

WEST OF ENGLAND PARTNERSHIP

9th March 2007

Report by Chief Executive

UPDATE ON PARTNERSHIP ACTIVITY

Context

1. This report provides an overview across all areas of Partnership activity. On this agenda there are draft work programmes from two groups – housing and culture / leisure, together with completed sub regional plans for tourism development and for economic development. At the previous Partnership meeting reports were considered dealing with waste and transport, evidence of good progress across all areas of Partnership activity.
2. The attached structure diagram illustrates how the Partnership relates to the working groups and also to additional associated initiatives. Partnership meetings have been scheduled on a quarterly basis throughout the coming year, preceded closely by PTEG and, wherever possible, by other working group meetings. An up to date diary of all Partnership meetings is kept on the West of England website.
3. This report has 3 sections. These deal with major work in progress; an update on other working group activity; and a section covering the Partnership Office.

i) Work in progress

New Growth Points

4. As previously reported Communities and Local Government has announced that the West of England is one of 29 areas to be granted the status of New Growth Point (NGP). The Partnership made a series of bids for a share of the NGP `pilot fund' and detailed submissions were required in order to access the funding which were made in January. Decisions on these submissions are currently awaited:
 - I. Homes West land banking project (£1.1m capital).
 - II. Green Infrastructure toolkit (£55,000 revenue).
 - III. Sub-Regional Delivery Plan (£100,000 revenue).

Sub Regional Delivery Plan

5. The need for this work was identified by the Partnership at its meeting in July and a bid was subsequently made to the New Growth Points pilot fund. Progress is now awaiting a decision on the submission to access the funding.

Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS)

6. The Examination in Public (EiP) will be held in Exeter from 17th April to 6th July 2007. A coherent sub regional case is being promoted by the Partnership and a comprehensive series of “statements” is being jointly prepared to answer questions raised by the Panel. The days set aside for dealing with the West of England are 15th to 17th May. Further details can be found at www.southwesteip.co.uk.

Waste Planning

7. Consultation is currently taking place on “issues and options” and there is an agreed programme of activity leading to the preparation of development plan documentation.

Transport Planning

8. The 5 major transport schemes, plus the Transport Innovation Fund bid, are being progressed within the governance arrangements endorsed at the last Partnership meeting. Two meetings of the Programme Steering Group have already taken place – this provides the strategic overview across all projects within the adopted project management approach.
9. The full business case for the Greater Bristol Bus Network will be submitted to the Department for Transport (DfT) shortly. It is hoped that the go ahead will be given later in the year enabling a start on delivery in the Autumn.
10. A major scheme business case for the Bath package was submitted in July 2006 and engagement is continuing with a view to obtaining programme entry, hopefully by Spring 2007.
11. Work is also taking place on developing proposals for the South Bristol Ring Road, Bus Rapid Transit and the Weston Package. Technical work on the Transport Innovation Fund bid is continuing and it is anticipated that a proposition may be ready for submission to DfT in July 2007.

ii) Update on Working Group activity

Planning, Transport and Environment Group (PTEG)

12. PTEG met on 2nd March, considering updates on the RSS and on Major Transport Schemes. It also provided preliminary comments on a paper which set out how the Partnership might tackle environmental issues, such as climate change. Environmental issues are given prominence in the Partnerships agreed Vision but have not so far been considered in any detail. At the next meeting of PTEG there will be a fuller debate.
13. PTEG members also attended the “Rail Summit” which brought together representatives from DfT, First Great Western and other related groups. The emphasis was very much on future investment and service improvement

plans and the need for the Partnership to co-ordinate a strong sub regional voice on rail issues.

Economy and Skills

14. The Groups priority has been to produce the sub regional economic strategy (see item 7 on this agenda). The emphasis will now move to the refinement of the draft delivery plan with clear milestones, responsibilities and outcomes, using “task and finish” groups to progress matters between the quarterly meetings of the main group.
15. The related IT @ Work programme is exceeding its targets and is now proposing to extend its programme, subject to agreement on operational funding.
16. The Science City initiative is working up its programme, and members attended the 3rd Science City Summit in Newcastle in February.

Rural Strategy Group

17. The Group met recently to start work on a “refresh” of the current rural strategy, with the aim of producing a much shorter, focussed document which relates closely to Local Area Agreements. The refresh will include a re-assessment of the governance arrangements for the Rural Renaissance programme.

Housing

18. The Housing Group work programme is included as Item 4 on this agenda.

Culture & Leisure

19. The draft work programme for this Group is included as item 5 on this agenda. The Group has also been involved with the Tourism Development Plan which forms agenda item 6. WESPORT works closely with the Culture and Leisure team and it is planned to bring an update on WESPORT activity to the Partnership when the final version of the Groups work programme is considered.
20. The Working Group for the 2012 Games is still awaiting a decision on the School Games, a decision which is due shortly. In the meantime the Group has generated a comprehensive programme of related activities.

iii) West of England Partnership Office (WEPO)

21. The attached structure illustrates the finalised staffing of the Partnership Office with its three cost centres – Joint Transport Team, Inward Investment and Policy and Research. All staff are now in post. Options for dealing with waste planning and management are currently under discussion.

22. WEPO budgets for 2006/2007 and for 2007/2008 have now been finalised and are with authorities for consideration. Following this transitional period it is intended to have a clear pattern of financial reporting to future Partnership meetings:

- June – out-turn from previous financial year
- September – review first 4 months of financial year
- December – review first 8 months of financial year + indicative budget for forthcoming year
- March – actual budget for next financial year.

23. WEPO work programmes are in the course of preparation and are at different stages of completion. The appended report demonstrates the breadth of the work across the three teams. As staff come into post the work programme is evolving and a further report on WEPO work programmes will be submitted to future Partnership meetings.

Recommendations:

That the Partnership notes the report.

WEST OF ENGLAND PARTNERSHIP OFFICE

Work programmes 2007 / 2008

i) Joint Transport Team (JTT)

1. There are three major work areas for the JTT in the coming year covering Major Scheme Co-ordination, Transport Policy and progress with the Joint Local Transport Plan.

Major scheme co-ordination

2. Work over the year will focus on providing the overview and co-ordination of the Regional Funding Allocation approved major transport schemes. The nature of this role varies depending on the context of the scheme, ranging from a lesser role of providing guidance and overview for single authority schemes (such as Weston Package, Bath Package) to a broader supporting role for sub regional schemes such as GBBN, Bus Rapid Transit and Transport Innovation Fund.
3. Work will include providing the Project Manager role for TiF, providing project management support to progress GBBN to full approval and BRT route option prioritisation, input to the RFA refresh process, and undertaking activities to support a co-ordinated approach to the development of these major schemes (eg monitoring and highlight reports)

Transport policy

4. Policy work will focus on accessibility, rail, rights of way improvement plan, and other regional / sub regional topics. Accessibility work continues to assist Bristol Health Service Plan and is starting to assist authorities with action plans on education, health and employment. Rail work is likely to increase following the recent Rail Summit and issues relating to the franchise.
5. Producing the Rights of Way improvement plan will be a major policy document with submission in November 2007. Representation will continue in regional issues and events.

JLTP – monitoring of capital programme + targets and indicators

6. The programme will concentrate on establishing a formal officer working group to coordinate consistent data collection, building on the successful monitoring framework established through the JLTP. This is likely to concentrate on the Best Value transport indicators for reporting to DfT and the finalisation of the strategic Transport Asset Management Plan (TAMP) document for highway maintenance, together with assessment of local authority capital programmes in terms of consistency.

7. A robust evaluation plan for GBBN will be produced with the collection of associated baseline data. A Congestion Delivery Plan will be submitted to DfT with 6 monthly updates including specification of targeted investment to improve journey times and schemes to be delivered with reward funding.

ii) Inward Investment Team

8. The initial focus is on transferring the land and property database from Bristol City Council and on ensuring that procedures are in place to maintain its accuracy and comprehensive nature. At the same time effective working practices are being put in place and working relationships established.
9. At a later stage work will be undertaken, in association with local authorities, in order to cover future planning for sites and buildings, to refine sector targeting, to link in with skills and training activity and to connect inward investment work with LAA priorities.

iii) Policy and Research Team

10. The team has an ongoing work load dealing with demographic, housing and economic statistics at a sub regional level, a work load which is driven by local authority requirements and which feeds into much planning work. Current work is concentrating on the RSS and the need for technical data to support Partnership arguments. With completion of this team a thorough review is starting to further improve, and possibly expand the service.
11. There is strong input to the waste development plan work, in association with staff from all local authorities and consultants. The future scope of this involvement is currently the subject of discussions between authorities and WEPO.