



**RTPI**

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# The location of development

Mapping planning permissions for housing in two North West city-regions



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# 1. Introduction

In Spring 2016, the RTPI and GVA published the overarching results of a major study into the location of recent planning permissions in twelve city-regions across England. This research provided much-needed evidence on spatial patterns of housing growth across cities, towns and rural areas, and sought to widen the debate around how we monitor the effectiveness of the planning system.

This report for the RTPI North West region presents full range of data, mapping and analysis for the city-regions of Warrington and Blackburn. These are complemented with notes from a roundtable discussion where RTPI members and other stakeholders from the North West discussed the research methodology and commented on the findings of the analysis.

## Why was this research commissioned?

There is a critical need for new housing in England, with studies showing a need for between 220,000 and 300,000 additional houses per year<sup>1,2</sup>. While demand is greatest in London and the South East, all regions are likely to need significant additional housing<sup>3</sup>.

Increasing the supply of housing is a national political priority, and one that exerts a strong influence on the shape of English planning policy<sup>4</sup>. In 2012 the NPPF introduced the presumption in favour of sustainable development, and required Local Plans to meet their own objectively assessed housing need by identifying a minimum five-year supply of land. The Government has more recently implemented further changes including measures to speed up the preparation of Local Plans, grant 'permission in principle' to housing on brownfield sites, and exempt certain types of development from making financial contributions to infrastructure provision.

Statistics are regularly published on the number of planning permissions granted and housing units completed. These are increasingly being used to debate the effectiveness and efficiency of the planning system. However these debates must not rest on quantity alone – spatial qualities of location and scale are of equal importance.

## Location in planning policy

In England, planning and containment policies are regarded as having been generally successful in achieving relatively compact settlement patterns and avoiding sprawl<sup>5</sup>. The current NPPF remains clear on the importance of location to sustainability, and states that "...sufficient land of the right type is available in the **right places**"<sup>6</sup> [emphasis added]. These are described as places which support growth, innovation and the efficient provision of infrastructure, are accessible to a range of local services, encourage the use of public transport, walking and cycling, and help

tackle climate change<sup>7</sup>. Local Planning Authorities are required to consider these sustainability criteria when allocating sites within a Local Plan.

## A lack of spatial analysis

While there is good evidence on the quantity of planning permissions being granted for housing, there is a lack of consistent monitoring and analysis on the location and scale of new developments. For example, there is no way of telling whether a significant proportion of new housing in England is:

- Located in places which are far from jobs and services, and accessible only by car
- Spread across multiple small sites which are harder to provide with infrastructure

This makes it hard to evaluate whether changes to planning policy are impacting on the aggregate location and scale of new development. This concern was raised in a 2014 report from the CLG Select Committee, which noted that efforts to assess the performance of the NPPF were hindered by "...an absence of reliable, up-to-date data", which made it difficult to determine "...how successful the Government's policies have been and how they may need to change"<sup>8</sup>

In response to these concerns, the RTPI commissioned GVA to conduct an exploratory study into the location and scale of recent planning permissions in twelve English city-regions. It looked at their distribution across urban, peripheral and rural areas, and analysed the relationship to major employment clusters and railway stations.

## What were the initial findings?

The study mapped the location of planning permissions granted for schemes of 50 or more housing units, between 2012 and 2015, across the

twelve English city-regions. It covered **704 major housing schemes**, which represented planning permission for **over 165,000 units**.

The spatial analysis found that:

- Almost 75% of the units granted planning permission were located within 10km of a major employment cluster
- Almost 13% were located within walking distance of a railway, light rail or metro station
- 50% were being delivered on very large schemes of 450 units and above
- 46% were located within an existing built-up area

## Adding local expert opinion

The overarching report recognised that the spatial dimensions of sustainability are complex, and could not be neatly captured by any single method of analysis. It recommended that the research be viewed as a stepping stone towards a broader and more informed debate on the effectiveness of planning policy, and the spatial dimensions of growth in England.

This report represents a further step in this direction, presenting the mapping and analysis for the North West with the notes from a roundtable discussion held in Manchester during October 2016. At this roundtable, planning professionals from the two city-regions discussed the validity of the research findings, and the factors which influence the location of development in their area. These expert opinions help to set the broad findings of the overarching report within a local context.

The green text boxes in this report contain the notes of the roundtable discussion. A list of roundtable delegates is provided on page 31.

## 2. Methodology

This section describes how the two city-regions were selected and defined, and the approach to mapping planning permissions, major employment clusters and railway stations. It then explains how the planning permissions were analysed based on location and scale.

### Selecting the city-regions

The two city-regions analysed in this report were selected in order to provide a balance of different settlement patterns from across the North West region. Each recorded positive employment growth on the Centre for Cities index of towns and cities<sup>9</sup>.

### Defining the city-region boundaries

The city-region is a useful scale at which to consider the relationship between a city and surrounding areas. While there is no fixed methodology for defining a city-region, there are a number of terms which help to understand the concept:

**Primary Urban Area (PUA):** A PUA is a city level-definition first used in Department for Communities and Local Government's "State of the Cities Report". It refers to the continuous built-up area of a town/city with a population over 125,000, and can include multiple local authorities<sup>10</sup>.

**Strategic Housing Market Assessment Area (SHMA):** These draw on a range of housing market indicators to define a relevant Housing Market Area (HMA), including migration patterns, house moves, labour flows and market performance/trends. They offer an understanding of sub-regional housing markets and are used to predict the levels and mix of future housing provision.

**Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) boundaries:** LEPs are voluntary partnerships between local authorities and businesses set up in 2011. Their geographical remit tends to include a wide range

of local authorities, based on a combination of economic and political factors<sup>11</sup>.

**Travel to Work Areas (TTWAs):** These are areas with a working population of at least 3,500, within which at least 75% of the resident workforce work in the area, and at least 75% of the people who work in the area also live in the area. They are helpful in defining a wider economic geography based on labour markets.

PUAs are based on the physical built up form of a given area, and do not necessarily capture the complex dynamics of wider job and labour market movements. SHMA boundaries capture the functional relationship between employment, transport, leisure and retail offer of the PUA, and a much wider surrounding area.

However TTWAs represent commuting patterns (or travel to work flows) between local authorities, and this directly captures the link between households (origin) and employment (destination). TTWAs were therefore selected to define the city-region boundaries.

To identify meaningful flows of inward commuting, this methodology defines a city-region as including any local authority in which 3.5% or more its employed resident population travel into the main city for employment. The 3.5% threshold was chosen as it displays a significant overlap with PUA and SHMA boundaries, and highlights the surrounding local authorities which have a functional economic relationship with the main city (see Table 1).

This provides a consistent approach for data collection and analysis, although the city-region boundaries presented in this report will differ from existing political or administrative city-region boundaries and should not be interpreted as such.

**Table 1: City-regions as defined by local authorities within the 3.5% commuting threshold**

City-region	Local authorities
Warrington	Warrington, Wigan, St Helens, Halton, Cheshire West & Chester
Blackburn	Blackburn with Darwen, Ribble Valley, Hyndburn, Burnley

### Mapping the location of recent planning permissions, major employment clusters and rail stations

For each city-region, data was collected on:

- The location and scale of planning permissions granted for housing schemes of over 50 units between 1 January 2012 and 18 September 2015. Each scheme was then categorised based on size and mapped using GIS.
- Significant employment clusters, defined as Middle Layer Super Output Areas\* (MSOAs) with 10,000 jobs and over.
- Areas of specialist sector job growth, defined as MSOAs with higher than average concentrations of employment in the knowledge economy and manufacturing sectors
- Rail stations including all forms of rail transport, such as inter-city rail, light-rail, metro and tram

Planning permission data was sourced from EGi, the Estates Gazette database. It is a live data source, and the data was extracted at a given point in time.

The data comprises outline planning permissions, permissions, and reserved matter applications. It should be noted that:

- Duplication of data was avoided. For example if there was more than one reserved matter application for the same phase of a development, then it was counted as a single planning permission.
- If a development had an outline planning permission and a reserved matter application between 2012 and 2015, then only the outline planning was considered to avoid duplication of numbers.
- The data does not include appeal information.

### Measuring the proximity of planning permissions to major employment clusters and rail stations

The distance was then calculated between each scheme and the nearest major employment cluster and railway station. This distance was calculated as a straight line (as the crow flies), and each scheme was ranked according to the following categories:

<b>Distance to major employment cluster</b>	<b>Distance to railway station</b>
Under 10km	Under 800m
10 to 20km	800m to 2km
Over 20km	Over 2km

The analysis also recorded the number of schemes located within a MSOAs with a specialism in the knowledge economy or manufacturing sectors.

### **Categorising the location of planning permissions**

Using GIS mapping, each scheme was categorised based on its location within either:

- The existing built-up areas
- Land designated as green belt, including previously developed sites in the green belt
- Other locations, including those on the edge of built-up areas, those beyond the green belt, and those in rural locations

### **Measuring the scale of planning permissions by the number of housing units**

Each scheme was also categorised by the number of housing units that it represents, using the following nine categories:

- 50-99 units
- 100-149 units
- 150-199 units
- 200-249 units
- 250-299 units
- 300-349 units
- 350-399 units
- 400-449 units
- 450+ units

\* Super output areas (SOAs) were designed to improve the reporting of small area statistics and are built up from groups of output areas (OA). MSOAs are geography with minimum population of 5,000 and maximum of 15,000.

# 3. Explaining the analysis

The metrics used in this report present several ways to explore the relationship between housing, jobs and infrastructure. This helps to consider methods of analysis that might support strategic planning at a city-region level and the effective monitoring of planning policy. It should be noted that the analysis in this report does not represent a judgment on the overall sustainability of a site or the effectiveness of planning across a city-region - the spatial dimensions of sustainability are complex, and issues of location and scale are influenced by factors beyond the planning system.

This section describes why each method of analysis was chosen, and provides caveats on how results should be interpreted.

## Measuring proximity to major employment clusters

A central aim of the government's economic development policy is to devolve powers and freedoms to the city-region level, creating a more flexible and decentralised system in which cities drive economic growth<sup>12</sup>. Through the mechanisms of growth, city and devolution deals, local authorities are now working collaboratively across borders and sectors to develop ambitious economic development strategies.

The success of this approach depends on the ability of city-regions to maximise the effects of agglomeration: the benefits to productivity, innovation and economic growth achieved by the clustering and networking of knowledge-intensive industries in urban areas<sup>13</sup>. This can be achieved by coordinating economic development strategies with plans to improve connectivity and deliver associated housing growth at the city-region scale<sup>14</sup>. This is because major employment clusters attract commuters

from a wide geographical area - however with the exception of London, these commuting journeys are predominantly made by car<sup>15</sup>. With limited road capacity, fast-growing areas can suffer from problems of peak congestion, road pollution and strain on infrastructure<sup>16</sup>. These negative externalities can undermine agglomeration benefits if not addressed<sup>17</sup>.

Successful economies also create a demand for new housing, which needs to be located in places which are accessible by active and low-carbon public transport modes to a range of jobs and services. The coordination and distribution of sufficient new housing across the city-region is also critical to sustainable economic development, and avoiding the problems mentioned above<sup>18</sup>.

By measuring the proximity of each new housing scheme to the nearest major employment cluster, this analysis offers one way to explore this relationship between housing and jobs at the city-region scale.

For the purposes of this analysis, major employment clusters have been defined as those with 10,000 jobs or above. This threshold was selected to highlight areas of high employment density - those which are likely to influence commuting patterns in relation to new housing across a city-region.

However it is important to recognise that patterns of commuting are heavily influenced by the distribution of existing housing in relation to employment, and by rates of churn within housing and employment markets. Employment will also be distributed across a city-region at a much finer grain than shown in this analysis, with lower density employment sites shaping commuting patterns. It should also be recognised that commuting patterns are more complex than the traditional 'in-out' model suggested here<sup>19</sup>.

## Mapping the overlap between planning permissions and areas of specialist sector job growth

This research also considers the location of planning permissions in terms of their relation to areas of specialism in the knowledge economy and manufacturing sectors. This complements the measurement of proximity to major employment clusters by demonstrating areas of potential future growth, and showing how these correspond with the patterns of housing development across the city-region.

While manufacturing reflects more traditional job forms and has seen decline in the recent years, it remains a key source of employment and economic activity for a number of English towns and cities. Parts of the sector have also continued to strengthen, for example in 'value added' or 'advanced manufacturing' activities.

The knowledge economy has played a key role in the economic resurgence of city-regions in recent years, creating a more balanced

economy following reliance on the financial and business service sectors. The agglomerative nature of the knowledge economy has led to a proliferation of clusters, enterprise zones and innovation and business centres in the economic policy interventions of local visions, masterplans and economic development strategies.

For the purposes of this research, the knowledge economy is defined as comprising of the following sub-sectors<sup>20</sup>:

**Table 2: Knowledge economy sectors**

Sector	Sub-sector
Science	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biotech and pharmaceuticals</li> <li>• Medical</li> <li>• Life sciences</li> <li>• Clinical Science</li> <li>• Research and development</li> <li>• Some forms of advanced manufacturing</li> </ul>
Computer programming, consultancy and related activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Software</li> <li>• Computer games</li> <li>• Computer programming</li> <li>• Information Service</li> </ul>
Telecoms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Telecoms and communications</li> </ul>

The strength of these sectors was mapped in each city-region using Locational Quotient (LQ) analysis, which measures the industrial specialisation of a MSOA relative to the entire region. For example, an LQ of 1.0 in manufacturing means that the MSOA and the region are equally specialised in manufacturing, while an LQ of 1.8 means that the MSOA has a higher concentration in manufacturing than the regional average.

### Measuring proximity to rail stations

In measuring the distance between housing schemes and rail or metro stations, this research suggests one way to understand the potential for sustainable commuting in a city-region. While living near a station does not guarantee use for commuting or other travel purposes, this simple measurement of proximity implies access to a key mode of low-carbon public transport. At the time of publication, the government is proposing to amend national planning policy to increase development densities around commuter hubs, defined as a rail, tube or tram interchange<sup>21</sup>. Meanwhile several reports have proposed that land close to a railway station could be loosely considered as a 'sustainable' location<sup>22</sup>.

However it is important to note that this research does not consider proximity to dedicated bus or cycle routes, despite the important role that these play in enabling sustainable commuting patterns. However these are relatively flexible forms of public transport infrastructure which can more easily be adapted to connect with new developments.

### Measuring proximity based on straight line distances

The analysis measures the distance between schemes, jobs and rail stations as a straight line rather than actual travel distances. It was not possible to measure actual travel distances for research of this scale, as these are complex and dependent on a wide range of external factors such as traffic, route choices and mode of transport. They are also subject to change over time as new infrastructure and development is delivered.

The distance categories for proximity to employment are based on the assumption that 10km represents a 15 minute drive under average

conditions. The category for proximity to rail is based on the assumption that an 800m distance represents an 8 to 10 minute walk.

### Measuring the size of schemes by the number of housing units

Categorising planning permissions by the number of housing units they represent helps to explore the relationship between location, scale and the provision of infrastructure.

Within a city-region, a proliferation of small-scale developments in peripheral locations, such as villages or on the edges of towns and cities, might indicate that housing demand is being met through a shift towards a more sprawling or dispersed settlement pattern<sup>23</sup>. Such developments are generally more costly and less efficient to service with infrastructure when compared to higher density large-scale urban extensions or new settlements<sup>24</sup>. Conversely, a proliferation of small-scale developments in existing built-up areas might indicate a city-region where brownfield sites are playing a bigger role in meeting housing demand.

Regardless of location, careful planning is needed to prevent an accumulation of smaller schemes from gradually overwhelming local infrastructure capacity. Large-scale developments often provide a direct financial contribution to infrastructure and affordable housing provision through a Section 106 agreement, whereas an effective Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), coupled with an Infrastructure Delivery Plan, is needed to ensure that smaller developments make a sufficient contribution to infrastructure provision. For this reason, it is important to understand the general size distribution of planning permissions across a city-region.

## Notes from the roundtable: is our methodology appropriate?

Delegates began by discussing the methodology used to define study area boundaries, map the location and scale of permissions, and analyse their proximity to employment clusters and railway stations. They were asked whether the methodology had produced results which matched with their understanding of settlement patterns in the two study areas.

They noted that it was hard to define a Warrington 'city-region' to analyse, as the area is composed of multiple smaller settlements which lie between the much larger conurbations of Liverpool and Manchester. They described an area characterised by complex travel to work patterns and administrative geographies, divided by Local Authority, Combined Authority, Housing Market Area and Local Enterprise Partnership boundaries. However, the choice of study area - encompassing four local authorities around Warrington - was seen as providing a suitably broad scale to conduct an analysis of planning permissions.

The Blackburn 'city-region' was seen as easier to define, with higher levels of self-containment. Delegates noted that Blackburn and Burnley were employment hubs for many of the smaller settlements included in the study area, with some outward commuting to the neighbouring cities of Preston and Manchester.

The number and distribution of mapped permissions generally matched with the delegates understanding of development patterns in each study area, and no major omissions were identified. However, the threshold for mapping employment clusters (defined as areas of 10,000+ jobs) was regarded as being too high. It was suggested that a lower threshold would better capture the distribution of employment across both study areas.

## 4. Focusing on the North West

This report presents a series of maps which show the location of planning permissions granted for schemes of 50 or more housing units, between 2012 and 2015, across two city-regions in the North West of England. This covers the location of 118 major housing schemes, which represent planning permission for over 20,000 units.

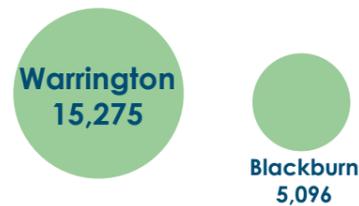
The report then analyses the relationship between planning permissions, employment clusters and railway stations in each city-region, along with commentary from the roundtables on the findings shown.

### The two city-regions

1. Warrington

2. Blackburn

### Number of housing units mapped in this report\*



\*numbers based on EGi data

### Statistics for the two city-regions

Their combined population was **1.5 million** in 2015, up by 1.8% since 2012.

Between 2012 and 2015, planning permission was granted for **25,730 new housing units**, divided across 360 different schemes. This is equivalent to one new house for every 58 people.

To place these numbers in context, recent housing projections indicate that **at least 220,000 additional households** will be formed each year across England until 2022. Between September 2013 and September 2014 **117,070 houses** were completed<sup>25</sup>.

These city-regions contained almost **650,000 jobs** in 2014. Private sector employment increased in these city-regions by an average of **4.5%** between 2011 and 2014, adding almost **28,000 new jobs**.

Between 2012 and 2015, 29% of the housing units granted planning permission in these city-regions were on minor schemes of 50 units or less. The remaining **71% of housing units were on larger schemes of over 50 units**, representing over 20,000 housing units. These are the subject of the mapping and analysis in this report.

## Warrington

<b>Total population (Dec 2015)</b>	<b>1,156,400</b>	
Population growth (2012-2015)	+22,800	2.0%
<b>Total jobs (2014)</b>	<b>494,255</b>	
Total jobs change (2011-2014)	+21,764	4.6%
<b>Total private sector jobs (2014)</b>	<b>414,428</b>	
Total private sector jobs change (2011-2014)	+34,654	9.1%

Demographic and employment trends

## Blackburn

<b>Total population (Dec 2015)</b>	<b>370,600</b>	
Population growth (2012-2015)	+3,700	1.0%
<b>Total jobs (2014)</b>	<b>153,678</b>	
Total jobs change (2011-2014)	+6,089	4.1%
<b>Total private sector jobs (2014)</b>	<b>120,618</b>	
Total private sector jobs change (2011-2014)	+6,421	5.6%

Core strategy and other plan progress

Warrington	<b>Core Strategy adopted July 2014</b>
Wigan	<b>Core Strategy adopted September 2013</b>
St Helens	<b>Core Strategy adopted October 2012</b> Bold Forest Area Action Plan submitted May 2016
Halton	<b>Core Strategy adopted December 2012</b>
Cheshire West & Chester	<b>Core Strategy adopted January 2015</b>

Blackburn with Darwen	<b>Core Strategy adopted January 2011</b> Site Allocations and Development Management policies adopted December 2015
Ribble Valley	<b>Core Strategy adopted December 2014</b>
Hyndburn	<b>Core Strategy adopted January 2012</b>
Burnley	<b>No published/adopted Core Strategy</b>

Plan progress information from DCLG, 2016 <sup>26</sup>



# 5. Mapping the permissions

This section shows the location and scale of permissions in each city-region

# Warrington

## Commuting flows in the city-region

Local authorities	No. of inward commuters	% of total commuters
Warrington	50,422	51%
St. Helens	6,804	7%
Wigan	6,539	7%
Halton	5,786	6%
Cheshire West and Chester	3,894	3.9%

## Number of schemes\* and associated housing units



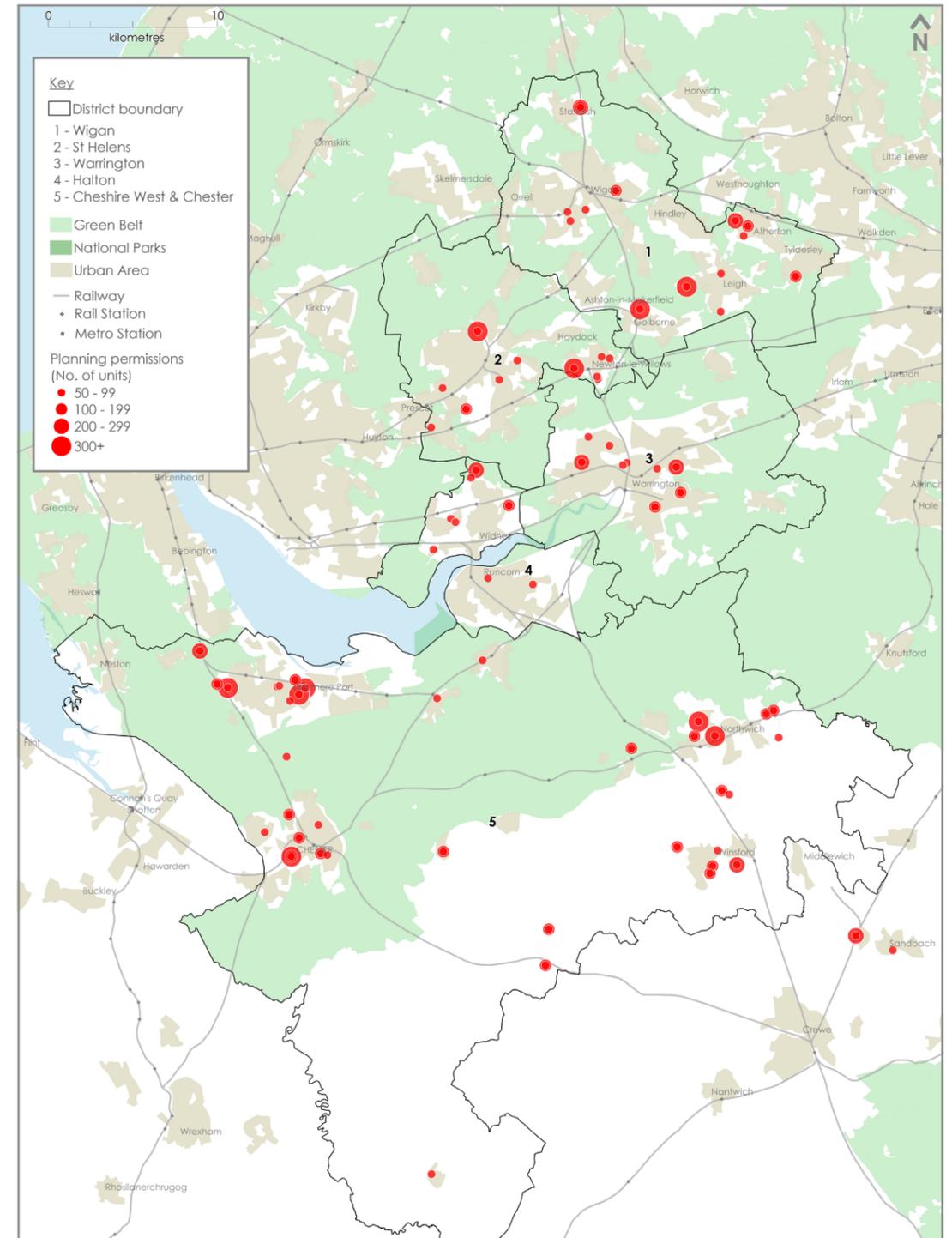
\*includes only those of 50 units of above

When compared to the twelve city-regions included in the full study, Warrington is seen to be giving permission for slightly more residential units when compared to levels of population growth. The graph below shows that the majority of these recent permissions have been granted in the local authority of Cheshire West and Chester, which lies to the south of the study area.

## Distribution of units by local authority

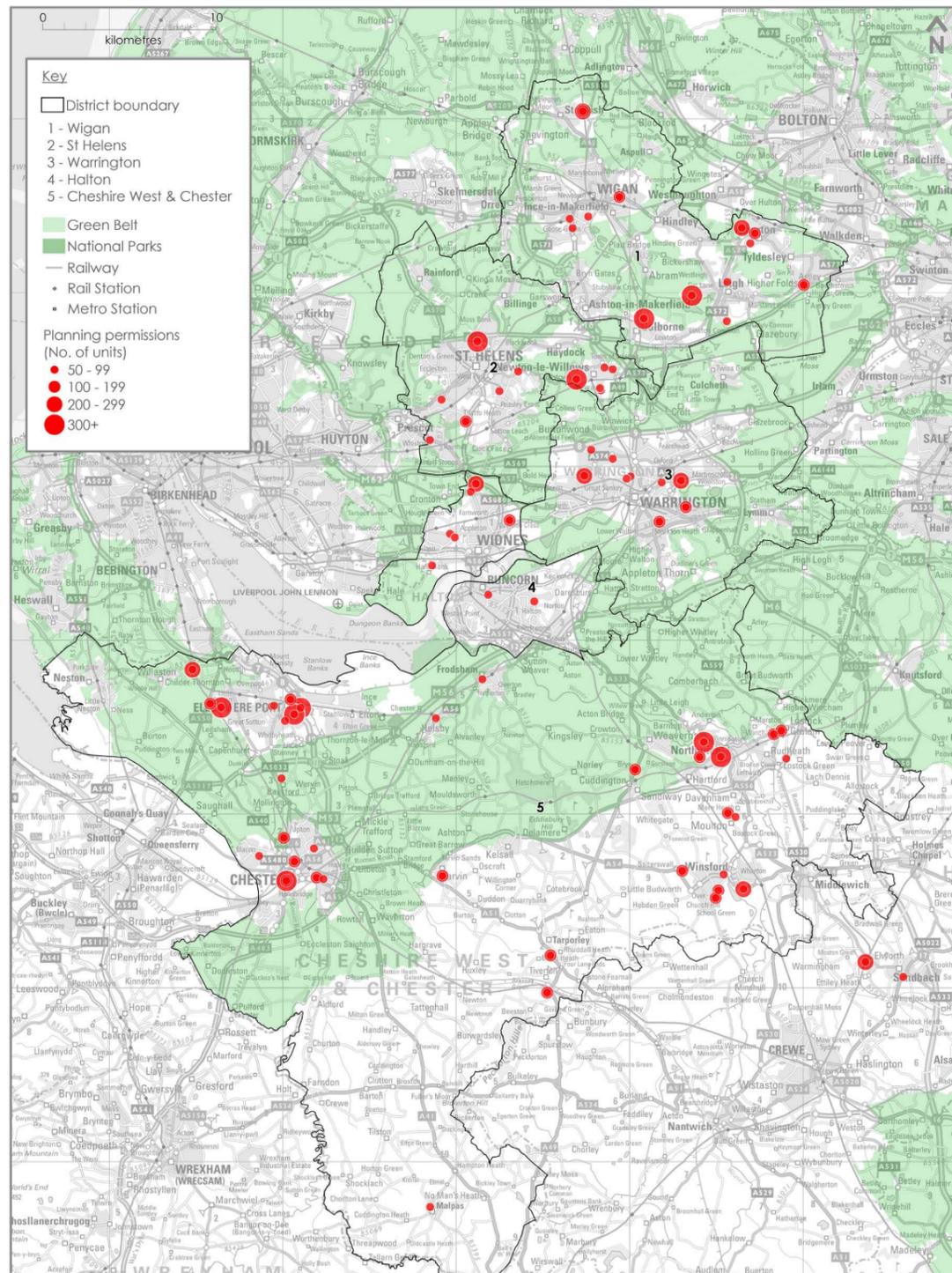


Fig 1. Simplified map of planning permissions for schemes with over 50 housing units (2012-2015)



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**Fig 2. Detailed map of planning permissions**

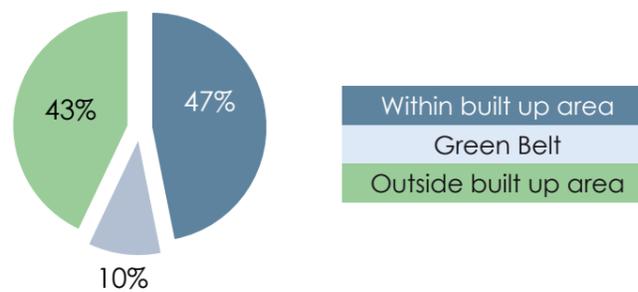


Figures 1 and 2 map the location of planning permissions for schemes of over 50 housing units. These schemes account for 81% of the total number of units granted planning permission between 2012 and 2015, which is a slightly higher proportion than for the other city-regions covered by the full study. It indicates that fewer residential units are being permitted on schemes of under 50 units in these local authorities.

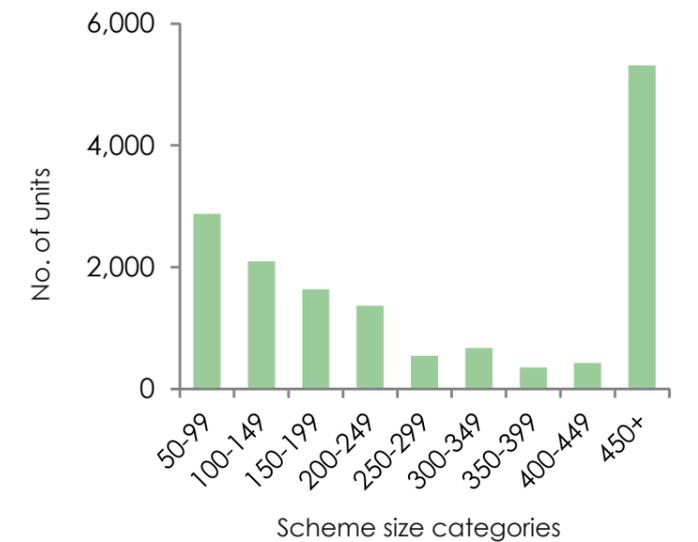
The average number of units per scheme is 79, which is slightly lower than the other city-regions covered by the full study. However, the graph below shows that the majority of units are being permitted in larger schemes of over 450 units.

The mapping shows that 47% of the housing units granted planning permission are located within existing built up areas, and 43% are located in areas that fall outside the built up area or green belt. 10% of permitted housing units are located within the green belt.

**% of housing units in existing built-up areas**



**Distribution of housing units by scheme size**



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# Blackburn

## Commuting flows in the city-region

Local authorities	No. of inward commuters	% of total commuters
Blackburn with Darwen	31,801	57.0%
Hyndburn	6,278	11.2%
Ribble Valley	3,126	5.6%
Burnley	2,103	3.8%

## Number of schemes\* and associated housing units



\*includes only those of 50 units of above

When compared to the twelve city-regions included in the full study, Blackburn is recorded as permitting the highest number of new residential units against levels of population growth. The graph below shows that the majority of recent permissions in the city-region have been granted in the local authority of Ribble Valley, specifically around Clitherhoe and Whalley.

## Distribution of units by local authority

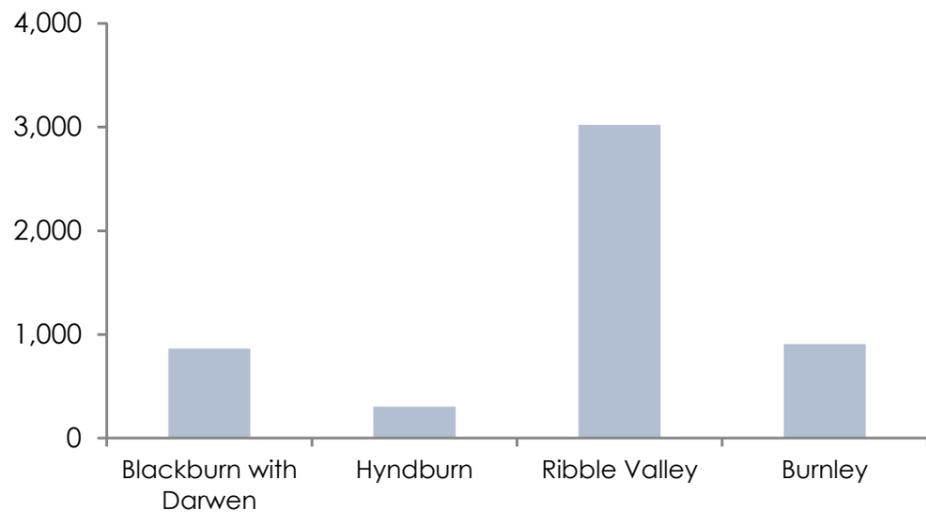
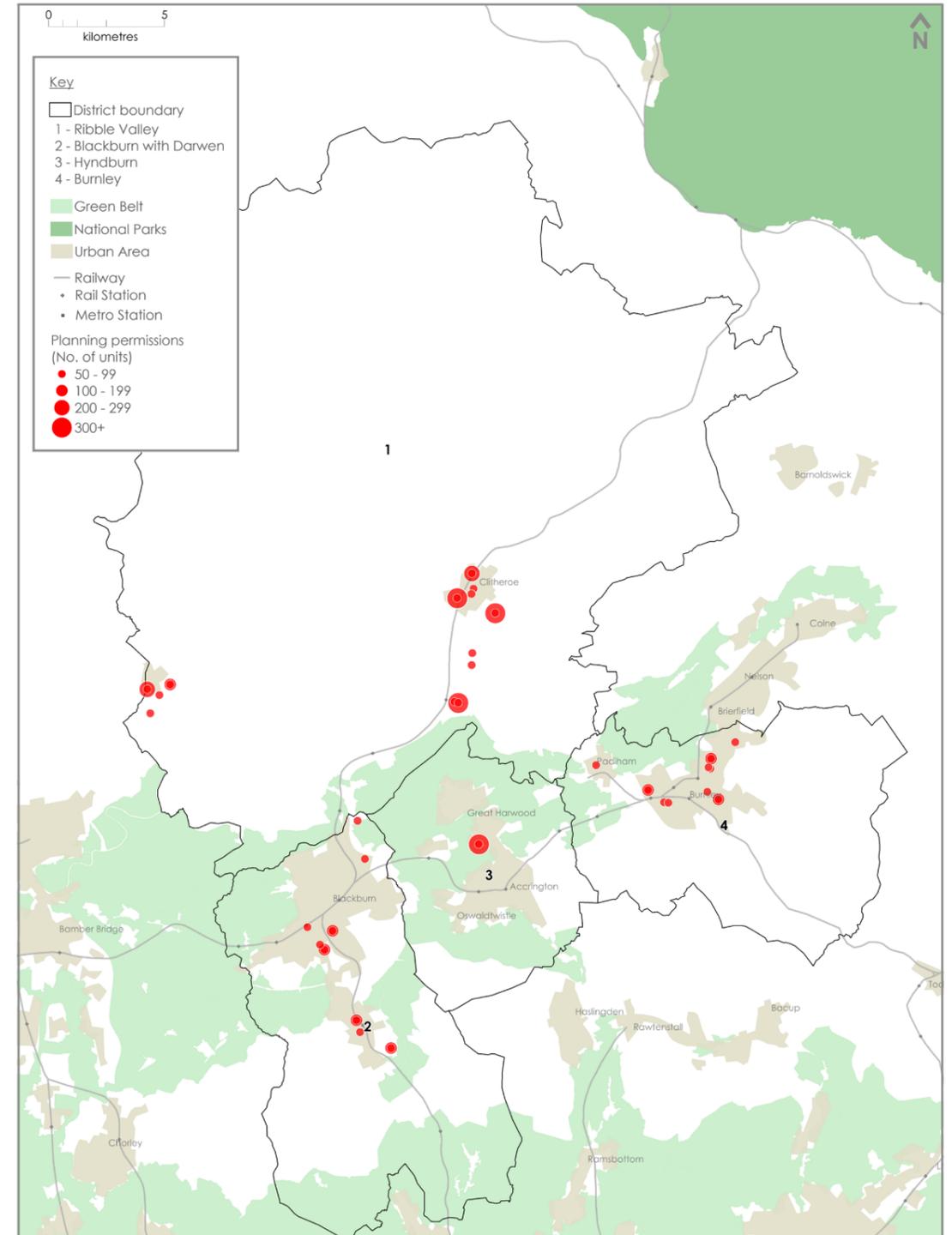
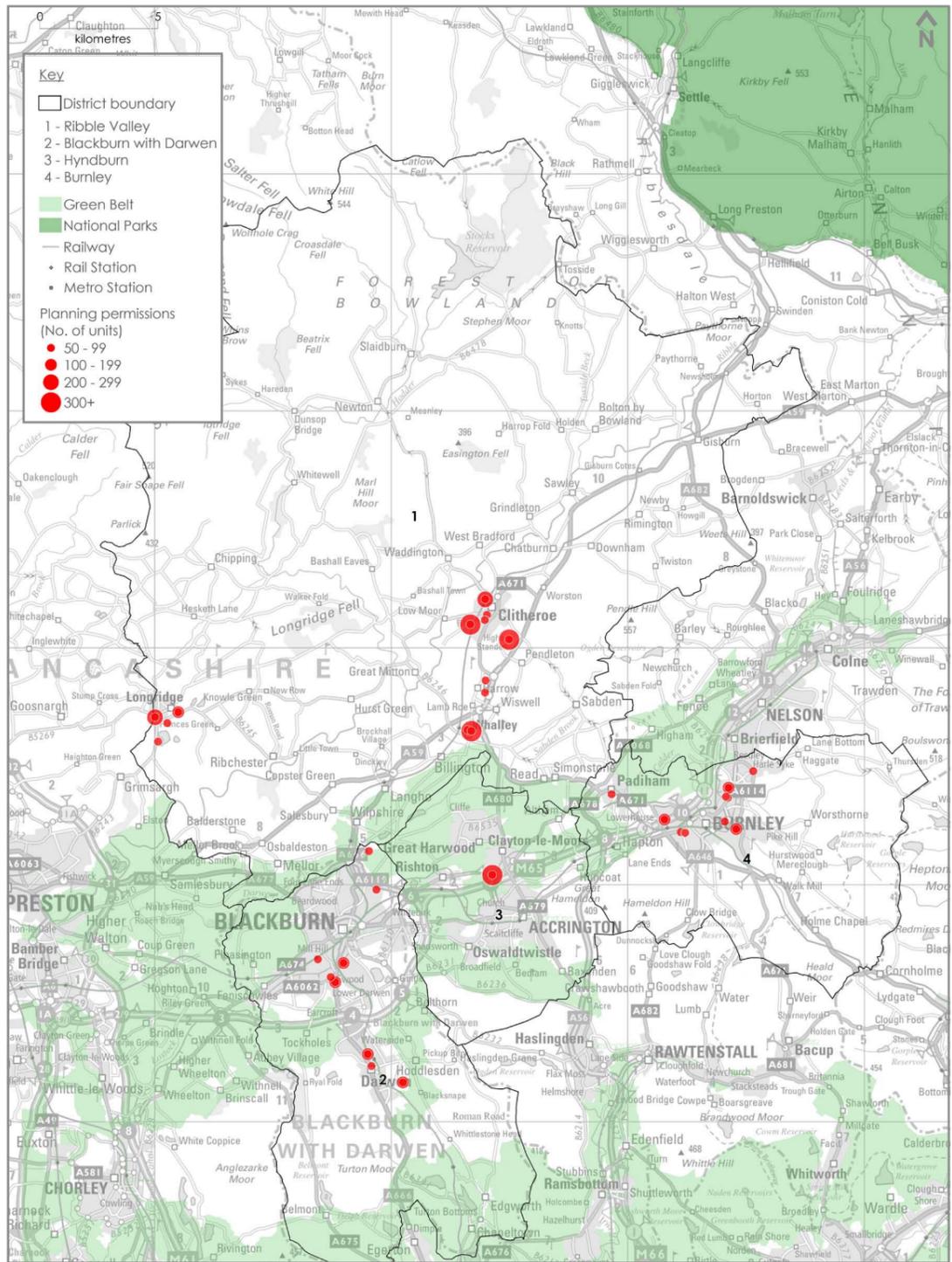


Fig 3. Simplified map of planning permissions for schemes with over 50 housing units (2012-2015)



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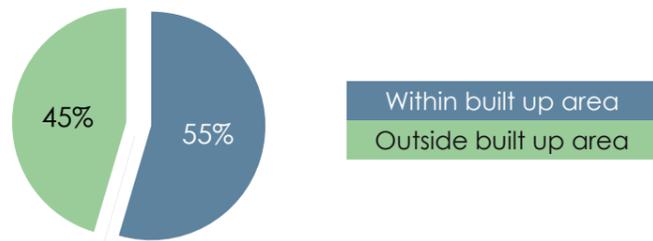
**Fig 4. Detailed map of planning permissions**



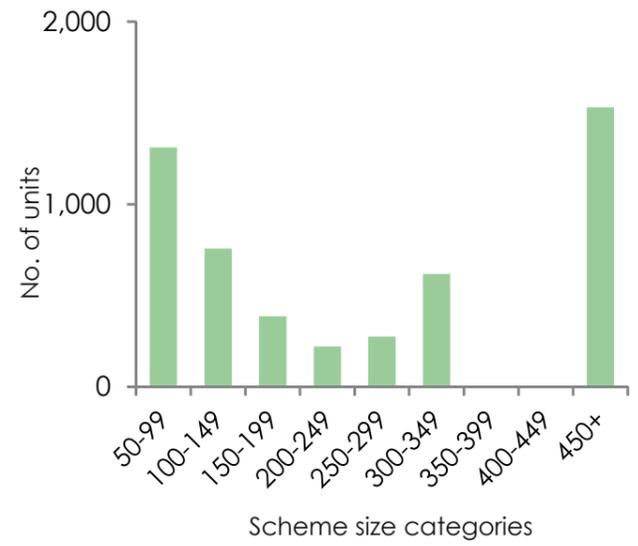
Figures 3 and 4 map the location of planning permissions for schemes of over 50 housing units. These schemes account for 74% of the total number of units granted planning permission between 2012 and 2015, which is around the average for the city-regions covered by the full study. The average number of units per scheme is 56, which is lower than the average, and suggests a pattern of smaller developments.

The mapping shows that 55% of the housing units granted planning permission are located within existing built up areas, with the remaining 45% in areas that fall outside the built up area. No planning permissions for schemes of 50+ units were recorded in the green belt.

**% of housing units in existing built-up areas**



**Distribution of housing units by scheme size**



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## Notes from the roundtable: what is shaping these patterns?

Delegates considered the key factors shaping patterns of site allocations and planning permissions in each city-region.

Starting with Warrington, delegates described how the 2014 Core Strategy had continued the focus on regeneration established by the 2006 Unitary Development Plan, in seeking to concentrate housing growth in brownfield sites around the urban core. This strategy aims to reverse patterns of outward expansion which occurred after Warrington was designated as a New Town in 1968, when population growth was accompanied by the decentralisation of housing, retail and employment into new districts on the outskirts of the existing built-up area.

Delegates noted that the green belt surrounding Warrington, introduced in 1977, had also played a key role in restricting any further expansion of the town. However, this was seen to have resulted in the dispersal of new housing beyond the green belt into neighbouring Cheshire West and Cheshire (CWaC), which accounts for the majority of permissions granted across the study area post-2012. These patterns of development were seen as being shaped by market factors, with developers attracted to more affluent areas in a local authority which until recently had no five-year land supply. Delegates believed that a sizable proportion of these permissions had therefore been granted on appeal, and were being built out faster than brownfield permissions in the centre of Warrington and other towns.

Similar issues were observed in the Blackburn city-region. Delegates noted that majority of recent permissions had been granted in the more affluent areas of Clitheroe and Whalley in the Ribble Valley, a local authority with strong housing demand and historic under-supply.

These conditions had been stimulated by the removal of a moratorium on new housing in the local authority, which dated from the old North West Structure Plan. This recent change in planning policy had seen the Ribble Valley come under pressure to accommodate more of its Objectively Assessed Need (OAN). Delegates noted that many new housing permissions had been granted on appeal before the council had an adopted Core Strategy or five-year land supply in place.

In both of the city-regions, delegates saw the continued influence of the 2008 financial crisis and subsequent recession in shaping the location and build-out of recent permissions. While some had been granted in brownfield sites within the towns of Burnley, Blackburn and Warrington, delegates explained that these were not being built out at the same speed as greenfield sites, if at all. Where land deals had occurred before the recession, landowners and developers were often waiting for the market to recover in order to achieve their desired return on investment. The additional costs and complexities of brownfield development, such as land remediation and drainage requirements, were seen as contributing to these delays. Landowners and developers were therefore focused on gaining permissions in more affluent areas beyond the green belt.

Delegates also commented that the mapping did not show the significant number of empty homes in places like Blackburn and Burnley, where house prices were not high enough to offset the costs of redevelopment, and markets were being suppressed by the dispersal of growth into more affluent areas. However, delegates noted that towns in both city-regions had successfully managed to regenerate other parts of their urban core. They saw a number of enabling

factors behind this, including strong Local Plan policies, green belt constraints, support from the Homes and Communities Agency in developing public sector land, and investments in transport infrastructure. In Warrington, they described how the Council had been working with Network Rail to deliver a new railway station to the west of the town centre to accommodate planned growth. Meanwhile in Burnley, the viability of brownfield sites had been boosted by improvements to the rail connection with Manchester.

In Blackburn, delegates described how the Council had also developed planning policy which permitted lower density development in peripheral locations in exchange for contributions to off-site affordable housing nearer the urban core. This was seen as necessary to ensure that affordable housing was delivered on historic site allocations in more accessible areas, where the need is greatest.

# 6. Analysing the permissions

This section describes the relationship between permissions, employment clusters and railway stations in each city-region

# Warrington

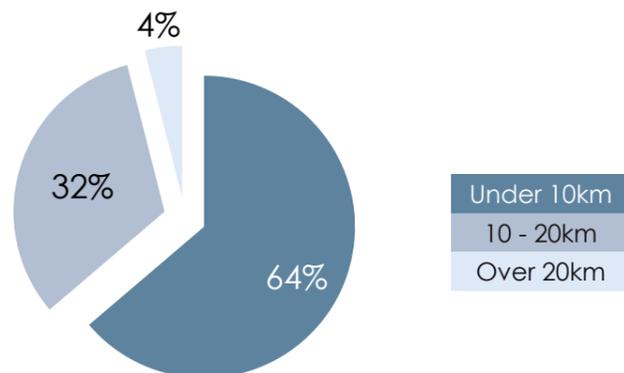
## Proximity to major employment clusters

The Warrington city-region displays average levels of private sector job growth when compared to the other city-regions included in the full study. Between 2011 and 2014 these local authorities collectively recorded a 9.1% increase in private sector jobs, which off-set the loss of public sector jobs as shown by the overall growth rate of 4.6% for both the public and private sectors.

Figure 8 shows an employment cluster of 20,000+ jobs to the immediate west of Warrington town centre, an area which includes several business parks, the main shopping district, and the Warrington & Halton hospital. Other major employment clusters near Warrington include the industrial estates on the periphery of Runcorn, and the industrial estates to the south of St Helens and Leigh. In Cheshire West and Chester, employment is clustered in the industrial and science parks at Ellesmere Port, and around the smaller towns of Wrexham, Chester and Crewe.

When schemes of 50+ units were mapped against major employment clusters with over 10,000 jobs, it was found that 64% of housing units were located within 10km of significant employment locations.

## Percentage of housing units by proximity to major employment clusters



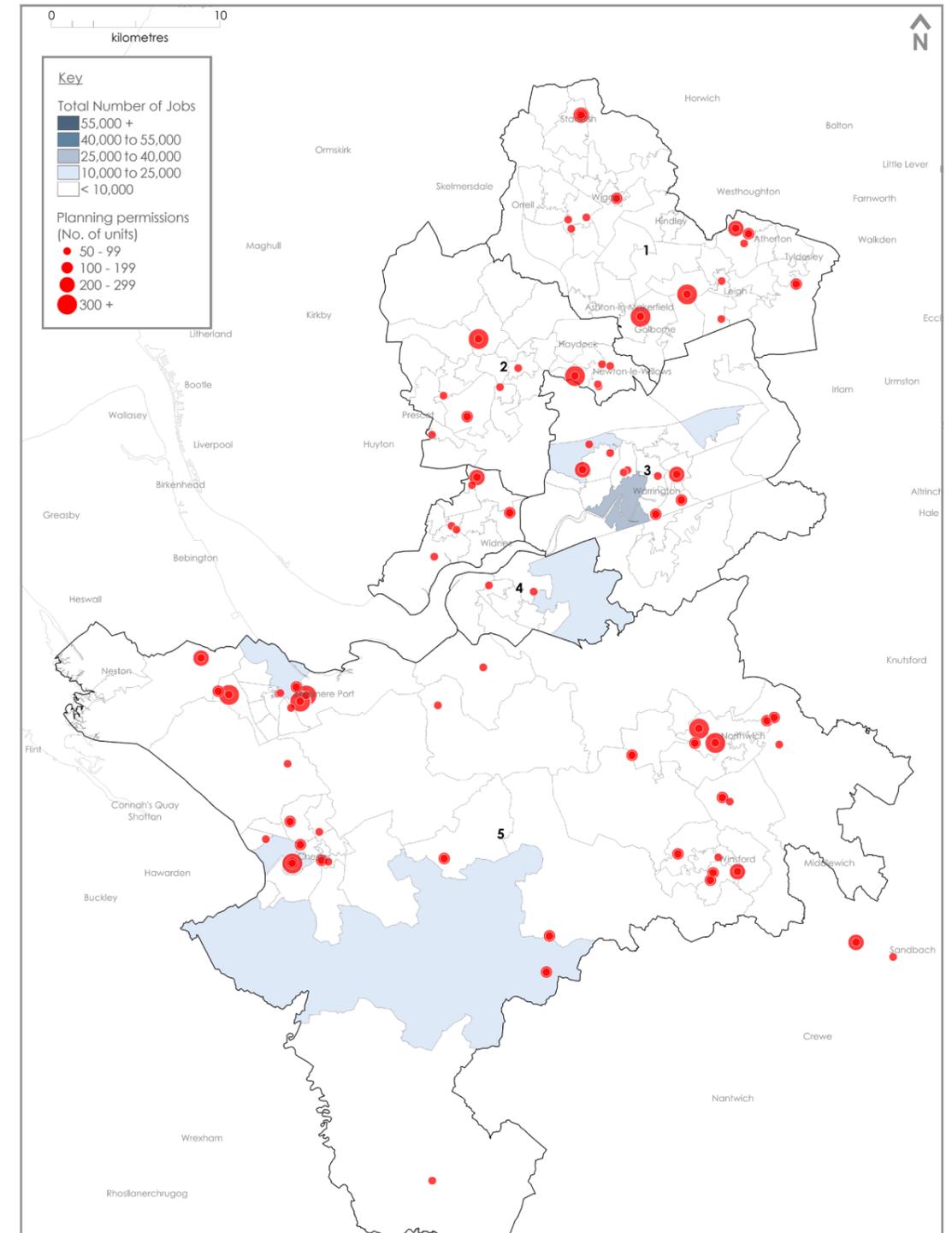
## Overlap with specialist employment clusters

Figures 9-12 show Medium Super Output Areas (MSOAs) in the Warrington city-region with concentrations of employment in four specialist sectors which are above the average levels in the North West. These maps indicate areas of potential employment growth in relation to the location of planning permissions.

### % of schemes located within MSOAs with specialist sector job growth

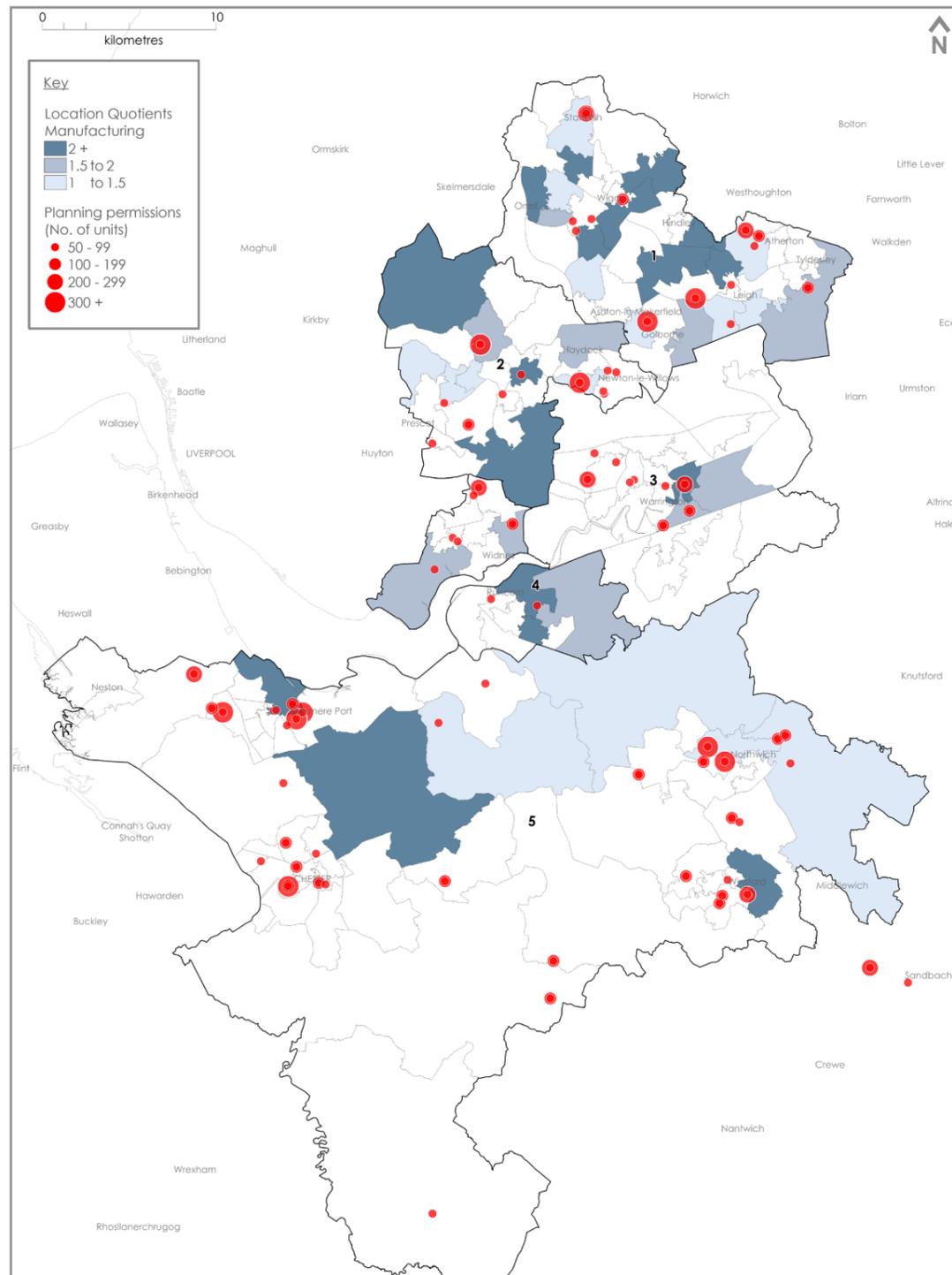
Manufacturing	13%
Computer programming	21%
Science and R&D	7%
Telecommunications	6%

Fig 8. Map of planning permissions and major employment clusters (2012-2015)



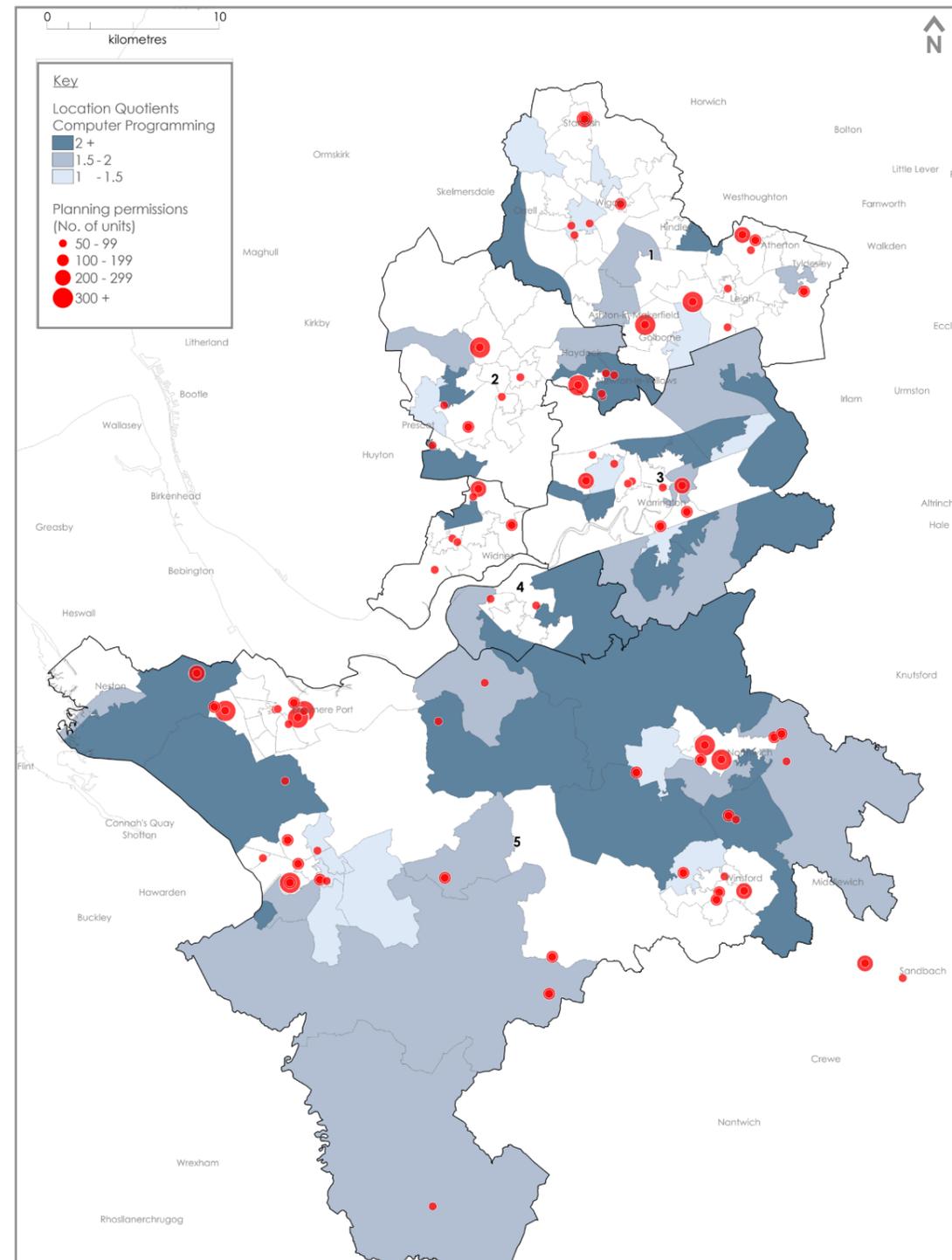
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**Fig 9. Map of planning permissions and manufacturing clusters (2012-2015)**



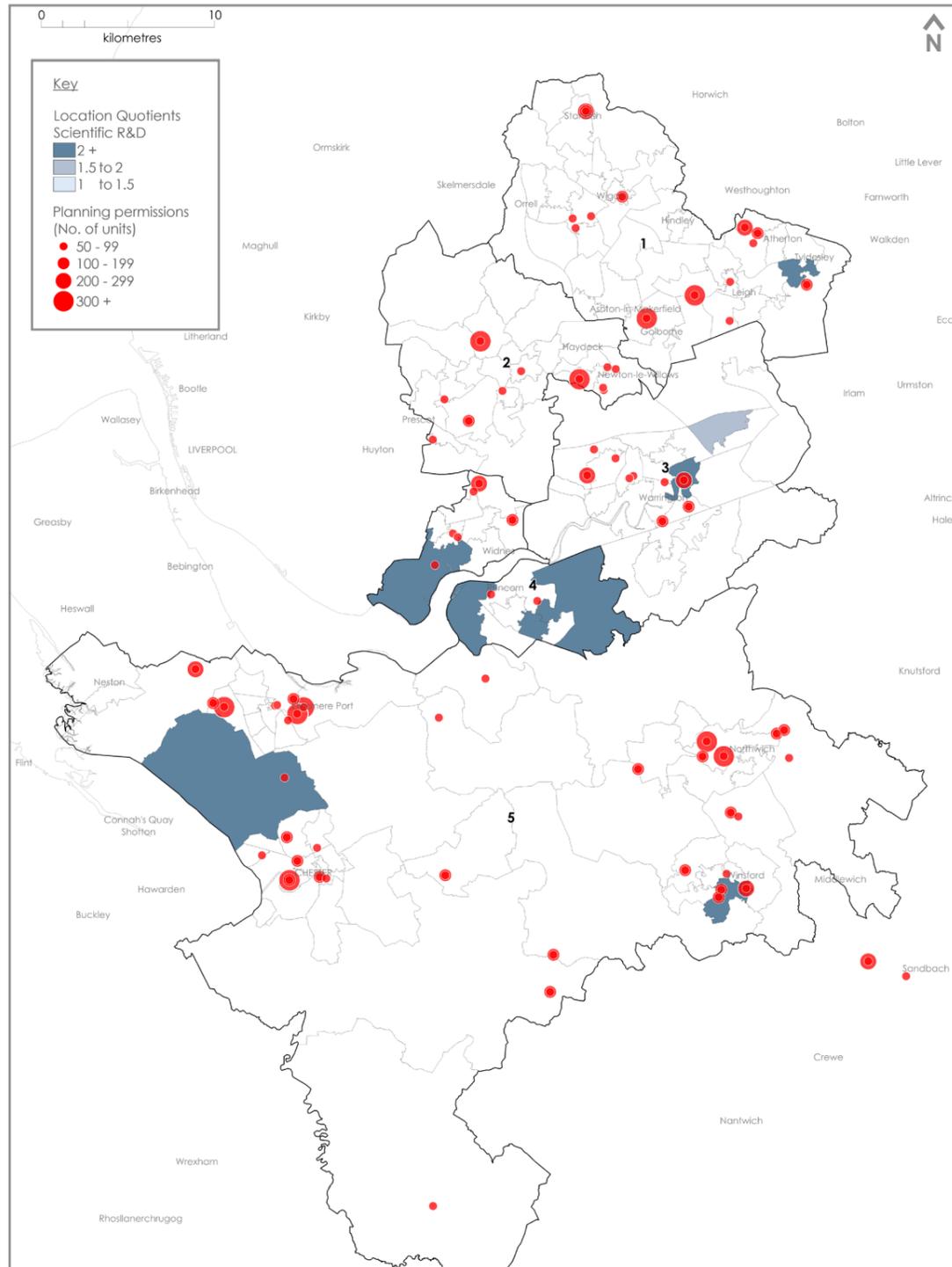
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**Fig 10. Map of planning permissions and computer programming (2012-2015)**



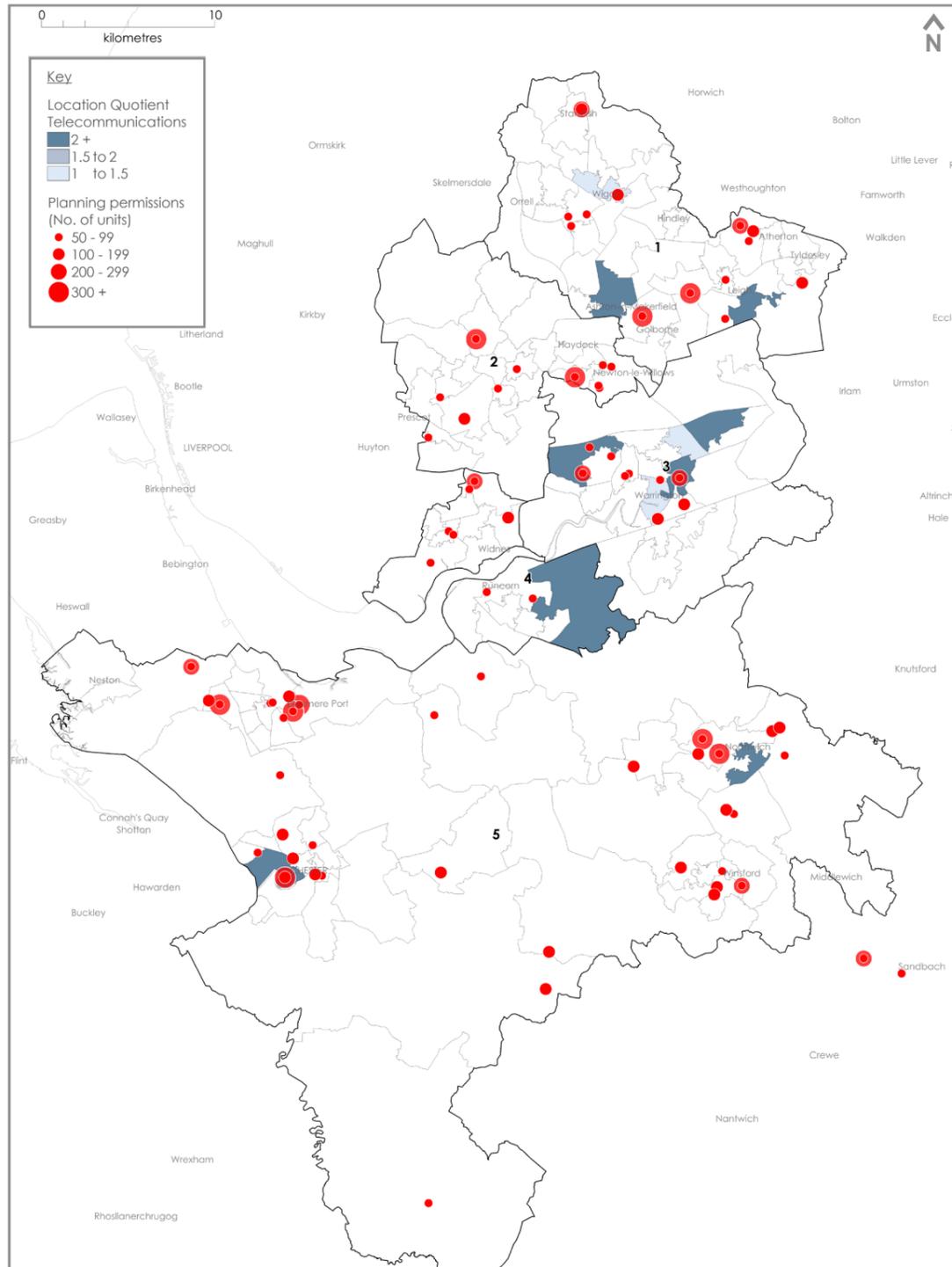
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**Fig 11. Map of planning permissions and science/R&D clusters (2012-2015)**



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**Fig 12. Map of planning permissions and telecommunications (2012-2015)**



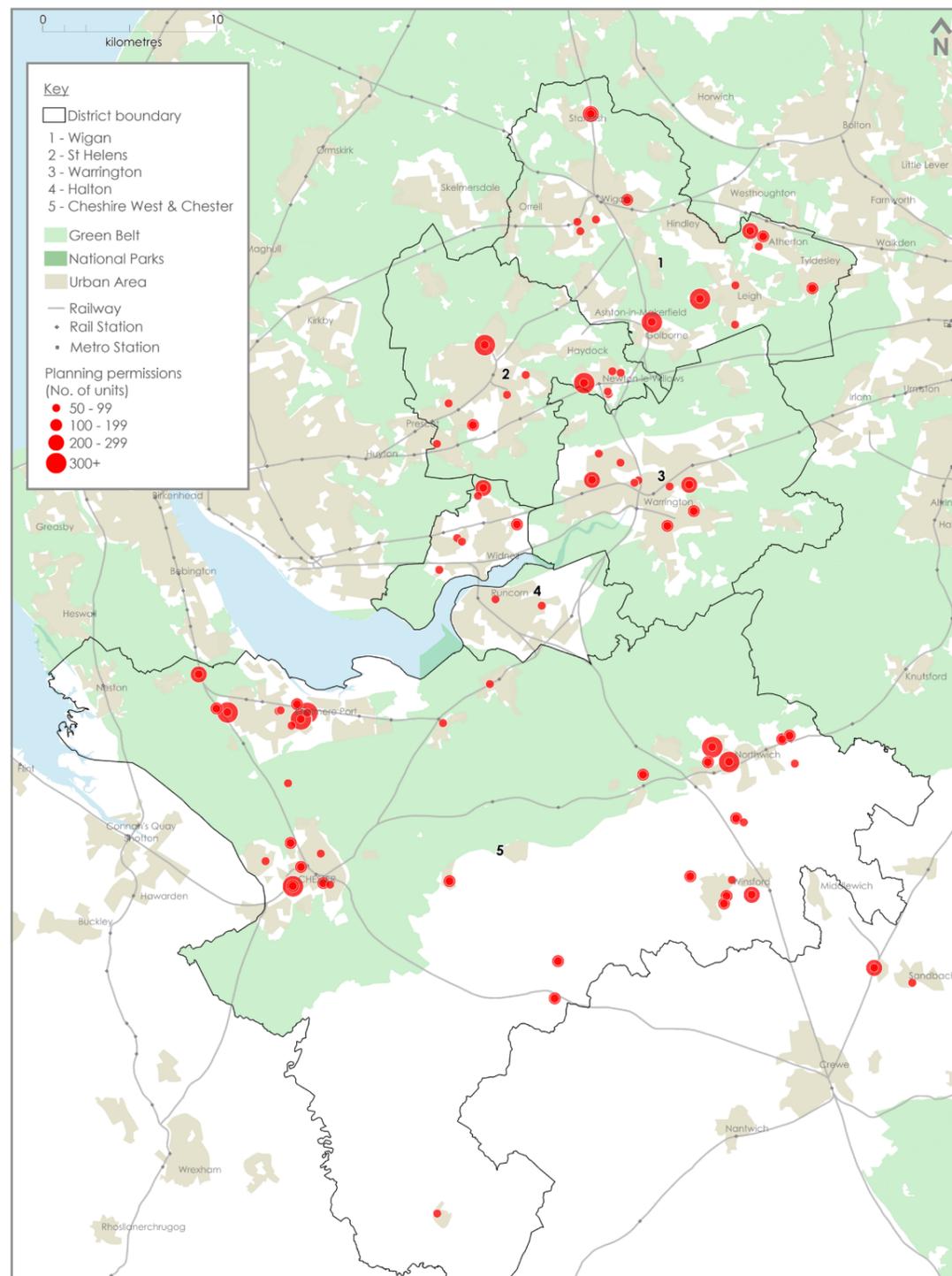
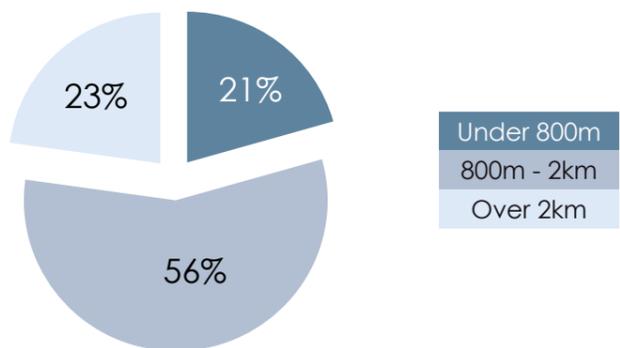
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**Fig 13. Map of planning permissions and railway stations**

Figure 13 shows a complex pattern of rail routes across the Warrington city-region. Warrington itself is connected to Manchester and Liverpool via routes operated by Northern, East Midlands and TransPennine Express, while north-south connections to places like Runcorn, Preston and Crewe are operated by Virgin and Arriva.

The relationship between planning permissions and rail stations shows that 21% of units are within a 10 minute walk of a rail station. The majority of units are located between 800m and 2km from the nearest railway station, while 23% are over 2km away.

**Percentage of housing units by proximity to railway stations**



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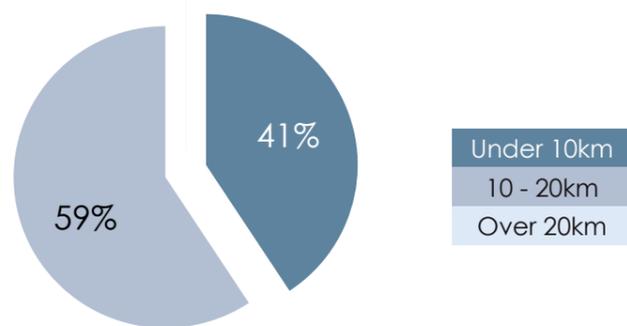
# Blackburn

## Proximity to major employment clusters

Blackburn is the lowest growth city-region for private sector jobs when compared to the twelve city-regions included in this study. Between 2011 and 2014 there was an increase of 5.6% in private sector jobs, set against an overall growth rate of 4.1% across both the public and private sectors.

Figure 14 shows employment clusters of 10,000+ jobs in the towns of Blackburn and Burnley. These represent a mixture of retail, business and industrial parks, in both central and peripheral locations. When schemes of 50+ units were mapped by proximity to these clusters, it was found that 41% of housing units were located within 10km, and 59% were located between 10-20km.

### Percentage of housing units by proximity to major employment clusters



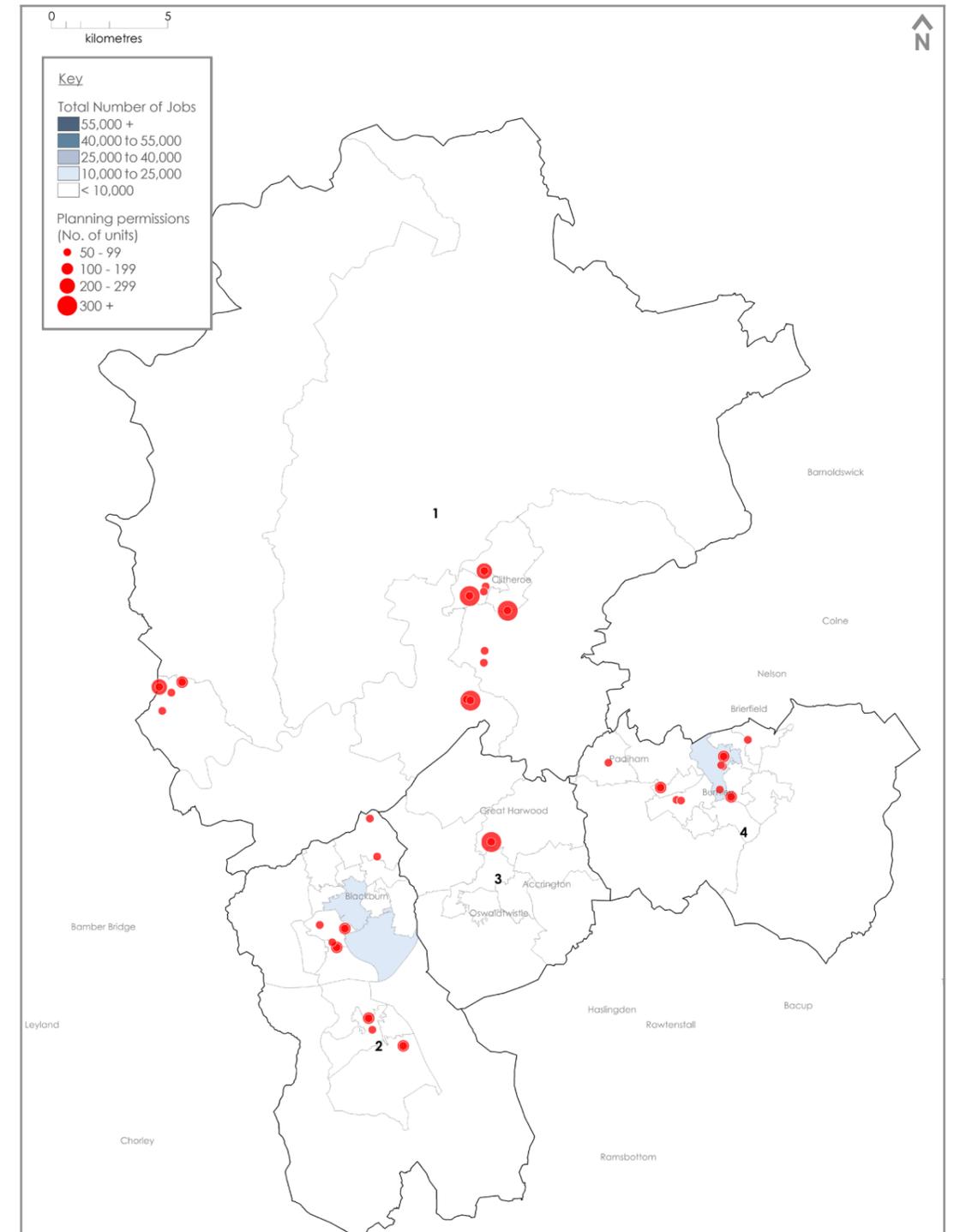
## Overlap with specialist employment clusters

Figures 15-18 show Medium Super Output Areas (MSOAs) in the Blackburn city-region with concentrations of employment in four specialist sectors which are above the average levels in the North West. These maps indicate areas of potential employment growth in relation to the location of planning permissions.

### % of schemes located within MSOAs with specialist sector job growth

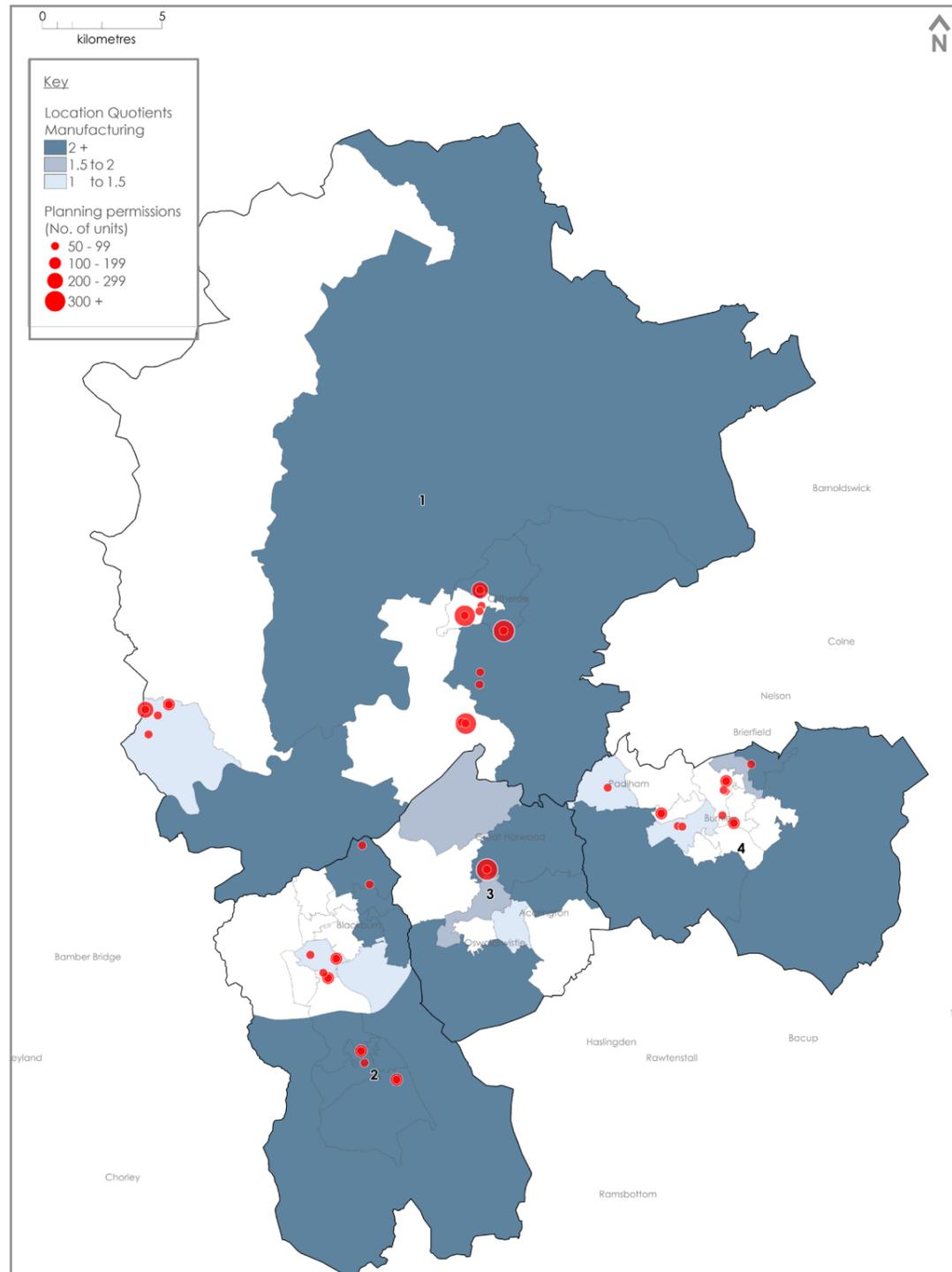
Manufacturing	33%
Computer programming	9%
Science and R&D	0%
Telecommunications	0%

Fig 14. Map of planning permissions and major employment clusters (2012-2015)



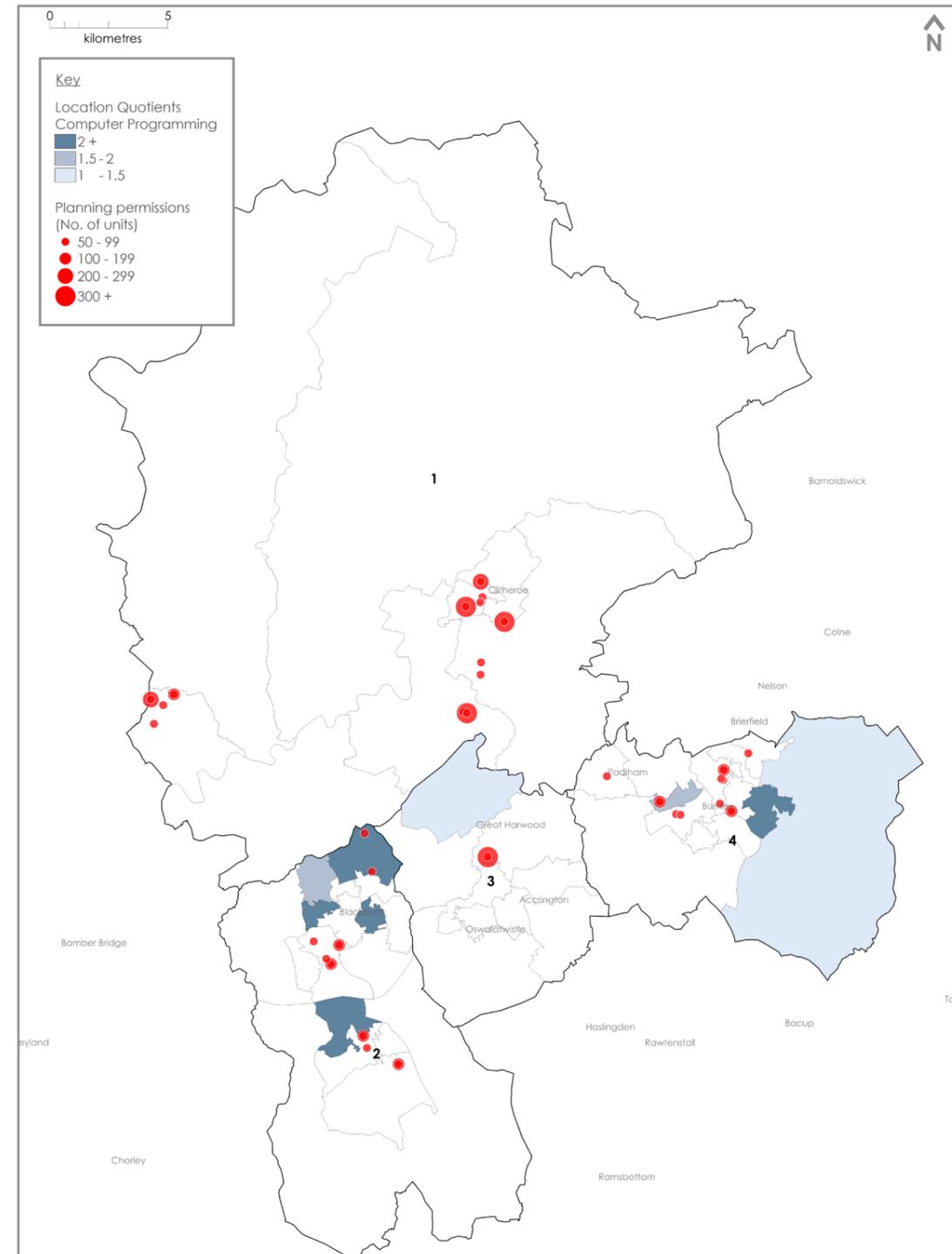
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**Fig 15. Map of planning permissions and manufacturing clusters (2012-2015)**



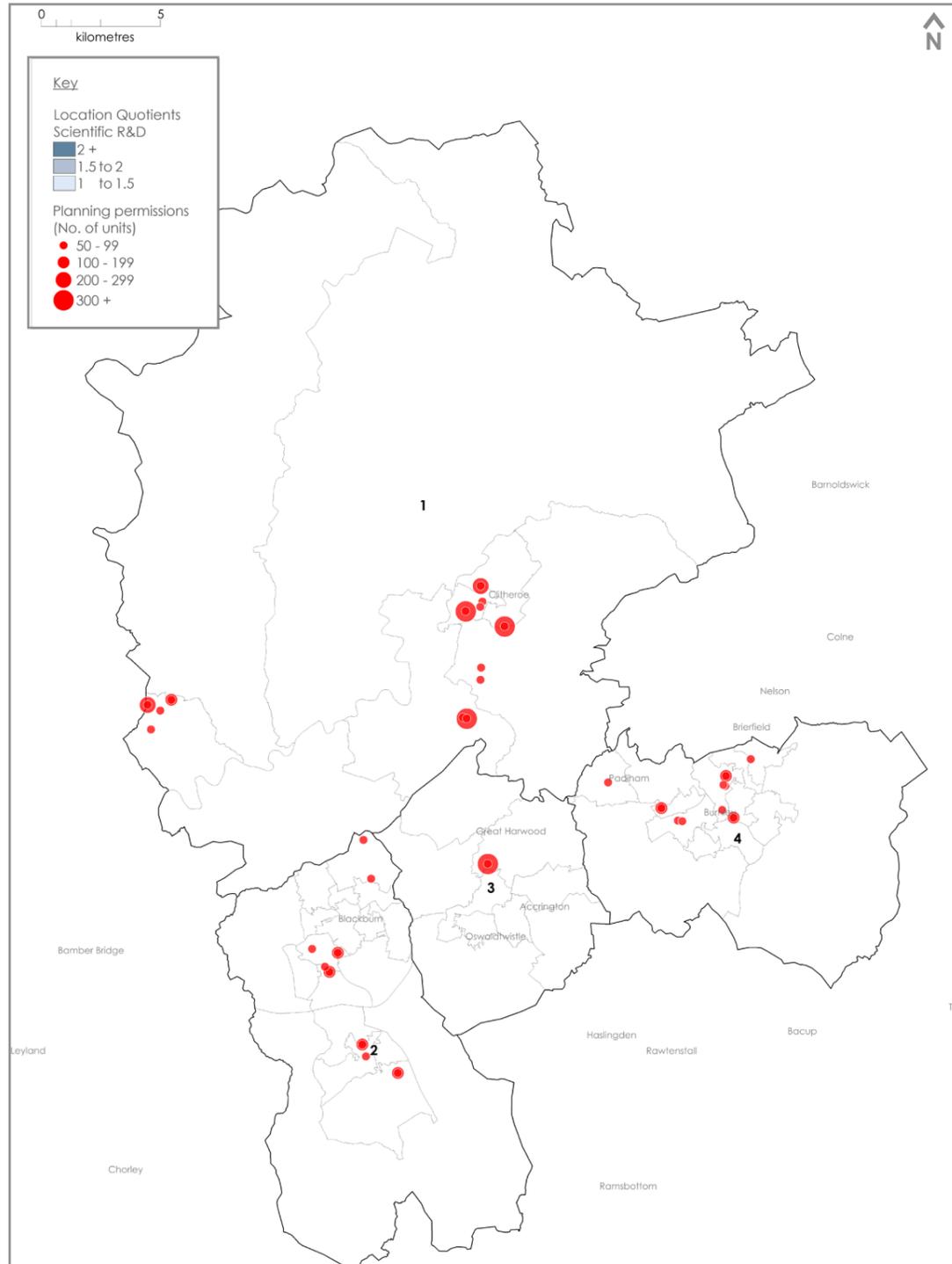
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**Fig 16. Map of planning permissions and computer programming (2012-2015)**



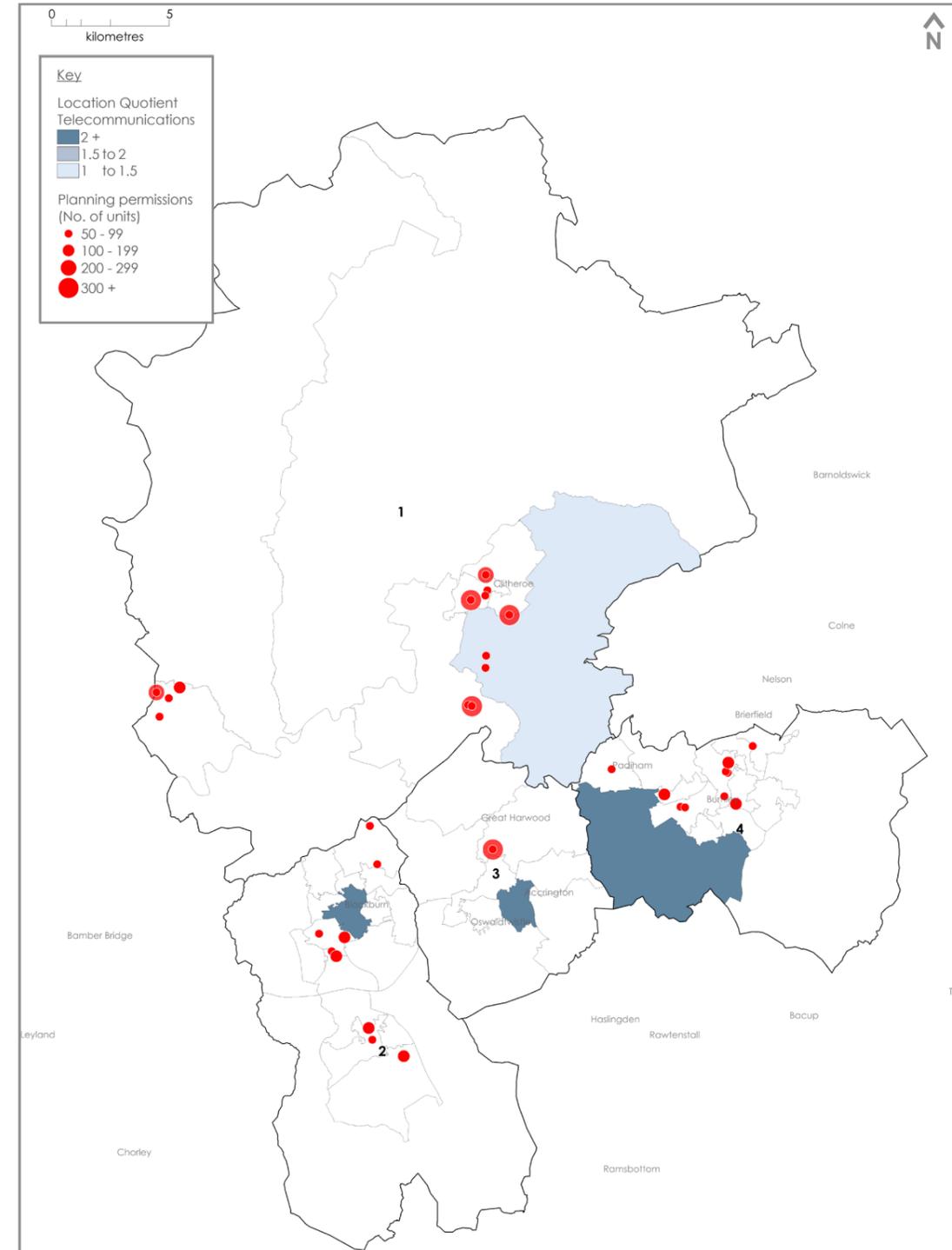
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Fig 17. Map of planning permissions and science/R&D clusters (2012-2015)



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Fig 18. Map of planning permissions and telecommunications (2012-2015)



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### Proximity to railway stations

Figure 19 shows the railway network in the Blackburn city-region, which is entirely operated by Northern Rail. These routes connect the smaller settlements of Clitheroe and Whalley to Blackburn, and provide services from Blackburn and Burnley to Preston and Manchester.

The relationship between planning permissions and rail stations shows that 29% of units are within 800m of a rail station, with the majority between 800m and 2km away.

#### Percentage of housing units by proximity to railway stations

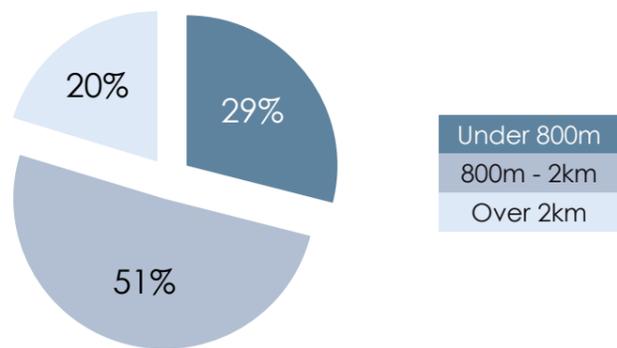
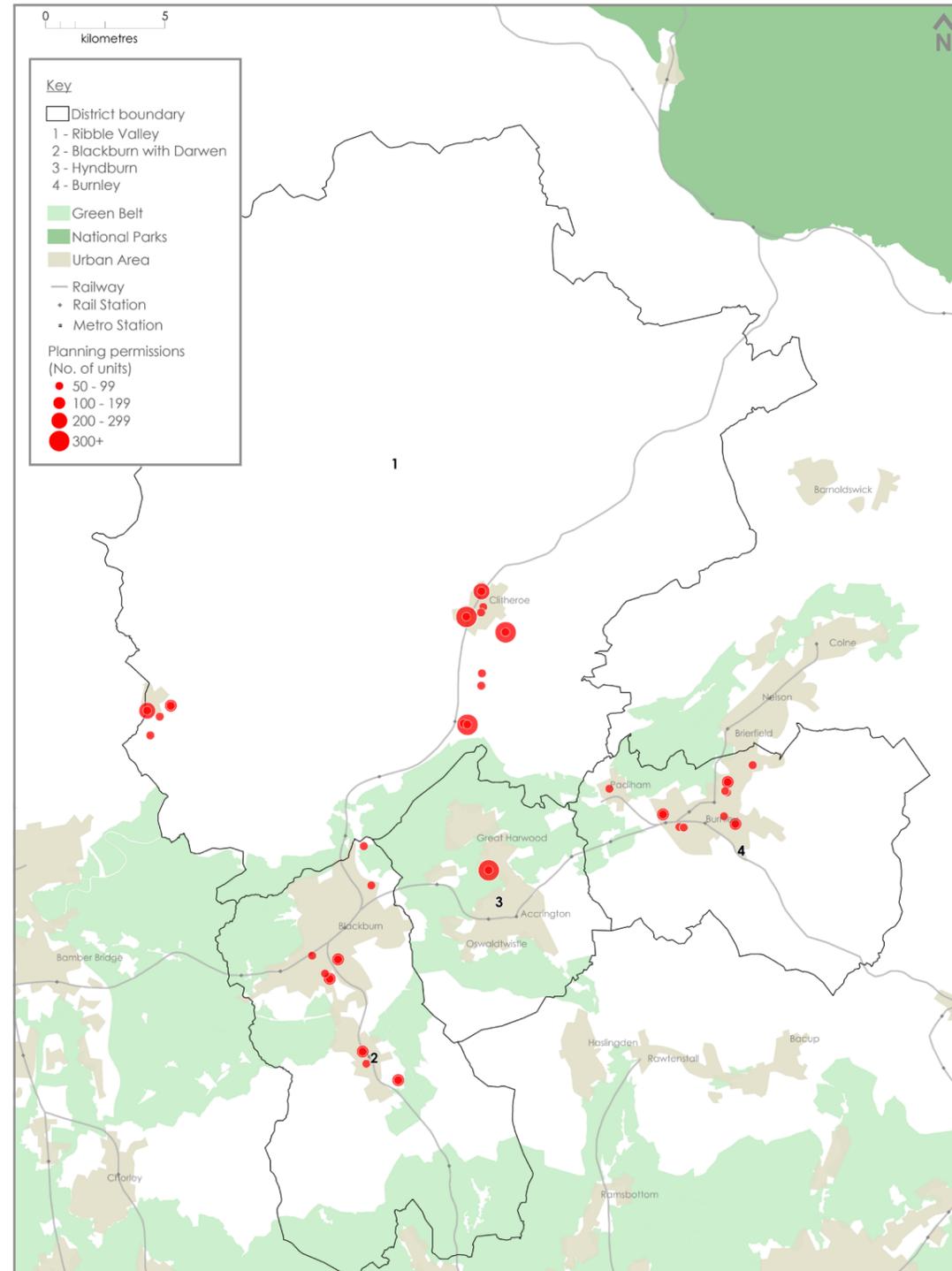


Fig 19. Map of planning permissions and railway stations



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## Notes from the roundtable: what does this analysis suggest?

In discussing the Warrington city-region, delegates commented that a sizable proportion (62%) of recent permissions had been granted in close proximity to major employment clusters of 10,000 or more jobs. They also noted that several business parks in the city-region may have fallen under the threshold for mapping employment clusters, but offered relatively close proximity to housing which was not captured by the analysis.

The Strategic Road Network (SRN) was seen by delegates as a key factor attracting businesses to this area, providing a wide catchment area for employment and connectivity to Manchester and Liverpool. However, delegates agreed that while this looked good on paper, the SRN and associated local roads frequently suffered from serious congestion. This was seen to offset some of the economic benefits that would otherwise accrue from the co-location of housing, transport infrastructure and employment. And while smart motorway trials in the North West had the potential to ease congestion in the short term, delegates questioned whether additional road capacity would be sufficient to meet the new demand created by housing and employment growth.

The analysis for the Blackburn city-region recorded fewer permissions in close proximity to employment clusters, with the majority (59%) between 10 and 20km away. While the mapping of clusters was also seen to exclude some areas of employment, delegates noted that the permissions granted around Clitheroe and Whalley were indeed further from major areas of employment in the towns of Blackburn and Burnley. However, the larger of these schemes were noted to be delivering new infrastructure such as extended bus services, which would help to mitigate their impact on the road network.

The analysis for the Warrington city-region also found that 21% of recent permissions were within 800m of a railway station, and 57% were between

800m and 2km away. Delegates questioned the extent to which this measure of proximity was a reliable indicator of sustainable development, as rail services within the city-region did not offer the frequency and capacity to encourage modal shift away from the car. Similar constraints were also mentioned for the Blackburn city-region, coupled with the observation that many of the railway stations offered limited car or bicycle parking. This made it difficult for commuters to use the train as part of a longer journey.

Delegates also noted that the number of bus passenger journeys were declining in both city-regions. While the more profitable routes into town centres remained viable, services in more rural and peripheral areas had been reduced, leading to greater levels of car dependency. Green infrastructure networks in Warrington, such as the Trans-Pennine Trail, were seen as having the potential to boost active travel to the town centre. However, these were not being fully exploited due to lifestyles and travel patterns which favoured the car.

Despite these issues, delegates agreed on the value of locating housing near to transport hubs - while public transport can be improved, the location of housing is fixed. They gave examples of the progress being made in Liverpool, where the Combined Authority had improved the sustainability of existing housing locations by developing an integrated and subsidised public transport network across the city-region.

While towns like Blackburn and Warrington lack the powers of a Combined Authority, delegates saw opportunities to make similar improvements to the speed, frequency and capacity of their public transport networks. They spoke about the potential of further devolution, such as the Buses Bill, the knock-on effect of major transport investments, such as High Speed 2, and the coordinating role of Transport for the North.

The challenge, delegates explained, would be to continually align future housing and employment growth with the necessary investment in transport infrastructure - a task that would require greater cooperation between local and combined authorities, transport authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships. This level of strategic planning was seen as the only way to address politically sensitive issues, like whether green belt land should be released to help meet housing need. The Greater Manchester Spatial Framework was referenced as a positive example of how to achieve this, but delegates wondered whether its recommendations might still prove too controversial at the local level.

Delegates finished by discussing wider issues of place and identity. They spoke of how the Northern Powerhouse agenda had to date focused on the Core Cities, but paid less attention to the role of smaller settlements like Warrington and Blackburn which struggled with the legacy of deindustrialisation. Should these places transform into dormitory settlements for the larger conurbations of Liverpool and Manchester, or seek greater levels self-containment? Could their heritage and environmental assets be used more effectively? These questions had implications for the direction of strategic planning in both city-regions, but delegates were concerned that wider issues of identity were being crowded out by the focus on housing numbers.

# 7. Further information

## Who was at the roundtable?

John Knight: *RTPI North West*

Nicola Rigby: *Director at GVA*

Rachel Ford: *Associate at Planning Potential*

Adrian Fisher: *Head of Planning at Cheshire East Council*

David Acton: *Warrington Borough Council*

Rachael Graham: *Senior Planner at Persimmon Homes*

Daniel Bimpson: *Senior Transport Planner, Prime Transport Planning*

Julian Jackson: *North West Planning Aid*

James Harris: *Policy and Networks Manager, RTPI*

## Next steps

This research programme is kindly sponsored by the RTPI South West, South East and North West regions.

These regional reports will be followed by a final report on the spatial dimensions of sustainability. This will continue to look beyond the simple metrics of proximity to employment and rail to consider the much broader range of factors which contribute to our notion of a 'sustainable location'.

In the meantime we encourage our members and other organisations to use our maps and analysis to explore the spatial dimensions of other significant issues. This could include, for example, a comparison of our maps against the location of major bus and cycle routes, patterns of housing affordability, smaller clusters of employment, or areas of current and future environmental risk.

You can stay informed with all the developments in this work programme, and download high-resolution of the maps, by visiting our website:

[www.rtpi.org.uk/knowledge/research/projects/location-of-development](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/knowledge/research/projects/location-of-development)

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Special thanks to GVA's internal expert advisory group: Jo Davis, Christopher Hall, James Kingdom, Pete Stockall, Matthew Morris, Nicola Rigby, Michael Nelson, Tom Baker, Charlotte Taylor, Hollie Bryant

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