

Report of	Meeting	Date
Director of Development and Regeneration (Introduced by the Executive Member for Economic Development and Regeneration Councillor P Malpas)	Executive Cabinet	09/08/07

NORTH WEST REGIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY – KEY POINTS FROM THE EXAMINATION IN PUBLIC PANEL’S REPORT

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. To set out the main recommendations of the Panel’s Report particularly in relation to the representations made by the Council and to explain the significance for the Borough.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

2. That representations be made to the Government Office for the North West expressing concerns about the Panel’s findings of deficiencies in the draft Regional Spatial Strategy and their recommendations concerning a partial review thereof. The Secretary of State is therefore urged to find ways to bridge these gaps so that Local Development Framework production can proceed to schedule on a firm strategic policy foundation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF REPORT

3. The Panel have rightly exposed the deficiencies with the draft Strategy but have generally stopped short of recommending changes to fill these gaps. They frequently refer to a further review, albeit a partial one, covering the missing bits. This alone would however leave many key policy areas unresolved for several years leaving local Development Framework documents with numerous strategic uncertainties to address. Research has been done in a number of areas which can be drawn upon to make the finalised Strategy more complete.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)

(If the recommendations are accepted)

4. To ensure the Government Office fully appreciates the concerns the Borough Council has and hopefully increase the chances of a more complete Regional Spatial Strategy being produced.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

5. The Council could wait to see what the Secretary of State’s Proposed Changes are but this would miss an opportunity to forewarn of the implications of the Panel’s recommendations at the local level and hopefully aid the resolve to find solutions now.

CORPORATE PRIORITIES

6. This report relates to the following Strategic Objectives:

Put Chorley at the heart of regional economic development in the central Lancashire sub region	4	Improved access to public services	
Improving equality of opportunity and life chance		Develop the character and feel of Chorley as a good place to live	4
Involving People in their Communities		Ensure Chorley is a performing Organisation	

BACKGROUND

7. The currently in force North West Regional Planning Guidance is in the process of being replaced by a new Regional Spatial Strategy for North West England. The procedure is for the Strategy to be first produced in draft by the Regional Assembly. This was done and submitted to Government in January 2006. There then followed a 12 week consultation stage. It was decided that the Borough Council would make joint representations with Preston and South Ribble Councils. The Executive Cabinet approved these at your meeting on 25 May 2006.
8. A Panel was then appointed (comprising the former Chief Planning Inspector for England and Wales and a currently serving Planning Inspector) to hear and consider evidence presented on key topics. The Panel sat from end of October 2006 to February 2007. Their report was published in May 2007. It contains a series of recommendations. Unlike the Local Development Framework process these recommendations do not have to be accepted by Government. It is the Secretary of State and not the Regional Assembly who will subsequently propose how the Strategy should be changed, in light of the Panel's recommendations, and ultimately approve the final document.
9. There is no formal opportunity to make representations on the Panel's findings. The next stage for such is when the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes are published – now expected to be at the end of October 2007. However the findings of the Panel are such that it is recommended the Council expresses its concerns now to the Government Office for the North West. This is because the Regional Spatial Strategy will have a profound influence on the preparation of the Local Development Framework. The latter must be in general conformity with Regional Strategy and should derive much of its strategic content there from. The main concerns stem from the deficiencies in the draft Regional Strategy and the delays this would cause to Local Development Framework production if a further review of the Regional Strategy is required to fill the gaps.

KEY POINTS FROM THE EXAMINATION IN PUBLIC PANEL REPORT

10. The Panel have identified a number of weaknesses in the draft Strategy which they consider can only be rectified through a further, albeit partial, review. The deficiencies are the following:
- the time period the strategy covers is too short;
 - housing policy needs more development including the identification of housing market areas;
 - affordable housing targets are needed;
 - district level employment land provision figures are required;
 - Key Service Centres need to be more consistently identified and defined better in policy terms;

- waste policies need developing especially, in identifying broad locations for facilities;
 - broad locations are needed for renewable energy policies;
 - the spatial distribution of accommodation for gypsies and travellers should be set out;
 - the concept of Green Infrastructure should be more developed.
11. Apart from the waste issue (which is a County matter) all the others have potentially serious implications for the preparation of Local Development Frameworks.
12. The joint representations made by Chorley, Preston and South Ribble Councils on the Draft Regional Spatial Strategy are summarised in bold type headings below and are followed by the Panel's response.

Recognise the status of the Central Lancashire City (Chorley, Preston and South Ribble) area as a key location for sustainable economic growth and within that reflect the strategic regional significance of Preston.

13. The Panel considered that the wider Central Lancashire City Region consists of four separate but linked and inter-dependent units based on Blackpool, Preston, Blackburn and Burnley. They chose not to place Preston in policy terms above the others, despite recognising its particular growth potential. Nor did they decide to reflect the economic driver role of Preston, South Ribble and Chorley combined. If accepted by Government this finding may reduce the scope for economic development in the three Council areas.
14. The Panel saw Preston as the primary centre within the city region, but did not consider it dominant in the way that Manchester and Liverpool are within their city regions. The Panel were not convinced that a new policy tier of settlement below Manchester and Liverpool should be created to include Preston (nor indeed Chester and Carlisle).
15. In retail terms the Panel thought that if Preston was to significantly increase its retail role in comparison to that of Blackpool or Blackburn then the polycentric character of the city region would be 'disturbed'. As a result only minor changes are proposed to the retail policy. This may restrict the scope for large city centre developments in Preston.
16. The Panel also did not favour the use of the term 'Central Lancashire City'. They preferred the term used in the draft Strategy of 'Greater Preston'. They thought Central Lancashire City 'suggests that the area in question dominates (and lends its name to) the Central Lancashire City Region. There can be little doubt that it lends its name and it remains to be seen what the Government concludes on the matter.

Clarify how changes can be made to the extent of Green Belts.

17. Only minor changes are proposed by the Panel to the policy referring to Green Belts. Their report proposes that the relevant policy should refer to a presumption against exceptional substantial strategic changes to the Green Belt thus reducing the possibility of these compared to the draft Strategy wording. At the local level the Panel advise that the scope of Local Development Frameworks to examine 'exceptional small scale detailed boundary changes' should be changed to replace 'small scale' with 'local' and there be reference to these being subject to prior agreement with the Assembly. Whether this clarifies the position on how localised Green Belt changes may be pursued is a moot point.
18. The Panel did however recognise the extensive Green Belt and the other countryside based designations within the Central Lancashire City Region as reflective of a key asset of the area and went on to propose an additional 'Green City' policy which advocates a wide range of protection and improvement provisions to the countryside and urban open spaces. This recommendation is to be welcomed.

Better explain what amounts of employment land are needed and split this down into district levels totals.

19. The Panel thought the different assumptions made about economic growth in different parts of the region were inconsistent and should instead be based on the same consistent assumptions used to predict new housing development requirements.
20. The Panel shared the concerns of many respondents that the employment land requirements should be disaggregated to the level of individual local planning authorities. They were however unable to recommend such figures due to a lack of necessary data so they propose this deficiency is to met through an early review of the Strategy. If local apportionment of employment land had to wait for such a review this would cause unacceptable delay.

Allow the overall amount of housing development proposed for Chorley, South Ribble and Preston to be shared between the three authorities' areas or failing that to equalise the amounts in South Ribble and Chorley to about 420 dwellings per year.

21. The Panel supported the equalisation of the South Ribble and Chorley housing provision figures. However, they did not recommend what the extent of housing market areas should be saying that this ought to be the subject of a further review of the Strategy. This means that the basis for establishing housing needs especially for affordable accommodation is left uncertain. The Panel concluded that a thorough assessment should be done prior to defining housing market area boundaries. Some GONW sponsored research does support a combined Preston, south Ribble and Chorley housing market area and this study should be used to inform the finalised Strategy.

Reduce the target for the proportion of new housing on brownfield land for Preston, Chorley and South Ribble from at least '80%' to 75%.

22. The Panel actually recommended the figure should be 70% - which is considered acceptable.

Clarify what scale of new development should be provided for in smaller towns and villages.

23. The Panel recognised that some research had been done on better defining which towns and villages should be designated as Key Service Centres but that this study came too late and insufficiently developed to be taken account of. The Panel propose a temporary partial solution based on the principles of this research pending the outcome of a review of this policy area. This would leave unnecessary uncertainty, the research already done should directly influence the finalised Strategy.
24. The Panel did specifically note that some Key Service Centres in the Central Lancashire City Region are substantial towns (Chorley and Leyland were cited as such) and stated each of these could accommodate a 'moderate amount' of development – a welcome conclusion.
25. Also recommended by the Panel was some clarification of what would amount to small scale development acceptable in Local Service Centres – that which would sustain local services, meet local needs or support local businesses. This is of some assistance.

Promote improvements to transport links and facilities for Preston, South Ribble and Chorley.

26. Aside from the Panel recognising that Preston railway and bus stations are important enough to be classed as Regional Gateways and Interchanges in the North West there is

no specific mention of additional improvements. The Preston-Chorley-Leyland-Greater Manchester public transport corridor was identified as being of regional significance in the draft Strategy but the approach now being advocated across the board is a general one with references to improving connections between the City Regions. It is not clear whether this approach will benefit Chorley, South Ribble and Preston.

Better justify the targets for renewable energy.

27. The Panel considered the Strategy does not give sufficient emphasis to climate change. As a result they propose changes to better justify the targets for renewable energy and put forward a more demanding threshold development size for when renewable energy generation should be sought. The Panel propose that for commercial development the threshold size should reduce from 1000 sq metres to 500 sq metres and for housing to reduce this from 10 or more units to 5 or more units. This is a sensible compromise approach for the region as a whole.

IMPLICATIONS OF REPORT

29. This report has implications in the following areas and the relevant Directors' comments are included:

Finance	√	Customer Services	
Human Resources		Equality and Diversity	
Legal	√		

COMMENTS OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

30. There are no direct financial implications associated with this report.

COMMENTS OF THE DIRECTOR OF CUSTOMER, DEMOCRATIC AND LEGAL SERVICES

31. There are no specific issues I wish to highlight.

JANE E MEEK
DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT AND REGENERATION

Background Papers			
Document	Date	File	Place of Inspection
Panel's Report on the North West Regional Spatial Strategy	May 2007	-	Union Street Offices

Report Author	Ext	Date	Doc ID
Julian Jackson	5280	18 July 2007	D&RREP/1807LM2