

REPORT:

Cheshire and Warrington Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Strategy: Consultation Findings



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Executive Summary



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background and Methodology

This project sought to consult with a wide range of stakeholders including elected Members, businesses, business representative organisations, community, voluntary and faith sector, town and parish councils, residents, health sector, education sector and young people, and a wide range of further organisations and sectors to get their views on the draft Cheshire and Warrington Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Strategy ahead of its proposed finalisation and approval by sub-regional Leaders in 2025.

Consultation Findings

The following summaries the key themes that emerged during the consultation, both overall and linked to the key Strategy chapters of Growing, Sustainable, Inclusive and Healthy and Enabling Infrastructure.

Over-arching themes

Key feedback includes:

- An overall endorsement of the strategy with stakeholders welcoming its ambitious and inclusive nature.
- The need to balance ambition vs Realism/Deliverability.
- A core recommendation that the Strategy needs to be supplemented by a detailed shorter term delivery plan, with detailed data dashboards to enable tracking of interim targets to meet the long term goals – and that this should be a stated next step written into the final Strategy.
- The need for the Strategy to explicitly state how it aligns with other regional and national strategies/partners as well as how Devolution will impact its deliverability.
- It is key that communication and engagement of the Strategy and aligned plans is person centric, accessible and focused on and co produced by those most in need of support.

- Skills is a key theme for discussion across all aspects of the Strategy with several suggestions for areas to focus on to meet the skills needs in Cheshire and Warrington.
- It is felt that the impact of how AI will influence the Strategy objectives should be strengthened in the document and should be a focus for future delivery planning work, to ensure the training offer is anticipated and adapted.
- Other key themes in discussions around Skills include addressing how to increase employer engagement in skills delivery, to continue and expand The Pledge/school and employer engagement programmes including the promotion of alternative career pathways to boost aspiration to Level 3 skills, to focus on expanding work experience opportunities for those furthest away from employment and to address skills training shortages.

Growing

Key feedback includes:

- The strategy should have a clearer definition of growth and how growth and sustainability can be balanced.
- The need for the strategy and future delivery plans to have a strong focus on business support interventions is clear.
- There is broad agreement with the core industry sector strengths outlined in the Strategy although there are some who express scepticism around the Hynet project. There are calls for other sectors to be more prominently referenced, including the need to more positively frame the potential and importance of the health and social care industry.
- The importance of community needs to be recognised and some feel that the narrative around the quality of place and place branding needs to be strengthened. The narrative around the importance of the visitor economy needs to be strengthened and more firmly embedded.
- The Strategy needs to be clear in its alignment with neighbouring areas in order to best take advantage of regional opportunity.



Consultation Findings

Sustainable

Key feedback includes:

- Whilst some recognise the significant potential of the Hynet project, others are more sceptical about its perceived unproven technology.
- A strengthened message that decarbonisation is not just for industrial and rural, but for all. However, real concern that the very ambitious targets are unachievable in the current economic climate.
- In addition, a call to more clearly state that sustainability is more than decarbonisation – biodiversity and ecosystem services are foundational to a sustainable economy and climate adaptation.
- A need to reframe messaging around net zero to better sell its benefits.
- A stronger narrative around the need to plan for climate and food security resilience.
- A call to embed nature and its benefits across all other Strategy themes more strongly with clearer links made to nature positive benefits to health, decarbonisation and overall economic growth.
- A major concern around grid capacity to enable sustainability targets to be met, along with concerns about water shortages and the planning system being a major blockage to growth and sustainability targets.

Inclusive and Healthy

Key feedback includes:

- There is support for Strategy objectives around eliminating NEETs/fuel poverty. There are queries from some around the metrics which report on this, for

instance the feedback about not relying on data averages as it masks intra-locality inequalities. This will need careful consideration in the delivery plan/future monitoring.

- A call to more firmly embed the benefits of health and well-being across the whole strategy. Stakeholders praise the references to health and wellbeing, but want this more deeply integrated, with a stronger narrative on how being healthy affects other aspects of the Strategy, such as overall economic growth, ageing healthy etc.
- There is a suggestion to consider a re-ordering the Strategy chapters, with health coming first in the Executive Summary and the other sections, e.g. Growing, to emphasise the point that an inclusive and healthy Cheshire and Warrington will contribute to a growing and sustainable Cheshire & Warrington.
- To more strongly reflect that nature contributes to health, wellbeing and equality.
- A welcome of the acknowledgement of the importance of community sector with calls for their contribution to be firmly integrated into future delivery planning and Strategy governance structures, This will help enable those most in need in society to be involved in the design and delivery of support. There is a need for sustainable support to this sector to enable inclusion and other benefits.
- There is also an ask that detailed and specific data dashboards are created for those groups the Strategy will aim to target.
- The need to reframe the health and social care sector more positively as an important employment sector with significant opportunities available.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Consultation Findings

Enabling Infrastructure

Key feedback includes:

- Transport and digital connectivity remains a key concern and blockage to future growth.
- Power supply and water management concerns and a call to address this in the Strategy and future delivery plans.
- A feeling amongst some that housing is not referenced strongly enough in the Strategy, which will bring both pressures and opportunity.
- A common theme is around frustrations with the planning system and how it is a major blockage to growth both overall and also in relation to meeting sustainability targets.



A photograph of a man and a woman in a professional setting. The man, with a beard and glasses, is pointing upwards with his right hand. The woman is looking at him attentively. They are in a room with large windows in the background.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction



INTRODUCTION

Background

Cheshire and Warrington Local Authorities and Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington have developed a draft Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Strategy which sets out to deliver their ambitions to be the UK's healthiest, most sustainable, inclusive and fastest-growing economy by 2045. Partners have been working together to develop the new Strategy since an initial public consultation on the evidence and the priorities in 2023.

The draft Strategy sets out a series of action areas that respond to the challenges and opportunities identified, such as poverty and rising inequalities, climate change and energy, AI and digitalisation, improving transport and connectivity, and securing transformational business sector growth. It acknowledges that effective collaboration will be essential to achieve this with diverse stakeholders including businesses of all sizes and sectors, community and voluntary sectors, education, the health and wider public sector, and the diverse communities living and/or working in Cheshire and Warrington.

This project sought to consult with a wide range of stakeholders to get their views on the draft Strategy before the document gets finalised and approved by sub-regional Leaders in July 2025. Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington commissioned Mickledore to provide support in the planning of the consultation, notetaking during the sessions and analysis and provision of a written report of the findings.

Methodology

Consultation took place over June and July and was a mix of presentation and discussion sessions with a wide range of stakeholders in the sub-region including Leaders, Elected

Members, colleagues in the 3 local authorities of Cheshire West and Chester, Cheshire East and Warrington, parish council representatives, the community and voluntary sector, business representative organisations, businesses, industry bodies, trade unions, college representatives and a small number of residents as well. Consultation opportunities were promoted via the ECW website, a press release and dedicated emails mailouts to ECW stakeholder database. In addition promotion took place where possible via partner organisations such as business engagement teams at Cheshire East Council, Cheshire West & Chester Council, Warrington Chamber of Commerce and the Rural Housing Task Group.

A full list of stakeholders who participated in this engagement exercise is listed in the Appendices and we thank everyone for their valuable contribution.

In total, 42 engagement sessions/opportunities have been completed. These have been a mix of presentation / presentation and feedback sessions at existing groups/meetings as well as tailored and bespoke presentation and discussion sessions (both online and in person). There were 29 sessions where feedback was given and in total 284 people attended these sessions. At a further 14 engagement opportunities, the draft Strategy was presented or referenced and this wider information distribution reached several hundred people.

Written responses have also been submitted by c14 organisations/groups (some of which also attended verbal feedback sessions too). For a full list of engagement sessions please refer to the Appendices.



— INTRODUCTION

Mickledore

Mickledore is an economic development advisory business based in Warrington. Established in 2008, we have worked on economic development projects across the UK for over 15 years. We have significant experience supporting projects in our local area of Cheshire and Warrington and have recently been involved in ongoing support for Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington in the development of a Fair Employment Charter. Mickledore also provides all the operational support for the Institute of Economic Development.





CHAPTER 2

Consultation Findings



CONSULTATION FINDINGS SUMMARY

Over-arching themes

There are some over-arching themes with regards to the consultation feedback. These are laid out below.

Overall endorsement

The vast majority of those consulted with are supportive of the Strategy and welcome its ambitious and inclusive nature. This is the case across a broad spectrum of stakeholder type including businesses, business support organisations and the community and voluntary sector.

“We welcome the ambition and direction set out in the Cheshire and Warrington Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Strategy...the aim to become “the healthiest, most sustainable, inclusive and growing economy in the UK by 2045” is bold and ambitious and we are especially pleased to see the Strategy’s cross-cutting approach to environment, economy, people, and place.” Chester Zoo representative

“As a representative of the charitable sector and specifically of a charity focused on the wellbeing of children and young people, I welcome the inclusive approach that underpins the Strategy.” Youth Federation representative

“We strongly support the plans set out in the Cheshire and Warrington: Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Strategy, and share your ambitions to develop the local economy and increase the potential for people who live and work in Cheshire and Warrington to thrive.” Health Innovation North West Coast representative

“Overall a good thumbs up, a really good read.” Reaseheath College representative

“A really good document which builds on a lot of the strengths that we know Cheshire and Warrington have.” North West Business Leadership Team representative

“Yes supportive of the strategy, it is the operational detail that needs thinking about.” CITB representative

“Completely supportive of the wider paper.” CIRCLE leadership representative (delivers business support for Cheshire East Council)

Whilst most are supportive, a few participants have differing views, either opposing growth entirely believing it to be entirely incompatible with sustainability. Another person feels strongly that the strategy should be purely about growth and that leaders should acknowledge that there is no funding to address any of the inclusive target aims. Whilst these are minority views, it is important to acknowledge them in this report.

Ambition vs Realism/Deliverability

Whilst the ambitious nature of the Strategy is undoubtedly applauded, many participants question whether the objectives and targets are deliverable and realistic given current economic challenges and dependency on external factors outside of the sub-region’s control. Some participants also feel that it would be better to focus on specific sectors or areas of development rather than aiming to be “the best at everything all at once”.



CONSULTATION FINDINGS SUMMARY

Over-arching themes

Ambition vs Realism/Deliverability (cont.)

There is a common view that the next steps with the Strategy development is to develop a more detailed delivery plan(s) with interim SMART objectives/targets, a shorter timescale (5 years?) and an indication of lead deliverer partners/roles and resources needed. Overall there is a recognition that the Strategy needs to be a living document with intermediate targets towards a longer-term goal. It is recommended that a roadmap of this nature with details on next steps is written into the “Next Steps” section of the Strategy itself.

One participant suggested that as part of the next steps it would be good practice to sense check the logic model outlining ambitions, outcomes and key results to demonstrate how outcomes will be achieved.

Several participants feel that the Strategy needs to be clearer about the challenges that lie ahead in an economic climate of very stretched local authority spending power and an uncertainty around potential future long term funding streams – which will be needed to achieve the ambition. There is also a wish for the Strategy to make clear what is and what is not within the control of the local authorities/sub-regional leaders and how it will need to adapt to potential future political uncertainties both in the UK and internationally.

It is suggested that in the “next steps” document, it would be sensible to outline which are the ‘big ticket’ items to ramp up and which are the underpinning enablers that the public sector

needs to support, e.g. increased spend in the community and the voluntary sector.

As part of this work, it is thought that a “key message” framework is something that all stakeholders could commit to, which details what is needed and how different stakeholders can contribute.

Alignment with other strategies/partners

A common view is that the Strategy needs to outline how it aligns/collaborates with other relevant regional and national strategies as they are published, such as the Modern Industrial Strategy, Get Britain Working Again and the Small Business Strategy. As devolution progresses, a clear link to how this will influence the Strategy should also be included.

The Strategy already references opportunities in the wider region, such as those within the Northern Arc and this is welcomed, with clear feedback that the sub-region needs to work alongside its neighbours, not in competition.

All partners welcome the input into Strategy development and in particular, the identification of the community/voluntary sector as a key partner is very welcomed.

Communication and Engagement

As the Strategy moves towards completion and beyond to the next steps in terms of delivery planning, there is a need for clearer, accessible language and better outreach to disengaged/hard-to-reach groups to ensure that the strategy is “person-centric” and centred on those that it aims to support the most. Some participants feel that there needs to be a clearer “what is in it for me” message, to ensure greater buy in to some of the wider objectives, particularly around sustainability.



CONSULTATION FINDINGS SUMMARY

Over-arching themes

Skills

The challenges and opportunities around skills in the Strategy was a key discussion point during the consultation. Whilst the Strategy itself is not a Skills Strategy, it is useful to summarise the key feedback given which should be incorporated into the overall Strategy where possible:

It is felt that the impact of how AI will influence the Strategy objectives should be strengthened in the document and should be a focus for future delivery planning work, to ensure the training offer is anticipated and adapted. One participant suggested that it would be useful to visually compare the skills mix now and the anticipated skills mix needed in the future.

Whilst there was reference to skills issues in each of the thematic areas, much of the feedback is relevant across themes and so is reported in the over-arching themes section. Key feedback is:

- With skills some of the issue is around the availability of teaching to teach the skills needed – this is the case across a lot of key sectors including energy, construction, health and social care, heritage etc.
- There is a need for employers to get more engaged with skills.
- Skills messaging and aspiration messaging needs to change in schools – resources need to go in the messaging.

- The alternative pathways to university need to get better. There is a plea that with devolution funding, the sub-region needs to be bold and innovative in terms of how to tackle Level 3 skills shortage, based on listening to local people.
- Make sure education/adult education/FE/HE is stressed in the Strategy and link it to the LSIP.
- Schools and employer links need to be strengthened, and the local authorities need to be conveners between employer and schools. The Pledge has achieved some great work, this needs to continue and be scaled up, with a particular focus on NEETs.
- Work experience opportunities need to improve, especially for those furthest away from employment. Job centres should make it easier for people to be able to volunteer to gain work experience and gain confidence and linked to upcoming changes in the Right to Try Bill.
- Make stronger reference to workforce plans.
- The strategy/future delivery plans need to focus more on skills retention in the area.
- Refer to Overall Chapter, risks and opportunities linked to AI.

The National Careers Service engaged in the consultation and listed a number of ways they can help achieve/deliver Strategy objectives.



CONSULTATION FINDINGS SUMMARY

Over-arching themes

The comments below are summaries of specific feedback from individual organisations that relate to over-arching themes.

Youth Federation

- Applauds the ambition and welcomes the inclusive approach.
- VCSE role is acknowledged throughout but some suggestions:
 - Formalise the sector's role – explicitly name mechanisms through which VCSE organisations will be involved in the planning, delivery and evaluation.
 - Embed the charitable sector so that it is represented across all major governance structures associated with strategy delivery.
 - Sustainable funding models – promote long term funding arrangements for VCSE partners.
 - Social value commissioning – linked to procurement that prioritise social outcomes and allows smaller VCSEs to compete for contracts.

CWIP

- Make use of VCS sector, they are trusted in local communities and can help ensure lived experience informs policy to get effective implementation.
- Sector has been hard hit by decline in funding routes.



CONSULTATION FINDINGS SUMMARY

Growing

The following summarises the main themes that relate to the Growing Chapter of the Strategy:

Defining Growth and the overall narrative

A common theme in the consultation is the balance between growth and sustainability. Some participants feel that the two concepts are simply incompatible, whilst others do feel that both objectives can be pursued, but that there is a need to define more clearly that growth needs to be sustainable and how this will be achieved with social value being more explicitly embedded in growth plans (including its links with procurement).

Business Engagement

Another common theme in the feedback is around business support. Several observations and suggestions for intervention can form part of a future delivery plan, with key feedback being:

- Some feel that the Strategy has an overemphasis on larger employers and that there should be more focus on SMEs, entrepreneurs and solo business owners. This is around targeted business support, better signposting of support, networking hubs, support for existing business retention as well as inward investment and measures such as opening up public procurement to SMEs.
- Also considered important is to address how SMEs have a role that they can play in meeting skills challenges.
- Businesses and business representatives are concerned about a risk-averse culture to investment, which is holding back future growth. The strategy and future delivery plans need to address finance and access to investment.
- For all businesses, problems in the planning system remains a key blocker to growth.

- There is uncertainty as to if the Strategy references an inward investment strategy and if not, that it should.
- Lack of funding for any kind of intervention is a major problem.

Sector focus

Feedback here included:

- A few participants expressed a scepticism around the potential Hynet opportunities, referencing in their view a risk around unproven technology. However, others see this as a significant opportunity, whilst acknowledging the urgent need for skills investment to unlock its potential.
- The majority of participants agree with a focus on clean energy, life sciences, manufacturing and construction as core areas of strength in the sub-region.
- Participants from a health and social care background feel that the strategy does not adequately/positively portray the potential this sector has, linked with life sciences strengths.
- Participants from the visitor economy sector also feel that the importance of this industry could be emphasised more in the strategy document.
- A call for a sector-specific value mapping exercise and targeted growth plans to form part of a future delivery plan
- There is a suggestion that the sub-region aims to become known for “sustainability science”.
- Another participant with a military background feels that this is an industry with expertise in the area and one which should be pursued.
- A call to strengthen reference of the creative and digital sector.
- Tech adoption and tech diffusion angles could be stronger.
- A call to emphasise the role rural has in growth.
- A call to reference key sector groups in the Strategy (this came from SP Energy Networks).



CONSULTATION FINDINGS SUMMARY

Growing

Quality of Place and place branding

Some participants feel that the section on quality of place and place branding/identity could be strengthened with stronger messaging to support the “live, work, study...” aspects, including around heritage assets.

On place more broadly, there is feedback from a couple of participants on some places feeling “forgotten”, whether that is rural in general or specific locations, such as Crewe.

One participant suggests that the narrative around Warrington could be strengthened, as it is in an ideal position to be a strategic connector for the various areas in the North West.

Visitor Economy

Participants working in this sector feel that the visitor economy does not have a strong enough narrative in the Strategy and also make the point that it is broader than creative, cultural and heritage sectors. One participant expressed a preference for “the creative and cultural economies”. Key themes to address in future planning include transport for visitors and workers and skills development. Investment into R&D, innovation and capital investment is also raised as needed to ensure that businesses can be sustainable to enable the long term vision to be met. It is stressed that thriving cultural and

creative economies contribute to the health and wellbeing of residents and thus the overall health of the economy.

Growth aligned to neighbouring areas

Several participants took the opportunity to stress the importance of working with neighbouring areas to take advantage of regional opportunities, such as the Northern Arc narrative and opportunities at Manchester Airport.

Community

CWIP feedback referenced that this chapter could strengthen the role of community enterprise, with business support being given to grass roots voluntary and community sector enterprises, with community wealth building initiatives also referenced more strongly. The role and importance of “community” is also something which is raised by the residents that took part in this consultation and overall it is felt that the narrative around “empowering communities” could be made more strongly in the Strategy.



CONSULTATION FINDINGS SUMMARY

Growing

Tracking Progress

There is a view that more work needs to be undertaken on the metrics to measure growth. Some feel that metrics such as GDP and GVA are too simplistic and do not take into account social value and sustainability impacts. For those participants who do not feel that growth and sustainability targets are compatible, metrics which help unpick this would help.

On visitor economy statistics, there is a suggestion to refer to national evidence, the Destination Management Plan and a piece of work undertaken in Cheshire East by Rise.

It is also suggested that the Strategy should consider the impact of population growth forecasting and how it will affect Strategy objectives, such as a falling birth rate, an ageing population and migration flows.

Other feedback

A number of organisations (the Health Inequalities Group, Mersey Forest and CHASE) gave specific page by page feedback on the draft Strategy. This is too detailed for inclusion here, please refer to the marked up draft Strategy provided under separate cover.



CONSULTATION FINDINGS SUMMARY

Sustainable

The following summarises the main themes that relate to the Sustainable Chapter of the Strategy:

Net Zero & HyNet

There is support for decarbonisation targets but calls for a broader focus (SMEs, households) beyond heavy industry in terms of decarbonisation.

There is some concern about the investment plan to achieve the objectives and funding availability to support the very ambitious targets.

There is some scepticism about HyNet's feasibility and overemphasis on what these participants viewed as unproven technologies.

There is some feedback about the need to reframe the narrative/messaging around net zero that better resonates with people and businesses to enable buy in particularly around viability and cost benefit.

Other feedback included:

- Concern about limited focus on indirect emissions and offshoring.
- A call for more skills development in green jobs, including welders, electricians and retrofit experts.
- No mention of onshore wind or solar.
- A call for the MNZ | Peak Cluster Partnership to be referenced as an opportunity for the sub-region.
- A suggestion from the University of Chester to include reference to their work with partners on the decarbonisation agenda.

Resilience

Some participants feel that the strategy needs to more clearly address the need for greater resilience (and solutions on how to achieve it) around food security and how to address future extreme weather risks. Local/small scale solutions such as small scale hydro and battery storage technologies are referenced.

Nature, Biodiversity and Land Use

Overall the feedback has centred on suggestions for nature to be more firmly embedded in the strategy as a core economic asset with clearer links made to nature positive benefits to health, decarbonisation and overall economic growth. There are specific comments from nature focused organisations detailed further in this chapter.

Other comments made include:

- A desire to link climate action and nature more explicitly.
- Reference the need to upgrade the natural environment.
- Nature recovery is not just a rural issue and can be contributed to by all, not just farmers and landowners.
- To reference blue spaces as well as green spaces, e.g. canals/canal towpaths and their health and wellbeing benefits. Also, green/blue spaces are urban as well as rural.
- Applaud the mention of "30 by 30" but make even more prominent.
- Should mention regenerative agriculture.
- A need to reference water management opportunities/need.



CONSULTATION FINDINGS SUMMARY

Sustainable

Nature, Biodiversity and Land Use (cont.)

- As well as decarbonisation there is a need to focus on reducing water and air pollution.
- Future delivery plan to address issues like land use efficiencies and a current lack of funding availability for farmers to adopt sustainable technologies.
- Should be promoting the 15 minute economy as much as possible as this is more sustainable.

Grid Constraints and Planning Blockages

Concerns are raised about the delays in the national grid upgrades hindering renewable projects. In addition, another key risk raised to achieving sustainability targets is thought to be the too slow/restrictive planning system.

Tracking Progress, delivery and next steps

There are a number of suggestions around activity for the next stages of delivery and monitoring. These include:

- The Cheshire East KSPF scheme on decarbonising businesses has some useful lessons learnt for future ways the sub-region could look to support a Net Zero target at ground level.
- The FSB has also got a recent report on how to cut carbon for small businesses that may be helpful.
- It is suggested that it would be useful to do an impact assessment on the impact of decarbonisation on manufacturing/industrial businesses.
- Secure private investment into nature. Comment about

habitat bank 2 years s106 for LAs – fast track and unlock – income streams to rural areas.

- Break down what residents/consumers/businesses need to play in the move to net zero.

In terms of metrics:

- One participant referenced that it would be good to see current and targeted GHG emissions for the area broken down by sector.
- CCC/DESNZ emissions only cover domestic emissions, and a participant felt that it should include manufacturing and air travel impacts.
- One participant suggested that the NFU may be a good source to fact check dairy industry carbon emissions data.

Other feedback

A number of organisations (the Health Inequalities Group, Mersey Forest and CHASE) gave specific page by page feedback on the draft Strategy. This is too detailed for inclusion here, please refer to the marked up draft Strategy provided under separate cover.

The following pages provide more detailed feedback given on the Sustainable Chapter by individual organisations.



CONSULTATION FINDINGS SUMMARY

Sustainable

The following gives a summary of feedback from individual organisations. For more detail, please refer to individual submissions, provided under separate cover.

Local Nature Partnership

- Strongly supportive of the Strategy's intent to deliver inclusive and sustainable growth but urge a more integrated and ambitious approach to addressing the critical role of nature in delivering a sustainable economy.
- Urge that the Strategy links to national strategies, e.g. rebuilding nature programme and a government move to landscape scale solutions and across boundaries.
- A call that the narrative shifts from "sidelining nature as a cost" to recognising its significant economic contribution, to businesses, growth and place.
- The group outlines key data from the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) which highlights ecological decline in the area (refer to individual feedback submission for more detail/future reference) and points that that nature's recovery should be prioritised to ensure the improvement and expansion of key habitats and species – particularly those that provide natural ecosystem services that underpin economic resilience – such as flood management, urban cooling, clean air and water.
- The group believes that Cheshire and Warrington whilst being one of the most nature-depleted areas in England also has capacity for large scale investment opportunities to unlock sustainable growth in the sub-region and to accommodate growing needs for mitigation and ecosystem services to support LCA, GMCA and beyond.

- A move to reframe sustainability beyond decarbonisation. Biodiversity and ecosystem services are foundational to a sustainable economy and climate adaptation. The group asks that the Strategy explicitly supports:
 - Delivery of the "30 x 30" target.
 - Full integration of the LNRS into planning with appropriate funding and governance.
 - Support for businesses and landowners to deliver nature-based solutions such as habitat restoration, regenerative agriculture, carbon sequestration, natural flood management and interventions that may support cleaner, more plentiful water in drier summers – a key future threat.
- The link between nature and health should be emphasised more as well as inequalities/access to green/blue space/nature especially in deprived urban and peri-urban areas.
- Refer to adaptation and all the different ways that the landscape can derisk flooding and also improve climate resilience/cooling. The strategy is a good place to get across the message that nature removes carbon and avoids more being emitted.
- Further frame that the natural environment underpins the economy, refer to the Dasgupta Review.
- The main bullet points on nature in the executive summary don't do it justice.
- Can the words in the executive summary change to "net zero" and "nature positive".
- Reference Natural England guidance on nature restoration funds.



CONSULTATION FINDINGS SUMMARY

Sustainable

Local Nature Partnership (cont.)

The submission gave several ideas/opportunities to put into a future delivery plan:

- Put nature-based solutions and nature friendly green space into social housing areas:
 - Design nature into new developments by default
 - Create a water and wildlife credit scheme
 - C&W to be the BNG bank in the Northern Arc
 - Create a nature recovery fund for offset.
- The Local Nature Partnership group call for a dedicated section in the Strategy on Natural Capital, making a clear economic case for investment in ecosystems.
- They ask that there is coherence with the Environment Act 2021 and emerging statutory LNRS obligations.
- Commitments to cross-sector collaborations (e.g. water companies, I and managers, health providers) to deliver outcomes.
- Use of spatial prioritisation tools to align infrastructure, housing and employment investment with areas that have potential to provide the ecosystem services vital to their success, whilst supporting nature's recovery.

Chester Zoo

- Overall, very positive about the Strategy.
- "30 by 30" reference could be made even stronger
- Strategy currently leans on agricultural land to deliver nature recovery, but about much more than farmers and landowners. Restoring nature is something everyone can participate in. The strategy could refer to Networks for

Nature project and the Chester Zoo Nature Recovery Corridor, and this could be a potential case study to sit within the Strategy.

- Encourage the strategy to highlight the National Education Nature Parks initiative – to encourage schools to be biodiversity hotspots.
- Need to put greater emphasis on quality of green and blue spaces not just the quantity – these spaces need to be rich in wildlife, ecologically healthy and designed to support nature and wellbeing, as well as being accessible.
- Recommend that the Strategy commits to the government ambition for everyone to live within 15 minutes of a high quality green or blue space.
- Acknowledge the vital role that nature reserves and parks in the area play, especially those on former industrial land – e.g. Anderton Nature Park, Moore Nature Reserve and Woolston Eyes – there is much potential to do more of this.

CWIP

- Strategy needs to connect the dots to enable poor people to access green spaces.
- The sector struggles to get investment to enable community centres become greener/warmer and there is a call for this to be addressed in the Strategy/future delivery plans.



CONSULTATION FINDINGS SUMMARY

Sustainable

Cheshire Wildlife Trust

- Their position is that they are not anti growth as long as it is environmentally sustainable and supports nature's recovery and they believe that is achievable.
- There needs to be a balance between decarbonisation and risks it poses to nature. They are currently working with Hynet to make sure a scheme is nature positive.

Green Economy

- An offer has been extended in terms of how they can support delivery solutions for decarbonising businesses and homes.

Mersey Forest

- A call to refer to the Mersey Forest Plan as leaders move forwards with the strategy, as there are several areas of key principles that are relevant:
 - Enrich peoples lives and livelihoods
 - Help nature flourish

- Strengthen climate resilience
 - Establish trees, woods and other habitats
 - Look after tress, woods and other habitats
 - Businesses – encourage businesses to support the work of the Mersey Forest
 - Funding and finance.
- Overall feedback is that they would like nature and climate positivity to be brought more to the fore in the vision and to be better embedded throughout the strategy.
 - Welcome sustainable and inclusive in title.
 - A suggestion to make the vision a little clearer in the strategy.
 - They have several specific suggestions about where this could be included in the strategy and specific suggestions on several sections of the Strategy, please refer to separate document.
 - They also refer to other reports that can provide useful narrative points and data, such as the Dasgupta Review, and the Nature North Strategy.



CONSULTATION FINDINGS SUMMARY

Inclusive and Healthy

The following summarises the main themes that relate to the Inclusive and Healthy Chapter of the Strategy:

Poverty

There is support for Strategy objectives around eliminating NEETs/fuel poverty. There are queries from some around the metrics which report on this and this will need careful consideration in the delivery plan/future monitoring. With specific reference to the recent rises in the national minimum wage, there is a query about how this would affect in work poverty figures and amongst some there is acknowledgement that whilst raising the minimum wage is to be supported, it is having a significant impact on some businesses, especially those in the hospitality sector.

Health and Wellbeing

Stakeholders praise the references to health and wellbeing, but want this more deeply integrated into the strategy, infrastructure planning and workforce strategy.

It is felt by those in this sector that there should be a stronger narrative on how being healthy affects other aspects of the Strategy, such as overall economic growth, ageing healthy etc. As an employment sector, it is believed that it should be presented more positively in the Strategy.

There are calls to shift the narrative on health, highlighting how it supports the economy and intergenerational value – e.g., aging healthy populations mentoring youth

Community

The voluntary and third sector are seen as key partner in inclusion and community development. There is a call for the Strategy to have a stronger recognition of the contribution of the third sector in local communities as many of these people are classed as “economically inactive” but in fact perform vital volunteering roles in their local communities.

There is a comment from Cheshire Community Action around the fact that Government funding has been withdrawn from Neighbourhood Plans and that this is an opportunity for regional leaders moving forward, to put neighbourhoods at the heart of its strategy.

Inclusive Business Support

There is a call for the need for targeted support for marginalised entrepreneurs (women, disabled...)

Skills

A common theme throughout the consultation across all themes, there are repeated calls for early engagement with youth, alternative pathways (not just university), and stronger school-employer connections with opportunities for work experience, especially targeted at those furthest away from employment.

It has also been mentioned the need to re-/training to be age-inclusive.



CONSULTATION FINDINGS SUMMARY

Inclusive and Healthy

Tracking Progress, delivery and next steps

There are some suggestions around activity for the next stages of delivery and monitoring.

- Whilst the IMD evidence is very useful and important for relative deprivation, the focus for setting targets should be on absolute deprivation (e.g. life and healthy life expectancies, NEETs, crime rates, household income and child poverty statistics).
- One participant feels that there is a lack of a reference to “migration” and the opportunities and risks it presents – both international and internal. The strategy should assess the available evidence and future outlook for migration flows and the potential implications for Cheshire and Warrington.

The Health Inequalities Group point to the Institute of Health Equity which has much useful material which could be used both in the Strategy narrative and in the data/metrics to inform delivery planning and monitoring. Specific feedback about data includes:

- Don't rely on averages as it masks intra-locality inequalities. For instance in Warrington Borough Council there is a 10 year gap in life expectancy between inner and outer wards. There are also notable differences in fuel poverty.
- In addition on RLW, Marmot data shows that women are twice as likely as men to be earning below the RLW. Need to have specific data points for single parents and disability characteristics too.

- The group states that it has access to modelling data which can be utilised for modelling effects of support measures which may be introduced.

The Youth Federation has suggestions in terms of monitoring impact on children and young people which charities can help with, including the establishment of a dashboard of indicators specifically tracking outcomes for young people on education, employment, health and housing.

They also call for transparent progress reviews with a commitment that periodic reviews of strategy implementation are shared publicly and include voices from civil society, including youth and charitable organisations.

Feedback from individual organisations

The following gives a summary of feedback from individual organisations. For more detail, please refer to individual submissions, provided under separate cover.

Skills for Care

- This group state that there is no reference in the Strategy to the importance and potential of the adult social care sector. They refer to a Skills England report which recognises the value the health and social care sector can bring to economic growth, reducing unemployment, improving population health and reducing NHS waiting lists.
- There are opportunities to take for instance the care workforce pathway to encourage skills retention in the sector.



CONSULTATION FINDINGS SUMMARY

Inclusive and Healthy

Health Inequalities Group

The Health Inequalities Group have submitted a formal, detailed response to the draft Strategy consultation, much of which refers to specific suggestions/commentary to specific sections/paragraphs of the Strategy. Please refer to the marked up version of the draft Strategy for their suggested changes/comments.

The Group suggests listing the full list of protected characteristics early on in the Strategy and lobbies for the region to include care experienced as a protected characteristic.

Other general/themes include:

- Include reference to the importance of social value for businesses/the economy and its importance for health and wellbeing.
- Where green spaces are referenced, include reference to blue spaces as well.
- Suggest that health comes first in the Executive Summary and the other sections, e.g. Growing, to emphasise the point that an inclusive and healthy Cheshire and Warrington will contribute to a growing and sustainable Cheshire & Warrington.
- Include a reference to the Health in All Policies approach, emphasising that the other priorities all form the building blocks of good health and wellbeing.
- Feedback that health and social care isn't presented as a positive employment option in the region and that as it is critical to success, this should be re-framed and include

assets such as the University of Chester Medical School and the Health Science Campus in Crewe.

- Rather than the strategy reading that everyone has equal opportunities, it should be emphasised that those experiencing the biggest inequalities are given adequate resources to support them out of poverty.

The Group suggests that the Strategy undergoes a health and inequalities impact assessment, that this is referenced in the foreword and they offer to support the production of this.

Health Innovation North West Coast (HINWC)

The representative of this organisation feedback that they also believe that the “health” aspects of the Strategy could be strengthened and at present understate the opportunities for economic growth, the impact on health outcomes and cohesion of plans with the NHS locally.

They refer to a report “Defining the Size of the Health Innovation Prize” by Frontier Economics which defines the economic value of reducing ill-health through innovation and FDI.

The current strategy does not refer to the role and work of the Cheshire and Mersey Integrated Care Board, or organisations such as the Health Innovation North West Coast – they ask that the value they bring is referred to.



CONSULTATION FINDINGS SUMMARY

Inclusive and Healthy

CWIP

Key feedback from this group included:

- Include more evidence about mental health and its effect on workforce wellbeing.
- Engage more with businesses on employing people with disabilities, and those off work with mental health issues.
- Rural mental health access and support – link with investing in community buildings, linked to asset transfer. There is a reference from Cheshire Community Action to a Rural Mental Health Strategy which has useful evidence to support the idea of increasing the capacity of community buildings to host more services in rural areas.
- VCS is a route to delivering inclusion. Could Cheshire and Warrington invest more in the sector, as the GM strategy has pledged to do?
- Neighbourhood planning – funding has disappeared and had been a key tool to get rural communities involved in decision making about their areas.
- VCS training and skills providers have been hard hit, would like to rebuild that capacity and a reference to this in future delivery planning would be welcome.

Youth Federation

- A call to expand early years focus – place greater emphasis on early childhood development.
- Support for vulnerable youth – please reference that this

group of people need intensive, specialist support which VCSE partners are best placed to deliver.

- Ensure youth voice and engagement are active participants in shaping the programmes intended for them, which relevant charities can help with.
- In terms of skills and inclusion:
 - Pathways for NEET young people – opportunity to develop targeted programmes co delivered by LAs and charities
 - Remove practical barriers – strategy should include a firm commitment to supporting subsidised travel and digital access for training and employment
 - Promote local career routes – community campaigns that help young people and their families see pathways to good jobs locally, especially in new growth sectors such as clean energy and life sciences.
- In terms of health, housing and economic security:
 - Whole family approaches should be central to community based regeneration efforts
 - Youth homelessness prevention – addressing insecure housing amongst young people should be an explicit priority
 - Fuel poverty and retrofit schemes – could be directly linked to youth employment initiatives and community wealth building, delivered via training programmes in partnership with local charities and colleges.



CONSULTATION FINDINGS SUMMARY

Enabling Infrastructure

Much of the commentary around infrastructure during the consultation is around current and future challenges and frustrations, rather than specifically related to what should be referenced in the Strategy itself, other than a clear message that these issues need to be addressed.

Transport Connectivity

There is widespread frustration with poor public transport options across the sub-region. Hot spots noted included in Crewe, Northwich, Gadbrook Park, Ellesmere Port, Winsford, Barrow, rural areas more broadly and links into Liverpool and Manchester – this is regarded as a critical barrier to growth, inclusion and sustainability.

There are calls for transport to be affordable and accessible in order to support employment, night-time/visitor economies and training access.

EV charging targets are welcomed but need faster grid upgrades and new development capacity and reliability.

Digital Connectivity

Digital connectivity issues also across the patch, noted in rural areas and at key business locations such as phone lines at Gadbrook Park.

Power supply

Major concern at the cited power grid capacity and a call for this to be addressed urgently to unblock economic growth and sustainability targets. This is referenced by several, including major businesses such as Chester Zoo.

There are calls for more work to address increasing regionality of power supply.

Water concerns

There is some feedback that there needs to be a greater emphasis on water management, whether that be flooding or shortages, with local level solutions suggested for delivery planning.

Housing

There is feedback that housing needs and the pressures of housing targets will put on the area is a major area and not something which is particularly referenced in the Strategy. In terms of sustainability, there should be an acknowledgment in the strategy that the quality of house building is important in terms of them being as sustainable as possible in their energy use.

Planning System

A major blocker on infrastructure, both traditional and digital connectivity. One participant also raised the point that at a local authority level, decisions can sometimes be opposite the Strategy objectives (e.g. cutting bus routes, approving schemes that don't have adequate infrastructure).



CONSULTATION FINDINGS SUMMARY

Enabling Infrastructure

Other feedback

Some stakeholder advocate for a “15-minute neighbourhood” model and stronger links between housing, services and transport.

Several participants suggest that when developing infrastructure there is an ongoing need to ensure health and wellbeing angles are considered.

A number of organisations (the Health Inequalities Group, Mersey Forest and CHASE) gave specific page by page feedback on the draft Strategy. This is too detailed for inclusion here, please refer to the marked up draft Strategy provided under separate cover.

Organisation specific feedback - CWIP

- Consider asset transfers to empower and strengthen the VCS, refer to the Locality manifesto (<https://locality.org.uk/reports/the-locality-manifesto>)

Organisation specific feedback - Chester Zoo

- Strategy could go further on walking and cycling – the strategy should have an ambitious target in this area which helps net zero and healthy goals.

- Strategy should more clearly champion the need for balanced transport investment across the region – Cheshire and Warrington can get overlooked.
- Look to integrate nature based solutions into urban planning – ample opportunities to incorporate urban wildlife habitats into development plans across Cheshire and Warrington. This could also apply to existing buildings, e.g. small sustainable drainage systems in schools, homes, other structures.
- Build in green and blue angles into transport infrastructure planning, e.g. tree planting, green roofs etc. For these areas, C&W could become a national leader.

Organisation specific feedback – Young People Groups from Youth Federation

- Calls to introduce affordable transport schemes for certain age groups, respectively, and improve communications and signposting of transport services.
- Ask for more and enhanced cycle lines – generally used to get to college and day-to-day activities.
- Suggestions to introduce community schemes to enhance quality and cleanliness of place, such as litter picking reward schemes.





Appendices



APPENDIX ONE - LIST OF CONSULTEES

30

Business	Business Representative Groups	Residents, Elected Members and Town and Parish Councils
Agreka Build Aron & Partners Solicitors Balfour Beatty Beech Best Nest Bents	CCSW Strategic Employer Engagement Group	Member Engagement Sessions were held with all three Councils Winter 2024/5. Member briefing notes were circulated to all Members across the three Councils during the consultation inviting them to engage or set up a bespoke consultation session.
Businesses at Warrington Chamber/Wbex “members on tour” session	Chemical Industries Association	Cheshire Association of Local Councils
Circle Leadership Diamond Trucks Energy Projects Plus Evero Energy Farrals Group	Cheshire and Warrington Business Advisory Board (BAB) and sub groups	* A small number of residents with no further affiliation also took part in the consultation. In addition, several of the organisation/business consultees were also residents of either Cheshire East, Cheshire West & Chester or Warrington
Gadbrook Park BID AGM attendees	Cheshire Business Group	
Gryp	Chester Business Club	
INFEX Therapeutics	CITB	
interGen	FSB	
Let's Step In	North West Business Leadership team	
Minerva Secure	NW Aerospace Alliance	
Seetec	South Cheshire Chamber of Commerce	
Scottish Power	Warrington Chamber of Commerce	
Shine Coaching Academy		
Shine Coaching Consultancy		
TPS Consultants		
Trac Precision Solutions		
Trundl		
Think Beyond		

APPENDIX ONE - LIST OF CONSULTEES

Other organisations		
Attendees at Place North West event at Chester Racecourse	Community and Voluntary Services Cheshire East	Rural Strategy Group – main group and Devolution Task and Finish Group
C&W Health Inequalities Group	CW&C UKSPF Partners group	Sci-tech Daresbury
C&W Infrastructure Partnership	DBT Trade and Investment Team	SEETEC (National Careers Service)
Canal and River Trust	Destination Chester	Skills Bootcamp Training Providers
Changing Lives Together	Elected Members	Skills England
Cheshire and Warrington Devolution Priority, Health Inequalities Lead	Ellesmere Port Development Board	Skills for Care
	Groundwork Cheshire	Storyhouse
Cheshire College South and West	Health Innovation North West Coast	Tatton Group
Cheshire Community Action	Into Work Board	The Mersey Forest
Cheshire East Council/Warrington Council/Cheshire West & Chester Council	Live Cheshire	The Pledge
Cheshire Language Academy	Local Nature Partnership Executive Board	Torus Foundation
Cheshire Leaders Board	Magenta Living	TUC North West
Cheshire West Poverty Truth Advisory Board – community inspirers/stakeholders	Marketing Cheshire Board	University of Chester Inclusive Environments Launch event
Cheshire West Voluntary Action	MDA Strategy Group	Weaver Vale Housing Trust
Cheshire Wildlife Trust	National Trust	Workforce and Economic Recovery Group
Chester Heritage and Sustainable Enterprises (CHASE)	Neston Community Youth Centre	Wrexham Council
Chester Sustainability Forum	NHS Cheshire and Merseyside	Youth Federation Youth Group
Chester Zoo	Priestley College	Youth Federation
Citizens Advice Cheshire East	Quarterly Review of the National Career Service delivery C&W	
College Principals Group	Reaseheath College	



APPENDIX TWO - ENGAGEMENT MATRIX

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Stakeholder (open invite) Consultation Sessions

Date and time	Consultation audience	Engagement Type	Venue	No. feedback	No. wider engagement
13.06.25 12-1.30pm	Stakeholders general	Consultation presentation and discussion	Online	11	
16.06.25 6-7.30pm	Stakeholders general	Consultation presentation and discussion	Online	6	
20.06.25 3-4.30pm	Stakeholders general	Consultation presentation and discussion	Online	14	
23.06.25 3.30-5pm	Stakeholders general	Consultation presentation and discussion	The Base, Warrington	8	
26.06.25 12.30-2.00	Stakeholders general	Consultation presentation and discussion	Online	20	
01.07.25 9.30-11	Stakeholders general	Consultation presentation and discussion	Winsford College	13	
02.07.25 2-3.30pm	Stakeholders general	Consultation presentation and discussion	In person, Delamere House, Crewe	7	



APPENDIX TWO - ENGAGEMENT MATRIX

33

Bespoke sessions

Date and time	Consultation audience	Engagement Type	Venue	No. feedback	No. wider engagement
16.05.25	Rural Strategy Group Devolution Task and Finish Group	Consultation presentation and feedback	Online	7	
30.05.25 1-3pm	Leaders Board	Consultation presentation	In person Warrington Council Chamber	15	
30.05.25 11-11.30am	Marketing Cheshire Board Briefing session	Consultation presentation	In person, Nunsmere Hall		8
05.06.25 10am-12pm	MDA Strategy Group	To promo the consultation			8
05.06.25	Place North West event Chester Racecourse	Reference in a wider presentation			200 attendees at event
w/c 9 th June	Elected Members				
09.06.2025	Quarterly review of the National Career Service delivery across Cheshire and Warrington (9 th June)	Reference to consultation events			80 in attendance
10.06.25	Workforce and Economic Recovery Group meeting	Consultation reference and slides/consultation details shared with group			30 on circulation list
11.06.2025	Cheshire College South and West Strategic Employer Engagement Group	Consultation presentation/reference to events			10



APPENDIX TWO - ENGAGEMENT MATRIX

Bespoke sessions

Date and time	Consultation audience	Engagement Type	Venue	No. feedback	No. wider engagement
13.06.25 9.30-11.30am	Warrington Chamber/Wbex - "Members on Tour" session	Consultation presentation	In person at The Base, Warrington	5	
18.06.25 4.30pm	Business Advisory Board	Consultation presentation	Online	20	
19.06.25 11.15-12.15	C&W Health Inequalities Group	Consultation presentation	Online	8	
19.06.25 11am	Local Nature Partnership Executive Board	Consultation presentation		15	
20.06.25 8.30-11am (9-9.25 slot)	Ellesmere Port Development Board	Consultation presentation	Online	15	
23.06.25 11am	Cheshire Business Group	Consultation presentation	Online	10	
25.06.25 10.30-12.30 but a 10 minute slot exact time TBC	CW&C UKSPF Partners meeting	Consultation presentation	In person The BIG Hub, Meridian House, Road One, Winsford Industrial Estate.		30
26.06.25	Independent Training Providers meeting	Consultation presentation			60



APPENDIX TWO - ENGAGEMENT MATRIX

Bespoke sessions

Date and time	Consultation audience	Engagement Type	Venue	No. feedback	No. wider engagement
30.06.25	STEM Symposium at Chester Zoo	SIES with high level description of the strategy, in the context of what our ambitions for future growth in the area are.	In person Chester Zoo		100 teachers and business representatives
01.07.25 10-10.30am	C&W Infrastructure Partnership (community and voluntary sector consortia)	Consultation presentation and feedback. Press release with reference to report has been emailed in advance	Online	8	
01.07.25 3-4pm	Business Advisory Board Net Zero	One to one discussion	Online	1	
02.07.25 12-2.30pm (Philip to present at 12.10 and leave by 1pm latest)	Gadbrook Park BID AGM	Consultation presentation and feedback	In person, Drake House, Gadbrook Park, Rudheath, Northwich CW9 7RA	16	
02.07.25	College Principals meeting	SIES referenced as part of a wider update			7
03.07.2025 2-3.30pm	Cheshire West Poverty Truth Advisory Board	Bespoke session	In person, Ellesmere Port Library	9	
03.07.25	Meeting of employers who work with the Careers Hub and wider Pledge Partnership	Reference to SIES as part of a devolution presentation			20



APPENDIX TWO - ENGAGEMENT MATRIX

Bespoke sessions

Date and time	Consultation audience	Engagement Type	Venue	No. feedback	No. wider engagement
03.07.25	Skills Bootcamp training providers meeting	shared the slides with around 100 of our skills bootcamp training providers.	Unknown	-	100 in attendance
07.07.25 2-4pm	Into Work Board meeting	Consultation update	online	-	25 with an additional 50 on circulation list
08.07.25 4.30-6pm	CHALC bespoke workshop	Consultation presentation and discussion	Online	5	
10.07.25 11-12.30	Destination Chester	Presentation at meeting	In person in Chester	12	
14.07.25 5-6pm	Chester Business Club	Presentation and feedback	online	3	
15.07.25 1-4pm	University of Chester Inclusive Environments Launch event	Discussion/workshop as part of event	University of Chester	30	
15.07.25 10-10.30	One-to-one call with Paula Gill from NW Aerospace Alliance	Consultation feedback discussion	Teams	1	



APPENDIX TWO - ENGAGEMENT MATRIX

Bespoke sessions

Date and time	Consultation audience	Engagement Type	Venue	No. feedback	No. wider engagement
15.07.25 2-3pm	BAB Community and Education Group	Presentation and feedback	online	6	
16.07.25 10.30am	DBT Trade and Investment Team	Presentation and feedback	online	1	
17.07.25	Paul Taylor BAB Infrastructure Group	121 conversation	online	1	
21.07.25 1pm	Youth Federation youth group	Presentation and discussion – bespoke session	online	16	
Unknown	BAB Sectors and Investment Group	121 conversation	online	1	

Note: In terms of the wider engagement number, there will be some duplication.

