



# land reclamation

To further economic development and regeneration

englandsnorthwest



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# LAND RECLAMATION IN THE NORTH WEST – POTENTIAL PROJECTS

## Introduction

The Land Reclamation Review, Reclaim the North West!, undertaken for the NWDA by Professor John Handley and his review team, proposed an enhanced programme of reclamation of the 11,000 hectares of derelict, underused, neglected and contaminated land in the region<sup>1</sup>. The Agency intends to quadruple the level of investment in 'soft' end use reclamation, that is in addition to the investment it makes in remediating land necessary for economic development. NWDA is therefore looking to sub-regional partnerships to help it make the case, not least by coming forward with proposals that fit within their overall economic strategy for the sub-region, and contribute to local strategic partnership plans.

The purpose of this document, which sits alongside the Regeneration Prospectus, is to encourage North West partners to 'think strategically' in devising their strategies for reclamation. There has been a tendency in previous years, no doubt as a result of the constraints imposed by limited resources, to follow a programme of relatively small scale and sometimes disconnected reclamation schemes. While they may have had an important local impact, their impact on the image of the region has not been marked. The North West needs to become as well known for the quality of its reclamation as it is for its record in urban regeneration. The Agency hopes that its partners will 'think outside the box' and devise schemes that will make a major impact on the quality of the urban and rural landscapes of the region, even to the extent of emulating imaginative and creative schemes that have been progressed elsewhere – for example the Eden project in the South West, or Emscher Park in the Ruhr, or Bos Park in Amsterdam. While the scale of these projects would exceed NWDA resources, they provide interesting exemplars for partners to examine. The process is under way, for example through the Forestry Commission's Newlands project that will turn derelict land into woodland. But more examples are needed. Eliminating the environmental deficit will require commitment over the long term and there is a role for small scale reclamation schemes, particularly in improving the quality of business, commercial and residential areas, but to make a significant impact on image requires sub-regional partnerships to come forward with sub-regional schemes.

To re-iterate the issue, and indeed the opportunity for radically improving the landscape quality of the region – according to a 1993 survey, the North West of England contains 25% of the nation's derelict land. While that is a minute proportion of the amount of land in the region, it has a disproportionate effect on the appearance of the older urban and industrial areas, and we need imaginative action to transform that situation. Reclamation costs between £25,000-£50,000 per hectare for landscaping purposes – considerably more for most commercial and industrial purposes. Between £1bn and £2bn of investment will be needed to

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<sup>1</sup> 10,802 hectares in Greater Manchester, Merseyside and North Cheshire alone, according to the Forestry Commission Aerial Survey, by comparison with the 5,859 hectares in the whole of the North West according to the 1993 Derelict Land Survey

eliminate the environmental deficit across the region. With this scale of problem, priorities must be established. The Agency has, at the broadest level, already defined the urban priority areas as the Mersey belt with particular emphasis on Liverpool city centre and East Manchester; East Lancashire, West Cumbria and Furness; coastal resorts and priority market towns. The Agency has also defined 25 local authority priority areas, where we will focus our community based regeneration activities. In these areas, the Agency is but one partner in a Local Strategic Partnership, bringing support for developing the local economy as part of comprehensive and integrated programmes, aimed at tackling the full range of economic, social and environmental problems within and around those communities. Such integrated plans have their part to play in tackling dereliction and improving image and the environment.

When the SRB programmes (Rounds 1-6) are coming to an end, the Agency will be investing around £100m a year in such community based, integrated programmes and will be looking to all the partners to align their programmes in support so that all aspects of the problems are tackled. And in addition to plans emerging from the 25 Local Strategic Partnerships to deal with dereliction alongside other issues, the Regional Rural Recovery Action Plan, published by the Agency, provides the basis for the development of programmes across the rural areas aimed at developing and diversifying the rural economy. It will give enormous scope to ensure that derelict, underused and neglected land in the rural areas are brought back into use in support of the development of the rural economy. The work of the Forestry Commission could be particularly important here, as could the response to the renewable energy agenda, including the development of energy crops.

The Agency has decided that in addition to giving priority to the environmental agenda within all its programmes, it will significantly expand the specific derelict land programme over the c £8m a year which it inherited. Over the coming 4 or 5 years it is intended to increase the level of spending annually by increments to £35m a year. Next year it will rise from £8 to £15m a year – then to £20m then to £25m in 2004/5. The Board of the Agency has decided that it wishes to see this level rise to £35m as soon as possible. This depends on 2 things;

- the ability to free up resources which can then be allocated to this programme - if there is sufficient headroom to get up to £35m more quickly then that is what will happen;
- the capacity in each of the sub-regions, to develop and deliver programmes totalling much more than £35m a year, given that resources should be supplemented by resources from local authorities, from Europe, other agencies and the private sector.

The overall objective of any Reclamation Programme or projects will need to support those of the Regional Strategy, in particular to enhance the image of the North West, not least to improve the prospects for attracting inward investment and retaining existing businesses. Along with a skilled workforce, potential investors comment on the importance of the quality of the environment in their locational

decisions. That is certainly borne out by the success of Chester Business Park. The creation of similar high quality landscape areas in the urban environment may make a similar impact. That is one of the reasons behind the development of the North Manchester Business Park in East Manchester.

Regional Planning Guidance, Structure Plans and Unitary Development Plans set the land-use planning context for such proposals. There is a huge over-provision of land for industry and housing in the North West, and every opportunity needs to be taken to find alternative, if temporary, 'soft-end' uses for it that will not blight it for future 'hard-end' use. RPG is still under consideration, and NWDA has suggested, in its response to the draft Regional Planning Guidance, that the policy in relation to land reclamation should be

*"Development Plans should provide the framework for realistic and achievable land reclamation and development programmes by allocation sites for appropriate final uses taking into account their*

*Level of contamination  
Shape, size, accessibility and development potential  
Potential open space and current nature conservation value  
Adjoining uses*

*They should avoid sterilising sites (especially those which are incapable of hard development) by impractical or unrealistic land use allocations."*

while in relation to regional parks the NWDA has suggested that the policy should be

*"Development Plans should provide the planning framework for implementing proposals for new Regional Park resources, either as contiguous areas or as networks of green space, in locations easily accessible to the main centres of population."*

These policies, and the overall thrust of the RS and RPG, can be pursued through accelerating and improving the quality of the redevelopment in the following types of areas –

- Decayed inner city areas
- Dereliction highly visible from motorways and main railway lines, ports and other gateways
- Coastal and riverside reclamation
- Derelict sites with scope for redevelopment or conversion to linked open space uses
- Potential regional park areas
- Enhancing visual quality, the public realm, and public
- Coastal and riverside reclamation
- Creating more attractive and easily marketable redevelopment sites
- Modernising the region's industrial image
- Improving the setting of towns and critical routes between them

And in the following ways –

- removing decayed buildings
- tackling degraded land and eyesores
- remedying hazardous and contaminated sites
- providing a greener setting for redevelopment
- screening unsightly development pending its modernisation
- greening urban corridors
- creating a more attractive and useable setting for existing residential areas in the urban areas
- introducing structured planting and site boundary and access works to encourage the marketing and redevelopment of employment and mixed use sites
- providing interim treatment and temporary landscaping of sites which are unlikely to be redeveloped for many years
- converting derelict land to open space, preferably within linked open space networks
- creating vibrant environments around gateways into the region.

Unfortunately existing data on the location and distribution of derelict land in the North West is inadequate, and will remain so until the review of the National Land Use Data Base, which gives a very distorted view of derelict land in the region (for example it records only 5 hectares in Manchester), is completed in 2002. The aerial survey, conducted and analysed by the Forestry Commission (see footnote 1, on page 1), provides a helpful visual impression of the incidence of such land across the region (see Annex 1).

Particular reference should be made to Regional Parks. The NWDA envisages Rural Parks as areas of informal and some formal open space and leisure provision in urban or urban fringe areas, easily accessible to the urban population, with supporting small-scale visitor facilities, including some built development for such purposes. Examples within the North West are the forest areas of Delamere and Grisedale, while Iron Bridge in the Midlands, and Bos Park in Amsterdam also provide ideas that partners could consider. The latter, for example, was based on modernist architectural and ecological principles to create the large forest (bos) park, planted in the 1930s and 40s, and now a mature forest covering almost 800 hectares. It includes boating lakes, wading pools, an open-air theatre for plays and music, an animal reserve, a campsite and numerous bike, horse and pedestrian paths. Ideas for parks along such lines (or indeed along post-modernist lines) would be welcomed. The term is not meant to imply 'Business Parks' or 'Science Parks', which will be developed in line with Local Strategic Partnerships' economic regeneration plans or the Agency's investment in cluster development facilities.

The maintenance and management of landscapes created through the land reclamation programme is a key issue, and proposers of schemes will need to ensure that arrangements are in place that will safeguard the initial investment. Partners will be aware that the Agency faces severe restrictions on the level of revenue funding at its disposal.

## **Land Reclamation – Some Ideas**

Below are a number of proposals that have emerged from discussions following the Land Reclamation Review. The proposals here are not intended to be exhaustive or definitive, or in any sense indicate that the Agency has committed itself to the areas mentioned; but they are included to illustrate the type of projects, which, at this stage, and largely because of their size and potential impact, seem to the Agency to be the type of projects, which it could consider supporting. Comments and ideas are needed to improve, sharpen and extend the list. The Forestry Commission map of the Greater Manchester part of the Mersey Belt, attached at Annex 1, may be helpful in devising land reclamation schemes that can bring together some of the sites into a more cohesive pattern that will serve the interests of the populations and businesses of the areas most affected by derelict, under-used or neglected land. While there are evidently many derelict sites in this sub-region, some of them of a significant size, they are geographically disparate. In order to make an impact in key areas, it may be better to amalgamate sites within well-defined areas, perhaps focused on particular landscape features or infrastructure, in order to enhance the impact of reclamation. For example, it may be possible to improve the appearance of the landscape around industrial areas by using tree-belts alongside motorways; it may be possible to improve the landscape and in effect create linear parks for the benefit of nearby communities along natural features, as is being undertaken along the Ashton Canal; important gateways to the region or to its major cities, that may have a disproportionate effect on the impression gained by visitors, could be improved by the removal of dereliction and better landscaping, urban design and public art.

Extensions of the aerial mapping to other parts of the North West are either in progress or in prospect, and it is hoped that this will become an important tool in devising attractive schemes.

### **Greater Manchester**

#### Central and North Greater Manchester

A programme to accelerate the gradual renewal of the central areas of the conurbation, over and above that which will be achieved by the reclamation accompanying economic development, by tidying up and greening land where low demand and decaying terraced housing is being cleared, piece by piece, over the next few decades, and to create better economic and environmental linkages between the centre and northern towns, for example by concentrating on the sites revealed by the Forestry Commission survey.

## **Pennine Edge Forest**

A community forest/park in Oldham, Rochdale, Stockport and Tameside could be a vehicle for delivering high quality landscaping, bio-diversity, reclamation, and regeneration of some communities on the eastern side of the conurbation.

### River valley greening

Many sites are evidently close to river valleys, for example to the south and west of the conurbation, which raises the prospect of developing linear parks in these areas for leisure and amenity purposes, possibly to include timber production and associated businesses.

## **Merseyside**

### Mersey Waterfront Regional Park

A proposal involving all the local authorities along the Mersey, for which a Masterplanning exercise is currently under consideration, likely to consist of plans to enhance the quality of the potential World Heritage site at Liverpool Pierhead (along with the development of the '4<sup>th</sup> Grace' building), better use of inland waterways in the area including the Leeds-Liverpool Canal and historic docks along the Mersey, but also protecting and enhancing the environmental assets and amenities of the estuary including its RAMSAR designation.

### Gateways to Liverpool City Centre

Improving the appearance of radial routes into the city centre, for example at Dingle and Edge Lane, by acquisitions of derelict property for which there appears to be no alternative use, clearance, and high quality and properly maintained landscaping, to give the same good impression as is provided by the Speke Garston Boulevard.

## **Cheshire**

### Northwich

Develop a "Legacy of Salt" reclamation programme (some of the sites offer unique habitats for rare species of orchids and butterflies), support the Anderton woodland project, improve the waterside environment, develop a Weaver Valley Regional Park extending across district boundaries in Cheshire.

### NW Cheshire

Afforestation of low-grade agricultural land between the M56 and the Mersey, from Sutton Weaver to Ellesmere Port, and linking Regional Biodiversity Centre & Shell Wetland habitat and remediating chemical industry sites; improve the landscape quality along the Manchester-Chester railway line in preparation for the western rail link to Manchester Airport.

## Mersey Belt

Develop 'Beacons' of relatively high land in the Mersey Belt to provide vantage points and visitor attractions - for example at

- Bidston Moss
- Sutton Manor
- Bold Colliery
- Delamere

## **Lancashire**

### East Lancashire Regional Park

Currently being pursued through a SRB scheme, to which the Leeds Liverpool Canal Study should contribute in order to identify a major linear scheme to develop leisure and amenity assets in the county along the line of the canal that runs through some of the most attractive areas and most valuable heritage environments of the region.

### Ribble Estuary

Proposals are beginning to emerge from the RSPB in connection with developing wetland habitats for birds, and associated bird watching and conservation activities in this part of Lancashire.

### South Heysham petrochemicals site

Proposed for community woodland in part, possibly usable for renewable energy coppicing.

## **Cumbria**

### Broughton Moor

A 425 hectare (1,050 acres) ex MoD site for which interest has been expressed for managed forestry, public open space and active leisure/tourism uses.

### Coastal Linear Parks

A proposal to identify and bring forward a number of brownfield coastal beacon sites of environmental and historical significance, for employment, nature conservation, community and tourism uses. Possible sites to include the Solway Coast, Maryport, Workington, Harrington, South Whitehaven, Millom and Barrow.

## Furness and West Cumbria

An on-going proposal to create a comprehensive Greenway/Cycleway network which will link communities to the countryside and cater for people on foot, bicycle and horseback, forming a strategic part of a car-free network in Furness and West Cumbria for utility and recreation.

## Central Workington

A programme to underpin the regeneration of Central Workington for which a Master Planning exercise is currently underway, by acquisition and clearance of derelict and under-used property, improvements to conservation and gateway areas, and better use of public open space for amenity and leisure.

## **Reclamation at Ward level**

While the Agency intends to spend the major part of its enhanced resources on major schemes that will make a major impact on the image and environment of the Region, it recognises the importance of tackling smaller scale problems, particularly those in the deprived wards, inner city areas and in and around its industrial and commercial areas. These include litter and graffiti; the quality (or lack of quality) of our public spaces; the harsh environment of dense terraced housing, seriously worsened in recent years by market failure and abandonment; the lack of well designed and well maintained play facilities in residential areas; the general quality of design in all our settlements; the poor landscape access quality of many industrial areas, and the unattractive nature of many of the rail and road transport corridors.

To overcome these problems, the Agency will be open to suggestions, via Local Strategic Partnerships, emerging from all areas (but particularly from its deprived wards) to schemes along the following lines: -

- Attractive amenity or leisure spaces from derelict land to improve the appearance of a neighbourhood, whether small parks, gardens, or art and sculpture areas;
- Public realm works to complement the appearance of a listed building or other heritage feature, possibly by introducing a robust lighting scheme
- Playing fields that meet a local need and are going to be well used;
- Allotments for using derelict land in the medium term, along with the facilities to ensure that equipment can be secured, and tool-sharing facilities established
- Enclosed play-ground areas with good surfaces for basketball, netball, roller-skating, skateboarding, tennis, five-a-side football or hockey, bmx or cyclo-cross;
- Secure facilities in which to store equipment for such sports and activities, and good lighting facilities to ensure they are used in the evenings
- Make all derelict sites look attractive by temporary tree or shrub cover, mounding to keep off fly-tippers.

For all these ward-level schemes, as well as the larger schemes, effective management and maintenance is essential. The Agency will be looking to external partners to engage responsibly with the need to manage reclaimed land in an active way, and ensure that suitable long-term arrangements for maintenance are in place. New mechanisms may need to be established, perhaps along the lines of the alliance between Groundwork, English Partnerships and Coalfield interests, or by establishing local companies based on 'social enterprise' lines involving local people who are likely to be most concerned to maintain the asset under a service agreement with local partnerships. NWDA will consider the possibility of establishing endowment funds to start off 'warden' or 'ranger' schemes where necessary.

### **Assessment Criteria**

The Strategic Investment Appraisal methodology to be applied to other regeneration projects will also be applied to land reclamation projects. It will be important to understand the strategic context for the proposal, in particular the ways in which it will help achieve Regional Strategy objectives and comply with its Guiding Principles, and help implement Regional Planning Guidance and Action for Sustainability. Once accepted for detailed appraisal, land reclamation projects will be assessed in relation to the issues set out in Annex 2.

### **Process**

NWDA is open to ideas from partnerships along the above lines. Indeed there is urgency to get schemes agreed and underway. Good projects are needed now to take up the allocations on land reclamation that have been made by the Agency.

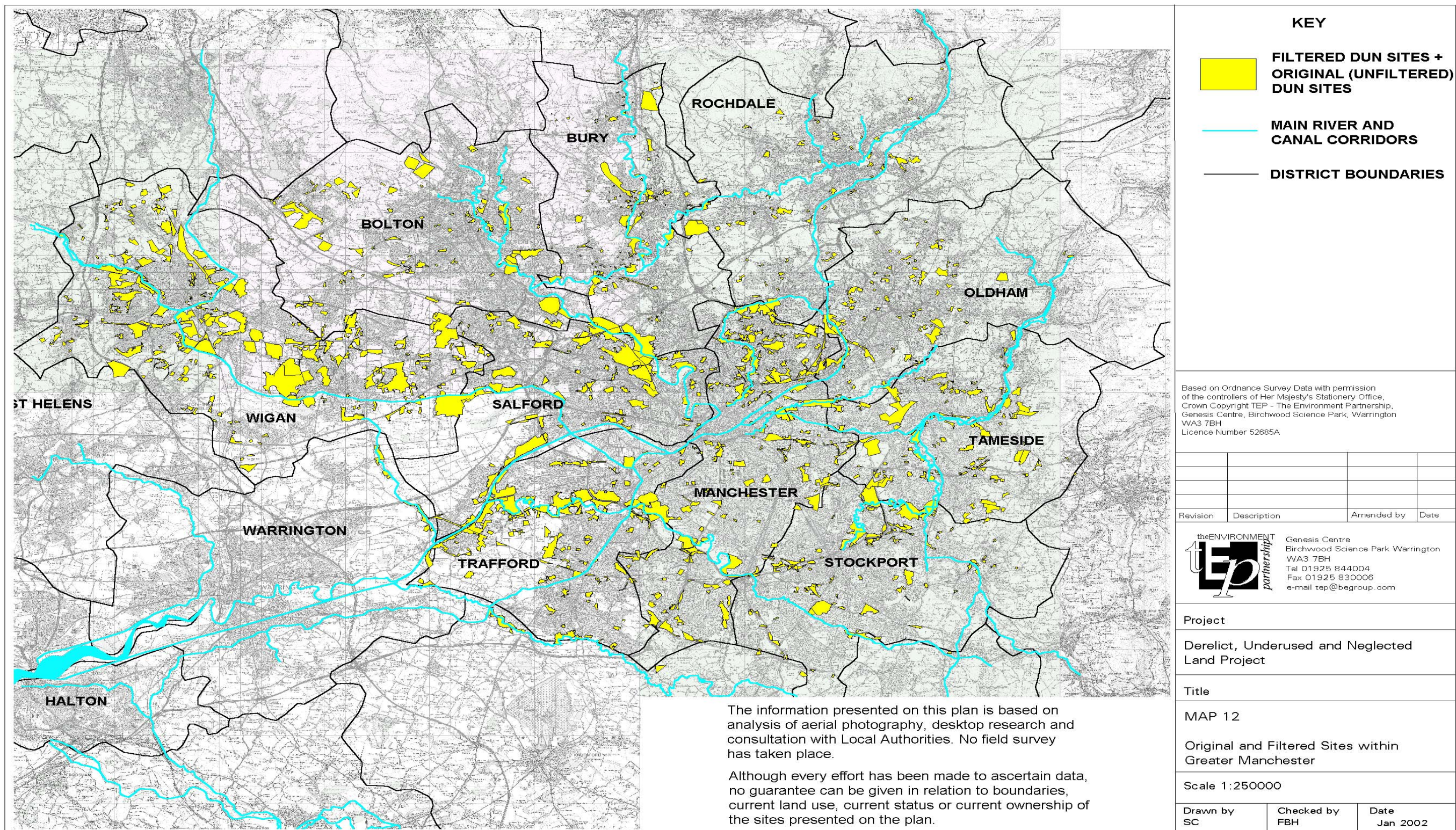
Even so, it has to be emphasised that the fact that particular ideas have been mentioned in this document does not imply that the Agency has chosen these sites – they are only illustrative of the type of schemes that it is willing to contemplate for funding – they will all have to meet the appraisal criteria. The Agency fully expects that they will emerge from Sub-Regional Partnerships over the coming months (in relation to large schemes or regional parks) and from Local Strategic Partnerships as they develop their Community Plan based strategies (in relation to smaller schemes). To start the process NWDA may engage specialist consultants in land reclamation to assist partnerships to produce an initial set of proposals that meet the broad objectives of the Land Reclamation Review and the aspirations of this note, as well as address local needs and capacities.

Finally, it should also be emphasised that a key requirement in agreeing schemes is that the sub-regional partnership should be able to deliver them and be confident in achieving the outputs to a firm timetable. Project management skills, in addition to imagination and creativity, will be essential elements of successful land reclamation teams

**Annex 1**

**DERELICT AND UNDERUSED LAND IN THE MERSEY BELT**

Forestry Commission Map



**KEY**

- FILTERED DUN SITES + ORIGINAL (UNFILTERED) DUN SITES**
- MAIN RIVER AND CANAL CORRIDORS**
- DISTRICT BOUNDARIES**

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Revision	Description	Amended by	Date


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**Project**  
Derelict, Underused and Neglected Land Project

**Title**  
MAP 12  
Original and Filtered Sites within Greater Manchester

Scale 1:250000

<b>Drawn by</b> SC	<b>Checked by</b> FBH	<b>Date</b> Jan 2002
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The information presented on this plan is based on analysis of aerial photography, desktop research and consultation with Local Authorities. No field survey has taken place.

Although every effort has been made to ascertain data, no guarantee can be given in relation to boundaries, current land use, current status or current ownership of the sites presented on the plan.

## **Annex 2**

### **ASSESSMENT CRITERIA FOR LAND RECLAMATION SCHEMES**

The demand for and potential impact of the scheme

Environmental, economic & social demand and impact

Short medium and long term impact

Contribution to wider regeneration objectives

The deliverability of the scheme

Land ownership and land owners support

Planning issues

Technical and regulatory matters

Financial issues, especially other sources of funding

Timescale

The Value for Money of the proposal

Cost per hectare

Leverage, both public: private and direct: indirect

Spin-off benefits, and ripple benefits

Potential increases in neighbouring asset values

The Sustainability of the project

Economic sustainability, especially in relation to maintenance

Social sustainability, especially visitors and community use

Environmental sustainability, especially its design and materials

