

THE MERSEY GATEWAY PROJECT

PLANNING POLICY

CHAPTER 6.0

PLANNING POLICY

CONTENTS

6.	PLANNING POLICY	6.3
6.1	Introduction	6.3
6.2	Project Description.....	6.4
6.3	Assessment Methodology.....	6.6
6.4	Planning Policy Framework	6.7
6.5	European Policy.....	6.8
6.6	Non-Statutory National Policy Guidance	6.10
6.7	Adopted National Planning Policy.....	6.23
6.8	Regional Planning Policy	6.52
6.9	Draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the North West.....	6.71
6.10	North West Regional Economic Strategy (2006).....	6.83
6.11	Local Planning Policy.....	6.85
6.12	Halton Local Transport Plan 2	6.136
6.13	Monitoring requirements	6.139

FIGURES

Figure 6.1 Mersey Gateway Project UDP Policies

APPENDICES

Appendix 6.1 Figures not included in the main text
Appendix 6.2 Halton UDP Policies BE1 and BE2

6. PLANNING POLICY

6.1 Introduction

- 6.1.1 This chapter undertakes a detailed assessment of the Mersey Gateway Project (the “Project”) against the relevant European, national, regional and local planning (and transport and economic) policy framework. It identifies where policies have either a statutory or non statutory status and has regard to emerging policy as appropriate.
- 6.1.2 The aim of the chapter is to undertake an assessment of the performance of all elements of the Project against this identified framework, identifying compliance or otherwise. Where whole or partial non compliance with a policy is identified, the chapter goes on to identify the detail of proposed mitigation and undertakes a further, post mitigation assessment of residual impacts.
- 6.1.3 This chapter is structured as follows:
- a. A **project description**, which draws from the technical description but cross refers to planning policy and land use.
 - b. A summary of the **policy review methodology**, describing the basis on which the chapter undertakes the assessment.
 - c. Identification of the **policy framework and assessment** which constitutes the key component of the chapter. For ease of understanding and internal consistency the identification of each policy and its subsequent scheme assessment has been undertaken on a set format.
 - d. A summary of the **forward monitoring requirements**, with reference principally to the need to have regard to emerging policy over the lifespan of the project.
- 6.1.4 This chapter cross-refers to and draws conclusions from other ES chapters and accompanying Technical Appendices as appropriate.
- 6.1.5 In summary, the hierarchy of policy documents assessed comprise the following:
- a. European policy including the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC;
 - b. Statutory and emerging non-statutory national planning policy guidance;
 - c. Regional planning policy comprising the Regional Spatial Strategy, and the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy; and
 - d. Local planning policy, including the Halton Unitary Development Plan (UDP) and Local Transport Plan 2.
- 6.1.6 A comprehensive assessment against each element is undertaken. By and large, this chapter includes all relevant policy. However, some technical policy is considered in greater detail in the topic-specific chapters of this ES.

6.2 Project Description

- 6.2.1 The Project is described in full both earlier within the ES and, on a more detailed technical basis, within the Construction Method Report (CMR as attached to Appendix 2.1). Whilst it is not proposed to repeat this detailed description, it is useful for the purposes of this chapter to summarise not only the individual elements of the project, but also to set them against the land use allocations and general policy framework as set out in the regional and local policy documents.
- 6.2.2 This exercise, which uses the construction areas described in the CMR as a framework to describe specific land-use designations is set out below. A plan of the Project alignment overlaid with Halton's UDP policies is shown on Figure 6.1 (Appendix 6.1).

Widnes approach works and tolling infrastructure

- 6.2.3 The western extent of the main alignment of the Project follows the line of Speke Road from a point to the west of the Ditton Roundabout. It widens out along its southern edge to provide the area required for the tolling infrastructure. In doing so it incorporates land currently occupied by the disused St Michael Jubilee Golf Course which is identified within the Halton UDP Proposals Map as washed over by a Greenspace allocation.

Ditton Junction to the Freight Line

- 6.2.4 The alignment runs eastwards from the tolling plaza to connect with an upgraded Ditton junction arrangement (signal controlled and grade separated) which largely occupies existing highway land. At this point the route begins to rise, supported by an embankment rising to a maximum height of 9m as it runs through to the existing Garston-Timperley freight line. The construction of the carriageway and associated embankment would take up land occupied by old industrial buildings and a scrap metal yard. This whole section is identified within the UDP as a Regeneration Area (see Para. 6.11.12 below)

Freight Line to St. Helens Canal

- 6.2.5 From the freight line the carriageway extends south eastwards to the St Helens Canal, initially on embankment but spanning the freight line, Victoria Road and the new Widnes loops junction arrangement by means of single and multi-span bridge provision. The land taken is mainly in existing industrial use and in policy terms sits wholly within the Regeneration Area designation as set out above.

St. Helens Canal to the North Abutment

- 6.2.6 The alignment would be carried over the St Helens Canal on a three span structure, running into the North Abutment of the main Mersey Gateway Bridge. The Canal is identified within the UDP as an Environmental Priority Area whilst the abutment rests within the Widnes Warth estuary edge which at this point is identified within the UDP as an Area of Special Landscape Value, as a Coastal Zone and as Greenspace.

North Abutment to the South Abutment, spanning the Estuary

- 6.2.7 From the North Abutment the alignment runs southwards over Widnes Warth Saltmarsh, crosses the Mersey Estuary via four spans supported by three towers and then on the south side of the estuary crosses Astmoor Saltmarsh, Wigg Island and the Manchester Ship Canal before meeting the South Abutment located within Astmoor Industrial Estate.
- 6.2.8 The route between the two abutments passes over land which is identified within the Halton UDP and associated policy framework as follows:

Widnes Warth	Area of Special Landscape Value, Coastal Zone, Greenspace and SINC
Mersey Estuary	SINC, Area of Special Landscape Value, and upstream of the Mersey Estuary Special Protection Area
Astmoor Saltmarsh	Area of Special Landscape Value, Green Belt, Coastal Zone and SINC
Wigg Island	Green Belt, Proposed Greenspace and Important Landscape Feature, as well as sitting within an Environmental Priority Area.

6.2.9 The Astmoor Industrial Estate, within which the south Abutment will be sited, is identified as a Primary Employment Area within the UDP. The area underneath and around the line of the Bridge would need to be cleared of existing structures, which are mainly in industrial use.

Astmoor Viaduct to Central Expressway

6.2.10 From the south Abutment the alignment heads south via a high level multi span viaduct, crossing Astmoor industrial park, the existing Bridgewater Junction and the Bridgewater Canal. The carriageway would then join the existing Central Expressway at Halton Brow. From south of Astmoor Industrial Estate the land use allocations oversailed by the carriageway comprise:

Bridgewater Junction	Proposed Greenway, greenspace; edge of the Regeneration Action Area;
Bridgewater Canal	Important Landscape Feature

Central Expressway to the M56

6.2.11 From Halton Brow the Project adopts the existing line of the Central Expressway, Lodge Lane and Weston Link junction through to junction 12 of the M56. Improvements to the existing highway alignment would take place along the whole route. All of this work is proposed to take place within the highway boundary which is unallocated within the Halton UDP.

SJB

6.2.12 A second element of the New Bridge is the works to SJB (the “SJB”) and its connection northwards into the re-modelled Ditton Junction. This includes downgrading the carriageway to a single lane in each direction and the introduction of footpath and cycle options on the deck of the Bridge.

6.2.13 A key policy consideration is that the SJB is grade 2 listed; the adjacent railway bridge is Grade 2* listed.

6.2.14 Moving north from the SJB to Ditton junction the project involves the introduction of tolling booths (wholly within the carriageway) and the physical demolition of the Widnes bypass link elements.

6.3 Assessment Methodology

- 6.3.1 As stated above, this chapter draws on European, national, regional and local policy, both adopted and emerging, so as to enable an assessment to be undertaken of the performance and compliance of the Project against the relevant planning policy framework.
- 6.3.2 This process involves identifying relevant adopted and emerging planning policies at a strategic and non-strategic level. This process will subsequently inform a detailed assessment of the Project against planning policy to understand the extent to which the Project is supported by, complies with, and (sometimes) conflicts with each planning policy.
- 6.3.3 Where potential conflict with planning policy is identified, this chapter identifies possible mitigation measures and enhancement opportunities, as identified within respective Chapters and Technical Annexes of the ES.
- 6.3.4 Whilst this chapter provides a detailed assessment of all relevant planning policies in relation to the Project, each chapter and Technical Annex within the ES draws upon key planning policies applicable to their specific topic area to inform the assessment process.

Spatial Scope

- 6.3.5 The spatial extent of planning policies considered within this assessment is guided by the geographical extent of the potential environmental impacts associated with the Project, as identified during the EIA process. Inevitably, given that the proposed route of the Project lies wholly within the Borough of Halton, the existing and emerging local planning policy framework alongside the wider strategic guidance established with national and regional planning policy documents, has been the primary reference.
- 6.3.6 However, as part of the policy assessment process consideration has been given to policies set within neighbouring Local Planning Authorities, including Liverpool, Warrington, Chester, Ellesmere Port and Vale Royal. This has identified that the majority of transport and highways policies set out within respective adopted UDPs and Local Plans are area-specific policies, and these do not extend beyond their local highway network and Borough boundaries. Whilst these policies have not been assessed within this chapter, the Project is in accordance with and/or does not conflict with the general themes of these policies.

Timeframe

- 6.3.7 Planning policies and plans have been considered for the period up to 2021. This covers the plan period of the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy for the North West, and the anticipated timescale for construction of the Project. A comprehensive list of policy documents considered as part of this policy assessment is set out within the References section of the Environmental Statement.

6.4 Planning Policy Framework

- 6.4.1 The following section of this Chapter establishes the main policies and plans relevant to the Project. The principal objective of this process is to demonstrate that relevant planning policies and legislation at a European, national, regional and local level have been fully considered and assessed against in the preparation of the Project.
- 6.4.2 The key policy documents considered within this policy assessment are set out below. Additional policies and legislation specific to each topic for which EIA took place are considered in the relevant corresponding chapters of this ES for that topic.

European Policy

- a. Habitats Regulations Directive 92/43/EEC.

National Policy

- a. Transport White Paper 1998;
- b. Transport Ten Year Plan 2000;
- c. Transport White Paper "The Future of Transport" 2004;
- d. Transport White Paper "Towards a Sustainable Transport System" (2007);
- e. Heritage White Paper (2007);
- f. Planning Policy Guidance 1, 2, 13, 15, 16, 17; and
- g. Planning Policy Statements 9, 10, 23, 24.

Regional Planning Policy

- a. Regional Spatial Strategy for the North West (2003);
- b. Draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the North West (January 2006), including the Regional Transport Strategy (2003); and
- c. North West Regional Economic Strategy (2006)

Local Planning Policy

- a. Halton Unitary Development Plan (2005);
- b. Emerging Halton Local Development Framework;
- c. Halton Supplementary Planning Guidance and Supplementary Planning Documents;
- d. Halton Local Transport Plan 2.

6.5 European Policy

Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC

- 6.5.1 European Directive 92/43/EEC, which refers to the "*conservation of natural habitats and wild fauna and flora*" requires that an appropriate assessment is undertaken to assess plans and development projects that may have an impact on European (Natura 2000) Sites.
- 6.5.2 Natura 2000 is the name given to the EU wide network of protected areas, recognised as 'sites of community importance.' This includes Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA). The purpose of the appropriate assessment is to consider the impacts of a land-use plan or an application for planning permission against conservation objectives of the site and to ascertain whether it would adversely affect the integrity of the site. Where significant negative effects are identified, the directive requires that alternative options should be examined. Only if no alternatives exist and for imperative reasons of overriding public interest can a plan or project be authorised if it has an adverse effect on the integrity of an SAC or SPA.
- 6.5.3 Under Regulation 48(1) of the Directive, an appropriate assessment needs to be undertaken in respect of any plan or project which:
- a) either alone or in combination with other plans or projects would be likely to have a significant effect on a European Site, and*
 - b) is not directly connected with the management of the site for nature conservation.*
- 6.5.4 Appropriate assessment is also required, as a matter of Government policy, in considering development proposals which may affect potential SPAs, candidate SACs and listed Ramsar Sites for the purpose of considering development proposals affecting them. The plan or project to be assessed does not have to be located within the designated area.
- 6.5.5 The appropriate assessment must be undertaken by the "*competent authority*," as defined in Regulation 6(1) of the Habitats Regulations, which includes any Minister, Government Department, public or statutory undertaker, and public body of any description or person holding a public office. The developer or promoter of the plan or project is required to provide information to satisfy these requirements. English Nature will advise, on request, as to whether any particular plan or project may be likely to have a significant effect on any of these sites. If the decision as to whether or not the development would have a significant effect on the designated site is inconclusive, on the information available, the competent authority is required to make a fuller assessment; in doing so they may ask the developer or other parties for more information.
- Relevance*
- 6.5.6 The Mersey estuary in the vicinity of Runcorn/Widnes may be divided into two, as follows:
- a. The Middle Mersey Estuary, which comprises that part of the Estuary lying to the west of the line of the SJB; and
 - b. The Upper Mersey Estuary, comprising that part lying east of the SJB.
- 6.5.7 The Middle Mersey Estuary is designated as a Special Protection Area (SPA), Ramsar site (in recognition of its conservation value, particularly its birdlife) and as an SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest).
- 6.5.8 The Upper Estuary enjoys no designation under European law. The New Bridge spans the Upper Estuary, some 1.5 km east of the SJB and the boundary with the Middle Estuary. As such there is no direct impact on any area benefiting from European designation. However given the

relative proximity to the Middle Estuary and the potential for indirect impact the policy requirements contained within the Regulations are of relevance.

Assessment

- 6.5.9 This Environmental Statement contains sufficient information to allow an appropriate assessment to be undertaken by the relevant competent authorities in accordance with Regulation 48(1) of the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 1994 (the "Habitats Regulations") in respect of any potential impact arising from the New Bridge. When making decision on applications supported by this Environmental Statement, the competent authorities will be required to undertake an assessment of the Project upon the integrity of the European Site based on the findings set out in this ES. Competent authorities include the Borough Council and Secretaries of State.

Compliance

- 6.5.10 The Environmental Statement has considered the potential impacts of the Project on the integrity of the Middle Mersey Estuary, given its status as a European Site by virtue of the Habitats Regulations. The conclusion in Chapter 10 of this ES is that the Project will not adversely affect the integrity of a European Site, after mitigation and other measures have been taken into consideration. Accordingly, decision makers may make the same conclusion in carrying out any appropriate assessment required for the Project.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.5.11 In carrying out any appropriate assessment, mitigation measures may be included before determining whether a plan or project will have an adverse effect upon a European Site. This ES has considered effects upon such sites and concludes that no residual adverse effect would be suffered to the integrity of such a site.

6.6 Non-Statutory National Policy Guidance

Transport White Paper 1998

- 6.6.1 The Transport White Paper, “*A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone*”, published in 1998, sets out the Government’s aim for a more integrated transport system, focusing in broad terms on improvements to public transport services and a reduction in private car dependency. The White Paper fulfils the Government’s commitment to the creation of a “*better, more integrated transport system to tackle the problems of congestion and pollution*”¹. This approach seeks to achieve a reduction in both congestion and pollution emanating from transport sources.
- 6.6.2 The White Paper seeks a greater degree of integration between transport and land- use planning, so that the two work together to support more sustainable travel choices and reduce the need to travel. This reflects the acknowledged importance of the transport system in moving goods and people, and “*helping to make the economy tick*”². The White Paper identifies the need for good transport to get people to work, and recognises that “*many jobs are based on extensive travel*”³.
- 6.6.3 The White Paper recognises that cars in particular have revolutionised the way we live, bringing great flexibility and widening horizons. However, the potential congestion and thus the unreliability of car based journeys is acknowledged as adding to the costs of business, and undermining competitiveness particularly within towns and cities.
- 6.6.4 In order to achieve these aims, the White Paper establishes a framework which seeks to:
- a. *reduce pollution from transport;*
 - b. *improve air quality;*
 - c. *encourage healthy lifestyles by reducing reliance on cars, and making it easier to walk and cycle more;*
 - d. *reduce noise and vibration from transport; and*
 - e. *improve transport safety for users, those who work in the industry and the general public.*⁴
- 6.6.5 The White Paper considers that the achievement is fundamental to the Government’s objective of developing an integrated transport system to improve health standards, increase access to employment opportunities and with it both create a vibrant economy and provide for a healthier environment for people in which to live.

Relevance

- 6.6.6 The Project will deliver regionally significant new road infrastructure with the primary objective of relieving the current problems of road congestion and unreliability associated with the SJB and its main approaches. The Project also seeks to facilitate the enhancement of public transport, pedestrian and cycle provision across the SJB through reduced journey-times. The Project is essentially transport-based and, as such, the extent to which it assists in achieving the Government’s vision for transport expressed within the White Paper should be considered in this policy assessment.

Assessment

- 6.6.7 The impacts of the Project have been assessed against the framework set out in the White Paper. This assessment has drawn on relevant supporting chapters of the Environmental

1 Page 3, Transport White Paper – A New deal for Transport, Better for Everyone
2 Page 18, Transport White Paper – A New deal for Transport, Better for Everyone
3 Page 18, Transport White Paper – A New deal for Transport, Better for Everyone
4 Page 18, Transport White Paper – A New deal for Transport, Better for Everyone

Statement, including the Transport, Noise Quality, Air Quality and Social and Health assessments. On this basis, an assessment of the proposals against the identified framework is set out below:

Reduction in pollution from transport

- 6.6.8 The New Bridge is designed with an aim of reducing congestion in and around the SJB and thus allowing for easier journeys by car across the Mersey at this point. It is possible therefore that this ease to movement and additional highway capacity will encourage a greater number of car-based journeys, with drivers choosing to use the route where previously they would not have done so simply because it is now easier by comparison to alternatives. This in turn may lead to an increase in car based pollution.
- 6.6.9 Conversely, the New Bridge will deliver a number a number of pollution related benefits:
- a. It will remove the standing congestion that regularly occurs at peak and non peak times on the SJB and its surrounding road network;
 - b. It will enhance the opportunity for bus, cycling and pedestrian movement across the downgraded SJB, which will have a direct beneficial effect on air and noise pollution generated by local based journeys which are currently undertaken by the private car; and
 - c. The introduction of road toll pricing will enable demand to be managed, and produce a lower level of trip rates across the main Halton crossings when compared to a non-tolled scenario.

Air Quality

- 6.6.10 The Air Quality Assessment conducted as part of the EIA has assessed impacts associated with the Project. This has identified that during construction, increased vehicular movements may increase congestion at different receptor locations within the route corridor, potentially resulting in an increase in concentrations and emissions in such instances. The effect of construction traffic emissions is however considered to be negligible, and no significant adverse effects are therefore identified. Additional potential impacts upon air quality include have been identified as construction dust within 200m of construction activity.
- 6.6.11 The Air Quality assessment advises that effects are more likely to arise as a result of the handling, storage and disposals of waste materials during the construction period. The release of known land contaminant during the construction phase of the Project may also lead to health risks for construction workers and local residents. The migration of ground gas or vapours into excavations or buildings could also represent a significant risk in terms of indoor air quality.
- 6.6.12 At operation, the Project is not identified to have a significant impact upon local air quality and it is therefore concluded that emissions within the route corridor will fall within the AQS thresholds.

Encouraging healthy lifestyles by reducing the reliance upon the private car

- 6.6.13 The Project will deliver improved cross-river walking and cycling provision by virtue of modifications to the SJB. The works will provide a wider choice of sustainable transport options rather than just the private car. In providing an enhanced opportunity for undertaking local journeys on foot and by bike, the Project will, as far as is possible, encourage healthier lifestyles.

Reduction in noise and vibration

- 6.6.14 The Noise assessment of the ES (see Chapter 17) advises that noise and vibration will vary considerably during the construction process, albeit these will not be permanent effects. There are some 1,200 residential properties within a 100 metre zone either side of the route corridor. There is the potential that some of the residents of these properties may be affected to some

extent during construction. In addition, there are two schools that may be affected by construction activities. These include West Bank Primary School, and Woodside Primary School. This will range from a low negative to moderate to high negative effect respectively. There is also expected to be a high negative effect at Wigg Island during construction of the Project.

6.6.15 At operation of the Project, the Noise Assessment concludes that the overall benefits of the Project will result in a reduction in the number of people likely to be bothered by road traffic noise. The assessment of people likely to be bothered by vibration shows no real change.

6.6.16 There are anticipated to be moderate positive effects for the housing adjacent to the northern approach to the SJB, the southern approach to the SJB, and all housing adjacent to the Weston Point Expressway. There will be a high positive effect upon the SPA adjacent to the SJB. Four local schools will receive lower noise levels, whilst one (Woodside Primary School) will receive increased levels in excess of the current situation.

Improved transport safety for users

6.6.17 Although the Project may encourage the continued use of the private car, the New Bridge and associated works to the SJB will deliver improved road safety in three main areas:

- a. The route will represent a modern road facility designed to accord with current standards and with ample capacity to accommodate current and future traffic levels. This represents an inherent improvement in road safety;
- b. The removal of the bottleneck currently caused by the SJB and its substandard provision represents a direct and corresponding road safety benefit; and
- c. The enhancement of pedestrian and cycling facilities on the SJB and the incorporation of current standard pedestrian/cycling facilities within the junction arrangements around the site will prioritise road safety, and aim to encourage an increased number of daily pedestrian and cycle movements.

Compliance

6.6.18 The Project is considered to be in general compliance with the objectives of the Transport White Paper.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

6.6.19 The Air Quality assessment identifies a number of mitigation measures to form part of a Construction and Environmental Management Plan (CEMP). These measures have regard to the control of dust during demolition and construction works, and include for the handling of contaminated and waste materials.

6.6.20 During construction and demolition, consideration will need to be given to the passage of vehicles entering and leaving works sites, re-suspended dust, and the operation of site vehicles and temporary traffic diversions.

6.6.21 Appropriate regard to the exhaust emissions of all construction works would form part of the CEMP, involving liaison with the Council's Environmental Health Department. The CEMP would also outline measures to limit disruption to traffic flows on the local road network and thus minimise the risk of increased vehicle emissions due to congested traffic. Specific mitigation measures will also be implemented within each defined construction area.

6.6.22 Measures outlined within the Noise Quality assessment include the adoption of maximum construction noise targets for the Project in accordance with the standards set out in BS 5228:1997. A Noise and Vibration Management Plan will also be established by the contractor in accordance with the good practice guidance. This will aim to ensure that construction noise is

kept to a minimum and within the required thresholds, and incorporate where necessary a series of mitigation measures. The Noise Quality assessment recommends that a detailed assessment of noise levels for specific activities should be undertaken when specific plant and working methods are known.

- 6.6.23 To mitigate noise disturbance during operation, the preferred option is to reduce noise at source, for example by the implementation of roadside noise barriers. These will seek to attenuate noise levels such that the unmitigated moderate noise effect along the Central Expressway will be reduced to a low effect.
- 6.6.24 Assuming effective mitigation measures are implemented during construction and operation of the Project, no significant residual impacts will arise for review.

Transport Ten Year Plan 2000

- 6.6.25 This national strategy for transport aims to deliver the Government's aims of tackling congestion and traffic generated pollution through the enhancement of all forms of transport, including rail and road, public and private and by means that diversify choice. To achieve this vision, the Plan identifies the need for greater integration between land-use and transport planning at a national, regional and local level to deliver a

"wider choice of quicker, safer, more reliable travel on road, rail and other public transport."⁵

- 6.6.26 The Ten Year Plan builds upon the principles set out in the 1998 Transport White Paper. It provides a year on year strategy to reach the goal of transforming the transport system up to 2010 by tackling congestion and pollution, increasing choice and raising standards to make travel safer, more attractive and accessible to all. The Ten Year Plan places an emphasis upon land-use planning and other policies to restrict the growth in private car demand and dependency. Concurrently, a range of alternative actions are identified to tackle rising congestion, including

"adding greater capacity to the most congested transport corridors."⁶

- 6.6.27 The Ten Year Plan identifies good transport as essential to an enhanced quality of life, to a strong economy, and to a better environment. Improving public transport is recognised as vital in reducing social exclusion, particularly for the older generations who have less access to a car.

- 6.6.28 The vision expressed within the Plan aims to provide the following by 2010:

- i. Modern, high-quality public transport, both locally and nationally; and*
- ii. Easier access to jobs and services through improved transport links to regeneration areas and better land-use planning;*

- 6.6.29 A well-maintained road network with real-time driver information for strategic routes and reduced congestion.⁷

- 6.6.30 The Plan expresses the Government's commitment to *"looking for ways to speed up the delivery of new transport infrastructure,"⁸* and the considerable scope for speeding up the procurement of new schemes. The Plan recognises that *"most people now accept that we cannot rely on road building as a sustainable long-term solution to the problems of traffic growth and*

⁵ Page 3, Transport Ten Year Plan 2000

⁶ Para 6.27, Pg 37, Transport Ten Year Plan 2000

⁷ Para 1.4, Pg 7, Transport Ten Year Plan 2000

⁸ Para. 6.3, Pg 26, Transport Ten Year Plan 2000

*congestion.*⁹” Road-building is not considered to represent “*the answer*¹⁰” long-term to addressing the problems of road congestion and pollution. However, until greater integration between land-use planning and other policies begins to take effect, the Plan identifies a range of alternative actions to tackle rising congestion, including:

- a. *Building bypasses to take traffic away from towns and villages and smooth traffic flows;*
- b. *Improving larger junctions to reduce accidents and remove bottlenecks;*
- c. *Adding capacity to the most congested corridors, largely by widening existing trunk roads.*¹¹

6.6.31 In all cases, the Plan advises that each option will be assessed using the New Approach to Appraisal (NATA) to ensure that decisions are based on a balanced view of the economic, environmental, safety, accessibility and integration implications of development. This will include all road schemes incorporating high standards of environmental mitigation to ensure that, so far as reasonably possible, noise and the impact on biodiversity, the landscape and heritage are minimised. The Plan advises of a

*“strong presumption against schemes that would significantly affect environmentally sensitive sites, or important species, habitats or landscapes.”*¹²”

6.6.32 The Plan concludes by advising of the Government’s key objectives for the next ten years, including the development of major bus infrastructure schemes in many cities and larger towns, and improved local traffic management and better maintained and safer roads.

Relevance

6.6.33 The Ten Year Plan seeks to balance two competing elements, namely the requirement to restrict the future growth in private car demand and dependency whilst acknowledging the current role of the private car and the need to tackle rising congestion. This has direct relevance to the New Bridge in that the Project fundamentally seeks to deliver a road based solution to an existing congestion problem but whilst also seeking to enhance the opportunity for non car travel.

6.6.34 The other elements of the Ten Year Plan, in terms of its requirement to employ NATA, and to have regard to biodiversity, landscape and heritage matters in considering road schemes are also directly relevant to the Project.

Assessment

6.6.35 The extent to which the Project conforms to the key elements of the vision set out within the Ten Year Plan is discussed below.

Deliver a wider choice of quicker, safer and more reliable travel via road, rail and other public transport

6.6.36 The New Bridge will directly deliver a wider choice of quicker, safer and more reliable road and public transport travel through both the provision of the New Bridge and the proposed works to Silver Jubilee Bridge. In summary the benefits comprise:

- a. Quicker, non-congested passage across SJB primarily benefiting public transport and local traffic;

⁹ Para. 6.26, Pg 36, Transport Ten Year Plan 2000

¹⁰ Para. 6.26, Pg 36, Transport Ten Year Plan 2000

¹¹ Para. 6.27, Pg 37, Transport Ten Year Plan 2000

¹² Para. 6.29, Pg 38, Transport Ten Year Plan 2000

- b. Safer travel over both Mersey Gateway Bridge (in compliance with current design requirements) and Silver Jubilee Bridge (given the reduction in usage/vehicle numbers and the works to provide upgraded pedestrian/cycling facilities);
- c. More reliable travel resulting from the removal of uncertainty as to journey timing that is currently caused by the severely congested Silver Jubilee Bridge. This latter point applies to both local, sub regional and inter regional traffic and directly to public transport provision; and
- d. Remove the impact on non-river crossing local traffic that occurs in both Runcorn and Widnes as a knock-on effect of congestion on the Silver Jubilee Bridge.

Contribute towards social inclusion

6.6.37 The Project will make a significant contribution to tackling social exclusion. In summary the key elements comprise:

- a. The enhanced opportunities for locally arising from travel between Runcorn and Widnes, allowing wider cross-river access to jobs and services. Appropriate provision within the tolling powers will allow a flexible approach to toll levels to be adopted; and
- b. The economic uplift that will arise as a direct result of the project. Mersey Gateway Bridge and the associated Silver Jubilee Bridge works and the de-linking will serve as a catalyst for the economic and social regeneration of South Widnes and Runcorn. The Regeneration Strategy and LDF policy framework which are under preparation in parallel with Mersey Gateway Bridge will maximise the prospect of capturing these regeneration benefits.

6.6.38 On both counts therefore there is a real prospect that the New Bridge will make a significant contribution towards enhancing social exclusion.

Improve access to jobs and services

6.6.39 The Project will provide for improved access to jobs and services on these three fronts.

- a. In terms of the enhanced opportunity for local travel across the estuary between Widnes and Runcorn by both car and non car modes, including a more frequent and more reliable public transport system;
- b. In terms of the removal of congestion and thus the enhanced certainty in vehicle journey times for the wider regional and sub regional journeys; and
- c. Improved communication and accessibility will encourage existing businesses to expand; encourage new business to set-up; bring new jobs and generate wealth; and make it easier to travel to work.

Environmental Impacts

6.6.40 The potential environmental impacts of the Project have been robustly assessed. In summary the key findings are that:

- a. There will be no significant impacts upon noise and air quality arising from the operation of the Mersey Gateway Project;
- b. The impacts of the Project upon ecology will be negligible;
- c. There will be no adverse integrity upon the European Site, SSSI and Ramsar; and
- d. The Project will generate only minor effects on biodiversity within the study area during construction.

Compliance

6.6.41 The Project is considered to be in general compliance with the objectives of the Ten Year Plan. Whilst it promotes a road based solution to a current congestion problem, the solution will

effectively address the issue it also delivers wider road safety, access and social inclusion benefits whilst minimising the scale of environmental impact.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.6.42 As the Project is considered to be in compliance with The Ten Year Plan, no mitigation measures are proposed, and no residual effects have been identified for review.

Transport White Paper “The Future of Transport” (July 2004)

- 6.6.43 In July 2004 the Government published its second Transport White Paper “*The Future of Transport: A network for 2030.*” The Paper sets out national transport policy, and emphasises the importance that the Government has placed upon the system of Local Transport Plans to deliver transport / accessibility improvements at a local level. In particular, the White Paper establishes a vision for the delivery of a range of transport modes by 2030 as follows:

- a. A more coherent road network providing a more reliable and freeflowing service for both personal travel and freight, with people able to make informed choices about how and where they travel;
- b. A rail network which provides a fast, reliable and efficient service, particularly for interurban journeys and commuting into large urban areas;
- c. Bus services that are reliable, flexible, convenient and tailored to local needs;
- d. Making walking and cycling a real alternative for local trips; and
- e. Ports and airports providing improved international and domestic links.

- 6.6.44 The Transport White Paper recognises the national need for a transport network that can meet the challenges of a growing economy and the increasing demand for travel. The White Paper advises that where necessary, road networks should be enhanced by “*new capacity where it is needed, assuming that any environmental and social costs are justified.*”¹³

- 6.6.45 The White Paper advises that an increasing proportion of journeys are now made by car. The Paper acknowledges that the shift towards car journeys has provided huge benefits for many people, “*opening up new opportunities*”¹⁴ for direct travel between destinations. However, the White Paper advises that cars can also have an impact on the environment and congestion, and thus identifies the need to

*“encourage those with cars to consider other forms of transport, particularly for short journeys.”*¹⁵

- 6.6.46 The Government’s aim as expressed within the White Paper is to provide a “*more reliable and freer-flowing system for motorists, other road users, and businesses.*”¹⁶ This approach should provide travellers with the opportunity to make informed choices about how and when they travel, and thus minimise the adverse impact of road traffic on the environment and other people.

- 6.6.47 A series of ‘smarter choices’ are proposed within the White Paper to promote the use of alternative means of transport, including School Travel Plans, Workplace Travel Plans, and personalised journey planning. The White Paper advises that the Government will continue to advocate this approach, recognising the importance of walking, cycling and public transport in providing reliable alternatives to the private car.

¹³ Para. 12, Pg 14, The Future of Transport, A Network for 2030

¹⁴ Para. 1.7, Pg 21, The Future of Transport, A Network for 2030

¹⁵ Para. 1.8, Pg 22, The Future of Transport, A Network for 2030

¹⁶ Pg 34, The Future of Transport, A Network for 2030

- 6.6.48 Where new road-building is required, the White Paper encourages good quality transport infrastructure which should “*complement or enhance the character of its local area.*”¹⁷ Transport schemes are also required to improve the quality of life for local communities, designed in ways that offer “*environmental gains, reduce community severance, and improve air quality wherever possible.*”¹⁸
- 6.6.49 In line with the 1998 Transport White Paper commitment to a presumption against transport schemes that damage landscapes, townscapes, biodiversity and the aquatic environment, the 2004 White Paper reiterates that:
- a. *there continues to be a presumption against schemes that would significantly affect environmentally sensitive sites, or important species or habitats;*
 - b. *the impact of schemes on the environment and communities is monitored;*
 - c. *design standards take account of environmental concerns and the impacts of any new development are kept to a minimum, with mitigation measures implemented to a high standard;*
 - d. *poor planning does not sever communities;*
 - e. *the amount of greenfield land taken for development is kept to a minimum;*
 - f. *biodiversity is respected, and wherever possible, enhanced, in our planning, decision making, delivery and network management processes;*
 - g. *the marine environment in coastal waters is protected from shipping;*
 - h. *all groundwater and surface waters are protected by controlling pollution from sources such as roads and airport runways; and*
 - i. *noise impacts from transport are reduced and mitigated, for example around airports.*¹⁹
- 6.6.50 Overall, the White Paper expresses the Government’s commitment to a measured and balanced approach to ensure that transport delivers the economic and social benefits that underpin our prosperity and welfare, and makes a positive contribution towards our environmental objectives.

Relevance

- 6.6.51 As with the Ten Year plan, the 2004 White Paper seeks to take a balanced approach to transport provision, acknowledging the role of the private car and the need to cater for its ongoing use whilst also supporting the provision of non car transport modes.
- 6.6.52 As a project which seeks to deliver a road based solution to an existing congestion problem, but also enhance non car modes of Transport, the provisions of the White Paper are of direct relevance to the assessment of the Project.

Assessment

- 6.6.53 The extent to which the Project conforms to the vision of the White Paper is discussed below. This framework against which the proposals are assessed represents a summary of the key aims expressed within the White Paper.

Deliver a coherent road network

- 6.6.54 The Project will provide new, high-quality and modern road infrastructure, in accordance with the White Paper’s approach of delivering new capacity to the road network where this is required. The Project will provide for reliable and efficient local and sub-regional vehicular movements by virtue of relieving road congestion around the Silver Jubilee Bridge. This will

¹⁷ Para. 10.7, Pg 108, The Future of Transport: A Network for 2030
¹⁸ Para. 10.7, Pg 108, The Future of Transport: A Network for 2030
¹⁹ Para. 10.29, Pg 117, The Future of Transport: A Network for 2030

include providing an efficient and direct road link between Junction 12 of the M56, and Junction 7 of the M62 which is regarded as a key regional transport corridor in both the North West Regional Spatial Strategy and the North West Regional Economic Strategy. Its overall contribution will be to directly deliver a more coherent network.

Deliver reliable and efficient public transport connections by bus and rail

- 6.6.55 The Project will deliver improved cross-river public transport linkages by virtue of modifications to the Silver Jubilee Bridge. The works to the Silver Jubilee Bridge include the implementation of bus lanes to provide an efficient and reliable means of cross-river public transport. Bus links into both Runcorn and Widnes will be improved as the Silver Jubilee Bridge de-linking will also be taken forward as part of the regeneration of both Runcorn and Widnes. The de-linking is delivered (in Widnes) or facilitated (in Runcorn) by the Project.

Promote walking and cycling as a real alternative to the private car

- 6.6.56 The proposed modifications to the Silver Jubilee Bridge include pedestrian and cycling facilities, providing for a safe and attractive opportunity for enhanced walking and cycling. The provision would represent a genuine alternative to the private car for locally arising journeys. A new, dedicated, pedestrian footway will be introduced on the Silver Jubilee Bridge, accessible for people with disabilities through measures such as dropped kerbs, tactile paving, and safe crossing provisions. Pedestrians and cyclists will not be allowed on the New Bridge.

Impacts upon townscapes, landscapes, and aquatic environment

- 6.6.57 The Project is a major infrastructure proposal which will inevitably have an effect upon its immediate context. These impacts are wide ranging in scale and effect and are considered in detail later within this chapter and described in this Environmental Statement when consideration is given to the more detailed planning policies. In brief, the assessment finds as follows:
- a. That the New Bridge will become a notable feature within the estuary, sitting alongside and complementary to Silver Jubilee Bridge;
 - b. That the New Bridge, in particular that part which spans the estuary, is in keeping with and is readily accommodated within the grand scale of the estuary setting; and
 - c. The Project will generate only minor effects on biodiversity within the study area during construction.

Compliance

- 6.6.58 The proposals are largely in compliance with the aims and aspirations of the White Paper. The main areas of potential divergence are in relation to the last point of impact upon townscapes, landscape and natural environments.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.6.59 To minimise the impacts arising the Project upon the natural, built and historic environment, a series of mitigation measures are proposed. These are set out within the corresponding chapters of the ES, including the Landscape and Visual Amenity assessment (see Chapter 12). These measures include the appropriate use of construction techniques, suitable means of landscaping to protect and conserve the existing fabric of the area, careful design, and the appropriate use of construction materials to reflect wherever possible the existing character of the area.

Heritage Protection White Paper (2007)

- 6.6.60 The Heritage White Paper reflects the importance of the heritage protection system in preserving the existing heritage for people to enjoy now and in the future. This approach is based around three core principles, namely:
- a. Developing a unified approach to the historic environment;
 - b. Maximising opportunities for inclusion and involvement; and
 - c. Supporting sustainable communities by putting the historic environment at the heart of an effective planning system.²⁰
- 6.6.61 Heritage is recognised as having a crucial role to play in delivering sustainable communities. Protecting heritage is an integral part of the planning system. As part of the reforms proposed in the White Paper, new measures will be implemented to clarify and strengthen the protection afforded to World Heritage Sites.
- 6.6.62 The White Paper also outlines proposals to ‘streamline’ the heritage consent regime by removing the current systems of Listed Building Consent and Scheduled Monument Consent, and replacing with a new, unified consent for Registered Buildings and Archaeological Sites called Historic Asset Consent.

Relevance

- 6.6.63 The proposed alignment of the Project lies upstream of the Grade II listed SJB, and the Grade II* listed Aethelfleda Railway Bridge, and in close proximity to the West Bank and Victoria Square Conservation Areas. It also proposes works to the SJB. As such the issues raised within the White Paper are of relevance in an assessment of the Project.

Assessment

- 6.6.64 The Landscape and Visual Assessment exercise and the Cultural Heritage assessment undertaken as part of this Environmental Statement has conducted a full review of the impacts of the New Bridge against a range of receptors. With particular reference to historic buildings matters, the assessment has considered the proposal in relation to the listed SJB and the railway bridge, with particular regard to any effects on the historical context and setting of both structures. The assessment concludes in respect of landscape and visual impact as follows:
- a. That the New Bridge, in particular that part which spans the estuary, is in keeping with and is readily accommodated within the grand of the estuary setting; and
 - b. That the quality of the bridge design, its lightness of cabling and structure and choice of materials, ensures the potential visual impact is reduced and that it has the capacity to be considered as an iconic structure in its own right.
- 6.6.65 The assessment acknowledges that the New Bridge will be mainly seen within the same sweep of view as the SJB and, to a lesser extent, the railway bridge. However, it concludes that given the relative separation between the New Bridge and the line of the SJB and the Aethelfleda railway bridge (1.8 km), the scale of the setting, the exemplary design features of the New Bridge and the clear difference in design and style between the New Bridge and SJB, then the relationship is adjudged to be one of appropriate co-existence. It is concluded that the New Bridge will become a notable feature within the estuary, sitting alongside and complementary to SJB, and on this basis the relationship between Mersey Gateway Bridge and SJB is considered to be beneficial.

20

- 6.6.66 With regard to Cultural Heritage matters, the assessment acknowledges that the new structures would affect the current setting of the listed bridge structures, introducing a new built element into what is currently an open estuary setting. However, the assessment concludes that the impacts of the New Bridge would be of low negative significance upon the SJB and Aethelfleda Railway Bridge.
- 6.6.67 The specific works to the SJB are minor, primarily involving reconfiguration of the carriageway to accommodate revised car, pedestrian and cycle facilities. The work will maintain the character of the existing structure and no heritage conflict arises.

Compliance

- 6.6.68 The design process of the Project has sought throughout to minimise the visual impacts of the New Bridge upon the setting of existing Grade II listed SJB, and the Grade II* listed Aethelfleda Railway Bridge, in recognition of their historic importance and townscape contribution. The proposed works to the SJB to accommodate enhanced cross-river public transport, walking and cycle links will also adopt a sympathetic approach to protect and conserve the existing character of this important structure. On both counts therefore the Project is considered to be in accordance with the provisions of the White Paper.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.6.69 Given the broad compliance with the policy provisions, no mitigation is proposed on this specific matter and there are no residual impacts to review.

Transport White Paper “Towards a Sustainable Transport System” (October 2007)

- 6.6.70 The Government released its latest Transport White Paper in October 2007. The document will be subject to formal consultation in summer 2008. The Paper itself has three key aims, as follows:
- a. To describe how the Government is responding to the recommendations made in the Eddington Study to improve transport’s contribution to economic growth and productivity;
 - b. To set out the Department for Transport’s ambitious policy and investment plans for the period to 2013-2014; and
 - c. To propose a new approach to longer-term transport strategy, building on the model recommended by Sir Rod Eddington.
- 6.6.71 The Eddington Study confirms that transport “*is vital to the economy*”²¹. Since the delivery of reduced carbon emissions and economic growth are mutually consistent, the Government sets out five explicit transport goals, as follows:
- i. *Maximise the competitiveness and productivity of the economy;*
 - ii. *Address climate change, by cutting emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases;*
 - iii. *Protect people’s safety, security and health;*
 - iv. *Improve the quality of life;*
 - v. *Promote greater equality of opportunity.*
- 6.6.72 The White Paper states that whilst there is a vital link between transport and the economy, the Eddington Study advocates a “focused approach, targeted on congested and growing cities and their catchment areas, and key inter-urban links and international gateways where congestion poses the most serious threat to economic growth.”²² Whilst investment in new transport

²¹ Pg 7, Towards a Sustainable Transport System White Paper

²² Para. 1.17, Pg 21, Towards a Sustainable Transport System White Paper

infrastructure may represent the only answer in some circumstances, the Eddington Study advises that other options should also be explored, including:

- a. Road pricing;
- b. Regulation;
- c. Traffic management;
- d. Encouragement of smarter travel choices;
- e. Travel Planning; and
- f. Development of new technologies.

- 6.6.73 The White Paper states that the right action must be taken to address congestion problems. If all modes are congested over a sustained peak period, the White Paper states that the *“solution may well need to involve increased capacity.”*²³ The White Paper acknowledges that local road pricing schemes could also have environmental benefits, such as a reduction in carbon emissions and air pollutants. There is also an emphasis towards reducing accident-risk across all modes of travel, in particular road deaths.
- 6.6.74 The White Paper identifies the ongoing role of public transport in helping to reduce carbon emissions and congestion across the highway network, and the *“health benefits of cycling and walking”*²⁴. Furthermore, the White Paper states that the *“benefits of creating jobs in regeneration areas should also be scored in the value-for-money assessment, provided that this is not at the expense of other regeneration areas”*²⁵.
- 6.6.75 The White Paper expresses the Government’s vision for the period to 2013-2014. This includes making provision for essential and committed expenditure whereby maintaining national and local roads in decent condition, supporting passenger rail services, and funding local authority investment plans. The White Paper also sets out the Government’s proposed exploration of the scope for road pricing across the wider UK road network, and *“congestion charging has a role”*²⁶ to play in tackling urban congestion, backed by continued investment in public transport.
- 6.6.76 The Government recognises the importance of reducing people’s need to travel to achieving the climate change and equality-of-opportunity goals. The planning system should also seek to ensure that major new developments are located where they can make the best use of existing transport links and to facilitate sustainable transport choices.

Relevance

- 6.6.77 The Project is essentially transport-based and, as such, the extent to which it assists in achieving the Government’s vision for transport expressed within the White Paper should be considered in this policy assessment.

Assessment

- 6.6.78 An assessment of the development proposals against the Government goals expressed within the White Paper is undertaken below:
- Maximise the competitiveness and productivity of the economy;
- 6.6.79 Mersey Gateway Project will serve as catalyst towards the regeneration of Southern Widnes and Runcorn. The Regeneration Strategy and emerging LDF policy framework which are being prepared in parallel with the Project proposals will ensure that the potential regeneration

²³ Para. 2.14, Pg 28, Towards a Sustainable Transport System White Paper

²⁴ Para. 2.67, Pg 39, Towards a Sustainable Transport System White Paper

²⁵ Para. 2.79, Pg 28, Towards a Sustainable Transport System White Paper

²⁶ Pg 49, Towards a Sustainable Transport System White Paper

benefits are captured as far as is possible. The Project will also provide for improved cross-river access to jobs and services within the wider Liverpool City-Region.

Address climate change by cutting emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases;

- 6.6.80 The Project will encourage non-car journeys and represent a direct improvement to non-car linkages. The enhancements are anticipated to result in an increase in daily travel to work cycle journeys and an increase in leisure use, and induce less reliance upon the private car.

Protect people's safety, security and health;

- 6.6.81 To enhance road user safety, the New Bridge will not incorporate any formal pedestrian or cycle links. However, the modifications to the SJB will provide safe and efficient means of non-car cross-river movement, encourage increased levels of walking and cycling, and thus promote healthier lifestyles. On the SJB, the paths will be accessible for people with disabilities through measures such as dropped kerbs, tactile paving, and safe crossing provisions.
- 6.6.82 The de-linking of the SJB from the Weston Point and Bridgewater Expressways, and the east Widnes by-pass, will significantly reduce the number of vehicular movements around the SJB. This reduction in vehicle movements will serve to enhance road user safety across the local highway network, and within the populated central areas of Runcorn and Widnes, and reduce the likelihood of accidents.

Improve the quality of life;

- 6.6.83 The Project will enhance access to existing jobs and key services by private car, bus, walking and cycling, and create new local employment opportunities. The Project also encourages the use of non-car travel to reduce carbon emissions and noise pollution, and thus create environmental benefits at both a local and regional scale.

Promote greater equality of opportunity.

- 6.6.84 The Project will deliver enhanced public transport, walking and cycle links across the SJB. This more integrated approach will provide non-car owners with a reliable, safe and efficient means of cross-river access to employment opportunities and services which is not currently available to them.

Compliance

- 6.6.85 The Project is considered to be in general compliance with the aims of the White Paper.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.6.86 No mitigation measures are required, and thus no residual impacts arise for review.

6.7 Adopted National Planning Policy

6.7.1 National land-use planning guidance is expressed through a range of Planning Policy Guidance Notes (PPGs) produced by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). These are being updated and replaced with Planning Policy Statements (PPS) under the Government's reforms of the planning system contained in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. Several of these Statements have already been published. The national policy documents of relevance to the Project are discussed below:

Planning Policy Statement 1: Delivering Sustainable Development (2005)

6.7.2 PPS1 provides broad policy guidance on delivering sustainable development, and should be read alongside other national policy statements. The Government's key objective is to encourage Local Planning Authorities to bring forward land of a suitable quality in appropriate locations for housing, retail, commercial and industrial development. An important principle established within PPS1 is the need to encourage patterns of new development which reduce the need to travel by private car.

6.7.3 PPS1 advises that the Government is committed to protecting and enhancing the quality of the natural and historic environment, in both rural and urban areas. To satisfy this objective, PPS1 advises that

"a high level of protection should be given to most valued townscapes and landscapes, wildlife habitats and natural resources."²⁷

6.7.4 With regard to all forms of new development, PPS1 advises that *"significant adverse impacts associated with development should be avoided and alternative options which might reduce or eliminate those impacts pursued."²⁸* Where adverse impacts are unavoidable, planning authorities and developers are required to consider possible mitigation measures to minimise the impacts of development. Emphasis is placed upon Local Planning Authorities to promote and facilitate good quality development, which is both sustainable and consistent with their Plans. Planning authorities are also encouraged 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."²⁹

6.7.5 As part of the Government's sustainability objectives, Local Planning Authorities are advised to seek

"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."³⁰

6.7.6 PPS1 also advocates a reduction in the need for people to travel, encouraging accessible public transport provision to secure more sustainable patterns of transport development. The guidance states that the planning process should also actively manage patterns of urban growth to make

²⁷ Para. 17, PPS1 Delivering Sustainable Development (2005)
²⁸ Para. 19, PPS1 Delivering Sustainable Development (2005)
²⁹ Para. 27(ii), PPS1 Delivering Sustainable Development (2005)
³⁰ Para. 27(v), PPS1 Delivering Sustainable Development (2005)

the “fullest use of public transport³¹” and focus development in existing centres and near to major public transport interchanges.

6.7.7 PPS1 ‘*Planning and Climate Change - Supplement to PPS1*’ (2007) sets out how spatial planning should contribute to reducing emissions and stabilising climate change when providing for the new homes, jobs and infrastructure to serve communities, and contribute towards the shaping of places without having an adverse impact upon climate change. It aims to:

- i. *Ensure planning policy contributes towards the Government’s Climate Change Programme;*
- ii. *Deliver energy efficient homes;*
- iii. *Deliver sustainable patterns of urban growth; and*
- iv. *Secure development that shape places resilient to the effects of climate change in ways consistent with social cohesion and inclusion.*

6.7.8 In identifying sites for development, Local Authorities are encouraged to take into account the location of sites and whether there is, or the potential for, a realistic choice of access by means other than the private car and for opportunities to service the site through sustainable transport, to encourage the use of alternative transport modes to the private car, and contribute towards a reduction in carbon emissions.

Relevance

6.7.9 PPS1 is both general and wide ranging and is relevant to the New Bridge in terms of its broad guidance as to development principles, accessibility, transport modes and climate change. The extent to which the New Bridge satisfies these overall objectives is a factor for assessment.

Assessment

6.7.10 The extent to which the Project conforms to the Government’s key principles as set out within PPS1 is discussed below.

Improve access to employment and services by non-car modes of transport

6.7.11 The Project will provide for improved access to jobs and services on two main fronts.

- a. In terms of the enhanced opportunity for local travel across the estuary between Widnes and Runcorn by both car and non car modes, including a more frequent and more reliable public transport system; and
- b. In terms of the removal of congestion and thus the enhanced certainty in journey times for the wider regional and sub regional journeys.

6.7.12 Both benefits would deliver a direct improvement in the options for accessing employment and services.

Reduce reliance upon the private car

6.7.13 In removing the congestion caused by the SJB, the Project will allow more efficient movements by private car. This will generate a permanent positive impact on journey times, and improved reliability. The reduction of congestion and the delivery of a more efficient highway network would in fact meet one of the governments transport policy aims. However, this ease of movement, the additional highway capacity and the increased reliability of journey times may have the effect of encouraging the use of the private car.

³¹ Para. 27(vii), PPS1 Delivering Sustainable Development (2005)

- 6.7.14 However, whilst acknowledging this potential encouragement to private car use, there are a number of accompanying elements which would act as a counter balance. These comprise:
- a. The enhanced provision (allowing improvements in frequency, reliability etc.) for public transport across the SJB, which will assist in improving cross river journey times and reliability of services;
 - b. The enhanced provision for the sustainable movement of pedestrians across the SJB. New facilities, alongside improved signage and the provision of pedestrian routes to local facilities each side of the river will also have a positive impact upon pedestrian trips;
 - c. Enhanced cycle provision across the SJB, including signage and dedicated routing, is expected to result in an increase in daily travel to work cycle trips. An increase in leisure cycle trips is also predicted; and
 - d. The implementation of tolling on both the New Bridge and the SJB to manage private car demand.

6.7.15 Each of these elements are materially significant and can be set against any implied encouragement to private car use that will be delivered by the Project.

Protect the existing natural and historic environment

- 6.7.16 It has been identified that the Project will have the following impacts upon the natural and historic environment:
- a. That the New Bridge, in particular that part which spans the is in keeping with and is readily accommodated within the grand scale of the estuary setting;
 - b. That the quality of the bridge design, its lightness of cabling and structure and of materials ensures that it has the capacity to be considered as an iconic structure in its own right; and
 - c. The known impacts and anticipated potential impacts of the Project upon archaeological and historic sites within the route corridor will in general be of low to neutral significance.

Regeneration benefits

- 6.7.17 The Project will serve as a catalyst towards the regeneration of Southern Widnes and Runcorn. With regards to direct and indirect employment matters the benefit is delivered at three main levels as follows:
- a. The creation of 243 new jobs within the tightly defined Regeneration Areas;
 - b. The creation of between 800 and 1300 (30 year discounted) new jobs as part of the wider regeneration proposals within which the New Bridge will serve as a catalyst to deliver; and
 - c. Wider sub-regional employment, in particular as a result of cumulative effects.
- 6.7.18 There will also be physical regeneration of Southern Widnes in terms of infrastructure de-linking and removal, alongside environmental improvement arising both directly from the New Bridge as part of the wider regeneration strategy.

Compliance

- 6.7.19 To relieve road congestion around the SJB and its main approaches, the Project will deliver modern, high-quality road infrastructure to facilitate the efficient cross-river movement of the private car. In order to encourage a reduction in car travel and promote the use of alternative transport modes in accordance with the policy objectives expressed within PPS1, the Project will enhance public transport, walking and cycling links across the SJB to deliver efficient and reliable means of non-car travel within Runcorn and Widnes, and reduce the associated journey times of each transport mode.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.7.20 Given the broad compliance with the policy provisions of PPS1, no mitigation is proposed and no residual impacts arise for review.

Planning Policy Guidance 2: Green Belts (1995)

- 6.7.21 PPG2 establishes the history and extent of Green Belts, and explains their purpose. It describes how Green Belts are designated and their land safeguarded. Green Belt land-use objectives are outlined and the presumption against inappropriate development is established. The guidance confirms the five purposes of Green Belts as follows:

- i. Checking unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas;*
- ii. Preventing neighbouring towns from merging into one another;*
- iii. Assisting in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;*
- iv. Preserving the setting and special character of historic towns; and*
- v. Assisting in urban regeneration, by recycling of derelict land.*

- 6.7.22 The guidance goes on to advise that following designation as Green Belt, the use of land in them has a positive role to play in fulfilling the following objectives:

- i. To provide opportunities for access to the open countryside for the urban population;*
- ii. To provide opportunities for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation near urban areas;*
- iii. To retain attractive landscapes, and enhance landscapes, near to where people live;*
- iv. To improve damaged and derelict land around towns;*
- v. To secure nature conservation interest; and*
- vi. To retain land in agricultural, forestry and related uses.*

- 6.7.23 PPG2 advises that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open and that the most important attribute of Green Belts is identified as openness. PPG2 advises that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt, and that the construction of new buildings in the Green Belt is considered to constitute inappropriate development unless it is for the following purposes:

- i. Agriculture and Forestry;*
- ii. Outdoor recreational facilities, and for other uses of land which preserve the openness of the Green Belt and which do not conflict with the purposes of including land in it;*
- iii. Limited extension, alteration or replacement of existing dwellings;*
- iv. Limited infilling in existing villages; and*
- v. Limited infilling or redevelopment of major existing developed sites identified in adopted local plans.³²*

- 6.7.24 In respect of how decision makers should consider proposals which constitute inappropriate development, the guidance states:

“inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt. It is for an applicant to show why permission should be granted. Very special circumstances to justify inappropriate development will not exist unless the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.”

- 6.7.25 When any large-scale development or redevelopment of land occurs in the Green Belt (including mineral extraction, the tipping of waste, and road and other infrastructure

³² Para 3.4, PPG2 Green Belts (1995)

developments or improvements), PPG2 advises that *“it should, so far as possible contribute to the achievement of the objectives for the use of land in Green Belts,³³”* as identified above.

6.7.26 This approach applies to all large-scale developments, irrespective of whether they are considered to constitute appropriate development in the Green Belt.

6.7.27 PPG2 also advises that the visual amenities of the Green Belt:

“should not be injured by proposals for development within or conspicuous from the Green Belt which, although they would not prejudice the purposes of including land in Green Belts, might be visually detrimental by reason of their siting, materials or design.³⁴”

Relevance

6.7.28 The Project oversails Wigg Island, a discrete parcel of Green Belt land situated on the south side of the estuary to the north of Astmoor Industrial Estate. The Project affects this area of Green Belt in two ways:

- a. Physically, in that the New Bridge supporting bridge piers will be within the Green Belt, occupying land at ground level, with the bridge deck occupying airspace; and
- b. Visually, in that the carriageway, piers and supporting infrastructure as well as the vehicles using the bridge will be visible from this area of Green Belt and from view points that enjoy views over the Green Belt.

6.7.29 Both elements are relevant to the policy framework established in the guidance and an appropriate assessment of the project against the provisions of PPG2 is required.

Assessment

6.7.30 The key premise to consider is whether the proposed physical works comprise inappropriate development within the Green Belt. In defining inappropriate development the guidance allows for a number of exceptions, one of which is:

“essential facilities... for uses of land which preserve the openness of Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it”

6.7.31 It is accepted that the physical development associated with the bridge piers and the oversailing of the Bridge deck constitutes inappropriate development. On this basis the assessment needs to consider first whether the necessary very special circumstances exist to justify the proposals, before going on to consider visual impact.

6.7.32 In considering whether very special circumstances exist, the assessment considers matters as follows:

- a. The scale of the development (i.e. the harm in itself);
- b. An assessment of the proposal against the purposes of Green Belt, to enable a further understanding of harm;
- c. An assessment of the proposals against the objectives of the Green Belt; and
- d. An assessment of visual impacts.

Scale of development

6.7.33 The Wigg Island Green Belt parcel comprises approximately 161 ha; the land take for the bridge pier elements is likely to be in the order of c. 0.12 hectares of ground area. The scale of land

³³ Para. 3.13, PPG2 Green Belts (1995)

loss is therefore minimal, which in itself limits the extent of harm. Therefore, whilst the built development is harmful by way of inappropriateness, it is possible to conclude that the extent of harm beyond this is clearly minimal.

Assessment against the Green Belt purposes

- 6.7.34 The stated purposes of Green Belt provide a framework against which to consider the Project, and thus inform a conclusion in respect of potential harm. This exercise is undertaken below:

To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas

- 6.7.35 The Project and the accompanying development or pier structures within the defined green Belt will have no direct impact on urban sprawl which is the primary thrust of this statement of purpose. It does however introduce an urban form of development with the accompanying traffic and activity into an area whose character is not currently urban; on this basis therefore it could be concluded that the Project raises limited conflict with this purpose.

To prevent neighbouring towns from merging

- 6.7.36 The Project and the accompanying development of pier structures within the defined Green Belt will not encourage any physical merging of the towns of Widnes and Runcorn. It does however create a new link between the two towns which could be interpreted as a form of merging. As with Paragraph 6.7.35 above, the Project does not offend the primary thrust of the stated purpose, but raises a minor impact.

To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment

- 6.7.37 The proposed works will involve the take up of c 0.12 ha of Green belt land. Whilst this take up of Green Belt land could be considered to represent encroachment it is in itself minimal and will not lead to any further encroachment or loss of land.

To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns

- 6.7.38 This purpose is not applicable to either the Project or the specific works proposed within the Green Belt.

To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land

- 6.7.39 The New Bridge proposals will act as a catalyst to the regeneration of Widnes and Runcorn. The LDF policy framework exercise will serve to capture this benefit as much as is possible.

- 6.7.40 On balance therefore, the proposal could be considered to raise a conflict with one green Belt purpose (land take or encroachment), a concern in respect of the urban sprawl and merging purposes, and an advancement of the regeneration purpose. On this basis it is possible to conclude that the harm to Green Belt purposes is not materially significant.

Assessment against Green Belt objectives

- 6.7.41 Having established the position on Green Belt harm, it is possible in accordance with paragraph 3.13 to consider whether the proposal contributes to Green belt objectives. This exercise is undertaken below:

To provide opportunities for access to the open countryside for the urban population;

- 6.7.42 The Project will result in the loss of approximately 0.12 hectares of Green Belt from an overall area of 161 hectares. The physical works will not therefore materially limit the opportunity that Wigg Island provides for continued access to the open countryside by the urban population.

To provide opportunities for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation near urban areas;

- 6.7.43 The Project and the siting of piers within the Green Belt would not prejudice the opportunity for this area of Green Belt to continue to be utilised by people for outdoor sport and recreation. However, the existing rights of the Astmoor Shooting Club at this location will be removed on safety grounds.

To retain attractive landscapes, and enhance landscapes, near to where people live;

- 6.7.44 The Project crosses the Wigg Island Green Belt area and will inevitably impact upon the Green Belt landscape. The Landscape and Visual Amenity assessment advises that the presence of the proposed new road infrastructure in what is currently a tranquil area of the Estuary is detrimental, and the exposure to views of the carriageway and the associated activity will be significant. An identified advantage is that the height of the deck and the openness of the viaduct will take traffic out to normal lines of sight at close range. Existing mature tree cover will also help to integrate the New Bridge with the landscape at its southern abutment adjacent to the Manchester Ship Canal.

To improve damaged and derelict land around towns;

- 6.7.45 The Project will not prejudice the redevelopment of damaged and derelict land within Runcorn and Southern Widnes. The proposed alignment of the Project (albeit that element outside of the Wigg Island Green Belt designation) actively encourages the delivery of vacant and derelict land for development as part of the regeneration of Southern Widnes and Runcorn in accordance with the Regeneration Strategy for the area.

To secure nature conservation interest;

- 6.7.46 The relevant assessment confirm that the Project will not impact upon the nature conservation interests of the Green Belt.

To retain land in agricultural, forestry and related uses

- 6.7.47 The Project will result in the loss of c. 0.12 hectares of amenity land by virtue of location of the New Bridge supporting piers. The agricultural land quality is recognised to be low (grade 5), and the land does not form part of an active agricultural unit. The Land-Use assessment advises that the remainder of the Green Belt post construction will continue to be suitable for use as agricultural land following development if so required.

Visual Appraisal

- 6.7.48 PPG2 paragraph 3.15 requires that a separate appraisal of the visual impact of any proposal is undertaken. The New Bridge oversails the Wigg Island Green Belt parcel and will be conspicuous in views from it. Views of the Bridge from Wigg Island will be inevitable, although the height of the deck and the partial benefit of mature planting will assist in reducing this impact.

Compliance

- 6.7.49 Compliance against the separate elements of Green Belt policy as expressed within PPG2 can be summarised as follows:

- a. The proposal (i.e. construction of piers) is considered to represent inappropriate, and therefore harmful, development in the Green Belt;
- b. The extent of harm is limited in itself, in that the extent of land loss is limited (c. 0.12 ha) and will not prejudice the future viability of the Green Belt in this location;
- c. The consideration of harm when assessed against Green Belt purposes is mixed, identifying minor encroachment and potential minor impact on sprawl and merge, but benefit in terms of regeneration; and
- d. The extent of harm when assessed against Green belt objectives is limited to the potential impact on the need to retain and enhance where possible attractive landscapes, and to retain land in agricultural, forestry and related uses.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.7.50 The Landscape and Visual Amenity assessment outlines possible mitigation measures at Wigg Island, including the introduction of additional vegetation adjacent to the New Bridge. However, this assessment advises that the physical and visual intrusion of the New Bridge upon the Green Belt cannot be wholly mitigated.

Planning Policy Statement 9: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation (2005)

- 6.7.51 PPS9 sets out the Government's vision for conserving and enhancing biological diversity in England, together with a programme to achieve it. It establishes a series of key principles that regional planning bodies and local planning authorities should adhere to in order to ensure that the potential impacts of planning decisions on biodiversity and geological conservation are fully considered.

- 6.7.52 This guidance advises that planning policies and decisions should aim to maintain and enhance, restore or add to biodiversity and geological conservation interests. A strategic approach to the conservation, enhancement and restoration of biodiversity and geology should be taken, recognising the contribution that sites, areas and features, both individually and in combination, make to conserving these resources. Development should contribute to rural renewal and urban renaissance by enhancing biodiversity in green spaces and among developments so that they are used by wildlife and valued by people.

- 6.7.53 PPS9 advises that a key aim of planning decisions *"should be to prevent harm to biodiversity and geological conservation interests."* Adequate mitigation measures should be put in place where necessary. Where a planning decision would result in significant harm to biodiversity and geological interests which cannot be prevented or adequately mitigated against, *"appropriate compensation measures should be sought."*³⁵

- 6.7.54 With regard to SSSI designation the guidance states that where a proposed development on land within or outside a SSSI is likely to have an adverse effect, planning permission should not normally be granted. Where an adverse effect on the site's notified special interest features is likely, PPS9 advises that an exception

*"should only be made where the benefits of the development clearly outweigh both the impacts that it is likely to have on the features of the site that make it of special scientific interest and any broader impacts on the national network of SSSI's."*³⁶

- 6.7.55 Networks of natural habitats are considered within PPS9 to represent a valuable resource. To reflect their importance, emphasis is placed upon Local Planning Authorities to maintain networks by

³⁵ Para. 1(vi), PPS9 Biodiversity and Geological Conservation (2005)

³⁶ Para. 8, PPS9 Biodiversity and Geological Conservation (2005)

“avoiding or repairing the fragmentation and isolation of natural habitats through policies in plans.”³⁷”

- 6.7.56 PPS9 is accompanied by *Circular 06/2005*. This Circular provides administrative guidance on the application of the law relating to planning and nature conservation as it applies in England. It complements the expression of national planning policy in PPS9 and the accompanying Good Practice Guide. Although this Circular outlines how statutory obligations impact within the planning system, in some cases the legislation will have an equal bearing on other regimes, including the Transport and Works Act (1992). The requirements of PPS9 and *Circular 06/2005* are considered in more detail in chapters 10 and 11 of this ES.

Relevance

- 6.7.57 The proposed alignment of the Project crosses the Upper Mersey, which lies outside but adjacent to the Middle Mersey SPA, SSSI and Ramsar site. Given this relative proximity, the Project should have regard to the provision of the guidance.
- 6.7.58 The Aquatic Ecology and Terrestrial and Avian Ecology ES chapters incorporate assessments of the scheme against the provisions of PPS9. This planning policy chapter has drawn from the findings of these assessments to enable a judgement to be made against the policy guidance expressed within PPS9.
- 6.7.59 The Aquatic Ecology assessment (see Chapter 11) analyses the intertidal and subtidal components of the ecosystem, and the potential impacts on the aquatic ecology of freshwater canals and brooks within the region of the Upper Mersey Estuary.
- 6.7.60 The intertidal and subtidal habitat downstream of the SJB is internationally important, a reflection of its designation as a Site of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Protection Area (SPA), and Ramsar site under the Habitats Directive.
- 6.7.61 Although the proposed alignment of the New Bridge does not physically lie within or adjacent to these areas, any effects on aquatic ecology have the potential for indirect effects on existing bird life within this region.
- 6.7.62 The Aquatic Ecology assessment has identified a number of key receptors which may be subject to potential impacts as a result of the Project, including:
- a. Intertidal and subtidal habitat;
 - b. Infauna and benthic algae;
 - c. Epifauna and fish;
 - d. Canal fauna and flora.
- 6.7.63 These receptors are related to the ecology of the main estuary channel. The Project also has the potential to impact upon freshwater watercourses including canals and brooks within or near to the proposed works.
- 6.7.64 A series of potential construction phase impacts have been identified within the Aquatic Ecology TA, including underwater noise generated by pile driving, sediment movement/resuspension, accidental release of pollutants, and habitat loss/disturbance.
- 6.7.65 In addition to the above, a number of operational phase impacts of the Project have been identified. These include possible sediment movement/resuspension, release of pollutants, habitat loss and disturbance, and guantrophy.

³⁷ Para. 12, PPS9 Biodiversity and Geological Conservation (2005)

- 6.7.66 The Terrestrial and Avian Ecology assessment (see Chapter 10) of the ES describes and evaluates the existing terrestrial and bird habitat ecological conditions of the Mersey Estuary and its surroundings, and identifies all terrestrial wildlife habitats and associated biodiversity that may be directly or indirectly affected by the construction and operation of the Project. It notes that the New Bridge:
- a. May have an adverse effect upon the ecology and nature conservation value of the Upper Mersey Estuary, particularly its estuarine habitats and their associated flora and fauna;
 - b. Could impact upon the Middle Mersey Estuary SSSI, SPA, Ramsar site, and European Marine Site given the number of sensitive estuarine habitats that are present; and
 - c. May lead to a loss of saltmarsh habitat, or damage to vegetation and soils within the Estuary during construction as a result of access by construction machinery, temporary structures, construction materials, and personnel.
- 6.7.67 The Terrestrial and Avian Ecology assessment advises that the contaminants in the intertidal sandbanks, sand and siltflats are not considered to pose a risk to pollution of downstream habitats and birds feeding in the Middle Mersey Estuary. Construction and access activities may disturb feeding, roosting and breeding birds on the saltmarshes and other intertidal species, albeit methods are available such as temporary fencing to limit construction disturbance to a defined corridor, thus reducing disturbance.
- 6.7.68 There is no evidence to suggest that the Project, during construction or thereafter, will interfere with bird movements between the Middle Estuary and the Upper Mersey Estuary given the rarity of such events.
- 6.7.69 It is considered within the Terrestrial and Avian Ecology assessment that construction and use of the Project approach roads and associated junction improvements will have only minor effects on biodiversity. Protected species, including bats, Great Crested Newts and Water Voles will be largely or entirely unaffected.

Compliance

- 6.7.70 The Project has been designed to limit the construction and operational impacts of the development upon existing biodiversity and geological importance associated with the Mersey Estuary. This includes the proposed works to the SJB. The findings of the Aquatic Ecology have demonstrated that the Project has the potential to impact upon existing freshwater watercourses within the study area during construction and operation. Appropriate mitigation measures have therefore been identified at both construction and operational phases to minimise impacts.
- 6.7.71 The Terrestrial and Avian Ecology assessment concludes that the Project will generate only minor effects on biodiversity within the study area during construction. To minimise these effects, mitigation measures have once again been identified, and these are discussed below. No adverse effects arising from the Project upon the integrity of the SSSI have been identified. On review, subject to mitigation and an assessment of residual impacts, the Project is therefore considered to be in general accordance with the guidance of PPS9.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

Aquatic Ecology

- 6.7.72 The Aquatic Ecology assessment undertaken as part of the Project EIA has identified a number of potential construction and operation mitigation measures associated within its development.
- 6.7.73 Effective construction mitigation measures will include the constant monitoring of noise levels during construction, and the selection of appropriate building materials/techniques to control noise levels.

- 6.7.74 Additional mitigation measures may also involve the use of silt curtains to reduced sediment dispersal during piling, and the careful removal of materials to a barge, and contaminated material to special hazardous waste sites. The direct loss of habitat at the sites of the proposed tower location is inevitable, and therefore difficult to mitigate. The construction of access tracks, causeway and pier structures is also likely to impact upon saltmarsh areas.
- 6.7.75 Mitigation measures to minimise the operational impacts of the proposed development include:
- a. Bed reinforcement and physical interception of the developing scour to limit its propagation; and
 - b. Integration of spillage channel/gully/drainage systems within the bridge design to minimise impacts of oil and chemical spills arising from road run-off.
- 6.7.76 Changes to sediment and corridor interruption are considered unavoidable; the Aquatic Ecology assessment advises of the potential to compensate for these impacts through the enhancement of the wildlife corridor of the Upper Mersey Estuary. One possible method is the implementation of conservation management plans designed to increase the conservation status of the Widnes Warth and Astmoor saltmarshes. Upon implementation of mitigation measures, the findings of the assessment are that the construction and operation of the MGP will not cause significant harm to matters of aquatic ecology.

Terrestrial and Avian Ecology

- 6.7.77 The Terrestrial and Avian Ecology assessment advises that the loss or damage to saltmarsh habitat, soils and vegetation as a result of the Project may be avoided or minimised through the construction of temporary access tracks designed to protect the saltmarsh habitat from damage and disruption. Other possible mitigation measures include temporary translocation and revegetation, encouraging natural regeneration, and/or reseeded. Upon implementation of appropriate mitigation measures, the Terrestrial and Avian Ecology assessment advises that the construction and operation of the Project will not cause significant harm to biodiversity, or to the habitat and wild bird importance of the Middle Mersey Estuary.

Planning Policy Statement 10: Waste Management (2006)

- 6.7.78 PPS10 expresses the overall objectives of Government policy on waste, identifying the need “to protect human health and the environment by producing less waste, and by using it as a resource wherever possible³⁸” as a key objective. The document serves two purposes. First, it establishes the broad principles for the management of waste with respect to the development of strategies, regeneration and the prudent use of resources; secondly, it sets out the Government’s policy on the planning of new waste management facilities.
- 6.7.79 The guidance reiterates the responsibility of Planning Authorities and regional bodies for waste planning and management. It confirms the requirement for planning authorities to take into account waste management needs for all waste streams in their area at a strategic level. This includes commercial industrial, and construction waste arisings.

Relevance

- 6.7.80 The construction of the Project has the potential to generate significant air and dust pollution and will require the transportation of significant quantities of construction and demolition materials. The guidance sets out the need to consider these issues.

³⁸ Para. 1, PPS10 Waste Management (2006)

Assessment

6.7.81 Potential impacts arising from the generation and management of waste and material resources during the construction phase of the Project are identified within the Waste and Resources chapter of the ES (see Chapter 15). The findings of this chapter have been taken to inform this assessment against the provisions of PPS10.

6.7.82 A summary of the potential impacts of the Project upon waste management processes are considered below:

Transportation

6.7.83 The movement of waste materials for on-site reuse or recycling, or off site recycling or disposal is identified as a major generator of HGV traffic during the construction phase of development. It has been estimated to date that approximately 8,580 vehicular movements are expected during the duration of the project, relating to the handling of waste arisings with the accompanying possibility of air and dust pollution.

On-Site processing of Materials for Recycling

6.7.84 The on-site processing of materials for recycling may give rise to noise, dust vibration and occasionally odour disturbance. This represents a potential health hazard to local residents and construction workers during the construction phase.

High Volume Waste Streams

6.7.85 The Project is estimated to give rise to very large quantities of both inert and hazardous waste streams. This will lead to significant implications for transportation and disposal capacity.

Waste Disposal

6.7.86 The disposal of Project waste to landfill, or in some cases incineration, can have indirect effects on human health and the environment. In general, the effect or level of risk would increase in nature dependant on the nature of the waste (i.e. inert, non-hazardous or hazardous waste).

Liquid Wastes

6.7.87 Hazardous liquid wastes (in the form of contaminated groundwater) could be encountered in excavations into contaminated soils and will require careful handling and management in line with legislation. They should be minimised at source where possible.

Construction

6.7.88 The Waste and Arisings assessment of the Project advises that high amounts of waste material will be generated during the following stages of the development process:

- a. Alignment and construction of the New Bridge;
- b. Incorporation of the new highway into the existing highways infrastructure at the northern and southern abutments of the River Mersey;
- c. Modifications to and the de-linking of the SJB;
- d. Landscaping works; and
- e. The development of associated infrastructure, including the new Bridge toll plazas.

Compliance

6.7.89 The Project will generate significant quantities of waste material during the construction phase of development. Whilst this is inevitable given the nature of the proposal, the aim is to minimise any potential impacts arising from this, in particular in relation to air and dust pollution, and

human health and safety. Appropriate mitigation measures have been considered, as discussed below, to ensure the safe removal and transportation of waste materials, and to minimise any environmental impacts which may arise as a result subject to mitigation. The Project is therefore considered to be in accordance with Government guidance in relation to the management of waste materials.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.7.90 To mitigate the potential impacts from waste generation, the Waste chapter of the ES recommends the implementation of a Site Waste Management Plan (SWMP) to create a framework for systematically identifying and quantifying project waste arisings, and developing an appropriate management plan and reporting system for project wastes. This would establish overarching strategy commitments, specific waste and recycling objectives, waste data, management options, and monitoring and review processes.
- 6.7.91 In addition, legislative compliance, particularly Duty of Care, licensing/permitting and Health and Safety regulations may be implemented to prevent and control many of the impacts outlined above. In light of the suggested mitigation measures, it is not therefore anticipated that there will be any residual impacts arising as a direct result of the project.

Planning Policy Guidance 13: Transport (2001)

- 6.7.92 PPG13 comprises the Government's main policy guidance in relation to transport. The principle aim is to achieve more effective integration of planning and transport at all levels so as to promote more sustainable transport choices. The guidance seeks to ensure accessibility to jobs, shopping, leisure facilities and services by public transport, walking and cycling with the overall aim to *"reduce the need to travel, especially by car."*³⁹ There is however recognition that the car will continue to have an important role to play for some journeys, and PPG13 requires Local Authorities to

*"protect sites and routes which could be critical in developing infrastructure to widen transport choices for future passenger and freight movements."*⁴⁰

- 6.7.93 PPG13 identifies the likely availability and use of public transport as a very important component in determining locational policies designed to reduce the need for travel by car. Local Planning Authorities are therefore encouraged to work in partnership with public transport providers and operators to improve public transport.
- 6.7.94 As part of the Government's sustainability objectives, Local Planning Authorities are encouraged to promote walking through a series of measures, including:
- a. *the provision of wider pavements, including the reallocation of road space to pedestrians, and environmental improvements including improved lighting; and*
 - b. *pedestrian-friendly road crossings which give pedestrians greater priority at traffic signals and avoid long detours and waiting times, indirect footbridges or underpasses.*⁴¹
- 6.7.95 Likewise, cycling is identified as having the potential to substitute for short car trips, particularly those under 5 km and to form part of a longer journey by public transport. PPG13 encourages Local Planning Authorities to promote cycling through a number of measures, including:
- a. *reallocation of carriageway, to provide more spaces for cyclists, such as cycle lanes or bus lanes where cycles are permitted; and*

³⁹ Para. 4(1), PPG13 Transport (2001)

⁴⁰ Para. 6 (10), PPG13 Transport (2001)

⁴¹ Para. 77(1) & (2), PPG13 Transport (2001)

b. *improvement of facilities off the carriageway, such as cycle tracks or paths.*⁴²

6.7.96 Annex C of PPG13 advises that *“care must be taken to avoid or minimise the environmental impact of any new transport infrastructure projects; this includes the impacts which may be caused during construction. Wherever possible, appropriate measures should be implemented to mitigate the impacts of transport infrastructure.”*⁴³

6.7.97 In planning for local infrastructure, including roads, PPG13 requires any approach to be compatible with the New Approach To Appraisal (NATA). The guidance confirms that particular emphasis should be given to the need to explore a full range of alternative solutions to problems other than road enhancement.

Relevance

6.7.98 PPG13 seeks to take a balanced approach to transport provision, acknowledging the role of the private car and the need to cater for its ongoing usage whilst also encouraging the provision and growth of non car transport modes.

6.7.99 As a Project which seeks to deliver a road based solution to an existing congestion problem, but also enhance non car modes of transport, the provisions of PPG13 are of direct relevance to the assessment of the Project.

Assessment

6.7.100 The extent to which the Project satisfies the policy objectives of PPG13 is considered below. The headings represent a summary of the main principles as expressed within PPG13.

Reduce the need to travel, especially by car

6.7.101 One of the objectives of the New Bridge is to address the congestion in and around the SJB and to allow for more reliable journeys by car across the Mersey at this point. It is conceivable therefore that this ‘ease to movement’ and additional capacity will encourage a greater number of car-based journeys, with drivers choosing to use the route where previously they would not have done so simply because it is now easier by comparison to alternatives. This in turn could lead to an increase in car based journeys. However, it is anticipated that the proposed tolling regime on the both the New Bridge and the SJB will exercise an appropriate degree of demand management. The findings of the transportation assessment are that the Project does not necessarily provide for suppressed demand nor induce significant cross-river travel growth, but rather provides a traffic benefit. The primary effect is to re-allocate traffic from the SJB.

Improve public transport linkages

6.7.102 The Project will by virtue of modifications to the SJB deliver improved opportunities for public transport linkages. The modifications will include the implementation of bus lanes to provide an efficient and reliable means of cross-river transport. The amendments to the SJB and its enhanced provision for public transport will allow for a greater frequency of public transport services and will deliver greater reliability and reduced journey times, thereby encouraging increased use. In each respect, the proposals will deliver significant improvements to public transport linkages.

⁴² Para. 80(4) & (5), PPG13 Transport (2001)

⁴³ Annex C (1), PPG13 Transport (2001)

Deliver improved pedestrian and cycle linkages

- 6.7.103 The Project will deliver enhanced cross-river walking and cycling provision by virtue of modifications to the SJB, which include wider pavements and designated cycle lanes. The proposals will encourage non-car journeys and represent a direct improvement to non-car linkages. The enhancements are anticipated to result in an increase in daily travel to work cycle journeys, alongside an increase in leisure use.

Compliance

- 6.7.104 The Project will deliver significant benefits in compliance with the objectives of PPG13, including a reduction in road congestion, reduced journey times, and the enhancement of public transport, walking and cycling provision across the SJB. The potential for it to provide an encouragement to car use is acknowledged however, and the proposed tolling regime will serve to control demand. On balance, it is considered that the Project is in accordance with the provisions of PPG13.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.7.105 The Project is considered to be in general compliance with the provision of PPG13. No mitigation is therefore proposed, and no residual impacts have been identified for review.

Planning Policy Guidance 15: Planning and the Historic Environment (1994)

- 6.7.106 PPG15 provides a full statement of Government policies for the identification and protection of historic buildings, conservation areas and other elements of the historic environment. Particular importance is attached to the desirability of preserving and enhancing areas of special architectural or historic interest. PPG15 also outlines the need for policies which foster positive and controlled management of change.
- 6.7.107 PPG15 advises that conservation can itself play a key part in promoting economic prosperity by ensuring that an area offers attractive living and working conditions to encourage inward investment. The guidance states that in order to protect the wider historic landscape, plans should set out to *“protect its most important components and encourage development that is consistent with maintaining its overall historic character.”*⁴⁴
- 6.7.108 The guidance accepts that, generally, the best way of securing the upkeep of historic buildings and areas is to keep them in active use. It is acknowledged that many listed buildings can sustain some degree of sensitive alteration or extension to accommodate continuing or new uses.
- 6.7.109 PPG15 recognises that major new transport infrastructure development can have an especially wide-ranging direct impact on the historic environment, both visually and physically and also indirectly, for example, by altering patterns of movement of commerce, and generating new development pressures or opportunities in historic areas. The guidance states that local highways and planning authorities should integrate their activities and should take great care to *“avoid or minimise impacts on the various elements of the historic environment and their settings.”*⁴⁵ Local highway and planning authorities are also required to take great care to assess the impact on existing roads of new projects.
- 6.7.110 Staying with transport matters, the guidance states that when contemplating a new route, authorities should consider whether the need for it, and any impact on the environment, might be obviated by an alternative package of transport management such as parking and charging

⁴⁴ Para 2.26, PPG15 Planning and the Historic Environment (1994)

⁴⁵ Para 5.2, PPG15 Planning and the Historic Environment (1994)

policies, park and ride schemes, and public transport priority. New roads should *“not be built just to facilitate more commuting into already congested areas.”*⁴⁶ If a new route is unavoidable, authorities should initially:

*“identify any features of the historic environment, and evaluate their importance.”*⁴⁷ Wherever possible, *“new roads should be kept away from listed buildings, conservation areas, and other historic sites.”*

6.7.111 However in each case;

*“a suitable balance has to be struck between conservation, other environmental concerns, economics, safety, and engineering feasibility.”*⁴⁸

6.7.112 Where work to listed structures, such as historic bridges, is needed to meet new national or European requirements, policy advises that this be carried out with great care. Many bridges are of considerable age and represent important features of the cultural heritage. Sympathetic remedial measures, which restore the carrying capacity and extend the life of these structures whilst retaining their character, are preferable to complete reconstruction, and will normally prove more cost-effective. Where construction is the only realistic course, authorities are encouraged to *“retain and restore the old structure for use by pedestrians and cyclists.”*⁴⁹

6.7.113 Where the opportunity arises, the possibility of reusing structures for new transport schemes should *“always be examined.”*⁵⁰ Disused railway viaducts and bridges provide an *“environmentally advantageous”* solution for such schemes.

Relevance

6.7.114 The New Bridge spans the Estuary a short distance upstream of the Grade II listed SJB, and the Grade II* listed Aethelfleda Railway Bridge. It also proposes works to the SJB. The West Bank and Victoria Square Conservation Areas are also situated in close proximity to the route corridor. As such the provisions of PPG15 are directly relevant to any assessment of the Project.

Assessment

6.7.115 The Landscape and Visual Assessment exercise undertaken as part of this ES has undertaken a full review of the impacts of the New Bridge against a range of receptors. With particular reference to historic buildings matters, assessment has considered the proposal in relation to the listed SJB and the Aethelfleda railway bridge, with particular regard to any effects on the historical context and setting of both structures. The assessment concludes as follows:

- a. That the New Bridge, in particular that part which spans the Estuary, is in keeping with and is readily accommodated within the grand scale of the estuary setting; and
- b. That the quality of the bridge design, its lightness of cabling and structure and choice of materials ensures that it has the capacity to be considered as an iconic structure in its own right.

6.7.116 The assessment acknowledges that the New Bridge will be mainly seen within the same sweep of view as the SJB and the railway bridge it concludes however that given the relative separation (1.8 km), the scale of the setting, the exemplary design features of the New Bridge

46 Para 5.4, PPG15 Planning and the Historic Environment (1994)

47 Para 5.5, PPG15 Planning and the Historic Environment (1994)

48 Para 5.5, PPG15 Planning and the Historic Environment (1994)

49 Para 5.6, PPG15 Planning and the Historic Environment (1994)

50 Para 5.7, PPG15 Planning and the Historic Environment (1994)

and the clear difference in design and style between the New Bridge and the SJB, then the relationship is considered to be one of appropriate co-existence. It is concluded that the New Bridge will become a notable feature within the estuary, sitting alongside and complementary to the SJB and on this basis the relationship between the New Bridge and the SJB is considered to be beneficial.

- 6.7.117 The narrower assessment of impact on the setting of the listed SJB and Railway Bridge concluded that the Project would inevitably change the existing open estuary setting by introducing a new river crossing which would have views from and to the listed structure. The appraisal however acknowledges the findings of the landscape appraisal and concludes that any such impact would be minor.

Compliance

- 6.7.118 Compliance against PPG15 needs to have regard to two distinct elements of the project, namely the general effect on the context and setting of the SJB and listed structures, and the specific effects of the proposed works to the SJB. The extent to which the Project complies with the general guidance expressed within PPG15 is summarised below.

Preserve and Enhance the Areas of Special Architectural and Historic Interest

- 6.7.119 The Cultural Heritage assessment of the ES concludes that the Project will not have a significant negative impact upon areas of special architectural and historic interest. The differentiation in design and style of the New Bridge with the existing listed structures is considered to lend itself to the estuary setting, and sit alongside and complement these existing architectural features. This is considered to be beneficial to its setting and surroundings.

Works to existing highways infrastructure

- 6.7.120 The modifications to SJB relate to the deck of the Bridge, which will be reconfigured to provide two offset lanes and associated pedestrian and cycle facilities. The works will maintain the character of the existing structure; in addition the reduction in traffic the works will be of benefit to its future retention. Further, a single carriageway on the SJB is the original configuration as built. Effectively, the SJB's original lane arrangement will in part be restored. This is of benefit to the listed building.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.7.121 No significant adverse impact in relation to either the setting or the fabric of the listed structures or the conservation areas is identified; on this basis no mitigation is proposed and no residual impacts arise.

Planning Policy Guidance 16: Archaeology and Planning (1990)

- 6.7.122 PPG16 sets out policy guidance for the preservation of archaeological remains. It advises that archaeological remains should be seen as a finite and non-renewable resource. Appropriate management is therefore considered essential to ensure that they survive in good condition. The preferred approach for the preservation of important remains is to ensure that they remain *in situ*. If physical preservation *in situ* is not feasible, policy advises that an archaeological excavation for the purposes of "*preservation by record*"⁵¹ may be an acceptable alternative.
- 6.7.123 Where nationally important archaeological remains are affected by proposed development policy advises of a "*presumption in favour of their physical preservation in situ, and a*

⁵¹ Para. 13, PPG16 Archaeology and Planning (1990)

*presumption against proposals which would involve significant alteration or cause damage, or have a significant impact on the setting of visible remains.*⁵²

- 6.7.124 Potential conflict between development and preservation should be positively planned and managed at an early stage of the process, by means of consultation and field evaluations.

Relevance

- 6.7.125 The proposed alignment of the Project may affect a number of archaeological and historic sites, buildings and areas. As such, the appraisal of any such impacts needs to have regard to the policy framework established within PPG16.

Assessment

- 6.7.126 Archaeology has been considered as part of the Project EIA to determine potential impacts of the proposed development upon existing archaeological and historic sites, buildings, and areas. The Cultural Heritage chapter of this ES (see Chapter 13) identifies a number of important receptors which may be directly and indirectly affected by the Project.
- 6.7.127 Potential direct impacts of the Project upon these sites include the possible loss of ground remains related to the history and development of each site, and the potential for buried features to be uncovered during construction.
- 6.7.128 The Cultural Heritage assessment identifies that the Project may also have an indirect negative impact upon the external views and visual setting of receptors along the proposed route alignment, albeit the magnitude of these impacts is generally assessed for all sites and buildings to be low negative to neutral.

Compliance

- 6.7.129 The significance of the effects of the Project upon the existing cultural heritage of the area has been assessed in full within the Cultural Heritage chapter.
- 6.7.130 All of the known impacts and anticipated potential impacts of the Project upon each of the archaeological and historic sites listed above are considered within the Cultural Heritage assessment to be of low neutral significance. On this basis, the Project is therefore considered to be in general compliance with the provisions of PPG16

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.7.131 The Cultural Heritage assessment advises that an over-arching archaeological watching brief should be maintained on all groundworks. This measure is considered to represent the appropriate response given the low potential for the construction groundworks to uncover archaeological remains. The requirement for a watching brief could be subject to appropriate planning conditions. The brief would also address the potential for impacts on any unknown archaeological resources.
- 6.7.132 To minimise the potential impacts arising from development of the Project, groundworks that form part of the proposed scheme may be preceded or accompanied by archaeological investigations and recording works. These measures may be subject to appropriate planning conditions. Works within the Widnes and Runcorn industrial heritage zones, works to Listed Buildings, and the industrial heritage zones/conservation areas would be preceded by the undertaking of a Building Recording on the structures affected by the Project.

⁵² Para. 27, PPG16 Archaeology and Planning (1990)

- 6.7.133 Such archaeological investigations and recording operations are considered to represent mitigation works and would be undertaken in accordance with professional best-practice and with the agreement of the archaeological advisors to the local planning authority, including English Heritage and the Cheshire County Council Historic Environment Officer.
- 6.7.134 Any loss to the heritage of the area would be partially off-set by the recording works undertaken as part of the mitigation measures, and the recovery of any information would add to the overall knowledge and understanding of the history and development of the area. The long-term residual effects of the Project, assuming that all the recommended mitigation measures are applied and that the Project advances in accordance with historic environment and archaeological policies, are considered to be low negative to neutral.

Planning Policy Guidance 17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation (2002)

- 6.7.135 The principal objective of PPG17 is to ensure that a sufficient supply of recreational open space provision is both retained and protected from development within local communities across the UK.
- 6.7.136 Prior to permitting the non-leisure development of existing open space, PPG17 requires all Local Authorities to undertake an assessment of open space provision within their local communities. This should ultimately contribute to the identification of existing areas of open space considered surplus to future requirements.
- 6.7.137 Existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land should not be built on unless an “assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space or the buildings and land to be surplus to requirements.”⁵³ In instances whereby a robust and up-to-date audit may not be available, PPG17 permits that any applicant seeking planning permission for development of an existing playing field(s) may demonstrate through independent assessment that a specific site is now surplus to satisfy local needs.
- 6.7.138 *PPG17 advises that the recreational quality of open spaces can be eroded by insensitive development or incremental loss of the site. In considering planning applications, the guidance states that Local Planning Authorities should “weigh any benefits being offered to the community against the loss of open space that will occur.”⁵⁴ Local Authorities should also ensure that open spaces do not suffer from increased overlooking, traffic flows, or other encroachment.*
- 6.7.139 PPG17 further advises that Local Planning Authorities should not grant planning permission for any non-leisure specific playing field development unless the playing field(s) lost as a result of development will be compensated for through the development of new playing field(s) provision of equivalent or superior quantity or quality, and in a suitably accessible location. Local Authorities should also
- “encourage better accessibility of existing open spaces and sport and recreational facilities, taking account of the mobility needs in the local population.”⁵⁵*
- 6.7.140 PPG17 identifies Public Rights of Way as another important recreational facility, encouraging local authorities to provide enhanced facilities for walkers, cyclists, and horse-riders by means of adding linkages to existing rights of way networks.

53 Para. 10, PPG17 Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation (2002)

54 Para. 16, PPG17 Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation (2002)

55 Para. 18, PPG17 Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation (2002)

Relevance

- 6.7.141 The proposed alignment of the Project will result in the permanent loss of allocated Greenspace (eg. at St. Michaels Golf Course to accommodate the toll plaza infrastructure, and at Widnes Warth, to accommodate the New Bridge piers). The Project will also affect existing Public Rights of Way. The potential extent of any physical impacts of the Project upon the operations of existing Greenspace (whether formally or legally defined as open space or not) and recreational land should therefore be considered.

Assessment

- 6.7.142 The Land-Use assessment of the ES advises that the Project will potentially result in the loss of elements of the following Greenspace sites during construction:
- a. St Michael's Golf course;
 - b. Greenspace south of Garston Rail Line; and
 - c. Widnes Warth Salt Marsh.
- 6.7.143 The extent of the loss amounts to c. 24ha, out of a total area of Greenspace within the corridor of c. 220ha. This equates to a loss of c. 10%. Within Halton Borough, there is 1, 601ha of designated Greenspace. The loss of Greenspace through the Project equates to a total percentage loss of 1.4% of overall designated Greenspace provision within the Borough.
- 6.7.144 The Project will result in the partial loss of part of the former St Michael's golf course. Although this is classified by the Council as Greenspace, it has been closed to public access on safety (contamination) grounds (the course is fenced off).
- 6.7.145 St Michael's golf course is the area where the greatest effect takes place, with c. 9.6ha being permanently removed in total by the proposed alignment. The southern part of this land will be permanently occupied by a tolling plaza.
- 6.7.146 In addition to the permanent effect, approximately 128.74 ha of the southern end of the golf course will be temporarily required for construction activities and compounds on a temporary basis. The duration of this temporary impact will be short term (predicted to be less than 40 months). During this time, the land will not be available for use, even if this was possible (i.e. which it is not).
- 6.7.147 The proposed alignment at the bridge approach on the north bank of the Mersey Estuary at the former Catalyst Trade Park will dissect a small area of Greenspace immediately to the south of the Garston to Timperley rail freight line. This area of designated Greenspace comprises approximately 0.81ha in area. The northern part of the site will be lost to the construction of the approach road embankment. The remaining southern section will remain as designated Greenspace during and after construction and access will not be severed by the Project
- 6.7.148 At Widnes Warth there will be a temporary loss of Greenspace during construction. The proposed loss of this land is temporary (maximum 40 months). The Project will also result in the permanent loss of a small area of proposed Greenspace at Wigg Island to accommodate the supporting Mersey Gateway Bridge piers. However, this will not prejudice the continued future use of Wigg Island for recreational use.
- 6.7.149 The Transport Assessment states that existing public right of way access to Spike Island, St. Helens Canal, the Trans-Pennine Trail and the Manchester Ship and the will be subject to closures and diversions during construction. The public right of way which links both halves of the St Michael's golf course in Widnes will also need to be realigned during construction of the main toll areas. The public right of way access across the Central Expressway which is provided via two grade separated footbridges will need to be extended as part of the Central Expressway works. Construction operations may also temporarily impact cycleways at Ditton roundabout,

Victoria Road, Astmoor Road, Bridgewater canal, but also whilst constructing the freight line to St Helens canal. Footway/cycleway bridges will also be effected during the construction period.

Compliance

- 6.7.150 The Project will result in the loss of allocated Greenspace at St. Michaels Golf Course for the development of the road toll plazas and at Widnes Warth in Widnes for the development of the supporting piers. The loss of this land is contrary to Government guidance expressed within PPG17. The Project does not incorporate proposals for the creation of direct compensatory open space provision within the scheme alignment, or elsewhere within Halton Borough save where the previously taken land is reinstated.
- 6.7.151 Additional areas of Greenspace partially lost or subject to alteration will continue to serve their current use. During construction, the provision of alternative routes/diversions could potentially be provided along greenway networks to lessen the impacts from the Project, whilst still enabling community routes/facilities to be accessed.
- 6.7.152 The Project through its enhancement to cross-river movements between Runcorn and Widnes by private car, public transport, walking and cycling will enable people to access other formal areas of open space and recreational facilities within Halton.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.7.153 No mitigation measures for the proposed loss of existing, designated open space are proposed as part of the Project.

Planning Policy Statement 23: Planning and Pollution Control (2004)

- 6.7.154 The principal aim of PPS23 is to ensure the sustainable and beneficial use of land. Within this aim, polluting activities that are necessary for wider social and economic reasons should be carefully sited and planned, and subject to such planning conditions so that their adverse effects are minimised and contained within acceptable limits.
- 6.7.155 Development control decisions on individual planning applications, particularly those for potentially polluting processes, can have an impact on the local environment, human health and well-being. In considering proposals for development, Local Planning Authorities should take account of the risks of and from pollution and land contamination, and identify how these can be managed or reduced.
- 6.7.156 PPS23 states that the planning system should focus on whether the development itself is an acceptable use of the land, and the impacts of those uses, rather than the control of processes or emissions. It expresses the Government's commitment to using the precautionary principle, invoked "*when there is good reason to believe that harmful effects may occur to human, animal or plant health, or to the environment,*⁵⁶" and "*the level of uncertainty about the consequence or likelihood of the risk is such that best available scientific advice cannot assess the risk with sufficient confidence to inform decision-making.*⁵⁷"
- 6.7.157 The presence of ground contamination is considered to affect or restrict the beneficial use of land, though development can present an opportunity to deal with it. Where land is affected by contamination, "*development can provide an opportunity to address the problem for the benefit of the wider community and bring the land back into beneficial use.*⁵⁸"

⁵⁶ Para. 6, PPS23 Planning and Pollution Control (2004)

⁵⁷ Para. 6, PPS23 Planning and Pollution Control (2004)

⁵⁸ Para. 17, PPS23 Planning and Pollution Control (2004)

6.7.158 The Governments objectives for contaminated land are set out in DEFRA Circular 01/2006, *Contaminated Land*. These include:

- a. to identify and remove unacceptable risks to human health and the environment;
- b. to seek to bring damaged land back into beneficial use; and
- c. to seek to ensure that the cost burdens faced by individuals companies and society as a whole are proportionate, manageable and economically sustainable.⁵⁹

6.7.159 PPS23 advises that the contamination of land may threaten public health and safety, the natural environment, the built environment and economic activities. It therefore “remains the responsibility of the landowner/developer to identify land affected by contamination and to ensure that remediation is undertaken to secure a safe development.”⁶⁰

Relevance

6.7.160 The Project will deliver new transport infrastructure providing for vehicular movements between Runcorn and Widnes and the wider Liverpool City-Region. Carbon emissions from vehicles represent one possible source of pollution, in addition to other sources of pollution that may be released during the construction phase of the development, particularly in relation to contaminated land. The framework provided by PPS23 and the extent to which these may impact environmentally is therefore of relevance to this assessment.

Assessment

6.7.161 Water Quality, Air Quality, Ground and Groundwater Contamination assessments have been undertaken to identify and assess any potential pollutant effects of the Project, at both construction and operational phases. The findings of these assessments have been drawn on to inform this planning policy assessment. This process has demonstrated that the Project has the potential to impact upon water quality, air quality and contamination at a local scale, as discussed below:

Water Quality

6.7.162 The Surface Water Quality chapter of the EIA (see Chapter 8) has assessed the potential effects of the Project upon the water quality of the Mersey Estuary and other surface watercourses. Areas likely to be sensitive to water pollution have been identified as the Mersey Estuary Ramsar site, SPA, SSSI and European Marine Site, all of which are located downstream of the Project.

6.7.163 During the construction phase of the project, potential construction phase impacts to the water quality of watercourses within the study area have been identified as follows:

- a. Disturbance of sediment creating an increased sediment load within the water column;
- b. Mobilisation of contaminated sediments;
- c. Spills from construction activities entering surface water features;
- d. Reduced water quality resulting from piling activities; and
- e. Increased scour and sediment mobilisation from around cofferdams.

6.7.164 In addition to the above, access options for construction works within the intertidal area have been assessed. This has identified that the amphibious craft option is only likely to disturb sediments already within the mobile zone, and so will not contribute towards a change in water quality.

⁵⁹ Para. 18, PPS23 Planning and Pollution Control (2004)

⁶⁰ Para. 20, PPS23 Planning and Pollution Control (2004)

- 6.7.165 There is the potential for spillages and leaks that occur during the construction works to have a detrimental effect on water quality within all watercourses in the defined study area. Areas likely to be sensitive to water pollution have been identified as the Mersey Estuary Ramsar Site, SPA, SSSI and European Marine Site located downstream of the Project. Several local designated sites are also located in the study area.
- 6.7.166 Potential operational phase impacts on the water quality of watercourses within the study area include:
- a. Scour around bridge piers resulting in an increased sediment load within the water column, mobilisation of contaminated sediments and deoxygenated waters;
 - b. Routine runoff and spillage of chemicals from roads into surface water courses; and
 - c. Guantrophy – increasing organic deposition from birds using the Bridge to roost.
- 6.7.167 In addition to Surface Water Quality, a Groundwater assessment has been undertaken as part of this ES (see Chapter 14). A distillation of the findings of this assessment identifies the presence of widespread contamination of groundwater by metals and other contaminants in Widnes. Groundwater contamination was also noted to the north of the Manchester Ship Canal at Wigg Island in Runcorn.
- 6.7.168 The assessment has identified existing impacts on groundwater within the Project area in Widnes and parts of Runcorn. It is considered that the potential effects on groundwater from the construction and operation of the Project can be mitigated. However, the wider contamination of groundwater will need to be considered. A preliminary options appraisal has been undertaken that identified further mitigation measures to address this and these would need to be developed as part of an overall remediation strategy to take account of the wider contamination issues in the area.

Air Quality

- 6.7.169 The Air Quality Assessment conducted as part of the EIA has assessed air quality impacts associated with the Project. This has identified that during construction, increased vehicular movements during construction may increase congestion at different receptor locations within the route corridor, potentially resulting in an increase in concentrations and emissions in such instances. The effect of construction traffic emissions is however considered to be negligible, and no significant adverse effects are therefore identified. Additional potential impacts upon air quality include have been identified as construction dust within 200m of construction activity.
- 6.7.170 The Air Quality assessment advises that effects are more likely to arise as a result of the handling, storage and disposals of waste materials during the construction period. The release of known land contaminant during the construction phase of the Project may also lead to health risks for construction workers and local residents. The migration of ground gas or vapours into excavations or buildings could also represent a significant risk in terms of indoor air quality.
- 6.7.171 At operation, the Project is not identified to have a significant impact upon local air quality and it is therefore concluded that emissions within the route corridor will fall within the AQS thresholds.

Contamination

- 6.7.172 Information obtained from desk studies and site investigations has identified widespread evidence of current and/r historic potentially contaminating land uses within Widnes and the Astmoor Industrial Estate and saltmarshes in Runcorn. This includes former chemical works and the St Michaels Golf Course in Widnes, and limited areas on the saltmarshes immediately north of the Manchester Ship Canal in Runcorn.
- 6.7.173 The Land Contamination assessment (see Chapter 14) has subsequently identified three potential sources of pollution arising from the Project, including:

- a. Contaminants associated with made ground and drift deposits;
- b. Contaminants in groundwater; and
- c. Contaminants in surface waters (including drains).

6.7.174 An important potential receptor with regard to policy PR6 is human health during both construction and operational phases, including construction workers, site visitors, local residents, future site users, maintenance workers, landscaping contractors, and road users.

6.7.175 Potential pathways for human health impacts include outdoor ingestion, indoor ingestion, migration of contaminated waters into excavations or surface waters, and ingestion or dermal contact with water from contaminated water supply pipes.

6.7.176 An additional receptor of relevance to policy PR6 is possible damage to building materials of services through direct contact with contaminants or through contaminant migration. Such impacts have been identified as representing feasible impacts upon investment confidence within Runcorn and South Widnes.

Compliance

Water Quality

6.7.177 The Surface Water Quality chapter has assessed the potential impacts arising from the Project upon local water quality. This has identified that the Project will not have major effects upon the surface water quality of watercourses within the study area, and thus will not represent a significant risk to human, animal or plant health, or to the environment. Appropriate mitigation measures have been identified to minimise the extent and risk of possible contaminants upon groundwater watercourses and water quality within the study area. These will require implementation with an approved strategy.

Air Quality

6.7.178 The Air Quality Assessment has identified that the Project has the potential to impact upon air quality at different locations within the route corridor during the construction phase of the Project. However, these impacts have been identified as temporary. Other potential air quality impacts may arise from the movement of waste material during construction. However at operation, the Project is not identified to exceed AQS standards.

Contamination

6.7.179 The Project has the potential to lead to effects associated with existing contamination during construction and operation, including water and ground contamination. The Project may also have an impact upon human health, in particular site visitors, workers and local residents. Structural damage arising from contamination has also previously been identified as impacting upon investment confidence in Runcorn and Widnes. To minimise the potential impacts associated with the Project, a series of mitigation measures have therefore been considered to minimise these impacts wherever possible.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

Water Quality

6.7.180 Mitigation measures can be applied through “*management techniques*” and “*physical techniques*.”

6.7.181 Management techniques proposed during the construction phase comprise a series of management plans (which will be required by planning condition), including:

- a. Waste and Resource Management Plan;
 - b. Pollution Control and Contingency Plan; and
 - c. Water Management Plan (Surface and Groundwater).
- 6.7.182 Physical techniques to be applied during the construction and operation phases that can be approved by planning condition will include:
- a. Appropriate design standards to be utilised;
 - b. Bunded fuel tanks shall contain 110% of the tank volume and be properly maintained;
 - c. Oil/Water separators will be used to remove oils/fuels accidentally spilled/accumulated during operation of the Project;
 - d. Measures to prevent the reintroduction of suspended solids into watercourses should be incorporated; and
 - e. Spill control measures to be used.
- 6.7.183 The Surface Water Quality chapter advises that the Project will have no major effects upon surface water quality of the watercourses within the study area. The suggested mitigation measures have therefore been identified to reduce any potential impacts which may otherwise arise, and no significant residual impacts have been identified.
- 6.7.184 To minimise the impacts of development upon groundwater quality, the Contamination of Soils, Sediments and Groundwater assessment considers mitigation measures at three stages of the Project – Design, Construction and Operation. Monitoring of groundwater levels and quality should also be undertaken. Following the implementation of these mitigation measures, it is considered that the construction and operation of the Project will not significantly affect the existing situation with regard to groundwater contamination.

Air Quality

- 6.7.185 The Air Quality assessment identifies a number of mitigation measures to form part of a Construction and Environmental Management Plan (CEMP). These measures have regard to the control of dust during demolition and construction works, and include for the handling of contaminated and waste materials.
- 6.7.186 During construction and demolition, consideration will need to be given to the passage of vehicles entering and leaving the site, re-suspended dust, and the operation of site vehicles and temporary traffic diversions.
- 6.7.187 Appropriate regard to the exhaust emissions of all construction works would form part of any CEMP, involving liaison with the Council's Environmental Health Department. The CEMP would also comprise measures to limit disruption to traffic flows on the local road network and thus minimise the risk of increased vehicle emissions due to congested traffic. Specific mitigation measures will also be implemented within each defined construction area. Assuming effective mitigation measures are implemented during the construction of the MGP, no significant residual impacts arise for review.

Contamination

- 6.7.188 To minimise the risk of contamination associated with the Project, a number of mitigation measures have been identified at the design, construction and operational phases of development. It is recognised that remediation may be required as part of the works to mitigate risks identified within the proposed alignment of the Project. To assess potential remedial measures, a Preliminary Remediation Options Appraisal has been undertaken to identify remediation techniques currently applied in the UK to determine their potential applicability to the ground conditions encountered with the Project area. A detailed Remediation Options Appraisal will be undertaken following the completion of a detailed risk assessment and the

completion of further discussions with the regulators. The final selection of appropriate mitigation measures will be dependant upon the construction methods which are adopted. However, no significant residual impacts post mitigation have been identified that significantly affect the existing situation.

Planning Policy Guidance 24: Planning and Noise (1994)

- 6.7.189 PPG24 advises on how the planning system can help to minimise the adverse impacts of noise without placing unreasonable restrictions on development. Land-use planning should seek to ensure that noise sensitive uses are located away from noise generating uses such as highway networks, and the planning system has the task of guiding development to the most appropriate locations.
- 6.7.190 The guidance advises that potentially noisy developments should be located in areas where noise will not be such an important consideration, or where its impact can be minimised. Much of the development which is necessary for the creation of jobs and the construction and improvement of essential infrastructure is regarded as likely noise generating development. However, PPG24 states that the planning system should not place unjustifiable obstacles in the way of such development. Nevertheless, Local Planning Authorities must also ensure that development does not cause an unacceptable degree of disturbance.
- 6.7.191 Where the segregation of land-uses is not possible, mitigation measures should be considered where practical. PPG24 advises of a number of measures which could be applied to control the source of, or limit exposure to, noise including engineering processes, and the layout of development.

Relevance

- 6.7.192 The project is not itself noise sensitive and, as such, PPG24 is not entirely applicable. However, the Project may generate noise pollution with potential sources of noise pollution including construction traffic and engineering works at the construction phase, and road traffic at the operational phase. The extent to which the Project will generate noise pollution requires an assessment against the provisions of PPG24.

Assessment

- 6.7.193 The Noise assessment of the ES (see chapter 17) advises that noise and vibration will vary considerably during the construction process, albeit these will not be permanent effects. There are some 1,200 residential properties within a 100 metre zone either side of the route corridor. There is the potential that some of the residents of these properties may be affected to some extent during construction. In addition, there are two schools that may be affected by construction activities. These include West Bank Primary School, and Woodside Primary School. This will range from a low negative to moderate to high negative effect respectively. There is also expected to be a high negative effect at Wigg Island during construction of the Project.
- 6.7.194 At operation of the Project, the Noise Assessment concludes that the overall benefits of the Project will result in a reduction in the number of people likely to be bothered by road traffic noise. The assessment of people likely to be bothered by vibration shows no real change.
- 6.7.195 There are anticipated to be moderate positive effects for the housing adjacent to the northern approach to the SJB, the southern approach to the SJB, and all housing adjacent to the Weston Point Expressway. There will be a high positive effect upon the SPA adjacent to the SJB. Four local schools will receive lower noise levels, whilst one (Woodside Primary School) will receive increased levels in excess of the current situation.

Compliance

- 6.7.196 The Project will generate noise pollution during construction and operation. However, at operation the Project will create overall benefits with regards to the number of people likely to be bothered by road traffic noise. In addition, the route corridor will not result in adverse noise impacts upon allocated residential sites. The Project is therefore considered to be in general compliance with the requirements of PPG24.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.7.197 Measures outlined within the Noise Quality assessment include the adoption of maximum construction noise targets for the Project in accordance with the standards set out in BS 5228:1997. A Noise and Vibration Management Plan will also be established by the contractor in accordance with the good practice guidance. This will aim to ensure that construction noise is kept to a minimum and within the required thresholds, and incorporate where necessary a series of mitigation measures. The Noise Quality assessment recommends that a detailed assessment of noise levels for specific activities should be undertaken when specific plant and working methods are known.
- 6.7.198 To mitigate noise disturbance during operation, the preferred option is to reduce noise at source, for example by the implementation of roadside noise barriers. These will seek to attenuate noise levels such that the unmitigated moderate noise effect along the Central Expressway will be reduced to a low effect.

Planning Policy Statement 25: Development and Flood Risk (2006)

- 6.7.199 The guidance sets out that the aims of planning policy on development and flood risk are to ensure that flood risk is taken into account at all stages of the planning process to avoid inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding, and to direct development away from areas at highest risk. Where new development is, exceptionally, necessary in such areas the policy aims to make it safe without increasing flood risk elsewhere and where possible, reducing flood risk overall.
- 6.7.200 PPS25 requires Flood Risk Assessments to be carried out to the appropriate degree at all levels of the planning process, “to assess the risks of all forms of flooding to and from development and taking into account the possible effects of climate change.”⁶¹
- 6.7.201 The guidance advises that landowners have the primary responsibility for safeguarding their land and other property against natural hazards such as flooding. Individual property owners and users are also responsible for managing the drainage of their land in such a way as to prevent, as far as is reasonably practicable, adverse impacts on neighbouring land.
- 6.7.202 PPS25 recognises that road and rail embankments and other existing transport infrastructure can affect water flows during floods. It is important that this is recognised, and where use of such infrastructure is proposed for flood management purposes, this should be discussed with the infrastructure owners. Where new transport infrastructure is proposed, “*the possibility of building-in flood management measures at the design stage should be considered.*”⁶²
- 6.7.203 For development within Zones 2 and 3, PPS25 recommends the application of the Sequential and Exception Tests at all stages of the planning process with the aim to steer new development to areas of lower probability of flooding.

61 Para. 10, PPS25 Development and Flood Risk (2006)

62 Para. 10, PPS25 Development and Flood Risk (2006)

Relevance

- 6.7.204 In accordance with PPS25 guidance, consideration should be afforded to the potential flood-risk of the New Bridge and associated highways infrastructure, along with any potential impacts arising from the new highways infrastructure upon the water flows of the Mersey Estuary, and the flood-risk associated with existing development. This reflects the coastal location of the New Bridge, and the significant scale and nature of the development proposals. In accordance with Table D.2 of PPS25, the Project is classified as 'Essential Infrastructure' with respect to flood risk vulnerability.

Assessment

- 6.7.205 To assess the extent to which the Project satisfies the policy requirements of PPS25, a review of the development proposals against the key objectives expressed within the Government guidance should be undertaken. This chapter draws upon the Flood Risk Assessment undertaken for the Project to inform this assessment:

Potential flood risk associated with the Project

- 6.7.206 The Flood Risk Assessment identifies existing areas of flood risk within the route corridor and its immediate surroundings, including all existing surface watercourses.
- 6.7.207 The Environment Agency indicative flood maps reveal that the proposed alignment of the Project lies within Flood Zones 1, 2 and 3. A stretch of the existing highway also lies within Flood Zones 2 and 3. The route corridor Flood Zone comprises the following areas:
- a. Catalyst Trade Park;
 - b. A557 (near Catalyst Trade Park);
 - c. St. Helens Canal;
 - d. Bowers Brook;
 - e. Widnes Warth (Saltmarsh); and
 - f. Astmoor Saltmarsh.

Flood risk to adjacent areas and downstream arising from the Project

- 6.7.208 The Flood Risk Assessment confirms that the construction of the proposed new highway will remove a section of land from the Flood Zones. The proposed highway will occupy a plan area within the Flood Zones that is larger than the existing highway plan area. Consequently, there will be a reduction of available floodplain estimated to be 2,300m³ for a 1 in 200 tidal flood. The effect on water levels due to this loss of flood volume is negligible. The volume available to a tidal flood within the Mersey Estuary is far in excess of that represented by land taken by the proposed scheme. There should not be any variation in flood risk due to the loss of flood volume upon the proposed scheme and neighbouring property.

Flood management measures

- 6.7.209 The Flood Risk Assessment states that an inspection of existing highway drainage systems reveals that there is no water attenuation of highway run-off. There is essentially no buffering effect of water discharge from the highway and so discharges to watercourses comprise relatively high volumetric flow rates. The proposed highway drainage would incorporate water attenuation so that highway runoff would be released at a low flow rate over a longer period of time. There should be a net benefit with respect to flood risk due to water attenuation.
- 6.7.210 Existing highway drainage arrangements along the route corridor will continue to be used where possible. At locations along the route corridor, surface water run-off from the carriageway will be collected and discharged into balancing ponds.

- 6.7.211 The Project will introduce new lengths of carriageway, and hence an increase in surface water run-off when compared to the existing drainage situation. The volume of runoff will be accommodated in balancing ponds.

The Sequential and Exceptions Test

- 6.7.212 The section of the Project lying within Flood Zones 2 and 3 comprises the Bridge and the elevated sections of the highway. In accordance with the provisions of PPS25, the Project is therefore subject to the Exceptions Test given that it lies partly within Flood Zone 3.

- 6.7.213 With regard to the Exceptions Test there are 3 key elements to this, against which the Project is considered below:

Wider Sustainability Benefits – The Project will deliver sustainable benefits to the community and the wider Liverpool City-Region. In addition, there is not expected to be any detriment to flood risk as a result of the proposals.

Previously Developed Land – The majority of the route corridor comprises existing highway routes and land occupied by or formerly used for industrial purposes. However, the section of elevated highway above the Upper Mersey Estuary comprises undeveloped land.

Flood Risk – The proposed highway's drainage strategy will lessen the rate of discharge of runoff to local watercourses, and will therefore reduce flood risk.

Compliance

- 6.7.214 The net effect of the Project on flood risk is negligible. The level of current flood risk is predicted to remain unaltered following the proposed development. The proposed surface water drainage systems will also ensure that there is no increase in the risk of flooding within the study area and within the surrounding catchment areas. The Project is therefore considered to be in full compliance with the provisions of PPS25.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.7.215 No flood mitigation measures are proposed, and thus no residual impacts arise for review.

6.8 Regional Planning Policy

Regional Spatial Strategy for the North West (RSS13, 2003)

6.8.1 RSS13 comprises part of the development plan. It provides a comprehensive regional planning strategy for the North West, setting out broad strategic policies at the regional and sub-regional level where there are matters which need to be considered on a scale wider than the area of a single planning authority. In terms of built development the guidance advises that the main focus for development should be the North West Metropolitan Area (NWMA), with priority areas identified as Manchester and Liverpool City centres.

6.8.2 In terms of transport, RSS13 identifies the need for a high-quality transport system to support the competitiveness of the North West's industry and commerce, and to facilitate the Region's social and recreational needs. The guidance also notes that a high-quality transport system is also important for attracting new investment, particularly in areas where declining traditional industries need to be replaced by new development. The key transport related policies are set out below:

Policy SD9 - The Regional Transport Strategy

6.8.3 The Regional Transport Strategy sets out to deliver effectively planned and efficient transport interchanges. The policy identifies the key objectives of the Regional Transport Strategy as:

- a. *Effective multi-modal solutions to the conveyance of goods, people and services, especially at major hubs;*
- b. *Effectively planned and significantly more efficient transport interchanges;*
- c. *Attractive gateways and transport corridors;*
- d. *High-quality public transport in urban and rural areas; and*
- e. *A safe and pleasant environment complementary to the need to improve the Region's image and encourage more use of environmentally-friendly modes of transport including walking and cycling.*

6.8.4 The three priorities for transport investment as set out within RSS13 include:

- a. *High-quality public transport in major urban areas;*
- b. *Key transport corridors; and*
- c. *Gateways and interchanges.*

6.8.5 The RSS encourages the effective use of land, including the promotion of mixed-use development within sites and the wider neighbourhood, to assist people to meet their needs locally and to encourage business clustering. The aim of this approach is to reduce the need to travel in the first instance, and secondly to reduce journey distance when travel is necessary. The reduction in journey distances and the promotion of more sustainable forms of transport are considered more "*readily achievable in metropolitan areas given the density of population and the relative proximity of housing, employment, retail and recreational facilities.*" Any infrastructure improvements are required to be "*undertaken and co-ordinated commensurate with planned development.*"

Relevance

6.8.6 The development of improved public transport services and facilities is recognised as a means of delivering efficient multi-modal transport solutions. The Project will deliver high-quality new road infrastructure, alongside enhanced public transport, walking and cycling links across the SJB. The proposed alignment of the Project will also improve a recognised key transport corridor between Junction 12 of the M56, and Junction 7 of the M62. An appraisal of the proposals against the provisions of SD9 is therefore appropriate.

Assessment

- 6.8.7 The extent to which the Project satisfies the five key objectives set out within the Regional Transport Strategy is considered below:

Effective Multi-Modal Solutions

- 6.8.8 The Project will provide new high-quality and modern road infrastructure, in accordance with the wider policy approach of delivering new capacity to the road network where this is required. The Project will deliver reliable and efficient local, sub-regional and regional vehicular movements by relieving severe road congestion across and around the SJB. This will include providing an efficient and direct road link between Junction 12 of the M56, and Junction 7 of the M62, regarded as a key regional transport corridor. The Project will also improve access by road to Liverpool John Lennon Airport, Manchester International Airport, the Port of Garston, the Port of Liverpool, and the planned Port of Weston. As much as it is able therefore, it will contribute to delivering a multi-modal solution.

Effectively planned and significantly more efficient transport interchanges;

- 6.8.9 The Project does not comprise a transport interchange in the strictest sense. It does however seek to address the problems generated by a severe bottleneck at a key location within the local, sub regional and regional transport network. The implementation of the New Bridge alongside the proposed works to the SJB will deliver a properly planned and significantly more efficient transport solution. The proposed modifications to the SJB will facilitate enhanced cross-river public transport operations, providing for efficient and reliable movements between existing public transport interchanges at a local and sub-regional level. The Project will not prejudice the future development of transport interchanges.

Attractive gateways and corridors

- 6.8.10 The Landscape and Visual Amenity assessment of the ES recognises that the New Bridge has the potential to represent a major iconic feature within the Mersey Valley. The siting, imposing design and colour themes of the New Bridge are, overall, considered to make a positive contribution to the Mersey Estuary landscape and will contribute to the landmark, gateway nature of the existing SJB.

High-Quality Public Transport

- 6.8.11 The Project will allow for the delivery of improved cross-river public transport linkages by virtue of modifications to the SJB. This will include the implementation of bus lanes to provide an efficient and reliable alternative means of cross-river transport which represents a viable alternative to the private car.

Encourage walking and cycling

- 6.8.12 From opening of the New Bridge, the SJB will be subject to a programme of de-linking works, whereby existing road links to the Weston Point and Bridgewater Expressways will be removed. The direct works to the SJB will also incorporate pedestrian and cycling facilities. Taken together the measures will serve as a significant means of encouragement to walking and cycling.

Compliance

- 6.8.13 It is evident that the Project will meet each of the key objectives set out within SD9 to some extent.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.8.14 The Project is considered to be in general accordance with the objectives of policy SD9. No mitigation measures are therefore proposed, and no residual impacts arise for review.

Policy T1 - Integrating Transport Networks in the North West

- 6.8.15 This policy considers that it is critical to the economic competitiveness of the North West region that transport systems should be modern, efficient and very well integrated. This approach should be applied alongside the efficient use of existing highway infrastructure through a strategy of network and demand management.

- 6.8.16 The accompanying text advises that a sustainable approach to integrated transport requires each transport mode to contribute to travel needs in an efficient and complementary way, noting that it is “*now widely accepted that constructing new roads to accommodate future traffic growth is neither environmentally nor economically sustainable.*” Alongside this, the text advocates the increased role of

“public transport, cycling and walking, together with making the best use of existing highway infrastructure through a strategy of network and demand management.”

Relevance

- 6.8.17 The Project aims to enhance cross-river connectivity between Runcorn and Widnes by relieving current levels of road congestion across the SJB and its main approaches. The Project also incorporates proposals to enhance public transport, walking and cycling provision by utilising the SJB at operation of the New Bridge. Both elements contribute to the transport network and any assessment of the scheme proposals need to have regard to the provisions of policy T1.

Assessment

- 6.8.18 The extent to which the Project complies to the main provisions and objectives of policy T1 are considered below.

Deliver a modern efficient and very well integrated transport system

- 6.8.19 The Project will deliver high quality highway infrastructure to provide efficient cross-river vehicular movements. This will enhance connections between Runcorn and Widnes, and the wider Liverpool City-Region through more reliable journey times derived from a reduction in delays and road congestion. The Project incorporates parallel works which will enhance the opportunity for public transport, cycling and walking as part of an integrated transport offer.

Strategy of Demand Management to make the best use of existing highway infrastructure

- 6.8.20 Demand management measures will be implemented as part of the Project include road tolling. This seeks to encourage the increased use of public transport, walking and cycling across the SJB, and reduce the need to travel and existing reliance upon the private car.

- 6.8.21 The Project will facilitate the re-configuration of the SJB to deliver enhanced public transport, walking and cycling links between Runcorn and Widnes and the wider region. This approach aims to encourage the use of alternative means of transport, and reduce current levels of dependency on the private car.

Compliance

- 6.8.22 The Project adopts an integrated approach to transport development, delivering high-quality new road infrastructure to relieve current levels of road congestion. The Project will also deliver

efficient cross-river vehicular movements, and provide enhanced public transport, walking and cycling linkages across the SJB.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.8.23 The Project incorporates proposals for the provision of public transport, walking and cycling links across the SJB to promote and encourage the use of alternative means of transport, providing a reliable and efficient alternative to the private car to access key services and a range of employment sectors.

Policy T3 - The Regional Highway Network

- 6.8.24 The policy states at the outset that the Highways Agency and Local Authorities should afford high priority to investment in the maintenance, management and selective improvement of regionally significant transport routes. Best use “*should be made of existing infrastructure, with new road construction only considered once a thorough examination of all possible solutions to a particular problem has taken place.*”
- 6.8.25 The accompanying text advises that “*further investment is still required on some sections of the highway network to bring it up to a safe and modern standard,*” and to provide relief for those communities badly affected by heavy flows of through traffic. In some locations, the policy text advises that “*the provision of a suitable bypass may be the only way to resolve traffic-related problems.*” However, RSS does overall continue to promote an emphasis “*on making the best use of existing infrastructure.*”

Relevance

- 6.8.26 The Project proposes the development of new road infrastructure to facilitate efficient cross-river vehicular movements, and to contribute to the regional highway network. It also seeks to deliver a better use of the highway network within Runcorn and Widnes. As such, an assessment against the provisions of policy T3 is appropriate. The key areas are how it relates to the highway network and whether alternative proposals have been considered.

Assessment

- 6.8.27 With regard to the requirements expressed within the policy to examine all possible solutions, the Alternatives chapter of this ES (see Chapter 5) sets out the options that have been considered. These include:
- a. Halton Travel Plan Network;
 - b. Charging for using the SJB or other roads;
 - c. Dynamic Lane Management;
 - d. Selective Access by Vehicle Tagging;
 - e. Road Space Re-Allocation;
 - f. Park and Ride;
 - g. Rail Service Improvements;
 - h. Fixed crossing to the west of the Railway bridge;
 - i. Fixed crossing between the SJB and the Railway Bridge; and
 - j. Fixed crossing to the east of the Railway Bridge.
- 6.8.28 It concludes that a fixed crossing to the east of the SJB is the only realistic option.
- 6.8.29 In terms of the more general provisions of policy T3, it is clear that new road infrastructure is the only realistic way of delivering the improvements in congestion. The investment to be made will ensure that the network in this location is of a safe and modern standard which will address an identified traffic problem.

Compliance

- 6.8.30 In accordance with the requirements of policy T3, a thorough assessment of all alternative solutions to the Project has been undertaken. This has demonstrated that a fixed crossing in the position proposed represents the only feasible option to deliver all of the identified scheme objectives. The Project, and the construction of the New Bridge, will also facilitate the reconfiguration of the existing SJB to deliver public transport, walking and cycle links between Runcorn and Widnes and to continue to maximise the potential of existing highway infrastructure where possible.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.8.31 The Project is considered to be in general accordance with the objectives of policy T3. No mitigation measures are therefore proposed, and the residual impacts are therefore neutral.

Policy T4 - Road Safety

- 6.8.32 The policy states that the Highways Agency and Local Authorities will be expected to develop and implement consistent speed management strategies to reduce the number of people killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents in the Region. A minimum target of a 40% reduction in the number of people killed or seriously injured in road accidents by 2010 is established.

Relevance

- 6.8.33 The Project seeks to deliver a road based scheme which will facilitate efficient vehicular movements between Runcorn and Widnes, and the wider Liverpool City-Region. The policy requirement to assess road user safety and possible measures to enhance road safety standards should therefore be considered within this policy assessment.

Assessment

- 6.8.34 The extent to which the Project satisfies the key requirements of policy T4 is considered below:

Speed Management

- 6.8.35 Maximum speed limits will be applied across the New Bridge. The Project separates vehicular traffic (which will be exclusive to the New Bridge), from pedestrian and cycling movements (which will be confined to the SJB).

Road Safety

- 6.8.36 To ensure road user safety, the New Bridge will not incorporate any pedestrian or cycle links. The modifications to the SJB will provide alternative safe and efficient means of non-car cross-river movement. On the SJB, the paths will be accessible for people with disabilities through measures such as dropped kerbs, tactile paving, and safe crossing provisions.
- 6.8.37 The de-linking of the SJB from the Weston Point and Bridgewater Expressways, and the east Widnes by-pass, will significantly reduce the number of vehicular movements around the SJB. Indeed, the Transport Assessment advises that on the opening of the Project, the level of traffic on the SJB will be reduced by about 80%. This reduction in vehicle movements will serve to enhance road user safety across the local highway network, and within the populated central areas of Runcorn and Widnes, and reduce the likelihood of accidents. The wider highway works will incorporate fully compliment pedestrian aware junction arrangements so as to further enhance road safety.

Compliance

- 6.8.38 The Project will enhance road safety at a local level by virtue of the implementation of speed management and road safety measures. These are focused upon enhancing road safety, and contributing towards a reduction in the number of people killed and seriously injured as a result of road traffic accidents. The Project is therefore considered to reflect the objectives of policy T4.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.8.39 No direct mitigation is proposed; the physical improvements which improve safety standards and which deliver compliance with policy T4 will be brought forward as part of the scheme design.

Policy T10 - Regional Priorities for Transport Investment and Management

- 6.8.40 RSS13 establishes general priorities for transport investment and management within the North West in order of importance, as follows:

1. Maintaining existing networks;
2. Making best use of the networks through measures to improve:
 - i. safety;
 - ii. conditions for pedestrians and cyclists;
 - iii. public transport passenger services;
 - iv. more sustainable movement of freight;
 - v. global and local environmental conditions; and
3. Investment in major transport infrastructure schemes of regional significance focused on the following key areas:
 - i. High-quality public transport;
 - ii. Key transport corridors; and
 - iii. Gateway and interchanges.

- 6.8.41 Table 10.2 lists a number of major priority schemes of regional significance for the period to 2007, subject to the availability of resources. The Project is identified as a “*Regionally Significant Transport Study*,” and a second crossing of the River Mersey in Halton as a “*Transport Proposal of Regional Significance for delivery by 2021*.” The accompanying text advises that Local Transport Plans are expected to include a strategy for highway improvement and bridge strengthening.

Relevance

- 6.8.42 The Project is recognised as a regionally important transport scheme within policy T10. The extent to which the Project satisfies the general priorities of policy T10 should therefore be considered.

Assessment

- 6.8.43 The extent to which the Project satisfies the general priorities set out within policy T10 is considered below:

Maintaining existing networks

- 6.8.44 The SJB will be re-configured upon opening of the New Bridge to maximise the use of the existing road infrastructure, providing for local traffic alongside enhanced public transport, pedestrian and cycle links to provide people with alternative means of transport to the private car. The New Bridge will also link in with the existing highway network, including the Central

Expressway, to utilise existing transport infrastructure where possible. The proposals will therefore both maintain and enhance existing networks.

Making best use of networks to enhance safety, pedestrians and cycle provision, public transport services, sustainable movement of freight, and global and local environmental conditions

6.8.45 The Project will deliver new, high-quality road infrastructure across the Upper Mersey Estuary, providing for efficient and reliable cross-river passenger and freight movements. The SJB will also be re-configured to maximise the use of the existing road infrastructure, providing enhanced public transport, pedestrian and cycle links.

6.8.46 Transport safety at a local level will be enhanced by virtue of the following:

- a. Relieving congestion across and around the SJB by virtue of the proposed de-linking of this with the Weston Point and Bridgewater Expressways, and the eastern Widnes bypass. The Transport Assessment advises that on the opening of the Project, the level of traffic on the SJB will be reduced by about 80%;
- b. Delivery of a new fully compliant second river crossing which delivers benefits in terms of safety and network robustness; and
- c. Downgrading and de-linking of the SJB so as to serve only local traffic, public transport, walking and cycle links with the attendant benefits in safety and sustainability.

Investment in major transport infrastructure schemes of regional significance

6.8.47 Policy T10 identifies the targeted investment of new transport provision as a regional priority. The Project is identified as a priority for major regional transport investment within Table 10.2 of RSS13, and the investment and delivery will meet these requirements. As such the overall proposal delivers on this policy priority area.

Compliance

6.8.48 The Project will deliver significant benefits in cross-river vehicular movements at a local and sub-regional level through major infrastructure investment, designed to relieve the current levels of road congestion associated with the SJB and the local highway network. The Project will also provide for modifications to the SJB to maximise the potential of this structure to accommodate cross-river public transport, walking and cycling links. The proposal is identified as a Regional Investment Priority and the proposals accord with this status.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

6.8.49 The Project is considered to be in accordance with the general priorities for transport expressed through policy T10. No mitigation measures are therefore proposed, and thus the residual impacts are considered to be neutral.

6.8.50 In addition to the key transport policies set out above, a number of other RSS13 policies are also considered to be relevant to the Project, as discussed below:

Policy DP1 – Economy in the Use of Land and Buildings

6.8.51 This policy sets out the Strategy's core development principles and emphasises the sequential approach to the effective use of previously developed land and buildings within urban areas. This policy states that new development proposals should "*make the efficient use of transport facilities/networks to assist people in meeting their needs locally.*" New development and other investment in infrastructure is required to be located so as to make the effective use of land, and promote the delivery of appropriate mixes of uses within a site and its wider neighbourhood. The accompanying text advises that a key aim is to improve local access to jobs, shops, leisure and

community facilities and open space, and providing for access to such amenities by walking and cycling.

Relevance

- 6.8.52 This policy is of indirect relevance to the Project in that it is directed towards new built development. Nevertheless, the proposal does involve built development within the urban area, and it will function as a catalyst for new built development. As such, an appraisal of the proposal against this policy is undertaken.

Assessment

- 6.8.53 The extent to which the Project satisfies the core development principles expressed within policy DP1 is considered below:

Development should maximise the efficient use of previously developed land and buildings

- 6.8.54 The Land-Use assessment advises that existing commercial and industrial land is the largest land-type to be affected by the proposed alignment of the Project. The loss of these sites will reduce the net availability of developable commercial and industrial land within Runcorn and Widnes, despite releasing defunct highways land for development. Two small plots of vacant land have been identified within the Land-Use assessment as being lost either permanently or temporarily at operation of the Project. These are located at the intersection of Ditton Road and Speke Road, and adjacent to Lowerhouse Lane. These properties are privately owned, and currently retained for development. The emerging Regeneration Strategy for the area will establish the policy framework for the redevelopment of vacant and derelict land and buildings within Southern Widnes and Runcorn, maximising the re-development of these sites to comprise a mix of uses.

Development should facilitate improved access to jobs, shops, leisure and community facilities, and open space

- 6.8.55 The Project will deliver efficient cross-river movements linking Runcorn and Widnes, and the wider Liverpool City-Region. This will provide people with access to a range of employment opportunities and key services providing a reliable means of transport, including the private car across the New Bridge, and enhancing public transport, walking and cycling by the changes to the SJB.

Compliance

- 6.8.56 Overall, the inclusion of previously developed land and buildings within the Project is considered to be in general accordance with the core development principles of DP1, and the Government's sequential approach to new development expressed within PPS1.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.8.57 The Project is considered to be in general accordance with the requirements of policy DP1. No mitigation measures are therefore proposed, and no residual impact arises.

Policy DP4 – Promoting Sustainable Economic Growth, Competitiveness and Social Inclusion

- 6.8.58 Policy DP4 aims to strengthen and expand the region's economy in a sustainable way to promote a greater degree of social inclusion. The accompanying text states that there will be opportunities to encourage the re-use of disused land and buildings, critical to improving the region's image. Opportunities should also be taken to reshape and restructure land uses to the extent necessary to establish well designed and compact, mixed-use and mixed-tenure

neighbourhoods with good facilities and linkages. The aim is to improve “local access to jobs, shops, leisure and community facilities and open space.”

Relevance

- 6.8.59 As a project which seeks to enhance connectivity between the two existing settlements, an assessment of the New Bridge should be undertaken against the terms of policy DP4. Because of its effect on land-use in Halton, the Project also provides opportunities for the re-shape and re-structure of land.

Assessment

- 6.8.60 The extent to which the Project achieves the key aims of policy DP4 is discussed below:

Contribution of the Project to the expansion of the region’s economy and social inclusion

- 6.8.61 The Project will facilitate enhanced public transport, walking and cycle links across the SJB. This represents a direct benefit in that it will provide non-car owners with a reliable, safe and efficient means of cross-river access to jobs and services which is not currently available.

- 6.8.62 A further benefit of the Project is the direct generation of new employment opportunities within Halton. The Economic Assessment which accompanies this application concludes that the Project will deliver the following employment benefits:

- a. the creation of 243 new jobs within the tightly defined Regeneration Areas;
- b. the creation of between 800 and 1,300 new jobs as part of the wider regeneration proposals within which the New Bridge will serve as a delivery trigger; and
- c. wider sub-regional employment, in particular as a result of cumulative effects.

- 6.8.63 Access to markets, international connectivity, skilled labour and transport within urban areas are also recognised as key factors influencing business location and investment. The Economics Impact Report advises that the Project will improve market access, as well as journey accessibility and reliability to Liverpool John Lennon Airport and Manchester International Airport. It is also expected to enhance the attractiveness of Speke as a location for globally mobile investment, and improve the ability of the local area to compete for national and regional mobile investment projects. Furthermore, the Project will enhance linkages to both Liverpool City Centre and Speke Boulevard, increasing the workforce catchment area for both locations.

Opportunities to re-use disused land and buildings

- 6.8.64 The emerging Regeneration Strategy for Southern Widnes and Runcorn will establish the policy framework for the redevelopment of previously developed vacant land and buildings within the proposed alignment of the Project and its surroundings, maximising the redevelopment potential of such sites to comprise a mix of sustainable land-uses.

Enhance access to jobs and services

- 6.8.65 The Project will deliver improved cross-river public transport, walking and cycling provision by virtue of modifications to the SJB. This integrated transport approach will provide people with a wider choice of reliable transport modes to the private car to access employment opportunities and services locally, sub-regionally and regionally. The delivery of improved public transport, walking and cycling links across the SJB will in particular provide non-car owners with significantly improved opportunities to access jobs and services at both a local and regional level.

Compliance

- 6.8.66 The Project is considered to be in full compliance with the provisions of policy DP4.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.8.67 No mitigation measures are proposed, and no residual impacts arise for review.

Policy SD2 – Other Settlements within the North West Metropolitan Area

- 6.8.68 Policy SD2 identifies Runcorn and Widnes as areas in need of very significant enhancement, in terms of townscape and landscape quality and opportunities for a higher quality of life overall. The policy states that wide-ranging “*regeneration and environmental enhancement should be secured.*” The accompanying text states that a focus on development within the NWMA will create the need for improved public transport networks between and within all the specific areas and towns identified within RSS13, in particular the introduction of management and other measures to ease traffic flow on the motorways.

Relevance

- 6.8.69 The proposed alignment of the Project lies wholly within Halton Borough, linking the towns of Widnes and Runcorn. The Project has the ability to deliver environmental regeneration whilst acting as a catalyst for wider economic and social enhancement. As such, the provisions of policy SD2 are of direct relevance.

Assessment

- 6.8.70 The Project will contribute towards the long-term regeneration of Runcorn and South Widnes. This includes the delivery of significant social, economic and environmental benefits at a local level by virtue of the following:
- a. Delivery of efficient cross-river movements by private car, public transport, walking and cycling to access a wide range of employment opportunities, services and amenities at a local and sub-regional scale;
 - b. Facilitate the economic regeneration of Southern Widnes and Runcorn, in line with the policy framework for the area to be set out within the emerging Regeneration Strategy;
 - c. Facilitate the physical regeneration within the built-up areas of Widnes and Runcorn, both directly via the landscaping proposals which will be associated with the works, indirectly via the wider public realm proposals which will emerge out of the regeneration strategies and LDF policy framework and by providing opportunities for land to be released for development; and
 - d. Provide enhanced public transport links across the SJB to connect Runcorn and Southern Widnes, representing an efficient and reliable alternative forms of transport to the private car. This seeks to encourage non-car dependant journeys between Runcorn and Widnes and the wider Liverpool City-Region, and thus assist in relieving current levels of road congestion.

Compliance

- 6.8.71 The Project satisfies the key objectives of policy SD2 as far as is possible within the bounds of the Project, which is transportation focused.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.8.72 The Project is considered to be in accordance with the requirements of policy SD2. No mitigation measures are therefore proposed, and no residual impacts arise to be assessed.

Policy SD7 – The North West’s Coast

6.8.73 This policy promotes an emphasis towards the conservation and enhancements of historic and archaeological features, natural beauty, seascapes and natural features. All forms of development occupying a coastal location should:

- i. Respect the changing physical nature of the coastline;*
- ii. Recognise the risk over time of fluvial and coastal flooding and erosion;*
- iii. Take active steps to ensure the conservation and enhancement of historic and archaeological features, natural beauty, seascapes and natural features;*
- iv. Enable wise use of all the natural resources, both on and off-shore; and*
- v. Ensure that on-shore enabling development to support off-shore activity is anticipated.*

6.8.74 The accompanying text states that urban areas including Liverpool and other parts of Merseyside dominate the coastline, and thus promotes a continual focus on water quality, habitat management, development quality, and the careful planning of waterside land uses.

Relevance

6.8.75 The New Bridge will oversail the Upper Mersey Estuary, incorporating land at its proposed northern and southern abutments. Whilst the wording of policy SD7 is directed towards coastal areas, rather than estuary locations, the extent of any physical impacts arising from the New Bridge upon the physical coastline should be considered. In addition, the any potential impacts of the Project upon landscapes and should also be considered. As such, policy SD7 is relevant.

Assessment

6.8.76 The following section provides an assessment of the Project against the relevant policy requirements of SD7:

Respect the changing physical nature of the coastline;

6.8.77 The Hydrodynamics assessment of the ES (see Chapter 7) has investigated the existing hydrodynamic and morphological regime within the Mersey Estuary, at both short-term and long-term intervals. This policy assessment has drawn on the findings of the Hydrodynamics assessment to assess the Project against the provisions of policy SD7.

6.8.78 The Hydrodynamics assessment has identified that the impact of the proposed Mersey Gateway Bridge upon the hydrodynamics and morphology of the Mersey Estuary will not be significant compared with the naturally occurring rate of change. The evidence gathered as a result of the range of modelling and investigations carried out suggests that there will be no material impact upon the hydrodynamics and morphology of the estuary. The results of the investigation demonstrate that the natural changes and fluctuations within the coastal system are in excess of the impacts predicted to arise from the New Bridge.

Recognise the risk over time of fluvial and coastal flooding and erosion;

6.8.79 It has been demonstrated through the Hydrodynamics assessment of the ES, and the Flood Risk Assessment that the Project will not contribute towards the physical change of the coastline, nor increase the risk of fluvial and coastal flooding in excess of the natural occurring rate of change of the estuary.

Take active steps to ensure the conservation and enhancement of historic and archaeological features, natural beauty, seascapes and natural features;

6.8.80 It is acknowledged within the Landscape and Visual Amenity assessment that the Project will have a visual impact upon the existing natural and historic environment of the estuary. To

minimise impacts, the New Bridge has been aligned to the east of the SJB to protect and conserve where possible the existing historic value and importance associated with this structure. The design of the New Bridge has also sought to maintain the external views of the SJB in recognition of its importance to the character of the local area.

- 6.8.81 The Cultural Heritage assessment of the ES advises that the identified impacts and potential impacts of the Project upon each of the archaeological and historic sites identified within the assessment are considered to be of low significance. Potential impacts of the Project upon estuarine archaeological sites are identified to include the possible loss of ground remains related to the history and development of each site, and the potential for buried features to be unearthed during construction.

Compliance

- 6.8.82 It has been demonstrated through the Hydrodynamics assessment that the Project will not contribute towards the physical change of the coastline, nor increase the risk of fluvial and coastal flooding in excess of the natural occurring rate of change. It is acknowledged that the New Bridge will have a visual impact upon the natural and historic environment of the estuary, and may also result in the possible loss of ground remains related to archaeological sites within the proposed alignment of the Project.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.8.83 Whilst no mitigation measures are proposed, it is recommended within the Hydrodynamics assessment that monitoring of the estuary is undertaken throughout construction, and during the first five years of the operation phase to develop a further understanding of the estuarine system. The Landscape and Visual Amenity assessment advises that appropriate landscaping measures will be implemented to mitigate the visual impacts of the New Bridge on the existing coastline where possible, and the design and choice of construction materials will seek to reflect the existing historic importance of the area.

Policy ER3 – Built Heritage

- 6.8.84 Policy ER3 advises planning authorities and other agencies within their plans, policies and proposals to identify, protect, conserve and where appropriate enhance the built heritage of the Region, including those features and sites (and their settings) of historic significance to the North West:
- i. Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Site;*
 - ii. The City of Chester;*
 - iii. Liverpool's commercial centre and waterfront;*
 - iv. Listed Building, historic parks and gardens, and conservation areas and battlefields; and*
 - v. The wider historic landscape that contributes to the distinctiveness of the Region, taking into account the chronological depth of heritage contained within the North West Metropolitan Area, the rural lowlands, rural uplands and coastal areas;*

- 6.8.85 The accompanying text advises that there will be areas where a series of sites and settings create an integral whole which provides interest, and which should be regarded as cultural assets in their own right.

Relevance

- 6.8.86 The Project will be aligned 1.8km upstream of the Grade II listed SJB, and the Grade II* listed Aethelfleda Railway Bridge, and thus may have a visual impact upon this historic landscape. The extent to which the New Bridge complies with the relevant criteria of policy ER3, in particular points iv and v within this policy.

Assessment

- 6.8.87 The Landscape and Visual Amenity assessment of this ES (see chapter 12) has undertaken a full review of the possible visual impacts of Mersey Gateway Bridge. With particular reference to historic buildings matters, this assessment has considered the proposals in relation to the Grade II listed SJB and the Grade II* listed Aethelfleda railway bridge. Particular regard has been had to any effects on the historical context and setting of both structures. The landscape assessment concludes as follows:
- a. That Mersey Gateway Bridge, in particular that part which spans the estuary, is in keeping with and is readily accommodated within the grand scale of the estuary setting; and
 - b. That the quality of the bridge design, its lightness of cabling and structure and choice of materials, ensures that it has the capacity to be considered as an iconic structure in its own right.
- 6.8.88 The assessment acknowledges that the New Bridge will be mainly seen within the same view as the SJB and the railway bridge it concludes however that given the relative separation (1.8 km), the scale of the setting, the exemplary design features of the New Bridge and the clear difference in design and style between the New Bridge and the SJB, then the relationship is considered to be one of appropriate co-existence. It is concluded that the New Bridge will become a notable feature within the estuary, sitting alongside and complementary to the SJB.
- 6.8.89 The narrower assessment of impact on the setting of the listed SJB and adjacent Railway Bridge concluded that the Project would inevitably change the existing open estuary setting by introducing a new river crossing which would have views from and to the listed structure. The appraisal concludes however that any such impact would be of low negative significance.

Compliance

- 6.8.90 The Project will as far as possible protect the existing built heritage of the area. The New Bridge may in its own right also be regarded as an iconic structure within the setting of the Estuary. The Project is therefore considered to be in general compliance with the provisions of policy ER3.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.8.91 No adverse impact in relation to either the setting or the fabric of existing listed structures is identified; on this basis no mitigation is proposed and no residual impacts arise for review.

Policy ER5 – Biodiversity and Nature Conservation

- 6.8.92 This policy sets out the requirement for Local Planning Authorities to
- “afford the strongest levels of protection to sites with international and national nature conservation designations, encompassing Ramsar Sites, Special Protections Areas, and Special Areas of Conservation, National Nature Reserves, and Sites of Specific Scientific Interest.”*
- 6.8.93 The policy advises that plans, policies and proposals should ensure that the overall nature conservation resource in the North West is protected and enriched through conservation, restoration and re-establishment. The supporting text also recognises the importance of parks and greenspaces as important sources of biodiversity in the Region.

Relevance

- 6.8.94 The proposed alignment of the New Bridge spans the Upper Mersey Estuary, which enjoys none of the designations specified within policy ER5. The Middle Mersey Estuary however, the

boundary of which is marked by the SJB, does benefit from Ramsar and other statutory designations. The potential for 'referred downstream input' does arise and as such the proposal should be assessed against the terms of the policy framework.

Assessment

- 6.8.95 The Aquatic Ecology and Terrestrial and Avian Ecology chapters incorporate relevant assessments as part of the Project EIA. This planning policy chapter has drawn from the findings of these assessments to enable the Project to be assessed against the policy guidance expressed within ER5.
- 6.8.96 The Aquatic Ecology assessment (see Chapter 11) analyses the intertidal and subtidal components of the ecosystem, and the potential impacts on the aquatic ecology of freshwater canals and brooks within the region of the Upper Mersey.
- 6.8.97 The intertidal and subtidal habitat downstream of the SJB is internationally important, a reflection of its designation as a Site of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Protection Area (SPA), and Ramsar site under the Habitats Directive.
- 6.8.98 Although the proposed alignment of the New Bridge does not physically lie within or adjacent to these areas, any significant impacts upon aquatic ecology have the potential for indirect effects on existing bird life within this region.
- 6.8.99 The Aquatic Ecology assessment has identified a number of key receptors which may be subject to potential impacts as a result of the Project, including:
- a. Intertidal and subtidal habitat;
 - b. Infauna and benthic algae;
 - c. Epifauna and fish; and
 - d. Canal fauna and flora.
- 6.8.100 These receptors are related to the ecology of the main estuary channel. The Project also has the potential to affect freshwater watercourses including canals and brooks within or near to the proposed works.
- 6.8.101 A series of potential construction phase impacts have been identified within the Aquatic Ecology TA, including underwater noise generated by pile driving, sediment movement/resuspension, accidental release of pollutants, and habitat loss/disturbance.
- 6.8.102 In addition to the above, a number of operational phase impacts of the Project have been identified. These include possible sediment movement/resuspension, release of pollutants, habitat loss and disturbance, and guantrophy.
- 6.8.103 The Terrestrial and Avian Ecology assessment (see Chapter 10) of the ES describes and evaluates the existing terrestrial and bird habitat ecological conditions of the Mersey Estuary and its surroundings, and identifies all terrestrial wildlife habitats and associated biodiversity that may be directly or indirectly affected by the construction and operation of the Project. It notes that the New Bridge:
- a. May have an adverse effect upon the ecology and nature conservation value of the Upper Mersey Estuary, particularly its estuarine habitats and their associated flora and fauna;
 - b. Could impact upon the Middle Mersey Estuary SSSI, SPA, Ramsar site, and European Marine Site given the number of sensitive estuarine habitats that are present; and
 - c. Will lead to a loss of saltmarsh habitat, and/or is likely to lead to damage to vegetation and soils within the Estuary during construction as a result of access by construction machinery, temporary structures, construction materials, and personnel.

- 6.8.104 The Terrestrial and Avian Ecology assessment advises that the contaminants in the intertidal sandbanks, sand and siltflats are not considered to pose a risk to pollution of downstream habitats and birds feeding in the Middle Mersey Estuary. In the Upper Mersey Estuary, construction and access activities may disturb feeding, roosting and breeding birds on the saltmarshes and other intertidal species, albeit methods are available such as temporary fencing to limit construction disturbance to a defined corridor, thus reducing disturbance.
- 6.8.105 There is no evidence to suggest that the Project, during construction or thereafter, will interfere with bird movements between the Middle Estuary and the Upper Mersey Estuary given the rarity of such events.
- 6.8.106 It is considered within the Terrestrial and Avian Ecology assessment that construction and use of the Project approach roads and associated junction improvements will have only minor effects on biodiversity. Protected species, including bats, Great Crested Newts and Water Voles will be largely or entirely unaffected.
- 6.8.107 In addition to the Aquatic Ecology and Terrestrial and Avian Ecology assessments, the Land-Use assessment of the ES advises that areas of greenspace at St. Michaels Golf Course and at Widnes Warth will be permanently lost by virtue of the proposed alignment of the New Bridge. Areas of greenspace are identified within policy ER5 as potential sources of biodiversity and nature conservation. No compensatory areas of greenspace will be provided through the Project.

Compliance

- 6.8.108 The Project has been designed to limit the construction and operational impacts of the development upon existing biodiversity and geological importance associated with the Mersey Estuary. This includes the proposed works to the SJB given its crossing of the 'Runcorn Gap' adjacent to the designated Middle Mersey Estuary. The findings of the Aquatic Ecology have demonstrated that the Project has the potential to affect existing freshwater watercourses within the study area during construction and operation. Appropriate mitigation measures have therefore been identified at both construction and operational phases to minimise the impacts of development, as discussed below.
- 6.8.109 The Terrestrial and Avian Ecology assessment has recognised that the Project will generate only minor effects on biodiversity within the study area during construction. To minimise these effects, mitigation measures have once again been identified, and these are discussed below. No adverse effects arising from the Project upon the integrity of the SSSI have been identified through the Appropriate Assessment.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

Aquatic Ecology

- 6.8.110 The Aquatic Ecology assessment undertaken as part of the Project EIA has identified a number of potential construction and operation mitigation measures associated within its development.
- 6.8.111 Effective construction mitigation measures may include the constant monitoring (and limiting) of noise levels during construction, and the selection of appropriate building materials/techniques to control noise levels.
- 6.8.112 Additional mitigation measures may also involve the use of silt curtains to reduce sediment dispersal during piling, and the careful removal of materials to a barge, and contaminated material to special hazardous waste sites. The direct loss of habitat at the sites of the proposed tower location is inevitable, and therefore difficult to mitigate. The construction of access tracks, causeway and pier structures are also likely to impact upon saltmarsh areas.

- 6.8.113 Mitigation measures to minimise the operational impacts of the proposed development include:
- a. Bed reinforcement and physical interception of any developing scour to limit its propagation;
 - b. Integration of spillage channel/gully/drainage systems within the bridge design to minimise impacts of oil and chemical spills arising from road run-off.
- 6.8.114 Whilst changes to sediment and corridor interruption are unavoidable, the Aquatic Ecology assessment advises of the potential to compensate for these impacts through the enhancement of the wildlife corridor of the Upper Mersey Estuary. One possible method is the implementation of conservation management plans designed to increase the conservation status of the Widnes Warth and Astmoor saltmarshes.

Terrestrial and Avian Ecology

- 6.8.115 The Terrestrial and Avian Ecology assessment advises that the loss or damage to saltmarsh habitat, soils and vegetation as a result of the Project may be avoided or minimised through the construction of temporary access tracks designed to protect the saltmarsh habitat from damage and disruption. Other possible mitigation measures include temporary translocation and revegetation, encouraging natural regeneration, and/or reseeded. Upon implementation of these appropriate mitigation measures, the Terrestrial and Avian Ecology assessment advises that the construction and operation of the Project will not cause significant harm to biodiversity, or to the habitat and wild bird importance of the national and internationally important Middle Mersey Estuary.

Policy EQ2 – Air Quality

- 6.8.116 This policy identifies a series of measures which seek to enhance air quality in the North West, and to co-ordinate actions to monitor air quality in line with the Regional Sustainable Development Framework. With particular regard to transportation matters, the policy promotes the use of air quality criteria to *“reduce or reverse the growth in road traffic and encourage greater use of public transport, walking and cycling,”* and promotes sustainable and healthier patterns of development. At a local level, the policy advises that the most significant pollutants are *“industrial processes and road traffic, particularly in the more industrialised and densely populated areas.”* It identifies *“efforts to reduce the need to travel, reduce dependency on private cars, and encouraging the use of public transport”* as means of addressing traffic pollution. Furthermore, *“encouraging the use of cleaner, less polluting vehicles and fuels can also be an important means of reducing pollution from road transport.”*
- 6.8.117 Along the region’s main transport corridors, RSS13 encourages tree and woodland planting and the creation of networks of urban greenspace in the interests of improving air quality, especially within urban areas, and those downwind of urban or industrial zones.

Relevance

- 6.8.118 As a primarily road based transportation proposal, the New Bridge has the potential to affect air quality. As such, the provisions of policy EQ2 are relevant to any assessment of the proposals.

Assessment

- 6.8.119 The extent to which the Project satisfies the key summary principles of policy EQ2 is discussed below.

Reduce or reverse the growth in road traffic

- 6.8.120 One of the primary objectives for the Project is to address the congestion in and around the SJB and to allow for easier journeys by car across the Mersey at this point. It would be possible

therefore that this 'ease to movement' and additional capacity will encourage a greater number of car-based journeys, with drivers choosing to use the route where previously they would not have done so simply because it is now easier by comparison to alternatives. This in turn may lead to an increase in car based journeys. However, the traffic modelling exercise shows that the primary effect of the provision of a second river crossing is a reallocation of traffic from the SJB to the new crossing, rather one of inducement of traffic or any catering for suppressed demand. The proposed tolling regime on the both the New Bridge and the SJB will exert effective demand management. The New Bridge has an essentially local effect in removing the congestion caused by the SJB, the Project will allow for more efficient movements by private car. The reduction of congestion and the delivery of a more efficient highway network would in fact meet one of the governments transport policy aims.

Encourage the use of public transport, walking and cycling

6.8.121 Whilst acknowledging that the Project is primarily the provision of a new road scheme will allows for the use of the private car, there are however a number of accompanying elements which would act as counter balance. These comprise:

- a. The enhanced (in terms of frequency and reliability) provision for public transport across the SJB;
- b. The enhanced provision for walking and cycling across the SJB. This will include a new dedicated pedestrian footway on the SJB. In addition, the paths will be accessible for people with disabilities through measures such as dropped kerbs, tactile paving, and safe crossing provisions; and
- c. The implementation of tolling on both the New Bridge and the SJB to manage private car demand and induce a reduction in reliance upon the private car.

6.8.122 Each of these elements act as a counterbalance to the provision for private car use that will be delivered by the Project.

Woodland planting along the main transport corridors

6.8.123 The woodland proposals detail the opportunity for planting to be incorporated as part of the wider Mersey Gateway Project proposals. The amendments to the Central Expressway and associated junctions will open up the potential for an appropriate level of planting provision.

Compliance

6.8.124 In relation to overall air quality, the relevant Air Quality assessment finds that the Project will not have a significant environmental impact at operation. Subject to the appropriate level of landscape provision, the proposals are therefore considered to be in general compliance with the provisions of policy EQ2

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

6.8.125 No mitigation measures are proposed, and no residual impacts arise for review.

Policy EQ3 – Water Quality

6.8.126 Policy EQ3 establishes a series of measures to improve and sustain the quality of the region's rivers, canal, lakes and sea. This policy places an emphasis on Local Authorities to avoid development that "*poses an unacceptable risk to the quality of groundwater, surface, or coastal water.*" Adequate pollution control measures should be implemented to "*reduce the risks of water pollution,*" and these should be integrated into new developments. The policy also advises that the construction of roads and other transport infrastructure should not "*unnecessarily add to diffuse pollution.*" This is identified as a major challenge to water quality, and can affect both the chemical and ecological quality of water, including bathing water. Sources of pollution are

identified as surface water systems that serve industrial, highway, residential or commercial schemes.

Relevance

- 6.8.127 The proposed alignment of the Project occupies an Upper Mersey Estuary location. The Project is sited in close proximity to and will oversail or otherwise affect a number of existing watercourses within Runcorn and Widnes, including the Manchester Ship Canal, Bridgewater Canal, and St. Helens Canal. Any potential sources of water pollution on existing rivers, canals, lakes and sea during both construction and operation should therefore be considered within this policy assessment against the provisions of policy EQ3.

Assessment

- 6.8.128 The Surface Water Quality chapter of the EIA (see Chapter 8) has assessed potential impacts of the Project upon the water quality of the Mersey Estuary and other surface watercourses. This has identified that areas likely to be sensitive to water pollution include the Mersey Estuary Ramsar site, SPA, SSSI and European Marine Site, all of which are located downstream of the Project. The findings of this chapter have been drawn on to inform this planning policy assessment.
- 6.8.129 During the construction phase of the project, potential construction phase impacts to the water quality of watercourses within the study area have been identified as follows:
- a. Disturbance of sediment creating an increased sediment load within the water column;
 - b. Mobilisation of contaminated sediments;
 - c. Spills from construction activities entering surface water features;
 - d. Reduced water quality resulting from piling activities;
 - e. Increased scour and sediment mobilisation from around cofferdams.
- 6.8.130 In addition to the above, access options for construction works within the intertidal area have been assessed. This has identified that the use of amphibious craft is only likely to disturb sediments already within the mobile zone, and so will not contribute towards a material change in water quality.
- 6.8.131 There is the potential for any spillages and leaks that occur during the construction works to have a detrimental effect on water quality within all watercourses in the defined study area. Potential operational phase impacts on the water quality of watercourses within the study area include:
- a. Scour around the bridge piers resulting in an increased sediment load within the water column, mobilisation of contaminated sediments and deoxygenated waters;
 - b. Routine runoff and spillage of chemicals from roads into surface watercourses; and
 - c. Guantrophy – increasing organic deposition from birds using the Bridge to roost.
- 6.8.132 In addition to Surface Water Quality, Groundwater Quality has also been assessed within the Contamination of Soils, Sediments and Groundwater chapter of this ES (see Chapter 14). The findings of this assessment identify the presence of widespread contamination of groundwater by metals and other contaminants in Widnes. Groundwater contamination was also noted to the north of the Manchester Ship Canal at Wigg Island in Runcorn.
- 6.8.133 The assessment has identified existing impacts on groundwater within the Project area in Widnes and in parts of Runcorn. It is considered that the potential effects on groundwater from the construction and operation of the Project can be mitigated. However, the wider contamination of groundwater will need to be considered. A preliminary options appraisal has been undertaken that identifies further mitigation measures to address this and these would

need to be developed as part of an overall remediation strategy to take account of the wider contamination issues in the area.

Compliance

- 6.8.134 The Project has been identified through the Surface Water Quality assessment as having the potential to impact upon local water quality standards during construction and operation. Whilst this is not considered to represent a significant concern, suitable mitigation measures have been considered in accordance with the requirements of policy EQ3 to minimise the extent and risk of pollution upon watercourses and water quality within the study area.
- 6.8.135 In addition, whilst the Project may impact upon local groundwater quality standards during construction and operation, this is unlikely to be significant. Appropriate mitigation measures have been identified to minimise the extent and risk of pollution upon watercourses and water quality within the study area.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.8.136 The Surface Water Quality chapter advises that a range of mitigation measures can be applied through “*management techniques*” and “*physical techniques*”. Management techniques proposed during the construction phase comprise a series of management plans, including:
- a. Waste and Resource Management Plan;
 - b. Pollution Control and Contingency Plan; and
 - c. Water Management Plan (Surface and Groundwater).
- 6.8.137 Physical techniques to be applied during the construction and operation phases will include:
- a. design standards to be utilised;
 - b. Bunded fuel tank to contain 110% of the tank volume and be properly maintained;
 - c. Oil/Water separators will be used to remove oils/fuels accidentally spilled/accumulated during operation of the Project;
 - d. Measures to prevent the reintroduction of suspended solids into watercourses should be incorporated; and
 - e. Spill control measures to be used.
- 6.8.138 The Surface Water Quality assessment advises that the Project will have no significant effects upon the surface water quality of the watercourses within the study area. The aforementioned mitigation measures have therefore been identified to reduce any potential impacts which may otherwise arise, and no significant residual impacts have been identified.
- 6.8.139 The assessment has identified existing impacts on groundwater within the Project area in Widnes and in parts of Runcorn. It is considered that the potential effects on groundwater from the construction and operation of the Project can be mitigated. However, the wider contamination of groundwater will need to be considered. A preliminary options appraisal has been undertaken that identifies further mitigation measures to address this and these would need to be developed as part of an overall remediation strategy to take account of the wider contamination issues in the area. Monitoring of groundwater levels and quality should also be undertaken.

6.9 Draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the North West

6.9.1 A full review of RSS13 commenced in July 2004. A submitted draft document was published by the North West Regional Assembly (NWRA) in January 2006. This was later subject to public consultation between 20th March 2006 and 12th June 2006. An Examination in Public (EiP) into the RSS was held between October 2006 and February 2007. On 8th May 2007 the EiP Panel published its report. Proposed Modifications were issued in March 2008, and will be subject to a further period of public consultation. It is expected that the RSS will be formally adopted in mid-2008. Whilst the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy policies largely re-iterate existing policies set out in the adopted Regional Spatial Strategy, these do comprise bespoke elements to which any consideration of the Project should address itself.

6.9.2 To inform the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy for the Region, the NWRA produced a *Regional Transport Strategy* in 2003. The Strategy was progressed by the North West Assembly with a steer from the Regional Transport Co-ordination Group and involved the participation of a wide range of stakeholders through a wider reference group. The Regional Transport Strategy now forms an integral element of draft RSS, and has informed the following policies:

Draft Policy RT2 – Management and Maintenance of the Highway Network

6.9.3 This policy focuses on the management, maintenance and improvement of the Regional Highway Network and existing infrastructure, affording a *“high priority to improving transport safety and security”* to implement a consistent approach to speed management across highway authority boundaries.

6.9.4 Policy advises that the effective *“re-allocation of road space in favour of public transport, pedestrians and cyclists should be considered”* as part of an integrated approach to managing travel demand. The accompanying text advises that proposals for major road improvements *“should only be identified following an examination of all practical alternative solutions to a particular problem.”*

6.9.5 The accompanying text advises that congestion on the highway network occurs mainly during the increasingly lengthy peak periods, and thus encourages the preparation of integrated strategies to *“manage demand in the most sustainable way, including the use of parking controls, and enhancement of the public transport, pedestrian and cycle networks.”*

6.9.6 The draft RSS EiP Panel Report published in May 2007 assessed the aforementioned policy objectives. With regard to Policy RT2, the Panel considered this to be reasonably comprehensive and suggested no changes. The Panel considered that this policy clearly indicates that the *“best use should be made of existing infrastructure, and that any proposals for major highways improvements should only be prepared after a thorough examination of the practical alternative solutions.”*

Relevance

6.9.7 The New Bridge proposals incorporate an improvement to the regional highway network and seeks to make enhanced provision for pedestrians and cyclists. It also incorporates demand management in the form of the tolling structure. On each point therefore, the provisions of draft policy RT2 are relevant to any proposal assessment.

Assessment

6.9.8 The Project has sought to have regard to the general elements of policy RT2 in that it:

- a. Reallocates road space to pedestrians and cyclists; and

- b. Seeks to manage demand via tolling on both the New Bridge and SJB. The framework that will be put in place has the ability to affect car borne commuting choices.
- 6.9.9 With regard to the requirements to review alternative options in meeting demand, the Alternatives chapter of this ES (see Chapter 5) set out how this exercise has been done as part of the assessment. The chapter has undertaken an appraisal of the following strategic development opportunities:
- a. Halton Travel Plan Network;
 - b. Charging for using the SJB or other roads;
 - c. Dynamic Lane Management;
 - d. Selective Access by Vehicle Tagging;
 - e. Road Space Re-Allocation;
 - f. Park and Ride;
 - g. Rail Service Improvements;
 - h. Fixed crossing to the west of the Railway bridge;
 - i. Fixed crossing between the SJB and the Railway Bridge; and
 - j. Fixed crossing to the east of the Railway Bridge.
- 6.9.10 The findings of the Alternatives assessment concluded that a fixed crossing to the east of Aethelfleda Railway Bridge is the only option which has the potential to deliver all of the identified scheme objectives. The Alternatives assessment has identified that preferred Route 3A would result in significant traffic alleviation, and deliver benefit from increased public transport reliability. Route 3A will also allow cycling and pedestrian facilities on the SJB to be improved.

Compliance

- 6.9.11 The proposals are in compliance with the themes of draft policy RT2.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.9.12 The Project is considered to be in general accordance with the objectives of policy RT2. No mitigation measures are therefore proposed, and no residual impacts therefore arise for review.

Draft Policy RT8 – Regional Priorities for Transport Investment and Management

- 6.9.13 Draft policy RT8 identifies a number of regional priorities for transport investment and management, in order of importance, as set out below:

- i. Improving transport safety and security;*
- ii. Maintaining existing transport networks and assets;*
- iii. Making best use of existing transport networks and assets, including the widespread introduction of complementary ‘smart choices’ and other incentives to change travel behaviour and reduce private car use; and*
- iv. Targeted investment in accordance with a schedule of highway priorities.*

- 6.9.14 The supporting text confirms that whilst it is considered imperative that existing networks and assets are adequately maintained and in particular, the deterioration in the condition of local roads halted, policy advises of the “*need for further targeted investment in new or improved roads and public transport infrastructure if the Vision for the North West is to be achieved.*”

- 6.9.15 Policy RT8, Table 10.2, establishes a number of regional and sub-regional priorities for major transport investment, including the Mersey Gateway (New Mersey Crossing). This scheme is identified within the Regional Funding Allocation programme, to be financed through combination of the RFA, PFI and toll revenue. The scheme is identified as delivering a major improvement to the A557 route between the M56 Junction 12 to M62 Junction 7, and an

improvement in access to and from the A562/A561 route in Widnes, which links to Liverpool John Lennon Airport and the Port of Garston, all of which are routes recognised as of “*regional importance*” as expressed within Appendix RT2.1 of the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy.

- 6.9.16 The Panel expressed some concern in respect of Policy RT8, and in particular the identification and inclusion of major transport infrastructure schemes within the RSS that were unlikely to come forward for development during the Plan period up to 2021. Whilst this does not apply to the Project, on balance the Panel decided against recommending changes to this policy.

Relevance

- 6.9.17 The Project is recognised as a regionally important transport scheme within the Regional Spatial Strategy, for delivery by 2021. The extent to which the Project satisfies the objectives of policy RT8 should therefore be considered.

Assessment

- 6.9.18 An assessment of the Project against regional priorities expressed within draft policy RT8 is set out below:

Improve transport safety

- 6.9.19 Transport safety will be improved by virtue of the following elements of the Project:
- a. Relieving congestion across and around the SJB by virtue of the proposed de-linking of this with the Weston Point and Bridgewater Expressways, and the eastern Widnes by-pass. The Transport Assessment advises that on the opening of the Project, the level of traffic on the SJB will be reduced by about 80%;
 - b. Implementation of modern highway provision across the New Bridge;
 - c. Downgrading of the SJB to prioritise local traffic alongside public transport, walking and cycle links, and encourage increased numbers of non-car journeys. The SJB will be accessible for people with disabilities through measures such as dropped kerbs, tactile paving, and safe crossing provisions; and
 - d. Incorporation of fully compliant junction configuration along the whole length of the New Bridge from Speke Road in the north to J12 of the M56 to the south.

Maintaining existing networks and assets

- 6.9.20 The Project incorporates proposals for works to the SJB to provide enhanced public transport, walking and cycling cross-river links. This approach will ensure that the existing highway network is maintained to a high standard, and its potential use maximised so far as possible. The damaging effects of the current capacity overload will be addressed by the proposals.

Make best use of existing transport infrastructure

- 6.9.21 The SJB will be re-configured on opening of the New Bridge to maximise the use of the existing road infrastructure, comprising enhanced localised public transport, pedestrian and cycle links provides alternative means of transport to the private car. The New Bridge will also link in with the existing highway network, including the Central Expressway, to utilise existing transport infrastructure where possible.

Targeted investment

- 6.9.22 Policy RT8 identifies the targeted investment of new transport provision as a regional priority. The Project constitutes an appropriate subject of targeted investment by virtue of its identification as a priority for major regional transport investment within Table 10.2 of emerging RSS.

Compliance

6.9.23 The Project would meet each of the policy themes set out within policy RT8.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

6.9.24 The Project is considered to be in accordance with the requirements of policy RT8. No mitigation measures are therefore proposed, and no residual impacts arise which require review.

6.9.25 In addition to the key transport policies set out above, a number of other emerging RSS policies are also relevant to the Project, as outlined below:

Draft Policy DP1 – Regional Development Principles

6.9.26 This policy sets out a range of broad development principles which seek to:

- i. Ensure that decisions are sustainable and transparent;*
- ii. Make better use of land, buildings and infrastructure;*
- iii. Ensure quality in development; and*
- iv. Tackle climate change.*

6.9.27 The policy emphasises the sequential approach to development locations, seeking to ensure that in each case all new development is “*genuinely accessible by public transport, walking and cycling.*”

Relevance

6.9.28 Each of the broad development principles set out within draft policy DP1 are relevant to the Project by virtue of the nature of the development proposals. The extent to which the Project satisfies these development principles should therefore be considered.

Assessment

6.9.29 The following provides an assessment of the Project against the broad development principles expressed within policy DP1:

Ensure that decisions are sustainable and transparent;

6.9.30 The application process both pre and post application, including consultation, will be undertaken in full accord with the appropriate process and will seek to follow best practice at each stage.

Make better use of land, buildings and infrastructure;

6.9.31 The proposal will set serve as a catalyst for the economic, social and environmental regeneration of Southern Widnes and Runcorn. It will release land either side of the Estuary for redevelopment and re-use. The emerging Regeneration Strategy and LDF for Southern Widnes and Runcorn will establish the policy framework for the redevelopment of previously developed vacant land and buildings, maximising the redevelopment potential of such sites to deliver an appropriate mix of sustainable land-uses.

Ensure quality in development;

6.9.32 The evolution of the Project has sought to protect and conserve the existing character of the area, and minimise the visual impacts of the proposals upon the natural, built and historic environment. The design quality has evolved out of this and has been subject to review.

Tackle climate change.

- 6.9.33 The Project through the amendments to the SJB will deliver the enhancement of public transport, walking and cycling provision. The availability of these alternative modes of transport seeks to encourage less reliance upon the private car, and establishes conditions whereby encouraging a reduction in the number of trips made by the private car.

Compliance

- 6.9.34 The Project is considered to be in accordance with the provisions of draft policy DP1.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.9.35 The Project is considered to be in general accordance with the requirements of policy DP1. No mitigation measures are therefore proposed, and no residual impacts arise for review.

Draft Policy RDF1 – Main Development Locations

- 6.9.36 Draft policy RDF1 aims to ensure that most new development in the region takes place within the urban areas of the Regional Centres and Regional Towns and Cities. The purpose of this is to “support development in the regional towns and cities in City Regions to secure urban regeneration and economic growth that is complementary to the Regional Centre.” Runcorn and Widnes are both identified as Regional Towns within the accompanying settlement hierarchy.

Relevance

- 6.9.37 The proposed alignment of the Project lies within Halton Borough in the North West Metropolitan Area, providing efficient cross-river connectivity between Runcorn and Widnes. The Project will deliver improved public transport, walking and cycling links between the two Regional Towns and the Liverpool City-Region, and encourage both regeneration and economic growth.

Assessment

- 6.9.38 The Project will deliver efficient and reliable transport links directly connecting Widnes and Runcorn. The development of the New Bridge will serve as a catalyst towards the planned regeneration of Southern Widnes and Runcorn, and will stimulate the development of disused and vacant land within Southern Widnes. This will help to deliver significant economic benefits at a local and sub-regional level, increasing access to a broad range of employment opportunities requiring varying degrees of skills levels, and key services to broaden consumer spending within the wider Liverpool City-Region. This includes enhanced linkages to both Liverpool City Centre and Speke Boulevard and increasing the workforce catchment area for both locations. It is also expected to enhance the attractiveness of Speke as a location for globally mobile investment, and improve the ability of the local area to compete for national and regional mobile investment projects.
- 6.9.39 The Project has the ability to become an iconic structure which will act as a marketing toll which enhances its external image both nationally and globally. Access to markets, international connectivity, skilled labour and transport within urban areas are recognised as key factors influencing business location and investment. The Project has the ability to improve market access, as well as journey accessibility and reliability to key regional transport nodes, including Liverpool John Lennon Airport and Manchester International Airport.

Compliance

- 6.9.40 The development of the Project represents suitable development within the Regional Towns in accordance with the principles of RDF1.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.9.41 The Project is considered to be in general accordance with the requirements of policy RDF1. No mitigation measures are therefore proposed, and no residual impacts arise for review.

Draft Policy RDF4 – The Coast

- 6.9.42 This draft policy, which refers specifically to the wider coastal areas, promotes the enhancement of the coastal region and the regeneration of coastal communities. The draft policy advises that plans and strategies should protect and diversify the economic and social regeneration of the Region's coastal areas. Policy encourages Local Authorities to promote the conservation and enhancement of cultural, historical and natural environmental assets, including land and seascapes, and ensure the prudent and sustainable use of natural resources. Local Planning Authorities are also encouraged to direct development requiring a coastal location to the developed coast, and safeguard the undeveloped and remote coast.

Relevance

- 6.9.43 The New Bridge spans the Upper Mersey Estuary, incorporating land at its proposed northern and southern abutments. Whilst the wording of policy RDF4 is directed more towards coastal areas rather than estuary locations, and a number of the elements are not relevant to the MGP, the extent to which the Project will contribute to the regeneration of the coastal areas, whilst protecting and conserving the historical and natural coastal assets, should be considered.

Assessment

- 6.9.44 The following provides an assessment of the Project against the relevant objectives summarised within policy RDF4:

Contribution to economic and social regeneration

- 6.9.45 The Project will contribute to the economic and social regeneration of Southern Widnes and Runcorn by virtue of the following:
- a. Act as a catalyst for the economic regeneration of Southern Widnes and Runcorn. The parallel policy framework will ensure that the prospects of capturing the potential benefits are maximised;
 - b. Release and maximise the re-use of previously development land and buildings as part of the Regeneration Strategy for the area; and
 - c. Provide public transport, walking and cycling links across the SJB, and enhance cross-river accessibility to employment opportunities and services at a local and sub-regional level, in particular for non-car owners.

Preserve and conserve the natural, built and historic environmental assets;

- 6.9.46 The Hydrodynamics assessment of the ES advises that the Project will not have a significant effect upon the hydrodynamics and morphology of the Mersey Estuary in excess of the naturally occurring rate of change, nor increase the risk of fluvial and coastal flooding. However, the Landscape and Visual Amenity assessment and Cultural Heritage assessment both advise that the New Bridge will have a negative permanent visual impact upon features of the estuary, including the SJB and Aethelfleda Railway Bridge, in particular from the east. The Surface Water Quality assessment has identified that the Project will not have a detrimental impact upon water quality as a result of development.

Compliance

- 6.9.47 As far as the policy draft RD4 is relevant, the Project is in compliance and therefore no conflict arises.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.9.48 Whilst no direct impact and no consequently mitigation measures are proposed, the Hydrodynamics assessment recommends that monitoring of the coastline is continued during the construction phase and the first five years of the operation to provide further understanding of the estuarine system. Appropriate landscaping measures will be implemented to mitigate the visual impacts of the New Bridge on the existing historic environment where possible, and the design and choice of construction materials will seek to respect the existing historic environment.

Draft Policy W1 – Strengthening the Regional Economy

- 6.9.49 Draft policy W1 encourages plans and strategies to promote opportunities for economic development which will strengthen the economy of the North West. Whilst the policy in the main is not relevant to the New Bridge proposals, one of the key objectives of this is “ensuring the safe, reliable and effective operation of the region’s transport networks and infrastructure in accordance with the policies and priorities of the Regional Transport Strategy,” to build on the region’s strengths, in particular the three City Regions of Manchester, Liverpool and Central Lancashire.

Relevance

- 6.9.50 The Project seeks to facilitate the safe, reliable and efficient cross-river movements between Runcorn and Widnes, and the wider Liverpool City-Region. The Project is directly relevant to this element of the policy, and the requirements of the policy should be taken into account in any assessment.

Assessment

- 6.9.51 The Project will provide efficient cross-river vehicular movements through the delivery of new high-quality, state of the art new road infrastructure. This will relieve the current levels of road congestion and delays around the SJB and its main approaches. In addition, the Project will also deliver enhanced public transport, walking and cycle connections between Runcorn and Widnes. A series of measures are also proposed to enhance local and sub-regional road safety standards, including:
- a. Relieving congestion across and around the SJB by virtue of the proposed de-linking of this with the Weston Point and Bridgewater Expressways, and the eastern Widnes bypass. The defunct highways land arising from this will form part of the regeneration proposals for Southern Widnes set out in the Regeneration Strategy for the area;
 - b. Implementation of modern provision across the New Bridge; and
 - c. Downgrading of the SJB to comprise local traffic, public transport, walking and cycle links.
- 6.9.52 In addition to these road-based measures, the Economics Impact Report has identified that the Project will deliver economic benefits locally, sub-regionally and regionally.
- 6.9.53 With regards to increasing domestic and international Trade, the Economics Impact Report states that the Project will improve access to the following:
- a. Liverpool John Lennon Airport;
 - b. Port of Garston;
 - c. Port of Liverpool; and

d. Port of Weston (planned).

- 6.9.54 This improved accessibility and enhanced journey reliability are expected to influence developer and investor perceptions and locational decisions in area close to and well served by the New Bridge.

Compliance

- 6.9.55 So far as policy W1 is relevant, the Project will deliver safe, reliable and efficient means of cross-river connectivity, and contribute towards the strengthening and increased competitiveness of the region's economy.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.9.56 The Project is considered to be in accordance with the relevant objectives of policy W1. No mitigation measures are therefore proposed, and no residual impacts will arise for review.

Draft Policy EM1 – Integrated Land Management

- 6.9.57 Policy EM1 seeks the delivery of an integrated approach to land management based upon detailed character assessments and landscape strategies. With regards to integrated land management, Policy EM1 advises that the following should issues be taken into account:

Biodiversity

- 6.9.58 Delivery of a “step-change” increase in the region's biodiversity resources by protecting, expanding and linking areas for wildlife within and between the locations of highest biodiversity resources, and “*encouraging the protection, conservation and improvement of the ecological fabric elsewhere.*”

Landscape and Heritage

- 6.9.59 Identify, protect and maintain, and where possible, enhance natural, man-made and historic features that contribute “*to the character and culture of landscapes, places and local distinctiveness*” within the North West.

Relevance

- 6.9.60 The Project has the potential to impact upon the natural, built and historic environment and should be assessed in accordance with the objectives of policy EM1.

Assessment

- 6.9.61 A Landscape and Visual Amenity assessment, and Cultural Heritage assessment have been undertaken to assess the potential visual impacts of the Project upon the natural environment. The proposed alignment of the New Bridge is situated 1.8km to the east of existing listed infrastructure, including the SJB and Aethelfleda Railway Bridge. The Landscape and Visual Amenity assessment of the ES advises that the New Bridge would be appropriate within its setting, given the scale of the estuary location and the intrinsic design merits of the Project. The assessment concludes that the Project has the potential to be considered as a beneficial major landmark feature of the Mersey Valley.
- 6.9.62 With regards to the biodiversity impacts of the Project, the findings of the Aquatic Ecology have demonstrated that the Project has the potential to impact upon existing freshwater watercourses within the study area during construction and operation. The Terrestrial and Avian Ecology assessment has recognised that the Project will generate only minor effects on biodiversity within the study area during construction. No adverse effects arising from the Project upon the integrity of the SSSI have been identified.

- 6.9.63 The Cultural Heritage assessment advises that the New Bridge will inevitably change the current setting of the SJB and Aethelfleda Railway Bridge. The affect however is considered to be of low negative significance, reflecting the intrinsic design and locational merits of the Project as set out within the landscape and visual appraisal.
- 6.9.64 The Aquatic Ecology and Terrestrial and Avian Ecology assessment have demonstrated that the Project will not have a significant negative impact upon watercourses and biodiversity, including the designated Middle Mersey Estuary.

Compliance

- 6.9.65 The effect on the setting of the listed building is acknowledged. However, the harm is considered to be limited and the Project has intrinsic designed landscape benefits. On this basis, the proposal is in broad compliance with the provisions of draft policy EM1.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.9.66 To protect the existing historic and conservation value associated with the existing listed buildings within the local area, the proposed alignment of the New Bridge is sited away from this existing historic infrastructure where possible to minimise its impact upon existing vistas. The Landscape and Visual Amenity assessment proposes a range of landscaping measures to minimise the visual impacts of the New Bridge on the historic environment where possible, albeit it is acknowledged that the visual intrusion of the New Bridge on these features cannot be wholly mitigated.
- 6.9.67 To minimise the ecological impacts of the New Bridge, appropriate mitigation measures have been identified at both construction and operational phases of development within the Aquatic Ecology and Terrestrial and Avian Ecology assessments of the ES to minimise the impacts of the New Bridge in accordance with the approach advocated in policy EM1. No residual impacts associated with the Project are envisaged post mitigation.

Draft Policy EM3 – Green Infrastructure

- 6.9.68 Draft policy EM3 places clear emphasis upon the delivery of new multi-purpose networks of greenspace through development, particularly where there is currently limited access to natural greenspace, or where connectivity between these places is considered to poor. New major development and regeneration schemes should seek to incorporate green infrastructure provision to address any deficiency.

Relevance

- 6.9.69 The proposed alignment of the Project will result in the permanent loss of allocated greenspace at St. Michaels Golf Course to accommodate the toll plaza infrastructure, and at Widnes Warth, to accommodate the New Bridge piers. The extent to which the proposals will provide new green infrastructure should therefore be considered.

Assessment

- 6.9.70 The Land-Use assessment of the ES (Chapter 9) advises that the Project will potentially result in the loss of elements of the following greenspace sites during construction:
- a. St Michael's Golf course;
 - b. Greenspace south of Garston Rail Line; and
 - c. Widnes Warth Salt Marsh.
- 6.9.71 The extent of the loss amounts to c. 24ha, out of a total area of greenspace within the corridor of c. 220ha. This equates to a loss of c. 10%. Within Halton Borough, there is 1, 601 ha of

designated greenspace. The loss of greenspace through the Project equates to a total percentage loss of 1.4% of overall designated greenspace provision within the Borough. Overall, this is considered to represent a minimal loss of green space within the wider context.

- 6.9.72 The Project does not comprise proposals for the provision of new green infrastructure within the route corridor, or elsewhere within Halton Borough.

Compliance

- 6.9.73 The Project will result in the loss of allocated greenspace and there are no proposals for the creation of new green infrastructure within the scheme alignment, or elsewhere within Halton Borough. However, there is not considered to be an overall deficiency of green space provision with Halton Borough. In addition, the Project enhance cross-river movements between Runcorn and Widnes by private car, public transport, walking and cycling thus enabling people to access existing designated green space within the Borough.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.9.74 No mitigation measures for the proposed loss of existing green space are proposed as part of the Project.

Draft Policy EM5 – Integrated Water Management

- 6.9.75 Draft Policy EM5 establishes the requirement for the quantitative and qualitative protection of surface, ground and coastal waters and effective flood management. As part of this, the policy identified a requirement for new, and where possible, existing development (including transport infrastructure) “to incorporate sustainable drainage systems and water conservation and efficiency measures.” The supporting text states that the region’s current and future flood risks must also be managed in a sustainable way to avoid potential damage to property and human life.

Relevance

- 6.9.76 The Project will be situated within an identified area of flood-risk. The nature of the development proposals will also be required to incorporate drainage systems. The extent to which the Project satisfies the requirements of policy EM5 should therefore be assessed.

Assessment

- 6.9.77 A Flood Risk Assessment of the Project has been undertaken in accordance with the provisions of national planning policy set out in PPS25. This has identified existing areas of flood risk within the route corridor and its immediate surroundings, including all existing surface watercourses. An inspection of existing highway drainage systems has revealed that there is no water attenuation of highway run-off. There is essentially no buffering effect of water discharge from the highway and so discharges to watercourses comprise relatively high volumetric flow rates. The proposed highway drainage would incorporate water attenuation so that highway runoff would be released at a low flow rate over a longer period of time. There should be a net benefit with respect to flood risk due to water attenuation.
- 6.9.78 Existing highways drainage arrangements along the route corridor will continue to be used where possible. At locations along the route corridor, surface water run-off from the carriageway will be collected and discharged into balancing ponds.
- 6.9.79 The Project will introduce new lengths of carriageway, and hence an increase in surface water run-off when compared to the existing drainage situation. The volume of runoff will be accommodated in balancing ponds.

Compliance

- 6.9.80 The net effect of the Project on flood risk is considered to be negligible. The level of current flood risk is predicted to remain unaltered following the proposed development. The proposed surface water drainage systems will also ensure that there is no increase in the risk of flooding within the study area and within the surrounding catchment areas.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.9.81 No flood mitigation measures are proposed, and thus no residual impacts arise for review.

Draft Policy LCR3 – Northern Part of the Liverpool City Region

- 6.9.82 This draft policy refers to the northern part of the Liverpool City Region outside the city centre and inner city area. The aims of this policy include ensuring that plans and strategies within the northern part of the Liverpool City Region will focus economic development and resources in, among other places, Runcorn and Widnes. The policy seeks to maintain and enhance the role of Runcorn and Widnes and to provide community facilities, services and employment.
- 6.9.83 The supporting text to the policy identifies the River Mersey as presenting the opportunity to “develop a strategic spatial approach that maximises the river frontage’s commercial potential, and the wider economic opportunities provided by the City Region’s coastline.”

Relevance

- 6.9.84 The Project is located within the Northern Part of the Liverpool City Region; it has a key role to play in delivering the improvements to community facilities, services and employment sought by the policy. The extent to which it will achieve these aims should therefore be considered.

Assessment

- 6.9.85 The extent to which the Project contributes to the summary objectives of policy DP4 is considered below:

Contribution of the Project to the expansion of the region’s economy and social inclusion

- 6.9.86 The Project will facilitate the creation of enhanced public transport, walking and cycle links across the SJB. In particular, this integrated approach will provide non-car owners with a reliable, safe and efficient means of cross-river access to jobs and services which is not currently available. The planned regeneration of Runcorn and Southern Widnes and the growth of the local economy will broaden the employment base at a local level, with each role requiring different qualifications and levels of expertise to open up the jobs market to people who may currently be unemployed, whilst also providing new employment opportunities to those who are.
- 6.9.87 It is expected that the Project will deliver new employment opportunities within both Widnes and Runcorn, and the wider sub-region. The improved accessibility and enhanced journey reliability are also expected to influence developer and investor perceptions of areas close to and well served by the Mersey Gateway. Enhanced multi-modal access is also expected to generate new opportunities for domestic and international trade.

Enhance access to jobs and services

- 6.9.88 The Project will facilitate the implementation of improved cross-river walking and cycling provision by virtue of modifications to the SJB at operation. This integrated approach seeks to provide people with a wider choice of transport to the private car to access cross-river employment opportunities and services, and those within the wider Liverpool City-Region. In particular, the delivery of improved public transport, walking and cycling links across the SJB will

provide non-car owners with significantly improved access to jobs and services at a local, sub-regional and regional scale.

Compliance

- 6.9.89 The Project will contribute to the regeneration of Southern Widnes and Runcorn in line with the Regeneration Strategy for the area. This will deliver new employment opportunities at a local level, and enhance accessibility to jobs and key services on a sub-regional and regional scale.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.9.90 No impact arises, and no mitigation measures are therefore proposed, and thus no residual impacts arise for review.

6.10 North West Regional Economic Strategy (2006)

- 6.10.1 The Regional Economic Strategy (RES) establishes the twenty-year economic strategy for the North West. It sets a framework for regional, sub-regional and local action.
- 6.10.2 Within the Liverpool City Region, within which Halton Borough is included, the RES identifies the need to *“continue to accelerate economic recovery and urban renaissance given a continuing gap in underlying economic performance.”* The RES also identifies the delivery of major transport infrastructure investments, including the *“Second Mersey Crossing”* as a key challenge for the area.
- 6.10.3 The North West is identified as having important cross-border economic linkages with North Wales, North Midlands, West Yorkshire, and Scotland, as well as with Ireland, London, the South East, and into Europe. The region is noted as having has an extensive public transport network in many places, but the RES identifies the opportunity *“to improve the capacity and quality of mass transit, particularly in terms of enhancing accessibility to jobs.”*
- 6.10.4 To support the growth of the heart of the Liverpool City-Region, the RES recognises the need for improved road access to Liverpool City Centre. The development of the Second Mersey Crossing is identified as a means of relieving congestion, and *“improving reliability of access to Liverpool Airport and improve linkages within the Liverpool City Region.”*
- 6.10.5 To widen the choice of travel available to people, the RES promotes the enhancement of public transport services between the five northern City-Regions so as to develop a critical mass of activity, which in turn *“supports growth of key sectors and widens the labour markets in the city centres.”* Infrastructure improvements are considered as key to improving accessibility to job opportunities, basic services and facilities, and thus delivering improved accessibility within, and between, communities. Public transport is also identified as a means of improving sustainability and reducing the growth of road travel and peak traffic volumes.
- 6.10.6 The RES recognises that improved infrastructure should encourage greater retention of the regional population, and attract new migrants. Actions focused upon improving the efficiency of existing infrastructure, including public transport, will minimise growth in carbon emissions. Reductions in congestion may *“make road travel more attractive,”* thus leading to carbon emissions. However, RES advises that this should be mitigated by actions to reduce congestion, including the *“increased use of public transport, home working, and reducing growth in road travel, rather than a major building programme.”*
- 6.10.7 The RES advises that the development of the region’s transport infrastructure and strategic regional sites may have some *“negative impacts upon natural resources and local environment conditions.”* However, the increased use of public transport is considered to represent a means of reducing vehicle emissions, improving air quality and road safety.

Relevance

- 6.10.8 The Project is specifically identified by the RES as an important contributor to the development of the regional highway network, and as an element in delivering enhanced economic growth and competitiveness within the Liverpool City-Region. The extent to which the Project will contribute to relieving road congestion, and the delivery of improved public transport links between the City Regions, should therefore be considered.

Assessment

- 6.10.9 The extent to which the Project satisfies the policy requirements of the Regional Economic Strategy is assessed below. This comprises a summary of the main objectives expressed within the Regional Economic Strategy, and has drawn on corresponding chapters of the ES, including the Transport, Economics, and Social and Health assessments.

Contribute towards the economic growth of the economy

- 6.10.10 The Project will serve as a catalyst towards the regeneration of Southern Widnes and Runcorn. The Regeneration Strategy and emerging LDF policy framework which are being prepared in parallel with the emerging Mersey Gateway Project proposals will ensure that the potential regeneration benefits are captured as far as is possible. It is anticipated that the Project will deliver new employment opportunities within both Widnes and Runcorn, and the wider sub-region during construction and post-operation. The improved accessibility and enhanced journey reliability are also expected to influence developer and investor perceptions of areas close to and well served by the Mersey Gateway. Enhanced multi-modal access is also expected to provide new opportunities for domestic and international trade.

Enhance access to employment opportunities

- 6.10.11 The Project will enhance cross-river walking and cycling links by virtue of modifications to the SJB. This integrated approach will provide people with a wider choice of transport to the private car to access cross-river employment opportunities and services at a local, regional and sub-regional level. The Mersey Gateway will also improve access to the key transport nodes of Liverpool John Lennon Airport, and Manchester International Airport to increase opportunities for global trade.

Relieve congestion and improve linkages within the Liverpool City Region

- 6.10.12 A primary objective for the new Mersey Crossing is to address the congestion in and around the SJB and to allow for easier journeys by car across the Mersey at this point. The impacts of the Project on car users will improve cross channel journey times as a result of the reduced level of congestion on the SJB and the rerouting of strategic traffic onto the New Bridge. This will be a permanent effect and is likely to reduce daily traffic on the SJB by 80%.

Delivery of improved public transport to reduce carbon emissions

- 6.10.13 The New Bridge will enable delivery of a wider choice of quicker, safer and more reliable travel through both the provision of the New Bridge and the proposed works to the SJB. In summary the benefits comprise:
- a. Quicker, non congested passage across SJB primarily benefiting public transport and local traffic;
 - b. Safer travel over both the New Bridge (in full compliance with current design requirements) and the SJB (given the reduction in usage/vehicle numbers and the works to provide upgraded pedestrian/cycling facilities); and
 - c. More reliable travel through the removal of uncertainty as to journey timing that is currently caused by the severely congested SJB.

Compliance

- 6.10.14 The Project is considered to be in general compliance with the objectives of the Regional Economic Strategy.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.10.15 The Project is considered to be in general compliance with the policy objectives of the Regional Economic Strategy. No mitigation measures are therefore proposed, and no residual impacts arise for review.

6.11 Local Planning Policy

- 6.11.1 The Halton UDP was adopted by the Council in April 2005 and covers the plan period 2002-2016. Under transitional arrangements, the UDP is currently automatically saved for three years under the provisions of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004), up to April 2008. The Council has now applied to the Secretary of State to save its policies for a further three years, for which a decision is imminent.
- 6.11.2 The Council is in the process of preparing a series of Local Development Documents which will form the basis of its Local Development Framework to replace the current UDP, including the Core Strategy scheduled for adoption by November 2009. However, given a slippage in timetabling the more likely adoption date is now Spring 2011.

Mersey Gateway Related Planning Policy

- 6.11.3 Strategic Policy 14 of the UDP provides in principle support for the Project. Policy S14 states that a new crossing of the River Mersey, east of the existing SJB, will be promoted to relieve congestion on the existing Bridge. The supporting text states that the existing severely congested SJB is considered to represent a *“constraint on the economic development of the Region, and severely restricts the development of an integrated transport strategy for Halton.”* It goes on to note that a strategic aim of the Council’s Local Transport Plan (LTP2) and the UDP is therefore to pursue the provision of a new and sustainable crossing of the River Mersey. The policy states:

“A scheme for a new crossing of the River Mersey east of the existing Silver Jubilee Bridge will be promoted to relieve congestion on the existing bridge as part of an integrated transport system for Halton and the wider regional transport network. Any proposed route of the new crossing will be the subject of an environmental assessment.”

- 6.11.4 The supporting text notes that the SJB carries road traffic over the River Mersey and the Manchester Ship Canal, linking the two Borough towns of Widnes and Runcorn. Traffic flows currently exceed capacity at peak time, and the congestion across the Bridge is a *“major contributor to the air quality hotspots that have been identified in the adjacent areas.”* The accompanying text states that the SJB also offers *“poor facilities for pedestrians, and no safe facilities for cyclists.”*
- 6.11.5 The text advises that (at the time of writing of the UDP), the traffic flows over the SJB had increased by 17% over the previous seven years, almost double the average growth across the country. The current average traffic flow across the SJB equates to the order of 80,000 vehicles each weekday with peaks in excess of that figure. These flows are significantly in excess of the design capacity for the four sub-standard lanes. The supporting text advises that future growth in traffic flows seeking to cross the SJB would force trips on to alternative routes, impacting on the Mersey Tunnels and the M6 motorway, particularly at the Thelwall Viaduct.
- 6.11.6 The supporting text advises that in addition to pursuing proposals for a second river crossing, the Local Transport Plan includes a Bridge Management Strategy for the existing crossing. This aims to:
- i. Ensure availability of the crossing route;*
 - ii. Ensure effective traffic management;*
 - iii. Reduce unnecessary trips; and*
 - iv. Increase the use of public transport.*

Relevance

- 6.11.7 The Project is directly supported by policy S14, and any assessment of the proposal should have regard to the policy.

Assessment

- 6.11.8 The development of the New Bridge will deliver the aspirations of policy S14, relieving the severely congested SJB and its main approaches, whilst will also delivering opportunities for enhanced public transport, walking and cycling links thereby directly contributing to the aspiration to deliver an integrated transport system. The proposal has also been subject to Environmental Assessment.

Compliance

- 6.11.9 The delivery of the New Bridge is in full compliance with the requirements of policy S14 of the Halton UDP.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.11.10 The Project is in compliance with policy S14. No mitigation measures are therefore proposed, and no residual impacts have been identified for review.

Non-Mersey Gateway related policy

- 6.11.11 The Halton UDP comprises a number of other policies relating to environmental, social and economic issues that influence, or are influenced by, the Project. These are considered below:

Policy RG1 - Action Area 1 – Southern Widnes

- 6.11.12 Policy RG1 identifies the Southern Widnes Action Area (amounting to c. 59.8ha) as being in need of regeneration, with preference for mixed-use development, including residential development. The policy identifies appropriate land uses as

- a. Business Use (B1);
- b. General Industry (B2);
- c. Residential (C2);
- d. Dwellinghouses (C3);
- e. Community Facilities (D1);
- f. Shops (A1);
- g. Food and Drink (A3);
- h. Recreation and Leisure (D2); and
- i. Open Space.

- 6.11.13 The policy wording does not explicitly document other potential uses.
- 6.11.14 Policy RG1 advises that new forms of development should provide people with the opportunity to work within walking or cycling distance of home. The policy states that the car should be safely accommodated without *“encouraging its use in preference to other means of transport.”* The supporting text states that to support this objective, the layout of streets, buildings and spaces forming part of new development should aim to *“minimise journeys by car and encourage movement by foot and bicycle.”* The policy requires the *“visual quality of the built and natural environment to be enhanced”*, and the quality of design to enhance its surroundings to raise the overall image and appearance of the area.
- 6.11.15 The supporting text advises of the need for regeneration within the area, particularly investment in the current housing stock, redevelopment of derelict and contaminated sites, and overall improvements in the living and working environment. The supporting text advises that the aim of this Action Area is to provide a convenient, efficient and pleasing place within which people can live, work and pursue their daily lives.

Relevance

- 6.11.16 The proposed alignment of the New Bridge occupies land within the Southern Widnes Action Area (c. 31.54ha). The impact of the Project on the regeneration of this Action Area and the provisions of policy RG1 should therefore be considered.

Assessment

- 6.11.17 The Southern Widnes Regeneration Action Area will be both directly and indirectly affected by the Project, as follows:
- a. The policy does not identify major road infrastructure provision as an appropriate land-use within the designation; and
 - b. The Project will lead to a loss of employment land; whilst it delivers new land (released as part of the de-linking works) the overall position is one of a minor net loss.
- 6.11.18 To counter balance this negative impact, the Project will:
- a. Contribute towards the delivery of the regeneration of Southern Widnes, acting in parallel with the emerging policy framework set out within the southern Widnes Regeneration Strategy, and LDF as a catalyst for economic, physical and social regeneration; and
 - b. Provide reliable and efficient direct access to Widnes from Runcorn by public transport, walking and cycling.

Compliance

- 6.11.19 Policy RG1 does not specifically identify major road infrastructure as an appropriate land-use within the Southern Widnes Regeneration Action Area. However, the construction of the Project will serve as a catalyst towards the regeneration of the Southern Widnes Action Area, and the integrated delivery of land-uses permitted by policy RG1. The Regeneration Strategy and emerging LDF policy framework will ensure that the potential regeneration benefits are captured as far as is possible, so as to deliver the aspirations of policy RG1.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.11.20 The Project will lead to a loss of land from within RG1 to a use that is not listed within the policy as appropriate. Whilst the proposal is considered to be in general compliance with the aims and objectives of policy RG1 in that it seeks to deliver regeneration benefits, no mitigation of the direct conflict is proposed.

Policy RG2 – Central Widnes

- 6.11.21 The Central Widnes Regeneration Action Area is proposed as a mixed-use area for uses supporting and enhancing the vitality and viability of Widnes Town Centre. The policy identifies appropriate land-uses as:
- a. Financial and Professional Services (A2);
 - b. Food and Drink (A3);
 - c. Business uses (B1);
 - d. Hotels (C1);
 - e. Residential Institutions (C2);
 - f. Dwelling Houses (C3);
 - g. Non-residential institutions (D1);
 - h. Assembly and leisure (D2); and
 - i. Shops (A1) that serve the local community, provided that UDP retail policies are complied with.

- 6.11.22 The policy wording does not explicitly document other potential uses.
- 6.11.23 The accompanying policy text states that new development should relate well to the Town Centre, and enhance its surroundings to raise the overall image and appearance of the area.

Relevance

- 6.11.24 The route corridor of the Project incorporates a small area of land within this Action Area (0.55ha). An assessment of the proposal against the permitted uses of policy RG2 is therefore required.

Compliance

- 6.11.25 Policy RG2 does not identify major road infrastructure as an appropriate use within Central Widnes Regeneration Action Area, and on this basis a policy conflict would arise. However, the impacts of the Project are considered to be minor, and will not impact upon the long-term policy aspirations and regeneration of this Action Area.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.11.26 Given the minimal loss of land within this Action Area, no mitigation measures are proposed, and no residual impacts arise for review.

Policy RG3 - Action Area 3 – Widnes Waterfront

- 6.11.27 The policy states that this declining employment area was formerly a major location for chemical industries in Widnes. Following large scale closure, the area now comprises a significant amount of vacant, contaminated land alongside a disused chemical tip at Johnson's Lane which lies outside of the Project area.
- 6.11.28 Policy RG3 seeks to encourage redevelopment, identifying acceptable development to include employment, residential, leisure and open space uses. The nature and design of new development will be required to maximise the Area's waterside location beside the St Helens Canal and the Mersey Estuary. Provision should be made for increased public access to the waterside, alongside significant improvements to the waterside environment, and the visual quality of the built and natural environment.
- 6.11.29 As part of the Area's regeneration, the policy advises that access into the area should be *"improved, particularly in relation to public transport access."* However, policy RG3 advises that no form of new development within the Action Area should *"prejudice the overall objective of securing a further crossing of the Mersey east of the existing bridge."*

Relevance

- 6.11.30 The proposed alignment of the Project partially crosses the western extent of the designated Widnes Waterfront Regeneration Action Area. The extent to which the Project may impact upon the regeneration of Widnes Waterfront should therefore be assessed.

Assessment

- 6.11.31 Policy RG3 does not identify major road infrastructure as an appropriate use, and on this basis a policy conflict would arise. However, the Widnes Waterfront Action Area comprises approximately c. 79.84 hectares of which c. 1.71 hectares of land will be taken up by the proposed alignment of the Project. The impacts are therefore limited and it is possible to conclude as follows:

- a. The New Bridge will have no direct material impact upon the policy aspirations and the planned redevelopment of Widnes Waterfront as established within the Widnes Waterfront SPD;
- b. There would be an indirect visual impact on the area. However, the findings of the Landscape and Visual Amenity assessment exercise which suggests that the New Bridge will become an iconic landmark feature suggests that having a view of the New Bridge would be beneficial;
- c. Policy RG3 advises that no development within the Widnes Waterfront Regeneration Action Area should prejudice the future development of the New Bridge; and
- d. The Project will significantly enhance access to Widnes Waterfront by private car, public transport, walking and cycling.

Compliance

- 6.11.32 Notwithstanding the minor land take issue, RG3 acknowledges the priority of the Project and the proposals are thus considered to be on balance in general compliance with the provisions of policy RG3.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.11.33 The Project is considered to be in general compliance with the requirements of policy RG3. No mitigation measures are therefore proposed, and no residual impacts arise for review.

Policy RG6 – Castlefields and Norton Priory

- 6.11.34 This policy states that development within this Regeneration Action Area will be permitted for the following land uses:

- i. *Housing (C3); and*
- ii. *Open Space and Community Uses.*

- 6.11.35 Where there is an identified need for the replacement of existing housing and community uses, policy RG6 allows for the restructuring of existing housing and open space areas to accommodate new housing and community facilities.

Relevance

- 6.11.36 The route corridor of the Project incorporates a minor area of allocated Greenspace within this Action Area. An assessment of the proposal against the permitted uses of policy RG6 is therefore required.

Assessment

- 6.11.37 Policy RG6 does not identify major road infrastructure as an appropriate use, and on this basis a policy conflict would arise. However, the impacts of the Project are considered to be minor, and will not impact upon the long-term policy aspirations and regeneration of this Action Area.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.11.38 The Project will lead to a minor loss of allocated Greenspace from within RG6 to a use that is not listed within the policy as appropriate. However, this loss is considered to be de minimis, and no mitigation of the direct conflict is proposed.

Policy GE1 - Control of Development in the Green Belt

- 6.11.39 Policy GE1 largely repeats the provisions of PPG2 in that it advises that planning permission will not be permitted for inappropriate development within the Green Belt nor for development conspicuous from the Green Belt that would harm its visual amenity by reason of siting,

materials or design. Development within the Green Belt will be regarded as inappropriate development unless it is for any of the following purposes:

- a. *Agriculture of forestry;*
- b. *The limited extension, alteration, or replacement of existing dwellings;*
- c. *The re-use of buildings;*
- d. *Essential facilities for outdoor sport and recreation;*
- e. *Cemeteries; and*
- f. *Other uses of land which preserve the openness of the Green Belt, and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.*

6.11.40 Proposals for new development that are considered to be acceptable within the Green Belt will be required to preserve the openness of the Green Belt and minimise harm on visual amenity by means of siting, materials, and design in accordance with those purposes and objectives as expressed through PPG2.

Relevance

6.11.41 The Project oversails Wigg Island, a discrete parcel of Green Belt land situated on the south side of the estuary to the north of Astmoor Industrial Estate. Having regard to the provisions of the policy, the Project potentially impacts of this area of Green Belt in two ways:

- a. Physically, in that the New Bridge supporting bridge piers will be within the Green Belt, occupying Green Belt land at ground level, with the bridge deck occupying airspace; and
- b. Visually, in that the carriageway, piers and supporting infrastructure as well as the vehicles using the bridge will be visible from this area of Green Belt and from view points that enjoy views over the Green Belt.

6.11.42 Both elements are relevant to the policy framework established in the guidance and an appropriate assessment of the project against the provisions of GE1 is required.

Assessment

6.11.43 The key premise to consider is whether the proposed physical works comprise inappropriate development within the Green Belt. In defining inappropriate development the guidance allows for a number of exceptions, one of which is:

“essential facilities... for uses of land which preserve the openness of Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it”

6.11.44 It is accepted that the physical development associated with the bridge piers and the oversailing of the Bridge deck constitutes inappropriate development. On this basis the assessment needs to consider firstly whether the necessary very special circumstances exist to justify the proposals, before going on to consider visual impact.

6.11.45 In considering whether very special circumstances exist, the assessment considers matters as follows:

- a. the scale of the development (i.e. the harm in itself);
- b. an assessment of the proposal against the purposes of Green Belt, to enable a further understanding of harm;
- c. an assessment of the proposals against the objectives of the Green Belt; and
- d. an assessment of visual impacts.

Scale of development

- 6.11.46 The Wigg Island Green Belt parcel comprises approximately 161 ha; the land take for the bridge pier elements is likely to be in the order of c. 0.12 hectares of ground area. The scale of land loss is therefore minimal, which in itself limits the extent of harm. Therefore, whilst the built development is harmful by way of inappropriateness, it is possible to conclude that the extent of harm beyond this is clearly minimal.

Assessment against the Green Belt purposes

- 6.11.47 The stated purposes of Green Belt provide a framework against which to consider the Project, and thus inform a conclusion in respect of potential harm. This exercise is undertaken below:

To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas

- 6.11.48 The Project and the accompanying development or pier structures within the defined green Belt will have no direct impact on urban sprawl which is the primary thrust of this statement of purpose. It does however introduce an urban form of development with the accompanying traffic and activity into an area whose character is not currently urban; on this basis therefore it could be concluded that the Project raises limited conflict with this purpose.

To prevent neighbouring towns from merging

- 6.11.49 The Project and the accompanying development of pier structures within the defined Green Belt will not encourage any physical merging of the towns of Widnes and Runcorn. It does however create a new link between the two towns which could be interpreted as a form of merging. As with Paragraph 6.11.48 above, the Project does not offend the primary thrust of the stated purpose, but raises a minor impact.

To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment

- 6.11.50 The proposed works will involve the take up of c 0.12 ha of Green belt land. Whilst this take up of Green Belt land could be considered to represent encroachment it is in itself minimal and will not lead to any further encroachment or loss of land.

To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns

- 6.11.51 This purpose is not applicable to either the Project or the specific works proposed within the Green Belt.

To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land

- 6.11.52 The New Bridge proposals will act as a catalyst to the regeneration of Widnes and Runcorn. The LDF policy framework exercise will serve to capture this benefit as much as is possible.

- 6.11.53 On balance therefore, the proposal could be considered to raise a minor primary conflict with one green Belt purpose (land take or encroachment), a concern in respect of the urban sprawl and merging purposes, and a primary advancement of the regeneration purpose. On this basis it is possible to conclude that the harm to Green Belt purposes is not materially significant.

Assessment against Green Belt objectives

- 6.11.54 Having established the position on Green Belt harm, it is possible in accordance with paragraph 3.13 to consider whether the proposal contributes to Green belt objectives. This exercise is undertaken below:

To provide opportunities for access to the open countryside for the urban population;

- 6.11.55 The Project will result in the loss of approximately 0.12 hectares of Green Belt from an overall area of 161 hectares. The physical works will not therefore materially limit the opportunity that Wigg Island provides for continued access to the open countryside by the urban population.

To provide opportunities for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation near urban areas;

- 6.11.56 The Project and the siting of piers within the Green Belt would not prejudice the opportunity for this area of Green Belt to continue to be utilised by people for outdoor sport and recreation. However, the existing rights of the Astmoor Shooting Club at this location will be removed on safety grounds.

To retain attractive landscapes, and enhance landscapes, near to where people live;

- 6.11.57 The Project crosses the Wigg Island Green Belt area and will inevitably impact upon the Green Belt landscape. The Landscape and Visual Amenity assessment advises that the presence of the proposed new road infrastructure in what is currently a tranquil area of the Estuary is detrimental, and the exposure to views of the carriageway and the associated activity will be significant. An identified advantage is that the height of the deck and the openness of the viaduct will take traffic out to normal lines of sight at close range. Existing mature tree cover will also help to integrate the New Bridge with the landscape at its southern abutment adjacent to the Manchester Ship Canal.

To improve damaged and derelict land around towns;

- 6.11.58 The proposed alignment of the Project (albeit that element outside of the Wigg Island Green Belt designation) actively encourages the delivery of vacant and derelict land for development as part of the regeneration of Southern Widnes and Runcorn in accordance with the Regeneration Strategy for the area.

To secure nature conservation interest;

- 6.11.59 The relevant assessment confirms that the Project will not impact upon the nature conservation interests of the Green Belt.

To retain land in agricultural, forestry and related uses

- 6.11.60 The Project will result in the loss of c. 0.12 hectares of amenity land by virtue of location of the New Bridge supporting piers. The agricultural land quality is recognised to be low (grade 5), and the land does not form part of an active agricultural unit. The Land-Use assessment advises that the remainder of the Green Belt post construction will continue to be suitable for use as agricultural land following development if so required.

Visual Appraisal

- 6.11.61 PPG2 paragraph 3.15 requires that a separate appraisal of the visual impact of any proposal is undertaken. The New Bridge oversails the Wigg Island Green Belt parcel and will be conspicuous in views from it. Views of the Bridge from Wigg Island will be inevitable, although the height of the deck and the partial benefit of mature planting will assist in reducing this impact.

Compliance

- 6.11.62 Compliance against the separate elements of Green Belt policy as expressed within PPG2 can be summarised as follows:

- a. The proposal (i.e. construction of piers) is considered to represent inappropriate, and therefore harmful, development in the Green Belt;
- b. The extent of harm is limited in itself, in that the extent of land loss is limited (c. 0.12 ha) and will not prejudice the future viability of the Green Belt in this location;
- c. The consideration of harm when assessed against Green Belt purposes is mixed, identifying minor encroachment and potential minor impact on sprawl and merge, but benefit in terms of regeneration; and
- d. The extent of harm when assessed against Green belt objectives is limited to the potential impact on the need to retain and enhance where possible attractive landscapes, and to retain land in agricultural, forestry and related uses.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.11.63 The Landscape and Visual Amenity assessment outlines possible mitigation measures at Wigg Island, including the introduction of additional vegetation adjacent to the New Bridge. However, this assessment advises that the physical and visual intrusion of the New Bridge upon the Green Belt cannot be wholly mitigated.

Policy GE6 – Protection of Designated Greenspace

- 6.11.64 This policy advises that development within designated and proposed Greenspace will not be permitted unless it is ancillary to the enjoyment of the Greenspace, or in the case of designated Greenspace within educational use, it is specifically required for educational purposes. Policy advises that exceptions may be made where the loss of the amenity value is adequately compensated for where either of the following criteria can be satisfied:

- i. *Development on part of the site would fund improvements that raise the overall amenity value of the Greenspace; or*
- ii. *The developer provides a suitable replacement Greenspace of at least equal size and amenity value, or significantly enhances the amenity value of nearby Greenspace.*

- 6.11.65 The policy notes that no proposal should result in a loss of amenity for local residents by forcing them to travel to a less convenient location, and that in all exceptional cases, there would need to be clear and convincing reasons why development should be permitted or that loss of amenity value could be adequately compensated. The supporting text identifies that Greenspace, regardless of whether or not it is publicly accessible, makes an important contribution to the quality of life of those who live and work within the Borough.

Relevance

- 6.11.66 The proposed alignment of the Project will result in the permanent loss of allocated Greenspace at St. Michaels Golf Course to accommodate the toll plaza infrastructure, at Widnes Warth to accommodate the New Bridge piers, and at Garston Rail Line.

Assessment

- 6.11.67 The assessment of Project undertaken as part of the Land-Use chapter of the ES advises that the Project will potentially result in the loss of elements of the following designated Greenspace sites during construction:

- a. St Michael's Golf course;
- b. Greenspace south of Garston Rail Line; and
- c. Widnes Warth Salt Marsh.

- 6.11.68 The extent of the loss amounts to c. 24ha, out of a total area of Greenspace within the route corridor of c. 220ha. This equates to a loss of c. 10%. Within Halton Borough, there is 1, 601 ha

of designated Greenspace. The loss of Greenspace through the Project equates to a total percentage loss of 1.4% of overall designated Greenspace provision within the Borough.

- 6.11.69 The Project does not comprise development that is ancillary to the enjoyment of the designated Greenspace. An assessment of the Project against the exceptions criteria set out in policy GE6 is therefore required:

Development on part of the site would fund improvements that raise the overall amenity value of the greenspace

- 6.11.70 The Project will result in the permanent loss of designated Greenspace at the above locations. The proposals will not fund improvements to raise the overall amenity value of this Greenspace or elsewhere within Halton Borough.

The developer provides a suitable replacement greenspace of at least equal size and amenity value, or significantly enhances the amenity value of nearby greenspace

- 6.11.71 The Project does not incorporate proposals to provide compensatory Greenspace provision.

- 6.11.72 The Project will result in the loss of Greenspace provision at the above locations which may result in a loss of amenity. The scale of this however does not prejudice the ability of the remaining Greenspace to fulfil an ongoing amenity function.

- 6.11.73 The Project will deliver a key transport policy aim as set out within the UDP. It will also act as a catalyst to the wider regeneration of Southern Widnes and Runcorn through the release of vacant and derelict land and buildings for redevelopment. The proposals will also enhance cross-river vehicular movements, reduce journey times, and provide opportunities for travel by public transport, walking and cycling.

Compliance

- 6.11.74 The Project leads to the loss of identified Greenspace and as such is not considered to be in compliance with the provisions of policy GE6.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.11.75 No mitigation measures for the loss of designated Greenspace are proposed as part of the Project.

Policy GE7- Proposed Greenspace Designations

- 6.11.76 This policy identifies proposed areas of Greenspace within Widnes and Runcorn. Development within these areas should be assessed against the provisions of policy GE6.

Relevance

- 6.11.77 The proposed alignment of the Project crosses an area of proposed Greenspace at Wigg Island, situated to the north of Astmoor Industrial Estate. Potential impacts of the Project on this proposed Greenspace should therefore be considered in accordance with the requirements of the policy.

Assessment

- 6.11.78 The Project will result in the permanent physical disruption of proposed Greenspace at Wigg Island to accommodate the New Bridge supporting piers. This does not constitute appropriate development as set out in policy GE6. The extent to which the Project performs against the provisions of policy GE6 should therefore be considered:

Development on part of the site would fund improvements that raise the overall amenity value of the greenspace

- 6.11.79 The Project will result in the permanent loss of an area of proposed Greenspace at Wigg Island. The proposals will not fund improvements to raise the overall amenity value of this area of proposed Greenspace.

The developer provides a suitable replacement greenspace of at least equal size and amenity value, or significantly enhances the amenity value of nearby greenspace

- 6.11.80 Given that Wigg Island is only allocated as 'proposed' Greenspace, this criteria is not applicable.

- 6.11.81 The Project will result in the loss of proposed Greenspace provision at Wigg Island. However, residents of Runcorn living in close proximity to Wigg Island will continue to have access to areas of existing designated Greenspace within convenient locations.

- 6.11.82 The Project will deliver a key transport policy objective as set out within the Halton UDP. It will also act as a catalyst to the wider regeneration of Southern Widnes and Runcorn through the release of disused land and buildings for redevelopment. The proposals will also enhance cross-river vehicular movements, reduce journey times, and provide opportunities for travel by public transport, walking and cycling.

Compliance

- 6.11.83 The Project will result in the physical disruption of a minimal area of proposed Greenspace at Wigg Island to accommodate the New Bridge supporting piers. However, this does not constitute appropriate development in accordance with the provisions of policy GE6.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.11.84 No compensatory Greenspace provision is proposed as part of the Project.

Policy GE10 - Protection of Linkages in Greenspace Systems

- 6.11.85 This policy identifies Greenspace Systems as networks of inter-connecting Greenspaces, providing important visual, physical, functional and structural linkages. They provide opportunities for people to move more freely by foot, cycle, or horseback between facilities and Greenspaces within the urban area, and beyond, as well as providing an effective network of wildlife habitats and corridors. Policy GE10 advises that development will not be permitted if this will have an adverse impact on any part of the system, or visual amenity, landscape value, impact on wildlife, and impact on the recreational value of the Greenspace System.

Relevance

- 6.11.86 The proposed alignment of the Project crosses an allocated Greenspace System at Wigg Island, alongside the Manchester Ship Canal at the southern abutment of the Upper Mersey Estuary. The supporting piers of the New Bridge will be located in this area. The extent of any impacts arising from the New Bridge relative to the provisions of GE10 should therefore be considered.

Assessment

- 6.11.87 The supporting piers of the New Bridge will be located within the protected Greenspace System at Wigg Island. This may result in the physical disruption to existing linkages within this area during construction. The New Bridge will also have a permanent visual impact upon existing linkages within this Greenspace system by virtue of its alignment and scale.

Compliance

- 6.11.88 The New Bridge will have a permanent visual impact on the existing Greenspace linkages at Wigg Island, and adjacent to the Manchester Ship Canal. The MGP may also have result in temporary disruption to these linkages at construction. However, the long-term use of these linkages by walkers, cyclists and horseriders will not be prejudiced by the MGP.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.11.89 The dedicated construction programme will set out how the temporary construction impacts on Greenspace linkage will be addressed. In visual terms, the Landscape and Visual Amenity assessment advises of woodland scale planting at Wigg Island to integrate the scale of the New Bridge approaches with the surrounding tree cover, whilst continuing to permit existing through views. However, it is acknowledged that the visual impacts associated with the New Bridge deck and associated traffic cannot be wholly mitigated, and residual impact would remain.

Policy GE17 - Protection of Sites of International Importance for Nature Conservation

- 6.11.90 This policy advises that development or land-use change that may affect a European Site will be subject to rigorous examination. The policy states that development or land-use change not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site will not be permitted if it is likely to have a significant effect on the site unless all of the following criteria can be satisfied:
- i. There is no alternative solution;*
 - ii. There are imperative reasons for over-riding public interest for the development or land-use change; and*
 - iii. It is necessary for reasons of human health or public safety or for beneficial consequences of primary importance for nature conservation.*

- 6.11.91 The supporting text advises that the Council will take into account any views expressed by English Nature in deciding whether for the purposes of this policy, the European Site would be significantly affected by a proposed development. Essentially, this policy gives effect to the Habitats Directive and PPS9.

Relevance

- 6.11.92 The Mersey estuary in the vicinity of Runcorn/Widnes divides into two as follows:
- a. The Middle Mersey Estuary, which comprises that part of the Estuary lying to the west of the SJB; and
 - b. The Upper Mersey Estuary, comprising that part lying east of the line of the SJB.
- 6.11.93 The Middle Mersey Estuary is designated as a Special Protection Area (SPA), Ramsar site (in recognition of its conservation value, particularly its birdlife) and as an SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest).
- 6.11.94 The Upper Estuary enjoys no designation under European Direction. The New Bridge spans the Upper Estuary, some 1.5 km east of SJB and the boundary with the Middle Estuary. As such there is no direct impact on any area benefiting from European designation. However given the relative proximity to the Middle Estuary and the potential for indirect impact the policy requirements contained within the Regulations are of relevance.

Assessment

- 6.11.95 This Environmental Statement contains sufficient information to allow an appropriate assessment to be undertaken by the relevant competent authorities in accordance with Regulation 48(1) of the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 1994 (the "Habitats

Regulations") in respect of any potential impact arising from the New Bridge. When making decision on applications supported by this Environmental Statement, the competent authorities will be required to undertake an assessment of the Project upon the integrity of the European Site based on the findings set out in this ES. Competent authorities include the Borough Council and Secretaries of State.

Compliance

- 6.11.96 The Environmental Statement has considered the potential impacts of the Project on the integrity of the Middle Mersey Estuary, given its status as a European Site by virtue of the Habitats Regulation Directive. The conclusion in Chapter 10 of this ES is that the Project will not adversely affect the integrity of a European Site, particularly after mitigation and other measures have been taken into consideration. Accordingly, decision makers may make the same conclusion in carrying out any Appropriate Assessment required for the Project.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.11.97 In carrying out any appropriate assessment, mitigation measures may be included before determining whether a plan or project will have an adverse effect upon a European Site. This ES has considered effects upon such sites and concludes that no residual adverse effect would be suffered to the integrity of such a site.

Policy GE18 - Protection of Sites of National Importance for Nature Conservation

- 6.11.98 This policy states that development in or likely to affect Sites of Special Scientific Interest will be subject to special scrutiny. The policy advises that development will not be permitted if it would have a significant effect, directly or indirectly, on a SSSI unless the reasons for the development clearly outweigh the nature conservation of the site itself. Where development is permitted, the the Council will consider the use of conditions or planning obligations to ensure the protection and enhancement of the site's nature conservation interests. The supporting text advises that the Council will take into account any views expressed by English Nature in deciding whether for the purposes of this Policy, the SSSI would be significantly affected by a proposed development.

Relevance

- 6.11.99 The Mersey estuary in the vicinity of Runcorn/Widnes divides into two as follows:
- a. The Middle Mersey Estuary, which comprises that part of the Estuary lying to the west of SJB; and
 - b. The Upper Mersey Estuary, comprising that part lying east of the line of SJB.
- 6.11.100 The Middle Mersey Estuary is designated as a SSSI, alongside wider European designations. Apart for recognition within the UDP of its landscape value, the Upper Estuary enjoys no designation. The New Bridge spans the Upper Estuary, c. 1.8km east of SJB and the boundary with the Middle Estuary. As such there is no direct impact on any area benefiting from European designation. However given the relative proximity to the Middle Estuary and the potential for indirect impact the policy requirements contained within the Regulations are of relevance.

Assessment

- 6.11.101 The Terrestrial and Avian Ecology has assessed the potential environmental impacts arising from the Project upon the Mersey Estuary SSSI. The conclusion in Chapter 10 of this ES is that the Project will not adversely affect the integrity of the SSSI, particularly after mitigation and other measures have been taken into consideration. Accordingly, decision makers may make the same conclusion in carrying out any Appropriate Assessment required for the Project.

Compliance

- 6.11.102 The impacts of the Project upon the SSSI are negligible. The proposal is therefore considered to be in compliance with the provisions of policy GE18.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.11.103 The Aquatic Ecology assessment recommends monitoring pre, during and post construction to ensure that the aquatic ecology of the Mersey Estuary can be assessed at all stages of the development. Upon applying mitigation measures, the Aquatic Ecology assessment advises that the Project will not have an adverse impact upon the SSSI, and no residual impacts arise for review.

Policy GE19 – Protection of Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation

- 6.11.104 This policy states that development and land-use changes will not be permitted if it is likely to have a significant effect on a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs), unless it can be clearly demonstrated that there are reasons for the proposal that outweigh the need to safeguard the substantive nature conservation of the site. Policy states that in all cases, where development or land use change is permitted which would damage the nature conservation of the site or feature, such damage will be kept to a minimum. Where appropriate, the policy states that the Planning Authority will consider the use of conditions or planning obligations to provide compensatory measures.

Relevance

- 6.11.105 The Project route corridor will oversail the following SINCs as identified in the Halton UDP:
- a. Manchester Ship Canal Bank at Astmoor;
 - b. St Helens Canal (reclaimed), Widnes;
 - c. Upper Mersey Estuary Widnes Warth and Fiddlers Ferry Saltmarsh;
 - d. Upper Mersey Estuary Astmoor saltmarsh and swamp; and
 - e. Upper Mersey Estuary intertidal areas and open water.

- 6.11.106 As such, an assessment of the Project against the provisions of GE19 should be undertaken.

Assessment

- 6.11.107 The Project will not have a significant impact upon the nature conservation importance of any of these areas, and will not prevent their long-term potential to continue to be recognised as sites of importance for nature conservation. Whilst the Manchester Ship Canal and St Helens Canal extend over considerable distances and although the Project may have a direct impact on limited portions of the length of each canal, the overwhelming majority of the canal fabric as existing would remain intact and the effects on biodiversity will be minor. The magnitude of the impact of development upon the Astmoor saltmarsh is recognised as low, and thus is not significant. Construction and use of the Project, given appropriate mitigation, which is feasible, will cause no significant harm to biodiversity or to the habitats and wild bird importance of the Mersey Estuary. The integrity of the Upper Mersey Estuary and other Local Wildlife Sites will therefore not be adversely affected by the Project.

Compliance

- 6.11.108 The Project will not have a significant effect upon the status and purpose of SINCs. The proposal is therefore considered to be in general compliance with the provisions of policy GE19.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.11.109 The Terrestrial and Avian Ecology chapter of the ES concludes that the low effects of development on the St. Helens Canal and the Manchester Ship Canal Bank SINCs can be reduced or mitigated, with off-site compensation on adjacent land or on Wigg Island if necessary. The chapter also advises of a range of mitigation measures which can be applied during construction and operation to minimise the impacts of the Project on the Upper Mersey Estuary. At implementation, the Project will not have a significant impact upon the integrity of the Upper Mersey Estuary. No residual impacts therefore arise for review.

Policy GE21 – Species Protection

- 6.11.110 Policy states that development which would cause unacceptable harm to a species of flora or fauna protected under national or international legislation, or its habitat, will not be permitted unless all of the following criteria can be satisfied:
- a. That the development is in the interests of public health and public safety, or for other imperative reasons of overriding public interest, including those of a social or economic nature and beneficial consequences of primary importance for the environment;
 - b. That there is no satisfactory alternative; and
 - c. That the derogation is not detrimental to the maintenance of the populations of the species concerned at a favourable conservation status in their natural range.
- 6.11.111 The policy also states that on any site that may be supporting a species of flora or fauna protected under national legislation, or its habitat, an expert on the relevant protected species should carry out a site survey. Policy requires that the survey should be a thorough investigation, with recommendations on how to mitigate the effects of development if this can be permitted without serious disruption to the species involved. The policy states that where development is permitted, the planning authority will consider the use of conditions or planning obligations to ensure the protection and enhancement of the site's species or its habitat.

Relevance

- 6.11.112 The Project will oversail the Upper Mersey Estuary, and is located 1.8km upstream of the Middle Mersey Estuary, designated as a Ramsar, SPA, SSSI and European Marine Site. As such, policy GE21 is of relevance to the Project and thus should be considered within this assessment.

Assessment

- 6.11.113 In accordance with the provisions of policy GE21, an assessment of the Project should be undertaken against criteria i to iii, as follows:

That the development is in the interests of public health and public safety, or for other imperative reasons of overriding public interest, including those of a social or economic nature and beneficial consequences of primary importance for the environment;

- 6.11.114 The Project will deliver improved cross-river public transport, walking and cycling provision by virtue of modifications to the SJB. This will deliver direct road safety benefits around the site and encourage an increased number of daily pedestrian and cycle movements. The Project will represent a modern road facility designed to accord with current road standards. This, along with the removal of the bottleneck caused by the SJB, will represent an inherent improvement in road safety.

- 6.11.115 The Project will serve as a catalyst towards the regeneration of Southern Widnes and Runcorn. The Regeneration Strategy and emerging LDF policy framework will ensure that the potential regeneration benefits are captured as far as possible. This will assist in the creation of new

employment opportunities at a local level, and enhance access to jobs and services at a sub-regional and regional level.

That there is no satisfactory alternative

- 6.11.116 The Alternatives chapter of the ES (see Chapter 5) set out the range of options that have been considered. These include:
- a. Halton Travel Plan Network;
 - b. Charging for using the SJB or other roads;
 - c. Dynamic Lane Management;
 - d. Selective Access by Vehicle Tagging;
 - e. Road Space Re-Allocation;
 - f. Park and Ride;
 - g. Rail Service Improvements;
 - h. Fixed crossing to the west of the Railway bridge;
 - i. Fixed crossing between the SJB and the Railway Bridge; and
 - j. Fixed crossing to the east of the Railway Bridge.
- 6.11.117 The findings of the Alternatives assessment concluded that a fixed crossing to the east of Aethelfleda Railway Bridge is the only option which has the potential to deliver all of the identified scheme objectives. The Alternatives assessment has identified that preferred Route 3A would result in significant traffic alleviation, and deliver benefit from increased public transport reliability. Route 3A will also allow cycling and pedestrian facilities on the SJB to be improved.

That the derogation is not detrimental to the maintenance of the populations of the species concerned at a favourable conservation status in their natural range

- 6.11.118 The Aquatic Ecology and Terrestrial and Avian Ecology assessment of this ES have demonstrated that the Project will not have a detrimental impact upon species population.

Compliance

- 6.11.119 The Project will not have a significant impact or cause unacceptable harm to the Mersey Estuary. A Terrestrial and Avian Ecology assessment and Aquatic Ecology assessment of the Project have been undertaken as part of the ES. These conclude that post-mitigation, the Project will not cause significant detrimental harm to the integrity of species within the Mersey Estuary. The Project is therefore considered to be in compliance with the provisions of policy GE21.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.11.120 The Terrestrial and Avian Ecology assessment advises that the loss or damage to saltmarsh habitat, soils and vegetation as a result of the Project may be avoided or minimised through the construction of temporary access tracks designed to protect the saltmarsh habitat from damage and disruption. Other possible mitigation measures include temporary translocation and revegetation, encouraging natural regeneration, and/or reseeded. Upon implementation of these appropriate mitigation measures, the Terrestrial and Avian Ecology assessment advises that the construction and operation of the Project will not cause significant harm to biodiversity, or to the habitat and wild bird importance of the Middle Mersey Estuary.

Policy GE23- Protection of Areas of Special Landscape Value

- 6.11.121 Policy GE23 advises that development will not be permitted within Areas of Special Landscape Value where this would cause an unacceptable effect on the visual and physical characteristics for which an area was designated as having Special Landscape Value.

6.11.122 Development proposals within Areas of Special Landscape Value should be capable of satisfying all of the following criteria:

- a. *It is in character with the Area, sensitively sited and designed, and constructed of appropriate materials;*
- b. *It is integrated and landscaped to a high standard;*
- c. *It can be accommodated without affecting the overall quality of the area.*

6.11.123 The accompanying text notes that sites designated as Areas of Special Landscape Value within the Borough include the Mersey Estuary, incorporating its beaches, cliffs and salt marshes. Development should be in character with these Areas, sensitively sited and designed, and constructed of appropriate materials. It should be integrated and landscaped to a high standard. It should also be accommodated without affecting the overall quality of the area.

Relevance

6.11.124 The whole of the Mersey Estuary is allocated as an Area of Special Landscape Value. The extent to which the Project will impact upon the Mersey Estuary should therefore be considered within this assessment.

Assessment

6.11.125 The extent to which the Project satisfies the provisions of policy GE23 are considered below:

It is in character with the Area, sensitively sited and designed, and constructed of appropriate materials

6.11.126 The design, alignment and use of construction materials have sought to minimise the impact of the New Bridge on this Area of Special Landscape Value, and to integrate the structure with the existing built and historic environment.

It is integrated and landscaped to a high standard

6.11.127 The Project has the potential to impact upon the existing external views of the Mersey Estuary by virtue of its proposed alignment across the Upper River Mersey.

6.11.128 The Landscape and Visual Amenity assessment (see Chapter 12) undertaken as part of this ES identifies that the New Bridge is appropriate to its location and will make a beneficial contribution within the landscape. The landscaping scheme for the proposed alignment has also been considered as an integral part of the evolution of the Reference Design to minimise any visual impacts associated with the Project upon the existing landscape.

It can be accommodated without affecting the overall quality of the area

6.11.129 The Hydrodynamics chapter of the ES (see Chapter 7) has investigated the existing hydrodynamic and morphological regime within the Mersey Estuary, at both short-term and long-term intervals. These investigations have identified the impact of the proposed Mersey Gateway Bridge upon the hydrodynamics and morphology of the Mersey Estuary to be insignificant in comparison to the naturally occurring rate of change within this estuary. The evidence gathered during the modelling and investigations undertaken suggests that there will be no impact on the dynamics of the estuary from the Project. The investigations demonstrate that the natural changes and fluctuations within the coastal system are in excess of the possible impacts arising from the New Bridge.

6.11.130 There is no evidence to suggest any impacts of the Project on the SPA site downstream of Runcorn. There is not expected to be any change to the SSSI in excess of natural change. In

addition, the evidence does not identify any potential impacts upon existing structures, in particular the Manchester Ship Canal and the SJB.

Compliance

- 6.11.131 In physical terms, the Project will not have a detrimental impact upon the Mersey Estuary Area of Special Landscape Value in excess of the naturally occurring rate of change. Visually, whilst external views of the New Bridge are inevitable, the high-quality landscaping, design and choice of construction materials has sought to reflect the existing fabric of the area to minimise the visual impacts associated with the Project.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.11.132 Proposed mitigation measures are set out within the Landscape and Visual Amenity assessment to minimise the visual impacts of the Project. These include earth mounding, screen bunds, vertical barrier and structural planting. At operation, any component of the landscape scheme considered essential to the project, and which may be lost through diverse physical damage (e.g. vandalism, road traffic accident) or other unforeseen incident, will be replaced in the most appropriate manner.
- 6.11.133 Given the lack of any identified physical impacts, no mitigation measures are proposed in respect of the Mersey Estuary. However in terms of potential construction impacts, it is recommended that monitoring of the coastline be continued throughout the construction phase, and during the first five years of operation phase to develop a further understanding of the estuarine system.

Policy GE24 - Protection of Important Landscape Features

- 6.11.134 This policy advises that development will not be permitted where it will result in an unacceptable effect on the visual or physical characteristics for which a site was designated as having 'Important Landscape Features.' The policy identifies a number of such areas including Wigg Island, Runcorn, the Trans-Pennine Trail (West Bank Dock section) and Spike Island in Widnes.

Relevance

- 6.11.135 Important Landscape Features located within the proposed alignment of the Project include Spike Island, Wigg Island, and the Trans-Pennine Trail. Any potential impacts arising from the Project on these features should be considered within this policy assessment.

Assessment

- 6.11.136 Land-Use (see Chapter 9) and Landscape and Visual Amenity (see Chapter 12) assessments have been undertaken as part of the Project EIA. These assessments have been drawn on to inform the assessment of the Project against the provisions of policy GE24.

Physical Impacts

- 6.11.137 Spike Island, located to the north of the estuary, is designated as an Important Landscape Feature. The most northern extent of this designation will be permanently lost to the Project, comprising an area of approximately 0.81 hectares. This land will no longer be available to serve its existing land-use.
- 6.11.138 Land lost at Wigg Island by virtue of the construction of the New Bridge piers comprises approximately 0.12 hectares.

Visual Impacts

- 6.11.139 The New Bridge spans Spike Island and Wigg Island and as such will impact visually on both elements both in terms of external views and - where relevant – upon views within these features.
- 6.11.140 The Landscape and Visual Amenity assessment advises that the crossing of Wigg Island represents one of the most problematical aspects of the proposed alignment. The presence of the highway in a publicly accessible and tranquil area of the estuary is considered to be detrimental, and its exposure to view will be considerable. However, the assessment does acknowledge that the height of the deck and the openness of the viaduct will take traffic away from normal lines of sight at close range. Existing mature tree cover will also help to integrate the structure with the landscape at its most southern point adjacent to the Manchester Ship Canal.

Compliance

- 6.11.141 In physical terms the Project will lead to the physical loss of land which falls within an Important Landscape Feature designation. However, the loss is minimal and would not prejudice the overall viability of the designation. In visual terms, it is acknowledged that the New Bridge will have a negative impact on the external views of the estuary and local margins from Spike Island and Wigg Island at operation.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.11.142 To minimise the visual impacts of the Project, proposed mitigation measures at Wigg Island include woodland scale planting in intermittent groupings to integrate the scale of the New Bridge approaches with the surrounding tree cover, whilst continuing to permit through views.
- 6.11.143 Whilst the crossing of Wigg Island will be mitigated in part by the introduction of additional vegetation adjacent to the structure, the Landscape and Visual Amenity assessment advises of the benefit to retain open views, which in turn expose traffic to view when approaching the structure. However, it is acknowledged that the visual impacts of the New Bridge Project cannot be wholly mitigated from these Important Landscape Features.
- 6.11.144 Interpretation boards, footpath improvements, and management schemes will be implemented to help to offset the scale of the impact of the Project at Spike Island.

Policy GE28 – The Mersey Forest

- 6.11.145 This policy identifies locations where planning permission for development will be conditional upon the carrying out of tree planting and other landscape improvements, as identified on accompanying Map 7 of the UDP. This advises that at Wigg Island and along the banks of the Mersey Estuary to the east of the SJB, a tree planting proportion of 20%-30% will be required as part of any development proposal.
- 6.11.146 The accompanying text states that the Mersey Forest is the largest in area of the twelve community forests being established throughout England. Identified opportunities for extended tree planting and woodland areas include the “banks of the Mersey east of Runcorn Bridge.” The supporting text advises that an expansion of the woodland cover of the Borough will deliver many recreational, educational, landscape and wildlife benefits, whilst helping to absorb housing, transport routes and commercial development into a greener environment. It will also assist in improving air quality standards, given trees remove carbon dioxide, release oxygen and filter out harmful pollutants.
- 6.11.147 The accompanying text states that the guiding principles for the Mersey Forest in Halton are:

- i. *Provide a woodland buffer around the urban edge and created a wooded edge to the Mersey Estuary;*
- ii. *Extend planting into the urban area using all appropriate and available open land, including derelict land;*
- iii. *Provide a new woodland structure for surrounding agricultural areas;*
- iv. *Protect and manage the existing resource of urban tress and woodlands in a sustainable manner.*

Relevance

- 6.11.148 The proposed alignment of the New Bridge crosses Wigg Island and the area of woodland planting identified on Map 7 of the UDP. The extent to which the Project will contribute towards the opportunity for extended tree planting and woodland along the banks of the Mersey east of Runcorn Bridge should therefore be considered.

Assessment

- 6.11.149 The Project will be accompanied by detailed landscaping proposals which will offer the opportunity of delivering the aspirations of the Mersey Forest.

Compliance

- 6.11.150 The proposal is capable of contributing to the aspirations of the Mersey Forest policy in accordance with the provisions of policy GE28.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.11.151 No conflict arises, no mitigation is necessary and as such there are no residual impacts which arise for review.

Policy GE29 - Canals and Rivers

- 6.11.152 Policy GE29 advises that development adjacent to St. Helens Canal, the Bridgewater Canal, and the River Mersey will not be permitted should it have an unacceptable effect on one or more of the following:

- i. *Recreation or tourism opportunities presented by the canal, river or their environs;*
- ii. *Important amenity, landscape and ecological characteristics of the canal, river or their environs;*
- iii. *The viability of important landscape and wildlife resources;*
- iv. *The provision or improvement of access points onto the canal's towpath or river's edge;*
- v. *The establishment of "The Greenway Network" in conflict with TP9;*
- vi. *The maintenance of a clean, healthy and pleasant canal or river environment.*

- 6.11.153 The policy also states that waterside development will not be permitted if it will have an unacceptable effect on water quality, or cause significant, damaging run-off from hard surfaces. The supporting text advises that canals and rivers are extremely important features in the landscape, for their wildlife interest and for providing important wildlife corridors. The supporting text also advises that where possible, proposals near to canals and rivers and other watercourses should increase the wildlife and landscape value by encouraging the opening up of culverted watercourses. The accompanying text states that in considering any development proposals which affect canals, rivers or watercourses, and their environs, the Council will ensure that significant user conflicts or problems of public safety would not be caused.

Relevance

- 6.11.154 The proposed alignment of the Project crosses the St. Helens Canal, the Bridgewater Canal, and the Upper Mersey Estuary. Any potential impacts arising from the Project upon these waterways should be considered in accordance with the provisions of policy GE29.

Assessment

- 6.11.155 The following assessment considers the Project against the provisions of policy GE29, as follows:

Recreation or tourism opportunities presented by the canal, river or their environs

- 6.11.156 The Project has been identified as having potential impacts upon the recreation and tourism opportunities associated with the St. Helens Canal, the Bridgewater Canal, and the Upper Mersey Estuary. However, some construction impacts upon these navigable waterways have been identified by virtue of the Navigation assessment, as follows:

- a. Demolition of the Bridgewater Junction causing disturbance to users of the Bridgewater Canal during construction;
- b. A temporary reduction of air clearance over the Bridgewater Canal and Manchester Ship Canal during the construction and operational phases;
- c. Temporary obstructions to recreational craft within the Upper Mersey Estuary.
- d. The use of amphibious craft in the river has the potential to cause interference with other users of the river during construction phase through congestion in the river and the working area; and
- e. The piled jetty will result in a temporary obstruction to users of the river during the construction phase.

- 6.11.157 In addition to the above, a number of potential operational impacts have also been identified:

- a. Temporary reduction of air clearance over the Bridgewater Canal and Manchester Ship Canal during the operation phase as a result of the use of temporary structures for maintenance works;
- b. Permanent reduction of air clearance over the River Mersey as a result of the Project, although this will be at a very high elevation;
- c. Permanent obstructions in the Upper Mersey Estuary from the three towers; and
- d. Permanent reduced air clearance over the St. Helens Canal as a result of the Project.

Important amenity, landscape and ecological characteristics of the canal, river or their environs

- 6.11.158 The New Bridge will have a permanent visual impact on the St. Helens Canal, the Bridgewater Canal, and the Upper Mersey Estuary, by virtue of its proposed alignment oversailing these features. Between the St. Helens Canal and the tidal channel, the road deck will be positioned about 20 metres above existing ground level. There is no scope for mitigation at this location if existing saltmarshes are not to be adversely affected. Any reduction in visual impacts is dependant upon the manner in which the New Bridge design relates to the local environment.

- 6.11.159 The Aquatic Ecology assessment has demonstrated the potential for the MGP to impact on existing freshwater watercourses within the study area during construction and operation. The Terrestrial and Avian Ecology assessment has recognised that the Project will cause minor effects on biodiversity within the study area during construction.

The viability of important landscape and wildlife resources

- 6.11.160 The Project will not have a significant impact upon nature conservation and important landscape features.

The provision or improvement of access points onto the canal's towpath or river's edge

- 6.11.161 The New Bridge will not prejudice permanent access to existing towpaths along the Manchester Ship Canal, St. Helens Canal and the Bridgewater Canal or the rivers edge, or the future enhancement of access to and from these waterways.

The establishment of "The Greenway Network" in conflict with TP9

- 6.11.162 An existing greenway running from the Quay Bridge, along Wigg Island and terminating at the most eastern point of Wigg Island, will be affected during the construction phase of development. Effects on this greenway will be temporary. There will be no direct change in the land-use as temporary diversions will be implemented.

The maintenance of a clean, healthy and pleasant canal or river environment

- 6.11.163 The Surface Water Quality chapter of the EIA (see Chapter 8) has assessed the potential effects of the Project on the water quality of the Mersey Estuary and surrounding watercourses. This process has identified the potential for spillages and leaks that may occur during construction to have a detrimental effect upon water quality in all watercourses situated within the defined study area.

Compliance

- 6.11.164 The Project will have a permanent visual impact on the St. Helens Canal, Bridgewater Canal, and Manchester Ship Canal, and the Mersey Estuary, by virtue of its crossing of these waterways. The New Bridge will not cause any significant impact upon biodiversity or water quality within the canals and Mersey Estuary. Where potential impacts are identified, appropriate mitigation measures have been considered within the Aquatic Ecology and Terrestrial and Avian Ecology assessments. No over-riding conflict with the policy aspirations therefore arise.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.11.165 Mitigation measures to minimise the impacts of the Project on the physical operations of the navigable waterways within the study area include:
- a. Consultation with the Manchester Ship Canal Company regarding any temporary closures of the Bridgewater Canal, and the use of temporary structures such as mobile gantries on both the Manchester Ship Canal and Bridgewater Canal during construction and operation;
 - b. Incorporation of suitable navigation lighting on the New Bridge where it crosses the Manchester Ship Canal; and
 - c. Lighting of the three towers to give a satisfactory indication of the navigable area.
- 6.11.166 The application of high-quality landscaping, design and choice of construction materials has sought to protect the existing grain of the area, and minimise the visual impact of the Project upon the integrity of the waterways.

Policy GE30 - The Mersey Coastal Zone

- 6.11.167 Policy GE30 advises that proposals for development within the Undeveloped Coastal Zone will not be permitted unless the development specifically requires a coastal location, relates to the recreational use of the zone, or is necessary for reasons of human health or public safety. Policy advises that proposals which would contribute to regeneration, and/or to the enhancement of environmental quality, tourism and recreation will be encouraged. The policy advises that development within the Developed Coastal Zone need not be limited to those which require a coastal location. However, policy advises that proposals within the Developed

Coastal Zone should pay particular regard to environmental quality, and where possible to improving accessibility to the coast.

Relevance

- 6.11.168 The proposed alignment of the Project comprises land within the Mersey Coastal Zone. Any regeneration benefits and environmental impacts associated with the Project should therefore be considered in accordance with the provisions of policy GE30.

Assessment

- 6.11.169 One aim of the Project, to provide efficient cross-river vehicular movements, specifically requires its location within the Mersey Coastal Zone. This will result in the permanent physical loss of land within the Mersey Coastal Zone to accommodate the New Bridge supporting piers. The New Bridge will also have a permanent visual impact on the Mersey Coastal Zone.
- 6.11.170 Whilst these impacts are unavoidable if a crossing of the estuary is to be created, the policy does acknowledge that projects which assist in regeneration can be supported. On this point, the Project will serve as a catalyst towards the regeneration of Southern Widnes and Runcorn. The Regeneration Strategy and emerging LDF policy framework will ensure that the potential regeneration benefits are captured as far as is possible.

Compliance

- 6.11.171 The New Bridge specifically requires a coastal location. At operation, the New Bridge will serve as a catalyst in the regeneration of Southern Widnes and Runcorn. It is considered therefore that the proposal meets the requirements of policy GE30.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.11.172 The Project is considered to be in general compliance with the requirements of policy GE30. No mitigation measures are therefore proposed, and no residual impacts arise for review.

Policy BE1 – General Requirements for Development

- 6.11.173 This policy establishes a series of criteria which all development proposals should satisfy where appropriate, as follows:

1. *Environmental Quality including:*
 - a. *High quality design;*
 - b. *Landscape proposals that reflect the essential character of the area;*
 - c. *Avoid unacceptable loss of amenity to occupiers or users of adjacent land or buildings by virtue of noise disturbance, noxious fumes, and dust or traffic generation;*
 - d. *Compatibility with surrounding uses;*
 - e. *Reduce fear and crime;*
 - f. *Not cause unacceptable levels of pollution or nuisance.*
2. *Accessibility including;*
 - a. *Design and layout of road, footpaths, accesses and servicing areas must comply with the Council's highway standards,*
 - b. *Adequate provision for and easily accessible by pedestrians, cyclists, public transport, and access to rail;*
 - c. *Not overload the capacity of the surrounding highway network;*
 - d. *Provision for people with disabilities and restricted mobility;*

- e. *Not prejudice access onto the Greenway Network, and where appropriate enhance greenway linkages.*
- 3. *Conservation of the Natural Environment including:*
 - a. *Ensure the retention, conservation and management of sites and archaeological features of historic, archaeological, landscape, ecological or amenity value;*
 - b. *Ensure the retention, conservation, integration and enhancement of features within and adjoining the site where there make a valuable contribution to the amenity of the site or surrounding area;*
 - c. *Not result in the unacceptable loss of designated greenspace or other Important amenity space;*
 - d. *Not utilise the best and most versatile agricultural land grades 1, 2 and 3a;*
- 4. *Infrastructure including:*
 - a. *Include adequate provision for any necessary improvements to utilities and services resulting from the development;*
 - b. *Meet the Council's on site drainage requirements;*
- 5. *Management of Resources including;*
 - a. *Not prejudice the planned development of a larger site or area for which comprehensive proposals have been approved or are in preparation;*
 - b. *Take into account the need for energy efficiency by means of building orientation, site layout and use of passive and active energy saving designed;*
 - c. *Maximise the use of recycled materials in the development;*
 - d. *Minimise the amount of waste produced during construction and operation;*
 - e. *Ensure adequate on-site provision is made for waste storage and collection;*
 - f. *Promote means to reduce the demand for water;*
 - g. *Take into account the need and potential for sustainable drainage techniques.*

6.11.174 The supporting text advises that the enhancement of the built environment is a primary aim of the UDP. The supporting text identifies this as a means of promoting economic prosperity and urban regeneration. Ensuring a high-quality design is a means of achieving these objectives.

Relevance

6.11.175 This policy is wide ranging, setting out a range of general requirements guiding development. Given that the Project proposes built development and infrastructure, the general provisions of the policy are of relevance in any assessment of the proposal.

Assessment

6.11.176 A tabulated assessment of the proposal against policy BE1 is provided in Appendix 6.2.

Compliance

6.11.177 The compliance of the Project against the provisions of policy BE1 is summarised in Appendix 6.2.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

6.11.178 Proposed mitigation measures and residual impacts are identified in Appendix 6.2.

Policy BE2 – Quality of Design

6.11.179 This policy states that the quality of design of a development proposal will be assessed by considering it against the following matters that influence overall design, including:

- i. *Layout;*
- ii. *Density;*
- iii. *Scale;*
- iv. *Massing;*
- v. *Height;*
- vi. *Materials;*
- vii. *Landscape;*
- viii. *Access;*
- ix. *Accessibility;*
- x. *Public Realm;*
- xi. *Topography and Site Levels;*
- xii. *Local distinctiveness and character;*
- xiii. *Energy Conservation.*

6.11.180 The policy advises that proposals should be designed to:

- a. Respect the existing any positive characteristics of the area;
- b. Respect and relate well to existing adjacent buildings and features of townscape value;
- c. Optimise the relationship and integration of buildings;
- d. Respect the nature and character of the surrounding area;
- e. Create visual interest;
- f. Provide an attractive building frontage with quality facing materials;
- g. Maintain and protect views important to the character of the area; and
- h. Be of a height, massing, density and layout that respects human scale.

6.11.181 The policy advises that original and innovative architecture will be encouraged provided it respects the character and appearance of its setting. Developments which will create a landmark or focal point will be acceptable where they will create an attractive reference point. Policy advises that planning permission will not be granted for proposals which will have an unacceptable effect on the character of the surrounding area because of its external appearance and style.

Relevance

6.11.182 This policy is wide ranging, setting out a range of general requirements guiding development. Given that the New Bridge proposes built development and infrastructure, the general provisions of the policy are of relevance in an assessment of the proposal.

Assessment

6.11.183 A tabulated assessment of the proposal against policy BE2 is provided in Appendix 6.2.

Compliance

6.11.184 The compliance of the Project against the provisions of policy BE2 is summarised in Appendix 6.2.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

6.11.185 Proposed mitigation measures and residual impacts are identified in Appendix 6.2.

Policy BE3 - Environmental Priority Areas

6.11.186 The policy defines the two Environmental Priority Areas within the Borough, focused largely upon the waterfront / townscape fringes of Runcorn and Widnes. Within the Environmental Priority Areas, policy BE3 advises that proposals for development will be:

- i. Expected to be of a quality of design that enhances the quality and appearance of the area; and*
- ii. Development, visible from main transport routes, and of a high quality in terms of landscape, boundary treatments and facing materials.*

Relevance

6.11.187 The proposed alignment of the Project incorporates land within an Environmental Priority Area. Potential environmental, visual and physical impacts of the proposed development upon this land should therefore be considered in accordance with the provisions of policy BE3.

Assessment

6.11.188 The extent to which the Project will impact upon the Environmental Priority Areas relative to the provisions set out within BE3 is considered below:

Expected to be of a quality of design that enhances the quality and appearance of the area

6.11.189 The incorporation of high-quality landscaping and public realm, design and choice of construction materials has sought to protect and conserve the existing characteristics of the Environmental Priority Area, and enhance this as far as possible.

Development, visible from main transport routes, and of a high quality in terms of landscape, boundary treatments and facing materials

6.11.190 The design of the New Bridge and choice of construction materials have sought to protect and conserve the existing character and appearance of the area. The landscaping scheme for the route corridor has been considered as an integral part of the development of the Reference Design to minimise as far as possible the visual impacts associated with the construction of the New Bridge upon the Environmental Priority Area.

Compliance

6.11.191 The Project will have a permanent visual impact on the Environmental Priority Area. However, the applied design and choice of construction materials have sought to enhance the visual appearance and character of the Environmental Priority Area where possible, enabling the conclusion to be drawn that the New Bridge has the ability to represent an iconic addition to the estuary context. On this basis, it is concluded that the proposals are in general compliance with policy BE3, subject to the delivery of appropriate landscape proposals.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

6.11.192 Proposed mitigation measures are set out within the Landscape and Visual Amenity assessment to minimise potential adverse visual impacts of development upon the Environmental Priority Area. These include Earth Mounding, Screen Bunds, Vertical Barrier and Planting along the proposed route of the Project.

6.11.193 To mitigate the visual impacts of the Project, the extent and diversity of tree and shrub planting is designed to create green corridors in areas where none currently exists and the provision of proposed new planting is substantially in excess of that proposed to be lost.

- 6.11.194 Any part or component of the landscape scheme considered essential to the project, and which are lost through diverse physical change or other unforeseen incident, will be replaced by the most appropriate means. It is however acknowledged that the visual impact of the Project on the Environmental Priority Area cannot be wholly mitigated.

BE5 – Other Sites of Archaeological Interest

- 6.11.195 This policy advises that development proposals that are likely to have an unacceptable affect on other known sites of archaeological significance will not be permitted. Permission may be granted if it can be demonstrated that measures of mitigation (such as preservation by design or record) and compensation (such as advances in knowledge or public understanding) can be employed to ensure there is no net loss of heritage or archaeological value. The accompanying text advises that preservation *in situ* is highly desirable, but where this is impossible to achieve, planning permission will only be granted subject to agreement on satisfactory range of measures of mitigation and compensation.

Relevance

- 6.11.196 The proposed alignment of the Project may impact upon a number of archaeological and historic sites, buildings and areas. As such, the appraisal of any such impacts needs to have regard to the provisions of policy BE5.

Assessment

- 6.11.197 Archaeology has been considered as part of the Project EIA to determine potential impacts of the proposed development upon existing archaeological and historic sites, buildings, and areas. The Cultural Heritage chapter of this ES (see Chapter 13) identifies a number of important receptors which may be directly and indirectly affected by the Project.
- 6.11.198 Potential direct impacts of the Project upon these sites include the possible loss of ground remains related to the history and development of each site, and the potential for buried features to be uncovered during construction.
- 6.11.199 The Cultural Heritage assessment identifies that the Project may also have an indirect negative impact upon the external views and visual setting of receptors along the proposed route alignment, albeit the magnitude of these impacts is generally assessed to be low negative to neutral.

Compliance

- 6.11.200 All of the known impacts and anticipated potential impacts of the Project upon each of the archaeological and historic sites listed above are in general, considered within the Cultural Heritage assessment to be of low neutral significance. Given that the Project will have minimal impact upon sites and buildings of archaeological interest, the Project is therefore considered to be in general compliance with the provisions of BE5.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.11.201 The Cultural Heritage assessment advises that an over-arching archaeological watching brief should be maintained on all groundworks. This measure is considered to represent the appropriate response given the low potential for the construction groundworks to uncover archaeological remains. The requirement for a watching brief could be subject to appropriate planning conditions. The brief would also address the potential for impacts on any unknown archaeological resources.
- 6.11.202 To minimise the potential impacts arising from development of the Project, groundworks that form part of the proposed scheme may be preceded or accompanied by archaeological

investigations and recording works. These measures may be subject to appropriate planning conditions. Works within the Widnes and Runcorn industrial heritage zones, works to Listed Buildings, and the industrial heritage zones/conservation areas would be preceded by the undertaking of a Building Recording on the structures affected by the Project.

- 6.11.203 Such archaeological investigations and recording operations are considered to represent mitigation works and would be undertaken in accordance with professional best-practice and with the agreement of the archaeological advisors to the local planning authority, including English Heritage and the Cheshire County Council Historic Environment Officer.
- 6.11.204 Any loss to the heritage of the area would be partially off-set by the recording works undertaken as part of the mitigation measures, and the recovery of any information would add to the overall knowledge and understanding of the history and development of the area. The long-term residual effects of the Project, assuming that all the recommended mitigation measures are applied and that the Project advances in accordance with historic environment and archaeological policies, are considered to be low negative to neutral.

BE6 – Archaeological Evaluations

- 6.11.205 The policy states that where development proposals affect sites of known or suspected archaeological importance, the Council may require the applicant to submit an archaeological evaluation prior to the determination of the planning application. The supporting text advises that the primary archaeological objective is the preservation in situ of important remains.

Relevance

- 6.11.206 The proposed alignment of the Project may impact upon a number of archaeological and historic sites, buildings and areas. As such, the appraisal of any such impacts needs to have regard to the provisions of policy BE6.

Assessment

- 6.11.207 To minimise the potential impacts arising from development of the Mersey Gateway Project, groundworks that form part of the proposed scheme may be preceded or accompanied by archaeological investigations and recording works. These may be subject to appropriate planning condition.

Compliance

- 6.11.208 The Project is considered to be in compliance with the provisions of policy BE6.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.11.209 No mitigation measures are proposed, and no residual impacts arise for review.

BE9 – Alterations and Additions to Listed Buildings

- 6.11.210 The policy states that in the determination of an application for planning permission or listed building consent to alter, internally or externally, or to extend, a listed building or a structure within its curtilage, the predominant consideration will be the preservation of the special architectural or historic features and character of the building or structure. The policy advises that proposals to alter or extend a listed building should comply with all of the following criteria:

- i. Extensions must respect the character and scale of the original building and not be allowed to dominate;*
- ii. The replacement of doors, windows and other features in non-traditional materials will not be permitted;*

- iii. *Attention should be paid to the retention of the original plan form, roof construction, and interior features of merit, as well as the exterior of listed buildings;*
- iv. *Extensions must as far as possible be built of materials matching those of the original building.*

6.11.211 The supporting text states that all alterations and additions should not unacceptably affect the essential character of the building, and should be in keeping with its architectural style and features and harmonise with its surroundings. The supporting text advises that development should be of a high standard of design and external appearance and materials will be expected to match as near as possible those of the existing buildings in kind and in detail.

Relevance

6.11.212 The Project comprises proposed works to the Grade II listed SJB. The extent to which these works comply with the provision of BE9 should therefore be considered.

Assessment

6.11.213 An assessment of the proposed works to the SJB, against the policy requirements expressed with BE9 is set out below:

Extensions must respect the character and scale of the original building and not be allowed to dominate

6.11.214 The proposed works to the SJB do not involve any extensions to the existing structure, and thus this element is not applicable to the Project.

The replacement of doors, windows and other features in non-traditional materials will not be permitted

6.11.215 This is not applicable to the proposed works to the SJB.

Attention should be paid to the retention of the original plan form, roof construction, and interior features of merit, as well as the exterior of listed buildings

6.11.216 The modifications to SJB relate to the deck of the Bridge, which will be carefully reconfigured to provide two central lanes to accommodate bus movements, and associated pedestrian and cycle facilities. The works will maintain the character of the existing structure; in addition the reduction in traffic due to the works will be of benefit to its future retention.

Extensions must as far as possible be built of materials matching those of the original building

6.11.217 This element is not applicable to the specific works proposed at the SJB.

Compliance

6.11.218 The proposed works to the SJB are considered to be in general compliance with the requirements of policy BE9.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

6.11.219 The Project is considered to be in general compliance with the provisions of policy BE9. No mitigation measures are therefore proposed, and no residual impacts arise for review.

BE10 – Protecting the Setting of Listed Buildings

6.11.220 This policy states that development which would affect the setting of a listed building should aim to preserve both the character and appearance of that setting and its historic relationship to the

listed building. This will include, where appropriate, the preservation of trees and other landscape features. The supporting text advises that it is essential to consider the impact of development and other proposals within the vicinity of listed buildings.

Relevance

- 6.11.221 The New Bridge will be situated 1.8km upstream of the existing Grade II listed SJB, and the Grade II* listed Aethelfleda Railway Bridge. The extent to which this may impact upon the character and appearance of the area and its historic context should therefore be considered.

Assessment

- 6.11.222 The Landscape and Visual Assessment exercise undertaken as part of this ES has undertaken a full review of the impacts of the New Bridge against a range of receptors. With particular reference to historic buildings matters, assessment has considered the proposal in relation to the listed SJB and the Aethelfleda railway bridge, with particular regard to any effects on the historical context and setting of both structures. The assessment concludes as follows:

- a. That the New Bridge, in particular that part which spans the estuary, is in keeping with and is readily accommodated within the grand scale of the estuary setting; and
- b. That the quality of the bridge design, its lightness of cabling and structure and choice of materials ensures that it has the capacity to be considered as an iconic structure in its own right.

- 6.11.223 The assessment acknowledges that the New Bridge will be mainly seen within the same sweep of view as the SJB and the railway bridge it concludes however that given the relative separation (1.8 km), the scale of the setting, the exemplary design features of the New Bridge and the clear difference in design and style between the New Bridge and the SJB, then the relationship is considered to be one of appropriate co-existence. It is concluded that Mersey Gateway Bridge will become a notable feature within the estuary, sitting alongside and complementary to the SJB and on this basis the relationship between the New Bridge and the SJB is considered to be beneficial.

- 6.11.224 The narrower assessment of impact on the setting of the listed SJB and Aethelfleda Railway Bridge concluded that the Project would inevitably change the existing open estuary setting by introducing a new river crossing which would have views from and to the listed structure. The appraisal however acknowledges the findings of the landscape appraisal and concludes that any such impact would be minor.

Compliance

- 6.11.225 The Project will not have a significant adverse affect on the setting of the SJB and Aethelfleda Railway Bridge, and thus is considered to be in general compliance with the requirements of policy BE10.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.11.226 No significant adverse impacts in relation to either the setting or the fabric of the listed structures is identified; on this basis no mitigation is proposed and no residual impacts arise.

Policy E1 - Employment Land Allocations

- 6.11.227 The UDP identifies a number of sites within Widnes and Runcorn for B1, B2 and B8 employment generating uses. This includes site reference 142 (Ditton Road/Speke Road) comprising 1.44 hectares of previously development land. Policy E1 seeks to maintain the allocation and resists alternative development.

Relevance

- 6.11.228 The proposed alignment of the Project will take up all of this allocated employment site. Potential impacts of the development proposals upon this allocated employment site should therefore be considered.

Assessment

- 6.11.229 The Land-Use assessment of the ES (see Chapter 9) advises that the allocated employment site at Ditton Road and Speke Road will be permanently lost during construction, and will not be available post construction for its allocated employment use.

Compliance

- 6.11.230 The Project will prevent the development of this allocated site for employment uses. The loss of this allocated employment site will therefore have a small adverse affect on the availability of available employment sites within Halton.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.11.231 The Project will result in the permanent loss of the allocated employment site; no direct compensatory provision is proposed. However, it is proposed to re-use areas of defunct highway no longer required as development land and re-allocate these for commercial/employment development through the Regeneration Strategy and LDF. This will go to replacing a significant amount of the land area subsumed by the Project, but not wholly. It is identified within the Land-Use assessment that land released at Ditton Road/Newtown will provide approximately 2.57 ha of employment land for future development.

Policy E3 - Primarily Employment Areas

- 6.11.232 Policy E3 identifies a number of sites for B1, B2, B8 and Sui Generis industrial uses, comprising the main areas within the Borough where employment uses will be permitted. The supporting text advises that they constitute areas where the predominant land-use is and will continue to be employment based that the Council aims to diversify the local economy away from the over-dependence on heavy chemical industries and will seek to enhance the overall environmental quality of the Primarily Employment Areas.

Relevance

- 6.11.233 The proposed alignment of the Project will comprise land situated within allocated Primarily Employment Areas at Astmoor Industrial Estate in Runcorn, and Catalyst Trade Park in Widnes. Within these areas, existing buildings will be demolished. The potential effect on employment land availability at these locations should therefore be considered.

Assessment

- 6.11.234 This Chapter has drawn on the Land-Use assessment of the ES (see Chapter 9) to inform this assessment. This has identified existing commercial and industrial land to be the largest land-type lost by virtue of the proposed alignment of the Project. The loss of these sites will reduce the availability of commercial and industrial land within Halton.
- 6.11.235 15 commercial properties will be subject to compulsory purchase within Widnes and Runcorn and demolished. On the Astmoor Industrial Estate, 13 units will be subject to compulsory purchase and demolished. Thirty properties/areas elsewhere across Widnes and Runcorn are at a low risk of requiring compulsory purchase as a result of the development proposals.

- 6.11.236 It is expected that existing commercial land and buildings lost following the construction of the Project, including:
- a. 2 units which currently exist as brownfield land;
 - b. 1 unit which has been identified as employment/brownfield land; and
 - c. 2 areas of land where no buildings have been identified.
- 6.11.237 The total amount of existing commercial/industrial land which has been identified to lie within the 500m buffer of the alignment is 227.60ha. The total area of commercial/industrial land to be lost equates to 18ha of which 6.9ha of land will be lost at Astmoor Industrial Estate, and a further 11.07 hectares at Catalyst Trader Park in Widnes. In addition, 6.17ha of commercial/industrial land will face short term temporary loss during construction. No additional loss of industrial/commercial land will occur at operation of the Project. The Borough wide total of existing and allocated employment land comprises circa 945 hectares, including the Regional Investment Sites situated within the Borough. The Project will therefore result in the loss of 1.9% of overall employment land within Halton.

Compliance

- 6.11.238 The Project will result in the loss of land allocated within the policy for employment uses. However, the de-linking process in the Ditton Road/Newtown area will release an additional c. 9.63 hectares of land to partially compensate for the loss of existing industrial and commercial land. The Project will therefore result in a net loss of c. 8.37ha of employment land.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.11.239 To compensate for the loss of existing employment land, the Council has prepared a Relocation Strategy to ensure that the benefits of the Mersey Gateway can be delivered whilst minimising the extent of the impact upon those businesses that require location. The Project is committed to helping effected businesses relocate where appropriate. To achieve this objective, existing businesses will need to be transferred to locations that are appropriate to the present and future needs of each business concerned. The Council will offer assistance for business relocation based on the advice and guidance incorporated within its Relocation Strategy.

Policy TP2 - Existing Public Transport Facilities

- 6.11.240 Policy TP2 states that development will not be permitted if it is likely to prejudice the use of the Runcorn Busway as part of the local public transport network, or the present or future use of existing stations, their interchange facilities, or railway lines. The supporting text states that the Busway in Runcorn is a vital strategic link in the public transport network. The supporting text advises that it is essential that this is retained for use by public transport and where possible, enhanced. The supporting text also advises that it is essential that existing railway lines and stations are retained to provide public transport services, along with the retention and enhancement of interchange facilities.

Relevance

- 6.11.241 The proposed alignment of the Project is in close proximity to existing public transport facilities in Runcorn and Widnes. Any potential impact of the development proposals on the operational capabilities of these facilities should therefore be considered.

Assessment

- 6.11.242 The development of the Project will not prejudice the use of existing public transport facilities. There will be no loss of rail infrastructure, bus routes or interchanges arising from the Project. Rail users will not be affected by the Project, and thus no operational impacts apply. It is however estimated that public transport efficiency and reliability will improve considerably as a

result of the Project through the re-configuration of the SJB to accommodate cross-river public transport links.

- 6.11.243 The protection of existing public transport routes, including the Runcorn Busway, and other existing public transport facilities is fundamental to the key objective of promoting and encouraging the use of alternative transport modes. This represents an important element in the delivery of a comprehensive integrated transport approach to relieve severe levels of road congestion across the SJB and its main approaches.

Compliance

- 6.11.244 The Project will not prejudice the use and operations of any existing public transport facilities, and is thus considered to be in general compliance with the requirements of policy TP2.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.11.245 The Project is considered to be in general accordance with the requirements of policy TP2. No mitigation measures are therefore proposed, and no residual impacts arise for review.

Policy TP4 - New Public Transport Facilities

- 6.11.246 The policy states that development likely to prevent the opportunity for new railway stations to be developed in specified locations within the Borough will not be permitted. Policy TP4 advocates the development of new stations and other new public transport facilities, including bus and rail interchanges and part and ride facilities. The supporting text states that the opening of new public transport facilities will enable more people to use the public transport network, and *“thus reduce the need to travel by private car.”* The supporting text states that providing new public transport facilities will increase the prospects of more people travelling by a variety of modes of transport other than the car, as will providing interchanges between rail and bus. This will also *“increase the potential for access to Liverpool Airport using public transport.”*

Relevance

- 6.11.247 The proposed alignment of the Project lies close to a proposed new public transport facility within Southern Widnes. The extent to which the Project may prejudice the development of this proposed facility should therefore be considered.

Assessment

- 6.11.248 The proposed alignment of the Project will not prejudice the opportunity for development of a new public transport facility within Widnes. The protection of existing and future public transport facilities and routes is critical to provide reliable and efficient alternative modes of transport to the private car, a key objective of the Project.

Compliance

- 6.11.249 The Project will not restrict the potential for the development of proposed new public transport interchanges within Widnes, and thus the Project is considered to be in general accordance with policy TP4.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.11.250 The Project is considered to be in general accordance with the requirements of policy TP4. No mitigation measures are therefore proposed, and no residual impacts arise for review.

Policy TP9 - The Greenway Network

6.11.251 This policy advises that development should not prejudice access onto or through the network unless arrangements can be made for suitable alternative linkages that are no less attractive, safe or convenient. The policy states the development proposals for sites that incorporate a greenway will be expected to satisfy all of the following requirements:

- i. The condition and appearance of proposed routes should be enhanced;*
- ii. Potential routes should be implemented;*
- iii. The route should be appropriately segregated; and*
- iv. Priority should be given to pedestrian, cyclists and horseriders.*

6.11.252 The supporting text advises that the concept of the greenway network aims to provide networks of largely car-free, off-road routes connecting people to facilities and open spaces in and around towns and cities.

Relevance

6.11.253 The proposed alignment of the Project includes land allocated by the Council as a Greenway Network. The extent of any impacts associated with the Project relative to the provisions of TP9 should therefore be considered.

Assessment

6.11.254 The Land-Use assessment of the ES (see Chapter 9) identifies that the Borough wide network of greenways will be affected where the Project intersects with land designated for this use. The greenway network will be impacted at the following locations:

- i. the Daresbury Expressway and the A558;*
- ii. the junction of the A533 and Central Expressway;*
- iii. the junction of the Rocksavage Expressway, Central Expressway and the A557; and*
- iv. greenway running from the Quay Bridge, along Wigg Island and terminating at the most eastern point of Wigg Island.*

6.11.255 Each of these greenways act as pathways for pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders. Effects on these greenways will be temporary and restricted to the construction period only. There will be no direct change from their current land use as temporary diversions will be implemented.

6.11.256 The extent to which the Project complies with the policy provisions of policy TP9 should be considered:

The condition and appearance of proposed routes should be enhanced

6.11.257 The Project will have a temporary impact upon the greenway network at the aforementioned locations during construction by virtue of temporary diversions and closures. However, these will not prevent their continued long-term function as greenways.

Potential routes should be implemented

6.11.258 The Project does not propose to develop any additional greenway linkages. However, the Project will not prejudice the long-term operations of the existing greenway network.

The route should appropriately segregated

6.11.259 The Project will have a physical impact on the greenway network during construction. During construction, alternatives routes and diversions will be implemented to segregate users from construction areas. Post construction, the Greenway routing will be restored to its current condition.

Priority should be given to pedestrian, cyclists and horseriders

- 6.11.260 The Project will not prejudice the use of the greenway network by pedestrians, cyclists and horseriders at operation. During construction, alternative routes and diversions will be implemented to ensure that existing greenway linkages are maintained to provide for ongoing pedestrian, cyclist and horserider movements.

Compliance

- 6.11.261 The Project will not prejudice the long-term operations and development of the greenway network in Halton. During the construction phase of development, alternative routes and diversions will be implemented along the greenway network, as advocated by policy TP9. All of the greenway networks will continue to serve their current use post construction of the Project.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.11.262 During construction, the provision of alternative routes/diversions will be implemented along the greenway network to lessen the impacts from the Project, whilst still enabling for community facilities and routes to continue to be accessed. No residual impacts have been identified.

Policy TP10 - The Trans-Pennine Trail and Mersey Way

- 6.11.263 Policy TP10 advises that the Trans-Pennine Trail and the Mersey Way are recognised as important routes within the Greenway Network. The policy states that proposals for the development of recreational, tourism or other related facilities adjacent to, and incidental to, the development and enjoyment of the Trans-Pennine Trail or the Mersey Way will be permitted subject to satisfying other relevant Plan policies.
- 6.11.264 The supporting text advises that the Trans-Pennine Trail and the Mersey Way provide valuable recreational routes for the residents of the Borough, opening up the waterfront to public access, enabling easy access for non-car owners to the countryside. The Trans-Pennine Trail is “*unique*,” representing Britain’s first robust multi-user long-distance recreational route providing for walkers and cyclists.

Relevance

- 6.11.265 The proposed alignment of the Project will oversail the Trans-Pennine Trail in Widnes. The extent of any impacts should therefore be considered to accord with the provisions of policy TP10.

Assessment

- 6.11.266 The Land-Use assessment of the ES (see Chapter 9) advises that the Trans Pennine Trail (as part of the national cycle network) will be affected by the construction phase of the Project requiring temporary closures and local diversions.
- 6.11.267 The Trans-Pennine Trail forms an integral element of the national cycle network, and as such a through route will be maintained during the full extent of the construction period. The Land-Use assessment advises that the Council has identified the long-term objective of linking the de-linked SJB into the Trans Pennine Trail. The Project may slightly alter the alignment of these routes in the long-term, albeit it is considered that this may also serve to enhance and improve these routes.

Compliance

- 6.11.268 The Trans-Pennine Trail will be affected in the short-term by the construction of the Project by virtue of possible temporary closures and diversions during construction. However, these

temporary closures and diversions would be removed at operation, and the land will be restored to its original land-use.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.11.269 The Project may result in the temporary closure or diversion of the Trans-Pennine Trail during construction. However, a route of the Trans-Pennine Trail will be maintained throughout the construction period should this be necessary. Given that the Trans-Pennine Trail will not be completely lost, no residual impacts arise for review. Appropriate detail will be agreed as to how the Trail will be maintained during construction.

TP19 – Air Quality

- 6.11.270 This policy states that in areas where air quality is shown to be poor due to pollution from transport sources, new development that generates traffic which will create additional pollution or intensify the pollution problem will not be permitted. The supporting text advises that within any potential or designated Air Quality Management Area, new development should not add to the pollution levels or create additional pollution problems. In terms of transport and land use within such areas, development that is only accessible by the private car would not be acceptable for example. However, the accompanying states that development may be acceptable:

- i. where the development is accessible by alternative means of transport other than the private car and it is shown that this will be utilised by those accessing the development; and*
- ii. where the development is mixed encouraging and enabling cycling or walking between various facilities, thereby reducing the number of journeys made by the private car.*

Relevance

- 6.11.271 As a primarily road based transportation proposal, the New Bridge has the potential to affect air quality. As such, the provisions of policy TP19 are relevant to any assessment of the proposal.

Assessment

- 6.11.272 The Air Quality assessment undertaken as part of the ES has assessed air quality impacts associated with the Project. This has identified that construction traffic emissions will be negligible and no significant adverse impacts are therefore identified. At operation, the Project is not identified as having a significant impact upon local air quality and emissions within the route corridor will fall within the AQS thresholds. However, given that the Project comprises a road based transportation scheme it will inevitably generate carbon emissions, and thus an assessment against criteria i and ii is required:

Where the development is accessible by alternative means of transport other than the private car and it is shown that this will be utilised by those accessing the development

- 6.11.273 The Project will deliver improved cross-river public transport, provision by virtue of physical works to the SJB. These alterations represent a genuine alternative to the private car, and will enhance access to employment opportunities and services at a local, sub-regional and regional level.

Where the development is mixed encouraging and enabling cycling or walking between various facilities, thereby reducing the number of journeys made by the private car

- 6.11.274 The works to the SJB include the implementation of new cycle and pedestrian links to encourage an increased use of non-vehicular transport. This will deliver both health and social benefits, and aims to encourage increased levels of cross-river walking and cycling. A new

dedicated pedestrian footway will be introduced on the SJB, accessible for people with disabilities and restricted mobility, to access cross-river jobs and services.

Compliance

- 6.11.275 The Project as a road based transportation scheme will create carbon emissions. However, the Air Quality chapter of the ES concludes that at operation these will not exceed AQS standards. To encourage a reduction in the use and reliance upon the private car, the Project incorporates proposals for the enhancement of public transport, walking and cycling provision across the SJB. The proposal is therefore considered to be in compliance with the provisions of policy TP19.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.11.276 The Air Quality assessment of the ES identifies a number of mitigation measures to form part of a Construction and Environmental Management Plan. Assuming that effective mitigation measures are implemented during the construction of the Project, no significant residual impacts arise for review.

Policy LTC8 - Protection of Tourist Attractions

- 6.11.277 Policy LTC8 advises that development that would affect an existing tourist attraction will not be permitted if it would be likely to detract from the function, appearance or setting of the attraction. It is therefore important that development that would have a negative effect on the tourism potential of its existing attractions is resisted. Policy LTC8 lists important tourist attractions as including the Trans-Pennine Trail, the West Bank Promenade, and the water features of the Borough including the estuary, rivers and canals, adding variety and interest to the area. Policy advises that *“importantly, the Trans-Pennine Trail will provide a link from Halton’s own tourist attractions such as the Catalyst Museum, to important tourist sites outside the Borough, such as Liverpool’s Albert Dock, and further afield, such as York Minster.”*

Relevance

- 6.11.278 The New Bridge will oversail the Trans-Pennine Trail, and will be aligned to the east of the Catalyst Museum. The New Bridge will also cross the Upper Mersey Estuary, Bridgewater Canal, and St. Helens Canal. The extent to which the Project may impact upon these identified tourist features should therefore be considered.

Assessment

- 6.11.279 The Trans-Pennine Trail will be affected by the temporary construction activities of the Project, including its temporary diversion and/or closure. However, the Trans-Pennine Trail will continue to provide for its existing use post construction.
- 6.11.280 It is acknowledged that there will be a permanent visual impact arising from the Project upon users of the Trans Pennine Trail, St. Helens Canal, and the Upper Mersey Estuary.
- 6.11.281 With regards to physical and operational impacts, the Navigation assessment of the ES has identified the potential for the Project to impact upon water based tourist attractions during construction by virtue of the following
- a. Demolition of the Bridgewater Junction causing disturbance to users of the Bridgewater Canal during construction;
 - b. A temporary reduction of air clearance over the Bridgewater Canal during the construction and operational phases;
 - c. Temporary obstructions to recreational craft within the Upper Mersey Estuary;

- d. The use of amphibious craft in the river has the potential to cause interference with other users of the river during construction phase through congestion in the river and the working area; and
- e. The piled jetty will result in a temporary obstruction to users of the river during the construction phase.

6.11.282 In addition to the above, a number of operational impacts arising from the Project have also been identified, as follows:

- a. Temporary reduction of air clearance over the Bridgewater Canal during the operation phase as a result of the use of temporary structures for maintenance works;
- b. Permanent obstructions in the Upper Mersey Estuary from the three towers; and
- c. Permanent reduced air clearance over the St. Helens Canal as a result of the Project.

Compliance

6.11.283 The Project will have a physical and visual impact upon the St. Helens Canal, Bridgewater Canal, and the Mersey Estuary during construction and operation, albeit these are not considered likely to have a significant detrimental impact upon the operational capabilities and visual attractiveness of these features. The Trans-Pennine Trail may be subject to temporary diversions and closures during construction, but the MGP will not prejudice its long-term use.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

6.11.284 The proposed landscaping scheme, design of the New Bridge, and choice of construction materials has sought to minimise the extent of the visual impacts arising from the Project upon the aforementioned tourist attractions where possible.

6.11.285 To minimise the physical impacts of the Project upon the Trans-Pennine Trail, a route will be maintained throughout the construction period.

Policy PR1 – Air Quality

6.11.286 The policy states that development will not be permitted where it is likely to have an unacceptable effect on air quality. The policy advises that the phrase 'unacceptable effect' includes consideration of the following:

- i. *Emissions which are likely to have a significantly unacceptable effect on the amenity of the local environment;*
- ii. *Where there is the significant possibility that public health may be affected;*
- iii. *Where there is a significant possibility that any proposed development will affect air quality standards;*
- iv. *Where there is a significant possibility that investment confidence in respect of surrounding land uses may be affected; and*
- v. *An air quality assessment may be required before determining applications with a potential to pollute.*

Relevance

6.11.287 As a primarily road based transportation proposal, the New Bridge has the potential to affect air quality. As such, the provisions of policy PR1 are relevant to any assessment of the proposals.

Assessment

6.11.288 An assessment of the Project against criteria i to v of policy PR1 is required:

Emissions which are likely to have a significantly unacceptable effect on the amenity of the local environment

- 6.11.289 The Air Quality assessment of the ES concludes that the Project will not have a significant detrimental impact upon the amenity of local development. There may be temporary air quality effects during construction including construction dust within 200m of construction activity, albeit these impacts are considered to be negligible.

Where there is the significant possibility that public health may be affected

- 6.11.290 The release of known land contaminants during the construction phase of the Project may lead to health risks for construction workers and local residents. The migration of dust, gas or vapours into excavations or buildings could also represent a significant risk in terms of both indoor air quality and air quality in excavations.

Where there is a significant possibility that any proposed development will affect air quality standards

- 6.11.291 The Project may generate air quality impacts during the construction phase of development, albeit these are considered to be negligible. At operation, the proposal is not identified to have a significant impact upon local air quality and it is therefore concluded that emissions will fall with the AQS thresholds.

Where there is a significant possibility that investment confidence in respect of surrounding land uses may be affected

- 6.11.292 Given that the air quality impacts of the Project will not be significant, it is not anticipated that the proposal will have a negative effect upon investment confidence within Halton. The Project aims to serve as a catalyst to the regeneration of Southern Widnes and Runcorn, and seeks to encourage inward investment within the local area.

An air quality assessment may be required before determining applications with a potential to pollute

- 6.11.293 An Air Quality assessment of the Project has been undertaken as part of the Environmental Statement.

Compliance

- 6.11.294 The Project is considered to be in compliance with the provisions of policy PR1.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.11.295 Air Quality mitigation measures are proposed as part of the Construction and Environmental Management Plan (CEMP). These measures will have regard to the control of dust during demolition and construction works, and include for the handling of contaminated and waste materials. The CEMP would also outline measures to limit disruption to traffic flows on the local road network and thus minimise the risk of increased vehicle emissions due to congested traffic. Assuming effective mitigation measures are implemented during construction of the Project, no significant residual impacts arise for review.

Policy PR2 - Noise Nuisance

- 6.11.296 The policy states that development will not be permitted which contains any new noise source likely to cause a significant increase in ambient noise levels for either day or night time conditions and where it is likely to affect land allocated on the Proposals Map for residential or any other existing noise sensitive land uses.

Relevance

- 6.11.297 The Project may generate noise pollution with potential sources of noise pollution including construction traffic and engineering works at the construction phase, and road traffic at the operational phase. An assessment of the Project against the provisions of policy PR2 is therefore required.

Assessment

- 6.11.298 The Noise assessment of the ES (see chapter 17) advises that noise and vibration will vary considerably during the construction process, albeit these will not be permanent effects. There are some 1,200 residential properties within a 100 metre zone either side of the route corridor. There is the potential that some of the residents of these properties may be affected to some extent during construction. In addition, there are two schools that may be affected by construction activities. These include West Bank Primary School, and Woodside Primary School. This will range from a low negative to moderate to high negative effect respectively. There is also expected to be a high negative effect at Wigg Island during construction of the Project.
- 6.11.299 At operation of the Project, the Noise Assessment concludes that the overall benefits of the Project will result in an overall reduction in the number of people likely to be bothered by road traffic noise. The assessment of people likely to be bothered by vibration shows no real change.
- 6.11.300 There are anticipated to be moderate positive effects for the housing adjacent to the northern approach to the SJB, the southern approach to the SJB, and all housing adjacent to the Weston Point Expressway. There will be a high positive effect upon the SPA adjacent to the SJB. Four local schools will receive lower noise levels, whilst one (Woodside Primary School) will receive increased levels in excess of the current situation.

Compliance

- 6.11.301 The Project will generate noise pollution during construction and operation. However, at operation the Project will create overall benefits with regards to the number of people likely to be bothered by road traffic noise. In addition, the route corridor will not result in adverse noise impacts upon allocated residential sites. As such, the proposal is considered to be in compliance with the provisions of policy PR2.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.11.302 Measures outlined within the Noise Quality assessment include the adoption of maximum construction noise targets for the Project in accordance with the standards set out in BS 5228:1997. A Noise and Vibration Management Plan will also be established by the contractor in accordance with the good practice guidance. This will aim to ensure that construction noise is kept to a minimum and within the required thresholds, and incorporate where necessary a series of mitigation measures. The Noise Quality assessment recommends that a detailed assessment of noise levels for specific activities should be undertaken when specific plant and working methods are known.
- 6.11.303 To mitigate noise disturbance during operation, the preferred option is to reduce noise at source, for example by the implementation of roadside noise barriers. These will seek to attenuate noise levels such that the unmitigated moderate noise effect along the Central Expressway will be reduced to a low effect.

Policy PR4 – Light Pollution and Noise

- 6.11.304 The policy states that development will not be permitted if it is likely to have an unacceptable effect on levels of light pollution or nuisance by visual intrusion of artificial light. The

accompanying text advises that the Council will ensure that where development requires external lighting, light spillage is minimised and, where appropriate, landscaping/screening is used. Some forms of lighting can also be detrimental to highway safety and any planning applications should be refused if there is a danger to public safety.

Relevance

- 6.11.305 The Project will incorporate carriageway lighting. The potential impacts arising from this should therefore be assessed in accordance with the provisions of policy PR4.

Assessment

- 6.11.306 Careful consideration has been given to the position of carriageway lighting. It is proposed that these are mounted on poles between the carriageways to allow a maintenance regime that prevents risk of falls from the Bridge. Aircraft warning lights will be required and these will be accessible within the towers and include fail-safe, alarm and redundancy systems. Architectural lighting does not form part of the Project.

Compliance

- 6.11.307 The lighting design has been carefully considered to minimise the impacts of light pollution and visual intrusion. No significant adverse impacts associated with the carriageway lighting have been anticipated to arise, and as such the proposal is considered to be in general compliance with the provisions of policy PR4.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.11.308 No mitigation measures are proposed, and no residual impacts arise for review.

Policy PR5 - Water Quality

- 6.11.309 This policy advises that development will not be permitted if it is likely to have an unacceptable effect on the water quality of water bodies including rivers, lakes and canals, or poses an unacceptable risk to the quality of groundwater. The supporting text states that pollution to water supplies not only poses a threat to humans, but also flora and fauna. The supporting text identifies the need to ensure adequate pollution measures are incorporated into new developments to minimise the risks of water pollution.

Relevance

- 6.11.310 Potential sources of water pollution should be considered to minimise and potential impacts of the Project upon existing rivers, canals, lakes and sea, at both operation and construction. This reflects the primarily coastal location of the New Bridge, and the proximity of associated infrastructure to the Manchester Ship Canal, Bridgewater Canal, and St. Helens Canal.

Assessment

- 6.11.311 The Surface Water Quality chapter of the EIA (see Chapter 8) has assessed potential impacts of the Project upon the water quality of the Mersey Estuary and other surface watercourses. This has identified that areas likely to be sensitive to water pollution include the Mersey Estuary Ramsar site, SPA, SSSI and European Marine Site, all of which are located downstream of the Project. The findings of this chapter have been drawn on to inform this planning policy assessment.
- 6.11.312 During the construction phase of the project, potential construction phase impacts to the water quality of watercourses within the study area have been identified as follows:

- a. Disturbance of sediment creating an increased sediment load within the water column;

- b. Mobilisation of contaminated sediments;
 - c. Spills from construction activities entering surface water features;
 - d. Reduced water quality resulting from piling activities; and
 - e. Increased scour and sediment mobilisation from around cofferdams.
- 6.11.313 In addition to the above, access options for construction works within the intertidal area have been assessed. This has identified that the amphibious craft option is only likely to disturb sediments already within the mobile zone, and so will not contribute towards a change in water quality.
- 6.11.314 There is the potential for any spillages and leaks that occur during the construction works to have a detrimental effect on water quality within all watercourses in the defined study area.
- 6.11.315 Potential operational phase impacts on the water quality of watercourses within the study area include:
- a. around the bridge piers resulting in an increased sediment load within the water column, mobilisation of contaminated sediments and deoxygenated waters;
 - b. Routine runoff and spillage of chemicals from roads into surface water courses; and
 - c. Guantrophy – increasing organic deposition from birds using the Bridge to roost.
- 6.11.316 In addition to Surface Water Quality, Groundwater Quality has also been assessed within the Contamination of Soils, Sediments and Groundwater chapter of this ES (see Chapter 14). A distillation of the findings of this assessment identifies the presence of widespread contamination of groundwater by metals and other contaminants in Widnes. Groundwater contamination was also noted to the north of the Manchester Ship Canal at Wigg Island in Runcorn.
- 6.11.317 The assessment has identified existing impacts on groundwater within the Project area in Widnes and parts of Runcorn. It is considered that the potential effects on groundwater from the construction and operation of the Project can be mitigated. However, the wider contamination of groundwater will need to be considered. A preliminary options appraisal has been undertaken that identified further mitigation measures to address this and these would need to be developed as part of an overall remediation strategy to take account of the wider contamination issues in the area.

Compliance

- 6.11.318 The Project has been identified through the Surface Water Quality assessment as having the potential to impact upon local water quality standards during construction and operation. Whilst this does not represent a significant impact, suitable mitigation measures have been considered in accordance with the requirements of policy PR5 to minimise the extent and risk of pollution upon watercourses and water quality within the study area. Appropriate mitigation measures have been identified to minimise the extent and risk of possible contaminants upon watercourses and water quality within the study area. It is considered that the potential effects on groundwater from the construction and operation of the Project can be mitigated although there are existing effects on groundwater quality that will have to be considered as part of the overall remediation strategy.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.11.319 The Surface Water Quality chapter advises that a range of mitigation measures can be applied through “*management techniques*” and “*physical techniques*” to minimise the impacts of development upon surface water quality.
- 6.11.320 Management techniques proposed during the construction phase comprise a series of management plans, including:

- a. Waste and Resource Management Plan;
 - b. Pollution Control and Contingency Plan; and
 - c. Water Management Plan (Surface and Groundwater).
- 6.11.321 Physical techniques to be applied during the construction and operation phases will include:
- a. Appropriate design standards to be utilised;
 - b. Bunded fuel tank to contain 110% of the tank volume and be properly maintained;
 - c. Oil/Water separators will be used to remove oils/fuels accidentally spilled/accumulated during operation of the Project;
 - d. Measures to prevent the reintroduction of suspended solids into watercourses should be incorporated; and
 - e. Spill control measures to be used.
- 6.11.322 The Surface Water Quality chapter advises that the Project will have no significant effects upon surface water quality of the watercourses within the study area. The aforementioned mitigation measures have therefore been identified to reduce any potential impacts which may otherwise arise, and no significant residual impacts have been identified.
- 6.11.323 To minimise the impacts of development upon groundwater quality, the Contamination of Soils, Sediments and Groundwater assessment identifies mitigation measures at three stages of the Project – Design, Construction and Operation. Measures include options for remediation together with the need for ongoing monitoring of groundwater levels and quality during the construction and operation stage. The Contamination chapter of the ES advises that whilst the impacts of the Project upon local groundwater quality will be neutral, there will be no additional significant residual impacts associated with existing groundwater contamination issues.

Policy PR6 - Land Quality

- 6.11.324 This policy states that development will not be permitted if it is likely to cause contamination of the soil or sub-soil on a development site or on surrounding land uses as a result of pollution. This includes consideration of:
- i. *The unacceptable effects of deposits and emissions;*
 - ii. *Whether development, through its potential to pollute, is likely to have a serious impact upon investment confidence; and*
 - iii. *The risk of damage to health.*
- 6.11.325 Policy PR6 advises that it is “essential to avoid the possibility of new land-uses which may themselves be a future source of land contamination.”

Relevance

- 6.11.326 The construction and proposed alignment of the Project will incorporate large areas of previously developed land, some of which is subject to contamination from former industrial land uses. The extent to which the Project may cause ground contamination should be considered in accordance with the provisions of policy PR6.

Assessment

- 6.11.327 The assessment of the contamination of soils and sediments has been undertaken as part of the Project EIA. The findings of this study (see Chapter 14) have been drawn on to inform this assessment.

The unacceptable effects of deposits and emissions

- 6.11.328 The Contamination assessment has identified three potential sources of ground contamination associated from the Project, including:
- a. Contaminants associated with made ground and drift deposits;
 - b. Contaminants in groundwater; and
 - c. Contaminants in surface waters (including drains).

Whether development, through its potential to pollute, is likely to have a serious impact upon investment confidence

- 6.11.329 An additional receptor of relevance to policy PR6 is possible damage to building materials of services through direct contact with contaminants or through contaminant migration. Such impacts have been identified as representing feasible negative impacts upon investment confidence within Runcorn and South Widnes.

The risk of damage to health

- 6.11.330 An important potential receptor in relation to policy PR6 is human health, during both construction and operation. This includes construction workers, site visitors, local residents, future site users, maintenance workers, landscaping contractors, and road users.
- 6.11.331 Potential pathways for human health impacts as a result of the Project have been identified to include outdoor ingestion, indoor ingestion and inhalation, migration of contaminated waters into excavations or surface waters, and ingestion or dermal contact with water from contaminated water supply pipes.

Compliance

- 6.11.332 The Project has been identified as having the potential to lead to ground contamination at a local level during construction and operation. The Project may also have an impact upon human health, in particular site visitors, workers and local residents. Structural damage arising from contamination has also previously been identified as impacting upon investment confidence in Runcorn and Widnes.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.11.333 To minimise the risk of contamination associated with the Project, a number of mitigation measures have been identified at the design, construction and operational phases of development. It is recognised that remediation may be required as part of the works to mitigate risks identified within the proposed alignment of the Project. No significant residual effects post mitigation have been identified arising directly from the Project though there are effects associated with existing contamination of groundwater to be considered. A detailed Remediation Options Appraisal will be undertaken following the completion of a detailed risk assessment and the completion of further discussions with the regulators. The final selection of appropriate mitigation measures will be dependant upon the construction methods which are adopted. However, no significant residual impacts post mitigation have been identified for review.

Policy PR7 - Development Near to Established Sources of Pollution

- 6.11.334 Policy PR7 advises that development near to existing sources of pollution will not be permitted if it is likely that those existing sources of pollution will have an unacceptable effect on the proposed development, and it is considered to be in the public interest that the interests of the existing sources of pollution should prevail over those of the proposed development. The policy

states that exceptions may be permitted where the applicant submits satisfactory proposals to substantially mitigate the effects of existing sources of pollution on the development proposals.

Relevance

- 6.11.335 The proposed alignment of the Project will incorporate large areas of previously developed land which may be subject to ground contamination from former industrial operations. The extent of existing ground contamination and sources of pollution should therefore be considered in accordance with the provisions of policy PR7.

Assessment

- 6.11.336 The proposed route corridor incorporates large areas of previously developed land which are subject to ground contamination from former industrial land uses. A programme of mitigation works will therefore be undertaken during the construction phase, to be agreed with the Local Planning Authority. No other established sources of pollution have been identified as likely to impact upon the Project.

Compliance

- 6.11.337 The Project is considered to be in general compliance with the provisions of policy PR7.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.11.338 No mitigation measures are proposed, and no residual impacts therefore arise for review.

Policy PR10 - Development within the Liverpool Airport Height Restriction Zone

- 6.11.339 Policy PR10 advises that development will only be permitted if it is below the height notified to the Council by the relevant authority and would not cause a hazard to air travel. The policy states that planting and other landscape improvements in the vicinity of Liverpool Airport must not adversely affect the operational integrity or safety of the airport.

Relevance

- 6.11.340 The Project proposes the development of a new three tower Bridge structure spanning the Upper Mersey Estuary. Given the proposed height of this structure, any potential impacts of the New Bridge upon the operational capabilities of Liverpool Airport should therefore be assessed to accord with the provisions of policy PR10.

Assessment

- 6.11.341 The Navigation assessment element of the ES (see Chapter 18) advises that the operations of Liverpool John Lennon Airport, located 2km to the west of the New Bridge, have the potential to be affected. The design and height of the structure has however been informed by the constraints provided by air travel and the requirements of Liverpool John Lennon Airport. Details of possible architectural lighting on the New Bridge are to be discussed with representatives of Liverpool John Lennon Airport when the development proposals are finalised.

Compliance

- 6.11.342 The Project has been designed such that no direct impact will arise on the operations of Liverpool John Lennon Airport by virtue of its scale and location across the Upper Mersey Estuary. Appropriate mitigation measures in respect of design/lighting will be implemented in agreement with the operators of the Airport to remove any risks to air travel. The Project is therefore considered to be in general compliance with the requirements of policy PR10.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.11.343 To remove any risks to airport operations, architectural lighting on the New Bridge has been proposed, and further discussions will be held with the Airport operators to finalise these proposals. No residual impacts are expected to arise.

Policy PR13 - Vacant and Derelict Land

- 6.11.344 This policy advises that the development and reclamation of derelict and vacant land will not be permitted unless all of the following criteria can be satisfied;

- i. Reclamation/decontamination works are carried out to ensure the safety and health of people and the environment on and around the land;*
- ii. The proposal is a suitable after use of the site;*

- 6.11.345 The supporting text states that the reuse of derelict land fits in with the sustainability issues of recycling land, and reduces pressure of the development of greenfield sites which are an important resource to the Borough.

Relevance

- 6.11.346 The proposed alignment of the Project will incorporate former industrial and commercial land which is now vacant and/or derelict. An assessment of the development proposals against the provisions of policy PR13 should therefore be undertaken.

Assessment

- 6.11.347 The Project route corridor will incorporate areas of vacant land to be permanently lost as a result of the development proposals. The route alignment will incorporate contaminated land uses from former chemical works in Widnes, more recent land uses at the Astmoor Industrial Estate and the saltmarshes in Widnes and Runcorn. The Project also crosses the eastern end of the former Wigg Island Landfill where material previously tipped material includes alkali waste. The presence of galligu waste has also been identified at St Michaels Golf Course in Widnes and at other sites. An assessment of the Project against the provisions of PR13 is therefore required:

Reclamation/decontamination works are carried out to ensure the safety and health of people and the environment on and around the land

- 6.11.348 Mitigation will be undertaken as part of the Project to ensure the safety and health of local residents and the environment. With regard to the existing effects of contamination on groundwater a detailed Remediation Options Appraisal will be undertaken following the completion of a detailed risk assessment and the completion of further discussions with the regulators.

The proposal is a suitable after use of the site

- 6.11.349 The incorporation of this land within the proposed alignment of the Project is considered to represent good practice in accordance with the Government's sustainability objectives set out in PPS1 bringing underused land back into beneficial use. This will also contribute towards the enhancement and visual appearance of the local area.

Compliance

- 6.11.350 The incorporation of vacant land within the proposed alignment of the Project will have a minor adverse affect upon the availability of developable land within Runcorn and Southern Widnes. It has been identified that elements of the route corridor are still subject to contamination from

previous land uses, and thus remediation works are proposed to be undertaken prior to the development of these sites.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.11.351 Mitigation measures will be required as part of the Project to address risks identified within the proposed alignment of the Project. No significant residual effects post mitigation have been identified arising directly from the Project though there are effects associated with existing contamination of groundwater to be considered. In this regard a detailed Remediation Options Appraisal will be undertaken following the completion of a detailed risk assessment and the completion of further discussions with the regulators. The final selection of appropriate mitigation measures will be dependant upon the construction methods which are adopted.

Policy PR14 - Contaminated Land

- 6.11.352 Policy PR14 advises that before determining and planning applications for development on or adjacent to land which is known or suspected to be contaminated, the applicant will be required to satisfy all of the following:
- i. Submit details to assess the nature and degree of contamination;*
 - ii. Identify remedial measures required to deal with any hazard to safeguard future development and neighbouring land uses; and*
 - iii. Submit details of a programme of implementation for the roll out and completion of mitigation measures to be agreed with the Council.*

Relevance

- 6.11.353 The Project will incorporate large quantities of brownfield land, some of which is subject to ground contamination as a result of former industrial land uses.

Assessment

- 6.11.354 Given the potentially contaminating land uses within Widnes and Runcorn lying within the route corridor, the Project should therefore be assessed against the provisions of policy PR14.

Submit details to assess the nature and degree of contamination

- 6.11.355 Information obtained from desk studies and site investigations has identified a number of potential sources of contaminated land within Halton within the Project area.

Identify remedial measures required to deal with any hazard to safeguard future development and neighbouring land uses

- 6.11.356 Mitigation measures have been identified for the risks associated with the construction and operation of the Bridge itself. With regard to the existing contamination that is present in the Project area, a Preliminary Remediation Options Appraisal has also been prepared identifying possible mitigation measures to safeguard development and wider land-uses. A detailed Remediation Options Appraisal will be undertaken following the completion of a detailed risk assessment and the completion of further discussions with the regulators.

Submit details of a programme of implementation for the roll out and completion of mitigation measures to be agreed with the Council

- 6.11.357 The programme of mitigation works will be subject to planning condition, and submitted to the Council prior to the commencement of development.

Compliance

- 6.11.358 The Project is considered to be in general compliance with the requirements of policy PR14.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.11.359 A programme of mitigation measures will be undertaken. However, residual impacts may remain post-mitigation.

Policy PR15 - Groundwater

- 6.11.360 Policy PR15 advises that development proposals considered likely to lead to an adverse impact on groundwater resources in terms of their quantity, quality and ecological features they support will not be permitted. The supporting text advises that a number of developments have the potential to pose a direct or indirect threat to groundwater quality. In order to ensure sustainability for future generations, there is a need to protect the environment from pollution.

Relevance

- 6.11.361 Given the large-scale nature of the development proposals, and its location oversailing the Mersey Estuary, any potential direct or indirect impacts of the Project on groundwater quantity and quality should be considered with regard to the provisions of policy PR15.

Assessment

- 6.11.362 A Contamination of Soils, Sediments and Groundwater assessment has been undertaken as part of this ES (see Chapter 14). A distillation of the findings of this assessment identifies the presence of widespread contamination of groundwater by metals and other contaminants in Widnes. Groundwater contamination was also noted to the north of the Manchester Ship Canal at Wigg Island in Runcorn.
- 6.11.363 The assessment has identified existing impacts on groundwater within the Project area in Widnes and parts of Runcorn. It is considered that the potential effects on groundwater from the construction and operation of the Project can be mitigated. However, the wider contamination of groundwater will need to be considered. A preliminary options appraisal has been undertaken that identified further mitigation measures to address this and these would need to be developed as part of an overall remediation strategy to take account of the wider contamination issues in the area.

Compliance

- 6.11.364 It is considered that the Project will not significantly effect the existing groundwater contamination that has been noted during construction and operation, albeit this is unlikely to be a significant effect. Appropriate mitigation measures have been identified to minimise the extent and risk of potential contaminants upon watercourses and water quality within the study area.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.11.365 To minimise the impacts of development upon groundwater quality, the Contamination of Soils, Sediments and Groundwater assessment identifies mitigation measures at three stages of the Project – Design, Construction and Operation. Measures include options for remediation together with the need for ongoing monitoring of groundwater levels and quality monitoring during construction and operation. The Contamination chapter of the ES advises that there will be additional significant residual impacts associated with existing groundwater contamination issues.

PR16 – Development and Flood Risk

- 6.11.366 This policy states that development will not be permitted where:
- i. The site is at risk from fluvial or tidal / coastal flooding;*
 - ii. It would contribute to the risk of flooding elsewhere;*
 - iii. It would cause adverse access or maintenance problems on or adjacent to watercourses;*
 - iv. It will cause loss of functional floodplain;*
 - v. It will adversely affect the integrity of existing fluvial or tidal flood defences;*
 - vi. It will adversely affect the geomorphology of channels, or increase instability and erosion; and*
 - vii. It will result in extensive culverting; unless the site is protected to the appropriate standard of defence and it can be clearly demonstrated that sustainable and appropriate mitigation methods can be implemented.*

- 6.11.367 The policy advises that a Flood Risk Assessment will be required where it is considered that there would be an increased risk of flooding as a result of the development or the development itself would be at risk of flooding. Where development is allowed, the policy states that mitigation measures are likely to be required to alleviate flood risk both on and off site. The policy requires that these measures should be derived from a Flood Risk Assessment and be included as part of the development proposals. Such proposals must protect and enhance the environmental quality of the river, its surroundings and natural history interests.

Relevance

- 6.11.368 In accordance with the provisions of PR16, consideration should be afforded to the potential flood-risk of the New Bridge and associated highways infrastructure, along with any potential impacts arising from the new highways infrastructure upon the water flows of the Mersey Estuary, and the flood-risk associated with existing development.

Assessment

- 6.11.369 The Flood Risk Assessment identifies existing areas of flood risk within the route corridor and its immediate surroundings, including all existing surface watercourses.
- 6.11.370 The Environment Agency indicative flood maps reveal that the proposed alignment of the Project lies within Flood Zones 1, 2 and 3. A stretch of the existing highway also lies within Flood Zones 2 and 3. The route corridor Flood Zone comprises the following areas:
- a. Catalyst Trade Park;
 - b. A557 (near Catalyst Trade Park);
 - c. St. Helens Canal;
 - d. Bowers Brook;
 - e. Widnes Warth (Saltmarsh); and
 - f. Astmoor Saltmarsh.
- 6.11.371 The Flood Risk Assessment confirms that the construction of the proposed new highway will remove a section of land from the Flood Zones. The proposed highway will occupy a plan area within the Flood Zones that is larger than the existing highway plan area. Consequently, there will be a reduction of available floodplain estimated to be 2,300m³ for a 1 in 200 tidal flood. The effect on water levels due to this loss of flood volume is negligible. The volume available to a tidal flood within the Mersey Estuary is far in excess of that represented by land taken by the proposed scheme. There should not be any variation in flood risk due to the loss of flood volume upon the proposed scheme and neighbouring property.
- 6.11.372 The Flood Risk Assessment states that an inspection of existing highway drainage systems reveals that there is no water attenuation of highway run-off. There is essentially no buffering

effect of water discharge from the highway and so discharges to watercourses comprise relatively high volumetric flow rates. The proposed highway drainage would incorporate water attenuation so that highway runoff would be released at a low flow rate over a longer period of time. There should be a net benefit with respect to flood risk due to water attenuation.

- 6.11.373 Existing highway drainage arrangements along the route corridor will continue to be used where possible. At locations along the route corridor, surface water run-off from the carriageway will be collected and discharged into balancing ponds.
- 6.11.374 The Project will introduce new lengths of carriageway, and hence an increase in surface water run-off when compared to the existing drainage situation. The volume of runoff will be accommodated in balancing ponds. The proposed highway's drainage strategy will lessen the rate of discharge of runoff to local watercourses, and will therefore reduce flood risk.

Compliance

- 6.11.375 The net effect of the Project on flood risk is negligible. The level of current flood risk is predicted to remain unaltered following the proposed development. The proposed surface water drainage systems will also ensure that there is no increase in the risk of flooding within the study area and within the surrounding catchment areas. The Project is therefore considered to be in full compliance with the provisions of PR16.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.11.376 No flood mitigation measures are proposed, and thus no residual impacts arise for review.

Halton Local Development Framework

- 6.11.377 The Council is currently preparing a series of Local Development Documents (LDDs) to form the basis of its emerging Local Development Framework (LDF). On adoption, these will replace the Council's existing strategic and generic UDP policies. At present, all existing UDP policies are saved for three years until April 2008. The Council has now applied to the Secretary of State to save its policies for a further three years, for which a decision is imminent.
- 6.11.378 The Council's Local Development Scheme (LDS) 2007 timetable establishes dates for the adoption of key LDF Development Plan Documents (DPDs) and Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) of relevance to the Project, as follows:

Core Strategy – This will set out the vision, objectives and strategy for the spatial development of the Borough of Halton. It is the over-arching policy document for the LDF and all other DPDs must be in conformity with the Core Strategy, as well as the RSS for the North West. The Council's LDS identifies a proposed date for adoption in November 2009. However, given a slippage in timetabling the more likely adoption date is now Spring 2011;

Development Control Policies – This will establish additional policies against which all planning applications will be decided. The scheduled date for adoption is September 2013;

Southern Widnes Regeneration Strategy – This will set out policies and proposals for the comprehensive development / redevelopment of the Southern Widnes area. Its proposed date for adoption is currently November 2008;

Transport and Accessibility – This will provide guidance for the development of new highways and parking standards in urban developments, and includes road hierarchy specifications and notes on the acceptability of Homezones. Its proposed date for adoption is currently July 2009.

6.11.379 At present, none of these planning policy documents are available for review. Hence, the Project has therefore been assessed against the existing planning policy framework within Halton.

6.12 Halton Local Transport Plan 2

6.12.1 The Council has produced two full Local Transport Plans (LTP's). The first Local Transport Plan (LTP1) was published in July 2000 and covered the period 2001/02 to 2005/06. This provided a non-statutory policy framework for the continual development of the local transport network. Since the publication of the first Local Transport Plan, significant changes in both national and local planning policies have demanded a new approach to the development and delivery of transport strategies and initiatives.

6.12.2 A second Local Transport Plan (LTP2) has now been published by the Council and sets out the objectives, strategies and policies for transport during the period April 2006 to March 2011 and beyond. It also identifies the schemes and initiatives that will be delivered, together with the performance indicators and targets which will be used to monitor progress. LTP2 continues and develops the work undertaken in the First Local Transport Plan (LTP1).

6.12.3 The overarching LTP2 objective established by the Council is:

"The delivery of a smart sustainable, inclusive and accessible transport system and infrastructure that seeks to improve the quality of life for people living in Halton by encouraging economic growth and regeneration, and the protection and enhancement of the historic, natural and human environment".

6.12.4 The LTP2 identifies the biggest congestion problem in the Borough as the SJB, with flows that can exceed 90,000 vehicles per day. The resulting congestion makes it very difficult to develop an integrated transport system that meets the travel needs of the Borough's residents, businesses and visitors. The Project will lead to *"significant journey time savings for cross river traffic and will enable the SJB to cater for locally sustainable travel."*

6.12.5 The above overarching LTP objective is underpinned by four further objectives based on the Shared Transport Priorities between local and central government;

Tackling Congestion

6.12.6 To address and manage both local and strategic travel demand to ensure that the area's regeneration needs are met;

6.12.7 To develop a sustainable and integrated transport system that meets the social, economic and environmental needs of Halton's residents;

6.12.8 To manage and maintain the highway network to minimise congestion and delay.

Delivering Accessibility

6.12.9 To resolve problems experienced by socially excluded communities, when accessing key services, and enhance life chances and employment opportunities.

Safer Roads

6.12.10 To minimise the incidence of personal injury road crashes within the Borough, through a combination of targeted physical measures and preventative road safety education and training initiatives.

Better Air Quality

6.12.11 To address air quality issues which have an impact on health and the environment, through the management of travel demand and the provision and encouragement of environmentally sustainable travel choices.

- 6.12.12 The LTP2 identifies a number of shared priorities to address the problems identified above. The development of the Project is identified as Priority 1 in the LTP2. The construction of the New Mersey Project is subject to strong support across the emerging Liverpool City Region, and its development is expected to deliver significant economic and connectivity benefits to the wider city region, and considerably improve linkages to North Wales, Cheshire, and Greater Manchester.

Relevance

- 6.12.13 The Project seeks to deliver new highways infrastructure to address the major problem of road congestion associated with the SJB, which currently places a significant constraint on the economic development of Runcorn and Widnes. Whilst the Project may encourage the use of the private car, it also aims to facilitate enhanced public transport, walking and cycling provision across the SJB through the reallocation and improvement of existing carriageway land to promote non-car travel. The extent to which the Project contributes to the relief of road congestion, and delivering improved public transport links between the City Regions, should therefore be assessed.

Assessment

- 6.12.14 The extent to which the Project satisfies the Council's transport policy objectives expressed with the Local Transport Plan 2 is considered below:

Contribute towards relieving road congestion

- 6.12.15 The primary motivation for the new Mersey Crossing is to address the congestion in and around the SJB and to allow for easier journeys by car across the Mersey at this point. The impacts of the Project on car users will improve cross channel journey times as a result of the reduced level of congestion on the SJB and the rerouting of strategic traffic onto the New Bridge. This will be a permanent effect and is likely to benefit the current average daily traffic on the SJB of 75,316 vehicles.

Enhance accessibility and contribute towards reducing social exclusion

- 6.12.16 The MGP will make a significant contribution to tackling social exclusion. In summary the key elements comprise:

- a. The enhanced opportunities for locally arising travel between Runcorn and Widnes, allowing wider access to jobs and services. Appropriate provision within the tolling structure will encourage and assist; and
- b. The economic uplift that will arise as a direct result of the project. The New Bridge and the associated SJB works and the de-linking will serve as a catalyst for the economic and social regeneration of South Widnes and Runcorn. The Regeneration Strategy, and LDF policy framework which is running in parallel with the New Bridge will maximise the prospect of capturing these regeneration benefits;

- 6.12.17 On both counts therefore there is a real prospect that the New Bridge will make a significant contribution towards enhancing social exclusion.

Deliver safer roads

- 6.12.18 To enhance local, regional and sub-regional road safety, the Project comprises proposals to address the following:

Speed Management

- 6.12.19 Maximum speed limits will be applied across the New Bridge. The Project separates vehicular traffic (which will be exclusive to the New Bridge), from pedestrian and cycling movements (which will be confined to the SJB).

Road Safety

- 6.12.20 To enhance road user safety, the New Bridge will not incorporate any pedestrian or cycle links. The modifications to the SJB will provide alternative safe and efficient means of non-car cross-river movement.
- 6.12.21 The de-linking of the SJB from the Weston Point and Bridgewater Expressways, and the east Widnes by-pass, will significantly reduce the number of vehicular movements around the SJB. This reduction in vehicle movements will serve to enhance road user safety across the local highway network, and within the populated central areas of Runcorn and Widnes. The wider highway works will incorporate fully compliment pedestrian aware junction arrangements so as to further enhance road safety.

Enhance Air Quality

- 6.12.22 The primary motivation for the new Mersey Crossing is the address the congestion in and around the SJB and to allow for easier journeys by car across the Mersey at this point. It is possible therefore that this 'ease to movement' and additional capacity will encourage a greater number of car-based journeys, with drivers choosing to use the route where previously they would not have done so simply because it is now easier by comparison to alternatives. This in turn may lead to an increase in car based journeys. It is expected however that the proposed tolling regime on the both the New Bridge and the SJB will counter balance this effect and encourage an increased number of non-car cross channel trips.

Compliance

- 6.12.23 The Project is considered to be in full compliance with the provisions of the Local Transport Plan 2.

Mitigation and Residual Impacts

- 6.12.24 No mitigation measures have been identified, and thus no residual impacts arise for review.

6.13 Monitoring requirements

- 6.13.1 The Project has been assessed against adopted and emerging national, regional and local planning policies. Policies and plans have been considered for the period up to 2021 concluding with the plan period of the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy for the North West.
- 6.13.2 The evolving nature of the planning system means that new policy documents will emerge and gain weight and status over the life of the Project. This will require the ongoing monitoring of planning policies at each strategic level as new policy documents emerge and are adopted by the relevant bodies. This will include the Halton Local Development Framework, within which key emerging documents include the Core Strategy and Southern Widnes Regeneration Strategy. These documents, as they emerge, may have a direct impact upon the Project, and as such will continue to be monitored following the submission of the Environmental Impact Assessment. This will serve to ensure that any future policy requirements are identified and satisfied where this will deliver environmental, social and economic benefits. Other emerging planning policy documents to be monitored will include Planning Policy Statements prepared by the Department for Communities and Local Government, and the North West Regional Spatial Strategy prepared by the North West Regional Assembly.
- 6.13.3 An additional form of monitoring which will need to be applied includes the ongoing assessment of the scheme as it is delivered against planning policy requirements and specific targets already established within other Technical Annexes within the Environmental Impact Assessment.