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Economic Objectives

The RSS supports the economic programme put forward in the Regional Economic Strategy. It seeks generally to strengthen and regenerate the regional economy and address problems of worklessness in line with the overarching spatial principles set out in Policies DP1-9. Specifically it will:

- support the business sectors identified in the RES;
- make provision for a supply of employment land to ensure that sustainable economic development is not constrained;
- establish criteria for the location of regionally significant economic development;
- promote strong and viable centres, as locations for the concentration of retail, office and recreational development;
- support the sustainable diversification of the rural economy; and
- harness the economic development potential of tourism in preferred locations.

6.1 This chapter focuses on the spatial implications of economic development in the North West. It sets out the spatial policy framework that local planning authorities and other agencies should follow in order to accommodate the scale and type of business facilities needed to sustain our vision for economic growth.

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Policy W 1

Strengthening the Regional Economy

Plans and strategies should promote opportunities for economic development (including the provision of appropriate sites and premises, infrastructure, and clustering where appropriate) which will strengthen the economy of the North West by:

- building on the region's strengths, particularly the three City Regions of Manchester, Liverpool and Central Lancashire. This should reflect the following growth opportunities:
  - Manchester City Region – advanced manufacturing and engineering (includes chemicals, aerospace, automotive and flexible materials), financial and professional services, media, creative and cultural industries, biomedical (biotechnology, pharmaceuticals and medical devices), ICT / digital, and communications;
  - Liverpool City Region – advanced manufacturing and engineering, financial and professional services, media, creative and cultural industries, biomedical, high value added knowledge based industries, ICT / digital, tourism, maritime and communications;
  - Central Lancashire City Region – advanced manufacturing and engineering, environmental technologies and biomedical, tourism and conferencing;
- realising the opportunities for sustainable development to increase the prosperity of Carlisle and Lancaster, and to regenerate the economies of the Furness Peninsula in Barrow, and in West Cumbria in Workington and Whitehaven;
- giving positive support to the sustainable diversification and development of the rural economy through the growth of existing businesses and the creation of new enterprise, particularly within Cumbria where there is a need to both develop high value business activities and sustain traditional economic activities. Prospects for growth in tourism, food and energy sectors should be developed, including promoting links between regional agriculture and production and retail facilities to reduce food miles and support local businesses;
- ensuring the safe, reliable and effective operation of the region's transport networks and infrastructure in accordance with the regional transport policies and priorities as set out in Chapter 8;
- supporting growth in service sectors, which will continue to act as significant employers within the region, and in which the greatest improvements in productivity can be made;
- improving the skills base of the region, including tackling skills deficiencies and concentrations of unemployment;
- providing sufficient and appropriate housing to support economic growth (Policies L2 – L5);
- linking areas of opportunity and need.

6.2 The region will require a range of sites with influences at different spatial levels to support the growth potential identified above:

- **Regionally significant** – a limited number of sites which will have a significant role to play in the growth of the regional economy, as a result of the type of development accommodated and the location of the site e.g. sites to meet the needs of the region's key growth sectors, knowledge nuclei, inward investment and headquarters functions. The sectoral focus, location and supply of these sites is dealt with in policies W1, W2 and W3. Intermodal freight terminals are also of regional significance, but are dealt with in policy RT8.

- **Sub-regional** – sites which sit below, and play a complementary role to, regionally significant economic development sites and have the potential to make a significant contribution to the growth of the sub-regional economy, particularly focused on the growth opportunities identified in Policy W1. Although a number of policies are relevant (such as RDF1, DP1 – 9 and sub regional policies in chapter 10-13) the RSS does not specifically address the location of these sites, but the amount of land required is set out in policy W3.
- **Local** – provision of a wide range of sites for a variety of uses which will support the development of a diversified local economy, ensuring that there is access to a range of job opportunities for the local population. Policy W3 also covers the requirement for local employment land.

6.3 Other sectors beyond those identified in Policy W1 will continue to provide significant employment opportunities across the region, particularly education and health sectors. The potential for further public sector growth through the opportunities presented by the Gershon [47] and Lyons [48] Reviews should be maximised.

6.4 A lack of basic skills and qualifications has been identified as a barrier to the growth of the regional economy. In particular the following districts have the highest rates of working age population without qualifications: Liverpool, Manchester, Oldham, Knowsley, Tameside, St Helens, Salford, Halton and Blackpool, which all fall within the City Regions. In addition Liverpool, Manchester, Salford, Halton, Knowsley, Wirral and Barrow have particularly high unemployment rates. Within and outside of these geographic areas there are also concentrations of low skills and unemployment within specific groups within the community. Localised policies and initiatives will need to focus on how best to enable the participation of such hard to reach groups in education and training initiatives in order that skills and participation in employment can be improved resulting in improved health and quality of life.

47 Releasing resources to the front line: Independent Review of Public Sector Efficiency, Sir Peter Gershon, July 2004.
48 Well Placed to Deliver? Shaping the Pattern of Government Services, Sir Michael Lyons, March 2004.

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Policy W 2

Locations for Regionally Significant Economic Development

Regionally significant economic development will be located close to sustainable transport nodes within the urban areas of Manchester, Liverpool and Central Lancashire City Regions and Lancaster, Carlisle, Barrow-in-Furness and Workington and Whitehaven.

Sites will be identified in Local Development Documents, having regard to the priorities in RDF1; spatial principles in Policies DP 1- 9 and relevant sub regional policies in Chapters 10-13. They should be:

- capable of development within the plan period, having regard to the condition and availability of the land, infrastructure capacity, market considerations and environmental capacity;
- highly accessible, especially by adequate public transport services, walking and cycling;
- well-related to areas with high levels of worklessness and/or areas in need of regeneration;
- well related to neighbouring uses, particularly in terms of access, traffic generation, noise and pollution.

They should not be used for development that could equally well be accommodated elsewhere and should not be developed in a piecemeal manner.

Sites for regionally significant office development should be located in accordance with the sequential approach in PPS6, focusing on the regional centres and the town/cities listed in RDF1.

Sites for regionally significant knowledge-based services may also be clustered close to universities, major hospitals or other research establishments. Sites for regionally significant knowledge-based manufacturing should be well connected to these facilities by transport and ICT links.

Sites for regionally significant logistics and high-volume manufacturing should be well connected to the primary freight transport networks.

6.5 If the vision and objectives of The Northern Way Growth Strategy, the RES and this RSS are to be achieved, the region must have a ready supply of land for employment use that is of sufficient quality and quantity to support economic growth. The supply must also reflect the implications of creating a more productive economy, with a focus on improving the productivity of workers in the business and services sectors, increasing employment in knowledge-based industries and tackling unemployment and skills deficiencies across the region.

6.6 The Regional Planning Body will work with NWDA, GONW and partners to identify sites within these broad locations and monitor their progress. Some will be new. Others may be the Strategic Regional Sites identified by NWDA as being critical to the delivery of the RES, especially where they already have planning permission or are allocated in adopted plans.

6.7 The region currently has around 5,475 hectares of land committed to employment use. Based on the current average annual take up rate of approximately 313 hectares per annum across the region, this equates to a sixteen year supply. 70% of this land is allocated for general B1/B2/B8 use.

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Policy W 3

Supply of Employment Land

Provision should be made for a supply of employment land as outlined in Table 6.1. Local planning authorities should undertake a comprehensive review of commitments, to secure a portfolio of sites that complies with the spatial development principles outlined in Policies DP1 – 9, and RDF1 and sub regional policies (Chapters 10-13), and to ensure:

- the most appropriate range of sites, in terms of market attractiveness and social, environmental and economic sustainability, are safeguarded for employment use;
- these sites can meet the full range of needs and are actively marketed;
- at least 30% of sites are available at any one time so that all new and existing businesses have the ability to grow successfully;
- the amount of brownfield land used for employment purposes is maximised, reflecting the likely increases in the amount available as a result of economic restructuring;
- full consideration is given to the scope for mixed-use development particularly within centres, and on larger sites;
- appropriate provision is made in Key Service Centres and full consideration given to the innovative re-use of agricultural buildings to facilitate the growth and diversification of the rural economy;
- the implications of home working on the scale and location of future employment land requirements are considered.

Office development should, as far as possible, be focused in the regional centres, in or adjacent to town / city centres listed in RDF1 and in Key Service Centres, consistent with RDF2 and the sequential approach in PPS6 .

The portfolio must be kept under regular review to ensure that the region does not over- or under- allocate land in relation to the actual scale of economic growth. Local Authorities should review their employment land portfolio every three years.

Table 6.1 Provision of Employment Land 2005-2021 (hectares)

	Greater Manchester	Merseyside and Halton	Lancashire	Cumbria	Cheshire and Warrington	North West
2005 Supply	1368	1234	1069	633	1171	5475
Current take up per annum	112	76	68	16	41	313
Projected inc in take up	6%	18.5%	4.25%	17.5%	6.00%	9.22%
Projected take up per annum	119	90	71	19	43	342
Need 2005 – 21	1904	1440	1136	304	688	5472

	Greater Manchester	Merseyside and Halton	Lancashire	Cumbria	Cheshire and Warrington	North West
Extra allocation required	536	206	67	-329	-483	-3
Flexibility factor	20%	20%	20%	33%	27%	-
Need 2005-21 (incorporating flexibility factor)	2285	1728	1363	404	874	6654
Extra allocation required (incorporating flexibility factor)	917	494	294	-229	-297	1179

6.8 Policy W3 focuses on allocations for B1, B2 and B8 land use. It includes regionally significant economic development (but not inter-modal freight terminals), sub-regional and local sites as described in paragraph 6.2. A wide range of other types of land use provide significant employment opportunities, particularly in retail, tourism, hotel, catering and education and in some parts of the region these sectors account for a large proportion of total employment. In respect of bullet three “available “is defined as fully serviced and actively marketed or likely to be fully serviced and actively marketed in the next three years.

6.9 As the economy of the North West continues to restructure, the demand for different land uses will change significantly. This is likely to result in a decline in the requirement of land suitable for B2 uses and a significant increased demand for land suitable for B1 uses. Local Authorities need to reflect this within their own portfolio of sites.

6.10 In rural areas, employment opportunities are not necessarily associated with the allocation of new development land. Agriculture will continue to play an important role in the rural economy, and is also important in relation to landscape management and ecological protection and enhancement, but the need for agricultural diversification [(49)] (particularly in sparsely settled rural areas) is pressing. This will mean finding new and sometimes imaginative uses for land and buildings previously used for farming purposes. Priority should be given to economic activity that has strong links with the area in question, for example food and drink processing, tourism and leisure; the conservation of natural, cultural and historic resources; and businesses that are ancillary to farming and forestry.

6.11 Table 6.1 quantifies the amount of the employment land needed in each sub region. However, it is acknowledged that there is a degree of uncertainty in establishing employment land requirements. It is also recognised that there may, exceptionally, be a need to provide additional land to take account of special circumstances, such as the expansion requirements of a particular business or the realisation of significant inward investment potential. Accordingly,

49 see “Farm Diversification in the North West – a Guide to Planning”, North West Regional Assembly, 2003.

an allowance for flexibility has been factored into the table through the incorporation of a flexibility factor, which has the effect of adding between 20% and 33% to the employment land requirement for each sub-region.

6.12 The provision of figures by sub-region will require Local Authorities and other partners to work together to agree the distribution of land within each sub-region. The Regional Planning Body will facilitate this approach. Where possible, figures should be distributed in accordance with local labour market areas, broadly indicated by Travel to Work areas identified in the 2001 Census. Further details regarding implementation of this policy will be set out in the RSS Implementation Framework.

6.13 In December 2004 Government published guidance [50] to Local Authorities to assist them in identifying an up to date and balanced portfolio of employment sites in Local Development Frameworks. In particular, the guidance 'Employment Land Reviews: Guidance Note' suggests that Planning Authorities should undertake employment land reviews where possible alongside reviews of housing capacity (para 2.8–2.11 of Guidance Note) and quantitative assessments should be updated regularly at no more than five yearly intervals (para 5.49 of Guidance Note). In this context it is important to note that policy W3 requires Local Authorities to review their employment land portfolio every three years.

6.14 There is currently an oversupply of land in Cheshire and Warrington, and Cumbria which results in the requirement to de-allocate land over the RSS plan period. Where allocated employment sites are of a poor quality, poorly located, or unlikely to become available for development within the foreseeable future, local planning authorities should remove the allocations in question in the relevant Local Development Documents. This does not mean that new sites cannot and should not be brought forward in these areas. Where they are of better quality and more suited to the demands of the changing economy this is supported. However, the overall scale of provision should be reduced to avoid sterilising land for other desirable purposes, and to ensure that the legacy of unsatisfactory committed sites does not frustrate attempts to secure a more sustainable pattern of development.

6.15 In Cheshire and Warrington the average site size is over 20 hectares, far greater than in any other part of the region. Sites over 5 hectares make up 88% of committed employment land in this area. Reducing the supply may be achieved by the de-allocation of a small number of larger sites. Cumbria has dispersed settlement patterns, which coupled with the county's geographical isolation from regional, national and international markets, create discrete labour market areas. It is necessary to offer a greater degree of choice and flexibility to prevent businesses locating outside Cumbria, and this is reflected in Table 6.1.

6.16 The impact of home working and other flexible working patterns, have not been fully considered in the preparation of this RSS and further work will need to be undertaken. However, ensuring that the figures identified in Table 6.1 are kept under regular review will enable this issue to be properly considered as its scale of influence become more fully understood. This will also ensure that the figures can be revised in light of changes to the wider national, international and global economy which will impact on the appropriateness of the figures presented in Table 6.1.

6.17 The Regional Planning Body will develop more regionally-specific guidance on office (B1(a)) development in town Centres, as required by PPS6, as part of a future review.

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50 Employment Land Reviews: Guidance Note, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, December 2004.

Policy W 4

Release of Allocated Employment Land

Where sites are to be de-allocated in plans and strategies (following a comprehensive review of commitments outlined in Policy W3) consideration should be given to a range of alternative uses and determined as appropriate to the location and nature of each site. Alternative uses considered should include housing, and soft end uses, particularly where this will contribute to the delivery of Green Infrastructure networks (Policy EM3). Appropriate remediation may also be required to address issues of land contamination before sites can be effectively re-used (Policy EM2). In de-allocating sites Local Authorities should be mindful of the need to create and sustain mixed-used communities where there is access to a wide range of services and facilities.

Outside of a comprehensive review of commitments (Policy W3) when preparing plans and strategies and considering proposals and schemes there should be a presumption against the release of allocated employment sites for other uses. Sites should not be released where they provide, or have the potential to provide, an important contribution to the economy of the local area. If Local Authorities are minded to release sites they should be satisfied, before so doing, that:

- an appropriate supply of sites is available for employment uses. The de-allocation or re-allocation of a site should not result in a deficient supply of employment land, in either quantitative or qualitative terms, matched against the demand and supply requirements of the local economy;
- if required, there are replacement sites available, of equal or better quality, or that alternative means of incorporating employment land needs have been identified. This might mean considering mixed-use developments, greater intensity of land use or the availability of sites in adjacent authorities.

In both cases consideration should be given to the implications of releasing / retaining employment land in relation to the spatial principles in DP1-9, in particular the promotion of social and economic inclusion, sustainable travel choices and access to services, particularly within Housing Market Renewal Areas and rural areas.

6.18 In many areas there is a demand for allocated employment sites to be released for other uses, in particular housing and retail developments, and a stringent review of commitments will be necessary to justify the decision to either release or safeguard individual sites (Policy W3). However, where the demand for the reallocation of sites is to be dealt with outside such a review, a consistent approach should be applied across the region. Soft end uses are defined as those designed primarily to improve the environment, often by providing a cover of vegetation. Examples include public open spaces, nature conservation and playing fields.

6.19 The demand for employment land to be released for other uses is particularly strong in Eastern Cumbria (Carlisle, Eden, South Lakeland), South and Western parts of the Manchester City Region (Macclesfield, Stockport, Salford), Eastern parts of the Liverpool City Region (St

Helens and Knowsley) and parts of the Central Lancashire City Region (Wyre, South Ribble, Preston and Pendle) [51]. These areas, particularly those within the City Regions, have an important role to play in driving forward the regional economy.

6.20 In the Lake District National Park, employment land is in particularly short supply and subject to competition from other uses that command higher land values. Demand for sites must be carefully managed to ensure that the National Park retains an adequate supply of employment sites to support improvements to the local economy.

51 See Regional Employment Land Study: Phase 1 & 2, Arup for North West Regional Assembly, April 2005.

Policy W 5

Retail Development

Plans and strategies should promote retail investment where it assists in the regeneration and economic growth of the North West's town and city centres. In considering proposals and schemes any investment made should be consistent with the scale and function of the centre, should not undermine the vitality and viability of any other centre or result in the creation of unsustainable shopping patterns.

Manchester/Salford and Liverpool City Centres will continue to function as the North West's primary retail centres.

Comparison retailing facilities should be enhanced and encouraged in the following centres to ensure a sustainable distribution of high quality retail facilities.

Altrincham	Ashton-under-Lyne	Barrow-in-Furness
Birkenhead	Blackburn	Blackpool
Bolton	Burnley	Bury
Carlisle	Chester	Crewe
Kendal	Lancaster	Macclesfield
Northwich	Oldham	Preston
Rochdale	Southport	St Helens
Stockport	Warrington	Wigan
Workington / Whitehaven		

Investment, of an appropriate scale, in centres not identified above will be encouraged in order to maintain and enhance their vitality and viability, including investment to underpin wider regeneration initiatives, to ensure that centres meet the needs of the local community, as identified by Local Authorities.

Retail development that supports entrepreneurship, particularly increasing the number of independent retailers, should be supported.

There will be a presumption against new out-of-centre regional or sub-regional comparison retailing facilities requiring Local Authorities to be pro-active in identifying and creating opportunities for development within town centres. There should also be a presumption against large-scale extensions to such facilities unless they are fully justified in line with the sequential approach established in PPS6. There is no justification for such facilities to be designated as town centres within plans and strategies.

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6.21 For the avoidance of doubt, comparison retailing is the provision of items not purchased on a frequent basis (e.g. clothing, footwear, household goods) [52] and convenience retailing is the provision of everyday essential items (e.g. food, drinks, newspapers). Large-scale extensions are defined as being over 2,500m² net floorspace.

6.22 The centres identified in Policy W5 are well developed as vibrant retail centres, particularly for comparison goods retailing which has traditionally been concentrated in town centres, and should continue in this role. Recent research [53] points to a significant growth in retail spending in the North West, which will in turn require the provision of additional retail floorspace across the region. The network of centres identified in Policy W5 will be the primary focus for this future growth and development, although they are not the only centres that should receive development through to 2021. The policy does not preclude the investment of resources in other centres, particularly where this will assist in the regeneration of the centre and the wider area. Future reviews of RSS may need to consider the impact of changes to retail formats on the pattern of both convenience and comparison retailing.

6.23 The flow of expenditure between sub-regions generally reflects the proximity of population to centres in adjoining sub-regions. New investment should promote sustainable shopping patterns, which result in a reduced need to travel, especially by private car, to access retail facilities of an appropriate type and nature.

6.24 Local planning authorities will have to prepare retail need assessments for their local development frameworks, in line with the advice in PPS6. Specific retail development schemes will also require the preparation of detailed need assessments.

6.25 There are a significant number of outstanding comparison goods retailing planning commitments within the region, totalling over half a million m^2 net. This would account for 89% of the growth identified to 2010. Whilst some commitments are historic and may not necessarily be implemented, and some permissions may not support the 'town centres first' objectives of PPS6 and this RSS, it will be important for local planning authorities, as part of their own needs assessments, to monitor the scale of retail development permitted and how this can contribute to meeting identified needs.

6.26 The Trafford Centre is recognised as an important retail facility in the North West, but, within the context of Policy W5, it will not be appropriate to encourage the expansion of its floorspace in the future.

6.27 The Regional Planning Body will develop more regionally specific guidance on leisure development in town centres as part of a future review to address regionally specific issues for the wider range of Town Centre uses identified in PPS6.

52 PPS6, ODPM, March 2005.
53 Town Centre Assessment Study, White Young Green Planning for North West Regional Assembly, June 2005.

Policy W 6

Tourism and the Visitor Economy

Plans, strategies, proposals and schemes should seek to deliver improved economic growth and quality of life, through sustainable tourism activity in the North West. This should be in line with the principles outlined in Policy W7 and focused on:

- the regeneration of Blackpool as an International Tourism Destination, and the North West's other coastal resorts as priority locations for major footloose tourism development, where tourism is a critical component of the economy;
- the regional centres of Manchester, Liverpool (European Capital of Culture 2008), and Preston, where tourism is a contributory component of the economy;
- Chester as a heritage city of international renown where tourism is a significant component of the economy;
- Carlisle, Bolton, Birkenhead, Lancaster and Kendal as destinations with emerging potential for heritage related tourism development, where tourism supports and compliments their status as historic towns and cities;
- promoting business tourism through the development of high quality conference and exhibition facilities, particularly of European significance in Manchester and national significance in Liverpool and Blackpool;
- opportunities for diversifying the rural economy and regenerating rural areas should align with Policy RDF2. Development should be of an appropriate scale and be located where the environment and infrastructure can accommodate the visitor impact. Coastal sites of international importance for nature conservation, The Lake District National Park and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are important tourist attractors in their own right. Sustainable tourism activity which will strengthen and diversify the economic base within these areas will be supported but the statutory purposes of these designations must not be adversely affected. Wherever possible, tourism development opportunities should be sought which take place in locations adjacent to the National Park and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, thus spreading the economic benefit of tourism;
- opportunities related to Regional Parks, Hadrian's Wall and Liverpool World Heritage Sites. Tourism activity in these locations should be promoted within the context of the relevant Strategic Frameworks and Management Plans [54].

6.28 In respect of the first bullet, "footloose development" is defined as that which is not fundamentally connected to a specific location, e.g. hotels, conference and exhibition facilities, non site specific museums. Examples of "non-footloose development" include heritage sites, historic properties and gardens and natural features.

54 Hadrian's Wall Management Plan 2002 – 2007, Hadrian's Wall Company; Liverpool – Maritime Mercantile City Management Plan, 2003, Liverpool World Heritage Site Steering Group and Liverpool City Council.

Policy W 7

Principles for Tourism Development

Plans and strategies should ensure (particularly to implement Policy W6) high quality, environmentally sensitive, well-designed tourist attractions, infrastructure and hospitality services, which:

- improve the region's overall tourism offer, increasing the market share of attractions;
- meet the needs of a diverse range of people and are easily accessible by sustainable means;
- support the provision of distinct tourism resources that harness the potential of sites and their natural attributes, including built heritage and cultural facilities;
- encourage and facilitate regeneration;
- promote facilities which will extend the existing visitor season;
- harness the potential of sport and recreation, particularly the role of major sporting events;
- improve the public realm;
- are viable in market and financial terms;
- help to relieve pressure on locations vulnerable to the impacts of climate change;
- respect the environmental sensitivity of the coast, particularly the undeveloped coast along with other sensitive areas, and ensure that the integrity of sites of international importance for nature conservation are maintained through assessment of proposals and through careful visitor management and restrictions on visitor access where necessary;
- promote eco-tourism in areas of high natural value in a way that minimises any adverse effect on the natural assets that visitors seek to experience.

The maintenance and enhancement of existing tourism development will be supported, providing that improvement, intensification and expansion proposals meet environmental and other development control criteria.

6.29 Improving the tourism offer in the North West is not simply about increasing the quantity of visitor attractions. The region must improve the overall quality of its offer to compete effectively, not just with other parts of the UK, but increasingly with international resorts and attractions. The region's coastal resorts (see Policy RDF3 and para 5.19), particularly Blackpool (see Policies CLCR1-2), have a very significant role to play in this along with the Lake District National Park. However, the role of cities is increasing with the growing concepts of 'business tourism' and city breaks. Manchester and Liverpool in particular have the potential to capture growth generated by these trends, while Chester will continue as a heritage city of international renown [55].

6.30 Whilst the benefits of tourism and the 'visitor economy' are numerous (the visitor economy is worth £7 billion per annum to the region and supports an estimated 40,000 jobs [56]) there are potential impacts which must be managed successfully if tourism is to have a positive benefit.

55 Historic Towns and Cities in England's Northwest, Northwest Regional Development Agency, October 2005.
56 Draft Northwest Regional Economic Strategy 2006 - 2009, Northwest Regional Development Agency, December 2005.

The impact of visitors on the environment, on transport infrastructure and on access to local services and facilities could be significant if left unmanaged. Ensuring environmental conservation and the long-term sustainability of both attractions and a tourism-dominated economy must be a priority.

6.31 In developing the region's business tourism offer the vision is for Manchester to become one of the most important convention and exhibition centres in Europe with Liverpool and Blackpool having the potential to become centres of national significance. Chester, Carlisle, Preston and Southport also have strong conference and exhibition potential which will be important in attracting 'business tourists' to the region [57].

6.32 Sport and recreation also have a key role to play. The British Open Golf Championship was hosted at Royal Liverpool in 2006 and at Royal Birkdale in 2008 and attracted a significant amount of tourism to the region. The legacy of success left by the Commonwealth Games in Manchester in 2002, provides the opportunity for further events in the region. The Major Events Strategy [58] provides a framework in which the value of sporting, and other events, to the region's economy can be developed.

6.33 The development of new tourism opportunities, including eco-tourism associated with the North West's rich and diverse wildlife, will be important in extending the existing visitor season.

6.34 Climate change will affect the visitor economy of the region. Of particular importance, some of the key natural attractions in the region are vulnerable to impacts of climate change (see DP9/EM5/EM6). It is crucial that these impacts are assessed to allow for early action to be taken to ensure the continued sustainable use of these resources. In addition, new developments will need to consider the provision of adequate infrastructure to take account of likely changes in climate.

6.35 The opportunity exists to capitalise upon links between tourist attractions in the North West and its surrounding regions, particularly in the Yorkshire Dales and Peak District National Parks, North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, with the North East through joint work being undertaken on Hadrian's Wall, and coastal resorts in North East Wales.

57 The Strategy for Tourism in England's Northwest, Northwest Regional Development Agency, June 2003.
58 Major Event Strategy, Northwest Regional Development Agency, March 2004.