

# 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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