

5 Regional Spatial Framework

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Policy RDF 1

Spatial Priorities

In making provision for development, plans and strategies should accord with the following priorities, taking into account specific considerations set out in Sub Regional Chapters 10-13:

- the first priority for growth and development should be the regional centres of Manchester and Liverpool;
- the second priority should be the inner areas surrounding these regional centres. Emphasis should be placed on areas in need of regeneration and Housing Market Renewal Areas in particular;
- the third priority should be the towns / cities in the 3 city regions: Altrincham, Ashton-under-Lyne, Blackburn, Blackpool, Bolton, Burnley, Bury, Chester, Crewe, Ellesmere Port, Macclesfield, Northwich, Oldham, Preston, Rochdale, Runcorn, St Helens, Skelmersdale, Southport, Stockport, Warrington, Widnes, Wigan. Development in larger suburban centres within the city regions would be compatible with this policy provided the development is of an appropriate scale and at points where transport networks connect and where public transport accessibility is good;
- the fourth priority should be the towns and cities outside the City Regions of Carlisle and Lancaster, with investment encouraged in Barrow- in -Furness and Workington and Whitehaven to address regeneration and worklessness in Furness Peninsula and West Cumbria.

In the third and fourth priorities development should be focused in and around the centres of the towns and cities. Development elsewhere may be acceptable if it satisfies other policies, notably DP1 to 9. Emphasis should be placed on addressing regeneration and housing market renewal and restructuring.

5.1 This policy is the cornerstone of the RSS. Much of what comes later flows from this clear statement of spatial priorities for growth and development, investment and regeneration in the region. For example, it has influenced the distribution of housing numbers, retail policy and the public transport framework. Increasingly it will guide decision making and the targeting of resources, for example, in connection with transport investment priorities, the location of growth points and ecotowns⁽³⁸⁾, and employment land. It will help guide business planning and funding decisions in a wide range of public, private and voluntary organisations such as NWDA, Strategic Health Authorities, economic partnerships and utility companies.

5.2 RDF1 should be read together with the sub-regional policies in Chapters 10-13 which amplify this regional framework. For example, policies MCR2 and LCR2 broadly define the regional centres and surrounding inner areas, and go on to explain the approach to specific

38 Defined by UK Govt as exemplar green developments meeting the highest standards of sustainability, including low and zero carbon technologies and quality public transport systems.

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sorts of development there, such as housing which will only be acceptable in certain circumstances. CLCR1 and 2 and supporting text set the specific priorities and visions for Preston, Blackpool, Blackburn and Burnley.

5.3 RDF1 has itself been influenced by the spatial principles in DP1 to 9. It builds on the concepts of the city region, of public transport accessibility and making the best use of existing resources. It reflects the vision set out in the RES and the RFA. The focus is on the cores of the Manchester and Liverpool City Regions. The approach is balanced, spreading development across a large number of towns/cities. In this it follows through the approach in RPG13.

5.4 The approach in RDF1 also allows for development in accessible suburban/urban centres, this is particularly necessary where these sit within areas with deprivation and regeneration issues. It will be for Local Development Documents to identify such centres and indicate their role. The Land Use Consultants (LUC) study could provide some useful insight into the roles and characteristics of different types of suburban centres, but it is not considered that such centres are Key Service Centres as set out in RDF 2.

5.5 Unlike RPG13, this RSS does not specifically define Regeneration Priority Areas (RPAs), with the exception of those in West Cumbria and Furness. It is clear where the emphasis should be in terms of the overall priorities for investment and regeneration activity, it is in the regional centres and inner areas (frequently the location of Urban Regeneration Companies); in the HMRA (including Pathfinder Areas) of Manchester/Salford, Liverpool/Sefton, Wirral, Oldham/Rochdale, East Lancashire; in Furness RPA and Housing Market Renewal Area, particularly in Barrow in Furness and in West Cumbria RPA and Housing Market Renewal Area, particularly in Workington/Whitehaven; as well as the areas of Housing Market restructuring of Blackpool, Fleetwood and Morecambe.

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Policy RDF 2

Rural Areas

Plans and strategies for the Region's rural areas should support the priorities of the Regional Rural Delivery Framework and:

- maximise the economic potential of the Region's rural areas;
- support sustainable farming and food;
- improve access to affordable rural housing;
- ensure fair access to services for rural communities;
- empower rural communities and address rural social exclusion;
- enhance the value of our rural environmental inheritance.

Key Service Centres

Plans and Strategies should identify a subset of towns and villages as Key Service Centres which:

- act as service centres for surrounding areas, providing a range of services including retail, leisure, community, civic, health and education facilities and financial and professional services; and
- have good public transport links to surrounding towns and villages, or the potential for their development and enhancement.

Development in rural areas should be concentrated in these Key Service Centres and should be of a scale and nature appropriate to fulfil the needs of local communities for housing, employment and services, and to enhance the quality of rural life.

Local Service Centres

Small scale development to help sustain local services, meet local needs, or support local businesses will be permitted in towns and villages defined as Local Service Centres in Local Development Documents which already provide a more limited range of services to the local community.

Outside Key and Local Service Centres

In remoter rural areas particularly the 'sparse' rural areas of the region, more innovative and flexible solutions to meet their particular development needs should be implemented and targeted towards achieving:

- more equitable access to housing, services, education, healthcare and employment; and
- a more diverse economic base, whilst maintaining support for agriculture and tourism.

Exceptionally, new development will be permitted in the open countryside where it:

- has an essential requirement for a rural location, which cannot be accommodated elsewhere (such as mineral extraction);

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- is needed to sustain existing businesses;
- provides for exceptional needs for affordable housing;
- is an extension of an existing building; or
- involves the appropriate change of use of an existing building.

LDDs should set out criteria for permitting the re use of buildings in the countryside in line with PPS7.

5.6 Government's Rural Strategy 2004⁽³⁹⁾ identifies the need to target resources at rural areas that are 'lagging', i.e. falling behind their counterparts. The targeting of resources must be backed by sound evidence of need and is best undertaken at sub-regional level, where it can be tailored to the widely differing nature of the regions lagging areas.

5.7 This Strategy is being taken forward in the North West through the Regional Rural Delivery Framework (RRDF) for the region⁽⁴⁰⁾. The RRDF was agreed by partners and is a driver for change across a range of issues that critically affect people who live in, work and visit the rural North West.

5.8 Good access to services is essential if rural communities are to survive and prosper⁽⁴¹⁾. By concentrating rural development in Key Service Centres, we can support sustainable development and social inclusion, providing focus for the economic regeneration of the wider rural area and housing to meet local needs, including affordable housing. In some areas, cities and towns will also play a role in providing access to employment and services for the surrounding rural areas. This will need to be considered in formulating rural policy and will tie in with the sub regional policy frameworks in Chapter 10-13.

5.9 Key Service Centres should be defined in LDFs on the basis of their current role in serving the needs of their rural hinterland and their potential to act as hubs for the provision of services, facilities and public transport. Factors such as their location, size, and the range of services already provided will be important in this. However, just because a centre currently operates at a particular level in the hierarchy does not in itself justify its designation as a Key Service Centre. Key Service Centres may be market towns or large villages and may be freestanding or operate as part of a network. The Land Use Consultants study provides further guidance.

5.10 It will also be important to maintain services in smaller villages. For this reason, LDFs should also define Local Service Centres and less accessible areas particularly sparse rural areas where they will encourage innovative approaches to service and transport provision involving, for example, ICT, the shared use of buildings and participatory budgeting (See also Policy L1 and para 7.2).

5.11 Local planning authorities will need to take a balanced view on proposals for development outside Key Service Centres and development in open countryside will be permitted in the exceptional circumstances listed. The open countryside does not include the Green Belt where policy is provided by national guidance in PPG2 and RDF4 in RSS. Proposals that seek to

39 Rural Strategy, DEFRA, 2004.

40 Regional Rural Delivery Framework, GONW and partners, 2006.

41 "State of the Countryside 2005", Commission for Rural Communities / Countryside Agency, 2005.

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diversify and expand existing rural businesses in areas that are lagging economically should be regarded positively, as long as they demonstrate the potential to help build and maintain sustainable communities and are sensitive towards the local environment.

5.12 RSS policy for rural areas builds upon a new system of classification for urban and rural areas introduced by Defra in 2004⁽⁴²⁾, which is based on the size of the settlements they contain. Areas are classified, from 'sparse to dense'. Sparse rural areas in the North West (found within Cumbria & North Lancashire) require particular attention because their remote nature and physical geography tend to make them less accessible and economically active. These areas are more dependent on agriculture and farm based tourism, this renders them more vulnerable to any decline in the agricultural economy and to the potential physical impacts of climate change on agriculture. Therefore there is a particular need to support agriculture whilst diversifying the economy in these areas. A flexible approach to the reuse of existing buildings for non agricultural use may be needed in some areas.

5.13 Recent reform of the EU Common Agricultural Policy represents a shift in support away from production subsidies and towards agri-environment and wider rural development measures. This may provide positive opportunities for sustainable farming and rural economic diversification. However, the decoupling of support payments from agricultural production may also have an adverse impact on the viability of upland farms. This means economic diversification, and support for alternative, sustainable forms of land management will be particularly important in these areas. Tourism is an important factor in diversifying and strengthening the rural economy but needs to be sustainably developed (see W6 and W7).

5.14 Whilst much of policy RDF2 concerns the requirements for built development, it must be remembered that the majority of the rural land area in the region is used for agriculture, forestry and various other land based industries and activities such as fisheries, nature reserves, inland waterways and MOD training areas. These should be supported where they are sustainable in nature and contribute to the rural environment and economy.

42 See DEFRA's Rural Strategy 2004, Annex A "A new Rural Definition".

Policy RDF 3

The Coast

Plans and strategies should:

- enhance the economic importance of the coast and the regeneration of coastal communities in ways that safeguard, restore or enhance and make sustainable use of the natural, built and cultural heritage assets of the North West Coast and address issues of environmental decline and socio-economic decline, through support for:
 - the protection, development and diversification of the North West's maritime economy;
 - regeneration based around opportunities for sustainable growth in coastal tourism and recreation;
 - regeneration opportunities associated with reuse of developed or under-used developed coast, former docks and other adjacent industrial areas;
 - improving the image of coastal resorts to attract inward investment and tourism;
 - the diversification of economic activity in coastal communities and rural coastal areas;
- define the undeveloped, developed (including despoiled), and remote coast at a strategic and local level using the criteria set out in paragraph 5.22;
- direct development requiring a coastal location, in all but exceptional circumstances, to the developed coast and safeguard the undeveloped and remote coast;
- protect the functional integrity of bays, estuaries and the inter-tidal areas immediately offshore;
- promote the conservation and enhancement of cultural, historical and natural environmental assets, including land and seascapes;
- promote the integrated planning and management of the coast (and adjacent sea areas and neighbouring coastal regions) and marine spatial planning of the Irish Sea;
- facilitate co-ordination and harmonisation between Local Development Frameworks and the wide range of plans, strategies and schemes which apply to the coastal zone.

5.15 This policy should be read in conjunction with Policy EM6, which provides further guidance on sustainable shoreline management policy and Policy RT6 (Ports).

5.16 Stretching from the Welsh border on the Dee Estuary to the Scottish border on the Solway Firth, the region's coastal area is complex and constantly changing, both in terms of the physical processes it is subject to and the broad mix of assets, uses and economic activity it encompasses. The majority of the North West population live no more than one hour's travel time from the coast, and large urban populations, notably in Merseyside, actually live within the coastal zone.

5.17 The North West coast is chiefly low-lying and sedimentary in nature, characterised by large estuaries and bays with vast inter-tidal mud flats and salt marshes, extensive sand dune systems and other habitats of national and international importance (Ramsars, SPAs, SACs, cSACs, pSPAs and SSSIs). Collectively estuaries and bays such as Morecambe Bay and the Dee, Ribble and Mersey Estuaries are home to many protected species and are an important point on a global migration route for birds. The coastal zone contains a wide range of cultural,

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heritage, economic and environmental assets including Heritage Coast, two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, World Heritage Sites, part of the Lake District National Park, and many sites of international and national importance for nature conservation. Areas outside these designations may provide supporting habitat for species of importance.

5.18 The low lying nature of the coast makes it particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, including rising sea levels and increasingly stormy conditions.

5.19 Traditionally, the region's tourism industry is a major employer, thanks to large resorts like Blackpool and Southport, and smaller ones such as West Kirby, Fleetwood, Morecambe and Lytham and St Annes. Changes in tourism patterns have led the region⁽⁴³⁾ to take a fresh look at its own tourism offering and to encourage the economic diversification of many of its resorts to combat declining tourist revenue and associated social deprivation. At the same time, an increased interest in ecological ("green") issues and recreation ("activity") holidays is giving rise to new opportunities for themed short breaks that help to extend the tourist season. Tourism activity will need to be appropriately managed to ensure that national and internationally important sites for nature conservation are not adversely affected.

5.20 Initiatives such as the Mersey Waterfront⁽⁴⁴⁾ and Blackpool Master Plan⁽⁴⁵⁾ aim to capitalise on the strengths of the North West coast, as do proposals to develop parts of the Ribble Estuary and Morecambe Bay as Regional Parks and the North West Coastal Trail. The availability of high quality water for swimming, clean beaches and convenient facilities are increasingly important factors in maintaining tourist numbers and attracting new visitors to the coast.

5.21 Historically, the region's coastal areas – its ports and fisheries, major resort towns and clusters of industry like that around Widnes - have been instrumental in driving its economy. The North West maintains a thriving maritime economy. Liverpool is a port of national significance and the region's other active ports: Barrow, Fleetwood, Garston Dock, Glasson Dock, Heysham, The Port of Manchester (Manchester Ship Canal), Silloth, and Workington continue to provide employment. All provide important landfall sites for servicing offshore operations such as oil and gas, fisheries and newer industries like offshore wind farms. Disused areas of dockland, for example in Liverpool, Barrow, Bootle, Maryport, Preston, and Whitehaven, are now providing significant opportunities for regeneration, bringing new employment to previously derelict and economically depressed areas.

5.22 There are considerable lengths of the coast that remain undeveloped or even remote, and which require planning and managing sensitively to retain their character. The following factors should be taken into account to classify the coastal zone:

- settlement size;
- areas of tidal flood risk and coastal erosion or land instability, reflecting Shoreline Management Plan assessments;
- biological criteria relating to the influence of maritime conditions on habitats and species;
- landscape criteria including local landscape character assessments (set in the context of the North West Joint Character Area map) and the extent of visibility between land and sea;

43 "A New Vision for Northwest Coastal Resorts - Summary Report", Northwest Regional Development Agency, March 2003.

44 See <http://www.merseywaterfront.com>

45 "Blackpool Master Plan – Executive Summary", Blackpool Borough Council 2003. "Blackpool Master Plan – Update Brochure", Blackpool Borough Council 2005.

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- patterns of economic activity and the extent of the maritime influence on the built environment;
- distinctive boundaries such as coastal roads, railways and field boundaries;
- the broader maritime zone to the three-mile seaward limit.

5.23 The coast is unique in the North West in its combination of exceptionally high economic, social, environmental importance and potential. Integrated Coastal Zone Management (Integrated Coastal Zone Management in Europe (2002/413/EC) includes full definitions and guidance) is critical to minimise conflict and maximise cooperation, to sustain and realise this value. This includes integration across the land – sea interface and country/international borders, including Isle of Man, Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland, Scotland and Wales. The North West Coastal Forum and a network of regional and local coastal and estuary partnerships has developed in response to this need, with support of coastal communities, local authorities, agencies and others. These partnerships make important contributions to promoting sustainable development and use of the coast.

Policy RDF 4

Green Belts

Overall the general extent of the Region's Green Belt will be maintained.

There is no need for any exceptional substantial strategic change to Green Belt and its boundaries in the North West within the timescales set out below:

- within Cheshire, Greater Manchester, Lancashire or Merseyside before 2011; and
- within Warrington before 2021.

After 2011 the presumption will be against exceptional substantial strategic change to the Green Belt in Cheshire, Greater Manchester, Lancashire or Merseyside. Strategic studies, undertaken by The Regional Planning Body, together with relevant stakeholders should investigate both the need for change and options for implementation. The findings will inform future reviews of RSS and subsequent reviews of plans and strategies.

Local Development Frameworks may provide for detailed changes in Green Belt boundaries to accommodate the expansion of Manchester Airport and Liverpool John Lennon Airport; and to provide for an inter-modal freight terminal at Newton-Le-Willows. Subject to the agreement of The Regional Planning Body, any other local detailed boundary changes should be examined through the LDF process.

5.24 The North West has four major, linked areas of Green Belt - in Greater Manchester, Merseyside, North Cheshire and Lancashire - plus one in South Cheshire, which is, in effect, part of the North Staffordshire Green Belt. Small but significant patches of green belt also exist on the Fylde Peninsula and in North Lancashire. The reasons for their designation vary but all fulfil to some extent the five main purposes of Green Belt set out in PPG2⁽⁴⁶⁾ and their contribution to urban regeneration, whether directly or indirectly, will be of prime importance for the foreseeable future.

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5.25 It is anticipated that future development in the North West, as set out in this RSS, can generally be accommodated without the need for strategic reviews of the Green Belt. Where new evidence or the monitoring of RSS indicates the need for review, this should be investigated and informed by strategic studies carried out by the Regional Planning Body together with relevant stakeholders. Any subsequent changes to Green Belt boundaries should be carried forward through a future review of RSS and subsequent reviews of Local Development Frameworks. Local authorities should bear in mind that any proposal to adjust Green Belt boundaries would need to meet the Government's commitment to maintaining or increasing the amount of Green Belt in every UK region.

5.26 Although no exceptional substantial change to the Green Belt is envisaged at this time, other more location specific detailed boundary changes may be required to meet exceptional purposes. Where such changes would not require a reconsideration of wider green belt boundaries through a strategic study and would comply with guidance in PPG2, they should be dealt with through the LDF process, subject to early consultation with, and the agreement of, the Regional Planning Body. Policy RDF4 confers that agreement in respect of specific changes to meet operational infrastructure requirements at Liverpool John Lennon and Manchester Airports, and to provide for an inter-modal freight terminal at Newton-le-Willows. Consideration of such schemes should be in the context of policies RT5 on Airports and RT8 on Inter modal freight facilities.