

Merseyside Rural Economy Action Plan (MREAP)

Foreword by Bob Hepworth, Director of Urban Regeneration and Housing, St.Helens Council

Merseyside Rural Economy Action Plan (MREAP) is the first coordinated and dedicated action plan for the Liverpool City Region's rural areas, which host 22% of the Merseyside economy and cover 58% of Merseyside's land.

The productive capacity of land in rural areas provides a basic foundation for the whole UK economy - in the provision of food, timber, fuel, energy, land for housing and business, transport, leisure and tourism. This land also provides services - most importantly clean air, clean water, and healthy soils, as well as establishing national and regional identity, and safeguarding heritage.

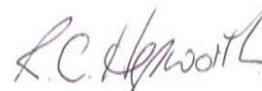
Increases in population, coupled with the imperative to mitigate climate change will mean that these competing pressures and demands on land will intensify in the next decades. Land is among the most valuable resources the UK has; the challenge of the next decades will be balancing these demands on the land and in the rural economy. In MREAP there is an opportunity for the Liverpool City Region to contribute towards balancing these demands, whilst enabling rural businesses to prosper, provide increased employment opportunities and contribute to the visitor, low-carbon and knowledge economies.

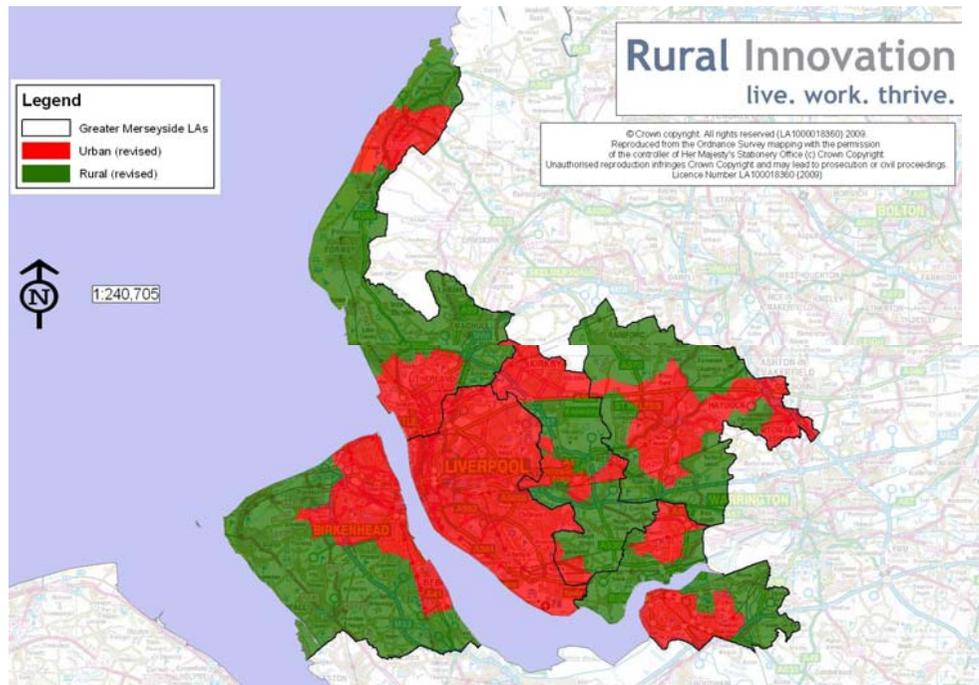
MREAP is designed to unlock the Merseyside rural economy. In identifying key strategic priorities for the transformation

of rural areas and an accompanying action plan, we believe that Merseyside's rural areas, or 'Green Zone', must and can do more to contribute to the transformation of the Liverpool City Region from a public sector dominated economy to a private sector based economy.

Over the past 12 months members of five City Region Local Authorities and key partners (including The Mersey Forest, The Mersey Partnership, and Mersey Rural Leader) have carried out research into the contribution made by the Green Zone and the role it plays within the City Region. This has established that Merseyside's Green Zone is a key asset and a fundamental part of the City Region, responsible for nearly a quarter of its economy.

This document summarises the outcome of this work, showcasing the assets and the potential of the Green Zone to make a material and enhanced contribution to the City Region's sustainable economic growth. The action plan includes 58 programmes and projects, which have been submitted from across the Green Zone, from private businesses and public sector organisations, and total £91million in investment for the Green Zone.





Merseyside's rural areas.

Liverpool City Region Green Zone:

Key Facts:

- 58% of Merseyside is designated as 'rural'
- Not exclusively open countryside, includes areas of rural fringe.
- Includes major employment sites: Science & Innovation Park at Daresbury, Arrowe Park Hospital and Clatterbridge Hospital
- 600 farms and horticultural businesses, managing more than 20,000 hectares of Merseyside land
- High landscape value, contributing to the Liverpool City Region tourism offer - with high yielding products like England's Golf Coast.
- Contributed £4.6 billion to Liverpool City Region economy in 2006

National Policy Context

In the **Programme for Government 2010**, there are several key driving policies which has significant effects upon the rural economy. These include urgent action to boost enterprise and support green growth, improving the competitiveness of UK tourism industry, promoting 'Home on the Farm' schemes to encourage farmers to convert existing buildings into affordable housing, introducing measures to promote a huge increase in energy from waste through anaerobic digestion, measures to protect wildlife halting the loss of habitats and restore biodiversity. The overall rural economy priorities for the government are to support and develop British farming, encourage sustainable food production and to support a strong and sustainable green economy, resilient to climate change.

Alongside the advancement of economic growth lies the need to address Climate Change. **The Climate Change Act (2008)** has set a binding target for an 80% cut in emissions of greenhouse gases by 2050. The first national "budget" for greenhouse gas emissions was published within the Climate Change white paper, *The UK Low Carbon Transition Plan* in July 2009. This, together with related strategies (economy and transport), makes it clear that by 2020 the ways in which we generate and use our energy, heat and power our homes and offices, and access work services and leisure will be quite different to those we know today. Not only must the way we do things in the future change, but we have a

significant and short term "correction" to make if we are to achieve the necessary cuts in emissions.

The challenging economic climate means that every opportunity should be taken to get "best value" from the sub-region's economy, wherever it is located. The symbiotic relationship of the urban and the rural means that to achieve a sustainable sub-region, the rural economy and Merseyside's Green Zone should be appropriately harnessed and correspondingly unlocked.

The **Land Use Futures and Food Strategy 2030** both reassert the commitment for farms and rural land to become more productive and less harmful to the environment. There will be increasing pressure for farmers to balance the demands on the land. The Food Strategy 2030 establishes that the UK agri-food sector is worth £80.5 billion to the UK economy, providing the basis for the UK's largest manufacturing sector, and the strategy calls for an increase in sustainable food production. Land Use Futures emphasises that the productivity of agriculture must be enhanced while simultaneously reducing its environmental burden. This requires new investments in technologies, knowledge and skills to improve the future sustainability of agricultural land use. This will require diverse collaborations amongst many different stakeholders, public and private, with interests in the future of land and the services it provides.

Liverpool City Region Context

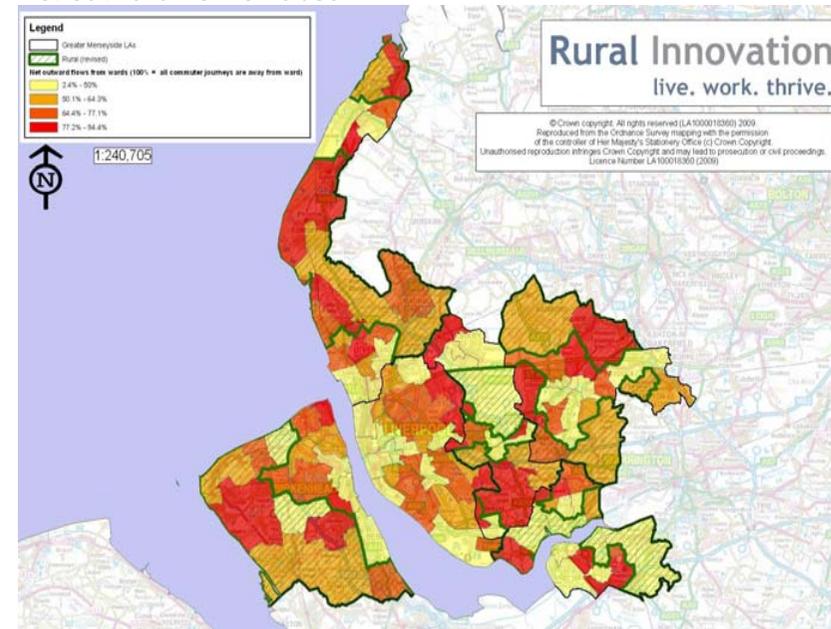
The Liverpool City Region has achieved considerable economic growth in the first decade of the 21st Century, and has benefited from improved economic performance, greater utilisation of indigenous assets and improved city region working in recent years, but has yet to achieve its potential. A substantial gap remains between the value of economic output achieved in Merseyside compared to the region and the country as a whole.

Merseyside remains one of the least “competitive” parts of the UK. The highest ranked borough in the 2010 UK Competitiveness Index is Halton (271), followed by Liverpool (298) and St Helens (311). Wirral (337), Sefton (356) and Knowsley (375) are all in the bottom 10% of the rankings. Knowsley has the lowest competitiveness ranking of all English local authorities and Liverpool the lowest ranking of 11 UK core cities (although its competitiveness score has increased significantly since 1997).

A step change is necessary to close the considerable gap in economic value, size of business base and skill levels between the city region and the North West and UK. If Merseyside is to improve its competitiveness it needs to attract entrepreneurs and business owners who will generate employment, contribute to increased earnings and create opportunities which will improve the skills of the labour force (through “upskilling” and migration / retention of

skilled individuals). In addition to increasing inward investment, there will be greater pressure on existing business to grow, provide increased employment opportunities and offer a robust basis for a strong private-sector based economy.

Net outward flow of labour



The City Region’s Local Enterprise Partnership bid sets out how the Partnership intends to focus on projects that will provide the conditions for business growth and ensure that

businesses are supported to deliver their growth ambitions. The city region needs the private sector to grow if the social and economic impact of planned reductions in public sector workforce is to be mitigated.

It is accepted that rural Merseyside is key to attracting businesses to the Liverpool City Region, as a significant part of the lifestyle offer. However, this action plan is specifically designed to complement the City Region LEP, and establish the importance of the Green Zone in strengthening the sub-regional economy. The investment potential of the Green Zone includes encouraging knowledge economy businesses to base themselves near hubs, in multi functional settlements, providing land and resources for the expansion of the low carbon economy, and providing a strong visitor economy offer.

In the coming years, the massive developments along the Mersey River (Liverpool Waters, Wirral Waters and the Mersey Gateway bridge) will provide economic revival for the City Region in terms of the investment associated with construction, eventually providing a greater inward investment proposition, and improving the access to the area. However, these developments will need to be balanced with significant commitments to sustainability across the City Region, and the Merseyside Rural Economy Action Plan provides opportunities for the Liverpool City Region to address this. In providing land and resources, the Green Zone can pioneer the low carbon economy, providing

solutions for waste management and energy generation across rural and urban areas (investment in anaerobic digestion), enabling homes and community buildings to be less reliant on electricity and gas for heating (biomass programmes) and providing essential services like flood alleviation and carbon sequestration.

Rural Merseyside's Economic Programmes

Rural Merseyside's economic development has been driven in recent years primarily by two programmes, which have emphasised sustainability and sought to support existing and start-up businesses. These programmes have enabled private sector investment to be maximised in rural areas, and businesses to grow.

Integrated Countryside and Environment Plan for Merseyside (ICEP)

ICEP was a partnership initiative to support the rural regeneration of Merseyside. Funded through Objective One, it was designed to fund and support innovative and sustainable projects to drive future developments in Rural Merseyside.

ICEP Example project: T Wilson & Sons, St.Helens

Tom, Robert and Amanda Wilson currently spearhead the rapid progression of this thriving rural business. This one time family farm is now a multimillion-pound operation, growing and packaging a wide range of produce mainly for supermarket outlets.

"The grants have helped us invest in a modern packhouse and packing equipment. That has enabled us to expand our business with ALDI by 180%," explains Tom Wilson.

The success of the grant application has enabled the business to undertake a massive expansion programme which has safeguarded 13 jobs, created 57 jobs and seen turnover quadruple.

- 13 jobs safeguarded
- 57 jobs created
- 20,000 sq feet of work space created
- Over £1 million of private investment
- £61,000 of EAGGF funding, £61,000 of Defra funding

Mersey Rural Leader

Mersey Rural Leader is a key delivery mechanism for rural projects in Merseyside. Funded by the Rural Development Programme for England, it is delivered by a Local Action Group, comprised of public sector representatives and private sector business.

An initial budget of just over £2 million was allocated for rural development until 2013, with expected outputs including creating and supporting micro enterprises, supporting new tourism actions, and leveraging over £5.4 million in private investment.

The programme aims to support the rural economy around the following themes:

- Supporting Merseyside
- Merseyside equine business
- Sustainable biomass
- Recycling and carbon auditing
- Rural retail business improvement
- Attractions and tourism

Mersey Rural Leader progress to December 2010:

- Assisted 73 businesses
- Developed 22 applications
- £766k of grant funding agreed by LAG executive
- £1.2 million private investment in rural Merseyside
- 36 new jobs created
- 7 new businesses set up

An Economic Strategy for Rural Merseyside

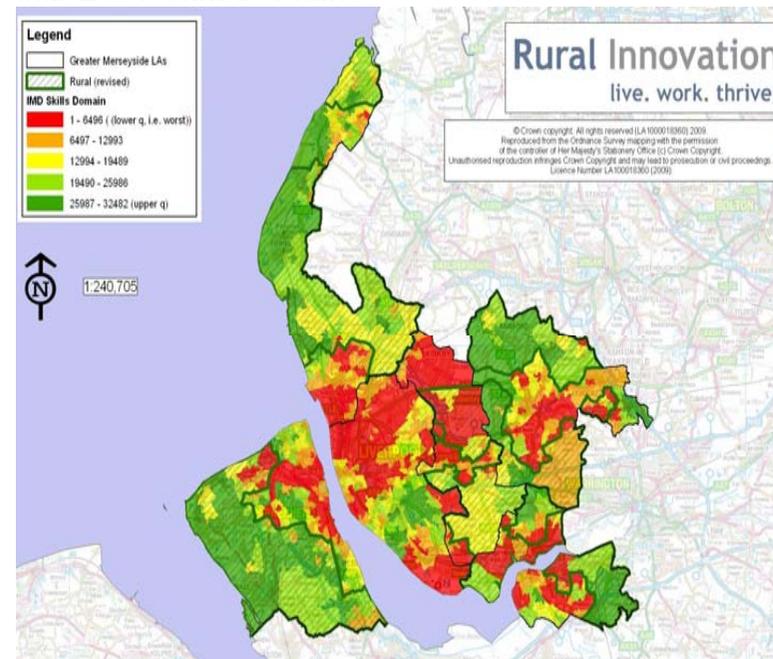
Merseyside Rural Economy Action Plan seeks to provide an over-arching approach to sustainable economic development across rural Merseyside. There is significant need for Merseyside's rural areas to be highly productive in the provision of key services to the Liverpool City Region, including food, landscape, and low carbon solutions, and to deliver significant economic benefits.

The potential of the people and businesses of rural areas to support local partners in achieving their economic objectives is clear. Analysis of the value and volume of economic activity shows that:

- Businesses and employers in the rural area accounts for 22% of Merseyside's total GVA.
- GVA per worker is higher in the rural area than in urban Merseyside.
- Despite the difference in the scale of economic activity in rural and urban areas, and the natural constraints on economic development outside the urban core, growth in rural GVA (10.9%) virtually matched growth in urban GVA (12.3%) between 2003 and 2006.
- Between 2003 and 2006 growth in rural GVA exceeded growth in urban GVA in the local authority districts of Knowsley, St.Helens and Wirral.

Beyond these measures of economic output, the Green Zone provides a wide range of benefits. It attracts and hosts many of the highly skilled and talented people that drive the private, public and third sector delivering wealth, and public services.

IMD 2007 Skill Domain



The Green Zone supports a thriving visitor economy, providing some of Merseyside's strongest brands and visitor destinations – including Sefton's Natural Coast, Wirral Peninsula, Southport England's Classic Resort, Knowsley Safari Park, and England's Golf Coast.

Its farming and land-based sector produce distinctive local food and maintain an extensive network of green infrastructure including the Merseyside Green Belt. Its towns and villages host a diverse and vibrant retail sector and provide services which underpin the quality of life for in the region of 400,000 people.

Areas of Growth

Analysis has shown that the Green Zone must do several things to support sustainable economic growth across Merseyside.

- It must maximise the sustainable productive capacity of its farmland, providing the highest quality raw materials for the food, drink and renewable energy sectors;
- It must develop its businesses, increasing their productivity and creating employment and support the establishment of new businesses through the provision of premises, the development of visitor destinations and by attracting entrepreneurs;
- It must develop its communities, ensuring that they are functionally sustainable and that they make their full contribution in the achievement of national, regional and sub-regional greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets;
- It must maximise the biodiversity that it supports, enabling flora and fauna to thrive and providing the

best possible natural environment and green infrastructure for residents, businesses and visitors;

- It must ensure that its countryside and green spaces are managed in as sustainable way as possible, providing a broad set of “ecosystem services” to urban neighbourhoods including clean air and water, flood alleviation and waste management.

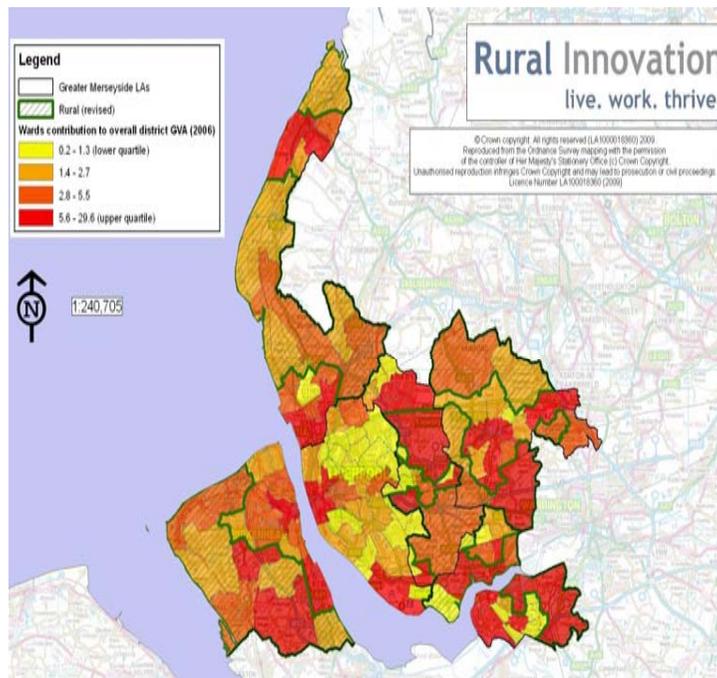
If Merseyside’s Green Zone can successfully meet these challenges, then it will have achieved our collective vision:

By 2025 Rural Merseyside will be recognised as a valuable part of the Northwest’s low carbon economy and as an important and integral contributor to the economic growth of the Liverpool City Region, characterised by a distinctive and high quality environment which is a rewarding place to live, work and to visit.

The Economic Contribution of Rural Merseyside

The rural areas of Merseyside play their part in delivering the sub-region's economic output. Their contribution of £4.6 billion equated to 22.2 % of total sub-regional GVA in 2006 (£20.7 billion), was produced across the full range of industry sectors and is slightly more than its 21% share of total employment.

Percentage contribution to district GVA 2006 by ward



The rural areas host some of Merseyside's most important wards in GVA terms; Daresbury and Knowsley Park provide in

the region of 3.5% of regional GVA. The whole rural area makes an economic contribution to sub-regional GVA and provides the space and raw materials for some of the sub-region's most important employment sites.

Economic output from Rural Merseyside is not restricted to major employment sites and smaller settlements. Analysis of the distribution of GVA within the rural area shows that the "countryside" wards host activity in all major industry groups. For example, rural Merseyside makes a greater than average contribution to GVA in the construction, production, distribution transport and communications sectors.

This level of contribution is all the more impressive when it is considered that much of the rural area operates within inherent economic constraints such as limited access to working age population, the influence of the green belt, and a planning system which focuses growth in urban areas. Despite this, the evidence shows that improvements in productivity in rural areas have kept pace with urban growth. Moreover the rate of overall growth in GVA is higher in some parts of the rural area (notably in St.Helens, Knowsley and Wirral) than in parts of the urban area, and across Merseyside as a whole.

The economic contribution of rural Merseyside extends beyond workplace GVA. In addition to its green infrastructure function analysis shows that it hosts a highly qualified labour force which makes a high value contribution to Merseyside's GVA.

SWOT Analysis

A SWOT analysis identifies the need for sustainable economic growth and the “decarbonisation” of the sub-region’s energy needs and supplies as key drivers. It highlights the positive potential of Merseyside’s land managers, rural communities and businesses, focusing particularly on the need for a re-appraisal of what is needed and expected from the countryside.

The key strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and threats identified include:

Strengths

1. The value and volume of economic contribution from rural Merseyside;
2. Sites and premises, including major employment sites, small commercial centres and dispersed building stock;
3. Land quality and environmental assets, plus the people and businesses that manage them;
4. Quality of life that attracts many of the sub-region’s leaders and highly skilled labour force.

Weaknesses

1. The complexity and inflexibility of Merseyside’s Green Belt;
2. The lack of market and cultural connectivity between rural and urban Merseyside;
3. The limited functionality of the smaller rural settlements;
4. The environmental impact of the movement of people, goods and services.
5. Low demand for agricultural skills training

Opportunities

1. The potential to attract knowledge based investment, new skills and technologies;
2. Providing ecosystem services to support transition to a low carbon economy;
3. New visitor economy product to support Merseyside’s destination offer;
4. ERDF, RDPE, and NWDA funding programmes (in the short-term).

Threats

1. The short-term impact on economic competitiveness of actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions;
2. The need for a new approach to land management and inherent tensions associated with it;
3. The need for new skills and technologies to enable transition;
4. The need to reduce personal mobility;
5. Limited access to private sector investment given the recession, massive reductions in future public spending, and the prospective end of large-scale EU/regeneration funding programmes.

Strategic Themes and Priorities

The SWOT analysis produces some clear themes which have been used to shape our vision for “the green zone” and have subsequently been adopted as priorities. These priorities have been chosen based on analysis of the evidence, other relevant strategic priorities, and a review of the current and emerging spatial planning context. They will subsequently be used to drive the Action Plan.

Five clear priorities have been identified for developing rural Merseyside.

Managing Land to Deliver Value to All

A new approach to integrated land management that will increase the outputs and broaden the benefits and public goods delivered from rural Merseyside’s land and natural assets.

Maximising Productivity and Competitive Businesses

A focus on enterprise and opportunity that ensures that those based and/or doing business in the rural area are able to maximise their productivity and improve competitiveness through the transition to a low carbon economy.

Developing Rural Destinations

Delivering against the vision and priorities of the Liverpool City Region Visitor Economy Strategy to 2020 by adding value to the destination offer and providing opportunities for increased visitor spending.

Planning for Multi - Functional Rural Settlements

A positive approach to enabling investment in rural settlements which will improve their multi-functionality and ensure they fulfil their potential as vibrant sustainable communities and as hosts and attractors of highly skilled and motivated residents.

Creating the Skills Needed for Transformation

Investment in skills will be needed to deliver across all the remaining priorities. This will mean improving basic skills (in order to ensure that opportunities emerging from the new low carbon economy are accessible to local people) and the acquisition of new skills and expertise necessary to support the development of environmental technologies and new business and land management practices

Merseyside Rural Economy Action Plan

Projects and Programmes Summary

Managing Land to Deliver Value for all

Assets:

- 20,000 hectares of farmland - 50% of which is best quality (Grades 1 & 2), producing vegetables and cereals
- 600 farm businesses producing food & supplying local homes, shops and restaurants
- Large areas of rural land managed to protect low lying and coastal areas from flooding.

Issues and Opportunities:

- Integrated land management to increase outputs and broaden the benefits and public goods delivered from rural land
- Encourage inward investment and entrepreneurial migration through greening projects
- Increasing food security and reducing food miles. Connect food producers & local consumers and invest in processing capacity.
- Vital need to protect habitats and biodiversity throughout rural areas.

MREAP Action Programme:

- **Future Land Use for Merseyside** - assess & plan for optimum land use food / fuel / biodiversity / access / flood alleviation
- **Planting for economic growth** - greening areas to attract investment and improving quality of place.
- **Biomass Woodland Advisory Service** - Designed to develop and enable the infrastructure for the wood fuel supply chain in Merseyside, to bridge the gap between the untapped resource of under managed woodland and the need for renewable energy
- **Supporting Merseyside** Supporting farms to move up the food & fuel supply chain
- **Taste Merseyside** - bring local food to consumer via retail and hospitality, farmers markets, farm shops
- **Liverpool City Region Ecological Framework** - an interactive mapping tool for landowners and developers to protect local wildlife and ecology
- **Merseyside Conservation Grazing Project** - A strategy to increase the effectiveness & efficiency of conservation grazing, and explore the possibility of establishing a conservation grading scheme for meat
- **St.Helens Future Farming Studies** - Interlinked studies to investigate the potential of issues such as vertical farming to maximise production for farms and growing crops in peri-urban areas, and collective action towards creating a low carbon economy, including biomass and anaerobic digestion.

Maximising Productivity and Competitive Businesses

Assets:

- One in three businesses are based in the Green Zone, hosting 22% of employment and generating 22% of Merseyside's economic wealth
- Key employment sites and modern rural workspace e.g. Daresbury & Stanley Grange
- Skilled labour force - highly skilled local population, and good schools, colleges and universities.

Issues/Opportunities:

- Liverpool City Region needs more businesses, more jobs and higher output to achieve its potential
- Many businesses at the forefront of developing commercial applications for the low carbon economy will be SMEs who will require support.
- In creating more jobs in the rural economy it will be necessary to have recognised rural education and training available
- Focus groups of rural businesses established that planning procedures can provide significant barriers for development and growth in rural communities

MREAP Action Programme:

- **Rural Business Support**: Application of business support activity to rural businesses
- **Low Carbon Logistics**: Programme of education for haulage & logistics companies to provide training in carbon savings
- **Rural trade school & Urban Farm**: an interactive learning centre, and educational facilities
- Enable private sector capital investments e.g. **Stanley Grange Workspace** buildings improvements
- **Rural Planning Support** establish dedicated planning support for businesses in rural and green belt areas.
- **Melling House Farm Regeneration** - Repairing listed buildings to make them suitable for sustainable farming purposes. The buildings are grade two listed, and would require repair work to the roofing, and to be made weather tight for agricultural storage
- **Rural Estates Web Platform** - Creation of 'Rural Estates' a website platform for online promotion, that will work with country estate owners to promote facilities to a worldwide audience.

Developing Rural Destinations

Assets:

- England's Golf Coast - major events at Royal Birkdale & Royal Liverpool, including The Open
- World-famous attractions like Lady Lever Art Gallery in Port Sunlight, and Knowsley Safari Park.
- Iconic public art - Another Place and *Dream*
- Miles of accessible coast and seaside resorts in Sefton and Wirral
- Strong food offer - festivals & farmers markets, award winning chefs, cafes and restaurants

Issues/Opportunities:

- Connect rural offer and urban market, making rural areas more accessible and easier to navigate
- Opportunities to develop new tourism products, to complement the Liverpool City offer, and differentiate offer from rural competitors
- Make local food even more important to the visitor economy
- Need for more good quality accommodation

MREAP Action Programme:

- **Knowsley Modern Pentathlon and Equestrian Sports Centre** - an international standard polo and pentathlon centre.
- Develop *Dream* as catalyst for inward investment and a new visitor destination - **Bold Forest Park**
- **Wirral International Visitor Centre** - capitalise upon the annual 200,000 visitors to Wirral Country Park
- **Lewis Carroll Interpretation Centre - Daresbury** to create tourism destination
- New accommodation and improved facilities at **Mere Brook House, Royal Hilbre Hotel and Spa, Mersey Valley Golf and Country Club.**
- Improvements at **Port Sunlight Museum Enhancement** to current signage and interpretation, exhibition experience and to the shop to increase visitor spend.
- **Church Farm Fitness Trail** - A fitness trail around the farm consisting of wooden obstacles, each one designed to exercise a different part of the body or develop a certain skill, as well as being fun for all.
- The **Upper Mersey Valley Forest Park** - Implementation of key capital investments to the sites, including creating pathways, signage and interpretation to increase connectivity between sites and bring them together under a single brand.
- **Another Place Interpretation** - Provision of a range of activities, information and interpretation based on Antony Gormley's *Another Place* figures on Crosby beach.

Planning for Multi-Function Rural Settlements

Assets:

- Attractive, well connected towns and villages
- Rapid transit bus and rail network
- Strongly performing schools and colleges
- Highly skilled resident population
- Investment in smart grid and energy efficiency in housing & workspace
- A wealth of natural assets enabling economic well-being.

Issues/Opportunities:

- Many rural settlements in Merseyside are not achieving their economic potential
- 70% of economically active residents of rural areas commute beyond the Green Zone to work
- The car is the dominant mode of travel to work, and with the City Region ambitions to become a low carbon economy require substantial reductions in greenhouse gas emissions from movement of people, goods and services.
- There is limited availability of workspace within rural settlements

MREAP Action Programme

- Delivering improvements to rural transport via **Station and Bus Stop Improvements**
- **Rural Cycle Signage** provide cycle signage within St. Helens & Knowsley to help encourage cycling & raise awareness of cycling routes.
- Demonstrating community scale application of renewable heat & power at **Port Sunlight**
- Developing exemplar eco homes via **Helena Partnerships' Green Base**
- Encouraging home-working and live-work through positive planning - **Rural Planning Advice**
- **Helena Partnerships Green Base** - The construction of a sustainable building (Passivhaus) that will house Helena Partnerships new Green Space Service (landscape maintenance and improvements on Helena land) and act as a community facility for landscape-related activity.
- **Halton Environmental Action Team** - Halton Housing Trust is collaborating with Halton Borough Council to develop a new social enterprise to undertake environmental works in and around properties, including homes and retail units, owned by the Trust.

Creating the Skills Needed for Transformation

Assets:

- Outstanding natural assets for green energy generation - onshore wind farms, biomass, biogas, tidal stream/change, and solar power.
- 2,600 hectares of new woodland planting in the last 20 years. Enough potential biomass from forestry management to heat 2,800 homes.

Issues/opportunities:

- Conversion of waste from farms to energy (anaerobic digestion) is a major focus for government
- Merseyside energy plants import biomass from around the world.
- Need to develop supply chain for locally produced renewable fuels, including biomass
- Initial capital costs for businesses investing in equipment to use or create green energy is high and often prohibitive
- Funding for green energy projects in rural areas is often focused on local communities owning the project and resultant energy

MREAP Action Programme:

- **More from Trees & Biomass Energy** - develop scale of supply and processing capacity to serve increasing local demand for biomass feedstock
- **St.Helens Future Farming Studies** - investigate heat & energy recovery for vertical farming, and assess how waste management can create energy.
- Maximise the benefit of feed-in tariffs to support development of local market for renewables - e.g. **Thornton Hall Hotel** green energy project and **Knowsley Safari Park energy development plan**.
- Enable community-owned renewable energy schemes e.g. **Port Sunlight Village** community scale renewable heat and power from biomass
- **St.Helens Urban Farm** - Urban farm comprising of an interactive learning centre, an exemplary small holding, and educational facilities.
- **Low Carbon Logistics** - A programme of education and awareness, linked to a demonstrator project, for smaller haulage and logistics companies to provide evidence of the carbon and financial savings available through the adoption of a variety of different solutions - some organisational some technological.

MREAP Delivery and Resources

To achieve the strategic objectives of MREAP there is an emphasis on public and private sector partnership. Through this approach the public sector should address the demands of the rural economy, in enabling sustainable development, facilitating greater skill development, and providing policy to maximise access to services and products.

Much of the responsibility for maximising Merseyside's rural economy will lie with the private sector. To achieve the aims of this strategy existing rural businesses should be proactive in managing demand, providing services and products, and providing innovative solutions for demands placed on the land. In addition there will also need to be private inward investment into the Green Zone, especially in regards to knowledge economy and low carbon economy.

To coordinate rural activity across Merseyside, and manage the MREAP programme, there is a dedicated resource in the Rural Economic Development Officer based at St. Helens Council. Rural Economic Development Officer is funded through St. Helens Council and the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE). In addition to focusing on St. Helens rural projects the Rural Economic Development Officer identifies projects, and funding for businesses throughout Merseyside, and plays an active role in the development and delivery of the RDPE programmes in Merseyside.

Potential Funding Sources

Rural Development Programme for England 2007 - 2013

- Total of £374 million for the Northwest region.
- Agri-Environmental Schemes - £299 million for Northwest region (including Higher Level Stewardship).
- NWDA allocated £75 million
- Mersey Rural Leader, £2.2 million allocated to Rural Merseyside
- Rural Carbon Challenge Fund, £4 million allocated for the Northwest
- Tourism Connect, £600,000 allocated for accommodation in rural Merseyside.
- Taste Merseyside

Lottery Funding

- Heritage Lottery Fund
- Big Lottery Fund
- Community Sustainable Energy Programme

Regional Growth Fund

- Application for the continued delivery of MREAP will be put forward.

Corporate Funding Schemes

- United Utilities - St. Helens Landscape Funds
- E.On Sustainable Energy Fund
- The Prince's Countryside Fund

Governance - Merseyside Rural Economy Group

Representatives of St. Helens Council, Knowsley Council, Halton Council, Sefton Council, Wirral Council, The Mersey Forest, The Mersey Partnership and Mersey Rural Leader/ICEP, form the 'Merseyside Rural Economy Group'.

The purpose of the Merseyside Rural Economy Group is to act as the designated strategic coordination body responsible for maximising the economic development potential of Merseyside's rural economy and achieving the MREAP vision.

This group is administered by St. Helens Council, and will ultimately report to the Liverpool City Region's Local Enterprise Partnership on rural activity, especially on issues connected with the low carbon economy, the visitor economy and the provision of rural services.

Merseyside Rural Economy Group is responsible for advocating rural issues to the economic board; ensuring the rural economy (and MREAP) has a voice within each member organisation and at the highest levels with the Liverpool City Region.

It will also hold the responsibility for monitoring the progress of projects, identifying new opportunities in terms of funding and innovation, and encouraging and enabling greater synergy and cross working throughout rural areas of Merseyside.

Merseyside Rural Economy Group

Objectives

- To convene ongoing representation and buy-in from all relevant stakeholders and collective organisations
- To "own" Merseyside's rural economy development agenda
- To advocate and influence accordingly
- To develop and coordinate rural economic policy and strategy
- To raise the profile and understanding of rural economic issues and opportunities
- To heighten and mainstream awareness of how the rural economy can directly contribute to delivering wider agreed economic development priorities for the sub-region
- To maintain and develop the collective rural economy research and evidence base
- To oversee and drive forward the delivery of the MREAP programme and its 5 key themes
- To support the delivery of individual MREAP projects
- To link local and sub-regional activity
- To secure resources for rural economic development delivery.

Functions

- To share information & intelligence
- To debate & agree collective responses to influence local & sub-regional policy & strategy
- To formulate & agree collective targets & actions
- To monitor & report on progress
- To provide recommendations on rural economic expenditure as required
- To facilitate events
- To provide structured updates and reporting to the prospective Local Enterprise Partnership and associated sub-groups
- To issue coordinated communications.

For more information and updates on Green Zone 2025 - please see www.merseyreap.co.uk

This strategy has been produced by St.Helens Council and Rural Innovation on behalf of the following:

Halton Council
St.Helens Council
Sefton Council
Wirral Council
The Mersey Forest
The Mersey Partnership

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