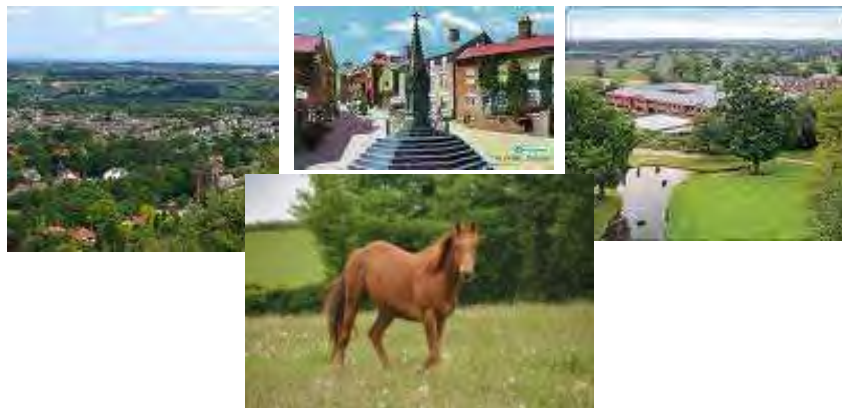


Cheshire West and Chester Council

Rural Regeneration Strategy and Action Plan

Adopted September 2011



Rural Innovation
live, work, thrive.



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Cheshire West and Chester Council

Rural Regeneration Strategy and Action Plan

Adopted September 2011

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Summary

1. Introduction

The Rural and Market Towns area represents approximately 85% of the total land area of the Borough, and is roughly 815 square km. In excess of 40% of the Borough's population lives in the rural area. It is important to recognise that the rural area covered by this Strategy extends beyond the countryside and smaller villages. It includes the larger villages of Malpas and Tarporley, and the towns of Frodsham, Helsby and Neston. It also includes areas which are close to the Borough's urban centres – such as Christleton, Weaverham, Cuddington and Willaston.

The rural areas of Cheshire West & Chester suffer from many of the same issues as other rural areas across England, including poor access to services, limited public transport, an ageing population and a critical lack of affordable housing. Despite the challenges affecting it, the rural area is an important asset. Its attractive natural and built environment, heritage and cultural infrastructure are a key part of the Borough's "value proposition" and significantly improve its quality of life offer. Cheshire West and Chester Council recognises that the rural area plays a key role in the character and economy of the county.

The Rural Regeneration Strategy (The Strategy), of which this is a summary, provides a framework which the Council will use to steer delivery of its regeneration services over the next 10 years. It will influence the way that it invests and supports its rural area, and the businesses, people and places within it. It sets out the Council's agreed approach to sustaining rural communities, the need for growth, and its views on the contribution that the rural area can make to improve the quality of life for all the Borough's residents.

The Strategy sets out a framework or road-map to guide the Council and its partners and assist CW&CC Regeneration Team with the preparation and implementation of its annual business plans.

The Council appointed a consultancy team, led by AMION Consulting¹ to work with relevant officers and Members to prepare the Strategy. Operationally it is "owned" by, and forms the basis of the Business Plan for, the Council's Rural Area and Market Town Programme Team.

The Council wants to use the Strategy as an opportunity to:

- maximise economic potential;
- create access to affordable living for rural communities;
- empower and connect rural communities; and
- capitalise on our environmental potential.

It is important to note that it is a *Regeneration Strategy* that has been prepared.

¹ The consultancy team also included Rural Innovation, GVA, Curtins Consulting and Analysys Mason.

**2. Strategic
context**

It therefore has an economic focus. It is not a Green Infrastructure Strategy, a Tourism Strategy or a Farming & Food Strategy. Nor is it a strategy focused on the local economies of the larger rural towns.

The Strategy sits as part of the evidence base and strategic framework supporting the Local Development Framework. It will be one of a series of strategies – including the Green Infrastructure Strategy, the Local Transport Plan and the Housing Strategy. The Local Development Framework will set the policy context for the future of the authority, and for addressing issues raised in the Rural Regeneration Strategy. It is therefore important to be clear that the strategy influences the Local Development Framework but does not set it.

The Council has an aspiration for growth involving an increase in population, housing, the local economy (measured by GVA) and employment. New development should be used to underpin local services, increase access to affordable and suitable housing for those excluded by market conditions, and attract younger working age residents into the area to improve the demographic profile of the local population.

The focus on economic growth will provide an incentive for the Council and its partners to create the conditions in which local enterprise can thrive. In the rural context this will mean providing positive and enabling planning policies which encourage sustainable economic development at farm scale, in villages and in the rural towns. It should also mean a focus on provision of high speed broadband, on improving the transport infrastructure and availability of public transport in the rural area and on a long term strategy for the generation and consumption of affordable and sustainable energy.

At the same time, it will be necessary to consider, and address, pressures which may damage the area's natural and heritage environment. These will arise from development, but also from other issues such as the economic challenges faced by many farming businesses, the significant reduction in funds available to nature conservation and heritage organisations and the continuing impact on biodiversity and habitats of modern living – particularly the continual movement of people, goods and services.

**3. Regeneration
challenges**

The evidence base, which is included in the Strategy as a technical appendix, shows that Cheshire West & Chester's rural communities face some serious threats to their long term sustainability.

These include:

- population imbalance;
- a shortage of the right sort of housing;
- unaffordable housing;
- withdrawal of services;

- limited economic opportunity;
- economic infrastructure including inadequate broadband coverage in many areas; and
- the increasing cost of fuel and energy.

**4. What a
growth-based
strategy
means**

Reversing the likely impact of these challenges requires positive remedial action. It is clear from the evidence that if the Borough's rural communities are to have a viable and sustainable future it will be necessary to allow, and help them, to grow. However, a readiness to plan for growth absolutely does not mean a planning free-for-all. Growth simply for the sake of adding houses will not be likely to address the key challenges outlined above.

Based on the evidence reviewed in developing the strategy and the analysis of the population, of inward migration trends and of the requirements of the knowledge sector (so important to Cheshire West and its residents) it would seem reasonable to conclude that growth of 15% in the number of dwellings and households in the rural area, which equates to 8,000 new homes in the 20 year period between 2011 and 2030, is the minimum necessary to address the challenges identified.

**5. Achieving
economic
growth**

Growth in the number of households is important, but will not be sufficient to secure the increase in the scale of economic output that is required if the Borough is to meet its growth ambitions.

The evidence shows that the rural area has been making a disproportionate contribution to Cheshire West and Chester's economic growth over the past few years. The rural area has the potential to continue this growth. Growth of 7% in the number of jobs available in the rural area (the preliminary target of the Cheshire & Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership) would increase the ratio of jobs available to the working age population in the rural area to a figure broadly in line with the current average for the Borough as a whole. An additional 7% growth equates to a further 3,800 jobs being created in the rural area over the next 20 years.

Simply creating an additional 3,800 jobs in the rural area will not be enough to ensure that the rural area makes a proportionate contribution to the Borough's economic growth ambitions. To do this, the rural economy must also increase the value of its economic output by 50%, making it necessary to significantly increase the value of economic output created by each job. This can be achieved in part by attracting new businesses which operate in higher value sectors and markets but will also require existing companies (of low, medium and high output values) to increase their productivity by adding value to their output and exchanging lower value for higher value activity.

**6. The role of the
Council**

The Council and its partners will need to be innovative and to leverage every possible means of attracting and enabling investment in the rural area. The role

7. Key ambitions and approaches

of the Council is threefold:

- it should lead on acquisition of funds for investment;
- it should make best use of its own assets to stimulate and attract investment; and
- it should provide the necessary enabling support, leadership and policy context to give the best possible opportunity to community groups, entrepreneurs and individuals to benefit from private investment in their businesses and communities.

In particular, in respect of the Council's enabling role, it should strive to provide the conditions, and support, to enable local activity and investment. It can do this by:

- a) creating policies within the Local Development Framework which maintain an attitude to development management which facilitates appropriate development and attracts entrepreneurs; and
- b) organising the way it does business so that many of its technical functions are outward facing and outcome focused.

This level of change will not happen without a positive strategic framework, and it must be managed. The Council believes that the key ambitions and approaches set out below will help to shape the actions necessary to implement the Strategy, and the manner in which they are best delivered.

- attract and retain an additional 17,000 young people, families and people of working age within the rural area;
- meet the housing needs of the rural population through the provision of new homes which are well-designed, energy efficient, affordable and suitable for young people, families and the elderly;
- safeguard local services, cultural and community facilities and maximised their contribution to the vitality of rural communities;
- support sustainable economic development across the rural area, securing an additional 3,800 jobs, improving the competitiveness of local businesses and providing the conditions where enterprise can flourish;
- address market failure where it affects quality of life and economic success - the provision of public transport services and high speed broadband;
- reduce the consumption of fossil fuels and the related CO² emissions by 37% by 2020 (relative to 1990 levels); and
- protect the natural and historic environment, cultural and heritage assets and ensure that they are preserved for the enjoyment and benefit of future generations.

**8. Thematic
strategies and
actions**

By adopting this Strategy the Council will commit to new ways of working and will:

- create and manage a positive and enabling planning framework which provides for smart growth in the rural area whilst ensuring the protection of the natural and historic environment;
- create an approach to asset management, spatial and investment planning which will enable local people to shape the future of their communities and to take responsibility and ownership of actions and investment which will secure their long term vitality;
- create a new structure for rural governance which will ensure that a single and strong rural voice is heard within the Borough's strategic and technical decision-making forums; and
- manage and utilise public assets in the rural area in a manner that will support the ambitions and plans of local communities and that ensures that they make the best possible contribution to the vision, objectives and ambitions embedded in the Strategy.

The Strategy includes a series of thematic strategies and actions :

- Accessibility
- Housing
- Enterprise, innovation and skills
- High speed broadband
- New ways of working
- Energy and climate change
- Natural and historic environment

It also provides recommendations in respect of the implementation and delivery elements of the Strategy. It is designed to inform the Business Plan for the Rural Area Regeneration Team and the proposed Rural Area Partnership Board. It is recommended that the (new) rural Area Partnership Board should manage and monitor progress made in delivering the strategy, whilst ensuring that it remains relevant and is supported by rural communities.

**9. Accessibility
theme
highlighted as
an example of
the Strategy's
focus on
solutions**

Within each of the themes referred to in section 8 above, there are many suggested interventions and actions but of particular note is the proposal for a Rural Metro. This involves the creation of hubs for the delivery of services at or near schools. The hubs proposed are where there is the most likelihood of linked trips, that is, a journey from the rural community to a council service hub, education facility, health centre or employment opportunity. Hubs therefore minimise the need for travel altogether or ensure efficiency by encouraging

linked trips to key services. The diagram in figure (i) below demonstrates the proposed hubs forming part of a “Rural Metro” concept.

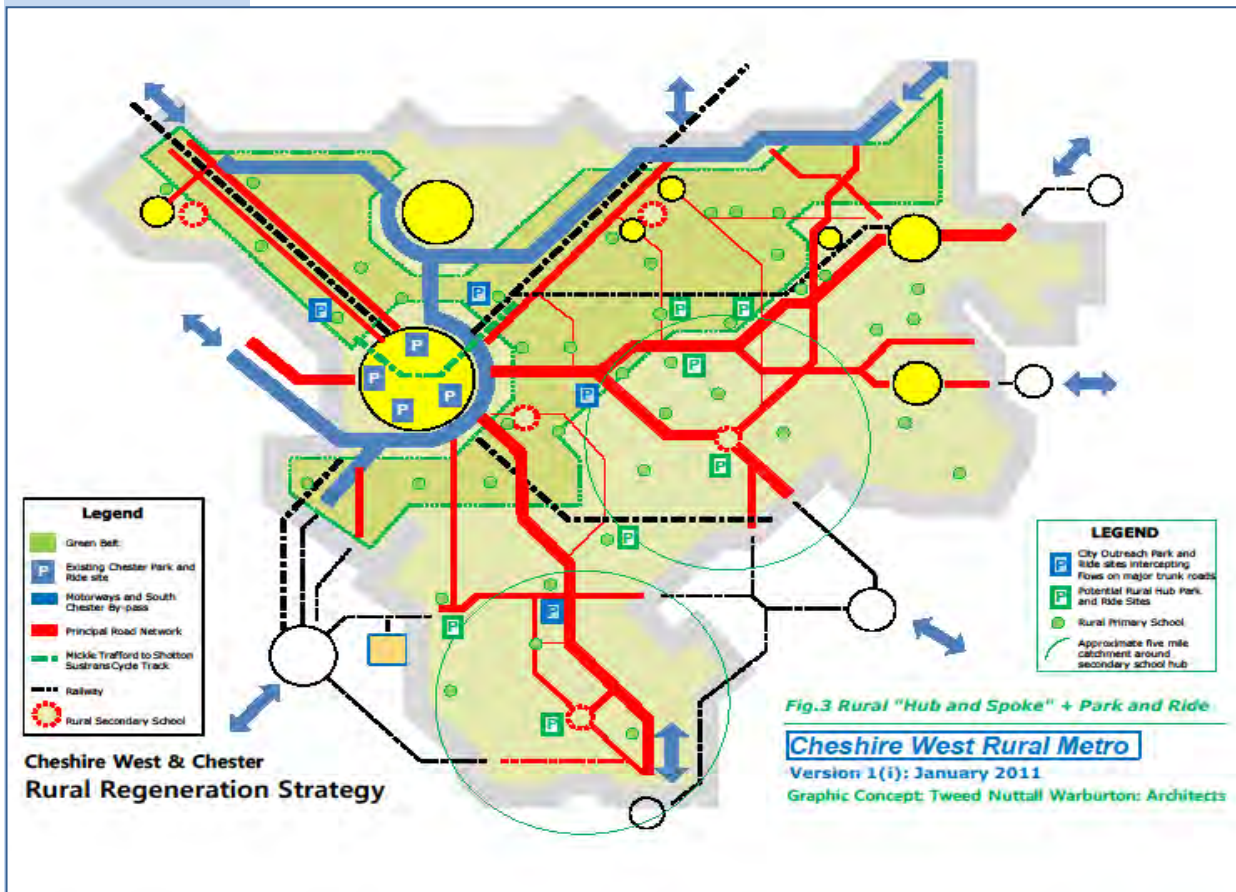
Hubs on their own cannot be successful unless they are accessible and whilst secondary schools are generally accessible, improvements are required to ensure the locations can operate as service centres. Given the challenging operating conditions facing traditional public transport services in rural areas, the Strategy recommends that community transport initiatives will have a significant role to play, involving a ‘Community Interest Company’ that is formed by a third party not currently involved with the existing Community Transport operators. In line with the localism agenda, it is envisaged that existing local assets can be used more efficiently by employing them in a number of uses. For example the school bus can be used to take children to school as normal. Once finished the bus could be employed to circulate rural settlements in the vicinity of the hub to provide a regular service. Social service vehicles and other local assets could be employed in the same way.

Furthermore, a key element of the proposed Rural Metro is centred on park and ride. This has been a great success in Chester with four existing facilities located on the outskirts of the City. These sites were designed to help reduce congestion in urban areas and on busy commuter roads and to encourage the use of public transport. It is envisaged in the Strategy that the park and ride concept could be extended to include additional sites that are located in key outreach locations that are approximately five miles away from the city centre.

Potential locations include the areas around Saughall, Mickel Trafford and Tarvin, where the A51 splits to form the A54. The area around Ashton Hayes and Delamere currently has particularly low levels of accessibility to key services by existing forms of public transport. Given the character of the area, traditional public transport options are unlikely to be feasible and therefore this is considered to be a good location for a rural park and ride facility to serve the north east areas of Cheshire West and Chester. Similarly, Tarporley is considered to be a good location for serving the eastern areas of Cheshire West and Chester.

Tattenhall, Farndon, Broxton and Malpas are all located to the south of Chester and suffer from low levels of accessibility to services. A park and ride location in one or more of these areas would greatly enhance accessibility in the largely rural area. Furthermore, the Tattenhall, Malpas site and Broxton site could tie into existing public transport services such as the number 41 and 41A buses which serve Chester, Waverton, Tattenhall and Whitchurch. In total, nine potential park and ride sites have been suggested by the rural Metro part of the Strategy.

Figure(i) : Cheshire West Rural Metro



**10.
Implementation
and delivery*****Governance***

Another key recommendation of the Strategy is that the Rural West APB should be remodelled into a Cheshire West Rural Partnership Board and that Northwich and Rural North and Winsford and Rural East APBs should remain as they are but should cease to deal with rural issues and focus on the towns of Northwich and Winsford.

Positive planning framework

The Strategy seeks to support the development of the Local Development Framework by setting a series of “asks” required to enable delivery. Central to these are the need for a planning framework that positively enables growth to improve the future vitality and sustainability of rural settlements and communities and to ensure that rural communities be enabled to plan for their own future.

Monitoring and evaluation

The Strategy identifies the importance of establishing and implementing a monitoring and evaluation framework in respect of actions taken as a consequence of the Strategy. It sets out recommendations for implementing a framework consistent with the best practice already established by the Council in other activity and service areas.

March 2011

PART ONE: Establishing a Vision

1 Introduction

This short introductory section sets out what and who the Rural Regeneration Strategy and Action Plan (the Strategy) is for, why the Council has developed it and how they intend that it should be used. It provides some definition and context of the rural area, makes links between the Strategy and other key documents and explains where the Strategy sits within the Council.

Cheshire West and Chester Council has identified four regeneration programme areas. These provide a place based focus for much of its activity. The Rural and Market Towns area represents approximately 85% of the total land area, roughly 815 square km. In excess of 40% of the Borough's population lives in the rural area. It is important to recognise that the rural area covered by this Strategy extends beyond the countryside and smaller villages. It includes the larger villages of Malpas and Tarporley, and the towns of Frodsham, Helsby and Neston. It also includes areas which are close to the Borough's urban centres – such as Christleton, Weaverham and Willaston.

Figure 1.1: Map of the Rural Area



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The rural areas of Cheshire West & Chester suffer from many of the same issues as other rural areas across England, including poor access to services, limited public transport, an ageing population and a critical lack of affordable housing. Despite the challenges affecting it, the rural area is an important asset. Its attractive natural and built environment, heritage and cultural

infrastructure are a key part of the Borough's "value proposition" and significantly improve its quality of life offer. Cheshire West and Chester Council recognises that the rural area plays a key role in the character and economy of the county.

This Strategy provides a framework which the Council will use to steer delivery of its regeneration services over the next 10 years. It will influence the way that it invests and supports its rural area, and the businesses, people and places within it. It sets out the Council's agreed approach to sustaining rural communities, the need for growth, and its views on the contribution that the rural area can make to improve the quality of life for all the Borough's residents.

The Strategy will be the basis of the Business Plan for the Rural Area Regeneration Team. The Rural Regeneration Team and Area Partnership Team will work to put in place a suitable governance structure (see Section 8 below) that will manage and monitor progress made in delivering the strategy, whilst ensuring that remains relevant and is supported by rural communities. The Council wants to use the Strategy as an opportunity to:

- maximise economic potential;
- create access to affordable living for rural communities;
- empower and connect rural communities; and
- capitalise on our environmental potential.

It is important to note that this is a Regeneration Strategy. It therefore has an economic focus. It is not a Green Infrastructure Strategy, a Tourism Strategy or a Farming & Food Strategy. Nor is it a strategy focused on the local economies of the larger rural towns.

1.1.1 Scope of the Strategy

The Strategy covers all parts of the rural area – town, village, farmland, woodland, hill and river. It considers the rural area as a constituent part of the Borough. Critically it also considers the rural area within the context of wider economic geography – taking account of overarching conditions which influence economic activity across the Borough and the sub-region. It does not focus exclusively on specific rural sectors – such as farming or tourism – but seeks to provide a framework which will enable an enhanced economic contribution from the rural area as a whole.

The Strategy is deeply concerned with the long term sustainability of the rural area, and therefore includes strategies and actions which seek to improve the viability and vitality of rural communities and the quality of life of rural residents (current and future).

The Strategy is founded on evidence and consultation. As such it will be an important influence on the Council's new Local Development Framework. It will also be used to inform and influence key delivery plans such as the Growth Point Plan, the Local Transport Plan and the Property, Leisure and Housing asset reviews.

1.1.2 Consultation workshops and other consultation

The Strategy has been prepared by a consultancy team led by AMION Consulting, working in close partnership with CW&CC officers in Rural Regeneration, Spatial Planning and other relevant areas of the Council. Working in partnership with CW&CC officers initial consultations were carried out with a wide range of relevant stakeholders, including representatives of the Council, partner organisations and rural communities. Through initial consultation and associated baseline analysis a series of emerging priorities were identified.

Emerging priorities were tested at a series of workshops, held between the 26th October and the 3rd of November 2010. The priorities were presented to a range of key stakeholders including CW&CC officers, Councillors and Parish Councillors, representatives of local businesses and charities and other relevant parties. The identification and invitation of potential stakeholders was coordinated by officers within Rural Regeneration Team within CW&CC. Feedback, coordinated through group discussion sessions, provided a challenge in respect of the completeness and appropriateness of the priorities, and allowed participants to identify specific constraints and opportunities around which action could be focused. A detailed review of the workshop consultation is set out in Appendix C to this strategy.

1.1.3 Ownership of the Strategy

The Strategy has been commissioned, prepared and adopted by Cheshire West & Chester Council. Its “champion” within the Council is the Prosperity Portfolio Holder. Although prepared by a consultancy team led by AMION Consulting², operationally it is “owned” by, and forms the basis of the Business Plan for, the Rural Area and Market Town Programme Team. Responsibility for delivering the Strategy is not retained exclusively by this team however. The cross-cutting nature of the Strategy is such that it will also influence and guide the work of many other teams across the Council, particularly in housing, planning, economic development and transport.

The Strategy is not purely a Council document however. It is relevant to a wide range of stakeholders, including the businesses, town and parish councils and communities of the rural area, many of whom have been involved in its creation. The Council will make the Strategy widely available and it is hoped that businesses and community groups with an interest in the rural area will find it useful.

The Strategy will also guide the work of the Rural Area Partnership Board, and consequently the private, public and civic sector organisations that sit upon it.

1.1.4 The Strategy’s evidence base

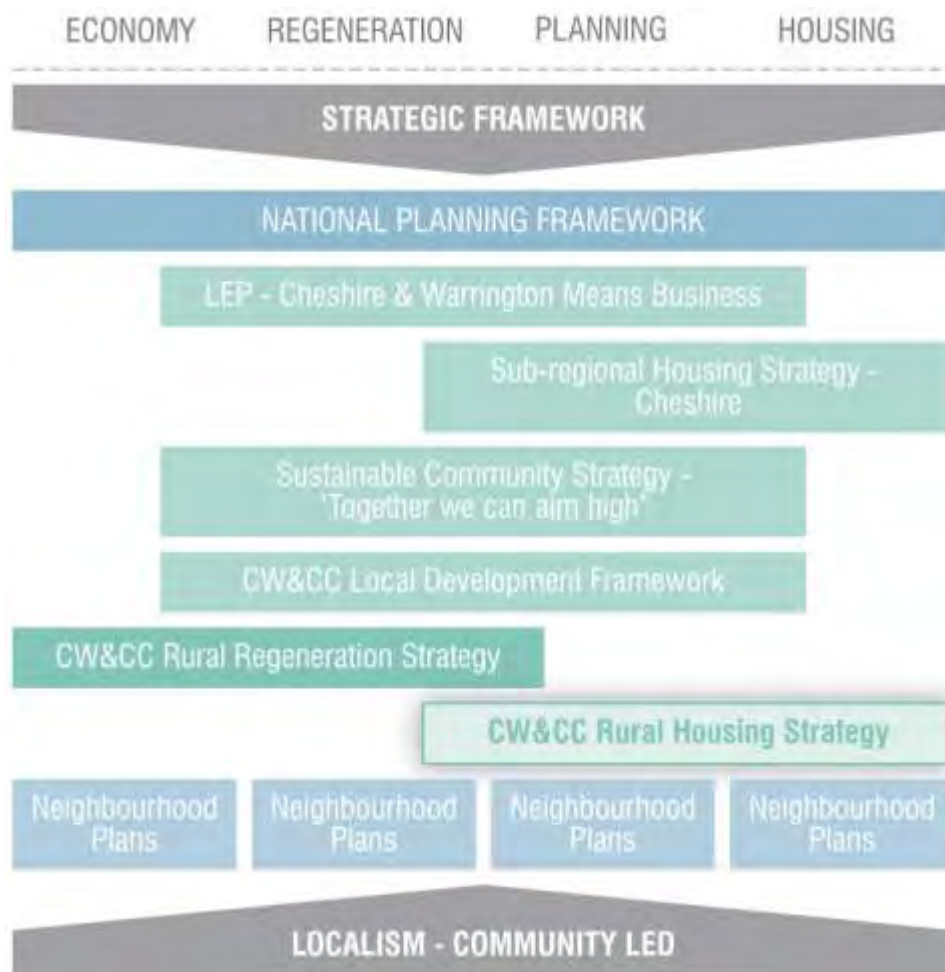
The evidence base prepared to support the Strategy will be of particular value to communities and neighbourhoods as they consider and shape their own futures. Every effort has been made to ensure that the data and evidence gathered to inform the development of the Strategy will be made available for independent use and analysis.

² The consultancy team included AMION Consulting, Rural Innovation, GVA, Curtins and Analysys Mason

1.2 Strategic fit

Figure 1.2 below shows how the Rural Regeneration Strategy sits as part of the evidence base and strategic framework supporting the Local Development Plan. It will be one of a series of Strategies – including the Green Infrastructure Strategy, the Local Transport Plan and the Housing Strategy.

Figure 1.2: Evidence base and strategic framework



In addition to forming part of the evidence base of the Local Plan, the Strategy will act as a guiding document for the work of the Area Based Regeneration Programme Teams.

1.3 Strategic context - overview

A full review of the policy context in which the Strategy will operate has been carried out to inform its development. A full summary of the strategic context is provided in the Technical Appendix A. It reviews the recent European Growth Strategy and actions of the Coalition Government around deficit reduction, its commitment to the Big Society and to an approach

based on localism. It reviews the current and emerging spatial planning context and moves on to consider the Government's new approach to local economic development and the ambitions for growth set out by the Council and its partners in their prospectus for a sub-regional Local Enterprise Partnership. The sections below consider the main thrust of this context and its relevance to the Rural Regeneration and the way in which it will need to respond.

Emerging local planning policy

The Borough is in the process of writing a new Local Development Framework. It has published an Issues and Options paper which recognises that some development in rural areas is likely to be necessary. It identifies increased pressure for development in rural areas and suggested that the need to protect the countryside must be balanced with achieving thriving rural communities. It also recognises that more remote areas will need more innovative and flexible solutions to development needs and that local development documents should include criteria for permitting the re-use of buildings in the countryside, in line with government advice in PPS7.

The Council expects to publish a draft Core Strategy for consultation in early 2012. This Strategy will part of the evidence base that informs the draft Core Strategy and will enable stakeholders and interested parties to prepare an informed and evidence based response.

1.4 What implications does this strategic context have for the Strategy?

The growth agenda will provide an opportunity to increase the population and number of homes in the rural area. It will be important that this is achieved in a manner which maintains and enhances the viability and vitality of local communities. Too often in the past residential development in rural settlements has led to growth without a commensurate improvement in local sustainability. This time around new development should be used to underpin local services, increase access to affordable and suitable housing for those excluded by market conditions, and to improve the demographic profile of the local population.

The focus on economic growth will provide an incentive for the Council and its partners to create the conditions in which local enterprise can thrive. In the rural context this will mean providing positive and enabling planning policies which encourage sustainable economic development at farm scale, in villages and in the rural towns. It should also mean a focus on provision of high speed broadband, on improving the transport infrastructure and availability of public transport in the rural area and on a long term strategy for the generation and consumption of affordable and sustainable energy.

EU and UK Government commitments to ambitious targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increases in the generation and consumption of renewable energy will mean that the Borough will need to play its part around this agenda.

The level of increase in economic performance required means that the Borough will have to attract new businesses, entrepreneurs and skilled workers as well as improving the output from its existing business stock. The rural area is a key part of the Borough's value proposition to inward investors. Consideration should therefore be given to the inward investment value of its rural towns and villages when making decisions around services and infrastructure.

The transition to a smaller state may have implications for the way that public, cultural and leisure services are delivered across the rural area. Some facilities, such as libraries, small schools and out-reach centres, may be threatened by efficiency savings. This pressure makes it even more important that development is distributed, and designed, in a way that safeguards vulnerable local services. The Government's focus on localism and initiatives such as the Community Right to Challenge³ and the Community Right to Buy may provide opportunities for public service delivery organisations to work with local communities and the civic sector to develop collaborative local solutions to maintain and safeguard services.

The localism agenda puts engagement and collaborative working with communities at the centre of the way that the council (and its public sector partners) does business. There is strong local capacity across much of the rural area and a history of effective community scale activity (including community led planning and local investment). The area benefits from a well developed voluntary and community sector with strong support from organisations such as Cheshire Community Action and the Cheshire Association of Local Councils. This capacity will not be universal however, and that which exists may not be capable of embracing some of the opportunities and responsibilities to be introduced in the Localism and Decentralisation Bill. There is likely to be a need to invest in "capacity building" across all rural communities, and for the Council (and its partners) to re-configure the way that they go about their business in order to embrace the shift to localism.

Finally, alongside planning for growth it will of course be necessary to consider, and address, pressures which may damage the area's natural and heritage environment. These will come from development, but also from other areas such as the economic challenges faced by many farming businesses, the significant reduction in funds available to nature conservation and heritage organisations and the continuing impact on biodiversity and habitats of modern living – particularly the continual movement of people, goods and services.

³

The Community Right to Challenge and the Community Right to Buy are to be introduced in the Localism and Decentralisation Bill. The Right to Challenge will enable local communities to challenge the withdrawal of a service and to express an interest in running that service. The Right to Buy will enable communities to acquire buildings of community value in the event of their disposal by a Local Authority

2 Understanding rural Cheshire West and Chester

2.1 A complex geography

The rural area of Cheshire West and Chester is far from homogeneous. Whilst the people and places of the rural area share some characteristics – an older population, larger more expensive housing stock, limited access to public transport – there are significant local variations. In reality Cheshire West & Chester is a geographically and culturally diverse Borough. The same is true for the rural area where local conditions are influenced by geography and topography as well as by culture and transport infrastructure.

The rural area hosts over 100 settlements. These differ in size from towns with over a population of over 10,000 (Neston) to small hamlets with a handful of dwellings and no services. These settlements sit within a wider geography with differing topography, history and infrastructure. The way that rural settlements work is heavily influenced by the historic pattern of development, their situation relative to key transport networks, the proximity of other, larger centres and the siting of key services such as secondary schools.

To enable a ‘finer grained’ analysis, it is therefore helpful to consider the rural area of Cheshire West and Chester as a series of “zones”, each defined by its geography and its relationship with key towns both within Cheshire West and Chester and in other areas. Whilst these different parts of the rural area all share a number of common challenges and characteristics, their geographical and cultural contexts vary. In demonstrating variance across the rural area the baseline analysis highlights the importance of ensuring that actions are appropriately targeted to address evidenced local need. This approach has been adopted in developing proposals for the Rural Metro, set out in Section 7.2.

2.1.1 *Weaver Valley Towns*

The area to the east of the Borough which stretches from its eastern boundary to the A49 includes the larger villages of Sandiway & Cuddington together with a series of smaller settlements. There is no “rural” secondary school or dominant rural service centre in this area. The main influence of travel to work patterns and service access within the Borough are the towns of Northwich and Winsford. People living in this area also have strong travel to work relationships beyond the Borough, mainly to the east.

2.1.2 *Frodsham & Helsby / M56 Corridor*

An area to the north of the Borough centred on the towns of Frodsham and Helsby reaching south down towards Delamere and south west towards Chester along the A54. There is a rural secondary school at Helsby and a wide range of services, including access to the rail network, at Frodsham. The area lies entirely within the Cheshire Green Belt. Proximity to the motorway and access to the rail networks means that many people that live in this area travel out of the Borough to work, often to Warrington and Runcorn but also to Manchester and Merseyside.

2.1.3 Neston and Parkgate

An area to the north west of the Borough centred on the town of Neston and its neighbouring larger villages (Burton, Parkgate and Willaston) has strong cultural and economic links to Wirral and Merseyside. Connectivity with Chester and Ellesmere Port is far more limited. Neston is the largest settlement in the rural area and in many ways does not consider itself to be rural. The countryside and villages beyond Neston are situated within the Cheshire Green Belt.

2.1.4 Chester and Ellesmere Port hinterland

An area which wraps around Chester from the A5117 in the north, incorporates villages to the east of Chester ring road extending eastwards towards Tarvin and wraps around the south of the city to the take in villages within the Cheshire Green Belt like Waverton, Saighton, Aldford and Doddleston. Chester is the dominant centre in this area and the major influence on travel to work patterns and the way that people access services. There is a rural secondary school at Christleton, just to the east of the Chester ring road.

2.1.5 Rural corridor

A zone lying between the main urban areas of Chester and Ellesmere Port to the west and the Weaver towns to the east, and extending from the south to the north. This area includes Delamere Forest, together with a number of larger villages which benefit from a range of services such as Tarporley, Kelsall, Tarvin and Tattenhall has strong east / west transport links – based on the A51 and A54 and the railway (with stations at Delamere and Mouldsworth). There is no dominant service centre in this area however there is a rural secondary school and a strong local retail centre at Tarporley. To the south, this area is the most sparsely populated part of the Borough and the most peripheral. Its border with Wales to the west means that it is literally on the edge of the map for many providers of public services. The major local service centre is Malpas, which has a secondary school and a wide range of services, despite being relatively small.

2.2 Regeneration challenges

This section considers the main challenges that the Strategy will need to address. The issues identified are based upon the findings from the evidence review. This review, which involved the analysis of a wide range of indicators, is set out in Appendix A. The challenges identified through this review have been tested during the initial consultation process and received consistent support as issues crucial to the successful future of the rural area.

The evidence shows that Cheshire West & Chester's rural communities face some serious threats to their long term sustainability. These include:

- population imbalance;
- a shortage of the right sort of housing;

- unaffordable housing;
- withdrawal of services;
- limited economic opportunity;
- economic infrastructure; and
- increasing cost of fuel and energy

2.2.1 Population imbalance

The populations of many rural communities are out of balance; put simply there are too many people over the age of 45 and too few under the age of 45. This imbalance is forecast to get far worse, with the proportion of the population that is of retirement age increasing by around 6% over the next ten years whilst the proportion of people of school age and of working age reduce commensurately. This imbalance threatens the future vitality of the rural communities and their ability to maintain valuable local services – such as nursery's, primary schools and libraries - in the future. It also has serious implications for local economies as the pool of labour diminishes.

2.2.2 Shortage of housing

The rural area has its fair share of housing – 40% of dwellings for 40% of the population – but it does not have enough of the right sort of houses. There are too many big houses and not enough small ones. Around 45% of the rural housing stock is detached, compared to only 36% across the Borough as a whole.

This lack of small houses is a barrier to young people and families making their home in rural communities. It also causes problems for established rural residents ready to “downsize” – many have no option but to remain in their larger properties if they want to stay in the local area. This causes a further constraint on the ability of younger people to live in the rural area and so contributes to and exacerbates the problem of population imbalance.

2.2.3 Unaffordable housing

Much of the housing that is available to rent or buy in the rural area is unaffordable to many people. Housing in the rural area is amongst the most expensive in the Borough – the average price of a home in the rural area is £263,729 compared to £203,535 for the Borough as a whole.

The cost of many homes in the rural area is beyond those reliant on local earnings and the earnings of many of those early in their careers. The average “lower quartile” income in the rural area is £22,622, more than ten times less than the cost of the average house.

The unaffordability of housing in the rural area further compounds the imbalance in the population and makes this problem even less likely to be addressed.

2.2.4 *Withdrawal of services*

Cheshire West and Chester's rural area includes some villages which have managed to retain a wide range of local services⁴. Naturally the larger towns of Neston and Frodsham are well served with shopping, workspace, health care and education services and community facilities. Many of the larger villages are also well served – places like Tarporley, Malpas, Tattenhall, Kelsall, Tarvin and Weaverham have retained vibrant village centres, libraries, schools, healthcare and community facilities.

Other smaller villages have lost the bulk of their key services. Whilst many still have primary schools, large numbers of local pubs and shops have closed, few have managed to retain post offices, banks or GP surgeries. Public transport services are limited and connections with anywhere other than Chester or the main towns practically non-existent.

All local services matter to rural communities, and holding on to those that remain is vitally important. The future of these services is far from guaranteed however. Reductions in public spending will bring increasing pressure to centralise services; there is particular concern that subsidized rural bus services will be particularly affected. Falling numbers of school age children and the increasing ageing of incumbent volunteers will add to pressure on small schools and local community groups.

2.2.5 *Limited local economic opportunity*

The evidence shows that the rural area makes a valuable economic contribution to the Borough. It hosts 54,000 of the 153,000 jobs in the Borough. It includes some important employment sites such as Chowley Oak Business Park near Tattenhall, Weaver Park Industrial Estate at Frodsham, Monument Park at Farndon and Portal Business Park at Tarporley.

Analysis of the distribution of creative and service based businesses in the CWEA Employment Land Study shows that economic activity is dispersed across the rural area, including within the green belt. Clusters of firms can be seen in many of the larger villages such as Farndon, Tattenhall, Tarvin, Kelsall, Tarporley, Malpas and Willaston as well as in the two rural towns of Frodsham and Neston.

Leading estates such as Grosvenor and Bolesworth have converted many redundant agricultural buildings, and some houses, to workspace. Together these two estates host nearly 1,500 jobs in the rural area. They continue to experience significant demand for workspace and have maintained rental values throughout the recession.

The sectoral mix of rural economic activity mirrors that found across the remainder of the Borough. The dominant sectors of private enterprise are financial & insurance services and retail & hospitality. Construction is also an important sector, particularly in the south of the rural area. Farming businesses are spread across the Borough, many hosting large dairy herds. Many farming businesses have diversified into food production – such as ice cream – and rural

⁴ A matrix showing services in 80 settlements in Cheshire West and Chester is available on the Cheshire West & Chester Council consultation portal. It is accessible via this [link](#).

tourism. Consequently there are some major visitor attractions in the rural area such as Delamere Forest, which attracts over 1 million visitors each year, Ness Gardens and the Ice Farm at Tattenhall.

The economic structure of much of the rural area (the exception being parts of the Chester and Ellesmere Port hinterland) differs from that of the urban area in a number of important ways however:

- a different occupational mix in terms of skills available in the local labour market;
- a higher incidence of self employment;
- a different size distribution of firms with micro-firms and sole proprietorships being more common;
- a different size distribution of places; and
- different influences of geography around proximity to markets.

These characteristics mean that overall economic contribution of the rural area to the Borough is limited by the scale of activity and the relatively small size of many rural businesses.

The rural area is not “self sufficient” in terms of employment. There are nearly 77,000 people of working age in the rural area but only 54,000 jobs. The jobs that are available are not spread evenly around the rural area. Of these 54,000 jobs some 20,500 (38%) are situated on the fringes of Chester and Ellesmere Port and 16,800 (31%) are situated in the area immediately surrounding the Weaver Valley towns of Northwich and Winsford. As a consequence, there are only 16,700 jobs available locally for the 34,800 people of working age that live in the remaining rural area - a ratio of just 0.48.

Therefore, many people of working age travel away from their local area for work each day. The evidence shows that only 42% of travel to work journeys made in the rural area are less than 10km in length. This compares to 53% of journeys in Cheshire West & Chester and 63% of journeys in the North West.

2.2.6 Economic assets and infrastructure

Rural Cheshire West & Chester is well equipped to host enterprise and economic activity. The evidence shows that where there has been investment in workspace in the rural area it has usually been successful. Employment in the rural area increased by 3% between 2003 and 2008, whilst the total number of jobs in the Borough fell very slightly during the same period.

Future growth will be threatened by failure to provide additional workspace and to invest in the next generation of economic infrastructure. The Rural Workspace Study by BE Group found that whilst the market for office space in the rural area was well supplied, agents reported a shortage of smaller workshops (0-100 m²) and space to support light industrial activity. The Analysys Mason study carried out as part of the background evidence work for this Strategy shows that the market will not bring forward comprehensive high speed broadband access in the rural area. Investment will also be required in transport infrastructure. Investigation by Curtins consultants found that less densely populated rural areas are too small to support

significant local bus networks and that consequently accessing employment or education via public transport was difficult or impossible.

Alongside assets and infrastructure, the availability of targeted business assistance for and skills development for the local workforce will also have a significant bearing on future growth. The importance of ensuring that infrastructure provision is coordinated with other forms of support is reflected in actions set out in Section 7.4 of the strategy.

2.2.7 Uncertain farming future

Britain's dairy industry is facing an uncertain future. Currently the cost of milk production remains above the average price received by dairy farmers. Looking ahead farm businesses continue to face significant cost inflation as the price of feed, fuel and fertiliser is pushed ever upward by increasing global demand for food and the actions of the world's commodity markets.

These economic pressures on farm businesses are likely to lead to increased pressures on the land that they occupy. Farmers will be forced to become ever more efficient, which for many will mean more intensive. This may lead to larger dairy herds, producing more waste as well as milk with an inevitable additional impact on the quality of life of their neighbours. They may also put more pressure on the land which is farmed, exacerbating the impact on biodiversity of mono-culture and the increased use of inorganic fertilisers, and altering the farming landscape upon which growth in the visitor economy is highly dependent.

2.2.8 Increasing costs of fuel and energy

Evidence produced by Government for the Low Carbon Action Plan forecasts rises in excess of 30% in the cost of hydro-carbon based fuels in the next ten years. Rapidly escalating costs of fossil based fuels and energy will have an increasing impact on the competitiveness of businesses (and the quality of life of residents) situated in the rural area.

Poor access to high speed broadband and public transport will exacerbate the problem.

3 The case for growth

3.1 Introduction

This section sets out how growth in housing numbers and population will be necessary to address the regeneration challenges outline above. It considers the scale of growth needed and whether this is appropriate or achievable in the rural area. It provides some conclusions about the scale of housing growth that this strategy, the Local Development Framework and the Rural Housing Strategy should aim to achieve.

Reversing the likely impact of these challenges requires positive remedial action. It is clear from the evidence that if our rural communities are to have a viable and sustainable future it will be necessary to allow, and help them, to grow. A readiness to plan for growth absolutely does not mean a planning free-for-all however. Growth simply for the sake of adding houses will not be likely to address the key challenges outlined above.

The rural area has seen some growth in the last ten years. Council Tax records show that around 1,951⁵ new homes were completed in the rural area between 2001 and 2007. This equates to growth (in the number of dwellings) of around 3.5% over that time. Completions of new households since 2007 are likely to have increased this growth to a figure in the region of 5% over a ten year period. This level of growth does not seem to have arrested the decline in the sustainability in rural communities. Indeed it is possible that in some instances it has contributed to it through the provision of more large detached houses rather than a more appropriate mix of size and tenure.

Growth to re-vitalise rural communities will need to be targeted in way that directly influences the imbalances and problems that have been identified. This means that communities should be enabled to grow in a way that allows more young families and people in the early and middle stages of their working lives to settle within them. Provision should be made for new housing which is suitable for elderly people, which allows them to “downsize” and stay within their local area for as long as possible. The cost of much of this new housing will need to be linked to the ability of the “right sort” of occupiers to pay for it. When considering who should be eligible to occupy new affordable housing thought should be given to the contribution that the new residents can make to improving the balance of the local population and their ability to contribute to the future viability of the village as well as to their claim based on local connections.

3.2 Housing growth linked to economic growth

It is important to note that in the knowledge economy, people do not follow jobs, jobs follow people, i.e. entrepreneurs, spurring new networks, which subsequently lead to new firm creation. Providing the right sort of housing, linked to attractive vibrant settlements and fit-for-purpose workspace can therefore be a successful strategy to secure sustainable economic growth in rural areas.

⁵ Dwelling Stock Council tax records ex AP spreadsheet Rural Figures

3.2.1 *Growth is necessary – but how much?*

The level of housing growth that will be necessary to revitalise our rural communities is influenced by a number of factors. These include:

- the trend of smaller households;
- the impact of migration from urban to rural areas;
- the need to attract more young families and people of working age in order to “rebalance” the age profile of the population;
- existing housing demand in the rural area; and
- meeting the employment needs of the rural area.

3.2.2 *Smaller households*

Firstly, we must accept that some growth in housing numbers will be required simply to accommodate the trend for smaller households inherent within our society. Even if the numbers of people living in the rural area remain constant more houses will be required to host them all.

3.3 Inward migration

The rural areas of Cheshire West & Chester are excellent places to live. They will continue to attract migrants – from within the Borough and beyond – who wish to share in the quality of life that they can offer. The evidence shows that the number of people moving into the area is likely to exceed that moving out of the area, so increasing demand for housing.

The ONS projections for the change in population forecast an increase in the number of households in the rural area in the region of 11% to 2026 - assuming that the % of the Borough's population that live in the rural area remains constant.

3.4 Population rebalance

Forecasts produced by the Office for National Statistics show that the proportion of people of working age and of school is due to reduce in the rural area whilst the number of people of retirement age is due to increase significantly. This will further imbalance the age profile of the population. Analysis in support of this strategy has shown that in the region of an additional 16,500 people will be needed (of the right age) to rebalance the rural population. Based on current household size this equates to the need for an additional 6,800 houses in the period from 2010 to 2026. This equates to growth in the number of dwellings in the rural area as a whole of 12%.

3.5 Housing need

The council has recently completed a Strategic Housing Market Assessment. This produces an analysis of current housing need and suggests the requirement for an additional 6,900 households in the rural area by 2026 – an increase of 13% on current levels.

3.6 Conclusion

Based on this analysis it would seem reasonable to conclude that growth of between 11% and 13% in the number of dwellings and households in the rural area is the minimum necessary to address the challenges identified. It is reasonable to add some contingency to this figure – to account for exacerbation of trends and to provide some slippage. A growth target of 15% which equates to 8,000 new homes is therefore considered to be appropriate.

4 Achieving economic growth

4.1 Overview

This section considers the need for economic growth alongside housing growth. It considers the scale and distribution of economic activity in the rural area, and the balance with local working age population. It provides some analysis on the capacity for growth, arrives at some conclusions around the scale of growth that is appropriate, and considers the approach necessary to convert growth in jobs and business stock to substantially increased economic output.

Growth in the number of households is important, but will not be sufficient to secure the increase in the scale of economic output that is required if the Borough is to meet its growth ambitions. The limited availability of jobs in parts of the rural area may encourage local people of working age to leave the area, and prevent people of working age from moving into it. The ONS mid-year population estimates show that the proportion of the rural population of working age declined by 3% between 2001 and 2009. The ONS forecasts indicate that this trend will continue. This erosion of the working age population has social as well as economic consequences.

The high level of outward commuting has an impact on local communities as well as on the families involved. Research shows that there is a strong correlation between travel to work and the way that people use services. Communities where there is a daily exodus of people of working age struggle to provide the viable market conditions for many privately provided services such as local shops, pubs and cafés.

The opposite is true of communities which manage to maintain a viable level of population in the day time. Tattenhall is an excellent example of a community where the incidence of workspace (over 800 people work in and near the village) has ensured that the village high street can thrive. Providing more opportunity for local enterprise and employment is therefore an important element of delivering the objectives of the Strategy to revitalise communities.

4.2 Capacity for growth

The evidence shows that the rural area has been making a disproportionate contribution to Cheshire West and Chester's economic growth over the past few years. Employment in the rural area increased by a factor of 3% between 2003 and 2008. The number of jobs in the Borough as a whole fell very slightly over during that period.

The rural area has the potential to continue this growth. Analysis of employment land carried out in the BE Group Rural Workspace Study shows that there is approximately 30 hectares of employment land available for development in the rural area. This does not include other sites and opportunities for change of use which may come forward in response to a more positive planning context.

The Rural Workspace Study by BE Group found that whilst the market for office space in the rural area was well supplied agents reported that there was a shortage of smaller workshops (0-100 m2) and space to support light industrial activity.

It seems probable therefore that some provision of new premises will be helpful as part of a strategy to revitalise local communities through managed growth.

4.3 Unleashing the potential

The Council and its partners are committed to delivering economic growth. In their submission to the (now defunct) Regional Spatial Strategy in March 2010, the council set an ambitious target to increase GVA by 51% and grow the Boroughs employment base by 7%, creating 11,000 new jobs, by 2026.

4.4 The right level of rural growth

There is no golden rule about what constitutes an acceptable ratio between residents of working age and the availability of jobs in the local area. Clearly in an ideal scenario a functional economic area would have a balance of jobs and residents to fill them. It is interesting to note that the ratio in Chester City is nearest to being in balance at 0.95.

Where smaller places form part of a larger economic area then it might not necessarily be expected to see a local ratio in exact balance. Where a community is more isolated – as a result of distance or poor transport connections – then maintaining a balance between jobs available locally and the working age population becomes more important to the overall sustainability of the local community.

Analysis of the ratio between jobs available locally and people of working age in Table 4.1 below shows where intervention to create more jobs (in order to improve the ratio of jobs to people of working age) might be targeted.

Table 4 1: Ratio of jobs to working age population			
Functional Area	Jobs	Working-age population	Ratio
Rural area	54,123	75,909	0.71
Neston & Parkgate	3,996	10,242	0.39
Chester & EP Hinterland	20,576	13,296	1.55
Frodsham & Helsby	4,342	9,062	0.48
Weaver Valley	16,813	27,789	0.61
Rural Corridor	8,396	15,520	0.54
Chester	48,562	49,139	0.99
Ellesmere Port	25,030	37,195	0.67
Weaver Towns	25,494	34,622	0.74
Cheshire West & Chester	153,216	201,150	0.76

A ratio of 0.54 does not seem beneficial for the Rural Corridor. However, a ratio of 0.39 may be viable in Neston – given its proximity to competing commercial centres and large employment sites.

It is apparent from the figures that to move the ratio for more rural parts of the Borough to something nearer the average for the Borough would require a significant increase in the number of jobs. For example, it is estimated that for Malpas this would necessitate an additional 1,476 jobs – an increase of nearly 70%. To achieve the same ratio in Kelsall & Tarvin would require an additional 2,564 jobs – a doubling of the current local employment base. This scale of increase may not be achievable – or acceptable to local people.

The Chester and Ellesmere Port Hinterland is the one area where the number of jobs exceeds the scale of the working age population. This area will remain highly attractive to businesses seeking to locate in a pleasing natural environment within range of the city and in close proximity to transport infrastructure. The coverage of the area by the Green Belt means that opportunities for growth will be limited. It will therefore be important to ensure that opportunities that do become available are developed in the way that best meets the objectives of the Council's priorities.

It seems probable that the vitality of communities across the majority of the rural area – with the possible exception of those in the Chester and Ellesmere Port Hinterland – would be materially enhanced by improving the ratio of jobs available locally to the working age population. This objective should therefore be carried across into the Local Plan.

Growth of 7% in the number of jobs available in the rural area (the target in *Cheshire & Warrington Means Business*) would increase the rural area's job density ratio to 0.76 – assuming that the working age population stays constant. This would be broadly in line with the current average for the Borough as a whole. Assuming that growth in the number of jobs will also be experienced across other urban parts of the Borough, this level of rural growth would seem a realistic target given that the scale and intensity of economic activity in rural areas will always be smaller than in larger employment centres. This scale of employment growth is virtually in line with the level of growth that has been achieved in the rural area over the period between 2003 and 2008 (3.4%). An additional 7% growth equates to a further 3,800 jobs being created in the rural area over the next 20 years.

It is important to note that this number of new jobs will not provide a job balance ratio of 0.76 if the working age population increases. It will therefore be necessary to add more jobs to support additional sustainable economic growth. It will also be important to monitor the ratio between jobs and the working age population throughout the life of the Strategy, adjusting targets and introducing new actions as appropriate.

4.5 Increasing economic output

Simply creating an additional 3,800 jobs in the rural area will not be enough to ensure that the rural area makes a proportionate contribution to the Borough's economic growth ambitions.

To do this, the rural economy must also increase the value of its output by 50%. Increasing the total number of jobs available by 7% will help, but it will also be necessary to significantly

increase the value of economic output created by each job. This can be achieved in part by attracting new businesses which operate in higher value sectors and markets but will also require existing companies to increase their productivity by adding value to their output and exchanging lower value for higher value activity.

Whilst looking for growth in output, it is important to remember that lower value work is an important part of local economies. It will not be possible, nor would it be appropriate, to seek to shift all local economic activity into high value sectors. Rural communities will still need personal services, retail and hospitality businesses and routine trades. Tourism and agriculture will remain an important part of the rural economy. Further diversifying the economic base will be important however. The range of businesses situated at Chowley Oak Business Park and in workspace owned and operated by the Bolesworth, Grosvenor and Cholmondley Estates demonstrate that rural Cheshire West & Chester is capable of attracting high value economic activity.

Economic growth in the rural area will need to be balanced. It should include the provision of some relatively large scale and high value employment sites - most likely in the Chester & Ellesmere Port and / or Weaver Towns hinterlands. It should also be based upon increasing access and the use of high speed broadband, and enabling the larger rural villages and towns to maximise their economic potential. Positive planning policies will be required to attract and encourage enterprise. Home-working and live/work should be made easy.

The traditional rural sectors must not be ignored. Every effort should be made to enable the Borough's farming sector to maximise its economic contribution. Tourism enterprises should be encouraged and supported with collaborative marketing and skills development. Opportunities must be found to introduce new technologies and develop a green economy. The rural area must move towards a position where it is meeting some of its own energy needs and if possible exporting energy to the Borough's urban areas.

4.6 Assets and opportunities

4.6.1 *What are the main drivers for/of investment?*

This section considers the drivers and opportunities for investment in the rural area and puts forward recommendations around the role that the Council will need to play to maximise investment in the rural area.

The Council and its partners will need to be innovative and to leverage every possible means of attracting and enabling investment in the rural area. The role of the Council is three-fold:

- it should lead on acquisition of funds for investment;
- make best use of its own assets to stimulate and attract investment; and
- provide the necessary support, leadership and policy context to give the best possible opportunity to community groups, entrepreneurs and individuals to benefit from private investment in their businesses and communities.

4.6.2 *Funding*

Access to capital funding will be limited. Where it is available the Council should collaborate with partners and make the best possible effort to secure it. The strategic focus and evidence based provided by this Strategy will be a considerable advantage in this respect.

The Council will need to investigate the potential to attract funding from European Programmes and from the government's Regional Growth Fund. Opportunities should also be explored to secure funding for investment in the natural and heritage environment (via the Lottery and other charitable foundations) and to maximise the value of agri-environmental funding secured by the Borough's farming sector.

Existing Section 106 monies, together with the New Homes Bonus and Community Infrastructure Levy will provide an opportunity to secure and harness monies arising from new development for investment in local infrastructure and services. It might be possible to persuade local parish and town councils to raise matching funds via the parish precept to achieve leverage these monies and maximise the impact of local investment. Parish precepts currently raise in the region of £2.5 million per annum.

Every effort should be made to secure funding to support the development of renewable energy initiatives and to invest in green technologies. The Council should explore the potential to act as a generator of renewable energy on its own sites (including the County Farms).

4.6.3 *Utilising Council assets*

The Council and its public sector partners control a range of property assets in the rural area. These include the County Farm Estate, libraries, schools, highways depots, and outdoor education facilities. The Council is in the process of carrying out extensive asset reviews of its property, leisure and highways estates. These assets – and the services that they support – are important to local communities. The Council (and its partners) should do all they can to ensure that it continues to use these assets in a way that supports the vitality of rural communities. This may mean identifying opportunities to intensify the use of the facilities for purposes beyond their core function (e.g. allowing local people to make use of computers and the fast internet connections available within primary schools after school hours and during the holidays).

In the event that any of these assets become surplus to operational requirements, the Council should consider how they might be used (or redeveloped – for example for affordable housing) for the benefit of the host community.

4.6.4 Providing the conditions for local investment

Most local economic development and new housing will be created by the private sector. Community and voluntary groups will be important providers of actions to improve the local environment of local services and investment in community facilities. The job of the Council is to provide the conditions, and support, to enable local activity and investment. It can do this by:

- a) creating a Local Development Framework and maintaining an attitude to development management which facilitates appropriate development and attracts entrepreneurs, and
- b) organising the way it does business so that its technical functions are outward facing and outcome focused.

These opportunities are considered in more detail in Section Three, Implementation and Delivery.

5 What are the main assets and opportunities (physical and human)?

5.1 Introduction

This section considers some of the assets and opportunities which have emerged during the evidential review and initial consultation. Rural Cheshire West & Chester has a wide range of assets, both physical and human which should be leveraged to deliver the objectives of this Strategy.

5.2 Natural environment, biodiversity and landscape

Cheshire West and Chester benefit from a large number of environmental assets, some of which have European protection. These include parts of the Dee and Mersey Estuaries, Oakmere, Midland Meres and West Midland Mosses. In addition there are 28 sites are designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest covering more than 5,199⁶.

The Borough also has:

- eight Areas of Special County Value (ASCV);
- 286 Site of Biological Importance (SBI) covering 4259ha;
- 39 Areas of Nature Conservation value, 4 Strategic Wildlife Areas, and 215 Sites of Nature Conservation Value;
- 6 Local Nature Reserves covering 104 ha;
- 3,634 ha of woodland (including Delamere Forest), of which 651 ha is Ancient Woodland;
- 31 Cheshire Biodiversity Action Plan habitats (including 17 UK BAP priority habitats in the region of 6,700 ponds; and
- 24 regionally important Geological and Geomorphological Sites wholly or partially in Cheshire West and Chester.

The natural environment is highly valued by the area's residents and there is a strong track record of public investment in the natural environment, biodiversity and landscape. Projects include the Sandstone Ridge EConet Partnership which was involved in the creation of a network of woodlands, heathlands, peatlands and meadows along the Sandstone Ridge to create an ecological network. The partnership worked with local communities to bring economic benefits, through increased tourism; and social benefits, through increased public enjoyment of the countryside and a focus on education and developing rural skills. Cheshire Wildlife Trust is working on a Living Landscapes Washlands project which aims to create a landscape where a resilient network of wetland habitats provides ecosystem services in

⁶ Including those partly within CW&CC

conjunction with high quality nature conservation resources of benefit to local people. The Habitats and Hillforts of Cheshire's Sandstone Ridge is a Heritage Lottery funded project (running to 2012) which aims to conserve the Ridge's Iron Age hillforts and surrounding wildlife habitats, and to encourage more people to access, learn about and become more involved in the area's heritage.

5.3 Heritage assets and built environment

Cheshire West and Chester has a rich archaeological and built heritage. This extends well beyond Chester's Roman amphitheatre, medieval moated sites and motte and bailey castles and includes prehistoric burial sites and hillforts, market towns and "new model" estate villages, the area's distinctive "black and white" architecture, as well as Georgian, Victorian and modern development.

The area has 97 conservation areas, 2,505 listed buildings, 7 registered parks and gardens of special historic interest, 1 Battlefield and 116 Scheduled Monuments. Much of this is in the rural area. It underpins much of the rural tourism industry and creates the distinctive local architecture and settlement patterns which make rural Cheshire's towns and villages such attractive places to live.

The historic environment has an important role in providing an insight into the past and can have educational, recreational and leisure benefits. It can also add to the character and appearance of individual towns and villages. Listed buildings, conservation areas, scheduled monuments and historic parks and gardens all contribute to cultural heritage and should be afforded adequate protection to ensure their future.

Design also plays a significant role in promoting accessibility. Thoughtful design of new development and related public realm will ensure that local communities have good access to public amenities, which are particularly mindful of the physically disabled and ageing population.

5.4 Community and cultural assets

Cheshire West & Chester has an extensive suite of villages and towns in its rural area. Most of these benefit from some sort of meeting place – be it a pub, community hall or village shop – as well as learning, leisure and recreational facilities. These cultural and community facilities are a rich asset to the rural area. They provide a focal point for social interaction and help to create the conditions in which people can work together to improve each others' lives. Each and every one of these facilities – and the activity and services that it supports – is valuable. The Strategy needs to do what it can to ensure that they are safeguarded and that the best possible use is made of them.

5.5 Higher and Further Education

There is a strong network of educational and training providers across the Borough. There are five secondary schools in the rural area in Neston, Helsby, Tarporley, Malpas and Christleton. Between them these schools had in the region of 6,500 children on their rolls in 2007. The rural area also benefits from a University Campus in Chester, the West Chester College in Ellesmere Port, the Liverpool University Vet School at Leahurst and the specialist land based and countryside learning institution Reaseheath College.

This network of educators provides a valuable resource to support the development of a highly skilled workforce, support product development and innovation and maintain the competitiveness of some of the areas traditional business sectors (such as food processing, farming and tourism). The incidence of leading specialists, such as in the Department for Environmental Sustainability at Chester University, provides an exciting opportunity to develop innovation networks and clusters of high value activity.

5.6 Landed estates

Rural Cheshire West & Chester hosts a number of landed estates. These are long established businesses that are rooted in the landscape and embedded within their local communities. These estates can be powerful drivers of local investment. Grosvenor and Bolesworth have created workspace which hosts over 1500 jobs in the last 20 years. Peckforton and Cholmondley have also provided new workspace, all be it on a rather smaller scale. They provide property for farming, tourism and residential use. They are capable and willing local developers and can be trusted to take “the long view” when it comes to generating returns from investment and working alongside local communities.

5.7 Local governance

The vast majority of rural Cheshire West & Chester is “parished”. This means that most communities benefit from an elected local governance structure (a parish or town council) capable of coordinating local activity, engaging people in decision making and raising money through local taxation. These parishes are supported by the County Association of Local Councils and by Cheshire Community Action, the local rural community council. This network of local councils (and councillors) and their professional support structure provide an excellent basis for collaborative working between the public sector and local communities. A plan of parishes and town Councils is shown in Figure 8.2 below.

5.8 Local distinctiveness

Many rural areas have a rich and unique identity, based upon distinctive heritage, traditions, buildings and customs. Within Cheshire, there is an opportunity to build upon activity in traditional land-based sectors, which remain important for the local economy. In particular, dairy farming and the salt industry have played a central role in shaping the landscape across

the rural area. Based upon traditional strengths in these sectors, Cheshire is now renowned for cheese and other local produce. There is an opportunity to exploit a reputation for quality local produce in marketing the rural area, utilising this distinctive heritage to promote growth in the food and drink and equine sectors, and in the visitor economy.

Chester has a strong brand, built upon its unique heritage assets and, along with other important attractions including Chester Zoo and Delamere Forest, attracts a significant numbers of visitors to Cheshire West and Chester. Opportunities exist to strengthen the linkages between existing assets and the surrounding rural areas, and to open attractions within the rural area to a wider market.

5.9 Strong business sectors

The economy of rural Cheshire West and Chester shares some of the strengths of the Borough and wider sub-regional economy. These include the banking and financial services sector, the energy complex at Capenhurst, the visitor economy, automotive manufacturing and chemical industries based alongside the Mersey Estuary.

As highlighted above, the rural area also benefits from a strong dairy sector – encompassing both production and processing capacity and expertise. There are other clusters of sector specific activity; the construction and building sector is very important in the rural south where two leading firms are located. Gas and mineral extraction remains important in the eastern side of the Borough and the high quality road network and access to the national motorway network means that logistics is a growing sector to the north and east.

These existing “winners” must be supported and helped to add value. At the same time the larger towns and villages in the rural area should be encouraged and enabled to attract a wider range of businesses to help diversify the economy and reduce the reliance on specific industries, and of course the public sector⁷.

⁷ Neston is particularly reliant on public sector employment, accounting for over 30% of jobs

PART TWO: Ambitions, objectives and actions

6 Rural Regeneration Strategic Framework

6.1 Vision and objective

The overarching objective of the Strategy is to revitalise the Borough's rural communities and contribute to Cheshire West and Chester's sustainable economic growth.

The Council's vision is that in 2030 the rural area of Cheshire West and Chester will be a vibrant and successful place. Its working countryside, thriving communities and market towns will host in the region of 40% of the Borough's population and over a quarter of its economy (in terms of jobs and value). Its high quality natural environment and built heritage will be accessible and enjoyed by all.

The Council is clear that if this vision is to be realised, the area will need to retain and attract more young people, families and people of working age in the rural area. The market will need to meet the housing and service needs of existing and future residents. The Council will need to step in and use public resources to address market failure where it affects quality of life and threatens economic success.

The rural area will need to host a larger population and a bigger, more valuable economy. This means planning for and achieving growth. Not growth for the sake of growth, but growth which improves the demographic profile of the population, which safeguards local services and enhances the long term sustainability of communities, and which leads to significantly increased economic output whilst protecting the natural environment and heritage assets of the rural area.

The Council believes that, by 2030, the number of homes in the rural area will need to increase by around 8,000 (in the region of 12 – 15%); the population will need to grow by 15,000 to 20,000 and we will need to attract and create in the region of 3,500 – 4,000 new jobs. Of course it must be sure that we get the right sort of growth in the right places. This means careful thinking about what goes where; guided by the principle that change should contribute towards the vision, objectives and ambitions of this Strategy – and of the local community - rather than prejudice them. How change is achieved will be as crucial as what is achieved. Growth must be designed and planned for by the communities that will host it. It must be delivered in a way that enhances the viability and vitality of the community, without unacceptable impact on the natural and historic environment. It is vital that in implementing this Strategy the Council and its partners encourage and enable communities to take the lead in planning for and delivering positive change.

This level of change will not happen without a positive strategic framework, and it must be managed. The Council believes that the key ambitions and approaches set out below will help to shape the actions necessary to take the Strategy forward, and the manner in which they are best delivered.

6.2 Key ambitions

- to retain and attract an additional 17,000 young people, families and people of working age within the rural area;
- to meet the housing needs of the rural population through the provision of new homes which are well-designed, energy efficient, affordable and suitable for young people, families and the elderly;
- to safeguard local services, cultural and community facilities and maximised their contribution to the vitality of rural communities;
- to support sustainable economic development across the rural area, securing an additional 3,600 jobs, improving the competitiveness of local businesses and providing the conditions where enterprise can flourish;
- to address market failure where it affects quality of life and economic success - the provision of public transport services and high speed broadband;
- to reduce the consumption of fossil fuels and the related CO2 emissions by 37% by 2020 (relative to 1990 levels); and
- protect the natural and historic environment, cultural and heritage assets and ensure that they are preserved for the enjoyment and benefit of future generations.

6.3 Key approaches

By adopting this Strategy the Council will commit to new ways of working and will:

- create and manage a positive and enabling planning framework which provides for smart growth in the rural area whilst ensuring the protection of the natural and historic environment;
- create an approach to asset management, spatial and investment planning which will enable local people to shape the future of their communities and to take responsibility and ownership of actions and investment which will secure their long term vitality;
- create a new structure for rural governance which will ensure that a single and strong rural voice is heard within the Borough's strategic and technical decisions making forums; and
- manage and utilise public assets in the rural area in a way that will support the ambitions and plans of local communities and that ensures that they make the best possible contribution to the vision, objectives and ambitions of this and CW&CC's other key strategies.

7 Thematic strategies and actions

7.1 Rationale

In order to deliver against these ambitions we have identified a series of thematic priorities – and related actions – have been identified where the efforts of the Council, its partners, businesses and communities are best focused.

It should be noted that these are neither spatially nor sectorally specific – there is no one set of actions for the Rural Corridor, or for the farming and food, or tourism sectors. The view has been taken that those involved in each sector, or in any particular place, will know best how to take advantage of the conditions created by the Strategy or to engage in and benefit from specific actions as they are implemented.

The purpose of the Strategy is to guide and inform the work of the Council (and its partners) and the way that they go about their business. The priorities (and related actions) have therefore been designed to target areas where the Council can play a lead role – for example around planning policy, housing and transport – where it can create the conditions to enable local enterprise and activity, and where it can co-ordinate and attract external investment – such as will be necessary to create a comprehensive high speed broadband network.

The actions have been developed against the guiding principle that the intervention must be something which is realistic, which can add value, and which will contribute towards the overarching vision and objective of the Strategy. The actions plans will shape the Council's activity in and related to the rural area over the next several years. Details around governance, implementation and monitoring are provided in Section Three.

7.2 Accessibility

7.2.1 *Rationale*

Transport and accessibility is an issue for everybody. It is a key factor in helping to support economic growth and regeneration, increasing accessibility to jobs and everyday services, improving the environment and helping to tackle poverty. The opportunities available to people in how, when and where they travel have a major impact on transport patterns as well as wider quality of life.

This is especially true in the rural areas of Cheshire West and Chester where poor accessibility can make it difficult for some people to reach employment opportunities, healthcare and education facilities without the use of a car. Furthermore, many services stop in the early evening or do not run at weekends making leisure based trips particularly difficult.

7.2.2 *Current position*

The Curtins Consulting study commissioned to support this strategy found that there is a significant disparity in the levels of accessibility between different areas within Cheshire West

and Chester. As a result of this disparity, the linkages between settlements and key services are often substandard and it is considered that from a functional geography perspective Cheshire West and Chester does not work as a single entity. Instead it operates as a collection of functional areas that are influenced by a wide variety of internal and external factors.

Chester is the only city within the study area and accessibility to services in the immediate vicinity of Chester is generally good. However, as the only City in Cheshire West and Chester, the public transport arrangements are based around the hub and spoke model where public transport provision extends outwards from Chester in an arterial fashion towards the wider area. Accessibility along the arterial routes is therefore reasonable, although the lack of radial routes and connections between smaller towns and settlements results in the creation of distinct functional areas that are as heavily influenced by external factors as they are by Chester.

To the north west of the study area, the influence of Chester diminishes and the connections to the Wirral become increasingly important. To the east of Chester the M56 corridor enables strong connections to Manchester, Warrington and Runcorn. Finally, the areas around Malpas to the south of Chester are primarily influenced by Chester East, Whitchurch (Shropshire) and Wrexham.

In addition to the aforementioned areas, there is a fourth area that includes a selection of rural settlements that lie to the south and east of Chester and sit within or just outside the 10 mile catchment around Chester. Given the proximity of these settlements to Chester, accessibility to key services should be good. However, the baseline evidence indicates that some of these settlements such as Farndon, Ashton Hayes, Tarporley, Kelsall and Delamere have the lowest levels of accessibility to key services in Chester and Cheshire West.

To enhance accessibility to key services it is acknowledged that some form of intervention is required. However, given the commercial nature of public transport provision and strain on public funding it is considered that there is limited scope for traditional enhancements such as new roads, road widening, additional bus services, or new/reopened railway lines and therefore an alternative strategy is required.

7.2.3 A strategy overview

(i) Creation of service hubs

To ensure that the key services of education, healthcare, employment and Council services are accessible to the rural community it is envisaged that there should be a decentralisation of some services from Chester and the larger towns out into the wider sub-region. This could include the relocation of customer services department of the Council which is currently assessing its remote service provision in the wider area.

In terms of locating key services it is useful to acknowledge the importance of secondary schools as existing services and miniature hubs. As an example, a five mile catchment around each of the secondary schools in Cheshire West and Chester covers a large proportion of the rural areas. The schools also tend to be reasonably accessible and benefit from existing public transport infrastructure or community transport facilities.

Some of the existing secondary school sites are already located in large towns such as Neston, Ellesmere Port and Helsby/Frodhsam. However, others located in Tarporley to the east, Malpas to the south and Christleton on the outskirts of Chester have the potential to act as miniature hubs for key services. Primary schools also offer similar benefits although the catchments are not usually as large. It is important to note that the changing face of education, particularly academy status, may change the influence that the Council has over schools.

It is envisaged that local communities, businesses, operators and the Council should encourage the development of key services in these locations. By providing services at or near the schools there is the potential to create important hubs that can form part of a linked trip, i.e. a journey from the rural community to a council service hub, education facility, health centre or employment opportunity. Hubs therefore minimise the need for travel altogether or ensure efficiency by encouraging linked trips to key services.

(ii) Community transport solutions

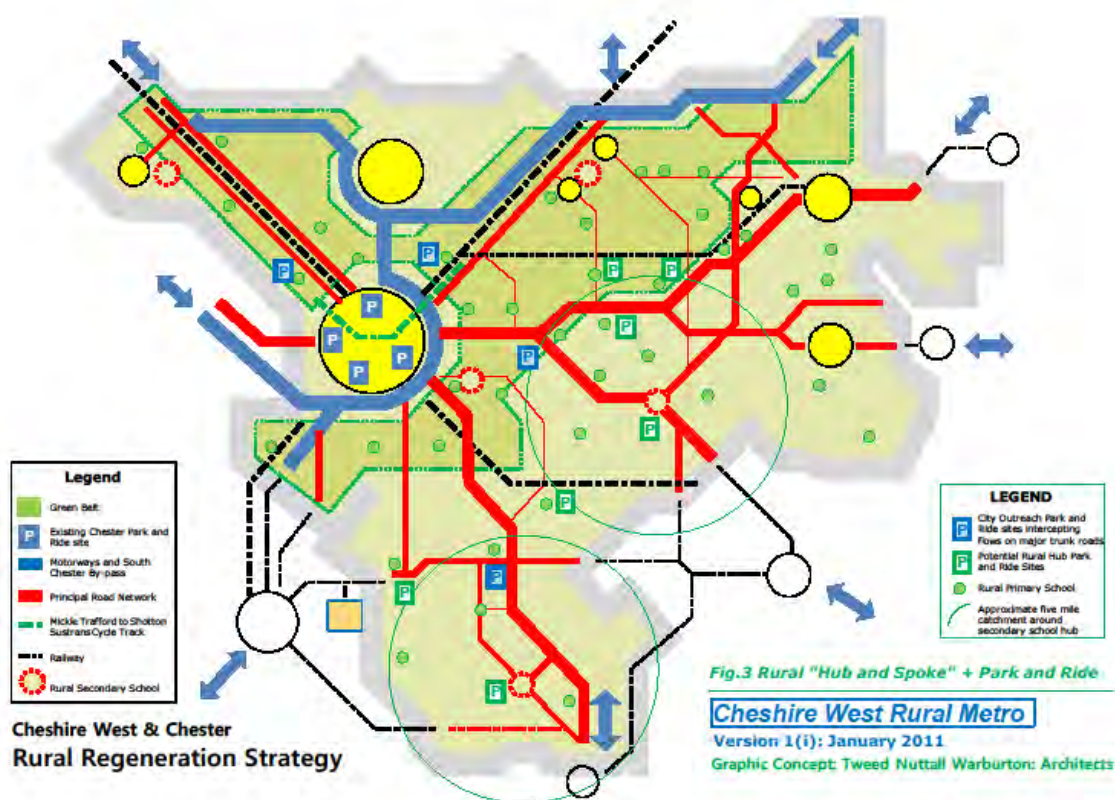
Hubs on their own cannot be successful unless they are accessible and whilst secondary schools are generally accessible, improvements are required to ensure the locations can operate as service centres. Given the challenging operating conditions facing traditional public transport services in rural areas, it is considered that community transport initiatives will have a significant role to play.

As mentioned in the baseline study, 'The Community Transport Strategy for Cheshire', 2007 found that the largest community transport (CT) operators in Cheshire were delivering services to a reasonable level of quality and provided a good base from which to build. However, it highlighted the need for the formation of an 'umbrella' body to oversee community transport across Cheshire and enable closer joint working between operators. The ability to proceed with establishing the 'umbrella' body was constrained by the decision to separate Cheshire County Council into Cheshire West and Chester and Cheshire East. Notwithstanding this, the proposals have recently been revitalised and as part of this strategy it is suggested that the 'umbrella' body be further explored.

Rather than a community transport operator-led initiative it is envisaged that the current localism agenda provides the potential for a 'Community Interest Company' that is formed by a third party not currently involved with the existing CT operators. Taking the localism idea a step further it is envisaged that existing local assets can be used more efficiently by employing them in a number of uses. For example the school bus can be used to take children to school as normal. However, once finished the bus could be employed to circulate rural settlements in the vicinity of the hub to provide a regular service. Social service vehicles and other local assets could be employed in the same way.

The end result of this strategy is the creation of miniature hub and spoke communities that can access key services without having to travel to Chester or one of the major towns.

Figure 7.1: Conceptual Metro diagram 3



(iii) Cheshire West Rural Metro

Whilst the above strategy provides a way forward for establishing miniature hubs, it must also fit within a wider sub-region and it is acknowledged that linkages between settlements, Chester, and external locations is of vital importance. Therefore, to visually demonstrate the above concept of hubs and the wider strategy a plan has been produced which demonstrates the concept of a Cheshire West Rural Metro. This can be seen at Figure 7.1 above and an overview is provided below.

A key element of the proposed strategy is centred on park and ride. This is something that has been a great success in Chester with four existing facilities located on the outskirts of the City. These sites were designed to help reduce congestion in urban areas and on busy commuter roads and to encourage the use of public transport. However, it is envisaged that the park and ride concept could be extended to include additional sites that are located in key outreach locations that are approximately five miles away from the city centre.

Potential locations include the areas around Saughall, Mickle Trafford and Tarvin, where the A51 splits to form the A54.

A facility at Saughall has the potential to increase accessibility and strengthen the influence of Chester by serving communities located to the north west of the City in the rural area between Chester, Ellesmere Port and the Wirral. A facility at Mickle Trafford could serve the rural areas

to the north east of Chester that are located around Frodsham and Helsby and finally a site close to Tarvin could relieve pressure on the A51, which is known as an area of significant congestion.

In addition to the above outreach park and ride sites, it is envisaged that the concept can be taken further by providing park and ride facilities in rural locations. This could potentially be linked to higher parking charges in the city centre which encourage longer park and ride journeys. Whilst some opponents to park and ride are concerned that the concept simply shifts congestion issues to the rural area it is considered that careful site selection, design and management can alleviate such issues.

The area around Ashton Hayes and Delamere currently has particularly low levels of accessibility to key services by existing forms of public transport. Given the character of the area, traditional public transport options are likely to be infeasible and therefore this is considered to be a good location for a rural park and ride facility to serve the north east areas of Cheshire West and Chester. Similarly, Tarporley is considered to be a good location for serving the eastern areas of Cheshire West and Chester.

Tattenhall, Farndon, Broxton and Malpas are all located to the south of Chester and suffer from low levels of accessibility to services. A park and ride location in one or more of these areas would greatly enhance accessibility in the largely rural area. Furthermore, the Tattenhall, Malpas site and Broxton site could tie into existing public transport services such as the number 41 and 41A buses which serve Chester, Waverton, Tattenhall and Whitchurch.

In total, nine potential park and ride sites have been suggested. However, it is not just the location of the park and ride site that is important it is the destination served. In most cases this may be Chester although it is envisaged that there is the potential to provide linkages to key employment sites such as the Chester Business Park, other miniature hubs or cross boundary towns such as Wrexham. The funding for park and ride facilities and community transport initiatives could be obtained through Section 106 and travel plan contributions as developers are attracted into the rural area or linkages between existing employment sites are strengthened. CW&CC should also consider the sustainable transport fund administered by the Department for Transport as a possible source of funding.

7.2.4 Strategy objectives

Each of the objectives associated with this strategy will be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time bound (SMART)

1. Establish an umbrella organisation to oversee community transport initiatives and encourage hub and spoke type arrangements in the rural settlements. This organisation would include community interest groups and would be set up by June 2012.
2. Establish two trial miniature service hubs in rural areas located to the south and east of Chester by 2014. The secondary schools in Malpas and Tarporley are considered to be potential locations.
3. Increase accessibility to key services by introducing new rural park and ride service hubs to serve the areas to the north west, north east, east and south of Chester.

Table 7 1: Action Plan Creation of service hubs and community transport				
Ref:	Action	Target	Lead	Timeline
1	Engage with current community transport stakeholders and seek to set up a body to oversee all community transport provision, with a view to enhancing existing services and encouraging miniature hub and spoke arrangements around the key rural settlements of Malpas and Tarporley.	Formation of Community Transport body.	Integrated Transport Services	June 2012 / Ongoing
2	Engage with the local community about involvement, aspirations and governance.	Community leadership of the body.	Integrated Transport Services	September 2012 / Ongoing
3	Establish two trial miniature service hubs in Malpas and Tarporley	Creation of two pilot service hubs	Integrated Transport Services	2014

Table 7 2: Action Plan Park and ride				
Ref:	Action	Target	Lead	Timeline
1	Set up an accessibility and service project team within the Council tasked with exploring the feasibility of park and ride service hubs.	Formation of an accessibility and service project team.	Local Transport Plan Group	March 2012 / Ongoing
2	Explore funding opportunities for park and ride/service facilities.	Secure funding for a trial rural park and ride facilities.	Local Transport Plan Group	March 2013/ Ongoing
3	Consider the feasibility of a pilot rural park and ride/ service centre.	Completed feasibility report.	Local Transport Plan Group	March 2014

7.3 Housing

The Rural Housing Strategy has been produced in parallel with this Strategy and provides a detailed route-map for the delivery of the housing response required to realise the Vision for the Rural Area. The following provides a summary of the housing strategy, following the style of the other Action Plans, but the reader is encouraged to consult the Rural Housing Strategy where additional strategic direction is required.

7.3.1 Rationale

Nationally, there is recognition that the supply of housing has failed to meet the level of demand being generated through an increasing population and a changing demographic structure. People are living longer and choosing to live independently for a greater period of

time. This presents a challenge on the existing stock. The importance of increasing the supply of housing to meet demand is recognised within the White Paper 'Local Growth: realizing every place's potential' and the recently published Localism Bill. Fundamental reforms to the planning system and a framework of powerful incentives to deliver sustainable growth form the core of the Governments approach to realising this aspiration.

The provision of a balanced housing offer within a settlement or indeed a wider 'market area' is fundamental in ensuring the future sustainability of a community. The successful delivery of the Vision for the Rural area of Cheshire West and Chester is intrinsically linked to enabling the smart growth of housing in the rural areas. Delivering the right type and tenure of housing is critical to re-balancing the demographic profile of the rural area as a whole and its individual settlements. This will require the retention and attraction of young households and families as well as the provision of suitable housing for older persons, to free up family properties currently under-occupied by this demographic. Development will need to occur in line with PPS3 which establishes the aim to deliver "high quality housing that contributes to the creation and maintenance of sustainable rural communities in market towns and villages".

Figure 7.2: The Vision



Clearly this is a nationally recognised issue for rural areas, with the Taylor review stating that there is a need for:

"urgent and innovative action to deliver more affordable homes to meet local needs and stimulate economic regeneration. Without this action the countryside faces a sterile future, based on virtual gated communities of the elderly retired and wealthy commuters while those who work in those communities are forced to live in nearby towns "(Living Working Countryside – The Taylor Review of Rural Economy and Affordable Housing, 2008).

The Rural areas of Cheshire West and Chester represent some of the most sought after housing locations in the north of the country. High house prices are a symptom of this level of demand which, whilst highlighting the strong quality of place and life within the areas, also represent a substantial barrier to many local newly-forming households looking to stay within the area, or indeed households without equity looking to locate into the area to take-up new employment opportunities. The need to delivery affordable housing in the rural areas of the authority is clearly set down under Action 1.1f of the Cheshire Sub-Regional Housing Strategy, however, the route to achieving this goal is not simple and will require innovative and new approaches.

Affordability issues have been compounded by the stock profile of the area, which is not only a historical legacy, but also a result of recent development activity which has tended to continue to deliver large family housing, which whilst attractive does not represent an achievable product for those households the Regeneration Strategy is looking to attract and retain within the area.

Addressing these challenges will require both a focus on enabling smart growth as well as strategies to better utilize existing stock. Development will require land, a commodity which is in short supply in the rural areas currently. New innovative approaches to delivery, including new ways of considering the appropriateness of land in partnership with communities, will be important in unlocking small-scale sites to delivery affordable housing, which will in turn have a substantial positive impact on settlements and their residents.

The Housing Strategy responds to the drivers of growth set out within this Strategy, however, the actual level of housing to be accommodated in the area, and indeed the balance of type and tenure and spatial distribution, will be consulted upon and set out through the emerging Local Development Framework and Neighbourhood Plans. The key messages around growth and change, however, represent an important contributing objective to this process, reflecting the outputs of consultation in the development of the Strategy.

7.3.2 *Current position*

The Rural areas of Cheshire West and Chester house approximately 40% of the Borough's population. This population and in particular the number of households is set to increase in the future according to the latest ONS Household projections and when the ambitions of the Council to 'unleash the economic potential' of the whole Borough are considered.

Looking at the housing characteristics of the rural area as a whole it is clear that common set of core issues exist which serve to define the operation of markets at a settlement and neighbourhood level:

- high demand for all tenures of housing demonstrated in notably high average house prices and a significant backlog of households in need on waiting lists;
- a significant shortage of affordable housing to meet local need;
- a stock profile which is skewed towards larger properties;
- a limited amount of housing land currently identified through the planning process and emerging evidence base (Draft SHLAA); and
- a demographic structure which includes an above average proportion of older person households, many of which currently under-occupy current properties which have the potential to house larger families;

These characteristics are evidenced to differing degrees within individual settlements and indeed the sub-area geographies presented through the Strategy. A significant wealth of information has been collated at a sub-area / settlement / parish level and is available in the Technical Appendix document which accompanies the Housing Strategy. A summary of key statistics is presented below to provide an overview of the scale and depth of the issues noted above.

High house prices are a particular characteristic of the rural area in Cheshire West and Chester. House prices are high across the Borough, with the average house price (August-October 2010)

being £203,535 compared to a UK average of £167,423⁸. This is particularly acute in the rural area, where the average house price (August-October 2010) stands at £263,729. Comparing this to median incomes, in some parts of the rural area in 2010, house prices are over ten times that of average income. This is compounded by the fact that the rural area a larger number of owner-occupiers (82% compared to a national average of 68%) with social housing making up only 10% of the total stock compared to an authority average of 14% (national 19%).

Estate Agents report that those remaining in the market with the ability to access housing within rural areas and those moving into rural areas tend to be retired people with considerable wealth, and that opportunity for first time buyers is limited. Indeed, housing waiting lists across the area contain a higher number of smaller family households, as well as single people and couples over the age of 55.

The published Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) identifies an imbalance between supply and demand of 2,677 market homes and 1193 affordable homes each year across the Borough. The annual shortfall of 1,193 affordable dwellings needed to address the current imbalance in the housing market across Cheshire West and Chester in the period 2009/10 to 2013/14. A recent update to this analysis has suggested a further increase in the number of affordable houses required to 1,204.

The high proportion of detached housing stock (45% compared to a national average of 23%) is clearly a key driver of the strength of the market, with this product type, particularly given the pleasant rural setting of many settlements, attracting a significant price premium. An examination of recent development trends suggests that this imbalance has been compounded rather than addressed, with new schemes tending to replicate the current offer rather than offer a diversifying of property sizes. In addition the level of recent development, whilst not insignificant with over 2,000 dwellings delivered since 2001, has not been geographically distributed meaning that many settlements have witnessed little change or growth in dwelling to accommodate newly emerging households. Looking forwards the SHLAA indicates that there is a limited capacity of suitable land in the rural area. From the land identified the SHLAA estimates that there is the potential to delivery 2,041 units on over the next 5 years in the rural area, with the potential capacity beyond this period significantly limited. Further detailed work needs to be carried out looking specifically at the true potential of the capacity of the rural area.

Matching the demographic structure against the stock profile suggests an imbalance in terms of properties meeting the actual needs of households. Under-occupancy of property is a significant issue identified within the SHMA for Cheshire West and Chester, with 11.4% of properties classified as suffering from severe under-occupancy (three empty bedrooms). Addressing these high levels of under-occupancy will be important in ensuring that the existing stock is used as efficiently as possible. Again ensuring that sufficient choice is available for all types of household is an important contributor to this goal and a prerequisite of market operation at a local level.

Bringing empty homes back into use also has the potential to release further housing into the rural market. The Empty Homes Strategy⁹ identified that in January 2010 there were 4,473

⁸ Land Registry, August 2010 (latest data)

⁹ [Empty Homes Strategy 2010/13](#), Cheshire West and Chester Council

empty homes the Cheshire West and Chester Authority. Of the 2,292 private dwellings, 43% of the housing was located in rural wards and the Empty Homes Strategy is beginning to target key affected areas. There are currently grants available (up to £5,000) through Cheshire West and Chester for the conversion of empty properties.

7.3.3 *Smart objectives*

The Housing Strategy is structured around four Strategic Objectives (see Figure 7.3 below) which are aimed at addressing the challenges identified above. These objectives are delivery-focused to complement the wider objectives and Vision set through the Rural Regeneration Strategy.

Figure 7.3: The Four Strategic Objectives



Each of the objectives within the Housing Strategy is underpinned by a number of 'SMART Objectives' which are set out in Table 7.3 below:

Table 7 3: SMART objectives	
Strategic Housing Objective	SMART Objective
1. Revitalise communities by enabling growth	1A: Deliver up to approximately a third of the Authority's housing within the rural area, recognizing the existing capacity and the growth potential of individual settlements
	1B: Grow the number of households in the rural area by up to 10 - 15% over the next 20 years, contributing to the Authority's overall ambitions for growth
	1C: Develop a strong communication / engagement process with parish councils to jointly work towards delivering growth
	1D: Ensure, through the Core Strategy and Neighbourhood Plan process and building upon the SHLAA, a deliverable supply of land in each settlement or grouping of settlements for the next fifteen years
	1E: Establish a clear rationale for growth within each settlement / cluster of settlements
	1F: Develop rural policies which enable the growth of settlements in the rural area within the Core Strategy and progress to adoption
2. Delivering housing to meet specific needs	2A: Deliver a significant uplift in the number of affordable units delivered in the rural areas, meeting and exceeding planning targets set for the Authority i) Enable at least 6 rural schemes to go to planning application per annum and to complete at least 4 rural schemes per annum (circa 80 units per annum).
	2B: Continue to update and monitor the evidence base providing a 'live' assessment of the quantum and nature of households in 'need'.
	2C: Lead the way in delivering new tenure products and affordable housing solutions introduced nationally where they will contribute towards addressing households in need.
	2D: Engage with Registered Providers to understand scale and location of assets and input into the development of their business plans. Identify opportunities to jointly utilize assets to deliver schemes meeting local housing need.
	2E: Demonstrate the delivery of new housing schemes targeted at meeting the needs of older persons households where need and demand are identified.

3. Realising the potential of the existing stock	3A: Use and amend allocation policies to ensure local housing meets the needs of local communities
	3B: Reduce the number of households classified as 'under-occupied' by 10 – 20% over the next fifteen years
	3C: Bring forward 10% of long-term empty properties, through working with landlords / owners, as new affordable properties in the next five years
	3D: Reduce the number of privately owned properties classed as non-decent by 10%
	3E: Ensure, where support is possible, that households within the rural areas receive support and advice when household circumstances change
4. Enabling innovative approaches to delivery	4A: A commitment to enabling innovative approaches to delivery is critical in achieving the overall Vision and the objectives set under the other three Strategic Housing Objectives. No SMART objectives are therefore identified under SHO 4.

7.3.4 Actions

The Rural Housing Strategy includes a full Action and Delivery Plan which is not replicated here but is available separately.

7.4 Innovation enterprise and skills

7.4.1 Rationale

In its commitment to improving the quality of life in rural areas, the government has identified the availability of a job, and having access to businesses which supply essential services, as fundamental. The Government has also pledged to create a fair and more balanced economy, promoting growth across a range of sectors, driven by the private sector. There is a conscious effort to redefine the role of government in relation to the promotion of economic development and growth. Central policy places the private sector at the heart of mechanisms to stimulate growth and promote recovery, emphasising the role of business leaders, entrepreneurs and the workforce in building the economy.

The role of the public sector is in promoting the conditions that support business dynamism. It is about recognising strengths, removing the barriers to business and making the private sector the primary focus of decision making. Innovation, enterprise and skills are identified as three of the key drivers of productivity, alongside competition and investment. Through targeted interventions, the public sector can address barriers to these drivers and catalyse private sector growth.

While the review of the current position, outlined below, highlights that business within the rural area enjoyed considerable success over the period up to 2008, substantial progress will need to be made at a local authority level to achieve ambitious targets for growth set out within the 2010 sub-regional strategy, *'Unleashing the Potential'*. Building upon its existing strengths, and as part of the Cheshire and Warrington Economic Area, the Council is looking to accelerate growth in population, jobs and productivity to boost its competitive position. The rural area, and the high quality of its landscape and environment, is recognised as a key asset, which enables Cheshire West and Chester to attract a highly skilled workforce, businesses and visitors. It is recognised that the rural area, as one of the four regeneration programme areas within the Borough, will have to play its role in delivering aspirations for population growth of 17%, employment growth of 7% and an increase in GVA of 51%.

While promoting economic growth represents an important goal in the context of the recovery, over the long term there is a need to ensure that rural communities benefit from more sustainable patterns of growth. Research presented in 2007 highlighted that rural communities are increasingly unsustainable. It is widely recognised that car use, and the private mobility of a high proportion of local residents, are significant factors behind this. High levels of personal mobility have opened up urban employment markets to those residing in rural areas, resulting in high levels of out-commuting from rural areas during the working day. As a result of both the relatively high proportion of residents commuting and the distances travelled to the place of work, it is unsurprising that per capita CO₂ emissions are significantly higher for residents living in rural areas. High levels of net out-commuting (up to 85% for rural wards within the Borough in 2001) also serve to reduce demand for a range of local services that are critical for those with more limited mobility, undermining their viability. The barriers to providing a comprehensive public transport service within rural areas, as discussed above, constrain access to services, as well as labour markets and training, for those without access to a car. As such, travel-to-work patterns serve to perpetuate exclusion and social polarity within rural communities.

Within the context of the growth ambitions adopted by the Council, there is an opportunity to promote more sustainable patterns of growth across the rural area. Enhanced connectivity across the rural area has the potential to promote enterprise within rural communities, making workspace within these communities more attractive to businesses reliant upon online resources, and making working from home a more viable option. This will have implications for the amount, size and type of workspace and services needed to support local business activity.

7.4.2 Current position

Working age population

While levels of employment within the rural area have increased in recent years, the working age population has experienced a notable decline. Rather than out-migration of working age groups, this decline can be primarily attributed to the long-term ageing of a relatively settled population. Extrapolating current trends, forward population projections indicate that the disparity between the working age population for the rural area and that for the Borough as a whole is likely to become more pronounced. The implications of this trend for the labour market within the rural area are significant, particularly in relation to delivering strategic aspirations for growth and securing services to sustain more rural communities. While current levels of

unemployment within the rural working age population are relatively high compared to the average for Cheshire West and Chester following the recession, providing for some flexibility within the labour market in the short term, over the long term there is a need to address the balance of the demographic profile.

Skills

While its overall size has declined, there is evidence to suggest that the rural working age population has a significantly higher skill profile than other areas within CW&CC. Based upon census data, the proportion of the rural working age population qualified to NVQ Level 4 or 5 is significantly higher than that for the Borough as a whole. While it is recognised that a substantial proportion of the highly qualified population commute away from the rural area for work, there is a clear opportunity to build upon the skills base of the resident workforce. Within the context of an ambitious strategy for sustainable economic growth, the skills profile represents a clear asset for the rural area.

Employment

Recent trends in levels of employment have been in direct contrast to those for the working age population. While the working age population in the rural area has declined, levels of employment have increased. This rate of increase of 2.8% between 2003 and 2009 can be contrasted with a decline in employment of 3.8% across the Borough as a whole. However, it should be noted that increases in employment were not uniform across the rural area. While growth was strong in the rural zone surrounding the Weaver towns of Northwich and Winsford, both Neston and Frodsham experienced a contraction in the local employment base of between 5% and 6%, as these centres have struggled to compete with larger neighbours.

Key sectors

Employment and business growth in the rural area was primarily driven by increased employment in the banking, finance and insurance sector, with employment in this sector increasing by in excess of 21%. There are particular strengths in this sector within the hinterland to the main urban centres of Chester, Ellesmere Port and the Weaver towns, and extending into the central rural area. Characteristically, growth within the financial sector has primarily been driven by smaller businesses. While average business size has decreased, again having implications for provision of employment land and floorspace, the number of workplaces across the rural area increased by 11% between 2003 and 2008. However, in the light of banking crisis and subsequent recession in 2008 & 2009, it is likely that opportunities for an equivalent level of growth in future will be more limited in this sector.

In contrast to the growth experienced in the financial sector, rural area employment in other sectors either remained steady or declined between 2003 and 2008. Levels of decline in manufacturing, construction and transport and communication were pronounced, albeit from a relatively low employment base. The level of employment in public administration was also relatively low in 2008 and, with the exception of Neston and Parkgate, the rural area should be relatively insulated from decline over the short term. Employment within the distribution, hotels and restaurants sector was also relatively stable across the rural area, suggesting that local retail, personal services and tourism businesses continue to need labour and provide a base level of employment across the rural area.

The level of employment in land-based industries remains relatively low. While there are concentrations within the rural corridor, where around 1.2% of employment was in the agriculture and fishing sector in 2008, across the rural area as a whole, just 0.3% of employment was accounted for by these activities. While a broader analysis of these activities indicates that there remains significant pressure on businesses within the agriculture and aquaculture sector, it also identified clear opportunities. In particular, as the global population continues to rise, levels of competition for food and land will remain strong. Further to this, as described in Box 7.1, Reaseheath College is an important asset in terms of promoting innovation and enterprise within the land based sector. Within this context, the Council and its partners should explore the extent to which innovative approaches to agriculture have the potential to yield substantial benefits for both the rural area and the wider economy.

Box 7.1: Case Study: Reaseheath College

Reaseheath is a leading land-based college, located on the outskirts of Nantwich. It has a long established track record of engaging with businesses in the rural economy, particularly through the Enterprise Delivery Hub and workforce development activity. The Hub, funded by the NWDA, was established to support the growth of Gross Value Added in Cheshire through specialist interventions to promote innovation, skills and enterprise, as three key drivers for growth, within the land-based economy. In addition to promoting knowledge transfer in food, agriculture and sustainability, the Hub engages with rurally based SME's, identify their needs and providing ongoing support to enable them to develop and grow. A review has indicated that over 18 months the Hub has supported over 630 rural businesses, enabling the creation of 120 jobs and 45 new businesses. Further to this, it has facilitated 70 innovation collaborations between businesses and delivered 500 skills interventions. Funding for this activity ends in March 2011.

The Hub also delivers the RDPE diversification capital grant scheme and the RDPE skills programme for Cheshire. VCC deliver the RDPE connect and vitality schemes from Reaseheath enabling cross referrals and joined up solutions being delivered to businesses. Specialist support in product and process development and improved efficiencies in the food sector are being delivered to Cheshire SME's through an ERDF project delivered by Reaseheath.

The business advisors based within the Hub enable the rural businesses to access world class facilities supported by technical specialist to drive new product and process development. Facilities available at the college to support business growth include:

- food and drink centre of excellence - this £7 million 2,500 sq m fully flexible food and drink manufacturing space provides high quality facilities, supported by in house specialists, and enables food businesses to take newly developed product from product concept to end customer delivery;
- Reaseheath Agricultural Development Academy – the offer of the Academy is extensive, ranging from working with the co-op farms through the apprenticeship scheme, delivery of the livestock programme, demonstrating best practice through the monitor farms to the development of bespoke programmes such as Lean manufacturing for Dairy farmers; and
- Anaerobic Digestion demonstration plant - this pioneering plant will lead on skills, knowledge transfer and support the development of economic solutions for anaerobic digestion at farm scale.

The success of the Hub model has been recognised by LSIS with the Reaseheath Enterprise Delivery Hub written up as a Best Practice model for Employer Engagement by LSIS, following our participation in the DIUS 'FE Specialisation and Innovation' Programme in 2009.

The distribution of employment

While a review of trends shows that employment growth within the rural area has outstripped that for the Borough as a whole in recent years, levels of employment per head of working age population within the rural area remain substantially lower than those in urban areas. In 2009 there were 0.71 jobs to working age residents across the rural area. Based upon this measure, there were 0.76 jobs per working age resident across the Borough as a whole. It should also be noted that employment is not evenly distributed across the rural area. Rather, the main urban centres exert a significant influence over activity within surrounding rural areas. Employment is concentrated within the hinterland to the traditional urban areas of Ellesmere Port, the Weaver Valley towns and Chester in particular. Within the Chester and Ellesmere Port Hinterland there were 1.55 jobs per working age resident in 2009. This high level of density distorts the picture for the rural area. Removing the Chester hinterland from the analysis, the ratio of employees to working age residents drops to 0.54. Recent studies have highlighted that these disparities are reflected in the levels of occupation of employment space, with higher levels of supply and demand in the Chester and Ellesmere Port hinterland than elsewhere in Cheshire West.

Employment accommodation/floorspace

While the level of business activity within more rural areas is low, there is little evidence to suggest that employment floorspace limitations have acted as a substantive constraint to the development of the rural area. There is evidence that conversions of agricultural buildings have flooded the market with office floorspace, while industrial provision remains relatively balanced. Rather, the profile of workplaces suggests that access and connectivity provide a greater barrier to development. Beyond the Chester Hinterland, the proportion of large workplaces employing in excess of 50 people is low. Given access constraints it is unlikely that growth will be fuelled by large employers. However, aspirations for the ubiquitous implementation of broadband could potentially enhance the viability of small business units across the rural area, and this will need to be reflected in the size and nature of future employment floorspace. The occupation levels and demand for rural workspace must be carefully monitored during the lifetime of this Strategy, in order to inform the Council of needs and opportunities to support further employment provision.

Commuting to work

The relatively low population density across more rural parts of the Borough coincides with significant levels of out-commuting. Fuelled by high levels of car ownership and constraints upon the comprehensive provision of public transport across the rural area, this represents a major component of CO₂ emissions and a significant barrier to improving levels of rural sustainability. Census data indicates that the proportion of the resident workforce out-commuting was higher for the rural area (at 61%) than for any other area of Cheshire West and Chester. Data also suggests that alongside higher outflows, people residing in rural areas also travel further to work. Some 42% of the rural population in employment travelled more than

10km to work in 2001. Across the Borough, just 34% of those in employment travelled an equivalent distance. Securing growth in local employment, building upon enhanced digital connectivity to reduce commuting and private car use, must form a central component of local efforts to curb emissions. Not only will promoting local employment and potential employment development sites within more rural areas result in enhanced environmental sustainability, through generating higher levels of local economic activity, it has the potential to support key services and sustain local functional communities.

7.4.3 SMART objectives

Based on an assessment of the current position as set out above, and from the strategy consultation process, SMART objectives have been identified:

- increased business and entrepreneurial activity to generate employment growth within the rural area and bring the ratio of employees to working age population up to the Borough average by 2030; and
- all businesses within priority rural sectors have the opportunity to access expertise and best practice within HE/FE and the private sector by 2015, to deliver an increase in the value and productivity of activity within the rural area.

7.4.4 Actions

The following actions have been identified:

Table 7.4: Action Plan: Innovation, enterprise and skills				
Ref:	Action	Target	Lead	Timeline
1	Priority Rural Sectors - Commission work to identify key business sectors focusing upon: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing strengths; • Growth potential; • Importance to environment and landscape; • Improving levels of local rural sustainability. Study to recommend routes for development of businesses within key sectors including visitor economy, equine and food and drink sectors.	Commission study to report on priority sectors and recommendations to form basis of action plan	CW&CC	September 2011
2	Employment skills strategy – to work with the Employment, Skills and Learning team to ensure that the Employment Skills Strategy for CW&CC reflects the needs of rural priority sectors.	Work alongside Employment, Skills and Learning team in commissioning employment skills strategy	CW&CC rural team	April 2011
3	Rural Sector Networks – support the formation of rural networks in relation to identified priority sectors that support innovation and enterprise through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • peer to peer interaction; 	Establish support network for all sectors identified through the priority sector study	CW&CC & Reaseheath	April 2015

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> integration with drivers of innovation (including Reaseheath and Chester University); and interactions with rural support functions of CW&CC to facilitate access to funding and expertise. <p>Networks will also capture and represent the interests of priority sectors.</p>			
4	<p>Local Business Networks – to promote and provide support for the development of local business networks where local communities identify demand. Actions to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> demonstrating the value of local business networks; provide access to appropriate venues; market events to local businesses and other relevant stakeholders. establish a CW&CC presence within local business networks to provide advice in relation to accessing grants and attracting private sector investment. 	<p>Promote Tattenhall Business Network as an exemplar</p> <p>Embed business expertise within CW&CC enabling team</p> <p>Facilitate formation of local business networks</p>	CW&CC	<p>April 2011</p> <p>September 2011</p> <p>Ongoing</p>
5	<p>Championing rural businesses – put structures in place within rural governance arrangements to guarantee representation of key priority rural sector and local business networks. This could take the form of a Business, Enterprise and Innovation sub-group. These governance structures would offer businesses input into strategic discussions around issues including skills, planning, transport and infrastructure at a CW&CC and CWEA level.</p>	<p>Establish Business, Innovation and Enterprise sub-group</p>	CW&CC, LEP	December 2011
6	<p>Flexible workspace – to employ a proactive approach to the provision of flexible workspace in rural areas based around:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> investigating the potential for existing CW&CC facilities and other existing stock to meet future growth within local communities; adopting a flexible planning position regarding the use of employment floorspace within rural areas; and monitoring levels of occupancy of stock and identifying the requirements of local businesses. 	<p>Establish potential of existing stock</p> <p>Identify additional empty commercial stock</p> <p>Monitoring occupancy and demand</p>	CW&CC CW&CC/Parish Councils	<p>September 2011</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>

7.5 Super-fast broadband

7.5.1 *Rationale*

The UK's ambition is to have the best superfast broadband network and connected society by 2015¹⁰. The European Commission target is for all EU citizens to have access to a basic level of broadband (2Mbps) by 2013 and for 100% access to at least 30 Mbps by 2020.

"Rolling out superfast broadband is probably the single most important thing we can do to ensure the sustainability of our rural communities in the 21st Century and end the digital divide. Reliable internet access is vital for business and education, and will help to promote social inclusion and improve life in rural areas right across the country. The new broadband strategy is a vital part of our commitment to improving the lives of people living in rural communities." Caroline Spelman, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs 12th December 2010

7.5.2 *Forecast position*

The Analysys Mason study commissioned as part of the evidence review to support this Strategy, found that the Cheshire West & Chester area does not provide broadband suppliers with sufficient economies of scale to deliver ubiquitous next generation broadband access. The vision for super-fast broadband in the North West is defined in the regional NGA Framework¹¹ as "the widespread take up and use of high speed broadband by all, to enable social and economic prosperity".

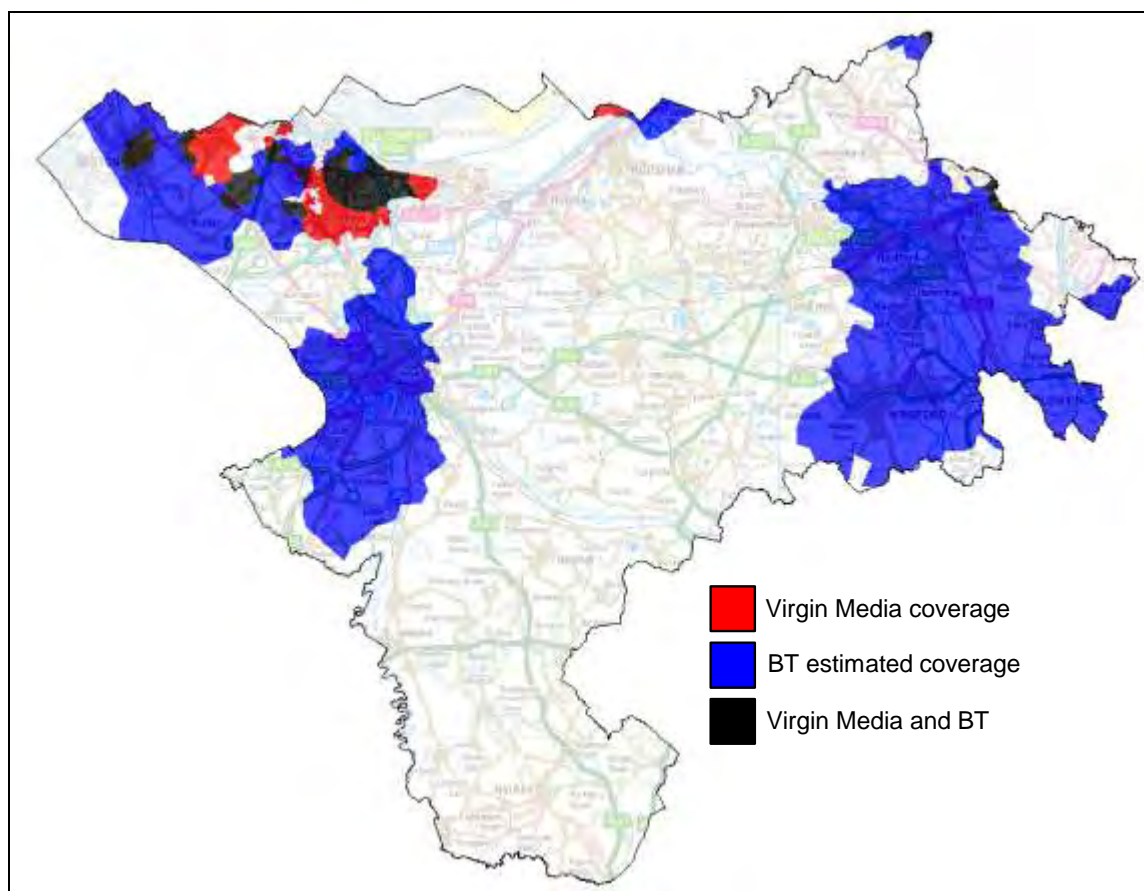
Analysys Mason's analysis shows that the private sector roll out of Next Generation Access broadband is likely to reach approximately 73% of the Borough's population. The map of expected high speed broadband coverage of Virgin Media and BT in 2015 in Figure 8.5 shows that small parts of the rural area are likely to be covered (around Neston, to the south of Chester and to the east of the Weaver Towns along the M6 corridor) but that the vast majority of the rural area would not be covered.

Analysys Mason estimates that 41,024, or 27%, of premises in the Cheshire West and Cheshire area are in State aid "white" areas, and are unlikely to receive access to NGA by 2015. This area would be eligible for publicly funded intervention under current EC State Aid guidelines, assuming other criteria outlined in the guidelines are met.

¹⁰ Britain's Superfast Broadband Future, December 2010

¹¹ Next Generation Access (high speed broadband)

Figure 7.5: Expected super-fast broadband coverage of Virgin Media and BT in the CW&CC area by 2015



Source: Analysys Mason

The Government's broadband strategy, *Britain's Superfast Broadband Future* states that where local authorities have superfast broadband as a development priority BDUK will work with them to source an upgrade to the broadband infrastructure.

BDUK is to release funding in waves to tier one local government bodies and Local Enterprise Partnerships. Local bodies will be invited to prepare plans for broadband infrastructure upgrades to be funded from each wave. BDUK advise that these plans should be developed in association with local communities.

7.5.3 SMART objectives

During the Strategy consultation, three broadband SMART objectives were identified, as follows:

- ubiquitous access to first generation broadband (2 Mbps) across the rural area by 2013;
- the creation of a competitive market for super-fast broadband access in the rural area by 2017; and

- the widespread take up and use of super-fast broadband access (30 Mbps) by residents and businesses of the rural area by 2020.

7.5.4 Actions

A series of actions have been identified; part from as recommended by Analysys Mason and part arising from the consultation process.

Table 7.5: Action Plan: Super fast broadband				
Ref:	Action	Target	Lead	Timeline
1	Set up a super-fast broadband project team within the Council. Collaborate with Cheshire East & Warrington and sign upto a tri-partite agreement to secure delivery Engage with operators and service providers.	Sub-regional Broadband Group active	CW&CC	March 2011 / Ongoing
2	Prepare and maintain supply and demand mapping across the Borough	Timely Market Intelligence	CW&CC	Ongoing
3	Identify super-fast broadband as a corporate priority and engage with BDUK; explore funding sources for intervention activities and make funding application(s), e.g. to BDUK, the Regional Growth Fund, RDPE & ERDF	Working relationship with BDUK Completed funding application(s)	LEP	June 2011
4	Promote and monitor take up of super-fast broadband from BT enabled exchanges in Chester, EP, Neston and the Weaver Towns. Prepare a plan to stimulate demand and take up for super-fast broadband	Demand Stimulation Programme	CW&CC / SR Broadband Group	September 2011
5	Incorporate requirements re super-fast broadband Access into planning conditions and protocols for street works	super-fast broadband ready s106 agreement & Street Works Licence	CW&CC	December 2011
6	Develop policy on use of Community Infrastructure Levy for super-fast broadband investment	Council policy on use of CIL for high speed broadband infrastructure	CW&CC	December 2011
7	Ensure state-aid issues are resolved and procurement is in place to deliver super-fast broadband	Delivery of super-fast broadband	SR Broadband Group	December 2011

7.6 New ways of working

7.6.1 *Rationale*

The Government is committed to transferring power from the centre (Whitehall) to local communities. Government's approach to this transfer is summed up in the phrase "From Big Government to Big Society". A Big Society is described¹² as one where those best placed to find the best solutions to local needs work together to get things done.

The over-arching theme of Big Society is one of collaborative local action. Government's job is to step aside and give people the space, and the tools, that they need. Local Authorities have a critical role to play. They will be the beneficiaries of decentralisation as power is passed to them through the Localism Bill and they will have the vital role in passing power to communities and individuals. The localism agenda puts engagement and collaborative working with communities at the centre of the way that the council (and its public sector partners) does business. The Rural Regeneration Strategy must fit this new context. It must provide a framework to guide and influence local collaborative action. The Council and its partners will need to adopt new ways of working which embrace the localism agenda and enable the development of the Big Society in the rural area of the Borough.

7.6.2 *Current position*

The vast majority of the rural area is parished. After May there will be 93 town and parish councils in the Cheshire West & Chester rural area¹³. There is strong local capacity across much of the rural area and a history of effective community scale activity (including community led planning and local investment).

In addition to town and parish councils, since local government re-organisation, the new unitary council has set up 15 community forums and five Area Partnership Boards. This local governance structure enables residents and local councillors to engage with ward councillors, council officers and public sector partners and to focus on issues with specific geographical implications.

The rural area also benefits from a well developed voluntary and community sector with strong support from organisations such as Cheshire Community Action and the Cheshire Association of Local Councils. This capacity will not be universal however, and that which exists may not be capable of embracing some of the opportunities and responsibilities to be introduced in the Localism and Decentralisation Bill. There is likely to be a need to invest in "capacity building" across all rural communities, and for the Council (and its partners) to re-configure the way that they go about their business in order to embrace the shift to localism.

The transition to a smaller state is likely to have implications for the way that public, cultural and leisure services are delivered across the rural area. Some facilities, such as libraries, small

¹² "Essential Guide to the Localism Bill", CLG, December 2010

¹³ There also 5 "parish meetings" where regular local meetings are held but there is no formal constituted local council

schools and out-reach centres, may be threatened by efficiency savings. This pressure makes it even more important that development is distributed, and designed, in a way that safeguards vulnerable local services. The Government's focus on localism and initiatives such as the Community Right to Challenge¹⁴ and the Community Right to Buy may provide opportunities for public service delivery organisations to work with local communities and the civic sector to develop collaborative local solutions to maintain and safeguard services.

The Localism Bill has introduced radical changes to the Spatial Planning system. The regional planning tier has been abolished with immediate effect. The Regional Spatial Strategy has not yet been revoked but it is the intention of the Government is to do this under the Localism and Decentralisation Bill and it will therefore no longer provide a binding context for local plan making.

Instead the Local Development Framework will have primacy. This must comply with a new National Planning Framework (yet to be introduced) and should include, and to a material extent be based upon - a series of plans produced by communities – to be known as Neighbourhood Plans. This shift drives forward the mission to devolve power to local communities. Ministers want to enable people to determine the future of their communities wherever possible. Neighbourhood Plans will become binding (provided they are consistent with national policy and the principles of the wider local plan) on the basis of a simple majority vote in a local referendum.

Cheshire West & Chester's Local Development Framework is at an early stage in development so will need to follow the Government's new approach. This puts a premium on local engagement and collaborative plan making at community and neighbourhood level. It also provides an opportunity for Cheshire West & Chester to lead the way by leveraging strong local capacity and relationships with strategic land owners to develop some "early wins" and create exemplars which the rest of the Borough can follow.

7.6.3 *The Council needing to work in a "matrix" fashion*

The rural strategy highlights the need for the Council to work increasingly on a place-focussed basis and in multi-disciplinary teams. Enabling and assisting in the development of Neighbourhood Plans across the rural area in the next few years is an example of the need to work with existing staff in a different way. Therefore, the Council and its partners need to consider corporately how to embed matrix working across its four priority programme areas, which will involve identifying all Council staff as being:

- corporate (i.e. not directly relating to programme areas);
- service related – responsive to residents irrespective of their geography; or
- place / programme area-focussed.

¹⁴ The Community Right to Challenge and the Community Right to Buy are to be introduced in the Localism and Decentralisation Bill. The Right to Challenge will enable local communities to challenge the withdrawal of a service and to express an interest in running that service. The Right to Buy will enable communities to acquire buildings of community value in the event of their disposal by a Local Authority

In the case of the latter, the individuals should co-locate and be directed in their normal day-to-day tasks by the Area Programme Manager, being responsive to the agreed Partnership Board's delivery plan. The individual will continue to have a relationship with his/her service discipline head in respect of professional, technical and training issues.

7.6.4 Smart objectives

- all residents of the rural area live within active parishes and are effectively represented by a locally elected (or nominated) town or parish councillor by 2020;
- all parishes are covered by a locally created and adopted Neighbourhood Plan by 2030;
- residents, businesses and councillors recognise the Rural Area Partnership Board as an effective forum and value its role as the voice of rural Cheshire West & Chester within local and sub-regional governance structures; and
- appropriate Council staff are brought into co-located multi-discipline team(s) in order to assist the Partnership Board in the delivery of the Rural Strategy.

7.6.5 Actions

Table 7.6: Action Plan: New ways of working				
Ref:	Action	Target	Lead	Timeline
1	Neighbourhood Planning Pilots – carry out two Neighbourhood Planning pilots, one as part of or aligned with the CLG Neighbourhood Plans Vanguard Scheme and one as a local “multi-parish” pilot.,	Two completed NP Pilots	CW&CC, Tattenhall Parish Council, Cheshire Community Action, Cheshire Association of Local Councils, CLG	Immediate - June 2012
2	Neighbourhood Planning Protocol and CW&CC Toolkit - monitor and capture learning from the two pilots, produce an protocol and toolkit to support Neighbourhood Planning across the remainder of the Borough	NP protocol and Toolkit	CW&CC, Cheshire Community Action, Cheshire Association of Local Councils, CLG	Immediate – June 2012
3	Establish a governance arrangement suitable for Rural CW&CC that takes consideration of the Area Partnership Board structure and the desire to simplify the governance arrangements	Governance model for rural CW&CC	CW&CC, Cheshire West & Chester Partnership	December 2011
4	Placed Based Working – develop a Place Based working protocol. Share with key partners and the rural APB's & test as part of the NP pilots and the completion of Asset Reviews.	Adopted Place Based Working Protocol	CW&CC, Rural Area Partnership Board	Immediate to March 2014

7.7 Energy and climate change

7.7.1 *Rationale*

The Climate Change Act 2008 set legally binding emission reduction targets for 2020 (reduction of 34 percent in greenhouse gas emissions) and for 2050 (reduction of at least 80 percent in greenhouse gas emissions), and introduced five-yearly carbon budgets to help ensure those targets are met.

The importance of the introduction of actions to address climate change is embedded with national and regional planning policy. The Climate Change Supplement to Planning Policy Statement 1 (published in 2007) states that in developing their Core Strategy and supporting local development documents, planning authorities should provide a framework that promotes and encourages renewable and low-carbon energy generation. Policies should be designed to promote and not restrict renewable and low-carbon energy and supporting infrastructure. Planning authorities, developers and other partners in the provision of new development should engage constructively and imaginatively to encourage the delivery of sustainable buildings. Planning authorities should also help to achieve the national timetable for reducing carbon emissions from domestic and non-domestic buildings.

The North West Regional Spatial Strategy which the current government is in the process of revoking reinforced this position. It stated that plans and strategies should promote sustainable energy production and consumption in accordance with an energy hierarchy. The first priority should be to minimise demand for energy and cut unnecessary use, the second priority is to ensure that energy use is as efficient as possible, the third is for renewable energy to be used and renewable sources developed and the fourth is for any continuing use of fossil and other fuels to be clean and efficient. All local authorities should in their own proposals and schemes (including refurbishment) lead by example to emphasise their commitment to reducing the annual consumption of energy and the potential for sustainable energy generation. (EM15). The Regional Spatial Strategy applied the targets set within the North West Sustainable Energy Strategy, that by 2010 at least 10%, rising to 15% by 2015 and 20% by 2020, of the electricity supplied within the region should be provided from renewable energy sources.

The Committee on Climate Change is responsible for setting the five – yearly carbon budgets. In its most recent report – December 2010 – it confirmed that its review of climate science demonstrates that without action, there is a high risk of warming well beyond 2 degrees which will have significant consequences for human welfare and ecological systems. The Committee has recommended that the carbon budgets currently in legislation (which cover the period up to 2022) should be tightened to reflect a 37% reduction in GHGs in 2020 relative to 1990 (from the currently legislated 34% cut), which could be raised further again to 42% once the EU has moved to more ambitious climate change targets. New carbon budgets should be legislated by summer 2011, as required under the Climate Change Act.

The Committee on Climate Change has made a series of recommendations around the actions necessary to achieve these emissions targets. These include; a focus on the development and deployment of local-carbon vehicles (and supporting infrastructure); the transformation of the

energy efficiency and heat systems of homes and commercial buildings and the widespread use of more carbon-efficient practices on farms.

7.7.2 *Current position*

Climate Change and emissions reduction is an important issue for Cheshire West & Chester. The evidence shows that per capita emissions in the Borough are above the regional and national averages for industrial domestic and road transport uses. Many of the impacts of climate change in the North West will have an effect on the Cheshire West and Chester area. Large parts of the Borough, particularly around Chester and Ellesmere Port are low-lying and support a range of industries important for the local economy including agriculture. A number of sites of international and national importance for nature conservation also form part of the local landscape. These would all be vulnerable to increased flooding, changing agricultural practices and a warmer and wetter climate.

The Borough benefits from a clear Vision document setting out the context and providing recommendations for actions which the Council (and partners) might take. Vision 2050: The Vision for a Sustainable Cheshire West and Chester centred on the premise that if we are to achieve a truly sustainable community by 2050 then the direction of travel set now must be right. The document recommends a focus on increased energy efficiency, a transition to use of energy from renewable sources and extensive development of small-scale electricity generation local to communities. Key actions are recommended around supporting community energy schemes, improving the energy efficiency of existing housing stock, supporting new energy start up businesses, introducing energy education and control into homes and schools, and engaging partners in planning for energy reduction.

The actions recommended for this Strategy are based on recommendations within the Vision 2050 report, recent statements from the Committee on Climate Change and opportunities which have been identified during the evidential review and consultation to support development of the Strategy.

7.7.3 *Smart objectives*

- contribute to a reduction in Cheshire West & Chester's per capita domestic CO² emissions of 37% by 2020 (on 1990 levels);
- reduce CO² emissions from agriculture in Cheshire West & Chester by 20% by 2030 (on 2010 levels); and
- generate 7.1 MW* of energy from renewable sources within the rural area by 2020.

7.7.4 Actions

Table 7.7: Action Plan: Energy and climate change				
Ref:	Action	Target	Lead	Timeline
1	Low Carbon Communities – improve and extend the Low Carbon Communities Network by developing and promoting the successes and learning from existing Low Carbon Communities at Ashton Hayes, Blacon, Tarvin, Tarporley & Tattenhall.	Exemplar Low Carbon Communities developed in all areas of the Borough.	CW&CC Energy Team, Low Carbon Communities Network, Cheshire Community Action, Cheshire Association of Local Councils	Ongoing
2	Design a Low Carbon Communities Challenge element and incorporate it into the Neighbourhood Planning process. Incorporate. Test it in the early Neighbourhood Planning pilot in Tattenhall.	Low Carbon Challenge element embedded within CW&CC's Neighbourhood Planning protocol	CW&CC Energy Team, Low Carbon Communities Network, Cheshire Community Action, Cheshire Association of Local Councils, Tattenhall Parish Council.	March 2012
3	Hard to Treat Domestic Energy Efficiency Demonstration – develop a rural demonstration project following the model trialled in the Sustainable Blacon Project	Demonstration energy efficiency project in rural hard to treat domestic property(ies)	CW&CC energy Team, LCCN, Grosvenor Estate, School of Sustainable Energy Chester University	March 2013
4	Hard to Treat Non Domestic Energy Efficiency Demonstration Unit / Project – develop a rural demonstration project following the model trialled in Sustainable Blacon	Demonstration energy efficiency project in rural hard to treat domestic property(ies)	CW&CC Energy Team, LCCN, Grosvenor Estate, School of Sustainable Energy Chester University	March 2013
5	Reduced Emissions from Agriculture – a project to develop and demonstrate emission reductions from commercial farming	X% reduction in emissions from County Farms by 2015 20% reduction in emissions from agriculture in CW&CC by 2020	CW&CC Team, Reaseheath College, NFU, Rural APB	December 2011 - ongoing
6	Local Carbon Fund –	Creation of £x million	CW&CC energy Team, Low	August 2012

Table 7.7: Action Plan: Energy and climate change				
Ref:	Action	Target	Lead	Timeline
	develop and manage an investment fund to provide interest free loans and grants to community groups. Funding sources may include UK & EU grants, CIL, New Homes Bonus, Parish Precepts	fund	Carbon Communities Network, School of Sustainable Energy Chester University, Reaseheath College	- ongoing
7	Renewable Energy Generation Programme – set up a programme to promote renewable energy projects, provide advice, facilitate the planning process, support community engagement and identify investment funds	Generate 7.1 MW of renewable energy from the rural area using a range of technologies	CW&CC Energy Team, Cheshire & Warrington LEP, Environ-link NW	2020

*Target for renewable energy generation based on the RSS Renewable Energy targets for Cheshire. Total share of RSS renewable energy targets for Cheshire by 2020 = 7.1 MW

Assumptions:

- 50% of total allocation for CW&CC
- 25% of production from turbines (25% share of employment) = 1.4 MW
- 40% of production from Biomass fuelled CHP (40% of population) = 1.8 MW
- 100% of production from Anaerobic Digestion Farm Biogas = 2 MW
- 40% production from PV (40% of housing stock) = 1.9 MW
- 0% of production from thermal waste treatment.

7.8 Natural and historic environment

7.8.1 *Rationale*

Cheshire West & Chester's natural and historic environment is a hugely important asset. Consultation to support the development of this Strategy has affirmed the value that residents place upon these assets and the importance role that they play in enhancing quality of life, enabling mitigation of and adaptation to climate change, and supporting the local economies.

It will be important to reconcile the need for housing and economic growth to re-vitalise rural communities with the need to protect the natural and historic environment. New development in the rural area may have an impact on wildlife and nature conservation and provision must be for mitigation and protection and enhancement. Listed buildings, conservation areas, scheduled monuments and historic parks and gardens all contribute to cultural heritage and should be afforded adequate protection to ensure their future.

The natural and historic environment is also a contributor to the Borough's inward investment proposition and underpins the visitor economy in rural areas. Every effort should therefore be made to maximise this contribution, whilst ensuring that the assets are protected and preserved for the benefit of future generations.

7.8.2 *Current position*

Cheshire West and Chester benefit from a large number of environmental assets, some of which have European protection. These include parts of the Dee and Mersey Estuaries, Oakmere, Midland Meres and West Midland Mosses. In addition there are 28 sites are designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest covering more than 5,199¹⁵.

The Borough also has:

- 8 Areas of Special County Value (ASCV);
- 286 Site of Biological Importance (SBI) covering 4259ha;
- 39 Areas of Nature Conservation value, 4 Strategic Wildlife Areas, and 215 Sites of Nature Conservation Value;
- 6 Local Nature Reserves covering 104ha;
- 3634 ha of woodland (including Delamere Forest), of which 651 ha is Ancient Woodland;
- 31 Cheshire Biodiversity Action Plan habitats (including 17 UK BAP priority habitats;
- in the region of 6,700 ponds; and
- 24 regionally important Geological and Geomorphological Sites wholly or partially in Cheshire West and Chester.

¹⁵ Including those partly within CW&CC

In addition to these natural environmental assets, 42% of the land area of the Borough is statutorily designated Green Belt.

The natural environment is highly valued by the area's residents and there is a strong track record of public investment in the natural environment, biodiversity and landscape. Projects include the Sandstone Ridge EConet Partnership which was involved in the creation of a network of woodlands, heathlands, peatlands and meadows along the Sandstone Ridge to create an ecological network. The partnership worked with local communities to bring economic benefits, through increased tourism; and social benefits, through increased public enjoyment of the countryside and a focus on education and developing rural skills. Cheshire Wildlife Trust are working on a Living Landscapes Washlands project which aims to create a landscape where a resilient network of wetland habitats provides ecosystem services in conjunction with high quality nature conservation resources of benefit to local people. The Habitats and Hillforts of Cheshire's Sandstone Ridge is a Heritage Lottery funded project (running to 2012) which aims to conserve the Ridge's Iron Age hillforts and surrounding wildlife habitats, and to encourage more people to access, learn about and become more involved in the area's heritage.

Cheshire West and Chester has a rich archaeological and built heritage. This extends well beyond Chester's Roman amphitheatre, medieval moated sites and motte and bailey castles and includes prehistoric burial sites and hillforts, market towns and "new model" estate villages, the area's distinctive "black and white" architecture, as well as Georgian, Victorian and modern development. The Borough has 97 conservation areas, 2,505 listed buildings, 7 registered parks and gardens of special historic interest, 1 Battlefield and 116 Scheduled Monuments. Much of this is in the rural area. It underpins much of the rural tourism industry and creates the distinctive local architecture and settlement patterns which make rural Cheshire's towns and villages such attractive places to live.

Previous work by the Council and its partners has identified a series of key issues which need to be addressed by the Strategy:

- managing, expanding and enhancing the Borough's Green Infrastructure network and recognising its importance in delivering local environmental, socio economic and health benefits;
- enhancing the connectivity of Green Infrastructure and reinforcing the protection of green corridors and linkages between sites;
- protecting, managing and enhancing Cheshire West and Chester's historic and natural assets;
- protecting and enhancing existing amenity and recreational open spaces, school playing fields, greenways and wildlife sites; and
- maintaining, enhancing, restoring or adding to local biodiversity/geodiversity, landscape and tree conservation interests, whilst securing regeneration of previously developed land and meeting development needs.

7.8.3 Smart objectives

- Green Belt boundaries around villages which provide for appropriate expansion needed to sustain the vitality of rural communities whilst protecting the local natural and historic environment;
- secure and maintain a robust Green Infrastructure Network for Cheshire West & Chester;
- secure protection and positive management for appropriate sites identified within the Biodiversity Audit and any designated sites not in good condition; and
- secure protection and positive management for those listed buildings and scheduled monuments in the rural area identified as being at risk.

It is important to note that the strategy seeks to influence the core strategy policy in relation to settlement boundaries and small scale greenbelt amendments. It seeks flexible policies within the Local Development Framework that may allow communities to review greenbelt or settlement boundaries to make small scale amendments if they so wish through neighbourhood planning.

7.8.4 Actions

Table 7.8: Action Plan: Natural and historic environment				
Ref:	Action	Target	Lead	Timeline
1	Positive Future for At Risk Sites - Identify designated sites, listed building and scheduled monuments in the rural area which are recorded as being at risk and work with local communities and land owners to develop a plan to secure their future.	At risk sites in positive management	CW&CC Rural Team, Cheshire Association of Local Councils, Country Landowners & Business Association, English Heritage	April 2011 - ongoing
2	Local Heritage Register - work with local communities and interest groups to identify and record locally important heritage assets, which are not formally designated, but which contribute to local distinctiveness and place-making;	Completed Local Heritage Asset Register	CW&CC Rural Team, Cheshire Association of Local Councils,	April 2011 - ongoing
3	Re-vitalising Green Belt Villages – work with local communities to define appropriate inset or village boundaries	Green Belt Village Boundaries reviewed and agreed.	CW&CC Rural Team, Cheshire Association of Local Councils, Cheshire Community Action, CPRE	March 2012
4	Ecological Networks – Develop further work on Ecological Networks and how to integrate into developments, including the River Dee Corridor.	Look at opportunities to further develop projects	CW&CC Regeneration Team, CW&CC Environmental Team, Cheshire Wildlife Trust, bordering	March 2011 - ongoing

		including River Dee Corridor	authorities	
5	Sandstone Ridge EONet & Habitats and Hillforts Legacy – review the impact of these two programmes, identify the potential for ongoing investment and secure funding.	Impact Assessment and 2011 – 2015 Programme	CW&CC Rural Team, EONet Partnership, Cheshire Wildlife Trust	March 2012 – ongoing
6	Green Infrastructure Strategy – complete and implement a Green Infrastructure Strategy to maximise the benefits of Green Infrastructure to rural people, towns, villages and employment sites	Green Infrastructure Programme	CW&CC Rural Team, Country Land and Business Association, CPRE, Cheshire Association of Local Councils	Ongoing

PART THREE: Implementation and delivery

8 Leading delivery

8.1 Introduction

Since May 2010, the Coalition Government has set about changing the regeneration landscape. Key regeneration-related reforms and developments have included the abolition of regional development agencies and regional spatial strategies, significant funding cuts to local authority budgets, the publication of a White Paper on Local Growth and the subsequent establishment of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and the unveiling of the Localism Bill. At its core, the Local Growth White Paper seeks to shift power to local communities and businesses by establishing LEPs of local business and civic leaders, operating within an area that makes economic sense, which is charged with providing the vision, knowledge and strategic leadership to set local priorities and empower communities to fulfill their potential. A nationally operated Regional Growth Fund (RGF) of £1.4b has been established with a view to driving enterprise and private sector employment¹⁶. Urban Regeneration Companies (URCs), which were one of the previous government's mainstays in the regeneration domain, have all but vanished following the inability of the Regional Development Agencies to continue offering them core funding.

Against this background, it is clear that if local authorities and its partners wish to prioritise the growth and development of a part of their area, they must do so by taking at least an initial lead role but working with other local partners and businesses to deliver positive change, growth and development. Since resources previously available for URCs to fund the recruitment of specialist staff will also not be available, local authority staff will have a key role to play.

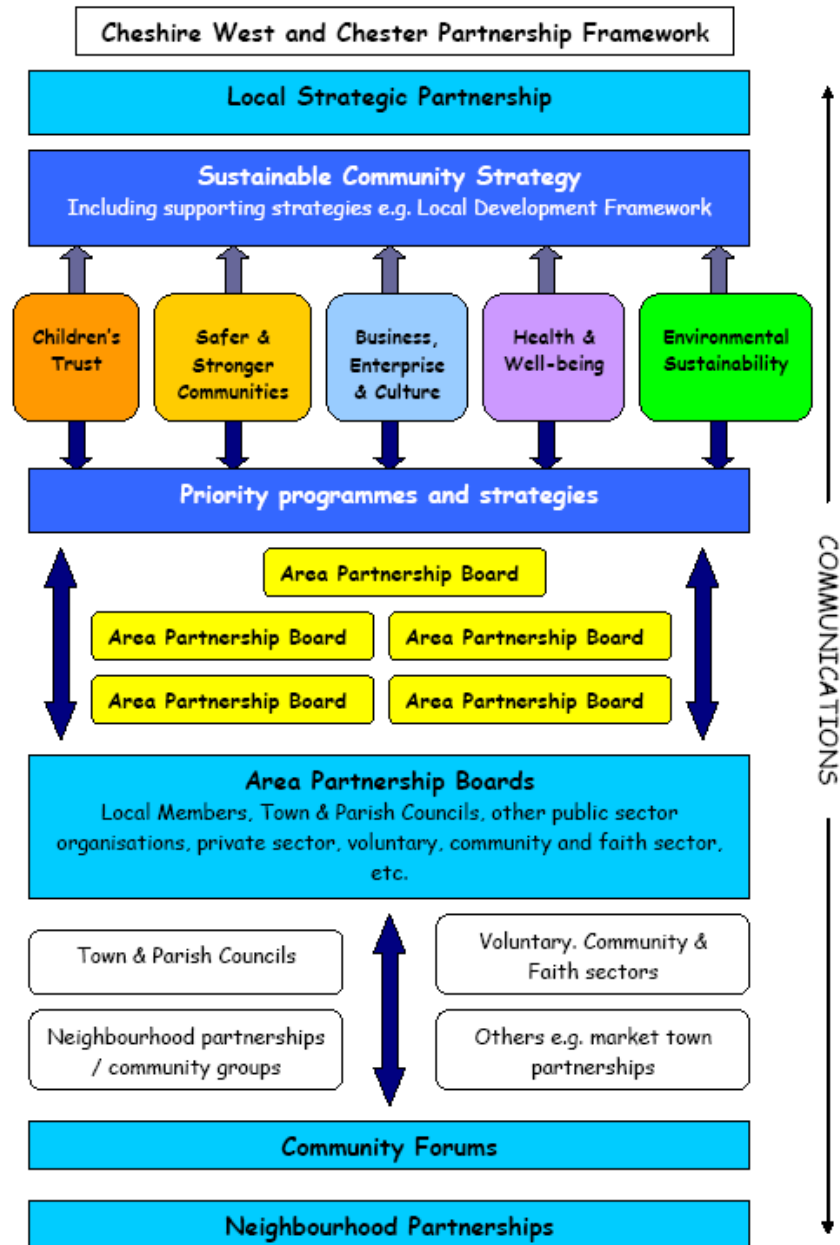
This section explores the implications of these changes and puts forward how the Council and its partners might set about the implementation and delivery of a regeneration programme for its rural area. In this new landscape, it is also important that an appropriate means of working effectively with a partnership is explored. The Council has already made progress in building partnerships with other relevant organisations in the rural area. Therefore, consideration is given first to an analysis of the existing partnership and governance arrangements and how these should respond to the regeneration strategy that has emerged. The importance of establishing a positive planning framework is then explored.

8.2 Existing partnership and governance arrangements

The partnership and governance arrangements of relevance to the rural agenda in Cheshire West are set out in Figure 8.1 below.

¹⁶ The objectives of the RGF, set out in the Application form guidance are to: (a) stimulate enterprise by providing support for projects and programmes with significant potential for economic growth and create additional private sector employment; and (b) support in particular those areas and communities that are currently dependent on the public sector to make the transition to sustainable private sector led growth and prosperity.

Figure 8.1 Existing Partnership Framework



At the core of this structure of relevance to the rural area are the Town and Parish Councils and the Area Partnership Boards. Not all of the rural area has a parish or town council as the plan in Figure 8.2 demonstrates.

Boundary Key

Cheshire West and Chester
Parish Councils (at September 2009)

Type

- Parish*
- Parish Council
- Parish Meeting
- Town Council
- Unparished Area

* The category "Parish" is used where no formal community governance mechanism exists.

Cheshire West and Chester
Parish Councils, Parish Meetings, Town Councils
& Unparished Areas (at September 2009)

Cheshire West
and Chester

Not Scale 1:100,000
This map is based upon Ordnance Survey material with the permission of
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Cheshire West and Chester Council. (11 November 2009)

- Northwich and Rural North;
- Winsford and Rural East; and
- Rural West.

¹⁷ Source: “WEST CHESHIRE TOGETHER” – GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS: August 2010

Table 8 1: Current APB structures			
Area	Chair	CW&CC Director	Area manager
Northwich and Rural North	Chris Rowbottom (Weaver Vale Housing Trust)	Mark Palenthorpe	Mark Simmons
Winsford and Rural East	John Salt (Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service)	John Stephens	Ewan McHenry
Rural West	Alison Roylance-White (Cheshire Community Action)	Steve Kent	Rob Callow

Core membership each APB includes:

- the Chairs (or their elected representatives) of the respective Community Forums operating within the Area Partnership Board area;
- a town or parish council representative to be elected from the relevant catchment area (or resident group where this is not applicable);
- a representative from the Third Sector to be nominated by the Third Sector Assembly
- relevant partners for each priority, for example Cheshire Constabulary

Projects and initiatives identified by each Area Partnership Board are steered through local 'task and finish' groups. The business of each APB is managed by the relevant Council Area Manager in conjunction with the Area Partnership Board Chair. The role of the elected Members as Community Forum Chairs on the Area Partnership Board is to provide the key link between the Community Forums and the Area Partnership Board.

The stated key purpose of the APBs is to provide differential services to meet differing needs across the Borough in order to improve outcomes for local communities and their key roles are to:

- develop local priorities through the analysis of research and intelligence, performance management, and local community engagement;
- develop Area Action Plans to meet local priorities and underpin the Sustainable Community Strategy¹⁸;
- develop and deliver specific localised projects and initiatives, identified either through the Area Partnership Board, thematic partnerships or Local Strategic Partnership, to respond to local priorities and improve outcomes for local communities;
- commission services to meet local priorities through aligned budgets, discrete Area Partnership Board resources and external funding;

¹⁸ West Cheshire: *Together we can aim high*: Sustainable Community Strategy 2010-2026

- develop local services through consultation with the Local Strategic Partnership and Thematic Boards;
- respond to the needs of local communities and support community engagement through the Community Forums; and
- monitor and, where necessary, challenge strategic policies or resource allocations made by any partner agency which may have a detrimental effect on the local area.

The APBs have numerous accountabilities across the wider partnerships framework, namely to:

- the Community Forums for responding to locally identified needs, issues and priorities not resolved at a local level;
- the Thematic Partnerships for commissioned projects and initiatives which contribute to the delivery of Sustainable Community Strategy outcomes;
- the LSP for the development of Area Action Plans which underpin the Borough-wide Sustainable Community Strategy;
- the Council for the effective local allocation of financial resources contributed by the Council;
- other key partners for the effective allocation of financial resources devolved down to local level to support local delivery; and
- the public for the effective delivery of Area Action Plans supported by local research and intelligence.

8.2.1 *The Cheshire and Warrington Rural Partnership*

At the Cheshire and Warrington LEP area level, the Partnership exists to bring together the diverse rural interests – economic, environmental and community – to play an active role in supporting the three local authorities¹⁹ and key stakeholders in the sustainable development of the Cheshire and Warrington LEP area. Its role, as set out in its terms of reference, is to:

- through consultation and debate with the wider membership, help to develop, understand and disseminate information on future policy;
- seek to influence policy as it is developed;
- ensure recognition of the strength of the Cheshire & Warrington Rural Economy and attract appropriate Regional, National and European funding;
- promote innovation and good practice, develop new ideas and support initiatives that help sustain rural communities and the rural economy;
- gain recognition and acceptance from key organisations as the rural voice for the Sub-region, and as a Strategic Partner Organisation, support the work of the Prosperity Commission;

¹⁹ Cheshire West and Chester, Warrington and Cheshire East

- identify common issues and seek to influence regional (now LEP) priorities and resources;
- develop links with the LSPs in the Sub-region;
- facilitate wider debate, through conferences and seminars on key rural issues in collaboration with partner, for example, Reaseheath EDH, CCVA;
- provide a steer on areas of key research to be undertaken to help identify and evidence rural priorities and need;
- retain the over-view and the Strategic Lead for the Rural Voice on the Prosperity Commission (now LEP);
- promote Equality and Diversity and social inclusion in all aspects of its work as a Strategic Partner;
- promote economic well-being and the move towards a more sustainable Rural Economy for the Sub-region (now LEP area);
- promote the sharing of best practice within our rural communities to reduce rural isolation in all its forms;
- support the development of the rural voluntary, community and faith sector to promote social inclusion and the development of social capital;
- establish a clear link between practitioners (delivery agencies) and policy makers to ensure the work of the partnership is relevant to the needs of the rural areas across the Sub-region; and
- inform effective working relationships with the emerging Sub-regional Partnerships.

Reaseheath College, provides the secretariat for the meetings, and will circulate agenda and papers at least seven days prior to each meeting.

8.2.2 *A new agenda for APBs - locality working*

The Coalition Government has stated²⁰ that it is committed to addressing three significant and interlocking challenges:

- how to restore confidence in public finances;
- how to rebuild trust in politics; and
- how to tackle entrenched economic, social and environmental problems.

These mean that public services will have to offer:

- much better value for money;
- more transparency, and

²⁰ Place based budgets: the future governance of local public services. LGA June 2010

- more effectiveness;

thereby encouraging social responsibility and reducing the incursion of the state into the lives of individuals and creating a big society that empowers residents and communities to come together to improve and localise services. The aim of the Government is to end bureaucracy, top-down control and centralisation – this is the approach Cheshire West and Chester Council wishes to adopt in their approach to Locality Working.

The core proposition of government is that:

- commissioning responsibility for a set of local services should rest with a locally accountable governance body;
- exactly how this body is constituted would be a matter for local decision but it would need to have a legal form and be fully democratically accountable locally;
- in most cases, it is likely to be based on a council or councils working together;
- the local body should be fully accountable for the budgets it holds: where the budget is funded by local taxpayers, it need only account locally to electors; and
- the role of this place-based budget-holder is a commissioning and enabling role. It is possible that the government will wish to move to funding models for many services which do not rely directly on public sector organisations holding budgets and instead allow money to follow citizens' choices. We expect that, as well as holding a placed based budget, the local body will be responsible for ensuring the conditions are in place locally to make sure choice-based models work effectively (so, for example, addressing constraints that prevent the development of a responsive supply side and encouraging the growth of the voluntary sector).

Over the three years to March 2014, the Council is planning a range of service reforms and efficiency savings to further improve the service offer from the Council to the local residents. It is in the process of determining a model for locality working (based on Ellesmere Port) , which involves determining the “locality” geography and then neighborhoods or clusters of parishes and then Identifying local neighbourhood priorities for improving service delivery and delivering improved outcomes. It then plans to focus on commissioning services and supporting other organisations including the voluntary sector, private sector, and community groups, to deliver services through a process that integrates service delivery and budgets across the public, private and community sector to deliver joined-up services at lower cost.

The APBs are to play an important role in designing the locality working model including priority setting, resource planning and communication with residents and elected Members. The local authority will remain the strategic enabler and the champion of communities – but it intends to devolve particular services which are assessed as the most appropriate to deliver at the local level. The services currently being assessed are:

- environment/greenspace;
- regeneration/worklessness;
- enforcement;

- community engagement; and
- adults and children and young people services.

It is already clear that the APBs will be part of the infrastructure for a new commissioning process. Therefore, this Strategy needs to have regard to this evolving position in making recommendations in respect of the governance and partnership arrangements appropriate for the delivery of the Strategy.

8.3 Delivering the Rural Regeneration Strategy – the rationale for change

The sections above demonstrate that:

- there is already a high level of partnership working in the rural area; and
- the APBs play a crucial role in coordinating local neighbourhood partnerships including Town and Parish Councils - thereby fulfilling an important role in helping local democracy to work.

However, because three APBs are involved in rural affairs and have a focused geographical remit, they are unable to be the voice of the rural communities in the Borough and with any authority to the Cheshire and Warrington Rural Partnership or to the LEP. Many rural issues are common across the Borough but none of the APBs develop thematic or strategic policy or priorities for the rural area as a whole.

A consideration of this Strategy is that the Rural West APB should be remodelled into a Cheshire West Rural Area Partnership Board and that Northwich and Rural North and Winsford and Rural East APBs should remain as they are but should cease to deal with rural issues and focus on the towns of Northwich and Winsford. This will require consultation with all of the APBs and, if accepted, lead to the creation of a new Board for the Cheshire West Rural Partnership Board that is reflective of the rural agenda and stakeholders across the Borough. Another consideration is that a separate strategic board is set up to deal wholly with rural issues that runs along side the three APB's however it is essential that the governance of the Rural Regeneration Strategy and the Rural APB are considered together and, although it may not create one board, that they have very strong links and work in partnership.

8.4 Positive planning framework

This Strategy sets out²¹ the level of and type of new development that we believe will be appropriate in the rural area to meet its overarching objective of re-vitalising rural communities and contributing to Cheshire West & Chester's future sustainable economic growth.

Determining the scale and type of development is only part of the story however. Just as important is the distribution of new development across the rural area – and critically – the establishment of guiding principles around the way that development is used to improve the sustainability of rural communities, and to meet the needs of the people that live within them.

²¹ Section Reference

This lies within the realm of the Borough's Local Development Framework which is currently in development – the council expects to publish a draft Core Strategy for consultation in early 2012. The Rural Regeneration Strategy provides important evidence and context for the new Local Plan. The evidential analysis which informs the Strategy demonstrates the need to use development as a tool to re-vitalise many of the Borough's rural communities – large and small. The thematic strategies and action plans provide some valuable spatial analysis – in particular the Accessibility Strategy – which should inform thinking on the appropriate spatial distribution of development to best support and safeguard local services. Further recommendations around a spatial strategy are offered in Section 8.4.3 below.

The Implementation Strategy²² sets out the need for an enabling planning framework for the rural area. This framework needs to provide the conditions which will help businesses, entrepreneurs and local communities take advantage of opportunities to improve the environmental, economic and social well-being, and to shape the future of their local area to meet their aspirations.

8.4.1 *“Asks” of the Local Development Framework*

The Regeneration Strategy therefore makes the following “asks” of the Local Development Framework, namely that it:

- recognises and provides for the need to enable the rural area to host in the region of 30% of new housing, economic and related development in the Borough during the plan period;
- recognises and ensures that growth (development) needs to be distributed across the rural area; no settlements - whatever their size - should be excluded from proportionate growth if the residents desire it;
- encourages and enables rural communities to plan for their own future by producing a Neighbourhood Plan (as provided for in the Localism and Decentralisation Bill);
- use these Neighbourhood Plans to inform the spatial strategy and distribution of new development, and as a framework for positive development management;
- includes a planning framework that positively enables growth to improve the future vitality and sustainability of rural settlements and communities;
- ensures that development which is permitted in the rural area is in line with the type and scale of development which this Strategy and local communities have identified as being desirable (via the Neighbourhood Planning process); and
- provides for sustainable growth whilst recognising the need to protect the natural and historic environment for the benefit of future generations .

It is not the role of this Strategy to draft planning policies for the rural area. It is useful however to point towards the sort of wording which – with some improvements - would provide an enabling policy context.

²² Section Reference

The wording examples below in Box 8.1 are taken from the draft Shropshire Core Strategy which has recently been adopted²³. These policies have been designed to promote a similar approach to revitalising rural communities promoted by this Strategy.

Box 8.1 Illustrative wording to provide an enabling policy context drawn from Shropshire

- 1 . Develop the roles of Shrewsbury as a sub-regional centre, and Shropshire's market towns and key centres as self contained settlements, providing the main focus for new housing, employment and infrastructure development and the preferred location for a range of services and facilities to serve the wider needs of their respective hinterlands.
- 2 . Rebalance rural communities through the delivery of local housing and employment opportunities appropriate to the role, size and function of each settlement, or group of settlements, ensuring the development delivers community development.
- 3 . Provide for a mix of good quality, sustainable housing development of the right size, type, tenure and affordability to meet the housing needs and aspirations of all sectors of the community, including provision for specialist needs and the elderly.
- 4 . Promote sustainable economic development and growth by providing a flexible and responsive supply of employment land and premises, and the development of further / higher education and training opportunities, to support business development, satisfy the changing needs and demands of the Shropshire economy, promote inward investment and help generate skilled, well paid employment opportunities.
- 5 . Support the development of sustainable tourism, rural enterprise, broadband connectivity, diversification of the rural economy, and the continued importance of farming and agriculture, ensuring that development proposals are appropriate in their scale and nature with the character and quality of their location.
- 6 . Support the improvement of Shropshire's transport system in a sustainable and integrated way and locate development to improve accessibility by quality public transport, cycling and walking, help reduce car dependency and the impact of traffic on local communities and the environment.
- 7 . Promote a low carbon Shropshire, delivering development which mitigates, and adapts to, the effects of climate change, including flood risk, by promoting more responsible transport and travel choices, more efficient use of energy and resources, the generation of energy from renewable sources, and effective and sustainable waste management.
- 8 . Promote high quality sustainable design and construction in all new development, ensuring that developments respond to their local context and create safe, accessible and attractive places which contribute to local distinctiveness.
- 9 . Ensure that the character, quality and diversity of Shropshire's built, natural and historic environment is protected, enhanced and, where possible, restored, in a way

²³ <http://www.shropshire.gov.uk/planning.nsf/open/2E1E13D0ADAA121E8025784500330747>

that respects landscape character, biodiversity, heritage values, and local distinctiveness, and contributes to wider environmental networks.

- 1 0 . Improve the quantity, quality and accessibility of multifunctional open space, rights of way, and sport, recreation and cultural facilities to provide varied opportunities for people of all ages to enjoy physical activity, cultural activities and lifetime learning, helping to improve health and well-being.

8.4.2 Spatial strategy - policies

CS3: The Market Towns and other key centres

The market towns and other key centres will maintain and enhance their roles in providing facilities and services to their rural hinterlands, and providing foci for economic development and regeneration. Balanced housing and employment development, of an appropriate scale and design that respects each town's distinctive character and is supported by improvements in infrastructure, will take place within the towns' development boundaries and on sites allocated for development.

CS4: Community Hubs and Community Clusters

In the rural area, communities will become more sustainable by:

- focusing private and public investment in the rural area into Community Hubs and Community Clusters, and not allowing development outside these settlements unless it meets policy CS5;
- allowing development within Community Hubs and Community Clusters that helps rebalance rural communities by providing facilities, economic development of housing for local needs, and is of a scale that is appropriate to the settlement;
- ensuring that market housing development makes sufficient contribution to improving local sustainability through a suitable mix of housing that caters for local needs and by delivering community benefits in the form of contributions to affordable housing for local people and contributions to identified requirements for facilities, services and infrastructure. The priorities for community benefit will be identified in partnership with the community; and
- ensuring that all development within Community Hubs and Community Clusters is of a scale and design that is sympathetic to the character of the settlement and its environs.

CS5: Countryside and the Green Belt

In the open countryside, new development will be strictly controlled in accordance with national planning policies protecting the countryside and Green Belt from inappropriate development.

Subject to further controls over development that apply to the Green Belt, development proposals on appropriate sites which maintain and enhance countryside vitality and character

will be permitted where they improve the sustainability of rural communities by bringing local economic and community benefits, particularly where they relate to:

- small scale new economic development diversifying the rural economy, including farm diversification schemes; and
- dwellings to house agricultural, forestry or other essential countryside workers and other affordable housing or accommodation to meet a local need in accordance with national planning policies and Policies CS11 and CS12.

It is important to note that the strategy seeks to influence the core strategy policy in relation to settlement boundaries and small scale greenbelt amendments. It seeks flexible policies within the LDF that may allow communities to review greenbelt or settlement boundaries to make small scale amendments if they so wish through neighbourhood planning.

8.4.3 Potential improvements

We believe that the outcome of these policies will be more strongly aligned with the objectives of the Rural Regeneration Strategy if subject to some slight amendments.

CS3: The Market Towns and other key centres

Rather than wording relating to the provision of facilities and services for the rural hinterland the policy wording should make clear that market towns and key centres should provide facilities and services to their residents and businesses (current and future) as well as their rural hinterlands. The ability of these settlements to meet as many as possible of the everyday needs of a large proportion of their population is vital in securing their future sustainability.

CS4: Community Hubs and Community Clusters

Local needs (for facilities, economic development and housing) should be defined by the community (within the context of the position evidenced and set out in the Local Plan) – where possible in a Neighbourhood Planning process. These needs should be determined and informed by requirements to meet the future sustainability of the settlement and not restricted simply to an analysis of the housing and service needs of existing residents.

The mix of new open market housing provided should be determined by the assessment of the type of housing needed to secure the housing stock necessary (type and number) which will help to support and maintain a balanced demographic and socio-economic profile within the local population. Where possible these needs should be determined by the local community in a Neighbourhood Planning process. This process should also identify priorities for community benefits which should attract investment as part of the development process.

CS5: Countryside and Green Belt

It is likely to be necessary to review the boundary of the Green Belt around some rural towns and villages to enable them to host development needed to re-vitalise and support sustainable economic growth. We understand that such a revision will be possible through the Neighbourhood Planning process, where communities can decide to amend existing boundaries or elect to remove the settlement from the Green Belt via the “inset” rules.

Local housing needs should be defined by the community (within the context of the position evidenced and set out in the Local Plan) – where possible in a Neighbourhood Planning process. These needs should be determined and informed by requirements to meet the future sustainability of the settlement and not restricted simply to an analysis of the housing and service needs of existing residents.

8.4.4 *Spatial development strategy*

National Planning policy sets a clear spatial framework for rural development. PPS1 sets out a series of key principles to ensure that development plans and decisions taken on planning applications contribute to the delivery of sustainable development. These state that a spatial planning approach should be at the heart of planning for sustainable development. They also make it clear that community involvement is an essential element in delivering sustainable development and creating sustainable and safe communities. In preparing spatial plans planning authorities should set a clear vision for the future pattern of development, with clear objectives for achieving that vision and strategies for delivery and implementation.

The PPS sets out general approach to development and its spatial distribution which requires that when preparing development plans planning authorities should (among other things) seek to:

- promote urban and rural regeneration to improve the well being of communities, improve facilities, promote high quality and safe development and create new opportunities for the people living in those communities;
- bring forward sufficient land of a suitable quality in appropriate locations to meet the expected needs for housing, for industrial development, for the exploitation of raw materials such as minerals, for retail and commercial development, and for leisure and recreation – taking into account issues such as accessibility and sustainable;
- transport needs, the provision of essential infrastructure, including for sustainable waste management, and the need to avoid flood risk and other natural hazards;
- provide improved access for all to jobs, health, education, shops, leisure and community facilities, open space, sport and recreation, by ensuring that new development is located where everyone can access services or facilities on foot, bicycle or public transport rather than having to rely on access by car, while recognising that this may be more difficult in rural areas; and
- reduce the need to travel and encourage accessible public transport provision to secure more sustainable patterns of transport development.

It is clear that the focus on integrated development in locations which are accessible on foot, bicycle or public transport rather than by public car is of critical importance. It should be noted however that the PPS does recognise that this may be more difficult to achieve in rural areas.

PPS7 Sustainable Development in Rural Areas provides further detail to inform a spatial development strategy for rural areas, directing in its Key Principles under Location of Development that most new development should be focused in places where employment,

housing, services and other facilities can be provided close together – so enabling access by public transport, walking or cycling.

It requires local planning authorities to identify such places – referred to as “local service centres” in their development plan.

“Away from larger urban areas, planning authorities should focus most new development in or near to local service centres where employment, housing (including affordable housing), services and other facilities can be provided close together. This should help to ensure these facilities are served by public transport and provide improved opportunities for access by walking and cycling. These centres (which might be a country town, a single large village or a group of villages) should be identified in the development plan as the preferred location for such development.”

PPS7 Key Principles Paragraph 3

PPS7 also requires (paragraph 4) that planning authorities should set out in the Local Development Documents their policies for allowing some limited development in, or next to, rural settlements that are not designated as local service centres, in order to meet local business and community needs and to maintain the **vitality** of these communities. In particular, authorities should be supportive of small-scale development of this nature where it provides the most sustainable option in villages that are remote from, and have poor public transport links with, service centres.

The spatial strategy for Cheshire West & Chester must follow these guiding principles – it must identify a series of “local service centres” which should host most development, and provide for some, limited, development in the remaining rural settlements to meet local business and community needs and to maintain the vitality of these communities.

Identifying local service centres

The planning statements provide a clear indication of what the role and function of a local service centre is considered to be. They are locations where *“employment, housing (including affordable housing), services and other facilities can be provided close together”* (PPS7, paragraph 3).

Settlements which offer this sort of multi-functionality should therefore be considered as local service centres. It is important to note that specific criteria are not set out in national planning guidance as to what a local service centre comprises. PPS7 specifically states that it could be town, larger village or group of villages, but provides no detail beyond this.

The choice of local service centres should therefore be guided by the ability of a settlement, or network of settlements, to perform this role – both now and in the future.

When considering which settlements to identify as service centres it is therefore important to take account the complexity of functional relationships between settlements. Many smaller villages and hamlets are considerably more sustainable than is apparent when they are considered in isolation. They may combine with neighbouring settlements to form more sustainable spatial entities, made up of groups of villages, or groups of villages and towns. Indeed the reason that one settlement may lack certain services and facilities is precisely because they are available close by in a neighbouring settlement.

It is therefore important to take account of this “network & clusters” functionality when identifying local service centres.

Considering diversity and role and function

As the analysis earlier in this Strategy has shown, rural Cheshire West and Chester is not a single homogenous area. Rather it is made up of a series of smaller areas which, whilst sharing many common characteristics, are very different in terms of their role and function, their relationships with and the influence of neighbouring urban areas, their local topography, and their economic, social and cultural legacy.

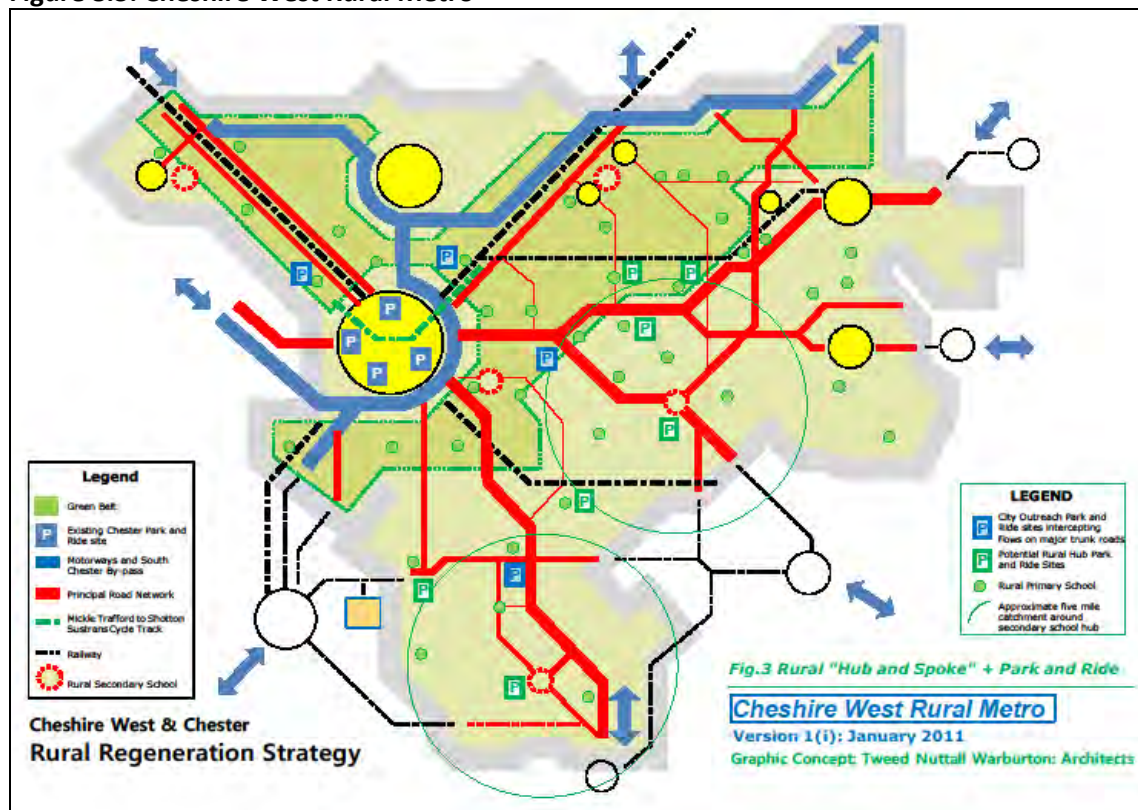
It is important that these local distinctions are understood and provided for in the spatial development strategy as they directly influence the way that different local service centres operate, and the “job” that will be required of them in the future.

Aligning with the accessibility strategy

The Regeneration Strategy includes a series of thematic strategies and action plans; they include one focused on Accessibility & Transport. Work to develop this strategy and action plan has included an extensive analysis of accessibility to employment and services across the rural area, a review commuting patterns, and an assessment of connections and linkages between settlements (rural and urban) in different parts of the rural area.

The thematic strategy (Section 7.2) provides a useful spatial context against which to consider the choice of local service centres. It identifies the spatial distribution of the network of secondary and primary schools across the rural area and identifies the need for a focus on the development of a series of “rural hubs” where services and sustainable transport connections can be developed. There is a strong argument that these “hubs” should be designated as local service centres.

Figure 8.3: Cheshire West Rural Metro



Maintaining vitality

The focus of the spatial development strategy applied to those settlements which are not identified as local service centres should be on maintaining vitality. PPS7 specifically provides for allocation of development in such settlements (especially those which have poor public transport links with service centres) where it maintains their vitality. This policy allows the Local Plan to adopt a positive approach to spatial development strategy where the smaller rural settlements are not seen as merely 'residual', but as having contributions to make to the enhanced sustainability of the rural area.

An important outcome of this more positive approach is that all settlements are included as part of the strategic plans for the area, no matter how small or lacking in services.

Given the number of small settlements in the rural area it is unlikely to be appropriate to seek to provide targets for development (in terms of housing numbers or sq metres of workspace) or to allocate sites. A more appropriate approach is to provide a positive and clearly defined policy context which will ensure that proposals for development which come forward are predicated on their ability to meet local needs (for housing, enterprise, community and leisure facilities) and which will enhance the future vitality of the host settlement (or a wider network of which it forms part).

Test of sustainable development

The test of what form and scale of development is appropriate in these settlements should not simply be that it meets specific and evidenced local needs, but whether it will make the settlement, the network or cluster of settlements, and / or the wider area *more or less sustainable*. This judgment should be made on the merits of the proposal, and its potential impact. It should be informed by the planning authority's knowledge of the community, by the policy and objectives of its development plan, and, critically by its alignment with the any aspirations expressed by the community about their future.

Green Belt

Whilst the availability of sites suitable to host development will be more restricted, the general principle of this approach is just as applicable in the Green Belt as in the remainder of the rural area.

The planning authority may wish to consider how it can better enable limited development to enhance the vitality of small settlements within the Green Belt as part of its new Local Plan. The Council should seek to allow flexibilities in the Local Development Framework policies that allow communities the ability to lift their "washed over" greenbelt status through Neighbourhood Plans.

Re-vitalising communities

Part of the overarching objective of the Rural Regeneration Strategy is to re-vitalise the areas rural communities. Section 3.4 sets out that this will require a "re-balancing" of the population to increase the proportion of the population that is of working age and consequently reduce the proportion of the population that is of retirement age.

This objective should be a major factor in determining the type of development sought in local service centres and that will be suitable in smaller settlements. Research²⁴ carried out in America into what attracts young people to places to live identified a common set of attributes which include diversity, access to arts and culture, gathering places, easy access to the natural environment, walkable streets, historic architectural character, access to different jobs and particularly to jobs in service businesses. Analysis of the criteria applied in surveys of the best places to live in the UK would add safety, local access to good schools, and an active community to that list.

There should be a positive enabling planning framework which helps young people and families to stay in, or move to, the rural area. This is likely to include development which:

- provides new homes suitable – and affordable – for young people and young families;
- provides homes which enable older people stay within their communities but free up larger housing for families;
- supports local primary schools, especially those whose rolls have been falling and / or which do not have the appropriate balance of children across year groups;
- creates workspace which enables people to work close to where they live;

²⁴ Can Small Towns be Cool, Ivan, D, Michigan State University

- creates housing which allows people to live close to where they work;
- provides and safeguards local community facilities, shops and pubs; and
- improves the “walkability” of neighbourhoods and enhances access by sustainable means to workplaces, services and community facilities.

8.4.5 *Neighbourhood Planning*

Community involvement

One of the key principles set out in PPS1 is that Community involvement is an essential element in delivering sustainable development and creating sustainable and safe communities.

The PPS sets out in detail (paragraphs 40 – 41) that community involvement is vitally important to planning and the achievement of sustainable development. It states that one of the principles of sustainable development is to involve the community in developing the vision for its area. It requires that communities should be asked to offer their ideas about what the vision should be for their area and to be given the opportunity to participate fully in the plan making process. PPS1 requires planning authorities to build a clear understanding of the make-up, interests and needs of communities. It goes on to say that community involvement in planning should not be a reactive, tick box process, but should enable local communities to say what sort of place they want to live in – and to do so at a stage when they can make a difference (to the shape of the final plan).

Neighbourhood plans

The new Localism and Decentralisation Bill takes this principle further and seeks to enable communities and neighbourhoods to create their own, statutory local development plan – to be known as a Neighbourhood Plan. The Bill provides the statutory basis of communities – led by the Parish Council in parished areas – to put together their own spatial development plan and to adopt it by achieving a simple majority in favour of the plan in a local referendum.

The plan will have to be compliant with national planning policy, and align with the strategic framework of the Local Development Framework, but beyond that, can determine the future shape of a local community.

The Rural Regeneration Strategy fully endorses this approach. It has identified the need for the Council to embrace “localism” and to adopt a new “place based” and collaborative approach to rural development. Nowhere is this more necessary, or important, than in the creation of an enabling planning context. The Strategy has proven the need for growth in the rural area, quantified the type and scale of growth it believes to be necessary, and has set a series of ambitions and guiding principles. This provides a strategic framework within which local communities should be allowed, and enabled to work, to define the future shape of their villages and neighbourhoods, and to set out what is required to secure it.

The Neighbourhood Planning process will provide the means for communities to do this. The Council is committed to adopting the Neighbourhood Planning process. It has developed an initial methodology for Neighbourhood Planning approach which will be tested in two local pilots – Tattenhall are currently embarking on this process. Pilots will allow the council to work

with local communities and its partners to develop, test and improve an approach to Neighbourhood Planning which it can then share and “roll out” across the rural area.

The council is working alongside partners such as Cheshire Community Action to develop this process. The findings from the pilots will be shared with and disseminated via the Rural Area Partnership Board to ensure that the widest possible range of communities and stakeholders can gain access to them.

Securing local benefit from development

New development is not always welcomed by communities. This is often the case in rural communities where the previous experience has often been of patterns of development which undermine rather than enhance the vitality of the community.

Rural Cheshire West and Chester needs growth however, so it is an important principle of the Rural Regeneration Strategy that growth is used to improve the places that host it. This means that development must address the needs identified and the overarching objective of the strategy, and of the community. Development must broaden the range and affordability of housing available in the rural area, not simply provide more of the same. Development must increase local employment opportunities and help to attract new entrepreneurs and their businesses. Development must be designed and located in a way that will support and safeguard local services, not undermine them.

Development can also provide direct benefits by way of investment. The Localism and Decentralisation Bill strongly supports the principle that local communities should see direct benefits from new development that they host. It includes new proposals relating to the Community Infrastructure Levy which are designed to provide incentives to communities to accept development.

The Community Infrastructure Levy allows local authorities to set charges which developers must pay when bringing forward new development in order to contribute to new infrastructure. The Localism Bill includes provisions to make regulations requiring some – currently defined as a “meaningful proportion” of these funds to be passed to neighbourhoods where the development has taken place.

The New Homes Bonus²⁵ will also provide additional funding for local areas. The intention is that local authorities will receive an additional “bounty” payment equivalent to six years council tax for each new home built in their area. An enhanced payment will be made for every new affordable home.

Local authorities will be able to decide how to spend the money in line with community wishes. The government expects local authorities to work closely with its communities – in particular those communities which host or are affected by the growth – to understand their priorities for investment.

These new funds offer a valuable means of securing direct benefits to local communities from development that they host. The Council is committed to using funds derived from development in the rural area to further the objectives of the Rural Regeneration Strategy.

²⁵ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/pdf/1767788.pdf>

Communities engaged in Neighbourhood Planning should factor this approach into their thinking and ensure that they identify the priorities for investment as part of the process.

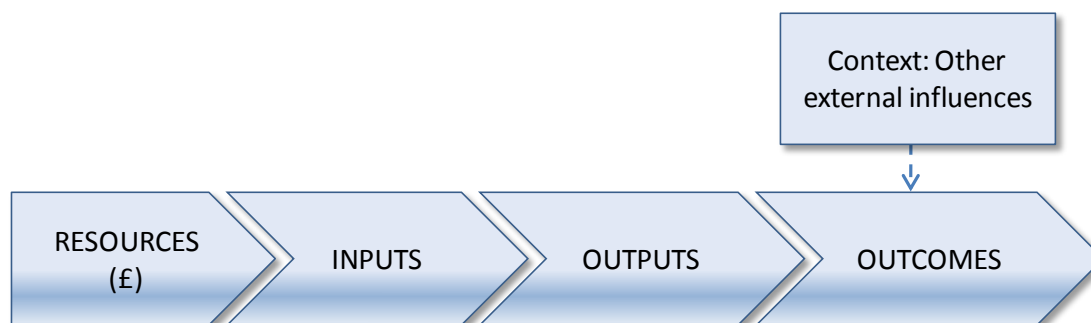
8.5 Monitoring and evaluation

The Government has placed particular importance on performance management in the public sector. In 2001, the National Audit Office, the Audit Commission, the Cabinet Office, the Office for National Statistics and H.M. Treasury published a joint document reflecting their common thinking on the general principles behind producing 'high quality performance information', called Choosing the Right FABRIC – A Framework for Performance Information (March 2001).

The guidance highlights that whilst the aim ultimately is to improve outcomes, these may be hard to measure and there may be a delay between the immediate effects of a project (outputs) and the eventual outcomes. Furthermore, it may be unclear as to how much of a change in an outcome can be attributed to a given organisation. As such, an understanding of how inputs, outputs and associated processes are contributing to changes in outcomes also needs to be formed. Performance measures will therefore need to look at inputs, processes and outputs as well as outcomes.

These linkages are highlighted in Figure 8.4 below.

Figure 8.4: Performance information – Inputs, outputs and outcomes



Source: Choosing the Right Fabric – H M Treasury

In addition to ensuring that consideration is given to the relationship between inputs, outputs and outcomes, the properties of effective systems of performance measurement are seen as being:

- focused – on the organisation's aims and objectives;
- appropriate – to the stakeholders who are likely to use it;
- balanced – covering all significant areas of work;
- robust – to withstand change;
- integrated – into the organisation's (and partners) operational and management process; and

- cost effective – making sure the costs of collection do not outweigh the benefits.

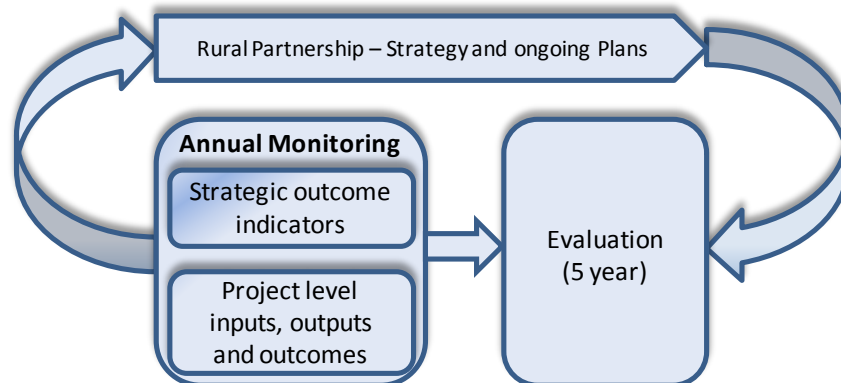
Choosing the Right FABRIC also sets out a number of criteria that individual performance measures should meet, as part of developing an effective performance measurement system. These are that a good performance measure should be:

- relevant – to what the organisation is trying to achieve and to the appropriate spatial area;
- able to avoid perverse incentives – not encourage wasteful or unwanted behaviour;
- attributable – influenced by the organisation's activity and with clear accountability;
- well-defined – unambiguous so that data can be collected consistently and is easy to understand;
- timely – can be collected quickly and frequently enough for it to be useful;
- reliable – accurate and responsive to change;
- comparable – with the past and other areas; and
- verifiable – subject to a clear audit trail.

The monitoring and evaluation framework proposed for Cheshire West and Chester's Rural Strategy will be based upon the good practice lessons highlighted above. However, it should also be recognised that it must not add significantly to the overall administrative burden. Moreover, an appropriate balance will need to be made between the competing demands of the different criteria. For example, the desire for the framework to cover all aspects of the rural regeneration programme should be offset by the need to maintain a focus on the partners' key objectives.

The framework recommended will involve annual monitoring of both strategic outcome indicators for rural wards along with project level inputs, outputs and outcomes as set out in Figure 8.5 below.

Figure 8.5: The proposed monitoring and evaluation framework for implementation of the Rural Regeneration Strategy through a partnership organisation.

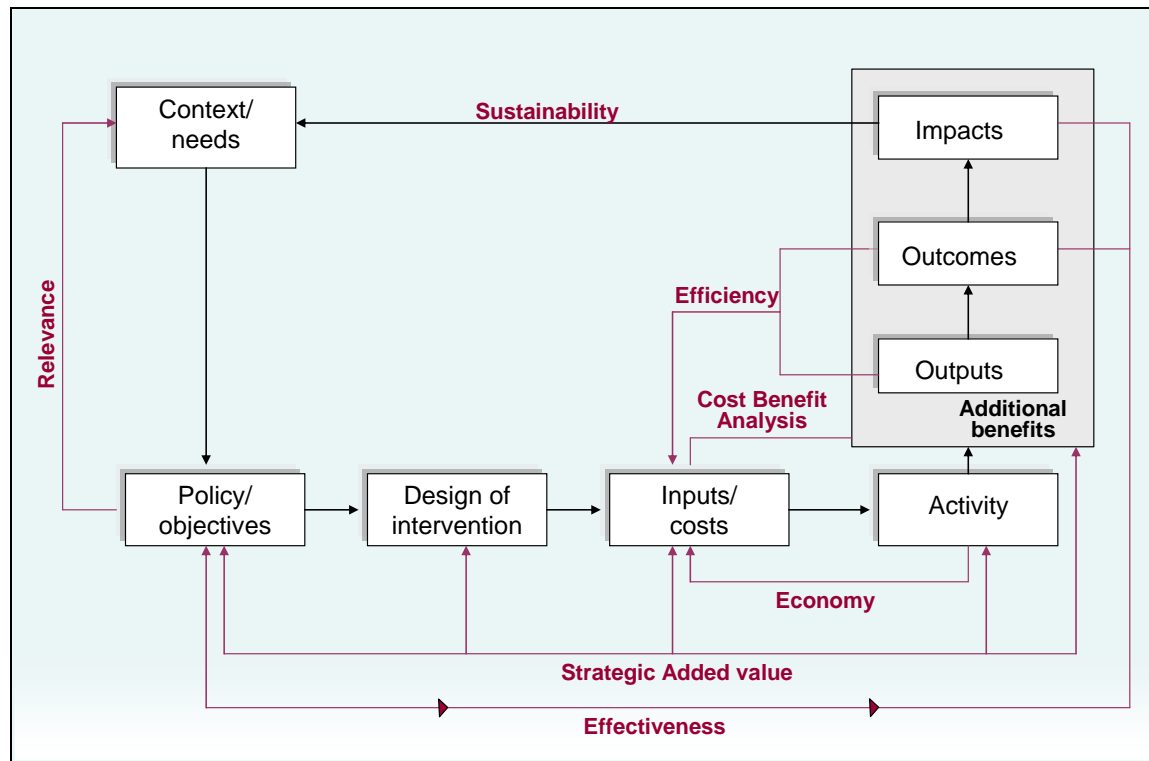


In view of the scale and complexity of the rural agenda in Cheshire West, it is recommended that a long-term, on-going evaluation is commissioned that would include the preparation of

annual reports, as well as an interim evaluation report after say every five years. This would enable the development of monitoring and survey arrangements to ensure that the appropriate information is collected and that the full effects of the implementation of the Rural Strategy are captured and analysed.

The evaluation will need to address and analyse a number of critical issues, which are set out within the evaluation framework diagram (see Figure 8.6). Thus, for example, the contextual conditions and need for any public sector investment in the rural area and individual projects will be assessed to ensure that it remains relevant. In addition, it is proposed that in terms of value for money, the costs and net additional Gross Value Added generated by the programme are brought together in a cost benefit analysis and also that an Effectiveness, Economy and Efficiency (3Es) analysis is undertaken.

Figure 8.6: Overview of an evaluation framework or Cheshire West and Chester's Rural Strategy



Source: AMION Consulting

8.5.1 The Council's expectations

The Council's expectations regarding monitoring and evaluation of partnerships it engages with are included in its March 2010 Partnerships Policy Framework – which is set out in Box 8.2 below.

**Box 8.2: Cheshire West and Chester Council Partnerships Policy Framework
Monitoring and evaluation**

Monitoring

All significant partnerships must be reviewed at least annually by an appropriate external evaluator, board, committee or senior management. A record of this review should be maintained.

An assessment should be made as to whether Cheshire West and Chester Council should continue with the existing arrangements. Included in the assessment should be consideration as to whether the costs outweigh the benefits as well as broader political and local political considerations. This will be contained in an annual report to Overview and Scrutiny and the Executive.

Governance arrangements should be reviewed and any necessary changes proposed.

Performance (including financial performance) should be evaluated against set criteria at regular intervals and linked to outputs. Appendix 7 of the Partnership Toolkit contains the current LAA performance management template and delivery plan. This can be adapted to meet the performance management needs of other partnerships.

Performance results should be shared with partners and the evidence used to inform future activity.

Any changes in the risk profile should be assessed and assurance obtained that the risks are being effectively managed.

New activities and decisions should be informed by quality intelligence.

Some partnerships produce an annual report or annual delivery plan to contain this information.

Evaluation

Partnerships should evaluate the improved value for money (VFM) or value added from each project or partnership activity and include that information in their sharing of performance results with other partners.

8.6 Smart objectives

Establish a Rural Partnership Board for Cheshire West to drive the implementation of the Strategy and be the voice of the rural area to the residents, partners, the LEP and to government.

Establish an appropriate monitoring and evaluation framework to underpin the credibility of the partnership in being able to evidence the delivery of positive change in line with the Strategy.

8.7 Action Plan – implementation and delivery of the Strategy

Table 8.2: Implementation and delivery			
Ref:	Action	Target	Timeline
1.	Led by the Council's Partnerships Manager, consult with Northwich and Rural North, Winsford and Rural East and Rural West APBs about the proposal to establish a Rural Partnership Board by remodelling Rural West APB.	Partners' agreement to the principle of a Rural Partnership Board.	March to June 2011
2.	Dependent on Action 34, develop a process and timetable for the transition to a new governance framework for the management of the Rural Regeneration Strategy.	To develop and constitute the Governance Framework for Rural CW&CC	June 2011
Positive Planning Framework			
3.	Preferred option consultation	Consult on the preferred options	Early 2012
4.	Adopted Core Strategy and Development Plan Documents	Provide clarity and enabling planning framework	Late 2012
5.	Deliver Neighbourhood Planning pilots, capture and share learning	A Borough wide protocol for Neighbourhood Planning	April 2013
Monitoring and evaluation			
6.	Establish and agree with the Partnership Board a monitoring and evaluation framework acceptable to the partnership and adopting best practice	An effective means of establishing value for money for of the partnership	November 2011
7.	Undertake annual monitoring of both strategic outcome indicators for rural wards along with project level inputs, outputs and outcomes. Report results to partners.	An effective means of establishing value for money for of the partnership	2012/13
8.	Undertake 5 yearly evaluations and report results to partners.	An effective means of establishing value for money for of the partnership	2016/17

9 Master Action Plan

The full or Master Action Plan arising from the Rural Regeneration Strategy is collated below. It should be noted however that the housing actions are numerous and are set out within the Rural Housing Strategy.

Table 9.1: Master Action Plan for the Rural Regeneration Strategy				
Ref:	Action	Target	Lead	Timeline
Accessibility				
1	Engage with current community transport stakeholders and seek to set up a body to oversee all community transport provision, with a view to enhancing existing services and encouraging miniature hub and spoke arrangements around the key rural settlements of Malpas and Tarporley.	Formation of Community Transport body.	Integrated Transport Services	June 2012 / Ongoing
2	Engage with the local community about involvement, aspirations and governance.	Community leadership of the body.	Integrated Transport Services	September 2012 / Ongoing
3	Establish two trial miniature service hubs in Malpas and Tarporley	Creation of two pilot service hubs	Integrated Transport Services	2014
4	Set up an accessibility and service project team within the Council tasked with exploring the feasibility of park and ride service hubs.	Formation of an accessibility and service project team.	Local Transport Plan Group	March 2012 / Ongoing
5	Explore funding opportunities for park and ride/service facilities.	Secure funding for a trial rural park and ride facilities.	Local Transport Plan Group	March 2013/ Ongoing
6	Consider the feasibility of a pilot rural park and ride/ service centre.	Completed feasibility report.	Local Transport Plan Group	March 2014
Housing				
7	Implement actions in Rural Housing Strategy	Rural Housing Strategy delivered	CW&CC Housing Team	2030
Innovation, enterprise and skills				
8	Priority Rural Sectors - Commission work to identify key business sectors focusing upon: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing strengths; Growth potential; Importance to environment and landscape; Improving levels of local rural sustainability. 	Commission study to report on priority sectors and recommendations to form basis of action plan	CW&CC Rural Team	September 2011

Table 9.1: Master Action Plan for the Rural Regeneration Strategy				
Ref:	Action	Target	Lead	Timeline
	Study to recommend routes for development of businesses within key sectors including the visitor, equine and food and drink sectors.			
9	Employment skills strategy – to work with the Employment, Skills and Learning team to ensure that the Employment Skills Strategy for CW&CC reflects the needs of rural priority sectors.	Work alongside Employment, Skills and Learning team in commissioning employment skills strategy	CW&CC Rural team	April 2011
10	Rural Sector Networks – support the formation of rural networks in relation to identified priority sectors that support innovation and enterprise through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • peer to peer interaction; • integration with drivers of innovation (including Reaseheath and Chester University); and • interactions with rural support functions of CW&CC to facilitate access to funding and expertise. Networks will also capture and represent the interests of priority sectors.	Establish support network for all sectors identified through the priority sector study	CW&CC & Reaseheath	April 2015
11	Local Business Networks – to promote and provide support for the development of local business networks where local communities identify demand. Actions to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrating the value of local business networks; • provide access to appropriate venues; • market events to local businesses and other relevant stakeholders. • establish a CW&CC presence within local business networks to provide advice in relation to accessing grants and attracting private sector investment. 	Promote Tattenhall Business Network as an exemplar Embed business expertise within CW&CC enabling team Facilitate formation of local business networks	CW&CC Rural Team and Economic Development	April 2011 September 2011 Ongoing
12	Championing rural businesses – put structures in place within rural governance arrangements to guarantee representation of key priority rural sector and local business networks. This could take the form of a Business, Enterprise	Establish Business, Innovation and Enterprise sub-group	APB (When re-formed)	December 2011

Table 9.1: Master Action Plan for the Rural Regeneration Strategy				
Ref:	Action	Target	Lead	Timeline
	and Innovation sub-group. Governance structures would offer businesses input into strategic discussions around issues including skills, planning, transport and infrastructure at a CW&CC and CWEA level.			
13	Flexible workspace – to employ a proactive approach to the provision of flexible workspace in rural areas based around: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> investigating the potential for existing CW&CC facilities and other existing stock to meet future growth within local communities; adopting a flexible planning position regarding the use of employment floorspace within rural areas; and monitoring levels of occupancy of stock and identifying the requirements of local businesses. 	Establish potential of existing stock Identify additional empty commercial stock Monitoring occupancy and demand	CW&CC CW&CC/Parish Councils	September 2011 Ongoing Ongoing
Super-fast broadband				
14	Set up a super-fast broadband project team within the Council. Collaborate with Cheshire East & Warrington and sign upto a tri-partite agreement to secure delivery. Engage with operators and service providers.	Sub-regional Broadband Group active	CW&CC Regeneration/Rural Team	March 2011 / Ongoing
15	Prepare and maintain supply and demand mapping across the Borough	Timely Market Intelligence	CW&CC Regeneration/Rural Team	Ongoing
16	Identify super-fast broadband as a corporate priority and engage with BDUK; explore funding sources for intervention activities and make funding application(s), e.g. to BDUK, the Regional Growth Fund, RDPE & ERDF	Working relationship with BDUK Completed funding application(s)	CW&CC Regeneration/Rural Team LEP	June 2011
17	Promote and monitor take up of super-fast broadband from BT enabled exchanges in Chester, EP, Neston and the Weaver Towns. Prepare a plan to stimulate demand and take up for super-fast broadband	Demand Stimulation Programme	CW&CC / SR Broadband Group	September 2011
18	Incorporate requirements re super-fast broadband access into	Super-fast broadband ready	CW&CC – Rural Team; Strategic	December 2011

Table 9.1: Master Action Plan for the Rural Regeneration Strategy				
Ref:	Action	Target	Lead	Timeline
	planning conditions and protocols for street works	s106 agreement & Street Works Licence	Planning	
19	Develop policy on use of Community Infrastructure Levy for super-fast broadband investment	Council policy on use of CIL for high speed broadband infrastructure	CW&CC	December 2011
20	Ensure state-aid issues are resolved and procurement of is in place to deliver super-fast broadband.	Delivery of super-fast broadband	SR Broadband Group	December 2011
New ways of working				
21	Neighbourhood Planning Pilots – carry out two Neighbourhood Planning pilots, one as part of or aligned with the CLG Neighbourhood Plans Vanguard Scheme and one as a local “multi-parish” pilot.,	Two completed Neighbourhood Planning Pilots	CW&CC Strategic Planning Team, Tattenhall Parish Council, Cheshire Community Action, Cheshire Association of Local Councils, CLG	Immediate - June 2012
22	Neighbourhood Planning Protocol and CW&CC Toolkit - monitor and capture learning from the two pilots, produce an protocol and toolkit to support Neighbourhood Planning across the remainder of the Borough	Neighbourhood Planning protocol and Toolkit	CW&CC Strategic Planning Team, Cheshire Community Action, Cheshire Association of Local Councils, CLG	Immediate – June 2012
23	Establish a governance arrangement suitable for Rural CW&C that takes consideration of the Area Partnership Board structure and the desire to simplify the governance arrangements.	Governance model for rural CW&CC	CW&CC Partnerships Manager	December 2011
24	Placed Based Working – develop a Place Based working protocol. Share with key partners and the rural APB & test as part of the NP pilots and the completion of Asset Reviews.	Adopted Place Based Working Protocol	CW&CC Partnerships Manager	Immediate to March 2014
Energy and climate change				
25	Low Carbon Communities – improve and extend the Low Carbon Communities Network by developing and promoting the successes and learning from existing Low Carbon Communities at Ashton Hayes, Blacon, Tarvin, Tarporley & Tattenhall.	Exemplar Low Carbon Communities developed in all areas of the Borough.	CW&CC, Climate Team Low Carbon Communities Network, Cheshire Community Action, Cheshire Association of Local Councils	Ongoing
26	Design a Low Carbon Communities Challenge element and incorporate it into the Neighbourhood Planning process Incorporate. Test it in the	Low Carbon Challenge element embedded within CW&CC's	CW&CC Climate Team Low Carbon Communities	March 2012

Table 9.1: Master Action Plan for the Rural Regeneration Strategy				
Ref:	Action	Target	Lead	Timeline
	early Neighbourhood Planning pilot in Tattenhall.	Neighbourhood Planning protocol	Network, Cheshire Community Action, Cheshire Association of Local Councils, Tattenhall Parish Council, Eccleston,	
27	Hard to Treat Domestic Energy Efficiency Demonstration – develop a rural demonstration project following the model trialled in the Sustainable Blacon Project	Demonstration energy efficiency project in rural hard to treat domestic property(ies)	CW&CC Climate Team, LCCN, Grosvenor Estate, School of Sustainable Energy Chester University	March 2013
28	Hard to Treat Non Domestic Energy Efficiency Demonstration Unit / Project – develop a rural demonstration project following the model trialled in Sustainable Blacon	Demonstration energy efficiency project in rural hard to treat domestic property(ies)	CW&CC Climate Team,, LCCN, Grosvenor Estate, School of Sustainable Energy Chester University	March 2013
29	Reduced Emissions from Agriculture – a project to develop and demonstrate emission reductions from commercial farming	X% reduction in emissions from County Farms by 2015 Y% reduction in emissions from agriculture in CW&CC 2015	CW&CC Climate Team,, Reaseheath College, NFU, Rural APB	December 2011 - ongoing
30	Local Carbon Fund – develop and manage an investment fund to provide interest free loans and grants to community groups. Funding sources may include UK & EU grants, CIL, New Homes Bonus, Parish Precepts	Creation of £x million fund	CW&CC Climate Team,, Low Carbon Communities Network, School of Sustainable Energy Chester University, Reaseheath College	August 2012 - ongoing
31	Renewable Energy Generation Programme – set up a programme to promote renewable energy projects, provide advice, facilitate the planning process, support community engagement and identify investment funds	Generate 7.1 MW of renewable energy from the rural area using a range of technologies	CW&CC Climate Team,, Cheshire & Warrington LEP, Environlink NW	2020
Natural and historic environment				
32	Positive Future for At Risk Sites - Identify designated sites, listed building and scheduled monuments in the rural area which are recorded as being at risk and work with local communities and land owners to develop a plan to secure their future.	At risk sites in positive management	CW&CC Environment Team, Cheshire Association of Local Councils, Country Landowners & Business Association, English	April 2011 - ongoing

Table 9.1: Master Action Plan for the Rural Regeneration Strategy				
Ref:	Action	Target	Lead	Timeline
			Heritage	
33	Local Heritage Register - work with local communities and interest groups to identify and record locally important heritage assets, which are not formally designated, but which contribute to local distinctiveness and place-making;	Completed Local Heritage Asset Register	CW&CC, Cheshire Association of Local Councils,	April 2011 - ongoing
34	Re-vitalising Green Belt Villages – work with local communities to define appropriate inset or village boundaries	Green Belt Village Boundaries reviewed and agreed.	CW&CC Environment Team, Cheshire Association of Local Councils, Cheshire Community Action, CPRE	March 2012
35	Ecological Networks – Develop further work on Ecological Networks and how to integrate into developments, including the River Dee Corridor.	Look at opportunities to further develop projects including River Dee Corridor	CW&CC Regeneration Team, CW&CC Environmental Team, Cheshire Wildlife Trust, bordering authorities	March 2011 - ongoing
36	Sandstone Ridge EConet & Habitats and Hillforts Legacy – review the impact of these two programmes, identify the potential for ongoing investment and secure funding.	Impact Assessment and 2011 – 2015 Programme	CW&CC Environment Team, EConet Partnership, Cheshire Wildlife Trust	March 2012 – ongoing
37	Green Infrastructure Strategy – complete and implement a Green Infrastructure Strategy to maximise the benefits of Green Infrastructure to rural people, towns, villages and employment sites	Green Infrastructure Programme	CW&CC Environment Team, Country Land and Business Association, CPRE, Cheshire Association of Local Councils	Ongoing
Implementation and delivery				
38	Led by the Council's Partnerships Manager, consult with Northwich and Rural North, Winsford and Rural East and Rural West APBs about the proposal to establish a Rural Partnership Board by remodelling Rural West APB.	Led by the Council's Partnerships Manager, consult with Northwich and Rural North, Winsford and Rural East and Rural West APBs about the proposal to establish a Rural Partnership Board by remodelling Rural West APB.	CW&CC Partnerships Manager	March to June 2011

Table 9.1: Master Action Plan for the Rural Regeneration Strategy				
Ref:	Action	Target	Lead	Timeline
39	Dependent on Action 34, develop a process and timetable for the transition to a new governance framework for the management of the Rural Regeneration Strategy.	To develop and constitute the Governance Framework for Rural CW&CC	CW&CC Partnerships Manager	June 2011
40	Preferred options consultation	Consult on the preferred option	CW&CC Head of Strategic Planning	Early 2012
41	Adopted Core Strategy and Development Plan Documents	Provide clarity and enabling planning framework	CW&CC Head of Strategic Planning	Late 2012
42	Deliver Neighbourhood Planning pilots, capture and share learning	A Borough wide protocol for Neighbourhood Planning		April 2013
42	Establish and agree with the Partnership Board a monitoring and evaluation framework acceptable to the partnership and adopting best practice	An effective means of establishing value for money for of the partnership	CW&CC Partnerships Manager and APB	November 2011
43	Undertake annual monitoring of both strategic outcome indicators for rural wards along with project level inputs, outputs and outcomes. Report results to partners.	An effective means of establishing value for money for of the partnership	CW&CC Partnerships Manager and APB	2012/13
44	Undertake 5 yearly evaluations and report results to partners.	An effective means of establishing value for money for of the partnership	CW&CC Partnerships Manager and APB	2016/17

PART FOUR: Technical Appendix

Introduction to Technical Appendix

The Technical Appendix sets out a

- strategic context for the strategy
- baseline analysis of evidence; and
- review of findings emerging from consultation workshops.

The baseline sets out a summary of key trends and other evidence that has informed the preparation of the strategy. It is underpinned by detailed analysis set out within baseline studies for traffic and transportation, property and housing. These detailed baseline reports, along with a range of supporting visual aids, will be accessible online through the DORIC website at <http://www.doriconline.org.uk/Pages/default.aspx>.

Appendix A: Strategic context

This appendix provides details on the key strategies and policies which influence the Strategy and against which it needs to be delivered.

Europe 2020

Europe 2020 is the EU's growth strategy for the coming decade. It sets a clear agenda to enable the EU to become a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy. The strategy's three mutually reinforcing priorities will help the EU and Member States deliver high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion.

The Strategy sets out headline ambitions around Smart Growth, Sustainable Growth and Inclusive Growth.

The Strategy aims to deliver its objectives around Smart Growth (improving performance in education, research and innovation and the digital society) through 3 flagship initiatives; the Digital Agenda for Europe, Innovation Union and Youth on the Move. The Strategy defines Inclusive Growth as an increase in Europe's employment rate, especially for women, young people and older workers. Helping people anticipate and manage change through investment in skills and training, modernising labour markets and ensuring that the benefits of growth reach all parts of the EU.

EU targets for Smart Growth and Inclusive Growth include:

- combined public and private investment in R&D and innovation to reach 3% of EU's Gross Domestic Product;
- 75% employment rate for women and men aged 20 – 64 (achieved by getting more people into work);
- reducing school drop-out rates to below 10% and reaching a position where at least 40% of all 30 – 34 year olds have been educated to tertiary level; and
- at least 20 million fewer people in or at risk of poverty and social exclusion.

The Strategy has two flagship initiatives to support Inclusive Growth; an Agenda for New Skills and Jobs and European Platform against Poverty.

The Strategy defines Sustainable Growth as building a competitive low-carbon economy (which make efficient and sustainable use of resources), protecting the environment and preventing biodiversity loss, developing new green technologies and production methods, introducing efficient smart electricity grids, harnessing EU scale networks to create additional competitive advantage for SMEs and helping consumers make well informed green choices. It set targets for sustainable growth which include:

- reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 20% compared to 1990 levels by 2020;
- increasing the share of renewables in final energy consumption to 20%; and
- moving towards and 20% increase in energy efficiency.

The Strategy will use two flagship initiatives to achieve these targets; Resource-efficient Europe and An Industrial Policy for the Globalisation Era.

This Cohesion Strategy will directly influence the focus of EU Structural Funds in the period following the completion of the current programmes in 2013.

The Rural Regeneration Strategy sits well within this framework. This alignment of the Strategy with EU priorities should provide opportunities for the Council to make strong bids for EU funding programmes as and when they become available.

Localism and Decentralisation Bill

The Localism Bill has introduced radical changes to the Spatial Planning system. The regional planning tier has been abolished with immediate effect²⁶. The Regional Spatial Strategy will therefore no longer provide a binding context for local plan making.

Instead the Local Development Plan will have primacy. This must comply with a new National Planning Framework (yet to be introduced) and should include, and to a material extent be based upon - a series of plans produced by communities – to be known as Neighbourhood Plans. This shift drives forward the mission to devolve power to local communities. Ministers want to enable people to determine the future of their communities where-ever possible. Neighbourhood Plans will become binding (provided they are consistent with national policy and the principles of the wider local plan) on the basis of a simple majority vote in a local referendum²⁷.

The Localism Bill will also introduce a Community Infrastructure Levy which allows local authorities to set charges which developers must pay when bringing forward new development in order to contribute to new infrastructure. The Bill includes provisions to make regulations requiring some of these funds to be passed to the neighbourhoods where the development has taken place.

Government sees this as a positive step forward in enabling appropriate development. It is not a “free for all”, Local Plans will need to respect and comply with superior national planning statements. Nor however will Neighbourhood Plans be allowed to prevent development which is shown to be needed – they must be consistent with wider Local Plans if they are to be capable of adoption.

Cheshire West & Chester’s Local Plan is at an early stage in development so will need to follow the Government’s new approach. This puts a premium on local engagement and collaborative plan making at community and neighbourhood level. It also provides an opportunity for Cheshire West & Chester to lead the way by leveraging strong local capacity and relationships with strategic land owners to develop some “early wins” and create exemplars which the rest of the Borough can follow.

²⁶ As at the date of writing this is being tested in the courts, but so far as forward planning is concerned the Regional Spatial Strategy has been abolished.

²⁷ Neighbourhood Plans are considered in more detail in Section 8.

Existing spatial planning policy

The Localism Bill is not yet on the statute book however – and will not be for another 10 – 12 months. The Strategy, therefore, has to be cognisant of existing national policy on spatial planning, and particularly regarding development in rural areas.

Current policy is driven by the need to ensure that development is sustainable – in terms of its impact on natural resources. This is mainly interpreted as a need to build on previously developed land where-ever possible and to focus development on locations where employment, housing and services are all accessible without undue reliance on the private car.

Policy does however recognise the need to provide for development in rural areas, and that in some instances it may be necessary to build in locations which are not well served by public transport. It also recognises the need to provide new housing, especially affordable housing, to safeguard local services and maintain the viability of rural communities.

The challenge for the Cheshire West & Chester Local Development Framework will be to determine how best to distribute the level of growth that the economic development plan requires between its three main urban areas and the remaining rural area. It is not the role of this strategy to answer that question. It is however the role of the Strategy to provide evidence, intelligence and analysis to help inform that decision. This is detailed in the baseline appended to this strategy.

Planning Policy Statement 1 (PPS1) Delivering Sustainable Development (2005)

PPS1 remains the leading statement of national planning policy. It is to be superseded by the new National Planning Framework – but this has yet to be written. PPS1 provides broad policy guidance on sustainable development, and should be read in conjunction with other national policy statements. It sets out the primary objective to encourage Local Planning Authorities to bring forward land of suitable quality in appropriate locations for housing, retail, commercial and industrial development. Its guiding principles (paragraph 27) include objectives to:

“promote urban and rural regeneration to improve the well being of communities, improve facilities, promote high quality and safe development and create new opportunities for the people living in those communities”

“reduce the need to travel and encourage accessible public transport provision to secure more sustainable patterns of transport development.”

“provide improved access for all to jobs, health, education, shops, leisure and community facilities, open space, sport and recreation, by ensuring that new development is located where everyone can access services or facilities on foot, bicycle or public transport rather than having to rely on access by car, while recognising that this may be more difficult in rural areas.”

It sets out that development should focus on the efficient use of previously developed land and buildings, including actively seeking to bring forward vacant and underused brownfield land and buildings back into beneficial use.

An important principle of PPS1 is to create an integrated development process in order to encourage patterns of new development which reduce the need for travel by private car and

enable access to workplaces, services and other facilities by public transport, walking or cycling. Further development proposals are encouraged to adopt high-quality and inclusive design to enhance the character and quality of the built environment and its surroundings.

Planning Policy Guidance 2 (PPG2) Green Belts

This planning guidance was published in 2006 and provides a very strong policy position which protects land designated as green belt from development. The document states (paragraph 1.4) that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the most important attribute of Green Belts is their openness. The general policies controlling development in the countryside apply with equal force in Green Belts but there is, in addition, a general presumption against inappropriate development within them. Normally any new buildings will be deemed as inappropriate development within the Green Belt.

It is possible to develop new affordable housing in the Green Belt however. Paragraph 3.4 states that “limited affordable housing for local community needs under development plan policies according with PPG3” will not constitute inappropriate development.

It is also possible to create new buildings in Green Belt where the development is limited infilling in existing villages where the boundary of the village is clearly defined (for this purpose).

Re-use of buildings in the Green Belt or extension of existing buildings is not generally inappropriate development provided the scale and design is appropriate and the impact of the development does not threaten the openness or purposes of the Green Belt. (Paragraphs 3.6 & 3.8)

Park and Ride development can also be appropriate development within the Green Belt. (Paragraph 3.17)

Planning Policy Statement 3 (PPS3) Housing

PPS3 sets out specific requirements for housing provision, including affordable housing for rural areas and villages, as well as local service centres and market towns, with the aim to enhance or maintain their sustainability. Specifically it states that:

“Key characteristics of a mixed community are a variety of housing, particularly in terms of tenure and price and a mix of different households such as families with children, single person households and older people”.

PPS3 requires that consideration be given to the relationship between settlements so that growth supports informal social support networks, assists people live near their work and benefit from key services, minimises environmental impacts and where possible encourages environmental benefits.

PPS3 enables local authorities to allocate small open market housing sites in rural areas where a higher proportion of affordable housing will be sought, within the requirement that the scheme as a whole remains viable. This enables schemes to be developed where “profit” from open market housing can be used to subsidise the affordability of the remainder.

PPS3 also states that sites can be allocated for the development of 100% affordable housing in communities that would not otherwise be considered for development. This supplements the windfall rural exception site policy where sites are not allocated but will be given planning consent if the development provides affordable housing to meet local housing needs in perpetuity.

Planning Policy Statement 4 (PPS4) Planning for Sustainable Economic Growth

This is the newest PPS, published in December 2009. It brings together guidance on economic development into a single document, superseding elements of other Planning Policy Statements, including elements of PPS7 Development in Rural Areas relating to economic development.

PPS4 sets out the government's overarching objective of sustainable economic growth. It includes an ambition to raise the quality of life and the environment in rural areas by promoting thriving, inclusive and locally distinctive rural communities whilst continuing to protect the open countryside for the benefit of all.

PPS4 has specific policy statements on Economic Development in Rural Areas. These state that local authorities should ensure that the countryside is protected by strictly controlling economic development in open countryside away from existing settlements or outside areas allocated for development in development plans. Local authorities should identify local service centres (which might be a town, single large village or group of villages) and locate most new development in or on the edge of existing settlements where employment, housing (including affordable housing), services and other facilities can be provided close together.

PPS4 also provides for conversion and re-use of appropriately located existing buildings in the countryside for economic development, for farm diversification for business purposes, for equine enterprises and for rural tourism and leisure developments.

PPS4 includes a policy for determining planning application for economic development in rural areas. This states that local planning authorities should support development which enhances the vitality and viability of market towns and other rural service centres and support small scale economic development where it provides the most sustainable option in villages, or other locations, that are remote from local service centres, recognising that a site may be an acceptable location for development even though it may not be readily accessible by public transport.

Planning Policy Statement 7 (PPS7) Sustainable Development in Rural Areas

PPS7 sets out key government objectives for rural areas which include raising the quality of life and the environment of rural areas, promoting more sustainable patterns of development and promoting the economic performance of rural areas.

It seeks to promote more sustainable patterns of development thus:

- focusing most development in, or next to, existing towns and villages;
- preventing urban sprawl;

- discouraging the development of ‘greenfield’ land, and, where such land must be used, ensuring it is not used wastefully;
- promoting a range of uses to maximise the potential benefits of the countryside fringing urban areas; and
- providing appropriate leisure opportunities to enable urban and rural dwellers to enjoy the wider countryside

It is clearly expressed within PPS7 (para. 5) that Local Planning Authorities should support a wide range of economic activity in rural areas – particularly where proposals can assist in supporting and improving the viability of existing local services, accessibility and community. Development that promotes rural recreation and leisure is also promoted, and there is recognition that these activities can boost the local economy and provide jobs for local people.

PPS7 recognises that people living in rural areas should have reasonable access to a range of services and facilities (par. 6), and that local planning authorities should plan to meet the housing needs of all in a community, including those in need of affordable and accessible housing in rural areas.

Planning Policy Statement 9 (PPS9) Biodiversity and Geological Conservation

PPS9 sets out planning policies on protection of biodiversity and geological conservation through the planning system. It operates within the context of the biodiversity strategy for England and reasserts a broad aim the planning, construction, development and regeneration should have minimal impact on biodiversity and enhance it wherever possible. In support of this aim PPS sets out the following objectives for planning:

- to promote sustainable development by ensuring that biological and geological diversity are conserved and enhanced as an integral part of social, environmental and economic development;
- to conserve, enhance and restore the diversity of England’s wildlife and geology by sustaining, and where possible enhancing, the quality and extent of natural habitat and geological and geomorphological sites; and
- to contribute to rural renewal and urban renaissance by enhancing biodiversity in green spaces so that they can be valued by people that use them, and ensuring that the value of biodiversity is recognized in supporting economic diversification.

National policy emphasizes that local plans should be based upon up-to-date information about the environmental characteristics of an area, and should reflect all appropriate designated sites. The importance of taking a strategic approach to the conservation, enhancement and restoration of biodiversity is emphasised. In terms of individual planning decisions, the principle aim is to prevent harm to biodiversity and geological conservation interests.

Planning Policy Statement 12 (PPS12) Local Spatial Planning

PPS12 explains what local spatial planning is, and how it benefits communities. It also sets out what the key ingredients of local spatial plans are and government policies on how they should

be prepared. PPS12 should be taken into account by local planning authorities in preparing development plan documents and other local development documents.

PPS12 establishes the importance of the Local Authority's role in the spatial planning system. It envisions the Local Authority assuming a leadership role and delivering services through partnership with the public, private and voluntary sectors and through the direct input of local communities.

PPS12 sets out the key aims that spatial planning should have in regard to housing which include ensuring that the necessary land is available at the right time and in the right place to deliver new housing required, orchestrating the necessary social and physical and green infrastructure to ensure sustainable communities are delivered and providing the basis for the private sector facilitation of affordable housing.

Local Planning Policy

Cheshire West and Chester Council has inherited the existing Local Plans from the three district authorities that previously covered the territory. These plans remain in place, with policies "saved" and carried forward for the purpose of development management.

The Council is in the process of putting in place a new Local Development Framework – currently under the auspices of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

Cheshire West and Chester's Core Strategy is the key document within the Local Development Framework. In light of recent political announcements, Cheshire West and Chester are now responding to the Government White Paper on local growth in developing its planning framework. Although the scope of the Core Strategy is now being reviewed, its role is to set out the spatial vision for the area over 15 years (up to 2028), together with objectives and policies designed to achieve the vision. It will be made up of a number of key parts, including the vision and objectives for the area, together with a spatial strategy, policies and a framework to monitor the effectiveness of the plan. The Core Strategy will provide the framework for the production of other, more detailed, Local Development Framework documents that will cover specific areas and topics.

The first Local Development Framework document to be produced was the Cheshire West and Chester Local Development Scheme (LDS) which was adopted on 2 March 2009. The LDS is a public statement setting out Cheshire West and Chester's programme for the production of its Local Development Documents, which include the Statement of Community Involvement, Development Plan Documents and Supplementary Planning Documents.

The Core Strategy Issues and Options paper was published in November 2009, with the Preferred Options Consultation Draft due for publication in Spring 2011. However, in the current political context, with the revocation of the Regional Spatial Strategy, and taking into account the new requirements set out in the Localism and Decentralisation Bill, the updated LDS will be taken to LDF Panel for consideration. CW&CC's priority is to consult on the Core Strategy Preferred Options document in September 2011.

The Issues and Options presented for the rural area recognised that some development in rural areas is likely to be acceptable whichever option is chosen. The document recognises that there is increased pressure for development in rural areas and the need to protect the countryside

must be balanced with achieving thriving rural communities. It also recognises that more remote areas will need more innovative and flexible solutions to development needs and that Local Development Documents should include criteria for permitting the re-use of buildings in the countryside, in line with government advice in PPS7.

The options presented for rural areas included five options for new buildings and conversions in the countryside and two options for location of new development in rural areas. In terms of options for new buildings and conversions the five options presented were:

- **7A:** No new buildings (except for agriculture, forestry, minerals and informal recreation). Conversions of existing buildings limited to employment uses only. It is suggested that this might have the outcome of directing development towards existing settlements and limit the expansion of rural businesses. By restricting residential development a number of conversion projects would not be viable.
- **7B:** New building and conversions restricted to employment uses and affordable housing only. This would maximise the potential for affordable housing supply, but it could potentially be in isolated locations
- **7C:** New building restricted to employment uses and affordable housing only, but conversions allow more flexible uses. This stipulates that conversions to employment, tourism and live/work units are preferred.
- **7D:** New buildings and conversions allowed for small-scale housing, live-work units, rural businesses and tourist facilities in specific locations (e.g. villages that may have some services, areas in close proximity to existing services or clusters of buildings)
- **7E:** New building and conversions allowed for general small-scale housing, live work units, rural businesses and tourist facilities. The policy would seek to restrict development to that which had an acceptable impact on traffic, landscape etc. This could result in many more buildings in the countryside.

In terms of options for location of new development in rural areas, the two options presented were:

- new development should be concentrated within villages. This is a more restrictive option and may mean that not enough sites are available;
- new development should be concentrated on the edge of existing villages. This option would enable more development to be undertaken, but it likely to result in increased loss of Greenfield sites and may require a review of Green Belt; and
- the comments and suggestions received during the consultation process will shape the preferred options. The Preferred Options report will suggest methods and policy approaches to achieve delivery of the options, and it set to be published in September 2011.

Appendix B: Evidence and baseline

Introduction

This technical appendix sets out a review of key indicators and other sources of evidence that have been reviewed as part of the process of preparing the rural regeneration strategy. This evidence underpins recommendations set out in the strategy and action plan. It also provides a detailed baseline, enabling CW&CC and its partners to track future trends across the rural area and thus identify the impact of actions implemented under the strategy.

This section sets out baseline information in relation to key themes including the rural population, economic activity, accessibility and connectivity and the environment amongst others. The analysis identifies key trends, underpinning the assessment of regeneration challenges and future opportunities. This baseline sets out a review of the main findings. Key evidence, along with supporting material, is available through the Doric system. Where supporting information is set out within supporting documentation reference to the relevant maps and figures is highlighted.

The geography

The rural area

Cheshire West and Chester Council (CW&CC), as part of its commitment to driving forward the regeneration and transformation of key settlements and areas within the Borough, has identified four key regeneration programme areas:

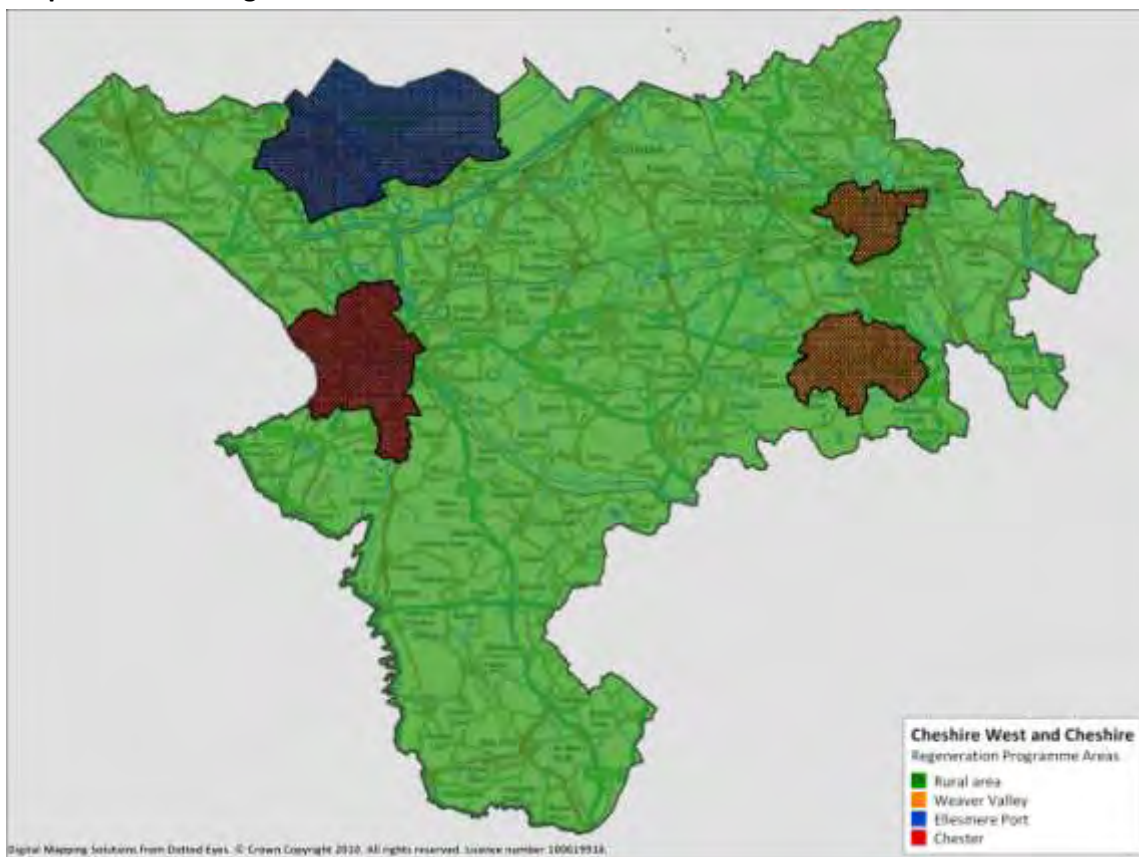
- Rural and Market Towns;
- The Weaver Valley, focusing primarily on the towns of Northwich and Winsford;
- Ellesmere Port; and
- Chester.

The rural area comprises some 81,400 ha, over 85% of the total land area of CW&CC. Stretching between and surrounding the largest conurbations within the area, the rural area borders the Liverpool City Region to the West and North, North Wales to the West and Shropshire to the South. Map A1 illustrates the location of the rural area within the wider context of CW&CC.

The rural area, encompassing the market towns of Neston, Frodsham, Tarporley and Malpas, is perhaps the most complex of these areas as it does not form a homogenous geography, either in terms of its landscape or its population. While national urban-rural classifications settlement and dwelling density show that the rural area has a very different morphology to the more urban regeneration areas, it also serves to demonstrate that the rural area is far more variable than other areas ([Map AM1](#) & [Map AM2](#)). While central and southern areas of the local authority area are classified as rural others, notably Neston, have a more urban character.

In preparing this strategy for the rural area a balance has been struck between ensuring that the strategy provides a strategic framework to structure the approach of CW&CC and its partners to delivering regeneration, and reflecting the diversity of the rural area.

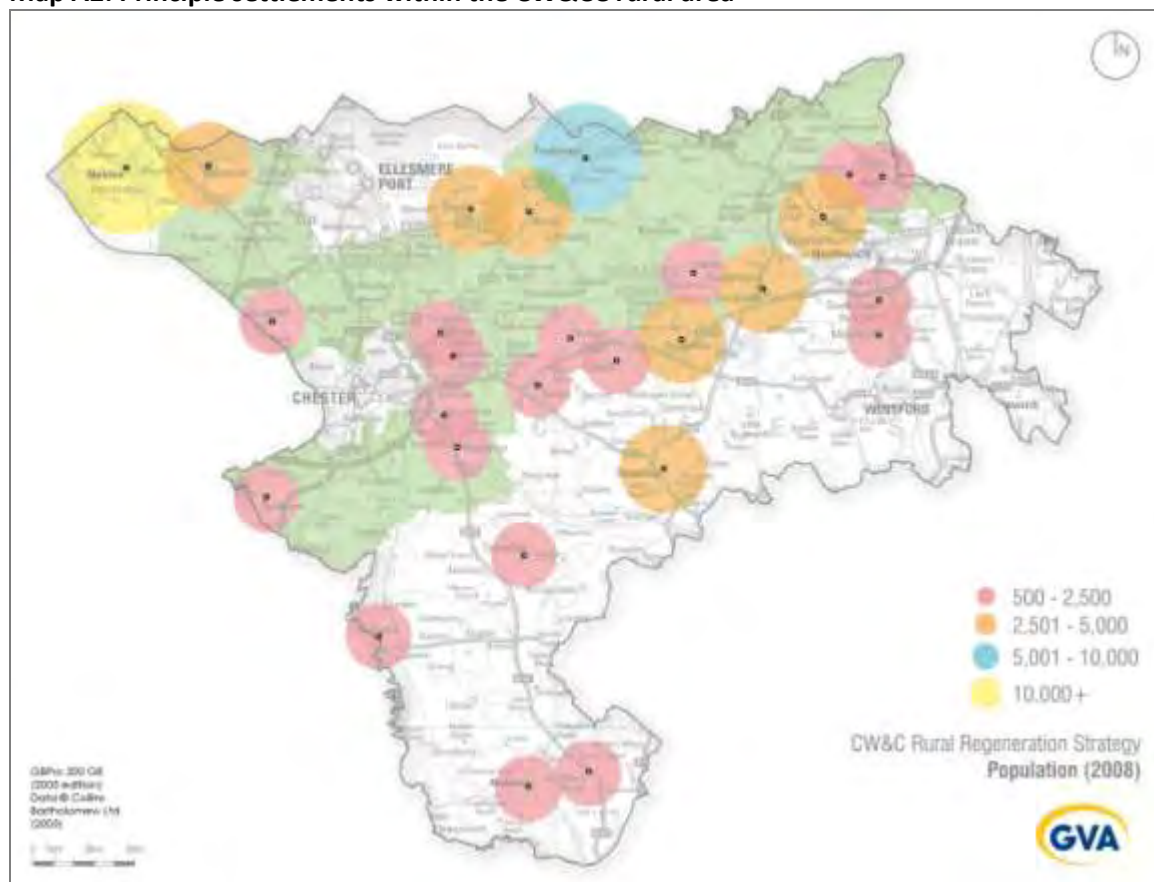
Map A1: CW&CC regeneration areas



Key settlements

The rural area comprises a significant number of distinct towns, villages and smaller settlements. It ranges from towns with populations of around 10,000 and strong local service centres to isolated hamlets with just a handful of dwellings and no services. Based upon ONS mid-year population data for small geographical areas, along with local level survey analysis, settlements with populations of more than 500 have been identified as representing the major community centres across the rural area. In total there are 27 settlements with a population of more than 500 (Map A2).

Map A2: Principle settlements within the CW&CC rural area



Neston and Frodsham are the largest settlements in the rural area, located to the north of the local authority area and enjoying strong linkages with the wider Liverpool City Region including Halton. Tarporley and Malpas also constitute important local centres within the rural area, although these villages are much smaller.

Mapping clearly shows that a significant number of settlements, including Tarvin, Kelsall and Cuddington, are clustered along the A54/A556 main road linking Chester with the Weaver Towns of Northwich and Winsford. Settlements within this belt are situated to the immediate south of the wider Mersey Greenbelt and, as such, have experienced fewer constraints to development in recent years. Other rural settlements are clustered around the major towns, and exist very much within the orbit of these conurbations.

The way that settlements within the rural area function is heavily influenced by the historic pattern of development, their location relative to key transport network, the proximity of other, larger centres and the siting of key services such as secondary schools.

Wards and parishes

The vast majority of rural Cheshire West & Chester is “parished”. There are 167 town and parish councils and parish meetings in the Cheshire West & Chester rural area [Map AM3].

These are operated by 72 local councillors. This means that most communities benefit from an elected local governance structure (a parish or town council) capable of co-ordinating local activity, engaging people in decision making and raising money through local taxation. These parishes are supported by the County Association of Local Councils and by Cheshire Community Action, the local rural community council.

Parishes sit within a ward structure that has been revised in 2010. The ward structure provides the basis for the administrative geography, acting as a political unit from which local councillor are elected. Under the 2010 revision there are 46 wards across the rural area [[Map AM4](#)].

While parish and ward boundaries form the basis of administration and governance across the rural area, they do not form the basis of statistical data collection. The baseline analysis comprises analysis of a wide range of statistical indicators. Data units for small geographies, which include output areas and census wards, form the basis of the statistical analysis, but do not have a strong spatial alignment with the administrative parish and ward boundaries.

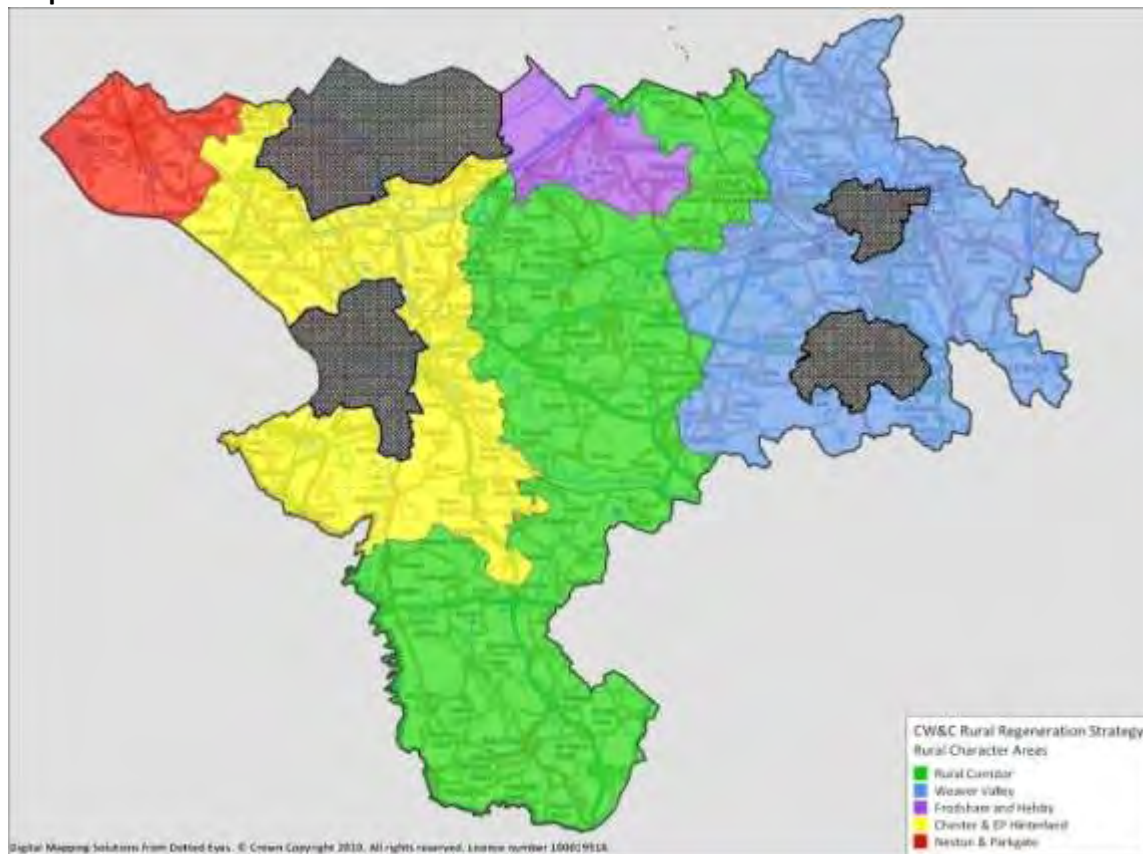
The functional geography

Reflecting both the diversity and the complexity of the local geography, the baseline analysis has been undertaken for a number of character sub-areas. Each of these sub-areas have been characterised on the basis of their broad economic structure and their relationship with primary local urban centres, and provides a means of analysing variance within the rural area. The analysis has drawn out five broad character areas. These areas are illustrated in Map A3 and are described below:

- Weaver Valley – A large area to the east of the Borough stretching from the eastern boundary across to the A49. It includes the larger villages of Sandiway & Cuddington together with a series of smaller settlements. Service provision is concentrated within the towns of Northwich and Winsford, which also act as an important focus for local employment. The M6 acts as an important arterial route through this area, with strong access to the strategic road network opening access to a wider jobs market for local populations. People living in this area also have strong travel to work relationships beyond the Borough, with significant commuting flows to the east;
- Frodsham & Helsby - An area to the north of the Borough centred on the towns of Frodsham and Helsby. There is a rural secondary school at Helsby and a wide range of services, including access to the rail network, at Frodsham. The area lies entirely within the Cheshire Green Belt. The proximity to the motorway and access to the rail networks means that many people that live in this area travel out of the Borough to work, often to Warrington and Runcorn but also to Manchester and Merseyside.
- Neston & Parkgate - An area to the north west of the Borough centred on the town of Neston and its neighbouring larger villages (Burton, Parkgate & Willaston). This area has strong cultural and economic links to Wirral and Merseyside, as well as Chester and, to a lesser extent, Ellesmere Port. Neston is the largest settlement in the rural area and in many ways does not consider itself to be rural. The countryside and villages beyond Neston are set within the Cheshire Green Belt.

- Chester & Ellesmere Port Hinterland - An area which wraps around Chester and incorporates villages to the east and south of Chester ring road, including villages within the Cheshire Green Belt like Waverton, Saughton, Aldford and Doddleston. Chester is the dominant centre in this area and has the major influence on travel to work patterns and the way that people access services. There is a rural secondary school at Christleton, just to the east of the ring road.
- Rural Corridor – A corridor located between the Chester and Ellesmere Port hinterland and the Weaver Valley, this area stretches from Delamere Forest in the North to the Shropshire border in the south. This area is the most characteristically rural area of CW&CC. Despite this, there are a number of significant settlements in the central belt clustered around east west infrastructure including Kelsall, Tarvin and Tarporley, along with other key local centres such as Tattenhall. Tarporley forms an important service centre, with a secondary school and a high quality service offer. Further to this, high quality road and rail infrastructure affords people living within this area access to labour markets in Chester and the Weaver towns. The area to the south of the A534 is more rural and more peripheral to the key service centres of CW&CC. Linkages are stronger with Wrexham and Whitchurch. Malpas acts as a focus for local services.

Map A3: CW&CC rural character areas

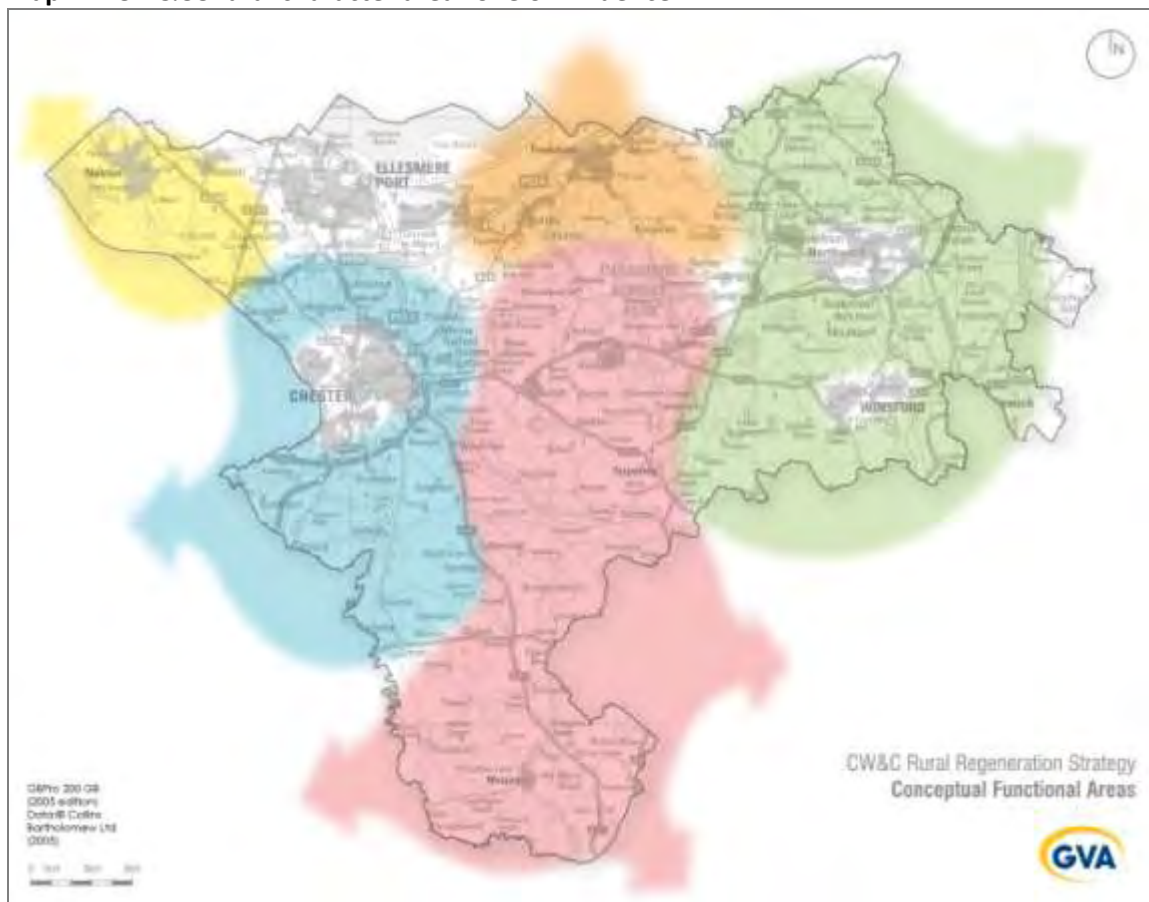


The sub-areas have been built up from output area geographies to enable analysis of Census and other more recent datasets held by the Council. Where data is not available for Census geographies a best fit has been established.

Zone of influence

To a significant extent the functional rural character areas are defined by their relationships with urban centres both within and outside CW&CC. These relationships reflect the relative strength and proximity for both employment and services. Map A4 illustrates the primary external influences, reflecting travel to work patterns and how rural communities access services.

Map A4: CW&CC rural character area zone of influence



Chester and its hinterland has strong linkages with the urban and industrial centres of North Wales, particularly Flintshire and Wrexham. To the north west of the study area around the market town of Neston connections to the Wirral and the wider Liverpool city region become increasingly important. To the east of Chester access to the M56 corridor enables strong connections to Manchester, Warrington and Runcorn. Finally, the areas around Malpas to the south of Chester benefit from strong linkages with Wrexham to the west and Whitchurch to the South.

Farming and Food

There are in the region of 1,800 farm holdings in Cheshire West & Chester covering around 70,000 hectares. These contribute about £88 million in aggregate net farm income each year. The number of farm holdings has fallen between 2001 and 2007, with a corresponding fall in employment. There are in the region of 1,600 people employed full time in agriculture in the Borough and a further 4,740 people employed part time. This equates to just 0.5% of the Borough's total employment, but it should be remembered that every job in farming supports another 7.5 jobs in the agri-food sector.

The dominant farming sector in Cheshire West & Chester is dairy, which accounts for about half of aggregated net farm income. The outlook for global dairy production is favourable as a result of growing consumption and demand – the world's population is expected to swell by 30% to 9 billion within 40 years. Margins remain tight however; input costs continue to rise and costs of production are likely to substantially increase.

The mechanism for buying milk in the UK, and the separation of production, processing and retailing, means that UK dairy farmers struggle to get a viable price for their milk. Producers in markets like New Zealand receive in the region of 27 pence per litre whilst farm gate milk prices in the UK average just 24.5 ppl. This is 3 ppl lower than the current cost of production according to NFU President Peter Kendall. 470 farmers left the industry in 2009.

Landscape and heritage

Cheshire West and Chester benefit from a large number of environmental assets, some of which have European protection. These include parts of the Dee and Mersey Estuaries, Oakmere, Midland Meres and West Midland Mosses. In addition there are 28 sites are designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest covering more than 5,199 hectares [[Map AM5](#)].

The Borough also has:

- Eight Areas of Special County Value (ASCV);
- 286 Site of Biological Importance (SBI) covering 4,259 ha [[Map AM6](#)];
- 39 Areas of Nature Conservation value, 4 Strategic Wildlife Areas, and 215 Sites of Nature Conservation Value;
- 6 Local Nature Reserves covering 104 ha [[Map AM7](#)];
- 3,634 ha of woodland (including Delamere Forest), of which 651 ha is Ancient Woodland;
- 31 Cheshire Biodiversity Action Plan habitats (including 17 UK BAP priority habitats);
- In the region of 6,700 ponds; and
- 24 regionally important Geological and Geomorphological Sites wholly or partially in Cheshire West and Chester.

In addition to these natural environmental assets 42% of the land area of the Borough is statutorily designated Green Belt (Map A2).

The landscape and environment is highly valued by the area's residents and there is a strong track record of public investment in the natural environment, biodiversity and landscape. Current projects include the Sandstone Ridge EConet Partnership which is involved in the creation of a network of woodlands, heathlands, peatlands and meadows along the Sandstone Ridge to create an ecological network [[Map AM9](#)]. The partnership is working with local communities to bring economic benefits, through increased tourism; and social benefits, through increased public enjoyment of the countryside and a focus on education and developing rural skills. Cheshire Wildlife Trust are working on a Living Landscapes Washlands project which aims to create a landscape where a resilient network of wetland habitats provides ecosystem services in conjunction with high quality nature conservation resources of benefit to local people. The Habitats and Hillforts of Cheshire's Sandstone Ridge is a Heritage Lottery funded project (running to 2011) which aims to conserve the Ridge's Iron Age hillforts and surrounding wildlife habitats, and to encourage more people to access, learn about and become more involved in the area's heritage [[Map AM9](#)].

Cheshire West and Chester has a rich archaeological and built heritage. This extends well beyond Chester's Roman amphitheatre, medieval moated sites and motte and bailey castles and includes prehistoric burial sites and hillforts, market towns and "new model" estate villages, the area's distinctive "black and white" architecture, as well as Georgian, Victorian and modern development.

The Borough has 97 conservation areas, 2505 listed buildings, 7 registered parks and gardens of special historic interest, 1 Battlefield and 116 Scheduled Monuments. Much of this is in the rural area. It underpins much of the rural tourism industry and creates the distinctive local architecture and settlement patterns which make rural Cheshire's towns and villages such attractive places to live [[Map AM10](#)].

Previous work by the Council and its partners has identified a series of key issues which need to be addressed by the Rural Regeneration Strategy

- Managing, expanding and enhancing the Borough's Green Infrastructure network and recognising its importance in delivering local environmental, socio economic and health benefits.
- Enhancing the connectivity of Green Infrastructure and reinforcing the protection of green corridors and linkages between sites.
- Protecting, managing and enhancing Cheshire West and Chester's historic and natural assets.
- Protecting and enhancing existing amenity and recreational open spaces, school playing fields, greenways and wildlife sites.
- Maintaining, enhancing, restoring or adding to local biodiversity/geodiversity, landscape and tree conservation interests, whilst securing regeneration of previously developed land and meeting development needs.

Population and demographics

The total population of the rural area in 2009 was estimated to be 132,831 or 41% of the total CW&CC population. On this basis the rural area is the most populous of CW&CC's four regeneration areas. However, reflecting the relative size of the rural area, it should be noted that the population density is, at 1.6 person per hectare, substantially lower than that for more urban areas. A breakdown of the population and population density is set out in the table below.

Area	2009 Population	Area (ha)	Density (Population per ha)
Rural area	132,831	81,417	1.6
Weaver valley	47,544	22,090	2.2
Frodsham & Helsby	16,022	9,856	1.6
Neston & Parkgate	18,343	4,321	4.2
Chester & EP hinterland	23,118	17,710	1.3
Rural Corridor	27,804	27,440	1.0
Chester	77,886	3,273	23.8
Ellesmere Port	61,087	5,772	10.6
Weaver Valley towns	54,751	3,349	16.3
Cheshire West and Chester	326,600	93,811	3.5

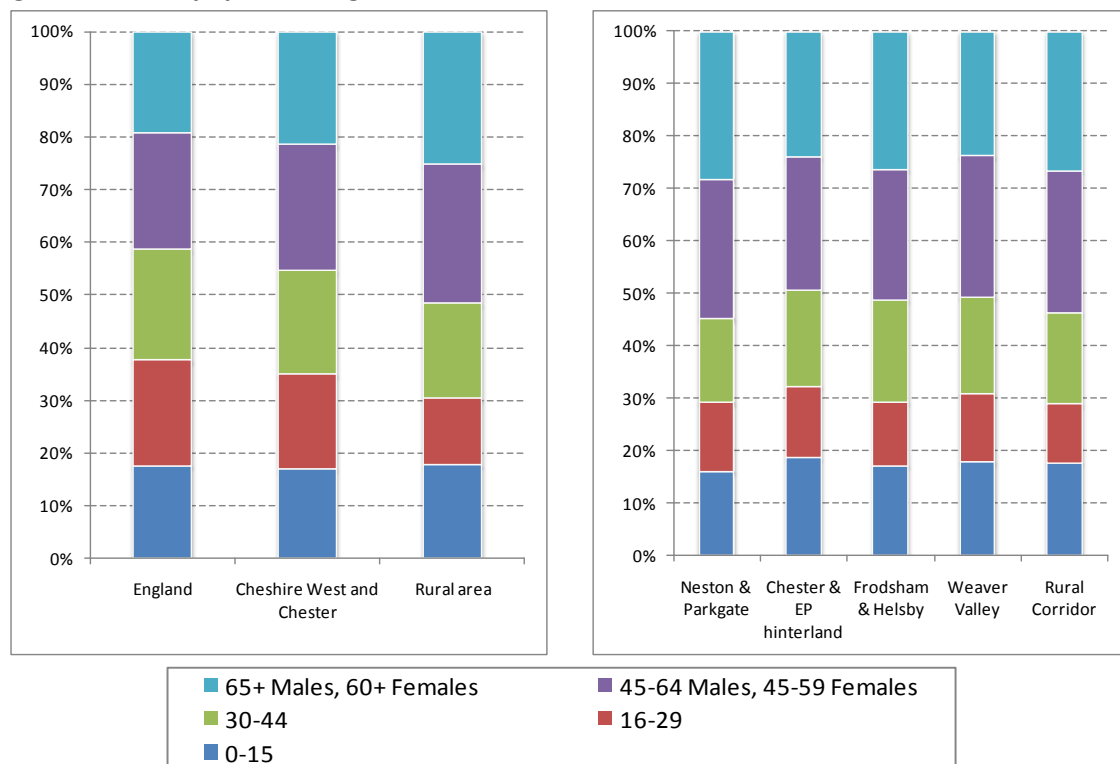
An analysis of recent trends highlights that growth of the overall population of the rural area has been severely constrained in recent years, with only a marginal increase of 0.4% since 2001 [\[Figure AF1\]](#). Growth was primarily focused within the Frodsham and Weaver Valley areas, both of which experienced a population increase of between 1% and 2%. By contrast, rural areas to the west of the Borough experienced a marginal decline. The overall level of growth was somewhat lower than that experienced within Chester and particularly the Weaver Valley towns. Limited growth over the short term could in part be attributed to a restrictive planning environment that has sought to focus development activity within existing urban areas, and the presence of the wider Mersey Greenbelt across northern sections of the rural area.

Recent growth trends highlight the scale of challenge associated with delivering targets for population growth of 17% by 2030, in line with targets set out in sub-regional strategy. Population projections for the Rural West APB indicate an overall level of growth of -2% based upon recent trends. While there is clear capacity for substantial housing development within other regeneration centres, there is also recognition that the rural area has a role to play in achieving this ambitious growth agenda.

A detailed review of population trends reveals a significant imbalance within the rural demographic structure. Overall, 25% of the population within the rural area is of retirement age, while a further 26% of the population is over the age of 45. In total some 52% of the rural area population are 45 years old or above. The proportion aged over 45 or over rises to 55% in Neston and Parkgate and 54% within the Rural Corridor. By comparison, 45% of the population of CW&CC is aged 45 or above while the average for England as a whole is just 41%. The age

structure of the population in rural areas is illustrated in figure A1 below. A spatial analysis emphasizes that as a proportion of the total population the retirement age population is high across the rural area, and particularly high within the Market Towns of Neston and Frodsham, as well as Malpas and Tarporley [\[Map AM15\]](#).

Figure A1: Rural population age structure



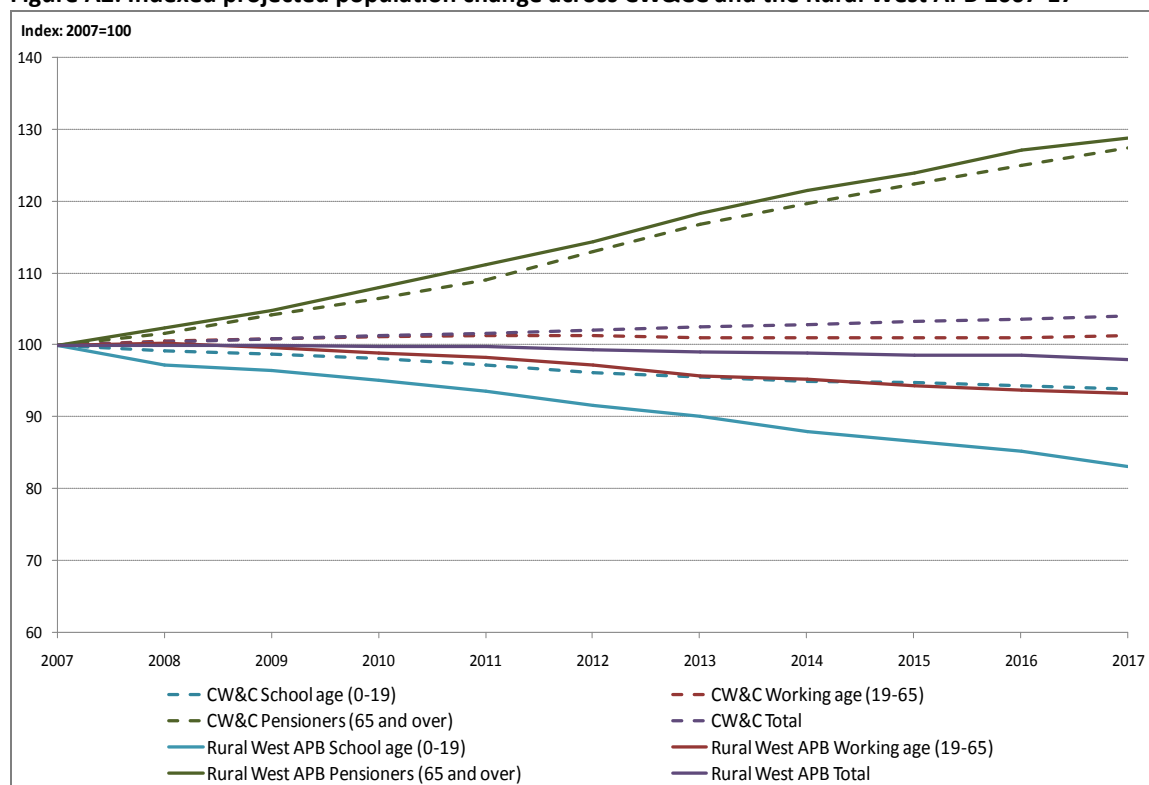
An analysis of trends highlights that between 2001 and 2009 the retirement age population has increased by 20%. Growth was particularly strong within the Chester and Ellesmere Port Hinterland where the retirement age population grew by almost 25%. Levels of growth significantly exceeded those for CW&CC (14%) and England as a whole (8%). By comparison, trends in the rural area population aged 45 to 60/65 have been far less significant, with growth of just 1% between 2001 and 2009. Analysis of data indicates that this low level of growth could potentially be attributed to natural change processes, with growth limited by barriers to entry in the form of restricted housing supply.

While analysis indicates that recent trends in the school age population within the rural area have been broadly in line with those of CW&CC and wider areas, the working age population has experienced a decline. In 2001, just 60% of the rural population were classified as working age compared to 62% for CW&CC as a whole. Across the rural area the working age population declined by 5% between 2001 and 2009. This decline was particularly significant for those aged 16 to 44. While the decline in the working age population was highest within the Chester & Ellesmere Port Hinterland at 8%, none of the rural sub-areas experienced growth between 2001 and 2009. Over the same period the working age population of urban areas within CW&CC

increased, while that of CW&CC as a whole remained stable. On the basis of recent trends, just 57% of the rural area population were classified as being of working age in 2009.

Population projections for the Rural West APB dating from 2007, and illustrated in Figure A2, show that based upon recent trends the retirement age population was expected to increase by 29% over a ten year period. This rate of growth was higher than that projected for CW&CC as a whole. Further to this, projections signal an ongoing decline in the working age population alongside a significant decline of 16% in the school age population over a ten year period.

Figure A2: Indexed projected population change across CW&CC and the Rural West APB 2007-17



In the absence of effective action, the balance of the population is likely to have a significant impact upon the vitality of rural communities. The demographic balance has implications both in terms of future economic growth and the provision of services. The contraction of the working age population will result in a contraction of the labour market. Given the skill profile of the local workforce, it is likely that this will impact upon businesses ability to recruit for technical and lower skilled occupations locally. This in turn could impact upon the viability of local service providers. Further to this, both the increase of the retirement age population and the potential decline of the school age population have fundamental implications for future service provision. It may undermine the capacity of local rural communities to support nursery and primary school services. The absence of these services would further undermine the suitability of these communities for families. Similarly, consideration will need to be given to the provision of suitable housing, services and transport to meet the needs of an aging population within the rural area.

Economy

Business and enterprise

A distribution analysis highlights that while employment locations within CW&CC are clustered within the main urban areas, there is an extensive network of businesses across the rural areas [[Map AM11](#)].

Across CW&CC the number of VAT registered businesses increased by 19% between 2000 and 2007. This local rate of growth exceeded that experienced nationally, as the number of businesses in Great Britain increased by just 14% over the same period. Analysis of ABI data indicates that over the period 2003 to 2007 increases in the number of workplaces across both CW&CC and Great Britain as a whole was broadly comparable with VAT data for businesses. Further analysis of ABI data indicates that over the period 2003 to 2008 growth in the number of workplaces within the rural area significantly exceeded that across CW&CC as a whole at 20% and 13% respectively. This growth was particularly strong within the Chester and Ellesmere Port Hinterland and the Weaver Valley, with these areas benefiting from close proximity to key service providers, transport hubs and a larger labour pool. However, it should be noted that the number of workspaces within the Rural Corridor also increased by 19% over the period 2003 to 2008, suggesting strong business growth in more typically rural parts of the Borough. By contrast, growth of 5% and 6% in Neston and Frodsham respectively suggests that these key market towns have failed to keep pace with other areas.

Data from the IDBR indicates that there were 68 private sector enterprises per 1,000 working age population across CW&CC in 2009. This is broadly in line with business density figures for England as a whole. However, across the rural area there were 87 businesses per 1,000 working age population. This relatively high business density can to some extent be attributed to the prevalence of sole traders, as a relatively high proportion of businesses within the rural area comprise single employee enterprises.

Business Demography data and VAT records indicate that business start-up rates across CW&CC have been broadly in line with national rates since 2000. As this data is not available for small spatial areas it is not possible to analyse the relative performance of the rural area in relation to business start-ups. A review of 2009 data from the Inter-Departmental Business Register indicates that the proportion of enterprises established within two years of the survey date was marginally lower across the rural area than that for CW&CC as a whole at 15.4% and 16.9% respectively. Meanwhile, a high proportion of enterprises within the rural area are established businesses that have been trading for ten or more years. In total, almost 45% of enterprises currently operating from the rural area have been working from that location for ten years. This compares to 41% across CW&CC. This suggests that a higher proportion of businesses within the rural area are strongly established, but that start-up rates are perhaps somewhat lower.

The baseline analysis suggests that while growth in the number of businesses across the rural area has exceeded that across CW&CC as a whole, activity has principally been focused within the hinterland of the major conurbations. Away from these areas, growth was more subdued. It also suggests that businesses within the rural area are, on average, smaller than those in urban areas.

Employment and key sectors

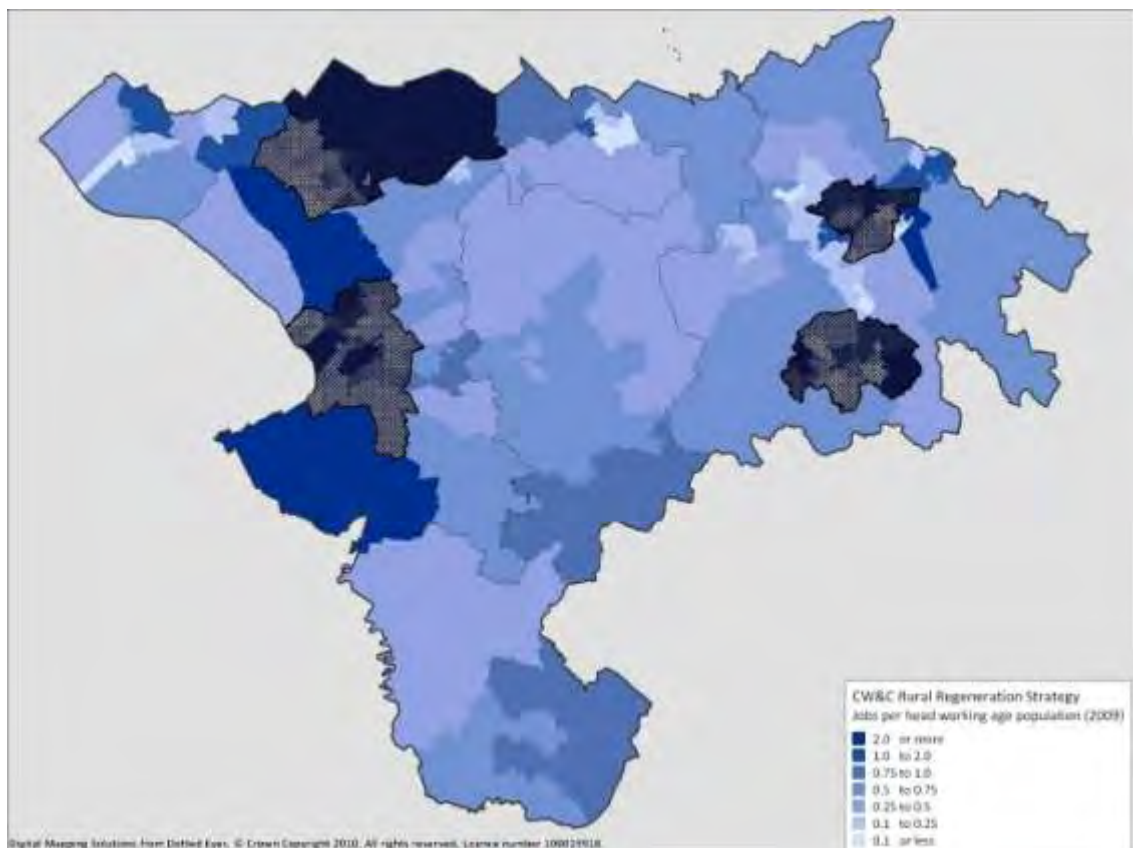
A review of employment across CW&CC demonstrates that the rural area makes a valuable contribution to the economy of the Borough. In 2009 workplaces within the rural area accommodated 54,100 jobs including employees, sole traders, partners and directors. This accounted for 35% of total employment across CW&CC. This compares to 32% for Chester, 16% for Ellesmere Port and 17% for the Weaver Towns.

Across the rural area levels of employment (based upon the number of employees) increased between 2003 and 2009. Over this period an increase in the number of employees working within the rural area of 2.8% can be contrasted with a decline for CW&CC as a whole of 3.8%. While this wider decline is, in part, a factor of the wider economic downturn, prior to 2009 employment growth across CW&CC was negligible. By comparison, between 2003 the number of employees working in the rural area increased by 3.4%, before falling back in 2009 [[Figure AF2](#)].

This growth trend was not uniform across the rural area. Growth in the employment base was primarily concentrated in the rural areas immediately surrounding key urban centres, particularly Chester and the Weaver Towns. The number of employees working within the Chester and Ellesmere Port Hinterland increased by 10.3% between 2003 and 2009, while growth of 8.4% was recorded for the Waver Valley. While data suggests that there was limited change across the Rural Corridor over this period, employment in both Neston & Parkgate and Frodsham & Helsby declined sharply (13.3% and 21.4% respectively). Analysis indicates that decline experienced over the period 2003 to 2008 accelerated in 2009, indicating that these key market towns have struggled to compete effectively, both over the long term and through the downturn.

While a review of trends shows that employment growth within the rural area has outstripped that for CW&CC as a whole in recent years, levels of employment per head of working age population within the rural area remain substantially lower than those in urban areas. In 2009 the ratio of employment to working age residents (job density) across the rural area was 0.71. Based upon this measure, the job density for CW&CC as a whole was 0.76, while that for Chester was 0.99. However, it should be noted that there was significant variation in job density across the rural area, reflecting the influence of the main urban centres upon activity within surrounding rural areas. Employment is concentrated within the hinterland to the traditional urban areas of Ellesmere Port, the Weaver Valley towns and Chester in particular. In 2009 the job density for the Chester and Ellesmere Port Hinterland was 1.55. This high level of density distorts the picture for the rural area. Removing the Chester hinterland from the analysis, the ratio of employment to working age residents drops to 0.54. Recent studies have highlighted that these disparities are reflected in the levels of occupation of employment space, with higher levels of supply and demand in the Chester and Ellesmere Port hinterland than elsewhere in Cheshire West. An LSOA level analysis of employment density is set out in Map A5, highlighting the disparity between employment densities in urban and rural areas.

Map A5: LSOA level employment density across CW&CC (2009)



A detailed review of employment across different sectors of the economy highlights that the sectoral profile of the rural area is broadly similar to that of CW&CC as a whole. In 2009 the most important sectors in terms of overall employment within the rural area were financial and insurance (16.5% of employment) and Education (10.5% of employment) along with retail, accommodation and food services and professional, scientific and technical activities (8.5%, 8.3% and 8.1% respectively). By contrast, agriculture, forestry and fishing sector accounted for just 0.3% of overall employment across the rural area, the lowest level of employment for any of the broad sectoral groups.

The review highlights the finance and insurance sector as a particular area of strength within the rural economy. The level of employment in this sector was significantly higher than that across CW&CC and England as a whole (8.2% and 3.9% respectively). However, it should be noted that activity within this sector is not distributed evenly across the rural area. Rather, 81% of employment within the finance and insurance sector is located within the Chester and Ellesmere Port Hinterland character zone, focused around Chester Business Park and forming a component of the wider Chester market. While activity within finance and insurance was substantially lower across other rural areas, employment within this sector made 8.7% of employment within the Weaver Valley area. Again, this could potentially be attributed to the functional linkages between this hinterland and the urban centres of North and Winsford.

Activity in other business sectors ('Information & communication', 'Property', 'Professional, scientific & technical', 'Business administration & support services') is also relatively strong across the rural area. These sectors accounted for over 20% of total employment across the rural area. This is broadly in line with the average for England (21%) and marginally higher than that for CW&CC as a whole (18%). While there was some degree of variance across the rural area, with the proportion of employment ranging from 15% in Neston and Parkgate to 30% in Frodsham and Helsby, the distribution of employment across the rural area was more even than that of the finance sector. The review of workspace emphasises that alongside the conversion of agricultural buildings, bespoke employment sites such as Chowley Oak in Tattenhall and Portal Business Park at Tarporley have played an effective role in supporting employment within key business sectors.

Relative to the overall level of employment across CW&CC, activity in the construction sector across the rural area was also high. In 2009 some 7.2% of total employment within the rural area was in construction, compared to just 4.6% across CW&CC as a whole. However, again it is noted that levels of construction employment across the rural area were highly variable. Employment in the construction sector was high in Neston and Parkgate and the Weaver Valley (at 8.9% and 8.1% of total employment respectively) and particularly high within the Rural Corridor where it accounted for almost 13% of employment. This reflects a cluster of construction sector activity to the south of the Rural Corridor around Malpas, where a number of large employers are located. By contrast, levels of employment within the construction sector around Frodsham and across the Chester and Ellesmere Port Hinterland are less significant.

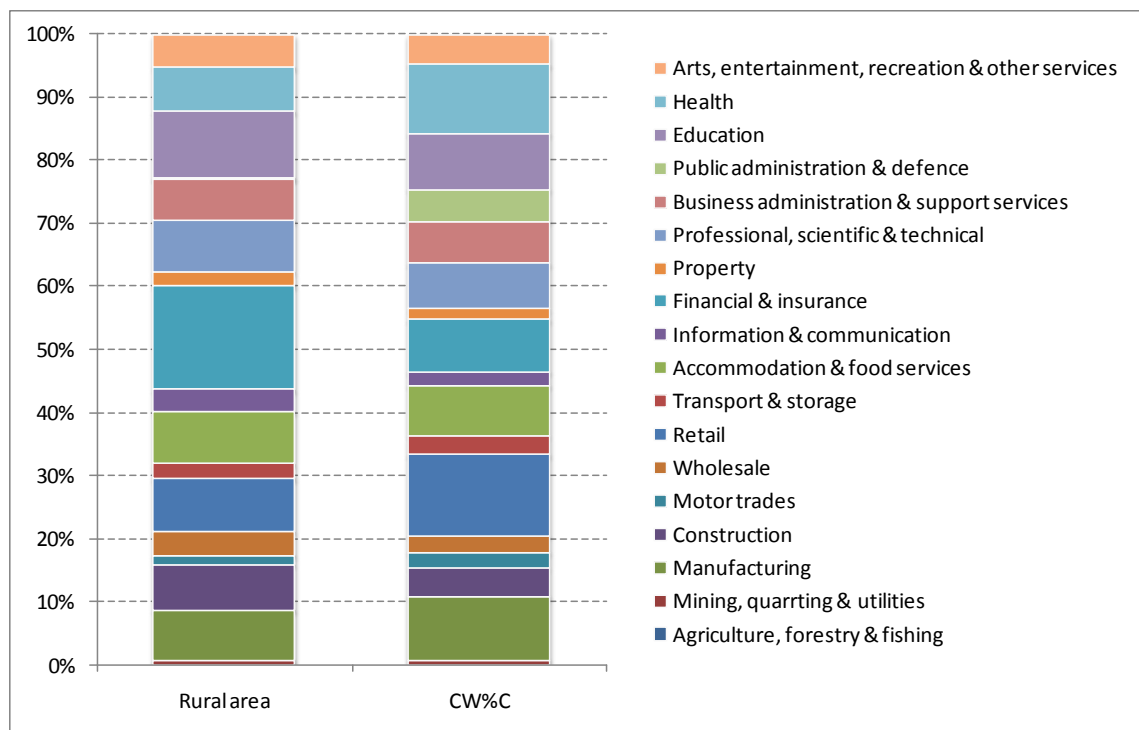
As highlighted above, the land based sector accounted for just 0.3% of total employment across the rural area in 2009. While higher than the average for CW&CC (0.1%), this level of employment was somewhat lower than the average for England as a whole (1.4%). Low levels of employment in this sector reflect both the morphology of the rural area and the characteristics of farming activity across CW&CC. As highlighted above, much of the rural area can be characterised as either urban fringe or less rural. Levels of agricultural employment are more significant within rural corridor, although even here the farming sector accounted for just 1.2% of total employment in 2009.

Alongside strengths, analysis indicates that levels of employment within rural area were low in relation to a number of sectors. In particular, employment in the manufacturing and retail sectors was low relative to averages for CW&CC. Overall, manufacturing accounts of 8% of employment across the rural area compared to 10% across CW&CC. However, levels of manufacturing employment within the rural area are only marginally lower than those for England as a whole (8.7%), and there remains a focus of activity within the Weaver Valley centred on the traditional industrial towns of Northwich and Winsford. Further to this, levels of employment within the retail sector are also low at 8.5% as businesses within local village centres struggle to compete with large and accessible retail centres such as Chester and Cheshire Oaks. Despite this, retail employment in Neston and Frodsham (at 15% and 18% respectively) exceeded overall levels for CW&CC in 2009 (13%). This indicates that these service centres continue to play an important role at the local level. Opportunities to build upon the strengths of existing centres, both to support business growth and sustain service provision, should be explored.

Alongside manufacturing and retail, levels of public sector employment are low across the rural area. At a local authority level, employment in public administration is primarily focused within Chester, Ellesmere Port and the Weaver Towns. This reflects the administrative pattern inherited when CW&CC replaced the separate districts of Chester, Ellesmere Port and Neston and Vale Royal. As such, just 2% of employment in public administration is based within the rural area. Further to this, levels of employment in the health sector are also relatively low. Overall, the combined public administration, education and health sectors account for 18% of employment across the rural area. Across CW&CC, the public sector accounted for 25% of total employment in 2009. While traditionally viewed as a stable sector, recognising the likely implications of reduced budgets at both a national and a local level over coming years, a low level of dependency upon public sector employment can be viewed in a positive light in the short term. However, it is noted that the employment profile of Neston and Parkgate is relatively skewed towards the public sector and, as such, this part of the rural area could potentially be exposed to future employment decline within this sector.

A summary analysis of the employment structure is set out in Figure A3 below showing key sectors for the rural area as a whole. An analysis has also been carried out for each of the character areas [\[Figure AF3\]](#).

Figure A3: Employment within broad industry groups (2009)



Source: Business Register and Employment Survey (SIC 2007)

The above analysis is based on the Business Register and Employment Survey. However, disparities between this source and its predecessor (the Annual Business Survey) make meaningful trend based analysis difficult. In particular, the ABI only provides data for employee and, as such, does not reflect sole traders, sole proprietors, partners and directors within the

estimate of employment. The review of employment trends is therefore based upon ABI employee data, and reflects an earlier system of sector classification. While there is some variation between sectors, the most up to date BRES indicates that at a national level total employment is between 5% and 10% higher than the number of total employees.

Across the rural area as a whole employment growth between 2003 and 2008 was driven by businesses in the banking, finance and insurance sector. As noted above, this sector is strongly focused around Chester and growth across the rural area of around 21% reflects the strength of the Chester market. While significant growth was also recorded for the 'agriculture and fishing' and 'other services' sectors over the period 2003 to 2008, this in part reflects the relatively low base employment recorded in 2003. In absolute terms, growth in other services accounted for approximately 800 jobs, while recorded employment in the agricultural sector increased by 150 jobs.

Workspace

A detailed review of the property market has been undertaken to inform and evidence the strategy. This is set out in the property annex to this baseline [\[LINK\]](#). A summary of the key issues emerging from this review is set out below.

Market structure

Within CW&CC there are a number of recognised sub-markets. While Chester is considered a desirable investment location, it has been somewhat hampered by a number of stalled development projects. Ellesmere Port is a key growth area for the Borough, with diversification enabling a gradual transition from dependence on the traditional industrial base to a broader spectrum of office and retail accommodation. While the rural area is intrinsically linked to these key commercial areas through travel-to-work patterns and spin-off businesses, it also retains some degree of independence and differentiation, in commercial terms, to the urban areas.

Across CW&CC, the overall quantum of workspace increased by almost 8% between 1998 and 2008. While industrial stock continues to dominate the commercial market, representing 37% of total commercial floorspace in 2008, manufacturing remains in long term decline and this is reflected in workspace requirements, as the amount of industrial floorspace declined by 227,000 sq m between 1998 and 2008. By contrast, in response to business led growth between 1998 and 2008 office and warehouse provision increased, both in absolute terms and as a proportion of total floorspace.

Cheshire and Warrington Rural Workspace Study

Undertaken by BE Group in 2009, this study assessed the demand and supply of Rural Workspace to 2013. The study identified 6,530 B1, B2 and B8 premises across rural areas of CW&CC, Cheshire East and Warrington, accommodating a total of 4 million sq m of employment floorspace. Just under half of this is located within the CW&CC rural area.

Through the study Malpas, Tarporley, Helsby, Frodsham and Kelsall were identified as key locations in terms of the provision of new employment floorspace, while specific opportunities

were identified in relation to the Eden Vale works, Bryn, Marley Tile Works and Roften Works sites [\[Map AM12\]](#).

The key finding from the survey was a severe lack of available industrial units throughout the rural area, with a particular shortage of small workshop units of up to 100 sq m and larger units of in excess of 1,000 sq m. Alongside this, many of the vacant premises identified are situated in isolated rural areas. Intervention to secure the delivery of new rural workshops, particularly through the redevelopment of existing agricultural buildings, was a key recommendation of the study.

Office provision across the CW&CC rural area was considered to be more comprehensive, with an adequate distribution in terms of location, tenure, size and quality. In 2009 vacancy rates on new office schemes were high as the market has been flooded as farmers have sought to diversify by transforming outbuildings into office accommodation. This market is now considered to be relatively saturated.

Market activity

Activity in the office market has been muted since 2008 due to wider economic pressures. Availability of workspace is mainly focused around Tarporley and Frodsham, with 26 units currently being marketed. However, as might be expected, levels of availability within rural centres are substantially lower than the main urban centres of Chester, Ellesmere Port and the Weaver Valley towns. Availability away from the main urban centres of CW&CC is in the main restricted to smaller units of up to 1,000 sq m. While Tarporley has performed strongly in terms of disposals, other parts of the rural area have experienced low levels of investment activity within the office market. While the letting market remains somewhat stronger, activity since 2008 has principally been driven by demand for very small units of up to 100 sq m.

Available industrial space within CW&CC is primarily concentrated in key urban and edge of centre locations. In the rural areas Neston, in particular, has a number of industrial properties available. While there is also a strong amount of enquiries for industrial space in Neston, the lettings and disposal market is relatively weak. This is attributed to the mismatch between demand and existing supply. There is significant availability of smaller stock of up to 500 sq m. Against this, the majority of enquires in Neston for industrial space of between 2,000 sq m and 10,000 sq m. Similarly, in Tarporley and Frodsham and Helsby enquires have not been translated into transactions due to the lack of product of any size.

There have been very few enquiries across Cheshire West and Chester for retail space. In the period January 2008 to October 2010 Neston received two enquiries, Frodsham and Helsby three enquiries, with a further eight enquiries across the remainder of the rural area. These enquiries have predominately related to workspace in the 100 sq m to 500 sq m range. In terms of A3 and A4 space, there were just two enquiries in Neston and eight enquiries across the wider Rural Districts. Activity in the CW&CC retail space market is heavily focused in the urban areas, particularly within Chester City Centre and at Cheshire Oaks. The rural market for lettings and disposal of retail units is very small, with limited floorspace and a lack of enquiries.

Labour Market

Economic activity, employment and worklessness

Latest available data for CW&CC indicates that levels of economic activity across the area were high at 79% in 2009/10 relative to the average for England (74%), despite a slight decline from a rate of 81% in 2008/09. Further to this, data also indicates that the proportion of the working age population in employment, at 72.5%, was high relative to the England average (70.4%), although again it represented a decline from a 2008/09 peak of 74.9%.

This data is indicative of low levels of unemployment and worklessness amongst the resident population of CW&CC. At a local level, Job-Seekers Allowance (JSA) claimant data indicates that levels of unemployment amongst the resident working age population are significantly lower within the rural area than in other areas of CW&CC. It is estimated that in 2009 some 2.3% of the working population residing in the rural area were claiming JSA. This compares with 3.4% in Chester, 4.2% in Ellesmere Port and 4.7% in the Weaver Valley towns of Northwich and Winsford. While the claimant rate for the rural area ranged from 1.6% in the Rural Corridor to 2.9% in the Weaver Valley, over the long term unemployment within the rural corridor has been significantly lower than that for CW&CC as a whole [[Figure AF4](#)].

A wider analysis of DWP data highlights that levels of worklessness are also significantly lower across the rural area. Comprising an assessment of all working age people on income related benefits, including job seekers, lone parents and those incapable of working, the rate of worklessness across the rural area in 2009 was 8.0%. While this was somewhat higher than levels in 2007 (6.7%), it remains lower than the CW&CC 2009 average (12%), and significantly lower than levels of worklessness within Chester, Ellesmere Port and the Weaver Towns (12.9%, 14.7% and 15.4% respectively) [[Figure AF5](#)].

This analysis indicates that levels of economic activity and employment for residents of the rural area are likely to be significantly higher than averages for CW&CC as a whole. Reflecting this conclusion, it is noted that a low proportion of neighbourhoods and communities within the rural area perform badly in terms of employment deprivation (one of seven domains of the 2007 Index of Multiple Deprivation). The analysis indicates that 9 of the 83 rural LSOAs (11%) were ranked within the 30% most deprived for employment nationally [[Figure AF6](#)]. Despite the fact that rural areas are relatively more remote from major employment markets, the rural area outperformed other areas within CW&CC. Across CW&CC as a whole, 28% of LSOAs were ranked within the 30% most deprived for employment. Within the rural area, employment deprivation was focused within Neston and Parkgate as five out of the eleven LSOAs in this area were ranked within the bottom 30% nationally for employment deprivation [[Map AM18](#)]. Subsequent analysis suggests that this cannot directly be attributed to a low skills profile within this area, and the cause of deprivation within these LSOAs should be subject to scrutiny.

Skills and Education

Cheshire West and Chester benefits from a resident population with a strong skills base. In 2009 almost 32% of the resident population were qualified to NVQ Level 4 or 5 compared to the national average of 30%. In part, this skills profile can be attributed to the high quality of

education providers within CW&CC, as set out below. However, the role of landscape and heritage in attracting and retaining highly skilled workers should not be overlooked.

National profiles indicate that skill levels are predominantly high across rural areas, with the exception of highly remote areas. This finding is consistent with findings for CW&CC. Census data highlights that 27% of the resident population of the rural area were qualified to NVQ level 4 or 5 in 2001, compared to 22% for CW&CC as a whole. Further to this, the proportion of the working age population with no qualifications was much lower within the rural area compared to CW&CC at 23% and 27% respectively.

The presence of a highly skilled workforce represents an important asset. There is a recognised relationship between skill levels within the labour market and economic productivity, with higher qualifications levels associated with greater entrepreneurial activity, research and innovation. The CW&CC Regeneration and Culture Directorate Business Plan 2010-11 emphasises the importance of enhancing skill levels as a means to improving productivity and delivering prosperity and supports interventions to deliver sector specific skills, working alongside partners and the private sector. Opportunities to advance this agenda through input into the employment and skills strategy for CW&CC should be explored.

Alongside a strong resident skills base, there is clear evidence that students residing in the rural area attain higher grades at GCSE. Analysis of data for educational attainment by area of residence indicates that 76% of students living the rural area achieved five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C in 2008/09. Attainment rates for students residing in other areas of CW&CC were substantially lower at 66%, 67% and 57% respectively for Chester, Ellesmere Port and the Weaver Towns of Northwich and Winsford. Across CW&CC as a whole some 69% of students attained five GCSEs at A*-C.

The extent to which travel time to schools and colleges acts as a barrier to educational attainment is difficult to establish. The analysis of GCSE attainment demonstrates that a higher proportion of children from rural areas achieved five A*-C pass grades than those from urban areas. Nevertheless, the 2010-11 Business Plan for the Children and Young People's Services Directorate identifies removing barriers to accessing educational opportunities as a priority of CW&CC.

Alongside more mainstream schools and colleges, there are a number of key assets with the potential to shape the future development of both the labour force and business within the rural area. Of particular note are Reaseheath College, one of the UK's premier land-based colleges, and the Leahurst facility in Neston, which forms an important part of the University of Liverpool's Veterinary School with specialist facilities for equine care. Alongside these nationally recognised facilities, there are opportunities promote knowledge based relationships between the University of Chester and local communities around the issue of environmental sustainability. Further details are set out in Box A1 below.

Box A1: Potential education, skills and innovation assets

Reaseheath College and the Enterprise Delivery Hub - Reaseheath is a key stakeholder in the development of the rural land based sector, with an established reputation for the delivery of FE and HE courses. As an educational facility all aspects of the college's activities have been rated either good or outstanding by OFSTED inspectors. Further to this, the college has been awarded Beacon College status and was the first college in the North West to receive the Training Quality Standard in recognition of our excellent partnerships with industry. While the College is located within Cheshire East, it has existing linkages with a number of businesses within CW&CC and supports employers through the work of the Enterprise Delivery Hub. The Hub enables the College to offer multiple solutions to business problems across the whole spectrum of skills, enterprise and innovation for land based sectors.

Leahurst - Alongside Reaseheath, the University of Liverpool has an established veterinary school at Leahurst on the outskirts of Neston. The Leahurst Veterinary Teaching Hospital is home to a Farm Animal Hospital and a nationally-renowned Equine Hospital. The facility is both a major employer and a key research centre, with strong links to existing businesses within the farming sector.

University of Chester - Professor Roy Alexander is the RSK Professor Environmental Sustainability at the University of Chester. Working within the School of Geography and Development Studies, he has played a central role in the ongoing development of a community carbon reduction initiative at Ashton Hayes. This clearly demonstrates the capacity and opportunities to build relationships between higher education intuitions and local communities (including businesses) around the issues of sustainability, environmental technology and carbon reduction.

Education and skills indicators form one of the domains of the Index of Multiple Deprivation. A review of 2007 data indicates that a high proportion of LSOAs within the rural area are ranked within the 50% least deprived nationally in terms of education and skills deprivation. However, it is noted that the analysis does identify pockets of deprivation within Neston and Frodsham and surrounding Northwich [[Map AM20](#)].

Occupations

The strong skills profile of residents of CW&CC can to some extent be linked to an occupational profile that, relative to national trends, is skewed towards the higher order managerial and professional groups. In 2009/10, 48% of the CW&CC resident population were employed in managerial, professional or associate professional and technical roles. This compares to 45% across England as a whole.

Evidence from the 2001 Census suggests that a relatively high proportion of residents employed in managerial or professional occupations reside in the rural area. In 2001 some 48% of the resident population of the rural area was classified within occupational groups 1 (manager or senior official), 2 (professional) or 3 (associate professional and technical) compared to 42% across CW&CC as a whole. The proportion of residents within high level occupations was

relatively evenly distributed across the rural area, ranging from 46% in the Weaver Valley to 51% in Frodsham and Helsby and the Rural Corridor.

Earnings and income

Overall, the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings indicates that median earnings across CW&CC were higher than those for England as a whole in 2010. This in part reflects the structure of the local economy, with significant growth in relatively high income service sectors such as finance and insurance. It also reflects the skills base and occupational profile of the local resident population. Growth in median weekly earnings has exceeded national trends in recent years, with a three year rate of growth of 5% for CW&CC compared to national growth of 4%.

ASHE data does not provide sufficient confidence to enable an assessment of earnings at a sub-CW&CC level. As such, an analysis of household income has been carried out based upon CACI data. Table A2 sets out median household income for key rural areas alongside comparator data for other parts of CW&CC. It clearly demonstrates that median annual income was significantly higher for households within each of the rural areas when compared to median earnings within the urban regeneration areas.

These findings are supported by an analysis at the LSOA level. This indicates that 67% LSOAs within the top median income quartile are located within the rural area. Further to this, just 17% of LSOAs within the bottom median income quartile are located within the rural area [[Map AM16](#)].

Reflecting this analysis, communities and neighbourhoods across the rural area perform well in terms of income deprivation. In total, just 5% of LSOAs across the rural area were ranked as being amongst the 30% most income deprived nationally. This compares with 23% of LSOAs for CW&CC as a whole. By contrast, 61% of rural area LSOAs were ranked within the 30% least income deprived nationally compared to 45% of all CW&CC LSOAs [[Map AM17](#)].

While this indicates that levels of income deprivation are relatively low across the rural area, analysis does highlight a number of communities in Frodsham and the Rural Corridor where income deprivation is considered to be an issue. Further to this, consultations and workshops emphasised that at the local level there remains a significant diversity in levels of income. On this basis, while the overall income profile of the rural area remains higher than that of other areas, there remains a need to address the needs of lower income groups through the provision of key services at a local level.

Table A2: Median income (2009)	
Area	Median annual income
Neston & Parkgate	£ 37,342
Chester & EP Hinterland	£38,342
Frodsham & Helsby	£37,162
Weaver Valley	£35,967
Rural Corridor	£39,878
Chester	£31,245
Ellesmere Port	£30,753
Weaver Towns	£30,944
CW&CC	£34,544

Housing

A brief review of key issues emerging from the housing baseline is set out below. A full and comprehensive review of housing conditions, including the market and policy context, is set out in the technical appendix to the Rural Housing Strategy [[LINK](#)].

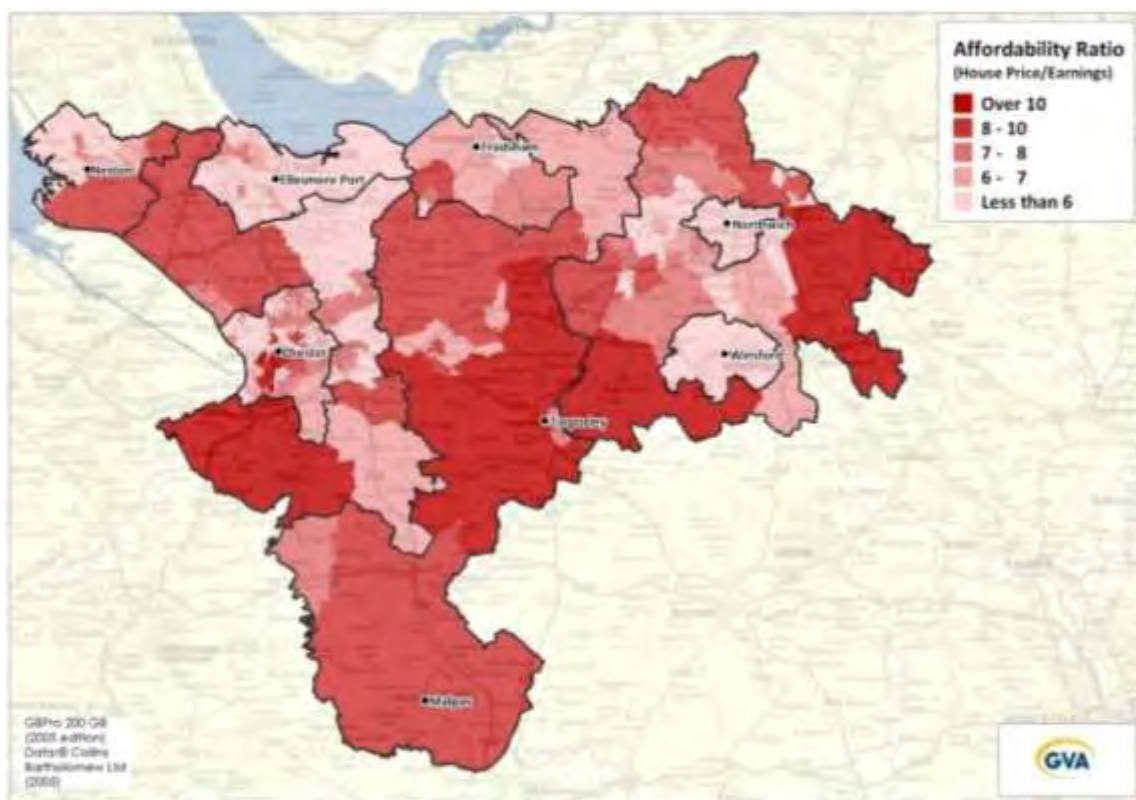
The Rural areas of Cheshire West and Chester house approximately 40% of the population. This population and, in particular the number of households, is set to increase in the future reflecting the ambitions of the authority to ‘unleash its economic potential’.

A review of the housing market within the rural area identified that common set of core issues which serve to define the operation of markets at a settlement and neighbourhood level:

- high demand for all tenures of housing demonstrated in notably high average house prices and a significant backlog of households in need on waiting lists;
- a significant shortage of affordable housing to meet local need;
- a stock profile which is skewed towards larger properties;
- a limited amount of housing land currently identified through the planning process and emerging evidence base (SHLAA); and
- a demographic structure which includes an above average proportion of older person households, many of which currently under-occupy current properties which have the potential to house larger families;

High house prices are a particular characteristic of the rural area in Cheshire West and Chester. House prices are high across the Local Authority, with the average house price (August-October 2010) being £203,535 compared to a UK average of £167,423. In the rural area the average house price (August-October 2010) was £263,729. Average house prices in the rural corridor were £356,369. Comparing this to median income data for 2010, in some areas house prices are over ten times that of average income, as illustrated in Map A6. This is compounded by the fact that the proportion of housing that is owner-occupied is relatively high (82% compared to a national average of 68%), while social housing making up only 10% of the total stock compared to an authority average of 14% (national 19%).

Map A6: Ratio of median house price to median annual earnings (2009)



Estate Agents report that activity within the housing market in rural areas has been much reduced in recent years, with low transaction levels throughout 2009 and 2010. Those remaining in the market with the ability to access housing within rural areas tend to be retirees with considerable wealth. Reflecting the lack of local services in more remote areas, families are seeking accommodation within or close to major urban centres. Agents also report that opportunities for first time buyers within the rural area are limited. Housing waiting lists across the area contain a higher number of smaller family households, as well as single people and couples over the age of 55.

The published Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) identifies an imbalance between supply and demand of 2,677 market homes and 1,193 affordable homes each year across the authority. On this basis an annual supply of 1,193 affordable dwellings is needed to address the current imbalance in the housing market across CW&CC over the period 2009/10 to 2013/14. A recent update to this analysis has suggested that provision be made for a further increase in the number of affordable houses required to 1,204.

The high proportion of detached housing stock (45% compared to a national average of 23%) is clearly a key factor behind the strength of the market, with this product type, particularly given the pleasant rural setting of many settlements, attracting a significant price premium. An examination of recent development trends suggests that this imbalance has been compounded rather than addressed, with new schemes tending to replicate the current offer rather than offer a diversifying of property sizes. In addition the level of recent development, whilst not

insignificant with over 2,000 dwellings delivered since 2001, has not been evenly distributed across the rural area. As such, many settlements have witnessed little change with limited growth in the number of dwellings constraining access to accommodation for newly emerging households. Looking forwards, the SHLAA indicates that there is a limited capacity of suitable land in the rural area. From the land identified the SHLAA estimates that there is the potential to deliver just 2,041 units on over the next five years across the rural area. Capacity beyond this period is judged to be significantly limited.

Matching the demographic structure against the stock profile suggests an imbalance in terms of properties meeting the actual needs of households. Under-occupancy of property is a significant issue identified within the SHMA for CW&CC. Some 11.4% of properties are classified as suffering from severe under-occupancy (three empty bedrooms). Under-occupancy is recognised as being, at least in part, a function of limited choice within the rural housing market. Addressing high levels of under-occupancy will be important in ensuring that the existing stock is used as efficiently as possible.

Bringing empty homes back into use also has the potential to release further housing into the rural market. The Empty Homes Strategy identified that in January 2010 there were 4,473 empty homes the Cheshire West and Chester Authority. Of the 2,292 private dwellings, 43% of the housing was located in rural wards, with particularly high levels of vacancy noted in Frodsham and Helsby (5.3%). CW&CC have recognised this issue and the Empty Homes Strategy is beginning to target key affected areas, with grants of up to £5,000 available for the conversion of empty properties.

Discussions with developers and RSLs highlighted a range of barriers to the delivery of appropriate housing. In particular, requirements for high levels of affordable housing undermines the viability of housing schemes, particularly given the small size and associated constraints upon allocated sites. Further to this, land owners are retaining land in the expectation that affordable housing requirements will diminish in future, allowing for greater land value. The stance of Parish Councils and local communities in relation to proposed residential development was also cited as a constraining factor by a number of RSLs and developers.

Accessibility and connectivity

The baseline analysis of accessibility and connectivity focuses upon transport and broadband provision, recognising the need for robust infrastructure to enable the delivery of services to more remote rural areas.

Service provision

The draft settlement hierarchy, produced by CW&CC in 2009 to inform the preparation of the core strategy, provides a schedule of key services within rural settlements across CW&CC²⁸. A key aim of CW&CC is to promote community sustainability, ensuring that housing, employment and services are appropriately located and integrated to support strong communities, while at the same time ensuring that adverse environmental impacts are minimised. The review of

²⁸ http://consult.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/portal/cwc_ldf/cwc_cs/cs_io/cs_dsh_io?pointId=1256815552082#section-1256815552082

service availability across communities within CW&CC highlighted a lack of key health, child care, retail and community services within many smaller rural settlements [Map AM14]. Where they are not available locally, residents must travel to access these services. Given future changes to the demographic structure, due consideration will need to be given to the capacity of elderly and other groups with limited mobility to access key services.

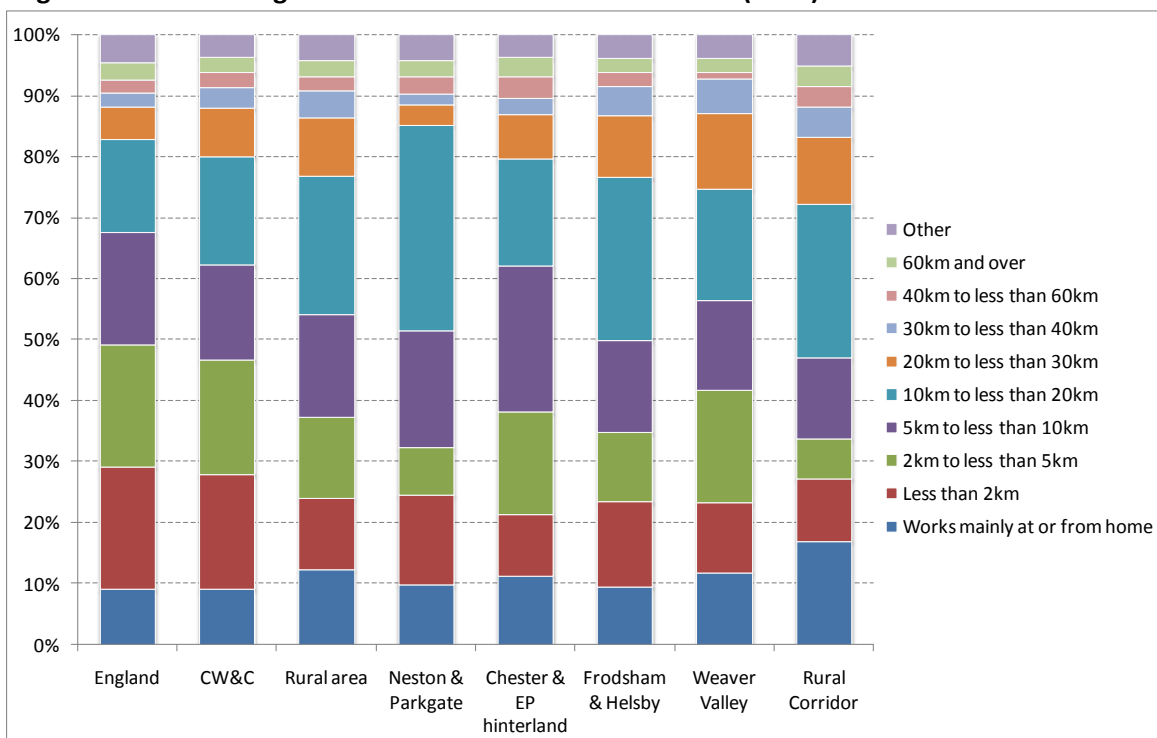
Analysis of the 2007 Index of Multiple Deprivation indicates that access to key services, alongside access to housing, is an important issue for communities within the rural area. Of the 81 LSOAs within the rural area, 27 (33%) are ranked amongst the 30% most deprived nationally in terms of barriers to housing and services, with 11 ranked within the 10% most deprived. By contrast, just 16% of all LSOAs across CW&CC were ranked amongst the 30% most deprived. Across the rural area, analysis indicates that barriers to housing and services were particularly significant within the Rural Corridor and Chester and Ellesmere Port Hinterland, with 65% and 67% of LSOAs within these respective areas ranked amongst the 30% most deprived nationally.

While a significant number of small rural communities are not currently capable of sustaining key services, baseline analysis indicates that there are significant constraints to enabling access to these services (alongside employment opportunities) through existing infrastructure. A significant number of rural settlements are relatively remote from primary transport infrastructure [Map]. While digital services have the potential to address deficiencies in transport access, at least in part, analysis also indicates that the rural area is underserved in terms of communications infrastructure. This is detailed below.

Transport and Accessibility

A review of existing travel patterns highlights that private forms of transport remain preeminent. Levels of car ownership across CW&CC in 2001 were significantly higher than those for England as a whole, while rates in rural areas were higher still. The proportion of the commuter journeys made by car within CW&CC was over ten percentage points higher than the national average 2001. Travel to work data indicates that while there were 50,341 commuter trips into CW&CC and 52,528 journeys out of CW&CC in 2001, there were 100,377 internal trips. This indicates that the majority of the resident labour force also worked within CW&CC. However, small area analysis indicates that just 39% of commuter journeys by residents of the rural area were to an employment destination within the rural area. This compares to 55% for Chester, 50% for Ellesmere Port and 51% for the Weaver Towns. Furthermore, while flows from the rural area exceed those from other areas of CW&CC, average commuting distances are also significantly higher. In 2001 42% of employees residing in the rural area commuted over 10km. By comparison, just 34% of the CW&CC population and 28% of the national workforce commuted an equivalent distance. Commuting distances for the rural area, along with individual character areas, are illustrated in Figure A4 below.

Figure A4: Commuting distances for the resident workforce (2001)



Source: Census Area Tables (2001)

Existing commuting patterns across the rural area, and the level of dependency upon private modes of transport, are recognised as being fundamentally unsustainable. Vehicle emissions form a significant component of CO₂ emissions across CW&CC. High levels of mobility expose local service centres to overwhelming competitive pressures. Further to this, traffic and transportation analysis indicates that there is significant stress within the existing road network, predominantly on strategic highway connections and surrounding major employment centres, with levels of stress expected to rise by as much as 36% by 2020. Survey work indicates that traffic congestion across CW&CC continues to worsen, while many rural routes are not considered to be capable of accommodating significant increases in traffic flows. Within the existing commuter centred model, failure to address access constraints within the network could potentially impact upon economic competitiveness, as well as reducing the environmental amenity of the rural area.

Public transport provision across CW&CC is focused around major population centres. Chester, as the largest urban centre, acts as the primary service location within CW&CC. Access to these services from within the general vicinity of the city is recognised as being good. The format of existing public transport arrangements, with provision extending outwards from the centre in an arterial fashion reflecting the hub and spoke model, delivers reasonable levels of accessibility along key arterial routes. However, lower population densities away from the main conurbations are not adequate to support radial routes and, as such, connections between smaller towns and settlements of the rural area are not prioritised by service providers. As a result, while a number of bus routes connecting key towns continue to run through the rural

area and thus provide an arterial service, provision for settlements more remote from key arteries is limited.

An assessment of public transport accessibility for key settlements within the rural area highlighted that residents of relatively large centres and those living in close proximity to larger conurbations benefited from a reasonable level of access to a range of health, education, employment and local authority administered services. However, there was significant variability, with levels of accessibility primarily dependent upon proximity to major conurbations (particularly Chester) and access to key arterial routes. Rural settlements not directly located on these routes, particularly those outside of a ten mile catchment, were found to be relatively inaccessible by public transport, with journey times in excess of an hour often necessary to access key services. These included a number of important rural centres including Farndon, Ashton Hayes, Tattenhall and Tarporley.

A technical accessibility and connectivity baseline has been prepared in support of the strategy and is annexed to this appendix [[LINK](#)]. As part of this process, detailed accessibility analysis was undertaken and accession mapping carried out. Mapping for the largest rural settlements forms part of the technical accessibility and connectivity baseline.

Broadband and Connectivity

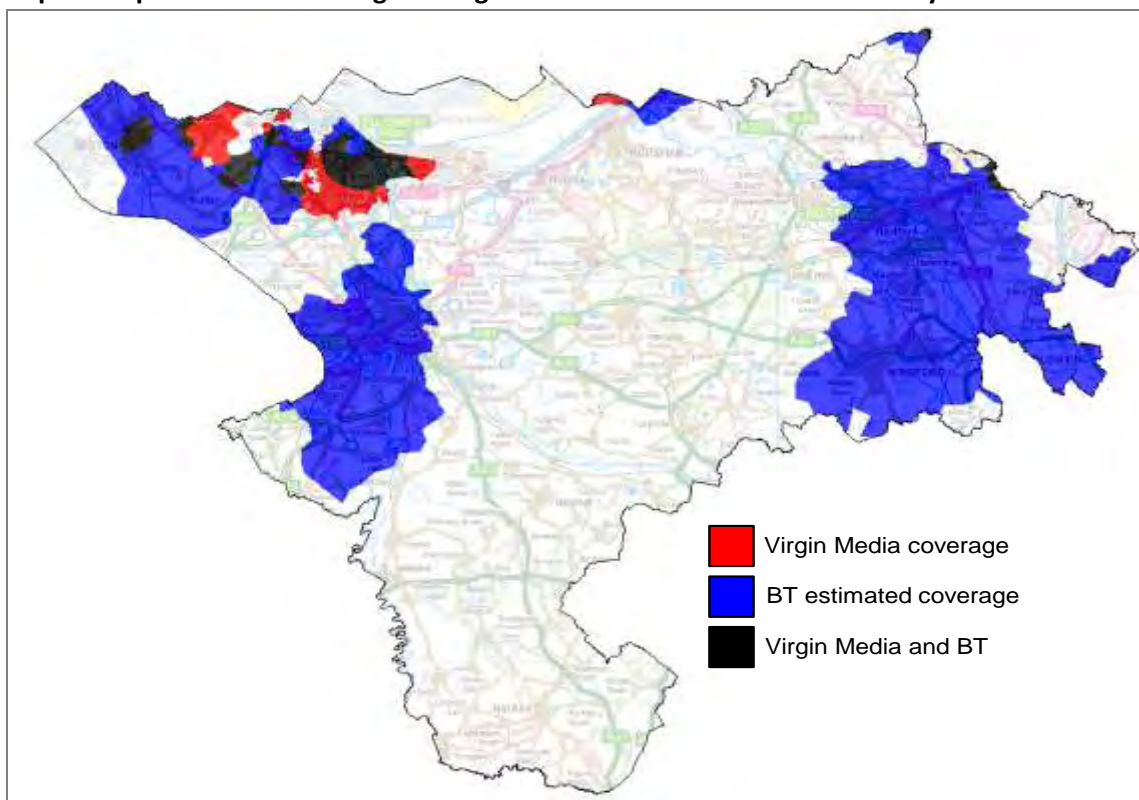
The rural area does not yet have full coverage by first generation broadband (up to 2 Mbps). GIS analysis of the distribution and reach of BT exchanges shows that a significant proportion of the rural area remains underserved in respect of broadband, resulting in a poor level of connectivity for communities in this area [[Map AM13](#)].

A study carried out by Analysys Mason to evidence and support this strategy, included as an annex [[LINK](#)], found that the Cheshire West & Chester area does not provide broadband suppliers with sufficient economies of scale to deliver ubiquitous next generation broadband access.

The vision for NGA in the North West is defined in the regional NGA Framework as “the widespread take up and use of NGA by all, to enable social and economic prosperity”.

Analysys Mason’s analysis shows that the private sector roll out of Next Generation Access broadband is likely to reach approximately 73% of the Borough’s population. The map of expected NGA coverage of Virgin Media and BT in 2015 (Map A6) shows that while small parts of the rural area are likely to be covered (around Neston, to the south of Chester and to the east of the Weaver Towns along the M6 corridor) but that the vast majority of the rural area would not.

Map A6: Expected NGA Coverage of Virgin Media and BT in the CWCC area by 2015



Analysys Mason estimates that 41,024 or 27% of premises in the Cheshire West and Cheshire area are in state aid “white” areas, and are unlikely to receive access to NGA by 2015. This area would be eligible for publicly funded intervention under current EC State Aid guidelines, assuming other criteria outlined in the guidelines are met.

The government’s broadband strategy, Britain’s Superfast Broadband Future states that where local authorities have superfast broadband as a development priority BDUK will work with them to source an upgrade to the broadband infrastructure.

BDUK is to release funding in waves to tier one local government bodies and Local Enterprise Partnerships. Local bodies will be invited to prepare plans for broadband infrastructure upgrades to be funded from each wave. BDUK advise that these plans should be developed in association with local communities.

Council and Community assets

Property and land assets may become increasingly important in enabling CW&CC to support a range of rural services and deliver development. CW&CC and other public sector partners own or control a large range of assets within the rural area, including educational facilities, libraries, the County Farm Estate, highways depots and a range of other community facilities. Cheshire West and Chester Council are currently in the process of undertaking a Capacity Review of Council assets, including property, leisure, farms and highways estates, with a view to

identifying those which may be surplus to requirements in the longer term. At this stage it is felt unlikely that the study will identify any potential for closures.

In addition, it will also be important to identify opportunities to intensify the use of existing facilities for purposes beyond their core function. In each rural community there are a range of educational, leisure and recreational facilities that have potential to serve functions beyond their current remit.

The rural areas of CW&CC also contain a number of landed estates and it is recognised that these are, and could continue to be, important drivers of local investment. The estates have been successful in developing housing and employment schemes alongside the community, and in a new era of neighbourhood planning, have important experience and expertise in understanding local need and delivering accordingly.

Energy and climate change

Climate Change and emissions reduction is an important issue for Cheshire West & Chester. The evidence shows that per capita emissions in the Borough are above the regional and national averages for industrial domestic and road transport uses. Emissions per capita are particularly high within Ellesmere Port and Neston, primarily as a result of industrial activity in this area. However, it is also recognised that per capita domestic emissions were marginally higher than the national average, while road transport emissions in Chester and its Hinterland were particularly high.

Many of the impacts of climate change in the North West will have an effect on the Cheshire West and Chester area. Large parts of the Borough, particularly around Chester and Ellesmere Port are low-lying and support a range of industries important for the local economy including agriculture. A number of sites of international and national importance for nature conservation also form part of the local landscape. These would all be vulnerable to increased flooding, changing agricultural practises and a warmer and wetter climate.

The Borough benefits from a clear Vision document setting out the context and providing recommendations for actions which the Council (and partners) might take.

'Vision 2050: The Vision for a Sustainable Cheshire West and Chester' centred on the premise that if we are to achieve a truly sustainable community by 2050 then the direction of travel set now must be right. The document recommends a focus on increased energy efficiency, a transition to use of energy from renewable sources and extensive development of small-scale electricity generation local to communities. Key actions are recommended around supporting community energy schemes, improving the energy efficiency of existing housing stock, supporting new energy start up businesses, introducing energy education and control into homes and schools, and engaging partners in planning for energy reduction.

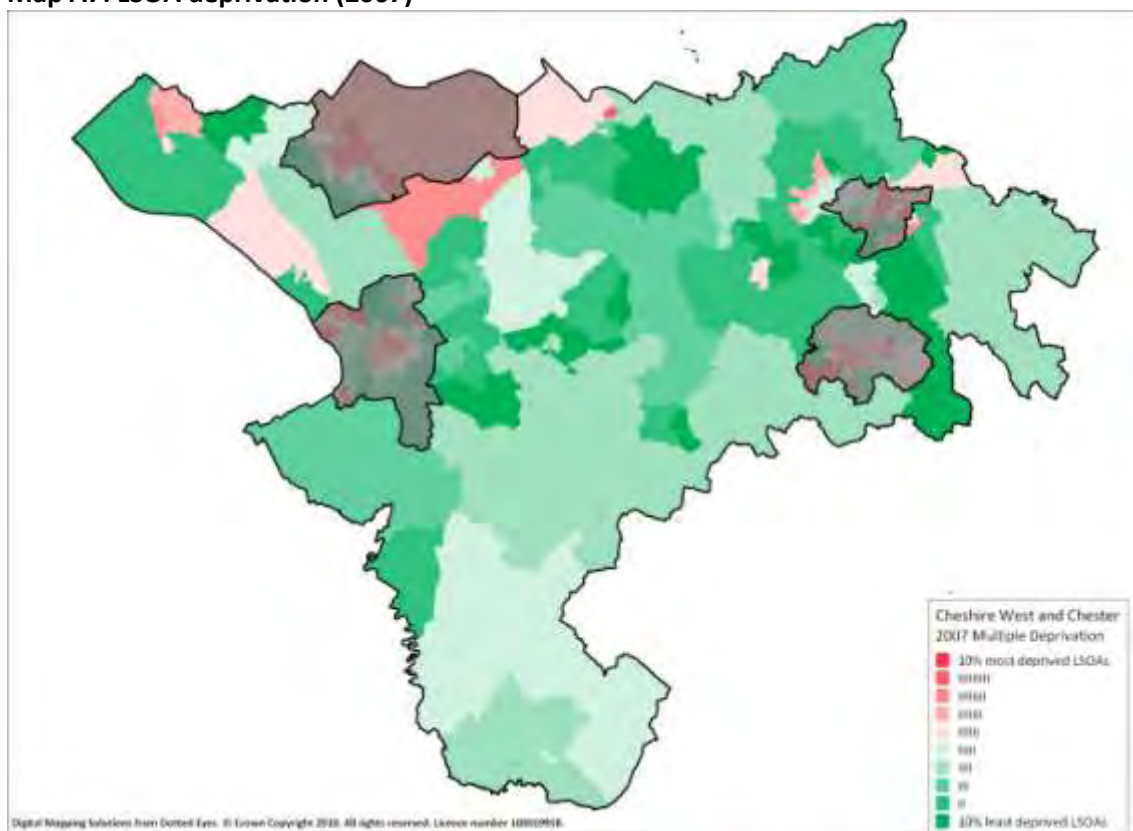
Deprivation and welfare

Overall, CW&CC is not an area of severe widespread deprivation, though pockets of deprivation do exist. Local level deprivation, as assessed through the 2007 Index of Multiple Deprivation, is primarily concentrated within urban areas of CW&CC, with all nine of the LSOAs ranked within

the 10% most deprived nationally located across Chester, Ellesmere Port and the Weaver Towns.

The Index of Multiple Deprivation comprises an assessment of conditions across a number of domains, with neighbourhoods scored and ranked based on performance in relation to set indicators. Overall deprivation across the rural area, based upon an assessment of all domains, is low. In total four LSOAs (5% of total LSOAs within the rural area) were ranked within the 30% most deprived nationally. By contrast, 57% of rural LSOAs were ranked within the 30% least deprived. While data suggests some degree of variance across the rural area, as illustrated in Map A7, levels of deprivation are in the main low.

Map A7: LSOA deprivation (2007)



Source: DCLG Index of Multiple Deprivation 2007

Analysis of individual domains of the IMD, detailed in other sections of this baseline, highlights that the proportion of rural area neighbourhoods ranked as experiencing significant levels of income and employment deprivation is low. However, the above analysis does highlight deprivation in relation to barriers to housing and services. Neighbourhood ranking under other domains, relating to health, education and crime, supports the conclusion that deprivation across the rural area is not widespread.

A separate assessment of child well-being, based upon a composite analysis of education, health, crime and material indicators, reinforces findings in relation to deprivation. Overall, the proportion of neighbourhoods in rural areas with significant incidence of poor well-being is low

across the rural area. Just one LSOA is ranked within the worst performing 20% nationally. However, within this analysis it should be noted that performance in relation to the domains of health and disability and environmental well-being was relatively poor. In total, 42% of rural LSOAs were ranked within the 30% most deprived nationally for environmental well-being, based upon indicators relating to air quality, road safety and access to services. Further to this, 23% of LSOAs ranked amongst the 30% most deprived nationally for health and disability, reflecting statistics for emergency and outpatient hospital admissions.

Appendix C: Consultation Workshops - Review

Introduction

This note provides a review of key issues emerging from the consultation process for the Rural Regeneration Strategy and Rural Housing Strategy for Cheshire West and Chester Council (CW&CC). It sets out a brief overview of the workshop sessions and summarises feedback received in relation to emerging priorities.

The Workshops

The consultation process was focused around a series of workshops. In total, five workshops were held, each lasting for approximately two hours on the following dates and venues:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|
| • Frodsham, Castle Park | 26th October 2010 |
| • Tarporley, Community Centre | 28th October 2010 |
| • Malpas, Jubilee Hall | 2nd November 2010 |
| • Neston, Town Hall | 3rd November 2010 |
| • Byley, Village Hall | 3rd November 2010 |

A range of key stakeholders were invited to these workshops including CW&CC officers, Councillors and Parish Councillors, representatives of local businesses and charities and other relevant parties. The identification and invitation of potential stakeholders was coordinated by officers within CW&CC.

Consultation was undertaken on the basis of key baseline findings and emerging strategic priorities, delivered through a 25 minute presentation at the beginning of each workshop. The presentation focused upon:

- the purpose of the strategy and how it will be used by CW&CC;
- key demographic, social, economic and environmental issues, and their implications for the future provision of services;
- the disjointed nature of the rural voice;
- ambitions for growth based upon the 2010 RSS submission;
- identified assets and opportunities; and
- emerging priorities for the strategy.

The workshop then broke out into sessions to discuss the following topics based upon the presentation:

- A - the completeness and appropriateness of the emerging priorities; and
- B - spatial constraints or specific opportunities relating to the priorities.

Discussions within each group were facilitated by a member of the consultation team, with a further team member acting as a scribe to record the issues raised. Key points were fed back to the wider group. A more detailed review of the issues emerging from the workshop sessions is set out below.

Finally, participants were asked to complete a priority ranking exercise. Key findings from this exercise are also set out below.

Group discussions

Discussions within groups across each of the workshops provided feedback in relation to the appropriateness of the priorities identified within the presentation. Based upon the feedback from discussion workshops, priorities identified within the emerging strategy were, on the whole, considered to be appropriate. In the second session, opportunities and constraints identified in relation to each of the emerging priorities, alongside other priorities identified by participants, were discussed.

A summary of issues raised in relation to each of the priorities is set out below.

1. Rebalance the housing market and revitalise communities through the provision of affordable and retirement homes throughout the rural area.

There was broad acceptance across attendees that the current and future projected demographic balance of rural communities represents a significant issue, particularly in terms of protecting services, supporting business and promoting sustainability. The role of the housing market in addressing this balance was widely recognised. The majority of feedback suggests that the focus upon affordable and retirement accommodation is appropriate.

Representatives of local communities acknowledged that it is difficult for young working age people to access housing within rural areas. Attendees also emphasised that opportunities for older people to downsize within existing communities is limited. The view that housing stock is being silted up due to a lack of appropriate retirement accommodation was broadly supported. The importance of ensuring that new accommodation for elderly groups is embedded within existing communities was emphasised.

The need to rebalance the local demographic was, in part, attributed to a lack of appropriate housing stock. Feedback from one of the workshops indicated that recent development had failed to bring forward an appropriate mix of housing, focusing instead on larger more valuable units. Some attendees proposed that future provision should be focused towards smaller units, particularly targeting lower income working families and elderly groups. There was a suggestion the planning policy should seek to extinguish hope that requirements for affordable housing might be scaled back in future, as this was viewed as a factor preventing market led schemes from coming forward. Further to this, some participants suggested that there was significant vacancy and under-occupancy across the rural area, with 'empty-nesters' continuing to occupy large family housing.

Against this, a significant number of other attendees emphasised that there should not be any special focus upon the provision of affordable and retirement accommodation within future

policy. The role of market housing in securing S106 funding was highlighted, particularly in light of demands for additional funding to support the activities of Parish and Town Councils.

Alongside the provision of appropriate stock, feedback from the workshops highlighted the need for a range of other mechanisms to enable young people, particularly those working within rural areas, to access housing. Suggested mechanisms included establishing local boards to vet housing applications and delivering a range of routes to ownership.

There was a broad consensus that new housing development should be focused around existing and proposed service centres, with a view that increased local population would support the ongoing provision of rural services. There was support for focused housing growth around existing centres, creating hubs of activity around which services could be focused, employment provision delivered and public transport planned.

2. Secure local access to services via innovative approaches, e.g. hubs, collaboration, ICT.

Discussions within the workshops highlighted that the provision of services remains a key issue for local communities. However, Feedback from groups highlighted that face-to-face delivery remains a priority rural communities. The value of such services for people with limited mobility, particularly the elderly, was emphasised. Local groups were keen to ensure that future approaches to delivering services maintained some degree of face-to-face contact, focused within existing centres. Focusing service provision within larger rural centres, which would form a hub around which public transport could be organised, was viewed to be an ideal solution.

Against this, other attendees were keen to explore alternative mechanisms for delivery, reflecting upon the likely impact of budget cuts for services. The value of mobile services was highlighted by some attendees, though it was argued that only a limited range of services were available. The response to service provision through ICT was more mixed. While some considered establishing service hubs based around ICT as potentially useful, others emphasised that those in greatest need would be those with the greatest barriers to using these services.

Attendees identified a range of potential stakeholders in relation to future service provision, including:

- Parish Councils – identifying need within the community and working with CW&CC and other stakeholders to address this need;
- Community groups – organising support for groups identified as being most in need within the community; and
- Private sector – exploring commercial opportunities for the provision of services to vulnerable groups. Key business stakeholders identified included retailers, taxi firms and local care providers.

Participants indicated that CW&CC would facilitate and coordinate activity, engaging with stakeholders in the public, private and community sector to deliver comprehensive service provision.

The role of CW&CC owned assets was also highlighted within group discussions. It was argued that many assets located within communities could be used more effectively, and potentially provide an ideal platform for an information centre. Other feedback suggested that services

should rather be focused around the local post-office and pub, reinforcing their role as a focus of community activity within rural areas.

While the principle of establishing larger rural settlements as service hubs was widely supported, feedback suggests that existing levels of public transport provision are not sufficient to secure effective access to these hubs. Access to larger settlements within the rural area was generally rated as poor on account of service frequency, directness and reliability. Public transport provision to smaller settlements was described as being very limited. On this basis, existing provision was not considered to be effective in addressing the travel needs of key groups, particularly the elderly, children and those with limited income, that have limited access to private transport.

The need to focus public transport provision around existing centres of population and services was supported. The emphasis on provision was particularly highlighted at Malpas, where opportunities for the delivery innovative approaches to provision were identified. This concept involved the provision of park-and-ride schemes at key service hubs across the rural area, with these hubs linked together through direct express bus services. Service provision could then be provided between larger communities, delivering a frequent and reliable service. Opportunities to work with local taxi firms and the providers of community transport initiatives could then be explored to enable people in smaller settlements to access this rural bus service.

Alongside bus provision, opportunities for enhanced rail provision were identified by participants at the Tarporley workshop, focused upon the station at Beeston. This could be adapted to provide a further park-and-ride location, providing sustainable access to Chester and Crewe.

3. Deliver ubiquitous Next Generation internet Access.

A significant number of attendees to workshops agreed that internet speeds are currently too slow. The impact of poor connectivity was recognised in terms of:

- constraining businesses activity, particularly those in knowledge based sectors, and undermining the competitiveness of areas remote from the urban fringe;
- limiting access to information and services provided by the local authority;
- limiting the capability of students living in rural areas to access educational resources;
- undermining rural sustainability, as local communities are forced to travel to access employment and services;
- reducing the attractiveness of rural areas for younger groups; and
- putting remote communities at risk of becoming even more peripheral.

Group discussions emphasised the opportunities associated with the provision of high speed internet access, with real growth potential as a consequence of having highly qualified resident population and a significant number of small businesses. It was also highlighted that higher speeds and improved reliability could promote home working, with clear sustainability benefits in terms of reducing out-commuting, retaining a higher day time population and, potentially, securing a higher level of spend within local services.

However, a number of participants argued that too much emphasis was placed upon the delivery of broadband, and that remote service delivery should not replace face-to-face contact. It was also highlighted that emphasis on remote delivery of services through ICT could exclude some groups most in need of support, particularly those with low levels of computer literacy.

4. Enable generation and consumption of renewable energy by community and business

The level of attention given to renewable energy within discussions was much lower. There was broad support for principle of renewable energy. However, this was balanced by a strong recognition that implementation is practically problematic.

Feedback from group discussions indicates that large scale commercial generation is unpopular within rural communities. It is perceived that large scale schemes such as wind farms and energy from waste plants have a detrimental impact upon residential amenity. Further to this, it was emphasised that large scale schemes could potentially undermine ambitions to grow the visitor economy. There was a view that renewable energy generation projects are “dumped on rural communities”.

However, there was a greater level of support for moving towards a principle of rural self sufficiency. Ashton Hayes was identified by a significant number of local stakeholders as an exemplar, and attendees were keen to ensure that lessons from Ashton Hayes should be recognised and best-practice adopted elsewhere. Within this framework of promoting greater self sufficiency there was support for energy efficiency measures and micro-generation. However, few attendees indicated that this was the greatest priority for rural communities.

5. Maximise the value of green infrastructure to people, places and businesses

There was limited feedback in relation to maximising the value of the landscape and the environment. There was a broad acceptance that landscape plays an important role in shaping rural communities, and as such should be carefully protected.

Against this, representatives of the land based economy highlighted that there remains a need for flexibility within rural areas to enable them to function as a working agricultural environment. Those working within the landscape were keen to promote potential opportunities for growth and development, in keeping with its role as a working environment. Potential opportunities identified included:

- developing the role of County Farms with a view to promoting enterprise and diversification in the land based sector;
- working with key innovation stakeholders, particularly Reaceheath, to promote enhanced productivity and specialist produce; and
- supporting rural opportunity sectors, particularly the equine sector, based upon existing assets such as Leahurst Veterinary Centre.

6. Provide a planning framework which enables housing and employment growth across larger and smaller settlements to deliver the rural contribution to growth targets

The principle of promoting growth to support the viability and vitality of existing rural settlements was broadly supported by participants within the workshops. There was

recognition that growth will be critical to underpin future service delivery, economic sustainability and to maintain active communities. However, there was a consistent message that future growth must be sensitive to existing settlements. As such, it was emphasised that consideration should be given to:

- the type of development – Feedback from private sector stakeholders indicated that residential development should be balanced with appropriate provision for businesses, with a particular focus on supporting entrepreneurial activity through the provision of flexible accommodation;
- where development should take place – feedback further reinforces the hub principle, with a range of attendees emphasising that new development should be focused within existing settlements which have appropriate services, a larger resident workforce and better levels of public transport access;
- the level of development – while the principle of growth was accepted, there was a broad view that activity in support of sub-regional targets should be focused within urban areas. There would be resistance to large scale development proposals that would fundamentally alter the characteristics of existing settlements;
- community aspirations – a key concern for local communities was that due regard is given to Parish Plans. Further to this, community representatives emphasised that residents are less likely to resist development proposals if they are involved from an early stage.

The importance of the planning system in promoting growth was recognised. Feedback suggested that in order to deliver appropriate growth the planning framework for rural areas should:

- adopt a flexible stance in relation to the use of existing buildings, enabling community assets to be used for a range of employment and service activities, and enabling local businesses to adapt and expand premises according to their needs;
- focus growth aspirations around existing centres of economic activity and service provision;
- target the provision of residential and employment accommodation to ensure that existing under-occupancy and vacancy are addressed, for example through enabling occupiers to grow-on or downsize as appropriate;
- review opportunities for the reuse of redundant farm buildings as residential or business accommodation; and
- consider whether opportunities exist to release greenbelt land for development.
- ensure that communities realise the benefits of planning gain (which was emphasised);

While there was recognition that establishing an effective planning framework will be critical to promoting appropriate growth, a number of other important factors were identified by participants. These included:

- the role of landed estates, with the role played by landowners in promoting growth within Tattenhall widely seen as an exemplar for future development;
- focusing business support around enterprise hubs to promote higher levels of entrepreneurial activity; and
- exploiting opportunity sectors, such as agriculture, food production and the visitor economy.

7. Reduce the fragmentation of rural governance arrangements to ensure the rural voice is heard at the council and sub-regional levels

There was broad based support for this priority. Discussions highlighted perceptions that there remains a valuable sense of community within many rural settlements, with a high proportion of the local population engaged in community activity. Further to this, it was emphasised that Parish structures in some areas represented a real asset, with Parish Councils well placed to identify local need. However, the view was widely articulated that the relationship between community level structures and local authority level governance remains disjointed.

Feedback from community representatives indicated that considerable resources were invested at a local level in the preparation of Parish Plans. However, there was a feeling that they have not been given suitable weight by officers within CW&CC. An example of this was cited in relation to the SHLAA process, whereby local parish councillors indicated that they only found out which sites had been taken forward once they read the report. Alongside this, Parish Councillors complained that CW&CC officers perceived the activity of local communities as competing with Council led activity, with low levels of complementary activity. Feedback from local stakeholders emphasised that there was a need for structures to ensure that local concerns within rural communities could be articulated at an appropriate level, and for enhanced mechanism to enable delivery of local aspirations.

Minutes of the discussion groups also indicates a perception amongst a number of attendees that the role and importance of the community and voluntary sector is not fully recognised, either by CW&CC or Parish Councils. Attendees emphasised that there is significant local capacity. However, communication between stakeholders was considered to be poor. There was some indication that this could be attributable to inadequate structures, with some feedback to suggest that existing community forums rural areas were not effective.

A number of community representatives suggested that Parish plans should form the basis of planning at the local level. This view was not shared by all participants, with some participants arguing that future planning should be based upon existing structures, but with mechanisms put in place to enhance communication between stakeholders. By contrast, others questioned the role of Parish Councils, arguing that local council structures speak for a vocal minority and, as they are not always representative of the wider community, that parish planning should be subject to appropriate checks.

There was broad support for proposals to build the capacity of local communities. While some local Parishes have a high level of capability, it was acknowledged that capacity across the rural area is variable. Amongst the ideas suggested were a community skills academy and setting up a resource within CW&CC to support community planning. This resource could support and

advice to enable communities to identify need and plan effectively. The potential value of a forum to allow ideas and best practice to be shared was also identified.

Finally, discussions regarding the role of elected town councils were limited to Neston. There was a view that town councils should be given greater autonomy to reflect the distinctive characteristics of Neston as a town.

8. Facilitate and promote private sector investment in assets and opportunities

There was limited feedback in relation to the role of the private sector. A number of attendees did emphasise the importance of engaging with the private sector. This particularly revolved around the issues of growth and service provision.

In terms of promoting growth, the landed estates were identified as extremely important stakeholders. Recent development around Tattenhall, including the enterprise hub, was considered to be an exemplar for future activity. The importance of engagement with major landowners as a priority was accepted.

In terms of service provision, the role of smaller businesses in supporting more vulnerable groups within rural communities was highlighted. In Frodsham it was highlighted that delivery services run by a local supermarket, enabling elderly people to get out to the shop, had been stopped. Working with businesses such as retailers and taxi firms was identified as a potential way of support such services at low cost.

Alongside those outlined within the presentation, discussions highlighted two other linked priorities. Opportunities associated with these priorities are outlined below:

- Council owned assets – A number of participants commented that there are a significant number of local and cultural assets across the rural area, with many of these assets under-utilised. A number of participants stated that opportunities to utilise these assets more effectively for the benefit of local communities should be explored. CW&CC officers indicated that a review of all assets was being undertaken and that the results should feed into the regeneration strategy.
- Visitor economy – On the basis of the quality of the environment, existing cultural assets and outstanding visitor attractions, it was felt that there should be an emphasis on promoting growth through investment in the rural economy. Based upon feedback from discussion groups in relation to Session B of the workshops the following opportunities were identified:
 - The River Dee corridor, based upon a range of themes including historic linkages with Wales, food production and wildlife;
 - Developing a visitor offer based upon the food sector, focusing upon high quality niche production and retailing, farmers markets and an improved restaurant offer;
 - Delamere Forest, an asset that is visited by approximately 1 million people every year;

- Waterways and trails, developing accommodation and amenities to support longer walking breaks focusing upon the Sandstone Ridge and canal network.

Participants emphasised that marketing and promotion of the visitor offer across rural Cheshire would need to be enhanced to deliver a substantive increase in activity. However, it was noted that there could be opportunities to establish linkages with existing attractions such as Chester and the Zoo to promote more overnight stays.

Priority ranking exercise

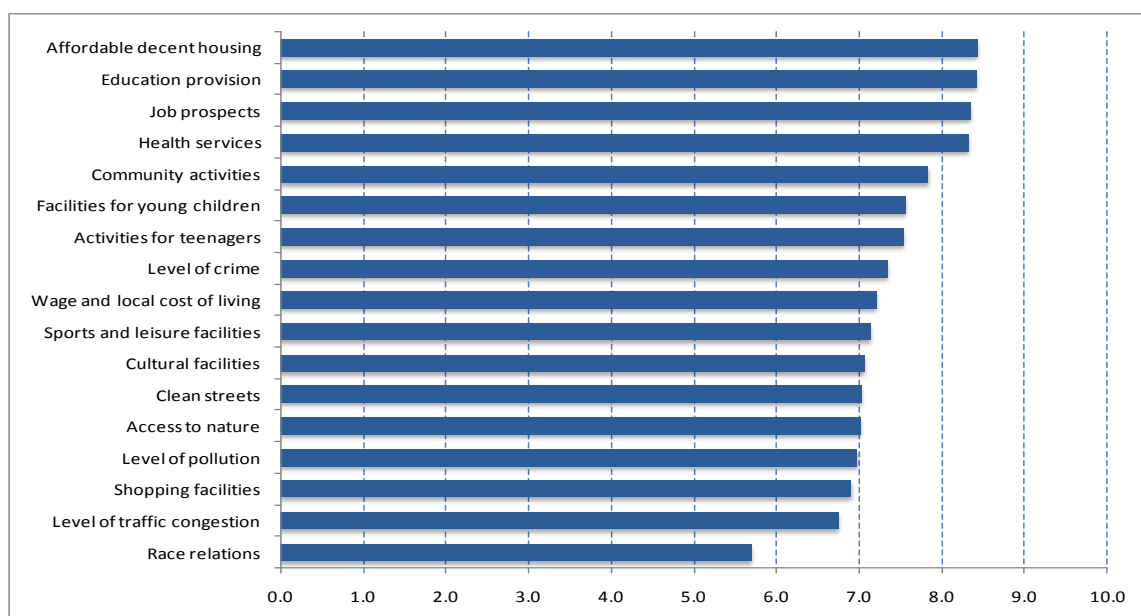
A priority ranking exercise was undertaken to provide an indication of the relative importance attached to a range of issues. Participants were given the opportunity to rate a range of issues from 1 (not at all important) to 10 (very important) in response to the following questions:

1. Which of these factors are important to you in terms of making communities within the rural area a better place to live, work and visit?
2. What are the things you believe the council should invest in, enable and support in the rural area over the next ten years?

Some 104 survey responses were collected from across the five workshops.

In relation to factors that make communities better places to live, work and visit, affordable decent housing was identified as the most important factor. Other key factors included education provision, job prospects and health services. The results of the ranking exercise for all workshops are illustrated in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: What are the things you believe the council should invest in, enable and support in the rural area over the next ten years?



In relation to key issues across the rural area, addressing the needs of an aging population was ranked as the most important priority. Increasing access to affordable housing, enabling more people to live in the rural area and protecting the natural environment also scored highly.

It is noted that all of the priorities achieved a mean score of more than 6, indicating that all were considered to be relatively important. However, maximising the value of the natural environment, along with renewable energy generation and protecting the greenbelt were ranked lowest.

The results of the ranking exercise are illustrated in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: What are the things you believe the Council should invest in, enable and support in the rural area over the next ten years?

