

## **Matter 3. Working in the North West** **(2000 word limit encompasses Matter 3A)**

### **Matter 3A: Economic Development**

- (i) Is there a sound evidence base for the employment land provisions set out in Tables 8.2 and 8.3?

Administrative county areas have been used for sub-regional employment land figures as city region boundaries were not confirmed when the Regional Employment Land Study was undertaken and the RES economic scenarios are also developed on a county basis. This is accepted, but it is unfortunate that the evidence collated and the policy included with the RSS are being targeted towards differing geographical areas i.e. evidence based on the former County areas but many aspects of policy aimed at the City Regions. Halton would like to see the NWRA commit to aligning the policies and evidence on a geographical basis in the future.

The evidence base relies on forecasts from the NWDA about changes in economic activity to forecast likely employment land take up. The highest forecast for employment land for each sub-region has been used as the basis of the employment land requirement. Given the regeneration needs of the region and the possible harm to employment creation and retention caused by a lack of suitable employment land, this approach of ensuring the highest possible need is able to be met is supported by Halton Borough Council.

Halton Borough Council would like to query the evidence behind the requirement set out in point 3 of W3 “*That at least 30% of sites are available, (58) so that new and existing businesses have the ability to grow successfully*”. Footnote 58 reads ~ “*Available is defined as fully serviced and actively marketed of likely to be fully serviced and actively marketed in the next 3 years*”

- (ii) Should the draft RSS set out employment land provision at a district level as well as the sub-regional level?

Halton Borough Council do not wish to submit any additional response in relation to this issue.

- (iii) On what basis have the broad locations for regionally significant economic development in Table 8.1 been selected and are the locations sustainable? Do they reflect the regional spatial framework and sub-regional policy framework in the draft RSS. How do they reflect and reinforce the spatial distribution of economic growth, regeneration priorities, and the broad housing locations, and what are the transport implications? (Note – for the avoidance of doubt the Parkside Colliery proposal falls within this policy)

Halton Borough Council feel that the broad locations for regionally significant economic development as listed in Table 8.1 should support development in locations that will help to achieve the intentions of the CRDP (Doc. Ref: SUB6) and should include Widnes Waterfront EDZ.

**Widnes Waterfront** is a regionally significant gateway development. It has a substantial role to play in the delivery of an uplift in economic activity for not only Halton but for the

Liverpool City Region and beyond. It is anticipated that, in excess of, £70 million of investment will be brought into the Widnes Waterfront area which will transform the area into a commercial development site of regional significance in a valuable riverside setting.

The economic impact of the Widnes Waterfront Economic Development Zone will be considerable with over 2,700 new jobs being created over the lifetime of the programme.

Over a period of six years over eighty hectares of low quality industrial land will be transformed into a new, regionally significant, development site made up of commercial office and light industrial developments in a waterfront setting in South Widnes.

The EDZ will contribute to targets to increase GDP and employment, deliver positive change and the reversal of the regions negative image and will attract support and investment from the private sector.

The EDZ is fundamental in helping achieve the visions of the RES particularly in relation to 'People and Jobs'. Particularly the points highlighted below.

*Point 52 - Develop and encourage employment creation in or near deprived areas focused on: HMR areas; URC areas; and Halton and Knowsley*

*Point 53 - Develop business start up and support services focused on: HMR and URC areas and Halton and Knowsley*

The development of Widnes Waterfront EDZ would support the Regional Spatial Framework as set out in Policy RDF1 and LCR3 as it will secure urban regeneration and economic growth, as set out above, which will support the development of Widnes, one of the Regional Towns listed in Table 7.1.

The Halton Local Transport Plan 2 already includes transport infrastructure improvements to enhance access to the Widnes Waterfront site these comprise enhanced pedestrian, cycle and bus stops provision to Tanhouse Lane and improvements to the Widnes Eastern Bypass/Fiddlers Ferry Road Junction.

Halton Borough Council continues to support the inclusion of South East Halton as a Knowledge Nuclei Sites and Widnes, with access to the West Coast Main Line as an Inter-modal freight terminal, within Table 8.1.

- (iv) Are the land designations in W2 focused enough in terms of use, or will they allow for significant B1 office development, which could undermine more sustainable town/city centre locations?

Halton Borough Council do not wish to submit any additional response in relation to this issue.

- (v) Is there sufficient clarity regarding the types and scale of development, which will be permitted on reserve sites? Do current trends in inward investment support the retention of reserve sites for “large scale manufacturing”?

There is insufficient clarity in Policy W2 as to what activities should be occurring purely on Reserve Sites and which can happen on any Regionally Significant Economic Development

Site (RSED). For example, it is unclear as to whether headquarter functions would normally be accommodated on Knowledge Nuclei Sites (apart from when it is also a Reserve Site) and this should be clarified.

The concept of Reserve Sites is also not clarified explicitly. Paragraph 8.6 states that “sites identified within these broad locations [for RSED] should not be used for development that could otherwise be accommodated elsewhere and should not be developed in a piecemeal manner”. There needs to be an explanation of how to assess whether development could be accommodated elsewhere, and what is meant by “a piecemeal manner” (i.e. does this mean that a masterplan for the site must be prepared as part of any application?).

It is also not clear whether Reserve Sites are meant to be safeguarded, or if the designation of reserve sites merely reflects the anticipated timescale for development. A clear definition of the purpose and conditions relating to the development of Reserve Sites is required.

There should be further guidance as to what, if any, form of development apart from large-scale manufacturing or headquarter functions are suitable on Reserve Sites. For example Halton would be keen to see the Reserve Site part of the South East Halton RSED protected for future science growth and innovation of national and international importance which would otherwise be lost to the region (such as the 4th Generation Light Source).