Are LEPs filling the strategic void?

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Context

- The demise of regional planning and economic development created a strategic void
- In 2010 Government suggested that LEPs may tackle issues such as planning and housing, local transport and infrastructure priorities, employment and enterprise ... but are not being prescriptive
- “The ‘acid test’ would be whether LEPs could influence planning decisions to encourage development” (David Frost, FT, 14.2.11).
- “LEPs are the only supra-local game in town” (Tony Fyson).
- J. Morphet: Should we wait for “whole place” alignment (1) For sustainability (2) For accountability?
The pattern going forward?

- Non-uniform development trajectory of LEPs
- Some appear to have little time for Planning whereas others are being more proactive
- For those that do envisage a planning role, how will the role of business interests be negotiated?
- In any case, recent Treasury statements implied that new funding (i.e. the Local Growth Fund) would be influenced by the quality of Strategic Growth Plans and clear co-ordinated land use planning across all constituent Local Authorities
Key opportunities

- LEPs locally distinctive and responsive
- Bespoke arrangements and deals
- The “official” conduit for government
- Enterprise Zones may generate a revenue stream
- Stronger role in prioritising funding bids – Regional Growth Fund, Growing Places Fund, EU Structural Funds 2014-2020
- New “Strategic Growth Plans” and new EU Funding “Investment Strategy”
Part 1; Planning without sub-regional strategy...

- Frustration of cross-boundary projects
- Silo-based decisions and spatially-blind approaches, LPAs lacking competence for contentious larger projects
- Contradictory approaches to environmental features, e.g. flooding and lack of SEA
- Extra expense to less effect, e.g. unrelated location of traffic-generating land-uses and transport developments
- Many commuting Districts “pull up the drawbridge” on new housing, especially round under-bounded LPAs
- “Investing in success” may ignore deprivation (e.g. a business park at every M roundabout)
- Retail conflicts between adjoining Districts
What to align?

- “Strategic Growth Plans” “will build on existing”
- Will largely use existing sites, projects & training
- Whereas, strategic plans must cover all “development”
- NPPF wording good for business but sees the Economic “sought jointly and simultaneously” with
  - The Environment= much more than EU/UK protected sites
  - The Social= more than housing; e.g. employment
    - should be accessible by public transport
    - should not overburden existing M junctions
- Align on evidence not the “hype”
Some notable dilemmas

- LEPs are under pressure to make an instant impact – deliver “quick wins”
- Big plans, visions and statements backed up by little action
- LEPs do not have a “duty to cooperate” with Local Planning Authorities
- Local plan-making process and development management are often detached from LEP-level strategic accords
- Majority of LEPs are reluctant to get embroiled in the bureaucracy and politics of statutory planning – they lack the remit, legitimacy, resources and inclination
Part 2; Administrative contradictions

- Government contradictions e.g. Treasury statement of March contradicted by a DCLG spokesman that Strategic Growth Plans will not be planning documents, but will primarily be economic and investment strategies that are likely to “touch on some planning issues”
- City Deals are due to cover 71% of population; but they’ve been developed “spatially blind”, sometimes dividing or covering only parts of some LEPs
- How might Planning Inspectorate work meantime without strategies for major growth projects and wider infrastructure transferred to them?
- Developments in Transport, some allocations involving groups of LEPs, as Local Transport Bodies; some contention here now?
Present limitations to Planning at sub-regional scale

- How much attention will fixed investment in Infrastructure and developments needing Planning permission get, given:
  - the national Treasury Infrastructure list, or PINS’ new work
  - in some areas LEP proposals won’t be much different from the priorities of constituent Councils

- the Combined Authorities themselves will do the real Planning through their own staffs (Greater Manchester doesn't actually do Planning)

- the whole idea of LEPs doing strategic work is much more for IPPR North’s city regions

- having strategic maps is just a nice comfort zone for Planners?
Possibilities for statutory alignment across LEP (type) areas

- **Government nudging towards sub-regional governance and admin through Conurbation Mayors, Combined Authorities, Joint Planning & Other Committees, Shared Services, Joint Planning Teams**
- **More Combined Authorities?** Are they fundamentally any more democratically accountable than LEPs with LA leaders on their boards, and LA officers discharging accountable body functions for public money?
- **More Joint Planning Committees?**
- **DCLG view;** LEPs should not control Housing numbers
- **However,** the Partnerships and Planning are mutually essential, LEPs provide economic consultees and the LEP scale provides the only theatre in which to avoid chaos
Interim steps toward greater accountability across LEP areas

- Codes of conduct for consultants in setting visions in “Soft Planning” and job forecasts
- But the “Duty to co-operate” won’t reliably succeed
- En route therefore to Combined Authorities etc. LEP areas might
  1. Agree protocols with Planners
  2. Train Board Members in Planning & vice versa
  3. Joint area Planning staffs, then Committees
- But greater use of LEPs still leaves the greater South East in a very serious position
Framework for research

- An audit of LEPs’ different roles in planning to date – recognising local differentiation
- An analysis and dissemination of innovative practice and creative working methods
- An investigation of LEPs’ role in facilitating mergers of planning services
- A survey of LEPs’ planning role going forward
- An examination of how “Strategic Growth Plans” interface with neighbourhood, local and national planning processes
- An appraisal of alternative mechanisms for filling the strategic void e.g. Combined Authorities, Joint Committees
Questions?

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