

27006/ASP/LH/A38a

18th January 2007

Sir Michael Lyons
Lyons Inquiry
Room 3/12
1 Horse Guards Road
London
SW1A 2HQ

Dear Sir Lyons

Lyons Inquiry into Local Government

Promoting economic prosperity: considering the implications of Eddington, Barker and Leitch

If we are to be considering changes then these should be in the light of perceived weaknesses in the present system, it was disappointing that there was no critical appraisal or identification of weaknesses in the current systems. Changes for the sake of change are usually expensive and counter productive.

Questions for stakeholders

Eddington Transport Study

We note the Eddington Study was commissioned to examine the long-term links between transport and the UK's economic productivity growth.

Governance – broadly speaking there is a need for partnership working on improving the performance of existing transport networks, (especially in congested and growing city catchments), to meet both economic and environmental goals. Policy is needed to get the prices right, (especially congestion pricing on the roads and environmental pricing across all modes), and make the best use of existing networks.

Convening – by a joined up approach with appropriate input at local level.

Funding – whilst local authorities currently retain the revenue from local road pricing schemes, there is a common perception that a greater proportion of monies going into central government from Road Fund Licences and petrol/diesel levies, needs to be utilised towards the funding of new roads and improvements.

Barker Review of Land Use Planning

We note the Barker Review was set up in 2005 to consider how, in the context of globalisation, planning policy and procedures could better deliver economic growth and prosperity alongside other sustainable development goals. The Review's interim report was published in July 2006, and that the Review's final report aims to create planning policy and processes that give appropriate weight to economic benefits, are more responsive to changing circumstances (including environmental pressures), and deliver decisions in a more transparent and timely manner.

Governance – paramount, we believe, is the need to ensure that the planning system and plan-making takes better account of the benefits of economic development and job creation, by the streamlining of policies and processes and reforming plan-making at the local level. Local authorities need to work effectively in partnership across wider areas. Green belt land needs to be retained as a 'green lung' and to avoid coalescence between towns and cities.

Convening – local authorities need to work with local communities on their concerns and potential benefits when addressing planning, housing and transport issues.

Funding – there is a need for incentives to local authorities to support appropriate growth, and the introduction of a charge on vacant and derelict brownfield land could be one way forward, perhaps with some degree of local flexibility.

Leitch Review of Skills

We note the Leitch Review was tasked in 2004 with identifying the UK's optimal skills mix in 2020 to maximise economic growth, productivity and social justice, and to consider the policy implications of achieving the level of change required. It published its interim report in 2005.

Governance – local authorities in their strategic leadership role need to take their shared responsibility with the LSC (Learning and Skills Council), for the planning and management of 14-19 education, consistent with their leadership role in children's services overall, ensuring the integration of the delivery of 14-19 reform with the wider agenda for children and young people in the locality.

Convening – new relationships need to be forged with local authorities and a reformed Learning and Skills Council, to achieve the outcome aims of the Review.

Funding – supporting funding to carry out the Leitch recommendations need to be prioritised by local authorities, in competition for other funding requirements of service delivery. With government funding, certainly in the South and East of England at a low, and with the threat of capping, delivery of this level of change may be somewhat problematical.

Overall – we doubt that local authorities currently have the powers they need to effectively undertake their place-shaping role, particularly with regard to pursuing economic prosperity. There is certainly a variation between different parts of the country with the rural/urban split, and not least the North/South divide with regard to government funding, which points need addressing, if this level of change is to be achieved uniformly. A power of general competence should be given to all tiers of Local Government, with more power and service delivery at the local Town and Parish Council level.

Yours sincerely,

Anita S Pack
Town Clerk