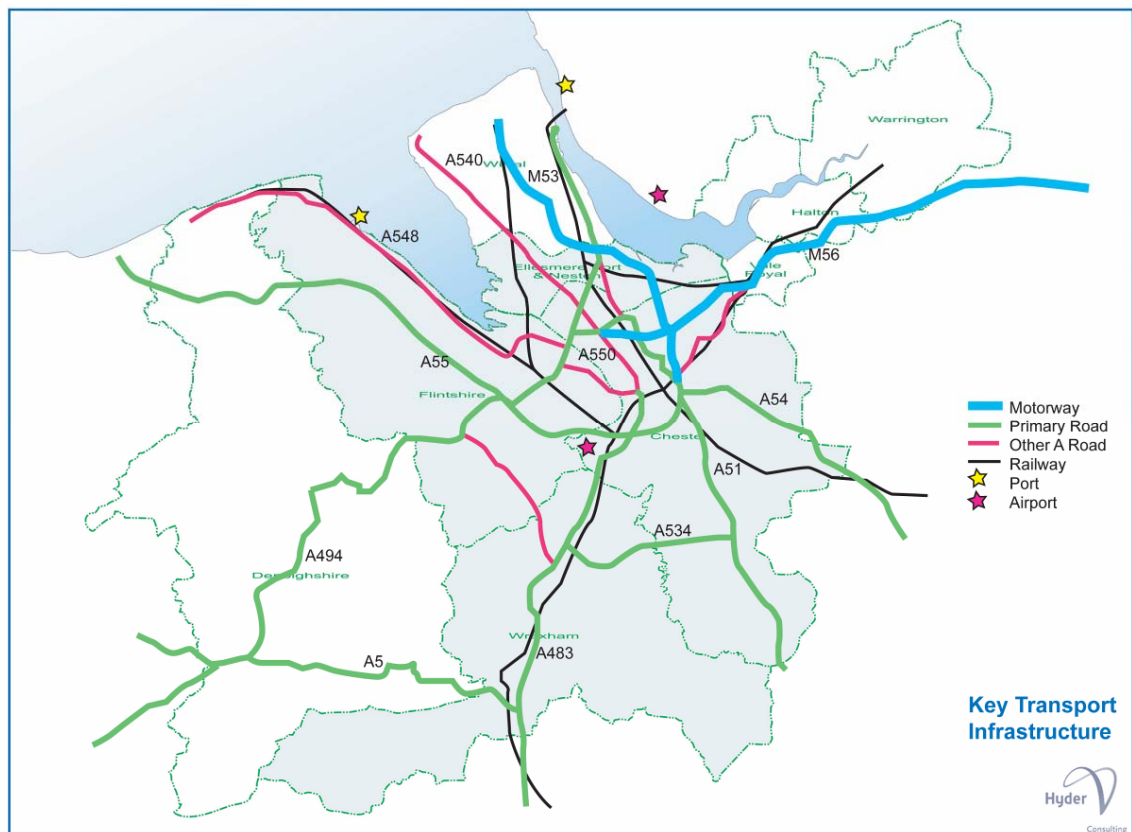


Diagram 3

The area includes the strategic Crewe – North Wales line, but also a significant local network linked to Merseyside which is not currently fully exploited. The electrification of the Wrexham-Bidston line would provide a significant opportunity for the sub-region in the future. However, the bus will remain the main form of public transport for the sub-region. The implementation of bus priority and other support measures are being developed and further initiatives are being considered by Taith (the North Wales Transport Consortium), Cheshire County Council and in the Mersey Dee Alliance Strategy. A large part of the sub-region is rural and has all the associated public transport accessibility problems. Park and Ride has developed around the main urban area of Chester, but there is the potential for a more strategic approach to park and ride locations serving not just town and city centres but strategic employment sites and other significant traffic generators.

Manchester Airport is the major international airport serving the region, but there is a growing importance of the Liverpool John Lennon Airport. There is a need to provide good service links (all modes) to both these airports. The proposed Mersey Gateway crossing would be a major benefit with regard access from the sub-region to Liverpool Airport. Notwithstanding the proximity to Manchester and Liverpool, there is also a need to investigate the possibility of improved air transport links from within the sub-region. There are, however, environmental consequences of increased air travel in the form of noise and carbon emissions, and these should be considered alongside any plans for expansion.

III -The Spatial Vision and Planning Principles

A spatial vision has been developed, together with a series of spatial planning principles, that will underpin the Sub-Regional Spatial Strategy and guide future development within the sub-region. The proposed spatial vision for the sub-region is:

“The West Cheshire and North East Wales sub-region will be an area able to compete successfully in the regional, national and global marketplace, where the area’s special characteristics are pursued to the benefit of both the sub-region and the Liverpool city-region, where the strengths of individual centres are recognised and enhanced within environmental limits, where the desire to pursue economic growth is intertwined with the need to realise social inclusivity and facilitate environmental protection and enhancement in order to achieve the ultimate goal of sustainability, where the distinctiveness of the local environment is appreciated and conserved, and where quality of life of the residents of the sub-region is paramount.”

Spatial planning principles

The broad spatial planning principles underpinning the Sub-Regional Spatial Strategy are to:

- Create a clear identity for the sub-region that recognises the distinct characteristics of the communities that define it;
- Strengthen existing settlements and communities and help combat social exclusion;
- Reduce the need to travel within the sub-region through the careful location of housing, employment, and retail;
- Enhance the external competitiveness of the sub-region by building on existing successes and identifying future opportunities to widen the economic base;
- Further develop the skills base of the labour force;

- Protect and enhance the environmental assets of the sub-region, including the natural, , built and historic environment, the quality and character of the countryside and coasts and ensure a high quality of development through good and inclusive design,
- Promote and develop an integrated transport system for the sub-region, and connecting into the wider area.
- Promote high quality development
- Recognise the vital importance of climate change with respect to spatial planning that works to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and deals with the long-term consequences of flood risk.

IV- The Sub-Regional Spatial Strategy

The Sub-Regional Spatial Strategy has been developed to offer the most beneficial impacts to the sub-region in economic, environmental and social terms. It is essential that the Sub-Regional Spatial Strategy takes into account the environmental qualities of the sub-region, which are reflected in the number of international and national designations present. Appreciation of these qualities and their implications on future development within the sub-region form a major consideration for the Strategy.

The main strands of the Strategy are:

- Supporting the existing strategic centres within the sub-region;
- Focusing on areas in need of regeneration including the rural hinterland
- Enhancing links between areas of opportunity and areas of need; and
- Placing emphasis on existing and future roles of settlements and centres within the sub region.
- Protection and enhancement of sensitive areas of natural, built and historic importance

These strands are illustrated on the Strategy diagram overleaf.



Diagram 4

Supporting existing strategic centres

The Sub-Regional Spatial Strategy supports the sustainable growth of the four strategic centres of Chester, Wrexham, the Deeside conurbation and Ellesmere Port. Whilst these centres have quite different characteristics, they are considered to bring a combination of strengths to the sub-region.

Supporting strategic centres means that the focus for new investment and development within the sub-region would, in the short-term at least, be on these four areas and based upon market-led requirements in those target sectors identified as being particular strengths. In focusing on these strengths, significant benefits can be realised to the sub-region in economic, social and (assuming considerate design and management) environmental terms for the period up to 2021 and beyond.

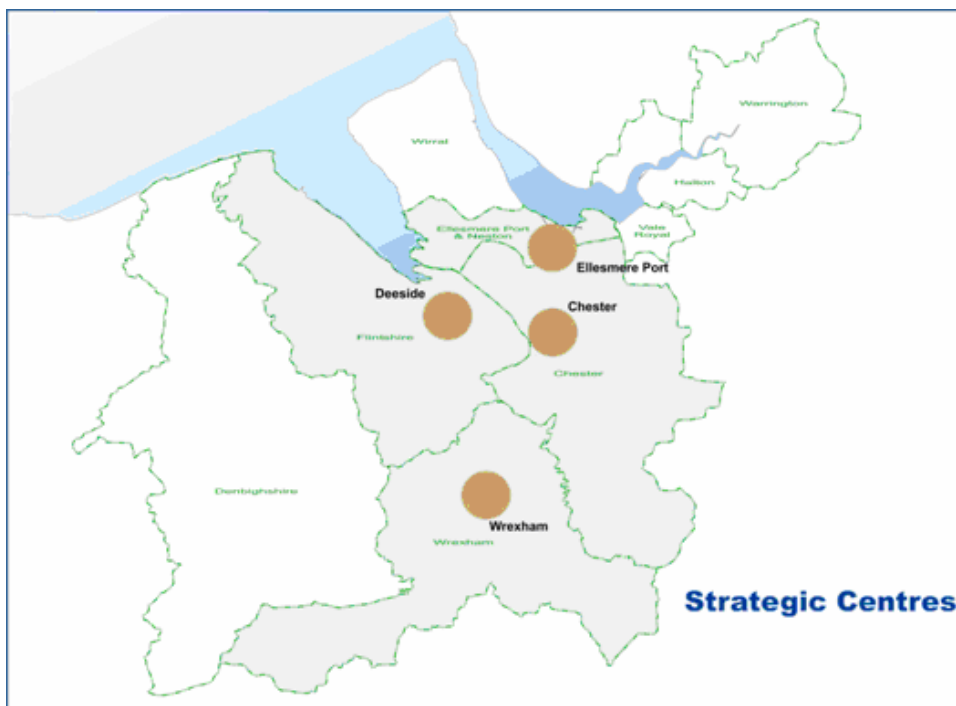


Diagram 5

What are the likely spatial implications?

There are various issues and constraints facing each of the four centres that may ultimately affect the extent of their future growth and on which decisions now need to be taken as to the most appropriate way forward. These have been highlighted as:

Chester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How to build on its success as a financial centre and key tourist destination. ○ Constraints associated with capacity – land availability, infrastructure. ○ Careful consideration of potential impacts on the environment, including the green belt around Chester, which serves a number of important functions which need careful consideration. Need for careful consideration of proposals in order to protect Chester’s unique heritage role
Wrexham	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Balance between developments in Wrexham and in its hinterland.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Continuing role of Wrexham as a major manufacturing centre. ○ Definition of its developing role in higher education and regional health services. ○ Further development of Wrexham’s role as an important retail centre for North Wales and adjoining areas. Consideration of green barrier implications
Deeside	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The need to enhance public transport accessibility. Need to consider coastal flooding issues and environmental quality
Ellesmere Port	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Large areas of brownfield land coming forward for development. ○ Need to continue to enhance the attractiveness and function of Ellesmere Port town centre.

Focusing on areas in need of regeneration

A second strand of the Sub-Regional Spatial Strategy is for a focus on the Regeneration Areas identified within the sub-region. These include Ellesmere Port town, the West Chester area, communities within Wrexham County Borough (such as Plas Madoc, Queesnway, Caia Park and Gwenfro) and communities within Flintshire such as Flint, Holywell, Mold, Shotton, Mostyn, Ffynnongroyw and Gronant). The coastal town of Rhyl in Denbighshire is also included. Note that this list of areas in need is not exhaustive and does not preclude other areas being identified through the Framework for Joint Action.

Regeneration strategies should be appropriate to the needs of the areas in question. For Wrexham's regeneration areas for example, the priority is to improve access to employment opportunities, rather than trying to direct business investment to areas which are unlikely to be attractive to business development, even assuming development land was available. Improving economic opportunities to such areas is best achieved by providing better access to education, training and childcare facilities, and by better physical access (public transport) to key employment sites such as Wrexham Industrial Estate. The individual characteristic and needs of regeneration areas will be explored in greater depth through the Framework for Joint Action.

The Sub-Regional Spatial Strategy does not provide a 'quick fix' solution to the problems experienced by the regeneration areas. However, it does present an opportunity by which these areas can be regenerated through strengthening their offer in order to encourage investment over the long-term. It is anticipated that this will be achieved through continued 'grass-roots' assistance, together with 'top-down' intervention in key areas, including for example in training and upskilling the workforce.

It will inevitably take some considerable time to improve the developer and investor proposition in these areas. However, recent examples like The Estuary Business Park in Speke have demonstrated that success can be achieved in regeneration areas if a highly focused and targeted strategy is adopted. In essence, this involves the careful selection of a relatively small number of locations considered to have the potential to compete effectively in the non-local marketplaces.

The focus on regeneration areas is supported by the emphasis on the market roles played by settlements and centres and the enhancement of links with the strategic centres that are already experiencing success in economic, housing and social terms.

In rural communities, there should be encouragement for local, self-sustained growth, which should help to reduce commuter flows to strategic centres. This should be supported by the development of sustainable and public transport links to further discourage car use.

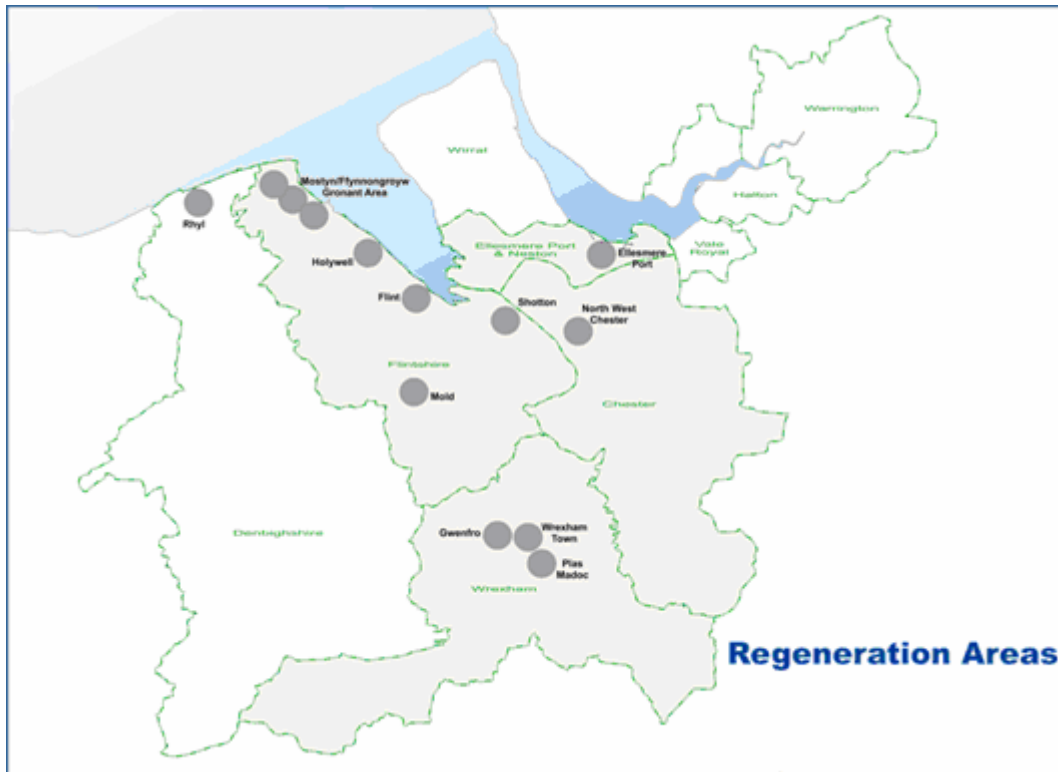


Diagram 6

Enhancing links between areas of opportunity and areas of need

A key way in which benefits of growth can be spread throughout the sub-region is via the enhancement of corridors and links with the existing centres of growth. Improvement of the regeneration areas will be a gradual process, with funding to and investment in these areas being steadily increased. Focal points along the key corridors will need to be identified for development to slowly spread the benefits of economic growth.

Corridors linking the various settlements and centres within the sub-region are considered to have different roles – whilst certain corridors are purely transport links and should be promoted as such, others may have a more critical role to play in terms of providing opportunities for development sites at accessible locations. It should be noted, that whilst these opportunities should be encouraged, people do not always desire to live and work in close proximity.

The links selected for inclusion in the Sub-Regional Spatial Strategy are as follows:

- The Flintshire coastal corridor, linking the Deeside strategic centre with the regeneration areas of Shotton, Flint, Holywell, Mostyn, Ffynnongroyw and Gronant. This coastal corridor is a critical link with the wider reference area, and in particular with the coastal towns of Denbighshire (especially Rhyl), which may experience benefit.
- The Wrexham-Bidston railway corridor, which provides a sustainable link between Wrexham, Deeside and providing connections with the Wirral and the wider Liverpool City Region.
- The enhancement of public transport links between Wrexham and Chester.
- Corridors radiating out from Chester, in particular the role of the M56 and A55/M53 corridors as critical transport links; the Chester-Hooton-Birkenhead corridor and links with both Ellesmere Port and Broughton; and the A483/M54 corridor, which provides key linkages, via Wrexham, to the West Midlands and South East of England;
- Improved connectivity through a new river crossing to the west of Chester, to relieve congestion from historic core, to unlock opportunities for the physical renewal of degraded areas on both sides of the border, and to provide a multi-modal link between deprived communities in England and Wales with key sub-regional centres of employment

Enhancements of public transport links and facilities may include such measures as:

- Limited stop express services;
- Quality bus corridors;
- Improvements to interchanges; and
- Strengthening of links with the rural hinterland.
- Demand management measures, in recognition of the adverse environmental consequences of transport, such as climate change issues.

It is also appreciated that a number of the links connect to one another providing a communication hub, linking Chester, Flintshire and Ellesmere Port. Plus the proposed Mersey Gateway will benefit the sub-region with improved links to Merseyside and Liverpool John Lennon Airport.

Emphasis on existing and future roles of settlements and centres

The Sub-Regional Spatial Strategy places emphasis on the roles that settlements and centres have in the sub-region, both now and in the future, particularly in terms of employment, housing and retail.

The Sub-Regional Spatial Strategy has at its foundation:

- An assessment of the existing market roles of the key spatial areas; and
- Consideration of the likely growth potential of various economic groupings within the sub-region and the key spatial areas related to those groupings.

An important distinction is drawn between the different types of market roles – ranging from international to local in geographical terms and across the various economic groupings (including for example manufacturing, high level services, processing industries, tourism and leisure).

The existing market roles of the key spatial areas both in the sub-region itself and neighbouring localities are described in Table 15. It illustrates the great importance of a relatively small number of spatial areas within the sub-region in the international and national markets. The complementary market role of the sub-region fits well with the emerging Liverpool City Region policy.

Market role	Existing Market Roles			
	International	National	Regional	Sub-regional
Economic grouping				
Emerging industries	St Asaph	Warrington	Liverpool Warrington	Liverpool
High tech manufacturing	Broughton Deeside	Deeside Wrexham Ellesmere Port	Deeside Wrexham Ellesmere Port	Deeside Wrexham Ellesmere Port
High level services	Chester	Chester Liverpool Warrington	Chester Liverpool	Chester Wrexham Liverpool
Mainstream mfg	Deeside Ellesmere Port Wrexham	Deeside Ellesmere Port Wrexham	Deeside Ellesmere Port Wrexham	Deeside Ellesmere Port Wrexham
Office services		Chester	Chester Ewloe Ellesmere Port	Chester Wrexham
Public services			Chester	Chester Wrexham St Asaph
General services			Deeside Wrexham Warrington Liverpool	Deeside Wrexham Mostyn (Broughton support)
Leisure & tourism	Chester Llangollen	Chester	Chester Wrexham Rhyl Prestatyn	Chester Wrexham Rural areas
Processing industries	Ellesmere Port	Ellesmere Port Wrexham Liverpool Bay	Ellesmere Port Wrexham	

Table 15 Source: PricewaterhouseCoopers

More specifically, in terms of individual areas:

Broughton. The prowess of Broughton as a centre of excellence for aerospace and related activities is being increasingly recognised and the exciting developments in new Airbus projects are likely to reinforce that role.

Deeside. The successful economic restructuring and repositioning of the Deeside area – across a wide range of manufacturing and related service activities – has firmly established Deeside as a major, modern employment centre for both the sub-region itself and neighbouring areas, including the Liverpool City region. There are, however, environmental sensitivities to be aware of and protect, for example, flooding and internationally important nature conservation sites.

Chester. Chester has a unique economic role not just in the sub-region itself, but also in the wider North Wales/North West regions and indeed the UK and international markets, as well as a distinct, internationally important heritage. This is particularly evident in the fields of:

- Tourism
- Retailing
- Financial services

Wrexham. Through a combination of major town centre urban renewal, an emphasis on promoting the development of retailing, education and healthcare, and its continued importance as a major centre for manufacturing, Wrexham is a significant economic force in the sub-region. There is also a policy commitment by the Welsh Assembly Government – articulated in the Wales Spatial Plan – that “Wrexham should be promoted as a main regional centre with a complementary function to Chester...”. Strengthening its service as well as retail role will continue its diversification, but there is also a need to balance tourism and conservation in rural Llangollen area.

Ellesmere Port. Ellesmere Port is now firmly established as an international centre for car manufacturing. There is an opportunity to build on this established reputation by increasingly promoting the area as an international centre of excellence for high tech manufacturing and taking new actions and initiatives – including land reservations and skill development programmes – to support this role. In addition the opportunities to diversify the employment base should be exploited to improve access to employment and provide higher quality job opportunities. The economic role of Ellesmere Port must be supported to adapt to the changes associated with industrial change. In developing the Sub-Regional Spatial Strategy, it is vital – given the sub-region’s competitive positioning in the regional, national and international marketplaces – that these ‘special’ market roles are protected and, where relevant, enhanced. The emphasis on market roles provides a continuing economic strength and momentum as a platform for the regeneration areas. The retail role of the area should be recognised through reference to Cheshire Oaks.

Denbighshire, within the wider reference area is now recognised as a centre for opto-electronics, agri-food and healthcare, as well as the Vale of Clwyd AONB for leisure and tourism, which extends significantly into the sub-region.

Flintshire coastal towns, such as Flint and Holywell, also have significant local retail and service functions to be developed as part of regeneration proposals.

A number of the settlements within the sub-region have a particular role to play in employment terms. Certain of these settlements are also more likely than others to be able to accommodate housing growth, in particular those with significant resources of brownfield land such as Ellesmere Port.

The housing/employment relationship is becoming increasingly crucial with the need to take into account both labour market requirements and issues of sustainable development, especially in relation to commuting.

The GVA Grimley study recognised the potential importance of improving the tight labour availability situation by taking steps to harness the latent labour supply in disadvantaged areas. Likewise there may well be more scope for persuading private investors to invest in housing developments in the regeneration areas than might be the case with investments in job creating projects.

An important initiative in the strategy could involve the creation of strategic mixed use sites able to accommodate a mix of housing and employment.

What does the Sub-Regional Spatial Strategy mean for the strategic centres and other settlements within the sub-region?

Chester

- The need to balance the demand for housing land with the continued protection of the environment and quality of life for residents.
- Need to ensure sufficient supply of affordable housing.
- Reinforcement and promotion of Chester's role as a key centre in terms of financial and business services, and as a location for prestigious employment sites for example international headquarters.
- Reinforcement of Chester's role as a major regional retailing centre.
- Emphasis on the importance of Chester as a nationally significant tourist attraction, and promotion of the 'Chester brand'.
- Develop role as a key public transport interchange and gateway to the region.
- Improvements to public transport links between Chester and other settlements and centres and in particular with more disadvantaged wards.
- Ensure that any development is compatible with the conservation and enhancement of the historic city centre and its setting.

Wrexham

- Enhancement of public transport links between Wrexham and other major settlements, notably Chester and the Deeside area through the Wrexham-Chester movement corridor and the Wrexham-Bidston railway line, and with Shrewsbury and the Midlands. Enhancement of public transport services could include such measures as provision of limited stop express services and the creation of quality bus corridors.
- Development of the role of Wrexham as a centre for education and healthcare.

- Provide continued support to the manufacturing sector, together with support for diversification of the economy and encouragement of service sector growth.
- Increased pressure for housing development within the County Borough.
- May need a comprehensive review of green barrier designations to ensure continued protection of the environment and to prevent coalescence of settlements.
- Continued development of Wrexham's role as an important retail centre.

Ellesmere Port

- To maintain Ellesmere Port's role in manufacturing and where opportunities arise maximise opportunities for growth particularly in high tech manufacturing and diversify the local economy to increase access to employment opportunities.
- Town to benefit from development of improved links between the sub-region and the Liverpool city-region, including the Mersey Gateway Crossing.
- Maximising the re-use of the stock of brownfield land to meet employment, housing and recreation with support for overcoming the infrastructure and environmental quality constraints that some of these sites possess.
- Enhancement of public transport links between Ellesmere Port and other key strategic centres, notably Chester and Deeside.
- Measures to support the continued economic, social and physical regeneration of Ellesmere Port to strengthen its role in the sub region.

Deeside

- Promotion of strategic sites within the Deeside area, such as the Northern Gateway - which will accommodate a wide range of land uses to promote sustainable development including housing, employment land (predominantly for B8 uses, supported by B1 and B2 uses) community, education health and leisure facilities.

- Reinforcement of the role of Deeside as a key location for manufacturing industry and related service activities.
- Review of environmental implications of future development in this area, notably in connection with flood-risk and implications for international environmental designations.
- Enhancement of transport links between Deeside and other strategic settlements and centres within and close to the sub-region, including Wrexham via the Wrexham-Bidston line, Chester and the Flintshire coastal towns and westwards to the coastal settlements of Denbighshire.

The Flintshire coastal towns

- Consideration of potential of the coastal towns for accommodating future housing development.
- Reinforcement of the sub-regional role of Mostyn Docks, although any further expansion of the Docks area should recognise the environmental constraints of its surrounds and be subject to environmental appraisal to avoid significant adverse impacts being incurred upon the Dee Estuary Special Protection Area, Ramsar site and possible Special Area of Conservation.
- Identification of strategic sites along the North Wales coastal corridor for the location of employment and mixed-use development.
- Enhancement of principal links between the coastal towns and strategic settlements, including public transport accessibility.

The rural hinterland of the sub-region

- Development within the rural hinterland is likely to be for local needs only, in accordance with existing and new development plans.
- Opportunities in this area to improve transport links and accessibility between rural areas and the main settlements and centres.
- Opportunities for sustained indigenous growth and micro-industries.

V- The Supporting Policy Framework

The Sub-Regional Spatial Strategy must be supported by a policy framework covering the key topics of housing, employment, transport and the environment. A set of principles covering these key topics is therefore proposed. It is emphasised, however, that all principles should be read as a whole

The Sub-Region's Environment

ENV1 Encouraging local distinctiveness

The local distinctiveness of settlements, centres and rural areas within the sub-region will be conserved and enhanced.

Local distinctiveness is influenced by heritage, landscape, culture, Welsh language and culture and the all round character and sense of place of a settlement or area. The sub-region is a large geographical area, comprising many settlements and centres with unique characteristics that should be protected and enhanced. It will be up to individual Local Development Frameworks and Local Development Plans to distinguish and describe these characteristics and to ensure that new developments respect local context and communities

ENV2 Protection of natural environment

Areas of environmental importance within the sub-region, in terms of designations relating to nature, wildlife and landscape conservation will be protected. Implementation of the Sub-Regional Spatial Strategy must have regard to the environmental qualities of the sub-region and the area's contribution to global climate change. The natural, built, historic and coastal environment will be protected and enhanced locally and at a strategic scale both for its own sake and for its contribution to economic and social wellbeing and local distinctiveness. Furthermore, no plan or project will be permitted or undertaken in furtherance of the aims of the SRSS unless either it is established that it is not likely to have a significant adverse effect either alone or in combination with other plans or projects on any Ramsar or Natura 2000

site, or it is ascertained , following Appropriate Assessment that it will not adversely affect the integrity of any Ramsar or Natura 2000 site.

The sub-region comprises areas of national, regional and local importance in terms of nature and wildlife conservation and landscape, and there should be no significant adverse impacts upon designated sites of nature conservation value particularly Natura 2000 sites, and the requirements in relation to Appropriate Assessment under the provisions of Part IV of the *Conservation (Natural Habitats&c) Regulations 1994*, should be rigorously followed. In the sub-region, there are eight Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) or possible SACs and four Special Protection Areas (SPAs) or potential SPAs and three Ramsar sites or proposed Ramsar sites, in addition to a large number of further national and local environmental designations. However, outside these designations, there is an extensive network of wildlife corridors and a wealth of wider biodiversity including protected species that afford protection. It should also be noted that cumulative and synergistic effects upon such sites resulting from multiple developments would not be acceptable.

Wales Spatial Plan and the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) and individual development plans should provide continued protection to these areas. Support should be given to the delivery of a step change increase in the sub-region's biodiversity resources. For example ecological frameworks are a strategic approach to biodiversity conservation which can be developed in order to expand and link areas for biodiversity offer.

ENV3 Brownfield land

Local authorities to be encouraged to identify and re-assess the potential of brownfield sites. The future role of such sites to be determined, together with actions necessary to achieve that role, within the context of a comprehensive review of brownfield land opportunities across the sub-region.

Emphasis is placed upon the vital contribution that brownfield land can make to the new social, economic and environmental planning agendas and the general need to maximise its use for development purposes. As part of this, it is important that re-use of brownfield land includes provision for remediation of any contamination caused by former land-uses.

The return of some brownfield sites and the remediation of contamination land to nature, or alternatively to some form of managed use such as forestry, is an important component of the Strategy to improve the investor appeal of the regeneration areas. A prime contender for this could be the Stanlow Complex within Ellesmere Port and Neston District, which is located at one of the gateways to the sub-region and which is included in regional strategies and plans for this purpose (for example the Mersey Forest Plan). This could help both with the visual perception of areas and could also help to unlock the development potential of the more attractive sites by giving special priority to them.

It is important not to consider the proposed development of brownfield land in isolation. The land should form part of a wider 'package' aimed to improve its investor appeal. This would include both soft and hard supporting infrastructure. The Estuary in Speke is a vivid example of such an approach – which can then be used as a catalyst to foster more comprehensive, social and environmental regeneration.

It should also be borne in mind that, given the characteristics of brownfield land and the development issues which must be tackled, it may well be necessary to offer a potential investor a package of support and encouragement which is even more attractive than a greenfield option.

It needs to be recognised that some brownfield sites can be highly biodiverse and support protected species. In these cases, other forms of managed use might be appropriate, for example, a tourism use might be particularly appropriate at some of the sites along the Dee Estuary. The biodiversity characteristics of brownfield sites should be fully assessed in advance of being brought forward for development.

ENV4 Existing green belt designation

A review of the existing green belt designation around Chester may be

necessary to assess the need for new development after 2011.

The review of the Green Belt is likely to be a medium to long-term requirement and would only be necessary if the potential to meet Chester's development needs outside the Green Belt prove not to be possible. Such a review would take account of a range of considerations including the environmental value of the designation. Within this context, a sequential approach to the identification and allocation of sites will occur.

ENV5 Protection Of Landscape Character

New development must be designed to maintain or enhance the character and appearance of the landscape, and development affecting the AONB should be carefully considered, giving emphasis upon not adversely affecting the quality and character of the area. Development must contribute to the intrinsic traditional and rural character of the area. On the coast, development should conserve its open character.

The physical structure of the sub-region has resulted in a diverse landscape that is a distinctive part of the character of the area, ranging from the Clwydian hills to the Dee estuary and Cheshire plain.

The Clwydian range in Flintshire and Denbighshire is designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and it is intended to extend the designation southwards towards Llangollen to include land in Wrexham County Borough.

ENV6 High Quality Design and Construction

All new development proposals within the sub-region should be designed and constructed to a high quality, incorporating sustainable construction techniques, energy efficiency measures and the prudent use of natural resources.

There is a need for a high quality of design, not only to help support and enhance local distinctiveness and improve the quality of the region as a place to live, work and do business, but also to ensure the principles of sustainable development are met. High quality of design would embrace the need to address factors such as location, siting and layout of development to provide the best use of land, to minimise the need to travel and to provide a high quality and safe environment. Sustainable construction principles and materials will be a key aspect of the design agenda, which will be the subject of separate guidance furthered through the Framework for Joint Action, aimed at securing the partnership of the construction industry in the sub-region.

Sustainable design and construction measures should consider the following in all new developments:

- An efficient and careful use of land, energy, and water
- Minimising waste and encouraging recycling and re-use
- Energy efficient designs
- Promoting water minimisation techniques and water re-use
- Use of recycled and resource efficient building materials
- Use of sustainable drainage systems
- Sustainable transport and access arrangements

For development proposals of sub-regional significance, the advice of the Design Commission for Wales or CABE should be sought.

Resource use is a key element of high quality and sustainable design. It is proposed that the Framework for Joint Action assist the delivery of integrated resources management for the sub-region including the following:

- Water resource use
- Minerals resource use
- Energy resource use

- Waste minimisation, recycling, re-use and disposal

ENV 7 – Limiting and adapting to climate change

All new development proposals should be designed to both contribute to limiting climate change through reducing energy use and carbon emissions (both directly through design and control measures and indirectly through reducing travel by private car) and to adapt to climate change through locating outside flood risk areas unless a need can be justified in line with the provisions of TAN15 and PPS25 and the flood risk can be effectively managed.

Climate change is arguably the single biggest environmental threat to the sub-region and a clear situation where actions at a local scale contribute to global environmental change. The two main threads of this issue relate to our contribution to climate change through carbon emissions and to our ability to adapt to climate change in the form of water resource use, flooding and effects upon wildlife and biodiversity.

The sub-region can be viewed as a significant contributor to climate change through carbon emissions from its extensive road transport network, concentration of industry and large number of residential properties, and also from its high levels of energy use which is largely generated from carbon emitting processes. It is paramount that the sub-region reduces its carbon footprint by taking pro-active steps to reduce distances travelled by motor vehicles, to reduce carbon emissions from homes, offices and industry through energy efficient design and control measures, and to increase its energy production from green energy sources.

The sub-region is also at significant risk from coastal flooding, notably with a large number of vulnerable settlements, transport networks and industry, already located within coastal floodplain. Future sea-level rise predictions threaten to increase this risk yet further and as such, proactive efforts should be made to locate new development away from areas of current and future predicted flood risk. PPS25 and TAN15 recommend that strategic flood risk assessments are carried out to assist the locating of new development in such vulnerable areas. Cross border cooperation between local authorities will be essential to facilitate this along with consultation with the Environment Agency. It is important that Planning authorities will need to consider the specific objectives and requirements of Catchment Flood Management Plans and Shoreline Management Plans for their area.

Housing

The Sub-Regional Spatial Strategy has identified a broad spatial distribution of economic activity. There will be a need to meet the support requirement of that activity in the most sustainable manner, which will include the provision of housing and related facilities. A broad indication of housing requirements has stemmed from an analysis of housing trends and commitments, an assessment of urban potential, a review of housing policies and related strategies, and the principles underlying the Sub-Regional Spatial Strategy. Broad housing figures are provided for each local authority area. Within these areas, distribution of housing should reflect the key strands of the Sub-Regional Spatial Strategy, particularly in terms of the development of the strategic centres and assistance to regeneration areas. The potential for any adverse impacts on the trunk road network could be effectively mitigated by ensuring that new housing areas are well connected by public transport links. Opportunities should be sought to improve the public transport network across the sub-region.

H1 Scale and Distribution of New Homes	
Provision should be made for approximately 30,000-35,000 new dwellings within the sub-region to 2021. For each of the local authority areas, a broad range has been identified as follows:	
Chester	6,500-7,500
Ellesmere Port & Neston	6,500-7,200
Wrexham	6,000-7,000
Flintshire	6,500-7,500
Denbighshire	4,500-5,500

The sub-region experienced an 8.8% growth in its housing stock between 1991 and 2001, exceeding the national level (7%) and that of the North West of England (4.9%). The highest rate of housing growth within the sub-region was Flintshire, which experienced an 11.6% growth in the housing stock. Recent studies have aimed to develop an understanding of the balance between housing demand and supply across the sub-region and have considered the spatial implications of economic growth with regard to population, household and dwelling numbers. Research has highlighted the complexities of the sub-regional housing market, including its many facets of population change, migration, affordability and areas of low demand, and issues associated with likely urban capacity of the main settlements and centres within the sub-region.

Regional policy interventions in the UK have centred on the debate of 'taking work to the workers' or 'workers to the work', with the latter becoming increasingly evident as employment locations become increasingly specialised and sophisticated. There is likely to be far more scope for 'persuading' prospective developers to take up housing land allocations than employment land allocations, especially within regeneration areas. With the development of the Sub-Regional Spatial Strategy for the period up to 2021, the debate about the relationship between housing and employment is intensified.

The Sub-Regional Spatial Strategy has identified the broad scale and distribution of future housing growth for the period 2004-2021 by local authority area, to act as a guide for local authorities in the preparation of their emerging Local Development Plans and Local Development Frameworks. Sources used to determine the scale of housing growth have included household and dwelling forecasts developed for the emerging North West Regional Spatial Strategy, population projections produced by the North Wales Population and Housing Research Group, housing data (such as completions, allocations and forecasts) received from individual local authorities and a review of housing policies and related strategies. The dynamics of the local housing market are such that pressure for development is not constrained to the core study area of the sub-region, but has implications for authorities within the wider reference area, most notably for Denbighshire.

The purpose of the Strategy is to consider how growth can be accommodated in the sub-region in the most sustainable manner. This relates not only to economic growth, but also to housing growth and the associated implications of this growth for the transportation network, levels of infrastructure required, together with the identified capacity of settlements and centres, and environmental limits. As such the Strategy seeks to identify the range of supply required by local authority area over the period. Sites should only be promoted where such use is not to the detriment or compromises protected species and habitats, but also include provisions for being able to mitigate for any such impacts if their occurrence is unavoidable.

A combination of factors have been used to derive the housing 'ranges' for individual local authority areas, including:

- estimates of potential housing supply;
- revised projections of the likely level of housing demand;
- urban potential (where such information is available); and
- policy requirements and implications.

With regard to supply, data from local authorities relating to average net completion rates and outstanding commitments has been used to provide an indication of the approximate housing supply remaining by area (see Table 16).

Housing Commitments and Estimated Supply			
	Average Net Completions (pa) ¹	Outstanding Commitments at 2004 ²	Approximate Supply from Commitments (number of years) ³
Chester	365	1,694	5
Ellesmere Port and Neston	141	1,673	12
Flintshire	403	1485	4
Wrexham	415	3,207	8

Housing Commitments and Estimated Supply			
	Average Net Completions (pa) ¹	Outstanding Commitments at 2004 ²	Approximate Supply from Commitments (number of years) ³
Denbighshire	284	1,549	6

Footnotes to Table

¹ Based on average rate of completions between 2000-2004

² Based on main supply data provided by Joint Housing Land Availability Model

³ Not taking into account windfall allowances for each local authority area

Table 16

Levels of housing demand have been based on a judgment derived from consideration of a number of factors, including population projections, predicted levels of economic growth and past levels of housing completions.

Differing levels of information are available regarding urban potential for the various authority areas in the sub-region. A Joint Urban Potential Study is currently being undertaken by Chester District and Ellesmere Port and Neston District Councils. This work will replace previous studies for the two districts and provide an up-to-date picture of urban potential for this part of West Cheshire. Previous urban capacity work for Chester City (Urban Potential Study, 2000) identified substantial actual potential (subject to the application of realistic densities to remaining undeveloped sites) and the identification of a number of additional brownfield sites. Within Ellesmere Port and Neston, the Urban Potential Study undertaken in 2003 provided a realistic snapshot of capacity in the Borough, although the timescale for the study was short (up to 2008). In Wrexham, an Urban Potential Study is currently being carried out and should be completed by Autumn 2006

The sub regional partners recognise that further consideration of these suggested figures will be required as part of the statutory planning process in England and Wales, including taking into account the findings of more up to date urban potential studies which emerge so any implications these may have on the likely need for development in the countryside/green belt can be assessed. It should be noted that these are broad ranges to provide an indication to the strategic authorities of the likely housing needs for the sub region. It will be for the strategic authorities through their own research to satisfy themselves that these are the appropriate levels of housing supply and to provide a transparent justification for them taking into account wider considerations such as the impact of the environment.

H2 Priority areas for affordable housing across the sub-region

To ensure the adequate provision of affordable housing in the sub-region,

Further work should be undertaken to improve understanding of affordable housing issues by:

- **Explicitly identifying levels of priority in the sub-region;**
- **Providing a consistent approach to reporting short fall provision across sub-region;**
- **Make reference to the requirements of national guidance for the development of a better evidence base for housing, including affordable housing.**

Housing affordability is an issue across the sub-region and is the result of the rapid increase in house prices relative to household incomes, exacerbated by increased demand for housing in certain areas and changing lifestyle needs. Affordable housing encompasses both low cost market and subsidised housing that will be available to people who cannot afford to occupy houses generally available on the open market, and therefore relates to both urban and rural areas (for the latter, access to local needs housing is an increasing problem, with growing levels of in-migration to attractive rural areas, pushing house prices out of the reach of many local people). In England, the Government no longer considers low cost market housing to be affordable (Draft

Planning Policy Statement 3 : Housing) The policy context for addressing problems of affordability is set out for England by PPG 3 (Housing))¹⁵, Draft PPS3 (Housing) and Circular 6/98 (Planning and Affordable Housing), which emphasises the role that affordable housing can play in the creation of mixed and inclusive communities. For Wales, the scene is set by the National Housing Strategy 'Better Homes for People in Wales,'¹⁶ TAN 2 (Planning and Affordable Housing)¹⁷ and TAN1 (Joint Housing Land Availability Studies).¹⁸ The National Housing Strategy has as its' vision statement for everyone to have the opportunity to live in good quality, affordable housing, to be able to choose where they live and decide whether buying or renting is best for them and their families.

The Regional Housing Strategy for the North West of England¹⁹ includes the provision of affordable homes to maintain balanced communities as one of its priorities, citing that in certain parts of the North West 'excess demand and restricted supply have pushed house prices and rents beyond affordable levels for many local people'.

Emerging housing demand studies for the North West (including research undertaken by Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners in 2005) have shown that Chester suffers particularly in terms of levels of housing need, in particular with regard to affordability. However, it is important to note that affordability problems are not solely confined to Chester, and are present throughout the sub-region to varying degrees. Ellesmere Port, Flintshire and Wrexham experience significant affordability problems, as a result partly of the impact of the dynamics of the Chester housing market, and spreading demand for housing outside of the immediate Chester area into the wider sub-region, leading to rapidly increasing property prices.

¹⁵ "Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) 3 - Housing " ODPM, 2000, "Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) 3 - Housing Update – Planning for Sustainable Communities in Rural Areas " ODPM, 2005, "Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) 3 - Housing Update – Supporting the delivery of New Housing " ODPM, 2005

¹⁶"Better Homes for People in Wales" National Assembly of Wales 2001.

¹⁷ TAN 2 "Planning and Affordable Housing" Welsh assembly Government 2006

¹⁸ TAN 1 "Joint Housing Land Availability Studies" Welsh Assembly Government 2006

¹⁹ "North West Regional Housing Strategy 2005 " North West Regional Housing Board 2005

The impact of increased demand for affordable housing in the sub-region has been exacerbated by a reduction in supply over recent years, with the result that most local authority areas experience an annual shortfall of affordable housing units. The Cheshire Sub-Regional Housing Strategy (2004-2008) identifies a need for additional affordable housing per annum of 639 and 428 units in the districts of Ellesmere Port and Chester respectively. . A recently completed housing needs assessment for Flintshire has identified a shortfall of just over 800 units per annum for the next five years. The Latest Housing Needs Assessment for Wrexham indicates a shortfall of 147 units of affordable housing over the next 5 years. The need is concentrated in Wrexham Town, followed by the West and North-East of the County Borough.

Evidence from Local Housing Needs Assessments and from examination of property market trends suggests that demand for affordable housing within the sub-region will continue to increase, and it is therefore paramount that supply issues are addressed during the timescale of the Sub-Regional Spatial Strategy. The following policy identifies Priority Areas for affordable housing within the sub-region. Within these areas, it will be the responsibility of the emerging Local Development Frameworks to establish targets for affordable housing on a site by site basis, subject to identified local housing need and based on current Housing Needs Assessments as necessary. Affordable housing needs to be well located in relation to employment opportunities and amenities and public transport connections.

H3 Support for housing in the regeneration areas

Regeneration of the more disadvantaged areas identified within the sub-region will be encouraged through new housing development where this is acceptable and appropriate in environmental, social, infrastructure and capacity terms.

Many of the regeneration areas within the sub-region have traditionally been associated with relatively low levels of housing demand. The Housing Market Renewal Initiative (HMRI) Pathfinder programmes have shown that housing-led growth can actually help to generate a new vitality in disadvantaged areas and encourage people to both join the labour market and undertake skill development programmes. This housing led renewal involves the improvement and upgrading of existing housing as well as new build.

It is acknowledged that certain of the regeneration areas identified by the Strategy, in particular the disadvantaged areas within Wrexham County Borough of Caia Park, Queensway, Plas Madoc and Gwenfro, do not provide significant opportunities for development, either for housing or for employment. Improving the opportunities for these areas will be best achieved through the provision of improved access to education and training, and by better physical access to key employment locations.

Employment

It has been identified that within the sub-region:

- There is a substantial supply of employment land but there are significant problems of quality and site readiness; and
- There are important gaps in the overall supply, especially in relation to quality sites for high value added activities.
- The traditional planning approach is centred on making employment land provision (based primarily on density assumptions) to cater for a forecast number of jobs. The demand side of the equation is rarely taken into consideration – neither are the varying investor requirements from one sector to another.

It is therefore important that the Strategy should enable provision for responding to current and potential demand and aim to fill key gaps in the sites portfolio. Matching the various types of economic activity (especially those of a high value added nature) is therefore a key feature of the Sub-Regional Spatial Strategy.

ECON1 Review of Existing Employment Sites

Local authorities within the sub-region are encouraged to reassess their supply of employment land and consider where appropriate its continuing relevance to employment uses. This should include a reconsideration of existing land allocations for large scale, single user inward investment sites. Where relevant, appropriate alternative uses for sites should be identified, subject to compatibility with other planning policies.

Sites in active use could also be reviewed to see if they can be redeveloped or upgraded to maximise their potential and flexibility, as this may reduce pressure of new greenfield development.

Since the publication of the framework for Joint Action for public consultation in December 2005, Ellesmere Port and Neston Borough Council, Denbighshire County Council and Wrexham are carrying out employment land reviews and it is expected that other Local Authorities across the sub region will be do the same.

The sub-region experiences a relatively large supply of employment land. However, there are issues of site readiness, suitability and attractiveness to current markets. Some of this land may no longer be of relevance to employment uses as both the structure of industry and key location factors driving investments have changed. It should be recognised that employment growth can only be achieved within the parameters of environmental and infrastructure capacities.

In particular, the strong trend past decades for planning authorities to make provision for large-scale, single-user, inward investment sites, especially for manufacturing activities like automotive, electronics and chemicals businesses, has declined. This has led to a proliferation of designated sites throughout the UK and effectively 'tied up' a relatively large amount of land from being used for other purposes, including other employment purposes. The market for such activities in the UK has declined significantly in recent years and now only a relatively small portfolio of these sites is required.

Increasingly, as the role of the public sector in property development diminishes – with notable exceptions such as high priority regeneration areas – employment land allocations must be attractive and viable for prospective private sector investors. If they are not, they are likely to remain just plans.

The strategy provides an opportunity for local authorities in the sub-region to reconsider employment land allocations and, where appropriate, identify alternative uses (including for example, housing, leisure, or ‘green’ uses such as forestry) if employment is no longer relevant or viable.

Local authorities should be encouraged to re-assess the relatively large supply of employment land in the sub-region – over 1,200 hectares – and consider its continuing relevance to employment uses. This re-assessment should embrace:

- The time period over which the land has been allocated for development but not taken up by prospective developers/investors;
- The constraints (and costs) of development; and
- The degree of interest expressed in developing the land.

Such a review may well identify the possibility of reconsidering the relevance of the employment land allocations and of identifying alternative appropriate uses. The review should recognise that both the structure of industry and commerce and the key location factors driving investments for employment-related activities have changed fundamentally in recent years. Inevitably, this has a knock-on effect on both the type and location of employment land sought by companies.

In the parts of the sub region where the development of local and strategic employment sites to deliver the strategy is not progressed through private investment alone, public finance should continue to be available through national government funding schemes and European Union structural funds for this purpose.

ECON2 Employment Sites

Local Authorities across the sub region should work together to identify the strategic employment sites across the sub region. The location of and the detailed proposals for any sites will be included in local authorities’

development plans and should also be considered within the context of environmental and infrastructural capacities. Action should be focused within the sub-region on the following:

➤ **A premier business park in the Chester area should be promoted for those business activities where there is a genuine current or prospective competitive edge for the sub-region in the regional, national and international marketplace. Further research is required to assess the quality of sites, the target sectors and the optimal locations for that development.**

This research should consider the need for:

- **International headquarters;**
- **Government sponsored research and development or potential government relocations; and**
- **High value added business, financial and professional services.**

➤ **Key sites to include:**

- **Warren Hall, Broughton**

To act as a new focal point for growth of business services and sustainable development in the Chester-Broughton corridor.

- **Wrexham Western Gateway**

The expansion of Wrexham Western Gateway as a strategic employment site may be needed to support the continuing development of Wrexham as a major centre in the sub-region. However further investigations should first take place into the need for additional land allocations, their environmental and landscape impacts, and whether there are other more suitable locations in Wrexham County Borough.

- **Saighton Camp, Chester**

- **4M Economic Development Zone, Ellesmere Port**

New sites to diversify the economic base in the Ellesmere Port area.

The provides an opportunity for the implementation of a number of key sites of importance to the sub-region, including Hooton Station (Roften), Hooton Park (Vauxhall) and Pioneer Park.

- **Northern Gateway, Deeside**

To serve as a natural extension to Deeside Industrial Park, which now has very little opportunity for development, but to also to accommodate a wider range of land uses to promote sustainable development. Sites in these areas have the potential to impact on sites within the Ramsar and Natura 2000 network. Development would only be permitted if the provisions of Policy ENV2 are satisfied.

- **Sites in the Chester and Ellesmere Port area with an emphasis on the re-use of brownfield sites/regeneration areas.**

- **St Asaph West/Bodelwyddan** to serve as a natural extension to the business park, to facilitate the expansion of the emerging industries already located in the area and to exploit the good access to the A55 corridor"

➤ **In line with the intention to promote sustainable development, a small number of strategic mixed-use sites should be brought forward for development, based on the following criteria:**

- **Good access to primary road and rail network and other public transport infrastructure;**
- **Strong labour catchment area;**
- **Ability to provide a minimum of 25 acres of land an initial focus upon brownfield sites; and**
- **Market appeal to potential investors for employment and supporting uses.**
- **Sites should not result in significant adverse environmental**

impacts upon Ramsar and Natura 2000 sites.

➤ **City centre/town centre sites. The re-use of brownfield sites within town and city centres should be maximised with emphasis on:**

- **The main settlements of Chester, Ellesmere Port and Wrexham; and**

In Chester the emphasis should be on supporting the city's role as a sub regional centre and realising firstly the potential of key brownfield sites in the city and where such sites are not capable of meeting development requirements the promotion of sustainable urban extensions. Within Ellesmere Port and Wrexham the focus should be on supporting the regeneration of the town centres and enhancing existing services and facilities.

- **The smaller-scale settlement of Mold.**

There is an overall ambition to ensure the continuing competitiveness of the sub-region, together with intense competition for mobile, high value added investments and opportunities. The preparation of this strategy has highlighted the importance of the Chester's role in high value added service activity and the success of Chester Business Park as a competitive location for financial and business services. It has also highlighted the need to reassess current employment land allocations in the sub region to ensure Chester's role is supported into the future.

A key element of ongoing work should be to investigate the target employment sectors, the quality of sites required and the optimal locations for significant economic development. The local authorities across the sub region will need to work together to identify the potential sites. A new sub regionally significant employment allocation should be in a sustainable location with excellent public transport links. There will be a preference towards brownfield sites unless there is a demonstrable need to consider greenfield locations.

Collectively the need is to identify and develop a relatively small number of new 'strategic' sites that can serve the international, national, regional and sub-regional roles – with a larger network of other sites to serve primarily local demand. The promotion of these sites will need to be taken forward collectively by authorities and agencies working together across the sub region and the sites identified in the development plans of the respective local authorities across the sub region.

The Strategy has already highlighted the international, national, regional and sub-regional roles of settlements and centres within the sub-region and these provide the framework for identifying strategic locations and sites. Of central importance to the Strategy is:

- The focusing of scarce resources on a relatively small number of 'strategic' locations/sites for each of the main economic groupings (for example manufacturing, processing, high level services); and
- In particular the creation/upgrading of employment sites in the regeneration areas which will have the appeal to attract mobile investment and job opportunities.

The need to create a portfolio of different types of employment sites in the sub-region is essential to meet potential demand requirements and ensure the Sub-Regional Spatial Strategy is delivered successfully.

In addition to industrial estates and business parks the value of strategic mixed use sites should be recognised, where there is an appropriate balance of employment development housing, leisure and retail. The increasing tendency towards a service sector economy has encouraged this market trend. However, it must be appreciated that in some key employment locations the housing will be located near to the employment site or on direct transport links rather than within the employment area.

Such mixed use sites can act as important focal points for economic growth in the sub-region. They can have the added advantage of contributing to the sustainable development of the area, especially by combining uses in close proximity with the potential to reduce commuting. Such sites can also be of appeal to potential employers as they are able to offer a package of employment land and supporting infrastructure – such packages are in increasing demand, especially when the availability of skilled labour is now arguably the single most important factor influencing the choice of location for a wide spectrum of economic activities.

ECON 2a

In taking forward any of the strategic sites identified within this Strategy, it is essential that detailed environmental appraisals and/or capacity studies are undertaken on a site by site basis to ensure that there are no significant adverse environmental impacts, particularly on sites within the sub-region protected by European designations. In particular, appraisals should be focused on ensuring that only appropriate land-uses are taken forward for each site.

New economic developments must be supported by appropriate public transport infrastructure and that the transport impacts must be fully assessed and mitigated in advance of new development occurring.

The redevelopment of coastal, industrial and brownfield sites in the Flint, Bagillt and Mostyn areas for premium office/scientific use classes could make better use of such a coastal strategic location, by encouraging higher quality jobs, reduced freight traffic, and be more consistent with the environmentally sensitive location.

Connecting places and people

T1 Promoting links between homes and jobs

The following links will be strengthened and promoted as public transport routes, to improve connectivity and public transport provision and to encourage a reduction in the use of the private car:

- **Flintshire coastal corridor and onwards to the towns of coastal Denbighshire and the Vale of Clwyd;**
- **Wrexham-Bidston railway corridor;**
- **Chester to Ellesmere Port, including the Chester-Hooton-Birkenhead railway line;**
- **Wrexham to Chester; and**
- **Wrexham to the Dee Valley**

The strong economic, social and cultural links across the Sub-Region are now well-established and accepted. Most movement takes place via the high quality road network, which continues to be improved. However, links by public transport are much less well developed.

If the Sub-Region is to continue to succeed, it must develop better public transport, both for moving people and goods, both within the area and with the rest of the world. This is vital for the area to retain its competitive position as a major manufacturing location, able to compete on a world stage and also if we are to see regeneration of the more deprived parts of the Sub-Region.

Links between homes and jobs will be improved by relieving certain existing congestion 'hotspots' and importantly by developing public transport routes, thus offering a choice of travel mode. In addition the identification of strategic mixed-use sites will offer opportunities to reduce the need to travel, by developing homes and jobs on the same or related sites and ensuring such sites are serviced by public transport. It is essential that where new residential sites or employment areas are identified that public transport requirements are taken into account in the site layout and that service provision is operational from occupation of the development.

Various enhancements to public transport services and facilities are necessary. These may include the provision of new services such as:

- Limited stop express services;

- Quality bus corridors;
- Improvements to interchanges; and
- Development of a core public transport service with links to community services (to strengthen links with the rural hinterland).

Proposals for additional employment developments which will result in a traffic impact upon the Trunk Road Network will need to be supported by appropriate highway mitigation measures that seek to reduce and minimise traffic impact. The capacity of key highway routes must be borne in mind in relation to proposals that will result in a growth of economic prosperity and investment in improvement proposals should be implemented where necessary.

The development of improved transport links in the sub region will be developed further as part of Regional Transport Strategies and Local Transport Plans and joint working between the sub regional partners. The opportunities for joint work at a sub regional level are set out in the Action Plan to this Framework for Joint Action. The implementation of transport schemes will be dependent on statutory procedures and the availability of funding.

T2 Provision of an Integrated Transport Strategy

Local authorities and other Strategy partners will need to work together to prepare an Integrated Transport Strategy for the sub-region, taking into account the Regional Transport Strategies for the North West of England and North Wales.

The Sub-Regional Spatial Strategy, by identifying the long-term spatial distribution of development will enable the provision of transport infrastructure and services to be better integrated. It will provide a framework for national and regional agencies, local authorities and rail and bus operators to work together. The Strategy will influence the demand for public transport services and assist with the definition of offsite works/service enhancements that are required to ensure the principles of sustainability are met, particularly with regard to choice of travel mode and the potential use of demand management.

T3 Encouraging ICT Infrastructure Development

Local authorities will be encouraged to work in partnership with other organisations and agencies to promote the continued development and coverage of ICT infrastructure within the sub-region.

The presence or absence of adequate ICT infrastructure throughout the sub-region will become increasingly important during the Strategy period, as location requirements of businesses adapt and change to modern technology and as home-working increases. Outside of the main settlements and centres of the sub-region, ICT infrastructure can contribute greatly to the rural economy. The lead in Wales comes from the Welsh Assembly Government's Wales On Line Initiative.

The Rural Hinterland

The rural hinterland of the sub-region differs from its urban settlements and centres in terms of environmental, social and economic characteristics and as a consequence warrants specific attention.

R1 Improving the competitiveness of the agricultural sector

Farms will be encouraged to develop both as producers and through the introduction of complementary activities

Changes to farming policy and a number of set-backs over recent years such as the BSE and Foot & Mouth crises have led to concerns over the sustainable future of the farming industry. Nevertheless, agriculture continues to make a major contribution to the economic prosperity of the sub-region's rural hinterland and exerts a major influence upon the appearance and well-being of its natural environment. The viability of agricultural holdings as productive units can be improved by adding value to their products, finding new markets for them and by introducing new products, technologies and quality schemes. Farm diversification projects may encompass a wide range of areas – from renewable energy to tourism accommodation. The role of tourism in particular in the sub-region presents a considerable opportunity to benefit local economies – whilst traditionally confined by seasonal variations and characterised by low wages, it may provide an important way of supporting farming businesses. It is, however, important to protect the best and most versatile of the sub-regions farmland.

R2 *Improving the vitality of rural communities*

The application of new technology and an improved supply of housing tailored to local circumstances can bring prosperity and secure local services in rural communities.

The vitality of rural communities can be improved by enabling their residents to obtain well paid work and obtain the services which they require in the areas where they live. Advances in information and communications technology mean that work with a high added value can now be undertaken in any location. By ensuring access to the latest telecommunications infrastructure, new high quality employment opportunities can be provided for working age residents in rural communities without them having to commute or relocate to urban centres. The resulting prosperity, together with an improved supply of housing tailored to local circumstances, can maintain or increase demand for local services, thereby improving viability and reducing the risk of withdrawal. Co-location of services in multi-use premises can further assist in this regard.

R3 *Improving rural accessibility*

Links between rural and urban areas within the sub-region will be

strengthened, to provide rural residents with greater choice and flexibility over employment and service provision where this cannot be provided within their own communities.

The rural hinterland is characterised by a more dispersed settlement pattern. Residents of rural areas are often disproportionately more reliant than their urban counterparts on the private car for the majority of their trips, due to issues associated with choice and availability. Residents may also be restricted in terms of access to jobs and services as a result of poorer public transport links between the rural hinterland and the urban settlements and centres. Improving rural accessibility will rely upon strengthening public transport links, including innovative community transport (particularly feeder services to core routes) between rural and urban areas. The sub-region's market towns act as service and employment centres for its rural hinterland and the provision of infrastructure and services in these towns needs to be sufficient to fulfil this role.

Skills and training

ST1 development of a new skills and training agenda

Partners within the sub-region should be encouraged to develop a new skills and training agenda, focusing on the up-skilling of those already in employment as well as the re-skilling of those who are economically inactive.

In any western economy the challenge posed by a changing industrial structure can have significant impact on spatial planning policy. The challenge for the sub-region in achieving a growth strategy is to embed existing investors while at the same time continue to focus on attracting new and nurturing existing businesses in the targeted high value sectors.

Some of the key employers, such as Airbus, Vauxhall Motors and MBNA and their associated sectors (aerospace, automotive, and financial services) have been engines for growth in the sub-region over the last 5 years or so. They have provided significant job opportunities with salaries above the sub-regional average. They have made a significant contribution to regional growth trends.

However, as these sectors, and the major companies in particular, are now subject to intense global competition from low cost/offshore location and competitive locations elsewhere in Europe (in the case of Airbus). These businesses and their continued positive contribution to the growth of the sub-regional economy will be crucial, particularly as the FDI greenfield investment market is slowing down.

The continued up-skilling of the existing workforce in the sub-region is clearly a priority as it contributes to the overall improvement of the competitiveness of existing businesses and helps embed them into the sub-regional economy.

The priority of the skills and training agencies, throughout the sub-region in prioritising the up-skilling of those in work should continue and this should continue with a focus on the key sectors and businesses in the sub-region.

Those economically inactive, particularly in the regeneration areas, will also need to be trained and upskilled if they are to take the advantage of new employment opportunities in the sub-region. This has to take place alongside the upskilling of existing workforce if the sub-region is to achieve growth targets. It will also assist in the process of revitalising the regeneration areas and improve resident access to employment opportunities.

Lifelong learning is an increasingly important theme and is especially apt in a sub-region that is both economically strong but also susceptible to significant structural change in the future. New skills and training programmes include those aimed at helping existing employers to develop more structured and longer-term approaches to staff recruitment, development, education and training.

Retail

Chester is a major shopping destination for not only the sub-region, but for the North West of England and North and Mid Wales. Together with its tourism role, it has a national significance.

Wrexham has an increasingly important regional retail role to play. Major regeneration projects have been completed which have greatly increased the town's retail offer and there are a number of other projects either under construction (for example the former brewery site) or about to start, which will further enhance this offer. Similarly there are proposals for Ellesmere Port which will improve its shopping environment. In addition, there are a number of town centre shopping areas in the sub region of which some to varying degrees have been affected by out of town shopping complexes or edge of town supermarkets.

RET1 Out-of town retail developments

There should be a strong presumption against granting planning consent for new out-of-town retail developments.

The regional planning policies for both Wales and the North West region reinforce the role of city and town centres and discourage out-of-town developments. This concentration on city and town centres for future retail developments should be the cornerstone of future planning policies for retailing.

Leisure and tourism

L1 Promotion of the sub-region as a tourist destination

The sub-region will be promoted as a national and international tourist destination.

The sub-region as a whole has much to offer as a tourist destination, with a full spectrum of attractions, services and facilities. The sub-region includes a wealth and variety of attractive landscapes, historic towns and villages and sections of coastline. Leisure and tourism are likely to be important sources of future economic growth in the sub-region but with an emphasis on activities and jobs at the lower end of the value added chain. However, leisure and tourism are also a vital element of the overall infrastructure of the sub-region for residents, visitors and investors alike.

At the top end of the market, Chester's heritage assets are recognised as being internationally significant. Despite its existing status as an established heritage destination, the Historic Towns and Cities in England's North West study recognises that there is significant potential for Chester to more fully realise its heritage assets and position itself as an international-class historic city²⁰ There are now plans to promote the Chester City Culture Park and a new 21st Century development for Chester Zoo. Both have been identified as 'Signature Tourism Development Projects' by the Cheshire and Warrington Tourism Board (CWTB) and have huge significance for the sub-regional economy over the next ten years. Furthermore, the Regional Tourism Strategy²¹ recognises Chester as a regional 'Attack Brand', thus providing opportunities to use the brand not just for promoting Chester itself but also to help in the wider promotion of the sub-region and region.

There are a number of other, local, tourist attractions that contribute to the tourism offer of the sub-region. For example tourism is worth over £66 million to the Wrexham economy, with growth of over 6% pa. As the sub-regional economy grows, its potential to attract footloose investment in key growth sectors will be dependent to some extent on quality of life decisions rather than incentives, and a high quality natural environment will be a major advantage which partners must exploit. Whilst tourism is very important for the sub-region it is important to appreciate that quality of attraction and service is of fundamental importance in a very competitive market with consumers being increasingly selective. Tourist development must be appropriate to the environment and locality to prevent the erosion of the resources that the tourism industry might be seeking to capitalise on.

L2 Regional Parks

There is an opportunity to benefit the sub-region through the continued development of the Mersey Waterfront Regional Park and the creation of a new River Dee Regional Park. There is a need to:

²⁰ 'Historic Towns and Cities in England's Northwest', EDAW and Locum Destination Consulting for NWDA and English Heritage, October 2005

²¹ "the strategy for Tourism in England's Northwest" Northwest Regional Development Agency, June 2003

- **Establish a partnership to undertake further research into the concept of the River Dee Regional Park; and**
- **Encourage the development of projects in the Mersey Waterfront Regional Park that will benefit the sub-region as a whole.**

The sub-region has many natural advantages in terms of its tourism and leisure offer, one of which being the estuary and coastal areas. The Regional Park concept is one that has been taken forward elsewhere, for example the Weaver Valley Regional Park and the Llanelli Millennium Coastal Park (which now attracts in the region of half a million visitors a year). Parts of the sub-region (Ellesmere Port and Neston) and the wider reference area fall within the Mersey Waterfront Regional Park, which spans over 120km and includes the River Mersey, its Estuary, and parts of the Rivers Dee and Ribble. It has been established to create a major internationally acclaimed attraction with a unique sense of place for people to live, work, invest in and visit.

A concept that could be further explored for the sub-region is one of the River Dee Regional Park, which could straddle the boundaries of England and Wales and provide benefits to both. The concept could integrate economic development with environmental enhancement, protection of internationally designated sites, and the regeneration of communities along the River Dee and estuary area. Linking recreational routes between communities, including walking and cycling routes, could improve the leisure offer of the sub-region and provide added value in terms of spend and employment. The Regional Park concept would require involvement from a wide-ranging partnership from both sides of the border to be successful. Development of the Mersey Waterfront Regional Park should be complementary to the establishment of the River Dee Regional Park.

VI- Implementation, Monitoring and Delivery

The Sub-Regional Spatial Strategy is supported by a policy framework, relating to key areas such as housing, the economy, the environment, transport and leisure and tourism. The policy framework will enable the implementation of the Strategy at various levels – regional, sub-regional and at local level. A Framework for Joint Action accompanies the Strategy and provides further information on implementation, monitoring and delivery.

Linkages between the strategy and other statutory \ non statutory documents, projects and initiatives at national, regional, sub regional and local levels have been highlighted earlier. As such the development of the strategy has provided an input into the development of the Wales Spatial Plan and the North West Plan (– Submitted Draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the North West of England). Future reviews and changes in content to either of these documents will necessitate the need to review the sub regional spatial strategy, in addition to any review instigated as an outcome of it monitoring and implementation. Provided it is in conformity with the North West Plan (North West RSS) or Wales Spatial Plan, it will form part of each authority's evidence base and could be used in support of individual policies in Local Development Frameworks and Local Development Plans (in England and Wales respectively).

Since the commencement of work on the Sub-Regional Spatial Strategy, the Sub-Region has become a major destination for migrant workers, mainly from the EU new accession countries (particularly Poland and the Czech Republic) but also Portugal. This is a new trend and it is not clear whether this is a temporary or long-term phenomenon. The movement of such large numbers of people can be explained mainly by the availability of employment in the Sub-Region. The immediate effect has been to reduce pressure on the labour market and to 'soak up' many of the hard to fill job vacancies. In doing so, this has allowed the local economy to continue to grow. The impact on the housing market and on demand for schools is, as yet, unclear. As a consequence the monitoring and implementation of the strategy will need to take account of this issue.



Appendices

Appendix 1 – Steering Group Composition

[the following includes those attending in an advisory capacity]²²

Chester City Council

Cheshire County Council

Flintshire County Council

Wrexham County Borough Council

Ellesmere Port and Neston Borough Council

North West Regional Assembly

Welsh Development Agency

Welsh Assembly Government Planning Division

Welsh Assembly Government Spatial Plan Team

Government Office North West

Merseyside Policy Unit

Denbighshire County Council

ELWa

²² NWDA is not a member of the Steering Group and is therefore not party to this report, although it has attended a number of steering group meetings as an observer

Appendix 2 – Consultation

Consultation with stakeholders has formed an essential component of the development of the Sub-Regional Spatial Strategy, a process in which there are many key players, all with differing levels of policy responsibilities. A wide range of consultees was identified for involvement and a register of consultations undertaken with organisations was maintained.

Consultations with key partners and stakeholders focused on the following tasks:

- Development of broad spatial options;
- Working up agreed and preferred options;
- Option testing and appraisal; and
- Development of spatial vision and spatial planning principles.

A series of topic-based workshops were also held at the outset of the study to gain a broad understanding of the sub-region; the various issues, constraints and opportunities present; and to assist with the identification of the broad objectives that should underpin the Sub-Regional Spatial Strategy. The workshops related to three areas, namely the economy, the environment, and travel and movement. They were well attended by a range of organisations. A separate meeting was held for the local authority representatives of the Housing Sub-Group.

Consultees

A51 Environmental Group	Home Builders Federation
ARENA Network, WDA	Indigo Planning Ltd (obo Commercial Estates Group)
AXIS	Indigo Planning Ltd (obo Peel Holdings Ltd)
Boyer Planning	Merseyside Policy Unit
Brockway Dunn Ltd (obo Anwyl Construction)	Mr Paul D W Jones, Flintshire
CBI	National Assembly for Wales Food and Farming Development Division
Cheshire & Warrington Economic Alliance	North Wales Chamber of Commerce
Cheshire County Council	North West Development Agency
Cheshire County Council, Environmental Planning Service	North West Regional Assembly
Chester City Council	Peacock and Smith (obo Morrison Supermarkets)
Countryside Council for Wales	Pegasus Planning Group LLP
CPRE - Campaign to Protect Rural England	Power Systems
CPRE North West Region	Royal Town Planning Institute in Wales
Denbighshire County Council	RPS Manchester
Ellesmere Port and Neston Borough Council	RSPB North Wales Office
ELWa	The Barton Wilmore Planning Partnership-Northern
Enviro Watch-Wales and The Borders	The Compton Group
Environment Agency Wales	The National Trust
Flintshire County Council	Welsh Assembly Government Planning Division
Government Office North West	Welsh Assembly Government, Wales Spatial Plan Team
Halton Borough Council	Welsh Development Agency
Handbridge Residents Council	Wrexham County Borough Council
Highways Agency	

Appendix 3 – Strategic Environmental Assessment Process Report