

**9.14** The Sankey Valley Park is an important greenway corridor, following the line of the historic St Helens Canal with significant stretches still in water. It is of significant value for public access, recreation and tourism with physical and visual links to the urban area.

The former Lyme and Wood Pits Colliery site to the north is currently being reclaimed by way of waste disposal operations. Once completed the area will become a significant country park.

### **Accessibility**

**9.15** Newton-le-Willows is well located in relation to the M6, Manchester and Warrington. It is for this reason that it is a broad location of choice for an Strategic Rail Freight Interchange (See CAS 3.2). It is also a reason for the pressure on Newton-le-Willows station and a key issue is the shortage of associated car parking. The need for improvement has been recognised in the North West Route Utilisation Strategy, CANGO study and Merseyside Local Transport Plan.

### **Cumulative Impacts of Development**

**9.16** The Sustainability Appraisal highlighted an issue in relation to the cumulative impacts of Parkside SRFI, together with other major developments in Newton-le-Willows and Earlestown, such as Vulcan Urban Village. Due to the impacts of such major proposals other schemes coming forward will also need to mitigate against cumulative effects. A detailed policy will be included in the Development Management DPD.

## **Policy CAS 3.2**

### **Development of a Strategic Rail Freight Interchange at the Former Parkside Colliery**

The Council recognises that the site of the former Parkside Colliery has the potential to facilitate the transfer of freight from road to rail. This area of land located to the west of the M6 motorway comprising 54.02 ha is shown on the Key Diagram . Planning permission will not be granted for any use which would prejudice the eventual use of the site as a freight interchange.

However, it is understood that for operational and commercial reasons a larger area of land extending westwards and to the east of the M6 motorway may be required to accommodate a Strategic Rail Freight Interchange.

Subject to meeting the requirements listed below the site will be removed from the Green Belt with the proviso that the site will only be developed as a Strategic Rail Freight Interchange and for no other form of development.

The precise boundaries of any enlarged area will be determined following consideration of a detailed scheme. Any proposal for a Strategic Rail Freight Interchange will need to satisfy the requirements set out below.

1. It complies with criteria set out in Policy RT8 of the North West of England Plan to 2021 (RSS);
2. Direct access to the site from the M6 for HGVs can be obtained avoiding use of the A49 and A573;

3. The ability of the local road network to accommodate traffic generated by the development without unacceptable impact on residential amenity and traffic flows;
4. That the character and amenity of the Newton High Street Conservation Area is safeguarded;
5. No unacceptable noise impact on local residents from the development itself or associated road and rail access routes;
6. All uses within the site should have the prime purpose of facilitating the movement of freight by rail. Any ancillary uses to this main use must be directly related the movement of freight by rail and must demonstrate clearly why they need to be located on the site;
7. Impact on Green Belt and landscape character is mitigated by significant landscape and green infrastructure enhancement, including tree planting;
8. Measures for the remediation of land affected by contamination, minimisation of environmental impacts and contributions to sustainable development, including waste management; energy generation by renewable means; energy efficiency; archaeology; agricultural land; air quality; biodiversity; water conservation and sustainable drainage; reuse of materials; access by public transport, cycle and foot;
9. Provision for the positive management of existing and new environmental assets;
10. Measures are in place to safeguard or relocate the Newton Park Farm Listed Buildings within the vicinity of Newton and preferably within the St. Helens local authority area; and
11. Training schemes will be put in place to increase the opportunity for the local population to obtain employment at the complex.

If an appropriate proposal for a Strategic Rail Freight Interchange cannot be formulated, and there is no prospect of such within a reasonable timetable, the future of the site will be reviewed and alternative uses assessed in the context of the Green Belt designation

#### Strategic Aims Met:

SA 1, SA 3, SA 5

#### Strategic Objectives Met:

SO1.1, SO3.1, SO5.1

#### Key Delivery Items:

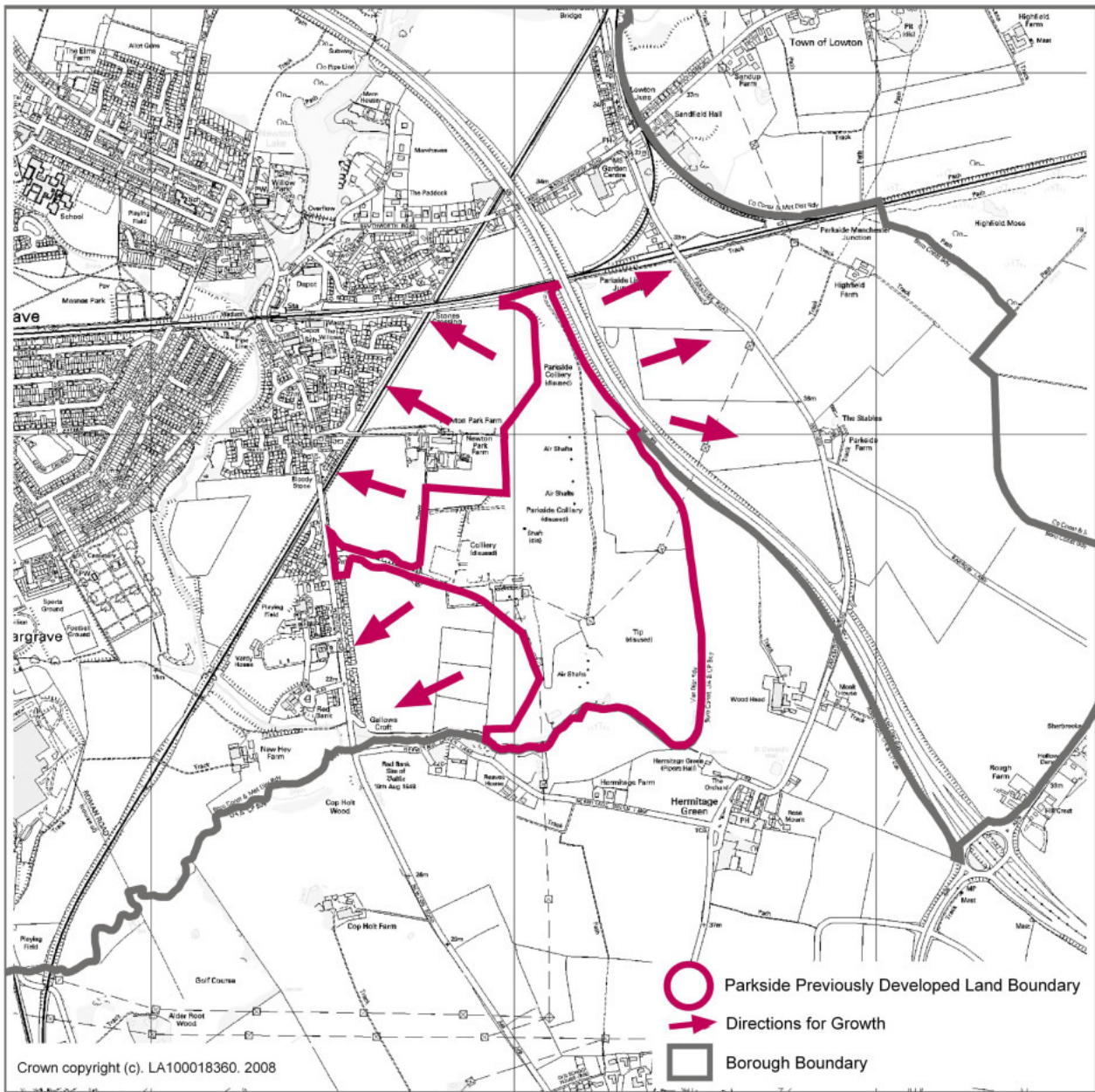
Development of a Strategic Rail Freight Interchange

### Purpose

**9.17** The policy is required to addresses two aspects:

- i. The national, regional and local policy context which underpins the case for releasing this site from the Green Belt; and
- ii. The need to ensure that any development is acceptable in terms of its transport and environmental impacts.

Justification



Strategic Rail Freight Interchange Site

Locational Characteristics

**9.18** The former Parkside Colliery is located on the south-eastern edge of Newton-le-Willows, approximately 1 km north of Winwick, which is in Warrington Borough Council, and 1.5 km south-west of Golborne, which is in Wigan Council. It is located within the St. Helens Green Belt which links with the Green Belt of Warrington and Wigan.

**9.19** Parkside has the following locational advantages:

- i. it is bordered by the M6 Motorway, but not currently directly accessed from it;
- ii. it is within 5 km of the M62 motorway;

- iii. the Liverpool – Manchester railway line borders the site on its northern side, which was formerly directly connected into the colliery; and
- iv. the west coast mainline borders the site in a cutting. Access is obtainable off the Liverpool to Manchester link via the Lowton curve, and from the south via Earlestown and Winwick junction.

**9.20** It is considered the site meets the criteria of PPG13 par 45 which advises Local Authorities in preparing their development plans to identify and, where appropriate, protect sites and routes which could be critical in developing infrastructure for the movement of freight such as major interchanges including facilities allowing road to rail transfer.

**9.21** The former colliery site and associated colliery spoil occupied approximately 54 hectares. This is previously developed land. However, in isolation this would have severe limitations in realising the locational potential of the site as a rail freight interchange. An enlarged area to the west and potentially to the east beyond the M6 would be necessary in order to:

- i. secure direct road access to the M6;
- ii. accommodate the required length of trains and management within the site
- iii. accommodate the need, including expansion requirements, for inter modal and warehouse facilities

## Regional Context

**9.22** Policy RT8 of the approved Regional Spatial Strategy states that plans and strategies should facilitate the transfer of freight from road to rail and / or water by the identification of sites for inter-modal freight terminals. Consideration should be given to the allocation of land for inter-modal freight terminals in four broad locations including Newton-le-Willows (with access to the West Coast Main Line and chat Moss Rail Route).

**9.23** A review of the Green Belt boundary in the local development framework would be justified in order to accommodate an inter-modal freight terminal in accordance with Policy RT8. If land is removed from the Green Belt in accordance with the Policy, there should be a presumption against its development for purposes other than an inter-modal freight terminal.

## Need for SRFI

### National

**9.24** It is Government policy to encourage the transfer of freight from road to rail, for example, The Future of Transport July 2004, Secretary of State Rail Freight Policy Statement July 2005, PPS1 and Climate Change Supplement, and Delivering a Sustainable Railway 2007.

### Regional

**9.25** The Regional Freight Strategy (November 2003) recognises the need for a number of inter-modal terminals and distribution centres around the region and the scarcity of ideal locations with good access and rail links as well as a sufficient amount of land for rail connected development.

RSS reinforces this concern, noting that attempts to increase the volume of freight moved by rail or water in the region could be a shortage of inter-modal freight terminals close to the major origins and destinations of freight in the North West.

**9.26** The NWDA supports the designation of Parkside and in 2004 the Strategic Rail Authority confirmed the importance of interchange development in the Northwest, recommending their location within the Liverpool – Warrington – Manchester commercial belt. These principles were confirmed by the DFT in October 2005.

**9.27** Both the Merseyside Local Transport Plan and City Regional Development Plan recognise the potential of Parkside.

### **Local Context**

**9.28** With its location on the Borough's eastern edge, the development of a Strategic Rail Freight Interchange will have impacts, both positive and negative, on St. Helens, Wigan and Warrington.

**9.29** The development of a more competitive and larger business base is a key objective of the City Growth Strategy (CGS).

**9.30** Worklessness is a key challenge for St. Helens, being tackled through the Local Area Agreement and its implementation mechanism, the Local Enterprise Growth Initiative (LEGI). The application bid to secure LEGI funding made reference to the economic opportunities created by the strategic location of St. Helens at the centre of the Northwest motorway network and mid way between the metropolitan growth poles of Manchester and Liverpool. Establishing St. Helens as a regional inter-modal transport hub by delivering the Parkside Freight Terminal is identified as an action in LEGI.

**9.31** Wargrave is one of the 5% most deprived Super Output Areas nationally, and is located in the vicinity of Parkside. The number of economically active full-time employees is below St. Helens and national levels, the level of unemployment is above the national average and the proportion of working age population claiming Job Seekers Allowance is higher than regional and national averages.

**9.32** The employment opportunities associated with the development will, however, extend beyond St. Helens and Newton-le-Willows. Both Wigan and Warrington are well placed to derive benefits from the development. It will be important that any development, through its travel plan proposals ensures that accessibility to the site by public transport, cycling and by foot from the surrounding areas is maximised.

### **Site Characteristics**

**9.33** In 1997, St. Helens Council proposed the removal of 34 ha of the former colliery and hard standing from the Green Belt for B1, B2 and B8 uses. This was a proposed modification to the St. Helens Unitary Development Plan. The inspector concluded that the benefits of developing the site on the scale envisaged did not amount to the very special circumstances necessary to justify the allocation in direct conflict with national, regional and UDP policy to protect the Green

Belt. Allocation of the site for development and its exclusion from the Green Belt would cause serious harm to a narrow and vulnerable section of the Green Belt, in conflict with its main aims of preventing urban sprawl and the merging of neighbouring towns into one another.

**9.34** The St. Helens Landscape Character Assessment refers to the dominant landscape feature of the M6, which physically and visually divides the character area. To the west, the existing disturbance caused by the former Colliery site should be restored and enhanced, with any development giving careful consideration to the visual and physical landscape relationship of the settlement edge of Newton-le-Willows and the defining linear form of the M6 motorway. To the east of the M6 corridor, there are constraints to further infrastructure development and inappropriate landscape enhancement that would emphasise the segregation and fragmentation of landscape character.

**9.35** Road access to the site at present is off the A49, which links to the M6 at junction 23 through the Newton High Street Conservation Area, and south to junction 22 at Winwick. This would not be acceptable as the main access to a freight terminal.

**9.36** While direct access to the site from the M6 will be a requirement, the development will inevitably generate traffic movement on surrounding road network including the A573 and A579 extending into Wigan and Warrington. The impact of this traffic in relation to air quality, noise and vibration will need to be fully assessed and minimised.

**9.37** Rail access can be obtained to the Liverpool – Manchester line. From there, access can be gained to the West Coast Line: -

- i. northwards via the Lowton Curve which could involve movements to the west of the site on the Liverpool – Manchester Line; and
- ii. southwards to Winwick junction, a distance of approximately 4 km which passes through residential areas.

**9.38** Other features of environmental significance include: -

- i. the majority of agricultural land is Grade 2 and 3a quality;
- ii. Gallows Croft Site of Community Wildlife Interest is located on the site's southern edge. The Highfield Moss SSSI is located approximately 150 metres to the northeast of the proposed application site boundary;
- iii. there are a number of Listed Buildings and features of archaeological interest in the vicinity, including the Newton Park farmhouse and Barn, both Grade II Listed;
- iv. the Newton-le-Willows High Street and Willow Park Conservation Areas are to the north of the site on the A49 Warrington to Wigan Road; and
- v. Air quality management – the M6 corridor and Newton High Street have been identified as Air Quality Management Areas

## Development Considerations

**9.39** In 2006, a planning application was submitted by Astral, for the development of 272 hectares of land to the west and east of the M6 at Parkside for a Strategic Rail Freight Interchange. The proposal includes up to 715,000 sq metres of rail served warehouse and distribution buildings; train assembly area; container depot within a perimeter landscape setting, up to 10,000 jobs are predicted.

**9.40** Since submission, detailed evaluation of the proposals have been in progress, and in particular negotiations with the Highways Agency in relation to the arrangements for a new motorway access on the M6.

**9.41** Further details of this proposal are provided in a Background Paper.