

WEST OF ENGLAND PARTNERSHIP

7 December 2007

Report of Chief Executive

UPDATE ON PARTNERSHIP ACTIVITY

1. This report provides an overview of Partnership activity. Partnership meetings are scheduled on a quarterly basis, preceded closely by PTEG and, wherever possible, by other group meetings. An up-to-date diary of Partnership group meetings and copies of papers for each meeting can be found on the Partnership website (www.westofengland.org). This report is in two sections: Work in progress and Update on groups.

Work in progress

New Growth Points

2. At the beginning of October the Partnership submitted a Programme of Development to the Department of Communities and Local Government. On the basis of these submissions the government will allocate New Growth Points funding for the next three years.
3. DCLG has said that announcements on this funding are expected in December. They have also said that, although the Programme of Development included a series of projects, the Partnership would not be monitored on the spend relating to these specific projects and the Partnership could decide to fund other infrastructure projects instead if these would achieve the required outcomes. The government will focus on whether outcomes for New Growth Points are achieved, in this case likely to be based on the numbers of new homes built.

Science City

4. This initiative covers the West of England and a detailed strategy is currently being formulated. A project co-ordinator has been appointed, Sarah-Jane Chilcott, who is based in the SWRDA offices in Bristol. A more detailed report will be made to a future meeting of the Partnership.

Forum For the Future

5. Forum for the Future, the sustainable development charity, is establishing an initiative with the aim of helping to make Bristol the most sustainable city region in the UK and one of the top green cities in the world. This will be a 10 to 15 year programme. The initiative will include developing exemplar projects, mapping the footprint of the city region, and communicating, learning and disseminating best practice. Within an overall strategy, specific work strands will cover sustainable mobility, local food systems, sustainable construction, low carbon living, zero waste

and education. As the initiative gathers pace there will be regular communication with the Partnership.

Regional Spatial Strategy

6. The report from the Panel (which led the Examination In Public earlier this year) regarding the draft RSS is due to be submitted to GOSW early in December 2007. Following initial checking the report will be published. It is anticipated that Proposed Modifications to the draft RSS will be prepared by CLG and published for consultation sometime after May 2008. There will follow a period of consultation, a thorough assessment of the submissions and final adoption of the RSS in Autumn 2008.

Regional Infrastructure Fund (RIF)

7. SWRDA has now appointed URS Corp to deliver the initial RIF Business Plan and their consultants are arranging visits to the local authorities in the South West growth areas to identify existing and potential schemes that could benefit from RIF.
8. The Fund has been provided to support the delivery of sustainable growth either by removing barriers to delivery, speeding up delivery or making the development more sustainable by earlier delivery of key infrastructure. Projects submitted must have a full business plan which justifies the need for cash flow support to conclude the viability of the scheme and demonstrates the ability to make the subsequent repayment of the investment. A formal agreement will be required with the local authority concerned to ensure that the investment is repaid.

Inward investment

9. The team has completed an initial review of the 'investwest' website. The review has resulted in improvements to the website including updated pages on key sectors, major development sites and information of the West of England economy. Changes being made to the existing site (www.investwest.org) are intended to contribute to the wider development of the WEP site, expected to supersede these improvements at a later date.
10. The 'evolutive' database, which holds information both on properties and enquiries, is being continuously updated to align recording processes and data. A key aim of these improvements is to enable the Partnership to monitor progress of enquiries and develop a robust understanding of 'hits' to the service and commercial property movements and availability. The team will be working closely with the Intelligence West service to further improve monitoring and information systems.
11. The team is responding to property and information requests arising from direct contact and referred by South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA) and other sources. These have included:
 - Location consultancy exploring options for financial services contact centre client
 - UK based environmental technologies company recycling facility
 - Hosting a visit to Bristol for foreign owned IT company
 - New 4* hotel provider seeking to set up a venture in the West of England

- Working with a range of West of England based companies seeking new premises
- Joint presentation with Swindon and Gloucestershire economic partnerships to UK consular financial and business sector advisors.

Local Development Scheme Timetable

12. A combined West of England timetable is being compiled using information supplied within each individual Council's Local Development Scheme. The timetable displays the planned production of the Local Development Documents, including: Statement of Community Involvement, Core Strategy, Site Allocations, Affordable Housing and the West of England Joint Waste Strategy. These are shown alongside the timetable for the Regional Spatial Strategy.
13. The stages of the preparation of these documents (Issues and Options, Preferred Options and submission) show little alignment across the West of England. However, the formal adoption stages, are broadly in line with one another, with all Core Strategies expected to be in place by 2010. Further details will be circulated to PTEG for the next meeting in February 2008.

Gypsies and travellers

14. Working is continuing with relevant officers in each Authority to prepare for the Examination in Public, being held in March 2008, into the Partial Review of the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) in respect of the provision of residential and transit accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers. Following this the RSS will specify pitch numbers for the area of each local planning authority. (The housing aspects of the work with Gypsies and Travellers are covered below.)

Research and Intelligence

15. The Research and Intelligence Team are developing the Intelligence West website as part of the wider review of the West of England Partnership Website review. The on-line map based tool has had a successful trial on the website and an additional 50 datasets will be added. This will be demonstrated at the upcoming West of England Local Intelligence Network event on January 16th at the Government Offices South West. The event is a part of the South West Observatory events series. Presentations will include an overview of the Network, and the implications of Sub-National Review and next steps in working together.
16. The Research and Intelligence Team have been supporting the following work streams:
 - a) Providing co-ordination of data for the Strategic Housing Market Area Assessment;
 - b) Co-ordinating work on producing a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment output;
 - c) Information to input into the West of England Delivery Plan;
 - d) Supporting the UAs Regional Planning Guidance monitoring returns;
 - e) Supplied data for Local Development Framework Annual Monitoring Report Contextual Indicators.

17. Key Statistics and an Economic Bulletin for Autumn 2007 have been published and are available on the Intelligence West website: www.intelligencewest.org.uk

Update on working groups

Economy and Skills Group

18. West at Work is being covered elsewhere on the agenda.
19. The Economy and Skills Group have agreed amendments to Sub-Regional Economic Strategy from North Somerset Council. Further amendments from South Gloucestershire Council have been agreed in principle, with specific wording to be agreed by the Group's Chair.
20. A sub-regional assessment of employment land requirements is being prepared. The assessment will take account of progress with local employment land studies being undertaken on an individual basis by the local councils and a further study of the employment land implications of the job growth proposals of the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy. In addition, listing of strategic employment sites is being assembled that will inform assessments of the stock of such land in the sub-region, including the consideration of availability and development constraints, and the handling of enquiries about business sites and the preparation of marketing and promotional initiatives.
21. The work and priorities of the Partnership in supporting and promoting the local economy are being set out in a 'glossy' summary. An early draft of this was considered by the Economy and Skills Group and further work now needs to be done to take their comments into consideration.
22. The September Economy and Skills Group discussed a 'Business Promotion and Relocation Strategy' and agreed a Task and Finish meeting to prioritise activities. A report, which recognised that some of the key activities of this work was already in progress, was presented to the November Economy and Skills Group. The Group agreed the recommendations, ie that the Partnership focus on the four main strands:
- Development of core enquiry handling service
 - Monitoring and intelligence
 - Developing a marketing plan
 - Linkages with sites and premises.
23. The Group further agreed that these should be undertaken with particular respect to:
- Adding value to partners' activities
 - Co-ordination of specific projects across the partnership
 - Developing better communication and relationships with the commercial sector and with property agents.

Culture, Leisure and Tourism Group

24. The first meeting of the reinvigorated group with member and partner representatives took place at the beginning of October. This focused on taking

Culture South West's *People, Places and Spaces* forward in the sub-region and on the opportunities which may be available.

25. The next Culture, Leisure and Tourism Group meeting will be on 5 December, so a verbal update can be given. It is intended that this will begin to look at the cultural and leisure needs of the sub-region, so that the link with *People, Places and Spaces* and the Regional Cultural Strategy can be driven by clearly expressed sub-regional requirements. It is intended that the culture infrastructure also be reflected in the Sub-Regional Delivery Plan, elsewhere on the agenda.

Rural Strategy Group

26. At the September meeting there was a presentation and discussion on transport and it is intended that there will be similar issue-based items in the future, so that the needs of rural areas can be reflected in all the work taking place at sub-regional level.
27. Further work is being carried out to develop actions, timescales, etc. in relation to the Rural Strategy. In particular, the Group will be taking part in a facilitated workshop on 6 December designed to take the Strategy work to the next stage.

Housing

28. The Housing Group has been progressing its delivery plan amidst much change in its membership following the elections. The new group met for the first time in October and will meet four times in 2008 with Cllr Matthew Riddle of South Gloucestershire as Chair. The highlights of our year are:
 - **Protocol with the Housing Corporation**

The protocol was finalised during the year and agreed at the meeting in October. The protocol sets out what each party will do to ensure that we and our partner housing associations are addressing housing needs in the sub-region. It includes actions to prevent homelessness, effectively use resources to deliver affordable homes, deliver choice based lettings and rationalise the ownership and management of housing association homes locally.
 - **Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA)**

Work is progressing on the SHMA for the West of England and the other areas included in our "housing market" (Mendip and West Wiltshire). Glen Bramley has been appointed to conduct the housing needs assessment and a project manager has recently been appointed to ensure the project delivers to meet our needs in line with the Government guidance.
 - **Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment**

The final report on the assessment was produced in time to provide the information needed by the Regional Assembly on the number of new pitches required. A workshop was held with staff working with Gypsies and Travellers to draft an action plan to address the other recommendations of the report. These will be discussed with the Forum in the new year and other Gypsies and Travellers will be consulted at an event in February.
 - **Land bank funded through New Growth Points**

Following the successful bid for funding a number of schemes have been identified that can progress within the timescale and these exceed the budget

by around £600k. Schemes are being prioritised on the basis of deliverability and value for money.

- **Private housing**

It was another busy year for this area as we developed joint accreditation standards for private lettings and held a further extremely successful Landlords Expo. We have recently extended our joint working to include activity around bringing empty private homes back into use.

- **Accommodation supply through private sector**

As an extension to the successful Cross Authority Lettings project, which encouraged new private landlords to let their homes through us to meet local needs, we have established an Accommodation Group. This will work to procure private rented accommodation to help prevent homelessness and to supply further choice through our choice based lettings services.

Transport

29. Significant progress has been made with Regional Funding Allocation approved major transport schemes. Full approval of the Greater Bristol Bus Network scheme by Department for Transport (DfT) is understood to be imminent. The Bath Package scheme achieved Programme Entry in October 2007. Work is progressing to submit to the DfT in October 2008 a Business Case for a Bus Rapid Transit scheme from Ashton Vale to Emersons Green and also a Business Case for the Weston Package scheme.
30. A major step towards tackling the region's congestion challenges was taken in October by submitting the first stage of the process that sees the four West of England Partnership authorities uniting to express continued interest in developing a bid for a slice of the Government's £1.4bn Transport Innovation Fund in Spring 2008.
31. The Rights of Way Improvement Plan is a requirement of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. It has 4 themes: improving maintenance and safety, signing routes, providing information and improving access for local travel. The Final Plan for Bristol, South Gloucestershire and Bath and North East Somerset Councils was submitted to Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) on 20 November 2007.
32. Rail continues to be an important issue and a letter from the Chair of the Partnership, the Chair of PTEG and Executive Members from the 4 UAs was forwarded to the Minister Tom Harris on 2 October 2007 and the Minister responded on 6 November 2007. It is proposed to send a further letter to the Minister as it is important to express our continued concerns about the use of Class 142 trains in the area, First Great Western's performance, the December 2007 timetable and Network Rail's role. It is proposed to keep these issues before the Minister by requesting a meeting in the near future.
33. With such a wide range of transport initiatives being progressed, communication with stakeholders is viewed by the Partnership as very important. A Joint Transport Forum was held on 16 November 2007 attended by over 100 delegates from across the area and a wide range of organisations at which lively discussions on all the above issues were held and a report on the event will be on the Partnership website in December.

Waste

34. Current work is focused on preparing the Preferred Options stage of the Joint Waste Development Plan Document, which is about the distribution of waste management facilities within the West of England. The four authorities have been working together with consultants ERM on a project to identify appropriate sites for strategic waste management facilities and to assess their suitability in planning terms and their deliverability. The Preferred Options will be consulted upon in Spring 2008. They have also been working with waste management officers who are preparing, with consultants Jacobs, a Joint Waste Strategy.

Recommendation:

That the Partnership notes the report.