

REPORT TO: Urban Renewal Policy and Performance Board
DATE: 21st January 2009
REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director – Environment
SUBJECT: Adopted Regional Spatial Strategy for the North West
WARDS: Boroughwide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To inform the Urban Renewal Policy and Performance Board of the consequences of the adoption of the Regional Spatial Strategy for the North West for Halton.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

1) The content of this report is acknowledged and the Board is periodically updated regarding future policy formulation at the regional level.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 A report was brought before the Urban Renewal Policy and Performance Board on 17th September 2008. Resolution URB69 of the URPPB minutes subsequent to that meeting resolved that a further report be produced detailing the implications of the adopted Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) for Halton. RSS was subsequently adopted on 30th September 2008 and a six week period whereby the document could be subjected to legal challenge expired after the 11th November, so this report is now required.

3.2 RSS has taken over four years to draft, but has some deficiencies in its policy content, so that it is presently subject to an early review. This covers matters of regional car parking standards and accommodation for travelling showpeople, gypsies and travellers. In addition, as explained in the URPPB report of the 17th September 2008, the new Regional Leaders Forum, 4NW, is required to produce a Single Regional Strategy (SRS). This will deal with matters including housing policy, Housing Market Areas, waste policies (specifically regionally significant waste management facilities) and broad locations for renewable energy. Presently, the two separate processes of progressing of the Partial Review and the SRS are running concurrently.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 As a consequence of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, RSS now forms part of the 'development plan' for the area and covers the period to 2021. The issues arising in RSS are therefore of importance to Halton Borough Council in the production of the new Halton Borough

Local Development Framework (LDF) and in making decisions regarding planning applications.

- 4.2 A summary of the main policy implications from RSS are detailed at Appendix A; this briefing note was presented as an item to the Local Development Framework Working Party on 30th October 2008 and was subsequently circulated to all members by email on the 18th November.

5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 RSS forms part of the 'Development Plan' as described at paragraph 4.1 above. It has implications for the production of the Local Development Framework (LDF) and in particular for the Halton Core Strategy. As the key document within the LDF, the Core Strategy is currently being produced and covers the period to 2026. The implications of RSS will have to be considered within the Core Strategy and, where appropriate, changes will have to be made. This will need to be done to ensure that the Core Strategy remains in general conformity with the RSS, as required by Planning Policy Statement 12.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People in Halton

As part of the Development Plan, RSS would support key objectives a) ensure that children and young people in Halton enjoy a healthy lifestyle; b) to ensure that all children and young people in Halton grow up and thrive in safe environments; and e) to ensure that all children and young people in Halton have positive futures after school by embracing life long learning, employment opportunities.

6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

RSS would support key objectives a) to foster a culture of enterprise and make Halton an ideal place to start and grow economic activity and d) to develop a strong, diverse, competitive and sustainable knowledge based local economy.

6.3 A Healthy Halton

Most fundamentally, RSS would support key objective c) to promote a healthy living environment.

6.4 A Safer Halton

RSS would support key objective c) to create and sustain better neighbourhoods that are well designed, well built, well maintained, safe and valued by the people that live in them, reflecting the priorities of residents.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

RSS would support all key objectives a) – e).

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

- 7.1 As new RSS forms part of the 'development plan' for the area, there are

risks associated with not taking policy content of the document into account in determining planning applications or in formulating policies in the LDF. These problems should not arise with suitable dissemination of the existence and policy content of RSS within the Council. Appendix A is of value in that respect.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

There are no equality and diversity issues contained in the report.

9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
Adopted RSS (2008)	Planning & Policy Division, Rutland House	Neil Macfarlane
Submission Draft RSS	Planning & Policy Division, Rutland House	Neil Macfarlane
Panel Report	Planning & Policy Division, Rutland House	Neil Macfarlane
SoS's Response to Panel Report	Planning & Policy Division, Rutland House	Neil Macfarlane
Partial Review of RSS Options Stage	Planning & Policy Division, Rutland House	Tim Gibbs

APPENDIX A

Briefing Note regarding the Published Regional Spatial Strategy for the North West (2008)

The Regional Spatial Strategy for the North West (also known as the North West Plan) was adopted on 30th September 2008. A summary of the main points is as follows:

Development Principles

A single overarching policy identifies 8 spatial principles; 8 following policies (DP2-9) expand upon each of these. Most notably, Policy DP4 promotes a sequential test to development, with first choice being existing buildings within settlements and previously developed land and buildings, suitable infill as the second choice and the development of other well located land as third choice. Policy DP7 promotes environmental quality and requires the effects of development on sites of international importance for nature conservation to be considered, including on sites outside the region. This may refer to effects of water abstraction upon reservoirs in relation to water abstraction in connection with major development.

Spatial Priorities and the Settlement Hierarchy

Policy RDF1 refers to named towns and cities as part of a three tier priority for growth and development. The first priority is the regional centres of Manchester and Liverpool, with second priority being inner areas surrounding the regional centres, including Housing Market Renewal Areas. Widnes and Runcorn are within a third priority of 23 named towns and cities in the three city regions. There is also a fourth priority of towns and cities outside the city regions of Carlisle and Lancaster. Development in the third and fourth priority centres should be focussed in and around the centres of the towns and cities.

Policy RDF4 (Green Belts) states that there is no need for exceptional substantial strategic change to the Green Belt before 2011 within Merseyside, Cheshire, Greater Manchester or Lancashire. There appears to be no definition of 'exceptional substantial strategic change' so it would need to be considered on a case by case basis. After 2011 there will be a presumption against exceptional substantial strategic change to the green belt. Strategic studies will be undertaken by 4NW to investigate the need for boundary change with the findings being used to inform future reviews of RSS and other plans and strategies. Local detailed boundary changes can be examined through the LDF, subject to the agreement of 4NW.

The policy goes on to say that LDFs may provide for detailed changes in Green Belt boundaries to accommodate the expansion of Liverpool John Lennon Airport (LJLA). In the case of Halton, this would entail considering whether land would need to be removed from the green belt in relation to the LJLA eastern runway extension. Co-ordination with Liverpool City Council upon this matter would be advisable in order to ensure 'soundness' of our LDF documentation.

Working in the North West

Merseyside and Halton now require an extra allocation of 494ha of employment land, which includes regional, sub-regional and local sites. However, Inter Modal Freight Terminals, such as Ditton do not form part of this allocation and are dealt with separately. The fact that RSS only provides a land figure for the Greater Merseyside sub region requires cross-boundary working in order to disaggregate this to the local authority level. This is a challenge, because Liverpool, Wirral and St Helens Councils have 'gone it alone' in carrying out their own employment land reviews. However, Halton has been working in partnership with Sefton, Knowsley and West Lancashire Councils to overcome this problem and the four authorities recently commissioned BE Group to undertake a Joint Employment Land Study. Part of this commission entails BE Group disaggregating the sub-regional figures to the local level.

A separate criteria based policy deals with locations for Regionally Significant Economic Development Sites (RSEDS). It refers to locations within the urban areas of the Liverpool City Region and the Council is now required to demonstrate that Daresbury meets the criteria set out in this policy before allocating it as a RSEDS site within the LDF. These criteria include capability of development within the plan period, being highly accessible, being well related to areas of high levels of worklessness and/ or areas in need of regeneration and being well related to neighbouring uses. Additionally, RSEDS should not be used for development that could be accommodated elsewhere and should not be developed in a piecemeal manner.

Policy W5 details the retail hierarchy for the North West. Neither Widnes nor Halton Lea is named within the second tier of retail centres of this policy, below the first tier of Manchester/ Salford and Liverpool. However, it should be noted that Policy W5 encourages investment of an appropriate scale in non-named centres, and this was a change to policy wording as a direct result of a representation by Halton at an earlier stage of plan preparation.

Living in the North West

A total of 416,000 dwellings is to be provided between 2003 and 2021 for the whole Region. This figure is also broken down by individual Local Authority and should not be regarded as a ceiling. Halton's housing figures are 9,000 dwellings between 2003 and 2021, which is equivalent to an average of 500 dwellings per annum. Paragraph 7.19 provides clarification as to when the principle of exceeding the stated figures might be applied. These are where there is evidence of need, demand, affordability and sustainability and where it would fit with relevant local and sub-regional strategies. Housing provision under the Housing Growth Point initiative, which is additional to the figures in RSS, would need to accord with these. The annual average requirement will continue for a limited period beyond 2021.

RSS has indicated that at least 70% of residential development should take place on previously developed land (pdl) in the North West. It provides indicative pdl targets for each authority or grouping of local authorities. The new pdl target for residential development for Halton with St Helens has been confirmed to be at least 65%.

There is no longer a policy regarding residential density, as this replicates guidance provided in PPS3, however there is a policy which requires provision to be made for affordable housing.

Transport

Paragraph 8.3 of Policy RT1 (Integrated Transport Networks) makes a presumption against new road building, which may have implications for the Mersey Gateway. In this respect, it will be vital to prove that the scheme will deliver network and demand management, and an increased role for public transport, which are the key strategies for dealing with congestion mentioned by this paragraph.

Policy RT5 (Airports) states that existing or proposed airport boundaries should be shown in Local Development Documents. Development that would impede the operational requirements of an airport should not be permitted within this boundary.

A policy dealing with Ports and Waterways seeks to optimise the use of these assets. Port operators are required to produce land surface access plans and port boundaries, as existing or proposed, should be shown in Local Development Documents.

Inter-Modal Freight Terminals are considered under policy RT8. 3MG is listed within the policy as Widnes (with access to the West Coast Main Line (Liverpool Branch)). Proposals for inter-modal freight terminals should satisfy several criteria, including that 'Local authorities should satisfy themselves that the prime purpose is to facilitate the movement of freight by rail and/ or water and that rail access and associated facilities are available before the site is occupied.' Schemes at 3MG would need to accord with these.

Policy RT10 sets out the priorities for Transport Management and Investment. Associated table 10.2 (Transport Investment Priorities) has been deleted from a earlier draft, which means that proposals within that table (including the Mersey Gateway) are no longer part of RSS but are intended to be part of a separate Implementation Plan (IP). The IP will be produced before the end of the year. Schemes for which funding has been provisionally allocated, subject to DfT approval, and those under development for delivery by 2021, are to be listed in it. The Mersey Gateway's current status with the DfT is "Programme Entry" (the next stage would be "conditional approval") which means that funding has been provisionally allocated. Therefore the scheme should be included in the Implementation Plan, however, there can be no guarantee that it will always be referred to in the IP. Naturally, Council officers objected to the deletion of table 10.2 and the policy has been reworded to say that priorities for transport investment and management will be determined in accordance with the Regional Economic Strategy, RSS transport objectives, the spatial principles and the regional and sub-regional frameworks. RES contains reference to developing the Mersey Gateway as action 65 so that a policy 'hook' at the regional level remains.

Environment, Minerals and Waste

Halton has been grouped with the Merseyside authorities in relation to waste matters. This is in line with the decision by the Council to work with the Merseyside Authorities on a Joint Waste DPD, as opposed to Warrington Borough Council. Policy EM13 states that regionally significant waste facilities may be needed to serve the Mersey Belt, which includes the Manchester and Liverpool conurbations.

The policy dealing with Regional Parks identifies three broad areas of search, including the North West coast and the Mersey Basin, both of which may encroach into Halton. It is likely that the Halton Core Strategy will have to develop this matter further, for example in co-ordination with work being undertaken by other organisations in relation to the Weaver Valley and Mersey Waterfront Regional Parks.

Local authorities should reduce energy requirements by incorporating policies to support the delivery of the national timetable for reducing emissions. Local requirements should be brought forward through development plan documents by making reference to nationally described standards, such as Code for Sustainable Homes.

Plans and strategies are to promote and encourage the use of renewable energy resources. At least 10%, 15% and 20% of the electricity supplied within the region should be from renewable energy sources by 2010, 2015 and 2020 respectively. Broad locations for renewable energy generation will be identified as part of a future RSS review. Plans should also encourage the use of decentralised and renewable or low carbon energy in new development. These are supplies of small scale and would locally serve a development or site. Local targets should be set out in development plan documents, however, in advance of setting those targets new non-residential developments above 1,000 sq.m and all residential developments of 10 or more units should secure at least 10% of their energy requirements from these sources.

Liverpool City Region

The Liverpool City Region comprises the local authorities of Liverpool, Halton, Knowsley, Sefton, St Helens and Wirral and extends as far as Chester, Ellesmere \Port, Vale Royal and West Lancashire. A bullet point is included within Policy LCR1, which states that plans and strategies should 'maximise the employment potential of the Strategic Investment Areas (SIAs) and Economic Development Zones (EDZs)'; this would include Widnes Waterfront. Detailed boundaries are to be set out in LDFs. It also includes a bullet point to 'improve the City Region's internal and external transport links in line with the priorities for transport investment and management set out in Policy RT10'.

Evidence base and explanatory documentation

There are several requirements placed upon local authorities in terms of producing evidence to support and justify the Local Development Framework. Included amongst this is a need to undertake a Strategic Housing Market Assessment; in Halton's case this would be done in conjunction with St Helens

and Warrington, who also fall within the mid Mersey sub-region. The requirement to examine transport problems in the region on a multi-modal basis may lead us, along with neighbouring authorities, to produce a multi-modal transport model for the Borough.

Several policies make reference to the need to consider the health and well being of local communities and the adverse effects on sites of national and international nature conservation importance. These policies deal with airports, ports and waterways, Intermodal Freight Terminals, Regional Parks, coastline and renewable energy. Where possible, the onus should be placed upon prospective developers to supply this information.