

**Panel Question (i)**

**Have the appropriate centres been listed in policy W5?**

1.1 The Assembly believe that Policy W5 does identify the most appropriate centres in the region in formulating a sensible and balanced network of retail centres. The centres listed are those identified in research undertaken on behalf of the Assembly by White Young Green<sup>1</sup>.

1.2 Policy W5 and supporting text is clear that while the centres identified are well developed and vibrant retail centres which should continue in this role, the policy does not preclude the investment of resources in other centres, particularly where this will assist in the regeneration of the centre and the wider area.

1.3 It is acknowledged that there is a difference between the centres listed in Policy W5 and the settlement hierarchy outlined in table 7.1; however the Assembly do not believe that this is inappropriate. This concept was explored at the Joint Lancashire Structure Plan Examination in Public and the Inspector concluded that in the case of the Structure Plan '*these differences do not undermine the policies, rather they strengthen their purpose*'<sup>2</sup>. The Assembly believe this to be the case with regard to Policy W5 and Table 7.1.

1.4 In respect of amendments to the policy, AGMA suggest that the reference in Policy W5 to Manchester as the Regional Centre should refer to Manchester/Salford to reflect Table 7.1. Assembly officers are happy to accept this amendment<sup>3</sup>.

1.5 The Assembly acknowledges representations<sup>4</sup> regarding the absence of West Cumbrian towns from the list of centres in Policy W5. The technical research<sup>5</sup> acknowledges '*that there are a number of opportunities already identified to help provide a more balanced provision at the local level which again contributes to the development of a more sustainable pattern of retail and leisure facilities, for example the redevelopment that is currently underway within Workington Town Centre which seeks to provide a better balance of retail provision helping to serve the needs of the west coast of Cumbria*'. Although not named in the policy the Assembly believe that Policy W5 provides support for such continuing investment, however the Panel may wish to consider naming Workington and Whitehaven in Policy W5, in the context of providing support to the regeneration of the wider West Cumbria area.

1.6 Representations made with regard to the inclusion of Ellesmere Port<sup>6</sup> and Skelmersdale<sup>7</sup> are also noted by the Assembly. The Assembly believe that Policy W5 provides support for ongoing investment in these centres which will support their continuing development and regeneration. This may result in the need to reassess the network of centres in a future review of RSS, however the Assembly do not

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<sup>1</sup> Town Centre Assessment Study, White Young Green for North West Regional Assembly, June 2005

<sup>2</sup> Joint Lancashire Structure Plan 2001 – 2016: Examination in Public, Report of the Panel, March 2004, paragraph 8.18

<sup>3</sup> Assembly Officer wording suggestions are set out in Briefing Paper 20.

<sup>4</sup> Allerdale Borough Council, CPRE, Copeland Borough Council, Cumbria County Council, Cumbria Strategic Partnership, Eden District Council

<sup>5</sup> Town Centre Assessment Study, White Young Green for North West Regional Assembly, June 2005, paragraph 9.31

<sup>6</sup> Ellesmere Port and Neston Borough Council, Cheshire County Council, The Northwest Development Consortium

<sup>7</sup> West Lancashire District Council, Lancashire County Council, The Northwest Development Consortium and English Partnerships

believe that the network of centres currently identified in Policy W5 needs to be amended to include these two centres.

**Panel Question (ii)**

**Should a more hierarchical approach be adopted?**

2.1 Research undertaken for the Assembly recommended the development of a balanced network of centres, rather than a hierarchical approach, stating that: '*There is no 'true' definition of what a regional or sub-regional centre should comprise of or how it should perform.....trying to accurately quantify whether [for example] Carlisle performs the same role as Stockport is extremely difficult due to the unique characteristics that have shaped them, including the proximity of competing facilities. In fact it is impossible to arrive at a common approach as to what constitutes a regional and sub-regional centre*'<sup>8</sup>

2.2 The Assembly believe that setting out a network, rather than a hierarchy of centres is more appropriate in that it provides flexibility to allow different centres to develop at different stages throughout the plan period, rather than being constrained by a rigid hierarchy.

2.3 The views expressed by a number of respondents<sup>9</sup> with regard to identifying Carlisle, Chester and Preston as sub-regional centres below Manchester and Liverpool would, in the Assembly's view, be contrary to the advice outlined above.

**Panel Question (iii)**

**Is the floor space requirement shown in Table 8.4 realistic?**

3.1 Table 8.4 clearly states that the figures set out are indicative floorspace requirements. This is highlighted further in paragraph 8.22 of the draft RSS which state that the figures are intended to provide a benchmark for needs assessments which Local Planning Authorities are required to prepare to inform the preparation of Local Development Frameworks, and as a benchmark figure for the purposes of the Annual Monitoring Report prepared by the Assembly. Assembly officers suggest that the title of Table 8.4 could be amended to ensure that the figures are not read as requirements, but as an indication of the potential need for additional floorspace over the plan period. Assembly officer suggestions are set out in Briefing Paper 20<sup>10</sup>.

3.2 It is important to note that the figures are based on a series of assumptions which are clearly set out in the Technical Appendix in relation to expenditure growth rates, rates of productivity and sales density. Adopting other assumptions would generate different figures. The assumptions adopted in the regional study were those considered to be the most appropriate when considering the North West as a whole.

3.3 It is also acknowledged that the figures set out in Table 8.4 do not fully consider the capacity of centres to absorb the predicted level of increase, although a cross-check to existing commitments has been undertaken. Whilst the Assembly consider that this would be helpful, it would not have been possible to undertake such an

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<sup>8</sup> Town Centre Assessment Study, White Young Green for North West Regional Assembly, June 2005, paragraph 9.07

<sup>9</sup> Carlisle City Council, Chester City Council & Preston City Council, Chester City Council, Preston Vision.

<sup>10</sup> Briefing Paper 20 - Suggested Wording Changes to Draft RSS, NWRA, September 2006

assessment within the timescale and resources available for the preparation of the draft RSS.

3.4 In the absence of any clear national guidance on either the methodology or assumptions to be adopted, despite a clear recognition of the need for such guidance in Planning Policy Statement 6<sup>11</sup>, the Assembly feel that the methodology adopted is appropriate for a regional study.

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<sup>11</sup> Planning Policy Statement 6: Planning for Town Centres, ODPM, March 2005 (Paragraph 2.32 and 2.38) (**PP6**)