

Cheshire County Council

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**South Cheshire Sub  
Regional Study**

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Executive Summary

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December 2008

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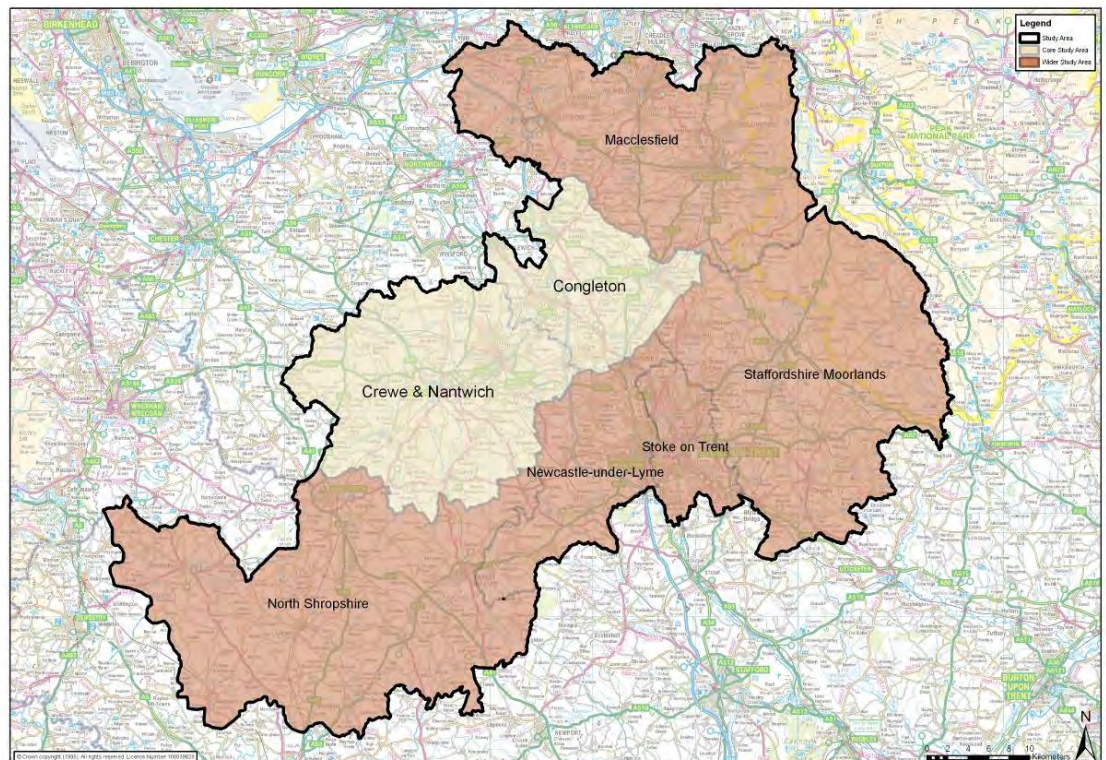
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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Purpose of the Study

The South Cheshire Sub Region Study (SCSRS) was commissioned by Cheshire County Council on behalf of 4NW to investigate the relationship between South Cheshire (Crewe and Nantwich and Congleton) and the neighbouring local authorities of Macclesfield, Staffordshire Moorlands, Stoke-on-Trent, Newcastle-under-Lyme and North Shropshire. The study was formulated in response to the recognised need in the North West Regional Spatial Strategy (NW RSS) Panel Report for a study to consider these inter-regional relationships.

**Figure 1 The Study Area**



The outputs from the study will contribute to the evidence base for future policy development in the NW RSS, the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy Phase 2 revision (draft WM RSS) and Local Development Frameworks (LDF) for the Study Area.

## 1.2 Objectives

The overall objectives of the study are to:

- Identify key economic drivers in South Cheshire and any aspects common to other parts of the Study Area;
- Assess the dynamics of the housing market in South Cheshire and its relationship to the wider Study Area;
- Identify the role of South Cheshire in comparison to other parts of the Study Area and stakeholder aspirations for the future;
- Assess the effectiveness of the existing transport network within South Cheshire and the connections to the wider Study Area and beyond; and
- Identify the implications for environmental quality in the Study Area of anticipated levels of development and the need for any improvements.

## 2 Key Issues for Strategy Development

### 2.1 Spatial Extent

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Current evidence does not conclusively support the existence of an extended South Cheshire Sub-Region, straddling the regional boundary. There are relationships between South Cheshire and the wider Study Area, but little to suggest that these relationships are more significant than relationships between South Cheshire and other neighbouring areas. Consultation on the role of South Cheshire did not reveal perceptions that the area shared a common identity with North Staffordshire in particular and there were suggestions that the successful regeneration of North Staffordshire would result in a greater emphasis on South Cheshire as a distinct entity.

Macclesfield's economy and housing market has a stronger relationship with the Greater Manchester conurbation than with other locations in the Study Area. For the development of policy and delivery, the new East Cheshire authority's views on whether a spatial strategy should seek to address the whole of their administrative area or not will determine the level of integration that will take place between South Cheshire and Macclesfield.

There is little evidence to support the existence of strong relationship between the North Shropshire area and South Cheshire and the formation of the new Shropshire authority will direct their focus towards other areas in Shropshire. This would not preclude the maintenance of good communication between the neighbouring authorities.

Commuting data is somewhat dated, however, if increasing travel to employment in Crewe from North Staffordshire becomes evident, this would strengthen the case for increased integration across the regional boundary.

### 2.2 Population & Housing

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National, regional and local planning policies advocate locating development in existing towns and cities, in sustainable locations, in existing buildings and previously developed land. Therefore, planning policies place more emphasis on development in the larger settlements in Crewe, Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme rather than the smaller settlements in Congleton, North Shropshire and Staffordshire Moorlands. However, the findings of a recent review examining the impact of planning policies on rural communities<sup>1</sup> may encourage the more flexible application of these principles in the future where this is more sustainable for rural communities.

The migration data indicates that the relationships are stronger amongst authorities in the same region. Macclesfield, Congleton and Crewe and Nantwich have their own individual Housing Market Areas and this will need to be recognised in housing policies for East Cheshire. There is a continuing need for new housing in North Staffordshire to support regeneration and to ensure that provision in Macclesfield and Congleton does not undermine this aim. Although current data shows that residents in Stoke-on-Trent are more likely to move to Staffordshire Moorlands and Newcastle-under-Lyme than the Cheshire authorities, this should continue to be monitored as the economy changes.

The recently adopted NW RSS has increased housing targets in the North West and the ongoing WM RSS review is considering options for increasing provision in the West Midlands. Authorities anticipate they will broadly be able to meet current targets for housing numbers and brownfield development.

### 2.3 Economy/Employment

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The impacts of global restructuring in manufacturing on Cheshire may affect the presence of some of their longstanding major employers. Recent downturns in the financial services

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<sup>1</sup> The Matthew Taylor Review on Rural Economy and Affordable Housing, 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2008

sector will have a greater effect on Crewe and Nantwich, Congleton and Macclesfield due to the higher number of jobs within this sector.

Local policies recognise the need to encourage improvements in skills levels and the associated provision of higher skilled employment, especially where this contributes to combating deprivation. Recently, the expansion of facilities for post-16 education has provided a boost to local economies and the contribution of existing establishments should be maximised. Residents in Congleton and Macclesfield are more likely to have higher qualifications and higher skilled occupations than residents in other parts of the Study Area, although often their jobs are located outside the area. Authorities should continue to pursue policies that encourage the provision of higher skilled employment within these authorities, thus reducing the commuting flows.

Large parts of North Staffordshire are classified as areas of great need and market failure, with concerns that economic development in South Cheshire could affect regeneration efforts in North Staffordshire and the Rural Regeneration Zone in North Shropshire. The availability of development sites in North Staffordshire may conversely affect demand for sites in South Cheshire, depending on the use classes being promoted. Integrated working arrangements are well established across North Staffordshire and the establishment of the new Cheshire East Authority provides the opportunity for a similarly integrated approach. This may assist future cross border communication.

The delivery of the Basford Strategic Regional Site and capitalising on ongoing private sector investment in Crewe is crucial if the economic potential of Crewe is to be realised. This requires the delivery of supporting infrastructure.

## **2.4 Transport**

The Study Area is arguably an accessible location from across North West Europe, due to the proximity of the UK's largest provincial International Airport, the West Coast Mainline providing direct rail services to Scotland and London, and its location at the heart of the UK motorway network. However, the 'gateway' character of the area is generally considered to be over-emphasised. With the exception of the M6 and the West Coast Mainline, the majority of highway and rail routes are east to west. This leads to poor connectivity north to south and the isolation of some areas. While major new route construction is not an option, initiatives seeking to improve local connectivity need to be continued.

Congestion is a major problem for parts of South Cheshire and the surrounding areas, leading to increased journey times and road accidents. The West Coast Mainline experiences peak time loading and consequently trains are running above capacity. Continuing investment in public transport is needed to encourage residents and visitors to use public transport rather than the car. A number of highway improvements proposed could ease the congestion on the network.

The provision of public transport (mainly bus) services in the more populated centres in the Study Area are generally good; however outer areas experience a lack of reliable services and a limited range of routes, encouraging dependency on the private car. This is difficult to improve where the potential patronage is dispersed.

The issue of relatively high levels of out-commuting from Congleton, Newcastle-under-Lyme and Staffordshire Moorlands is well documented and should continue to be addressed. The 2001 Census shows that the only significant cross-regional commuter flow in (i.e. more than 2,000 movements) is between Congleton and Stoke-on-Trent. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that house price increases in the intervening period may have led to changes to the established patterns.

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## **2.5 Environment & Sustainability**

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Environmental sustainability is extremely important, especially with climate change moving to the forefront of many of social, political and environmental policies. Climate Change is likely to lead to increased severe weather episodes, wetter milder winters, drier, hotter summers and increased flooding of flood plains. Pressures on natural resources and man-made infrastructure will also need appropriate consideration within long term plans. Significant population increases will place increased demand on natural resources (e.g. groundwater), energy requirements and infrastructure provision.

Outside the localised urban areas and North Staffordshire, the landscape of the Study Area is characterised by attractive countryside, comprising farmland, hedgerows and woodland blocks. There are protected environments (RAMSAR, Special Areas of Conservation and SSSIs) distributed across the Study Area. Consideration of conservation and enhancement of landscapes in plans and policies is likely to have positive environmental, social and economic impacts. In particular, the protected environments should be enhanced to adhere to national and international legislation and conventions.

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## **2.6 Conclusions**

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It is evident that relationships within the Study Area exist, however the study concludes that there is currently insufficient evidence to support the existence of an extended sub-region beyond the core South Cheshire authorities. However, the presence of links between authorities suggests that key indicators should continue to be monitored to assess whether an integrated strategy is required. Joint working can help to conduct this monitoring to ensure policies in neighbouring authorities complement one another.

## 3 Next Steps

### 3.1 Monitoring Indicators

Comprehensive monitoring frameworks are in place to measure the progress in implementing the policies in the NW RSS and WM RSS. Monitoring in South Cheshire should reflect these frameworks to minimise additional burdens on local authorities.

Relevant contextual indicators are summarised below.

**Table 1: Monitoring Framework**

Indicator	Issues to be Monitored	Cross Border Impact
Population change	Population and Housing	Yes
Migration (internal and international)	Population and Housing	Yes
VAT registrations as % of total business stock	Economy and Employment	
Proportion of the working age population that are in employment	Population, Economy and Employment	Yes
Percentage change in the number of people employed in identified growth sectors/the knowledge economy	Population, Economy and Employment	
Percentage in the number of people employed in sectors in transition	Population, Economy and Employment	
Average (median) weekly wage (resident and workforce)	Population, Economy and Employment	Yes
% of population claiming unemployment benefit	Population, Economy and Employment	
Qualification levels of resident working age population	Population, Economy and Employment	
Renewable energy capacity installed by type	Environment and Sustainability	
Total amount and distribution of derelict land	Environment, Sustainability and the Built Environment	
% of river water quality to be 'good' or 'fair'	Environment and Sustainability	
Average house prices and ratio of average pay to average house price	Housing, Population, Economy and Employment	Yes
Time taken to travel to work	Transport and Employment	Yes
Commuting patterns (Area of residence and Area of workplace of individuals)	Transport and Employment	Yes
Journey to work by mode	Transport and Employment	
People killed or seriously injured in road accidents	Transport	
Number of Grade 1 and Grade 2* buildings on the at Risk Register	Environment	
% of housing stock that is unfit (by tenure/area)	Housing	
Changes in industrial rents and land values	Economy	

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## **3.2 Joint Working Arrangements**

### **3.2.1 Forming an Informal Partnership**

It is advised that at this stage the monitoring of indicators and policy liaison could be completed through the development of an informal partnership, comprising:

- Local Authorities (including all appropriate service areas)
- Regional Planning/Housing Bodies
- Economic & Skills Development/Regeneration agencies

The monitoring of indicators will need to be reported to the stakeholder group who will determine whether the evidence supports a higher level of joint working. Consideration should also be given to involving a wider stakeholder alliance in the process, although at a less intensive level.

### **3.2.2 Developing a Formal Partnership**

If future monitoring demonstrates the existence of a functioning sub-region, stakeholders may decide to proceed with the development of a cross regional strategy for the South Cheshire/North Staffordshire sub-region, necessitating the development of more formal arrangements. In this situation more extensive data collection and monitoring is likely to be required to ensure that the decision making group has access to an appropriate evidence base. This may require a more dedicated resource being put into place.