



It's all happening IN HALTON



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URBAN RENEWAL
ACTIVITIES

Draft URBAN RENEWAL

Strategic Review
& Action Plan
2007 - 2010



Spring 2007

URBAN RENEWAL Strategic Review & Action Plan 2007 - 2010

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1.0 FACTS & FIGURES

1.1 Population Trends

The population of Halton has been gradually falling by an average of 300-400 each year since 1990, reaching 118,200 by 2002. However since 2003 the population of Halton started to rise from 118,200 to 118,800 in 2005.

This was followed up by the Office of National Statistics (ONS) releasing its revised population projections for the next 25 years. These are based on the 2004 baseline, which predicts that Halton's population will rise to around 120,000 by 2020 before stabilising at this figure until 2029.

This is a substantial improvement over the previous prediction undertaken in 1996, which showed that Halton's population would continue to slowly decline each year until it reached 110,000 in 2021.

2.0 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

2.1 With regard to economic development, Halton performs well in terms of its current economic performance and infrastructure. However, the findings suggest that current trends in economic growth may present problems in the future. Although Halton currently contains a high proportion of employment in the knowledge driven sectors, ranking 62nd out of 408 districts in the country, employment in the knowledge economy has been declining.

In 2002-03, just 30.7% of the employed workforce was engaged in knowledge intensive occupations, compared to 36.6% in the North West and 39.6% in Great Britain. The proportion of businesses operating in the knowledge economy is also low. In 2002, 25.7% of businesses fell into the knowledge driven sectors, compared to 26.7% regionally and 30.1% nationally. This suggests that we should place more emphasis on the knowledge economy in our urban renewal agenda and ensure that future policy drives this forward.

2.2 Halton also performs poorly in terms of skills and qualification levels, ranking 342nd out of 408 districts. Such a low skills base could not support a growth in knowledge economy based jobs, which would result in well paid positions being taken by people from outside the Borough.

This is highlighted by the occupational breakdown for Halton, which reveals that 'higher end' occupations (managerial, professional and technical jobs) are significantly under-represented in the Borough (11.4% compared to 14.4% in Great Britain).

As the predicted key growth sector, it is important that urban renewal links much more closely with education and training to balance out this skills mismatch.

3.0 ENVIRONMENT

3.1 Housing

3.1.1 Whilst house prices in Halton are below the national and regional averages, the latest Housing Needs Survey indicates an emerging affordability issue arising from house price increases over the last five years which have excluded many "first time buyers" from the owner occupied market.

The average house price in Halton was £134,493 in April-June 2006, compared to a regional average of £146,600 and a national average of £198,952 at June 2006. The percentage of owner-occupier housing is slightly below the national average at 65.8% compared to 68.3% nationally.

3.2 Commercial and Industrial Property

3.2.1 Between 1985 and 2003, the amount of industrial and commercial floorspace in Halton grew by 31.9% - slightly higher than the national rate of 23.5% and substantially higher than the regional rate of 12.9%.

The floorspace profile, however, shows a marginally higher proportion of industrial and commercial space at 77.7% compared to 69.3% in the North West and 66.3% in England as a whole. Retail and office space is under represented at 10.5% and 11.9% respectively, which is substantially lower than the national average of 19.2% and 16.8%.

Establishing more office accommodation and attracting suitable private sector business is important for the Borough, particularly in the town centre areas as it helps support other trade throughout the day and evening.

3.2.2 A commercial property review was recently presented to the Borough's Policy & Performance

Board and this will no doubt have an impact on future actions with regard to commercial property developments.

3.3 Action for Sustainability

3.3.1 The main regional institutions are committed to the Action for Sustainability agenda, which aims to establish a firm foundation for balancing the region's economic, environmental and social needs. A toolkit has been produced to aid the development of environmental sustainability.

4.0 REGIONAL WORKING - ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

4.1 The North West Regional Assembly

4.1.1 Perhaps one of the most significant developments of recent times was the formation of the North West Regional Assembly (NWRA) in 1997. This represents Local Authorities and other key economic and social stakeholder representatives in the region.

4.1.2 The NWRA presents a regional view to the Government and European Union institutions on issues or areas falling within the Assembly's competence and also provides a forum for considering and debating any issues or policy proposals, especially those of a relevant social, economic or environmental nature at a regional level and having an impact upon the people of North West England.

4.1.3 Their role has principally been in the promotion of planning, transport and sustainability in the region. They were also involved in the development of the Housing Strategy and the Regional Housing Board.

4.1.4 The 'no' vote on Elected Regional Assemblies has forced the NWRA to review its core business and activities and focus on three main functions: the scrutiny of the North West Development Agency (NWDA), a role as the North West planning body and acting as a strategic focal point for the region.

Despite this, there is still uncertainty over future membership of the assembly and, therefore, whilst Halton needs to continue to form allegiances with the NWRA, it would also be prudent to strengthen

links with Government departments, and the Government Office.

4.2 North West Development Agency

The NWDA leads on economic development in the region. In April 2005 the NWDA produced its first Strategic Investment Plan, which outlines the Agency's priorities for financial support over the next three years. This is rolled forward annually. Halton will need to continue to promote its key capital projects for inclusion in the Plan.

4.3 The Mersey Partnership (TMP)

4.3.1 TMP is the economic development partnership for the Merseyside sub-region. It is now NWDA's Sub Regional Partner for Merseyside, with strategic responsibility across the region's six local authority areas. This adds to TMP's existing responsibilities in economic development, inward investment and tourism.

4.3.2 TMP's strategic goal is to encourage economic growth through building a positive image of the Liverpool City Region that will attract more visitors to the area and at the same time build confidence among those already living, working and investing in the region.

The members of TMP reflect a broad and diverse range of activities representing over 400 businesses across the Liverpool City Region including manufacturing and trading companies, six local authorities, government agencies, universities, media organisations, professional agencies, tourism and conference businesses.

4.3.3 The Mersey Partnership's activities take place in three core areas:

- o **Economic Development** - co-ordinating Merseyside's economic development activity through the Merseyside Action Plan.
- o **Investment** - bringing new business into Merseyside and encouraging growth in existing businesses.
- o **Tourism** - promoting Liverpool and Merseyside's tourism assets to increase visitor numbers and grow the economic benefit to the Liverpool City Region.

5.0 REGIONAL STRATEGIES

5.1 Northern Way Growth Strategy

5.1.1 Moving Forward: the Northern Way Growth Strategy was launched in September 2004 by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM). Its key objective was to work with the three northern Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) to reduce the economic performance gap of £29 billion between the North and South-East of England by 2025.

The Growth Strategy sets out a framework for taking forward the key economic assets and opportunities of eight City Regions in the North of England, which includes the Liverpool City Region.

5.1.2 The Northern Way Business Plan was published in June 2005. This set out the plan to implement an economic development strategy for the North of England. It set out ten investment priorities, including improving transport links, bringing more people into employment, strengthening the North's knowledge base and driving innovation. To support the Northern Way, a £100m Growth Fund has been established by the ODPM and the RDAs.

5.1.3 This means that cities rather than regions are the focus for economic development, with the Government view that successful core cities will 'pull up' the economic performance of surrounding areas. It is therefore important for Halton to work with the Liverpool City Region to ensure that Halton's major projects are included.

5.2 City Region Development Plan

5.2.1 The Liverpool City Region is bringing forward a strategic prospectus or 'City Region Development Plan' which sets out priorities for growing the economy of the sub-region and the region as a whole.

5.2.2 The Liverpool City Region submitted an interim report for the Northern Way Steering Group in January 2005. The *Liverpool City Region - Transforming Our Economy* was produced in May 2005. It focused on issues, assets and opportunities which are of strategic significance to the North of England as a whole, and set out priorities for

investment in the sub-region, aimed at generating major economic benefits and impacts. The implementation plan brings transformational projects for the sub-region to the fore.

5.3 Merseyside Economic Review

The latest Merseyside Economic Review was launched in February 2007 and provides an update on much of the economic evidence underpinning the development of the City Region Development Programme, Regional Economic Strategy Review and other related strategic frameworks. The review is published each year and the 2007 report reveals some notable successes against major economic indicators. Merseyside is performing well and in 2004 (latest data) produced a £17bn economy - keeping pace with the UK, regional and city comparators on most measures and in some cases doing rather better: closing the gap.

5.4 Regional Economic Review

The NWDA commenced work on its Regional Economic Strategy in April 2005. The new strategy was published in March, 2006. This placed emphasis on the issues arising from the Northern Way Growth Strategy, in particular focusing on Gross Value Added (GVA) and increasing jobs.

5.5 Regional Planning Strategy

5.5.1 *Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.*

5.5.2 This Bill was given Royal Assent in May 2004. Part 1 of the Bill states that there will be a regional spatial strategy (RSS) for each region in England. The Regional Planning Body must keep the RSS under review and monitor and report on its implementation.

5.5.3 Part 2 provides for the preparation of local development documents (LDDs) to replace local plans, unitary development plans and structure plans. Part 3 of the Bill includes a duty to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. A series of development control measures are introduced in Part 4 of the Bill.

5.5.4 There are two types of LDDs: Development Plan Documents (DPDs), which are statutorily tested and form part of the Development Plan, and Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs), which

are not statutorily tested and do not form part of the Plan. It is expected that Halton will produce 22 SPDs including 3MG (Ditton Strategic Rail Freight Park), Widnes Waterfront Economic Development Zone and transport in Halton. Of these 22 documents 15 have been written and 7 adopted. It will also produce possibly seven DPDs including housing, employment and retail & leisure, in addition to the core strategy.

5.6 Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) and Spatial Development Framework

5.6.1 Sub-regional strategic spatial proposals have been submitted to the North West Regional Assembly. Further work is continuing, including a refinement of policies, spatial options and sustainability appraisals. The Merseyside partners are also working together to ensure there is synergy between the RSS and City Region Development Plan (CRDP), e.g., recognising land and spatial requirements emanating from the CRDP.

5.6.2 Due to the new status of RSS as part of the 'development plan', as set out in the new Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the issues arising in the new RSS are of significant importance to Halton Borough Council and the production of the new Halton Borough Local Development Framework (LDF).

5.6.3 The RSS will also be used in the determination of planning applications. Decisions will now have to be made in accordance with the RSS, unless other material considerations indicate otherwise.

A number of policies within the UDP which are to be saved will have to be agreed with the Secretary of State by October 2007.

5.7 Unitary Development Plan

The Unitary Development Plan for Halton was adopted in April 2005. It is in two parts. Part 1 gives a written statement of Halton's strategic planning policies and Part 2 forms the framework for the use and development of land. It conforms with the Regional Planning Guidance for the North West (now the Regional Spatial Strategy), and describes the role that Halton will play in the development and regeneration of the region as a whole.

5.8 North West Regional Housing Strategy

The revised North West Regional Housing Strategy, published in 2005, sets out the priorities for strategic housing investment in the region. More information on the Strategy is available in the Housing section of this report. The Liverpool City Region Housing Strategy is likely to be adopted in the summer of 2007.

6.0 FUNDING

6.1 Generally - there are a number of funding pots to help deliver urban regeneration within Halton. The main sources are identified below, but more specific funding for specialist areas such as contaminated land are considered under their appropriate headings. However, many more exist and the sources of funding and funding criteria are constantly changing. For example the Kingsway Learning Centre accessed 14 different funding sources, many of which no longer exist, highlighting a continuing challenge for the Borough.

6.2 Gershon - The required 3% all-cash saving each year presents a real issue for local authorities and the urban renewal agenda has already suffered. This is likely to continue as attempts are made to achieve yet further 'savings'.

6.3 North West Development Agency Funding

6.3.1 When the over-programming funding problems of the NWDA were discovered, Halton went through a process of cutting back on all non-high priority schemes in order to concentrate available funding on those deemed to be the most important, such as Widnes Waterfront. At the time, we were led to believe this would safeguard funding for those initiatives. This was not always the case, with a prime casualty being the economic initiatives contained within the Castlefields Regeneration Masterplan. Other initiatives such as town centres, tourism and waterside developments are also no longer likely to receive funding, as the priorities have shifted.

6.3.2 Halton now comes within the remit of the NWDA's Merseyside Office. This means that we are competing with other Merseyside districts for funding. Land values are higher there and match funding is more easily available through Merseyside's ERDF Objective 1 'Phasing In' status. Given the competition

for funding, this will be a challenging time for Halton.

6.4 SRB

After nine years, the Single Regeneration Budget programme ceased in March 2006. In the final year £865,760 was committed to nine projects. An Evaluation Report of Halton's three SRB schemes is to be published.

6.5 NRF

6.5.1 Neighbourhood Renewal Fund has been awarded to areas with high levels of deprivation, in order to help bring them up to the standard of other areas.

6.5.2 It has currently been in place for 6 years, in which time Halton has received £31m, with a further £5.377m for 2007/08, after which time the NRF programme will cease. Successor funding, if any, will form part of the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review, planned for Autumn 2007. All indications are that renewal funding, in whatever guise, will be at a reduced level and far more targeted.

6.5.3 Urban Renewal, as a Halton priority, was awarded £768,000 in 03/04, £1.031m in 04/05, and £1.367m in 05/06. However, this dipped to £887,000 in 06/07 and to £769,700 in 07/08.

6.6 European Funding

6.6.1 Up to 31st December 2006, Halton lay within a European Objective 2 area where European Structural Funding has been available. The Objective 2 Programme has provided in excess of £22m of ERDF for the delivery of projects in the Borough.

6.6.2 Halton Borough Council was appointed as Accountable Body for the European funding on behalf of partners and has entered into an agreement with the Government to do this. State Aid support overall has been worth £61.3m to Halton businesses.

6.6.3 In 2004, the European Union increased from 15 to 25 Member States and then to 27 in January 2007. This led to an acceptance that the bulk of the funds would be allocated to the new Member

States of Eastern Europe.

6.6.4 The National Strategic Reference Framework, used to allocate European Funding nationally, was approved at the end of 2006 and regional allocations for 2007-13 were set.

The allocations for the North West are:

- o Rest of the North West £314m
- o Merseyside £213m

6.6.5 This represents a 50% cut in resources compared with the previous programme - a key challenge to the borough.

6.6.6 The North West Operational Programme (NWOP) is the guiding document which presents key priorities and actions with regard to how European Funding will be allocated and spent in the North West during the period 2007-2013.

6.6.7 The NWOP is expected to be published in September 2007. The new European Programme is therefore likely to start late in 2007 or early 2008. It is expected that the European Programme will focus on the following priorities and action areas:

Priority 1 Stimulating Enterprise & Supporting Growth in New Sectors and Markets

- AA1.1 Developing High Value New Enterprise
- AA1.2 Developing Higher Added-Value Activity in Target Regional Sectors
- AA1.3 Increasing Sustainable Consumption and Production

Priority 2 Exploiting Innovation & Knowledge

- AA2.1 Exploiting the Science and R&D Base of the Region
- AA2.2 Encouraging Innovation to Improve Productivity in All Companies
- AA2.3 Developing Better Management and Leadership

Priority 3 Creating the Conditions for Sustainable Growth

- AA3.1 Access to Major Gateways in Merseyside
- AA3.2 Developing High Quality Sites and Premises of Regional importance

AA3.3 Supporting the Improvement of the Region's Visitor Offer and its Image

Priority 4 Growing & Accessing Employment

AA4.1 Stimulate Enterprise in Disadvantaged Communities

AA4.2 Supporting Linkages to Key Employment Areas

AA4.3 Supporting Employment Creation in Areas of Regeneration Need

6.6.8 It will be important for Halton to continue to develop links with the North West Development Association since RDAs in the English Regions will be key players in the management and allocation of European and non-European resources earmarked for regional development.

Halton's attitude is that there must be some form of ongoing support for areas which have a continuing legacy of deprivation and decline. It would not be sensible to ignore the needs of areas such as Halton which have the potential to achieve and sustain regional economic growth.

6.6.9 There is a wish to strengthen work already undertaken through the use of the European Structural Funds to ensure that Halton continues to rise out of industrial decline and emerge with a leading 'knowledge based' economy for the 21st Century.

6.6.10 It is worth noting that Halton's unique position with regard to how Gross Value Added (GVA) and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) figures are collated could place the borough at a significant disadvantage in the allocation of successor funding. Whilst Halton is ranked as the 21st most deprived Borough in the Index of Multiple Deprivation, 2004, the over-reliance on a high-value chemicals industry skews these figures, giving the result that Halton appears to be more affluent than is actually the case.

The chemicals industry is highly capital intensive, with relatively few people employed for the value of production. Capital (plant) and raw materials are imported from outside the borough, with little benefit to Halton. Similarly, in the chemicals

industry much of the activity is undertaken by branch plants. This means that profit is extracted to and investment decisions take place in other countries. Another difficulty faced by Halton is that the better-paid employees tend to live outside the borough, giving a clear mismatch between GDP per capita and levels of prosperity. Work has been completed to disaggregate these figures for Halton and we have now started lobbying the Department for Trade & Industry and the NWDA accordingly.

6.6.11 Halton Borough Council sees it as vital that, as part of its lobbying strategy, it is able to disaggregate GDP and GVA figures from the chemicals industry, together with an appropriate analysis of the Halton/Warrington Travel to Work Area, as Warrington's economic buoyancy statistically masks Halton's problems.

6.7 Regional Selective Assistance

Over the period 1st April 1999 - 31st March 2004, a total of £61.2m was invested in Halton businesses with the support of both Regional Selective Assistance and Enterprise Grant Schemes. This funding supported 63 separate organisations, a total of 4,971 jobs and includes £50m investment in Ineos Chlor. That funding has largely ceased to be available to Halton businesses.

6.8 Review of State Aid Rules

6.8.1 'State Aid' is public money used to support private sector business activities. European Commission rules are designed to ensure that if businesses do receive financial support then they should not be given an unfair commercial advantage.

6.8.2 Some form of support is allowed, providing this does not exceed permitted levels. Different parts of the European Union are allowed to provide different levels of support, dependent on how affluent or poor they are considered to be.

6.8.3 The 2006 review of the Assisted Areas Map left Halton outside the redefined area with effect from 1st January 2007.

This means that the level of financial support which the public sector can give to companies in Halton has been reduced significantly. However, despite this

news, there are still opportunities to support economic regeneration projects through special exemptions and exclusions.

6.9 National Lottery

6.9.1 National Lottery funding has been very successfully used across Halton for a number of arts, community, heritage and sports projects. In 2002, 51 grants were awarded, totalling £1,719,651; in 2003 this increased to 63 grants totalling £3,393,076, whilst up until August 2004, 36 grants, totalling £487,053 were awarded. Between April 1995 and March 2005, Halton received £25,616,657 from a total of 394 grants.

6.9.2 By April 2006, Halton had moved up from 13th to 12th position in the league of North West authorities that record the amount of funding received from the National Lottery. In April 2004, regionally, Halton was in 18th position. By April 2005, we had improved by 6 places to 13th position.

6.9.3 Funding is allocated through the following lottery distributors:

6.9.3.1 Awards For All

'Awards for All' is a joint lottery programme funded by the Arts Council England; Big Lottery Fund; Heritage Lottery Fund and Sport England. It offers grants for arts, heritage or community projects of from £500 to £5,000.

6.9.3.2 Big Lottery Fund

'The Big Lottery Fund' has been formed from the Community Fund and New Opportunities Fund. It is responsible for 50% of the money going to good causes and will offer a range of grant programmes, from smaller grants at a local level through to large capital projects. It will continue to fund charities, the voluntary sector, education, health and the environment, but will also support large-scale regeneration projects.

6.9.3.3 Arts Council England

Arts Lottery funding is spent on a wide range of projects, including the construction and refurbishment of arts venues, arts activity and public participation in the arts.

6.9.3.4 Heritage Lottery Fund

Halton was a priority area for Heritage Lottery funding until March 2006.

The Heritage Lottery Fund distributes money raised by the National Lottery to support all aspects of heritage, from historical buildings and museums to nature conservation. It helps community projects with relatively small amounts, as well as multi-million pound developments and can fund both capital and revenue projects. In the last 18 months, 14 heritage projects have been funded within Halton.

6.9.3.5 Sport England

Sport England is responsible for delivering the Government's sporting objectives. It is committed to creating opportunities for people in the North West Region to start in sport, stay in sport and succeed in sport.

7.0 KEY URBAN RENEWAL PROJECTS

Halton has a number of key urban renewal projects currently ongoing or to be delivered in the near future. These are:

7.1 The Castlefields Regeneration Programme

7.1.1 The Castlefields Masterplan was approved, following public consultation, by all partners (including English Partnerships) at the end of 2003 and became the basis of a Supplementary Planning Document, which was adopted by the Borough Council in 2005. Proposals included:

- The creation of a new link road to provide direct access to a proposed new local centre and existing community facilities.
- A programme of pedestrian and cycle link improvements, to improve access to facilities;
- Street lighting improvements on Castlefields Avenue North;
- The development of a state-of-the-art youth activity park, the Phoenix Park, including a skate park, flood-lit multi-use games area, a climbing boulder and play areas; the release of land for the development of new houses for sale.

7.1.2 Excellent progress has already been made in the selective demolition of over 700 problem deck-access flats and the building of almost 400 new homes.

7.1.3 NWDA funding has still to be secured to allow the skills and workforce development elements of the Masterplan to be delivered.

7.1.4 £7m of further funding, over and above that committed to the implementation of the Regeneration Masterplan has been secured from the Housing Corporation to continue housing renewal projects until 2010. Coupled with additional funding promised by the RSLs, this will help deal with all but two of the remaining problem blocks.

7.1.5 However, further regeneration work under Phase 2 of the Masterplan will still remain to be completed. Therefore funding is being sought from the Housing Corporation and English Partnerships to allow this to be effected.

7.2 Widnes Waterfront Economic Development Zone

7.2.1 The Widnes Waterfront EDZ area will become a strategically important 'Gateway' development, linking the region's 'Metropolitan Axis' along the M62 Corridor with the 'Southern Crescent' along the M56. The Council appointed the Manchester-based consultancy, building Design Partnership, to undertake a masterplanning exercise in 2002 which provided a framework for the transformation of the southern part of Widnes over six years to create around 2,700 new jobs.

7.2.2 This Masterplan was agreed in 2003 for the 80 ha. Widnes Waterfront site which is located adjacent to the River Mersey. It set out a key vision and outputs for the area, to be delivered through a set of projects. These include landscaping and environmental upgrades, enhancing existing business premises, road works and signage, marketing and training which engages with local businesses. This Masterplan has subsequently been converted into a Supplementary Planning Document.

7.2.3 £5.59m has been committed from the NWDA to add to the £8m of ERDF and £3m of Halton Borough Council funding to assist with the

regeneration. This will support the considerable public and private sector investment which is already bringing forward new office and industrial park, retail and commercial leisure developments.

7.3 3MG - Mersey Multimodal Gateway (formerly known as Ditton Strategic Rail Freight Park or DSRFP)

7.3.1 3MG will utilise brownfield land for rail-related warehousing (up to 200,000 M²), new rail sidings, a new link road to the A5300 Knowsley Expressway and the generation of 5,000 jobs over a 10-year period (and potentially up to 8,000 in 15/20 years time).

7.3.2 The site is 26 hectares in total and will result in derelict and contaminated land being brought back into productive use. There will be lasting improvements to the environment and 195 million HGV kms will be removed from the UK road network per annum. The cost of the regeneration over five years has been estimated at £80m. The UDP Public Inquiry Planning Inspectors' Report's recommendations gave clear support for the creation of 3MG, stating that "...through a rare combination of advantages the Rail Freight Park is accepted to be a project of exceptional potential worth."

7.3.3 The Masterplan for this site was approved by Halton Borough Council in December 2004.

7.3.4 The Supplementary Planning Document for 3MG has been adopted by the Borough Council.

7.3.5 Planning Permission for 75,000 M² of new rail-related warehousing space has subsequently been granted to Drawbridge Securities Ltd., for the Innovis development on land formerly owned by AHC at West Bank.

Planning permission for an extensive landscaping scheme at HBC Fields was secured by Halton Borough Council in 2006 with implementation planned for 2007. Negotiations with Network Rail and design work are on-going over the replacement of the Hale Road bridge.

7.3.6 Common facilities will need to be effectively managed 'in common' for the effective working of 3MG. To this end, Halton Borough Council is

negotiating the establishment of a management company with the private sector to achieve this.

A further key issue for Halton Borough Council is the future disposal and development of 'HBC Fields.'

7.4 New Mersey Crossing - The Mersey Gateway

The Mersey Gateway is being promoted by the Mersey Crossing Group which includes public and private sector bodies. A Major Scheme Appraisal was submitted to the Government in July 2003 and approved in 2006.

A project team has been established and work is ongoing, in preparation for the submission of a planning application expected in 2008.

7.5 Business Parks Improvement Programme

7.5.1 The Council is currently delivering a programme of regeneration to businesses on local industrial estates. Steering Groups have been set up on individual estates in order that businesses can formulate action plans to improve their own area.

7.5.2 The Business Parks Improvement Programme offers grants to enhance business premises, improve safety and security and improve the environment on older industrial estates.

To date, site improvements have been made on each of the Tanhouse and Gorsey Lane, Astmoor, Halebank and Riverview Industrial Estates.

7.6 St Michael's Golf Course

Major remediation works are planned at St Michael's Golf Course, to be funded by DEFRA, in order to seal in contaminated material and install a leachate collection and treatment facility.

Further phases will remould the land and re-establish fairways, greens and tees for the continued use of the site as a municipal golf course. More on this can be found in the contaminated land section of the report.

7.7 Halebank Regeneration

A new-build 'Co-op' convenience store opened in mid-August 2004, to coincide with the closure of the old ASDA supermarket. Planning permission was obtained for 156 new houses to be built on

the former ASDA site and work is now underway. A Supplementary Planning Document has been approved by the Borough Council.

7.8 Halton Stadium

A new East Stand was opened in September 2005 as the final development stage of the Stadium.

The East Stand has a capacity of approximately 2,500, taking the overall capacity of Halton Stadium to about 13,500. The Stadium is Council owned and provides an excellent events venue which is well patronised.

7.9 Halton Castle

7.9.1 Halton Borough Council was gifted this Grade I Listed Building by the Duchy of Lancaster in September 2002 under a 99yr Guardianship Agreement and Norton Priory Museum Trust (NPMT) has subsequently agreed to manage the site.

7.9.2 Halton Castle has problems with vandalism, youth nuisance and drinking. NPMT and the Council have been working together in an attempt to resolve these issues.

7.9.3 The Council has recently invested £50,000 to secure the site and make it safer. This has funded essential masonry repairs, together with interpretative fencing which reflects the history of the Castle.

7.9.4 A successful preliminary bid for funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund was submitted in Spring 2005. This has funded consultancy work for a Conservation Management Plan and Access Plan in advance of submitting the main bid to HLF.

7.9.5 The ultimate aim is to renovate and enhance Halton Castle with links to Norton Priory and the Town Park.

It is hoped to develop a visitor centre, lighting of the castle (if vandalism issues can be addressed) and general enhancement of the site's special features, including sunken garden and 'lock-ups'.

7.10 Wigg Island

The second phase of landscape works on this site were completed in June 2005.

This includes new cycleways and footpaths, as well as an outdoor 'classroom'. A new Visitor Centre will be opened in summer 2007.

7.11 *New Approaches*

This programme of works aims to reclaim land adjacent to strategic corridors and gateways into Merseyside. £70,000 Neighbourhood Renewal Funding has enhanced the major routes through the Borough as part of the 'Strategic Routeways Programme.' This has involved major landscaping works, including new planting, management of existing trees and woodlands, tidying verges and bulb planting.

7.12 *Town Centres*

7.12.1 The Borough of Halton is unusual in having three distinct town centres, each of which provide an essential service for the community it serves. Since the end of the last century, Widnes and Runcorn have grown to meet the needs of their separate communities. The third centre, known as Halton Lea, is the result of a decision in the early 1960's to develop the New Town area of Runcorn.

7.12.2 All three town centres have changed in recent times and more change is planned with public and private sector involvement.

7.12.3 Such development in town centres is guided by national and regional planning policy advice, including Planning Policy Statement 6 (PPS6), which aims to sustain their vitality and viability.

It requires local authorities to develop effective town centre strategies in partnership with the private sector, as part of the development plan process. Halton currently has an overall town centre strategy and three separate, more detailed strategies for each of the town centres dating from 1997. These are in the process of being updated.

Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) for Runcorn Town Centre and Halton Lea are currently being developed, whilst Widnes will have an Area Action Plan - a detailed document, which will set and prioritise development objectives as well as specifying and co-ordinating requirements for new infrastructure and services. Funding for this work has not yet been identified.

7.13 *Widnes Town Centre*

7.13.1 Widnes is the largest of the three town centres, with approximately 46,450M² of retail floorspace in over 350 separate units.

It also has both an indoor and an outdoor market. Widnes has developed from a traditional 'High Street', with the addition of the new ASDA and the regeneration of Albert Square, Green Oaks and the Windmill Centre. There is a wide mix of retailers providing a more comprehensive shopping offer than at the other two centres. Widnes is one of the top 10 performing centres in the North West over the last 10 years, showing a 66% growth in prime retail rents.

7.13.2 *Progress to date:*

Widnes Town Centre has seen the addition of a number of new retail units and enhancement schemes in the last five years. These include:

- 1) Relocation of the ASDA store from Halebank to Widnes town centre, providing 4,180M² of retail space and 470 car parking spaces;
- 2) New 9,290M² JJB Fitness Centre and retail store;
- 3) New road at Marzahn Way;
- 4) Revamping of retail units at Albert Road;
- 3) New retail units at Gerrard Street, Liebig Court and Simms Cross, all adjacent to the new ASDA store;
- 4) New town centre housing at Alfred Court and 'The Element at Liebig Court';
- 5) 40 new homes provided at Lacey Street;
- 6) Streetscape improvements to both Widnes Road and Albert Road;
- 7) A Home Zone development of the 'Streets Ahead' project around the new ASDA site;
- 7) The Windmill Centre redevelopment and creation of new retail space;
- 8) Streetscape improvements to Victoria Square, including new paving and street furniture;
- 9) A new Mental Health Centre in Broseley Square, together with the new Primary Care Centre on Moor Lane;

- 10) Residential developments over bar/restaurant provision in two developments at Victoria Square;
- 11) A programme of shop-front improvements throughout the town centre.

7.13.3 What is planned for the future?:

1. Widnes Town Centre is constrained from widening by housing and road infrastructure, but consideration is being given to the future of adjoining sites such as the Widnes Waterfront and the 'P&O site' for development with appropriate uses. For example, the P&O site has been considered in the UDP (Policy TC3) as suitable for retail, warehousing and leisure (after 2011), while the construction of a new B & Q store on Dennis Road will take retailing into the EDZ.
2. The Council is also welcoming plans for a leisure development on Venture Fields.
3. As Widnes Waterfront is developed, it is recognised that there is a need to develop better links to the town centre. To facilitate this, junction modifications are being implemented. A new gyratory on Fiddlers Ferry Road is being created in order to improve access by foot and cycle.
4. The production and adoption of the proposed Action Area Plan will be key to the delivery and change proposed to be delivered within Widnes.

7.14 Victoria Square/Queens Hall

7.14.1 Building upon the investment made by the Council and the private sector, particularly in the renovation of Victoria Buildings, further regeneration initiatives are currently in progress in this area to enhance the evening/weekend economy.

7.14.2 Progress to date:

The Kingsway Learning Centre, which is within the Victoria Square Conservation area, opened following a £7m refurbishment of the original Widnes Library/Widnes Technical College/St Paul's Youth Centre building. A complete lifelong learning package is offered at the centre including an improved and extended Widnes Library, a Neighbourhood Nursery, Sure Start New Steps,

Connexions & Youth Service, as well as Adult Learning facilities.

7.14.3 What is planned for the future?

7.14.4 The Council intends the redevelopment of the Halton Business Forum (the former Widnes Town Hall) into new bars and restaurants. However, this development has been delayed by the failure of private sector partners.

7.14.5 Encouraged by the regeneration successes to date, other private sector-led proposals have begun to emerge around Victoria Square. Two prominent public houses are being redeveloped as bars with residential apartments above; a retail unit has been converted into a restaurant; and shop units have been, and are continuing to be, converted into wine bars.

7.15 Runcorn Town Centre

7.15.1 Runcorn 'Old Town' operates as a small market town and as such incorporates a number of individual niche market traders, some of whom have been there for many years.

7.15.2 Progress to date:

7.15.3 The centre has seen much private sector investment as a result of traders improving their shop frontages (with the aid of SRB and NRF funding). Although this centre serves a fairly localised catchment, the area is usually very busy, with parking often difficult to find. However, Runcorn Town Centre has fewer than half of the multiple retailers of the other two Halton centres.

7.15.4 The Brindley, Halton's purpose-built theatre and arts centre, opened in November 2004. It provides a 420-seat theatre, 108-seat studio, other flexible space as well as exhibition and gallery space, together with associated refreshment facilities, all overlooking the Bridgewater Canal. The Town Centre survey of people in Runcorn Town Centre worryingly identified a reluctance to visit that centre during the evening. The Brindley is overcoming this challenge with a vibrant Show and Events programme.

7.15.5 Runcorn Town Centre has seen many new developments in the last five years, which include:

- 1) A new campus for the Riverside College;
- 2) A new Market Hall with additional shop units;
- 3) The new Halton Direct Link facility that will offer residents a 'one-stop-shop' experience for council-related business;
- 4) A new Somerfields supermarket with associated car park
- 5) The new Bus Station interchange;
- 6) Upgrading of car parking and access at Runcorn Railway Station;
- 7) The new Brindley Arts Centre
- 8) A new link road at Leiria Way

7.15.6 What is planned for the future?:

A joint venture between Halton Borough Council and award-winning developers Urban Splash has been established to secure the development of the Canal Quarter alongside the Bridgewater Canal. This will bring new retail, residential and civic amenities to the town centre. The development will also include the site of the former Crosville Bus depot, on the opposite side of the canal. Still the subject of further work and discussion, this programme technically began late in 2006 with a planning application, with the development due to commence in early 2007.

A DIY store for Homebase is being constructed on the Daresbury Expressway, while 450 residential apartments are being built in 'The Deck' development on the waterfront adding considerably to the vitality of the Town Centre.

7.16 Halton Lea

7.16.1 Halton Lea is a custom-built, elevated and covered shopping mall with 4 dedicated multi-storey car parks offering 1,950 free car parking spaces (excluding Trident and ASDA parking). Surrounding this main structure, the Trident Retail Park and ASDA superstore have been developed in the last ten years.

Halton Lea encompasses 46,450M² of shopping space with a range of national multiple retailers within the centre. It is also close to the police station, library and Halton Direct Link, together with Post Office and Job Centre.

7.16.2 The Town Centre User Survey showed general customer satisfaction with Halton Lea shopping centre. They were happy with the cleanliness of the main shopping area and public facilities were considered well maintained, whilst public perception of safety was very high.

7.16.3 What is planned for the future?:

There are proposals for an extension of the existing general retail provision at Halton Lea incorporating a new superstore. There are also plans for an extension to the ASDA development.

7.17 Astmoor Industrial Estate

Parts of the Astmoor industrial estate will be affected by the new Mersey crossing. The estate was built as part of the Runcorn new town development in the 1970s and 1980s. Many of the units no longer reflect the needs of modern business. For example the car parking provision is inadequate, servicing access is poor and the units are not of sufficient internal height for some industrial uses.

8.0 HOUSING

8.1 The two largest sites for residential developments in the Borough over the past decade or so have been at Upton Rocks in Widnes and Sandymoor in Runcorn. The focus on providing a broader range of housing types by concentrating on more executive styles of property has led to an increase in the number and proportion of managerial and professional socio-economic groups living in the Borough. At the time of the 1991 census, these groups accounted for just 14% of total households. By 2001, this figure had increased to 19%, while the number of detached houses showed a similar increase. A wider choice of house types does seem to produce a more rounded spectrum of socio-economic groups.

8.2 Demand for housing is reliant upon prices and mortgage rates. When both of these rates were relatively low, demand for social housing significantly decreased. However after several years of large price rises in the housing market, home-ownership is no longer so affordable to those in lower income groups and demand for social housing is again on

the increase. Indeed, the local housing waiting list has increased by 23% since 2004.

8.3 The Halton Housing Needs & Market Assessment Survey, completed at the end of 2005, provides the most comprehensive and up-to-date information available on current and future housing needs and preferences of households living in the Borough. The Survey found that, despite house prices in Halton being lower than the regional and national averages, there is an emerging affordability issue caused by the relationship between local incomes and the realistic supply of the cheapest stock available. The average price of a terraced dwelling increased by over 150% between 2000 and 2005, exceeding local income inflation by over 7 times. Consequently, access to the market for first time buyers is very limited. The cheapest 2 bedroom terraced house in the Borough requires a minimum income of £21,900 and 79% of concealed households (i.e. someone living within a household who wishes to move to their own accommodation and form a separate household) earn below £20,000.

8.4 The Housing Needs Survey identified a need for 176 affordable housing units per annum, after allowing for current re-let supply, and recommends this be achieved through the adoption of an affordable housing policy within the Local Development Framework, which contains a 25% target for new units to be developed as subsidised affordable housing.

8.5 The Needs Survey also recommended that the supply of small units be improved to address the future needs and preferences of increasingly smaller households and that a comprehensive delivery strategy to address future housing for the elderly and for care needs be developed to cater for an increasingly ageing population, with a particular emphasis on extra care accommodation. The Survey found a relatively high proportion of households contained at least one person with a disability or limiting long-term illness and recommended the development of a register of adapted property and disabled people needing adapted accommodation to ensure their specific needs are met and that best use is made of the existing adapted stock.

8.6 The National Context:

8.6.1 In December 2000, the Government published 'Housing Policy Statement - The Way Forward for Housing'. This document set out a wide range of policies determining the Government's aim that everyone should have the chance of a decent home.

8.6.2 In 2003, 'Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future' was published, which seeks to create the framework for a sustainable housing plan for the nation. This set out a number of national priorities for housing under two broad headings:-

- 1) Achieving a better balance between demand and supply, which includes tackling low demand; ensuring 60% new build on brownfield land; increasing the supply of affordable housing to key workers and reducing homelessness;
- 2) By 2010, to make all social housing 'decent' and to reduce the proportion of private sector housing occupied by vulnerable groups that is not decent.

8.6.3 'The Sustainable Communities - Homes for All' Plan was published in 2005 and sets out an £18m investment for housing in the North West, to tackle low demand outside of the pathfinder areas. Both Liverpool and Manchester City Regions have commissioned consultants to develop City Region Housing Strategies, which will help to identify areas in need of this additional funding.

8.6.4 The Government also established Regional Housing Boards that have developed Regional Housing Strategies to target investment to regional housing priorities.

8.7 North West Regional Housing Strategy 2005

The North West Regional Housing Strategy 2005 sets out a number of key priority areas. These are:

- 1) Urban renaissance and dealing with changing demand;
- 2) Providing affordable homes to maintain balanced communities;
- 3) Delivering decent homes in thriving neighbourhoods;

- 4) Meeting the region's needs for specialist and supported housing.

8.8 Urban renaissance and dealing with changing demand

This regional priority aims to address changing demand across the North West, particularly the contrast between the hot-spots and other areas where increasing numbers of properties are vacant, experience high turnover or are subject to falling house prices. The North West has the largest concentration of low demand areas in the country. The 'Pathfinder' areas cover about half of the homes affected by low demand. There is also a great deal of housing which, although not suffering the worst extremes of low demand, can be classified as 'at risk.' This priority looks to maximise the impact of the market renewal Pathfinders, whilst also developing a targeted approach to preventing further market failure in other areas at risk.

8.8.1 The Halton Perspective:

In order to deliver this investment agenda, the NWDA, Government Office North West (GONW), the Housing Corporation and English Partnerships are seen as having important roles to play. The reality is that Housing Market Renewal Areas, or 'Pathfinder' areas, will receive a significant proportion of the available funding. Halton has not been identified as a priority Pathfinder area and therefore cannot hope to benefit significantly from this funding source. However, the draft Liverpool City Region Housing Strategy identifies areas such as Castlefields, Windmill Hill and West Bank as vulnerable housing markets. It is hoped that this will strengthen the case for investment under this priority. There are, however, limited funds available for investment outside of the Pathfinder area and Halton is only one of a number of authorities which will be seeking investment.

8.9 Providing affordable homes to maintain balanced communities

8.9.1 This priority aims to tackle areas where increasing house prices have forced many, including key workers, out of the housing market. The strategy hopes to address the shortages of affordable housing in these areas.

8.9.2 The Halton Perspective:

8.9.2.1 Despite the findings of the Housing Needs Survey, affordability issues in Halton are not as extreme as those experienced in some other areas of the region, e.g., Macclesfield and Southport, and the Borough does not experience particular problems with key workers being unable to afford to live in the area. Therefore, Halton is unlikely to benefit from this priority.

8.9.2.2 To bring a spatial dimension to the Regional Housing Strategy, the Regional Housing Board have devised a high level typology of housing markets which describes in general terms the ways in which housing markets function in different parts of the region.

The typologies used are: unbalanced markets, balanced markets, high value/demand, low value with potential, high value/rural towns, high value/potential, rural/commuter pressure and city centre market. Halton falls within the balanced market typology where demand/supply is roughly in equilibrium but with possible pockets of low demand or affordability problems.

The recommendation for this typology is for planning policies to continue to meet demand with an appropriate balance of affordable provision. Halton aims to develop an Affordable Housing Policy in 2008 as part of the Local Development Framework process on the strength of evidence from the Housing Needs Survey.

8.10 Delivering decent homes in thriving neighbourhoods

8.10.1 This priority aims to address the physical condition of properties in the North West. All social housing tenants are required to have 'decent homes' by 2010 in order to meet the Government target.

8.10.2 The Halton Perspective:

8.10.2.1 Although Council housing stock (6,680 dwellings in 2004) was generally well maintained, the scale of work required to meet this target required a much greater investment. It is estimated that 54% of the Council stock failed to meet the decent homes standard compared to a national average of just over 40%, with an investment of £85m required by 2010. As a result, Halton Borough

Council transferred its stock to a newly created Housing Trust in December 2005, following a positive ballot of tenants.

8.10.2.2 Significant investment is not only required into public sector, but also into private sector housing, for which there is a secondary target 'to reduce the number of owner occupied dwellings occupied by vulnerable households that fail the Decent Homes Standard'. Halton's Private Sector House Condition Survey was undertaken in 2002, before this requirement came into being, and the Council consequently has no detailed information on how many households in Halton fall into this category. Recognising this as a problem facing many authorities, the Government has developed a model based on the findings of the English House Condition Survey that will produce an approximation of the numbers in each authority area.

For Halton, the model suggests that 65.7% of the homes occupied by vulnerable households currently meet the decent homes standard, which matches the 65% target set by Government for achievement by 2006. This figure will be used as the baseline for future monitoring until the next housing condition survey can provide more accurate data. In the meantime, it is proposed that grants awarded under the new Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy will be used to bring homes occupied by vulnerable households up to the Decent Homes Standard.

8.10.2.3 Halton Borough Council is working to establish a Home Improvement Agency, which will act as a 'one-stop-shop' to assist applicants through the grants process. A Landlord Accreditation Scheme has recently been established in conjunction with the Private Landlords Forum, to improve conditions and drive up standards of private rented property.

8.11 Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) (excluding the Halton Housing Trust) owned 7,668 dwellings in Halton in 2006. Most of these were constructed in the late 1960's and 1970's. However, latest information suggests that only 8% of these properties currently fail the decency target and there is confidence that they will meet the 2010 target.

8.12 Figures from the Private Sector Stock Condition

A Survey carried out in 2002 show that the average SAP value (a measure of energy efficiency on a scale of 1 to 120) of private sector dwellings is 48 - better than the national average of 44. It also indicates that 82% of private sector properties have central heating.

8.13 Regional Priority 4: Meeting the region's needs for specialist and supported housing looks at how best to meet the needs of our most vulnerable residents. This includes older people, people with learning disabilities, people with mental health problems, people with physical disabilities, victims of domestic violence, people with drug and/or alcohol-addictions, teenage mothers and ex-offenders.

8.13.1 The Halton Perspective:

8.13.2 Current demographic predictions for Halton show a growing elderly population and increasing demands for a variety of housing types such as bungalows, supported housing and residential care. With existing waiting lists for such provision, this issue will be a key challenge for the future, as our elderly population increases.

8.13.3 Halton is in the process of developing an 'Extra Care Housing' scheme in Palacefields, Runcorn. This will provide over 40 units of supported accommodation for elderly people, giving older people more choice and independence.

8.13.4 A new private retirement homes scheme has also been developed in Peel House Lane, Widnes and there are proposals to provide at least one further such development in Widnes. However the public sector provision of bungalows and other suitable retirement homes is under pressure, with demand currently exceeding availability.

With a growing elderly population, as identified above, this situation is likely to worsen and needs to be addressed.

8.13.5 The Council's Planning Department has produced a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for housing entitled Design of New Residential Development. This takes into account changing

housing needs, promoting 'lifetime homes' which are built to be accessible and meet the occupants' lifelong needs. It encourages a greater provision of homes suitable for the elderly, e.g., bungalows, which developers are often reluctant to build because they have a greater footprint on the ground - allowing fewer to be built on available land, which makes them less economically viable. This is further exacerbated by planning guidance, which encourages house-building to be of increased density.

8.13.6 Because of the variety of people this priority is hoping to address, it is important that a wide range of partners work together to establish need, map existing provision and develop strategies accordingly.

8.13.7 Financial resources provided by the Regional Housing Board to local authorities will primarily be allocated to fund Priorities 1 and 3. Funding for Priorities 2 and 4 will be administered through the Housing Corporation via RSLs. As Halton is unlikely to be allocated funding under Priorities 1 and 3, we will rely on funding under Priorities 2 and 4 from the Housing Corporation. The Regional Housing Board has, in principle, agreed further significant funding for Halton toward the next phase of the Castlefields redevelopment. However, this may restrict the amount of additional funding we are allocated for other priority areas, leading to another real challenge for Halton.

8.13.8 This challenge is likely to intensify should there be a continuing realignment of the regional housing pot with the Regional Housing Strategy, which seems likely to happen. The funding safety net currently in place for areas is likely to diminish, with areas allocated funding under Priorities 1 and 2 taking greater shares year on year and others such as Halton having to cope with fewer resources.

8.14 Halton Partnership Approach

The implications of the Regional Housing Strategy are addressed through the Halton Housing Partnership. This comprises representatives from the Council and the larger RSLs. In addition Halton plays an active role in a number of cross authority/agency groups. These include the North West Housing Forum, the Merseyside Housing

Forum, the Merseyside Planning and Housing Officers Group and the M62 Corridor Group. This enables us to further our understanding of market change and to adopt common goals where appropriate.

8.15 Housing Market Research

A considerable amount of research has been undertaken which helps inform Halton's Housing Strategy. The key issues and trends are summarised as follows:-

8.16 Population

The Council has sought to stabilise Halton's falling population through economic growth, improving the environment and providing attractive new housing. As mentioned earlier, the average household size is decreasing in Halton, whilst the proportion of single person households is increasing. According to the 2001 census, the number of households has increased by 3,000 from 45,857 in 1991. However, Council Tax records suggest an increase of nearly 6,000 to 51,000 showing that the trend towards smaller households is sustaining the demand for increased housing provision.

8.17 Housing Tenure

8.17.1 The social rented sector has remained relatively static within Halton for some time, whilst the private sector has nearly doubled. In 2006 there were 13,882 social rented properties (26%), as compared to 38,733 (74%) private sector properties. Despite this, the social rented sector still represents an unusually large proportion of the housing stock when compared to the North West figure of 20% and the national figure of 19% (Census 2001).

8.17.2 The Housing Needs Survey found that about 4% of the total of Halton's housing stock is privately rented and it is estimated that these properties are owned by approximately 600 different landlords.

8.18 The Private Sector

8.18.1 Housing markets in Widnes and Runcorn operate separately, with little or no interaction (1997 DTZ Pield Urban Capacity Study).

The Housing Needs Survey identified that 39% of households who moved into the Borough over the last 3 years were from Merseyside, 16% from Cheshire, 13% from Warrington, 17% from outside the North West and 6% from abroad. The majority of households moving into the Borough were owner occupiers with a mortgage (56.2%) and a fifth of households said the most important reason for moving into the Borough was employment related, with a further fifth stating that they wished to move to a larger home. There are indications, therefore, that the local housebuilding policy has helped address population decline to some extent, whereas in the past the lack of such housing caused people to move away to neighbouring areas.

8.18.2 Average house prices within Halton tend to be lower than Merseyside and the North West, but are significantly lower than those for England/Wales. A high proportion of properties built in recent years have been in the upper price bracket. Reflecting land availability and demand, these have mainly been located on the fringes of the Borough. Land contamination and lack of available sites in the inner parts of the Borough has limited development. However, with 70% of properties in the lower Council Tax bands, this has helped to address the imbalance in the range and type of property available.

8.18.3 The Council estimates that to address population decline 500 dwellings a year need to be built, but Regional Planning Guidance in 2003 set a target of 330 for Halton. However, the draft revised Regional Spatial Strategy proposes a target of 500 for Halton, but with limits on how much of this can be built on greenfield land. Given the land contamination issues mentioned in a previous paragraph this could cause some difficulties in meeting the target.

8.19 The Social Rented Sector

In Halton, 26% of housing is within the social rented sector. This relatively high level has been sustained, due to significant unemployment, a low wage economy and other deprivation issues. Findings from the Housing Needs Survey found that the current market situation, in terms of affordable housing, is increasing demand in the social rented sector and that overcrowding in social housing may be a result of this. The Survey also identifies that there may be a need for RSLs to consider

restructuring their stock in the long term, to take account of the needs of elderly and disabled households.

8.20 Supported Housing Needs

8.20.1 There are clear links between the Council's Supporting People Strategy and its Housing Strategy, with a key aim being to enable vulnerable people to remain in their homes. The Supporting People Strategy for Halton identifies priority client groups as:

- those with mental health problems,
- single, homeless young people,
- older people and
- those with physical and sensory disabilities.

8.20.2 We also work in partnership, to ensure the necessary provision of supported housing for teenage parents, refuges for victims of domestic violence, together with suitable accommodation for ex-offenders, people who misuse drugs and alcohol and those with HIV/Aids.

8.21 Halton Stock Transfer

The transfer of Council owned housing stock to Halton Housing Trust, a newly created organisation, took place in December 2005.

8.22 Considerations for the future

8.22.1 With recent regeneration schemes in Castlefields and Dukesfield, the quality of housing in the Borough has increased. However there are pockets of housing which will require attention in the near to mid term. These will include West Bank in Widnes, which now has some of the oldest properties in the Borough.

Consultants have been appointed and are carrying out work to assess housing conditions in the area and carry out an environmental assessment. Links will also be made to the neighbouring Widnes Waterfront EDZ development.

A number of costed options are expected to be reported.

8.22.2 Windmill Hill requires regeneration work if the estate is to continue providing viable accommodation for local residents.

The design and layout of the estate no longer meets modern day needs, e.g., there is inadequate car parking provision and poor public transport links increase the isolation felt by residents of the estate.

8.22.3 Development at Upton Rocks and Sandymoor is likely to continue for the next few years. However, Upton Rocks has dwindling land availability. The emerging Local Development Framework will examine land availability and site supply.

9.0 TRANSPORT

9.1 Halton Borough Council is responsible for the maintenance of nearly 500km of roads, 22km of busways and 200km of footpaths. In addition, we maintain the Silver Jubilee Bridge and a further 200 highway structures, including expressway and busway bridges.

9.2 Legislation

9.2.1 In 2004, the Government produced a review of its 10 year Transport Plan in the form of a White Paper entitled The Future of Transport. This had three key themes:

- o Sustained investment over the long term. The spending review settlement supports the Governments' commitment to deliver sustained improvements to transport networks. Spending by the Department for Transport (DfT) will rise by an annual average of 4.5% in real terms between 2005-06 and 2007-08. An additional £1.7 billion transport reform package will be provided for the railways, over and above the 10 Year Plan provision.
- o Improvements in transport management. The rail industry is to be re-organised to improve performance, drive down costs and get better value from public spending. Better traffic management is proposed and where it makes sense economically and environmentally to increase the capacity of the road network, measures will be required to 'lock in' benefits e.g., road pricing. In addition, assistance will be given to local authorities to combine better bus services with local charging schemes.
- o Planning ahead, the long-term trends in travel are evident to all.

We cannot build our way out of the problems we face on our road networks and doing nothing is not an option. The Government intends to lead the debate on road pricing and will ensure that transport decision-making will be shared with regional and local stakeholders. The Government also intends to ensure that regional and local planning will be based on a shared view of priorities, deliverability and affordability.

9.2.2 Underlining these themes is balancing the need to travel with the need to improve quality of life. This means seeking solutions that meet long-term economic, social and environmental goals.

Achieving this aim will clearly contribute to the objectives of the UK Sustainable Development Strategy.

9.2.3 The Traffic Management Act received Royal Assent in July 2004 and is being implemented over the next two years. It places responsibility on Local Authorities to be pro-active in the management of the road network. The aims of the Act are to tackle congestion and reduce disruption.

9.3 Regional Context

9.3.1 The North West Regional Assembly's Transport Strategy is being reviewed as part of the Regional Spatial Strategy. The regional context currently remains as published in RSS 13, Regional Planning Guidance for the North West (March 2003). This lists the Mersey Crossing Study as a 'regionally significant transport study' and as a 'transport proposal of regional significance'.

9.3.2 The Regional Economic Strategy provides the economic development framework for the North West. Improving transport is key to delivering four of the five priorities of the strategy, e.g., business development, regeneration, infrastructure and image.

9.3.3 In January 2005, Merseyside produced 'The Liverpool City Region', which looks at how Merseyside will contribute to the Northern Way. This includes expansion of the John Lennon Airport (located just outside Halton) and the Mersey Gateway, which will help improve connectivity of the City Region.

9.4 Local Transport Plan (LTP)

9.4.1 In July 2000, Halton produced its first Local Transport Plan for the period 2001/02 to 2005/06. This document was well received by Government Office and resulted in a £2.227m increase in funding for 2001/02 over that awarded for 2000/01.

Halton has made significant progress towards achieving its transport aims and objectives. In the period 2003/04, 87% of Halton's targets were either already achieved or on track, with Halton achieving a 'well above average' classification from the Department for Transport. In 2006 it was deemed to be an Excellent Authority in this respect, one of only two in the North West.

9.4.2 The Council's LTP 2, covering the period April 2006 to March 2011, sets out the Council's vision for local transport and its long-term strategy for tackling transport problems within the Borough. A five-year implementation programme of schemes and initiatives is included, together with targets and performance indicators that will be used to monitor progress in delivering objectives.

9.4.3 The Plan is structured around the four shared priorities for transport agreed between local authorities and the Government, which are:

- Tackling congestion
- Delivering Accessibility
- Safer Roads and
- Better Air Quality

9.4.4 Tackling Congestion - The biggest congestion problems within Halton are on the approaches to the Silver Jubilee Bridge, where up to 90,000 vehicles cross every day. This bottleneck stands in the way of economic development both within the Borough and across the wider Merseyside area. However congestion at peak times also occurs at other key junctions, including the A56 Chester Road/A558 Eastern Expressway roundabout, the Widnes Eastern Relief Road/ Fiddlers Ferry Road and the A557 approach to M56. There is also growing evidence that regeneration is bringing about local congestion within the town centres. Congestion not only constrains the economy but also impacts on air quality.

9.4.5 The approval and development of the second Mersey crossing, the Mersey Gateway, will lead to significant journey time savings for cross river traffic and will enable the Silver Jubilee Bridge to cater for sustainable local travel. A decision on the crossing is expected in the near future, but even if it gets the go ahead, it will not be completed before 2012.

9.4.6 Delivering Accessibility - The ability of people to be able to move around Halton and access services, such as schools, hospitals, work, shopping and leisure, has a big impact on their quality of life. The key objective is to ensure that vulnerable communities have good access to these services, which are fundamental to tackling problems of social exclusion. However, it is now widely recognised that accessibility problems cannot be addressed by transport authorities alone, but require close co-operation with providers and users of the services.

In consultation with our partners, a wide range of measures are proposed, including focused improvements to non-commercial and accessible bus services, highways network travel planning advice and publicity and facilities for cyclists and pedestrians. In addition, planning conditions on new developments will continue to be used to maximise opportunities to increase accessibility through sustainable travel. These will include use of S106 and S278 Agreements.

9.4.7 Safer Roads - Halton has made significant progress in reducing accident casualty rates and we are on track to meet Government targets. However, accident rates are still above the national average and more work needs to be done to bring levels down further. In particular, the number of children killed or seriously injured on Halton's roads is twice the national average. There has also been an increase in the number of injuries to users of two-wheeled motor vehicles, with the total casualty rate in Halton for the five years up to 2003 being 33% higher than the 1994-98 baseline figure.

A comprehensive and holistic approach to casualty reduction will continue to be employed, incorporating targeted highway improvements, safety cameras, traffic-calming, road safety

education, training and publicity, traffic management and safety audits.

9.4.8 Better Air Quality - There are clear linkages between high levels of air pollution and people's health. Extensive modelling of pollution in the Borough has shown that pollution levels are currently within acceptable air quality standards. However, we will continue to introduce measures and interventions to encourage sustainable travel, to reduce the potential for congestion and pollution and monitor air quality.

9.5 Local Transport Plan Funding

The Government is consulting on a new formula approach to allocating funding for the 'Integrated Transport' block. Current indications are that this will have a major impact on Halton's ability to undertake capital improvements to the transport system in future years. The following table indicates the potential allocations for the Maintenance and Integrated Transport elements.

Year	06/07	07/08	08/09	09/10	10/11	Total
Integrated Transport block- Indicative (£000s)	1,639	1,500	1,428	1,500	1,575	7,641
Maintenance of Roads & Bridges- Indicative (£000s)	2,089	2,131	2,237	2,344	2,467	11,268
Total	3,728	3,631	3,665	3,844	4,042	18,909

N.B. In addition, a major scheme bid of between £25m and £35m has been submitted to the DfT to enable the Silver Jubilee Bridge to be brought to a steady state of maintenance. (See immediately below for further information on the bridge).

Comparing the above indicative programme to that which was available for the period 2001/2 - 2005/6, it is possible that there will be an overall reduction over the next five-year period of £11.7m.

9.6 The Government has provided Halton with an indicative allocation of Local Transport Plan funding of £8.334m for integrated transport and £11.458m for highway maintenance over five years.

10.0 SILVER JUBILEE BRIDGE

10.1 The Silver Jubilee Bridge is a Grade II listed structure, opened in 1961. At that time, it was the third longest span steel arch bridge in the world. It was designed to carry 9,000 vehicles a day, but was widened in 1977 to increase capacity to 65,000 vehicles. This capacity has now been massively exceeded, with daily flow rates reaching 90,000 vehicles per day. As a result, traffic flow across the bridge is extremely sensitive to disruption, with the slightest incident during peak hours causing congestion over a wide area.

10.2 80% of vehicles using the Silver Jubilee Bridge have a final destination outside of the Borough, the remaining 20% being local traffic.

This demonstrates the high strategic importance of the crossing.

10.3 The Silver Jubilee Bridge is now over 40 years old and is operating beyond its original design capacity. Before Halton, as a new Unitary Authority, took on responsibility for the structure, its maintenance had been consistently under-funded for years and as a result of these factors, the bridge continues to require significant investment. To date, it has benefited from £9m of essential structural maintenance. However, £25m is required for a further 10-year programme. This will be pursued through a major scheme bid as part of the LTP and will bring the bridge to a steady state condition to ensure its continued viability.

11.0 MERSEY GATEWAY

11.1 By the end of the 2005/6 financial year total development costs for the Mersey Gateway since 2001/02 exceeded £5.7m. Halton's contribution was £3.2m from internal resources supported by £1m from LTP allocations, with the balance of £1.5m from partners. The development work has included modelling the impact of the new bridge on the motorway network and looking at the impact of the new crossing on river flows, water quality, the economy, wildlife and the landscape. There has also been extensive consultation with interested organisations and the local community, 97% of the latter being in favour of a new crossing, which emphasises the strength of support.

11.2 In July 2003, a detailed bid was submitted to the Government for over £300m for the new crossing. In December 2003, the Government responded positively by awarding the project the status of 'super work in progress'. A revised and expanded appraisal was submitted in December 2004. It was approved in 2006.

11.3 It is intended that a planning application will be submitted early in 2008.

11.4 The Mersey Gateway will be more than just a bridge for Halton. It will support the regional economy and act as a catalyst for regeneration within Halton. In particular it will be a major boost to the Widnes Waterfront EDZ and 3MG. It will have the capacity to take up to 120,000 vehicles a day and provision for a light rail system, together with walking/cycling access. It will also enable the Silver Jubilee Bridge to cater for more sustainable local trips.

12.0 CONSULTATION

As part of the LTP development, a series of consultation events were carried out, including a household survey, which went to 6,935 residents, and a series of LTP conference events for stakeholders.

13.0 FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

13.1 There is huge scope for future transport opportunities:

13.2 Improved public transport links to Liverpool John Lennon Airport will benefit the development of this important regional airport and, as a consequence, the economy of the whole region.

13.3 Liverpool Capital of Culture in 2008 is on the near horizon and improved transport links will have a beneficial impact on this important year-long series of events, together with the anticipated economic expansion we can expect, as seen in recent Capital of Culture cities such as Dublin and Glasgow.

14.0 RAIL

14.1 Halton Curve Rail Link is a £7.5m scheme which, if implemented, would lead to new local services, a possible new local station at Beechwood

in Runcorn and the re-opening of Ditton Station. It would also complement the Mersey Gateway.

14.2 Car Parking and Access Improvements could be made at both Widnes and Hough Green stations.

14.3 3MG is a large-scale road/rail freight interchange to undergo considerable expansion in south west Widnes. It will provide major investment into existing rail freight businesses and be of regional and national significance. In order to deliver this programme, however, other road infrastructure improvements, which are part of the LTP, are being worked on. These include a new bridge on Ditton Road and the provision of an HGV bypass.

A Masterplan for this site was approved in December 2004 and details a five-year implementation programme. This has now been converted into a Supplementary Planning Document.

15.0 BUSES

15.1 The vast majority of the bus network within the Borough is operated commercially, with the remainder supported by Halton Borough Council. In recent years, there had been a general decline in bus usage, but in the last year this has reverted to a small increase of 0.3%.

15.2 There is a good, high frequency core bus service in the Borough, which includes a unique 20km dedicated Busway in Runcorn. However there are opportunities for improvement such as:

- More flexible bus services using low-floor vehicles, together with enhanced passenger infrastructure and frequency improvements;
- Direct bus links between the town centres and railway stations;
- Increased public transport information, advice and publicity;
- Re-alignment of the supported bus network, to better meet locally identified needs;
- Roll out of 'real time information' scheme;
- Introduction of a multi-operator, pre-paid bus ticket pilot covering all bus services.

15.3 Key Issues

15.3.1 There is a lack of funding to local bus services. Supported bus networks are necessary for general public accessibility but are not commercially viable. Improvements should include late night and weekend services, as well as services to industrial areas and hospitals. The cost for providing the current level of service is rising each year and this will lead to cuts in services unless budgets are increased.

15.3.2 At present, bus operators are reluctant to operate busway routes after 9:30pm due to the number of anti-social behaviour incidents and attacks on bus drivers. With the proposal and promotion of the night-time economy, this presents a key challenge. However, the 'Travelsafe' programme, which puts police and community support officers on the buses during the day, has been successful in tackling these issues and could be extended, but this would have resource implications.

15.3.3 There are potential links to be made, to support the growing night-time economy, including late night bus services to take people out of the town centre areas as quickly as possible.

16.0 STREET LIGHTING

16.1 Currently, there are 19,200 lighting units in the Borough, about 46% of which are over 30 years old and are consequently at the end of their designed life.

16.2 Key Issues

16.2.1 Funding over recent years has not been sufficient to remove older and potentially dangerous units. Their removal therefore needs to be prioritised.

16.2.2 Increases in energy charges and the introduction of new lighting columns on new developments will significantly increase energy costs.

17.0 PRINCIPAL ROAD INFRASTRUCTURE

17.1 The Expressway network in Runcorn was built at approximately the same time as the Silver

Jubilee Bridge and is wearing out. At the moment, discussions are underway with the DfT and GONW to review the allocation for road maintenance within Halton. Resources need to be secured to ensure that roads are suitably maintained to take modern loads and vehicle usage.

17.2 Key Achievements

17.2.1 As part of the CPA assessment, the environment, which includes transportation issues, was given full marks.

17.2.2 The annual programme reports submitted to show progress against the LTP have all been 'above average' with the last one 'well above average.' This currently places Halton 8th in the country.

17.2.3 Halton is a 'Centre of Excellence' for local transport services.

17.2.4 Halton is a 'Beacon Council' for better local public transport.

18.0 CONTAMINATED LAND

18.1 The Environmental Protection Act, 1990 addresses some of the issues surrounding contaminated land: in particular, the retention and treatment of contaminated land on site rather than removal to tip, and a 'source-pathway-target' approach for dealing with risks to health.

18.2 The 'source-pathway-target' approach involves local authorities using historical records of land use and other information to identify contaminated or potentially contaminated sites within their area. Site investigation works then need to be carried out at these sites, to establish the types and location of the contamination. The Council is able to prioritise key sites depending on location, current land use and the likely contaminant present. This then establishes that a contamination or a 'source' is present. Contamination on its own will not always present an immediate health risk and the next step is to identify if there is a pathway, such as a watercourse or drainage system, which would give the contamination the means to move or 'leach' from the site. Once contamination is no longer locked

into the ground, it is able to cause harm to the health of humans and wildlife. When contamination can be shown to be causing or have the potential to cause harm, the Council is required to act. If contaminated land is in private ownership, we can serve notice requiring remediation to be implemented. If the Council own the site then we need to remediate it. Sites meeting these criteria are categorised as 'Special Sites' under the Environmental Protection Act.

18.3 The National Land Use Database (NLUD), produced in 2004, shows that 27.69% of Halton's previously developed land remains derelict - a significant decrease from 36% in 2003. This represents 3% of the entire land in the Borough: 217 sites covering 248 ha., with 173 sites and 75 ha., in Widnes and Runcorn respectively. Unsurprisingly, these sites tend to be concentrated on land either side of the River Mersey, as for many years this was dominated by the chemical industry. Bringing these sites back into productive use is a key aim of the Council and of the Council's Unitary Development Plan. However, this legacy presents a major disincentive for development and makes it impossible to meet Government Policy objectives i.e., for most new development to take place on previously used land. Up to 75% of this land is economically and environmentally beyond reclamation for a hard end use. Despite this, since 1974 the Council has brought back into use 190 ha., of derelict and contaminated land, 71% of which was so badly contaminated it is suitable only for green end use.

19.0 REMEDIATION FUNDING

19.1 DEFRA

19.1.1 Derelict Land Grants

19.1.2 Between 1974 and 1990, over 397 acres of derelict land within Halton was reclaimed through funding from the Government's Derelict Land programme. It represented a public investment figure of over £20m. Derelict Land Grant aid and our success in attracting such funding has made an immense difference to the image of Halton. However with our industrial heritage there still remains much to do. In fact, some of the sites which

had already been reclaimed fell below the environmental standards that were subsequently expected. The Municipal Golf Course is a good example of this. Following a reclamation operation, leachate continued to enter Steward's Brook, but because we were not allowed to attract two lots of grant for different contamination problems in the same piece of land remediation, this remains unresolved.

19.1.3 The Council continues to access Derelict Land Grant each year. This has gone towards the reclamation of sites such as Percival Lane, Barrows Green Lane, Southern Widnes, the ICI Coal Stock Yard, TAC Derby Road and Factory Lane. Derelict Land Grants are issued from the governments Derelict Land Programme, controlled by English Partnerships (EP). The NWDA act as administrator and our contact. There are various different funds that deal with contaminated ground when linked into hard end use, all under EP's control.

19.1.4 Under part IIA of the Environmental Protection Act, funding is now disbursed by Defra. This is provided for three specific areas:

- 1) Site investigation;
- 2) Risk assessments/consultants reports;
- 3) Costs for remediation work.

19.1.5 Funding for Parts 1) and 2) is available for all potential contamination sites identified, but money for Part 3) is only available for sites that are designated as 'Special Sites'. Halton currently has only one designated special site: St Michael's Golf Course, which was reclaimed many years ago using Derelict Land Grant. However, this site no longer meets today's more stringent environmental standards and obtaining designation is proving a lengthy process, which the Council originally embarked upon back in 2003.

19.1.6 The process has involved putting a case together for designation to the Environment Agency (who need to formally support the proposal), as well as carrying out site investigation works and developing a design scheme. Although funding was available for the site investigation works, the design scheme had to be funded by the Council at a cost of £270,000. As Defra has agreed

to designate the golf course as a Special Site, these costs will be refunded as part of the overall reclamation costs. Closure of the golf course while this process continues is incurring additional costs for security - currently running at in excess of £150,000 per annum, which will not be eligible for refund from Defra.

19.1.7 Such a lengthy and costly process presents some real issues for Halton. As an area with more 'blackfield' than 'brownfield' sites, we potentially have some way to go to prove our need to Defra. We are, however, continuing with a programme of testing to identify sites and categorise any possible risks. This work is funded through Defra.

19.1.8 Key sites in Halton which may possibly require future designation as special sites are Weston Quarries, Johnson's Lane Tip, Weston lagoons and parts of the Widnes Waterfront EDZ. Although some of these are currently in private ownership, they may eventually become the responsibility of the Council.

19.1.9 In Halton, site contamination is often severe and the consequent cost for remediation is therefore very high. St. Michael's Golf Course will, for example, cost in the region of £4.5m to remediate.

19.2 Landfill Tax Credits

This is a further source of funding that can be used for smaller scale projects involving site contamination. As its name suggests, it is funded from Landfill Tax, which is a tax levied on all waste that currently goes to landfill. The ICI Coal Stock Yard received £300,000 from Landfill tax credits towards the costs of site remediation.

19.3 North West Development Agency (NWDA) Funding NWDA single pot funds can also be used for land reclamation, but this has become increasingly difficult for Halton to access due to the NWDA's changing priorities.

20.0 CONTAMINATED LAND REMEDIATION TECHNOLOGIES

20.1 The variety of technologies for treating contamination and remediating sites is advancing all the time.

Halton Borough Council has carried out pioneering works using 'Cement Stabilisation Technology' at a number of sites in the Borough. This process is particularly suitable for a commonly occurring contaminant in Halton called 'Galligu.' This semi-liquid substance causes major land stability problems and poses a risk to watercourses, etc. The cement stabilisation technique locks up the contamination and changes its consistency to a hard solid, thus preventing further risk and improving the quality of the site for potential further development. This technique was used on the Coal Stock Yard site in Widnes which is now a demonstration project being monitored by the Environment Agency and the University of Liverpool. To date, tests have proven the technology to be successful. This method also has the advantage of being relatively cheap and is thus more cost effective when compared to landfill. The cement stabilisation technology is also likely to be used on parts of St. Michael's Golf Course and the Widnes Waterfront EDZ.

20.2 Other technologies include:

- bio-remediation and vacuum extraction, which remove oils and solvents; and
- permeable reactive barriers, which treat collected leachate from sites with suitable chemicals in order to make them safe.

20.3 Land Reclamation Schemes

20.3.1 Halton Borough Council is currently reclaiming approximately 10 hectares of contaminated land each year. These sites, e.g. Wigg Island, are mainly being reclaimed for green, soft end uses: generally most appropriate given the site conditions. However the cement stabilisation technique has been so successful that it may be viable to build on sites in the future. Sites treated in this way, e.g., the old Crosville Bus Depot, Runcorn, could be viable for a number of uses, including housing, as the ground conditions are much more suitable.

20.3.2 One site which has recently been reclaimed:-

20.3.3 The Brindley Arts Centre is the former site of an old tannery and soap works in Runcorn Town Centre, where various contaminants were left in the ground.

20.3.3.1 The first phase of this development involved dealing with the contamination which, due to environmental regulations, had to be retained on site. Temporarily encapsulated as 'the mound' adjacent to the Brindley, it was prevented from causing further harm. However, as part of the nearby new development for the Runcorn Canal Quarter, the mound is being removed.

20.3.3.2 In addition, the foundations for the Brindley were piled in order to accommodate the ground conditions.

20.3.4 Reclamation schemes proposed in the future:

20.3.4.1 St Michael's Golf Course

It is hoped that work will begin on the golf course in the near future, but it is estimated that it will be four years before the site will again be open to the public. As the site was a 1970s design, consideration is being given as to how it can be improved and updated, for example through the inclusion of a golf driving range.

20.3.4.2 HEDCO or Hutchinsons Tip, West Bank

Currently in private ownership, this heavily contaminated site, adjacent to Stewards Brook and the Mersey estuary, will require some remediation in the near future to prevent leachate from entering these watercourses. Work is currently underway to look at the possibility of collecting the leachate and burning it.

20.3.4.3 3MG

This site has two watercourses, Ditton Brook and Stewards Brook, into which leachate could potentially escape. The site adjacent to Stewards Brook has been sheet-piled, which will prevent further contamination from entering the brook. However, other parts of the site may require additional treatment.

21.0 KEY URBAN RENEWAL ACHIEVEMENTS

21.1 The Highways and Transportation Department won Beacon Council status in 2004, under the theme 'Better Local Public Transport'.

21.2 In November 2003, the Planning

Department achieved runner up status in the Local Government Award category of the AGI Awards (Association of Geographic Information) for its on-line planning application system and were short-listed in the 2004 Local Government Chronicle Awards category of 'Improving Services with E-Technology'.

21.3 Landscape Services won Beacon Council status in 2002, under the theme 'Improving Urban Green Spaces'.

21.4 In the Best Value Audit Inspection carried out in 2003 for urban renewal, the service was awarded a Good 2* Service with 'Promising Prospects for Improvement.' Halton was praised for having a strong track record over many years of reclaiming contaminated and derelict land and of completing re-development projects on the land released. Inspectors felt that Halton had been successful in creating employment opportunities by attracting private sector investment into the Borough. In addition, they found that Halton had good working relationships with locally based businesses and that progress had been made in demonstrating leadership in partnership-working and devolving influence over the use of resources to local communities. Relative data showed Halton compared well with others on refurbishing derelict housing.

21.5 Awards Won for Halton Regeneration Schemes in 2004/5/6:

21.5.1 Green Apple Awards for:

21.5.1.1 Halton Business Forum, Victoria Square, Widnes (2004);

21.5.1.2 Transporter House, Widnes (2004);

21.5.1.3 The regeneration of the Kingsway Learning Centre, Widnes (2005);

21.5.2 Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) Award for The Brindley Arts Centre, Runcorn (2005);

21.5.3 Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) for the Wigg Island reclamation project in Runcorn (2004);

21.5.4 2005 Regeneration Award: Best Design-led

Regeneration Project awarded for The Brindley Arts Centre, Runcorn (2005);

21.5.5 Civic Trust 2005: Centre Vision Special Award for The Brindley Arts Centre, Runcorn;

21.5.6 'Green Flag' for Parks & Open Spaces for Wigg Island, Runcorn (2006);

21.5.7 Local Government Chronicle (LGC) Environment Award 2006 for the development of the former Coal Stockyard (now Ted Gleave Fields) into playing fields.

21.5.8 Chartered Institute of Housing: Excellence in Delivering Regeneration Award for Castlefields area (2006).

21.5.9 Regional Property Awards: Best Partnership Project (with Plus Housing Group) for the Waterbridge Mews Development (2006) in Castlefields.

21.6 In addition, a number of projects have been shortlisted for awards for this year, but results have, to date, not been announced.

22.0 URBAN RENEWAL WORKING STRUCTURES AND PARTNERSHIPS

22.1 The process of urban renewal is a highly complex, cross-cutting issue. As the Government's White Paper makes clear, the requirements for success go well beyond the relatively tight definition of urban renewal used in this paper, which emphasises the physical environment.

22.2.1 Halton Borough Council recognised the importance of bringing responsibility for the delivery of physical regeneration programmes under one roof, by creating the Major Projects Department in 2002. This department, together with other directorates within Halton Borough Council, various partners, agencies and organisations having an input into urban renewal, are brought together in several ways:

22.2.2 The Urban Renewal Specialist Strategic Partnership (UR SSP), reporting to the Halton Strategic Partnership Board, manages Halton's Urban Renewal Strategy. It approves, disburses,

monitors and co-ordinates Halton's NRF allocation for Urban Renewal projects and acts as Management Board for the NWDA funding for the Widnes Waterfront EDZ.

22.2.3 The Castlefields Regeneration Partnership agreed the Castlefields Regeneration Masterplan and Action Plan and oversees its implementation. The Castlefields Implementation Group monitors progress on the Council's behalf.

22.2.4 The 3MG Steering Group has brought together land-owners and public sector partners in the formulation of the Ditton Strategic Rail Freight Park Masterplan and monitors progress against the agreed Action Plan. Halton Borough Council's Executive (Transmodal Implementation) Sub Board manages the implementation of the programme.

22.2.5 The Widnes Waterfront EDZ Steering Group consists of officers with an interest in delivering the Widnes Waterfront EDZ Masterplan and Action Plan.

22.2.6 The Council's Urban Renewal Policy and Performance Board monitors and reviews progress on all Urban Renewal matters.

22.3 In addition there are other informal and formal partnerships with private sector developers driving forward Urban Renewal. These are:

22.3.1 Widnes Regeneration Ltd., established in February 1999 as a joint venture development company between Halton Borough Council and St. Modwen Properties plc., to tackle the regeneration issues facing Widnes Town Centre and other named sites in Widnes. This partnership has delivered:

- Widnes Road redevelopment with a new ASDA store, Albert Court 20-unit residential scheme, Gerrard Street shops, the Lacey Street housing development and the Liebig Court mixed residential and retail developments.
- The North Albert Road redevelopment with the JJB leisure/retail development and Streetscape Improvement scheme;
- Two Streetscape Improvement schemes, one in Widnes Road and one in Broseley Square;

- o Halebank Local Centre;
- o The Simms Cross Redevelopment, incorporating retail and commercial floorspace;
- o Following the purchase of the former Lafarge and Clariant sites, the Heron Business Park development on the Widnes Waterfront EDZ;
- o The sale to Barratt's of a housing development site with planning permission for 204 houses on the former ASDA site at Halebank;
- o the commercial leisure development at Widnes Waterfront.

22.3.2 Halton Development Partnership Ltd., which is a joint venture company with Peel Holdings Ltd., to promote development/regeneration initiatives targeted solely to Council-owned land. The joint venture company has delivered the Runcorn Old Town Central Area Redevelopment Scheme and is currently progressing the proposed District Centre at Upton Rocks, Widnes.

22.3.3 The Council has entered into an exclusivity agreement with Urban Splash to bring forward development proposals for the 'Canal Quarter', a collection of sites alongside the Bridgewater canal in Runcorn. The development will include residential, commercial, retail and civic elements.

22.3.4 The Council is in discussion with private sector developers wishing to procure the Halton Business Forum for redevelopment.

22.3.5 Pochins plc - A joint venture company that has built and is now managing industrial units at Dock Road, Runcorn.

22.3.6 An informal private sector regeneration partnership was also established with Maryland Securities in developing a proposal for one of the key buildings (the former Co-op store) in Victoria Square, Widnes.

22.3.7 There are also partnerships within both Runcorn Town Centre and Widnes Town Centre, which are aimed at increasing the vitality and viability of these two town centres.

- o In Widnes, the Widnes Traders Group has 70 members concerned with retail and

commercial interests in the Town Centre.

- o In Runcorn Town Centre the business community there has established the Runcorn Traders Group with 7 member representatives for 100 commercial interests in the town.

These groups meet bi-annually.

22.3.8 Halton Borough Council is a member of two regional partnerships which include developments in Halton within their programmes:

- o The 'New Approaches' programme aims to reclaim under-used land on strategic corridors and gateways to and from Merseyside;
- o The 'River of Light' scheme aims to create light beacons to form 'lighting routes' throughout the Merseyside coastline.

22.4 Comments on partnership working

22.4.1 Substantial progress is being demonstrated in achieving the desired outcomes, as measured through the Floor Targets and action plans in place to address areas where challenges remain and to focus on continuing needs.

22.4.2 Successful expenditure of all external resources committed to the borough in line with strategic plans. Partners have demonstrated their commitment through dedicating their own resources to Partnership activity and in examining mainstreaming.

22.4.3 An exemplary strategic planning process is in place, which allows partners to address the needs and aspirations of our communities. This is reflected in a very favourable Audit Commission report on the Partnership's Performance Management Framework, which is deemed to meet all necessary criteria. In addition, the Government Office assessment of the Partnership and its work places it in one of the upper ("green/amber") bands for the annual review for the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit.

23.0 EMERGING POLICY ISSUES

The Local Government Bill, currently before Parliament, will have profound implications for areas like Halton. It reinforces the need for councils to pursue the well-being of residents in an holistic way;

strengthens the role of Partnerships by placing a duty on many organisations to co-operate; and places engagement with residents and businesses as a cornerstone of the approach to be taken. Key to this is a radical reworking of Local Area Agreements as a means to promote and facilitate partnership working across cross-cutting themes.

23.1 Local Area Agreements

From April 2007, there is a requirement for every area to produce a Local Area Agreement (LAA). It is important that we work together to deliver key outcomes for the Borough as part of this process. Halton has developed a robust LAA, which mirrors the focus on five strategic themes, including Urban Renewal, set out in the local Sustainable Community Strategy.

23.2 Funding

23.2.1 As has been explained previously, external funding changes are likely to result in Halton receiving far less resource than we have had in the past, as a number of funding sources upon which urban renewal has relied in recent years are now coming to an end. The task will be to work in a smarter way to make best use of what resources are available.

23.2.2 In addition we are not identified as a Pathfinder area and are therefore likely to miss out on many of the resources allocated for housing.

23.2.3 Halton is now allocated NWDA resources via The Merseyside Partnership (TMP) and is therefore having to compete for funding with the Merseyside area generally. As mentioned earlier, this is likely to be a key challenge for Halton.

23.2.4 It is important that Halton continues to develop links with the NWDA as RDAs in the English Regions are likely to be key players in the management and allocation of European and non-European resources earmarked for regional development in the immediate future.

23.2.5 There are, therefore, major challenges for Halton in delivering Urban Renewal. It is likely that we will increasingly have to focus on private sector funding and partnership.

However, we must acknowledge that much of the private sector intervention to date has relied upon public sector funding to attract it to the Borough, or to provide improvements which have acted as a catalyst to private sector development. With diminishing public funding support, opportunities may be fewer or on a smaller scale.

23.3 Best Value Review

23.3.1 The Audit Commission Inspectors for the 2003 Best Value Review of Urban Renewal felt that Halton did not have sufficiently well defined service delivery outcomes and that the focus had been on managing existing projects as well as securing funding for future projects, rather than on identifying how projects would meet the needs of local people and their environment.

As a consequence, they felt that this had led to a 'piecemeal' approach to physical renewal and regeneration in the past. Comparative data showed that performance was poor in respect of some indicators associated with housing, economic development and the environment.

23.3.2 Although much has since changed and improvements have been made following that review, more still needs to be done to address this challenging agenda.

24.0 SKILLS AND EMPLOYMENT

24.1 Although considered as part of 'Employment, Learning & Skills', skills and employment issues also cut across part of the urban renewal agenda. Halton generally performs poorly in terms of skills and qualification levels, ranking 342nd out of 408 districts. The 19+ age group has a particular lack of employment skills and qualifications, leading to new Halton businesses recruiting from outside the Borough. Halton is, therefore, not fully benefiting from the inward investment to areas such as Daresbury Park. This issue needs to be addressed by both the Urban Renewal and the Skills and Employment priorities, with better links made between the two. Intelligence needs to be provided to schools and colleges, to support curriculum development and provide more informed careers advice to students.

There is also a question as to whether colleges are catering for local businesses in offering students what businesses need in terms of flexibility and vocational training opportunities.

24.2 Education in Halton, and the UK generally, is currently very focussed on academic qualifications. This option may not suit some students, who could learn valuable vocational skills and gain greater employment opportunities through a more structured approach to learning.

24.3 While we need to focus on the knowledge economy, the current skills mismatch is unlikely to be able to support a growth in this sector. This is further impacted upon by a loss in our youth population, predicted at 20% decline over the next ten years in the 10-19 yrs., age group and 6% in the 20-30 yrs., age group. It is likely that these losses will be due to families moving out of Halton, to Cheshire and surrounding areas, and students moving to university. This presents us with the challenge to:

- o make Halton a more attractive and viable place to live and
- o meet the needs and quality of life issues

and in order to keep families here and attract new graduates back to the area, businesses should also be encouraged to employ local graduates. These issues will need to be addressed if we are to have a young, local, skilled workforce in place that will underpin Halton's economic growth.

25.0 HOUSING

25.1 Housing may present the key to reversing Halton's population decline amongst young people. As mentioned above, current predictions suggest that by 2015, the number of young people aged 10-19 and 20-39 will decline by 20% and 6% respectively (based on a 2003 baseline). If we are to attract graduates and young families into the area, we need to meet the demand for high quality residential property. Otherwise, people will continue to 'vote with their feet' and leave the borough. However, regional restrictions placed upon the Authority with regard to new-build housing, together with diminishing land reserves (particularly in Widnes)

present key challenges for the borough.

25.2 For a variety of reasons, the problems facing the borough do not correlate with the priorities of the Regional Housing Strategy, which may result in Halton not securing funding for the housing investment we require.

25.3 As the Regional Housing Board has, in principle, agreed significant funding for Castlefields, the amount of additional funding which we are allocated for other priority areas may be restricted, leading to a major challenge for Halton.

25.4 Within Halton there are a few housing areas where properties may require attention in the near to mid-term. These include West Bank in Widnes, which has some of the oldest properties in the borough. Consultants are currently carrying out a condition survey in the area, which will inform the future housing strategy.

25.5 Current demographic predictions for Halton show a growing elderly population, with projected rises in the over 60's and the over 75's by 27.5% and 19% respectively by the year 2015 (based on a 2003 baseline). This dramatic rise will put increasing demands on a variety of housing types, including bungalows, supported housing and residential care. With existing waiting lists for such provision, this will present another key challenge for Halton, as its elderly population increases.

25.6 The 2001, census figures showed a trend towards a smaller household size within Halton, which is expected to reach an average size of about 2.2 within the next decade. This may lead to an increase in demand for apartments or smaller properties, rather than large houses. The trend towards smaller households is currently sustaining the demand for increased housing provision and it is likely that this will continue into the future.

25.7 The Housing Needs Survey has identified an emerging affordability issue in the Borough and recommends that 25% of new units should be the target for subsidised affordable housing, subject to site viability. Officers from the Housing and Planning Departments of the Council plan to work together, with a view to developing an affordable housing

policy for the borough to address this. The current market situation has implications for the social rented sector, which is beginning to experience an upturn in demand.

25.8 The housing stock transfer took place in December 2005 and the Council has committed to work closely with Halton Housing Trust, in order to ensure the delivery of the significant investment required to the stock.

25.9 Halton Borough Council is strengthening its links with private sector landlords in order to bring about improvements in the condition and management standards required in the private rented sector, with the introduction of the Landlord Accreditation Scheme.

26.0 TOWN CENTRES

26.1 Halton's town centres are currently being developed to support a night-time economy. However, restaurants and bars may suffer from sparse trade during the day, due to the low number of other businesses and commercial offices available to be serviced. This detracts from the vibrancy of the town centres during the day and affects the mix and viability of gustatory premises in the borough. If we are to attract quality night-time investment and have vibrant town centres, then we also need to develop office space which will provide the trade to ensure that restaurants and bars remain viable and thrive. Linking the Widnes Waterfront EDZ area to the town centre should help enhance the economic development of Widnes, particularly during the day, but possibly with employees also going for a drink or meal after work.

26.2 Within Halton, retail and office floorspace is relatively under-represented commercially, at 10.5% and 11.9% respectively - substantially lower than the national average of 19.2% for retail and 16.8% for office floor space. This presents a further important challenge for our town centre development.

26.3 There are a number of private sector investment projects proposed within our town centres, including those of Urban Splash in Runcorn and Marmalade in Widnes. Halton needs to work with these investors and attract further private

sector investment to the town centres in order to ensure their continued regeneration.

As mentioned earlier, this will become increasingly difficult as public sector funding diminishes. The remarkable regeneration of both Widnes and Runcorn is far from complete and new developments, such as the Canal Quarter in Runcorn and Liebig Court in Widnes, need to be supported by continuing the physical improvements of the established areas. Over the last three years, schemes such as the Streetscapes Enhancement and Shopfront Improvements schemes have used NRF funding to supplement private sector investment with other funding such as Local Transport Plan and Section 106 monies. It is vital that the improvement of these town centres remains a high priority for future funding, whilst available.

27.0 REGIONAL ISSUES

27.1 *NWDA Funding*

27.1.1 The North West Development Agency has now produced a Strategic Investment Plan, setting out their priorities for funding. Castlefields no longer features as a priority in this plan. As this programme's employment and skills initiatives were reliant upon NWDA funding, a major review of spend for these projects has been necessitated. This is a real issue for Halton, both in the short and longer term. As NWDA funding priorities change, support is increasingly diverted to areas outside of Halton.

27.1.2 Halton has recently been placed within the remit of the NWDA's Merseyside Office. This means that we are now competing with areas where land values are higher, land more sought after and match funding more easily accessed through European Objective 1. **28.2** City Region Development Plan.

27.2 *City Region Development Plan*

27.2.1 The City Region Development Plan builds on a detailed mapping of key actions and initiatives across Merseyside, which together form an Action Plan for the years 2006-2009. This Action Plan and the Development Plan itself are designed to show how the Merseyside Region can make a significant

contribution to initiatives such as the Northern Way Growth Strategy and the Regional Economic Strategy.

27.2.2 The Liverpool City Region does not feature significantly in the Northern Way Growth Strategy, which seems to be Leeds-Manchester focused, and Halton's major strategic initiative, the Mersey Gateway, is barely mentioned in the document.

27.2.3 The New Mersey Gateway is, however, named and given prominence in the North West's Regional Economic Strategy, a document that will give a significant steer to projects and programmes to be supported by NWDA and key regional partners both in the short and the long term.

27.3 The North West Regional Assembly

The 'no' vote on elected regional assemblies, has forced the North West Regional Assembly to review its core business and activities.

There is now uncertainty over future membership of the Assembly and, whilst Halton needs to continue to form allegiances with the NWRA, it is also prudent to strengthen links with Government departments and the Government Office.

27.4 Planning

The draft Spatial Development Framework for the Regional Spatial Strategy recognises both Liverpool and Manchester as regional centres (Policy RDF1).

Halton and sub-regional partners will need to push to ensure that the Liverpool City region is identified as being of equal significance as a regional centre, placing emphasis on joint working between the two areas.

27.5 Transport

27.5.1 Mersey Gateway

27.5.1.1 The Mersey Gateway means much more to Halton and the region than just a means to get across the Mersey Estuary.

For far too long the Borough and the North West region have been constrained by the current inadequate capacity of the Silver Jubilee Bridge.

Over time, this has cost the North West economy a significant amount of money through delayed orders, late arrival of employees at work and companies taking business outside of the region to avoid such potential problems and delays.

27.5.1.2 The new Mersey crossing will deliver a real boost to the regeneration of the North West. It will make transport and access across the region much faster, more reliable and more efficient, thus increasing confidence in the area. It will also open up new areas of land in Widnes and Runcorn - in particular the Widnes Waterfront EDZ - bringing much needed investment.

27.5.2 The Silver Jubilee Bridge

The Silver Jubilee Bridge presents a daily problem at peak times, with the slightest incident causing major traffic tailbacks across the region. The infrastructure of the bridge is also struggling to cope with traffic flows, as it now takes well in excess of its designed capacity of traffic, on narrow and substandard width carriageways.

Essential works are difficult and costly to programme, due to the heavy and constant traffic demand. This presents a major challenge for Halton Council, responsible for the maintenance of the structure, and it is currently struggling to keep abreast of the necessary work. Ideally, the bridge needs to be closed for significant blocks of time and over a long period, which is simply not feasible.

Unless a new crossing can be put in place, it remains only a matter of time before this work will become essential, regardless of the resultant traffic chaos. It is also key that necessary funding for maintenance is made available through the LTP process, to try and bring the bridge to a steady state of maintenance.

27.5.3 Road Accidents

Halton has made significant progress in reducing accident casualty rates and is on track to meet associated government targets. However, accident rates are still above the national average and more needs to be done to bring levels down further.

In particular, the number of children killed or seriously injured on Halton's roads is 2.3 times the national average.

27.5.4 Public Transport

27.5.4.1 Supported bus networks are necessary for accessibility but are not commercially viable. Some networks are available, although there is currently a lack of funding for these services. These will be extended to include late night and weekend services to support the night-time economy, as well as those serving industrial areas and hospitals. The costs for providing the same services each year are rising. This will lead to cuts in provision unless budgets are increased.

27.5.4.2 Bus operators do not currently operate busway routes after 9:30pm due to the number of anti-social behaviour incidents and attacks on bus drivers. With the promotion of the night-time economy, this presents a difficult challenge. Halton has developed the 'Travelsafe' scheme, which puts police and community support officers on buses during the day. This scheme has been successful in tackling these issues, but more needs to be done.

27.6 Street Lighting

The funding available for street lighting over recent years has not been sufficient to remove older and potentially dangerous units and their removal therefore needs to be prioritised.

28.0 MAJOR PROJECTS

28.1 Castlefields

28.1.1 There are two key issues with regard to this programme of works:

28.1.2 Castlefields has now been downgraded by the NWDA and is no longer viewed as a priority area, despite an initial agreement to invest £1.9m. An ongoing debate is continuing in an attempt to move this forward and secure funding.

28.1.3 The current and approved programmes of works will leave the renewal of two residential blocks unfunded, together with several other regeneration projects. Support needs to be sought

for the completion of this scheme.

28.2 Widnes Waterfront EDZ

The EDZ area includes some of the previously reclaimed area known as 'Venture Fields.' As this site was reclaimed using Derelict Land Grant, there will be an issue of 'claw back', whereby any profits from the sale would need to go back to the Treasury. In the short term we have agreement to utilise this money for the reclamation of adjoining sites in the EDZ. However, in the longer term, this may present an issue of up to £2.5m being repaid.

28.3 3MG

28.3.1 A key issue for Halton Borough Council concerns the disposal and development of 'HBC Fields'.

28.3.2 The establishment of a Management Company to administer common facilities will involve both the Borough Council and the private sector.

28.4 Contaminated Land

28.4.1 Although significant achievements have been made in reclaiming contaminated sites within Halton, much remains to be done. As an area with such significant contamination this presents a challenging agenda. As the birthplace of the chemical industry, many of the contamination problems within the Borough are much worse and more difficult to deal with than other areas of the country. This makes it both difficult and expensive to develop these sites.

28.4.2 Halton has long been leading the way in utilising new technology and has made great progress in remediation techniques, which will assist with future site development. However there are a number of key challenges still facing Halton. These include the uncertainty of public funding, generally, in the medium term and the lengthy and costly process involved in accessing government funding. Other key issues include the severity of the contamination and the ongoing liability of these sites for the foreseeable future.

28.5 *Economic Development*

28.5.1 The knowledge economy needs to be placed at the heart of the economic development agenda. Although Halton has a high proportion of

employment in the knowledge driven sectors, this is declining. The proportion of businesses operating in the knowledge economy is also low. Growth in this sector would need to be supported by an increase in the skills and qualifications of Halton's workforce. A current occupational breakdown for the Borough, reveals that 'higher end' occupations are under-represented.

28.5.2 The likely reduction, if not removal, of grant aid from areas such as Halton will prevent us from offering financial grant incentives to potential investors. This will leave us in open competition with other areas which are perhaps much easier to develop and will be a key issue for the area.

28.5.3 We are currently losing young people from the Borough and, as already stated, predictions suggest that by 2015 the number of young people aged 10-19 and 20-39 will decline by 20% and 6% respectively. If we are to attract graduates and young families to the area, we need to meet the demand for high quality jobs and investment in Halton. Without this, the young people of the Borough will have no choice but to seek better job opportunities elsewhere.

28.5.4 Retail and office space is under-represented at 10.5% and 11.9% respectively, which is substantially lower than the national average of 19.2% and 16.8%. Establishing more office accommodation and attracting suitable private sector business is important for the borough, particularly in the town centre areas, to help support their trade throughout the day and evening.

29.0 CONCLUSION

Much has been done; there is still much to do. With diminishing public funds available to us over the period covered by this report, that will not be easy.