

Jocelyn Davies AC/AM
Y Dirprwy Weinidog dros Dai
Deputy Minister for Housing



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

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Dear Janet

I am writing in response to your 16th April plenary question to the Minister for Finance and Public Service Delivery in relation to the West Cheshire – North East Wales Sub Regional Spatial Strategy and its impact on housing.

The West Cheshire – North East Wales Sub Regional Spatial Strategy (SRSS) was launched in 2007 and evolved from six years of partnership working and a cross-border study undertaken by GVA Grimley. Its purpose is to provide a non-statutory framework for greater cross-border co-operation and development between North East Wales and West Cheshire over the next 15 years (2006-21), and to inform the Wales Spatial Plan and the North West Plan.

The Mersey Dee Alliance (MDA) was reconstituted in 2007 as the key delivery body for the SRSS, and was born out of the recognition of the shared economic and community interests across the West Cheshire, Wirral and North East Wales area. The Alliance is led by the local authorities of Cheshire, Chester, Denbighshire, Ellesmere Port & Neston, Flintshire, Wirral, Wrexham, and the Welsh Assembly Government and Merseytravel.

The partnership recognises the cross-border area as a single economic sub-region with a population of approximately 930,000 which is divided by a national boundary. Partners agree to work together on common strategic interests to sustain the economic future of the area, and facilitate a coherent approach to social, economic and environmental issues.

The MDA is currently preparing its business plan and delivery action plan, to be launched at its Annual General Meeting on 17th July. Delivery will focus around the key themes of skills, employment sites, transport and accessibility, and sustainability. These actions will provide key outcomes for the North East Wales Spatial Plan area.

In addition to formal delivery plan outcomes, the MDA partnership also provides a unique opportunity for partners on both sides of the border to discuss and jointly plan in relation to key issues as they arise. As you have identified, housing is one of the areas where it has been beneficial to discuss the impact of the Chester and Cheshire housing markets on the neighbouring areas of North East Wales. The development of the SRSS provided an excellent opportunity for the planning authorities to come together to agree in a non-statutory document broad housing development ranges over the lifetime of the plan. It is now the responsibility of authorities on the Welsh side of the border to consider these ranges more formally through the preparation of their Local Development Plans, and they are provided with a good background by the SRSS in that they have proactively worked with their neighbours to agree a joint approach.

Further to the development of the housing ranges within the SRSS itself, the MDA partnership has been able to lend its support to the following initiatives on the English side of the border which aim to address the issues identified around housing:

- Previous Regional Planning Guidance for the North West (RPG13) restricted housing growth in the Cheshire area in order to promote regeneration in Liverpool and Manchester. This document is now being replaced by the Regional Spatial Strategy for the North West (RSS) which has been out in draft and Proposed Changes have been published for consultation by the Secretary of State.
- The draft RSS proposed increased house building figures across the North West region, and in the West Cheshire area, these were: 417 new homes per annum for Chester; 400 for Ellesmere Port and Neston; and 500 for Vale Royal Borough. The Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to RSS suggest that these figures be kept, but they should no longer be regarded as maximum figures, and that local authorities could provide housing over and above these levels. These Proposed Changes are out to consultation until 23 May 2008.
- In addition to this, Chester City Council, Vale Royal Borough Council and Ellesmere Port and Neston Borough Council have joined together to submit a proposal for Growth Point status, following last year's Housing Green Paper. This submission proposes that the authorities work together to provide an increased level of house building over and above the RSS targets, of 23% (in total some 1600 new homes per year across the sub-region). The Growth Point Bid is currently being considered by the government and the authorities are waiting to hear back on whether they have been successful.

I am copying my response to the Minister for Finance and Public Service Delivery and the Minister for Social Justice and Local Government in their roles as Lead Minister for the Wales Spatial Plans, and Lead Minister for spatial planning in North East Wales respectively.

Jocelyn Davies AM

Deputy Minister for Housing