WIRRAL COUNCIL

CABINET – 4th February 2010

REPORT OF THE DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE/DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE SERVICES

Summary and Response to the RS2010 Regional Strategy for England's North West: Part 1 – The High Level Strategic Framework Consultation Document January 2010

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1.   Executive Summary

1.1   This report provides a summary of the RS2010 Regional Strategy for England's North West: Part 1 Higher Level Strategic Framework Consultation Document presented for consultation by the North West Development Agency (NWDA) and the Regional Leaders Forum 4NW. A proposed Wirral Council consultation response is attached at Appendix 1. Members are asked to support the response and authorise officers to participate as appropriate in the development of the Regional Strategy on behalf of Wirral Council.

2.   Background

2.1   The Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 places a statutory duty on 4NW (the Regional Leaders Board) and NWDA to produce a single Northwest Regional Strategy which sets out the long term strategic framework for sustainable economic growth. The Regional Strategy will be part of the statutory development plan for every local authority within the region and will replace the existing Regional Economic Strategy (2006) and the North West of England Plan - Regional Spatial Strategy to 2021 (2008).

2.2   The Northwest agreed as a region to prepare an Integrated Regional Strategy in 2008. Work started in 2008 to develop the evidence base which has been subjected to an independent peer review by CLES (Centre for Local Economic Studies). In February 2009 the Principles and Issues Paper set out the challenges and opportunities facing the region as a preparatory consultation document in advance of the strategy itself. Wirral Council submitted a formal response to the consultation on the Principles and Issues Paper, as approved by Members at Cabinet on 23rd April 2009 (Minute 479 refers).

2.3   The next stage sees the development of three components of the Single Regional Strategy. These are:

- **Part 1: High Level Strategic Framework**
  Presenting the overarching vision and proposed strategic priorities
  Released 4th January 2010 for an 8 week consultation period.
- **Part 2: Detailed Policies**
  Presenting the detailed spatial and thematic policies
  Scheduled for release Spring 2010.
- **Implementation Framework**
  Presenting the actions to make the strategy happen
  Scheduled for release alongside Part 2 in Spring 2010.
- 12 Week Consultation on revised Part 1, Part 2 and the Implementation Framework
- Examination in Public scheduled for late 2010
- Secretary of State Formal Consultation scheduled for Autumn 2011
- Final Publication scheduled for the end of 2011

3. Part 1: High Level Strategic Framework

3.1 Set consultation questions are presented in the Part 1: High Level Strategic Framework seeking a response to four priority strands, key spatial issues and potential areas for action. The document also offers four strategic options designed to consider the spatial and sustainability implications of putting different emphasis on economic, environmental and social factors. There is a legal requirement to prepare and engage on alternative options as part of Regional Strategy development. The following paragraphs 3.2 to 3.9 of this report provide a summary of the consultation document.

Vision

3.2 The document offers an extended version of the future vision for the Northwest presented in the initial Principles & Issues Paper as follows:

The quality of life for the people of the NW will be excellent and the region will become more prosperous, more equitable and produce less carbon – by 2030 it will be a better place to live, learn work and invest and where:
- We are well on the way to a low carbon economy and lifestyle, using our nuclear and other assets to contribute to energy security and with low carbon and resource efficient solutions embedded throughout our activities;
- There are jobs for all in a highly productive, well-skilled, knowledge-based economy, attractive to private investment and internationally competitive;
- Deprivation, especially child poverty, has been eradicated and with high levels of health and social well being;
- People have a good choice of high quality, affordable and low carbon homes, well connected to sustainable transport and with high quality digital access for businesses and individuals;
- We are living within environmental limits and have enhanced our natural and built environments.

The final version of the vision will also have spatially specific elements, amending or adding to the following four bullets dependent on the outcome of strategic options consultation:
- The region has built on the combined strengths of Manchester and Liverpool as world class cities and Preston as a driver for economic growth;
- We have regenerated those areas and communities facing significant economic, environmental and social challenges;
- Growth opportunities around Crewe, Chester, Warrington, Lancaster and Carlisle have been fully exploited;
- We have thriving towns and socially and economically sustainable rural communities.

Four Priority Strands

3.3 The document proposes four priority strands which will provide the basis for the Regional Strategy and the consultation exercise concentrates on seeking responses to sub-topics within each strand. The four proposed strands are:

- Capitalise on the opportunities of moving to a low carbon economy & address climate change
- Build on our sources of international competitive advantage & regional distinctiveness
- Release the potential of our people & tackle poverty
- Ensure the right housing & infrastructure for sustainable growth

Strand 1: Low Carbon Economy & Climate Change

3.4   The document offers a number of potential areas for action in order to address climate change and capitalise on the growth of a low carbon economy. These include:

Low Carbon Energy & Technologies: world class nuclear technology; tidal power opportunities; small scale energy generation; low carbon technology research and market development capacities.

Adaptation & Resilience to Climate Change: identifying and managing risks; identifying and utilising the capacity of natural assets.

Low Carbon & Resource Efficient Solutions: building on research and innovation in new low carbon products; developing low carbon solutions to reduce resource demand; retrofit of housing stock to improve energy efficiency; strengthening business support on eco-innovation; developing skills to support low carbon economy; encourage ultra-low carbon/electric vehicles and associated infrastructure; Next Generation Access digital connectivity.

Strand 2: International Competitive Advantage & Regional Distinctiveness

3.5   The document offers a number of potential areas for action in order to build on the Northwest's sources of international competitive advantage and regional distinctiveness. These include:

Internationally Competitive Sector: supporting cluster growth and strengthening interaction with higher educational institutions (HEIs); identifying emerging sectors for Northwest competitive advantage; diversifying the advanced manufacturing sector in Lancashire; ensuring a responsive skills system; promoting and supporting exporting to meet global opportunities.

Knowledge, Science & Innovation: supporting knowledge transfer and exploiting the science base; maximising globalisation opportunities; ensuring supportive public sector procurement; business support that encourages entrepreneurship; promoting high quality employment opportunities.

International Connectivity: ensuring a well-connected Northwest both nationally and globally; developing high speed rail connections.

Sport, Culture & Environment: developing the international destination offer of Liverpool, Manchester, Chester and the Lake District; developing the facilities and hosting potential for the Northwest sporting offer; developing the cultural and heritage offer; developing Blackpool as a 21st Century resort; safeguarding and improving the natural and physical environments; promoting sustainable farming and food production; attracting high profile international events such as the 2018 Football World Cup; improving the quality and distinctiveness of visitor destinations.

Strand 3: People Potential and Tackling Poverty

3.6   The document offers a number of potential areas for action in order to release the potential of our people and tackle poverty. These include:

Employment, Enterprise & Skills: meeting future labour market skill requirements; raising aspirations and attainment; stimulating employers to invest in workforce skills; supporting skills for the workless; ensuring labour market led skills provision; working with young

children and parents to improve educational attainment; supporting greater utilisation and retention of graduates; encourage innovation, enterprise and self employment.

Social Enterprise: developing world class social enterprise/third sector; utilising cultural assets; ensuring public sector procurement is in line with regional compact; adopting policy in favour of mutuals and co-operatives.

Regeneration & Communities: continue regenerating communities facing significant economic, environmental and social challenges; recognising inability to transform everywhere and ensure targeted investment.

Social Exclusion, Deprivation, Ill-Health & Inequality: tackling barriers to work; raising BME and people with disabilities employment rates; realising women's potential; improving health; reducing IB/ESA claimants; delivering intensive support; providing accessible services.

Demographic Change: maximise employment and skill opportunities; celebrating diversity; maximising business benefits; realising potential of under-employed groups; delivering skills in growth sectors resulting from ageing population; addressing rural demographic imbalance.

Strand 4: Housing and Infrastructure

3.7   The document offers a number of potential areas for action in order to ensure the Northwest has the right housing and infrastructure. These include:

Housing: high quality, diverse, affordable, well-located new housing; maximise the housing role in regeneration; ensure high quality housing support through best use of available resources; improving the quality and energy efficiency of new and existing stock; improving the condition of stock; ensuring full role of private rented sector in extending housing choice; ensuring range of housing options; recognising specific needs of rural areas.

Digital Connectivity: enhancing access to super fast broadband; ensuring availability of appropriate technology; leading the UK in widespread use of Next Generation Access (NGA); considering NGA in public investment and planning conditions; ensuring widespread benefits to NGA.

Transport: tackling congestion, improving accessibility and connectivity and maintaining existing infrastructure; securing a shift to sustainable modes of transport for people and freight; encouraging new development locations accessible by public transport, walking and cycling.

Critical Infrastructure: developing innovative approaches to managing and providing critical infrastructure; planning for increased flooding; determining strategic employment sites.

Green Infrastructure: promoting benefits of green infrastructure and developing its role; repairing, protecting and managing the landscape and biodiversity.

Key Spatial Issues and Priorities

3.8   The document identifies the assets, opportunities and challenges for each of the five sub-regions in the Northwest proposing which are the priority actions to be tackled through the Strategy. For the Liverpool City Region the key points are:

Assets & Opportunities:
- Culture, leisure & sporting assets including European Capital of Culture 2008
- City centre £1bn investment
- Planned expansion of Mersey Ports & John Lennon Airport & 2014 Mersey Gateway
- £10bn private investment in Liverpool & Wirral Waters
- Low carbon economy opportunities – wind & tidal power & research & manufacturing strengths in photo-voltaics & marine technology
- Knowledge economy : 3 universities, Daresbury, National Bio-manufacturing Centre, Science Park, School of Tropical Medicine

Challenges:
- Gross Value Added (GVA) gap
- Employment rate
- Gap in business density
- Lag in skills levels
- Housing quality, choice & range
- Unchanged deprivation

Needs to be done via Strategy:
- Improve visitor economy
- Exploit low carbon opportunities
- Support airport & logistics/distribution sector & develop Superport
- Reduce worklessness & improve enterprise
- Develop knowledge economy focus on business incubation, graduate retention & high value jobs in tourism & port related developments

Strategic Options

3.9 There is a legal requirement, both in the legislation requiring regional strategies and also the sustainability appraisal/strategic environmental assessment legislation, to prepare and engage on alternative options as part of the strategy development. These options are designed to set out the range of choices which could be considered and allow stakeholders to consider the implications of putting emphasis in different ways on economic, environmental and social factors. The four options presented for consultation are:

- Option 1: Business as Usual – reflecting the current Regional Spatial Strategy and Regional Economic Strategy position;

- Option 2: Focus on Economic Opportunity – prioritising growth and international competitiveness;

- Option 3: Focus on Environmental Opportunities & Protecting Environmental Resources – prioritising land reclamation, green infrastructure and sustainable resource use;

   Option 4: Focus on Regeneration & Tackling Social Deprivation – prioritising investment and improvement on priority areas and communities of entrenched deprivation.

4.   Wirral Council Consultation Response

4.1 The full proposed consultation response from Wirral Council addressing each of the questions posed in the RS2010 Part 1 High Level Strategic Framework Consultation

Document is attached at Appendix 1 to this report. We broadly agree with the priority areas for action presented in the consultation paper but suggest some additional comments.

4.2   As with our response in 2009 to the Principles and Issues Paper, we have emphasised the importance of acknowledging the wider City Regions as opposed to a focus on the inner centres of Liverpool and Manchester as key areas for growth. As part of this emphasis, we have put forward the case for Wirral to be considered as the 'next big opportunity' within the Regional Strategy priority areas for investment. This includes promoting the development of Wirral Waters as a key opportunity to tackle issues of decline whilst offering highly attractive growth potential for the region within each strand of the strategy.

4.3   We acknowledge and welcome the significant opportunities for economic growth that the move towards a low carbon economy offers but highlight the clear challenges that this transition presents such as short term net increases in carbon emissions created by increased growth; and the need for strong regional and central leadership to support renewable and low-carbon opportunities to happen such as energy supply through tidal power.

4.4   We highlight the important role of maritime and SuperPort proposals as an internationally competitive sector of importance to the region along with the need to reference Wirral Waters as a significant planned development with the influence to attract investment from high value added sectors into the region.

4.5   As part of the sport, culture and environment section, we promote England's Golf Coast as a marketing 'attack' brand which would serve to benefit many different areas and businesses throughout the region. We also highlight the omission of Birkenhead in the list of 'heritage cities' in the document, presenting the case for its inclusion.

4.6   It is encouraging to note that the infrastructure challenge we put forward as an additional priority issue in our response to the Principles and Issues consultation now features as a priority area for action in the Northwest. However, it is absent from the priorities for the Liverpool City Region, therefore we have again highlighted the significant challenges in facilitating major investment in Wirral and the wider City Region due to major infrastructure constraints such as limited power and digital capability in specific locations.

4.7   We clearly demonstrate the scale of the challenge and need in Wirral in relation to the worklessness challenge and present the statistical argument for the boroughs inclusion as a regionally significant priority area for investment in the Northwest strategy. As part of this section we also promote Wirral Waters as a realistic opportunity to reverse decline in our neighbourhoods with the highest levels of worklessness.

4.8   Under the theme of housing we welcome the priority given to Housing Market Renewal Initiative areas within the regional strategy. We have highlighted the need to consider the challenges arising out of the recession in terms of future housing market direction and the empty homes issues which do not feature significantly in the current document. Similarly, we have sought recognition for cross authority working demonstrated, for example, through the sub-regional Choice Based Lettings initiative.

4.9   Officers have considered how the Council's priorities for action, including the development of Wirral Waters, could contribute to each of the proposed strategic options presented in the consultation document. Our recommendation is a focus on Option 4: regeneration and tackling social deprivation combined with elements of growth within

Option 2: economic opportunity and the existing positive aspects of the current Regional Spatial Strategy within Option 1. This recommendation offers best fit with Wirral Council's current policies and strategic direction.

5. Financial implications

5.1 There are no direct financial implications arising directly from this report. The timetable for the Regional Strategy development includes a 3-5 year investment/implementation plan to be released alongside Part 2: Detailed Policies. All decisions and investment locally, regionally and by central Government are expected to achieve the goals laid out in the Strategy.

6. Staffing implications

6.1 No implications arising directly from this report.

7. Equal Opportunities/Equality Impact Assessment

7.1 The Regional Strategy will be subject to an Equality Impact Assessment.

8. Community Safety implications

8.1 There are no direct Community Safety implications arising from this report.

9. Local Agenda 21 implications

9.1 Section 77(2) of the Local Democracy, Economic Development & Construction Act 2009 requires regional authorities to carry out a sustainability appraisal. Directive 2001/42/EC also requires that a strategic environmental assessment is carried out.

10. Planning implications

10.1 The legislative changes to integrate the Regional Economic Strategy with the Regional Spatial Strategy represent a significant change to the current process, particularly with the transfer of responsibility for regional planning to the NWDA.

11. Anti-poverty implications

11.1 The Regional Strategy will aim to enable central and local government and other partners to work together to help maximise prosperity in all parts of England and tackle social deprivation and inequality.

12. Human Rights implications

12.1 There are no implications arising directly from this report.

13. Social Inclusion implications

13.1 The Regional Strategy will promote social inclusion and be subject to a Health Impact Assessment and rural proofing.

14.   Local Member Support implications

14.1   There are no implications arising directly from this report.

15.   Background Papers

15.1   The RS2010 Part 1 High Level Strategic Framework Consultation Paper and associated documents can be found at: http://www.nwregionalstrategy.com/

15.2   Cabinet Report: Summary and Response to the RS2010 Regional Strategy for England's North West: Principles and Issues Paper, 23rd April 2010.

16   RECOMMENDATIONS

16.1   A cross departmental response to RS2010 Part 1 High Level Strategic Framework Consultation Paper has been developed on behalf of Wirral Council. This response is attached at Appendix 1 of this report.

16.2   Members are recommended to:

(1) Consider the content of the RS2010 Regional Strategy for England's North West Part 1 Higher Level Strategic Framework Consultation Document and endorse the proposed consultation response attached at Appendix 1 for submission to NWDA on behalf of Wirral Council.

(2) Authorise officers to continue to work on associated North West Regional Strategy development issues and return further reports as appropriate.

J. WILKIE
Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Services

Appendix 1
Wirral Council Proposed Response to RS2010 Regional Strategy for England's North West: Part 1 Higher Level Strategic Framework Consultation Document

4 Strands & Key Spatial Issues
Question 1: Do you agree that the 4 strands & key spatial issues should provide the basis for the Regional Strategy?
Question 2: Are there any priorities we have missed & what is the evidence for them?

We agree with the 4 key strands identified as priority areas for action to be dealt with via the Regional Strategy for the Northwest. The detail of each strand is explored in our response to the individual actions covered in consultation questions 6 through to 22. We would like to propose a specific reference at this stage to ensuring that the right housing and infrastructure for sustainable growth should include the need to secure high quality housing in locations which support sustainable economic growth and also those areas of deprivation where the existing poor quality of the housing stock hinders economic opportunity.

We are in broad agreement with the key spatial issues identified however feel the listing of specific places creates inconsistencies in the spatial approach. The city regions of Liverpool and Manchester are dealt with as single entities whereas key towns in other 'sub-regions' are specifically identified. This is an issue for concern. There is a risk that the implied focus for the city regions is the central zones as stated in the first comment: 'world class cities of Liverpool and Manchester as economic cores of substantial city regions'. Specific reference is made to Preston as a driver for regional growth; Chester, Crewe, Lancaster, Warrington and Carlisle as key hubs; and Blackpool, and Barrow as key spatial areas that face substantial social and economic regeneration challenges alongside 'areas within the two city regions'. We suggest the identifications of 'key spatial areas' cannot be conducted in simplistic terms and requires further consideration alongside lower level thematic analysis. For a Regional Strategy, we believe the evidence base needs to work at several spatial levels including sub regional and local information as well as the higher level strategic analysis.
We would welcome an exercise that draws out key locations in this way on comparative spatial levels. The impact of this issue is demonstrated in our response to Strand 3: Releasing the Potential of Our People & Tackle Poverty, questions 13 to 16 with the headline evidence as follows:

- The national indicator, NI 153 (rate of working age people claiming out of work benefits in the worst performing neighbourhoods) *nationally*, both Blackpool and Wirral have the highest and second highest rates respectively.
- In Wirral, this accounts for 36.8% of the working age population in its most deprived neighbourhoods claiming key out of work benefits
- Out of the 39 local authority areas in the North West region, Wirral is the third largest contributor to the worklessness challenge with 35,480 working age people claiming key out of work benefits.
- The 2007 Index of Multiple Deprivation ranks Wirral as 8th worst nationally for its employment domain behind 7 English cities.

We would also propose a re-wording of the phrase 'the international potential of the Liverpool-Manchester corridor through the Atlantic Gateway concept' in this section to ensure that the geographical scope of this concept includes the full extent of the geographical focus. We support the ambition for Liverpool Waters and Wirral Waters to form the Western anchor of the Atlantic Gateway and the current 'city to city corridor' phrase in this document excludes Wirral unnecessarily.

As an additional point of note we would suggest reference to Chester's 'substantial links with Wales' should be changed to 'Wirral and West Cheshire's substantial links with Wales' in line with Mersey Dee Alliance commitments.

Spatial & Thematic Outstanding Questions
Question 3: Are these the key outstanding questions facing the region?

We agree with the outstanding questions as presented in the consultation document.

Vision
Question 4: Do you agree with the vision? If not, how can it be improved?

We agree with the vision for the Northwest but suggest it presents quite generic aspirations in line with national drivers. It is difficult to introduce unique identifiers, however some key messages on the economic aspirations related to our key drivers for growth could introduce a stronger Northwest flavour to the vision.

We also suggest that the statement: 'growth opportunities around Crewe, Chester, Warrington, Lancaster and Carlisle have been fully exploited' should refer to all the New Growth Points as Growth Opportunities.

Indicators
Question 5: Would the indicators accurately reflect the high level delivery of the Part 1 outcomes? If not, how would you improve the list?

As part of the Principles & Issues consultation, stakeholders were asked to propose how best the aims and goals could be measured. Our consultation response then suggested it was unclear how the strategy development would take account of spatial differences, local and sub-regional governance drivers, and compatibility with respective measurement indicators. We requested greater flexibility introduced into the strategy to take account of existing and future localised issues and priorities over the lifetime of the document which would have implications for the prioritisation of elements and measurements of success. We questioned the effectiveness of a 'one size fits all' approach and measurements of success set by regional indicators which can mask localised success or failure rates. We concluded our response stating we would welcome further work to explore and consult on options for flexible activity and performance frameworks underpinning the strategy development.

This remains our position at the Part 1: Higher Level Strategic Framework consultation stage. We propose that the introduction of specific indicators is more appropriate at the Implementation Framework stage of Regional Strategy development when thematic and spatial activity is more clearly defined. This would also introduce a timeframe compatible with the development of local economic assessment indicators to assist with an integrated performance framework across local, sub-regional and regional strategies.

In relation to specific proposed indicators we would seek a number of clarifications as follows:
Outcome 2: propose inclusion of 'number of day visits / total day visit spend'
Outcome 7: 'proportion of graduates with a degree' – requires clarification
Outcome 9: propose inclusion of key 'narrowing the gap' indicators in line with Local Area Agreement commitments.

Strand 1: Low Carbon Economy & Climate Change

General Comment – relating to Qs 6-8:

The importance of mitigating Climate Change, by ensuring the region reduces greenhouse gas emissions, does not come out clearly in the Strategy. Whilst capitalising on the opportunities that tackling climate change presents, it needs to form an integral part of the plan and more emphasis needs to be placed on mitigation.

We recommend either adding a new point specifically relating to climate change mitigation or more clearly articulating that this forms a key part of the strategy within the existing points.

Whilst the document generally refers to the importance of reducing greenhouse gas emissions, the Strategy itself only appears to seek a reduction in carbon emissions. Reductions in the wider basket of greenhouse gas emissions can be achieved through adopting more sustainable approaches to waste and land management; however, these links to their role in tackling climate change have not been emphasised in the Strategy (e.g. see section on Critical Infrastructure)

Wirral Council recognises the significant opportunities for economic growth presented by the move towards a low-carbon economy; however, there are also some clear challenges that this transition presents, which RS2010 must recognise and address. Primarily, RS2010 must give clear and realistic direction to local authorities about how to achieve economic growth in the region without this resulting in increases in carbon emissions in the short to medium term, prior to zero carbon development becoming a feasible reality in all circumstances.

In Wirral, with an annual housing target of 600 units and a need to deliver approximately 10 hectares of employment land per year (as highlighted in the Council's employment land evidence base), there will be a need to deliver development that could result in a net increase in carbon emissions over the next 5-10 years. In order to continue driving down borough-wide carbon emissions, this likely increase in emissions will need to be off-set through tackling emissions in the existing building stock and transport sector. The current and emerging regulatory framework will help drive down these emissions, and there is scope to drive emissions down further through local mechanisms, e.g. through Local Development Framework policy and business support mechanisms. Wirral Waters also presents a significant opportunity to minimise the impact of the housing target on our carbon footprint by concentrating growth and new infrastructure in a relatively compact geographical area built to higher standards of sustainability than could be achieved if this growth was dispersed across the borough. However, additional support and public and private investment will be needed in Wirral to fully make this transition to a low-carbon economy without prohibiting economic growth or compromising greenhouse gas emission reduction targets. Support at the regional level is needed to ensure benefits and investment opportunities arising from the Government's Low Carbon Transition Plan reach the local level.

Low Carbon Energy & Technologies
Question 6: Do you agree with the potential areas for action? If not, what changes would you suggest and why?

Wirral Council generally agrees with these areas of focus for low-carbon energies and technologies. The Council supports the need to focus on improving security of energy supply by developing renewable and low-carbon opportunities, including tidal power opportunities in the Mersey, and developing opportunities for small scale distributed energy generation. In order to help ensure these opportunities are realised, there will be a need for strong leadership and ongoing support and investment from regional authorities and Central Government, for example to de-risk private investment in decentralised energy infrastructure, and to explore establishing regional/sub-regional public-private Energy Services Companies (ESCOs).

A joint Merseyside evidence base for renewable energy is currently being prepared to inform LDFs in the sub-region. As set out in current RSS Policy EM 17 Renewable Energy, the outcomes of this evidence base should also be used to inform RS2010.

The Council welcomes the Government's plan to develop a 'smart grid' and consider this to be a vital part of ensuring future security of an efficient, low-carbon energy supply in the region. The Council considers that the statement in this document: 'developing opportunities for small scale distributed energy generation' should be clarified to ensure it includes the promotion of decentralised energy supply and not just generation, i.e. investment in CHP/CCHP and community heating infrastructure. The strategy should be clear in supporting the development of this infrastructure to ensure the more efficient use and distribution of energy.

We strongly support the need to build capacity in the region's research and development facilities. However, to meet the need for growth in the low carbon sector, there is likely to be a need to establish new facilities and not solely focus on existing assets. Wirral is currently working in partnership with Chester University to develop a satellite campus in East Wirral, and the Council sees this as an opportunity to make this campus the focus of a wider education quarter, which would include associated research and development facilities and business space, including incubator space. Wirral Council would welcome discussions at the regional level to explore this opportunity further.

Wirral Council would strongly encourage the inclusion of an additional area of focus, or expanding the 4th area of focus (building capacity in research etc.) to focus on ensuring opportunities in the low carbon sector are used to help tackle worklessness – a key priority for most North West authorities.

Building capacity in research, science etc should refer to 'based on existing assets such as ....and on other opportunities that may come forward in sustainable locations, particularly linked to higher education and existing research establishments.'

Adaptation & Resilience to Climate Change
Question 7: Do you agree with the potential areas for action? If not, what changes would you suggest and why?

Wirral Council generally agrees with the areas of focus to ensure adaptation and resilience to climate change. However, a stronger link between climate change adaptation and mitigation should be recognised. There is a need to ensure adaptation measures are developed with climate change mitigation in mind, for example avoiding the increased use of mechanical cooling (air conditioning), or where this is necessary, use efficient systems such as Combined Cooling Heat and Power. Such measures also relate to transport and road networks to ensure that these crucial assets will be resilient to climate change as acknowledged in the Government's 'Delivering a Sustainable Transport System'.

In addition, the Strategy should clearly recognise the need to assist with biodiversity adaptation in the natural and urban environments, including through biodiversity enhancements in new and existing development and green infrastructure (e.g. green roofs, open space landscaping improvements).

Low Carbon & Resource Efficient Solutions
Question 8: Do you agree with the potential areas for action? If not, what changes would you suggest and why?

Wirral Council generally agrees with these areas to focus action for low-carbon and resource efficient solutions. In relation to the retro-fit of building stock, the Council supports the

development of a regional programme. Economies of scale will help reduce the cost per unit or sqm of floorspace; however, regional and/or Central government investment, or other innovative means of funding will be needed to help ensure the successful delivery of this programme. This programme, and other opportunities presented by growth in the low-carbon sector, should be used to help provide employment and training for local, deprived groups.

Wirral Council is interested in the concept of establishing a sustainable technologies park in the Borough in order to support growth in the low-carbon sector and provide the benefits of clustering to these new and expanding businesses. The Council would welcome discussions at the regional level about progressing this concept.

In relation to 'planning new developments in ways which reduce the need to travel', regional planning bodies are required (by the Supplement to PPS1: Planning and Climate Change) to provide a framework to focus substantial new development in locations with good accessibility by public transport, walking and cycling and where there are/is potential for, decentralised energy supply systems. Parts of inner east Wirral, specifically the Birkenhead docks, provide the opportunity to focus some of this growth and this should be recognised through RS2010.

See 'Digital Connectivity in question 19 for the Council's response in relation to Next Generation Access.

Strand 2: International Competitive Advantage & Regional Distinctiveness

Internationally Competitive Sectors
Question 9: Do you agree with the potential areas for action? If not, what changes would you suggest and why?

We agree with the need to build on the excellence in a number of industrial sectors within the North West, particularly in relation to the Liverpool City Region. Wirral has a number of pharmaceutical companies with leading edge R&D facilities alongside a number of internationally recognised manufacturing operations.

Maritime is a key component of the Northwest economy and this isn't reflected enough in this section. Liverpool City Region has strong maritime heritage and given that the Port of Liverpool is the largest Freeport Zone in the UK, handling around 34 million tonnes annually we feel that this merits more recognition as a focus within this section. The Port of Liverpool is the top UK port for UK-USA and UK-Canada container trade and the UK's third largest container port overall. Additionally, Wirral's waterfront has seen massive investment at Twelve Quays Ro-Ro terminal carrying freight and passengers to and from Belfast and Dublin.

Equally, planned development of high profile and high quality business locations warrant referencing in the strategy as key actions to attract investment in higher value added sectors and higher value added functions (such as regional, national and divisional HQ functions). The creation of business locations with an international profile will attract and sustain higher levels of inward investment (domestic and FDI), securing expansion of the regional economic base. As the largest planning application of this type in the UK, we would expect Wirral Waters to feature highly in this strand as a significant opportunity for the Northwest.

The Mersey Dee Alliance (MDA) is committed to the development of composite technologies within its manufacturing industries – particularly aerospace, maritime and automotive. This forms a core part of the MDA's knowledge industry development plans. In particular, this includes ensuring the skills system responds to future needs, responding to the requirements of

employers to retain global competitiveness and promote the area as a high quality investment offer.

Sustainable technologies in the North West has huge potential to support economic growth over the next ten years, particularly in relation to energy efficiency and renewable energies. Greater resource efficiency has a fundamental role to play in increasing the productivity and competitiveness of North West businesses and it is also increasingly becoming a selling point for the North West. Whilst it features within Low Carbon, it should feature within this sections focus.

<u>Knowledge, Science & Innovation</u>
Question 10: Do you agree with the potential areas for action? If not, what changes would you suggest and why?

Agree with the focus for action. A more skilled workforce is a more employable and productive workforce. It is also a better paid workforce and one better suited to meeting future needs. There is also a clear link between higher level skills and GVA. Wirral's significant contribution to the gap in regional economic performance is attributed to our clear productivity challenge, as evidenced by very low GVA. Wirral has too many firms operating in low value added market segments. Ideas and knowledge can transform business and industry and will be crucial in the development of the North West economy. Access to Higher Education is a key driver for economic growth in the region. Wirral's economic strategy acknowledges this, and is reflected in our current 'University Challenge' bid. Wirral's proposal is one of only six nationally to be given the green light to go forward out of 23 initial proposals and as such, we would welcome further discussion around this potential key opportunity.

Additionally, the proposals for Clatterbridge Heath Science Park aims to provide the highest quality facilities to encourage innovation in a sector that is increasing in size within the North West, encouraging knowledge transfer via Higher Education Institutions (HEI's)

<u>International Connectivity</u>
Question 11: Do you agree with the potential areas for action? If not, what changes would you suggest and why?

Agree with the proposals for the action area, however, would suggest that the Liverpool SuperPort should be contextualised within the areas for focus.

The SuperPort project aims to exploit the potential that exists in the Liverpool City Region to develop intermodal (transfer) freight and passenger facilities between the Mersey Ports, John Lennon Airport and the rail network. Currently the city region's port, freight and airport facilities contribute £1.1 billion of gross added value (GVA) to the regional economy and provide over 34,000 jobs.

<u>Sport, Culture & Environment</u>
Question 12: Do you agree with the potential areas for action? If not, what changes would you suggest and why?

We agree with this inclusion of the 'international destinations – Liverpool, Manchester, Chester and the Lake District'. These destinations are the attack brands for the Northwest, and hopefully work to bring visitors/investors into the region and then disperse into the Northwest as a whole. Liverpool and Manchester have excellent international transport links, and these cities and areas contain the strongest tourism products in the Northwest. The three cities that are part of the Northwest's destination marketing are likely to bring in tourists who spend the most money (under Arkenford these are known as Cosmopolitans, Style Hounds, and Traditionals).

This is specifically important for the Northwest because this results in more day visitors and increased spend in the wider spatial areas. For example, during Liverpool's Capital of Culture, the number of day visits to Wirral increased by 16% from 2007. However, the expenditure in Wirral's accommodation only rose by 1% in 2008. By adding products like England's Golf Coast as an attack brand would be beneficial especially for the accommodation sector. Also, taking advantage of the natural beauty in the North West outside the Lake District would be beneficial to wider areas. While not wanting to dilute the destination marketing message of the North West, adding England's Golf Coast or a coast/countryside element to the marketing would serve to benefit many different areas, and businesses throughout the region.

We agree that developing the sporting offer is not only aspirational, but also provides vital tourism revenue, with hotels especially benefitting from increased volume of visitors and visiting teams. For example, Wirral's accommodation businesses benefited hugely from hosting The Open in 2006. Not only is there a huge economic benefit while events are on, once visitors come once, they are very likely to return so events can drive increases in tourism for years afterwards.

We agree that the Northwest's cultural offer is among the strongest, and as evidenced by the success of Capital of Culture in Liverpool, there are significant advantages to pushing this part of the offer. However we are surprised at the omission of Birkenhead within the list of 'heritage cities' in this document. In 2005, Birkenhead was one of five 'Historic' towns and cities in the Northwest to be the focus of further study that looked into the town's potential to benefit from its wealth of cultural heritage. Birkenhead was identified in recognition of its superb industrial and maritime heritage - hailing its collection of warships, museums, green spaces and stunning architecture. Hamilton Square in Birkenhead has the greatest concentration of Grade One Listed Buildings in one place outside London and its park was the inspiration for New York's Central Park

We agree that in promoting sustainable farming and food production, the farming sector can not only lead the way in terms of low-carbon economy, but provide a significant boost for the overall economy and health of the region. Wirral's micro-climate means that it is an excellent area in which to grow high quality produce. This is an area which Wirral, and the Northwest, can take advantage of, in promoting farming and food production.

We agree that the attraction of high profile international events should continue to be a key area for action. However it is vital that organisers seek to work alongside hotels in the area, and work to towards extending the tourism accommodation product.

We suggest an additional area of focused action within this theme to provide on going support for the North West Coastal Forum, which works to promote Integrated Coastal Zone management for the region for the long term sustainability of the coast.

Strand 3: Releasing the Potential of Our People & Tackle Poverty

Employment, Enterprise & Skills
Question 13: Do you agree with the potential areas for action? If not, what changes would you suggest and why?

While the strategy does recognise the need to meet the skills requirements of the future labour market, it is imperative for the region to understand and address skills requirements within its most deprived communities in order to regenerate areas and communities facing the most significant challenge. This requires local level analysis that highlights and identifies these communities to ensure that these are not lost conducting higher level analysis. However

analysis at this level is currently prevented owing to the deficiency in the level of data available nationally.

Question 15 recognises the need for a more targeted approach to regenerate communities facing significant economic challenge. In order to address this Region must focus on communities that have high concentrations of worklessness and acknowledge that there is a correlation between worklessness and low level skills. Within the North West Region, both Blackpool and Wirral have the highest and second highest rates **nationally** for worklessness within its most deprived communities. Therefore it is essential for the strategy to identify these areas, acknowledge the significant contribution they make to the North West gap and make a continued commitment to address low/no skills and key employability skills to support workless residents from these areas into sustainable employment.

In relation to higher level skills, plans to create a £20 million Centre of Higher Education at the heart of a new Education Quarter have moved a step closer, after a proposal submitted by the University of Chester was given the green light to move onto the second stage in the process. Out of 23 proposals submitted to the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) under the government's University Challenge initiative, just six across the country have been given approval to move forward, although any further progress will be subject to a decision on how much government funding is available. Wirral Council would welcome the opportunity to progress this in partnership with the education institutions and NWDA.

Within the Liverpool City Region and the Northwest as a whole we need to attract and retain skilled labour in order to meet core economic and regeneration objectives. Large scale ambitious developments such as Wirral Waters offer significant scope to create attractive, diverse and distinctive residential environments alongside increased number, range and quality of employment opportunities which will attract and retain skilled workers in the region. As such, we feel there is a case for this to be referenced in the regional strategy.

Social Enterprise
Question 14: Do you agree with the potential areas for action? If not, what changes would you suggest and why?

We propose some reference to third sector development related to community asset transfer as a potential key action.

Regeneration & Communities
Question 15: Do you agree with the potential areas for action? If not, what changes would you suggest and why?

Wirral fully recognises the significant challenge to address its severe concentrations of deprivation in the borough and we welcome a commitment to continue regeneration of areas and communities facing significant economic, environmental and social challenges. This is demonstrated through the key aspirations within the development of Wirral Waters which will create a wide range and high volume of opportunities for employment at entry, intermediate and higher levels underpinned with supportive action to maximise the impact for Wirral's most deprived communities which are in close proximity to the site. However, as stated, future investment must be targeted at the right spatial level and tightly focused, therefore recognising the areas within the North West that face the most significant challenge and make the largest contribution to the Northwest gap, to bring the below the national average. It is the scale and need of the challenge combined with the realistic opportunity to reverse decline in one of the most deprived and economically weak areas in the UK that identifies Wirral Waters as a priority strategic action in the regional strategy.

The national indicator, NI 153 identifies the rate of working age people claiming out of work benefits in the worst performing neighbourhoods. Analysis of the latest NI 153 data from DWP (May 09) highlights that **nationally**, both Blackpool and Wirral have the highest and second highest rates respectively. In Wirral, this accounts for 36.8% of the working age population in its most deprived neighbourhoods claiming key out of work benefits, and as such it is vital that as with Blackpool, Wirral's significant challenge is referenced and acknowledged within the strategy.

This is further supported if we conduct analysis of the overall level of worklessness across the North West. Out of the 39 local authority areas in the North West region, Wirral is the third largest contributor to the worklessness challenge with 35,480 working age people claiming key out of work benefits. This is only surpassed by the two cities of Manchester and Liverpool, which highlights the scale of the challenge in the borough and the significant contribution to the North West gap. Similarly in the 2007 Index of Multiple Deprivation, Wirral is ranked 8th worst nationally for its employment domain behind 7 English cities. This is once again only surpassed regionally by the cities of Liverpool and Manchester.

The strategy should make reference to accessibility to jobs, education and training opportunities to ensure that the North West Regions most deprived communities who face the most significant challenges can access the required services. In addition to this the strategy must also recognise the transport barriers that must be removed to ensure that areas with high concentrations of worklessness can access major employment sites both within the locality, but also outside the North West Region. For example the electrification of the Wrexham to Bidston line which would provide a major economic boost for the Liverpool City Region, enabling economic opportunities to be realised by significantly cutting journey times and access to employment opportunities in North East Wales.

<u>Social Exclusion, Deprivation, Ill-Health & Inequality</u>
Question 16: Do you agree with the potential areas for action? If not, what changes would you suggest and why?

We agree with the action areas but would stress that to tackle inequalities in its broadest sense action also needs to be taken to raise educational attainment, provide decent standard homes, tackle all hate crimes, and address obesity and drug/alcohol misuse.

We welcome the commitment to address to reduce the proportion of Incapacity Benefit/Employment Support (IB/ESA) Allowance claimants within the region to a level that is below the England average.

In Wirral, 10.5% (19,160) of the working age population are claiming IB/ESA compared to a regional rate of 9.3% and a national rate of 6.7%.
Partners in Wirral have for a long time recognised the requirement to address high levels of worklessness associated with ill health, however Wirral's high levels of IB/ESA remain, despite recent significant reductions which are in excess of regional and national performance. Analysis of the latest IB/ESA data available from DWP (May 09) demonstrates that Wirral's rate has reduced by 1.4% points (2,900) claimants compared to the North West average of 1.1% points.

For the North West to achieve an IB/ESA rate that is below the England average, the region must clearly identify those areas that are currently performing below the North West average and additionally make the most significant contribution to the North West gap. Within the North West, Liverpool, Manchester, Wigan and Wirral are respectively the areas with the highest level of IB/ESA claimants, with their combined numbers accounting for 28% of the North West total.

Demographic Change
Question 17: Do you agree with the potential areas for action? If not, what changes would you suggest and why?

Implementing the Regional Strategy will need to involve a range of activities to promote diversity and equality issues, actively stimulate employment opportunities to optimise economic contribution of ethnic groups, and tackle race and other hate crime.

We would add also that a wider reference is required to demonstrate the significance of the **economic** challenges and opportunities presented to the Region by an ageing population.

We suggest that addressing the demographic imbalance only in rural areas is not enough. There is a significant challenge in key urban areas to balance our ageing population better, as demonstrated within our area of interest through the key aspirations that underpin Wirral Waters. A suggested wording is offered as follows: "Addressing population loss and an ageing population within the inner urban areas of the Liverpool City Region".

Strand 4: Ensure the Right Housing & Infrastructure

Housing
Question 18: Do you agree with the potential areas for action? If not, what changes would you suggest and why?

In housing terms, we welcome the spatial priority given to HMRI areas, although more could be said about the growth/renewal balance of housing strategy across the Northwest.

We welcome also the recognition and profile of the Private Rented Sector and its future importance in meeting housing need and supporting economic mobility, although there is little mention of the challenge of empty homes in this regard.

Homelessness and the needs of vulnerable people is only given passing reference although the document is explicit in its recognition of providing support for vulnerable people to remain in their own home.

There should be some recognition of existing cross authority working in sub-regional initiatives, for example Choice Based Lettings and some MAA projects.

More could be said also about the need to emerge from a period of housing market downturn and how we can still focus on improving access to home ownership, access to lending and supporting existing home owners.

In similar vein, the document is too quiet about how the recession, credit crunch and housing market falls mean that the housing market will need to be, or look, different in the future where good design, affordability and building house types to meet evidence-based needs/aspirations has more chance of succeeding than speculative development. Building energy efficiency into new-build could also be expanded.

The Strategy needs to more explicitly acknowledge the linkage between Housing and Economic objectives. For example, understanding that housing policy can reduce inequalities through greater choice of areas of living and because homelessness disproportionately affects disadvantaged communities. Reference is also recommended for inclusion on the potential positive impact that housing policy can have in increasing choice and control for vulnerable people who live in the more deprived areas.

<u>Digital Connectivity</u>
Question 19: Do you agree with the potential areas for action? If not, what changes would you suggest and why?

We agree with the areas for action identified identifying the need for improved Next Generation Access coverage in the region.

Major telecoms companies have not announced plans to deploy NGA in the all areas of the North West except in new-build sites, claiming that there is not enough evidence for willingness to pay to justify investment. Therefore we welcome the dialogue with Regional partners as to how NGA will become a condition of investment.

We feel the Regional Strategy provides an opportunity to highlight and progress the need for a coherent Investment Strategy for NGA across the North West. This is a huge issue that should be covered under several areas of the strategy including:
- International Connectivity
- Regeneration and Communities
- Critical Infrastructure

There are more opportunities than those offered by MediaCity UK and these should be reflected within the strategy, for example Wirral Waters. Wirral is at an advanced stage with the development of an NGA project which will open up numerous investment opportunities.

<u>Transport</u>
Question 20: Do you agree with the potential areas for action? If not, what changes would you suggest and why?

We suggest that 'developing the transport infrastructure' list of actions would benefit from expansion as follows:
- a. supports economic growth
- b. Is safe and secure – design and operate facilities to reduce actual and fear of crime and anti-social behaviour on transport network
- c. Is affordable to all
- d. Improves connectivity
- e. Is integrated – promote easy interchange from bus and rail, supported by quality walking and cycling facilities and routes.
- f. Maintains existing transport infrastructure to a high standard
- g. Improves journey time reliability & tackles congestion on main routes
- h. Secures shift to sustainable modes of transport
- i. Secures safe & efficient access between residential areas & key destinations
- j. Improves quality of life through improved accessibility and promotes equality of opportunity for all eg: young people, people with disabilities & isolated communities
- k. Improves surface access & interchange arrangement at international & national gateways – Liverpool & Manchester
- l. Integrates management and planning of transport systems
- m. Contributes to a healthier community through the provision and promotion of facilities for active travel (walking and cycling), and interchange facilities with public transport (reduce carbon emissions)
- n. Supports and facilitates the use of alternatively fuelled vehicles and realistic alternative forms of transport – provide infrastructure such as charging points for electric vehicles, develop water and increase rail transport for freight movements

o. Has minimal impact on local and natural environment – reduce number of people and dwellings exposed to noise pollution from road and rail networks

We would also suggest the inclusion of two further points of priority actions:
1. Balance demand management measures and needs of business
2. To improve connectivity out of the region (eg into North Wales through improvements to the Borderlands and Chester-Wrexham railway lines)

<u>Critical Infrastructure</u>
Question 21: Do you agree with the potential areas for action? If not, what changes would you suggest and why?

We agree with the comments within the critical infrastructure section but query whether the issues are wider than just the Liverpool and Manchester City Regions. As a general comment, infrastructure is a cross-cutting issue for the whole Strategy and the whole region. This strand may be better titled "Other critical Infrastructure" as Transport and digital connectivity are equally critical infrastructure and could be a separate strategy area from housing.

We also feel that Strategic Regional Sites are sidelined in this section and document overall: there is no assessment of their effectiveness and purpose, what their future role might be in delivering the objectives set out elsewhere in the Strategy. Historically, the designation as a Strategic Regional Site has been an important endorsement of the importance of sites.

The Strategy should also emphasise the importance of ensuring new growth, and where possible existing development, minimises pressure on power, water and waste management infrastructure, through the use of sustainable design and development solutions.

We would also like to highlight the need to debate urban growth within this document as it was originally a key action area in the Principles & Issues Paper. As part of Wirral Council's response to this key area in the previous consultation exercise we proposed that regionally, unless a unique opportunity is identified, a strategic review of the green belt should be opposed until opportunities in the urban areas have been fully exploited. Specific Wirral examples would be Wirral Waters and Woodside. The new Growth Points were also highlighted as significant areas of opportunity for urban growth and merit greater significance in the regional strategy as do the areas of HMRI. RS2010 Part 1: Higher Level Strategic Framework does not open up debate on urban growth in such a specific way.

<u>Green Infrastructure</u>
Question 22: Do you agree with the potential areas for action? If not, what changes would you suggest and why?

We agree, in principle, with the potential areas for action suggested under the heading of 'Green Infrastructure'. It is considered that a brief description is necessary, detailing how the final potential 'area for action' ('Repairing, protecting and managing our landscape and biodiversity where the natural environment is vital to economic development and tourism') will contribute to economic development.

We consider that the use of the term, 'pinch points' needs to be clarified within 'area for action' two, as it does not necessarily explain what the issue is. We suggest the following change within the text to reflect the role Green infrastructure has to play in terms of addressing particular site constraints:

Amend second area for action to: 'developing the role of green infrastructure in providing solutions for "pinch points" – areas where significant investment and development is expected

but where there are site constraints, such as flood risk, which must be addressed before successful economic regeneration can be achieved.

Spatial Implications: Sub-region

Questions 23-27 relate to the key assets, opportunities, challenges and proposed actions for each of the five sub-regions of the Northwest. For the purpose of Wirral Council's response to the consultation we have taken question 27 only which is specific to the Liverpool City Region

Question 27: Have we identified the key assets, opportunities and challenges and what needs to be done in each sub-region? If not, what changes would you suggest and why?

We are in broad agreement with the Liverpool City Region key assets, opportunities and challenges but suggest a number of minor amendments to specific statements and the inclusion of one key missing point as follows:

Amend first action to: 'Improve the visitor economy to build on international interest from European Capital of Culture status in 2008 and international sporting events (such as the Open Golf Championship), including investment in infrastructure (eg hotels) and new markets (eg business tourism).'

Amend third action to: 'Develop Superport into a true gateway into the North West, with complementary development across the Atlantic Gateway, including associated linkages with the airport, Manchester Ship Canal and logistics/distribution centre.'

We strongly recommend the inclusion of Next Generation Access as a key challenge (as highlighted in further detail in the digital connectivity section) and as a proposed additional action for the Liverpool City Region.

In relation to the key actions to support demographic change and economic growth, we would also propose that one of the key additional actions for our sub-regional area is the need to include our growth aspirations. This could be worded: "Focus (or deliver) growth in population and employment at the heart of the inner urban areas in Wirral and Liverpool."

Spatial Implications: Intra & Cross Regional

Question 28: Are these the most significant intra & cross regional opportunities?

We highlight two key proposed amendments as follows:

Atlantic Gateway: 'The Atlantic Gateway has, in the Liverpool and Manchester City Regions, two global economies separated by only thirty miles. This unique area encompasses a large proportion of the region's population and economic opportunities, including two international airports, universities and the ports of Liverpool and the Manchester Ship Canal. There is comprehensive road, rail and canal connectivity. The Atlantic Gateway has the potential to deliver greater levels of trade and enhanced international/national significance through collaboration, through and alongside city region plans, to deliver new levels of sustainable economic growth.'

West Cheshire and North East Wales: Wirral, West Cheshire and North East Wales. This cross-border area contains the strategic hub of Wrexham-Deeside-Chester, includes Broughton and extends to Wirral, through Ellesmere Port. The future development and potential of many of these communities is interdependent, something which is recognised in the Wales Spatial

Plan. Whilst the centres have quite different characteristics, they are considered to bring a combination of strengths to the cross-border sub-region.'

Strategic Options

<u>Option 1: Business as Usual</u>

Question 29: Will this option deliver the outcomes & priorities of the Strategy?
Question 30: What are the strengths & weaknesses of this option?

There is no analysis in the RS2010 of the success or otherwise of Option 1. In the absence of such evidence, it is difficult to assess the benefits or otherwise of this option. The analysis of delivery against the outcomes is broadly positive and there is no justification for following a less regeneration focused option.

From Wirral's perspective, the current strategy is very supportive of the Borough's regeneration objectives. We are currently operating an approach to new housing development which is more restrictive than RSS in order to support HMRI and regeneration in the inner area.

The way that this option is presented as "business as usual" implies that this a lesser option compared to the others. Unlike the other options, the current RSS has the benefit of having been subject to annual monitoring and a starting point would be to provide some review of the effectiveness of the existing strategies.

Aside from seeking the inclusion of Birkenhead/Wirral Waters as part of the Regional Centre we feel the current RSS has significant strengths and is supportive of the Northwest's key regeneration objectives. This needs to be balanced against the weaknesses of the current RES however, which would suggest a need to design in new elements of the alternative options presented in order to strengthen the 'business as usual' approach.

<u>Option 2: Focus on Economic Opportunity</u>

Question 31: Will this option deliver the outcomes & priorities of the Strategy?
Question 32: What are the strengths & weaknesses of this option?

The main objectives of this option can be supported and indeed present key opportunities for economic growth objectives.

We welcome and agree with the aim of this option to link areas of need and opportunity however strongly recommend an amendment to the areas of deprivation listed: '…in Liverpool, Knowsley, Birkenhead, Salford, Manchester and Pennine Lancashire'. The rationale for the selection of Birkenhead as a town amongst a list of local authority areas is unclear and spatially inconsistent. We clearly demonstrate the scale of the challenge and need in Wirral in relation to the worklessness challenge and present the statistical argument for the boroughs inclusion as a regionally significant priority area for investment in the Northwest strategy as part of our response to Strand 3: Releasing the Potential of Our People & Tackle Poverty. We therefore request an amendment from Birkenhead to Wirral.

However, there are potential contradictions in this option which promises a continued focus on the physical and economic regeneration of greatest deprivation, but allows for "selective" Greenfield land release and suggests that brownfield sites close to regional centres should be reclaimed for Green Infrastructure. While this is important, it is not an appropriate use for all brownfield land in the inner urban areas, for example in Wirral's area of interest: Hind Street and Cammell Laird or Wirral Waters. The tight Green Belt and restrictions on Greenfield

development have been an important driver of regeneration: any suggestion of a relaxation in approach could significantly undermine initiative such as HMRI.

As stated above the suggestion that Greenfield land should be released for development and that brownfield land in the inner urban area only has a future as sites for Green Infrastructure are the major weaknesses of this option.

Option 3: Focus on Environmental Opportunities & Protecting Environmental Resources

Question 33: Will this option deliver the outcomes & priorities of the Strategy?
Question 34: What are the strengths & weaknesses of this option?

The strengths of this option are in its focus on brownfield land reclamation at the heart of regeneration priority areas and maximises the opportunities presented in the growth of the low carbon economy.

However we feel that the focus of this option is not comparable to the other three: it is more a series of cross-cutting issues which would apply to the other options, for example avoiding development in flood risk areas. It is weak in provision of an indication of how any transition to a low carbon economy would be achieved or how this relates to the NW economy as it is now. Many of the objectives contained in this could comfortably underpin the objectives in the other options.

Option 4: Focus on Regeneration & Tackling Social Deprivation

Question 35: Will this option deliver the outcomes & priorities of the Strategy?
Question 36: What are the strengths & weaknesses of this option?

The general focus on urban regeneration with limitations on Greenfield development can be supported in this option. It clearly supports regeneration at the heart of the existing most deprived communities; those that are currently subject to Housing Market Renewal Initiative which we see as the key strengths of this option.

There is a less clear statement of priorities than Option One and a less clear statement of priorities for growth which suggests a need to combine some of the elements of Option 2 in order to strengthen the focus on matching need with opportunity across the region.

Question 37: Within the context of the Strategy, which option or combination of options do you consider best delivers the needs of the region? If that option has weaknesses how could they be improved?

Our recommendation is a focus on Option 4: regeneration and tackling social deprivation combined with elements of growth within Option 2: economic opportunity and the existing positive aspects of the current Regional Spatial Strategy within Option 1. This would reflect the need to regenerate existing communities (including through the Housing Market Renewal Initiative) and support economic growth to improve the competitiveness of the region and the constituent sub-regions and city regions. Complementary development that achieves both regeneration and economic growth by linking areas of opportunity and need should be supported, including the proposals along the Atlantic Gateway.