

3 North East Wales

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The consultation event was held on the 26th November 2003 at the North East Wales Institute Plas Coch campus in Wrexham. Thirty-eight people attended, representing a range of national and local organisations (see Appendix). This was one of the larger events embracing a broad spectrum of issues, helped by the range of participants – including some from England.

3.2 GENERAL OVERVIEW

Following a presentation of the key objectives and content of the Plan, there were discussions about its content. A dominant theme in the discussion of zoning was that of cross-border issues - to the extent that some participants suggested the zone should realistically extend further into England. There was definitely an influx of people buying homes, affecting the 'cultural balance'.

The statement that the North East zone has a diverse economic base was rejected strongly - it is still heavily influenced by the manufacturing and public sectors. The zone also lacks tourism and is only seen as a way station to West Wales. The lack of economic diversity, and changing community structure was reflected in the 'where are we now' sustainability matrix discussion. Prosperity alongside deprivation, low value tourism, dependence on agriculture in the hinterland, and lack of educational attainment were all mentioned.

In the discussion promoted by the Plan cards - and the forward-looking 'then' matrix - participants felt environmental action was not strongly featured in the plan. Flood protection, sewage and waste treatment in general could all be pinch points for development.

A strong cultural identity - developing 'Welshness' without alienating the English - was considered to be important, together with a new approach to economic development.

The action planning session embraced issues such as access/transport infrastructure, community safety & health, deprivation, skills/education, housing and brownfield sites, with a wide spread of ideas and agencies that would have to be involved in any implementation. Some actions depended on investment, but many were predicated on changes in attitudes – some requiring a cross border perspective. The issue of leadership in carrying initiatives forward was also identified as a theme.

3.3 THE EVENT

Following an explanation of the purpose of the day and a presentation on the principles and components of the draft Wales Spatial Plan, the audience split into five groups. The discussions of the different stages and sessions are summarised below.

3.4 ZONE ISSUES

There was considerable discussion around the extent and appropriateness of the Orange Zone in North East Wales:



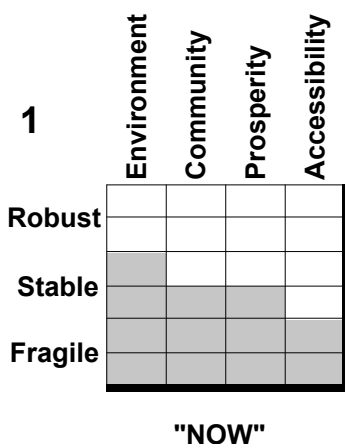
Considering the Zone

- Conwy & Llangollen were considered to stand apart from the Orange Zone
- Some thought was given to reducing the Orange Zone to a coastal belt but this was eventually decided against.
- There was doubt expressed about the phrase “national centres providing higher order services” and it was agreed that this would have to be explained in more detail.
- Participants agreed there are great similarities to the other Orange Zone in the South East. The main similarities are intense cross-border linkages and an “English” culture.
- Differences were seen in the geography (valleys in the Southern part) and settlement patterns (urban villages in the North, greater conurbations in the South). Furthermore, it was considered that sea trade was not as important for the North as for the South, and that the economy in the North East was more dependent on manufacturing.
- There are cultural differences between the North and South. For instance, while the South is very supportive of the establishment of the Welsh Assembly, the North felt more attached to England and is less keen on devolution.
- Comment about the shape and extent of the zones was ultimately limited to whether the southern part of the Orange Zone should belong to the Green Zone.
- The Plan statement: “strong relationships between places (property and employment markets, labour supply and jobs)” was felt to be unclear. Does this mean that places of work should be close to where people live? This statement was seen to link with the attributes of North East Wales as a border zone. However, clarification is needed here.
- The North East does not have as diverse an economic base as suggested in the Plan. The area is still heavily influenced by manufacturing and the

public sector, and it was thought diversification will only be achieved with great difficulty. The zone certainly lacks tourism and is only really seen as a way station to West Wales.

- However, Wrexham has developed positively over the years. It does not cater for a tourism market, but it provides retail and other main services for the local population, which allegedly demands more affordable, lower quality products.
- Even though local people complain about traffic jams on the A55, in comparison to other areas, this is really only a minor problem.
- Agriculture issues are not mentioned in the Plan – this was felt to be erroneous omission.
- Environmental diversity has to be included.
- The cultural influence of England should be stressed more clearly. Most people from North East Wales feel closer to Manchester and Liverpool than to any other Welsh city.
- The presentation of the Orange Zone should really be extended to North West England through the strong linkages with Chester, Warrington, Shrewsbury and Manchester.
- The urban coastal area is not adequately recognised in the Plan and this should be rectified.

Groups considered the baseline position in terms of the sustainability matrix. In viewing the categories, some participants were uncomfortable with the 'stable' terminology



3.5 SUSTAINABILITY MATRIX (1)

Environment

- The River Dee is important – for environmental quality, water supply – and issues in its upper catchment
- Future waste problems were seen as an issue influencing Wrexham's future and indeed were considered to be a potential threat.
- There is a need to disaggregate factors – visual, pollution (air, land, water), biodiversity, land contamination and so on.
- Some considered the environment might not be as stable as suggested. The effect of CO² emissions, the quarries, the demand for housing, existing pollution and the move for further incineration makes it a much more fragile environment. Flooding was also an issue.

The diagrams show:

1. The "Now" Matrix set after group discussion (average of all groups)

2. The Matrix adjusted to show the affects of the implementation of the Plan (average of all groups)

Nevertheless the combined rating for the Environment from the different groups levelled out at **stable**.

Community

- Local communities are relatively weak because Wales is often only seen as a place to work in, but not to recreate and live.
- Communities were certainly regarded as being more fragile, due to high pockets of deprivation that exist, sometimes alongside more prosperous areas.
- It is not a particularly healthy area – notably in Deeside (which has high lung disease through smoking, especially young girls).
- The trend of 19-35 age out migration, and 65+ in-migration increases pressure on local services and deprives the area of valuable skills.

Combined overall, the groups set the Community rating at **fragile**.

Prosperity

- It was considered that the area had poor economic diversity.
- It was now very dependent on public sector money and on the economic drive of, for instance, Chester
- There was a modest cultural contribution -mainly local economy – low value, day tourism
- There was low educational attainment
- Very low creation rates of new small firms
- The role of Mostyn Docks should be emphasised
- There is a great disparity between the rich and poor and that the gap is getting wider. For example: Rhyl vs. Overton on Dee. There is thought to be a large black economy in the area, but, generally, the area is prosperous.
- People in the area don't aspire to quality education. More resources are needed for better pre-16 education.
- There was a view that the area has the potential to be unstable

The Prosperity rating was therefore rated as **fragile**, largely because of disparities across the area.

Accessibility

- Accessibility to services is only relatively strong because of proximity to English settlements and

institutions. However there were also a number of weaknesses identified.

- Dissatisfaction mostly applies to rail transport. Train connections to Wrexham are considered very poor and rail is not accessible to most work locations.
- Commuting is therefore significant with heavy reliance on the car and occasional Congestion. Cycling levels are poor
- There are fairly strong east-west links by road – and arguably by rail. But there is poor integration of road and rail in a way which materially improves access to services
- There are also relatively good external links – both to motorways and also to airports. There are two hospitals in the area. Accessibility to education is good and in the more prosperous areas it is even better. This is stronger than many other parts of Wales.
- On balance, therefore the zone is considered to be accessible, both in terms of transport and service provision. .

Accessibility in the zone is fairly good. The majority of groups, however, set the rating at **fragile** indicating dissatisfaction with rail links, road congestion and the poor integration of transport services.

3.6 PRIORITIES AND TIMESCALES

Groups considered the cards representing the main Zone proposals in the draft Plan (see PDF document accompanying this report). The table shows placement of the cards in the Timescale / Priority matrix.

Figure 1 - Group Card Placements

Challenge	Timescale			Priority			Weighted Priority
	Short	Medium	Long	High	Medium	Low	
Knowledge Economy	4	1		5			15
Coast & River Risks	2	2	1	4	1		14
Infrastructure	2	2	1	4	1		14
Brownfield Development	2	2	1	3	2		13
Environmental Capacity	3	1	1	2	3		12
Landscape & History	3	1	1	3	1	1	12
Housing Opportunities*	2	1	1	4			12
Links	1	3	1	3	1	1	12
Skills*	3	1		4			12
Clusters & Networks	1	4		3	1	1	12
ICT	4			4			12
Built Environments	3	1	1	2	2	1	11
Communities*	2	1	1	3	1		11
Tourism	2	2	1	2	2	1	11
Access*	2	1	1	3	1		11
Protection	1		4	1	3	1	10
Transport & Environment*		4		2	1	1	9
Urban Ecosystems*	2		2	1	2	1	8
Opportunities*	1		2	2	1		8
Development*	1		3	1	2	1	8
External Accessibility*		2	1	2		1	7
Settlement Identity*		1	3		2	2	6
Collaborative Work:							
Cross Border work	3	2		3	2		13
Climate Change	1	1	2	3		1	10
Increase prosperity in disadvantaged areas	3			3			9
Develop Knowledge Economy	3			3			9
Housing & Employment	2		2	2	1	1	9
Opportunities for whole of North Wales	1	2	2		3	2	8
Wrexham as regional centre		2	1	1	2		7
Green belts & wedges	1	1	1	2		1	7

Note: Actions with an asterisk indicate that one or more groups dropped them from the selection. Weighted Priority is determined by multiplying High priority scores by 3 and Medium by 2 and then adding across all priorities
Dark cells indicate the degree of consensus light shading indicates little consensus.



Assessing the cards

Summary

- The only Plan objective with complete priority unanimity across all groups was Knowledge Economy and much of the discussion concerned establishing research and other knowledge based work in the area, rather than seeking this externally. There was considerable agreement over the role of Information Technology in these activities
- Coastal and river flood risks and infrastructure were also seen as having a high priority.
- There was a large range of cards that achieved broad support grouped around matters concerned with development and physical aspects, such as housing, landscape and brownfield development.
- Interestingly, given the existing level of accessibility, Transport and environment was given low priority along with urban ecosystems.

Comments drawn from the groups and noted by the facilitators, as they explored the themes and cards, were:

Environment

- “Protect and utilise landscape and historical assets”: This card was not seen as appropriate for the area. Wrexham, it was said, is not mainly characterised by historical assets.
- A balancing view was that we shouldn’t just plan for the new, we need to plan for the old and the existing as well – that meant taking a perspective on maintenance.
- Water / sewerage were identified as a key pinch point. Waste management is also essential.
- Brownfield renewal was important – but we need to be mindful of any longer term environmental risk?

Communities

- “Development of safe and healthy communities”: This is important, but “Welshness” also has to be promoted within the area. Without a stronger sense of being Welsh, the North East will only be characterised through its linkages with England and therefore lack and special community identity.
- It was felt that there here is poor commitment to Welsh culture and language in the area.

Prosperity

- The economic base allegedly has a lack of high value / value added.

- There is a poor local knowledge base. Businesses use Manchester University for research and development, yet the public sector does not make this kind of investment.
- The Knowledge Economy is therefore a high priority, but was amended by some to take out the HE and FE, because the core action should take place from pre-16 education. This tackling from the very young needs to start now otherwise it will miss another generation.
- “Development of clusters and networks to maximise economic potential”: This was felt to be more a description of the area rather than an aim.
- Some felt Clusters are less relevant than networks in this area whereas others felt Clustering is important and would help to put competition back into the area.
- Potentially, this might help redress the overpowering effects of Greater Manchester and Liverpool.
- Ideally, here should be more joint working with the North West England and with Europe. The area would benefit from collaborative work - for example, could Wrexham produce a joint Objective 1 bid with Liverpool?
- There was a query as to whether the objective should always be to have economic growth – can the area not just stand still and maintain the level it is at?

Accessibility

- *“Make better use of infrastructure capacity with selective improvements to external accessibility”/ “Improvements to promote internal access and mobility and reduce the impact of transport on communities”*: Connections to the West Midlands are considered very good but linkages between Wrexham and Cardiff are poor and will not help to bring Cardiff and “Welshness” to the people in the North East.
- *“Strengthening environmentally friendly transport modes”*: this was seen by some as unrealistic. What is needed is more trains, stopping at smaller places like Grasford. However, lack of finance does not make this very likely. However this would become more desirable if congestion worsens.
- *“Consider Wrexham as regional centre for North East Wales”*: there was a discussion around whether Wrexham could ever be considered to be the regional centre of North East Wales because of its competitive proximity to Chester, where many important roles and functions were performed. However, positive changes within the last decade

have upgraded Wrexham's reputation and the potential to compete with Chester has grown. This is less true for high quality retail provision but more so for other services.

- *“Identify the need for green belt and wedges to protect pressured open spaces”*: While Chester has implemented a green belt policy, Wrexham has not followed. Pressure on Wrexham to be open for inward investment has led to some neglect of environmental and landscape issues.
- *“Establish the potential impact of climate change including necessary mitigation measures”*: Flood protection was seen as a major issue in the zone, particularly looking forward to the impacts of continuing climate change.
- There is a need for stronger links between organisations and also cross border to improve strategic thinking and action – for instance, better Welsh Development Agency – North West Development Agency joint working.



Presenting group results

Added cards

The group discussions prompted a number of extra cards

- *“Need for harmonisation of Welsh and English policies”*: Different standards of services exist in England and Wales. Interdependencies have to be recognised and these differences evened out as much as possible.
- *“Maintenance – look after what we have”* has implications for revenue as well as capital budgets.
- Minimise use of scarce or non-renewable resources.
- Enhance Welsh identity and distinctiveness while maintaining cross border links.
- Develop Research and Development centres with leading UK centre for growth of knowledge economy.
- Tackle coastal tourism and aim to upgrade it.
- There are brownfield opportunities to improve environment – particularly in “gateway” areas.

3.7 SUSTAINABILITY MATRIX (2)

	Environment	Community	Prosperity	Accessibility
2				
Robust				
Stable				
Fragile				
	"THEN"			

Assuming the Plan proposals and priorities had been implemented, the groups reviewed the potential effect on the sustainability matrix.

- The Plan was considered to have little effect on the Environment. The only measures that would be undertaken to protect the environment were stronger green belt policy implementation and stronger flood protection measures. Much would depend on how effective these were
- There was no clear consensus on whether prosperity or communities should be the top priority. While some saw healthy communities as a precondition for a growing economy, others said that a growing economy and prosperity would have positive effects on the communities.

Generally then, the groups felt that the Plan measures would have little effect on environmental matters, while raising Community and Prosperity to more **stable** positions. Accessibility was also partly improved.

3.8 IMPLEMENTATION DISCUSSION THEMES

From the morning's worksheets the following key themes were selected for further examination

1. Infrastructure
2. Access / Transport
3. Health and Safety of Communities
4. Deprivation
5. Skills / Education
6. Housing
7. Knowledge Economy

Each group considered two topics in discussion.

Infrastructure

- Infrastructure was considered to be defined as follows:
 - Physical – roads, railways, ferries, airports
 - Services – utilities (gas, water, electricity)
 - Social – hospitals, education, jobs, houses
 - Environment – biodiversity, land use, landfill, visual, quarrying, materials use
 - Communication – ICT

- The vision or objective would be to achieve a basic infrastructure that everyone can use. A possible vision was suggested:
 - *“An appropriate and adequate infrastructure to meet the needs of the population without inhibiting socio-economic activity and without compromising the environment”.*
- In terms of implementation of the plan (and in particular infrastructure) it was questioned whether 15 years long enough? What is long term for Welsh Assembly Government is often short term for others, e.g. 5/6 years is comparatively short term for National Grid.
- It was accepted that action is often reactive as opposed to proactive – and this needs to improve.
- Furthermore, least cost is not always best option – there is a need to consider longer-term effects and costs.

Actions:

- We need to find different ways of making the existing infrastructure work harder.
- We also need to establish a clearer picture of the current structure, in order to identify what needs to be done:
 - what are the population’s needs and requirements – notably regional vs. local. Including a view on the cost benefits.
 - identify capacity constraints – better utilisation/managing demand and supply
 - need to think strategically on a larger scale and longer term
 - engage wider parties e.g. National Grid
- There was a call for joined up thinking and working This embraced public/private – joint working, as well as establishing some all party consensus
- A best practice principle for new infrastructure should be adopted – identifying good practice from a worldwide perspective. It was claimed we can aid and assist other countries to set up water systems/electricity etc. but can’t achieve this effectively locally
- Communication and consultation of good new ideas must be part of the new way of working.

Actors:

- The Assembly has to engage with major partners at a wider level.

- They could establish Forums to include wider interested parties at the appropriate level
- The theme needs to be mainstream within the local authorities and formally integrated into
- Maintain existing infrastructure/current resources and reinvestment should be a basic aim of all parties – increasing resources should follow

Access / Transport

Actions proposed included:

- Identifying the problems: congestion was cited
Alongside the desire to remove local congestion blackspots
- Set targets: particularly reduce dependency on the car, reduce travel time and need to travel
- One goal might be to attract service jobs locally to reduce need to travel
- Others could include work-from-home initiatives: broadband!
- This could be complemented by the establishment of Green Travel Plans, encouraging employers to find more flexible working hours to reduce peak traffic (e.g. extended working hours and therefore one day off)
- There is a also need to remove the stigma of public transport and to encourage initiatives
- Need for Park & Ride schemes and charged parking is considered one possibility
- Investment in rail, with more stops between Wrexham and Chester would be helpful.
- It was claimed something of a cultural change is required including aiming to keep people in the local area, encourage them to think locally and to create better links between where people live/work/recreate
- There is also a need to tackle social exclusion in terms of giving people access to jobs
- There was also the question of whether we need strategic North-South link (via Shrewsbury?)

Actors :

- Local Authorities, communities, transport providers, central government (taxation), Welsh Assembly Government

Blockages:

- Cultural attitudes
- Dependency on car

- Costs (investment in public transport)
- Taxation
- Split responsibility between WAG and Local Authorities

Health and Safety of Communities

This included live, work and social communities. The objectives included:

- A healthy workforce (addressing stress, work-life balance, bullying, etc)
- A safer environment (issues of lighting, Closed Circuit TV, open visibility)
- A healthier environment (tree planting, lower pollution)
- Road safety (pedestrian zones, speed cameras)
- Schools role in health (sourcing of food/meals on wheels)

Actions:

- More and better local nature reserves
- Good design of new community spaces
- Enhancement of existing spaces
- Improved environment for better living and working
- Policing
- Preventative design measures
- Better utilisation of existing resources
- Encourage community ownership
- Respect for others and the environments in which they live and work
- Travel plans/commuter car sharing

Actors:

- Businesses, Local Authorities, communities, agencies and their appropriate representatives

Blockages:

The group looked at the blockages for both issues together and considered them to be as follows:

- Traditional output requirements of public sector bodies restricts innovative delivery solutions.
- Outputs vs. Outcomes- we need to consider the latter more
- Short-termism – a clear long term vision needed

- We can think outside of the box - but the box says 'Do not open'! For instance there are fairly inflexible funding regimes
- Generally there were thought to be too many initiatives – they need simplification and more working together
- There is no adequate leadership

Resource implications:

- Public sector to engage with all levels – but it should focus on new ways of working at least cost.
- Making existing infrastructure work harder
- Improve funding
- Accepting responsibility in different job roles

Deprivation

Actions proposed included:

- A need for skills, education, permanent and well-paid jobs in the area
- This was a call for range of employment opportunities and real choice
- There is also a need for associated housing renewal and new houses which are affordable
- In addition, safe living environments free of crime and antisocial behaviour must be secured

Actors:

- Children and Young People's Framework, schools, local businesses, Local Authorities, Housing Associations, Local Authority Housing, private landlords, developers, urban designers, Welsh Assembly Government, communities, career services, North East Wales Institute of Higher Education, Education and Learning in Wales, community safety organisations, Community First partnerships, Welsh Development Agency

Blockages:

- The aggregate cost
- Benefit cycle /trap which inhibits people from 'breaking out'
- Susceptibility to the economy as the main driver of future trends

Skills / Education

Proposals included:

- Nursery provision – a 100 communities first, bottom up strategy
- Further Education was claimed to be in a difficult situation – technical skills and vocational skills need to be enhanced – including removing barriers for mature students, because older people need upskilling
- This reflects a re-skilling approach – based on the concept of life long learning
- Skilling for future needs may include tourism, land management
- New FE upskilling needs to engage more effectively with industry. Outreach education approaches – in time and space – non traditional delivery, may be relevant to current and future needs
- The HE - NEWI / Bangor merger was welcomed (To gain critical mass would require £11k per undergraduate (compare with England average of £14k)
- Investment is also needed in schools for the next generation. This should not be overlooked

Housing

Actions proposed included:

- Defining more clearly what the problem is by assessing the housing needs across the region (the wider economic region) and identifying what the drivers and problems are?
- Regenerating the existing poor housing stock (but also building in environment and sustainability dimensions)
- As far as possible, linking new housing to employment development

Actors:

- Local Authority Housing Strategies – on a Pan Regional basis
- Private Developers in partnership with Local Authorities and employers
- Brownfield redevelopment specialists

Resources:

- Communities First programme
- Infrastructure investment in areas identified for regeneration/development

Blockages:

- Local Authorities can't make direct provision

- Right to buy difficulties – lead to low stock of rented/affordable housing
- Low aspirations are linked to poor education and social deprivation

Knowledge Economy

Actions proposed are:

- Identifying the specific knowledge based employment opportunities (e.g. environmental technology, language based?, optics, IT skills, Aero Industry and so on)
- Talent spotting to capture the right people
- Seek Collaborations with other places and businesses in wider Europe and the World
- Analyse clustering opportunities around existing knowledge based industries, building u a network capability

Actors:

- NEWI, Welsh Development Agency, ELWA, Existing businesses, Collaborators from elsewhere, North West Regional Development Agency, Other universities

Resources:

- Re-target existing education resources
- Start-up support – seedcorn/collaboration exercises
- Infrastructure for 'Technia' or similar

Blockages:

- No recognised reputations in this field
- Lack of aspiration/expectation from the existing community
- Lack of successful entrepreneurs to follow

Appendix

WORKSHOP ATTENDEES

- Sue Gittens Ramblers Association
- Andrew Dale Countryside Council for Wales
- Jenny Bicknell Clwyd Powys Archaeological Trust
- Council for British Archaeology
- Olivier Sykes University of Liverpool
- Martin Mills Environment Agency Wales
- Chris Kay Flintshire County Council
- Helen Worsley National Grid Transco
- Rachel Jowitt Wales Local Government Association
- Marc Evans British Waterways
- Lawrence Isted WCBC
- Toni Garnett Arena Network
- Melanie Emery NEWI
- Imelda Bowers NEWI
- Susan Broadaway Denbighshire County Council
- Michael Cantwell WCBC
- Andrew Martin ELWa
- Malcolm Phillips WCBC
- Paul Roberts WCBC
- Charlie Seward Chester County Council
- Sasha Davies Welsh Development Agency
- Lara Griffiths Denbighshire County Council
- Patti Fitton CCBC
- Gareth Clegg North West Development Agency
- Iain Jenkinson GVA Grimley
- Ernie Williams NW Fire & Rescue
- Steve Murray NW Fire & Rescue
- Mervyn Davies Flintshire CC
- Nick Ireland GVA Grimley
- Iain Smith NWRA
- Mary Robinson Ramblers Association/CPRW
- Ian Brooke GO-NW
- Imogen Sherriff Welsh Development Agency

- Mike Roberts Conwy County Council
- Richard Siddons Forestry Commission
- Stan Moore NEWI
- Jon Talbot NEWI
- Huw Brodie Welsh Assembly Government
- Richard Jarvis CCW