



Campaign to Protect
Rural England

AVONSIDE

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Dear Partnership Members

RE: West of England Local Enterprise Partnership

Background

- 1) A special meeting of the West of England Partnership's Joint Scrutiny Committee is to consider the Partnership's response to the Secretaries of State's (SoS) request for plans for a Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). This letter expresses CPRE Avonside Branch's views on the matter for consideration at that meeting. These views have been formed in consultation with CPRE's National Office, which has made representations on LEPs to Parliament and to the Government.
- 2) CPRE's Avonside Branch area shares the same boundary as the existing Partnership's area.

Summary

- 3) The SoS letter suggests that the LEP "tackles" planning and the Partnership's response should make clear how that is to be achieved. However, to be clear about the LEP's involvement in planning the Partnership needs first to clarify how it plans to resolve the strategic planning vacuum caused by the abolition of the RSS.

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The Campaign to Protect Rural England exists to promote the beauty, tranquillity and diversity of rural England by encouraging the sustainable use of land and other natural resources in town and country.

Registered charity number 1078047

Letters

- 4) The SoS letter seeks to “encourage a wide range of ideas, and to aid that, we would suggest some parameters.” One of that letter’s suggestions is that the LEP should “tackle” planning, housing and transport. This appears to be the only indication from the new government about what is to replace the strategic planning role of the RSS. That letter appears to be ruling nothing out though restrictions can be expected when the white paper passes into law.
- 5) The “West of England Local Enterprise Partnership” paper to be considered at the Joint Scrutiny Committee meeting includes a letter from the Partnership to the SoS with initial observations on possible content of the proposed white paper. We have taken that letter as the basis for our comments though we realise that the current draft of your response to the SoS will have evolved substantially. It is not currently available to CPRE. We anticipate obtaining a copy of the draft that will be discussed at the meeting in time to make sensible comments under the Public Forum agenda item.
- 6) The wide range of ideas that is being sought by the SoS’s letter includes tackling planning, which, as the CLG is involved, CPRE takes to mean town and country planning. This allows an option for the LEP to take on some planning functions. The LEP could inherit planning functions from two areas, which are referred to below as strategic planning functions. First, there are the areas of planning co-ordination among the four unitary authorities that the existing Partnership carries out. The second area is those functions, previously covered by the RSS that have been left for local authorities to handle. The existing Partnership will need to decide how to integrate all of the planning functions in this second group with its existing planning functions.

Strategic Planning Document

- 7) An area of joint partnership working that would greatly benefit the unitaries’ planning activities would be the production of a strategic planning document similar to the Avon Structure Plan produced by the Partnership’s predecessor JSPTU. The documents submitted by the Partnership to the Regional Assembly as preparation for the RSS provides a useful start for this. Without such a document to provide a consistent reference the unitaries’ LDF documents and planning decisions will be open to appeal on such grounds as that they are somehow inconsistent with the decisions of one or more of the other four unitaries.
- 8) The largest local strategic planning issue to be resolved is the level of residential housing provision in the four unitaries. In their appeals developers would take full advantage of any indication of inconsistency among the level setting procedures used by the unitaries. A published strategic planning policy agreed through the existing Partnership would provide a degree of protection against such appeals.

Relationship Between the Ongoing Existing Partnership and the LEP

- 9) The three basic options for integrating the augmented strategic planning functions are a) the LEP has no planning function, b) the LEP has all of the planning functions and c) the LEP has only those planning functions that relate to the economy.
- 10) There is a further option in which the existing Partnership converts into the LEP focussing primarily on economic matters. CPRE would argue strongly against such an arrangement. The broad scope of matters covered by the existing partnership and its predecessors has served the area well. It would make no sense for the “Big Society” to promote local involvement by giving the local population and non-business interests unequal voices.
- 11) If no functions are devolved to the LEP then it will be an organisation that is separate from the existing partnership and the existing partnership would retain all of the strategic planning functions.
- 12) For the LEP to have all of the strategic planning functions it would need to be fully integrated into the existing partnership. An advantage of this option is that there would be a minimum of reorganisation.
- 13) The option of setting up the LEP as a separate organisation and devolving only the business planning functions to it would require the balance of planning functions to be taken on by another organisation, presumably the existing partnership. Such a split in the planning functions would probably be unworkable because planning decisions are a balance among a wide range of competing issues. This balance is often difficult to judge even under the existing arrangements and this difficulty would be aggravated if planning functions were split.

Recommendations

- 14) The response to the Secretaries of State should clarify, in general terms, a) how the LEP is to tackle planning, housing and transportation and b) the associated groundwork that will be required before the constitution of the LEP can be finalised. This clarification should express:
- that the LEP will take on no planning responsibilities until a strategic planning document for the area is agreed
 - that the strategic planning document for the area is required to fill the vacuum left by abolition of the RSS
 - that There will be public consultation on the strategic planning document as the means of legitimising its local foundations
 - that if the LEP is given planning responsibilities then environmental and other non-business interest will be given equal representation on the LEP.

Yours sincerely

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