

## Appendix 2: Strategic Sites

### 1. Strategic Sites in the South West

This technical appendix sets out a review of the definition of what constitutes a strategic site. Firstly, the paper examines the current definition used in the South West Region, setting out the current supply of strategic sites. Secondly, a review of the definition of strategic sites used in other Regional Spatial Strategies is set out and the paper concludes with a summary of the implications for the definition of strategic sites in the South West.

#### 1.1 Current South West Regional Policy Guidance

The current definition of a strategic site in the South West is set out in RPG 10. Policy EC 4: Major Strategic Sites, states that:

*'Strategic sites should be identified jointly by the Regional Planning Body and SWRDA, to meet the needs of major business users or groups of users, based on the following criteria:*

- *A minimum size of 12 and preferably 50 + hectares;*
- *Ideally on flat land, free from significant constraints that would impede the delivery of a site – preference should be given to previously developed sites, particularly within existing urban areas, well located in them with respect to infrastructure, servicing and public transport and where opportunities exist for making good past environmental damage including contamination;*
- *In areas close to a large pool of labour, with appropriate service infrastructure, good accessibility and capable of being served by sustainable modes of transport.'*

In terms of location it is felt that most major strategic sites should be located at the PUAs and the Principal Regeneration Area in Cornwall, with some larger PUAs possibly offering a choice of two or more sites. The guidance also identifies that each strategic site should be identified in a structure plan which will need to set out clearly why these are sustainable locations. The public and private sectors should work together to protect major strategic sites from incremental development.

#### 1.2 Draft RSS Strategic Sites Policy

The draft RSS identifies that strategically significant sites need to be identified and safeguarded for employment use. It is stated that an employment site can play a strategic role for a number of reasons related to location and potential users' requirements. Strategic sites will be of different sizes, serve different employment uses and provide different numbers of jobs in different parts of the region, i.e. a strategically important site in Bristol could be very different to a strategically important site in Cornwall. When identifying strategic employment sites, local authorities should give consideration to provision of onsite support facilities, such as child-care and training, and to the eventual layout and quality of environment created.

### **1.3 Currently Available Major Strategic Employment Sites**

Major Strategic Employment Sites which are readily available and meet the requirements of RPG10 Policy EC4: Principal Urban Area (PUA) and are available as follows:

1. Plymouth PUA Plymouth International Business Park
2. Bournemouth/Poole PUA Aviation Park
3. Bristol PUA Western Approach Phase I
4. Bristol PUA Cabot Park Phase 1 & 2
5. Gloucester PUA Gloucester Business Park
6. Swindon PUA South Marston Business Park

Committed and readily available sites, which are acceptable in the short term under RPG 10 EC4 in the absence of, better located alternatives are:

1. Indian Queens Indian Queens, Cornwall
2. Tewkesbury Business Park Tewkesbury, Gloucester
3. Express Park Bridgwater, Somerset

### **1.4 Possible Future Strategic Sites**

A number of potential strategic sites have been previously identified in the region including:

1. Exeter PUA Sky Park
2. Swindon PUA Keypoint
3. Gloucester PUA RAF Quedgeley
4. Bristol PUA Western Approach Phase II
5. Weston PUA Locking Regeneration Area
6. Plymouth PUA Langage Business Park
7. Plymouth PUA Broadmoor Farm (Saltash)

A Major Strategic Employment Site was not identified for each of the PUAs, Taunton and Cheltenham are noted in this regard. Sites were however accepted at Bridgwater and Tewkesbury in the short term in the absence of better-located alternatives. The Structure and Local Plan processes has also led to the deletion of a number of the potential sites, notably Broadmoor Farm at Saltash. It was felt that some sites did not perform well against sustainable development criteria or meet the likely future needs of the economy particularly in terms of the potential for large-scale inward investment.

A key driver behind the establishment of this portfolio was the desire to identify a limited number of large sites which were well related to the region's Principal Urban Areas (PUAs). The focus was therefore very much on quantitative considerations. It is notable that the Bristol Science Park is not part of this portfolio. Whilst this is not a particularly large site it does have to have the potential to develop key businesses and the knowledge driven economy. It is likely to punch well above its weight. This highlights the need to give equal consideration to qualitative as well as quantitative issues with regard to protecting employment sites.

## 2. Case Studies

This section of the paper reviews the definition of strategic sites being progressed in other regions around the UK. Regional Spatial Strategies reviewed, include:

- East of England
- West Midlands
- East Midlands
- South East
- One North East

### 2.1 Case Study 1: East Of England RSS

In the East of England a Strategic Employment Site is defined as:

*'A site capable of accommodating a user requiring a plot of 10 hectares or more or Special User Sites, e.g. Port, Airport related; and Available now or within 24 months.'*

Under Policy E4: Provision of Strategic Employment Sites, Local Development Documents should provide strategic employment sites of the appropriate quality and quantity required to meet the needs of business (particularly in the locations listed below).

It is also identified that Local Development Documents should identify further sites to take account of opportunities in other areas in accordance with the core spatial strategy.

Research has been carried out on the quality and quantity of sub-regional and strategic sites within the East of England and the categorisation of strategic and sub-regional employment sites. The research highlights the changing role of strategic sites and suggests site-specific criteria against which to assess the market suitability of sites.

Within each of the sub-regions it is identified that local development documents should provide for at least one readily available serviced strategic employment site and two sub-regional employment sites for general employment land use (B use class). Local development documents should propose serviced strategic employment sites solely for 'high technology' users in parts of the East of England where there is an identified need to develop significant clusters and sectors, including the Cambridge sub-region. Where a need is identified, readily available serviced strategic employment sites solely for warehousing and distribution should also be proposed.

The RSS also states why strategic sites are required at particular locations. Strategic sites are needed for the following reasons:

- Harlow – to achieve regeneration needs, ensure growth in key sectors and clusters, and ensure a balance to housing growth;
- Harlow and Stansted – development linked to the expansion of Stansted Airport;

- Thames Gateway/South Essex – to support the role of Thurrock as a sustainable European logistics hub, to support the role of Basildon as a business hub and strategic centre and to promote sustainable economic regeneration in Southend-on-Sea and its role as a strategic cultural and intellectual centre;
- Cambridge sub-region – to secure its full potential as a centre for world-class research and development;
- Peterborough – to achieve regeneration, attract business activities and key sectors and clusters including environmental services;
- Norwich – to support regeneration and its role in bio technology;
- Ipswich – to support regeneration and its role in ICT as exemplified by Suffolk Innovation Park and Adastral Park;
- Harwich, Great Yarmouth and Felixstowe – development associated with port expansion; and
- Hertfordshire – at locations that support strong, continued growth of mature and emerging clusters and sectors and to support regeneration in the Lee Valley corridor and at Stevenage.

## 2.2 Case Study 2: West Midlands RSS

In the West Midlands RSS there is no specific reference to strategic sites, however, the RSS includes a detailed hierarchy of employment sites.

Under Policy PA6, Local Authorities, AWM, local economic partnerships and other agencies should aim to provide and maintain a range and choice of readily available employment sites to meet the needs of the regional economy. This portfolio should be developed in accordance with the Spatial Strategy and will include the following hierarchy of sites:

First tier sites/locations of regional significance (see below) including:

- Regional Investment Sites (RIS);
- Major Investment Sites (MIS);
- Regional Logistics Sites (RLS).

ii) Second tier, locally significant employment for which development plans should establish the level and distribution for their areas within the following categories:

- Sub-regional Employment Sites – high-quality attractive sites, generally 10 to 20 hectares in size in sustainable urban locations – including market towns – with potential to meet both cluster priorities and local needs. Sites in this category should be suitable to attract clients with an international/ national/ regional choice of location. Land in this category would usually need to be located on or have a direct link to the strategic highway network and be, or proposed to be, well served by public transport.
- Good Quality Employment Sites – good quality sites suitable for locally based investment. Sites in this category are likely to exceed 0.4 hectares in size. This category may include larger sites which are some distance from the strategic highway network as well as sites within rural areas.
- Other Employment Sites – land likely to be of interest only to local investors. Sites in this category are likely to be either very small (less than 0.4 hectares in size) or only

likely to be suitable for marginal or 'bad neighbour' activities. This category may also include small sites within rural areas.

This policy does not cover land suitable for employment purposes within town centres. In accordance with PA11 and PPG6, it is identified that large-scale office developments (Class B1(a), more than 5,000 sq.m gross floorspace) should be located within the network of strategic town and city centres. Where large-scale office developments are proposed, particularly outside strategic centres, the views of the RPB's centres working group (7.63) should be an important consideration.

The importance of monitoring the supply is also recognised in the RSS. It is stated that:

*'To ensure that strategic sites are identified, re-assessed for their appropriateness and implemented, progress on RIS, MIS and RLS should be monitored on a continuing basis by the West Midlands Employment Land Advisory Group (WMELAG) on behalf of the RPB'.*

### **2.2.1 Regional Investment Sites**

Under Policy PA7 within the portfolio of employment sites it is stated that:

*'Provision should be made for a series of Regional Investment Sites (RIS) the purpose of which will be to support:*

- i) the diversification and modernisation of the Region's economy; and in particular;*
- ii) the development of the Region's cluster priorities as identified in the Regional Economic Strategy.*

*Regional Investment Sites will be identified within development plans. The RPB should be consulted on such proposals. Sites should generally be:*

- i) between 25-50 hectares;*
- ii) high-quality sites attractive to national and international investors;*
- iii) served or capable of being served by multi-modal transport facilities and broadband IT infrastructure;*
- iv) well related to the motorway and trunk road network; and*
- v) located within, or close to, the areas of greatest need.*

*At least one RIS should be linked to other initiative including:*

- i) each of the Urban Regeneration Zones; and*
- ii) each of the High-Technology Corridors.*

*In some circumstances, a particular RIS may serve the needs of more than one Zone/Corridor'.*

### **2.2.2 Major Investment Sites**

Policy PA8 requires that within the portfolio of employment sites, provision should be made for two Major Investment Sites (MIS) the purpose of which will be to meet the need for

accommodating very large-scale investment by single users with an international choice of locations in order to help diversify and restructure the Regional economy. It is stated that:

*'The MIS will be identified within development plans. The RPB should be consulted on such proposals. Sites should generally be:*

- i) in the order of 50 hectares;*
- ii) high-quality sites;*
- iii) served or capable of being served by multi-modal transport facilities and broadband IT infrastructure;*
- iv) well related to motorway and trunk road network, but avoiding sites immediately adjacent to motorway junctions where this is likely to exacerbate congestion problems;*
- v) located in areas close to a large pool of labour with employment needs;*
- vi) accessible to effective education and training opportunities to ensure that the employment benefits are available to the local workforce; and*
- vii) supported by the RPB.*

*The Region should at all times have two sites readily available for development in order to respond quickly to demand. Development proposed on the edge of MUAs or on other greenfield sites should meet the criteria set out in policy PA1.'*

### **2.2.3 Regional Logistics Sites (RLS)**

It is felt that warehousing and distribution is an important and fast growing sector for the Region. Therefore, under PA 9 it is stated that:

*'Within the portfolio of employment sites, provision should be made for Regional Logistics Sites (RLS) the purpose of which will be to provide opportunities for the concentrated development of warehousing and distribution uses. RLS will be identified within development plans. The RPB should be consulted on such proposals. Sites should generally:*

- i) be in the order of 50 hectares or more;*
- ii) possess good quality access to the Regional rail and highway networks and public transport links, or capable of having such links provided;*
- iii) be served or proposed to be served by multi-modal transport facilities and broadband IT infrastructure;*
- iv) have easy access to an appropriate labour supply and education and training opportunities; and*
- v) aim to minimise compromise to the local environment.'*

It is also stated that the Region should have a choice of RLS available at any point in time and consideration and priority should be given to bringing forward previously developed sites in North Staffordshire and Telford. Development proposed on the edge of MUAs or on other greenfield sites should meet the criteria set out in policy PA1.

## **3. Case Study 3: East Midlands RSS**

Again there appears to be no specific reference to Strategic site, instead there are a series of regional priorities for employment land. However it is stated that:

*'Local Authorities, emda and Sub-Regional Strategic Partnerships should work together in Housing Market Area groupings to undertake and keep up to date Employment Land Reviews in order to:*

- *ensure that there is an adequate supply of good quality land for office and industrial uses available for development (B1, B2 and B8 land) in sustainable locations allocated in Local Development Frameworks;*
- *bring forward good quality allocated employment sites to meet the specific requirements of potential investors; and*
- *review current employment land allocations to ensure that they are relevant to current and likely future requirements and that surplus employment land is considered for beneficial alternative use.*

*In addition, Local Authorities should:*

- *ensure that any additional strategic distribution centres over 25,000 square meters maximize potential for rail freight and generate at least 10% of their energy requirements from on-site renewable sources; and*
- *monitor gains and losses in the overall supply of good quality office and industrial sites and assess the floorspace capacity of allocated sites.'*

In terms of regeneration activities it is stated that regeneration activity should be focused on areas of greatest identified need. These include:

- the Region's Principal Urban Areas and Sub- Regional Centres that exhibit very high and concentrated levels of deprivation;
- the Northern Sub-area, with its concentration of economic, social and environmental problems linked to the decline of the coal industry;
- 'economically lagging' rural areas identified by the Government's Rural Strategy, including the districts of East Lindsey, West Lindsey South Holland, Bolsover, High Peak and the more rural parts of Derbyshire Dales, Bassetlaw and Newark and Sherwood;
- the towns of Gainsborough, Mablethorpe and Skegness; and
- other settlements which display high levels of deprivation including Corby which is also designated as a Growth Town in Policy 4.

It is also identified that the quality and location of existing employment land designations may not always be consistent with market demands or sustainability principles and this needs to be addressed.

In allocating sites, it is highlighted that Local Planning Authorities should ensure that allocated sites for employment uses are consistent with priorities contained in the Regional Economic Strategy and are attractive to the market. A range of different sites should be provided, and consideration should be given to enhancing marketability by means such as the provision of essential infrastructure, remediation or measures to enhance attractiveness. Local Planning Authorities will also need to consider whether currently allocated or safeguarded sites are likely to become surplus to future requirements. In such cases they should consider what other uses might be appropriate in line with Draft PPS3. In identifying need and provision for employment land, Local Planning Authorities should work together in the same groupings as

those identified for purposes of developing Housing Market Area Assessments. This will encourage a balanced approach to housing and employment development.

### 3.1 Case Study 4: South East RSS

The South East RSS sets out a criteria based policy for employment land provision. Identification of strategic employment sites is not felt to be helpful in the South East because there is considered to only be a limited relationship between employment change and land use and currently a poor understanding of land supply at a local level. Only broad locations for new employment generating development have therefore been identified in the sub-regional strategies. Sub-regional strategies also identify employment figures for monitoring purposes.

The RSS states that:

*'Local Development Documents will need to ensure that there is an adequate quantity and high quality of employment land to meet the current and future requirements of the local economies. Parts of the South East have an extensive range of premises and sites. Factors such as changes in the fortunes of different sectors will affect the amount of space and location of premises demanded by businesses. This can lead to some sites being abandoned and pressure for development elsewhere. It is important to enable flexibility in the range of premises while at the same time ensuring better use is made of existing developed land.*

*It is therefore important to have an up-to-date review of employment land in considering proposals for using land allocated for industrial or employment use. In 2004 ODPM published good practice guidance on employment land reviews which refers to Regional Planning Bodies taking account of and co-ordinating employment land studies in the region. Employment land reviews are an integral part of the preparation of LDFs. Local authorities will need to carefully assess the needs of their local economy for land and building, and to make provision that meets the requirements of the sectors and types of firms which exist and are suitable to the area, including warehousing, offices and light and general industry.*

*It is also important to support economic diversity through the promotion of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and businesses in rural areas. A balanced economy requires a range of types of employment space in terms of size, location and cost. In addition there will be an increasing demand for services in the South East due to rising disposable incomes and the ageing workforce. This will require not only new forms of customer focused skills, but accommodation for business services, retail, restaurants, hotels and leisure'*

It is also identified that in the preparation of Local Development Documents, local authorities will assess the employment needs of the local economy and workforce. The assessments should take account of sub-regional strategies for the location, quantity and nature of employment land and premises. Policies should provide for a range of sites and premises based on the following criteria:

- i) Locations that are accessible to the existing and proposed labour supply;*
- ii) Efficient use of existing and underused sites and premises;*
- iii) Locations which intensify the use of existing sites;*
- iv) Focus on urban areas;*
- v) Promotion of mixed use development where appropriate and subject to replacement of land and premises lost to non-employment uses; and*
- vi) Locations that promote the use of public transport.*



It is also identified that accessible and well-located industrial and commercial sites should be retained where there is a good prospect of employment use. Local Development Documents should be supportive of the agricultural, horticultural and forestry industries, and rural economic diversification and non-land based business proposals in towns and villages or on farm sites where applications show positive benefits, based on clearly defined criteria and evidence-based assessments.

## 3.2 Case Study 5 - North East RSS

Policy 12 Sustainable Economic Development, states that:

*'Strategies, plans and programmes should focus the majority of new economic development and investment:*

- *in the conurbations and main towns within the Tyne & Wear and Tees Valley city regions, particularly the core areas;*
- *at regional brownfield mixed-use developments; and*
- *at Prestige Employment Sites, particularly for employment uses of regional and subregional significance.'*

*It is also highlighted that new economic activity of an appropriate scale and nature should also be encouraged:*

- *in the towns serving the regeneration areas within the city regions acting as the stimulus for their regeneration and surrounding areas, with a particular emphasis on improving access to skills and training, education and employment opportunities; and*
- *in the rural service centres, and to a lesser degree in other local rural centres, to provide a framework for integrated rural development of an appropriate scale to support sustainable, rural communities and diversified economies.*

Policy 13, refers to Regional Brownfield Mixed Use Developments and states that:

*'Strategies, plans and programmes should continue to support and promote the following key regeneration projects in the conurbations and main towns, which are being developed as major mixed-use schemes:*

- *Blyth Estuary, Blyth;*
- *Discovery Quarter, Newcastle;*
- *Tyne Gateway of South Shields and North Shields riversides;*
- *Central Area Framework, Sunderland;*
- *Greater Middlehaven, Middlesbrough;*
- *Central Park, Darlington;*
- *Victoria Harbour, Hartlepool; and*
- *North Shore, Stockton.*

*Local Development Frameworks should make provision for the above regional brownfield mixed-use developments and should ensure that the development of each site:*

- a) is subject to the preparation of a detailed masterplan prior to the commencement of development;
- b) adopts an appropriate phasing and monitoring framework to ensure alignment with changing local and wider city region objectives so that housing development does not exceed the respective local authority's housing provision;
- c) mitigates any potential exacerbation of housing market failure in the respective local authority and surrounding districts;
- d) ensures that the respective adjacent town centres are not adversely affected by the proposed retail development associated with the mixed use scheme;
- e) is served by high levels of public transport, walking and cycling, particularly through the development of workplace travel plans;
- f) secures any necessary improvements to the strategic and local road network required to accommodate traffic generated by the development, taking account of the likely use of public transport to the site;
- g) seeks to maximise the employment opportunities for residents of surrounding wards, particularly from the more deprived wards;
- h) ensures that the necessary utilities infrastructure is coordinated with new development; and protects and enhances environmental, historic and resource assets.'

In terms of the employment land portfolio it is stated that:

*'It is essential that the scale and quality of the employment land provision meets requirements to assist the accelerated growth in the regional economy. The provision should ensure that the RES, Urban Regeneration Companies and Sub-Regional Partnership strategies can be delivered effectively and will not be constrained by a lack of suitable and available land. Local authorities will be required to monitor and review their employment land allocations. This will include examining the potential for mixed-use schemes, and the continued need to consider, as part of the preparation of LDFs, the de-allocation or reallocation of sites.'*

Policy 18 refers to the Employment Land Portfolio and states that:

*'Local Development Frameworks should make the appropriate provision of general employment land, regional brownfield mixed-use developments and Prestige Employment.'*

The policy also then identifies the volume of land required by settlement.

Policy 19 refers to Prestige Sites and states that:

*'Strategies, plans and programmes should focus investment towards the following Prestige Employment Sites to enable the accelerated growth in the regional economy to be maximised:*

- West Hartford, Cramlington
- Newcastle Great Park
- Newburn Riverside, Newcastle
- TyneWear Park, South Tyneside
- Baltic Business Park, Gateshead
- North East Technology Park, Sedgefield
- Wynyard, Stockton/Hartlepool

*In making provision for the above Prestige Employment Sites, Local Development Frameworks should:*

- a) *prepare a detailed masterplan prior to the commencement of development;*
- b) *accommodate major investors and prestige business development of national or regional significance;*
- c) *ensure high levels of public transport accessibility and use;*
- d) *provide a parking approach that manages private car use, whilst promoting sustainable transport modes;*
- e) *secure any necessary improvements to the strategic and local road and rail networks required to accommodate traffic generated by the development, taking account of the likely use of public transport to the site;*
- f) *maximise the employment opportunities for residents of surrounding wards, particularly from the more deprived wards;*
- g) *ensure that the necessary infrastructure is coordinated with new development;*
- h) *employ sustainable construction and design methods, which deliver biodiversity benefits and foster local distinctiveness;*
- i) *protect and enhance major environmental, historic and resource assets; and*
- j) *ensure that the integration of the development with the landscape meets high environmental standards.*

*South Tyneside Local Development Framework should define the area of Green Belt to be excluded for the Tyne Wear Park Prestige Employment Site.'*

It is identified that the sites are being developed with a particular strategic function, these sites are located within the city regions and within or adjacent to the conurbations. The sites are:

- West Hartford, Cramlington – 55 hectares in size with good road and potential rail access, this site is being marketed as a Bioscience Park.
- Newcastle Great Park – will be a location for digital based businesses, with a particular focus on innovation and entrepreneurship, providing incubator units for start-up firms and facilities for technology transfer, financial and management support.
- Newburn Riverside, Newcastle – situated on the north bank of the River Tyne, the 92 hectare site has planning consent for offices, general industrial, and warehousing. Due to the nature of the site, this will meet many of the City's general employment land requirements.
- TyneWear Park, South Tyneside – up to 90 hectares in size and located in South Tyneside, the site will provide a flexible response to attract regionally significant investment in emerging growth sectors. This site could encompass developments to support knowledge-based industries or major inward investors.
- Baltic Business Park, Gateshead – this is a prestigious international centre, providing physical workspaces, technology based products, practices and methodologies, and online services to the global product development community within the core of the Tyne & Wear conurbation.
- North East Technology Park, Sedgefield – capitalising upon the research potential of the region's universities and colleges, NetPark has been conceived as a regional centre for technology transfer, creating a bridge between research work and product development, encouraging a knowledge-based economy within County Durham and the region. It will provide wide-ranging benefits in terms of enabling

high quality business start-ups, improving competitiveness and encouraging diversification. Whilst the site is 77 hectares, only 49 hectares (gross) is expected to be developed within the timeframe of the RSS.

- Wynyard – 205 hectares in size, this site is being developed for the prestige electronics and high technology sectors.

In addition, Reserve sites are identified in order to allow the region respond quickly to the potential needs of large-scale inward and mobile investors. The North East has three of these key strategic greenfield sites, which are reserved to accommodate large-scale developments and which should not be used in a piecemeal manner. The sites are Faverdale Reserve, Heighington Lane West and South of Seaham. All of these sites are capable of accommodating upwards of 1,000 jobs; have good accessibility; provide an attractive environment; are deliverable in financial and technical terms; support the broad regional development objectives; and benefit from the availability of skilled labour and training packages.

It is also stated that:

*'These sites should only be considered for development if:*

- a) employment sites within the conurbations and main towns cannot accommodate the proposed large-scale development; and*
- b) no large single site is available on a Prestige Employment Site or a Regional Brownfield mixed-use site.'*

In addition under Policy 21 Airports and Policy 22 Ports the sustainable expansion of the regions airports and ports is supported.

The Public Examination into the RSS for the North East was held during March and April 2006 and the Panel's Report published in July 2006.

In terms of the regional brownfield mixed use developments, the EIP considered the role of the Regional Brownfield Mixed-Use Developments and whether their development ambitions are consistent with the viability of the city and town centres, and whether the developments can be regarded as town centre locations.

The Panel felt that the potential role of the sites in achieving the locational strategy needs to be spelt out more clearly. They also felt that Policy 13 should have a more generic title such as "Brownfield Mixed-Use Developments" to encompass other brownfield sites which could come forward during the Plan period. In addition, it is recommended that the word is amended to give impetus to bring forward other large mixed-use brownfield opportunities.

In terms of Prestige and Reserve Employment Sites the Panel examined the extent to which the designation of these sites is consistent with the sequential approach and the principles of sustainable development. Consideration was given to the extent to which the uses being considered for these sites were in conflict with the viability of the city and town centres and the Regional Brownfield Mixed-Use Developments. Consideration was also given to their justification in terms of the changing needs of inward investment, and whether there is a need to include a sequential test to ensure that development on these sites does not prejudice the

viability of city and town centres and is consistent with the ambitions of the Regional Brownfield Mixed-Use Developments.

In terms of the sequential approach, it was identified that not all sites could be treated the same. They were concerned with sites located on the edge of the built-up area and beyond. The Panel was also uncertain about the justification of Prestige sites in the Submission Draft. Paragraph 3.30 states that *“To assist in the Region’s accelerated economic growth, unique opportunities within specialist growth sectors of the economy should be maximised. As the city and town centres and regional brownfield mixed-use sites may not be the most suitable locations to accommodate these opportunities, economic investment should also be directed towards Prestige Employment Sites.”*

The Panel stated that:

*‘No information is given as to why the alternative locations might not be suitable, despite all the information provided that suggests the majority of this type of development will seek such locations.*

*The scale of opportunity in the large greenfield Prestige Employment Sites on the edge of or beyond the urban limits does not easily fit with the concept of “unique opportunities within specialist growth sectors”. In our view the key characteristic of these large sites is their scale, and we are of the opinion that the present policies do not take advantage of that characteristic. The scale of opportunity at these sites should be protected as long as possible to provide the Region with an option that the other locations cannot offer. We are concerned that market/commercial pressures are encouraging greater subdivision of a number of the sites. In order to minimise this we recommend that Policy 19 be amended as shown in Appendix C.’*

It was recommended that the policy is amended to say:

*‘In order to enable the accelerated growth in the regional economy to be maximized strategies, plans and programmes should focus appropriate investment towards the Prestige Employment Sites shown below:*

- *Newcastle Great Park*
- *Newburn Riverside, Newcastle*
- *Baltic Business Park*
- *Development as in Planning Consent or Master Plan*
- *West Hartford, Cramlington Limited sub-division for manufacturing*
- *North East Technology Park, Sedgfield Limited to 13ha*
- *Wynyard, Stockton/Hartlepool*

*Long term restructuring to maximise large scale opportunities and minimise B1 (a) potential in making provision for the above Prestige Employment Sites, Local Development Frameworks should:*

- *prepare a detailed masterplan prior to the commencement of development;*

- *accommodate major investors and prestige business development of national or regional significance;*
- *ensure high levels of public transport accessibility and use;*
- *provide a parking approach that manages private car use, whilst promoting sustainable transport modes;*
- *secure any necessary improvements to the strategic and local road and rail networks required to accommodate traffic generated by the development, taking account of the likely use of public transport to the site;*
- *maximise the employment opportunities for residents of surrounding wards, particularly from the more deprived wards;*
- *ensure that the necessary infrastructure is co-ordinated with new development;*
- *employ sustainable construction and design methods, which deliver biodiversity benefits and foster local distinctiveness;*
- *protect and enhance major environmental, historic and resource assets; and*
- *ensure that the integration of the development with the landscape meets high environmental standards.'*

In terms of Reserve Sites, the Panel concluded that there is not a case to hold additional sites considering their recommendations in relation to general employment land supply and Prestige Employment Sites, recommending that policy 20 which refers to Reserve sites is deleted.

## Conclusion

The above review of the current situation in regards to strategic sites in the South West and the review of the approach being adopted by other regions clearly confirms that there are various approaches to strategic sites. The review also raises the question whether 'strategic sites' are required.

Originally one of the fundamental drivers of designating strategic sites was the need to accommodate large scale inward investment projects. However, since regional planning guidance was published it is widely acknowledged that the market for large-scale inward investment projects has changed significantly and such projects are becoming increasingly rare. In the South West, figures from 'Invest UK and Regional Competitiveness and State of the Regions – April 2005' reveal that the number of manufacturing inward investment projects has declined in the South West from a high of 16 investments in 1998/99 to 7 projects in 2002/3. This is associated with the globalisation of the economy. In other words another inward investment of the scale of the Honda Plant in Swindon is now unlikely.

The decline in inward investment proposals is forecast to continue and this raises issues over what is a strategic site and what is their future role. As previously stated, EC4: Major Strategic Sites states that:

*'Strategic sites should be identified jointly by the Regional Planning Body and SWRDA, to meet the needs of major business users or groups of users, based on the following criteria:*

- *A minimum size of 12 and preferably 50 + hectares;*
- *Ideally on flat land, free from significant constraints that would impede the delivery of a site – preference should be given to previously developed sites, particularly within existing urban areas, well located in them with respect to infrastructure, servicing and public transport and where opportunities exist for making good past environmental damage including contamination;*
- *In areas close to a large pool of labour, with appropriate service infrastructure, good accessibility and capable of being served by sustainable modes of transport.'*

The size of the site has been one of the main driver's of identifying strategic sites, however the rationale for this has been undermined by recent trends. In addition, the current approach being used to define strategic sites clearly varies by region.

The East of England RSS does define a strategic site as 'A site capable of accommodating a user requiring a plot of 10 hectares or more or Special User Sites, e.g. Port, Airport related; and Available now or within 24 months.', whilst the West Midlands RSS does not refer to strategic sites but establishes a hierarchy of sites. The East Midlands RSS identifies a series of regional priorities for employment land, highlighting that Local Planning Authorities should ensure that allocated sites for employment uses are consistent with priorities in the Regional Economic Strategy and are attractive to the market. Again the South East RSS does not set out a hierarchy of sites but sets out a criteria based policy for allocating employment sites through the LDF process. Finally, One North East RSS sets out a hierarchy of potential employment sites, including Regional Brownfield Mixed Use Developments, Prestige and

Reserved Sites. The Panel's Report for the One North East RSS has been published and highlights a number of key issues which need to be considered in relation to the definition of strategic sites, including:

Regional Brownfield Mixed-use Developments:

1. Are the office floorspace (B1) ambitions consistent with the viability of the city and town centres;
2. Can any of these developments be regarded as town centre locations; and
3. Are these the only candidates?

Prestige and Reserve Employment Sites

1. To what extent is the designation of the sites consistent with the Sequential Approach?
2. Will the uses being considered for the sites conflict with the prospects of the City and Town Centres and the Regional Brownfield Mixed-use Developments within the two city regions?
3. Is there a meaningful difference between the Prestige and Reserve categories and are these the only candidates?
4. Does the release mechanism for sites under Policy 20 provide a realistic basis for speedy response to inward and mobile investors' needs?
5. How important is the potential for rail servicing in identifying priority locations for inward and mobile investment?

The Panel actually recommended the deletion of Reserve Sites due to the provision provided by Prestige sites being sufficient to respond quickly to the potential needs of large-scale inward and mobile investors. In addition, unsustainable sites which failed the sequential approach are also recommended to be deleted.

A number of these considerations and the findings of the Panel have implications in terms of defining what constitutes a strategic site in the South West. The sustainability of sites and their adherence to the sequential approach is clearly becoming very important, which tends to conflict with one of the fundamental determinates of a strategic site being its size. It is extremely difficult to find large sites in town and city centres. This is demonstrated by the existing provision of strategic sites in the South West. It is clear that the definition of strategic sites needs to consider issues other than size alone. A site should not be considered to be strategic purely on the basis that it is 12 or more hectares. Rather other considerations such as the ability to develop key business sectors, support the development of the knowledge driven economy and help with the successful delivery of economic development and regeneration initiatives. Equally this needs to be applied to existing as well as planned future sites. Key criteria may include:

- Allocated sites need to be sustainable
- Allocated sites need to be consistent with the sequential approach
- The implications of allocated sites on the viability and vitality of town and city centres needs to be considered
- Fit with Regional priorities



The other issue which also needs to be given careful consideration is the actual need to have designated strategic sites and whether with the aspirations to move to a higher value economy that all potential investors and occupiers are looking for high quality employment sites and only sites and locations which can realistically meet these demands should be allocated.

Identified employment sites should form part of a modest and fully justified portfolio designed to the requirements of the RES and local circumstances. Sites should be tested and selected on the basis of the intended function. A criteria based approach should be used but a single set of criteria will not suffice. The criteria will vary depending upon whether the site is for rural workspace or to accommodate headquarter offices and are explored further in the Delivery Plan.