

Appendix: The RS2010 Part 1 Consultation Draft – suggested response

Most sections of the Consultation Draft are punctuated by one or more questions. This Appendix summarises the main sections and sets out an initial suggested response to each question.

The Strategy in Summary (pages 3-6)

This sets out 4 key strands within which regional economic and planning policy is being developed. These propose that the region should:

Capitalise on the opportunities of moving to a low-carbon economy and address climate change by:

- positioning the region to take full advantage of the opportunities from low-carbon energy and technologies
- ensuring that the region understands and adapts to the implications of unavoidable climate change; and
- ensuring that all sectors, including housing, transport and industry, are considering the challenges and opportunities presented by climate change and developing low-carbon, resource-efficient solutions and alternatives.

Build on our sources of international competitive advantage and regional distinctiveness by:

- developing our strengths in internationally competitive sectors in nuclear, advanced manufacturing, biomedical, digital and creative, chemicals and automotive;
- strengthening our concentration of knowledge based assets driven by our universities and science and innovation base;
- improving our international connectivity through the Liverpool Superport, including John Lennon Airport, and Manchester Airport; and
- developing our world-class sporting/culture/quality of place offer and the attraction of Manchester, Liverpool, Chester and the Lake District as international destinations.

Release the potential of our people and tackle poverty by:

- increasing the potential of the workforce by improving employment opportunities, enterprise and skills;
- building on our strong tradition of social enterprise;
- regenerating areas with deep-seated economic and social challenges and building strong communities;
- tackling the serious challenges raised by social exclusion, deprivation, ill health and inequality; and
- addressing the implications of demographic change for our workforce and services.

Ensure the right housing and infrastructure for sustainable growth by:

- securing high-quality housing in locations which support sustainable economic growth;
- ensuring high-quality digital connectivity to stimulate enterprise, improve service delivery and reduce the need to travel;
- improving internal connectivity through a sustainable transport infrastructure which better connects opportunity and need;
- developing the critical infrastructure the region needs to support sustainable economic growth; and developing the region's green infrastructure to provide economic, environmental and social benefits.

These issues are explored in more detail later, but the first two questions are:

Question 1: Do you agree that these four strands and key spatial issues should provide the basis for the Regional Strategy?

Suggested response:

These would seem to be appropriate, although given what follows in the detail, it would be helpful if the issue of improving our international connectivity referred to high speed rail. Also helpful would be a reference in the fourth strand that recognizes the tensions (sustainability) between reducing the need to travel (i.e. providing local employment opportunities), and the aspiration to encourage commuting (albeit using public transport) from areas of need to areas of opportunity.

Question 2: Are there any priorities we have missed?

Suggested response:

A major issue for RS2010 is to understand what are the environmental limits to development how these differ spatially throughout the region, as this will determine what constitutes *sustainable* economic growth in different parts of the region. Unfortunately, this does not come through adequately from the information currently contained in the evidence base, nor in the four strands and key spatial issues that have been identified. It is suggested that this matter is identified as a new strand (e.g. Ensure environmental limits aren't breached by etc) or incorporated into the existing strands.

The housing and infrastructure strand refers to a potential requirement for additional infrastructure/capacity to support development. However, the document underplays the extent to which the existing network is a regional asset and it is important that the regional makes best use of existing capacity.

On page 6 there is a set of supplementary outstanding spatial and thematic questions.

Question 3: Are these the key outstanding questions facing the region?

Suggested response:

Spatial question b: The question seems to be based on the simple and misleading premise that North Cheshire merely plays a subordinate role to Greater Manchester. The situation is more complex, with North Cheshire supporting Manchester in some respects (e.g. by providing housing for people who work in Manchester), but being supported by Manchester and other neighbours in other respects (as there are also significant commuting flows from these areas into Cheshire and major Cheshire employers such as AstraZeneca rely in part on Greater Manchester residents and other inward commuters to fill some of their jobs). It is also debatable whether North Cheshire's role makes it a subservient player, rather than a joint contributor to Manchester's economy.

There are a number of more local 'quality of life' issues that many would wish to see in the emerging regional strategy. This includes several which relate to development patterns and transport/movement impacts arising from them, such as: noise; local air quality; obesity and poor active travel (as well as active lifestyle) opportunities; crime and security (an operational issue on public transport but, at a 'street'/community level, linked to mobility, traffic, and pedestrian activity levels); and personal stress from travel patterns arising from the separation of homes from facilities, and the experience of using networks which are over capacity (congestion, journey time unreliability etc.).

The Context for the Strategy (pages 8-16)

This section describes the North West region and the process through which RS2010 is being developed. It sets out 11 assumptions that have been developed from those in the Principles and Issues Paper, which are not unreasonable overall. On page 13 there is a short headline vision on which a response is requested. The suggested vision is:

The quality of life for the people of the North West will be excellent and the region will become more prosperous, more equitable and produce less carbon; by 2030 it will be a better place to live, learn, work, visit and invest.

Sub clauses are included referring to a low carbon economy and lifestyle with energy security, jobs for all in a new knowledge based economy, the eradication of deprivation especially child poverty, a better choice of high quality and accessible homes, and a way of living within environmental limits.

Question 4: Do you agree with this vision? If not, how can it be improved?

Suggested response: It is appreciated that a Vision for the North West is necessary as part of RS2010. However, the vision as described is not regionally distinctive and could describe the aspirations of almost any UK region. Taken together with the sub-clauses it is also very long. If this approach is to be followed there is a need to be more specific about the targets for improvement on the range of factors representing the aspirations, for as written the vision is a little vague.

Cheshire East Council recognizes that much will depend on the spatially specific elements included after consultation on the strategic options.

One of the specific sub-clauses states “we are well on the way to a low-carbon economy and lifestyle using our nuclear and other assets to contribute to energy security...”. This could be read as an overt support for new nuclear developments that might be considered premature.

A significant reduction in deprivation is essential. While the reference to its eradication is an admirable aspiration it may be unrealistic over only 20 years.

Cheshire East Council welcomes the suggestion that growth opportunities around Crewe might be fully exploited by 2030.

Within the vision and the strategy there needs to be a greater emphasis upon improving health and reducing health inequalities.

The vision could also mention “accessible” facilities and opportunities as well as ‘well-connected’ ones. The more the planning system can deliver accessibility to things that people want to access, the lower the impact on the environment and the less the stress of travel and burden on networks.

Outcomes (page 14)

A set of outcomes has been developed and indicators devised to allow for the monitoring of the implementation of the Strategy.

Question 5: Would these indicators accurately reflect the delivery of the Part 1 Outcomes? If not, how would you improve the list?

Suggested response: A fundamental question is whether or not these are the right outcomes and whether they are sufficiently aspirational or stretching. In particular, Outcome 3 should refer to business start-ups and business survival, not just business growth.

The Council has the following detailed comments on the related outcomes:

- 1) RO2: adults regularly participating in sport indicator: this is a measure of social inclusion or of health and wellbeing, rather than of cultural or sporting assets, so it belongs under Outcome 6 or Outcome 8. It would fit best under Outcome 6, as Outcome 8 already has an indicator (obesity prevalence) that is probably quite closely correlated with sport participation (and therefore a good proxy for it).
- 2) RO3: Outcome 3 (page 14) refers to “Increasing the levels of enterprise”, which involves more than business survival. It would therefore be useful to include an indicator that measures business start-ups or growth in business stock. Of these two, the latter (growth in stock) is probably the better one, as it takes account of both business births and deaths.
- 3) RO3: patents applied or granted indicator: this sits better under Outcome 4, as this latter Outcome is that which refers to “innovation, science and research”.

- 4) RO7: proportion of graduates with a degree: all graduates have a degree, so there is something wrong with the wording of the description. In any case, it is hard to see how a “degrees” indicator would differ very much from the NVQ Level 4 indicator already under RO7.
- 5) RO7: This should include a skills indicator, given the importance that RS2010 (rightly) attaches to skills. The most obvious candidate would be “employers with skills gaps”, as this is both a National Indicator (NI 174) and one of the Local Economic Assessment Core Indicators that 4NW and NW partners have recently agreed.
- 6) RO9: Outcome 9 rightly mentions “quality employment opportunities”. However, none of the proposed indicators measure the **quality** of employment. There is no particularly obvious indicator of employment quality, but some measure of occupational mix (for example, the proportion of employment which is in the top 3 SOC2000 occupational groups, i.e. managerial, professional and associate professional/ technical occupations) is perhaps the most suitable proxy.
- 7) RO10: It would be helpful to include a measure relating to vacant dwellings, particularly vacant properties that have been so for more than six months. Long term periods of vacancy can be wider indicators of lack of demand, neighbourhood decline, crime, litter etc and that feeds into wider regeneration and community issues. In addition, very long term voids may represent a liability to local authorities in a financial sense (as intervention and remedial work may ultimately be required for the vacant properties).
- 8) RO11: journey times indicator: It is unclear to which journeys this refers. If it means journeys to work then fine: journey times to work seems an appropriate indicator.) The stress here is heavily skewed towards additional infrastructure, with little focus on performance of existing networks other than public transport satisfaction (which is a difficult indicator for public bodies to influence, as it relies too much on private operators). Managing congestion on the network, overcrowding on public transport and journey time reliability are a more realistic indicator suite (especially in a future where investment funds may be seriously constrained). As well as these, accessibility indicators for employment and other key facilities are already available for local authority area (and indeed every LSOA); these would measure both transport and land-use benefits.

Section B: The Strategy (page 17ff)

The draft document expands on the issues set out in part 1 and takes each of the four key strands in turn. The first of these relates to moving the region towards a low carbon economy. The other three strands are developed within the context of the first.

1. Capitalise on the opportunities of moving to a low-carbon economy and address climate change (page 18)

There are 3 elements to this strand each with its own question.

- a. positioning the region to take full advantage of the opportunities from low-carbon energy and technologies

The draft suggests potential areas of action that include making the region a world class center for nuclear technologies; developing renewable and other low-carbon opportunities such as tidal power; developing small scale energy generation and building on existing assets to create a new capacity in low carbon technologies.

Question 6: Do you agree with these potential areas for action? If not, what changes would you suggest and why?

Suggested response: Cheshire East Council recognizes the potential for the north west to take advantage of the opportunities arising from low carbon technologies. The Council recognizes and supports the potential of West Cumbria as a centre of excellence for developments in nuclear technologies, subject to appropriate environmental safeguards. Security of energy supply is an important issue, but if the low carbon and resource efficient solutions set out in c below are adopted this will reduce the need to develop additional resources. Cheshire East Council notes the example of tidal power. A balanced approach is needed to energy generation and tidal power will represent only a partial solution. There remains a significant potential to generate energy from wind that should not be set aside.

However, the focus is mainly on energy supply. That is a national rather than a regional issue. The approach should be about the technologies that could be developed for application in reducing domestic and industrial energy demand, energy efficiency and travel.

- b. ensuring that the region understands and adapts to the implications of unavoidable climate change.

The draft strategy recognizes the need for the region to identify and manage risks and to have in place adaptation measures to improve the resilience of the region and deal with unavoidable climate change effects. There is a suggestion that one area of action is to identify and use the capacity of natural assets to assist.

Question 7: Do you agree with these potential areas for action? If not, what changes would you suggest and why?

Suggested response: This approach, while laudable, is rather vague, especially the point about the use of natural assets. Climate change impacts are often very local, and specific, and an attempt to include appropriate actions in a regional strategy may be too general. National planning policy already seeks to address these issues. All local authorities are currently developing Local Climate Impact Profiles with a view to developing adaptation strategies under National Indicator 188. By extension, the strategy could encourage the development of adaptation strategies for all business sectors especially those most vulnerable to climate change, including transport. The resilience of transport networks is crucial to maintaining economic performance in the face of worsening weather conditions arising from climate change. In this respect, investment choices may wish to take account of the greater resilience of rail and light rail as opposed to road transport.

c. ensuring that all sectors, including housing, transport and industry, are considering the challenges and opportunities presented by climate change and developing low-carbon, resource-efficient solutions and alternatives.

Ideas in this section include the development of new technological solutions, reducing demand for energy, continuing to “retrofit” the housing stock (presumably with insulation, low energy lights etc), sustainable travel and improve digital connectivity.

Question 8: Do you agree with these potential areas for action? If not, what changes would you suggest and why?

Suggested response: In general, Cheshire East Council supports these areas, especially steps to reduce energy demand in all sectors (is the health sector not included here), the promotion of alternatives to private car use and planning developments to reduce the need to travel. The issue of managing climate change (and creating sustainable communities) through managing need to travel should be a great deal more central to the strategy as a whole. These should form the basis of the strategy’s response to a move to a low carbon economy, with energy supply and adaptation as secondary issues. The Council notes the need to develop Next Generation Access digital connectivity but would seek reassurances that this is throughout the region and not constrained to the cities or city regions.

There are particular opportunities in Cheshire East and elsewhere in the sub-region in a developing sustainable business model that includes home based working and business development and it is crucial that digital access is extended to rural areas.

Within national planning policy, there should perhaps be a reference to a requirement for new major developments to incorporate a percentage of renewable energy requirements.

2. Build on our sources of international competitive advantage and regional distinctiveness (page 21)

This strand recognises that there are specific sectors and technologies on which the region can compete internationally, and the draft strategy suggests these together mean the region can make a unique contribution to the UK, European and world economy. There are four elements to this strand, each with its own question.

a. developing our strengths in internationally competitive sectors

Sectors highlighted are advanced manufacturing, biomedical, digital and creative, chemicals and automotive, where the aim is to develop them and their supply chains by supporting clustering and stronger interaction with universities. In Cheshire the focus is on the biomedical, chemical and automotive sectors. It is also suggested that new and emerging sectors should be targeted, the development of necessary skills be promoted and the potential of exports.

Question 9: Do you agree with these potential areas for action? If not, what changes would you suggest and why?

Suggested response: Cheshire East Council welcomes the idea of playing to sub-regional sectoral strengths. However, the list included does not reflect the importance to Cheshire of wider engineering excellence over and above the automotive sector, and mention of the food and drink sector as a sector of strength would be welcome. The Council supports efforts to attract global companies and knowledge-based businesses and the development of relevant skills. However, it is important that the strategy does not rely too heavily on such sectors.

Whilst the focus of support is rightly on growth sectors there needs to be recognition of the need to diversify local economies to ensure they are more resilient to future economic shocks/global economic forces. – through encouraging entrepreneurial activity and growth of SMEs.

There ought to be recognition of the economic importance of the agriculture sector (it is covered in sport, culture and environment but not in an economic sense). The agricultural industry has the potential to play an important role in the transition to a low carbon economy through sustainable farming practices, security of food production and encouraging regional distinctiveness through promoting local food products where appropriate (such as in Cheshire and Lancashire).

- b. strengthening our concentration of knowledge based assets driven by our universities and science and innovation base

The draft strategy states that innovation, science and technological development are the key to building an internationally competitive, knowledge-based, low carbon regional economy. The strategy therefore seeks to exploit the current science base, enhance collaboration with universities, support regional R&D businesses in gaining access to emerging markets, support public sector procurement and promote high quality employment opportunities and the supply of skilled labour. Also proposed is a business support service.

Question 10: Do you agree with these potential areas for action? If not, what changes would you suggest and why?

Suggested response: All of the measure will help. However, the issue is the extent to which these potential areas for action are any different from activities currently carried out and the extent to which they have been successful during the time period covered by the current Regional Strategy. In other words, what has been the contribution to date of activities in these areas and what is their future potential? More emphasis should be given to the potential role of SMEs and the provision of finance generally, not just through Business Link.

Whilst Business Link will continue to provide the bulk of public business support services there needs to be recognition of the role that other agencies play in supporting business growth and development – Chambers of Commerce, Local Enterprise Agencies, Social enterprise networks, etc.

An action focus (building on the point made in the text) should also be on developing links between business and schools to encourage entrepreneurial aspirations, particularly in science and technology.

c. improving our international connectivity

Competitiveness will depend on connectivity whether that be by road, rail or air. The focus is on the Liverpool Superport, including Liverpool John Lennon Airport, and Manchester Airport with specific support being given to the development of high speed rail connections to London and Europe.

Question 11: Do you agree with these potential areas for action? If not, what changes would you suggest and why?

Suggested response: The strategy suggests that, within the context of national policy, development at Manchester Airport should be “sustainable”. Cheshire East Council recognizes the airport as an international gateway and a major contributor to the success of the north west economy. However, it is important that the Green Belt is protected from any further intrusions unless development is demonstrated to be essential in meeting the operational needs of the airport and justified in terms of the tests in PPG2. Any development should also be contingent on meeting environmental targets relating to public transport journeys to the Airport, noise and pollution.

A consideration of connectivity to other regions (not just the SE) and internal connectivity would also be helpful. For example, the Lancashire towns have poor links with Manchester that is holding back their economic growth potential. Connectivity between North Cheshire and South Manchester is also critical to growth potential.

It is considered that the focus of this area is too narrow. It ignores the potential of rail stations such as Crewe to act as international gateways. While the development of high speed rail is supported subject to environmental safeguards, it is important not to ignore the potential of existing stations to perform a gateway role subject to sufficient investment being made available.

The region’s well-connected position within the nation is also worthy of mention – with access to the Birmingham, Leeds and Sheffield city regions within an hour’s travel of Manchester, a hub road and rail network connecting into these neighbouring areas but also Wales, and the gateway function for outward sea travel to the west and the major international airport provided for neighbouring city regions to take advantage of. A Channel Tunnel access for rail (high-speed passenger and freight) and trans-Pennine freight connections to east coast ports are the essential missing parts of the jigsaw.

d. developing our world-class sporting/culture/quality of place offer and the attraction of Manchester, Liverpool, Chester and the Lake District as international destinations.

The draft strategy points out that the North West is known throughout the world for these assets which support a strong visitor economy and also attract investment and business growth. The strategy seeks to promote these assets with a particular focus on those areas above, but also develop Blackpool as a 21st century resort, and for Carlisle and Lancaster to join Chester as “historic cities”. Within the package of measures are increasing business tourism, and the attraction of high profile international sporting events. Also here is the promotion of sustainable farming and food production and its role in managing the countryside, increasing food security and promoting health in the region.

Question 12: Do you agree with these potential areas for action? If not, what changes would you suggest and why?

Suggested response: Cheshire East Council fully supports efforts to capitalize on the regional visitor economy. The reference to sustainable farming is welcome but is misplaced in the draft strategy. While agriculture plays a major role in maintaining the landscape its importance and its potential as an economic sector seems underplayed. While agriculture contributed less than 2% of GVA in Cheshire East in 2006, compared to other areas the sector has a significant presence with 5300 employees in 2007 – around 14 per cent of the North West’s agricultural employment. A separate policy approach is recommended.

Further, sustainable farming and food production is not divisible from the market towns around which the agricultural infrastructure is based. There needs to be a framework for developing and supporting the network of sustainable towns across the region that is complementary to the approach in the cities and main towns.

3. Release the potential of our people and tackle poverty (page 25)

This strand recognises that it is the people of the North West that is the region’s main source of competitive advantage. There are five elements.

- a. increasing the potential of the workforce by improving employment opportunities, enterprise and skills

Skills is a major component of RS2010. To provide the right mix and balance of skills is needed to respond to current demand in the labour market to support economic recovery but also to focus on sectors and markets which can be expected to sustain future economic growth. There is a need to provide for both entry level and high level skilled jobs, and while fewer young people are joining an increasingly ageing workforce, the skills level need to rise to meet labour market requirements. As public expenditure falls over the next 2 decades there will be a need to do more with less, so behavioural change is needed as businesses will need to build their futures on more innovative and creative practices.

Key areas for action include the focus on developing skills for a future labour market especially with regard to internationally competitive sectors, the low carbon economy and major employment sectors such as health care, education, leisure and tourism, food, retail, construction, logistics and financial and professional services. Raising aspirations and skills amongst 16-19 year olds is also vital, as is persuading

employers to invest in leadership and management training. Encouraging greater graduate retention in the north west is also proposed.

Question 13: Do you agree with these potential areas for action? If not, what changes would you suggest and why?

Suggested response:

Cheshire East Council considers that these areas are appropriate, subject to emphasis on increasing entrepreneurship and investment in some areas to build the business base, in particular SMEs. It is also important to link the ability to attract and retain skilled workers with the housing offer and other quality of life considerations. In addition, it would be useful to refer to the need for linkages to accessible locations of (appropriate) employment as a result of improving the skills base.

b. building on our strong tradition of social enterprise

The draft strategy recognizes that the North West had significant social issues, but that there is a leading role for local authorities in addressing these through LSPs and the development of the third sector, social enterprises and community networks. Suggestions for action include developing a world class third sector/social enterprise sector, using cultural assets to combat worklessness, promote volunteering, retention of graduates and civic pride, ensure public procurement is in line with the regional compact for public/third sector, and have a positive policy in favour of mutuals and cooperatives.

Question 14: Do you agree with these potential areas for action? If not, what changes would you suggest and why?

Suggested response:

c. regenerating areas with deep-seated economic and social challenges and building strong communities

The aim is to target investment in the right place, following the principles set out in the Regeneration Framework published at the end of 2008. Investment will therefore be based on opportunities for transforming economic prospects by targeting areas of market failure based on four factors. These are levels of deprivation; strength of the wider sub-regional economy; economic and social characteristics of an area; and whether it is improving or getting worse. The strategy will therefore target those areas and communities already showing serious problems, to make sure that investment is as close to communities as possible, is focused on economic outcomes, worklessness and vulnerable housing markets, and by concentrating on those communities where the most severe poverty and worklessness persists.

Question 15: Do you agree with these potential areas for action? If not, what changes would you suggest and why?

Suggested response: Cheshire East Council agrees that regeneration funding should follow the principles in the Regeneration Framework. It is important though, that

while investment should take place close to communities it may sometimes be appropriate to invest in neighbouring local authority areas with the capacity for new job creation, and to provide accessibility improvements to enable those from deprived areas to access new job opportunities. Cheshire has areas of need and opportunity in close proximity and with its record of economic success is well placed to spread entrepreneurship and business development to less successful areas both within and adjacent its boundaries. It is important, however, that areas such as Cheshire East, with small but severe pockets of deprivation, are not overshadowed by problems elsewhere and lose much needed investment as a result.

- d. tackling the serious challenges raised by social exclusion, deprivation, ill health and inequality

Poor health, worklessness, poor housing, low skills and poor environmental quality are seen as persistent social challenges for the region. Health is recognized as a driver of economic performance, and the strategy suggests that a new public health agenda is needed to address issues such as alcohol misuse, obesity, mental health and wellbeing. Measures proposed include tackling barriers to worklessness in areas of high concentrations; raising employment rates amongst those with disabilities and from black and ethnic minorities; improvement employment rates amongst women; reducing dependence on benefits and improving access to public services.

Question 16: Do you agree with these potential areas for action? If not, what changes would you suggest and why?

Suggested response: Cheshire East supports a strong focus upon the reduction of health inequalities and promoting good health and healthy lifestyle choices. There is no reason not to support these areas for action, although they are very generic. A customized approach is essential.

- e. addressing the implications of demographic change for our workforce and services.

The draft strategy points out that the proportion of people over 65 will increase from 1.1 million to 1.7 million, from 16.5 percent of the population in 2009 to over 22 per cent by 2030. Under 25s will fall from 31.4 to 29.1 per cent. All local authorities are faced with demographic changes that will impact on housing requirements and skills needs. There will also be an increasingly diverse population. The suggested areas for action include the need to retain older workers and their skills in the workforce; ensuring the right skills are in place to meet the demands of sectors catering for an ageing population in health and social care, hospitality and leisure industries; by celebrating diversity as an economic, social and cultural asset and by realising the potential of under-employed groups.

Question 17: Do you agree with these potential areas for action? If not, what changes would you suggest and why?

Suggested response: Demographic changes in Cheshire East are expected to increase the number of those over 65 year of age by 50 percent (nearly 34,000) between 2006 and 2026. There will be a severe impact on services including hospitals and other health services, care services, public transport, leisure and cultural services, including libraries and sports centers. Cheshire East Council supports the suggested areas for action, and in particular support efforts to sustain the contribution of older workers to the economy. It is therefore important that the strategy encourages and supports businesses to facilitate the employment and training of older persons in addition to the proposed action of retaining them and their skills. The demographic imbalance in rural areas is also a matter of concern. It is hoped this could be addressed by supporting diversification of employment and the provision of affordable housing, both of which help sustain towns and villages. It might also be appropriate to refer in the strategy to the impact of economic migration from EU accession states. The effects of demographic change are not universal, and an approach that allows for spatially specific support is required.

4. Ensure the right housing and infrastructure (page 31)

This fourth strand of the draft strategy is about making sure the right infrastructure is in place for sustainable growth. There are five elements.

- a. securing high-quality housing in locations which support sustainable economic growth

A tendency towards smaller household suggests that new housing will be needed in the range of 23000-29000 over the next 20 years. However, the existing housing stock also needs to be maintained and improved if the region is to meet its obligations to reduce CO2 emissions and our aspirations for a healthier society. The aim is to make sure new housing is affordable and well located in relation to need, employment opportunities, transport and services. The strategy will be about supporting vulnerable housing markets areas, improving the well-being of communities by reducing fuel poverty, improving the condition of the housing stock in all tenures and improving the quality of the private rented sector. Efforts will also be made to make sure that housing options meet the needs of the ageing population and those with care needs, and by reducing the dependence of institutional care by maintaining people in their own homes. Access to affordable homes in rural areas is also seen as a priority.

Question 18: Do you agree with these potential areas for action? If not, what changes would you suggest and why?

Suggested response: In linking housing to economic growth i.e. providing housing where people want to live, there needs to be recognition that areas of planning restraint such as NE Cheshire which have developed a successful knowledge based economy, cannot accommodate all market housing demand without detriment to the environmental qualities of the area. New housing is restricted to meeting local and affordable needs and this balanced approach has been successful in maintaining the area's economic success.

- b. ensuring high-quality digital connectivity to stimulate enterprise, improve service delivery and reduce the need to travel

The draft strategy suggests that high speed Next Generation Access (NGA) digital connectivity will offer opportunities for all areas, especially rural, to help build an internationally competitive economy. There is no doubt that some businesses will benefit and digital and creative sectors in particular need high speed, high capacity data transfer. Proposals included enhancing the penetration of NGA, developing technologies initially through the opportunities offered by MediaCityUK, stimulating demand and ensuring the benefits of NGA are spread across all communities.

Question 19: Do you agree with these potential areas for action? If not, what changes would you suggest and why?

Suggested response: The aim of developing high speed NGA across the North West is laudable, but needs to be realistic. The aim of 90 per cent coverage in the medium term and 100 per cent in the longer term is far too vague. Also, the idea that the North West can lead the rest of the UK in the widespread use of NGA is probably not achievable. Two things militate against the proposed actions being successful. Firstly, the level of penetration of mass broadband access to date, and secondly, the capital cost of construction and the costs of connecting to a high-speed network, assuming that is in place already. The key will be in the extent to which sufficient commercial demand can be created, and for sheer economies of scale that would mean development in the core commercial centers first. Since some parts of the North West do not yet have access to broadband due to distances from the nearest exchange, care must be taken with the development of NGA to ensure that the region is not left with a three-tier information network.

However, there are existing networks and infrastructure developments not in the cities that should be prioritized and used to advantage, such as the Fibrespeed network between Manchester and North Wales.

The benefits to communities need to be better articulated, in that NGA could support more flexible ways of working, facilitating home working and local hubs which help to reduce trips to office locations and manage peak travel.

- c. improving internal connectivity through a sustainable transport infrastructure which better connects opportunity and need

The draft strategy points out that transport underpins our quality of life and the issue is about choice. Decarbonising transport is seen as a major part of the solution in encouraging sustainable travel, and there is an expectation that we will see a very different road and rail network by 2050, and technical challenges will be being overcome to improve the efficiency of aviation and shipping. Reducing the need to travel, especially by car, is seen as crucial as is an integrated approach to travel demand. Taking advantage of the Government's "Delivering a Sustainable Transport System" (DaSTS), proposals seek to develop a transport framework that improves connectivity and journey time reliability and tackles congestion and overcrowding on the main transport corridors. The aim is secure shifts toward more sustainable modes of travel, and to improve safety and efficiency of access between homes and

destinations. Improvements to surface access and interchanges at gateways are proposed, as is the integration of management and planning of transport networks. Finally, there is a proposal to encourage all new development in locations that are genuinely accessible by public transport, walking and cycling.

Question 20: Do you agree with these potential areas for action? If not, what changes would you suggest and why?

Suggested response: Cheshire East Council welcomes the proposed areas for action, especially improved connectivity between rural and urban hubs, the need to reduce the need to travel and improvement of accessibility to employment and services, especially to isolated communities. However, the language in these areas is too vague, with phrases such as “maintain existing transport infrastructure in good order”. This section could be much more specific given the current strategic infrastructure projects already planned, and a broader point is the need to realize the potential of economic development at key transport interchanges. Fewer journeys also require employers to collectively adopt progressive policies that encourage home-based working. The public sector could initially develop and promote these. This is however dependent upon sufficient broadband capacity and linked to b. above. The text suggests, “highly skilled people...do not always want to live near where they work”. However, they wish to live in pleasant, attractive communities and if these can be created in and around city centres, then additional long-distance commuting can be avoided. Moreover, even where they are remote from employment centres, such communities can still be sustainable when served by a viable commuter rail service and equipped with accessible local facilities to meet non-work needs. This should be a primary aspiration of the regional strategy.

d. Developing critical infrastructure

The draft strategy points out that the region faces substantial infrastructure challenges to accommodate growth, especially an ageing water and sewage system. We need to reduce the amount of waste going to landfill, protect areas from flooding and secure long-term energy supplies. We also need to ensure the supply of high quality employment land and buildings, and identify the broad locations for regionally significant economic development

Question 21: Do you agree with these potential areas for action? If not, what changes would you suggest and why?

Suggested response: Cheshire East Council agrees with the need to secure improvements in the critical infrastructure of the region, especially energy and water supplies and the facility to dispose of residual waste.

The strategy (in Part 2) needs to be specific about the locations of regional employment sites, otherwise it will encourage speculative approaches by developers rather than a plan led approach with the backing of the community.

e. Green infrastructure

The draft strategy proposes the maintenance of the current network of green spaces within and between cities, towns and villages for its benefits in supporting sustainable development and quality of life.

Question 22: Do you agree with these potential areas for action? If not, what changes would you suggest and why?

Suggested response: Cheshire East Council supports the proposals relating to green infrastructure. Developing, improving and promoting the Green infrastructure should be a major feature of public policy and sustainable community strategies. Green environments encourage high quality of life, attract people to live and play in and contribute to healthy lifestyles.

The proposal to repair, protect and manage landscape and biodiversity where the natural environment is vital to economic development and tourism is too narrow. It should be protected and managed for its own sake.

There will be tensions between the focus on meeting increased housing needs and the protection/creation of open spaces/green areas in our towns and villages, leading to the prospect of 'town cramming'. Policies need to ensure there is an appropriate balance.

The need for additional provision for car ownership and use tends to act against the greening of areas; with more green space turned into road space and land allocated for parking (including the conversion of front gardens to hard standing for parking). Hence, a commitment to sustainable transport and more 'greenways' on which to walk and cycle would be welcomed.

Section C: Spatial Implications of the Strategy (pages 37ff)

1. Sub-regional assets and opportunities

Question 23: Have we identified the key assets, opportunities and challenges, and what needs to be done, in this sub-region? If not, what changes would you suggest and why?

Suggested response:

This section requires a thorough rewrite and this is being provided separately to NWDA as a replacement for pages 38 and 39.

On this version there are several points of detail. The map is incorrect. Halton is shown as part of Cheshire and Warrington, although there is no border between Warrington and Halton included. Halton is shown correctly as part of Merseyside on the map on page 46.

In the list of key challenges on page 39, the recession's impact on key sectors is a separate point from the brownfield land issue. The recession has of course led to

some employment sites being vacated, but this is an issue for all NW regions, rather than one peculiar to Cheshire & Warrington. Other challenges include the ageing population and declining number of young people which could constrain growth potential; high house prices in NE Cheshire/Chester and lack of affordable housing; and pockets of deprivation highlighting disparities in wealth.

There is no reference food and drink in the list of key sectors. Further, Cheshire East Council is currently working on a new vision for Crewe that will define its role. There is a reference to mid-Cheshire towns in the text. This is inappropriate, and a better alternative would be to consider the potential of sustainable towns across the sub-region.

The environment is listed as a key growth sector – presumably this means that the environment of Cheshire and Warrington is a particular strength that can be used as part of a brand approach to developing inward investment opportunities?

Additional actions could include the creation of local employment opportunities with public transport linkages to areas of need where appropriate, to reduce outward commuting and reduce carbon emissions, and the provision of a range of housing, particularly affordable, to attract and retain young people, and highly skilled workers.

The map underplays connectivity across central Cheshire, as evidenced in 4NW's A51/A500 Route Management Study, but also along the M56 and Mid-Cheshire and Crewe-Chester rail lines. It does however helpfully illustrate that northern parts of east Cheshire relate to Manchester while West Cheshire relates to Warrington and Merseyside. However, elsewhere in the text this is compressed to a 'relationship with Manchester and Liverpool city regions' that is not always helpful. Rail lines should be represented on the map, as these are an important part of Cheshire's connectivity to key locations, both the WCML to London and the commuter lines to Manchester. Key assets should include significant well-located employment/mixed-use sites around Crewe, Alsager and Nantwich.

2. Intra and cross-regional opportunities

The draft strategy recognises that some priorities cannot be addressed only at the regional and sub-regional level and that there are opportunities and benefits from working with neighbouring regions and countries. Those relevant to Cheshire East are:

The Atlantic Gateway

Manchester City Region, East Cheshire and the Peak District

West Cheshire and North East Wales

Question 28: Are these the most significant intra and cross regional opportunities?

Suggested response:

It is stated (in part i of p48) that the West Cheshire/NE Wales linkages extend from NE Wales and Chester to Ellesmere Port. The Mersey Dee Alliance and its partners would argue that the linkages extend further, into the Wirral – hence the inclusion of Wirral MBC as a MDA member.

While not of great significance at the moment, there is potential in improved cross regional linkages with the West Midlands, including the Potteries and Shropshire.

Section D: Strategic Options

Under each strategic option, the following question is posed “What is the role of North Cheshire? To what extent should it focus on supporting the Manchester and Liverpool city regions?”. The question seems to be based on the simple and misleading premise that North Cheshire merely plays a subordinate role to Greater Manchester. The situation is more complex, with North Cheshire supporting Manchester in some respects (e.g. by providing housing for people who work in Manchester), but being supported by Manchester and other neighbours in other respects (as there are also significant commuting flows from these areas into Cheshire and major Cheshire employers such as AstraZeneca rely in part on Greater Manchester residents and other inward commuters to fill some of their jobs). It is also debatable whether North Cheshire’s role makes it a subservient player, rather than a joint contributor to Manchester’s economy.

Detailed comments on the Appendices

P71, right-hand column, 4th bullet: “third largest growth” – but in what? Total expenditure on R&D?

Appendix 2 rightly mentions (in right-hand column of p71) the significance of the biomedical sector (in terms of its employment and GVA concentrations within the NW) and the importance of AstraZeneca in particular. However, the reference, in the space of a single sentence, to AstraZeneca and to opportunities “to create high-quality jobs for the region” (final bullet in left-hand column on p74) ought to be accompanied by some acknowledgement that (a) AstraZeneca’s NE Cheshire sites have shed a large number of jobs (over 1,000) since the start of 2007 and (b) there is a substantial risk of further job losses at these sites, or even that the company may relocate some of its operations to a site outside the region (or UK). (Cost pressures were a key factor in AZ making cuts in the pre-recession era, with some activities being outsourced or restructured to save money, and the most recent large-scale reduction in staff numbers – 250 in February 2009 - appears to be part of a long-term response to global competition, rather than simply a result of the recession alone.)

P72, 2nd bullet in right-hand column: this states that “Certain areas in the region are showing improvement [in terms of deprivation], particularly districts in north and central Lancashire and Cheshire...”. It would be useful to confirm which Cheshire districts the text alludes to and what the sources of the underlying evidence are.

P72, penultimate bullet in right-hand column: the RS2010 text refers to Congleton as a “district”. It would be helpful and prudent to state clearly that it is a former (pre-2009) rather than existing authority, and to do likewise where there are other RS2010 references to the former Cheshire districts.

In its first paragraph (p76), the Summary of Places and Sub-regional forecasting work gives Cheshire & Warrington’s population as 880,000. The latest official data (i.e. ONS’ 2008 mid-year estimates) put the population at 886,300, or 890,000 to the nearest 10,000, so this would be a better figure to quote.

The following paragraph (i.e. 2nd on p76) notes that “Chester would seem to be underperforming”, but it is not clear in what sense the city’s performance is deemed to be weak, nor is there any reference to evidence to support this assertion. Some further explanation of the Chester comment would be helpful.