

DUTY TO CO-OPERATE

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

BETWEEN

BLACKPOOL COUNCIL,

LANCASHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL,

FYLDE BOROUGH COUNCIL AND

WYRE BOROUGH COUNCIL

August 2013

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1.0 PURPOSE OF THE MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

- 1.1 This Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is between Blackpool Council, Fylde Council, Wyre Council (to be referred to as the Fylde Coast Authorities (FCAs) for the purpose of this MOU) and Lancashire County Council (LCC). It provides for those strategic planning issues which require cross boundary co-operation and collaboration to ensure the requirements of the Government's 'Duty to Cooperate' are met and that the local plans of the FCAs are sustainable, deliverable and found 'sound' at examination. It formalises the ongoing dialogue and co-operation that currently exists between the four authorities.
- 1.2 The MOU will also guide the approach that the FCAs and LCC take with respect to responding to strategic planning applications and nationally significant infrastructure projects.
- 1.3 The following sections of the MOU provide:
 - Context on the Government's requirement regarding the Duty to Cooperate;
 - Background on the Fylde Coast Peninsula and its geographical and economic characteristics;
 - Cross Boundary Issues - highlighting strategic areas of agreement, including existing co-operation and collaboration between the FCAs and LCC and areas for continued and future co-operation, to fulfil the Duty to Co-operate;
 - Governance arrangements.

2.0 CONTEXT

- 2.1 The Government has made some significant changes to the planning system that will affect the responsibilities of all local planning authorities. The intention of the changes is to make the planning system one that better supports sustainable economic growth and jobs, underpinned with the principles of localism, with less 'top-down' prescription and more 'bottom up' involvement.
- 2.2 The changes were introduced through the Localism Act which received Royal Assent on 15 November 2011. A key provision of the Act is the abolition of Regional Spatial Strategies, the consequences of which means that local authorities are now responsible for their own strategic planning. The North West Regional Strategy was revoked on 20 May 2013.
- 2.3 With the revocation of Regional Spatial Strategies, to ensure that sensible planning for issues which extend beyond a local authority boundary still happen, the Government has introduced through the Localism Act and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) a 'Duty to Co-operate' on strategic planning issues.

- 2.4 The Duty to Co-operate applies to all local planning authorities, County Councils and a number of other public bodies, in consultation with Local Nature Partnerships and Local Enterprise Partnerships in particular. It requires working with neighbouring authorities and other bodies on strategic priorities and includes collaborating on evidence critical to understanding the needs of local areas and the wider economic and housing market areas.
- 2.5 Strategic cross-boundary needs should be considered in an authority's local plan and authorities will need to demonstrate that they have successfully co-operated with other bodies on cross-boundary issues. If this is not achieved the Government has indicated that authorities run the risk of their Local Plans being found 'unsound' at Examination.
- 2.6 In particular, the new duty:
- relates to sustainable development or use of land that would have a significant impact on at least two local planning areas or on a planning matter that falls within the remit of a county council;
 - requires that councils set out planning policies to address such issues;
 - requires that councils and other bodies engage constructively, actively and on an ongoing basis to develop strategic policies in the preparation of local plan documents and activities that can reasonably be considered to prepare the way for such documents;
 - requires councils to consider joint approaches to plan-making.
- 2.7 Paragraphs 178 -181 of the NPPF give further guidance on 'planning strategically across local boundaries' and highlights the importance of joint working to meet development requirements that cannot be wholly met within a single local planning area, through either joint planning policies or informal strategies such as infrastructure and investment plans.

3.0 THE FYLDE COAST PENINSULA – SUB REGIONAL FUNCTIONALITY

- 3.1 The Fylde Coast sub-region encompasses the area covered by the unitary authority of Blackpool Council and the two-tier area covered by Lancashire County Council and the district councils of Fylde and Wyre. The area stretches from the Ribble Estuary in the south to Morecambe Bay in the north and the Forest of Bowland moorlands in the east. The area covers 384 sq km and is home to 327,400 residents.
- 3.2 The Fylde Coast sub-region demonstrates a high level of self containment in terms of housing markets, travel to work patterns and economic functionality.
- 3.3 The Fylde Coast housing market area is broadly determined by patterns of local migration and travel to work patterns. There are strong local connections within that part of the Fylde Coast housing market area comprising Blackpool and west Fylde and Wyre. The remaining areas of Wyre relate to a wider rural housing market and eastern Fylde relates more strongly to Preston.

- 3.4 The economic functionality of the Fylde Coast is apparent through the strong travel to work patterns and employment with a shared tourism and cultural offer; regionally and nationally significant advanced manufacturing (BAE Systems at Warton and nuclear processing at Westinghouse, Springfields); the Department for Work and Pensions; and a shared infrastructure including Blackpool International Airport, coastal tramway and strategic highway and rail networks.
- 3.5 This economic coherence was reflected in the establishment of the Multi Area Agreement in April 2009 and the Blackpool, Fylde and Wyre Economic Development Company in April 2010 (rebranded the Blackpool Bay Company in 2011), to support local authority partnership working, co-ordinate and drive forward shared objectives and deliver a co-ordinated programme of capital investment.

4.0 CROSS BOUNDARY ISSUES

Context

- 4.1 Paragraph 156 of the NPPF sets out strategic issues where co-operation might be appropriate including:
- the homes and jobs needed in the area;
 - the provision of retail, leisure and other commercial development;
 - the provision of infrastructure for transport, telecommunications, waste management, water supply, wastewater, flood risk and coastal change management, and the provision of minerals and energy (including heat);
 - the provision of health, security, community and cultural infrastructure and other local facilities; and
 - climate change mitigation and adaptation, conservation and enhancement of the natural and historic environment, including landscape/habitats and the importance of European sites.
- 4.2 The priority given to these issues will depend on local circumstances and strategic approaches may not be required in every situation.
- 4.3 Working together on strategic planning issues is not new to the FCAs and LCC. Engagement on issues of common concern with respect to housing, employment land and transport infrastructure have been ongoing for many years.
- 4.4 Currently, the spatial planning policies of the FCAs are being reviewed through the development of local plans. Whilst the Duty to Co-operate proposes that neighbouring authorities should consider joint approaches to plan making, the authorities have decided to develop separate Local Plans, albeit closely aligned, due to the different stages of the local plan process at which each authority finds itself and having regard to the unitary status of Blackpool Council.
- 4.5 To undertake a joint local plan would further delay the adoption of an up to date plan for each authority. The coalition government has advised local planning authorities to ensure that they get up to date local plans in place as soon as possible. Without an up to date plan, development decisions will be made on the basis of the

NPPF, with the presumption being ‘yes’ to sustainable development unless ‘any adverse impacts would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole; or specific policies in the Framework indicate development should be restricted’. This could result in development being approved which does not have the support of the authorities.

- 4.6 Lancashire County Council (LCC) is responsible for the delivery of key infrastructure and services within Fylde and Wyre districts including the delivery of the Local Transport Plan and highways infrastructure, as well as education and social care provision and new responsibilities relating to flood risk and health. This also involves working with Blackpool at a strategic level to ensure a co-ordinated approach to infrastructure and service delivery. LCC’s involvement is therefore critical in the development and delivery of the FCAs’ local plans.
- 4.7 With respect to waste management and the provision of minerals, LCC and Blackpool Council as minerals and waste authorities, have a long standing relationship of working together in preparing and monitoring the Joint Minerals and Waste Local Plan for Lancashire.
- 4.8 The FCAs and LCC acknowledge that addressing cross-boundary issues is essential if sustainable development is to be delivered at a local level and economic growth and social and environmental well being for the sub-region is to be achieved. Those strategic issues which are considered to need cross boundary co-operation are set out below. The ‘Key Issues’ which are highlighted at the end of each section are not exclusive. The Duty to Co-operate is an ongoing process, as issues and the policy approach are agreed other issues will arise which will need to be addressed. This memorandum will be reviewed and updated as appropriate in accordance with the governance arrangements set out at the end of this document.

Housing

- 4.9 The housing offer on the Fylde Coast has an important role in supporting the sub-region’s economy. The Fylde Coast housing market area (HMA) as a whole offers a wide range of housing and neighbourhoods, including some very attractive areas, but there are also some major concentrations of poor quality homes in very unattractive neighbourhoods. These neighbourhoods contribute to the underperformance of the local economy, whilst in the attractive areas it is difficult for local people on modest incomes to be able to afford to buy or rent a suitable home.
- 4.10 To achieve a more balanced housing market the FCAs have undertaken a joint approach to addressing housing issues unrestricted by local authority boundaries. This has included appointing a Fylde Coast Housing Strategy Manager in October 2007 to develop and manage the sub-regional approach to housing and inform policy development.
- 4.11 Various joint housing studies have been produced to inform policy development, including the need for new and affordable housing:
 - the **Fylde Coast Housing Market Assessment Study 2008** - to provide a robust evidence base to inform the policy approach to be adopted in the individual local

plans. This study is a key document in the Local Plan evidence base and is currently being reviewed to ensure it is appropriate for examination;

- the **Fylde Coast Housing Strategy 2009** - to provide a common understanding, vision and set of priorities for housing across the Fylde Coast housing market area to provide a wider understanding of issues and priorities that enables public and private sector partners to develop their work in a clear strategic context.

4.12 The FCAs have also produced, through the Blackpool Fylde and Wyre Economic Development Company and in association with Lancashire County Council and the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), a Local Investment Plan (LIP) to help make clear the local objectives and delivery priorities for capital investment in housing and regeneration in support of economic improvement across the Fylde Coast area over the 2011 – 2014 period.

4.13 In considering housing need and requirements, the FCAs also need to address the accommodation requirements of Gypsies, Travellers and travelling showpeople. A Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment was undertaken by the University of Salford, commissioned by the North West Regional Assembly on behalf of the Lancashire authorities and published in May 2007. This study was in response to obligations and requirements to resolve some of the long standing accommodation issues for members of the Gypsy and Traveller communities.

4.14 Recently both Fylde and Wyre Councils have come under pressure with respect to unauthorised Travellers encampments and importantly the NPPF now requires all local authorities to provide for a 5 year supply of sites where a need is identified. With this requirement the FCAs will need to agree the evidence base and ensure that policies contained within their respective Local Plans address the accommodation needs of Gypsies, Travellers and travelling Showpeople and that the policy approach by each authority is appropriate and complementary across the sub-region.

KEY ISSUES

To work together to:

- **agree the housing provision and strategy approach across the Fylde Coast sub-region;**
- **establish a more balanced and wider housing choice in the HMA, with a focus on family and affordable housing needs which will assist economic uplift in line with priorities established in the Fylde Coast Local Investment Plan;**
- **promote a strong and distinctive sustainable urban extension closely integrated with the surrounding areas on land on the Fylde/Blackpool boundary around Junction 4 of the M55;**

- **provide for the accommodation needs of Gypsy, Traveller and travelling Showpeople communities across the Fylde Coast sub-region;**
- **agree the policy approach for lands in Blackpool/Fylde comprising Marton Moss;**
- **agree complementary/joint approaches to the delivery and accessibility of affordable housing.**

Economy – Business and Industrial Development

- 4.15 There are strong links between the FCAs in terms of travel to work patterns and employment, which warrant the joint consideration of future employment development for the sub region.
- 4.16 The size of the Fylde Coast economy is around £4.8bn – some 2% of the North West economy but productivity per head significantly underperforms the Lancashire and England average, reflecting the predominance of the tourism sector. However the sub-region does contain significant specialism in advanced manufacturing in Fylde - aerospace at Warton, identified in 2012 as a Local Enterprise Zone and nuclear processing at Springfields, accounting for almost half the industrial business lands in the sub-region.
- 4.17 Other strengths exist in food processing, environmental technologies and chemicals. The chemical industry, environmental technology including Global Renewables at Thornton and fish processing associated with Fleetwood docks contribute significantly to employment in Wyre. The public sector and government agencies are also substantial providers of jobs in the sub-region along with insurance providers Axa and Aegon in Fylde.
- 4.18 Decline in GVA and employment has been a shared experience across the FCAs. However they recognise the need to strengthen, promote and enhance the tourism offer whilst at the same time further develop the other key sectors referred to above, with a need to persuade existing businesses in these sectors to grow and to provide the right conditions for other firms to invest.
- 4.19 Crucial to this is the provision of quality development sites to support new business growth. The peripheral location of the Fylde Coast within the North West makes it critical to provide a portfolio of sustainable employment opportunities to improve economic performance. The FCAs have recognised the need to capitalise on the particular assets, strengths and opportunities of the sub region as a whole. In 2010 a Fylde Sub Region Employment Land Review was agreed by Blackpool, Fylde and Wyre which sets out the current position in terms of employment land availability. Updating this in 2012 Fylde Borough Council commissioned consultants to carry out an Employment Land Study and Wyre Council undertook an Employment Land and Commercial Leisure Study. Blackpool Council is reviewing its employment land evidence base in 2013. An additional employment land appraisal study has been

jointly commissioned in 2013 by Fylde and Blackpool authorities relating to land on the Fylde/Blackpool boundary around Whitehills and Junction 4 of the M55 and specific sites in the south of Blackpool.

- 4.20 A Fylde Coast Economic Strategy is also being developed by the Economic Development Company to support the coordinated development of future employment across the Fylde Coast Sub-Region.

KEY ISSUES:

- to undertake joint consideration of future employment development for the sub-region in response to the strong links between the FCAs in terms of travel to work patterns and employment;
- To work together to agree the sub-regional employment land requirement;
- To work together to agree the strategic priorities for land around junction 4 of the M55 – Fylde/Blackpool boundary with the aim of attracting major new economic development to help strengthen the Fylde Coast economy;
- To work together to promote the sustainable development of the following key strategic sites/corridors:

Blackpool Airport corridor – Blackpool/Fylde boundary;

The Enterprise Zone at BAE Systems – Warton – Fylde;

Land at Thornton – Cleveleys (Hillhouse) – Wyre;

Central Business District – Blackpool Town Centre;

Whyndyke Farm – Fylde/Blackpool boundary A6 Corridor/Garstang – Wyre

Retail

- 4.21 Retailing is a key strategic issue over which the FCAs collaborate and in September 2007 White Young Green were commissioned by Blackpool, Fylde and Wyre authorities to carry out the first sub-regional retail study for the Fylde Coast. The study, which was published in June 2008, was undertaken to provide an in-depth analysis of the retail provision within the main centres of the Fylde Coast Sub-Region, including an assessment of the extent to which the centres were meeting the retail needs of the local population and the role of the local shopping network and the sub-regional shopping hierarchy.

- 4.22 This 2008 study was recently updated by Roger Tym and Partners – the ‘Joint Fylde Coast Retail Study 2011’ in order to reflect significant changes since the first study. These include major new developments, in particular the extension to the Houndshill Shopping Centre in Blackpool; economic changes; forecast retail expenditure growth rates; and changes in national guidance with respect to the publication of PPS4 (December 2009) and the test of soundness for Local Plan Documents in PPS12 (June 2008), now superseded by the NPPF.
- 4.23 The 2011 study provides evidence to inform the local plans of the FCAs with respect to:
- a. the retail role of towns within the Fylde Coast and their position in the retail hierarchy;
 - b. potential future development needs for each authority; and
 - c. definition of the town centres within the Sub-Region which are Blackpool, Lytham, St Annes, Kirkham, Fleetwood, Cleveleys, Poulton-le-Fylde and Garstang.
- 4.24 The 2011 study has been endorsed by the Executives of each of the FCAs to be used as appropriate evidence base on which to inform policy in their local plans.

Key recommendations in the Fylde Coast Retail Study 2011 that have strategic implications:

- that Blackpool, Fylde and Wyre authorities pursue a strategy of increasing the amount of comparison goods expenditure that is spent in the sub-region, from a current level of 75% of total expenditure to 78% in 2021 and 80% in 2026;
- each authorities’ share of the sub-regional floorspace total reflects its current share of retained comparison goods;
- that the role of Blackpool town centre as a strong sub-regional centre, should be restored thereby reducing the unsustainable level of expenditure flowing to out of centre locations within the catchment area, and to competing destinations outside the catchment area;
- restoring Blackpool’s role as a strong sub-regional centre is at the expense of out of centre locations not at the expense of other centres in the Fylde coast sub-region;
- a presumption that there is no need to plan for a net gain in floorspace in out of centre locations. The FCAs should plan to accommodate the indicative levels of floorspace identified in the study on sites located within and on the edge of the identified town centres;
- there is no overall quantitative need for further convenience goods floorspace in the sub region for the period up to 2021.

KEY ISSUES

- **The need to work together to provide evidence to effectively resist retail applications which are not in accordance with the development strategies of the FCAs.**

Transport

- 4.25 Developing a more sustainable and efficient transport network across the Fylde Coast is vital for our economic prosperity and our social and environmental well being. Our sub-regional transport infrastructure needs to support our economic priorities and effectively integrate with future development locations to reduce the need to travel, making it safe and easy for Fylde Coast residents to access jobs and services; for visitors to access and enjoy the tourism and cultural offer; and for business to be attracted to invest in the sub-region.
- 4.26 The transport infrastructure of the Fylde Coast comprises road, rail, tram, air and port links supported by a comprehensive network of footpaths, canal, cycle routes and bridleways.
- 4.27 At the heart of the transport network is the M55 linking Blackpool with the M6 north of Preston. This is supported by the principal road network including the key routes of the A583 (Preston-Kirkham- Blackpool), the A584 (Freckleton/Warton – Lytham St. Annes-Blackpool) and the A585(T) (M55 Junction 3 to Fleetwood).
- 4.28 Main line rail connects Blackpool North via Poulton-le-Fylde and Kirkham with Preston and the South Fylde line links Lytham St. Annes via Kirkham to Preston and Blackpool South. Network Rail’s project to electrify the line from Blackpool north to Preston and on to Manchester will enhance rail services to London and other major UK cities and increase the potential for modal shift to relieve the road network.
- 4.29 The Blackpool Tramway system runs from Starr Gate in south Blackpool to north Fleetwood some 11 miles along the coast, assisting north-south movements. The tramway has seen significant investment with a comprehensive upgrade completed in 2012, providing a modern accessible transport system. In addition through Sintropher funding, work has been undertaken to assess the development of tram services linked to the national rail network. The Blackpool North Tram Extension scheme option proposes a 700m extension from the promenade at North Pier along Talbot Road to Blackpool North rail station. The intention is to create an interchange between the tram and rail, increasing accessibility and connectivity between destinations along the Fylde Coast tramway and the national rail network.
- 4.30 The Fylde Coast also benefits from the presence of an international gateway at Blackpool International Airport located on the Fylde/Blackpool boundary operating regular charter and scheduled flights throughout the UK and to various European destinations. In addition, whilst the Port of Fleetwood ceased ferry services in 2010 it maintains its capacity for ferry RORO and has potential as a maintenance base for the off-shore energy sector, including wind turbines.
- 4.31 Whilst the transport infrastructure for the Fylde Coast could be considered as comprehensive there are major strategic challenges which need to be addressed to improve our economic competitiveness. These include:
- The A585(T) corridor currently suffers from severe congestion at ten junctions. At peak times 70% of all travel to work trips within the Fylde Coast are made by car. This causes serious problems of congestion and traffic noise intensity in

residential areas. The problem of access and connectivity is exacerbated by growing demands of the industrial area of Thornton;

- Congestion on the A585 between the M55 and Fleetwood could undermine future economic development activity of the Fleetwood -Thornton Development Corridor (to which the adopted Fleetwood-Thornton Area Action Plan, is applicable);
- In the south access to the BAE Systems site at Warton needs to be improved to allow redundant brownfield land to be suitable for future development. Such connectivity issues act as a barrier to communities accessing employment. In response to this the Central Lancashire Highways and Transport Masterplan proposes a Western Distributor road around Preston linked to a new Junction 2 on the M55 to accommodate significant housing development in northwest Preston and improve access to the Enterprise Zone site.
- Public transport connectivity within the Fylde Coast area and links outside are poor. Rail links between some of the key urbanised areas and market towns of Wyre and Fylde and the wider North West are poor. The St Annes connection to Preston, for example, is restricted by a single track line with trains only running once every hour in both directions. The propensity of those in the South Fylde rail line catchment area to use rail is well below the national average. There is a real need to increase service frequency and reliability, meeting transport demand from Lytham St Annes and supporting regeneration in Blackpool South. In addition, the tram system is disconnected from the rail infrastructure;
- Blackpool International Airport is a considerable sub-regional asset and there is a need to ensure that the economic potential of this asset is realised. Balfour Beatty, the major stakeholder in the airport is currently developing a new aeronautical masterplan which will set out the growth capacity of the airport and replace the currently adopted 2007 plan. The FCAs therefore need to work closely with Balfour Beatty to ensure the masterplan delivers an outcome that sustains the airport as a major economic asset. Currently public transport access to the airport is relatively poor. There is no rail station and at present no buses directly serve the site. If the airport is to truly appeal as a sub-regional entity, there needs to be investment in transport infrastructure to the site from not only across the Fylde Coast but also from places such as Preston.

4.32 The Lancashire and Blackpool Local Transport Plans will play an important part in addressing these strategic challenges. As part of the Lancashire LTP, the Fylde and Wyre Highways and Transport Master Plan will consider many of these challenges and how they can be met. Close coordination with the Blackpool LTP will be necessary to ensure the successful delivery of the Master Plan.

KEY ISSUES:

- **Continue to support improvements to the A585(T) to relieve short to medium term road congestion along that route and within the Blackpool urban area and improve the transport of freight.**
- **Continue to safeguard land for the M55 to Norcross Link to relieve longer term road congestion.**
- **Support the sustainable development of Blackpool Airport as an economic priority for the Fylde Coast sub region including improvements to surface access by public transport.**
- **Continue to support improvements to Preston Station and improved accessibility to the Fylde Coast towns.**
- **Continue to safeguard the Poulton to Fleetwood rail line to support the Fleetwood -Thornton Development Corridor and the Port of Fleetwood.**
- **Support further improvements to the tram network to assist north-south movements along the coast from Fleetwood to Starr Gate; to support links to Talbot Gateway and Blackpool International Airport; and to integrate the tramway with other modes of transport including the potential of the South Fylde rail link.**
- **To continue to support the M55 to Heyhouses road link.**
- **Support proposals in the Central Lancashire Highways and Transport Masterplan that will have a material benefit for the Fylde Coast;**
- **Seek a common approach to parking standards across the sub-region.**

Surface Water Drainage and Waste Water

- 4.33 Water infrastructure capacity is a key cross boundary issue which will directly affect the delivery of built development across the Fylde Coast. The main issues relate to surface water drainage; the capacity of the existing sewage network and the need to ensure that proposals for new development have no adverse effect on the bathing water quality along the Fylde Coast. This is a vital issue as the quality of our beaches and bathing water underpins our tourism offer and our future economic prosperity.
- 4.34 Recent studies have been undertaken to inform the evidence base including the Central Lancashire and Blackpool Outline Water Cycle Study completed in April 2011. Whilst this study covers those authorities in Central Lancashire and Blackpool which were included in the Growth Point area, the study provides an assessment of the flood risk planning data, foul drainage, surface water management water resources and infrastructure issues including information on the wider Fylde Coast area. In addition, as part of its role as a Lead Local Flood Authority, Blackpool is currently producing a Blackpool Surface Water Management Plan researching and aligning all data, information and legislation, in liaison with United Utilities and the Environment Agency on critical capacity issues, with a focus on existing assets, identifying flood risks, mitigation measures, and developing an on-going implementation plan. It includes wider consideration of cross-boundary surface water infrastructure and drainage issues along the coastal belt in order to generate and develop sustainable drainage measures. Lancashire County Council is the Lead

Flood Authority for the Fylde and Wyre area and is currently producing the Lancashire Flood Risk Management strategy which will also include the Blackpool area. As part of this work the County Council is working closely with the FCAs to identify and address key flood risk management issues.

- 4.35 From the evidence base it is clear that the main cross boundary issues relate to network capacity issues which are contributing to surface water flooding and spills of untreated waste water into the Irish Sea, putting at risk Fylde Coast bathing waters under the new bathing water legislation due to come into force in 2015.
- 4.36 It is therefore imperative that the FCAs and LCC agree a supportive approach to surface water and waste water management to ensure that the economic prosperity of the Fylde Coast is not compromised and that the future development requirements of the sub-region can be accommodated. This includes the approach to ad hoc development not compromising the delivery of required infrastructure improvements to address the capacity issues of the Fylde Coast.
- 4.37 In recognition of the issues surrounding water management a Fylde Peninsula Water Management Group was set up in April 2011. This group is a partnership comprising the Environment Agency, United Utilities, the FCAs, Lancashire County Council and Keep Britain Tidy. The purpose of the group is to provide a sustainable and integrated approach to the management of coastal protection; water quality (including bathing waters), surface water drainage (including flooding) and development.

KEY ISSUES

- **To agree a common approach to surface water and waste water management, including the approach adopted to ad hoc development, to ensure the delivery of required infrastructure improvements needed to accommodate future development requirements is not compromised.**

Natural Environment

- 4.38 The Fylde Coast is characterised by a wide variety of natural environmental assets. There is a range of overlapping designations including sites of international and local habitat importance. Five European sites are focussed upon two areas of Morecambe Bay (including Ramsar, Special Protection Areas and Special Areas of Conservation) and the Ribble and Alt Estuaries (Ramsar and Special Protection Area). In addition, there is a candidate Special Area of Conservation offshore reaching from Blackpool to Cleveleys (Shell Flat and Lune Deep). These designations seek to conserve natural habitats and/or species, important wetlands and birds. The nationally designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) include Morecambe Bay, the River Wyre and part of the Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. There are also locally important Biological Heritage Sites (BHSs) and pockets of ancient

woodland. In addition, the Morecambe Bay Nature Improvement Area (NIA) was one of twelve designated in 2012, with the aim of improving the landscape for nature, the community and visitors. There are also proposals for the designation of two Marine Conservation Areas covering the Wyre-Lune and Fylde Offshore areas.

- 4.39 The sub-region is also characterised by relatively small but strategically important areas of Green Belt between i) Fleetwood, Thornton and Cleveleys ii) Thornton, Cleveleys, Poulton-le-Fylde and Blackpool iii) Blackpool and St Annes and iv) Lytham and Warton. Any substantial strategic changes to Green Belt boundaries would need to be undertaken as part of a holistic sub-regional review and there is not currently any evidence of a requirement for such a review to take place.
- 4.40 A core planning principle of the National Planning Policy Framework relates to conserving and enhancing the natural environment. This should be considered at a strategic level as networks of biodiversity and green infrastructure cross administrative boundaries and development in one area can have a potential effect upon natural assets in another. Green infrastructure is defined by Natural England as a strategically planned and delivered network comprising the broadest range of high quality green spaces and other environmental features.
- 4.41 Under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive and Regulation 61 of the Habitats Regulations an assessment is required where a plan or project may give rise to significant effects upon a European designated site as outlined above. This will include each authority's local plan, as well as Local Transport Plans, the plans and projects of infrastructure providers and planning applications such as for sea defences or renewable energy. There are several stages in a Habitats Assessment with initial scoping followed by Appropriate Assessment, where the project or plan would have a significant effect. Assessment requires the effects of plans and projects of neighbouring authorities to be considered, so requiring co-ordination and sharing of information at the Fylde sub-regional level.

KEY ISSUES

To work together to:

- **conserve and enhance natural habitats, biodiversity and landscapes of importance; and**
- **develop a strategic network of green infrastructure.**

5.0 GOVERNANCE

- 5.1 The Duty to Co-operate requires that councils engage constructively, actively and on an ongoing basis. There is therefore a need to establish governance arrangements and protocols to ensure that the requirements of the Duty to Co-operate are met and that the FCAs can demonstrate at examination of their Local Plans that appropriate and constructive co-operation has taken place to ensure sustainable outcomes to strategic planning issues.
- 5.2 It is initially proposed that:
- **a Joint Member and Officer Advisory Steering Group is established to oversee the work under the Duty to Co-operate. The group will be chaired on a rotational basis by a Member of one of the four authorities. The Council Leaders and Chief Executives will have the remit to appoint up to two appropriate representative to act on their behalf as necessary. A key remit of the group will be to resolve difficult and sensitive issues, reaching common understandings;**
 - **an Officer Working Group will provide support to all joint working arrangements as appropriate and on request.**
 - **Governance meetings as detailed above will take place as and when required. All meetings will be minuted to provide ongoing evidence of co-operation;**
 - **Under the Duty to Co-operate the FCAs and LCC will commit to constructive engagement, good communications and transparency, seeking innovative sustainable solutions to strategic issues to ensure the environmental, social and economic prosperity of the Fylde Coast sub-region;**
 - **Where appropriate and necessary a joint evidence base will be developed to inform the policy development on strategic issues.**