Background to this paper

The Multi Area Agreement suggests that there is currently a lack of prestige employment sites in Pennine Lancashire and proceeds to advocate ‘Whitebirk 2’ as a potential additional site to meet future needs. Due to its proposed location in the area of Green Belt between Blackburn and Rishton, the MAA recommends a study to investigate the feasibility and impact of developing the site. Whilst the MAA states that evidence shows there is a current lack of sites, the source of this evidence is not clear, and is insufficient to support the allocation of such a site at present. The Genecon study also highlighted deficiencies in Pennine Lancashire’s offer of high quality prestige business accommodation, and warned that this constrains the sub-region’s ability to compete effectively with neighbouring sub-regions. The importance of strategic sites and their contribution towards Pennine Lancashire’s growth objectives is stressed in the Multi Area Agreement, and whilst there are inferences that the sub-region’s prestige employment site offer needs to be improved, this does not amount to robust evidence to justify the need for an extra site (or sites) and allocation in a DPD. Further work therefore needs to be undertaken by the Pennine Lancashire authorities to determine whether existing and allocated ‘prestige’ strategic employment sites are sufficient to meet the sub-regional transformational agenda, or whether an additional prestige site (or sites) will be required in future years.

The paper circulated for the 9th July PLPOG meeting proposed two future stages of additional work relating to strategic employment land in Pennine Lancashire:

**Phase 1** Sub-regional review of strategic employment land supply and future requirements in Pennine Lancashire

**Phase 2** Site identification process and feasibility/impact assessment, arising from conclusions in Phase 1

This paper presents a potential outline for a brief for the two phases of work

**Phase 1 – Outline**

Overall aim of study:

The overall aim of the study will be to determine whether Pennine Lancashire’s supply of prestige employment sites is sufficient in terms of supporting the delivery of the sub-region’s transformational agenda, or whether an additional prestige site (or sites) will be required to meet the area’s objectives. If the study concludes that an extra prestige site will be required, it will need to be robustly evidenced and provide sufficient justification for the PL authorities to proceed to Phase 2 of the additional work on strategic employment land, which would consist of a site identification process and feasibility/impact assessment.
Study Objectives:

- To assess Pennine Lancashire’s current strategic employment land supply and its ability to support the delivery of the sub-region’s transformational agenda. This will therefore, in addition to a quantitative assessment element, require a qualitative assessment of the type and location of existing and allocated sites and what geographical area and employment sector they serve.

- To determine whether Pennine Lancashire has a sufficient supply of deliverable ‘prestige’ strategic employment sites to enable the sub-region to realise its economic transformation objectives in the long term.

- To determine the future need for strategic employment sites in Pennine Lancashire, not just in terms of quantity, but in terms of type and broad location in order to meet sub regional strategic objectives, including the transformational agenda, MAA outcomes and the Pennine Lancashire Integrated Economic Strategy.

- To determine whether there is a need for an additional prestige employment site in the sub-region, and assess the potential contribution it would make to delivering sub-regional objectives. If a need is proven it will need to be robustly evidenced in order to provide justification for the PL authorities to proceed to undertake a site identification process and feasibility/impact assessment.

Key Tasks to be undertaken:

- An assessment of the current provision and future supply of strategic employment land across the sub-region, taking into account:
  - The quantity of existing sites, and allocated sites yet to be brought forward
  - When allocated/pipeline sites are likely to be delivered
  - The location of the sites and the area that they serve
  - The type of existing and future sites – i.e. which sector they (will) provide employment in, and how this aligns with targeted sectors in the MAA

- An analysis of the extent to which the cumulative strategic employment land supply across Pennine Lancashire is successfully supporting the delivery of the transformational agenda, MAA outcomes and sub-regional economic objectives.

- An assessment of future need for prestige sites in Pennine Lancashire, not just based on historic take up, but through an analysis of the economic aspirations for the area, and a judgement on the quantity, type and location of sites that would be required to meet them. The Genecon (2005) study states that 3-4 prestige sites (Whitebirk, Princess Way/Westgate (“Burnley Gateway”), Greater Huncoat) is ‘arguably sufficient’ whilst the MAA suggests there is a lack of sites. The study will therefore be required to provide clarification on this matter.

- Provide a clear conclusion as to whether there is justification to proceed onto a second phase of work to identify an additional prestige site and assess the feasibility/impact of locating such a site in Pennine Lancashire.

*Issues to be resolved by PLPOG:*
- What exact type of sites should the study look at? Just ‘prestige’ sites, or strategic sites more generally? Is the definition of ‘prestige’ sites accepted?
- How will the study be funded? Who will take the lead?
Phase 2:

Working on the assumption that Phase 1 reveals a need for an additional site, Phase 2 could consist of the following:

Objectives:

- To identify potential suitable locations for additional strategic employment sites in Pennine Lancashire.
- To assess the suitability of each potential location, through an assessment of the impact and feasibility of any required Green Belt boundary changes, landscape impact, impact upon motorway network, and potential economic impact and contribution to sub regional objectives.
- To determine the most suitable location for an additional prestige site from the above assessment.

Key tasks to be undertaken:

- To identify potential locations for additional prestige strategic employment sites in Pennine Lancashire. The Genecon study stated accessibility and proximity to the motorway network as crucial criteria for prestige sites, and highlighted areas further west in the sub-region to be more suitable due to their greater accessibility at a regional scale and beyond. It is therefore suggested that the study could narrow its search to the section of the M65 running through Blackburn with Darwen and Hyndburn boroughs, between junctions 4 and 7.

- To assess the impact and feasibility of any required Green Belt boundary change to accommodate an additional prestige site. The location of an additional site in the Blackburn/Hyndburn area will most probably require changes to Green Belt boundaries. Any proposed Green Belt boundary changes are likely to be politically sensitive and controversial with local communities, and therefore if deemed necessary, the justification needs to be thorough and clear, and accompanied by a full appreciation of the potential impacts in line with PPG2.

- To assess the potential landscape impact of any new potential prestige employment site, whether it is located in the Green Belt or not.

- To assess the potential impact of the site on the motorway network and how it may be mitigated against. Concerns have already been expressed by the Highways Agency about the capacity of the M65, and given the likely location of strategic employment sites in close proximity to motorway junctions, it is of crucial importance that the potential impact of further sites is fully understood.

- To assess the potential economic impact of the site and its contribution to sub-regional objectives through a consideration of the type of businesses that may be attracted to the site, the estimated amount of employment that could be generated, the type of employment that could be generated in terms of skills and qualification levels, and where the labour would be likely to travel from, i.e. would it provide opportunities for local people or encourage in commuting from neighbouring areas?