

Panel Question (i)

Is the evidence base for Table 7.1 sound? Should the proposed settlement hierarchy be reassessed, and should a consistent approach be adopted towards the identification of Key Service Centres?

1.1 Details of the background and rationale behind the settlement hierarchy set out in Table 7.1 are set out in Briefing Paper 2¹ and the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) Technical Appendix (paragraphs 2.2 – 2.6).

1.2 The work undertaken in developing the Spatial Development Framework (SDF) in the adopted RSS informed the development of the settlement hierarchy for draft RSS. The methodology used in deriving the regional poles of Liverpool and Manchester/Salford, and the key towns and cities, included in the SDF remains valid and provides a robust evidence base for Table 7.1 in the draft RSS. The only addition to the key towns and cities in the revised settlement hierarchy in draft RSS is Altrincham.

1.3 Draft RSS took a pragmatic approach to Key Service Centres (KSC) by incorporating the identified settlements listed as KSCs in adopted structure plans. The Assembly's latest position in relation to Key Service Centres is expressed in Briefing Paper 14² which provides an initial response to the recommendations and options set out in the recently completed research by Land Use Consultants³. In essence, the research has provided a consistent approach for the identification of key service centres to be taken forward into a future review of RSS⁴. Assembly officers have suggested some minor word changes to Policies RDF2 and RDF3⁵.

Panel Question (ii)

When, and in what circumstances will there be a need for a review of the Green Belt?

2.1 The supporting text for policy RDF5 in draft RSS sets out the Assembly's view that there is unlikely to be a need for strategic reviews of the Green Belt in the North West to accommodate the anticipated levels of development set out in the draft plan. The text goes on to note that there may be a need to undertake '*...small scale detailed boundary changes to Green Belt, in line with PPG2, as part of the Local Development Framework process to accommodate small scale localised changes to meet exceptional circumstances...*' Examples of the types and location of development that may fall within the small scale boundary changes envisaged are set out in the draft RSS including aviation related infrastructure at Liverpool John

¹ Briefing Paper 2 - Key Service Centres and Settlement Hierarchy (Table 7.1), NWRA July 2006

² Briefing Paper 14 - Key Service Centres – Role and Function Study and Initial NWRA response, NWRA, September 2006

³ Key Service Centres – Role and Function Study prepared by Land Use Consultants for North West Regional Assembly, 2006

⁴ Pending the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR07) no funding currently exists beyond 31st March 2008, to support the Assembly's RPB function (including the employment of staff). Therefore the Assembly is only able to commission new research that will be completed by 31st March 2008. Until the medium - long term funding situation is resolved, the Assembly is also unable to give a firm timescale commitments on undertaking a future review of RSS, as it may not be possible to comply with all the procedural process requirements of PPS11 over next 18 months, to ensure submission of a Draft RSS to Government before 31st March 2008.

⁵ Briefing Paper 20 - Suggested Wording Changes to Draft RSS, NWRA, September 2006

Lennon and Manchester Airports, and the broad location around South West Chester⁶ for a regional investment site/ knowledge nuclei site.

⁶ See Matter 3A (iii) paragraph 3.4 that notes a suggested change to the description of the broad location described as 'South West Chester' in the Draft RSS to a wider description of 'Chester'.