

Matter 8. Liverpool City Region

All District Councils in the Liverpool City Region have been invited to attend the session. Under Matter 8A Districts will have the opportunity to raise issues relating to matters discussed earlier in the EiP. They should however ensure that debate is restricted to matters of a strategic nature. They should avoid unnecessary repetition, and to this end it would be useful if they attended relevant earlier sessions in which they have an interest.

(2000 word limit encompasses Matter 8A & 8B)

Matter 8A: Sub-regional Strategy

- (i) Does the strategy communicate a clear, sustainable and appropriate vision for the sub-region? If not how should the strategy be modified? In particular:
- do the proposals for employment, housing, transport and the environment amount collectively to a coherent and appropriate vision for the sub-region;
 - are the proposals for employment land (of various kinds) appropriate and achievable;
 - are the transport proposals adequate and logical in relation to the strategy as a whole;
 - is adequate attention paid to issues of climate change and the protection of the environment;
 - are there any other material deficiencies which you perceive in the plan as it affects the sub-region;
 - do you believe the proposals to be deliverable, through the development plan system or in other ways;
 - how will the sub-regional sub-area priorities be monitored.

As a general point, Halton Borough Council consider that the Sub-Regional Frameworks should be included within the Regional Spatial Framework policies in Part 2 (Regional Development Framework) in order to provide a consistent and coherent regional strategy.

Throughout the Liverpool City Region section, there is a lack of support for the Mersey Gateway Bridge, which was strongly promoted within the policy advice previously submitted to the NWRA. The construction of the Mersey Gateway Bridge will bring significant economic and connectivity benefits to the wider city region, improving linkages to North Wales, Cheshire and Greater Manchester. The Mersey Gateway Bridge is recognised as a key economic driver for the Liverpool City Region and as such, must be highlighted throughout this section.

- (ii) Does LCR4 adequately reflect the policies and strategy emerging from the West Cheshire/ North East Wales Sub-Regional Strategy?

Matter 8B: Housing Issues

- (i) Is the sub-region's housing provision and distribution appropriate and achievable? Are the PDL targets in Table 9.1 realistic, deliverable, and based on robust evidence?

Halton Borough Council broadly support the draft housing provision allocation for Halton of 500 units per annum net of clearance (2003~2021).

In our response to the Draft RSS and to the earlier Interim Draft, Halton expressed support for the principle of using economic modelling to estimate housing demand and for these figures to be used to inform (though not determine) housing allocations. The Nathaniel Lichfield work clearly demonstrated the likelihood of strong economic growth and therefore strong demand for additional housing in the Mid-Mersey Sub Region. Given this forecast growth and the environmental constraints faced elsewhere in the sub-region, Halton believe that a housing policy figure significantly higher than the 330 dwellings per annum provided by current RSS (formerly RPG13 - Doc. Ref: REG8) is appropriate.

Halton has made significant strides over recent years in regeneration (c.f. Castlefields / Runcorn Old Town) and in promoting the provision of a more balanced housing stock. Halton has suffered a sustained period of marginal decline in population, and the proposed housing policy figure of 500 p.a. will help secure the population stabilisation forecast in the recent ONS Population Projections.

Since adoption of the current RSS (formerly RPG13 - Doc. Ref: REG8), gross housing completion figures in Halton have averaged over 600 units per annum, with the net figure being only slightly above the 330 pa policy figure by virtue of the programmed clearance of difficult to let social stock on Castlefields. With the completion of the Castlefields demolition program, Halton is facing the prospect of having to introduce a housing supply restraint policy, should the draft housing policy figure not be confirmed. This will impact on the ability to provide much needed regeneration within the Borough and may undermine recent successes in the identification and delivery of windfall sites, where completions are currently running at almost 3 times that forecast in the UDP (April 2005) (Doc. Ref: ME3a).

The recently completed Halton Housing Needs Study (Doc. Ref: SDL/HBC/I) has identified a shortage of affordable housing units within the Borough and here again, the 500 p.a. housing policy figure will provide a suitable supply of market developments from which the Borough can seek to negotiate supply to address this newly identified shortfall.

The proposed figure of 500 p.a. for Halton is therefore supported.

Halton supports the principle that the target proportion of housing to be delivered on previously developed land across the region be raised from 70% (RPG13 – Doc. Ref: REG8) to 80% in the RSS, however, the Council has concerns regarding the distribution of targets between housing areas. RPG13 divided the region into 7 sub-areas allocating "brownfield" targets of between 50 and 90%. Whilst, RSS divides the region into 17 housing typology areas and again allocates "brownfield" targets of between 50 and 90%.

Halton is concerned at the apparent lack of reference to the evidence base concerning potential brownfield supply in allocating brownfield targets. Many authorities are now faced with substantial rises in their allocated target, whilst others see no increase at all. In Halton's case, RPG13 sought an average of 65% brownfield completions across Merseyside (excluding Liverpool City) and Halton, i.e. across 5 districts. RSS now groups Halton with only 2 other authorities and seeks an average 80% brownfield target. This is apparently without reference to any evidential base that 80% is an achievable target across the 3 districts concerned.

The Merseyside Authorities, of which Halton is a member, have historically voiced concerns regarding the housing typologies in RHS (Doc Ref: HOU7), which have fed through into the allocations in Table 9.1. Whilst not yet adopted policy, draft PPS3 (Doc. Ref: PP3d) places significant weight on the identification of housing market and housing market assessments but a robust basis for this in the North West will not be developed for some time. As such, there should be an early review of policy L4 and accompanying allocations in Table 9.1 including both total numbers and indicative brownfield targets.

Halton Borough Council support the identification of the Mid Mersey as an area where 'provision of sufficient new residential development to support the potential for economic growth and local regeneration strategies (including replacement and renewal of housing stock), a wider range of general and high quality market housing (in sustainable locations which are well served by public transport), while at the same time ensuring the ability to meet local needs and requirements for affordable housing.'