

Key Service Centres and Settlement Hierarchy (Table 7.1)



1. The Development of the Settlement Hierarchy (Table 7.1) in draft Regional Spatial Strategy

1.1 The evolution of the settlement hierarchy outlined in table 7.1 in “The North West Plan” can be traced back to the development of Regional Planning Guidance 13 (March 2003), now the adopted Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS). In particular reference needs to be made to a series of publications, consultations and seminars which helped develop the draft RPG:

- Listening to the North West (1999), the consultation paper on issues
- Views from the North West: The Issues (1999), dealt with the pattern and scale of development under Housing, Population and Community Issues.
- Choices for the North West (2000), consulted on the strategic options for the region identifying five alternative methods of distributing development across the region.

1.2 This body of work recognised the need to encourage the development of sustainable urban and rural communities to help stem migration from urban centres, peripheral urban areas and remote rural locations and to encourage more efficient use of the urban areas. It also recognised the problems facing coastal towns and the peripheral urban areas of the Pennine villages and West Cumbria. The spatial options paper developed a locational framework which included the range of settlements in the region of different sizes and roles including the conurbations of Merseyside and Greater Manchester and their inner-urban cores; the Mersey Belt (stretching from Liverpool to Manchester) as a whole, including both conurbations and the towns and settlements between them; the regional towns and cities outside the belt, generally having a population of over 60,000 and providing a wide range of services for their hinterlands; the smaller towns with populations ranging from 10,000 to 60,000, which are important local service centres for villages and smaller settlements; the rural lowlands and uplands and the coast and estuaries.

1.3 Other key factors considered were the key transport corridors including the M6 and the West Coast main line, the trans-Pennine M62 routes between Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds and Hull, the existence of gateways to the European territory as a whole including the main ports, airports and significant centres at the region’s boundaries, and the various landscapes of the north-west and the land use patterns and constraints associated with them.

1.4 In preparing the draft Regional Spatial Strategy a fundamental review of the spatial development framework was considered unnecessary, given the relatively recent adoption of Regional Planning Guidance. A ‘Fit for Purpose’ review carried out during the preparation of draft RSS recommended retaining

all of the Spatial Development Framework policies, with amendments where necessary to reflect the new urban/rural definition prepared by DEFRA. However the Spatial Development Framework (now the Regional Spatial Framework) has been restructured around the City Regions of Manchester, Liverpool and Central Lancashire to ensure synergy with the Northern Way Growth Strategy. Reference to the North West Metropolitan Area is no longer made.

2. Settlement Hierarchy – Table 7.1

2.1 Table 7.1 establishes a three-tiered settlement hierarchy for the North West:

Regional Centres

2.2 The identification of the Regional Centres of Manchester / Salford and Liverpool reflects the adopted Regional Spatial Strategy. Originally identified as conurbation cores, adopted RSS identifies them as Regional Poles, reflecting their importance as internationally recognised centres for shopping, administration, financial services, business, heritage, sport, music, leisure and cultural life¹. The term Regional Centre continues to reflect this important, and growing, role, and also their role as the drivers of growth within their respective City Region areas, as identified in the Northern Way Growth Strategy².

Regional Towns and Cities

2.3 The 27 Regional Towns and Cities identified in Table 7.1 are those which have a particular importance within the region, serving large rural or urban hinterlands and acting as centres for services and public administration. They generally have a population of over 60,000 and some have specialised economies based on a particular industrial sector, such as tourism in the coastal resorts. On this basis they generally reflect the Spatial Development Framework in adopted RSS, with the addition of Altrincham.

2.4 There is a strong, although not perfect relationship between the Regional Centres and Regional Towns and Cities identified in table 7.1 and the network of retail centres identified in Policy W4. It is not considered that the differences between these two aspects of the plan are appropriate and simply reflect the varying nature of the retail role of the Regional Towns and Cities identified³.

Key Service Centres

2.5 The identification of Key Service Centres in Table 7.1 represents, and is acknowledged in the document⁴ as being, an interim position. This reflects:

¹ Regional Planning Guidance for the North West paragraph 3.10, GONW, March 2003

² “Moving Forward: The Northern Way”, The Northern Way Steering Group, September 2004

³ There was significant debate about the relationship between settlement hierarchies and retail hierarchies at the Examination in Public on the Joint Lancashire Structure Plan (January 2005). The Panel concluded that ‘*these differences do not undermine the policies, rather they strengthen their purpose*’ (Joint Lancashire Structure Plan 2001 – 2016, Examination in Public: Report of the Panel, March 2004)

⁴ The North West Plan: Submitted Draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the North West of England, North West Regional Assembly, January 2006, paragraph 7.2

1. The need to take on board the settlement hierarchies identified in the recently adopted Structure Plans for Cumbria and the Lake District, Lancashire and Cheshire, to provide a comprehensive and overarching settlement hierarchy for the North West region.
2. The recognition of the varying and inconsistent criteria used to define Key Service Centres in different parts of the region.
3. The absence of identified Key Service Centres in Metropolitan areas.

2.6 The rationale for the identification of the Key Service Centres identified in the respective Structure Plans is set out in Appendix 1.

3. Further work

3.1 The North West Regional Assembly commissioned Land Use Consultants in April 2006 to undertake a study of Key Service Centres in the region. The purpose of this work is to analyse the role and function of a number of settlements across the region, addressing the need for a comprehensive region-wide approach to the consideration of Key Service Centres, and the need to explore their identification in Metropolitan areas. The study is considering 175 'candidate' settlements.

3.2 The study methodology identifies three distinct phases of work:

- Assess the roles and functions of the candidate settlements through data gathering and analysis
- Develop the criteria for the identification of key service centres
- Suggest a policy approach, on the basis of a full understanding of all the 'candidate' settlements.

3.3 The rationale for this approach put forward by Land Use Consultants is that *'the policy approach of seeking to anticipate what key service centres should be like, and then go out and find them, is precisely the approach which has failed to capture the true nature and diversity of the region's market towns⁵.'* It is considered that by starting from a list of candidate settlements and exploring, and seeking to understand the way they function, will lead to the development of a strong evidence-based policy.

3.4 For the candidate settlements a wide range of data is being collected and analysed including:

- selected 2001 census variables – demographics, household structures, housing stock and tenure, transport (car ownership and average distance to work)
- Travel to work analysis using 2001 Census Output Area data to indicate self-containment for employment and net overall employment role
- Migration 'turnover' analysis using 2001 Census Output Area data
- 2005 house price information (Land Registry)
- CACI retail catchment data

3.5 The study is due to be completed in September 2006 and it is anticipated that the initial outcomes of the study will be available to inform discussions at

⁵ Key Service Centres – Role and Function Study Tender Submission, Land Use Consultants, March 2006

the Examination in Public. However we anticipate that the findings of the research will be incorporated into a future review of RSS.

Appendix 1

Key Service Centres identified in Cumbria and Lake District Joint Structure Plan 2001 – 2016 (April 2006)

In preparing the Joint Structure Plan for Cumbria and the Lake District, Cumbria County Council undertook a detailed study to identify Key Service Centres outside of the Lake District National Park. The study methodology⁶ identified Key Service Centres which have:

- A minimum population of 1,500
- 2000sqm or more of retail floorspace (Use Class A1)
- Primary School
- Secondary School
- Doctors Surgery
- Post Office
- Library

The emphasis in Cumbria is therefore on service availability, and the minimum population required to support those services.

As a result of the Examination in Public three settlements were identified as Key Service Centres within the Lake District National Park; Windermere/Bowness, Keswick and Ambleside, recognising that these should not be the foci for new development with the same emphasis as the Key Service Centres identified outside of the National Park. Development in Key Service Centres within the National Park is therefore permitted where it:

- Provides a service for the local community and is in scale with the local service to be provided
- Helps sustain a range of services in the centre or supports local businesses
- Meets other identifiable needs of the locality⁷.

Key Service Centres in Joint Lancashire Structure Plan 2001 – 2016 (March 2005)

The Joint Lancashire Structure Plan: 2001 – 2016 (adopted March 2005) sets out a three tiered settlement hierarchy which identifies:

1. Principal Urban Areas
2. Main Towns
3. Key Service Centres (Market Towns)

The categorisation process has been developed based on criteria relating to size, accessibility and the function of settlements. The settlements identified as

⁶ Planning Cumbria: Technical Paper 2 – Key Service Centres Methodology, Cumbria County Council, 2003

⁷ Planning Cumbria: Response to the panel report following Examination in Public, Cumbria County Council and Lake District National Park Authority, September 2005

Key Service Centres in Table 7.1 in the Central Lancashire City Region and the Liverpool City Region correspond to the Key Service Centres identified in Policy 4 and the Main Towns identified in Policy 3, which have not been identified as Regional Towns and Cities.

The criteria used for the categorisation of settlements by the Joint Structure Plan authorities is set out in a further statement⁸ to the Examination in Public on the Joint Structure Plan which took place in January 2005.

For Main Towns the criteria used are as follows:

- Generally have populations between 28,000 and 70,000
- Contain retail centres which lie in the top 23 as defined by the 1996/7 Vitality and Viability Study, and top 20 as defined in the 2001 Retail Study
- Nearly all contain major transport interchanges

For Key Service Centres (Market Towns) the criteria used are as follows:

Distinct settlements serving rural areas, with a population of 2,000 – 28,000, which share the following characteristics:

- Potential to sustain and transform the economy of the surrounding rural areas
- Potential to promote social inclusion, i.e. increase access to housing, services, education, healthcare and employment for everyone
- Distinct settlements which are the largest in a wide rural area serving a larger rural hinterland, not merely commuter or retirement towns
- Potential to act as service centres for surrounding rural areas
- Existence of good transport links to surrounding towns and villages or the potential for further enhancement

Some settlements with a population of less than 10,000 have been identified as Key Service Centres (Market Towns) where they meet the criteria above and have at least one of the following:

- A high level of services (for example secondary school, superstore)
- Existing or proposed railway station, or existing high quality bus services: and/or
- Are the largest settlement in a wide rural area.

Key Service Centres in Cheshire 2016: Structure Plan Alteration (March 2006)

The Key Service Centres identified in the Cheshire 2016: Structure Plan Alteration are commensurate with the secondary towns identified in the hierarchy of centres identified in relation to Policy TCR1. The hierarchy reflects the size of centres in terms of comparison and convenience floorspaces, function and catchment area of each centre. Paragraph 9.13 identifies that all of the secondary town centres act as key service centres, as they provide a range of services and have public transport links to their surrounding rural area⁹.

⁸ Examination in Public, Further Statement: Issue 3, Joint Structure Plan Authorities (December 2003)

⁹ Cheshire 2016: Structure Plan Alteration, Cheshire County Council, March 2006