

# Merseyside Rural Economy Action Plan (MREAP)



# What is MREAP?

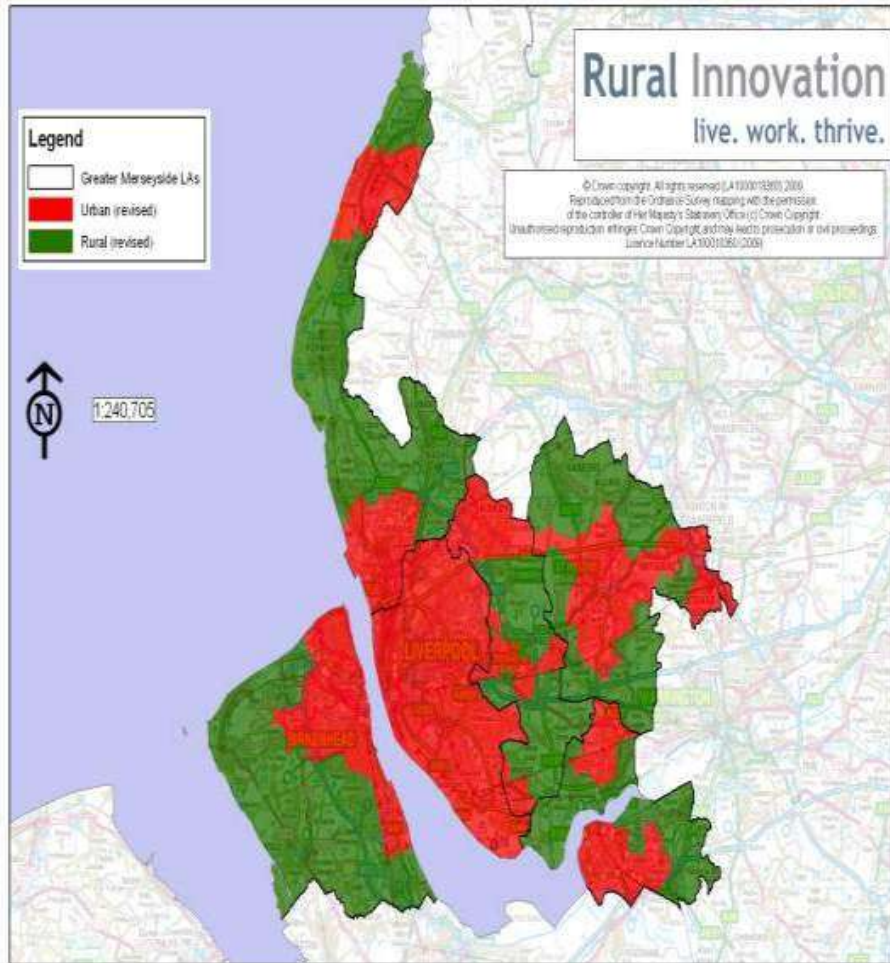
Strategy & programme to unlock the economic potential of rural Merseyside - the area we call the Green Zone

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

## **MREAP = Merseyside Rural Economy Action Plan**

- Led by St. Helens Council as designated LCR rural ED lead
- + Halton, Knowsley, Sefton & Wirral Councils, TMP, Mersey Rural Leader, Mersey Forest
- Rural Economic Development Officer co-funded by St. Helens & NWDA

# What is the “Green Zone”?



# What is the “Green Zone”?

- 630km<sup>2</sup> designated rural of 1087km<sup>2</sup> total LCR (58%)
- Extensive green belt coverage
- Only 230km<sup>2</sup> of this agricultural (36%)
- 600 farms/horticultural businesses managing more than 20,000 hectares
- Rural 21% of total LCR employment
- Includes major employment sites - Science Park, Hospitals
- 22% of total LCR businesses
- High landscape value - especially coast
- Critical to the LCR (golf) coast & countryside tourism offer
- Higher skills levels & GVA per worker than urban Merseyside
- Contributed £4.6 billion to LCR economy in 2006 = 22% of GVA

# SWOT Analysis

## Strengths

- Existing economic contribution - value & volume
- Major employment sites
- Thriving small commercial centres
- Land quality (20% grade A land)
- Statutory Green Belt designation
- Coast & environmental assets
- Quality of life

## Weaknesses

- No coordinated governance or vision
- Lack of rural & urban market connectivity
- Limited functionality of smaller settlements
- Environmental impact of labour movement
- Low demand for agricultural skills training
- Non-recognition of rural ED opportunities

## Opportunities

- Attractor for knowledge-based investment
- Transition to a low carbon economy
- Round 3 wind energy
- New/developing visitor economy products
- Major golf championships
- ERDF, NWDA, RDPE funding (very short-term)
- New Local Economic Partnership
- New government policies
- More skilled & entrepreneurial people

## Threats

- Short-term competitiveness impact of actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions
- New approach to land management needed
- Need for new skills
- Need to reduce personal mobility
- Limited access to private sector investment
- Massive reductions in future public spending
- Lack of capacity -> ongoing focus on urban LCR

## Key things that the Green Zone must do to support sustainable economic growth across Merseyside.

- Maximise the sustainable productive capacity of our farmland, providing the highest quality raw materials for the food, drink & renewable energy sectors
- Develop our businesses, increasing their productivity, creating employment, supporting the establishment of new businesses, & attracting entrepreneurs
- Develop our communities to ensure that they are functionally sustainable
- Maximise the biodiversity that it supports, providing the best possible natural environment & green infrastructure for residents, businesses & visitors
- Ensure that it provides “ecosystem services” to urban neighbourhoods including clean air, water flood alleviation & waste management.

# From Strategy to Delivery

## MREAP Strategic Themes

1. Managing Land to Deliver Value to All
2. Maximising Productivity & Competitive Business
3. Developing Rural Destinations
4. Planning for Multi-Functional Settlements
5. Creating Skills Needed for Transformation

## Love....

Our Productive Land

Our Thriving Businesses

Our Tourism Destinations

Our Sustainable Communities

Our Renewable Energy

-> direct contribution to 4 LCR LEP priority transformational sectors:  
Visitor Economy - Low Carbon Economy - Superport/Logistics - Knowledge Economy

# Love our productive land . . .

LCR's land produces food & fuel, stores carbon, & provides flood defences

## Assets:

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

## Issues & Opportunities:

- Integrated land management to increase outputs & broaden benefits from rural land
- Greening projects to encourage inward investment & migration of entrepreneurs
- Connect food producers & consumers, & invest in processing capacity to increase food security & reduce food miles
- Need to protect habitats & biodiversity.



Harvesting in Billinge

# Love thriving businesses

Businesses based in the Green Zone contribute £4.6 billion to the LCR's GVA = 22%

## Assets:

- 1/3 LCR businesses based in the Green Zone, generating 22% of both employment & economic wealth
- Key employment sites & workspace e.g. Daresbury & Stanley Grange
- Highly skilled/educated local population; good schools, HE & FE.

## Issues/Opportunities:

- LCR needs more businesses, jobs & productivity to achieve its potential
- Support required for SMEs to develop commercial applications for the low carbon economy
- More, recognised rural education & training needed to create new jobs
- Planning policy/procedures cited by SMEs as a significant growth barrier.



Daresbury Innovation Centre, Halton

# Love green energy

## Merseyside's Green Zone: a natural power station

### Assets:

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

### Issues/opportunities:

- Round 3 wind farm assembly/supply chain opportunities
- Anaerobic digestion - conversion of farm waste to energy a major government focus
- LCR imports most biomass -> locally produced renewable fuels & supply chains
- High/prohibitive SME capital outlay costs for green energy equipment investment
- Funding often focused on communities owning green energy projects & outputs.



Wind farm off the Sefton coast

# Love our tourism destinations

LCR's coast & countryside is home to stunning scenery, attractions & events

## Assets:

- England's Golf Coast; The Open at Royal Birkdale & Royal Liverpool
- Miles of accessible coast & seaside in Sefton & Wirral
- Iconic public art: *Dream & Another Place*
- Major attractions, e.g. Lady Lever Art Gallery, Knowsley Safari Park
- Food offer - festivals, farmers markets, award-winning chefs, cafes, restaurants.

## Issues/Opportunities:

- Connect rural offer & urban markets
- Make rural areas more accessible/navigable
- Enhance/develop existing products
- Develop new products, to complement the city offer & differentiate from competitors
- Greater VE emphasis on local food
- Need for more good quality accommodation



Houghwood golf course, Billinge Hill

# Love living sustainably

The Green Zone is a place where people & families can live, work and thrive

## Assets:

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

## Issues/Opportunities:

- Many LCR rural settlements not achieving their economic potential
- 70% of economically active residents commute beyond the Green Zone to work
- Car is the dominant mode of travel to work
- Substantial greenhouse gas emission reductions required re. people/goods/services.
- limited availability of rural workspace



Antony Gormley's *Another Place*, Crosby

# Next Steps

Making it happen...

- Finalise LCR Rural Steering Group & ToR
- Get individual LA buy-in/approvals to MREAP
- Print, launch, publicise MREAP
- Support ongoing project developments & delivery e.g. *Dream legacy*
- Support new project development
- Assist with securing funding
- Support to SMEs & stakeholders
- Dovetail with emerging LEP agenda



Tigers at Knowsley Safari Park

# Love our productive land . . .

LCR's land produces food & fuel, stores carbon, & provides flood defences

## MREAP Action Programme:

- **Future Land Use for Merseyside** - assess & plan for optimum land use food / fuel / biodiversity / access / flood alleviation
- **Planting for economic growth** - greening areas to attract investment & improve quality of place.
- **Supporting Merseyside** - supporting local farms to move up the food & fuel supply chain
- **Taste Merseyside** - bring local food to consumers via retail & hospitality, farmers markets, farm shops
- **Liverpool City Region Ecological Framework** - an interactive mapping tool for landowners & developers to protect local wildlife & ecology



Claremont Farm, Bebington

# Love thriving businesses

Businesses based in the Green Zone contribute £4.6 billion to the LCR's GVA = 22%

## MREAP Action Programme:

- **Rural Business Support:** provision of diverse support to rural businesses
- **Low Carbon Logistics:** training in carbon savings for haulage/logistics cos.
- **Rural Trade School & Urban Farm:** an interactive farm-based learning centre
- Facilitate private sector capital investment, e.g. **Stanley Grange Workspace** buildings improvements
- **Rural Planning Support:** dedicated planning support to rural SMEs
- **Melling House Farm** - renovating listed buildings for sustainable farming purposes
- **Builderscrap** - a dedicated website to reuse surplus building materials & provide SROI calculations & a carbon calculator.



The Woodlands Business Park, Newton-le Willows

# Love green energy

Merseyside's Green Zone: a natural power station

## MREAP Action Programme:

- **More from Trees & Biomass Energy** - develop scale of supply & processing capacity to serve increasing local demand for biomass feedstock
- **St.Helens Future Farming Studies** - investigate heat & energy recovery for vertical farming, & see how waste management can create energy
- Maximise the benefit of feed-in tariffs to support development of local market for renewables - e.g. **Thornton Hall Hotel green energy project & Knowsley Safari Park energy development plan**
- Enable community-owned renewable energy schemes e.g. **Port Sunlight Village heat & power from biomass.**



PS Johnson & Sons Farm, Heswall

# Love our tourism destinations

LCR's coast & countryside is home to stunning scenery, attractions & events

## MREAP Action Programme:

- Develop *Dream* as a visitor destination per se & a gateway/catalyst for the wider forest park - *Dream Legacy & Bold Forest Park*
- Knowsley Modern Pentathlon & Equestrian Sports Centre - an international standard polo & pentathlon centre.
- Wirral International Visitor Centre - capitalise upon the annual 200,000 visitors to Wirral Country Park
- Lewis Carroll Interpretation Centre Daresbury - new visitor attraction
- New/improved accommodation & facilities at Mere Brook House, Thornton Hall & Spa, Mersey Valley Golf Club.



The landmark *Dream* sculpture, Sutton Manor

# Love living sustainably

The Green Zone is a place where people & families can live, work & thrive

## MREAP Action Programme

- Delivering improvements to rural transport via **Station and Bus Stop Improvements**
- **Rural Cycle Signage** provide cycle signage within St. Helens & Knowsley to help encourage cycling & raise awareness of cycling routes.
- Demonstrating community scale application of renewable heat & power at **Port Sunlight**
- Developing exemplar eco homes via **Helena Partnerships' Green Base**
- Encouraging home-working and live-work through positive planning - **Rural Planning Advice**



The Bottle & Glass pub, Rainford