The opportunities and challenges of governing mobility in the rural-urban fringe - a study of Warrington, UK

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ABSTRACT:

The rural-urban fringe is a complex space, yet one increasingly being viewed as a unique, positive opportunity space (Scott et al., 2013). It is characterised by a flexible, context-specific spatial form and is subject to governance pressures by both local and national public authorities (Gallent, 2006). Crucially, the rural-urban fringe is also often conceptualised as a 'space of flows' (Ros-Tonen et al., 2015) – characterised by the movement of people, goods, money and services – and thus has an inherently unique mobility potential to it. Yet, the ways in which this 'mobility potential' itself is governed remains a gap within the literature, which instead only focuses on the 'rural' vs. 'urban' dichotomy in such spaces and thus the flows therein (Scott, 2019a). This thesis argues that a more pluralistic 'territorial' and 'relational' perspective on how mobility is governed in the rural-urban fringe is conducive to transgressing this limited dichotomy. It aims to set the foundation for this by focusing on Warrington in the UK. Using a metagovernance approach, it explores how the state 'metagoverns' specific organisations and institutions across a variety of hierarchal scales and assesses how this creates inherent challenges and opportunities of governing mobility in the rural-urban fringe. In doing so, the thesis develops a foundation upon which to consider how the rural-urban fringe is not necessarily just a product of the rural and urban, but holds particular, intrinsic and mobility-centred properties, functions, challenges and opportunities - of which require an explicit governance focus.

FOREWORD:

This thesis would not exist if it were not for the love, dedication and support from a variety of people. It is as much their piece of work as it is mine and I'll be forever indebted to those that have stuck by me through this. Be it balancing a full-time postdoc, a global pandemic or just going through the journey that is a PhD, I'm indebted to you all for everything you have done for me.

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More interviews were planned to be conducted with other key governance stakeholders, however, Covid-19 interrupted the research process and made it exceptionally difficult to access these individuals. The research sought to move in two additional directions. Firstly, it sought to move towards a lower geography of governance, to the Parish council level in each respective fringe location, in order to assess if the 'local' understandings of the opportunities and challenges of mobility (and governing mobility) in the fringe were viewed as similar or different by different local actors with different powers, responsibilities and perspectives. This is owing to the fact that there can be problematic relationships between different local actors owing to "fractured and uneven local enactments" (Newman, 2014, p. 3294) from borough council decision-making.

Otherwise, the research also sought to talk to key mobility stakeholders, such a Highways England, who manage key mobility infrastructure. This was the next critical step for phase 3 of the research process and these individuals were identified as important stakeholders by a number of interviewees. Unfortunately, there was no response from these stakeholders, who were contacted just before the first lockdown in England. Due to the time constraints of the thesis, the research was therefore concluded. Both these groups are suggested to be important stakeholders for further research in this area.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION:

Introducing the rural-urban fringe.

"If we want to change the landscape in important ways we shall have to change the ideas that have created and sustained what we see"

— Meinig, (1979: pp. 42)

1.1.   The obfuscation of the rural-urban fringe

What *is* the rural-urban fringe (RUF)? It is now "arguably, the predominant land type globally" (Scott, 2019a, p. 469) – but what is it? This question is difficult to answer. For instance, from an academic lens, one response might be that it is "spatial settings in which rural and urban identities are most entangled and rural-urban distinctions most elusive" (Woods, 2009, p. 852). Does this truly answer the question? Potentially, but it does so in an arguably vague and circular manner. The quote tells us that both the rural and urban are, in some capacity, intertwined in the rural-urban fringe. Yet so too does the very name of these landscapes – the 'rural-urban' fringe. Problematically, the quote also tells us little

about *where* we might find the rural-urban fringe - where does it start and where does it end? How does one distinguish where these "spatial settings" are and what they look like? What is the 'purpose' of the rural-urban fringe and how is this 'purpose' managed and exploited – how is it governed?

Another, perhaps more practical response to the question might be that these are spaces "between (a) the continuously built up urban and suburban areas of the central city and (b) the rural hinterland" (Pryor, 1968, p. 202). This definition is more functional – we have an understanding that we might expect to find the rural-urban fringe between the 'rural and 'urban', but now, little information conveyed about *what it actually is*. What does it do and why should we care? Why is it important? And who is it important to?

The discussion above reflects a critical problem for the rural-urban fringe within academia; a compulsion to overly problematise, conceptualise and even romanticise the complexity of such landscapes, without actually engaging with the people who might govern the rural-urban fringe and thus actually shape it. Decision makers, and the influences they have on characterising such landscapes, tend to be marginalised in definitions of the rural-urban fringe and our approaches to understanding these perspectives thus far have been entrenched in this rural-urban distinction. The discipline, to date, has largely failed to think beyond this dichotomy – "most policy and academic narratives are still conceived and implemented within either urban or rural narratives; each with their own associated paradigms…. and in increasingly complex governance frameworks" (Scott, 2019a, p. 469).

But these decision makers – those that *govern* the rural-urban fringe - are those that largely *attribute meaning* to such spaces. What are their perspectives on this rural-urban dichotomy in defining these spaces? How do these individuals engage with the landscapes and shape them in particular ways within these new 'governance frameworks'? Why do they make particular decisions and what are the key influences on these decisions? These are all key, but largely neglected questions. Where there has been engagement with them, this has seldom occurred outside of this binary rural vs. urban dichotomy (Scott et al., 2013). Overall, I argue that this is representative of an ongoing 'rural-urban obfuscation' of such spaces. This refers to the tendency to focus on the fact these spaces "are dynamic, complex and 'messy', providing an arena within which urban and rural land uses, infrastructure(s), identity(ies) and values are negotiated and contested within wider place-making processes and outcomes" (Scott, 2019a, p. 469) with seldom any specific or realistic engagement as to how such spaces are shaped, managed or organised – governed - around any other key influences. We tend to problematise the fringe, rather than engage with it.

Perhaps more critically, this rural-urban obfuscation is also prominent outside of academic circles. There is a paradoxical 'dual narrative' that is communicated to the wider public on a regular basis. This is exemplified by the text in figures 1a and 1b. On the one hand, figure 1a above tells a story about the forces of 'urbanisation' as being responsible for the formation of these landscapes. This is likely factual in some instances and certainly tends to dominate conceptualisations of such spaces – a notion "written into the lexicon of every urban planner" that urban land uses are the best uses for the rural-urban fringe (Hough, 1990, p. 80). Yet, from a more rural perspective, we are told we are supposed to resist the rural-urban fringe – to protect the green belt or inhibit the pace of development. Certainly,

with emerging questions of sustainable development being touted, there has been a resurgence of interest in this perspective (Ravetz, 2010). Thus, in the article in Figure 1b, we are told that these landscapes are "forgotten rural pieces..." here the "urban beast" is seen to be an "evil to be resisted" (no page number). This is likely also factual; the fringe can certainly be seen as a site of rural resistance against this urban agenda, demonstrated time and time again through the conflict in such spaces (Pacione, 2013).

News

25th July 2017

Developer in new bid for 125 homes on Hove's urban fringe

(**Figure 1a**: *Vowles, 2017; screenshot taken from The Argus*)

The forgotten rural pieces of the West Midlands

A significant rural-urban fringe surrounds "Greater Birmingham" where the wider rural development dimension has been largely forgotten and neglected in policy and decision making.

(**Figure 1b:** *Scott, 2015; screenshot taken from Birmingham Post*)

Figure 1- News focusing on the rural-urban fringe

The question for many with a less critical understanding of geographical conceptualisations of space will wonder; which is it? Which approach should we take? Are we supposed to support development or resist it? Which one of these is more important for our understandings of the rural-urban fringe? And is this enough for understanding these spaces?

1.2.   Evaluating the obfuscation of rural-urban fringe

From a broader analysis of the literature to date, the reasons behind this continued obfuscation both within academia and planning appear to be a function of a conflict between traditional 'absolute' and 'relative' conceptualisations of the fringe, and the need to further move towards more relational definitions of these spaces. Firstly, there is a continual emphasis on defining the rural-urban fringe in an 'absolute' sense – as a unique space but one within specific boundaries (Qvistrom, 2007) – a 500m girdle enveloping a settlement, for example (Gallent, 2006). As alluded to above (and outlined extensively in Chapter Two) these more 'absolute' definitions of the rural-urban fringe are often based on an academic romanticisation of such spaces and an obsession with measuring the degree of their remaining rural or urban attributes consolidated within a fixed spatial container between these two rural and urban boundaries (Pryor, 1968). It is therefore perhaps unsurprising that there are an overabundance of outdated definitions and conceptualisations surrounding defining the rural-urban fringe (Adell, 1999; Pryor, 1968).

Yet, the literature is also beginning to realise that this seemingly makes little sense. How can the rural-urban fringe be a distinctive, absolute space, but one also shaped by 'relative' rural and urban factors? This is conceptually confusing - it would mean that it lacks any semblance of unique identity and is a sum of its relative rural and urban forces. This has largely contributed to idea of the 'zone of transition' in such spaces (Pryor, 1968), which in turn contributed to a 'siloed' thinking in the fringe (Scott, 2019a)

It appears that it is exactly this never-ending debate between the 'absolute' notions of these 'unique' spaces and the 'relative' rural and urban factors – and their respective degree of influence on shaping the rural-urban fringe – which has contributed to the binary, abstract and arguably limited focus on such spaces to date (Woods and Heley, 2017). There is a tendency to only focus on these discussions within academia, planning and even to the wider public. Thus, these supposed 'positive opportunity spaces' remain ensnared in an array of conflicting rural-urban perspectives and as such are insufficiently engaged with in a practical sense (Scott et al., 2013). In turn, we remain caught in this ongoing obfuscation of such spaces, with pre-existing work focusing on the rural-urban complexities of such spaces, but seldom the extrinsic processes and actors that shape such spaces in a variety of ways. This has rendered such spaces as "…too urban to attract traditional rural researchers and too rural to incite urban scholarly inquiry" (Audirac, 1999, p. 7), whereby such spaces have seemingly slipped through the cracks of academic inquiry of late.

So where does this leave our understandings of the rural-urban fringe? We have a neglect of academic research over time, coupled with outdated (and contradictory) conceptualisations of such spaces. We therefore need new approaches to understanding the rural-urban fringe. One more recent option might be to frame the rural-urban fringe as a highly 'relational' space – as created by "open-ended, **mobile**, **networked**, and **actor-centred** geographic becoming" (Jones, 2009, p. 487). This would suggest that the rural-urban fringe is, at one time, shaped by the differential localised rural and urban pressures – "we are seeing new flows of dependencies and relationships associated with rural land uses within urban spaces" (Scott, 2019a, p. 473), but similarly, also shaped by additional

pressures as a function of changing national and global processes (Woods and Heley, 2017).

It recognises how "rural and urban distinctions (as both materially and discursively drawn)

are being blurred by the hybrid sociospatial forms produced through these processes"

(Heley and Jones, 2012, p. 212). In this view, the rural-urban fringe has carved out its own

identity – fulfilling new functions and having specific, unique processes. (Scott, 2019a).

Thus, the rural-urban fringe is not simply a product of being urban or rural but defined by

the individuals who govern such landscapes – who impart meaning to these landscapes –

and of whom can originate from a plethora of organisations, places and perspectives. From

this view, the fringe remains in flux (Ros-Tonen, 2015).

There are, however, concerns that such an approach raises a 'cartographic anxiety'

(Painter, 2008) and echoes the need to consider that "there may be certain circumstances

in which… practical and bounded spaces have been institutionalized through particular

struggles and become identified as discrete territories in the spheres of economics, politics

and culture" (Jones, 2009, p. 501). What this thus articulates is a need for both a territorial

and a relational approach to understanding the rural-urban fringe (Heley and Woods,

2017). In turn, it would not be a case of whether the rural or urban influences were most

prominent in such spaces (Hoggart, 2005), but rather more, understanding how these

spaces are created through the actions of key individuals working both locally and further

afield. These spaces "are not simply the intensification of the urban in the rural, but

become a spatial category in their own right, deserving of particular attention and

distinctive policy approaches" (Wandl and Magoni, 2017, p. 2). Thus, we return to the

questions at the beginning of this chapter – who governs the rural-urban fringe, how do

they define it and based on this - how do they govern it?

This leads to the final issue with the obfuscation of the literature on rural-urban fringe, and of which is crucial in the context of this thesis - there is no alternative research base through which to challenge and develop such relational understandings of these spaces. Papers focusing on the modern rural-urban fringe continue to describe such spaces as 'unique' – "as distinct but interconnected spatial units and open spaces with wide-ranging functions" (Wandl and Magoni, 2017, p. 2). Yet there has been little effort to move away from the rural-urban focus. Of course, this is not to suggest that the rural-urban components of such spaces are not important. They evidently are. But could there be more to the rural-urban fringe than its rural-urban nature? Is this rural-urban distinction still what epitomises how such spaces are governed, particularly if we accept them as 'mobile', 'networked' and 'actor-centred'? (Jones, 2009).

1.3. A new research agenda for the relational rural-urban fringe?

Perhaps the question remains, "**why should we care about the rural-urban fringe and those who govern it?".** Aside from the fact such spaces are estimated to account for an estimated 20% of England's land area (Gallent et al., 2006) - Scott (2019a) wagers this is in fact far higher - there has been a renewed interest in such spaces in the UK explicitly, and for a number of critical reasons (Wandl and Magoni, 2017).

One such reason pertains to the increasing housing crisis in the UK (Gallent et al., 2018) and the need to begin to consider the extent to which current greenbelt policy at the 'edge' is still practical for modern life (Cheshire, 2013). Yet, paradoxically, it is also recognised that these "areas have enormous potential to play a positive role in enhancing urban sustainability at the global level" (Wandl and Magoni, 2017, p. 1) - echoing concerns about meeting the demands of population growth *vis a vis* sustainable development.

In this regard, it is clear that these spaces are gaining interest from an increasing diversity of actors, from governmental organisations, planning companies, and private development agencies – a variety of bodies which seek to impose their own ideologies as to how these spaces might be used and of which may not fit neatly in to a rural vs. urban category. Indeed, Gallent et al., (2006) note how "debate is focusing on the fringe, on the increasingly diffuse nature of some cities and on the problem of managing growth and potential sprawl" (p. 385). But also, such housing pressures might not be from simply the local city or town, but from other places, owing to the increasingly mobile society we live in (Woods and Heley, 2017), thus reaffirming the increasingly relational nature of the rural-urban fringe. As such, the landscapes at the edge of many cities and towns are thus being pressured to grow faster than ever before to cope with the infrastructural, economic and social demands of modern society (Simon, 2008).

As a consequence of this, the rural-urban fringe increasingly appears to epitomise the battleground of broader local, national and even global pressures, predominantly in increasingly city-regional development agendas (Harrison, 2012), but also is a space

compounded by localised, territorially relevant economic or ecological concerns (Scott et al., 2013). It is thus increasingly multiscaler. In turn, there is a need for renewed understanding as to how such spaces are governed. Understanding what the inherent opportunities and challenges might be in this regard is crucial for informing this policy and decision making towards more sustainable means. Similarly, it once again echoes the need to consider a relational rural-urban fringe – one which can be shaped by pressures and people – outside of the binary rural-urban surroundings. This reminds us that the rural-urban fringe does not sit within a local spatial container, but that much like elsewhere, such spaces are shaped by a complex array of wants, needs and pressures – many of which are dictated at multiple, vertical and horizontal scales (Woods and Jones, 2017).

Otherwise, whilst these spaces *may* represent an unmanaged, erratic mixture of rural and urban land uses, they also provide an array of important, often-overlooked relational services, "… supplying energy or drinking water, or dealing with domestic sewage or commercial waste*" (*Gallent and Andersson, 2007, p.2) to a multiplicity of areas. These factors are argued to be unique to the fringe. The specific land uses found in these landscapes is an essential component in identifying their extent and this 'feature based definition' has become a staple methodological tool for identifying such landscapes in the literature (Gallent, 2006). This positions the rural-urban fringe as being a space created out of *necessity* – as spaces, which seek to at one time, preserve the everyday appearance of the urban and rural by absorbing the 'unsightly features' mentioned above, but at the same time provide key economic functions that typically go unnoticed, yet remain crucial to the functionality of a number of other spaces (Gallent et al., 2006). Thus, these connections to other places once again signal that the rural-urban fringe is a relational space.

1.4. Mobility in the rural-urban fringe

A final, crucial contribution to the importance of the rural-urban fringe pertains to mobility - how "the roads themselves, along with railway marshalling yards and airports, also come to characterise this landscape" (Gallent and Andersson., 2007, p. 459). Furthermore, Gallent et al. (2006) suggest "transport development, motorisation and the private car have all had a major influence on the development of the fringe, driving economic change and subsequently resulting in sociocultural shifts...transport occupies a central position in the fringe's history" (p. 94). Many of these infrastructures are relational in themselves – they are shared, negotiated and utilised by an array of different people from an array of different places (Adey, 2006), yet converge at the fringe (Gallent, 2006).

Historical importance aside, it is also clear that the mobility-potential of these spaces is **continuing** to have a significant effect on the ways in which such spaces are being developed and governed. As Qvistrom (2013) states "With increasing urbanisation and the rise of the private automobile...development accelerated in the Western world. Today, these landscapes are a global phenomenon... challenging centuries-old ideals of city and country" (p. 427). This therefore infers that the mobile nature of the fringe might be impacting the traditional rural-urban dichotomy, potentially superseding these factors and becoming increasingly central to the functionality of the rural-urban fringe.

But, paradoxically, Zsilincsar (2003) reminds us "highway intersections" typically found in the fringe "become focal points for the construction of shopping centres and enterprises dependent on good traffic links and accessibility together with ample space…" but the "…growing number of shopping centres, business – and industrial parks and of leisure facilities (multiplex cinemas, sports stadiums, out- and indoor recreation sites, etc.) produces increasing traffic with all its consequences (noise, jams, air pollution, accidents, high costs for road conservation)." (p. 55). Thus, with mobility comprising such an important component of (and perhaps even threat to) the rural-urban fringe, it is surprising that it has not received more attention within the literature. Or perhaps not, given "little has been written about how to govern the [rural-urban fringe] in recent years" (Ros-Tomen et al., 2015, p. 85).

It is perhaps unusual to prioritise something other than the 'rural' or 'urban' in the 'rural-urban fringe' – it certainly appears counterintuitive. Yet, to what extent has this limited rural-urban approach been useful in progressing our understandings of such spaces? As outlined at the start of this chapter (and scrutinised considerably more in Chapter Two) we appear to have reached a crossroads with the rural-urban fringe. Perhaps it is time to apply a new approach – to look at other key factors that may influence the ways in which such spaces have, are, or could be, governed. That opportunity could be mobility. As presented above, it has both characterised and remains central to the functionality of rural-urban fringe. Development pressures, business opportunities and service functions aside, such spaces are increasingly being used by residents in order to maximise opportunities for travel (Peacock and Pemberton, 2019).

This appreciation of the underrepresentation of mobility in active research pertaining to the rural-urban fringe has, in many ways, informed the logic behind this PhD. It is founded upon a longstanding interest in mobility and transport and the ways in which these shape the rural-urban fringe. The Master's thesis which served as a pilot study for this work explored older residents' perceptions of the rural-urban fringe and examined the reasoning behind residing in such spaces by these individuals (Peacock and Pemberton, 2019). Consequently, it showed how having close proximity to the opportunities of 'urban', coupled with a 'doorstep rural idyll', were key logics behind residing in the rural-urban fringe. Yet, it was rather more the perceived inherent mobility potential of such spaces that was critical for such individuals and their decisions to 'age in place' in the rural-urban fringe (ibid). Yet, this was also presented as a considerable paradox, for this mobility potential was being undermined by wider decision making - whereby the transitional nature of development had resulted in crucial bus routes either no longer operating, operating instead to new communities in areas of development, or that congestive pressures had increased along key arterial routes due to wider decision making behind landfill sites and the development of warehousing. This illustrated a critical need to think about those who might 'govern' mobility in the rural-urban fringe, what their agendas are and the ways in which they might aim to shape the uses of mobility in a fringe space in particular ways. It was a clear reminder that "the spatial and functional development of the fringe largely depends on its political actors" (Zsilincsar, 2003, p. 52).

Yet, as argued at the start of this thesis, it is also important to not overly romanticise this focus on mobility. If research on how mobility in the rural-urban fringe is governed is to remain relevant, it must remain conscious of the socio-economic and political contexts which regulate, constrain, and influence the decision-making processes of governors and thus the ways in which this proliferates the opportunities and challenges pertaining to mobility in such spaces. After all, the governance frameworks that interplay with these spaces, and thus how mobility might be governed, continue to change – as function of "devolution from central government, partnership, networked governance, decision making, enabled by… new forms of governance". (Scott, 2019a, p. 473).

1.5.   Governing mobility in the modern rural-urban fringe?

In continuing the themes of this chapter, the literature on how the rural-urban fringe is governed is limited and imbued with the same outdated conceptualisations of these spaces. As alluded to previously, the rural-urban fringe is a particularly chaotic space in that it is highly variable across both space and time (Pryor, 1968). In theory, this would lead to a number of issues regarding how to govern and manage it explicitly, particularly in relation to mobility, but these have seldom been explored. Further to this, the rural-urban fringe was historically less regulated, with less stringent planning regulations – thus contributing to their transitional nature (Gallent et al., 2006). Similarly, it is regarded as a highly variable landscape across both space and time (Pryor, 1968). On this basis, the rural-urban fringe is typically considered a landscape "created by fortune rather than design" (Shoard, 2002,

p.4), one shaped by unmanaged sprawl along key mobility infrastructures within the literature. Previous literatures have consequently noted a distinctive 'ebb and flow' of interest in these spaces (Scott et al., 2013), in that policy makers, planners and particularly academics, have gone through distinctive phases of being interested or concerned about these spaces –but such focuses are typically short-lived (Ibid). In summary, this has had distinctive implications for both the depth of knowledge accrued concerning these spaces and the subsequent lack of understanding regarding how these spaces are governed today.

Consequently, there is also a largely linear view of mobility in the rural-urban fringe and how it is governed for the same reasons. In line with renewed calls to view the rural-urban fringe as a 'positive opportunity space' (Scott, 2019a) and given mobility is central to these landscapes, it important to explore this in more detail. With mobility also fostering increased development, emergent fringe spaces continue to be constructed in line with new development pressures, within increasingly changing governance contexts and under an increasingly changing ethos of what it means to 'be mobile' (Elliott and Urry, 2008).

Similarly, such decision making for the rural-urban fringe does not happen in an abstract spatial container. It is far more relational - these are spaces situated in broader macro-governance contexts within the UK – an aspect which is seldom considered within the literature relating to the rural-urban fringe, particularly outside of thinking around greenbelt policy. Indeed, Gallent (2006) notes that "in the last few years the 'city-region' agenda has provided a context in which interest in the future of the fringe could grow. But government's interest in the urban edge has a fairly narrow outlook" (p. 391) – one

entangled in arguments pertaining to designations of land as 'brownfield' or 'greenfield' and a 'one size fits all' approach to policy, with seldom any consideration for the unique properties of the local area (Cheshire, 2014). Yet, to what extent is this true now that such city-regional realities have seemingly started to come to fruition some 15 years later? In turn, it is important to consider how approaches to these spaces might change in line with broader governance changes. Have these 'positive opportunity spaces' been realised within new governance frameworks and how has this altered how mobility is now governed?

This PhD is focused on understanding these contexts within the UK, the justifications for which are extensively discussed in Chapters Two and Three. Critically, UK governance networks have been undergoing a variety of changes in recent times and some of these governance changes are likely to be crucial in the context of governing mobility. As Bailey and Wood (2017) outline, there have been distinctive national processes of devolution – the push to more localised, contextually specific forms of socio-economic governance - which may have reconfigured the methods (and allocated resources therein) by which mobility in these spaces will be governed. Otherwise, the movement to subregional forms of governance may have been impactful on the types of agencies involved in such spaces – i.e., who governs mobility in the rural-urban fringe - as well as the resources they attribute to governing mobility in such spaces. Crucially, on a national scale, the state has continually removed itself, instead encouraging co-development of strategies with the private sector in order to promote economic prosperity (Bailey and Wood, 2017). In order to try to emphasise this approach to governance, central government has developed Local Enterprise Partnerships that are expected to help facilitate cross state-private socio-

economic prosperity (Broadhurst, 2018).

There has thus been a distinctive reconfiguration of the state in recent years and therefore any study which seeks to understand how mobility is governed in the rural-urban fringe will need to immerse itself in this new reality. There is a need to move away from the continual rural-urban obfuscation of the rural-urban fringe, to recognise that such spaces are more than a product of rural-urban interactions and a renewed, grounded approach to understanding how other factors which differentiate these landscapes, such as mobility, are governed. As is clear, there are a number of governance related questions, which have to be answered in order to understand how such landscapes might designed, by whom and with whom in mind. This similarly helps to 'ground' our understandings of the rural-urban fringe and move away from current abstract conceptualisations,

Accordingly, whilst there is a clear acknowledgment of the contested nature of governance in the rural-urban fringe (Pacione, 2013) and a diversity of actors increasingly involved in these landscapes - there is little literature that discusses how governing mobility might be contested in the rural-urban fringe. For example, how do particular actors try to organise such spaces around mobility, or is mobility governed around a specific crafting of different types of fringe spaces (specific types of land uses, for example)? Who are these individuals and where do the tensions lie? This PhD supports the view that "policy and decisions for rural-urban fringe are largely reactive and discordant" (Scott, 2019a, p. 469) and "a combination of a lack of long-term planning/governance strategies for the [rural-urban fringe]… may serve, over time, to undermine [such spaces]" (Peacock and Pemberton (2019) p. 16). In turn, the agenda for a focus on mobility – a key defining features of such

landscapes and facilitator to the activities to the rural-urban fringe - has never been more justified.

This thesis therefore seeks to re-synthesise and, crucially, re-develop understandings of how mobility is governed in the rural-urban fringe within the current political-economic context of the UK. In particular, it seeks to critique the linear narrative that these spaces are ungoverned, to suggest that a simple urban or rural-led lens is unproductive and, most crucially, to begin to scratch the surface of what I fundamentally believe is a rich and important area of research which will become vital for urban and rural geographers, town and city planners and responses to economic and housing crises in the near future. Such a development comes at a particularly important time in the UK, where the continual push for devolution of power, the reinforcement of an array of sub-regional objectives and the increasing importance of 'context' in shaping economic growth and planning, requires a more specific, nuanced understanding of what these spaces are and what they might offer in different political considerations by different actors.

1.6.   Addressing the gaps

Given the discussion above, there are clearly a number of gaps that require addressing within the literature. Indeed, there has been a distinctive lack of research on the rural-urban fringe, from both mobility-oriented perspectives and governance-oriented perspectives. This is exemplified in considerably more depth in Chapter Two. Little is known about how these landscapes are designed and managed, particularly in the context of a

devolved, city-regionally oriented UK framework. As suggested, this re-configuration of actors, agencies and stakeholders is an important consideration that requires further investigation. It is clear that a robust understanding of the current nature of rural-urban fringe landscapes is unachievable without this embedded into the research framework of this PhD.

Irrespective of this, we have some understanding that mobility is essential in these landscapes, owing to its historic presence in shaping such landscapes (Gallent et al., 2006) and its current presence in many of the world's RUF landscapes. Yet, this raises more questions: Is this mobility-centric design *still* the objective of those who plan these spaces? Are they even aware of this supposed 'mobility-centricity'? What are the key challenges regarding mobility in such spaces? How have the approaches to governing mobility in the rural-urban fringe been impacted under current UK governmental restructuring? Have new challenges emerged because of this?

As such, the research aims to dedicate this full-length PhD to addressing this disconnection – it will employ a distinctly governance perspective to understanding the rural-urban fringe, in turn producing some of the most empirically detailed and conceptually robust understandings of mobility in these spaces, from the position of key stakeholders to date. Thus, from an academic perspective in relation to the field of Human Geography, this research will exemplify the challenges or opportunities associated with the supposed mobility-centric design of the rural-urban fringe. Furthermore, it will either challenge or support the suggestion of a closer focus on the importance of mobility in conceptualising

such landscapes. Either way, given the few case studies conducted on such landscapes (Qvistrom, 2007), it will begin to lay the foundations for further studies in this continually neglected field of research. Otherwise, this research will contribute to a growing literature associated with the implications of the restructuring of the UK state, with a particular emphasis on linking the rural-urban fringe into such discussions.

Given the increasing interest in these spaces (Scott et al., 2013) and the potential for restrictive green belt policies to eventually be lifted (Rogers, 2016), there urgently needs to be more data of this type generated. Knowing what the current challenges are in these spaces, will only serve to counteract the neglected, confused and abstract perspectives on these spaces. Certainly, this PhD will provide a starting point through which to develop such assertions.

1.7.   Aims, objectives and thesis structure

Owing to the considerations made thus far, the following aim and objectives have been devised:

Aim:

"To understand the challenges and opportunities pertaining to governing mobility in the rural-urban fringe"

Objectives:

1. *To identify and critically assess the relative influences of key stakeholders responsible for governing mobility in the rural-urban fringe.*

2. *To understand the importance of mobility in the rural-urban fringe from the perspective of those who govern such spaces.*

3. *To explore how wider state restructuring has positively or negatively impacted the capacity for key stakeholders to address the opportunities and challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe.*

4. *To critically examine the types of formal and informal responses utilised by key stakeholders in addressing challenges and developing opportunities for governing and utilising mobility in the rural-urban fringe.*

1.8. Thesis structure

In order to answer the above objectives, this PhD utilises the following structure. Chapter Two provides a robust literature review of each of the key topics of concern within this study. Beginning with a detailed analysis of the current literature on rural-urban fringe, section 2.2 provides an extensive review of modern understandings of these spaces - how

they are defined - and traces past theoretical approaches to understanding and conceptualising these spaces. It provides a justification to the theoretical approaches made later in the chapter by outlining how limiting some of the current approaches to understanding are. Crucially, section 2.3. outlines the arguments for the mobility-centric arguments made in relation to these spaces, demonstrating how mobility infrastructures are crucial in shaping these landscapes and shaping the economic structures and uses of these spaces. Similarly, it demonstrates the limited research pertaining to how mobility is governed in these spaces.

Finally, Chapter Two also delves into the governance literatures of relevance to the thesis. Section 2.4 begins by highlighting the usefulness of applying a metagovernance approach to understanding how changing governance structures might impact how mobility is governed in the rural-urban fringe. Section 2.4. begins to critically outline the broader metagovernance processes currently of relevance in the UK. It does so by outlining the literature which has sought to explain and analyse the implications of such a restructuring across vertical and spatial scales. In doing so, it considers the implications of processes of devolution and how emergent governance structures might impact the types of organisations involved in governing mobility in the rural-urban fringe.

Chapter Three then outlines the research theory, research design, research strategy and research methods which are employed in the study. Section 3.2. outlines the theory behind this thesis. This then informs section 3.3, which provides a clear explanation for the strengths and limitations of the qualitative approach employed in this research and

exemplifies how this particular research design addresses the empirical gaps in the literature and answers the aims and objectives outlined above.

Chapter Three also provides a justification for, and outline of, the robust case study site selection process – one that ensures the validity of this research in relation to understanding rural-urban fringe landscapes. Section 3.4 depicts the mixed GIS and research approach to finding a suitable case study, utlising multiple definitions of the rural-urban fringe. The chapter therefore introduces the reader to the selected area – Warrington. In doing so, Chapter Three also outlines the two fringe sites that were selected for analysis and discussions – Birchwood – a more established space located to the Eastern periphery of Warrington – and Omega – a relatively newer, emergent space to the Western periphery of Warrington. The PhD deliberately utilises two different fringe spaces in order to compare the supposed linearity of perceptions regarding the rural-urban fringe by senior officers in Warrington Borough Council and whether there is any critical contextual variation between them. Thus, detailed profiles of both spaces are also outlined.

Following this, the chapter summarises the research methods used; 19 semi-structured interviews with key agencies and stakeholders, employing a snowballing approach. It expresses how the PhD is confronted by a lack of pre-existing data and literature regarding governing mobility in the rural-urban fringe specifically and within emergent governance contexts. Using Warrington Borough Council as a base, the snowball sampling approach allowed these senior officers to suggest which stakeholders to talk to regarding governing mobility in the rural-urban fringe, which meant that the selected interviewees were

considered as having some form of crucial role in shaping the nature of mobility in Warrington's rural-urban fringe spaces. Finally, this chapter outlines how the data collected from these processes was analysed. It also addresses any inherent biases in researcher positionality.

Chapter Four is the first of three chapters dedicated to the analysis of the data collected. This chapter is deliberately empirical. It explores the perspectives of key senior officers within Warrington Borough Council and unpacks their perspectives regarding the nature of mobility in the rural-urban fringe. This step was crucial in order to establish a baseline from which to compare the challenges and opportunities suggested by such officers. Such perspectives are shown to build important key findings upon existing literature, particularly in expressing the territorial and relational understandings of mobility in the rural-urban fringe and how such spaces interrelate with other spaces. Chapter Four then proceeds to outline the key challenges as outlined by such interviewees. These are comprised of three key challenges. Firstly, it is outlined that the car-centric nature of the rural-urban fringe is a fundamental challenge for officers in Warrington. There are evident concerns regarding the extent to which such officers have the resources to address this challenge. The second key challenge relates to the increasing diversity of requirements as to how mobility it utilised. This differential nature of mobility means that operating and altering public transport – a crucial strategy for tackling the car-centric nature of the rural-urban fringe – remains a complex problem for such officers. Again, there are inherent concerns regarding the cost of operating such services and the power to influence commuters to adopt such modes. Finally, the chapter also explores how wider pressures from central government

have created a necessity to focus on making mobility more sustainable in the rural-urban fringe. In turn, such officers exemplify how they have differential capacities to enact this between both rural-urban fringe spaces, which is dependent on the extent to which such spaces require a retrofit of infrastructures. Chapter Four summarises that there are indeed key challenges related to mobility in the rural-urban fringe and that such challenges are differentiated across each of the cases. Yet, these challenges are also largely ascribed to issues regarding funding and power, which thus reaffirmed the need to explore how wider, structural forces were hindering or supporting the capacity to address such challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe.

Chapter Five therefore situates these challenges of mobility within the devolved structure of English governance. Through a metagovernance lens, Chapter Five evaluates how the state-led processes of devolution and the insertion of subregional structures of governance have reconfigured the power and resources afforded to officers in Warrington, which thus significantly interplays with their capacity to address the challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe. The chapter therefore examines the relationships between Warrington Borough Council and a variety of other organisations. It firstly illustrates the relationship between central government and Warrington Borough Council, which is one compounded by a continual 'distancing' of the state and increased enforcement of a competitive, overly political bidding process. This has subsequently created a high degree of uncertainty for senior officers in Warrington, particularly in their capacity to respond to immediate challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe.

Next, the relationship between Warrington Borough Council and the Cheshire-Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership (CWLEP) is examined. There have been clear attempts by central government to rebalance power in favour of the CWLEP, which is primarily a function of the strategic privileging of the CWLEP as the "only game in town". What is illustrated is that the LEP is viewed as having more power than Warrington Borough Council due to more money flowing through the LEP and being viewed as having the 'ear of the government', but that the CWLEP also works at a fundamentally different scale, with different state-imposed ambitions at the subregional level. This, at times, stops the CWLEP from engaging on the specific priorities of Warrington Borough Council, including addressing some of the territorial challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe that officers within Warrington Borough Council view as important.

This dynamic is then compared to the surrounding Manchester and Liverpool city-regions, which alongside Warrington comprise the Mersey belt. The comparison is particularly important. Having illustrated the importance of relational mobility challenges in Warrington's rural-urban fringe spaces, this section outlines how the strategic and spatial privileging of both city-regions by the state affords them a greater degree of influence over emergent mobility solutions to relational transport infrastructures, which serves to undermine the extent to which officers in Warrington can ensure their challenges of mobility are recognised. Overall, Chapter Five summarises that the metagovernance strategies employed by the state create significant issues for Warrington Borough Council in terms of both their capacity to respond territorially to mobility challenges in the rural-urban fringe, but also to engage with organisations that govern relational projects related to mobility across the corridor.

Chapter Six takes the view that "it is not enough to simply analyse and describe the restructuring and shrinking of the state. We must know what is developing in its place and through what aims and means" (Fulller, 2018, pp. 565). It seeks to outline how rather than accept the inequalities perpetuated by central government in its devolution agenda, officers in Warrington Borough Council have sought to lean into particular, emergent opportunities created by state strategy. In doing so, the chapter outlines the critical influence of entrepreneurialism of officers in Warrington, of which has critical implications of how such officers engage, strategise and utilise mobility in the rural-urban fringe.

The chapter begins by suggesting that officers in Warrington Borough Council have always maintained an entrepreneurial ethos, based on a historical deprivileging through time. Yet, Chapter Six also proceeds to outline how there has been a significant mobilisation of entrepreneurial activity in such spaces in recent years – which is largely a function of the introduction of the Cheshire-Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership. Overall, it is clear that officers in Warrington have crafted a specific 'Warrington brand', which utilises two key objects of governance of relevance to the rural-urban fringe – land and connectivity/ mobility – in order to anchor potential growth opportunities from the surrounding city-regions. The Warrington brand has thus influenced some of the types of fringe spaces found across Warrington, of which are reflective of a particularly *selective* form of entrepreneurial 'soft spaces' crafting by officers in Warrington. Finally, it is also illustrated that this these soft spaces serve to reinforce the interconnectivities between Warrington and the surrounding city-regions, which in turn is seen as vital to ensuring that Warrington is more

prominently embedded into the emergent plans regarding relational mobility infrastructures.

Finally, Chapter Seven ties the PhD together. It illustrates how the results in Chapters Four, Five and Six collectively answer the aims and objectives outlined in this chapter. It recognises the limitations in this thesis. Crucially, it provides a new avenue for understanding the rural-urban fringe by suggesting it should be viewed as a 'soft space' in itself.

1.9. Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the subject of the rural-urban fringe. In particular, it has focused on the lack of research in these spaces despite the increasing importance and pressure these spaces face both today and in the future. In particular, where there has been pre-existing research on the rural-urban fringe, this has been typically caught in an abstract, often romanticised binary distinction between rural and urban literatures (Adell, 1999). Whilst, in many circumstances, this rural-urban focus on such spaces is important, it is also clear that this focus has contributed to an over focus on the definition of such spaces and the degree to which they are more urban than rural (and vice versa) (Gallent et al., 2006). As outlined, this has prevented a critical engagement with such spaces, particularly in relation to understanding the importance of mobility in such spaces – regarded by many as a defining feature of the rural-urban fringe – and how such mobility is governed.

This study therefore aims to address this gap. It seeks to explore the ways in which the rural-urban fringe is shaped extensively by mobility and the subsequent presence of mobility infrastructures and questions how mobility is governed by key stakeholders. Thus, the claim of mobility-centricity is often made, but with little empirical evidence as to the emergent opportunities and challenges this mobility potential creates and how key stakeholders might seek to navigate these opportunities and challenges. However, it is also evident that in order to understand these challenges and opportunities, an approach that provides a more grounded perspective on mobility is needed. In moving away from the continued obfuscation of the rural-urban fringe, this introduction has also recognised the need to begin embedding understandings of the rural-urban fringe and how it is governed within wider governance literatures. This therefore means trying to situate the findings of this thesis within a modern context and includes considering how state restructuring – and thus the ways in which the capacity to respond to the opportunities and challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe have similarly changed as a function of this state restructuring. Therefore, this identifies the need to explore what these implications might be in Chapter Two.

In summary, given the lack of research conducted on the rural-urban fringe, this work will lay the foundations for further enquiry into these spaces. It not only adds to theoretical and empirical understandings of the rural-urban fringe, but it also further develops the mobility literature – primarily by providing an extensive qualitative study to understand how key stakeholders engage with mobility in the rural-urban fringe. Finally, it also provides the foundation for a better exploration of the governance literature in relation to the rural-

urban fringe by analysing how the rural-urban fringe, as a distinctive space, interplays with wider state restructuring and how decisions regarding mobility factor into this. In turn, this body of work should be seen as a multi-faceted exploration of the rural-urban fringe with subsequent contributions to each of the fields aforementioned, the combination of which lay the foundation for an alternative, more critical and contemporarily grounded exploration of the rural-urban fringe.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding the modern rural-urban fringe.

2.1. Introduction

This chapter aims to outline and critically review the literature of relevance to the aims and objectives of this study. Drawing initial focus to the rural-urban fringe, section 2.2 outlines what the rural-urban fringe is and explores how some of the key debates regarding defining the rural-urban fringe have evolved within the literature, including how understandings of these spaces have evolved from 'zones of transition' to 'unique spaces that are transitional in nature' – echoing the tensions between absolute and relative conceptualisations of these spaces as identified in Chapter One. Building upon this, section 2.2 also proceeds to discuss the varying lenses through which the rural-urban fringe has been conceptualised, from either an urban-centric or rural-centric approach. This is an important component that informs the case study selection process in Chapter Three. The discussions in section 2.2. reinforce the suggestion that such spaces suffer from an abstracting within the literature and consequently that new approaches to understanding these spaces are required. It is also clear that such spaces have had little consideration in relation to other literatures, making existing research highly limited.

Section 2.3 then aims to progress beyond these limitations, by again illustrating the fundamental importance of mobility in rural-urban fringe landscapes. It is argued that not

only has mobility shaped and created these landscapes historically, but also remains central in their functionality today – a puzzling reality given the relative lack of empirical research towards understanding mobility in these spaces. Whilst there are suggestions that mobility might be unique in such spaces – owing to particular types of industries, services and processes that exist in these landscapes – the implications of these factors are seldom considered in the literature. There is an inherent relational nature to the rural-urban fringe that is identified. In turn, it is outlined that mobility has rarely been sufficiently considered *vis a vis* how the rural-urban fringe is governed – particularly in a modern context.

Finally, sections 2.4 and 2.5 situate current understandings of the rural-urban fringe within broader metagovernance processes – which is shown to be a particularly useful framework for completing this analysis. As acknowledged in Chapter One, political and economic agendas have distinctive influences on the formation of fringe locations. This section considers the implication of this on a national scale across England. Key processes, such as the devolution to the sub-regional level, the continuing movement towards city-regional political-economic approaches to governing and a doubling down on 'new localism' and entrepreneurialism are all evaluated. In particular, the implications such changes have to the rural-urban fringe and how mobility might be governed in such spaces is emphasised.

The chapter concludes in section 2.6 by drawing together the implications of the findings in the literature review.

2.2 Defining the rural-urban fringe

2.2.1. Introducing the rural-urban fringe

Labelled as the 'battleground' "where 'rural uses'…vie for space with ostensibly 'urban uses'" (Gallent and Shaw, 2007, p. 619), the rural-urban fringe is regarded as representing a complex and dynamic space (Scott et al., 2013). These spaces are predominantly defined in the literature as products of land-use, comprising an amalgamation of rural uses, including farming, forestry, and related industry, as well as an array of 'over spilled' urban uses, such as suburban residential housing (Gallent and Shaw, 2007). More recently, attention has been paid to the unique social characteristics of such space (Peacock and Pemberton, 2019).

From an international perspective, such spaces are increasingly recognised as becoming important, yet pressured, spaces (Adell, 1999). Both academics and planners have continued to highlight that, in many cases, these landscapes are unregulated with a distinctive short-termism in planning - creating the RUF "by fortune rather than design" (Gallent et al, 2006, p. 457). In a similar capacity, these spaces have received an 'ebb and flow' of interest from academics and policy makers, not simply in the last 30 years as suggested by Scott et al., (2013), but since the early 1940s, whereby the theorisations as to how these spaces function, as well how they should be addressed, have distinctly changed.

Thus, the rural-urban fringe "is therefore schizophrenic; subject to a conflation of terms

reflecting different conceptual priorities" (Scott, 2019a, p. 469). In turn, these spaces are known by a variety of conflicting appellations; as 'peri-urban areas' (Adell, 1999), the 'Urban dowry' (Bryant, 1995), as 'mutations' (Hoggart, 2016), or more traditionally as the 'rural-urban interface' (Pahl, 1966), a perplexing result of what remains a divided literature on the subject (Scott et al., 2013). The rural-urban fringe thus remains a messy and, in many ways, poorly conceptualised space. The term 'rural-urban fringe' is used in this thesis as a term to encapsulate all of these titles, of which are generally referring to the same thing (Ibid).

Such changes have instigated the need to re-evaluate our understandings of these spaces, how they function and what their purpose may be, as well as how responses to governing such landscapes may also have changed. As such, the following section seek to outline how the theory regarding the rural-urban fringe has changed, which has subsequently prompted a revaluation as to how these spaces are perceived within academia. It is in exploring these arguments that a justification for focusing on mobility can be made.

2.2.2. Theorising the fringe: a zone of transition or unique space?

The earliest definitions of the rural-urban fringe referred to the 'rural-urban interface' (RUI), (Adell, 1999). Historical literature discussing the RUI, dating back to the 1940s, considered the identity of the RUI - its existence - as a zone of transition between the rural and urban, situated somewhere in the middle of the two cores of the rural-urban continuum (Wehrwein, 1942). The use of a rural-urban continuum sought to be more

inclusive in understanding the variable nature of the urban, from towns through to cities, and how such a dynamic interplayed with the ways in which the rural-urban fringe might be variably shaped as a function of this (Wehrwein, 1942). However, this also reinforced the idea that the RUI existed as a subset of areas that appeared urban in nature but existed outside of the main urban zone (Adell, 1999). Critically, at this time in the literature, the RUI was not viewed as an absolute space, but a conceptual 'zone of transition', which explained how the landscape changed from urban to rural as a function of sprawl. Indeed, the focus on 'urban-to-rural' and not 'rural-to-urban' demonstrates the distinctive urban-centric lens that is traditionally used to understand these spaces and which, in many ways, propagates understandings today (Copus, 2010). The empirical research conducted on the RUI at this time was focused around three core themes; population density and characteristics, developmental morphology and most prominently, land use changes, each from a typically urban-centric lens (Adell, 1999), and neglecting to acknowledge any kind of socio-economic or political autonomy for the fringe (Gallent, 2006).

In the 1960s, however, the 'zone of transition' conceptualisation of the rural-urban fringe underwent a considerable alteration. For example, Pahl (1966) heavily criticised the use of a 'rural-urban continuum', suggesting that in its attempts to allow more variability in the morphological characteristics of rural and urban landscapes, it had minimalised the distinctive social existence of 'urban villages', suggesting that some people are "in the city but not of it" (p. 299). This was the first real acknowledgement of fringe landscapes as having any distinctive 'rural' elements.

This work laid the foundations for the zone of transition argument became more grounded in the 'material'; attached to distinctive and progressive changes in land use rather than as a theoretical 'interface' separating the rural and urban. In this sense, attention began to be paid to the ways in which the rural-urban fringe was a physical 'relative' space – shaped by urban and rural form. In particular, Pryor (1968) made a prominent contribution to developing a more nuanced, material understanding of such spaces. He stipulated that the rural-urban fringe could actually be split into two fringe spaces. First, the 'urban fringe, which was a zone which was demarked by the interactive, service based and more densely populated area of the fringe closer to the urban periphery, and "characterised by the almost complete absence of non-farm dwellings, occupations and land use" (p. 206). Equally, he noted the existence of the 'rural fringe'; a zone that was more closely entangled with traditional rural land uses, such as smaller population sizes, which would eventually give way to urban use as urban pressures grew. Such an approach was demonstrated through a diagram produced by Pryor, which identified how land uses within the fringe, as well as the demographic characteristics and level of accessibility to these spaces, would var [...] l space (Figure 2).
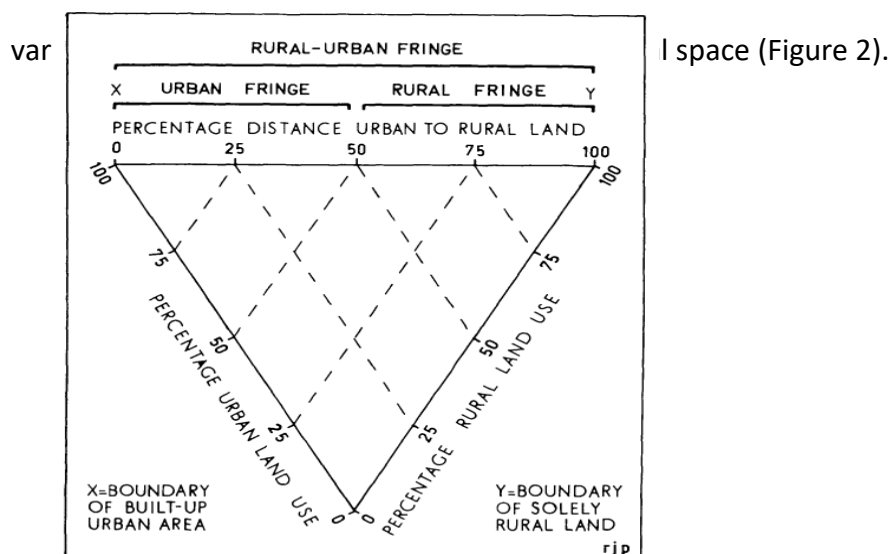
Figure 2 - Pryor's (1968) proposed schematic diagram of the RUF, which identifies how the land uses in these spaces alter based on urban sprawl.

Pryor's (1968) approach also recognised how the diversity and character of the rural-urban fringe was variable across space and between localities – dependent on the different urban or rural pressures. Yet, these spaces were still seen as having either rural or urban land uses and thus the RUF was still viewed as a zone of transition between them. In this sense, the traditional rural-urban divide had still not been truly challenged, as both 'poles' appeared to dictate the characteristics of the fringe. Other problems associated with applying Pryor's (1968) conceptualisation of the rural-urban fringe include the overt emphasis on the rural and urban as having defined boundaries. Indeed, urban and rural spaces are now viewed as blurring under the extensive processes of globalisation, increasing mobility and the diversification of land uses (Bell and Osti, 2010; Barcus and Brunn, 2010). Contemporary understandings of space often involved both a relational and territorial approach and with fringe spaces being viewed as 'hybrid': "as settings in which rural and urban identities are most entangled and rural-urban distinctions most elusive" (Woods, 2009, p. 852). Hence the rural and urban are not as distinctive at their boundaries as Pryor (1968) argued, and with Sharp and Clark (2008) suggesting that an alternative perspective of the rural-urban fringe is required - as being mutated and scattered spaces (also see Hoggart, 2016). Furthermore, Gallent et al. (2006) provide a comprehensive critique of the 'zone of transition' perspective on the rural-urban fringe. They identify that many of the land uses found within the fringe are actually unique to these spaces. As shown in Table 1, Pryor's conceptualisation fails to focus on such issues and simply suggests that fringe space sits exclusively "between limits of exclusively urban or rural land" (p. 204).

TABLE 1. THE RURAL-URBAN FRINGE: DEFINITION AND DELINEATION

Structural Content		Functional Content	
Definition	Delineation	Definition	Delineation
Location	Census categories (direct or derived) e.g., non-village RNF, urbanized area minus central city Contiguous census units e.g., "first-tier counties"	Land use	Specific e.g., market gardens Mixed e.g., between limits of exclusively urban or rural land Valuation changes
Administration	Non-census areal units beyond control of central city e.g., school, voting districts.	Employment	Census categories e.g., RNF Commuting zone beyond central city boundary
Population density	Selected parameter e.g., 500 sq. mile	Population density	Rate of growth per year or inter-censal
Zoning regulations	Zoned mixed land use (rural and urban) Lack of subdivision control	Utility services	Area not served by specific services
Dwelling age	Selected parameters e.g., proportion in recent inter-censal period	Social orientation	Rural location, urban orientation of social activity
		"Transition," "dynamism"	Undergoing change e.g., increase in population density or vacant or urban land.

Table 1: Pryor's (1968) delineations of a number of definitions used to describe the RUF with the land use section emphasised in red.

Thus, by contrast, Gallent et al. (2006) therefore acknowledge that the fringe can be seen as a peri-urban area, but one that is directly influenced by urban pressures, recognising that the fringe does "contain 'urban' uses that thin out away from the built-up area" (Ibid, pp. 459). Such features are suggested to include service functions, such as sewage works, landfills and energy/ water production – features that support the 'urban agenda'. Yet, Gallent et al. (2006) also stipulate that just because these uses relate with the urban, this does not necessarily make them 'urban features'. Instead, they suggest that they are distinctly 'unique' to the fringe, located at the edge due to requiring more extensive amounts of space than the urban is capable of offering, or due to being considered 'unsightly' within the main urban extent. They therefore critique the zone of transition model, suggesting that: "this definition is deficient in one particular regard: it fails to

recognise the uniqueness of the fringe… these are not standard urban land uses: rather they are particular to the fringe" (Ibid, pp. 458-459). This appreciation of the uniqueness of the fringe offers the opportunity for a more pluralistic, both territorial and relational, understanding of the rural-urban fringe. It is territorial because, as Gallent et al. (2006) outline there are several local factors which can affect the morphology and composition of these landscapes – they are seldom "uniform girdles enveloping a settlement" (Gallent at al., 2006, p. 461) because local population pressures, local economic development and topography drive distinctive variations of these landscapes and thus they vary distinctly in density, shape, size, and content as a result of this (Ibid). However, factors such as local and national political, economic and environmental agendas, across international, national, and localised scales also coalesce at the rural-urban fringe (Qvistrom, 2007) – rendering it a state of flux and in competition (Scott, 2019a). Consequently, understandings of the rural-urban fringe have transitioned towards viewing such spaces as being unique across time and space (Scott et al., 2013), comprised by multiple flows (Ros-Tonen et al., 2015) but conditioned by a need to 'order' these landscapes at the territorial level (Qvistrom, 2013).

This dual territorial and relational approach to understanding these landscapes is not simply due to land use, but also due to the unique processes that are acting upon, and occurring within, them. In this sense, the rural-urban fringe is a space of unique process, as much as form. Its transitional nature is often due to the fact it has the capacity to change at a more rapid pace than urban or rural spaces (Gallent, 2006). This is depicted as being due to less stringent planning regulations, or a supposed lack of longer-term planning by those who might govern such landscapes (Scott et al., 2013). In this regard, and under forces (or restrictions) of urbanisation, these spaces act transitionally, of which means they

can change from rural to urban. However, these processes carve them as being distinctive in their own right; shaped by a particular blend of economic, social, environmental, and political influences, at a multitude of scales and from a plethora of perspectives. What this further shows is a need to consider how wider structural forces that dictate these processes, particularly those political or economic in nature, might serve to shape the ways in which such landscapes develop – that might seek to contain or allow the transitional nature to a greater or lesser extent (Simon, 2008).

As has been illustrated above, the literature on the rural-urban fringe through time has largely been committed to developing conceptualisations of such spaces, often in a predominantly theoretical or abstract sense, but with a movement towards understanding the particularities of these spaces through the presence or absence of land use and process. Whilst such an obfuscation arguably still exists, we can nonetheless see that the literature pertaining to the RUF has developed to focus on such spaces as being unique, with both territorial and relational attributes. This is an important movement within the literature and it suggests that there is a need to consider what other factors may similarly be 'unique'

2.2.3. Governing an urban-rural or rural-urban fringe – does it matter?

Despite the arguments proposed for the rural-urban fringe being a distinctive, variable and unique space, there is still an incessant need to evaluate whether such spaces should be defined as 'rural-urban fringes' or 'urban-rural fringes' within the literature which leads to a fundamental disconnection in approaches. Indeed, the definition that is taken to defining

such spaces will also likely impact the way such spaces are governed (Scott, 2019a), given it informs the supposed function, purpose and challenges that will be perceived to exist in such landscapes (Scott et al., 2013). Thus, it is important to understand why this division remains and how it has hindered progress within the literature. Critically, as Adell (1999) highlights in his dated, yet extensive review of this literature, there has been a distinct schism in the approaches to understanding and therefore governing such spaces on an international scale. This distinction is important to note as it dictates why the literature on the rural-urban fringe has become so wide-ranging and, once again, has contributed to why understandings of such spaces have become so abstract – there are a multiplicity of approaches to governing such landscapes which fundamentally vary from one another. Indeed, upon accepting that such spaces are shaped by broader political, economic, social and environmental factors, it is perhaps self-explanatory that the character and definitions of such spaces will vary internationally.

On the one hand, approaches to the rural-urban fringe in more expansion-driven countries, such as the United States, have seldom been concerned with issues of the rural, instead drawing attention to the process of suburbanisation that had become particularly dominant within urban landscapes (Simon, 2008). Beyond the U.S., Simon (2008) also notes how the German literature on the fringe has a distinct emphasis on how the processes of urban sprawl shape such landscapes. These perspectives re-affirm the 'urban bias' already dominating the rural-urban fringe literature (Adell, 1999), whereby they acknowledge such spaces as being a product of urban sprawl (Simon, 2008); those created by urbanisation and suburbanisation processes (Weaver and Lawton, 2001). As Gallent et al. (2006) suggest,

from this perspective, "the fringe is viewed as peri-urban but strongly influenced by urban pressure and process" (pp. 459); a product of the need for extra space for urban expansion, or the retainment of a commuter culture in line with the centralising of urban services (Heimlich and Anderson, 2001). Indeed, returning to Pryor's (1968) definitions in Table 1, there is a clear recognition of such a 'commuting culture' in his model with an emphasis that such landscapes propagate an inherent mobile nature in their wider connectivity to the urban (Weaver and Lawton, 2001).

In addition, there has also been a recent surge of interest in fringe spaces in countries such as China and Thailand, and where rapid population growth and urban expansion are generating significant development pressures. Indeed, it has been recognised that this has resulted in significant environmental degradation of many 'peri-urban' landscapes (Hara et al., 2010; Bogaert et al., 2015), as well as leading to the emergence of a number of distinctive social issues resulting from the increased pressures facing these spaces, such as the displacement of rural communities (Hiramatsu et al., 2009). Dick and Rimmer (1998) suggest that such spaces are created via a process of cities being "bundled, unbundled and reassembled" into complex forms (p. 2311), gradually propagating outwards. Indeed, the urban bias in such work comes not from a belief that such spaces require control, but that they contribute to assisting to the wider urban form and its inherent connection to the global economy (Kanai and Schindler, 2019). Indeed, this highlights the need to understand perspectives which appropriate and determine the diversity of functions the fringe can supply, and indeed, is comprised of. It reinforces the idea that there is a need to better understand both the contextual, structural forces that design and enable such landscapes

to exist, as well as which can choose (or not choose) to contain them.

A key critique of the urban-centric approach to the fringe is that it fails to recognise any rurality to such spaces (Woods and Heley, 2017). Weaver and Lawton (2001) suggest that there are a number of "spatially extensive urban-oriented land uses such as airports, waste disposal sites…" (pp. 440) which also serve rural communities. These suggestions can often be found in countries with extensive green belt policy and are prominent across both the UK and Canada (Simon, 2008). Here, there are greater calls in the literature to protect, but also consider, the 'rural' in the rural-urban fringe, and which as Hough (1990) suggests, has turned the fringe into a 'battleground' to "preserve rural land" (p. 88).

Thus, contrary to the urban-centric lenses presented above, these perspectives on the rural-urban fringe are thus situated within an alternative perspective that views such spaces as requiring restriction, control and re-ordering (Adell, 1999) on the basis of contesting longstanding ideals that "urban development is the highest and best use for non-urban land" (Hough, 1990, p. 88). This has thus led to the development of an alternative, divisive, 'rural-urban fringe' perspective within the literature. This standpoint views the rural-urban fringe as a 'peri-rural' space: those spaces that are countryside 'mutations' (Hoggart, 2005) and created by the interaction of the encroachment of the urban into the rural yet failing to assimilate it as an entirely urban space (Ibid). This approach places more emphasis on the rural social structures and networks that predated urban development and explores how such spaces are not just a product of new in-migration but are also shaped and re-shaped by those that resided in such spaces before a

greater urban presence was established (Qvistrom, 2007). For example, Harrison and Clifford (2016) note the distinctive resistance rural residents often express when their local area begins to undergo processes of suburbanisation.

Thus, supporters of such a perspective argue there is a need to consider the dynamic and networked rural communities that have demonstrated significant resilience and a sense of place within such spaces, and how this serves to shape the RUF (Ibid). Others have also sought to emphasise the importance of more rural-specific 'features' in shaping understandings of the fringe; for example, Hiner (2016) illustrates how the stereotypical dimensions of rurality, such as beautiful open spaces and a strong sense of community are espoused by those moving from rural spaces into the fringe. As a result, many RUF spaces have been subject to an "influx of residents seeking specific idealised notions of rural life whilst maintaining connections to urban places" (Ibid, p. 525). Such a viewpoint thus gives pre-eminence to the fact that the rural idyll maintains a strong component of the rural-urban fringe. Others have illustrated how this idyll contributes to a sense of place in such spaces for residents, with the 'doorstep' proximity of the rural being a distinctive reason for ageing populations in particular to move to such spaces (Peacock and Pemberton, 2019).

Nevertheless, on the whole, a rural-centric lens to the fringe has not been as widely adopted internationally as an urban-centric lens (Scott et al., 2013) – most likely because such spaces are "…characterized by chaotic sprawl in transition and developing countries, it is a zone of spatial restructuring in post-industrial countries" (Ravetz, 2010, p. 13). Indeed, the development of a 'rural-urban fringe' dichotomy appears to largely be a

modern construct, arising from the resurgence of interest in the rural literature in the UK in particular (Woods, 2009).

However, given the uniqueness of the rural-urban fringe, whichever of these perspectives is prioritised is arguably null. It is that it is becoming increasingly difficult to differentiate between what defines rural and urban activities, in conjunction with increasingly relational perspectives on the world (Hoggart, 2016). This returns to the questions posited in Chapter One. What is the benefit of focusing explicitly on the respective balance (or domination) of rural and urban land uses? This evidently can shape the perspectives to governing these landscapes at the local level, through interpreting local conflict and resilience, but it assumes that the perspectives to governing these landscapes are simply rooted in balancing rural or urban perspectives. Indeed, Scott et al. (2013) demonstrate that the agendas of those in predominantly 'rural' or 'urban' lenses were largely working towards similar goals and outcomes. If so, what is the purpose of focusing on this binary approach? Might there be other ways in which the rural-urban fringe is governed? Thus, in the UK literature in particular, this acknowledgement of the fringe has been argued to represent a space of still undiscovered, yet positive, opportunity (Scott et al., 2013).

Hence, in accepting such spaces have a uniqueness about them, it might be more productive to focus on these unique aspects, rather than remaining stuck in binary perspectives that have rather hindered significant development within the literature in recent years. This has led Gallent et al. (2006) to suggest that the term 'rural-urban fringe' should be used in alphabetical order only, given such spaces are "subject to a complex array of processes, which makes it difficult to quantify the degree to which 'rural' factors have

overridden 'urban factors' or vice versa" (p. 459). Instead, they suggest that the rural-urban

fringe should be treated as a complex space, with a messy combination of both urban and

rural features, but indeed, that there is something more characteristic about these spaces

than simply their position between the rural and urban. Rather more, what has also been

clear from this section of the literature review is that the rural-urban fringe is influenced

by powerful state agendas. Indeed, the arguments thus far have indicated the need to focus

on the national contexts – government agendas, approaches and resource allocations to

such landscapes – but also the ways in which these are interpreted at the local level.

Consequently, in an attempt to limit this complexity, the PhD proceeds to have a specific

focus on the UK. This is because this is where a significant amount of literature focusing on

the 'unique' aspects of such spaces can be found and how this determines process and

form, the scope of the PhD would become fundamentally too complex.

2.3   Mobility and the rural-urban fringe

As argued in Chapter One, and in taking all of the above arguments into account, multiple

authors have highlighted that there is thus one overarching key control on the

development, organisation, and subsequent experiences of the rural-urban fringe in the

UK, one which supersedes the local rural vs. urban divide – mobility (Gallent and

Andersson, 2007). The following sections therefore seek to outline this and to evaluate

current understandings pertaining to how mobility is governed within the rural-urban

fringe.

2.3.1. The importance of mobility in the rural-urban fringe:

Mobility is "self-evidently central to Western modernity... the word modern seems to evoke images of technological mobility" (Cresswell, 2012, pp. 15-16). Recent years have seen mobility become centred in the analyses of the societal changes we are witnessing today, whereby humans are able to travel considerably further distances, in considerably shorter amounts of time, at more frequent rates, and therefore access a greater array of spatial opportunities than possible hitherto (Cresswell, 2006). Importantly, mobility has become viewed as more relational - as much about "the hard wirings of road systems, rail networks, runways and taxi ways..." as it is about the "information communications technologies, not to mention capital, administrative and institutional fixities" (Adey, 2006, p. 76) that make this mobility possible and also characterise it. Indeed, from this perspective "Power and governance may even be seen to operate across territories, states and scales and in complex and non-linear ways" (Ibid, p. 77).

Yet, in avoiding the world becoming an impossible assemblage of 'liquid modernity' (Bauman, 2000), the mobility literature has also highlighted a need to focus on 'territorial fixes' – immobile places where power and governance might be concentrated in order to harness this mobility. Such a recognition has demonstrated the need to re-think the importance of mobility in a modern time – to view it as more than the simple movement from A to B but as an essential, negotiated component of the human experience today that is shaped in particular ways, by particular people, for particular purposes in particular areas (Massey, 2005).

Thus, this again aligns with the dual 'territorial' and 'relational' approaches to the rural-urban fringe. As Scott (2019a) identifies "Relational geography… has been an increasingly useful concept to grasp the potentials of the rural-urban fringe, moving beyond urban–rural divides" (p. 479). These spaces epitomise "material flows of goods, energy and wastes [which] now occur over long distances, stretching urban-rural linkages beyond urban boundaries" (Ros-Tonen et al., 2015, p. 90). Yet this mobility is seen to coalesce at the rural-urban fringe, with these landscapes characterised by static, territorial uses which seek to harness this relational mobility potential. Therefore, Gallent et al. (2006) argue that in the UK, "transport development, motorisation and the private car have all had a major influence on the development of the fringe, driving economic change and subsequently resulting in sociocultural shifts…transport occupies a central position in the fringe's history" (p. 94).

Historically then, the rural-urban fringe has always been depicted as a particularly mobile space. As Gallent and Andersson (2007) note, areas at the 'edge' of UK conurbations were typically associated with key industries during the industrial revolution, such as natural resource extraction and transportation, which were fundamentally connected to key railway nodes and the capacity to move goods. These nodes were situated outside the main urban extent but enabled connectivity to the main urban spaces but also to flows of money and people further afield – reflecting an inherently relational nature to such spaces. As such, distinctive communities formed around such infrastructures and industries (Ibid). Such trends characterised these landscapes and were particularly prominent during the 19th century and early 20th century and have come to characterise many of the rural-urban

fringe spaces in the UK today. Pryor (1968) in a study of reasons to residents to locate to the 'urban fringe' noted that the presence of transport infrastructures and 'closeness to work' for such industries were key factors in determining the choices for residents to locate to these spaces. What this seemingly highlights are both a territorial and relational aspect to mobility in these spaces, where the attractions of mobility potential in these spaces attracts residents, but in order to connect them to other places.

Despite the decline of many such industries, the importance of mobility in rural-urban fringe spaces in the UK can still be seen today. In a more recent piece of work, Peacock and Pemberton (2019) exemplified how the opportunities for mobility of different modes (buses, cars, walking) were still a prominent factor for older residents to relocate to the rural-urban fringe in England – another 'territorial' reason for locating to such spaces. Yet, such modes were often disrupted by the 'paradoxical' transitionary nature of such spaces – a function of wider decision making in the rural-urban fringe which served to undermine the mobility services they had relocated or aged in place for. This is thus a function of more relational decision-making processes. From this, they further emphasise that expectations regarding mobility in the modern world have fundamentally changed and progressively, so too has the importance of mobility in the modern rural-urban fringe. Their study subsequently argues that there is a need to understand how such mobility is governed within and beyond these spaces' context and what the inherent challenges might be in governing such spaces due to this. The paradoxical transitionary nature of mobility that exists for such residents is a product of decision making from somewhere and someone and thus understanding such governing processes and how they might be shaped by

particular interests which have differential ideas regarding the utilisation of mobility in the rural-urban fringe.

2.3.2. Governing mobility in the UK rural-urban fringe – what do we know?

In considering what some of the challenges regarding governing mobility in the rural-urban fringe might entail, the UK literature is relatively lacking. Yet, some can be inferred from (limited) literature of governing the rural-urban fringe and the nature of mobility in the rural-urban fringe more widely. This section therefore infers what these might be.

2.3.2.1. Considerations for territorial mobility:

At a more territorial level, it has been noted that the ways in which mobility is 'performed' within such spaces continues to shift. Lichter and Zilliak (2017) argue that the increased potential for populations to be mobile has made the rural and urban 'boundaries' that surround the rural-urban fringe highly permeable. They also emphasise that the access to these mobility opportunities is seldom equal for everyone. However, they focus directly on American examples, demonstrating that the suburb exemplifies the classic American middle-class dream, a landscape designed around the freedom of private vehicle ownership and opportunity - an idyll that is seldom economically or socially achievable for a vast proportion of American residents today. Otherwise, Peacock and Pemberton (2019) also found this to be the case in the UK rural-urban fringe, where individuals were seeking

to 'age in place' due to a perceived greater access to mobility services as they decided to retire their driving licenses. Thus, for those that might govern such landscapes, this infers that there is a need to consider the plurality of mobility needs within such landscapes and the inherent pressures this might perpetuate.

This is however problematic because, as Gallent et al. (2006) suggest, the continual development of new housing estates in the rural-urban fringe will increase population pressures – and thus mobility pressures - in these localities. This is likely to be a key factor in determining the stability of community networks in the fringe, particularly given that such spaces continue to offer increasingly localised socio-economic opportunities and are viewed as sites of opportunity within the UK (Scott et al., 2013). This has already been illustrated to have significant ramifications on older residents residing in the rural-urban fringe in particular (Peacock and Pemberton, 2019).

2.3.2.2. Considerations for relational mobility:

Otherwise, Gallent et al. (2006) also outline how many rural-urban fringe landscapes typically comprise a complex network of shared mobility infrastructures, such as A-roads, B-roads, motorways, rail and bus services. Indeed, it is widely accepted that the higher presence of such infrastructures has "given the fringe its own unique fabric" (Gallent and Andersson, 2007, p. 8). Yet, whilst features may intersect these spaces, they are not necessarily *confined* to just these spaces – they will be similarly utilised by other people and places which seek to utilise mobility to contribute alternate goals. Thus, these

infrastructures contribute to the **relational** rural-urban fringe and connect these spaces to people and places from far further afield yet maintain a **territorial** presence in the fringe. Within this may follow conflict, as different individuals seek to take advantage of the mobility infrastructure perpetuated by these landscapes in potentially conflicting ways.

In this regard, there are different types of relational pressures which might exist. In the UK, Christie (2002) notes how motorways commonly intersect fringe areas, whereby they "take us from place to place via a kind of limbo" (Ibid: quoted in Jensen, 2009, p. 3). Thus, people regularly travel through the fringe, but perhaps not to it. In supporting this, Jenson (2009) notes how the rural-urban fringe encompasses varying 'ephemeral' forms of mobility practices, whereby many individuals travel through the rural-urban fringe via high-speed infrastructure and often fail to acknowledge the existence of these types of landscapes; rather more they are routes in and routes out of particular economic functions.

The rural-urban fringe has also been associated with fleeting visits to these spaces, where these relational pressures might coalesce at the fringe. This sees mass amounts of individuals travelling to and engaging with such landscapes and facilities transiently - for example, through visiting large shopping complexes before promptly leaving, which arguably contributes to a 'placelessness' in the rural-urban fringe (Shoard, 2002). This again suggests that there might be wider relational mobility pressures impinging upon such spaces due to the presence of such infrastructures and facilities, though this has not been explored within the literature in a sufficient capacity.

Otherwise, uses of mobility from further afield have also changed, which has seemingly incited a need to adapt transport services. The relative importance of railways, for example, have somewhat declined *vis a vis* the continuing increase in the affordability private car. Gallent and Andersson (2007) note how such transport facilities have transitioned to park and ride systems which accommodate attempt to mediate the over dependence on the private car. In turn, there is seemingly a car dependency within such landscapes today, with specific attempts to overcome this through a return to promoting shared transport services. However, how openly or reluctantly those who govern have been to initiate this, or how easy or difficult it has been to accomplish this, is not sufficiently understood.

2.3.3. Summarising the rural-urban fringe literature:

As has been outlined in these discussions, there is a need to stop exploring mobility in the rural-urban fringe from purely local 'rural' or 'urban' centric perspectives (Scott, 2019a), which often detracts from thinking about the unique aspects of governing mobility in such spaces. There are clearly both territorial and relational processes of mobility in the rural-urban fringe, where different people, each with different powers who wish to enact different processes and create different forms, converge in these spaces (Qvistrom, 2013). This suggests that mobility in the rural-urban fringe is negotiated (Scott, 2019a) – beyond simple 'rural' or 'urban' divisions, but with other actors at different scales and in different places. Thus, power (or a lack of) is important for understanding mobility in the fringe. But the literature tells us that mobility has changed and hence that the ways in which mobility is governed in the rural-urban fringe may have also changed. What is therefore required is research that seeks to move away from abstract conceptualisations of such spaces and

towards more grounded understandings of the power conflicts that characterises governing mobility the rural-urban fringe. Consequently, the following section considers the modern processes which may be of relevance to the rural-urban fringe, including the 'governance institutions' that will impinge upon such landscapes and thus the ways in which mobility may be shaped and/ or governed within a modern context. This is critical given that "peri-urban and urban-rural interfaces [are] produced by the activities and perceptions of the people who govern [across] the horizontal/ territorial dimensions of *scale* and the need to govern across jurisdictional and institutional scales" (Ros-Tonen at al., 2015, p. 86).

2.4. New governance frameworks for the rural-urban fringe literature

Woods and Heley (2018) argue, that the "effective governance of rural-urban [fringe] relations require approaches that are grounded in the democratic legitimacy provided by the association of governance institutions with territorial space" (p. 58) – which Scott (2019a) concurs will help move away from the abstract conceptualisations of such spaces. This situates the rural-urban fringe, its character, challenges and opportunities as being a product of democratic structures and suggests there is a need to consider the wider state mechanisms and decision making that maintain or alter such structures. As Ros-Tomen et al. (2015) state – "the complex urban-rural linkages and their connection to distant places and players, requires a nested approach that connects local authorities with national and global actors" (p. 102). Sections 2.2 and 2.3 also illustrated that the rural-urban fringe is indeed subject to influences from the actions of national government and how they shape

policy approaches. These impinge upon how such landscapes are governed locally. Similarly, it was also discussed that mobility itself in the rural-urban fringe could be contested – comprised of differential sources of power. Thus, in understanding how mobility might be governed in the rural-urban fringe, there is a need to think about how these actions are accomplished in line with the 'nested' governance structures, rules and regulations utilised by the state (table 2).

Institutional design dimensions for peri-urban and urban-rural governance			
Dimension	**Addresses the problem of:**	**Meaning**	**Authors**
Integration	Fragmentation (horizontal)	Integrated vision of city regions or rural-urban landscapes as social-ecological systems (SES) that should be steered for resilience	Folke et al. (2005), Rauws and de Roo (2011), Scott et al. (2013), Forster and Escudero (2014)
Interaction and collaborative governance	Fragmentation (horizontal)	Decision-making based on coalitions and interactions between societal actors (households, businesses, public sector, civil society organizations) oriented towards defining and resolving societal problems and creating new opportunities	Kooiman and Bavinck (2013), Hajer (2014)
Multi-level governance	Fragmentation (vertical)	Governance involving interactions between different levels within a scale: from global to local on a geographical scale or from constitutions to operational rules on an institutional scale	Bulkeley and Betsill (2005), Cash et al. (2006), Corfee-Morlot et al. (2011), FAO (2011), Biermann et al. (2012)
Adaptiveness	Institutional rigidity	Flexibility to adapt to complex and unpredictable dynamics associated with the uncertainty caused by global environmental, financial, social and demographic trends and their impact on the urban-rural landscape; coping with risk	Torfing et al. (2012), Kooiman and Jentoft (2009), Rauws and de Roo (2011), Scott et al. (2013), Forster and Escudero (2014)

Table 2 - Proposed governance dimensions for better understand how rural-urban fringe spaces are governed by Ros-Tonen et al. (2015).

These suggestions resonate strongly with the metagovernance literature, which focuses on articulating the relationships and logics behind the 'vertical' and 'horizontal' structures of the state, and which captures many of the dimensions in figure 2 above. This will in turn, will help to understand which specific actors need to be engaged with in order to answer the aims and objectives of the PhD. In turn, the following section seeks to review the metagovernance literature, an increasingly popular body of literature which seeks to evaluate the ways in which these different scales engage with one another and thus how resources to 'govern' are allocated. For the objectives of this PhD, it is clear that understanding the influence of national government on the actions of officers at a variety of scales is imperative and provides a useful way through which to understanding the types of activities being undertaken by local partners, including those seeking to shape and govern mobility in rural-urban fringe spaces. As such, this comprises the focus of this section of the literature review.

2.4.1. What is metagovernance?

Jessop's (2000) notion of 'meta-governance' depicts the governance of organisations and subsequent governance strategies needed to influence control over increasingly decentralised governance networks. Metagovernance as "the governance of governance networks conducted by the central state as a privileged (although not uncontested) site of political authority" (Bailey and Wood, 2017, p. 968). Therefore, "metagovernance is an act of agency in which specific actors (i.e., metagovernors) interact to influence the activities of other actors" (Gjaltema et al., 2020, p. 1766). Whilst in theory this suggests that

metagovernance could be completed by any public or private actors with adequate resourcing and power (Ibid), a significant proportion of the literature has focused on national governments or international bodies, such as the European Union or United Nations (see Gjaltema et al., 2020, for an extensive review on the subject matter).

Internationally, therefore, the focus around metagovernance has grown substantially in the last 20 years (Jessop, 2016) and is increasingly viewed as a useful, though not entirely uncontested, conceptualisation for explaining a plethora of ways in which metagovernors alter the relationships, power, and potential of other actors in order to enact their goals – to differential successes. For example, Bell and Park (2006) illustrate how the New South Wales Authority hindered effective governance by not including the necessary stakeholders in water reform programmes, not defining clear enough goals and ambitions, failing to provide adequate resourcing or sufficient powers to make said goals a reality. Critically, the authors emphasise the impact of "politically loaded decision making" (p. 79), which reminds us that the state is also seeking to enact its own agenda in decentralised governance, rather than simply achieving objective goals.

There exists a diversity of applications of the metagovernance concept, and it is this flexibility which illustrates the potential to apply this theory to understanding how mobility is governed in the rural-urban fringe. As examples, others have applied metagovernance to explain the outcomes for decision-making processes regarding climate change and insect infestations (Parkins, 2008), the planning of national parks (Lund, 2009), urban regeneration (Engberg and Larsen, 2010) and more recently, tourism strategies (Adie and Amore, 2020). In particular, a key critique of current governance research in transport and

mobility has been a "lack of attention to power, context, resources and legitimacy" (Tønnesen et al., 2019, p. 35). This is particularly founded under the recognition that decision making for transport is also increasingly becoming a "complex negotiation through a network of actors" (Marsden and Reardon, 2017, p. 239), of which the state can aim to control. However, for some, this diversity of applications for using metagovernance reflects a significant problem, whereby metagovernance begins to develop a "conceptual ambiguity" and "risks becoming a catch-all phrase and a solution for every complex problem" (Gjaltema et al., 2020, p. 1760).

The literature also illustrates that metagovernance is a contested concept, with tensions between its initial conception as a macro-level, regulatory concept (Jessop, 2000) and its applications at the micro-level (Klijn and Koppenjan, 2004; Sorenson and Torfing, 2007). Whilst this initially appears to reflect a disjunct in the legitimacy of the metagovernance approach, Sorenson and Torfing (2007) rather more outline that this diversity of scalar approaches to metagovernance is actually a strength. In turn, the combination of these scales of applying metagovernance positions it as a reflexive, higher order form of governance involving: (1) the development and propagation of hegemonic norms or ideologies pertaining to how to govern and be governed; (2) political, normative and context-dependent selections among different amalgamations of governance mechanisms; and (3) the calculated development of particular institutional arrangements of governance in order to prevent interruption and advance particular political goals.

In summary, metagovernance is generally steered from the 'top', but can be enacted by any purposeful public of private organisation or actor providing they have the resources

and relative power to actualise their ambitions. As Ravetz (2010) argues, the rural-urban fringe "is subject to many layers of influence from local to regional, national and global: it involves a wide variety of stakeholders, actors and institutions: and it shows levels of complexity, innovation, transition and emergence" (p. 3). In applying the metagovernance approach to governing mobility in the rural-urban fringe, we can thus analyse (1) the ways in central government develop ideologies regarding how to govern mobility more generally, (2) the political, normative or context-dependent governance mechanisms and organisations that influence the ways in which mobility can be governed in the rural-urban fringe and (3) the institutional arrangements which impinge upon the officers that govern mobility in the rural-urban fringe, of which are linked to wider state agendas. Indeed, this offers a far more pluralistic perspective on governing mobility in such spaces and how decision making is determined by a variety of hierarchal scales of governance structures, institutions and political agendas.

Metagovernance is therefore an incredibly useful concept for two critical reasons. Firstly, it serves as a tool for understanding the ways in which different officers and organisations at the local **territorial** scale might be empowered or disempowered with regards to governing mobility in the rural-urban fringe. This is because, as Gjaltema et al. (2020) ascertain, metagovernance is contingent on a central government setting conditions within which local authorities can attempt to enact their own objectives within a governance network. This involves the resources, power and frameworks that situate the approaches that can be taken to governing mobility in the rural-urban fringe.

Secondly, metagovernance outlines how the state might alter the relationships between different officers and organisations at different vertical and horizontal scales, which will impact the contexts in mobility is governed in the rural-urban fringe (Geddes, 2006). Crucially, as identified previously, some mobility infrastructures and services in the rural-urban fringe transcend local, jurisdictional remits and are often also **relational**. Thus, the literature on metagovernance would also suggest that there could be a plurality in the types of actors at a variety of scales that might influence decision making regarding these shared infrastructures. Yet, Marsden and Reardon (2017) note that despite there being many papers that recognise the need to focus on the governance of mobility at a variety of different scales, such analyses are often confined to one such particular scale, meaning that any investigation of the interactions of different actors between different scales are typically neglected within the literature. It is particularly interesting that this is similarly the case for the rural-urban fringe literature and reaffirms that the combination of these approaches remains a critical gap to be addressed. Indeed, the primary benefit of the metagovernance approach is that it respects both sides of this proverbial coin and "enables us to analyse the relationship between public authorities and governance networks" which might determine the quality and conditions of mobility (Ravetz, 2010, p. 1776).

2.4.2. Metagovernance in England:

The literature on metagovernance in the context of the UK continues to depict the state as undergoing a process of restructuring - a transition representing the outwards movement of responsibilities of the state and a focus on establishing the "resources, rule setting

capacities and agenda-setting capabilities" which then enable "an actor (or group of actors) to shape the practices and preferences of other actors in a governance network" (Bailey and Wood, 2017, p. 969). These processes initially began through calls for Scottish devolution and eventual (contested) appetite for independence (Jonas and Moisio, 2018).

But, in England in particular, there has been a concerted movement towards 'new localism' – a transition from regional policy and planning towards those achieved at the subregional or local level (Gallent et al., 2013) and with the Conservative-coalition (and subsequent Conservative majority) governments increasingly favouring such approaches (Gallent et al., 2013). This largely came about from criticisms that the state was too 'top down' (Jessop, 2003) compared to, for example, other EU countries. In turn, whilst some have argued that these represent processes of a 'hollowing out' of the state (Gjaltema et al., 2020), the metagovernance approach posits that such processes are not about the UK government relinquishing power, but rather more aiming to control increasingly complex, supposedly localised network from a distance (Pemberton and Goodwin, 2010).

Thus, Goodwin et al (2005) have argued that there has also been a process of 'filling in' of the UK Government. They suggest that the ideology of hollowing out has a 'spatial myopia' – failing to account for how the state has been able to reconfigure under "new institutions, new priorities and new strategies of governance" (p. 338). Consequently, the literature appears to have reached a consensus on the need for a more flexible conceptualisation of these processes, given substantive evidence in the literature that central government has both hollowed out the regional level and filled in at the subregional level (Harrison, 2012), thus evidencing that such process can flow in multiple directions. Much of the literature

has therefore outlined how these processes are "linked in a dialectical relationship through the hollowing out of the nation state and filling in of other spatial scales" (Shaw and MacKinnon, 2011, pp. 24). It is therefore important to understand how this has occurred.

2.5. English devolution

On the surface, this more nuanced view of hollowing out and filling in can certainly been seen in the case of recent processes of English devolution. This process was initially promoted under New Labour but was adopted and altered by the 2010 Conservative-led coalition government and has continued to become entrenched by the Conservative majority party since (Hoole and Hincks, 2020). Through devolution, governance structures in recent years have been characterised by the transfer of power from national or regional levels to emergent subregional structures (Gherhes et al., 2020) and with an increasing emphasis placed on self-regulation at the local scale. This process is commonly described lacking even implementations (Harrison, 2012) and has been critiqued for how it has resulted in the creation of differently empowered organisations across different spatial contexts.

Subsequently, the following sections focus on the modern "institutional and organisational structure of the state" in the UK and how this "affords government the ability to manage networks" without direct intervention (Baker and Stoker, 2012, p. 1028). Within this, it is outlined how the state is aiming to replace its direct intervention in local governance and embedding new organisations and institutions, all of which have direct relevance to

considerations on the types of officers and organisations that may now influence how mobility is governed in the rural-urban fringe. This investigation is critical, for it allows for a closer investigation of contextual micro-politics and power conflicts created by central government, which enables a greater assessment of how certain people and places might be served better by such a reconfiguration rather than other places (Stout and Love, 2018) and thus, for example, have more power to steer how shared mobility infrastructures are governed. Indeed, the imbalance of the devolution process is important to consider – not all territories have been given such power and there will thus be differences as to how territorial and relational mobility can be governed (Jonas, 2011; Dembski, 2015). Thus, understanding the characteristics of this emergent subregional scale is critical in embedding a detailed understanding of how mobility is governed in the rural-urban fringe within a modern context.

2.5.1. City-regions – a new political arena:

The first critical consideration centres around city-regions – government constructed 'soft spaces' which are argued to exist based on (questionable) functional economic areas (Hoole and Hincks, 2020). The objective here is not to focus on what city-regions are and their respective history – Scott (2019b) provides a crucial summary of this – but to understand city-regions rather more in the context of modern devolution processes in England – what Scott (2019) has coined as an 'unfinished third wave' of city-regionalism. This is because, as outlined in Chapter One, Gallent (2006) predicted significant implications

for the rural-urban fringe in the subsequent increasing traction around city-regions in government policy. Gallent's interest here potentially developed upon the recognition that "improved accessibility in peripheral zones is conducive to the further outward expansion of the built-up area of the city-region, while the outward shift of the built-up area creates demands for yet additional rounds of investment in transport infrastructure" (Scott, 2019b, p. 560-561). Indeed, this reasserts the importance of mobility and the rural-urban fringe within a city-regional contexts.

Scott's (2019b) assertion of an 'unfinished third wave' of city-regionalism proposes the idea that city-regions themselves remain in flux. This is likely due to the increasing relational arguments underpinning city-regionalism (Harrison, 2012) – whereby despite "compelling evidence that spatial configurations are constituted through the spatiality of flow, city-regions are unable to escape the existing territorial mosaic of regional and subregional political-administrative units and boundaries" (p. 24). Indeed, Harrison (2012) therefore suggests there is a need to focus on what renders city-regions 'visible' – the processes which make the city-region appear 'territorial', of which draws our attention to how the state has attempted to legitimise them.

Since 2004, the government has proceeded to double down on the city-regional agenda. England has since seen the promotion of mayoral combined authorities around city-regions, of which are "now established as a key spatial arena for shaping sub-national urban policy" in the UK (Waite and Bristow, 2019, p. 689). This has seen the 'pooling' of local government resources and responsibilities alongside an inheritance of economic

development, local regeneration and (critically in the context of this thesis) transport functions 'assumed' from central government (Deas, 2014, p. 2284). An engagement of policy at this scale is reflective of a more rigorous transition towards forms of self-autonomy at lower scales than has been seen before. Similarly, English devolution is increasingly being wrapped in an emergent 'metropolitics' of US-driven agglomerative thinking (Etherington and Jones, 2016) – the implications of which are returned to later. In recent times, this flux and desire for 'visibility' is characterised by ongoing processes of devolution and a discourse of supposed 'levelling up' (MacKinnon, 2020) – imbuing these city-regional combined authorities with more power.

In critiquing how this visibility has been created, the literature has therefore drawn attention to the fact that, whilst the concept of city-regionalism has roots in regional planning of the early 20th century (Hall, 2013), modern applications of the concept in England are now being "remoulded and stretched…to fit better the processes and patterns…and territorial organisation associated with globalisation" (Jonas and Moisio, 2012, p. 354). Thus, a recent and arguably critical movement in the city-region literature has been one that seeks to draw attention to the geopolitical processes of negotiating city-regionalism (Hoole and Hincks, 2020), of which both shows how city-regions are political-economic in nature, but is also said to shed light on how the state has increasingly centred itself within the city-regional agenda - and of which contrasts a hollowing out of the nation state (Jonas and Moisio, 2018).

Indeed, from this perspective, the creation of city-regional combined authorities has rather more been coined as being underpinned by the 'spatial selectivity of the state', whereby the UK central government is seen to be directly privileging "scales, places and spaces through accumulation strategies (economic policy) and hegemonic projects (ideology)" (Jones, 1997, p. 237). This has been exemplified to be happening at the city-regional level in England, whereby certain cities and towns have been demarked as being outside of city-regional limits (see Harrison, 2012) despite being functionally (particularly academically) integrated with surrounding spaces. This reflects how central government, as a metagovernor, chooses who, how and why to prioritise certain areas within this city-regional agenda (Ibid).

Therefore, this emphasis on the geopolitics of the state is crucial as multiple authors have demonstrated how city-regions are as much functions of a focus on the global economy as they are "rooted in the distinct historical-geographical contexts and political-institutional structures" (Li and Wu, 2018, p. 314), which infers that the mayoral combined authority structures have not been erected on an empty canvas, but are constructed on the foundations of past state processes. Indeed, many argue that the mayoral combined authorities which exist in English city-regions "inevitably attract powers away from the nation state, but only insofar as the strategic and selective provision of social and physical infrastructure to city-regions forms part of the state's management of its own self-interests" (Jonas, 2013, pp. 288-289). Consequently, many have framed city-regions in England as a 'chimera' – something hoped for yet impossible to achieve (Etherington and Jones, 2016).

Indeed, "for others, the asymmetric and experimental nature of English city-regional deal-making is problematic in deepening territorial inequalities and pitting places against one another" (Hoole and Hincks, 2020, p. 1586). This renders city-regions "as a contested product of discourses (talk), territorial relationships (territory) and technologies (both material and of power)" (Addie and Keil, 2015, p. 409). Therefore, there are clear criticisms regarding the effectiveness of city-regionalism in English devolution. Yet, such discussions nonetheless re-affirm the need to focus on the implications of the city-regionalism and devolution agenda and how these are reinforced through the active decision making of the state. Indeed, this could have significant implications on the extent to which certain officers and spaces are privileged with regards to governing relational mobility infrastructure rural-urban fringe.

Finally, there remain a number of critical gaps in this literature of which are of clear relevance to this thesis. Firstly (and crucially in context of this thesis) there is a tendency for the literature to focus on "winning" or "superstar" cities and regions (Hadjimichalis and Hudson, 2014, p. 213), whereby other 'ordinary' cities or towns are seldom explored. If this is true, then it is critical to focus on areas outside the city-regional agenda – those in the 'spatial in-between' (Dembski et al., 2017). Indeed, Dembski et al., (2017) make a critical contribution in this regard. Drawing attention to places on the 'urban periphery' of city-regions, namely St Helens, they note that there has been a strong emphasis on re-urbanisation in the Mersey Belt region, but where both cities (Manchester and Liverpool) experience higher growth than their surrounding local authorities. This has real

implications for areas such as Warrington and St Helens. Critically, they also conclude by suggesting "this is not to say that… all places on the urban periphery are affected the same way" (p. 239).

Furthermore, as many authors have outlined; "the focus thus far has been almost exclusively on urban manifestations" (Scott, 2011, p. 857) whereby there has been "little consideration of the nature and effectiveness of such arrangements on rural areas" (Pemberton and Shaw, 2012, p. 441). These spaces are generally considered less attractive in this city-regional configuration due to their less immediately obvious connections to the global sphere, despite authors such as Pemberton and Shaw (2012) emphasising the important roles these spaces play in an era of more localised economic governance *vis a vis* the limited amount of attention they receive in a city-regional context. Thus, the current literature on governance and city regionalism in the UK can be seen as deficient in this regard. Indeed, this could be particularly relevant in an exploration of the rural-urban fringe – spaces which may either be regarded as attached the city-regional status assigned to them and thus benefitting from the accompanying powers afforded to those that govern within this jurisdiction, or otherwise outside of them.

Nonetheless, "metagovernance failure are important for analysing the development, tensions and contradictions of city region economic governance within the context of the UK Government's devolution and localism agenda" (Etherington, 2019 p. 371). This is particularly because, as Harrison (2012) outlines, they link particularly to a focus on the territorial, relational and mobility. Indeed, "To overcome the debilitating binary division

between territorial and relational geography one needs to recognize that political space is bounded and porous: bounded because politicians are held to account through the territorially defined ballot box…porous because people have multiple identities and they are becoming ever more mobile, spawning communities of relational connectivity that transcend territorial boundaries." (Morgan, 2007, p. 33). Thus, given city-regions constitute the new 'political space' (Ibid) and that the concentration of this mobility is often hyper-located in the rural-urban fringe (Gallent, 2006; Gallent and Andersson, 2007), this re-affirms arguments to not only focus on the rural-urban fringe, but also to use a metagovernance lens in order to assess the effectiveness and relative influence of city-regionalism on how mobility might be governed in such spaces.

2.5.2. Enhanced entrepreneurialism? New localism and Local Enterprise Partnerships:

Within the devolution agenda, there has also been an increasing emphasis on entrepreneurialism. Entrepreneurialism has a distinctive history within UK governance and is characterised as "the process of creating value for citizens by bringing together unique combinations of public and/or private resources to exploit social opportunities" (Morris and Jones, 1999, p. 74). This legacy of entrepreneurialism in UK policy is key to highlight and as the authors suggest, its existence as a governance strategy pre-dates modern assemblages of subregional governance structures. Consequently, local actors have been influenced by entrepreneurial institutions in different eras of government restructuring; through subsequent changes government and thus in metagovernance strategies (Ibid).

Neck et al. (2014) identified 4 distinctive periods with regards to entrepreneurialism in the UK, with the current form - post-2010 localist – seeing the emergence of a new scale of subregional entrepreneurial governance, alongside a greater emphasis on self-governance at the local level.

Thus, the emphasis on entrepreneurialism and enterprising in the UK has changed over time but has (discursively at least) become more prominent in UK policy today. In this understanding, the state has encouraged cross-economic forms of private sector relationships to encourage forms of development. Indeed, it is these beliefs held by the government that began the hollowing out and filling in of the state, through the abolition of regional assembles and creation of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). Established in 2010, the now 39 LEPs transpose the traditional, geographical delimitated administrative territories used by central government. Instead, the delineation of the LEP remit is based around supposed 'functional economic areas', whereby an array of multi-scaled public partnerships are expected to re-configure with increasingly private-led partnerships (Broadhurst, 2018). These partnerships objectively seek to create sub-regional methods of economic development through tying local businesses with smaller democratic levels of government bodies (Harrison, 2010). Thus, whilst governmental policy steers the ethos of devolution, local agency gains responsibility for sub-regional governance. In turn, central government is increasingly focusing its attention on "LEPs to perform locally inflected roles and to foster the horizontal coordination of local actors" (Gherhes et al., 2020, p. 1020), which may thus mean that LEPs have become important in determining the approaches to

governing mobility in the rural-urban fringe.

Otherwise, Harrison (2012) emphasises that the increasing dependency on the private sector for economic prowess in city-regional contexts has accentuated the potential for private investors to implement their ideologies into these spaces. In turn, Jonas (2011) emphasises that such relationships unveil the increasingly complex interplays of capital-state-space relations – those that are considerably less straightforward than once before. This suggests that whilst the actions of government and its policies may be a "key influence on the external environment in which entrepreneurship takes places" (Smallbone, 2016, p. 201), but such practices ultimately result from the "creativity, drive and skills of individuals" (Ibid, pp. 201). Thus, central government may steer the 'rules of the game' (Pemberton and Goodwin, 2010), but the literature also suggests that decision making that occurs at the local level is contingent on how said actors engage and aim to steer these rules in their favour. Indeed, recently, Salder (2021) argued the need to account for a more relational entrepreneurialism and to focus on how economic growth may be contingent on spaces outside of immediate territorial, administrative boundaries.

This had led to a reading on 'entrepreneurial governance'. Recent literature has increasingly "been noticing the role of entrepreneurial individuals" (Döringer, 2019, p. 2) and how they might shape local economic contexts in relation to wider policies. However, "knowledge about the possible influence of individuals on local and regional governance has thus far remained superficial" (Ibid). Thus, recent literature calls for a deeper insight into 'governance entrepreneurship' – the ways in which "governance changes [are] caused

internally by entrepreneurial individuals" (Ibid, p. 11). However, this literature typically aims to frame these changes as being focused on policy or institutional changes internally, rather than framing such individuals in relation to drawing potential from existing policy or institutional changes. In turn, there is an assumption within the literature that entrepreneurialism is contingent on individuals that "are willing to invest their resources – time, energy, reputation, money – to promote a position in return for anticipated future gain" in influencing policy outcomes, rather than improving their immediate economic position (Kingdon, 1995, p. 179).

2.5.3. An increasing focus on collaborative governance:

Combining the entrepreneurial insights with those on city-regionalism, as a summary of the increasing movement to subregional scales of governance, it is clear that modern processes of metagoverning by central government have dramatically changed. The vertical creation of new sub-regional structures and an increasing focus on entrepreneurialism has emphasised the need for more complex collaborative, 'horizontal' forms of governance. As noted back in 2000, the "emphasis on inter-organisational arrangements is a mainstay of government regimes", however, "Government incentives and directives for collaborative governance have become ever more abundant" (Huxham et al., 2000, p. 338). Certainly, this has only increased in recent years (Harrison, 2012).

A crucial development within this literature is a focus on the inherent power dynamics between these collaborations. For example, Stout and Keast (2021) argue the need to define collaborative governance on the basis of "how power is held and wielded fundamentally alters how we work together and whether genuine collaboration is achieved" (p. 17). This power, they argue, is variable across different governance networks and will be contingent on the types of actors that are engaged in decision making. Yet, Stout (2019) also emphasises that a good proportion of the literature on collaborative governance discusses practices that are not inherently collaborative in themselves, particularly because of hierarchal and competitive agendas inherent within any governance network. Thus, this recent push for consideration of power dynamics in the collaborative governance literature appears to have also sparked a need to "turn our attention to the dispositions that prefigure interpersonal dynamics along with organisation process designs that either hinder of foster collaboration… and takes account of micro-practices in action" (Stout et al., 2018, p. 99). This is important for understanding how governing relational mobility in the rural-urban fringe may too be impacted by this.

This correlates well to another, increasingly 'soft' method of policy intervention utilised by the current central government – pan-regional spatial imaginaries – which constitute favoured policy arenas which constitute an array of political, administrative and democratic officers, combined with entrepreneurial, private sector actors. A prime example of this (of relevance to this thesis) is that of the Ocean/ Atlantic Gateway, which crossed the Manchester-Liverpool city-regions and the spatial in-betweens (Dembski et al., 2017) but was largely the brainchild of the private sector (Harrison, 2012). For a considerable amount

of time, this was a vehicle for improving the transport and connectivity across the Northwest (Ibid). Others have thus note that the "imprecision and flexibility of spatial imaginaries" (Hoole and Hincks, 2020, p. 1487) enables once isolated private entrepreneurs to have a greater influence in the steering, coordination and subsequent delivery of these projects – of which can also serve as a vehicle to propagating their own economic interests (Dembski et al., 2017). Thus, within increasingly complex collaborative networks are also increasingly 'fuzzy' models of delivery (Haughton and Allmendinger, 2009).

Another example of this is the Northern Powerhouse. Where city-regions remain the catalysts of drawing growth from the global economy (Harrison, 2012), the emergence of an undefined, 'fuzzy' Northern Powerhouse – the connecting of several city-regions through mobility infrastructures in order to trigger an agglomerative effect (Lee, 2017) - remains engrained in promises to Northern leaders and, consequently, in narratives conveyed to Northern constituents. In turn, through state generated dialogue such as "rebalancing the economy" and "levelling up" (MacKinnon, 2020), the Northern Powerhouse brand has remained a relatively resistant promise since it is conception in 2014. Indeed, the Northern Powerhouse remains a critical way in which central government has aimed to foster collaborative governance in the North. Yet, the effectiveness of developing such a Northern Powerhouse thus far has been similarly criticised. Many argue that the realisation of such initiatives is blocked by an array of *conflicting* spatial imaginaries: geographically fuzzy and insufficiently defined in nature (Haughton and Allmendinger, 2015), with inadequate funding to realise the project (Lee, 2017). As such, the Northern Powerhouse remains a powerful ideology that Northern leaders, even those in mayoral combined authorities, lack sufficient political or fiscal

powers to actualise (Ibid). Yet, this discourse still seemingly dictates key rhetoric used to govern the North from a distance. Nonetheless, it is clear that the development of the Northern Powerhouse is centred around the relational, mobility potential of city-regions – once again returning to questions as to how the rural-urban fringe might be functionally, economically and potentially politically integrated into such imaginaries.

2.6. Conclusions

This literature review has accomplished three critical objectives. Firstly, section 2.2. has outlined the reasons behind a continued obfuscation of the rural-urban fringe literature. It is characterised by an incessant need to define such spaces by their degree of urban-rural interactions. This has resulted in an international schism as to how such spaces are understood and indeed, has informed the highly variable and complex understanding of the rural-urban fringe that exist today. Arguments have been made for a more neutral, alphabetically driven, both territorial and relational approach to these spaces, of which considers other important factors which may instead drive how these spaces are governed. Arguably, it is such pre-existing literature which appears to have prevented an engagement with literatures that aim to substantiate how the rural-urban fringe is governed – resulting in a tendency to problematise the rural-urban fringe rather than critically explore.

Building upon this, section 2.3. outlined how conceptualisations of a territorial and relational mobility align well with the historical and contemporary importance of mobility in the rural-urban fringe. However, it was again clear that the supposed mobility-centric nature of the rural-urban fringe lacks validation from the perspective of those that might govern. Whilst there is clear descriptive evidence regarding how mobility infrastructures and mobility contingent processes shape processes and form the rural-urban fringe, there is a clear gap in the literature regarding how such mobility is acknowledged and interacted with by key stakeholders who might govern the rural-urban fringe. Crucially, what are the key opportunities and challenges regarding the mobility-centric nature and in which ways are they being addressed?

Overall, both sections 2.2 and 2.3 also evaluated that little is known about which types of individuals, organisations and agencies influence the rural-urban fringe outside of considerations of rural and urban actors. As already noted, the rural-urban fringe is a messy and chaotic space. Yet, the RUF in the UK has also seen a resurgence of interest in recent years (Scott et al., 2013) by key stakeholders and agencies. Arguments were thus made regarding likely prominent actors – those who are encapsulated within the jurisdictional remit of the territory to which the rural-urban fringe is attached, but also the influence of other actors, such as national governments or those that engage in relational, shared transport infrastructures. Yet, evidently, more work is required to substantiate such considerations, but needs to do so in a way that is grounded in current governance processes.

Thus, sections 2.4 and 2.5 sought to review literatures which will help to substantiate such gaps. Firstly, section 2.4 introduced metagovernance – an umbrella term within the governance literature which seeks to show how particular (generally public) metagovernors seek to govern governance networks, whilst simultaneously enacting their particular ideals. This will therefore alter the extent to which those who govern territorial mobility are imbued with power and resources to do so, as well as altering the relationships between those that govern relational mobility. It will also alter the institutional environment in which such changes occur.

Section 2.5 then explored the relevance of this in the UK, focussing in particular on the devolution processes that have been regarded as instrumental in the state accomplishing the restructuring. It explored how the UK Government dismantled previous regional structures and constructed emergent subregional structures, thus changing the network design and political framing of the UK governance networks and consequently changing how local actors engage with one another at different scales. It also notes how such hierarchal changes are contingent on the imprecise – be it the fuzzy city-regional agenda, fuzzy travel-to-work remit of the LEPs or the promotion of soft-spatial imaginaries under collaborative frameworks. The inherently political nature of this approach has also been outlined.

Finally, Chapter Two has also outlined the need to focus on the micro-practices of different stakeholders and the ways in which they can respond to metagovernance, particularly in

entrepreneurial ways. In turn, the research approach for this thesis will need to aim to factor all of this in.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

3.1.   Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological considerations and research approach used within the project. Section 3.2 outlines the research theory pertaining to the project, including the use of the metagovernance lens and the epistemological implications of using this approach. Section 3.3. then outlines the research design of the project and further discusses the rationale behind the qualitative approach adopted within the research. Section 3.4 then outlines the research strategy, discussing how the qualitative approach was employed through a case study approach. This section also discusses how the case study location was selected. This process utilised a robust mixed-methods approach, whereby data pertaining to identifying and situating a rural-urban fringe locality were incorporated into GIS software and combined to find ideal localities – these were Birchwood and Omega. Finally, a variety of literature reviews, background reading and site visits were used to ensure that the chosen sites was accurate. Once such sites had been located, the broader governance considerations were identified. In the context of the chosen site, for example, there were two large city-regions situated either side of the selected locality, which had to be considered in line with relational ways of thinking about joined-up governance.

Next, the chapter moves to focus on the research methods used. Therefore, section 3.5 outlines the rationale, merits and limitations of both of the semi-structured interview methods used within the research, as well as the sampling methods used to recruit participants. Section 3.6 outlines how the results were analysed and interpreted. Section 3.7. focuses on the ethical considerations of the research, as well as the implications of the researcher's positionality in the data collection and analyses processes. Section 3.8. summarises the approach taken in this research.

3.2.   Research theory

3.2.1. Metagovernance as a critical realist approach:

Metagovernance in itself is an approach founded in understanding the interrelation of both structure and agency. It aims to transcend the boundaries of both a strict institutionalist perspective concerned with prioritising 'structure' in governance networks and more fluid, interpretative approaches concerned with prioritising agency and individuals. It is instead a more nuanced, critical view of governance (Ungsuchaval, 2016), of "governmental capacity and the constraining role played by institutions and structures whilst allowing for the agency of networked actors" (Baker and Stoker, 2015, p. 38-39). This respects both the power of the state and the reflexive, relational behaviour of individuals.

	INSTITUTIONALIST GOVERNANCE	INTERPRETIVIST GOVERNANCE	CRITICAL REALIST GOVERNANCE
Epistemology	Positivist orientation	Idealist orientation	Critical realist orientation
State theory	(New) institutionalist approach	Anti-foundational approach	Strategic-relational approach; asymmetric power model
Governance theory	Network governance; Anglo-governance school	Decentered governance	Metagovernance
Approach to governance theory	State- and society-oriented approach	Society-oriented approach	Mostly state-oriented approach; state and society as continuum
Unit of analysis	Structures; processes	Individuals; beliefs; traditions; dilemmas	Relations; Modes of governing/governance
Network management	Network can be managed/steered	Network cannot be managed/steered	Network can be steered/collibrated through 'hand on' and 'hand off' approaches
Institution	Reified structure; Top-down	Contingent; Bottom-up construction	Dialectical; interactive; iterative
Meta-theoretical tendency	Structure over agency (dualism)	Agency over structure (dualism)	Structure-agency as duality
Relationship with government	Shift from government to governance	Shift from government to governance	Government coexists with governance in the shadow of hierarchy
Key thinkers	(Early) R.A.W. Rhodes; G.B. Peters; J. Pierre;	M. Bevir; (Late) R.A.W. Rhodes	B. Jessop; D. Marsh; P. Fawcett; J. Kooiman

Figure 3 - Differences between institutionalist, interpretivist and critical realist approaches (Ungsuchaval, 2016)

It seeks to understand the impact of the state in how it sets "the context for the design of self-organisation, ensuring the relative coherency of diverse aims and objectives, and setting the parameters within which governance transactions take place" (Flinders and Matthews, 2007, p. 196). It thus focuses on the ways in which these relational individuals converge in specific forms and over specific issues – sometimes in specific territories. This is important because this PhD is concerned with understanding how mobility is governed

in the rural-urban fringe and the extent to which the metagovernance of the state and the inherent governance structures and institutions (and relations between actors) it creates, interplay with this. This positions metagovernance as steering an ensemble of networks.

This therefore posits this research as understanding how the state permits relational interactions 'in the shadow of hierarchy' (Unsuchaval, 2016) but also how it creates and sustains scale across space. In relation to the territorial, Jessop (2016) reminds us that spaces are seldom *terra nullius* – land without sovereign. There are active processes that shaping specific types of forms in strategic ways. Yet, an overly relational approach, contingent on a hypermobile multiplicity of flows (with seldom any consideration of context and idealised forms of delivery) "insufficiently problematizes boundedness, inertia, power, and time – and internalizes spatiality into our cultural constructions to such an extent that it perhaps loses senses of space" (Jones, 2009, p. 499).

In balancing these, Jones' (2009) employment of 'phase space' – though typically applied to region building – is similarly a critical theoretical perspective for the rural-urban fringe, for it acknowledges relational flows but also focuses on how these flows are anchored or moored within specific temporal and spatial contexts of the state. In turn, space is fluid and ever-changing, but characterised by 'snapshots' of order, where metagovernors develop, organise, destroy and privilege different 'fields of force' (politics, power, positionality, etc.) and of which shape specific eventualities at any one time. These are, of course, layered over a palimpsest of other eventualities that came before. Thus, given this PhD aims to explore the implications of current governance structures on how mobility is governed in

the rural-urban fringe, this is a useful concept. Similarly, it infers a strategic-relational approach is needed – one which is "sensitive to the interaction of the various structural components of the state with political imaginaries and state projects as mediated through the balance of forces" (Jessop, 2016, p. 13).

This frames this research as 'grounding' the rural-urban fringe within this paradigm, which arguably helps to move away from abstract understandings regarding such spaces and towards understanding the specific mechanisms which impacts how mobility in such spaces might be governed in particular ways – via the conditions enacted by metagovernors. It is similarly clear from the literature that a metagovernance approach has seldom been applied to wider research concerned with mobility (Marsden and Reardon, 2017). This situates this study as attempting to form a foundation through which to connect these literatures under the metagovernance lens, which therefore begins to provide a new basis through which to interrogate these landscapes in more detail.

Overall, the topics above present this research as being situated within the Critical Realist paradigm of thought, whereby this research is interested in how "power is negotiated, maintained and resisted" by metagovernors and by different officers (Leavy, 2017, p. 130) within this 'snapshot of time' (Jones, 2009). It thus takes a 'strategic relational' approach – where it "is sensitive to cross-border complexities and tensions, strategies and tactics, in its recognition of the unfolding, dynamic, and overlapping nature of space" and thus "by focusing on territories, spaces and flows, a phase space perspective provides a basis for articulating collaboration and coherence" (Jones, 2009, p. 501). Thus, it is a useful

theoretical basis for understanding how mobility is **currently** governed in the rural-urban fringe, but therefore, cannot claim to be summative of all governance approaches that came before, nor those that may emerge after this distinctive period of metagovernance.

3.3. Research design

Overall, there is a need to explore these 'fields of force' – how they are sustained and their interactions which constitute how and why mobility in the rural-urban fringe is governed. This points towards utilising a more qualitative approach, which enables more flexibility to explore this. There are thus two critical foundations in this study where the qualitative approach is important in this research.

3.3.1. Understanding the relationships between those that govern relational mobility

The choice to focus on metagovernance means focusing on the ways in which central government (as the likely main metagovernor) is impinging upon different actors and/ or organisations, consequently shaping or regulating their approaches to governing mobility in the rural-urban fringe at the local level. Through its 'strategic' and 'spatially selective' (re)structuring of resources, central government will undoubtedly generate distinctively imbalanced vertical and thus hierarchal relationships (Jones, 2005). Indeed, Chapter Two illustrated that such networks will be differentially imbued with powers and resources across the vertical scales (Goodwin et al., 2005). Yet, under such variable scales remains the expectation of emergent 'joined up' scales of working (MacKinnon, 2020). It is within

such considerations that tensions between actors will arise as they seek to navigate a differentially governed, yet closely interrelated network of other actors and influences, at varying spatial and vertical scales (Haughton and Allmendinger, 2009). Thus, it is through assessing these interactions that the governance context for mobility will be understood.

In turn, this research needs to be designed in a manner which allows such interactions to be explored in more detail, without reducing the findings to questions of statistical representativeness. The benefits of the qualitative approach strongly support the governance focus of this research by allowing the opportunity to more closely engage with the specific agents who are responsible for governing fringe spaces, but also those who engage from wider, relational perspectives. Typically, assertions made from metagovernance perspectives are encapsulated using secondary data, by assessing policy changes or by exploring different political objectives across and array of scales (Jonas and Moisio, 2018). Yet, this has been increasingly scrutinised in the literature for it does not allow for a detailed assessment as to where differences in approach lie, nor does it provide detailed descriptions of the tensions and coalitions of approaches that exist as a function of metagovernance (Bevir and Rhodes, 2016). Consequently, this research rather more employs a primary approach to collecting qualitative data. This in turn will allow the results to explore the implications of metagovernors on the "networks and partnerships" and how they are "assertively or subtly affected and influenced" by such arrangements (Thuesen, 2013, p. 601).

There can often be difficulty in utilising such methods, particularly in gaining trusted relationships which permit accurate accounts of the tensions that might exist in a governance system (Ungsuchaval, 2016). Yet, Ayres (2018) suggests that building a trusted, co-production approach with key stakeholders is essential – which means allowing participants to help shape the research by providing the opportunity to help to identify the appropriate individuals to engage with. This is feasible in the context of this research as there is a desire to allow key stakeholders that govern mobility in the rural-urban fringe to identify who else is important in this process. In turn, this research approach will be largely shaped by the local authority of relevance - given these have typically been identified as an important organisation in governing the rural-urban fringe (Gallent, 2006) - and focus on the types of actors and organisations that they feel are important to providing a comprehensive insight into governing mobility in the rural-urban fringe. In turn, thus research follows Jonas and Moisio's (2018) call for further exploration of the 'geopolitics' that constitute and create different governance relationships and responds to current gaps in the literature by employing a qualitative approach which enables a detailed exploration of the "territorial-political processes, material structures and actors" of relevance to governing mobility in the rural-urban fringe from the perspective of local officers and the relationships between them (Ibid, p. 366).

3.3.2. Taking a more pluralistic approach to mobility in the rural-urban fringe:

As noted in Chapter Two, there has been little qualitative understanding of how mobility is governed in the rural-urban fringe, and thus this opportunity to understand the challenges

and decision-making rationales such actors adopt within wider governance narratives is fruitful. Whilst the literature regarding how the rural-urban fringe is governed has always alluded to a 'fragmented' and 'neglected' approach (Gallent, 2006), this has always been within a strictly rural-urban paradigm (Pryor, 1968; Scott et al., 2013), which only serve to perpetuate rural-urban arguments within the literature. Thus, given the evident significance of mobility in the rural-urban fringe, yet limited amount of research pertaining to this, it is crucial to begin to unpack how such mobility might be planned, organised – i.e., governed. In particular, it is important to recognise that many of the mobility infrastructures that characterise the rural-urban fringe, such as motorways, may not be owned by the local authority in question *per se*, which reaffirms to need to consider a broader, more relational approach to understanding these issues. Indeed, "governance in the rural-urban interface can be more effective, responsive, and accountable where both territorial and relational aspects" of such spaces are considered (Brown and Shucksmith, 2017, p. 296).

Otherwise, despite the importance of mobility in the rural-urban fringe, Qvistrom (2010) has also argued that "transport was… at the same time was considered one of the major threats" to such landscapes (p. 222). This highlights a paradoxical nature to mobility in the rural-urban fringe whereby mobility both underpins and threatens these landscapes (Peacock and Pemberton, 2019). It re-emphasises the importance of a deeper, more grounded study as to how the rural-urban fringe in governed and what these challenges (threats) might be. Hence, there are two key benefits to employing a qualitative approach pertaining to developing the literature on the rural-urban fringe specifically. Firstly, the

approach will enable the interviewees to explain (or indeed, counteract) the arguments made regarding the supposed neglected governance of these landscapes, in turn critically developing understanding as to how and why such a situation exists and how it is a function of metagovernance. Secondly, the qualitative approach will enable a rich understanding of governing mobility in such landscapes specifically. This is a critically neglected gap in the literature, with little foundations through which to begin to contextualise such findings. Moreover, given the focus primarily on localised context of the rural-urban fringe as a specific object of study, there will thus been a need to provide scope to allow participants to provide substantial amounts of detail in order to understand the experiences of engaging with such landscapes, which in turn supports the need to employ a qualitative approach to this research.

3.4. Research strategy: the case study approach

Given the qualitative approach adopted for this research and the fact that, in many ways, this research is innovative, there is a need to consider the best basis through which to begin to explore how mobility in governed in the rural-urban fringe. The case study approach provides an ideal approach to adopt to conduct this research as it enables specific focus on the local, contextual factors of relevance, but also those that impact this space from more relational perspectives. This method is particularly apt given the rural-urban fringe is in 'phase' and thus highly variable across time and space (Pryor, 1968). In this regard, it would be exceptionally difficult to collectively summarise how mobility is specifically governed across rural-urban fringe landscapes collectively, particularly given the inherent gaps in the

literature. Thus, this research rather more seeks to identify who is responsible for governing mobility, at what scale, what the critical challenges and opportunities appear to be in doing so and how these are sustained or addressed through current (meta)governance networks in the UK.

In turn, the objectives need to be substantiated through an initial manageable study rather than a broader approach. Certainly, as Bryman (2008) remarks, the 'exemplifying case' approach is therefore particularly useful when "the objective is to capture the circumstances and conditions of an everyday or commonplace situation…" (p. 56). In this context, the objectives of this research are to begin to understand the 'conditions' which underpin the governing mobility in the rural-urban fringe, which makes this a particularly suitable method for conducting the research. Indeed, Bryman (2008) also continues to discuss common misconceptions about the replicability of case study research. The exemplifying case approach is less concerned with a particular "extreme or unusual" aspect, but more because the case will "provide a suitable context for certain research questions to be answered" (Ibid, p. 56). Consequently, despite prominent literatures in each of the two areas of interest; the rural-urban fringe and processes of metagovernance, there is little literature linking each of the two together. No one study within the reasonable resources of a doctorate thesis can hope to summarise the complex "effect of detailed processes of spatial organization, temporal arrangement, functional specification, and supervision and surveillance" from metagovernance perspectives entirely (Mitchell, 1991, p. 95). In turn, a singular, detailed case study approach allows for a more grounded and arguably robust form of analysis which may instead begin to illustrate how such processes

constitute governing mobility in the rural-urban fringe. This is particularly effective strategy as it provides respondents with greater opportunity to exemplify the experiences that they consider relevant, rather than reducing each factor to a statistical level with little explanation. Indeed, such an approach will therefore establish a groundwork through which to build later analyses.

However, this is not to say that the case study approach is not without its limitations. As already discussed, the qualitative approach provides limitations for drawing a statistical generalisation for policy approaches. Bertaux and Thompson (2017) further emphasise this issue, suggesting "while the case study approach enables us readily to encompass the underlying processes and the particularity of contexts… such an intensive approach cannot at the same time claim to statistical representativity" (p. 12). Yet, as already remarked, this research seeks to provide an overview of which challenges or opportunities of mobility may be important, thus providing a basis of thematic inquiry rather than comprehensive list aiming to summarise the rural-urban fringe collectively. Indeed, the basis of the research is to begin to draw out whether there is any distinctiveness in the context-specific challenges of governing mobility in such spaces, what they may be and who is responsible for them across a variety of scales. Thus, the data that is collected will be specific to this landscape and 'case', however, there may be broader themes which can be explored further in future studies and in other localities, particularly if they are influenced by similar 'field of force' (Jones, 2009). Given the lack of research thus far into how mobility is governed in the rural-urban fringe in particular, a case study approach therefore provides an ideal method of conducting this research.

3.4.1. Case study selection process:

As Yin (2011) suggests, the case study approach to research is an exceptionally robust and rewarding framework if done correctly. Further to this, for Human Geographers concerned inherently with socio-spatial variations (and in the context of this study, the particular focus on the rural-urban fringe as the unique landscape), then ensuring that a suitable space was chosen in many ways underpinned the success of the research and determined the representativeness of the results. Thus, the following section begins with outlining why the research was conducted in the Warrington area, including a brief, but important, detail of the historical uses of fringe localities in this part of the UK. Moving forward, the section proceeds to outline the two approaches were taken to selecting a specific locality.

3.4.2.   Case study selection process – the North-West of England:

The first objective was to decide where in the UK to conduct the research. Of primary concern was locating the research in a part of the UK which provided to opportunity to explore the varying scales governance and that were reflective of current acts from metagovernors, but which also had a plethora of mobility infrastructures. In recent years, the Northwest of England has received prominent attention from academics, policy makers and politicians (Haughton and Allmendinger, 2015), owing to the continual increase in self-governance afforded to large, combined authorities such as Greater Manchester Combined Authority and Liverpool City Region Combined Authority have been granted (Harrison, 2010).

In addition, the Mersey Belt/ Atlantic Gateway in this region symbolises an important dynamic space, with economic and social competitiveness largely contingent upon mobility (Dembski, 2015). Thus, in locating a suitable fringe space, this region of the UK appeared a good location to explore. Furthermore, with regards to exploring current metagovernance dynamics, the Mersey Belt corridor has in many ways has been viewed as a test bed for the restructuring of the state by metagovernors (Bailey and Wood, 2017). Therefore, it was decided that the Mersey Belt region would provide an interesting case study. Thus, using data from the Centre for Hydrology and Ecology, figure 4 was developed in order to look for land use patterns across the Mersey Belt area. Then, the connectivity between these spaces was analysed using mobility motorway infrastructure to look for distinctive urban areas which were situated in between these spaces and might be encapsulated in this dynamic. This is because the fringe is known to exist especially along arterial routes" (Gallent et al., 2006, pp. 384). The broader GIS analyses at this stage demonstrated that Warrington could be a particularly interesting space to analyse as it encompassed: a) fringe spaces aligned with key mobility infrastructure (figure 4), b) a space encapsulated within complex, currently relevant, metagovernance dynamics (figure 5).

The question, however, was whether to situate the case study location within a larger metropolitan area or a nearby urban locality. It was decided that given the current inequalities within the devolution process (Harrison, 2012), it would be more apt to select a locality that reflected a greater proportion of 'fringe spaces' within the UK. Whilst it has been argued that there is significant variability between fringe spaces, the potential

governance structures of relevance could indicate some degree of replicability in the findings. Thus, the decision was made to focus on Warrington. This decision was further supported by an exploration of the fringe spaces surrounding Warrington.
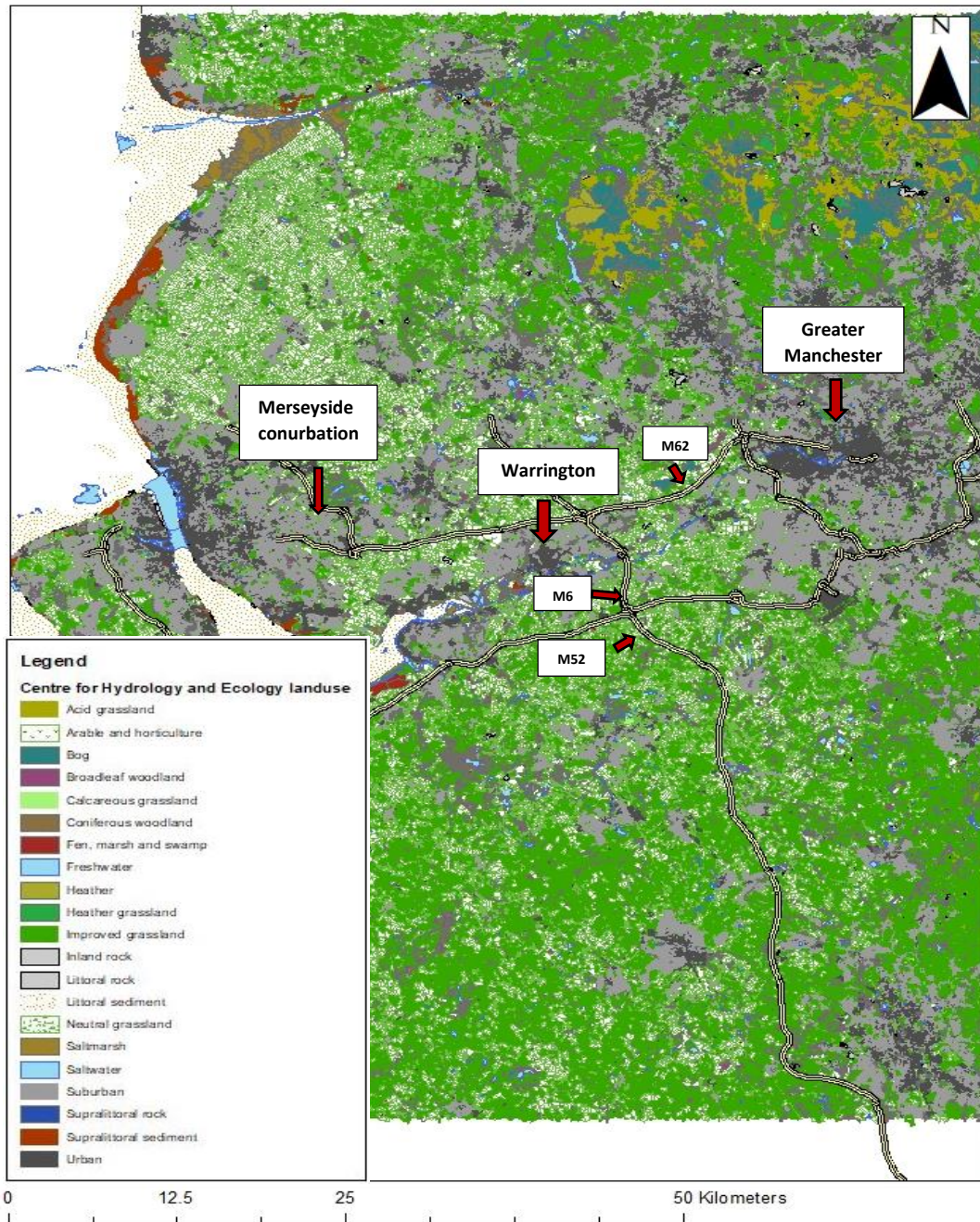
Figure 4 - Land use in the Manchester-Warrington-Liverpool corridor (Centre for Hydrology and Ecology, 2015; Open Roads, 2017).
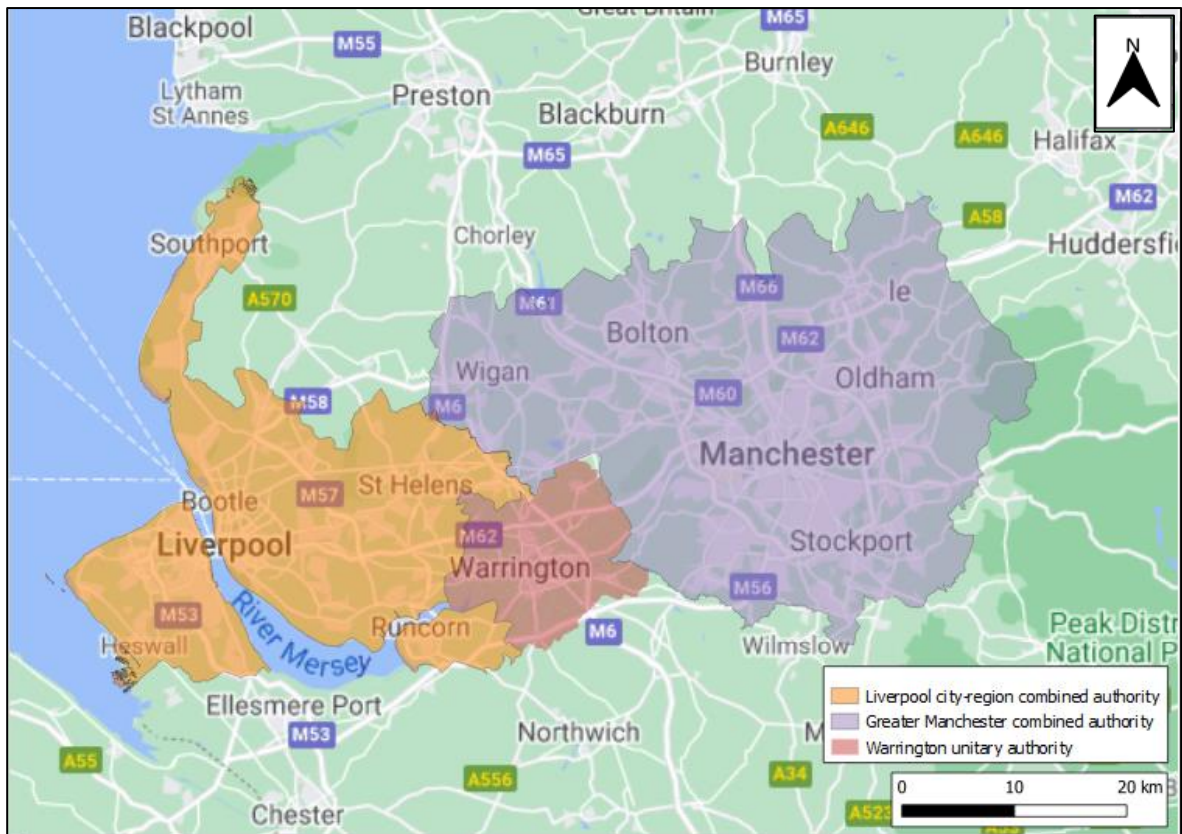
Figure 5 - The administrative boundaries of the case study region (Google Earth, 2021; ONS, 2020)

3.4.3. The case area - Warrington

Taking the discussion in this chapter so far into account, it is important to reflect on why there is a focus on Warrington specifically. Warrington is a large town of approximately 210,000 people (mid-2019 estimates) (ONS, 2020). It attained Unitary Authority status in 1998 (Bickerstaff and Walker, 2005) – "Warrington Borough Council… as a consequence has wide-ranging powers in education, social services, local transport and town planning" (Jones and Gibson, 2011, p. 241). Indeed, "Warrington's history has been shaped by the east to west River Mersey and its valley, and efforts to cross the river by ford, ferry and (since the 1200s) by bridge… Transport links were improved with new canals, including the Manchester Ship Canal in 1893, and railway links" (Jones and Gibson, 2011, p. 240).

This thesis has extensively argued the importance of mobility infrastructures in shaping the rural-urban fringe. Warrington, by function of its position, is situated within the Northwest and sits in the box of the M56, M6 and M62 – literally surrounded by mobility potential. It was clear that Warrington had sought to develop industries around this – manufacturing and logistics industries which are archetypally located in the rural-urban fringe. Yet "By the 1980s, however, de-industrialisation had left its mark… many of Warrington's manufacturing industries had declined, despite their diversity. The M6 motorway, built in the 1960s, brought benefits to the town but also allowed people to by-pass it" (Jones and Gibson, 2011, p. 240). On the surface, this indicates that the way mobility is governed in Warrington and thus in the rural-urban fringe may too have changed.

As a Unitary Authority, Warrington Borough Council have a number of powers afforded to them and thus governing mobility will be of crucial concern. Past research outlined previous council's interests in resolving "road safety, developing walking and cycling strategies, proposals for improving public transport and the recommendation that congestion charging and paying for workplace parking should not be pursued" (Bickerstaff and Walker, 2005, p. 2133). Indeed, as figure 8 below shows, the interest in mobility is still highly prominent. Whilst this does not give any indication pertaining the extent to which these considerations were focused on the rural-urban fringe explicitly, it does provide some initial understanding of the types of challenges which might be of prominent concern in such spaces.
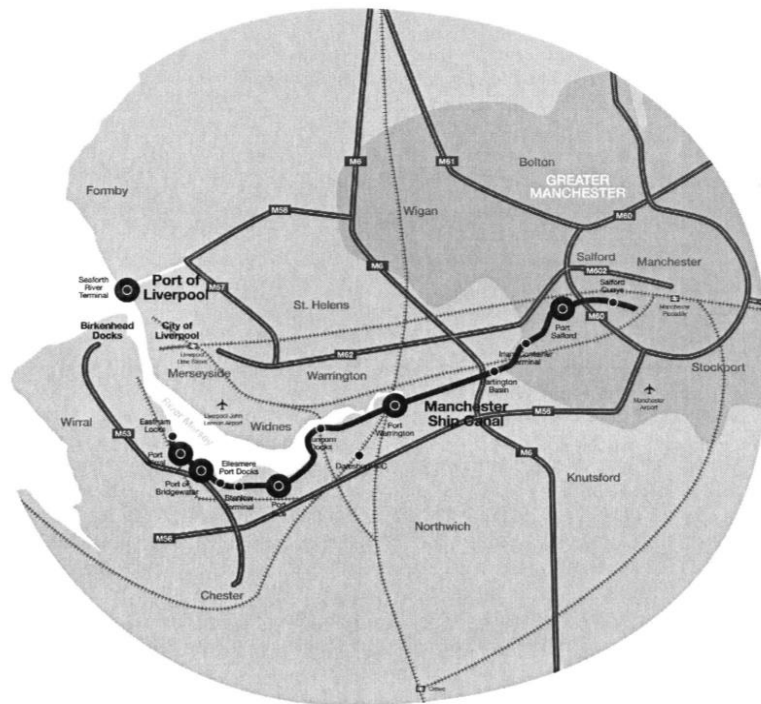
Figure 6 - A map of key transport routes in the 'Atlantic Highway' (Wray, 2014)

The clear importance of mobility in the above figure leads to the next crucial point - Warrington is also in a particularly interesting locality with regards to modern governance structures. To Warrington's East and West, as shown on figure 5, are two significant conurbations – Manchester and Liverpool – both of which comprise city-regional combined authorities and have an accompanying set of devolved powers. Indeed, many of the mobility infrastructures that characterise Warrington are similarly utilised by both city-regions (Wray, 2014). However, as said above, a distinctive decision was made not to focus on city-regions due to representativeness. The powers attributed to mayoral combined authorities in city-regions are not reflective of the powers attributed to the majority of England, which would mean that the perspective of how mobility is governed would be less applicable to a wider variety of spaces. Nonetheless, given the importance of a relational

rural-urban fringe, the proximity to both city-regions could be particularly interesting and have significant ramifications for the ways in which the rural-urban fringe is governed, including mobility explicitly. Indeed, there is a significant amount of focus on the Northwest currently, with continuing discussions regarding the improvement of transport between city-regions within wider Pan-Regional agendas (Hoole and Hincks, 2020). Consequently, Warrington appeared to be an interesting and apt space in which to situate this research, for it provides a textbook location for understanding mobility and the modern governance structures which have been enacted around these mobility structures.

3.4.4. Selecting rural-urban fringe spaces in Warrington:

As discussed in Chapter Two, there are a number of different ways of defining the rural-urban fringe. Some of these are perhaps more academic (Woods, 2009), whilst others serve a more functional purpose – aiming to demarcate where specifically the rural-urban fringe is. Such functional definitions range from 500m girdles around the edge of a city (ODPM, 2003), using specific 'feature based' definitions (Gallent et al., 2006), using land-use classifications data or by using governmental produced administrative boundaries (DEFRA, 2011). Indeed, each of these definitions has its flaws, which are outlined in table 3 below.

Definition of the 'rural-urban fringe':	Calculation and usefulness of utilising definition:	Limitations of utilising definition:
(1) 500 metre girdle enveloping all metropolitan (and smaller 'built-up') areas (ODPM, 2003)	Provides a clear delineation of where a 'fringe area' is in a strictly absolute sense. This is easy to calculate and quantify and pays acknowledgement to the difference between urban 'built-up' areas, suggesting that the fringe exists around all metropolitan areas. Also acknowledges the inter-relational nature with the urban, depicting the fringe as an extension from the immediate urban boundary.	Assumes a linear formation around urban areas. Gallent (2006) provides a useful critique: "*Fringes are not uniform girdles. They stretch or contract depending on topography, politics and economics. If an adjoining municipality or local authority has a lax attitude towards development, then a fringe may stretch; if it is keener on containment then the urban edge might be more tightly defined (p. 384)* **Unlikely to use due to evident limitations.**
	Classifies 'parcel-level' data in to 21 categories, including 'urban', 'sub-	Whilst the data is useful for assessing urban sprawl and a more detailed morphological shape of development, it

(2) Parcel-based land use cover (Centre for ecology and Hydrology, 2015)	urban' and varying rural and environmentally classes. This is extracted from a variety of different spectral categorisations. 'Urban' is calculated from two factors; a) dense urban areas such as city centres, areas where there is little vegetation, b) dock sides, car parks and industrial estates. 'Sub-urban' is calculated using spectral signatures that emit both urban and vegetation signatures. This helps identify the interaction of ruralised aspects of the RUF, paying homage to the mix of natural vegetation and urban features. It also differentiates 'improved grassland' or agricultural data so as to see the mixture of natural and economic rural uses.	has a number of issues in being used solely to demark the RUF: 1) It provides no distinctive boundary as to where the RUF starts and where it ends. 2) The features used to define this data type combine an array of features, but make it difficult to define what each parcel specifically represents, i.e. is a parcel housing, waste and derelict ground, or retail parks? Each factor is moulded in to one valued 'parcel'. 3) Is constructed from a focus more on vegetation than specific urban development pressures, which typify the rural-urban fringe (Gallent, 2006).
(3) Feature based definition:	Provides a comprehensive list of features which are considered 'specific' to the RUF, but in a particular 'fuzzy' formation. These include:	Strong focus on 'cities' rather than other types of peri-urban areas, such as towns or 'rural-urban' fringes, rather than 'urban rural' fringes.

(Gallent et al., 2006; Scott et al., 2013)	*"(1) Service functions (the urban dowry comprising the essential apparatus needed for cities to work) exiled from more central locations; a range of (2) commercial activities; (3) noisy and unsociable uses pushed away from people; (4) transient uses such as markets; (5) bulk-retail; (6) light manufacturing, warehousing and distribution; (7) some public institutions; (8) degraded farmland; (9) planned recreational areas such as country parks; and (10) fragmented residential development (often centred on road junctions) interspersed between (11) areas of unkempt rough or derelict land awaiting re-use."* (Gallent and Shaw, 2007, pp. 620)	Little G.I.S related data available for working with this definition. This method is dependent on digitalising aerial imagery and visualisations – susceptible to a considerable amount of bias.
(4) DEFRA Sparsity index (rural-urban classification, RUC 2011 data set)	Combines measures of population size (<10,000 = urban) and 'sparsity' to produce a scale of population density.	'Rural town and fringe' and 'rural town and fringe in a sparse setting' comprise two of the factors produced from this method. There are two crucial issues here. (1) Rural towns and fringe landscapes should be separate classifications. Indeed, these

	(For a full explanation, see Bibby et al., 2013)	definitions represent two very different spaces, thus the combination of these two features as a definition could distort the results. This requires testing, however. (2) The sparsity function does not account for the diversity of these landscapes which will range in sparsity; thus, it should have little baring on differentiating between different 'fringe types'. Finally, as acknowledged by Bibby et al. (2013), this definition takes little account of other crucial criteria in creating these outputs.
(5) Mobility infrastructure **(Gallent et al., 2006)**	This pertains to the idea that key mobility infrastructures, such as motorways, A roads, B roads, airports, shipping ports, train stations and complex residential road networks are indicative of the location of fringe landscapes. Such infrastructures	Whilst a useful conceptualisation, there is no differentiation of which mobility infrastructure specifically to look for. Questions such as "Is this a rural-urban fringe landscape despite not being next to a motorway but being intersected by A-roads?" should typify further thought on this definition. Furthermore, the idea that residential road networks typify these

	facilitate the 'hypermobile' nature of the rural-urban fringe.	landscapes is confusing – what should their morphology look like in order to classify areas as distinctly RUF?
(6) Social constructivist approach	The social constructivist approach is one utilised most recently by rural geographers, as a way of showing how *"the importance of the 'rural' lies in the fascinating world of social, cultural and moral values that have become associated with rurality, rural spaces and rural life" (Woods, 2009, p. 851).* This approach has not been officially adopted within the RUF literature, but has made a significant impact in the rural and, to a lesser extent, urban literatures. More importantly, there is increasing interest of the ways in which the people that move between urban and rural space are "cultural-carriers that reshape communities in uncertain	Whilst this definition is important to mention as a possible avenue of selecting a case study location (completed by handing out questionnaires with the local population, for example), in terms of the initial G.I.S approach being adopted, the definition does not work as there is no geo-spatial data to reflect these attitudes, though using GPS technology it is possible to achieve. This is particularly time consuming, however.

	ways" – bringing the socially constructed norms and values across spatial contexts (Lichter and Ziliak, 2017, p. 12). Given this increasingly relational view of social constructivism across spatial boundaries, there is indeed scope to apply such an approach to the RUF, particularly as a space that comprises "arenas in which rural and urban identities are negotiated and contested" (Woods, 2009, p. 852).	

Table 3 - The various approaches that could be used, or have been used, to define the rural-urban fringe.

As table 3 highlights, there have been a multitude of ways that the rural-urban fringe areas have been politically, academically, functionally, and socially identified as a landscape. More importantly, it is also clear that each approach to defining the RUF has its own number of flaws, meaning that it was difficult to utilise any one of them alone in order to select a case study location.

Yet, there were also consistencies between the definitions. For example, there was a significant emphasis placed on the land-uses found in the rural-urban fringe, including balances between vegetation densities and 'built-up features', which though the specific

assemblages of such characteristics varied, showed a broadly linear ideology about how these spaces should be identified. Similarly, though contested in literature that focuses on whether fringe landscapes need to be fixed to urban boundaries per se (Scott et al., 2013), there was also a clear recognition that the positioning of the RUF in between the rural and urban was important and thus that proximity was an important concept in need of further exploring. This aspect has been illustrated further in a social constructivist approach by Peacock and Pemberton (2019).

Logically, therefore, it became apparent that using a combination of such methods to explore where to locate the rural-urban fringe and to then select a case study area would provide an effective approach. It was possible to download data types [2] and [4] from table 3 above. Data type [3] was generated from a series of site visits, combined with analysis of aerial photography. The exact process for adopting a mixed approach for deciding on a single case study area is now described in more depth. This is an extensive summary of the approach taken, for the justification of this part of the PhD is not only novel, but also critical in ensuring the validity of the results.

Stage 1: Utilising G.I.S data to provide broader areas of focus:

Firstly, a Google Earth map was live XYZ tile embedded directly into QGIS (figure 7). The administrative ward boundaries for the UK were downloaded and added to QGIS. The specific Warrington wards were outlined using the attribute selection feature (figure 8) and overlain on top of the Google Earth map. This provided an indication of where senior officers in Warrington's jurisdictional remit was.
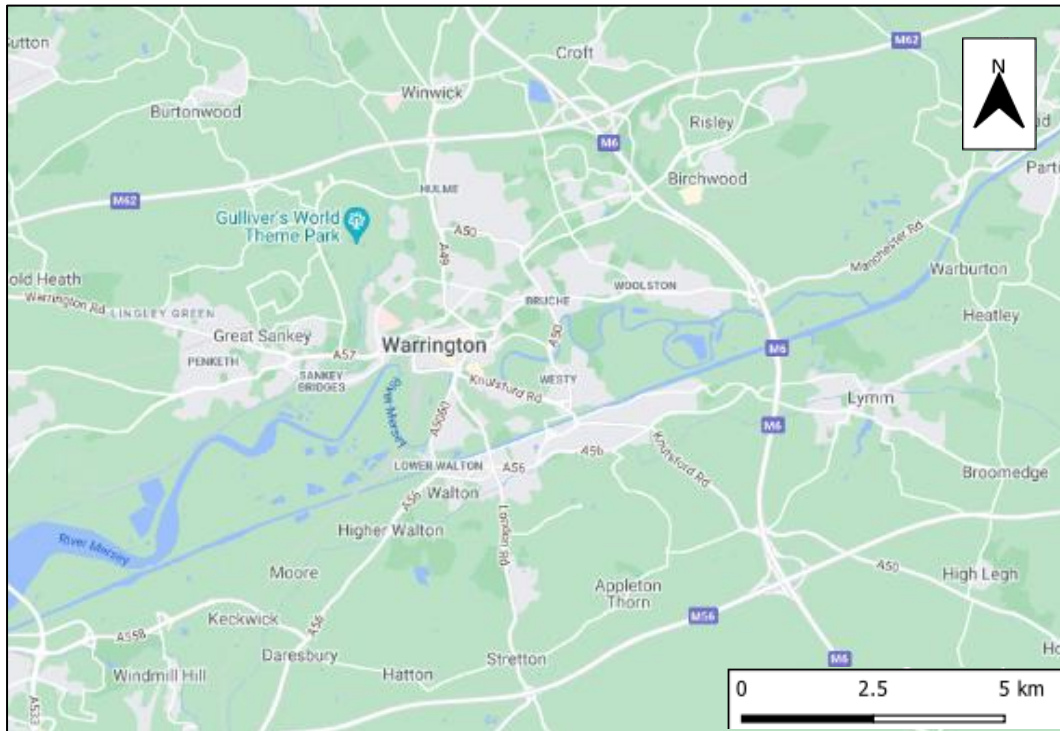
Figure 7 - Warrington Unitary Authority (Google Earth, 2021)
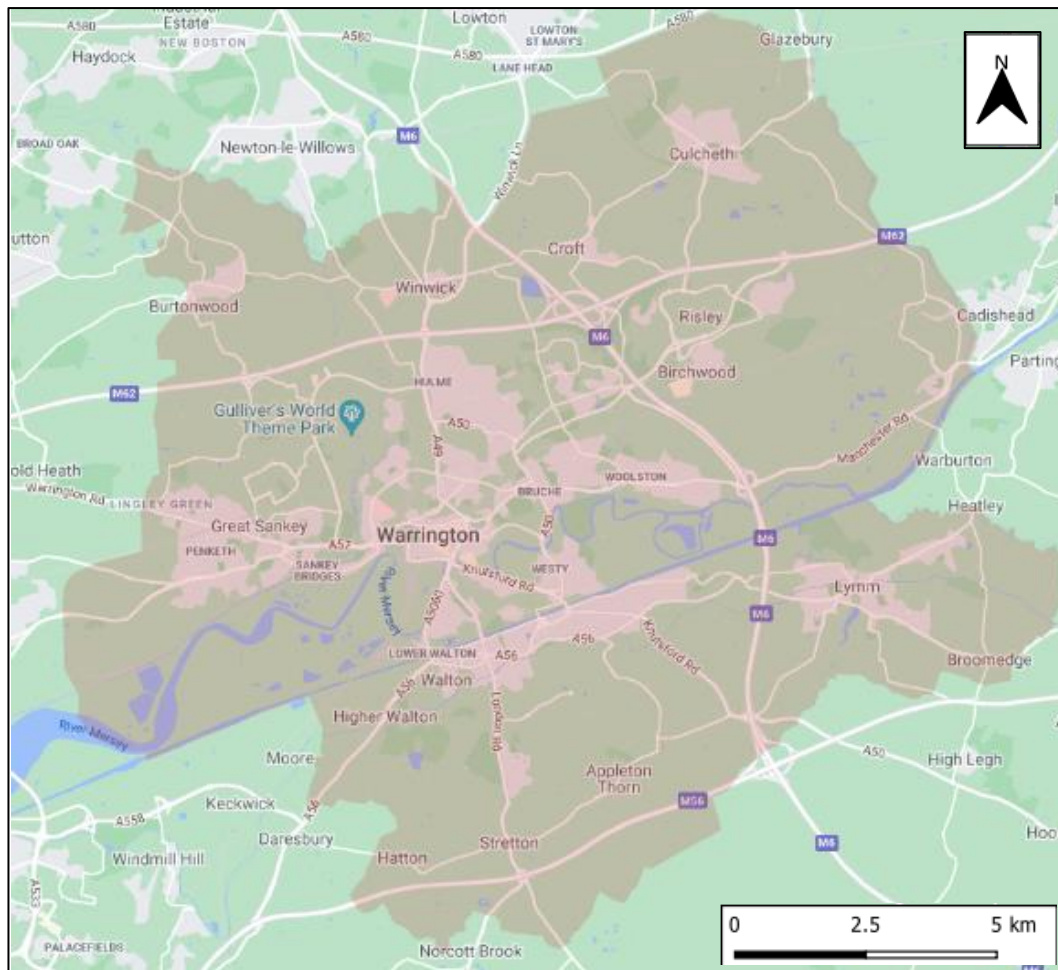
Figure 8 - The jurisdictional remit of Warrington unitary authority (Google Earth 2021; ONS: 2021.

The DEFRA boundary was then added on top to begin to look at the classification of urban areas. Immediately (and as suspected) the DEFRA classification of urban in figure 9 appeared to look out of place compared to the morphology displayed in figure 10 This is because "Urban and rural domains are distinguished solely by physical criteria. The question of whether it is any longer valid to try to distinguish between the 'urban' and the 'rural' in any broader sense is not considered further here" (Bibby et al., 2013, p 6-8). Certainly, this seemed contradictory to the literature discussed in Chapter Two regarding the unique socio-economic context of the rural-urban fringe as being important in defining such spaces. In turn, it was decided to remove the DEFRA classification from further consideration.
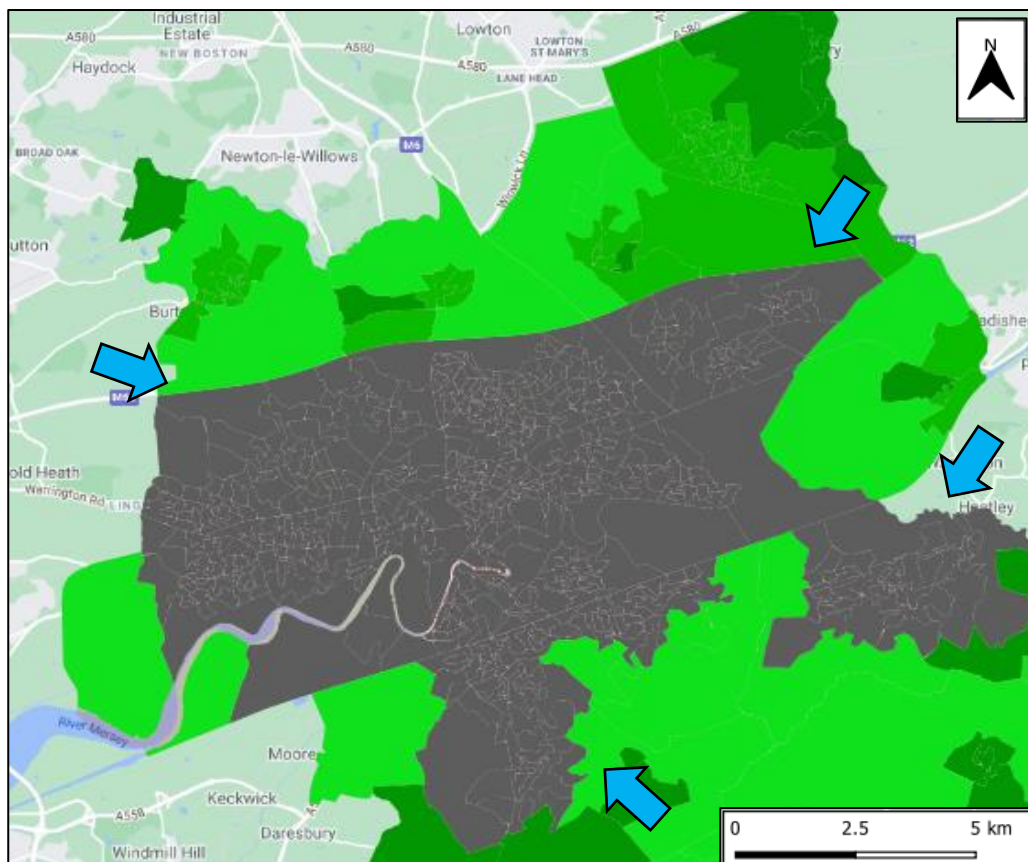
Figure 9 - DEFRA classifications of rural and urban (DEFRA, 2011)
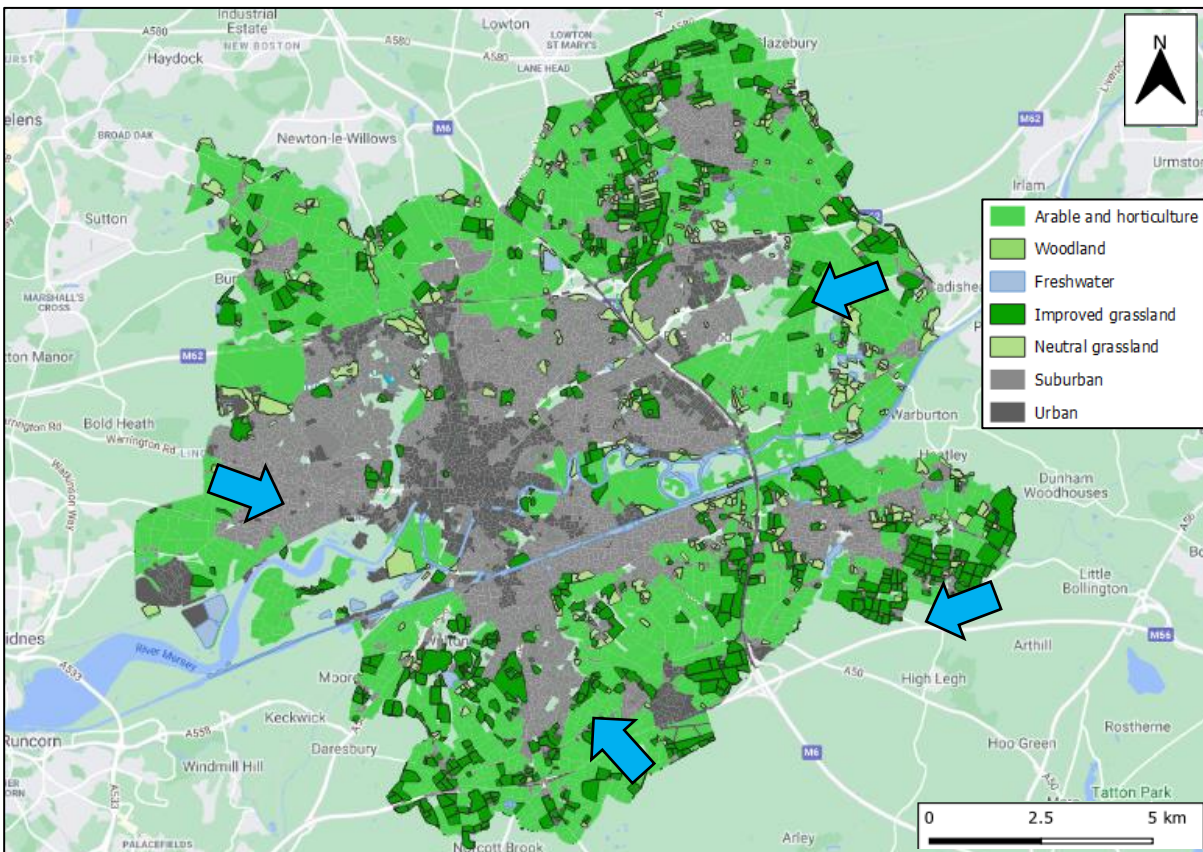
Figure 10 - Land use classifications of Warrington using parcel level data from the Centre for Hydrology and Ecology.

For comparison, the parcel level data from the Centre for Hydrology and Ecology was added. For simplicity, a number of categories were regrouped, for example, the coniferous and broadleaf woodlands were simply rendered as 'woodlands' using the same colour. This is because using a diverse array of ecological indicators was not viewed as essential in locating rural-urban fringe spaces.

Once this had been generated the map was then overlain with any possible mobility infrastructure data [data 5]. As in figure 11 below, OpenRoads (2019) data provided motorway, A-road, B-road and residential road network data, though the latter was not

deemed particularly important for this section of site selection because as described in table 3 above, there is no differentiation of what this residential road network should look like to typify the rural-urban fringe. Motorway junctions in particular were important as they have been argued to typify these landscapes (Shoard, 2002). Rail infrastrucutre, including railway stations, were also utilised.

Utilising mobility data made a critical impact, for it differentiated between the two Southern most available sites and those on the Northeast and Northwest.

Figure 11 - Road infrastructure and land use. (Google Earth, 2020; Centre for Hydrology and Ecology, 2015; Open Roads, 2017)
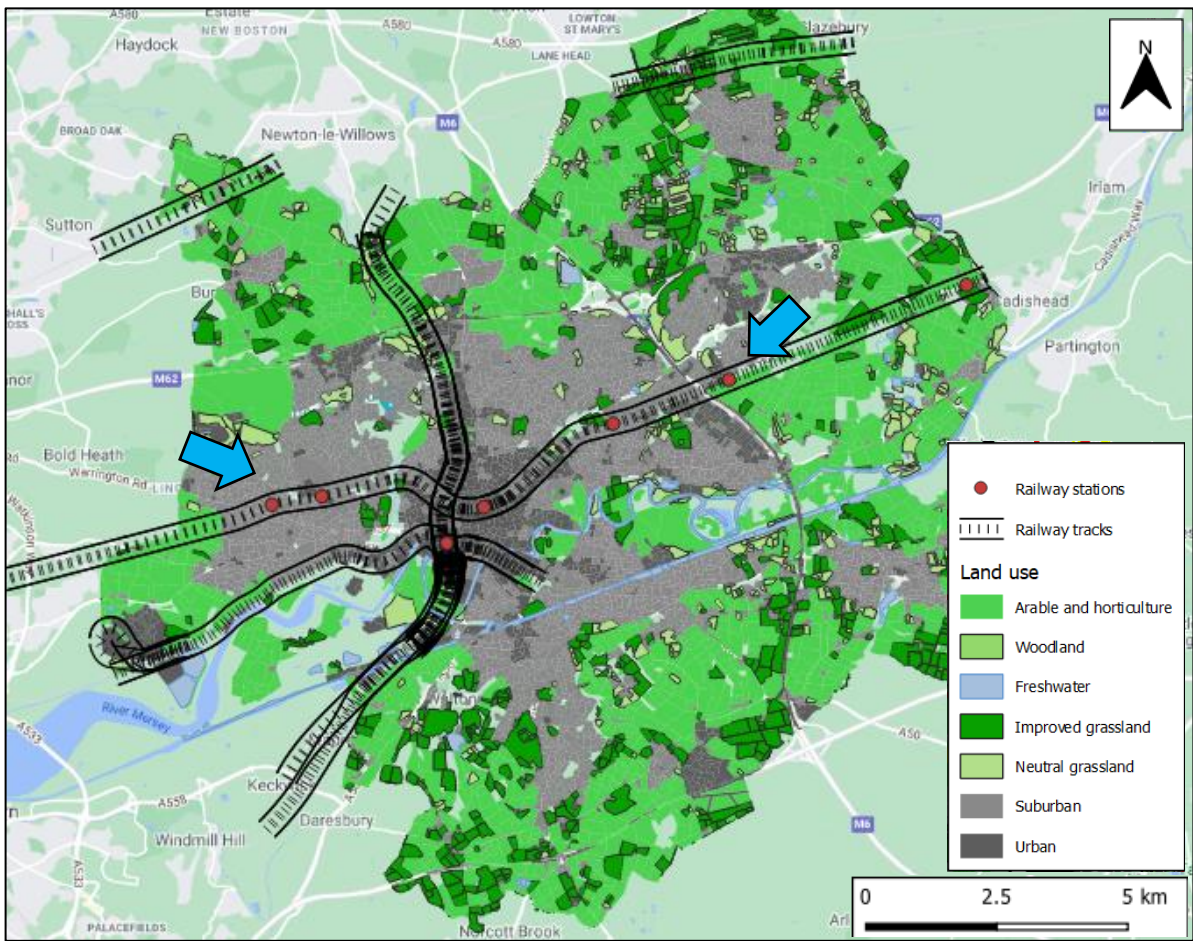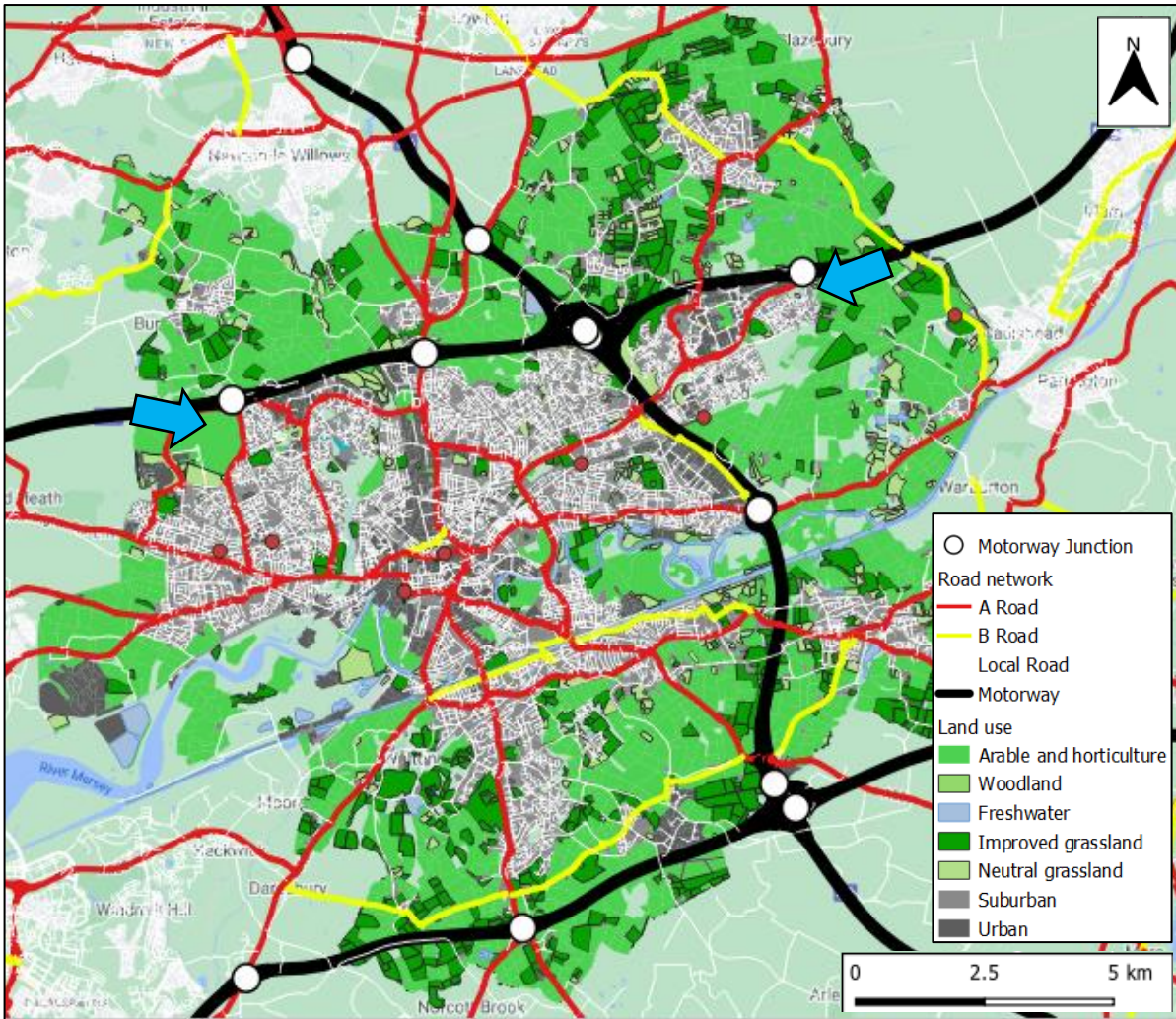
Figure 12 - Rail infrastructure and land use (Google Earth, 2020; Centre for Hydrology and Ecology, 2017; Open Street Map, 2021)

The land use data combined with mobility infrastructure used here was helpful in identifying that the Western and Eastern sides of Warrington were indicative of rural-urban fringe spaces. However, the data was limited because it failed to detail what each specific 'parcel' of land was with respect to specific land-use. It was therefore not possible to apply the 'feature based definition' (table 3), though it did reflect that there was a mixture of each land use type in this area.

Stage 3: Assessing relevant policy documentation:

The GIS approach had been important in analysing which parts of Warrington could be classified as rural-urban fringe. However, it was also important to check how these corresponded with the ambitions of the incumbent authority. This process therefore included looking through relevant policy documentation published by Warrington Borough Council, so as to look for explicit references to any of the rural-urban fringe locations identified through the GIS analyses. Two sites were continually referenced, which corresponded with two of the identified sites – Birchwood (on the North-eastern periphery) and Omega (on the North-western periphery). The Southern border was also continually referenced, but more in regard to future growth ambitions rather than being currently governed *per se.*

Stage 4: Using aerial photography and employing the feature-based definition:

The next stage involved using aerial photography in order to try and identify the specific

'features' expected to be found in a RUF locations (refer to figure 13 for a full list of these features). This approach focuses far more on the economic nature of the rural-urban fringe – focusing on processes and functions of these spaces and the 'unique' features, rather than broad classification based on sparsity. As figures 13 and 14 below both show, each site contained a significant proportion of the features.
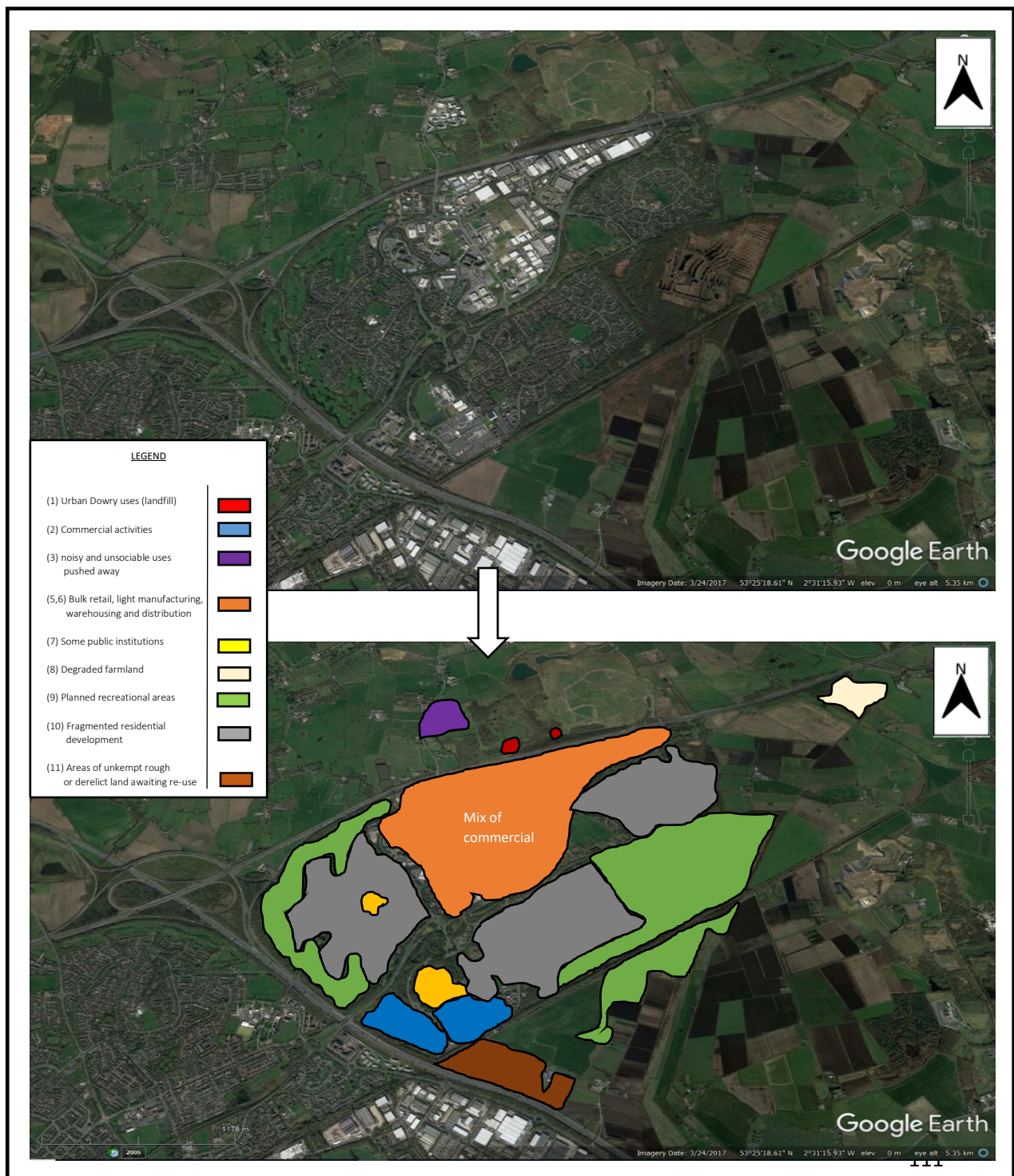
Figure 13 - Gallent's (2006) feature-based definition applied to Birchwood (Google Earth, 2020)
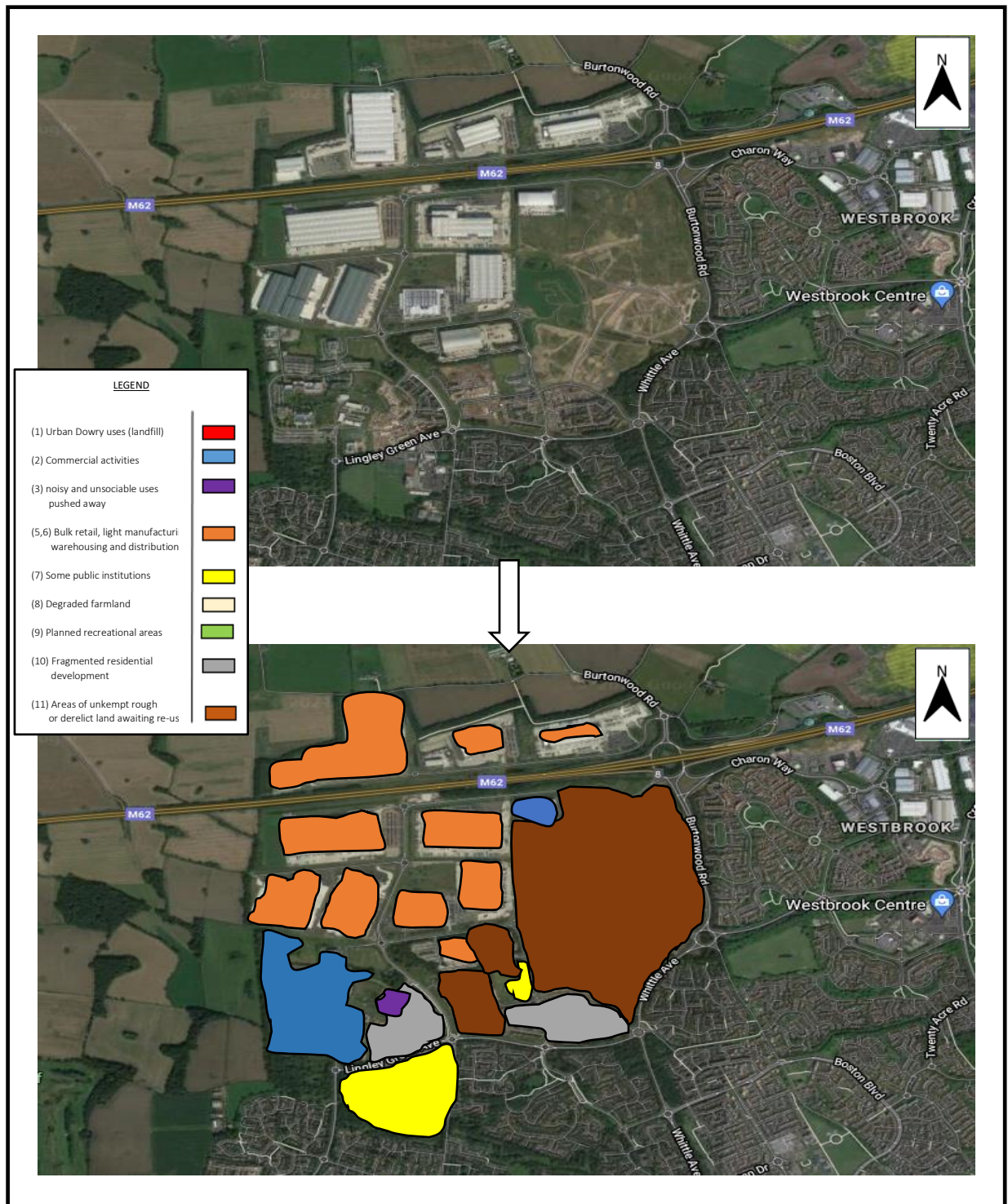
Figure 14 - Gallent's 'feature based definition' applied to Omega. (Google Earth, 2020)

After due consideration, it was decided that aerial imagery and the use of google earth could only provide a limited, albeit useful, amount of visual information. What it did show is that both these spaces are fundamentally different types of fringe space, despite being located using the same methods. These therefore saw the incorporation of an additional stage.

Stage 5: Site visits and wider reading

As Appleton and Lovett (2003) note "potential limitations can actually be camouflaged by details which have been inferred by the producer" when working with G.I.S data (pp. 118). Given the initial concerns about the quality of this data, as well as the lack of critical testing of these techniques of defining the RUF more widely, the decision was made to conduct site visits. This would allow a personal visualisation of the landscape and would be looking for the same features observed in stage 3 – those that comprise the feature-based definition.

The site visits including driving around a substantial portion of Birchwood and Omega, stopping at multiple destinations, referring to figures 13 and 14 and then assessing whether the area actually 'fit' with the RUF as it seemed it might from the data. The benefits of incorporating this final approach were quickly realised. The sites, from the perspective of one individual, fit perfectly with a RUF landscape. In turn, it was decided that these were the ideal case study sites.

After stages 3,4 and 5, a case study profile was developed in order to outline the key understandings of both the Birchwood and Omega rural-urban fringe spaces.

3.4.5. Case study profiles:

3.4.5.1. Birchwood, Warrington:

Birchwood is an area located on the North-eastern fringe of Warrington, Cheshire, located in-between junctions 22 and 23 of a major motorway - the M6. In addition, another motorway - the M62 - intersects the M6 close to the periphery of the Birchwood community. It was constructed in the 1970s when Warrington grew from New Town funding (Figure 15), yet Jones and Gibson (2011) note that "The New Town Master Plan was only partly implemented with new developments being built close to the M6 in the north-eastern (Birchwood) area" (p. 241). In this sense, the fringe area of Birchwood is unique in that the development of the area is less 'chaotic sprawl' in nature given the planned nature of Warrington but is also situated in-between two extensive urban cores with a variety of agencies that govern both spaces and interact with Warrington and its fringes. As such, Birchwood is interesting as a case study as it is an in-between space located in the post-industrial core cities of Manchester and Liverpool.

Yet Birchwood remains an archetypal fringe landscape, and especially when applying a character or feature based definition of the fringe (Gallent and Andersson, 2007). The community of Birchwood was designed as three key settlements: 'Locking Stumps', 'Gorse Covert' and 'Oakwood'. Each of these communities is centred around the Birchwood shopping centre, an area which historically was used by the military but is now used for shopping and recreation and predominantly logistics and warehousing (figure 14) – reflective of the transitional nature of such landscapes. The fragmented nature of these communities, interspersed by motorway infrastructures and adjunct to the main urban core of Warrington, is characteristically fringe (Gallent et al., 2006). The area has large warehouses and a train station which provides connections to both Liverpool and Manchester, and thus a crucial plethora of mobility opportunities in the area. Local Policy documents also demonstrate on-going development pressures in the region, including proposals to release areas of green belt around the Northern and North-eastern perimeters of Birchwood.

Figure 15 - A map of Birchwood (Tzoulas and James, 2011).

3.4.5.2. Omega, Warrington:

The Omega site in Warrington is also characteristically fringe, despite being significantly different in character from Birchwood. The site is reflective of an emerging rural-urban fringe space; one very much in its youth. As figure 16 reflects below, it is being developed subject to a distinctive array of mixed uses, including characteristic mobility-centric fringe industries - warehousing and logistics – as well as having residential housing interspersed with a distinctive green character. As the Omega website states, the Omega fringe space is very much a fragmented construct – "each of the phases within it were submitted as separate planning applications" (Omega Warrington, 2017: accessed 29/01/2020). Thus, this also contributes to the characteristic development of such space (Gallent et al., 2006).

Figure 16 - The outline plan for the Omega site (Omega Warrington, 2021).

The Omega site represents an important comparative example to Birchwood for two critical reasons. Firstly, the space is likely to be governed by the same officers – Warrington Borough Council - but reflects an emergent fringe space which is more transitional than Birchwood. Thus, it provides a critical opportunity to study how the transitional nature of the landscape's interplays with the challenges and opportunities pertaining to mobility in the rural-urban fringe.

3.5. Research methods and sampling:

3.5.1.   Choosing the semi-structured interview approach:

Interviews are a well-developed, conventional choice of research technique for human geographers (Dowling and Lloyd, 2016). In particular, the semi-structured approach was seen to be particularly favourable as it allows the researcher to maintain a broad structure to the session but the respondents a significant amount of freedom in what they choose to talk about, how much they choose to say, and how they wish to express it (Van Teijlingen, 2014). One of the primary rationales behind this approach was the recognition that whilst a number of key themes and questions could be devised based on existing literature, it is possible that there may have been aspects excluded from priori consideration. Alternatively, using a more open, unstructured approach was possible, but risked the subject matter moving too far off topic. Thus, the semi structured approach allowed some flexibility in discussion, yet maintained general focus on the subject of inquiry.

3.5.2. Critiques of the interview research method:

Whilst the semi-structured approach was seen as the most favourable research methods for the project, it is not without some flaws. Primarily, some critique the interview research technique for suggesting that the 'discussion' had within the interview and the 'practices' that participants actually do are mutually exclusive phenomena, i.e., what people say under interview conditions can be significantly different to their actual practices. As Dowling et al., (2016) suggest, in this respect the interview can in many ways be viewed as "a performance" (p. 683), whereby respondents can construct their own reality of the real world. Given the inseparable political alignments captured within the research and possibility for information to be included or excluded depending on the respondent's desire to represent the issue at hand, this is certainly a consideration that is worth noting. Indeed, there is a large emphasis placed on the trust of the participants and they, in many instances, they have to be taken at their word. Yet, the nature of the research (with significant parts of being based on work-life experiences) means that this is an inevitable limitation; one that ultimately cannot be avoided. Certainly, the nature of the interview structure (see section 3.5.4) below should not make participants feel pressured in to lying. This is ultimately the role of the interviewer – to ensure the environment is comfortable enough for the participant to feel able to engage in truthful discussion. This was constantly acknowledged to the best of my ability.

There were two key methods of data collection used during the research process of the main study area, 1) A comprehensive literature search of white and grey literatures and 2) semi-structured interviews with key governance figures and relevant researchers. The

literature review included looking through local policy and planning documents, as well as key reports published by various agencies, statutory bodies and think tanks. 19 semi-structured interviews with key governance stakeholders were conducted. Accordingly, no attempt is made here to provide an overarching characterisation of the relationship between central and local government. Rather, the data are used here purely to investigate the modes of organisation in English central-local relations in the Northwest.

3.5.3. Sampling process for interviewees:

Participants were initially identified from Warrington Borough Council and other local agencies. These were selected through reading local planning documents regarding transport in Warrington. As figure 17 below illustrates, this also began to identify other key organisations that may impact how mobility in governed in the rural-urban fringe spaces of Warrington.

Figure 17 - The regional and subregional organisations involved in steering the decision making for Warrington's Local Transport Plan (Warrington Borough Council, 2019).

The sample strategy used for this aspect of the research was both selective and snowball. From research into the local area, certain participants were deliberately chosen due to their positions, roles, or involvement within Warrington. This included individuals involved in planning, policy, transport, local economic development and local politics. These individuals (N=5), in some capacity helped to govern the RUF, be it though policy, planning, economics or other local involvements. Some individuals approached were unable or unwilling to partake in the interview process, but in some instances, were able to recommend individuals whom they recommended talking to instead.

A variety of multi-scalar agencies and organisations. As recognised earlier in this chapter, there was a necessity to explore a variety of individuals at a variety of scales in order to understand how broader governance structures and policy approaches may be shaping the actions of local agency. These types of officers were selected based on those individuals within Warrington had recommended, so as to include the reflexive and co-produced element of this research. In this sense, the sampling process was broadened to talk to individuals working across regional of governance, as well as those who were experts in current governance dynamics in the Northwest and were able to provide broader, objective discussions of some of the findings, or were significant private investors in the region and were identified as important in influencing mobility plans.

Overall, this sampling method proved to be a particularly effective approach. As illustrated briefly by figure 18 below, this process enabled a three-phase process of sampling. Phase one involved exploring the opportunities and challenges of mobility in the rural-urban

fringe according to stakeholders local to Warrington (Blue – table 4). Through such connections, phase two involved talking to broader stakeholders identified by officers in Warrington (Orange – table 4). These individuals were those directly suggested to be critical in emphasising or addressing current challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe of Warrington through wider policy and planning. Then, through compiling and reviewing the existing data, a variety of additional stakeholders were identified. These were either suggested as reputable sources through which to both interviewees in phases one and two were approached (Green – table 4).
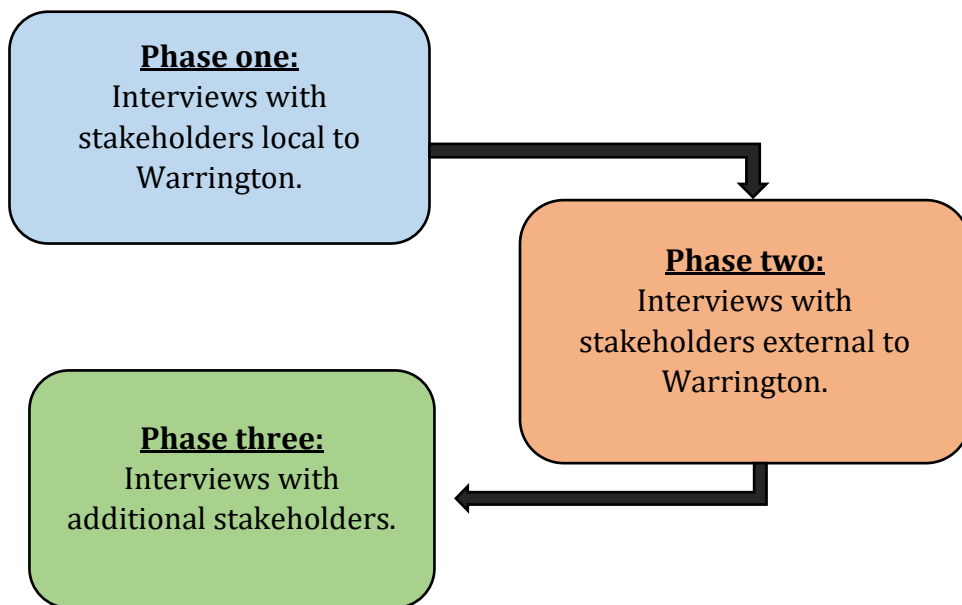
Figure 18 - The phased sampling process for participant recruitment.

Interviewee #	Affiliation	Interview length
Senior officer 1	Policy – Warrington Borough Council	*43 minutes*
Senior officer 2	Development – Warrington Borough Council	*1 hour 4 minutes*
Senior officer 3	Transport – Warrington Borough Council	*42 minutes*
Local economist 4	Economist – Warrington Borough Council	*51 minutes*
Local councillor 5	Warrington	*1 hour 9 minutes*
Senior official 6	Cheshire-Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership	*42 minutes*
Senior official 7	Cheshire-Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership	*53 minutes*
Senior official 8	Transport for the North	*43 minutes*
Senior official 9	Transport for the North	*47 minutes*
Senior official 10	Transport for the North	*46 minutes*
Senior official 11	Transport for the North	*55 minutes*
Senior official 12	Northern Powerhouse	*32 minutes*
Senior planner 13	Liverpool city region	*44 minutes*
Senior policy maker 14	Transport – Transport For Greater Manchester	*44 minutes*
Senior expert 15	CLES	*1 hour*
Senior expert 16	Centre for Cities	*41 minutes*
Senior expert 17	IPPR North	*35 minutes*
Private investor 18	Peel Holdings	*1 hour 10 minutes*
Senior official 19	Northwest Business Leadership Team	*1 hour 9 minutes*

Table 4 - Anonymised interview participants.

Whilst individual identities are anonymised for ethical purposes, brief descriptions of individuals are provided above in table 4. Generally, interviews lasted a good amount of time, and a highly in-depth discussion was fostered. Interviewees came from a range of backgrounds and were typically held a seniority in their respective organisation. The research is therefore generally representative of the officers that make strategic decisions regarding mobility in the rural-urban fringe, or those who make strategic decisions about transport more generally in the Northwest. This enabled a robust picture of the relationships between such officers.

Despite the metagovernance approach employed, it was highly difficult to interview key stakeholders from central government. This was primarily due to the unfolding Covid-19 pandemic which took place during this data collection phase. However, the interviewees above are mostly those selected by senior officers in Warrington Borough Council (bar some interviewees from national thinktanks) and at no point did the senior officers from Warrington Borough Council suggest officers from central government should be approached. This was particularly interesting and was seemingly reflective of 'hands off' metagovernance approach being employed by central government (Bailey and Wood, 2017).

3.5.4. Structure of interviews with governance stakeholders:

Below is a broad outline of the interview structures with individuals. The description is deliberately broad as given the reflexive and exploratory nature of the research process,

specific questions were edited, altered, or altogether removed from interview to interview, depending on the respective stakeholder's expertise. For example, some stakeholders had no specific engagement with the governance of the rural-urban fringe *per se yet* had insightful perspectives in to planning and transport across the North-West which had broader impacts on Warrington's economic and growth initiatives. Thus, there was no necessity to include RUF specific questions for these individuals. Conversely a variety of stakeholders, whose remit was within Warrington specifically, only had limited insight into the discussions held between higher tier stakeholders and so were unable to necessarily comment of some of the broader partnerships and spatial imaginaries that had been established.

Phase 1 interviews structures:

Section one: Discussion of job role and individual background:

This initial section aimed to get more information about the individuals and their respective positions. No personal information was collected about the individuals except for their name, job title, how long they had been in the position and how they would describe their roles. Individuals were asked to provide background as to how they had come into the position, why they felt it was an important role and how their roles might have changed (as well as the relative influences on this) - no other information was necessary.

Section two: Discussion of the rural-urban fringe:

This next section sought to explore what these individuals thought the 'rural-urban fringe' was. They were asked to identify locations around Warrington and explain why they had these regions and on what criteria. Eventually, more detailed discussions around Birchwood and Omega were employed. Then, individuals were

asked to discuss how their job roles interacted with the RUF and what they thought their job accomplished within these spaces. Finally, individuals were asked to discuss what they viewed as the most critical issues within these spaces.

Section three: **Discussion of planning and governing mobility in the rural-urban fringe:**

For individuals working within Warrington specifically, the following section asked participants to detail how they felt their roles shaped the nature of the rural-urban fringe and the respective approaches to how the fringe was being designed, re-designed and governed, respectively. If the conversation had not already been directed towards mobility, then this became the next topic of discussion. Once this had been completed, participants were asked to outline how they thought these issues were manifested within the RUF specifically. This section was deliberately quite broad in order to prevent the interviewer from directing the conversation too much in one direction – if respondents did not view mobility as being the main issue in the RUF then this was not pushed any further, though they were asked to justify why.

Section four: **Discussion of devolution and implications for governing mobility in Birchwood and Omega.**

This section was essential to the metagovernance aspect of the research. The discussion was centred around ideas of power and resource allocation for mobility within the Northwest and between different officers and organisations. Depending on the interviewee's role, they were asked to disclose their role in relation to planning or governing different aspects of mobility. Further discussions typically prompted a discussion of the key issues of managing RUF landscapes when situated in between two larger cores with typically larger levels of funding. Participants were asked to reflect on how they interacted with surrounding agencies in the sub-region and what they saw as important relationships or mutual partnerships in the context of managing transport in the sub-region. They further reflected on what they saw as the main challenges of managing transport in this respect.

The final section of the interview asked interviewees to reflect on the discussion thus far. It asked if they had had any new realisations about governing mobility in the RUF or thought of any new issues that they felt needed addressing. If so, they were asked how they felt their role would contribute to this. They were finally asked if they had any other reflections at all from the conversation that had been had.

Phase two and three interview structures:

These questions were different in that they did not focus as explicitly on the rural-urban fringe in Warrington, but in transport across the North of England and Warrington Borough Council's place within this. This owed to the fact that there were highly relations challenges of mobility identified by Warrington Borough Council. As such, these interviews focused more prominently on the impacts of devolution and the relationships between different officers and organisations in relation to mobility. Therefore, this section sought to contextualise the information provided by senior officers Warrington Borough Council to the perspectives of other key stakeholders involved in governing mobility and to assess any similarities or differences in their experiences or perspectives.

Section one: Discussion of job role and individual background:

This initial section aimed to get more information about the individuals and their respective positions. No personal information was collected about the individuals except for their name, job title, how long they had been in the position and how they would describe their roles. Individuals were asked to provide background as to how they had come into the position, why they felt it was an important role and how their roles might have changed (as well as the relative influences on this) - no other information was necessary.

Section two: Discussion of involvement in governing mobility in the Northwest:

This section aimed to unpack the involvement such officers had with governing mobility across the Northwest. It asked a series of question pertaining to the key challenges and opportunities that were prominent with regards to mobility in the Northwest, which were compared to the information provided by Warrington Borough Council. It sought to ask individuals to articulate who were the important officers and organisation pertaining to governing mobility and what the relationships between different organisations and officers might be.

Section three: Discussion of governing and negotiating mobility in current governance networks:

A recurrent theme here was the implications of devolution and the creation of new organisations, such as Transport for the North. This section sought to consider how central government as a key metagovernor might spatially and selectively privilege certain officers and organisations over others. As such, it sought to assess how the governance of mobility might be negotiated between different types of officers at different spatial scales, therefore highlighting any key tensions created or perpetuated by central government. The conversations also always discussed Warrington's place within these spatial scales and what these interviewees felt the opportunities and challenges of governing mobility for Warrington were.

Section four: Reflective stage:

The final section of the interview asked in interviewees to reflect on the discussion thus far. It asked if they had had any new realisations regarding how mobility was governed in the Northwest or whether they had thought of any new issues that they felt needed addressing. If so, they were asked how they felt their role would contribute to this. They were finally asked if they had any other reflections at all from the conversation that had been had.

More interviews were planned to be conducted with other key governance stakeholders, however, Covid-19 interrupted the research process and made it exceptionally difficult to access these individuals. The research sought to move in two additional directions. Firstly, it sought to move towards a lower geography of governance, to the Parish council level in each respective fringe location, in order to assess if the 'local' understandings of the opportunities and challenges of mobility (and governing mobility) in the fringe were viewed as similar or different by different local actors with different powers, responsibilities and perspectives. This is owing to the fact that there can be problematic relationships between different local actors owing to "fractured and uneven local enactments" (Newman, 2014, p. 3294) from borough council decision-making.

Otherwise, the research also sought to talk to key mobility stakeholders, such a Highways England, who manage key mobility infrastructure. This was the next critical step for phase 3 of the research process and these individuals were identified as important stakeholders by a number of interviewees. Unfortunately, there was no response from these stakeholders, who were contacted just before the first lockdown in England. Due to the time constraints of the thesis, the research was therefore concluded. Both these groups are suggested to be important stakeholders for further research in this area.

3.6.   Analysis of results:

The following methods were used to analyse each of the three stages of research. Firstly, all interviews were transcribed manually. This was viewed a crucial step in order to 'learn'

the data. Phase 1 of interviews were then uploaded to NVIVO and inductively analysed. This inductive form of analysis was used as there were no preconceived expectations about what respondents would say regarding governing mobility in the rural-urban fringe, particularly given the lack of previous research in this specific area and using the metagovernance framing outlined in this thesis. However, Corlett and Mavin (2018) note there is a need to reflect upon researcher judgement - that is - "upon the way in which we carry out our empirical research projects" to reach "certain conclusions" (p. 377). Upon reflection, it is firstly argued that the researcher has a critical expertise in mobility, rural-urban fringe and metagovernance literatures, and thus the key themes that have been extracted are in line with the judgement of the researcher. This expertise is demonstrated in the comprehensive literature review in Chapter Two and throughout the discussions in the results chapters. There are therefore inevitable 'ontological and epistemological biases' pertaining to the key themes that have been selected, but this is also an inevitable bi-product of qualitative research (Ibid). Therefore, the key findings that have been presented are inevitably rooted in the bias of my own perceptions of the literature.

Secondly, as stated previously, the research was co-produced *with* Warrington Borough Council - owing to the 'phased' approach to data collection (figure 18). In turn, the key themes that emerged in the data were those from the perspective of these actors and this is another cause of significant bias in the key themes that have emerged – a product of participant positionality and agendas through focussing on specific actors. It is therefore accepted in this research that there is inevitable bias in the results arising from both participants and the researcher. Overall, these acknowledgements are in line with a widely

accepted as a 'reflective mode' of 'interpretation of interpretation' – "critical self-exploration… of how empirical data have been interpreted (and constructed)" (Ibid, p. 379).

With these aspects of researcher positionality considered, data was then organised around each of the research objectives, particularly looking for 'challenges' and 'opportunities' of governing mobility. A variety of codes were then deduced from this process, particularly around 'power' and 'funding' in shaping the decision making in the rural-urban fringe, which served as key terms to look out for in the remainder of the interviews and formed the theoretical basis through which the remainder of data analysis in research phases 2 and 3 occurred.

The data obtained from research phases 2 and 3 were then deductively analysed compared to the themes that emerged from research phase 1. This process ensured that the results were always analysed in relation to the perspective of senior officers within Warrington Borough Council and their perspectives of governing mobility in the rural-urban fringe, which thus retained the element of 'co-producing' the results with these officers. Data was also deductively analysed in conjunction to the metagovernance literature and key themes identified in Chapter Two.

Once this had been completed, the data was then re-analysed again at a later date to look for any key themes which had been missed during the initial coding of the data. This aimed to reduce the bias that could be inherent in utlising this approach and to further open the

analysis up to 'scrutiny' (Corlett and Mavin, 2018)No further themes or codes were identified, though some additional quotes were included in the previously established codes. To the best my ability, I have been as reflexive as possible about the findings presented in this thesis and acknowledge my role and the role of my participants in determining the results that have been produced.

3.7. Researcher positionality and ethical considerations:

3.7.1. Researcher positionality and ethical considerations:

Despite some consideration of researcher and participant bias in the coding of the data, this section aims to consider research positionality more specifically for the research in its totality. As Sultana (2007) rightly states: "It is critical to pay attention to positionality, reflexivity, the production of knowledge and the power relations that are inherent in research processes" (p. 380). Consequently, this section aims to achieve exactly this – to outline my own position within the research and biases this may cause.

Evidently, the qualitative methods discussed above meant that I actively engaged with participants. In some respects, this could have skewed the data, particularly if the participants felt they had to say something due to my presence (even if they fundamentally disagreed with it), or conversely, if they felt that they wanted to say something but felt unable to due to my presence. Given this research was attempting to assess the

relationships between different officers and agencies, there may have been certain aspects that were left 'off the record'. This is clearly an inevitable effect of the type of research that has been conducted. There will evidently be some power imbalances in how this knowledge has been constructed, but I was exceptionally careful to allow the participants to respond how they chose to and to not guide their thought process – unless they were going significantly 'off topic'.

My position within the research process also inevitably holds some bias. I have designed the project (under the guidance of my supervisors) and therefore have inadvertently devised inclusionary and exclusionary criteria as to which knowledge will be produced – irrespective of the reflexive and co-produced approach applied. It is therefore acknowledged that the knowledge produced from this study is a product of active decisions by me to frame it in a specific way (as stated above). Nonetheless, given the limited research conducted on mobility in the rural-urban fringe, this study provides vital insight into the mobility experiences and practices within these areas and the knowledge produced here requires testing across different spatial and temporal contexts.

The Ethical Review Committee at Keele approved this research in June 2019. They provided extensive insight into ensuring processes of anonymity were maintained throughout this research process. All participants consented to taking part in the research on this basis.

3.8.   Conclusions:

This chapter has outlined the key theory and methods that have underpinned this research. Beginning with a justification of the theoretical and qualitative approach that has been adopted to the research, it has been argued that this research consequently contributes to an important gap within social sciences.

In order for this research to be conducted, it was essential that a rigid research process was enforced. As justified, this was argued to be the case study method of approach. As was argued, this began with trialling a G.I.S only based approach, which ultimately proved difficult to achieve due to the respective difficulties which each of the data sets. Thus, approach two necessitated dropping the more problematic of the data sets and incorporating a mobility infrastructure dataset. In turn, the broader case study region became self-evident. Then, by adopting both a 'feature based definition' approach to the area (as is commonly used by academics today) and cross referencing the area with a policy review, the final case study locations became transparent.

In selecting the case study area, the research process then began, which involved using two forms of research methods - two different semi-structured interview approaches. Both of these interview processes varied from one another – seeking to explore the same ideas from vastly different contexts; one more experiential and one more structural, but both as essential as each other to understanding the broader picture. In particular, the merits and limitations of the semi-structured approach to interviews were discussed in depth, with the

final conclusion being that it was a particularly effective method in the context of this research. The methods by which the results were analysed was also discussed.

Finally, the researcher's positionality was considered in an attempt to maintain as much reflexivity in the research process. There are inevitable biases in how the research has been conducted, but these have been avoided where possible to do so.

CHAPTER FOUR:

MOBILITY IN THE RURAL-URBAN FRINGE – KEY CHALLENGES.

4.1. Introduction:

This chapter focuses explicitly upon the perspectives of key official of relevance to governing mobility in the rural-urban fringe (and specifically senior officers within Warrington Borough Council - WBC). It serves to outline the key challenges of mobility that they viewed as being prominent in the rural-urban fringe, focusing on both case study areas of Birchwood and Omega. The chapter is deliberately largely empirical, focusing on the general perceptions of mobility in the rural-urban fringe and the key challenges of mobility therein. In doing so, this chapter sets an important precedent for the remainder of the analysis within this thesis, building the foundation upon which the findings in Chapters Five and Six are built. Chapter Five demonstrates how the challenges outlined within this chapter are reinforced by 'metagovernance' strategies enacted by central government, which have created a power vacuum across the Manchester-Warrington-Liverpool region, and of which limit the potential of WBC to respond to such challenges of mobility. Alternatively, Chapter Six looks at the opportunities of governing mobility in the rural-urban fringe, instead focusing on the alternative strategies used to navigate around the metagovernance barriers, and which provide emergent insights as to how the entrepreneurial actions of local officers can serve to capitalise on the mobility-potential of the rural-urban fringe.

Section 4.2 begins by first outlining how interviewees within WBC perceived the rural-urban fringe, including the extent to which they viewed such spaces as unique and the importance of mobility to their perspectives. Importantly, given the uniqueness of different types of fringe spaces within the same urban context (Gallent, 2006), the chapter explores the extent to which differentiated nature of the fringe within the context of Warrington informed the extent to which different interviewees focused *explicitly* on mobility in such spaces, and how the centrality of mobility shaped their perceptions of the challenges within such spaces in similar and different ways. It does so by comparing the overarching perceptions of such landscapes to individual differences between Omega (to the West) and Birchwood (to the East). The section expands current thinking regarding these landscapes by moving beyond an inherently territorial analyses and the need to consider wider relational influences shaping mobility in such landscapes.

Section 4.3 subsequently proceeds to outline in more detail the key mobility challenges within the rural-urban fringe. Three issues of relevance were identified by interviewees, each of which exemplifies the complexities of managing mobility in such spaces. First, section 4.3.1 focuses on the car centric nature of the rural-urban fringe in Warrington and the relative pressures of congestion therein. It outlines that such pressures are a product of both intralocal (town hub-to-fringe) and relational (wider city-to-fringe) commuting pressures and begins to discuss the limitations such Interviewees had in their capacity to address such challenges. Section 4.3.2 then outlines how Interviewees sought to promote public transport services to tackle such issues. Once again, it is highlighted how both relational and territorial issues shaped the promotion and relative uptake of such services,

as well as the viability of such services. Finally, section 4.3.3 outlines the importance of emergent governmental pressures in creating new challenges of mobility in such spaces. Such a transition in thinking is outlined to be a function of wider political and social change, which has accelerated the pressures facing typically 'unsustainable' fringe spaces (Simon, 2008). Through outlining the development of an integrated sustainability-driven 'micro-mobility' approach, WBC has sought to address issues associated with car-induced congestion and the viability of public transport in the fringe. Inherent within their approach has been the need for substantial investment in mobility infrastructures to facilitate new mobility practices.

Section 4.4. concludes that the infrastructural and public transport-based challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe are functions of inadequate power and financial resources afforded to key Interviewees who govern mobility in Warrington's fringe spaces. In turn, there is a need to consider how such issues are being reinforced by state-led governance structures and how vertical (top-down) influences - in the form of policy directives and funding regimes - frame the ways in which local Interviewees (such as WBC) can respond to mobility challenges in the fringe. Subsequently, this highlights the need to focus on the 'metagovernance' of local Interviewees by the state and the way in which it such processes may be deprivileging Interviewees involved with governing mobility within Warrington, both in terms of their power and autonomy and financial resourcing. This is explored further in Chapter Five.

4.2. Perceptions of mobility in Warrington's rural-urban fringe spaces:

To understand the challenges pertaining to mobility in the rural-urban fringe, it was important to first contextualise key stakeholder's understandings of such spaces. Mobility is considered a central component of the rural-urban fringe within the literature (Gallent et al., 2006). The prevalence of an array of mobility infrastructures as defining features of such spaces aside, the literature alludes to the overarching importance of mobility as being a factor which creates opportunities for other key processes in the rural-urban fringe, such as waste management. Similarly, given the 'unique' nature of the fringe itself (Scott et al., 2013), it follows that the challenges or opportunities in relation to mobility in such spaces may also be unique.

However, the emphasis on the supposed centrality of mobility within the fringe literature has, to date, lacked any substantiation in relation to those in charge of governing mobility in such spaces. In essence, the importance of mobility within such spaces and the benefits or challenges it creates may be interpreted differently by different Interviewees. As Gallent (2006) notes, if a "Borough Council has a lax attitude towards development then a fringe may stretch; if it is keener on containment then the urban edge might be more tightly defined… especially along arterial routes" (p. 384). Thus, it is also clear that the extent of development in such spaces may also be contingent on the extent to which such interviewees embody mobility-centric principles. In turn, an array of questions arose pertaining to the presence of mobility infrastructures, how this altered the contextual perceptions of the rural-urban fringe and thus the key challenges and barriers that

individuals viewed as being important. These are therefore unpacked further below.

4.2.1. Local mobility – is the urban or rural important?

Individuals within WBC with direct responsibilities for the strategic development of fringe spaces (and mobility therein), viewed the fringe as a distinctive space - functionally connected to the predominantly urban character of Warrington and facilitating access from and to the main urban area, yet "nestled in greenbelt":

"I suppose the urban-rural fringe - it obviously is the interface from the main urban areas and nestled in the green belt…. Birchwood's a good one good one to use, you know, they say, you know, probably one of the most successful science parks of its types in the Northwest. Omega is a hugely important logistics facility too. So, mobility is important there, as in, how accessible it is from Warrington, but also further afield". **[Senior officer 3 (Transport), Warrington Borough Council]**

A historic concern with controlling urban expansion has engrained the need to view such landscapes from this perspective (Simon, 2008). There was an interesting balance here, however, with both urban and rural connectivity being seen as important. Whilst a more urban-centric approach to the rural-urban fringe indeed dominates the literature, the above quote also provides a particularly interesting perception of the importance of mobility in such spaces and how it facilitated access to Warrington's 'outer', more rural areas. Peacock and Pemberton (2019) have explored such ideas with residents in such spaces and noted how the rural-urban fringe had a perceived 'idyllic' quality in facilitating

access to both urban services, but also in permitting access to the rural idyll. This perspective was also held by several key Interviewees within WBC who similarly argued how the fringe could facilitate mobility into the urban centre, as well as to outlying rural spaces:

"You know, you don't have to travel very far from those areas if you want to reach open space. And I mean that's an important factor. I mean, it's why they're so popular and why that particular land is so much in demand". **[Senior official 2 (development), Warrington Borough Council].**

Thus, mobility in such spaces was seen as being urban-centric yet situated within a wider rural context and permitting access to such spaces. Mobility was thus seen as an essential contributor to 'sense of place' (Massey, 2005) within Warrington's fringe spaces and, from the perspective of those who govern Warrington's fringe spaces, the potential mobility idylls were similarly seen as being important in creating demand for land in such spaces. This reaffirms the findings presented in Peacock and Pemberton (2019) and further reinforces the need to think about the importance of mobility within such spaces and an equilibrium of urban and rural access to mobility.

Yet, whilst connectivity to the main urban extent of Warrington's town centre was perceived as being an essential consideration in such spaces, this was far from a unidirectional relationship. Rather, interviewees reported significant inflows of people (as well as goods and services) into the fringe given the location of a number of key employers within such areas:

"Those spaces represent the economic heart of the border... So, the job at hand for the council is to change the mix – to transform not just parts of those areas as such, but just to redesign the mass movements of people between them". **[Senior officer 3 (transport), Warrington Borough Council]**

Consequently, whilst the fringe literature typically focuses on mobility from the perspective of fringe-to-city flows (Bartle and Chatterjee, 2019; Simon, 2008), interviewees highlighted how mobility was more complex and with flows of people either way and with such spaces acting as a permeable space for commuting flows. In one regard, this challenges the conceptualisation of the rural-urban fringe as being 'ephemeral' (Shoard, 2002) in the sense that such spaces were flowed *through*, rather than *into*.

As suggested above, such spaces also held an intrinsic value in the types of opportunities they offered – depicting an "economic heart" (above) for Warrington as a whole. Thus, rather than being neglected spaces (Gallent et al., 2006), these spaces were viewed in a fundamentally positive light (Scott et al., 2013), with their mobility-centric nature being crucial to flows into and through such spaces from a multitude of perspectives. Indeed, it appeared that the perspectives of various Interviewees aligned more closely with what Woods and Heley (2018) define as 'proximity territories' where "improved infrastructure has allowed residents to meet needs for proximity and 'human-scale territories' in new peri-urban poles rather than by travelling to more distant urban regional centres." (p. 30) - particularly as personal mobility has grown (Simon, 2008). Certainly, this perspective was also evident in terms of those interviewed in this study, notwithstanding how they

additionally saw the need to "change the mix" in relation to mobility, and which in the first instance reflected a number of mobility challenges to be addressed in the fringe.

4.2.2. Relational influences and understandings of the fringe

In addition to the central position of the rural-urban fringe in influencing local mobility patterns within Warrington (from urban and rural origins to the rural-urban fringe), interviewees also strongly identified the critical role of mobility infrastructures within the rural-urban fringe in facilitating accessibility into (and out of) Warrington to other parts of the region and beyond. As one interviewee noted:

"I think it's an important part of Warrington. I think it is one of our key or key selling points at times. And I think one of the reasons for that is the accessibility from a transportation perspective; they're very accessible into Liverpool and very accessible into Manchester". **[Senior officer 2 (development), Warrington Borough Council].**

Crucial to note here is the emphasis as to how the rural-urban fringe was recognised as interacting with wider commuting flows beyond Warrington (and its fringe). The literature focusing on mobility has often depicted a more 'proximate' lens to mobility (i.e., mobility from one local point to another; see Peacock and Pemberton, 2019). Yet the perspectives of those interviewed in this study adopted a wider relational perspective. As such, they identified how the location of Warrington - and its fringe space - between two metropolitan conurbations of Merseyside and Greater Manchester provided the opportunity to draw benefits from wider commuting flows. Thus, the fringe of Warrington - as a 'proximate

territory' (Woods and Heley, 2018) provided a key "selling point" (above) for Warrington in terms of capturing investment and workers, and with mobility not only critical to the functionality of such landscapes (on both sides of Warrington), but also seen as something marketable according to those interviewed:

"Because of Birchwood's location and its connectivity to multiple places, you can get land away in no time at all… and you can see that with Omega - it's two and a half million square feet of development land… So, it just shows that the location still very, very important and therefore that transport infrastructure is going to be conducive to our future growth ambitions". **[Senior officer 2 (development), Warrington Borough Council]**

Therefore, interviewees did acknowledge the crucial importance of mobility in the rural-urban fringe; both in how it facilitated the interdependencies of such spaces with the urban centre of Warrington as well as with metropolitan areas elsewhere (e.g., Merseyside and Greater Manchester). Thus, we see how mobility was centrally embedded into understandings key Interviewees had of the rural-urban fringe and how characterisations of mobility in such spaces were based on more than an urban or rural centric lens, but also, the functional economic potential that mobility brought to such spaces. This is important to note as it subsequently informs efforts to govern mobility in such spaces and the key challenges (or 'objects of (mobility) governance) that need to be addressed (see Goodwin, 1997), and how these may be shaped territorially and relationally. In particular, this is critical to the arguments in Chapter Six.

4.2.3. Differentiated mobility in the fringe – Omega and Birchwood

Whilst the above discussion reflects the broader conceptualisations of mobility in the rural-urban fringe by interviewees in WBC, there was also a need to consider whether these perceptions varied between the different fringe case studies. The literature has typically described the rural-urban fringe as a highly transitional landscape (Gallent et al., 2006), with some even describing the rural-urban fringe as a 'zone of transition' (Pryor, 1968). Transport infrastructure is often viewed as conducive to this growth (Ibid). Yet, this is a generally broad conceptualisation which neglect to consider how such processes might vary across different contexts, despite recognising that the rural-urban fringe will vary intralocally (Gallent, 2006). Otherwise, the rural-urban fringe is also strongly associated with Green Belt policy, which is supposed to restrict such spaces from growing unsustainably outwards (Ravetz, 2010), yet the shape and size of the greenbelt and the perceptions of its effectiveness are similarly variable. In this section, it is highlighted how interviewees held differential perceptions regarding the nature of mobility infrastructures in the fringe and their interplay with greenbelts and transport infrastructures. Thus, the two case study locations in the rural-urban fringe of Warrington are critically evaluated to argue how the differentiated nature of fringe space - both in terms of its materiality (morphology) and in terms of discourses (as being defined by mobility) - serves to shape perceptions on its role and function.

First, if we take as an example the Omega site on the Western periphery of Warrington, this part of Warrington's rural-urban fringe was perceived as a highly transitional

landscape, having quickly been developed upon and highly sought after due to its proximity to major mobility transport infrastructures (such as the M62 and M6). This was reflected in the types of industries that had settled in the site:

"Four years ago, it was just a flat field you know, now it's two and a half million square feet of logistics, manufacturing, and some food production". **[Senior officer 2 (development), Warrington Borough Council].**

The Omega site was thus largely seen as a product of freight uses of the mobility infrastructure – a rural-urban fringe space that had been designed specifically to take economic advantage of mobility in relation to fringe spaces, despite having planning permission to be a mixed-use site (Chapter Three). As outlined in the previous section, the accessibility and connectivity fostered by Warrington has been a "key selling point" for the area (in economic terms) and hence what was clear from the example of Omega was how the Borough Council was utilising the mobility potential of such a space in the fringe to facilitate growth. Thus, there was evidence that the rural-urban fringe was perceived as a positive opportunity space (Scott et al., 2013) due to its inherent mobility potential. In many ways, it appeared archetypal of WBC's approach to such spaces, with mobility underpinning how future fringe spaces might be designed:

"Omega is by and large a product of the M6/ M62. So, if you can think of that part of the borough as the kind of the Northwest Quadrant? The Southeast quadrant in the bottom righthand corner is where the M6 and the M56 are and there's a huge parcel of land there that - subject to planning submission - would be the next logistics location because of its proximity to the motorways". **[Senior officer 2 (development), Warrington Borough Council].**

Yet, in the case of a second case study site in Warrington's fringe - Birchwood- interviewees viewed this fringe space as being much more 'contained' or 'restricted' in terms of the mobility potential. This was due to the importance of the greenbelt in this particular area and the extent to which this space was fully built up due to both greenbelt and mobility infrastructures, which were more interspersed within the local landscape. Taking the greenbelt first, as indicated in the existing literature (Simon, 2008), greenbelt policy had a significant bearing on how WBC perceived the Birchwood rural-urban fringe. Therefore, in the context of Birchwood, considerations of the rural and urban were far more prominent than in Omega:

"With Birchwood, I think that's kind of where you start to touch on Greenbelt. Where I think tension exists. What you have to be very careful of is the built form. You need to be very careful of the rural setting and the lifestyle that that exists there. You have very clear planning policy guidance at a local level when considering applications for new builds, extensions or the demolition of heritage assets. Those issues are more frequent in that rural-urban Fringe and it's really where your where your built environment matches up against the greenbelt... that's kind of how I see it...". **[Senior official 2 (development), Warrington Borough Council]**

In turn, such arguments revealed that decision making in relation to such spaces was centred - on the one hand - around using the green belt to preserve rural lifestyles which were seen as being separate from the 'urban'. But on the other, there were also calls to promote the 'built form' further and to roll back the greenbelt. Hence there was some ambiguity as to how to approach specific fringe spaces and which highlights how the rural-urban fringe may also be seen as a more challenging space in terms of mobility:

"Well, it's interesting because that's a big issue for is at the moment is that we're looking quite a bit of a roll back on the greenbelt... But it's difficult. So that urban-rural fringe is always had, shall we say, a bit of a question mark over it and I think that's one of the key battles of the moment from a planning perspective, you know, it's clearly different. It's clearly defined…". **[Senior official 3 (transport), Warrington Borough Council]**

Furthermore, it was also identified how existing mobility infrastructures (for example, of A-roads, B-roads and motorway infrastructure (Gallent et al., 2006) can serve to restrict the capacity for further development:

"[In Birchwood] I suppose you've got a quite a tight fringe at the moment as far as… with the M6 and M62 there. You know, there's no way to really go much beyond what's already there because of those". **[Senior officer 2, Warrington Borough Council]**

Indeed, where in Omega key motorway infrastructure served to enable economic opportunities in the rural-urban fringe, in Birchwood interviewees characterised such mobility infrastructures as being both embedded into the character of such spaces, but furthermore, as also creating 'tight' landscapes which restricted expansion (and thus transitional) potential. This was particularly interesting given that the overarching perspective to date has been on transport infrastructures being overwhelmingly conducive to the growth of these areas (Ravetz, 2010), and particularly in relation to car and highway transport systems (Simon, 2008). Thus, despite being seen as a transitional, highly mobile space, the differentiated nature of these spaces mean that the rural-urban fringe may also be a landscape with limited opportunity for significant change (Qvistrom, 2007). Thus, it is

possible to identify a develop a differentiated perception of mobility - and the way it shapes the function and role of such landscapes and the perspectives of those who govern these landscapes.

4.2.4. Summary: the explicit focus on mobility in the rural-urban fringe

Far from being a forgotten space, it is clear from the discussions above that there is explicit interest in the rural-urban fringe by the interviewees in WBC. Furthermore, it is also clear that mobility was seen as a key 'object of governance' in the context of fringe spaces and had a central place in influencing definitional, though differentiated, perceptions of such spaces. In turn, those interviewed identified that they did indeed have a specific focus on issues of mobility in the rural-urban fringe space(s) of Warrington. Certainly, the evidence above suggests that mobility has been central in shaping a specific identity for such spaces and indeed, has attracted crucial economic industries in these parts of Warrington, which in part, likely explains the explicit focus on mobility in such spaces. This was further confirmed below:

"The transport and infrastructure side are very much the enabler function for those areas. My view has always being once you've got your core priority determined and your spatial locations and spatial priorities determined, then you say "right, how do we get transport to support that?". **(Senior officer 3 (transport), Warrington Borough Council)**

The above quote summarises how mobility *was* explicitly focused upon in the rural-urban

fringe, rather than mobility being considered simply in conjunction with the main urban or rural extent of Warrington, but that this mobility was seen as underpinning key economic and spatial priorities (i.e., the fringe as a proximate territory and a positive opportunity space). Crucially in the context of the objectives of this PhD, the centricity of mobility to such spaces appears to drive an understanding that mobility in such spaces required an explicit focus, but also acted as a facilitator to other activities. As such, improving transport infrastructure in the rural-urban fringe was deemed to be critical to future growth ambitions, indicating how mobility within such spaces was a specific priority:

"Well, their location is very important and transport infrastructure is going to be conducive to our future growth ambitions. Absolutely… Accompanying that we have what is called our local transport plan, which involves asking things like – what is it that is stopping you from using public transport services?" **[Senior officer 2 (development), Warrington Borough Council]**

It is clear, however, that such mobility is far more pluralistic than has typically been discussed in the literature (Gallent, 2006), with a plethora of territorial and relational forms of mobility being viewed as shaping such spaces. In sum, discussions of mobility in the context of fringe spaces appears to be intertwined with broader considerations – and attributed to the unique nature and positionality of the fringe itself. The interplay of mobility infrastructure and broader green belt planning policy appeared to be shaping the extent to which such interviewees viewed capacity for development in such spaces and indeed the development of new mobility infrastructures, compounded by differential demands on mobility when comparing such spaces. This thus suggests an inherent

complexity in trying to govern mobility in such spaces – adding to the already 'chaotic' nature of trying to govern such spaces generally (Scott et al., 2013).

4.3. The challenges of mobility in rural-urban fringe spaces

The literature on mobility in the rural-urban fringe is somewhat limited, apart from a few recent contributions (Peacock and Pemberton, 2019). Given the discussions above, it was important to unpack how such perceptions would interplay with what interviewees felt the key challenges of mobility were and, subsequently, explore how they categorised such challenges. Hence this section focuses on the mobility challenges viewed as being most prevalent and the extent to which interviewees within WBC felt equipped to manage such challenges.

4.3.1. Different eras of development; congestion and pinch points on the road network

As Nabielek et al (2014) posit, urban development in the rural-urban fringe continues to accelerate, requiring improved transport infrastructure to facilitate interpersonal mobility. Rural-urban fringe spaces have been argued to have been liberated by the "increased affordability of the car" (Ravetz, 2010, p. 16), which has subsequently facilitated a greater degree of interpersonal mobility (Ibid). Consequently, such spaces are often car-centric

creating "congestion and pollution consequences of increasing vehicle ownership and use" (Simon, 2008, p. 172). The pressures and challenges are substantial and will likely increase in the future (Ibid). Yet, such impacts have seldom been explored in relation to rural-urban fringe spaces in the context of towns, and with most literature focusing on mobility challenges in the fringe of cities (Ravetz, 2010).

In the context of Warrington, interviewees expressed significant concerns regarding the dependence on private transport, and argued that the car-centric nature of Warrington in totality was a particular problem in terms of mobility across the Borough and in the fringe more specifically:

"The problem we've got in Warrington when it comes to mobility is that we are car dependent. You know, a large percentage of all our trips are by car". **[Senior officer 3 (transport), Warrington Borough council]**

The reliance on private transport - at least until now - across the whole of Warrington was thus deemed to have contributed to the car-centric planning of certain fringe spaces (such as Birchwood), and informed by Warrington's development as a New Town following World War II and the car-centric attitudes of planning during this era:

"I think the legacy, in terms of the architecture that exists on this side of the motorway [Birchwood], is evidence of an industrial heritage. And that drives a built form which drives a certain car-centric behaviour... So, you know, an urban-rural fringe that is designed for the car is a bit counter intuitive to me. That was a

product, I think, of the new town urban design, you know, that's half a century old". **[Senior officer 2 (development), Warrington Borough Council]**

"It was... born out of a New Town movement in the 60s and you know, just to take taking a look at the place will tell you that… the green space that exists, the way the pavements are designed and the way that the residential developments are nestled behind tree lines". **[Senior officer 3 (transport), Warrington Borough Council].**

Hence on the one hand, challenges of mobility in Birchwood were related to long-established car-centric infrastructure that was planned during a different era of planning and with a different lens on governing mobility in such spaces. Birchwood was therefore a fringe space which created different challenges of mobility, owing to its 'tight' developed landscape and of which coerced specific types of mobility from users. Yet, on the other hand, this was also differentiated in the Omega site. As a counterpoint, interviewees suggested that this area was less congested due to the implementation of an active travel policy (section 4.3.3. discusses this in more detail) and which was arguably easier to implement given the ability to work on a 'blank slate' in this part of the fringe rather than trying to modify / adapt existing mobility infrastructures focused around the car:

"We've done some fantastic work, you know up Omega, on the Western end. There's some factories and units there and 35% of the staff are going to work every day by bike. That's because we got in early when we were developing the site". **[Senior officer 3 (transport), Warrington Borough Council]**

Consequently, it is possible to discern differentiated challenges of mobility once again across different fringe spaces. Interestingly, in the context of a largely freight intensive site such as Omega and the types of economic activity that have been developed in such spaces (such as logistical and manufacturing industries) will undoubtedly have served to contribute to increase traffic and congestion, albeit in a different form. This was, however, seldom mentioned.

It was evident that there was a desire to improve the accessibility to, from and within the rural-urban fringe. In this respect, Warrington's Local Transport Plan has focused on enhancing accessibility to and from 'suburban' fringe areas, resulting in "less traffic and improved access to the town centre" (Warrington Borough Council, 2015, p. 8). Some work had been completed in this regard, but it was also clear that a number of challenges remained:

"How do we encompass and improve accessibility to the rural-urban fringe, both in terms of getting access *into* those key areas, but also then gaining access *from* the urban hub to then access the wider employment opportunities in these spaces?" **(Senior officer 1 (policy), Warrington Borough Council]**

"We've still got further improvement works we need to do within our borough, such as at the A49. You know, we have done some improvement on that. You know, it's really important we carry on with that. There are some critical junctions which will be looking to do to really provide some strategic relief for the town centre". **[Senior officer 3 (transport), Warrington Borough Council].**

This illustrates how the interrelations between the 'urban' and 'rural-urban fringe' are sustained *by* the interpersonal mobility afforded by private vehicles, but similarly, how such interdependencies also continue to reinforce and exacerbate challenges of congestion. Certainly, this appears to be a cyclical, almost paradoxical dynamic; removing or reducing interpersonal forms of mobility would diminish the profit mobility-dependent fringe spaces, yet the current emphasis on such car-centric forms of mobility is precisely what contributed to challenges. The paradoxical nature of mobility has previously been identified by Peacock and Pemberton (2019) from residential perspectives, in relation to the transitional nature of the rural-urban fringe itself. It was therefore interesting to see such challenges identified by the interviewees from a governing perspective, but also associated with the interconnectivities with the urban, rather than a condition of just the rural-urban fringe itself.

However, it was also evident that these challenges of congestion were heavily influenced by the actions of others elsewhere in the region, in a wider, relational sense. For example, interviewees noted how Warrington's positioning between Manchester and Liverpool was creating a substantial amount of pressure on their road network, leaving them with a "disbenefit of incidents" – referring when car accidents would occur and cause additional backlog in an already congested network. This was particularly prominent in relation to the motorways that intersected Warrington:

"Warrington is a victim of its own success at times, you know. We are very accessible when people want to be here, but the reason we're so accessible is that we've got excellent infrastructure- you know got the M6 running through as we got the M62 and the M56. If they are running fine - it's great. But if you get any sort of an incident - it's gridlock. So not only is that disrupting traffic trying to get in, but you've got all this diversionary traffic as well. We really do need Highways England to manage that strategically to stop us getting the disbenefit of incidents. It would give us a bit more network resilience". **[Senior officer 3 (transport), Warrington Borough Council].**

Such congestion pressures in Warrington's fringe were thus also a function of Warrington's positioning within the Northwest region and were an inevitable consequence of the current state of the strategic road network. Being a smaller town between two significant conurbations, interviewees acknowledged how Warrington - and its fringe - were inheriting additional traffic beyond their own intralocal pressures, and which was then creating localised impacts in and beyond the fringe, but particularly in the context of Birchwood:

"Birchwood has services both through to Manchester and through to Liverpool, you know, but it suffers because the M62 particularly during the evening peak in the morning and evening peaks, is very busy... almost from you know, it's almost from Junction 8 right through to Junction 12". **[Senior officer 3 (transport), Warrington Borough Council].**

Consequently, interviewees unveiled that this meant that considerable amounts of time were spent on strategising where key 'pinch points' were, and which challenges were within their potential to address. As already noted, in relation to the 'tight fringe' around

Birchwood, this meant that the focus was on reshaping existing infrastructure rather than the development of new mobility infrastructures:

"We have done things at Birchwood to alleviate the transport problems, changes around about dual carriageways… etc. So, it is looked after…. But it's still got the "don't build environment" and that… that will never change". **[Local economist 4, Warrington Borough Council]**

Moreover, the process of retrofitting to existing mobility infrastructure requires significant capital to address. However, even at the Omega site there were challenges of retrofitting relatively new mobility infrastructure that had been introduced, and which was now struggling to accommodate increased flows of traffic as a result of new investment in the area. In this regard, improving such services were based on ensuring that these key economic sites could continue to fuel local growth:

"For example, Birchwood at the moment, we're now duelling the section from Junction 11. Now it's been quite an expensive job… look at Junction 8 by Omega. We've got to go back and redo that junction and again some of the road network around it that was put in, as far as the New town days, was a single carriageway. But in areas it now needs to be duelled and we're going back and retrofitting, so it is *helping* solve an existing problem… but more importantly, it's serving that growth". **[Senior officer 3 (transport), Warrington Borough Council]**

Thus, despite some interviewees highlighting Warrington's rural-urban fringe as a positive opportunity space, it was clear that this was also paradoxically creating significant challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe. As suggested, such Interviewees recognised

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that they had little influence in alleviating such pressures and were dependent on external organisations, such as Highways England, and other interviewees in Greater Manchester and Merseyside to tackle such challenges. This is initially indicative of how the capacity of Interviewees within Warrington to respond to challenges of mobility is limited by the powers held by other organisations and spaces and implicitly begins to draw attention to how the interviewees responsible for governing mobility in such fringe spaces are deprivileged compared to their city counterparts.

In summary, the evidence presented here indicates that the car-centric challenges that characterise fringe spaces in cities can also be prevalent in towns (Ravetz., 2010), but of which can be differentiated. In the context of Warrington, what we see is an example of a town that is also inheriting relational traffic pressures from these proximate city spaces. However, this can reduce the capacity for local Interviewees to address such problems as they often originate outside of their jurisdictional remit. With insufficient capital to address these issues, it is clear that such interviewees often have to operate in a reactive capacity. This is especially the case when   fringe landscapes are shaped by greenbelt planning regulations from elsewhere (Shoard, 2002) or where there is a reliance on other organisations at a regional or national scale to address such issues.

4.3.2. Challenges of balancing variable uses of mobility in the fringe:

This section outlines how, in the face of paradoxical car-centric patterns of mobility in the rural-urban fringe, interviewees in WBC have sought to improve and promote public

transport strategies and encourage alternative, congestion-alleviating modal shifts. Pemberton and Peacock (2019) state that there is a need to consider the differentiated use of mobility in the rural-urban fringe - for example, "how an individual or group takes possession of the realm of possibilities for mobility and builds on it to develop personal projects" (Flamm and Kaufmann, 2006, p.168). Such a perspective calls for a more pluralistic approach to mobility and calls for planners and policy makers to consider the diversity of transport users. In the context of this research, interviewees rather more demonstrated a significant acknowledgement of the diversity of uses of mobility in the rural-urban fringe, which in turn was exemplified as being yet another key challenge in Warrington's rural-urban fringe spaces. Interviewees drew attention to the multifaceted experiences of mobility for those living and / or working within or beyond the fringe:

"If you're a resident, I think it depends on where you're living, because for example there are parts of Birchwood that are quiet and not troubled too much by some of the heavy traffic. That inevitably impacts on the sense of place. There are other residential communities that are almost inside a business park, and they've lived cheek-by-jowl for decades – they've become accustomed to it… And, you know, there are people that will travel from North Manchester to work at Rolls-Royce every day and they will go through the pain of the M60, and it is a pain, or they will go through the horror of experiencing Northern rail into Manchester or out of Manchester into Birchwood…". **[Senior officer 2 (development), Warrington Borough Council]**

First and foremost, what the above quote therefore highlights is that the experiences of mobility by residents in the rural-urban fringe are differentiated, again supporting earlier research by Peacock and Pemberton (2019) which reported how wider decision making can have significant implications for the lived experiences of mobility within different parts of

such spaces. The idea that such mobility was perceived to have a direct impact on the 'sense of place' in such spaces is particularly interesting, again reinforcing suggestions made by Peacock and Pemberton (2019) that there is a need to consider how perceptions on mobility – how they are 'appropriated' – can develop different expectations about the fringe and create different types of communities (networked, marginal, etc; see Bell and Osti; 2010).

Secondly, in the case of the Birchwood case study site especially, we can discern how challenges of mobility are differentiated intra-locally within the rural-urban fringe space itself – depending on a resident's proximity to key amenities or sites of congestion. This significantly builds upon earlier research by suggesting that both *proximity* to mobility infrastructures as well as the implications of such features (whether they facilitate congestion, for example) create highly differentiated expectations around mobility. This is important to highlight as mobility in the rural-urban fringe has typically been reported as contributing to an overarching lack of sense of place within the literature (Shoard, 2002). It is this factor *specifically* that was viewed as a central challenge related to mobility in such spaces - the differential experiences of mobility - as well as differential requirements for mobility dependent on an individual's residential location, dispositions etc – and how these gave rise to a further set of challenges for meeting such needs. These are discussed below in relation to two key groups – commuters and younger residents.

4.3.2.1 Provision of public transport services for 'commuters' in Birchwood:

One of the major groups that interviewees had challenges in responding to were commuters. This is not an unexpected finding. Indeed, one of the groups that have been addressed in the literature pertaining mobility to the rural-urban fringe is commuters, with such individuals being conceptualised as having 'ephemeral' – non-engagement – practices within such space (Shoard, 2002). The complexity for interviewees was related to managing different capacities of commuters – those within local commuting flows and those from the more relational mobility flows from across the region – and how to engage such individuals in using public transport. Such issues were seen as being fundamentally more problematic in Birchwood. As is made clear below, however, despite distinguishing between these different types of commuters, interviewees were significantly more focussed on relational mobility pressures:

"Birchwood is a very successful economic centre in its own right, and that's reflected in the travel flows into it per day from afield. So, at somewhere like Birchwood, you know, one of our key issues is you know, how can we improve accessibility into Birchwood for people who are commuting every day via non car modes?"
[Senior officer 1 (policy), Warrington Borough Council]

One attempt to overcome this involved actively demonstrating an investment in such services. The strategy had involved a combination of retrofitting the bus station at Birchwood train station and to improve public transport in the area, yet this had proven to be expensive and had not led to a significant uptake of such services:

"We try to encourage that as far as, you know, there's a circular bus route that picks people up in the [Birchwood] station and takes them out. We've done quite a lot of improvements for that. Like we've recently put a bus gate in. So those buses aren't having to sit in the middle of the road. So, you know, it was quite a substantial amount of investment to do that. We are desperately trying to encourage that mode shift, *but it's difficult*, because if you're coming into Birchwood every day, to get to Warrington by public transport is perceived as difficult". **[Senior officer 3 (transport), Warrington Borough Council]**

Thus, longstanding 'perceptions' that commuters were deemed to hold around the difficulty of utilising public transport in such fringe spaces was seen to be particularly difficult to overcome - but was seen as the critical commuting pressure above Warrington's own territorial commuting flow. What this implies is a need to look outwards, at how such spaces interact relationally with other places, as well as the extent the capacity for actors within Warrington to manage such pressures outside their jurisdictional remit. For instance, as outlined below, the capacity for such Interviewees to pro-actively engage in encouraging the uptake of such modes of transport was limited by the inability to directly engage with such individuals given that they resided outside of Warrington itself:

"They know the alternative is so poor, i.e., rail, because the quality of the stock, the cost of the transport, the whole rail experience is just not a pleasant one. You just can't get people out of the cars because the alternative is not attractive enough. So, for me the road network in Warrington - it is what it is. They're doing the best they can. But unless there is a tidal shift in attitude to public transport, the roads will always be a mess". **[Senior officer 2 (development), Warrington Borough Council].**

Furthermore, it was also highlighted that the ability for residents living within Birchwood (and where such a fringe space was located between two larger cities) to commute out to other areas was also problematic in that services typically began and ended in either Manchester or Liverpool:

"There are people in Birchwood, trying to make journey like everybody else into Manchester, but in the morning it's difficult. What we hope through some of the future rail stuff is.... because the problem is sometimes when the trains get to Birchwood, they are literally full, you know, so people can be left on the platform sometimes at Birchwood because the train is full". **[Senior officer 3, Warrington Borough Council]**

Hence it was recognized that there was a need to improve capacity on the railway and which in turn, would help promote increased uptake of such services for residents commuting from fringe spaces such as Birchwood. However, interviewees noted that they lacked the resources to be able to address this issue directly and were thereby contingent on lobbying central government for new investment to increase capacity:

"So, you know, lobbying government to make sure that we do get improved rolling stock like… It should be a comfortable journey rather than feeling a bit of a cattle truck". **[Senior officer 3 (transport) , Warrington Borough Council]**

To draw this argument together, it was evident that the Borough Council had invested substantial capital in improving the connectivity of Warrington's fringe spaces (mainly at

Birchwood). However, to date, this had been to limited effect and due to an overall lack of resources and a lack of power to effect significant changes in mobility and mobility infrastructures, particularly those created by influences outside of their jurisdictional remit. There is therefore a need to look at who might be influencing the decision making around such shared transport infrastructure. This point will be returned to in the following chapters.

4.3.2.2 Provision of public transport for different groups – younger residents in Birchwood:

Coupled with difficulties in encouraging a greater uptake of public transport services for those commuting in / out of the fringe from further afield, it was also recognised that challenges of mobility existed in relation to responding to the intra-local mobility needs of different groups in Birchwood (albeit to a lesser extent). Peacock and Pemberton (2019) have illustrated how such spaces have paradoxical challenges for older age groups, with changes to key services acting to "undermine the mobility experiences and practices of older people over time" (p. 9). They illustrate the complexities of organising and maintaining transport services within the transitory nature of the rural-urban fringe. Within this study, this was also a prominent concern for those who were interviewed, but who focused less on the transitory nature of such space (as explained above, Birchwood was perceived as contained and thus less transitory), but rather as a product of differential mobility needs across age groups:

"I think Birchwood is perceived by different age groups differently. Okay. So, I think that let's say [people aged] 40 and above would see Birchwood as a straight employment area and a pain in the backside to drive into equal pain in the backside to drive out of heavily congested at peak times. I think if you're under 40, you see Birchwood as a bit of a pain in the backside to get to in general". **[Senior officer 2 (development), Warrington Borough Council]**

However, in contrast to Peacock and Pemberton (2019), those interviewed stated that a key difficulty was in generating new forms of mobility in the fringe that responded to the needs of younger people - and which were not necessarily tied to car ownership or using the car as a key mode of mobility. This was put down to an increase in demand responsive mobility opportunities and also due to an increasing awareness of the environmental impact of combustion vehicle engines:

"A lot of young people, certainly under the age of 25, really don't want to drive. There's a good proportion now with people under the age of 40 that simply don't possess a driving license and that percentage is growing. Or when people do drive then they'll hire for a specific period of perhaps the weekend. A 19-year-old looks at the total life cost of a car and divides it by the number of Uber Journeys and says the Uber are by far the cheapest way of doing it. Yeah, so why on earth would I have the angst of a car? So, because of the unwillingness to own a car and more of this recognition of the climate agenda and CO_2 emissions, trying to get young people into Birchwood – as nice as it is nestled in green space AND as economically successful as it is – it's a real challenge. Unless we address that, it is a real threat to its future economic success…" **[Senior officer 2 (development), Warrington Borough Council]**

Thus, it appeared that the challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe were perpetuated by changing ideologies of younger people. As discussed previously, Birchwood is a

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fundamentally car-centric space and ensuring that there was a plethora of services which facilitated mobility into and out of the rural-urban fringe spaces in Warrington was a distinctive priority for such Interviewees. Above and beyond simple generational considerations, there were also individuals that could not drive or could not afford to use public transport. However, once again the costs associated with facilitating a modal shift in mobility and improving mobility choices for those in the fringe were highlighted by different interviewees:

"Within any community you're going to have problems as far as, you know, people who are deprived, are maybe unemployed, people who haven't got access to a car, you know… And hence, we are very keen to make sure we have that public transport offer, you know, certainly, you know, I know there's a lot of local people work, you know on Birchwood Park". **[Senior officer 3 (transport), Warrington Borough Council]**

And:

"There was several hundred thousand pounds to pump prime that, you know, bus services are expensive to put on... particularly on the provision of non-commercial bus services. It's sometimes having the resource to deliver it which we struggle a bit more. It's interesting as far as public transport because again because we haven't got the money really... you've got a bus service during the day. It's in those out-of-hours terms that it gets very infrequent. So, for people are reliant on public transport, it's more difficult to get there and back". **[Senior officer 3 (transport), Warrington Borough Council]**

In turn, rather than public transport provision simply changing in relation to the shifting (transitory) nature of such spaces (Peacock and Pemberton, 2019) - and demands of individuals therein - it was clear that in Birchwood, the costs associated with improving mobility options and a modal shift in mobilities were ongoing challenges. Whilst this was

framed as a response to the car-centric nature of this space, it was clear that attempting to respond using public transport had created a significant number of emergent challenges for interviewees; many of which they felt ill-equipped to address. Illustrated above are considerations of external mobility pressures which interviewees had struggled to engage with, as well as a plethora of changing ideological expectations about mobility more generally which were subsequently impacting expectations of mobility in the rural-urban fringe. This points towards issues of power, influence and thus capacity to address changes.

4.3.3. Ideological shifts - creating 'sustainable mobility' in the differentiated fringe:

The final significant challenge for governing mobility in the rural-urban fringe pertained to emergent challenges around sustainability, which had been enforced by a combination of changing governmental and public pressures. This proved to be a significant, yet once again contained differentiated challenges for interviewees to address. Recent works on the rural-urban fringe has focused on the ways in which sustainability has become a major driving factor in the management of such landscapes (Bunker and Houston, 2004), particularly due to "current public and planning concerns with environmental quality, and increasingly aspects of sustainability" (Simon, 2008, p. 172), owing to the inherently unsustainable nature of such spaces (ibid). In relation to mobility specifically in such landscapes, Simon (2008) further outlines how a key challenge for rural-urban fringe landscapes pertains to "the congestion and pollution consequences of increasing vehicle ownership and use within densifying urban areas" (p. 9). In turn, Pacione (2013) notes that increasing vehicle ownership in the fringe has led to "decision making processes" being focused on "more

socially acceptable and sustainable outcomes" (p. 76). Therefore, it was recognised by all of those interviewed that there was a need to reinforce and re-emphasise the need to embed principles of sustainability into their own efforts to address mobility challenges in the fringe. Yet, aside from pressures from different groups, it was clear that such pressures were being enforced by the state through the climate emergency declarations:

"So, because of climate emergency declarations, we need to transform and redesign the mass movements of people in more sustainable ways, walking, cycling, those kinds of things, rather than you know being in the car". **[Senior officer 2 (development), Warrington Borough Council]**

Thus, because of such pressures, alongside increasing the use of public transport in the rural-urban fringe, active travel options, such as walking and cycling, were also firmly embedded into their future transport plans across Warrington, and indeed embedded into the most recent iteration of the Local Transport Plan:

"One of the key drivers of our new LTP (Local Transport Plan) is to try and move those modes to more sustainable modes, you know, so certainly walking and cycling". **[Senior officer 3 (transport), Warrington Borough Council]**

Yet, and as already noted, retrofitting new sustainability-friendly mobility infrastructure was problematic in certain fringe spaces (for example, Birchwood) due to the costs and scope of the work involved – particularly given the difficulty in creating new infrastructures

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in a 'contained' fringe space:

"I suppose if you look at the local area now, I think generally we have had to put a lot of investments into Birchwood as far as local accessibility, you know walking and cycling... You'd hope that those people are actually walking or cycling". **[Senior officer 3 (transport), Warrington Borough Council].**

This signalled a more reactive approach was required to embedding sustainability in such spaces – a need to engage with mobility in such landscapes in ways that were not envisioned upon the initial planning of the site. As made clear above, this required a significant amount of investment, with the Borough Council seemingly unsure if the investment had actually enacted change. This was yet another battle against the car-centric modes of travel, once again contingent on funding and steered by the character of the fringe landscape itself.

The influence of the sustainability agenda could also be seen as embedded into emergent fringe spaces. In the Omega site, for example, a more proactive approach had been adopted, embedding such agendas as the spaces was undergoing development changes:

We're just doing another one. Now we're doing a pathway costing half a million from Omega up to Burtonwood. We'll put in a cycle lane pathway all the way up there to get that connectivity and as well so, you know accessibility by those modes is a key driver there. **[Senior officer 3 (transport), Warrington Borough council]**

Conversely to Birchwood, such discussions with interviewees were reflective of a more *proactive* approach – with the ability to 'build in' such infrastructure 'from the off', and with planning officers from the Borough Council being able negotiate the planning of such modes with other business stakeholders during the initial development of the site, rather than having to retrofit. As such, the ability the implement sustainable mobility in the rural-urban fringe was possible from the earliest points of development:

"Well, that was because when they were being built, we got in straightaway, spoke to the occupiers and worked very closely with them. And, as far as travel planning advice, you know, they were very *progressive"*. **[Senior officer 3 (transport), Warrington Borough Council]**

Thus, the site was reflective of a differentiated emphasis on mobility – one compounded by the sustainability agenda:

"Importantly, we have the infrastructure in, so all the cycling infrastructure, as far as cycle paths in those parts of Warrington, it probably one of the most complete. So, you know going by bike is actually very easy as far as accessibility, as far as the perception of safety… but it also enables people who didn't have access to a car to get out and meet the shift pattern of work". **[Senior officer 3 (transport), Warrington Borough Council]**

Consequently, what this example reflects once again is the 'unique' differentiated nature of the rural-urban fringe (Scott et al., 2013) at an intra-local level, and how with the implementation of sustainability mobility strategies across fringe spaces involves different challenges therein. It shows how the individuals who govern mobility in the rural-urban

fringe are unable to develop broad, 'one size fits all' strategies to implementing the imposed agendas of the state, in turn developing a simultaneous need for *proactive* and *reactive* approaches to governing mobility in the rural-urban fringe, which is linked to the specific, diverse character of such spaces. As such, this ultimately makes developing new responses to mobility a more complex phenomena than has typically been acknowledged in the literature.

4.4. Conclusion

Mobility in the rural-urban fringe was shown to be a variable, multifaceted challenge for Interviewees within WBC. As one interviewee summarised:

"Responding to messages that we're getting from workers, residents, visitors, investors and actually putting together an integrated transport system, that's fit for the 21st century, addresses climate change and health and well-being, whilst at the same time having to balance that with the economic status of the council and, you know, the needs of residents. It's not an easy trick to pull off at the moment". **[Senior officer 2 (development), Warrington Borough Council]**

Therefore, this chapter has illustrated how mobility in the rural-urban fringe was shown to be a multi-faceted issue, with unique challenges arising not simply from the unique nature of such spaces themselves, but also because of the differentiated nature of different rural-urban fringe landscapes. Thus, rather than view mobility within a broad, conceptual

manner, it is clear that such mobility creates different challenges across fringe spaces within the same town context. It is also clear that such issues need to be examined both territorially and relationally.

From a territorial perspective, the chapter has illustrated how the mobility infrastructures associated with such landscapes can serve to create a significant car-centric lock in, and which creates congestion and has significant implications for the capacity of Interviewees to respond to the wider sustainable mobility challenges of relevance in the early 21st century. Yet, many of the territorial pressures are significantly influenced by relational pressures and many such challenges are inherited. Relationally, what the research also emphasises is a greater consideration of the relational influences shaping such landscapes and the differential capacity for key Interviewees to address such challenges. Moreover, the chapter identifies 'infrastructural' challenges related to existing mobility infrastructures in the fringe and the need to either adapt / amend such infrastructures or to build new infrastructure for those living in or beyond the fringe and travelling in or out. This chapter also pointed towards 'service' based challenges in the fringe as being important and which relate to the demands, pressures and use of existing transport networks and how to facilitate or alter the ways in which users engage with existing mobility transport networks In particular, key challenges identified related to a lack of resources and power in effecting mobility transitions by local Interviewees, as well as the ways in which mobility was shaped relationally in the context of commuting behaviours - and a lack of ability to influence therein.

However, also signalled throughout the chapter is a need to consider the different scales of governance which are also of relevance to shaping mobility in fringe spaces and which shape the capacity (either positively or negatively) for interviewees to address such challenges, both vertically and horizontally. Indeed, issues of power to influence changes – particularly on relational pressures - combined with a general ethos of struggling to financially respond to many of the explored challenges remain pertinent considerations here. It is therefore evidently important to understand how local Interviewees may be privileged or deprivileged by central government and how the 'strategic' or 'spatial' selectivity of the state may serve to privilege certain areas (such as adjoining city-regions) above others - such as an in-between fringe space like Warrington. This has been alluded to by Scott et al. (2013), who note how "top-down imposition of change can also occur through the active intervention of government and/or powerful stakeholders who manipulate or bypass the main institutional gatekeepers and systems through their power and influence, thereby further complicating the decision-making picture [in the rural-urban fringe]" (p. 3).

Indeed, what is clear is that irrespective of the efforts of local Interviewees to address mobility problems in the fringe, such problems cannot be resolved without input from those operating at wider spatial scales, including central government, as well as other key Interviewees. It is also clear that such actors are contributing to creating emergent challenges of mobility. This dynamic is considered in the following chapter and which considers the relative importance of Interviewees operating at a national, regional or sub-regional scale in either reinforcing or addressing such challenges of mobility in Warrington's rural-urban fringe spaces.

CHAPTER FIVE:

Metagovernance and its influence on governing mobility in the rural-urban fringe.

5.1. Introduction:

This chapter seeks to outline how central government, as the key metagovernor allocating resources and power, can privilege stakeholders at a variety of multispatial scales of governance which in turn may influence the potential of local actors, such as Warrington Borough Council (WBC), to address the challenges of mobility outlined in the previous chapter. Critically, whilst Chapter Four emphasised that WBC, as a public institution at the local scale, was the central organisation through which mobility challenges in the rural-urban fringe were addressed, it also identified that such challenges were both territorial and relational in nature and thus alluded to the idea that other key organisations might be impactful in the regard. Therefore, the chapter unpacks the vertical tiers of governance of relevance to such actors and those which might seek to hinder or help address such challenges of mobility in this regard. As shown previously in Chapter Three, there were organisations external to Warrington "who have an interest in improving or managing the transport network" (Warrington Borough Council, 2019, p. 4), which reflect organisations at different scales of governance.

Exploring the role of central government as a 'metagovernor' (Bailey and Wood, 2017) is essential because, as Pemberton and Winstanley (2010) exemplify, central government "can control who it lends powers to, on what terms and how it chooses to redraw and redefine its distribution of powers over time" (p. 29) a varying of spatial scales. In this way, central government is not viewed as an abstract source of power and resources, but rather more as having specific agendas and utilising specific processes of change to enact its 'vision' within society (Fleurke and Willemse, 2006). This means that the powers afforded to actors at a variety of scales, and governmental support therein, can fluctuate through time (Jessop, 2000). For example, in recent years, the UK government has been engaging through an increasingly arm's length or 'hands off' approach (Bailey and Wood, 2017), coupled with forms of strategic and spatial selectivity (Jones, 2005) through how it allocates power and funding. Thus, there is an evident need to understand how central government, as a metagovernor, is privileging or deprivileging different organisations above others - of whom operate at a variety of spatial scales – and how this might interplay with addressing the territorial and relational challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe.

The overarching question for this chapter, therefore, is how does central government, in how it currently distributes and thus privileges power around mobility and resources, help or hinder Warrington Borough Council's capacity to respond to such challenges? In beginning to answer this question, section 5.2. explores how, at the territorial scale, the state manages WBC 'at an arm's length'. This is primarily due to an increasing tendency to metagovern from a distance and largely through a bidding process for financial resources, which officers in WBC find complex, strenuous, and largely ineffective for addressing

challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe. It also highlights how successful funding applications by WBC are attached with a variety of stipulations, which determine where, when, and how the money can be spent. In this regard, the rural-urban fringe is seldom a specific 'object of governance' for central government and this serves to undermine the extent to which officers within Warrington can respond to challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe.

Of relevance to this thesis is the transition towards sub-regional forms of governance and new devolution settlements (Harrison, 2010) which have had distinctive impacts on the distribution of power and resourcing in the Northwest of England. Crucially, it is important to note that such processes are reflective of the fact "that governance (in its narrow sense of networking, negotiation, etc.) and metagovernance depend on the organization of reflexive self-organisation among multiple stakeholders across several scales of state territorial organisation" (Jessop, 2000, p. 14). Thus, section 5.3 proceeds to understand the importance of the Cheshire-Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership (CWLEP) in both helping and hindering the capacity for officers in Warrington to address challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe. This is a complex relationship; one marked by a broader hegemonic alliance, but sometimes characterised by different agendas with regards to which mobility challenges should be addressed. This is ultimately a product of the remit of the CWLEP (how they have been established by central government) and the differences in the spatial scales at which both organisations operate.

Section 5.4 then seeks to outline how the unequal processes of devolution between city-regions and Warrington Borough Council (and privileging of devolved structures therein) have created significant power vacuums across the Northwest. Fundamentally, section 5.4 shows how devolution has given rise to emergent, collaborative organisations such as Transport for the North (TfN) – regarded as strategic-state projects (MacKinnon, 2020). On the surface, TfN appears to provide a critical opportunity for officers in WBC to address the more relational challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe. Yet, despite a supposed 'evidence-based approach', the 'non-geography specific' remit of TfN contributes to unequal power structures and indirectly deprivileges the capacity for WBC to engage in such opportunities. Section 5.5. concludes these arguments, reiterating that central government, in how it metagoverns, creates both territorial and relational barriers for governing mobility in the rural-urban fringe.

5.2. Metagoverning territorial mobility in the rural-urban fringe:

As unpacked in Chapter Four, the ability to address expensive infrastructural problems of mobility in the rural-urban fringe was seen as a critical barrier overall – one which interplayed with both types of fringe spaces examined, albeit in differentiated ways. Indeed, officers within Warrington Borough Council did not feel that the funding needed to address such problems was easily obtainable from central government. Through exploring this further, it became clear that Warrington Borough Council were locked into a complex (and often 'frustrating') bidding processes in order to obtain such funding:

"Local areas know more the local issues, and other problems, better than Whitehall officers. So, we spend a lot of time in bids, trying to get Whitehall to understand *what* the issues are and *where* the issues are so that we might address them". **[Senior officer 2 (development), Warrington Borough Council].**

Yet, senior officers in Warrington Borough Council felt ill-equipped to engage in such bidding processes. This was depicted as being due to three crucial factors: (1) *The 'arm's length' distancing of the state* - this contributed to a lack of knowledge regarding when funding pots might become available and a lack of feedback regarding how to improve in the bidding process, (2) having insufficient resources to effectively engage with the bidding process, and (3) the rural-urban fringe not being a direct 'object of governance' for the state as a 'metagovernor'.

5.2.1. The 'arm's length' distancing of the state on the bidding process:

The first issue pertained to the 'distancing of the state' and how central government increasingly metagoverns 'at an arm's length' (Pemberton and Winstanley, 2010). This is reflective of a 'hands off' approach which has aimed to bring powers "closer to the people" (Polverari, 2015, p. 1075). Yet, this has disempowered officers within WBC. A direct consequence of this strategy of metagoverning it that it has blurred the channels of communication between WBC and central government. Consequently, senior officers were confined to lobbying strategies in order to make their case for capital investment:

"We get frustrated with the fact we are highly thought of, but we haven't got a mechanism into the infrastructure of government. It is more on the lobbying side". **[Local economist 4, Warrington Borough Council]**

Officers within WBC also remarked that due to this distancing, they seldom gained little feedback as to how to improve their success in the bidding process:

"We put our bid in and the limited feedback we were given was that we were just we were just short…. but that's very, very frustrating in the sense that… is it better to miss by a bit or is it better to miss by a mile? If you don't get it, you've wasted a lot of time". **[Senior officer 3 (transport), Warrington Borough Council].**

Evidently, a predominantly lobbying-based strategy with a blurring of communicative channels into central government is reflective of a relatively ineffective strategy for obtaining capital for addressing infrastructural challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe. In this regard, WBC felt they had been *forced* into compliance in engaging with the bidding process. What this is reflective of is the limited capacity to which "government authorities give local government freedom" and the "…extent to which local government is dependent on other authorities in its decision-making practices" (Fleurke and Willemse, 2006, p. 75). Evidenced here is how the continual distancing of the state had similarly removed direct communicative channels and, paradoxically, increased dependency on the state in order to deliver capital-based objectives in addressing mobility in the rural-urban fringe. This is therefore reflective of how the officers most in charge with governing mobility in the rural-urban fringe are seemingly not privileged by central government. Such an issue has been well-documented in the literature, yet never in relation to the rural-urban

fringe specifically. This study builds on this literature by suggesting that the 'arm's length' strategy of the government made it difficult for WBC in isolation to prepare, compete and subsequently obtain such funding for addressing mobility challenges in the fringe, which in turn serves to reinforce the challenges of mobility that WBC wanted to address.

5.2.2. Insufficient resources to prepare bids:

The second crucial problem with the bidding process was related to the limited resources that WBC had to prepare bids, as well as the relative instability of these resources. There were evident frustrations of "wasted scarce resources in bid preparation" (Entwistle, 2010, p. 641) for Senior officers in WBC:

"No matter what you missed by, you know, a lot of work goes into those bids, and you don't get it, that's frustrating. I mean, we are spending time on just trying to bid into them. We try to find out… with some of the noises made from central government, you know, the sorts funding they are going to provide, but it's difficult". **[Senior officer 3 (transport), Warrington Borough Council]**

The above quote is important for two critical reasons. First and foremost, it reinforces the idea that the funding WBC require to address some challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe is locked behind a bidding process, which critically, requires them to use their own resources and time to engage with (Entwistle, 2010). Secondly, however, the latter half of the quote exemplifies that in order to prepare these bids, such officers were similarly dependent on the limited communication they received. In turn, this did not mean that

these resources were necessarily used as effectively as they could be. Thus, this initially suggested that rather than the rural-urban fringe being a neglected space (Scott et al., 2013), the ways funding is distributed to such officers contributes to the neglect, particularly in regard to addressing mobility.

Yet, these senior officers also further exemplified that such frustrations with the bidding process were also exemplified by the continual churn of civil servants and the need to continually re-train individuals in WBC. As such, there was an internal instability in the security of the resources on offer:

"There's a churn of civil servants on a reasonably frequent basis, which means you then have to spend time educating the new people on the bidding process, etc.". **[Senior officer 1 (Policy), Warrington Borough Council].**

Thus, above and beyond the complexities of the bidding process itself, it is also clear that Warrington Borough Council seldom have the stability of resources to engage with the bidding process - by way of trained individuals to assist with navigating this process. Taking these two points together, clearly, there is a disconnection regarding the dependency on bids, a lack of certainty regarding the timing of bids and the time and use of unstable resources in engaging with bidding processes. What is evident from this discussion is therefore the ways in which metagovernance strategies employed by the state *vis a vis* the bidding processes for obtaining capital funding were imposing on the capacity of Warrington Borough Council to govern at the local level. For those responsible for

governing mobility in the rural-urban fringe, there was little sign that this was going to be resolved:

"But, you know, I think that model will persist and only get worse as far as disparity. So yeah, I think there is a disadvantage there". **[Senior officer 3 (transport), Warrington Borough Council]**

The idea of disparity raised an interesting question: disparity in relation to whom? Evidently, senior officers in Warrington Borough Council believed they were deprivileged *in relation* to other organisations. This point is critical and is returned to in section 5.3.

5.2.3. The rural-urban fringe not being an 'object of governance' for metagovernors:

The final concern that interviewees focussed upon was how they found it difficult to know what the bids would actually allow them to accomplish. There appeared to be an array of political stipulations attached to funding applications and a disconnection as to whether these necessarily matched the ambitions of such officers in relation to the rural-urban fringe:

"I think a lot of the problem is these bids are directed by limited resources or the timing of an initiative – whether they [central government] feel it's the right timing for something politically, or even nationally". **[Senior officer 1 (policy), Warrington Borough Council].**

This comment reflects how, from the perspective of WBC, the 'political' ambitions of central government as a metagovernor was steering the types of issues that could be addressed by the way of the types of pots of money that were on offer. This was highly problematic for WBC. The competitive based nature of how government grants are distributed ensures that local authorities make promises regarding how money will be spent and increases competition between competing authorities (John et al., 2004). Similarly, Entwistle (2010) further explains such stipulations around bidding as producing a "patchwork quilt of resources that isn't necessarily where it needs to be" (p. 641). Certainly, this was also exemplified within this research. As outlined below, the money that received by WBC had a variety of different stipulations attached to it regarding how it could be spent. Thus, even in successfully obtaining this funding, this did not necessarily empower such officers to address challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe:

"We need the flexibilities and powers for us to decide, collectively as partners and with our local residents, how we want to use the resources that we have to best benefit us, because at the moment they're coming in different funding streams and sometimes they are coming in as different bids. So, it's not the best value for money. You'll see that the devolution has had a differential impact in terms of identifying areas which will benefit more from National investment". **[Senior officer 1 (policy), Warrington Borough Council]**

Building upon this, such officers suggested that this made it difficult for them to know the extent to which they could engage with the rural-urban fringe explicitly, despite evidently desiring to (see Chapter Four):

"Well, the rural-urban fringe is always had, shall we say, a bit of a question mark over it in terms of how we can respond from that funding. I think that's one of the key battles of the moment". **[Senior officer 2 (development), Warrington Borough Council]**

5.2.4. Summary of the impact of central-local relations

There was an evident imposition of central government, as a metagovernor, in influencing the degree to which WBC was able to engage with the challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe. The politics, rules and stipulations imposed on funding bids by central government clearly determines **which** issues can be addressed and **when**. 'When' is significantly problematic as interviewees appeared to lack knowledge as to when funding pots might become available, or indeed, lacked adequate resources to develop strong bids. Aside from simply being locked into a bidding process, there were significant issues around the timing of bids – when they might become available – and the often stringent 'rules' imposed on utilising such funds by central government. Thus, we see how metagovernance narratives steer the 'rules of the game' at the local level (Pemberton and Winstanley, 2010).

In relation to the capacity for WBC to respond to the infrastructural challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe, there were clear restrictions in the autonomy of officers within WBC to resolve such challenges at their own will. What can therefore be identified is a problematic relationship between the need to address key challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe *vis a vis* an array of barriers reinforced by the metagoverning strategies

of central government, of which limit the capacity to respond to such challenges through public sector approaches. Certainly, this process was depicted as having significant impact on the capacity of officers to engage with what they viewed as the key prioritisations in the rural-urban fringe and similarly, in their capacity to allocate resources as they viewed important. As stated previously, "Local areas know more the local issues and other problems better than Whitehall officers" (above), yet it was precisely Whitehall officers that were deciding how money should be spent – a paradoxical frustration for WBC. We thus see how local actors are coerced in to the "adaptation of national programmes to local conditions" (Etherington and Jones, 2016, p. 372), rather than local conditions (challenges) receiving support from national programmes.

5.3. The insertion of LEPs at the sub-regional scale:

As alluded to above, there was evidence of a need to understand how processes of devolution might be impeding on the potential of WBC to respond to the challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe. It has been widely noted in the literature that the potential for officers to respond is "contingent on the configuration of multi-scalar governance that results from devolution and on the dynamics between actors at different scales" (Gheres et al., 2020, p. 1020). Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) have been viewed within the literature as a forceful insertion of a new governance layer above local governance structures by central government (Bailey and Wood, 2017). Such processes are reflective of the state 'filling in' the gap of 'hollowed out' Regional Development Agencies

(Entwistle, 2010). Where local authorities were once direct recipients of funding from Regional Development Agencies, the creation of LEP structures has seen the prioritisation of LEPs instead (Pike et al., 2015), thus reflecting how the strategic privileging of the state has moved to the subregional level (Etherington and Jones, 2016). The following section reveals a complex dynamic between the interactions between WBC and the CWLEP; one where the strategic privileging of LEPs by central government and in the absence of other devolved responsibilities, has enabled the LEP to become a metagovernor at the subregional level.

5.3.1. The CWLEP as an emergent metagovernor?

Interviewees in WBC revealed how the creation of the CWLEP had (and was still having) a significant impact on their capacity to address several challenges associated with mobility in the rural-urban fringe. This was primarily a function of central government privileging the CWLEP above WBC. As one interviewee noted below, the CWLEP was viewed as being transformational in the capacity of WBC to gain access to more funding due to the funding allocated directly to the CWLEP, which subsequently had enabled them to address some of the infrastructural challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe:

"We get a lot of our local growth funding and other pots of money through the LEP, which has been vital. Like, that has been the thing that has really transformed us, because if you go back eight years or nine years ago, the amount of funding we were getting to do large capital infrastructure projects with was minimal... If you go back sort of seven or eight years ago, you know, we might do a two million pounds scheme every two

or three years. Now we've had, I think, about a hundred and fifty million pounds worth". **[Senior officer 3 (transport), Warrington Borough Council]**

The consequence of this is that WBC are integrating their activities more closely with the CWLEP. As revealed below, senior officers within WBC had realised that the CWLEP, in how it was strategically privileged by central government, was functionally the 'only game in town' and thus were working primarily with them. Contrary to the perceived distancing of central government and WBC, the CWLEP was rather more viewed as having a 'relationship' with central government:

"Because of its relationship with government… they are the only game in town. So, naturally, we would work with them extensively because it is for our benefit". **[Senior officer 2 (development), Warrington Borough Council]**

Crucially, it was clear that CWLEP was perceived as being 'closer' to central government. There was indeed evidence to suggest that doing so had allowed WBC to address some challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe. The LEP would 'loan' money to WBC to do so, which did indeed provide the capital needed to begin to address some of the challenges. Yet, in paying attention to the language used by actors, it is also clear that the logic of loaning the money was based around the LEPs focus on generating **growth:**

"For example, Birchwood at the moment, we're now duelling the section from Junction 11. Now it's been quite an expensive job, but we loaned money from the LEP. You look at Junction 8 by Omega - that originally was put in by highways England for another purpose. So, we've got to go back and redo that Junction and

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again some of the road network around it that was put in (as far as the New Town days) was a single carriageway. But in areas it needs to be duelled and that's what we're able to go back and retrofit. So, it's helping solve an existing problem. But more important is that it's helping serve that growth". **[Senior officer 3 (transport), Warrington Borough Council)**

Thus, the CWLEP, in how it was being strategically privileged by central government, had a powerful role in determining the potential for local officers in WBC to respond to challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe. More crucially, there appears to be a complex tier of metagovernance , with Central Government having created and continuing to regulate LEP structures; however, because of the privileging afforded therein, the CWLEP had become a metagovernor of mobility at the local level. The introduction of subregional governance structures had allowed central government to shape local governance networks in Warrington and had subsequently increased their capacity to address some of these key challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe (Bailey and Wood, 2017). However, due to the inequalities perpetuated by this strategic privileging, this had in turn has created a form of centralised dependency by WBC on the CWLEP in order to resolve predominantly infrastructural challenges of mobility in rural-urban fringe - challenges which were otherwise directly hindered by the bidding process WBC was trapped in. Therefore, this illustrates how central government was aiming to ensure the compatibility and coherence of different governance structures and regimes (Etherington and Jones, 2016) and shows the ways in which central government has altered local relations and the capacity of actors to address mobility challenges at the local scale.

The CWLEP itself recognised its central role in this regard. As one key interviewee within

the CWLEP noted, their role was around organising local authorities and helping to strategise the most effective methods through which to procure funding from government departments. TheCWLEP thus viewed themselves not simply as providing access to funding, but also as having a better understanding of the 'rules of the game'. Critical to note here is how the CWLEP was steering WBC away from a lobbying-based approach and towards a more evidence-led strategic approach:

"When dealing with a lot of the government departments, if you are going out with an evidence-based approach, that tends to carry a lot more weight than if you are just going in lobbying. So, a lot of the stuff that we do work with the authorities and utilities is to gather evidence, get the story right and then worked closely with government departments to sort of get them to understand what the issues are, why they are the issues, and have the evidence to support - doing that tends to gain lot more traction". **[Senior official 7, CWLEP]**

In addition, CWLEP described their role as being based on local 'authorities' (plural) rather than WBC in isolation. This reiterated that the spatial scale to which officers within the CWLEP were working at was more expansive than simply Warrington alone and, as such, that decision making by the CWLEP would also be a function of the needs of both Cheshire East and Cheshire West local authorities - i.e., the subregion. This was continually reiterated by CWLEP interviewees when discussing the extent to which they might engage in addressing challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe within Warrington explicitly:

"Limited, our role is high level in terms of linking the importance of connectivity and mobility within the strategy work that we've done across the remit of the LEP. In terms of actually developing and delivering solutions, it is very limited". **[Senior official 6, CWLEP]**

Consequently, despite the advantages CWLEP brought, the extent to which they were actually supporting WBC to address such challenges of mobility was more questionable outside of providing funding required. This also raises questions as to the extent to which the CWLEP, as a form of metagovernor, was steering decision making at the local level. WBC appeared to be working with the CWLEP closely but how did their strategies align and to what extent did this mean that WBC could respond to the challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe that they *themselves viewed as important*? The following section thus addresses this question.

5.3.2. Degree of empowerment from the CWLEP:

Despite the financial advantages the CWLEP brings to WBC, the role of the LEP and the degree of *power* it actually provides to Warrington Borough Council to directly respond to challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe that WBC deem as important was more variable. In the first instance, conversation with the CWLEP revealed how despite their better relationship with central government, they were still often compounded by the same experiences as the Borough Council in the bidding process and, indeed, faced similar frustrations:

"Within the Cheshire-Warrington LEP, we sometimes have to bid from funding from central government and follows the various rules of the various bids that come out of whatever the funding pot is at the time. We're not given funding as of right to spend as we wish… it means we have to spend a lot more time and effort into bidding process, which you are not necessarily successful at and it's a waste of time". **[Senior official 7, CWLEP]**

Thus, whilst the CWLEP offered additional avenues for funding; this still did not guarantee that capital could be secured. Similarly, despite the better engagement the CWLEP supposedly had with central government, they also expressed that they were still affected by the politics of the bidding process and the extent to which this could quickly change, though they indeed had a clearer understanding as to how things might change due to their improved contacts in central government, particularly those who were closer to potential funding pots which might become available, and the stipulations attached to these:

"Obviously, there are changes in politicians which can change the direction of or emphasis on particular issues. So, you've always got to be life to that. By trying to work closely with them, I tend to get sort of a *bit of a steer from them* on "which way is the wind blowing this week". **[Senior official 7, CWLEP]**

However, there was also evidence of a misalignment of priorities between WBC and the CWLEP, which was particularly important when considering the extent to which such a working dynamic empowers actors within WBC to address some of the more public transport-*based* challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe. As Bailey and Wood (2017) note, the insertion of the LEP in many ways can be seen as a method through which to "constrain the actions of the long-mistrusted local authorities" (p. 974). Hence there were

multiple instances whereby the CWLEP steered the specific focus around which challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe could be addressed. Primarily, this appeared to be a product of how the CWLEP – in terms of central government directives to focus predominantly on the discourse of 'opportunities for growth' across their geographical remit of three local authorities– would primarily focus on resolving challenges that embodied such growth objectives. Thus, there were different geographical scales of intervention by the CWLEP. For example, as outlined previously in Chapter Four, WBC were interested in addressing locally differentiated challenges of mobility in Warrington and its fringe spaces. Given their strategic privileging by central government, the CWLEP were crucial to helping attain funding to do this. Yet, as evidenced below, the extent to which the CWLEP engaged specifically with challenges of residential mobility in the rural-urban fringe was limited. Instead, they viewed such issues as being down to WBC to resolve. Upon asking one senior official within CWLEP to outline the degree of involvement they had in addressing residential challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe, they responded:

"I suppose from the LEP perspective we probably don't get into that level of detail. So, we look at it from the strategic perspective. Where are the opportunities for growth? What are the things that are getting in the way of that growth in terms of whether that might be… capacity constraint on a network? One of the things that we've funded for Omega rather than Birchwood is a new railway station, because I think we're conscious of the fact that a huge proportion of the workforce travels into there every day – they're a net importer of labour. So, when we make decisions around infrastructure and roads and stuff like that, we think about how it will impact people within and out the sub-region. In terms of impact on local residents that is more down to the local authorities to understand and to respond to that". **[Senior official 6, CWLEP]**

This was further exemplified by the fact that actors within the CWLEP were unable to specifically engage with questions focussed on what the challenges of mobility might be for residents in Warrington's rural-urban fringe spaces:

"I'm not sure that our focus is explicitly on transport in places like Birchwood. We have a sub-regional transport strategy which considers connectivity a range of different levels - that does include Birchwood. I know we are doing transport improvements around Birchwood Park, but that's pretty much related to increasing capacity into and out of the employment site". **[Senior official 6, CWLEP]**

Thus, the CWLEP viewed commuting capacity as the only challenge of mobility in the rural-urban fringe that they would engage with as it was vital for their own growth ambitions. Yet, as outlined in Chapter Four, a prominent issue for officers in WBC was addressing the differentiated uses of mobility in the rural-urban fringe by residents. Thus, we see here how the strategic privileging of the CWLEP by gentral government as a metagovernor meant they had greater power and influence – a hegemonic influence over WBC that did not empower them per se (Jones, 1997). Such a dynamic was also further explored from   the perspective of other sub-regional stakeholders. Such actors shared the concerns that the imposition of the CWLEP and its focus on a more subregional scale was inhibiting the decision-making capabilities of WBC:

"In terms of Warrington's control over this big pot of money... local growth fund, for example, is a lot of money. But LEPs are in charge of spending a lot of very important money and if local industrial strategies, which are being written by LEPs, are being written by more business minded LEPs, then an even bigger chunk of public money that is being spent in Warrington... is not actually going to have much of a vote in that area, nor will it have much of a say about it". **[Senior expert 16]**

Furthermore, for this particular individual, there were concerns that the increasing prominence of the CWLEP would further exacerbate the limited capacity that Warrington Borough Council had in decision making:

"The other element of LEPs for me is that Warrington would probably be worried about if they'll get more money is you know, I'm not really a fan of businesses in charge of spending public money... of being in charge of it. Whereas I think having a metro mayor gives you that - a name to sign off on it. It is very hard to say that it is defensible... it might be spent a bit better... putting a self-selecting group of local people who might just be lobbyists or whatever in charge – that's risky". **[Senior expert 16]**

Thus, we can see how the privileging of LEPs by central government has created complexities in the extent to which WBC can address challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe. The CWLEP is still 'metagoverned' by central government, which has been exemplified in the way that they are still forced to engage with centralised bidding processes. However, due to the fact the LEPs have been enacted by central government, they also act as metagovernors of WBC in that they choose how to allocate resources at the local level. The consequence of this for WBC is complex. As shown previously, there is a clear dependency on the CWLEP in order to gain funding to begin to address challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe. However, due to the different scales of intervention (local vs. subregional), with WBC often focusing on the local, residential and CWLEP focusing on the subregional level (and balancing the needs of other local authorities), the CWLEP was more interested in the relational challenges of mobility, predominantly through

a commuting lens, than addressing challenges which would serve to benefit residents in Warrington and its fringe spaces. In turn, there were different 'objects of governance' in relation to mobility in the rural-urban fringe operating at different scales and thereby highlighting how the strategic privileging of the state was therefore determining which challenges of mobility could be addressed.
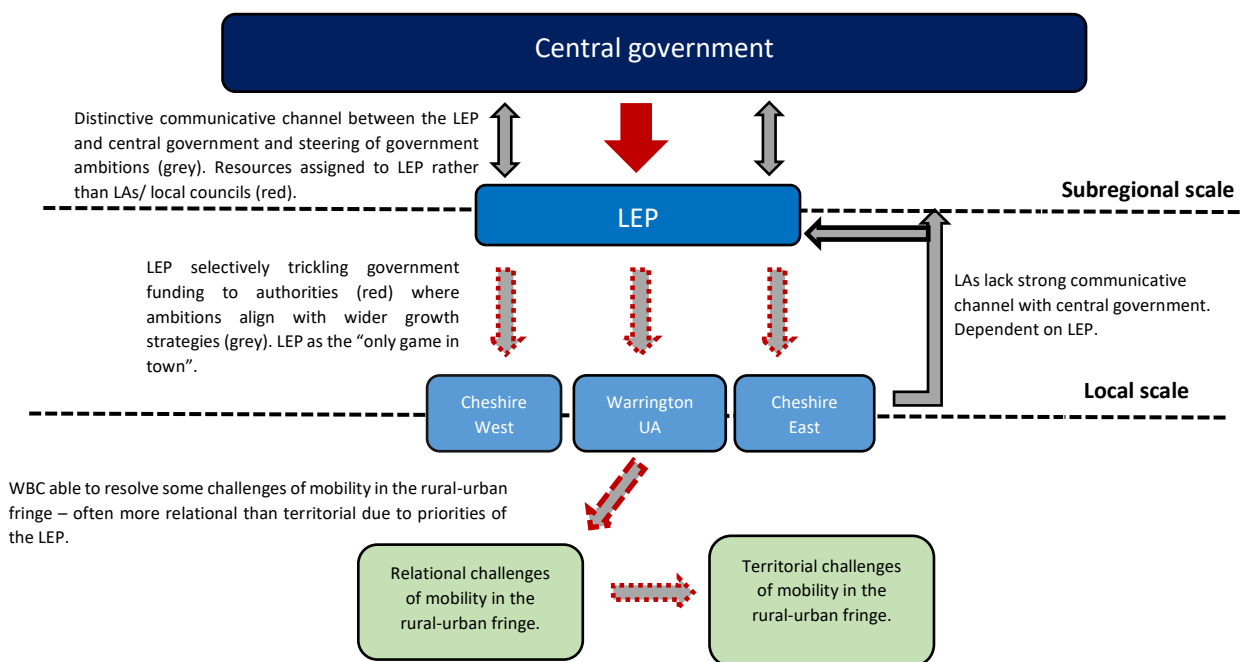
Figure 19 - The governance relationships between central government, the CWLEP and WBC with regards to power and funding.

5.4. Metagovernance implications on governing relational challenges of mobility:

Thus far this chapter has explored the relationships between WBC, the CWLEP and the ways in which central government as a 'metagovernor' interplays with such relationships in how it selectively privileges certain projects and organisations over others. This has largely been

an exploration of how mobility is governed within the territory of WBC and its fringe more specifically. Yet, Chapter Four also illustrated that an array of relational challenges of mobility existed, which interplayed considerably with both the Birchwood and Omega rural-urban fringe spaces. Thus, this section evaluates discussions with interviewees of relevance to developing mobility infrastructures impinging on those in the fringe of WBC. It outlines how central government, in how it privileges organisations such as Transport for the North, as well as the inherent privileging through devolution to the UK's core cities (e.g. Manchester and Liverpool in the context of this case study), creates an array of challenges for Warrington Borough Council to deal with.

5.4.1. Transport for the North, Northern Powerhouse and 'non-geography specific solutions' for mobility

For many, the Northern Powerhouse a proposed Polycentric Urban Region spanning across the five major cities of the North of England, represents the latest hegemonic project through which the government is seeking to promote new scales and structures of governance (MacKinnon, 2020). Central to arguments in favor of the Northern Powerhouse are ideas founded in agglomeration economics, positing that "if the Northern cities were joined into a single functional economy, they would have the scale to counterbalance London" (Lee, 2017, p. 479). Such an idea is compounded by processes of devolution – "devolution to Northern city regions has been directly folded into the [Northern Powerhouse] strategy as a key 'ingredient'" (MacKinnon, 2020, p. 15) – and thus state

privileging is inherent to such a state-strategy (Ibid). Thus, it is perhaps unsurprising that the Northern Powerhouse focuses on "economic imaginaries constructed around… agglomeration economics that privileges the role of large cities" (Hincks et al., 2017, p. 643).

Deeply engrained within Northern Powerhouse is Transport for the North, an example of institutional reform from central government which aims to provide the North with independent statutory agency for transport of a similar scale to London (Lee, 2017). Transport for the North is thus a body tasked with assessing and improving the strategic value of transport across the North and which includes assessing the viability of (and subsequently designing) a variety of projects via road and rail. It is a critical organisation through which mobility will be improved across the North of England. A key focus of Transport for the North is on Northern Powerhouse Rail. Therefore, given the inherent interests that WBC had in improving relational transport links (Chapter Four) - in order to address their own territorial challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe - it is unsurprising that there was a vested interest in the Northern Powerhouse Rail for interviewees within Warrington. It signified a critical opportunity to tackle two of the most fundamental challenges of mobility within the rural-urban fringe – improving public transport links and reducing issues of car congestion in relation to such spaces:

"The economic spine, if you like, that has been previously the M62 is now more likely to be Northern Powerhouse rail.... it is at the heart of a lot of these announcements that you care hearing coming out of the government of the moment". **Senior officer 2 (development), Warrington Borough Council]**

Furthermore, the CWLEP was also recognised the importance of Northern Powerhouse Rail for Warrington Borough Council:

"I think the opportunity for Warrington in probably more around Northern Powerhouse Rail than, say, HS2. I think they see Northern Powerhouse Rail as a priority for them". **[Senior officer 6, CWLEP]**

Critically, then, it was important to initially unpack the degree of influence Warrington had on Transport for the North. Officers within Transport for the North emphasised that their approach to designing pan-Northern rail networks was based on evidence-based approaches, through which Warrington would, in theory, be embedded into. As one senior official below comments, Transport for the North was not a decision-maker, but was rather more steered by the leaders of the North:

"It's all evidence based, and you've got to remember - we've been slotted in at a level. What we're supposed to be doing is drawing powers down from the government, not drawing them up from our constituent members. It is not our job to decide between Greater Manchester, Warrington and Liverpool who gets the local funding because, back to the governance question, our members haven't decided if that's what they want". **[Senior official 10, TfN]**

What this indicated was that Transport for the North was rather more an emergent collaborative governance organisation, which immediately raised questions around the degree of hegemony exerted by different organisations. A key question which therefore

emerged was the extent to which Warrington was able to use TfN to address challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe? Thus, the following sections explore such a dynamic from the perspective of actors at different levels of governance. It traces emergent plans centred around 'Northern Powerhouse Rail' (NPR) – a system being designed to improve the status of commuting rail and freight across the North – and outlines the hegemonic imbalances perpetuated by state, whereby the processes of devolution enacted by the state, and which underpin the Northern Powerhouse and Transport for the North, serve to reduce the capacity for Warrington Borough Council to contribute to pan-Northern initiatives created by Norther Powerhouse. This is assessed in two ways. Firstly, section 5.4.2 explores the sense of privileging inherent across Manchester-Warrington-Liverpool - as expressed by officers within Warrington Borough Council and the CWLEP. This illustrates how central government makes conscious, **direct** decisions which serve to create unequal power structures and thus impacting on the degree to which different organisations can engage with TfN. Section 5.4.3. then outlines the **indirect** implications on WBC in practice. It explores how the movement away from 'geography-specific solutions' within considerations around NPR consistent serves to increase dependence on the unequal hegemonic devolved structures created by the state, and thus reduces the degree to which Warrington is considered as a specific 'object of governance' within plans for NPR.

5.4.2. Direct privileging - devolved structures and power inequalities:

Literature focussing on the strategic and spatial selectivity of the state towards devolved city-regions identifies the importance of the geopolitics of such spaces and the relative

powers afforded to them (McKinnon, 2020). It has become "increasingly difficult to separate the new economic geography of city-regionalism from its geopolitical and ideological construction…city-regionalism is 'politically' constructed through state-orchestrated processes" (Pemberton and Morphet, 2013, p. 2356). In turn, senior officers within Warrington MBC relayed their frustrations at how the continual processes of devolution were giving (adjoining) city-regions better capacity to obtain power and address their own respective challenges of mobility:

"I think there is a disadvantage there, you know, with the powers which the mayoral authorities get. There are certain powers which are going to continue to get devolved which if we don't get, we would continue to be at a disadvantage. So, they have that relationship with central government". **[Senior officer 3 (transport), Warrington Borough Council]**

In order to maintain objectivity, such issues were also explored with senior officers within Northern Powerhouse:

"They're politically in the slow lane, that's one of the issues, there's a disconnect between cities and some of their neighbours based on the devolution". **[Senior official 12, Northern Powerhouse]**

In the first instance, this suggests that central government, in how it has selectively privileged cities over surrounding towns has created distinctive inequalities within the collaborative nature of Northern Powerhouse. Conversations with officers involved with Liverpool Combined Authority served to reinforce this notion:

"It must be very difficult be Warrington because they are stuck in between two very large metropolitan areas with mayoral combined authorities and metro mayors, and they are relatively small Unitary Authority within that. They must get frustrated that they are a relatively small fish between two large ponds, particularly Manchester to their East". **[Senior planner 13, Liverpool city regional combined authority].**

This privileging was also seen to be facilitated by the guarantee of funding provided to the city-region, which in turn, meant that there were differential capabilities to improve mobility within specific territorial areas:

"The big advantage Manchester and Liverpool have over us is that because they're metropolitan areas under various statute and acts, they traditionally were able to raise a precept on the council tax. Okay that went into fund, for example, TFGM. That gives them a massive pot of revenue funding. So, we often have our residents compare our public transport position to Liverpool and Manchester, but they have a substantial amount of more revenue than we have. So, when you ask how our transport strategies align, I think they mostly do align, but sometimes we haven't got the **financial clout** to be able to do the same sort of things".
[Senior officer 3 (transport), Warrington Borough Council]

These findings are by no means new. Such inequality has been described as a product of the "dominance of the agglomeration narrative… [sustained] by a concerted effort by England's core cities to present a positive case for their role in the UK economy" (Cox and Longlands, 2018, p. 1). In turn, such processes are evidence of 'fiscal conditioning' (Bailey and Wood, 2017) – a framing mechanism in the multispatial metagovernance processes of central government, particularly in how "England has shifted from a 'conditional' model enforced through top-down inspection and performance regimes put upon the local by Whitehall under Labour, to one enforced through increasing austerity imposed by the

national on the local in constraining the ability of the local to raise financial resources locally at the same time as imposing major cuts in central funding to local authorities" (Hildrith and Bailey, 2014, p. 367). The differences in funding were less prominent, but it was the way in which the funding was **directly** provided, created a greater degree of security regarding how to address challenges of mobility, coupled with the devolution process making central government more inclined to engage with the Combined Authorities:

"With Greater Manchester and Liverpool getting their devolution deals, the budget is less than it would have been previously, but they get it all in one. Plus, they've got that interface now with central government". **(Local economist 4, Warrington Borough Council).**

"The DFT, you know, from a purely Transportation perspective, give the funding directly to them. So, there's something called the transforming cities fund. Yeah, that basically was halved, half the proportion went to all them and the rest of us have to bid into it". **[Senior officer 3 (transport), Warrington Borough Council]**

These processes of devolution have come under extensive critique – "devolution has not delivered a substantial decentralization of authority and resources" (McKinnon, 2020, p. 15). Yet, critically in relation to this thesis, there was also substantive evidence that the fact such processes - as an ongoing state-spatial project (Ibid) - directly privileged city-regions over 'peripheral areas' (Dembski, 2015). For example, even for the CWLEP – as an organisation which commanded some degree of hegemony from WBC, the inherent political power afforded to city-regions and their Combined Authorities appeared to have a direct impact on CWLEP's capacity to shape decision making:

"So, at a **strategic level** it causes issues because you are against two Metro Mayors who have a stronger voice". **[Senior official 6, CWLEP]**

This is a crucial point: the state, in how it has geopolitically devolved power, has similarly created hierarchal imbalances within shared transport networks, which seemingly serve to undermine WBC's capacity to address challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe. From the quote above, we see a clear example of how WBC are locked into bidding processes to a greater degree than local authorities in surrounding (devolved) city-regions. Officers within WBC acknowledged that they were not being specifically deprivileged per se, yet rather more recognised their embeddedness within increasing inequalities within the North and how this would subsequently steer where (and to whom) resources needed to improve mobility in the rural-urban fringe:

"I think they have a louder voice nationally, which means that they've got access to further resources, compared to those of us that don't have an elected mayor. I've seen urban areas really cry out because of this, the devolution and the additional funding they obtain because of perceived crises, and whereas other areas are only bidding for what might be left over. I've seen that happen. So, that's the case, in terms of the additional resources that are going into these big conurbations that have agreed devolution deals". **[Senior officer 1 (policy), Warrington Borough Council]**

What can therefore be observed here is evidence of how "the concentration of government capital in the major cities (or 'engines of growth')… justified through the Northern

powerhouse agenda, has actually blunted the mechanisms of regional redistribution and threatened to exacerbate uneven development" - but from a mobility perspective (Bailey and Wood, 2017, p. 982). This sets an important precedent for the following section.

5.4.3. Indirect deprivileging of Warrington in collaborative governance networks

Having illustrated the strategic and spatial privileging of city-regions by central government (Jones, 1997), this section discusses the indirect implications of such an approach on WBC's capacity to address mobility challenges in the rural-urban fringe. The central basis of this argument is underpinned through an analysis of TfN, as a state-strategic project (MacKinnon, 2020), and how it chooses to operate its strategic redesign of shared transport networks. On one level TfN is branded as an entity which aims to work with the leaders of the North, reflecting a degree of hegemony and permeability as to how it operates:

"We are very much in the early stages are continuing to develop the strategic outline case. Major challenges include continuing to keep our partners, which are the leaders of the north, on board with our development plans. Making sure that we encompass their needs and wants within those plans". **[Senior official 11, TfN)**

Yet, in an important contribution to understandings of the impacts of devolution in the North, Lee (2017) articulates that the decision-making practices within Northern Powerhouse and Transport for the North have become increasingly 'fuzzy'. A critical example of this in relation to the governance of relational mobility infrastructures relates to the transition to Pan-Northern ways of strategic planning. Each of the four senior officers

interviewed from Transport for the North perpetually argued the need to move away from 'geography specific solutions' – reflecting a move away from predominantly territorial fixes, including improvements to mobility infrastructures specifically within Warrington:

"We need to move away from what I call geography-specific solutions. What we've been trying to do is look at corridor solutions. And so, in your case, it's all well and good saying that we might look at the junction of the M62 and the m=M6, but what we would actually be saying is how do we move people goods and services between Liverpool and Manchester better? And what are the solutions on both road and rail?". **[Senior official 10, TfN]**

Despite the supposed movement away from geography specific solutions, there was nonetheless an evident favouring of larger cities within such strategising. This is because the emphasis of such a project was focused primarily on an agglomeration narrative:

"I think the key point is that you do need cities to drive economic growth. So, we have no shortage of Metro's, if you take an agglomeration mindset... Manchester, Sheffield, Leeds they're clearly going to be able to work better if you create a single travel to work area that crosses them all. Benefits will always be hyper located in cities, even if the activity which creates many of them is not actually in the city at all. And that's where the concept of city regions comes from, right, where you need to be able to connect your economic assets with a core city or an equivalent to a core city". **[Senior official 12, Northern Powerhouse]**

And:

"What it will do will really transform the economies of Liverpool and Manchester and it will bring them far closer together. So, the idea being that when you bring all the key 6 city regions and Manchester Airport closer together you turn on that big agglomeration effect". **[Senior official 10, TfN]**

Therefore, not only did the movement away from 'geography-specific solutions' mean that the focus of TfN was less on alleviating local, territorial issues of mobility, which is critical for Warrington, but it also meant that such strategies would revolve around the powers created by central government through devolution – which were structured around city regions as new political spatial entities. Consequently, this served to *reinforce* the power vacuum that existed between Warrington and the surrounding city-regions. This implications of this were significant in that the privileging afforded to city-regions via devolution also created distinctive power imbalances within Transport for the North, whereby such powers were seen to disrupt the supposed hegemonic, evidence-based approach:

"They have elected politicians and have the ear of the chair of Transport for the North and transport ministers. And they will always argue that got a bigger economy than us". **[Senior official 7 (policy), CWLEP]**

In this regard, Warrington Borough Council were increasingly becoming passive partners in the work of TfN process and given evidence that above "a growing governance and financial gap between devolved and non-devolved areas" (MacKinnon, 2020, p. 17), there was also evidence of a power gap in influencing collaborative governance networks over shared mobility infrastructures:

"There's an analogy that was made about Warrington to my boss. The then Chancellor George Osborne said we were like the well-behaved little child and you've got the two big brothers either side". **[Senior officer 2 (development), Warrington]**

Other, more objective perspectives outside of the collaborative governance network also recognised this. They felt that, through the ongoing consultation process in relation to non-territorial focused initiatives, there was still a chance that Warrington could continue to be deprivileged and struggle to articulate their own challenges:

"For Warrington, those connections are really important, but I suppose they also to make their voice heard. If I were Warrington, I'd really want to bang the drum loudly to keep the train stopping in Warrington and not just going straight through. You can perhaps see the threat is like "well, hold on a second why are we still stopping in Warrington when we've got a big powerful mayor in Greater Manchester, big powerful mayor in Liverpool city region?". Who is going to speak up about Warrington? And that's probably where devolution comes in to play...". **[Senior expert 17]**

This was similarly recognised by interviewees within Transport for the North:

"The Omega site…I mean that if you want to if you want to understand really get the proof of the pudding of Warrington's transport links - it is as good a proof as any... And on the other hand, it does still suffers from its kind of shadow of two larger places - although one shadow casts rather longer than the other one these days". **[Senior official 8, TfN]**

It was therefore clear that the limited powers given to WBC would hinder the potential of WBC to take advantage of the opportunities they might benefit from within TfN. This was regarded as a function of devolution, thus highlighting the impact of central government as a metagovernor:

"So, the challenges Warrington has at the moment... there's an asymmetry of functional economic geography and powers. So, Warrington doesn't have its own devolution settlement. So, although it has lots of economic opportunities, it doesn't have the tools to be able to take advantage of them. I think that the solution for Warrington is that its connectivity needs improving, and it needs more ability to make its own decisions". **[Senior official 12, Northern Powerhouse]**

Paradoxically, it was also the view of Northern Powerhouse and Transport for the North that the territorial challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe were the responsibility of Warrington Borough Council to address, irrespective if they were created from such shared mobility infrastructures:

"There is the local Transport Funding. There is local maintenance that comes from all these different funding pots. And I think some of the issues are because ministers like competitive funding. And where we are is that… what we don't want is to be seen as another layer of red tape. So, in terms of what I would call the internal management of road and rail and buses, we see that as the responsibility of the incumbent authority. What we are trying to do is look at it from a sort of Pan-Northern perspective". **[Senior official 9, TfN]**

What this therefore reflects is how central government has indirectly created inequalities in shaping decision making for shared mobility infrastructure. There is significant evidence as to how the devolved structures put in place by the state indirectly cause collaborative

partnerships to "endorse selected ways of thinking and acting… and marginalises others" (Jonas and Moisio, 2018, p. 356). This has significant implications for Warrington. The greater political and financial power afforded to city-regions due to the devolved structures offered by central government made it difficult for actors within Warrington to voice their opinion and make a case for Warrington. The above quote also shows the need for consistent lobbying from Warrington in order to ensure they are not neglected in the negotiation of such plans – which reinforced the issues regarding the 'arms distancing of the state' as discussed in section 5.2.

Crucially, then, such impacts were proven to have direct ramifications on the capacity of actors to address public transport related challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe. Whilst MacKinnon (2020) argues that "the transregional scale of the Northern Powerhouse plays a supplementary role as a 'soft' space of cross-regional collaboration between local political actors, amplifying their voices in lobbying the central state for additional resources and powers" (p. 17), the findings from this thesis outline a need to consider how direct privileging by central government of emergent, devolved structures can have indirect consequences in relation to the degree of hegemony in strategic regional collaborations. Reflected above are clear examples as to how the blurring of spatial boundaries exacerbates existing power structures. Certainly, this raises a variety of concerns regarding the degree to which WBC are able to steer such decision-making processes. If we take the argument regarding greater power being afforded to Liverpool and Manchester, then the following quote from a senior official at TfN begins to raise questions as to hegemony in decision-making for pan-Northern initiatives, particularly in instances of contention:

"Well, in HS2 there is a little tension point, you know, Warrington would prefer probably Bank Quay solution, where with Liverpool might prefer a Parkway solution because the trains would go faster between Liverpool and Manchester". **[Senior official 10, TfN]**

And:

"This is quite topical at the moment. The original plan for HS2, for example, is not to stop at Bank Quay. We are arguing that that just wouldn't make any sense because you've already got the infrastructure in place to come forward and therefore why would you just bypass it unnecessarily and build this new track? Just come through at bank Quay and just continue the journey that way… So that is a conversation that we're having mostly with Transport for the North about that East-West connectivity as we know it's not brilliant. **[Local economist 4, Warrington Borough Council]**

Furthermore, it was clear that despite attempts to move away from 'geography specific solutions' with regards to redesigning mobility infrastructure during the strategic planning phases, the actual delivery of these pan-Northern solutions would require funding to be distributed to specific places:

"We can't... you can't deny the fact that those boundaries are there... Yeah, they exist, and you've got to work with them, but that's… where all the engagement groups we've got come in. One of the potential challenges is that is the further you get away from a plan and the more you get into or how we actually going to deliver it all, the more you get into conversations about and resource allocation and attention". **[Senior official 11, TfN]**

5.5. Conclusions:

Through a metagovernance lens, this chapter has outlined the differential ways in which central government acts as a critical metagovernor. The chapter has argued that central government selectively and strategically privileges certain governance structures over others and thus (in both direct and indirect ways) supports and impedes the capacity of officers within Warrington to address the challenges of mobility in its rural-urban fringe.

Critically, section 5.2. outlined how bidding systems for funding have been deliberately used as a metagovernance strategy by central government for allocating resources to places like Warrington – those which lack formal devolution settlements. From the perspective of Warrington Borough Council, it was illustrated how a number of barriers exist in relation to Warrington's capacity to engage with such strategies of metagovernance, and which ultimately serve to restrict the capacity of such officers to address challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe. Furthermore, it is also clear that central government's stipulations regarding the types of funding that are available and rules regarding how such funding can be spent reflect different 'objects of governance'. These seldom allow officers within Warrington Borough Council to spend their funding as they wish. In turn, the state continues to micromanage such officers at the local level through this bidding process.

Section 5.3. proceeded to explore other metagovernance strategies at the subregional scale – exploring the processes of devolution and the types of organisations which

appeared to have decision making over mobility in Warrington's rural-urban fringe spaces. It focused on the relationship between Warrington Borough Council and the Cheshire Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership. Whilst it was clear that the LEP was empowering WBC through providing loans and funding, it was also clear that there were nonetheless stipulations attached to such resources. Primarily, the CWLEP appeared to selectively engage with Warrington, assisting them where their agendas aligned – particularly in relation to commuting-based challenges of mobility. However, despite being a more powerful organisation, the CWLEP was also acting as a metagovernor of sort on Warrington Borough Council and consequently also had 'objects of governance' not necessarily focused on directly addressing the challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe.

Finally, Section 5.4. evaluated the influence of central government at a regional level. Interviews with key stakeholders in WBC outlined how emergent organisations such as Northern Powerhouse and Transport for the North, and the specific relational mobility projects they were involved in, were viewed as critical in potentially empowering officers in WBC to address specific challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe. Yet, the Northern Powerhouse and TfN are regarded as being a 'state-strategic project' – with a focus on spatial imaginary led – 'non-geography specific' solutions which aim to avoid specifically empowering any one authority. Thus, this section evidenced how central government, in how it has fostered unequal devolution and directly created differential power structures in the Northwest, has indirectly created a power vacuum within the North with regards to improvements to key mobility infrastructures of which are critical for WBC

and their rural-urban fringe spaces which serves to undermine the extent to which WBC can argue their need to be included in the ambitions of TfN.

Fundamentally, therefore, Chapter Five illustrates the need to understand the vertical structure of relevance to addressing the challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe. Reflected in this analysis is evidence as to how metagovernors, in how they 'frame' governance networks, ultimately determine the degree of power and resources at a variety of scales. The evidence here suggests that Warrington is both directly and indirectly deprivileged as a function of decision making by central government, which has implications on their capacity to address the challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe that they view as important. Overall, it outlines the need to consider the interplay of organisations and actors outside the jurisdictional remit those who govern mobility in the rural-urban fringe as a territorial space, for evidenced here is how central government can directly and indirectly privilege a variety of actors at a variety of scales, which consequently serves to empower or disempower those who seek to govern the rural-urban fringe. Thus, this serves as an important contribution to the literature on such spaces and gives rise to a number of pertinent questions requiring further investigation. For example, is the rural-urban fringe neglected or is it hindered by unsuitable vertical governance mechanisms employed by the state? And in which ways have officers in WBC sought to navigate around these vertical barriers created by central government in both territorial and relational ways?

CHAPTER SIX

THE OPPORTUNITIES OF GOVERNING MOBILITY IN THE RURAL-URBAN FRINGE.

6.1. Introduction:

The previous chapter "draws our attention to the politically constructed strategies – situated at various spatial scales– which help to mould the contemporary state" (Pemberton and Goodwin, 2010, p. 277), and of which have evident implications on the capacity for Warrington Borough Council (WBC) to respond to challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe. Yet, central government has increasingly favoured public entrepreneurialism, which has increasingly been recognised as "an engine of economic development" in the modern 'new localism' strategies of the UK government (Gheres et al., 2020, p. 1020). Yet, the extent to which the combination of continual public sector cuts *vis a vis* the enforcement of private-sector led growth have actually created increased empowerment for actors at the local level has been widely contested – regarded as a 'rhetoric-reality gap' and 'illusion of power' (Ibid, p. 1020). Furthermore, such a conceptualisation of entrepreneurialism is arguably overly simplistic, neglecting to consider local variability and the differential ways key actors can react to entrepreneurialism. Indeed, Pemberton and Goodwin (2010) make a critical point; that there is a need to look at local officers' economic and governance responses to entrepreneurialism and how these

responses "might take a particular form in [rural-urban fringe] areas; and to how they might be changing" (p. 277 - adapted). As such, it is the attitudes towards entrepreneurialism that are important, as much as the mechanisms through used by key stakeholders to realise entrepreneurial potential (Zakauskaite et al., 2017).

This PhD takes the perspective that in the context of Warrington, there are two specific types of entrepreneurial activity occurring, both of which have distinctive relevance to governing mobility in the rural-urban fringe. These are **selective entrepreneurial economic development** and **selective entrepreneurial governance**, both of which are interrelated with one another. Whilst the former is an attempt to create economic potential through specific 'objects of governance' (and of which are directly related to mobility in the rural-urban fringe), the latter is indicative of both to the strategies and enablers that facilitate entrepreneurialism in Warrington, as well as serving as a basis through which to 'jump scales' to the subregional and regional levels. In setting this up, section 6.2. first suggests that whilst modern metagovernance processes by the state have encouraged such officers to be more entrepreneurial, WBC have actively engaged with such processes for a much longer period, and with a perceived historical deprivileging of the area encouraging entrepreneurial approaches over a much longer period of time. With this in mind, section 6.2 = outlines how this underlying local entrepreneurial culture has encouraged officers to appropriate the resources and opportunities they have for local economic growth in creative ways. The entrepreneurial resilience such officers have developed has resulted in the culmination of a specific ' Warrington brand' for economic development, whereby WBC

have capitalised on the mobility potential, land availability and positioning of Warrington as specific 'objects of governance' – and directly linked to the rural-urban fringe.

Section 6.3 proceeds to outline the selective entrepreneurial approaches that have been used to enact this brand. At the local scale, it is noted how economic growth strategies that are employed by WBC in the rural-urban fringe are highly 'selective' in nature, and which seek to further embed Warrington in local spatial imaginaries linked to industries, supply chains and innovation taking place in surrounding city-regions. The section also argues that due to being 'organisationally thin', WBC are able to capitalise on any strategic opportunities that emerge far quicker than both adjacent city-regions. Thus, engaging with the relational nature of the rural-urban fringe and the mobility-potential of such spaces has resulted in the crafting of specific types of rural-urban fringe spaces in Birchwood and Omega. Consequently, this chapter highlights how WBC are being "reflexive and strategic" as well as how they have "orient[ed] themselves and their strategies towards the environment in which their strategic intentions must be realised" (Hay, 2002, p.9) – towards city-regions.

Yet, the ambition behind this entrepreneurial governance is more extensive than selective local economic development practices – officers within WBC have also sought to increase investment in mobility in the rural-urban fringe through these practices. In adapting the work of Coulson and Ferrario (2007), section 6.4. outlines how WBC have built a close relationship with the Cheshire-Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership (CWLEP). It illustrates how WBC are 'framing' their economic projects in the rural-urban fringe in

particular ways which they argue will appeal to the remit of the LEP – constituting a form of **selective entrepreneurial governance** through which to 'lock-in' interest from the CWLEP**.** With entrepreneurial foundations crafted by WBC, the CWLEP similarly benefit from helping to drive forward growth and to incentivise investment in mobility in the rural-urban fringe. Indeed, the development of enterprise zones in both the Birchwood and Omega sites are a pivotal tool in anchoring the CWLEP's interest in the rural-urban fringe, meaning that the CWLEP is more likely to help to address some of the key challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe.

Finally, section 6.5. argues that through a combination of these two forms of entrepreneurial activity, WBC have attempted to ensure that, irrespective of unequal devolution processes, Warrington continues to remain closely interconnected with both city-regions – subsequently reaffirming the importance of Warrington within the Manchester-Liverpool corridor and increasing the arguments made regarding improving shared transport infrastructures and services operating in Warrington. Thus, in line with suggestions made by Pemberton and Goodwin (2010), the soft spatial imaginaries that have been crafted are as much political as economic in nature. Warrington's connectivity with the surrounding city-regions is viewed as exemplifying the need for Warrington to be critically embedded within the agendas of the Northern Powerhouse and Transport for the North and thus comprising a selective entrepreneurial governance approach in attempting to address challenges and draw opportunities for economic growth out the rural-urban fringe. Overall, what is outlined is how WBC have sought to work with the CWLEP to improve their organisational thickness at the sub-regional and regional scale.

6.2. Entrepreneurial economic development in Warrington – building the 'Warrington brand':

Despite public entrepreneurialism being increasingly used as an engine of economic development, officers working within WBC suggested that they had experienced a historic deprivileging by the UK government, which had perpetuated a local dependence on largely entrepreneurial ways of thinking and working:

"Well, Warrington hasn't really ever qualified for funding anyway, because, for example, you've had assisted area status in the UK. Warrington never qualified for that. So, in a way, we don't know what we're missing as we've never had it… And that gives you a different mindset, which is just <u>crack on and have confidence in your brand</u>". **[Local economist 4, Warrington Borough Council].**

In many ways, officers in WBC were keen to emphasise that they had received an ebb and flow of limited government support. In particular, they emphasised that there had been a sudden cut in government interest in Warrington after the New Town development policies 'fell away', yet had retained a number of 'ingredients of success' nonetheless:

"Warrington was once in receipt of not just New Town design, but Government funding. But it was 20 years ago that fell away… What was left in Warrington was a substantial amount of land. It was highly developable land, in large scale, and it was in the box of the M6, M62 andM56. So, it had land. It had location prior to having any Government funding through a New Town commission. So, it had all the ingredients of success -

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that's kind of self-evident". **[Senior officer 2 (development), Warrington Borough Council]**

Three critical points emerge from these quotes. First, officers in WBC appeared to show resilience to the types of barriers outlined in Chapter Five – a function of a historical ebb and flow of governmental support, which appeared to have shaped an entrepreneurial confidence in their 'brand'. This is an important foundation for the arguments later in this chapter. Secondly, this 'brand' itself appears to be a function of three 'ingredients' – positioning, where Warrington is specifically located, land availability, and the presence of motorway infrastructures. However, we also learn that, of late, officers in Warrington have recent been forced to work in more entrepreneurial ways than they previously had to. What this reflects is a pre-existing entrepreneurial ethos which has taken a far more prominent role as an economic development strategy in recent years – which has been centred around the creation of a specific 'brand'.

The further conversations about the Warrington 'brand' continued with interviewees, the more evident it became that policy makers from WBC had placed a significant amount of confidence in it. Indeed, this brand appeared to be instrumental in shaping their overall economic development strategies and of which was constructed around specific 'objects of governance' which both included and complimented mobility. These objects of governance include connectivity to other places (through mobility-potential), the availability of land and the positioning of Warrington between two city-regions. The ways in which these culminate around and comprise the Warrington brand are now outlined.

6.2.1. Mobility and connectivity:

As exemplified below, officers had chosen to focus on local assets which were strategically inherent to Warrington and its position (Doringer, 2019) and how to articulate local economic growth from these. Evidenced below is the return of emphasising Warrington's 'brand', but in particular, the emphasis on connectivity and positioning:

"Warrington is confident with its brand and its **positioning** to turn around to companies and say: "I can't give you any money, but, it's Warrington!" You know, "look how **well-connected** we are, look at all these other great companies" and that's shown in economic performance". **[Local economist 4, Warrington Borough Council]**

In the first instance, the idea that officers within Warrington were unable to 'give' money indicated the impact the metagovernance of the state – as discussed in Chapter Five - interplayed with the emergence of this brand. Yet, it was mobility, namely the presence of motorways, surrounding A and B-roads and the railway stations which were viewed as being a significant factor in determining Warrington's 'success'. This was recognised by both WBC and the CWLEP:

"It's because of this mobility... but that's the world over, you know, where you have an intersection of strategic infrastructure, the location where that intersection exists becomes an economic powerhouse in itself - anywhere in the world. You look at any strategic infrastructure, be it road or rail, and where they cross is where you'll find economic activity – that is true from days when we were just driving horses and carts to now with high-speed rail - the philosophy is still the same". **[Senior officer 3 (transport), Warrington Borough Council]**

And:

"The geographic location [of Warrington] means we have quite a large two-way commuting flow. Thinking in terms of the geography. So, it is all very interconnected. Warrington is slap-bang in the middle of the other two metropolitan areas, which helps". **[Senior official 6 (Transport), CWLEP]**

The importance of mobility in relation to Warrington's positioning was similarly recognised by organisations outside of WBC or CWLEP:

"Warrington's success if you like is due to its locational advantage. It's right next to the North major motorways, and it is slap bang in the middle of the two major Northwest conurbations". **[Senior policy maker, 14,TfGM]**

Thus, the mobility potential of Warrington, as a space in-between two larger conurbations, evidently provided some strategic value – one which had led to the crafting of a regionally recognised Warrington Brand. This was therefore the first 'object of governance' that was being utilised by WBC more widely.

6.2.2. Land availability and the rural-urban fringe:

In seeking to capitalise on Warrington's mobility potential, it was clear that Warrington both historically, and more recently, had focused on land development. This was the second key object of governance, and which had specific implications in the context of this

thesis:

"It's a unitary authority with huge amounts of land... Warrington has been shown to be **entrepreneuria**l and **make gain out of planning decisions**, it's in a good place". **[Senior expert 16]**

In turn, interviewees were asked to describe where they sought to take advantage of this mobility potential and the spatial distribution of these 'planning decisions'(above). Interestingly, the town centre had been less utilised to promote this brand by such officers

"Warrington has turned its back on the town centre a bit… It is underpopulated, so it probably will need to rediscover that". **[Senior officer 2 (development), Warrington Borough Council]**

And:

"So, just near the Town Centre, we do have a few business offices for smaller organizations, but we don't tend to have big companies in the Town Centre. It is more when you get out to where the retail parks are, such as at Omega". **[Local economist 4, Warrington Borough Council]**

This was not to say that the town centre was not important *per se,* but that in a strategic, entrepreneurial sense in the 'brand' of Warrington, interviewees proceeded to identify that it was rather more the outskirts of Warrington, and thus the rural-urban fringe and its inherent mobility potential, that were key to the promotion of the Warrington brand. This brand is widely supported by Warrington & Co., Warrington's inward investment and regeneration agency, which is owned and operated by the council. As the Warrington & Co website proclaims "Ask **Amazon, Hermes, Asda** and **Travis Perkins** why they located to

Omega Business Park - a thriving development on what was the location of the US Army Air Force's most significant base outside America. Or why is **Birchwood** now home to world-leading nuclear engineering giants?" (no page number). Furthermore, the Warrington & Co website – figure 20 below - illustrates how the rural-urban fringe is marked as a 'premier location':

Thus, we see that the objects of governance that comprise the Warrington brand have been explicitly crafted around the rural-urban fringe. Returning to the suggestion made in Chapter Four regarding 'proximate territories' and the importance of governing mobility in the rural-urban fringe, we can identify that this explicit interest was largely a product of how officers in WBC had attempted to cultivate this brand for such spaces, and which was

> ## Premier locations
>
> Warrington offers an excellent choice of out-of-town business parks, including **Birchwood Park** ⬀ - the North West's premier business park and Lingley Mere - home of United Utilities HQ and Omega, the 580-acre mixed-use development providing bespoke commercial premises with direct access to the M62 motorway.
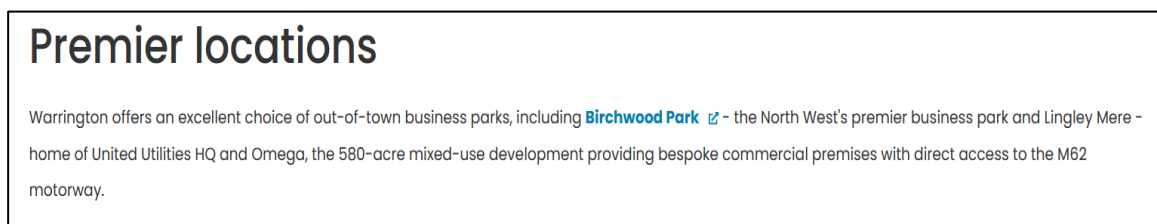
Figure 20 - The Warrington brand being applied to the rural-urban fringe (Omega Warrington, 2021)

contingent on the mobility potential of the rural-urban fringe and thus it's connectivity to other places. This was apparent in both Birchwood and in Omega:

"The success of Warrington is that it has had access to land that has allowed employment and residential development to take place. Because of Birchwood's location and its connectivity to multiple areas, you can get land away in no time at all. You can also see that with Omega... Four years ago, that was just a flat field. Now it is two and a half million square feet of logistics based upon manufacturing and some food production. So, it just shows that those locations are still very, very important". **[Senior officer 2 (development), Warrington Borough Council]**

"So, in Omega - that's where I've got those big companies, the big distribution ones. There is a company called Plastic Omnium who manufacture parts for Jaguar Land Rover. That is a good one for us. They're up there at Omega. So, certainly, you get those companies have come there because, well, it's very visible - you can see the development and it's really well connected as it's next to the motorway". **[Local economist 4, Warrington Borough Council]**

This highlights a critical finding within the thesis – not only is the mobility-centric nature of the rural-urban fringe a specific object of governance, but this mobility potential also enables officers to entrepreneurially use this potential to create a specific brand for economic development. Evidenced above is not a focus on the urban centre per se, but rather more, a focus on the rural-urban fringe and how mobility was centrally embedded into the types of economic strategy being utilised in these spaces. This finding also develops the literature on the rural-urban fringe by challenging broad assertions of such spaces being chaotic and unmanaged (Qvistrom, 2007); rather, there was a clear desire from WBC to organise and market these spaces in specific ways. In turn, this seemingly resonates with the literature on soft spaces, whereby we have evidence as to how WBC are "drawing in relational conceptions of networked space into territorial forms of governance... soft spaces can emerge to address specific and complex issues around growth management within territories in relational ways" (Allmendinger et al., 2014, p. 2706). Outlined here is the importance of mobility and the rural-urban fringe in accomplishing this.

6.3 Entrepreneurial governance:

The key question, therefore, related to the ways in which soft spaces were being articulated and who was endorsing them. After all, "soft spaces emerge to challenge or obscure where power actually resides" (Allmendinger at al., 2014, p. 2706) and Gilbert et al. (2004) state that "entrepreneurship policies are implemented at all levels of government and are growing in utilisation warranting greater attention and understanding than is currently available" (p. 313). As such, this section therefore aims to unpack how such entrepreneurship was being utilised as a governance strategy by WBC. Having outlined the 'Warrington brand' and its relationship with mobility in the rural-urban fringe, attention first turns to the methods used by WBC in order to enact and cultivate this entrepreneurial vision.

6.3.1. Selectivity and flexibility within Warrington Borough Council:

At the local level, WBC had employed a highly **selective** approach and sticking to the entrepreneurial brand they had crafted. Interviewees were keen to distinguish that their crafting of the rural-urban fringe was not ad-hoc but had a high degree of selectivity with regards to the types of industries they were attracting to their rural-urban fringe spaces. As both interviewees below discuss, this selectivity appeared to interplay significantly with supply chains in Liverpool and Manchester and how they selectively picked which aspects of these supply chains best suited their 'brand':

"We have to be aware of the opportunities, and it is the opportunities, not threats, that Liverpool and Manchester bring... the very economical very, very, powerful economic centres that they are, the supply chain to which exists in those parts of Warrington... I don't think they're a threat and we're not in competition". **[Senior officer 2 (development), Warrington Borough Council]**

and

"We can be a bit more picky with who we want to come here. So, our inward investment function, we are not out looking for stuff, which is what I've done in the past in other jobs at the regional level. We are... we were just waiting till people come to us and that's clearly not as regular as it is in Greater Manchester, but it's a really... It's a great system. It's nice position to be in. You're not fighting with people, scrapping over low-value inquiries coming in, so you can just bat a few away and then if something comes in with that really fits in engineering and nuclear [Birchwood] you can look at it and go "Yeah, that's definitely one for us". **[Local economist 4, Warrington Borough Council]**

This is a key finding and in contrast to the current literature on the rural-urban fringe, which tends to over-simplify the economic character of the fringe as being 'chaotic' and unmanaged (Gallent et al., 2006). Rather more, what is evidenced here is a very particular form of economic crafting in such fringe spaces – whereby the types of industries prevalent in the rural-urban fringe had to conform to the Warrington 'brand'. This is crucial to mention, for whilst (in a vertical, political sense) such individuals felt ill-equipped to compete with Manchester and Liverpool city-regions (Chapter Five), by employing a more horizontally focused entrepreneurial approach, such officers were aiming to tap into the potential of adjoining city-regions.

Second, another way in which WBC were able to employ the Warrington brand as a successful economic development strategy was due to Warrington's 'organisational thinness'. The literature has typically described institutional 'thinness' as involving a lack of firms or support organisations or structures through which to achieve specific means – usually at the regional level (Todtling and Trippl, 2004). Whilst this has been shown to have significant implications with regards to limiting the capacity to engage in formal, vertical tiers of public governance (Chapter Five), in the case of the findings in this chapter, it enabled WBC to be entrepreneurial and to be able to mobilise quickly in relation to opportunities that were presented. As articulated by the interviewees below, this enabled WBC to flip between city-like agglomerative behaviour of selectively accumulating certain industries, yet to maintain the flexibility that accompanies being a smaller town council with less complex decision making:

"Sometimes we get drowned out by what they're up to, but we also can take full advantage of it. So, we also think that Warrington behaves like a city when it needs to but then it can also revert to be in a town as well". **[Local economist 4, Warrington Borough Council]**

and

"Typically, when I'm on a stage, you know, I get asked "what do you think of the threats that Liverpool and Manchester pose to Warrington" and well, I don't think they're a threat and we're not in competition. Their growth supports our growth". **[Senior officer 2 (development), Warrington Borough Council]**

Indeed, accompanying this 'thinness' was a recognition that WBC were able to make quicker decisions regarding how to mobilise land to develop new types of fringe spaces:

"As a Unitary Authority it's probably got way more power than Andy Burnham does over that [land], that's what Andy should be aiming for… It's in a better position than metro mayors in some ways". **[Senior expert 16]**

Outlining these two factors is important because they provide a basis for understanding how WBC is employing the Warrington brand – their strategies of entrepreneurial governance. Yet, the creation of the brand and the articulation of the supply chains interconnected with Warrington expresses something far more robust than simply developing spaces which seek to take forward any type of economic growth. Rather, their approach had a local specificity about it. Whilst Arboloeda et al (2009) state "that many governments at the national, regional, and local levels are attempting to foster entrepreneurship in unproductive and uncoordinated ways, doing too many things at once or resorting to generic rather than locally meaningful plans" (p. 3), the opposite is true in the case of WBC. In contrast, there was a clear strategy by WBC, one that was built directly upon mobility in the rural-urban fringe. Indeed, the fact the WBC have a specific development agency to enact their entrepreneurial vision highlights that there is a significant degree of entrepreneurial governance being enacted on top of entrepreneurial economic development. Consequently, having illustrated how a specific 'Warrington brand' has been developed around the rural-urban fringe and having shown the selective and flexible approaches to entrepreneurial governance therein , the following section returns to each of the two case studies in the rural-urban fringe – Omega and Birchwood –

and illustrates how these resulted in specific types of 'proximate territories' being developed – each underpinned by the inherent mobility-potential of the rural-urban fringe.

6.3.2. Entrepreneurial governance I: selectively connecting the Omega site to Liverpool City Region:

To the Western side of Warrington is the Omega site, a significant development space in the fringe of Warrington and which can be classified as an emergent fringe space (Chapter Three). This site represents a joint venture with the Homes and Communities Agency who own the land, upon the condition that the site would include a substantial number of houses in phase 2 of development, and Omega Warrington Limited (OWL – comprised of Miller Developments and KUC properties ltd), in partnership with WBC and supported by the CWLEP. Yet, planning permission is still granted by WBC. This shows a particularly diverse range of public officers and private stakeholders coalescing under one brand – Omega Warrington.

The site represents an ex-military airbase. The Northern phase of development was completed in 2015, with Southern development ongoing. As figure 21 below outlines, the site has strategically been developed around mobility infrastructure – echoing the importance of such infrastructures for such spaces (Gallent et al., 2006).
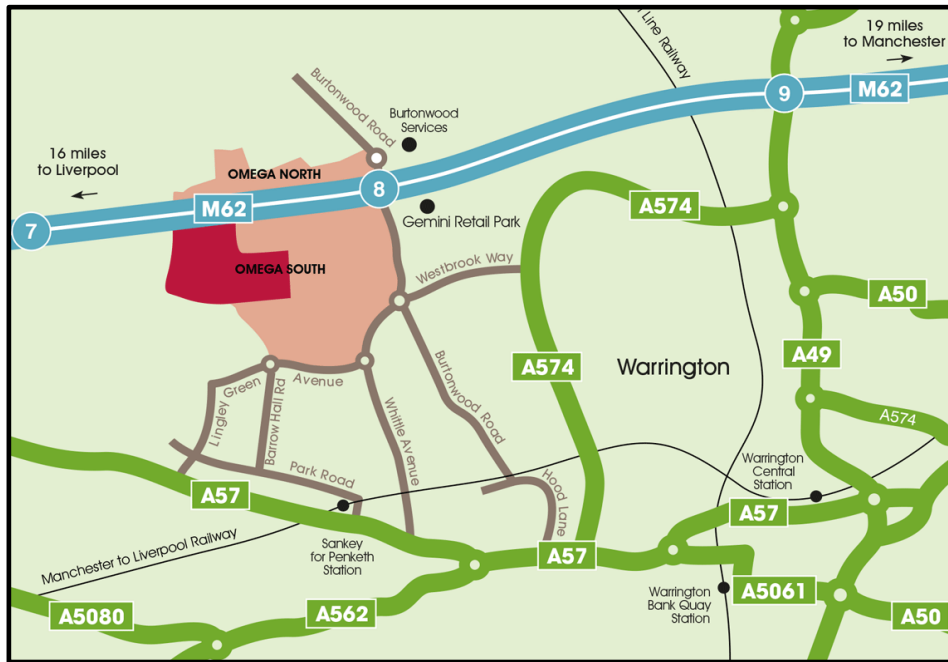
Figure 21 - The Omega site (Warrington Borough Council, 2021)

The mobility infrastructure and connectivity to both city-regions of Liverpool and Manchester comprises a key part of the branding of the Omega. As the website proclaims, "Omega's infrastructure links are unbeatable: immediate access to the M62 at Junction 8 [and] situated 3 miles West of M6/M63 interchange, midway between Manchester and Liverpool" (Omega Warrington, 2021, no page number). Thus, the entrepreneurial branding of Omega as being a space built around the mobility-potential of the rural-urban fringe is once again deeply embedded into a connectivity strategy focused on drawing potential from proximate city-regions. In this respect, it was evident that actors involved in developing this space had recognised that Liverpool was seeking to increase its logistics capacity through the re-opening of its port:

"Liverpool again, I think is rediscovering its industrial heritage and is focusing again now on its port, particularly Peel… So, if you've got shipping coming into Liverpool, the place where those goods are delivered

sorted and re-sent on, then the main centre is going to be Warrington. So, Liverpool's economic growth helps Warrington's economic growth". **[Senior official 2 (development), Warrington Borough Council]**

In turn, the types of industry recruited to Omega are particularly interesting, with Amazon, Hermes and Royal Mail all comprising significant stakeholders in the area (Omega Warrington, 2021) – and with a specific focus on freight use in relation to mobility in such spaces. Warrington's capacity to quickly mobilise assets that would draw from this was in many ways a function of its status as a Unitary Authority – with the negotiation with the Homes and Communities Agency to include more housing in the area being the only form of contention which had to be overcome to proceed with the development of the site. By contrast, given the presence of multiple actors involved in the combined authority, such negotiations may have taken take considerably longer to conclude due to inherent party politics and conflicts between officers working at different scales (Roberts, 2020). Thus, the flexibility afforded to Warrington as being 'organisationally thin' provided a significant advantage, contrary to the literature. Indeed, those interviewed within the Liverpool city-region similarly recognised how Warrington's quick mobilisation of land had enabled them to accomplish such development:

"In terms of the west of Warrington are some very large containers, you know, Amazon, Post Office, Travis Perkins, they've got some huge, super warehouses just off the M62. Arguably, they should really be in the Liverpool City region, but Warrington **got there first**, and you know, the business has established there. It's really escalated recently with Logistics facilities. In many ways, I think you could argue that they've actually **stolen** some of our some of our leading edge there". **[Senior Planner 13, Liverpool city region combined authority]**

Thus presented above is an example as to how officers within WBC have not only utilised their entrepreneurial brand for economic development - in order to develop new types of fringe space which draw upon the growth potential of the Liverpool city-region in particular - but it also reflects how their approaches to entrepreneurial governance are key to ensuring this strategy is successful. Hence whilst WBC may be disadvantaged by state selectivities (Chapter Five), they have explored the potential of city-regions either side of them and selectively taken specific attributes to craft the rural-urban fringe. Crucial WBC's smaller size as a Unitary Authority appeared to bring tangible benefits and facilitated a 'fleet of foot' approach that allowed them to draw on the potential of surrounding city-regions - it has the "advantage of being more flexible and faster in navigating through complex and changing actor constellations than organizations or association" (Döringer, 2019, p. 5). The above example thus illustrates how the 'organisationally thin' nature of WBC presented opportunities to quickly and selectively mobilise an approach which served to reinforce the Warrington brand.

6.3.3. Entrepreneurial governance II: selectively connecting Birchwood to the Manchester City Region

Another example of Warrington Borough Council's entrepreneurial governance of economic growth in the rural-urban fringe relates to the purchasing of Birchwood Park, located on the Eastern Periphery of Warrington. The Birchwood Enterprise Park is a renowned knowledge intensive site, with nationally leading sectors in nuclear research, as well as other vital scientific sectors. It also has an array of warehouses which typify the

rural-urban fringe (Gallent, 2006). Yet, the case of Birchwood was slightly different to Omega. Rather than crafting a rural-urban fringe space from scratch, officers in WBC purchased the Birchwood Enterprise Park as a key element of its entrepreneurial approach:

"The council bought Birchwood Park around two years ago. That's not because we're awash with cash – far from it – in fact it's totally the opposite because we've had our funding cut and we need to try and make money. So, we borrow cheaply at the public works rate and then we can buy things like that and enjoy the revenue coming in through the rental". **[Senior officer 2 (development), Warrington Borough Council]**

Carroll (2017) reminds us that when public authorities utilise entrepreneurial approaches, they also introduce a greater degree of 'risk' – introducing a greater likelihood of 'failure' (p. 108). Yet, due to the highly specialised nature of the industries in Birchwood Park, there was a perceived lack of churn of businesses, primarily because many of the sectors there are well-established stable industries. In this regard, the purchasing of Birchwood Park was therefore seen as a 'low-risk gain' for WBC and exemplifying a highly selective approach to building a revenue stream from the rural-urban fringe:

"For example, Birchwood has 165 businesses and there's not a great deal of churn of those businesses. So, the birth rate and the death rate of the businesses is very long. You've got to remember that, particularly in the nuclear sector, they are dealing with projects that are generally speaking 25 years in the making and the dealing with decommissioning of nuclear waste and recycling activities that takes hundreds of years. So, you know, they are probably in the most secure jobs that the UK has to offer because the matters they're dealing with decades". **[Senior officer 2 (development), Warrington Borough Council]**

Yet, further discussions regarding the decision making behind purchasing the site also revealed a more nuanced motive. Officers within WBC revealed that the logic in purchasing the site was primarily based upon the interconnectedness of the site with Manchester's science and innovation industries:

"We are incredibly well-connected to Manchester and there's a lot of Science and innovation going on in Manchester. Graphene institutes and the Dalton Nuclear Institute that Birchwood can in particular connect into so, you know, there's collaboration to be had. That's not a wish, it happens every day". **[Senior officer 2 (development), Warrington Borough Council].**

Thus, what is illustrated in the context of Birchwood is how key officers in WBC again sought to exploit its fringe and the connectivity and relationality of such spaces but were interested in **selectively** targeting certain industries. As demonstrated above, such actors recognised the robust, knowledge intensive connections Birchwood Park had with Manchester – a science-focused 'spatial imaginary' that they could engage with. Hence as a result of the mobility potential of the rural-urban fringe - which enabled commuting to and from Birchwood Park - officers within WBC utilised the mobility-centric nature of such spaces to generate new forms of investment:

"Birchwood's a good one good one to use, you know, it probably has one of the most successful science parks of its types in the Northwest – a massive cluster of nuclear industry, we own now, you know, we've we bought that, and certainly I suppose transport to and from that - and around it - we've done a lot as far as mobility

from the rail station up to the park. So, you know, and that sort of thing is important". **[Senior officer 3 (transport), Warrington Borough Council].**

In turn, we see how the perceptions of improving public transport in Birchwood, as noted in Chapter Four, were linked specifically to the ways in which the mobility potential of the rural-urban fringe had been aligned with the 'Warrington brand'. The development of these soft spaces within the Warrington brand is important and undoubtedly steered the ways in which such officers were engaging with governing mobility in the rural-urban fringe. Yet, the combination of entrepreneurial economic development and entrepreneurial governance had another specific angle – one as a more 'political tool' (Allmendinger et al., 2014).

6.4. Reinforcing the Warrington brand through the CWLEP:

Chapter Five illustrated how there were, on occasion, some conflicts between the 'objects of governance' for addressing mobility in the rural-urban fringe between the CWLEP and WBC. Yet, "entrepreneurship is the concept that addresses the personal capabilities and attributes of individuals as well as their embeddedness in environmental contexts and **institutional settings**…that highlights the perception and realisation of opportunities by purposeful individuals" (Doringer, 2019, p. 5). The arguments presented below describe how the CWLEP provided a critical institutional setting through which officers in WBC could engage with in order to further the capacity to develop the Warrington brand. As will be outlined, the CWLEP thus became an enabler to the activities of WBC – reinforcing their

selective crafting activity and providing funds to enable the quick mobilisation of reinforcing the Warrington brand.

6.4.1. Entrepreneurial and organisational 'thickening':

The historically embedded, recently escalated, emphasis on entrepreneurial approaches to capturing investment by WBC aligned with the ambitions of the Cheshire-Warrington Local **Enterprise** Partnership. Indeed, it can be argued that actors in WBC had aligned with the CWLEP in order to increase their 'organisational thickness' and entrepreneurial effectiveness. Coulson and Ferrario (2007) provide a useful framework for outlining the character of this synergistic relationship – one centred around institutional thickness. The first element of this framework is based on **high levels of mutual interaction between different actors.** In this respect, mutual interactions between WMBC and CWLEP had developed around economic growth and mobility:

"We have what's called a Local Enterprise Partnership and I spend time down the road at least twice a week. Yeah. I've been down there today. I was there yesterday… They are organization through which we access government for funding. By and large, other than some direct routes to government, we use them for seeking money on the Department for Transport forums". **[Senior officer 2 (development), Warrington Borough Council]**

Yet, in alluding to a second element of Coulson and Ferrario's framework (2007) - that of an overarching **'structure of domination'** – it was clear that the CWLEP were actually willing to 'take the lead' from WBC and their aspirations, whilst also contributing important

'thinking':

"In Cheshire-Warrington compared to those places [city-regions], it's often the LEP that does the thinking and takes the lead from the local authority. So, we might have a bit more freedom to think about stuff like that". **[Senior official 6, CWLEP]**

This thinking, however, was far more relational than the ambitions of WBC. It was further evident that the CWLEP was creating a '**strong *subregional* institutional presence'** between the local authorities of Cheshire West, Cheshire East and Warrington Unitary authority - a third element of the institutional thickness framework outlined by Coulson and Ferrario (2007). This, in turn, was helping to draw investment into the area and to address mobility challenges in Warrington's fringe:

"Obviously, LEP wise, we are closely aligned with the two Cheshire's. Like if you look at Warrington, we have more journeys to work, in fact, with Liverpool and Manchester than the Cheshire's. But on the other hand, we do some great work with the Cheshire's (authorities) you know, like certainly that's where we get a lot of our local growth funding and other parts - through the LEP". **[Senior officer 3 (transport), Warrington Borough Council]**

The above quote is indicative of how officers within WBC were drawing upon the CWLEP to increase their 'social capital'. WBC were using the CWLEP to create new knowledge networks (of trust) and with the spatial remit of the CWLEP as an organisation acting as a facilitator for 'reciprocal ties' (Coulson and Ferarrio, 2007). Similarly, the CWLEP was shown to be a crucial organisation in helping to coordinate a strategic vision for mobility within and beyond Warrington, but which also respected the strategic growth strategy being

employed by WBC. As expressed in Chapter Four, officers within WBC had struggled to develop a distinctive mobility strategy themselves. Hence through engagement at the subregional level, there were far more opportunities to work collaboratively with neighbouring local authorities:

"We obviously produce a Subregional Transport Strategy, which we did jointly with the three authorities. So that would then feed into their 'Local Transport Plan', so that it becomes embedded, and everyone understands… the whole idea about doing a Subregional strategy is to try and get some consistency. So, we started working with them to understand what and where the constraints were, and what help do they need from us?" **[Senior official 7, CWLEP]**

The CWLEP itself recognised that they held a powerful role in this regard – particularly in how they acted as an organisation through which to foster a **'mutual awareness of being involved in a common enterprise'**, a fourth element of the institutional thickness framework:

"No organisation has the funding or the ability to deliver everything. By collectively working together you can actually start to do stuff. Various reorganisations, across various governments, across many years, has changed the landscape quite substantially and local authorities don't have the resources that they used to have many years ago. LEPs have sort of started to fill that space". **[Senior official 7, CWLEP]**

This was similarly argued to be true in relation to planning mobility across the sub-region:

"We have what is called 'Transport Advisory Group'. So, it's senior officers from each of the three authorities meeting broadly monthly and we have weekly teleconferences. So, we worked really hard over the last couple

of years to make sure they are fully part and parcel of what we do, I don't select anything to take to Whitehall unless they've already agreed it". **[Senior official 7, CWLEP]**

In particular, through being encapsulated within a 'structure of domination' offered by the CWLEP, WBC actors argued that this was supportive of CWLEP investment in their area which they could direct towards addressing mobility challenges in Warrington's fringe space. As such, this strategy can be seen as an internalised spatial selectivity of sorts whereby both respective organisations appropriated each other's positions as being important to the other. The structure of domination was quite blurred indeed and more collaborative than hierarchal:

"So, the Local Enterprise Partnership for me, as it is, serves two principal purposes. One is to set out the economic growth picture and the potential for the sub-region. And the other part is about narrative. They're somebody who does get better access to funding from government. Because in the end, that's the game isn't it, to make sure that Warrington has got sufficient profile to capture the attention of the government and investors. *The LEP's job is to scream those messages to governments and investors* and tell them "We're ready; whatever funding pot you've got, whichever way you want to deploy it, with whatever terms or conditions want to deploy it with, we will work on that". That's the LEPs role and it does it very well". **[Senior official 2 (development), Warrington Borough Council].**

And:

"Warrington have done a huge amount of work and continue to do a huge amount of work about thinking through what their place is going to look like in the future and how it is going to grow. I think that also includes trying to think about how the *different parts of it are connected as a whole*. And so, I'm fairly comfortable that Warrington have that well thought through - certainly from the stuff that I've seen in terms of those sort

of growth plans. They recognise that there are distinctive parts to Warrington as a place and so they look at the individual parts, and then look at the sum of those parts as well". **[Senior official 6, CWLEP]**

In particular, the quote from the WBC interviewee reinforces how "locally relevant actors can shape the course of economic evolution by mobilizing flexible institutional strategies" (Macleod, 2004, p. 66), with the CWLEP in turn serving to empower such officers - resonating with the highly selective and flexible forms of crafting outlined in the rural-urban fringe.

6.4.2. Using organisational thickness to improving mobility in the rural-urban fringe

As outlined above, developing a relationship with the CWLEP provided a better 'voice' for WBC to capture the attention of central government and other potential investors, as well as a greater capacity to obtain funding to address challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe. This applied to both the Omega and the Birchwood sites – each of which was an enterprise zone. Indeed, in the case of the Omega site, the CWLEP was crucial in enabling Warrington Council to obtain funding to address initial challenges with mobility and infrastructure – a form of 'public sector priming' which inspired confidence for private sector investment:

"Their real issue was actually getting some of the infrastructure in place to unlock the site. And so, the LEP loaned Warrington Borough Council £3 million from the Growing Places fund which is a pot that every LEP had. That put in the access road for Warrington and Omega North off junction 8 and unlocked first the

development site… Those plots went really quickly and gave the market enough confidence to start developing South of the M62. So that sort of… 'public sector priming' if you like does work". **[Senior official 6, CWLEP]**

Thus, we see how the CWLEP helped to enable WBC to actualise their ambitions of addressing infrastructural challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe. This was similarly the case in Birchwood. Evident again was the importance of the CWLEP in acting as an enabler:

"We have invested in things like new roads going into Birchwood, which is also an **enterprise zone**. So, we are probably **a bit more open to doing that** than some of the areas around us". **[Senior official 6, CWLEP]**

Consequently, these examples reiterate two key points. First, they outline the use of enterprise zones in order to attract interest from the CWLEP – and which also help the CWLEP to achieve its growth ambitions. Second, it reflects on how the CWLEP were 'more open' to assisting WBC with their economic ambitions as a consequence of the alignment in the entrepreneurial ethos of both organisations. Yet, the arguments here are not just that the CWLEP was helping in a more distanced capacity; rather the symbiotic relationship which had developed between both organisations created an 'institutional thickness' around entrepreneurialism. In sum, WBC were able to engage the LEP's interest in the rural-urban fringe specifically through crafting both fringe spaces as 'enterprise zones' – creating hubs of growth potential:

"What we do benefit from is that we've got the business rate relief that we can offer with it being an Enterprise Zone - big tick there. That's fantastic. And then we do work with the LEP about getting investment in, so some money is coming in from to Birchwood Park, to then speculatively build some more units, and that's what they do in other sites too. So, it benefits from being in an Enterprise Zone". **[Local economist 4, Warrington Borough Council]**

"We have what is called a 'science corridor' here in Birchwood, which *strings together economic assets* and actually we've wrapped it in what's called an 'Enterprise Zone' which gives business rates relief to investors coming into the area and it allows the Local Enterprise Partnership to retain business rates, to reinvest in the area and it therefore looks like a tax efficient geographic area. So, it gets that kind of message into government". **[Senior officer 2 (development), Warrington Borough Council]**

This is a critical finding with regards to explaining how the relationship between the CWLEP and WBC has been maintained. Indeed, enterprise zones are also typically viewed as 'soft spaces' (Haughton and Allmendinger, 2009), and "such soft spaces of delivery can be developed in partnership and seek to assemble land, create a consensus around a scheme, and garner private sector confidence and finance" (Haughton et al., 2013, p. 219). We thus see this multiscaler partnership converging explicitly on these rural-urban fringe 'soft spaces'. This is particularly interesting as it reflects attempts to craft new governance identities in such spaces. Indeed, as Haughton et al. (2013) outline "soft spaces such as enterprise zones… can exist as 'black holes', working in isolation from statutory spaces. Here, the relationship is one of disruption or experimentation forcing a new way of working or set of priorities upon an area" (p. 219). Thus, enterprise zones were a key strategy that has been used to ensure engagement from the CWLEP in the rural-urban fringe and by focusing on such forms of growth, addressing mobility in the rural-urban fringe was

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consequently seen as an attractive investment for the LEP:

"So, if you take Omega a few miles down the road from Birchwood, the LEP loaned them the money in the early days. That resolved issues in getting some of the infrastructure in place to unlock the site. So, the LEP loaned Warrington £3 million from the Growing Places Fund, which is a pot that every LEP had. We have invested in things like an electricity substation to unlock enterprise zone sites in Omega. That also put in the access road Omega North off junction 8, which unlocked the development site and gave the market enough confidence to start expanding South. So that public sector priming does work". [**Senior official 6, CWLEP**]

To summarise, whilst many have critiqued LEPs for having limited powers and resources (Marlow, 2019), there was a significantly different story in the context of this research. In many ways, the CWLEP was viewed as providing access to funding and other opportunities which WBC had struggled to access on their own. Thus, as discussed in Chapter Five, whilst WBC had alternative, residentially focused challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe that they wished to address, they also recognised that engaging with the ambitions of the CWLEP was crucial in order to make any progress in this regard. As a result, there was significant evidence as to how both organisations were increasing their 'thickness' from an alignment in entrepreneurial principles and indeed how this thickness was maintained as a function of the 'entrepreneurial soft spaces' crafted by WBC. What we could therefore argue is that engaging a multi-level governance approach to such spaces enabled a subsequent 'hardening' of these soft spaces – providing them with more security and thus allowing WBC to continue to engage in their selective and flexible crafting strategies around mobility in the rural-urban fringe (Allmendinger et al., 2014).

Within the literature on organisational thickness, the flexibility in adapting to the subregional scale of working is reflective of "how locally relevant actors can shape the course of economic evolution by mobilising 'flexible institutional strategies' through and appropriate blend of organisational support structures and embedded social capital" (Macleod, 2004, p. 66). I thus argue that due to a perceived historical deprivileging and subsequent increased emphasis on entrepreneurialism by central government as an institutional strategy of metagovernance, in Warrington we consequently see an example of the development of a flexible institutional entrepreneurial strategy employed by officers within WBC. This strategy focuses on the utilisation of emergent subregional support structures in the form of the CWLEP and the embedded social and economic capital this brings. Thus, with a greater degree of 'organisational thickness' established through which to focus on the rural-urban fringe, officers in WBC had secured better opportunities through which to develop their 'brand'.

6.5. Political entrepreneurialism and the rural-urban fringe:

In drawing the findings of this thesis together, it is important to stipulate that there was an alternative political motive driving decision making around the crafting of the soft spaces in the rural-urban fringe. Whilst the emphasis thus far has been on economic entrepreneurialism, the entrepreneurial governance literature also reminds us that "…actors can 'jump scales' by constructing a new scale for a given issue. In doing so, they open new opportunities for themselves…" (Princen and Kerremans, 2008, pp. 1139-1140).

The chapter has already suggested that WBC had attempted to forge a close relationship with the CWLEP. In doing so, they had arguably 'jumped' scale in order to access the opportunities afforded to the CWLEP by central government. Yet, there were other clear agendas at play. It was clear that in developing their relationship with the CWLEP, WBC would be able to access other emergent forms of collaborative governance at the regional scale. An initial example of this is NP11. As MacKinnon (2020) notes "the government established the NP11 group in 2018, comprised of the chairs of the 11 Northern LEPs, proclaiming it as a new 'Council of the North' akin to the body established by Edward IV in 1472" (p. 14). This had encouraged WBC to work as closely as possible with the CWLEP:

"With the whole concept of the Northern Powerhouse people were wondering well, what is the future and… all the power - where does it exist? Well the LEPs, they've realised that Northern Powerhouse has still got something to it… The Local Enterprise Partnerships know that there is power in collaboration amongst themselves. So last year they created what's called NP 11… they have an annual conference called the 'Convention of the North' which happens to have taken place last Friday in Rotherham… Guess who spoke - Boris Johnson. So, government choose to use that platform to deliver messages no matter how ineffective the delivery mechanism might be". **[Senior official 2 (Development), Warrington Borough Council]**

This suggests an ulterior, more political motive from WBC in developing their relationship with the CWLEP. Indeed, despite recognising that the devolution 'mechanism' might be 'ineffective', they also saw greater engagement from the Prime Minister in Northern Powerhouse. The creation of NP 11 was supported by central government and thus we see how such officers have tried to develop relationship which seemingly help them 'jump' to

the scales they see as being more favoured by central government – in this instance, those focused on the Northern Powerhouse at a regional level.

Another way in which WBC had attempted to 'jump scales' and build stronger links at the regional level was through Transport for the North. Illustrated in Chapter Five was a clear political disconnection between the collaborative networks Warrington was involved in *vis a vis* their capacity to shape decision making. Yet, by creating a symbiotic relationship with CWLEP, WBC were able to engage with other scales of governance, such as NP11 to increase their 'voice'. Thus, returning to the challenges outlined with regards to Transport for the North in Chapter Five, there appeared to also be a collaborative governance and politically driven logic behind the crafting of rural-urban fringe imaginaries. Critically, however, WBC appeared to be more focused on embedding the importance of Birchwood in relation to the Manchester City Region, rather than Omega in relation to the Liverpool City Region:

"Manchester is a very, very, powerful economic centre; the supply chain to which exists in Warrington. So, a stronger Manchester equals a stronger Warrington and we consider Manchester Airport to be Warrington's airport. We are incredibly well-connected to Manchester, if Manchester catches a cold or if Manchester sneezes...". **[Senior officer 2 (development), Warrington Borough Council]**

In the first instance, this highlights two additional and important points. First, the mobility infrastructure existing in the rural-urban fringe of Manchester, by way of Manchester Airport, was seen as critical for Warrington. In turn, this strengthens arguments regarding

the need to think about the relational nature of the rural-urban fringe and how the mobility-potential of fringe spaces connects with other urban centres. Second, it emphasises how the entrepreneurial strategies WBC were using were also focused on further embedding them into the Manchester city-region and the mutual supply chains existing between both spaces. Officers in WBC also identified that embedding Warrington's interconnectedness within the Manchester-Liverpool transport corridor had created opportunities to increase their respective 'voice' and thus capacity to steer decision making regarding the developments and changing services pertaining to shared transport infrastructures. This was outlined as a critical risk for Warrington in the previous chapter, whereby the inequalities associated with devolution were preventing them from voicing their concerns. Yet, an entrepreneurial approach to crafting their scales of work and intervention - based on specific soft spaces and the spatial imaginaries perpetuated by Northern Powerhouse - ensured that Warrington remained relevant within the Northwest corridor. In turn, this builds upon the previous findings by illustrating that "soft spaces are not only an outcome of political processes, but they can also be employed as a political tool. They can be an efficient element in political bargaining of political competences and power" (Allmendinger et al., 2014, p. 2714):

"I think increasingly, places like Birchwood are being seen as somewhere that is affordable to live, yet that still gives the opportunity to access Manchester. *It might strengthen the argument when it comes to improving connectivity into some of those places as well...".* **[Senior officer 6, CWLEP]**

In turn, this is reflective of the fact "that individuals aim to establish a central position or formal function in decision-making processes in order to increase their impact and to

articulate their needs" (MacKinnon, 2020, p. 11). In this case, it was clear that for Warrington, the best way in which to articulate their needs was through advocating the entrepreneurial approaches which have been outlined in this chapter - thus highlighting interconnectivities with Manchester, who were seen to be the leaders of the TfN project:

"I think Manchester has for many years shouted loud and shouted confidently. I think Liverpool's learning to do that. But more in the last decade - self-evidently those two shouting together makes quite a powerful sound. If we can get Warrington into there as well it would get even more powerful. And that's where the LEP I think has a role to play, the LEPs can come together and shout louder for local authorities". **[Senior officer 2 (development), Warrington Borough council]**

In this respect, we again see the importance of the relationship between WBC and the CWLEP, for the CWLEP was viewed as having a stronger voice through which to engage with more powerful, surrounding structures, but also through which to articulate the importance of Warrington, as identified previously. Crucially, there was a clear recognition that Warrington's entrepreneurial growth strategy was being recognised by officers in Transport for the North and by others:

"It's punching above its weight, I think. But the point is that what it doesn't want to do is stand still whilst everything else grows. So yes, what it's got to do is keep on the trajectory that it's on, then I think it will benefit, you know, because a lot of people that live and work in Warrington, but they also live and travel to Liverpool and Greater Manchester. So, I think, you know, as we become more peripatetic in the way we work as we go forward, then I think that connectivity is going to be really important for Warrington". **[Senior official 8, TfN)**

"You could foresee Greater Manchester and then Liverpool behind, because they've got lower population, becoming so dense and so desirable, but they become more expensive, so then, the spill over would be asking "Well, where do we go next?". If you're a property speculator or a business, Warrington starts to look very attractive in that situation – even more attractive than it currently is. I mean, it's not that expensive to set up in Greater Manchester already at the moment, but it could become more expensive and then like what is already a relatively thriving economy in Warrington, you'd expect benefit from that spill over". **[Senior expert 16]**

6.6. Conclusions:

Outlining an entrepreneurial crafting strategy around the rural-urban fringe, as well as the importance of the CWLEP as an organisation to help reinforce this strategy, is an original insight from this thesis. What we learn from this chapter is how officers in WBC wanted to address challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe not just because such issues exist at the intra-local level, but because such spaces encompassed a broader strategy of embedding themselves into the market potential of surrounding city regional spaces. This was reinforced through an integral 'entrepreneurial ethos' held by such actors – a historically embedded governance approach in Warrington reinforced by historical deprivileging – which in turn had generated the development of a 'brand' which sought to market Warrington as the perfect intermediary space between both city-regions. This offers insights as to the logics key stakeholders might use in the formulation of fringe

spaces, particularly in the use of mobility to market such spaces and to attract and develop specific types of industries. In the examples above, mobility was conducive to the functionality of both fringe case study spaces; one as a commuting-centric fringe space with residential challenges and the other as a multifunctional logistics fringe space which may eventually have residential challenges. Nonetheless, both were being taken forward through an underlying entrepreneurial ethos.

The discussion above also illustrates how rather than viewing WBC as a passive actor disadvantaged by the process of political and economic devolution in England, they had taken the initiative to embed themselves into the functional economic area of both city-regions. This is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it has served to reinforce congestive pressures in the fringe that they were ill-equipped to address; but on the other they had little alternative due to a lack of other funding support mechanisms. In many ways, we can characterise the main ethos behind the governance of mobility in such spaces as largely relational in nature. In returning to a suggestion made in Chapter Four, such spaces were indeed being marketed as 'proximate territories' (Woods and Heley, 2018), which only served to increase mobility flows to such spaces and to reaffirm pressures of mobility. We learn here that mobility and mobility infrastructures seemingly underpin the effectiveness as to how such proximate territories can be deployed. What is clear is that there was a deliberate use of fringe spaces to capture relational mobility potential and, given the mobile nature of fringe spaces themselves (Gallent, 2006), a clear logic as to *why* mobility was of such crucial importance for such actors.

In addition, the CWLEP sustained a vital leadership role across the subregion, yet officers in WBC were selectively and entrepreneurially framing the rural-urban fringe in a specific manner in order to entice the CWLEP to work with them. Whilst the CWLEP was shown to potentially hinder decision-making powers for officers within WBC (outlined in Chapter Five), as long as their ambitions were centred on achieving economic growth, the CWLEP represented a critically important organisation for WBC. In some ways, the findings presented here contrast with other accounts of the relationships between local authorities and LEPs in the literature, which often depict a contested relationship and confusion over leadership (Broadhurst, 2018). The entrepreneurial ethos maintained by actors within WBC permitted the LEP to work effectively on their own entrepreneurial growth strategies – facilitated by a pre-existing ethos of this method of governing within WBC. There was a clear coalescing of an entrepreneurial environment. In turn, through meeting the CWLEP at its aim for increasing economic growth, greater opportunities were provided to WBC to address some of the key mobility challenges in their rural-urban fringe spaces, particularly those that were more relational in nature. This is not to say that this was a perfect relationship, but nonetheless, it outlines the selective and reflexive strategies used by WBC in an attempt to navigate this.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

DEVELOPING A NEW RESEARCH PARADIGM FOR THE RURAL-URBAN FRINGE.

7.1. Introduction

This chapter draws together the analysis developed in Chapters Four, Five and Six, as well as returning to key arguments made in the literature to address the overarching question behind this thesis: "**To understand the challenges and opportunities pertaining to governing mobility in the rural-urban fringe**". It does so by drawing together the key arguments in chapters Four, Five and Six and evaluating how they fit into the wider literature. Of key relevance to this chapter are two emergent themes which have encapsulated this thesis: (1) the benefits of a focus on how mobility is governed in the rural-urban fringe that is not influenced by rural or urban bias, and (2) in the context of the rural-urban fringe, mobility has its own multiscaler governance challenges and opportunities that require a territorial and relational perspective. Critically, the discussion of both these points has provided a sound foundation through which to move away from a binary rural-urban focus on such spaces and, instead, to appreciate the differential territorial and relational influences which key stakeholders can use to govern and ultimately shape such spaces. Yet, this is not to suggest that the rural-urban focus on such spaces is not important. Rather more, the objective of this PhD was to illustrate that a broader, more fluid approach to

understanding the rural-urban fringe can provide vital new insights into how such spaces are shaped.

Section 7.2. provides a brief review and critical summation of the findings from Chapters four, five and six. Section 7.3 then proceeds to outline the key contributions this PhD has made to the existing literature on the rural-urban fringe by responding to the objectives outlined in Chapter One. Sections 7.3.1 and 7.3.2 therefore outline these contributions in relation to the first two objectives set out in Chapter One respectively – *"To identify and critically assess the relative influences of key stakeholders responsible for governing mobility in the rural-urban fringe."* and *"To understand the importance of mobility in the rural-urban fringe from the perspective of those who govern such spaces "*. Both of these objectives provide the foundation upon to which develop responses to objectives 3 and 4 – *"To explore how wider state restructuring has positively or negatively impacted the capacity for key stakeholders to address the opportunities and challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe."* and *"To critically examine the types of formal and informal responses utilised by key stakeholders in addressing challenges and developing opportunities for governing and utilising mobility in the rural-urban fringe"* respectively. These are discussed in sections 7.4 and 7.5. Section 7.6 outlines the limitations of the study, whilst section 7.7 proceeds to outline the directions for future study. In particular, a key recommendation is for the need to view the rural-urban fringe as a politically and economically crafted 'soft space' – how individuals that govern seek to impart specific identities and functions for these landscapes, and which often supersedes rural-urban conflict.

7.2. Understanding how mobility is governed in the rural-urban fringe:

7.2.1 Recontextualising the aim of the study:

The PhD began by outlining the need for a more nuanced approach to understanding the rural-urban fringe. The literature on the rural-urban fringe thus far is regarded as being limited, primarily because it has focused too much on the binary division of rural and urban influences shaping such spaces, and which has contributed to a focus on defining the fringe rather than focusing specifically on the opportunities and challenges of relevance to such spaces more explicitly (Scott, 2019a). In particular, given the emergent interest in the rural-urban fringe internationally in light of an array of pressures (Qvistrom, 2013), there is a critical need to think about how such spaces are managed or 'governed'. Whilst Scott et al. (2013) made a key contribution in this regard, their study was again focused on the rural and urban *per se* and the conflicting ways of defining and engaging with fringe spaces through these different lenses. This approach was adopted despite calls to engage with the rural-urban fringe as a unique space given how the degree of urban and rural influences in such spaces is highly variable (Hoggart, 2005; Gallent et al., 2006). In turn, the other consistent factor which has characterised the rural-urban fringe literature relates to mobility. Mobility has been regarded as a key factor in defining and in 'making' the rural-urban fringe (Gallent and Andersson, 2007; Qvistrom, 2007). Yet despite this recognition, existing work has lacked sufficient exploration and contextualisation of mobility within the fringe literature. Hence a number of questions remain such as: 'How mobility is important in the rural-urban fringe?'; 'How is it governed?'; 'How is the way mobility is governed in

the rural-urban fringe also unique and how does this ultimately shape such spaces'; and 'What are the opportunities and challenges this creates'?

It was also argued that the literature on how the rural-urban fringe is governed is not only limited, but also disconnected from wider governance literatures. Thus, with the recognition that the rural-urban fringe is impinged by wider government agendas - such as being contained through greenbelt policy (Rogers, 2013) – but also subject to local pressures and influences (Gallent, 2006), this raised key questions as to how mobility in the fringe is impinged by wider government decision making and how different actors might be equipped to govern mobility accordingly. This subsequently led to a decision to draw upon the metagovernance literature, which illustrates how the UK government has steered wider English devolution, with clear themes being city-regionalism, entrepreneurialism, and collaborative governance. Finally, due to this PhD being the first attempt at combining and synthesising these different literatures, it was decided to use a case study approach using a comparative example of two rural-urban fringe spaces within the same jurisdictional (administrative) space (of Warrington). This provides an insight into the variability of mobility in the rural-urban fringe and how key stakeholders differentially govern mobility in such spaces. The overall case study area needed to be a location which had a) characteristically rural-urban fringe spaces; b) had an evident mobility-centric character to it, and c) would be influenced by city-regional and devolutionary aspects yet remained a representative example of a fringe space in the UK in as much as is possible. Consequently, Chapter Three illustrated why Warrington was an ideal case study, as well as why Birchwood and Omega were selected as comparative examples within this

administrative area. In turn, the aim developed for the thesis was:

"To understand the challenges and opportunities pertaining to governing mobility in the rural-urban fringe"

7.2.2. Key empirical findings

Chapter Four initially sought to understand how officers in Warrington Borough Council perceived mobility in the rural-urban fringe, which was shown to be somewhat related to the rural and urban at a territorial level, yet critically, also driven by broader, relational understandings of mobility. It then unpacked the key challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe based on responses from officers in Warrington Borough Council. These were shown to be (1) the car-centric nature of rural-urban fringe space and congestion pressures this created; (2) the diversity of needs that need to be encapsulated in decision making regarding public transport in the rural-urban fringe (particularly commuting vs. leisure uses); and (3) the need to embed wider state agendas regarding sustainable mobility *vis a vis* the differentiated nature of the rural-urban fringe. Overall, the challenges outlined were indicative of how officers in Warrington Borough Council viewed mobility as a specific 'object of governance', and which challenged notions of the rural-urban fringe as a neglected space and emphasised the importance of mobility in these landscapes. Chapter Four thus concluded by considering how these key challenges of mobility in the fringe were often territorial, but also relational and influenced by the activities of other (more powerful) organisations.

Chapter Five then proceeded to explore the influence of other stakeholders in determining how mobility is governed in the rural-urban fringe and thus the extent to which the challenges outlined in Chapter Four could be addressed. In particular, it used a metagovernance lens to analyse how central government, in the way it shapes the 'rules of the game' (Pemberton and Winstanley, 2010), strategically and spatially privileges certain agendas over others through allocation of power and funding. Overall, from a vertical governance perspective, officers in Warrington Borough Council argued how they were indirectly deprivileged by a central government focus on subregional and city-regional scales of policy delivery. Hence whilst officers in Warrington Borough Council were locked into competitive, complex and often unsuccessful bidding processes, other sub-regional organisations such as the Cheshire-Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership (CWLEP), were provided with more funding and power. In turn, this allowed the CWLEP to act as a type of metagovernor and to steer which challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe should be addressed, which often emphasised more relational challenges of mobility.

Chapter Five also presented arguments concerned with the direct and strategic privileging of combined authorities at the city-regional scale. The chapter illustrated how central government afforded greater powers and funding to such structures, and which were argued to be significantly greater than those afforded to Warrington Borough Council. Finally, Chapter Five introduced a focus on emergent pan-northern organisations, such as Northern Powerhouse and Transport for the North, and discussed an increasing need to work collaboratively (owning to the relational nature of mobility) with such organisations

due to a movement away from 'geography-specific' (and thus territorial) solutions. Yet, due to the spatial and selective privileging of these spaces and organisations by central government, such projects were often steered by the combined authorities due to central government prioritising these areas through agglomeration narratives.

In contrast to the previous two chapters, Chapter Six adopted an alternative stance on the 'micro-practices' of Warrington Borough Council officers and how they had sought to use entrepreneurial practices to create new ways of working, of which helped them to address the challenges of mobility in fringe spaces. Such officers were being selectively entrepreneurial in two ways. First, Warrington Borough Council had employed a selective entrepreneurial 'crafting' approach. This involved creating a distinctive 'Warrington brand', which was based upon the mobility potential of Warrington's rural-urban fringe, as well as the proximity of such spaces to surrounding city-regions. Second, they were using the Warrington brand - and its mobility-centric fringe spaces - to draw economic potential from Liverpool and Manchester. Indeed, there was evidence of a selective entrepreneurial governance approach which involved Warrington Council developing a symbiotic relationship with the Cheshire Warrington LEP, to draw funding and organisational support from the LEP, and which enabled them to address key challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe. Crucially, the combination of these two selective entrepreneurial strategies reaffirmed the interconnectivities Warrington had with the adjoining city-regions, and which was viewed as a way of increasing Warrington's relative power in collaborative decision making around relational transport infrastructures.

7.3. Developing a multi-level understanding of governing mobility in the rural-urban fringe and developing a relational, mobility-centric perspective on the rural-urban fringe.

This section synthesises the key stakeholders identified as governing mobility in the rural-urban fringe (Objective 1) and the importance of developing a relational, mobility-centric perspective on the rural-urban fringe (Objective 2).

7.3.1. Towards a multi-level understanding of governing mobility in the rural-urban fringe:

In relation to objective 1 *-To identify and critically assess the relative influences of key stakeholders responsible for governing mobility in the rural-urban fringe –* this PhD has: **demonstrated that the incumbent local authority, in this case Warrington Borough Council, were imbued with significant local jurisdictional responsibility for the rural-urban fringe and governing mobility therein.** Chapter Four therefore focused on the perspective of ssenior officers in Warrington Borough Council. In a multitude of ways, it was clear that the responsibility to govern mobility in Warrington's rural-urban fringe was tasked to these individuals, but that such individuals also generally felt as though they lacked the capacity to do so. This is perhaps unsurprising given that the literature has suggested that decision making in relation to the rural-urban fringe is typically contextually bound to the urban locality it is attached to (Gallent et al, 2006), and that local authorities continue to face increasing cuts from austerity measures (Gherhes et al., 2020). Hence there were concerns expressed that many of the influences shaping the ability to govern mobility in Warrington's fringe (funding, policy etc) originated from elsewhere, yet had to

be managed at the local level. In turn, this reinforced the relational nature of Warrington's rural-urban fringe and its connectivity to other places.

Another interesting finding was that beyond local authority officers with responsibility for managing transport explicitly in the fringe, there were also other senior officers from a variety of backgrounds involved in the governance of mobility in Warrington's fringe spaces, including town planners and economic development officers. As was subsequently illustrated in Chapter Six, this is because the mobility potential of the rural-urban fringe was also tied explicitly to a key economic growth strategy for Warrington, and which also served to attract the interest of other organisations operating at wider scales. In turn, this reflects how the plurality of interest in governing mobility in the rural-urban fringe is not just horizontal, but also vertical.

Thus, building upon such arguments, the thesis applied a metagovernance approach to identify how: **a diversity of stakeholders - operating at different spatial scales - can impact how mobility is governed in the rural-urban fringe, including those working at a wider sub-regional and regional level. The relationships between these stakeholders is compounded by the strategic and spatial privileging of the state.**

The metagovernance lens enabled an exploration of the vertical aspects of governance and the ways in which sub-regional and regional actors shape how mobility is governed in the rural-urban fringe of Warrington. For example, Warrington Borough Council faced a

number a of challenges in relation to mobility in fringe spaces that it needed to address, ranging from relational commuting pressures to responding to the needs of local residents. Yet, whilst concerns pertaining to the day-to-day local mobility needs of residents in the fringe was acknowledged by the Cheshire-Warrington LEP, it was far more concerned in reality with facilitating commuting, given its involvement in delivering the UK Government's growth agenda. Similarly, Transport for the North had a focus on the agglomerative benefits increased mobility potential would bring from improving links between Warrington's fringe spaces and elsewhere, and which again served to impinge on the extent to which Warrington Borough Council were able to engage and shape such an agenda.

Crucially, the thesis has identified that there can be a disconnection between the objects of governance of local actors (those of Warrington Borough Council) for mobility in the rural-urban fringe vis a vis those being promoted by other actors (those of the LEP). Yet it was also identified that there was scope to develop greater synergies between the different actors in terms of governing mobility in the fringe. This an important contribution because the rural-urban fringe is typically reported as 'neglected' with regards to how it is governed (Scott et al., 2013). Yet, taking a broader metagovernance approach has highlighted how decision making in the rural-urban fringe with regards to mobility can be shaped locally and extra-locally by other (and often more powerful) actors. Similarly, it is clear that the officers that are in charge of mobility in the rural-urban fringe at the local level can lack the ability to actualise their agendas due to limited financial resources. In turn, they therefore need to work with other organisations who may be able to provide the resources to at least help deliver some of their ambitions. In the case of Warrington, the

Cheshire-Warrington LEP was seen as being a crucial actor but which itself was being subject to 'metagovernance' by the UK government in respect of the activities it was required to prioritise. Consequently, there is a significant benefit for adopting a multi-scalar 'metagovernance' approach to understanding the rural-urban fringe, particularly in a modern devolution context within the UK.

In summary, the thesis has helped to highlight the importance of a broader vertical approach to understanding the governance of mobility in the rural-urban fringe. Therefore, in answering objective one, *the overall finding is that the incumbent local authority are the main officers who govern mobility in the rural-urban fringe. However, the links such officers have with other key public and private officers at a variety of vertical scales, as determined and shaped by central government, means that others operating at wider spatial scales also have significant influence as to how mobility in the fringe is governed. This is largely a function of the relational nature of mobility and how mobility infrastructures often coalesce at the rural-urban fringe.*

7.3.2. Towards a relational, mobility-centric perspective on the rural-urban fringe:

In relation to the second objective - *To understand the importance of mobility in the rural-urban fringe from the perspectives of those who might govern such spaces -* this chapter **challenges the assertion that the rural-urban fringe is a neglected governance space. Rather, it illustrates how mobility can be a key object of governance and with specific**

opportunities and challenges emerging as a consequence of the unique features and functions of these landscapes.

A key point from the thesis is that binary rural vs. urban perspectives on the fringe are limiting and fail to account for the importance of mobility in such spaces. Each of the three empirical chapters in the thesis (Chapters Four, Five and Six) have therefore outlined the critical importance of mobility in the rural-urban fringe and provided specific insights as to why governing mobility is important from the perspective of those engaged in shaping such spaces. Crucially, this is an important contribution to the literature, for it both synthesises the claims made regarding the importance of mobility in such spaces, as well as providing a foundation upon which to continue to develop these understandings.

As an exemplar of one key finding, Chapter Four highlighted how mobility was a key object of governance for senior officers within Warrington Borough Council – a recognition that there was a need to think about mobility explicitly in such spaces as much as the relational movements it fostered. Indeed, mobility itself was a critical factor as to how the rural-urban fringe was defined, which re-affirms the importance of this factor in defining the rural-urban fringe (Gallent et al., 2006). A further key insight was that mobility was perceived as being differentiated across different rural-urban fringe spaces, which meant that some challenges were regarded as being less or more important in one fringe space compared to another. This appeared to be, in part, a function of the 'age' of the rural-urban fringe landscape - how 'transitional' it was and the extent to which such issues interplayed with other limiting factors on mobility such as greenbelts or indeed mobility infrastructures

themselves. A key example pertains to the challenges of trying to retroactively reduce a more 'fixed' car-centric commuting culture in Birchwood through encouraging more diverse forms of 'active' travel, compared to the relative ease of undertaking such an approach in proximity to the comparatively newer, transitional Omega site. Such differences impinged on the degree to which these differential challenges of mobility could be addressed. This is an important finding: it moves beyond simply citing how mobility is important in all fringe spaces to arguing for a more nuanced and pluralistic understanding of mobility in the rural-urban fringe to be adopted.

In addition, Chapter Six also outlined how mobility in the rural-urban fringe was highly fluid and could be used to foster different types of industry and economic activity in such spaces. Indeed, mobility characterises many of the key industries that are located in such spaces (Gallent et al., 2006), but these features are determined by specific actors. These actors frame and thus seek to govern mobility in particular ways in the rural-urban fringe. Whilst the Omega case study site was regarded as illustrating the interconnections between warehousing, logistics and manufacturing trades, whilst Birchwood (which similarly contained such facilities) was depicted as exemplifying a more commuting-centric fringe landscape. Indeed, the importance of mobility and how it offered economic growth potential in the rural-urban fringe was significant in binding interests between Warrington Borough Council and the LEP, thus fostering a hegemonic vision on the rural-urban fringe between such officers.

Overall, in relation to the second objective the thesis outlined the need for a consideration of the plurality of mobility in the rural-urban fringe and the inherent governance challenges this can create. The literature thus far has recognised the different scales of mobility infrastructures, services and modes that can be present in the rural-urban fringe (Gallent and Andersson, 2007), but has otherwise not considered the ways in which this requires local authorities and others to respond differentially to these challenges. Undoubtedly, this thesis has only 'scratched the surface' of this but provides a crucial foundation from which to build understandings as to the variability of governing mobility in the rural-urban fringe.

Moving beyond the above arguments, the thesis also **illustrates how understanding mobility in the rural-urban fringe, as a key object of governance, requires a focus on relational issues as much as territorial characteristics.** Critically, from the perspective of Warrington Borough Council, there was indeed a clear understanding that governing mobility was related to surrounding urban and rural spaces, and with a recognition of the tensions which existed as a result. In turn, mobility was seen as a key facilitator in the movement of people between the fringe and other such spaces and with mobility being a critical characteristic in thus characterising the rural-urban fringe. Initially, this seemingly frames mobility in the rural-urban fringe as being 'ephemeral' (Shoard, 2002) – as simply facilitating the movement between different rural and urban spaces. Yet, it was precisely the relational nature of the fringe and mobility therein – and the inherent economic potential that could be fostered from this - which made mobility a key object of governance and again accentuating the importance of developing a more pluralistic perspective of mobility in such spaces.

In addition, many of the challenges and opportunities pertaining to mobility in the rural-urban fringe have been *more extensively* relational in nature. In the context of the local case study area, this was largely a function of the influences of other places outside of Warrington, namely Liverpool and Manchester, and the accompanying agendas of key stakeholders operating / located in such spaces. For example, Chapter Four highlighted that both the car-centric nature of Birchwood and capacity pressures on public transport at both Omega and Birchwood were largely regarded as being shaped through commuting pressures from/to surrounding city-regions. Hence this point illustrates how local actors who govern mobility in the rural-urban fringe can inherit challenges and pressures from elsewhere.

Conversely, Chapter Six also outlined those relational influences on mobility in the fringe were also connected to wider sub-regional and regional economic strategies – thus economic flows of goods and services as much as the flows of people. The presence of strategic motorways and railway services were viewed, in many ways, as formulating the 'economic spine' of Warrington, much of which subsequently coalesced at the rural-urban fringe. However, this also shows how decisions to locate particular industries or types of economic activity in the rural-urban fringe can be driven through active decision making by those who govern the rural-urban fringe and who seek to harness the relational mobility potential of such spaces. Critically, in the context of the case study area, it was also identified that subject to planning permission, such development would continue in the

southerly edges of Warrington's fringe and reflective on an ongoing mobility-centric crafting of rural-urban fringe space.

In summary, the findings exemplify the need to think far more relationally when considering mobility in the rural-urban fringe, exemplifying how both local and extra-local influences and pressures can shape how mobility in such spaces is governed. Similarly, harnessing the potential of mobility can be a key economic development strategy for such spaces.

Thus, in answering Objective 2, *mobility remains a paradoxical function of such spaces - whereby there can be a clear dependency on mobility in order to craft specific types of fringe landscapes, but that this crafting also serves to reinforce the inherent challenges of mobility that exist.*

7.4. Situating the challenges and opportunities of governing mobility in the rural-urban fringe in a decentralised governance context:

The third objective of the PhD was *to explore how wider state restructuring has positively or negatively impacted the capacity for key stakeholders to address the opportunities and challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe.* In this respect, the thesis highlighted **that**

the ways in which central government, as a key metagovernor, privileges organisations at different scales with differential degrees of power and funding shapes the capacity for decision-making regarding mobility in the rural-urban fringe.

The findings in Chapter Five and Chapter Six help to synthesise our understandings of the importance of 'metagovernance' in contributing to local challenges of governing mobility in the fringe, but also how this can lead to entrepreneurial ways of thinking and working to overcome such challenges at a local level. Senior officers in Warrington Borough Council frequently identified how they lacked adequate powers and financial resources from central government in order to engage with challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe. As a result, they were trapped in a 'lobbying and bidding' approach. It was clear that the bidding approach in particular required extensive preparation time and that high levels of competition for funding led to an often-disappointing result in terms of being able to address challenges of mobility in different fringe spaces. Furthermore, the rural-urban fringe was seldom seen as a specific 'object of governance' per se for such 'metagovernors', despite clearly being important to officers in Warrington Borough Council and the delivery of their own objectives. In particular, this was accentuated through the increasing specificities which frame and control funding pots from central government and how and where funding from successful bidding processes could be spent. Thus, through a focus on attempts to govern mobility territorially in the rural-urban fringe, it initially appears that localism is indeed an illusion of power (Gherhes et al., 2020).

The position for Warrington - as a case study area - and its fringe spaces can be contrasted

with the ways in which successive national governments have directly privileged city-regions and associated governance structures such as Combined Authorities (Harrison, 2012). In an attempt develop understandings of the impacts of city-regionalism beyond an explicit focus on city regions, this PhD has evidently taken an alternative approach looking at the experiences of those who govern mobility within the 'in-between spaces of city-regionalism' (Dembski, 2015), but relative to how relational and shared mobility infrastructures and services are collaboratively governed in a modern context. This has revealed a number of important findings.

First, an important organisation within the context of this thesis has been Transport for the North, an organisation seeking to improve the quality, capacity and relative speed of (predominantly) rail services between city-regions in the North in order to trigger an agglomerative effect (Lee, 2017). Importantly, such infrastructures act as the 'economic spine' of Warrington and which come together at the rural-urban fringe. Indeed, the workings of Transport for the North reflect a pan-Northern style approach to "develop a transport strategy for the North and to represent the region to government as a kind of 'single voice'" (MacKinnon, 2020, p. 11). Thus, Transport for the North self-described themselves as objectively working from a 'holistic' and 'grassroots' non-geographically driven perspective (see Chapter Five) – despite their agglomerative remit.

However, this was challenged by senior officers in Warrington Borough Council, as well as those from the Cheshire-Warrington LEP. Indeed, the thesis has shown how the interjection of the state as a metagovernor has not only prevented Transport for the North from

evolving beyond a largely advisory capacity (MacKinnon, 2020), but importantly - in how it strategically and spatially privileges mayoral combined authorities - creates a significant power vacuum (in the absence of territorial fixes to proposed mobility solutions) along these shared transport infrastructures. Indeed, the thesis has shown how there are evident conflicts as to which mobility solutions would work best for Warrington (allowing it to potentially address challenges of mobility in its fringe spaces therein) and which would work best for surrounding city-regions. Yet, given the economic agglomerative narrative embedded by the state and shaping the activity of Transport for the North, Warrington Borough Council felt they lacked the capacity to steer decision making and to compete with surrounding city-regions on an equal footing. Therefore, in relation to Objective 3, this thesis provides an important contribution in two key ways. First, it reaffirms MacKinnon's (2020) notion that the Northern Powerhouse (and Transport for the North therein) is a 'state-spatial' strategy and illustrating how the metagovernance strategies of the state, through who it privileges, can be detrimental for those 'left behind', such as Warrington. Second, it shows how under current metagovernance strategies by central government, local officers in the 'in-between spaces of city-regionalism' often struggle to engage with and shape collaborative networks which help to harness the relational mobility potential of the rural-urban fringe as well as addressing key challenges.

In contrast, this PhD has also identified that government-led restructuring has also **created structures at the subregional level, namely Local Enterprise Partnerships, which can support the ambitions of local partners in their attempts to govern mobility in the rural-urban fringe and to take advantage of the opportunities of such spaces.** The

metagovernance literature typically takes a negative stance on governance restructuring in England, often outlining the key barriers or errors which metagovernors make (Gjaltema et al., 2020). Whilst acknowledging such challenges in the PhD - especially in terms of the allocation of funding and resources to other actors beyond the 'in-between spaces of city regionalism', the thesis has also suggested that the Cheshire-Warrington LEP has acted as a positive metagovernor of sorts. Gherhes et al (2020) suggest that there is a "rhetoric-reality" gap between the local and subregional, whereby "the scope and focus of enterprise policy at the LEP level contrast with heterogeneous local realities" (p. 1020). Given the findings of this research, it is suggested that this is perhaps an oversimplification of such relationships. The Cheshire-Warrington LEP has been argued (by officers in Warrington) to have been 'transformational' and in a number of instances has worked positively with Warrington Borough Council on meeting their objectives for improving mobility in the rural-urban fringe, particularly in encouraging improvements to infrastructure which helped deal with the extensive relational pressures of mobility (and which simultaneously helped to address its own sub-regional economic growth priorities). Hence the research in the thesis highlights the need to explore in detail the quality of local relationships vertically (Coulson and Ferrario, 2007) in terms of metagovernance relations.

Indeed, the literature has typically framed the creation of LEPs as a way in which the state has "exerted arms-length influence over the devolved regions through curating (with a significant degree of coercion) the composition of these reconfigured networks of local governance so that they include… Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs)" in an effort to "constrain the actions of the long-mistrusted local authorities" (Bailey and Wood, 2017, p

4). But what is clear from this research is that where ambitions align, LEPs can be key partners in helping local actors to deliver their own agendas. This reframes the implications of this form of metagovernance from one of conflict – the idea that "LEPs have been forcefully inserted into the renewed local governance structures by central government" to one of collaboration, whereby LEPs help empower local actors. In Warrington, this was particularly the case due to a perceived lack of central government's support over time. It was also identified that this was - at least in part - dependent on the underlying entrepreneurial ethos of officers in Warrington Borough Council, and which facilitated mutual LEP priorities. Nonetheless, the work highlights the need to focus on the local, contextual dynamics which exist vertically between local and sub-regional actors when discussing the implications of the metagovernance strategies of the state.

Therefore, as Broadhurst et al. (2020) argue "more work is needed to understand the complexities involved" in place-based research, suggesting that more "research into the dynamics within multi-actor collaborations help further our understanding of why some partnerships are more successful than others" (p. 556). In turn, what has been reflected in this study is a mutual understanding of the need to focus on addressing relational challenges of mobility in the rural-urban fringe between organisations working at different vertical scales, which thus far, has been lacking from the literature. In turn, to some degree, we see both organisations "embodying the hegemonic conception of what constitutes 'Good Governance'" around a highly entrepreneurial ethos (Sorenson and Torfing, 2009, p. 245) and thus, is evidence as to "how policy actors seek to communicate, debate, and work together more effectively… across scales" (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2009, p. 619)

using entrepreneurial institutions. Thus, scalar divisions, which are compounded by different governance remits and perspectives, do not necessarily propagate conflict as is widely suggested in both the metagovernance and rural-urban fringe literatures. Rather, such conflict can be overcome to achieve mutual aims.

In turn, the thesis has similarly **outlined the ways in which central government's increased promotion of entrepreneurialism can encourage alternative approaches to governing mobility at the local level. In this respect, the PhD has reflected upon the fact that outside of wider organisational restructuring, there has also been an intensification of entrepreneurialism in the institutional metagovernance strategies of the state**, whereby "entrepreneurship's role as an engine of economic development" in 'new localism' initiatives are increasingly evident (Gherhes et al., 2020, p. 1020). Yet, for many, such incentives lack the appropriate mechanisms for change and "recent evidence casts doubt on the promises of the new localism" (Ibid, p. 1020). In this respect, the thesis has also criticised this idea by suggesting that whilst such state-centric approaches are undeniably important, they tend to generalise the extent to which local officers engage with, and thus govern by, entrepreneurial strategies.

Thus, what can be discerned in relation to objective 3 is that *state restructuring and processes of metagovernance have created new organisations(and power structures), at the subregional and regional level, which in the context of Warrington as an 'in-between space' of city-regionalism, have both positively and negatively shaped the capacities for officers to engage in decision making for governing mobility in the rural-urban fringe.*

7.5. Emphasising the importance of the adaptive capacity of local officers to governance restructuring:

In relation to the fourth objective of this thesis -*To critically examine the types of formal and informal responses utilised by key stakeholders in addressing challenges and developing opportunities for governing and utilising mobility in the rural-urban fringe*– the thesis has **emphasised the need to consider how key stakeholders in the in-between spaces of city-regionalism opportunistically and entrepreneurially respond to governance inequalities by selectively crafting specific types of fringe spaces in order to draw growth from adjoining city-regions.** Thus, Chapter Five discussed how governing mobility in the rural-urban fringe has become increasingly complex. Yet, in the face of austerity and a deprivileging of such spaces relative to city-regions officers from Warrington Borough Council have sought to 'double down' on entrepreneurialism, highlighting how such officers have become "reflexive and strategic" (Hay, 2002, p.9). This is argued to have had significant implications for how mobility is governed in the rural-urban fringe. Crucially, Chapter Six focuses on how Warrington Borough Council have been highly 'selective' in the ways in which they have governed the rural-urban fringe more broadly. This thesis has highlighted that this entrepreneurial selectivity was visible in two forms in Warrington – i) in the selective entrepreneurial economic crafting of fringe spaces; and ii) in facilitating a 'thickness' (with the LEP) focused entrepreneurial governance.

With regards to the former, Chapter Four outlined how there was a distinctive spatial focus based on governing differential mobility challenges in the rural-urban fringe, which was

highly contrary to the general idea that rural-urban fringe spaces are 'neglected' (Gallent, 2006). Chapter Six then contextualised such findings, illustrating how officers from Warrington Borough Council sought to craft the 'Warrington brand', which was founded upon the proximal location of the rural-urban fringe to adjoining city-regions and the inherent mobility potential of such spaces. This brand had been developed in two contrasting ways - based upon how mobility in the rural-urban fringe is differentiated. First, officers in Warrington Borough Council had purchased Birchwood Park on the basis of it being linked to key science corridors being fostered nearby by the Manchester Combined Authority, thus linking Warrington into a key, 'high end' spatial imaginary of a wider economic space deemed amenable to governance practices. Thus, a key focus was about fostering a two-way commuting flow. Second, officers from Warrington Borough Council had also deliberately crafted manufacturing and logistics facilities in relation to the Omega side in Warrington's fringe, and which sought to capitalise upon developments in the Liverpool City Region by Peel Holdings and the enhancement of Liverpool port. Thus, rather than working on the "assumption that the benefits of investment in (major) city centres would somehow filter out to surrounding districts and towns" (McKinnon, 2020, p. 14), officers in Warrington have sought to capture this benefit themselves through utilising and governing mobility in an entrepreneurial way.

In terms of the latter point on 'thickness', Chapter Five illustrated how Warrington Borough Council lacked sufficient resources to achieve many of their aims. Hence, in Chapter Six, we learned how despite some tensions, Warrington Borough Council had developed a close working relationship formed with the Cheshire-Warrington LEP. Moreover, through

promoting both Birchwood and Omega as enterprise zones, Warrington Borough Council anchored the interest of the LEP and in so doing this helped to secure resources to address some mobility infrastructure challenges in its fringe spaces. In turn, this has helped to create a form of institutional thickness vertically. Furthermore, whilst central government can "constrain local agency and reduce the effectiveness of enterprise policy-making at the local level" (Gheres et al., 2020, p. 1020), this has led both the local authority and the LEP to consider other required collaborations to create a capacity to act at a more local level. This returns us to the focus on Transport for the North.

Thus, the PhD also **outlines how entrepreneurial modes of governance - in relation to fringe space and mobility issues - being employed in Warrington are also a political tool, designed to reinforce the importance of Warrington within the Manchester-Warrington-Liverpool agglomeration narrative and increasing the likelihood of being included within (the unequally distributed power network and activities of) collaborative, pan-regional governance organisations.**

Whilst Chapter Five paints a rather bleak picture as to the capacity for Warrington Borough Council to engage with the Northern Powerhouse Transport for the North, the selective entrepreneurial strategies they have employed to brand Warrington (through the mobility potential of its fringe space) have also helped to embed the importance of Warrington as an interconnected place with both Manchester and Liverpool city-regions. The Northern Powerhouse (and thus Transport for the North) has been depicted as an 'uneven' 'state-spatial strategy' (MacKinnon, 2020), akin to devolution (Ibid). Consequently, through

mobilising the Cheshire-Warrington LEP to invest in mobility infrastructures in its rural-urban fringe, Warrington has sought to enhance its potential for engagement in the collaborative networks developed under the auspices of Transport for the North. The interconnectivities being fostered are therefore reflective of attempts to draw out the potential of a 'new localism' and to navigate past barriers of the state in its metagovernance strategy. Whilst this was not initially expected to be captured in this thesis, it is a critical finding. It reflects how the rural-urban fringe can become a local state project, being shaped, altered, marketed and governed in specific ways, and which - in the context of the case study area - has sought to emphasise the economic interdependence of Warrington with surrounding, more powerful combined authorities. In this sense, mobility in the rural-urban fringe of Warrington has concurrently become a political tool; this again is in contrast to ideologies of rural-urban fringe spaces as being 'neglected' (Gallent, 2006) and showing how the rural-urban fringe can be embedded into localised attempts to 'level up'.

Thus, in sum - and in answering Objective 4, an *absence of public funding to address the challenges of mobility in its fringe spaces has informed attempts by Warrington Borough Council to utilise the mobility-potential of the rural-urban fringe as a strategy for (a) local economic growth and (b) to capture investment from wider initiatives and collaborations.*

Overall, the thesis has made the following key contributions:

- The thesis has demonstrated that the incumbent local authority are the main officers who govern mobility in the rural-urban fringe. However, the links such officers have with other key public and private officers at a variety of vertical scales, as determined and shaped by central government, means that others operating at wider spatial scales also have significant influence as to how mobility in the fringe is governed. This is largely a function of the relational nature of mobility and how mobility infrastructures often coalesce at the rural-urban fringe.

- The thesis has reaffirmed how mobility is a paradoxical within the rural-urban fringe - whereby there can be a clear dependency on mobility in order to craft specific types of fringe landscapes, but that this crafting also serves to reinforce the inherent challenges of mobility that exist.

- The thesis has outlined how state restructuring and processes of metagovernance have created new organisations (and power structures), at the subregional and regional level, which in the context of Warrington as an 'in-between space' of city-regionalism, has both positively and negatively shaped the capacities for officers at the local to engage in decision making for governing mobility in the rural-urban fringe.

- The thesis has shown how the spatial selectivity of the state and the absence of public funding to address the challenges of mobility within fringe spaces can inform the entrepreneurial strategies used by actors within the 'in-between spaces of city-regionalism'. This is shown by Warrington Borough Council and how they utilise the

mobility-potential of the rural-urban fringe as a strategy for (a) local economic growth and (b) to capture investment from wider initiatives and collaborations.

Overall, these findings present critical new foundations for understanding the characteristics of the rural-urban fringe – including the importance of mobility within such spaces- as well as the need for a more pluralistic, multi-level metagovernance perspective which helps to outline causes of decision-making for mobility in such spaces. This lens, it is argued, is a vital new step in better understanding the variable nature of mobility in the rural-urban fringe.

7.6. Limitations of the thesis:

It was stated at the beginning of the thesis that this PhD was embarking on a difficult journey. Indeed, the thesis represents the first step in not only transpiring past a binary rural-urban conceptualisation of fringe spaces, which are increasingly being called for (Scott, 2019a) towards one that recognises the importance of mobility. In addition, the thesis has also attempted to illustrate how mobility is governed in line with wider strategies of state restructuring. Arguably, there was a limited base through which to begin to develop such explanations but with a diversity of choices in the theoretical and explanatory approaches to choose from. Whilst mobility had been widely mentioned as a crucial factor in the shaping and design of fringe spaces, there had seldom been any substantiation of the relative impacts of this for the rural-urban fringe. Similarly, there have been few attempts to incorporate understandings of the rural-urban fringe into modern

governance arguments, aside from some initial work from Woods and Heley (2018) on rural-urban interrelations and their respective attempts to links this into modern democratic arguments.

Ultimately, this led to the decision to focus on a single case – one which was believed to be as representative as possible. Yet, it has become increasingly clear as the writing of the results progressed that this case became further and further driven by arguments which were founded in the need for viewing the rural-urban fringe as contextually dependent – linked fundamentally to the perspectives, actions and relationships of those that govern such spaces, but also to the economic and social landscape that the fringe is located in. In turn, Warrington represents a very specific type of rural-urban fringe – one perhaps further distorted by its position within two major city-regions and positioned squarely in the agglomerative narratives pushed by the UK Government. In this regard, on the one hand the research could be seen as a very specific example of governance strategies for mobility in the rural-urban fringe. Yet, on the other hand, the research can also be viewed as an example of how the establishment of a multi polycentric urban region also creates much wider capacities and governance opportunities for governing the rural-urban fringe - and involving a whole range of stakeholders. However, further research is required on the governance of mobility in other types of fringe spaces, and which may be shaped by iterations of politics, culture and territory, including differing institutional, geographical and socio-economic contexts, in order to fully appreciate this.

Second, the PhD has perhaps made some brave decisions regarding a focus on mobility in the rural-urban fringe. However, it does not aim to reduce the significance of the rural and urban in such spaces and indeed recognises the importance of such influences on fringe spaces and the need to bring rural-urban dynamics back into considerations of the fringe and mobility therein. This should also be considered further in future research.

Finally, it would also be a disservice to myself to not mention the implications the Covid-19 pandemic had on this research. A fourth research phase was initially planned to involve a further set of follow-up interviews with officers and members from Warrington Borough Council and central government in order to understand their perspectives on the thoughts of wider (sub-regional and regional) stakeholders, and especially in order to interrogate the entrepreneurial crafting practices outlined in Chapter Six. However, this proved to be impossible as the pandemic took hold, but also offers the potential to be considered in follow-on research. Yet, this also offers an avenue for future, complementary research.

7.7. Future studies - The relational rural-urban fringe – from discrete territories to soft spaces:

Despite the limitations described in the previous section, this thesis concludes by suggesting that it might be more apt to stop defining the rural-urban fringe as a discrete territorial space influenced by the rural and urban (Gallent et al., 2006). In contrast we need

to develop a perspective which captures the mobility-driven, relational nature of the rural-urban fringe, including its interconnectivities with other spaces and a variety of vertical actors. Indeed, this thesis has outlined how the rural-urban fringe itself is a product of a range of different agendas, shaped by specific, locally focused but relationally driven, entrepreneurial governance strategies centred around mobility. Indeed, this suggests a need to frame rural-urban fringe spaces as 'soft spaces' in future research – "informal or semiformal, non-statutory spatialities of planning with associations and relations stretching both across formally established boundaries and scalar levels of planning and across previously entrenched sectoral divides" (Metzger and Schmitt, 2012, p. 265-266). Such a perspective would help to move away from viewing the fringe as an abstract spatial container and to alternatively see it as a distinctive soft space - complex and hybrid in nature, interconnected and shaped territorially and relationally by a range of horizontal and vertical influences and involving a complex set of governance actors.

A soft space perspective on the fringe would remove the incessant need to draw arbitrary boundaries as to where such spaces exist, despite largely being seen as a pointless endeavour (Gallent and Andersson, 2007). In particular, Chapter Three outlined the difficulties in applying such limiting, discrete definitions to the fringe. Instead, a more prominent approach has been to focus on the types of industries and economic activities found in such spaces as well as the interconnections of rural, urban and mobility infrastructures to locate such spaces (Gallent et al., 2006). In turn, this has invoked the need to focus on how such spaces are planned and governed but respecting that they are shaped by decision making processes influenced from a range of vertical scales and

horizontal interconnectivities. Thus, Allmendinger and Haughton's (2009) arguments in relation to planning and the development of a soft space perspective also offer considerable opportunities for studying fringe spaces in a similar way: that "if (planning) is to reflect the more complex relational world of associational relationships which stretch across a range of geographies, (it)also needs to operate through other spaces" (p. 619). Thus, the same logic should be applied to the rural-urban fringe, as it would encourage an investigation of the relative influences of associational relationships shaping the fringe and thus help to incentivise a recognition of the pluralistic nature of such spaces (also see below for further elaboration).

Second, not only would recognising the rural-urban fringe as a soft space therefore encourage greater engagement with the relational characteristics of the fringe, but it would also therefore encourage an acknowledgement of the 'fuzzy boundaries' of such spaces (Haughton and Almendinger, 2009). Indeed, the fringe can be 'fuzzy' due to natural topography (which indeed is used to define the extent of the rural-urban fringe – see Gallent, 2006), as well as due to 'identity politics', owning to the fact that some people may reside 'ephemerally' in the rural-urban fringe but not feel a stringent sense of belonging (Shoard, 2002). Similarly, with regards to the transitional nature of such spaces, the rural-urban fringe characteristically "exhibit(s) more hybrid or evolutionary qualities" (Haughton et al., 2009, p. 218) –which in this thesis have been shown to be in part driven by the mobility potential of such spaces. Indeed, there is widespread recognition that soft spaces "may 'harden' as a result of certain 'performative' processes" (Zimmerbauer and Passi, 2019, p. 771), which may go a considerable distance to explain the differential and

transitional nature of fringe spaces, and as exemplified in the thesis when considering the differences between Omega and Birchwood. Indeed, Birchwood was seen as having reached its 'performative' potential, linked explicitly into wider spatial imaginaries. For Omega, such processes were continuing to unfold.

However, a soft space perspective on fringe space does not necessarily infer that statutory governance boundaries should not be considered. Rather, a focus on the rural-urban fringe as a soft space acknowledges that such spaces "exist both beyond and in parallel to the statutory scales of government, often involving the creation of a new territorial entity which sits alongside and potentially challenges existing territorial arrangements" (Ibid, p. 218). Thus, this PhD has articulated how the rural-urban fringe is confined to the jurisdictional remit of the local authority, but that the practices and strategies used to govern such spaces are seldom "if ever contained within a particular set of boundaries" (Haughton et al., 2009, p. 218). Indeed, the thesis illustrated how key objects of governance, such as mobility were being used by organisations at different scales – predominantly local and subregional - to craft specific types of fringe space, and which compliments the plurality and actor-centric development of such spaces. Hence a soft space understanding of the fringe would correlate with wider understandings of "old, well-established (planning) spaces with relatively hard administrative borders becom(ing) redefined and treated in planning practice as soft entities with fuzzier or more porous borders" (Zimmerbauer and Passi, 2019, p. 771).

Third, as shown through this thesis, soft spaces require an understanding of the 'associational relationships' (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2009, p. 619) that comprise and create rural-urban fringe soft spaces. Indeed, the case of the Omega site in one part of Warrington's fringe space is a particularly apt justification here. Haughton et al., (2009) note that "where there is a functional spatial justification for the emergence of a new soft space governance formation the relation between the higher scale soft space and lower scale statutory spaces of planning is informative: a subregional plan has no statutory status but can be prepared cooperatively between authorities to provide a strategic, multisectoral vision that informs and coordinates statutory plans" (219). Hence such arguments can also be applied to the rural-urban fringe when considering how such forces converge at the local scale. For example, the development of the Omega site was a collaborative venture between Warrington Borough Council (as the statutory planners) and the Cheshire-Warrington LEP as a subregional body with the resource to actualise (and concretise) this emergent soft space. In turn, this again draws attention to the micro-politics of crafting and governing the rural-urban fringe.

Furthermore, the thesis exemplifies how local actors seek to improve mobility in the rural-urban fringe through navigating state-driven inequalities by creating their own soft spaces. Metagovernance is once again of relevance here, because "in the UK at least, [soft space] initiatives were often seen as imposed and top down, (however) since the election of Conservative-led governments in 2010 there has been a move towards open calls from central government, inviting local actors to create their own new governance spaces, rather than predetermine what these should be" (Hincks et al., 2017, p. 644). Consequently, in

the thesis we have illustrated how the strategic and spatial privileging of other actors and spaces (such as city-regions) has served to incentivise the development (in different ways) of locally contingent soft 'rural-urban fringe' spaces. Thus, it is perhaps apt to refer to such spaces as 'soft rural-urban fringe spaces' or 'soft fringe spaces' – depending on how convinced we are of the need to downplay the rural-urban argument.

Nevertheless, it is suggested that the rural-urban dichotomy does have an important role to play in further research. In understanding how soft fringe spaces are crafted - for example, through harnessing the mobility potential of such spaces as outlined in this thesis – it would then be necessary to consider how rural-urban tensions might hinder or enable such soft space imaginaries to be enacted. Thus, moving beyond a focus on the importance of economic growth, sustainability and politics rural-urban interactions may also serve to determine how easy or difficult, it is to enact specific visions for the rural-urban fringe as a particular type of soft space. In so doing, framing rural-urban fringe spaces as soft spaces may also help to better situate the rural-urban fringe in relevant (rural or urban) governance literature and provide a platform from which to better interrogate such 'positive opportunity spaces' (Scott et al., 2013) and to further unlock their respective potential.

What does this mean for the rural-urban fringe in the future? The future is unclear and the previous 'ebb and flow' of interest in such spaces is not reassuring. However, it is my hope that this PhD, as a sum of its parts and critically with regards to this final discussion, might in some capacity provide the key to a renewed, enlightened and progressive stance on the

rural-urban fringe. The pressures currently facing these spaces will continue to mount. Without imaginative and exploratory thinking, such spaces will remain in the shadows of their urban and rural counterparts. I, for one, would like to think this is the start of a new approach to enhancing and appreciating the positive opportunities such spaces have and the critical role they might play in our future.

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Appendices:

Ethical Opinion letter:

Keele
U N I V E R S I T Y

18th June 2019

Dear Adam,

Project Title:	Mobility and exclusion in the rural-urban fringe
REC Project Reference:	NSFI-0006 | NS-190014
Type of Application	Initial application

Keele University's Faculty of Natural Sciences Non-psychology Research Ethics Committee reviewed the above application.

Favourable Ethical opinion
The members of the Committee gave a favourable ethical opinion of the above research on the basis described in the application form, protocol and supporting documentation.

Reporting requirements
The University's standard operating procedures give detailed guidance on reporting requirements for studies with a favourable opinion including:
- Notifying substantial amendments
- Notifying issues which may have an impact upon ethical opinion of the study
- Progress reports
- Notifying the end of the study

Approved documents
The documents reviewed and approved are:

Document	Version	Date
Application form	2	18.06.19
CV	1	18.06.19
Interview questions	1	18.06.19
Interview forms	2	18.06.19

Protocol	1	18.06.19

Yours sincerely,

Dr Sandra Woolley Committee Chair