

Questions for stakeholders

Overall

1. Do local authorities have the powers they need to effectively undertake their place-shaping role, particularly with regard to pursuing economic prosperity?

Place shaping is a task for local authorities working in partnership with other agencies and organisations. This requires the local authority to use the wide range of powers already available including the new types of delivering models but to also be able to formally hold other bodies to account as envisaged in the White Paper in relation to Local Area Agreements.

Functional economic sub area/regions, such as the Haven Gateway do cross traditional local authority boundaries and the challenge is to find new ways of working.

Making the production of Regeneration Strategies/Statements a statutory requirement, which they previously were, would help the focus. This could be achieved by making this document a key component part of the new Sustainable Communities Strategy regime.

2. How do the issues raised by the three reviews, and the implications of their recommendations, vary between different parts of the country and different kinds of place, for example between rural areas and major cities?

The reviews are very urban centred and the subsequent City Development Companies consultation only reinforces this emerging approach. Issues of rural deprivation and disadvantage are often masked by the lack of data.

There is clearly a different agenda for cities, towns and rural areas driven by their changing roles and transport and housing costs are key issues. For example, cities have to find ways of increasing public transport patronage to maintain their competitive advantage by being able to continue to draw on dense and wide labour markets whilst villages are increasingly of necessity car dependant as services like shops, post offices and banks are steadily being withdrawn.

3. Are there any other aspects of these reviews relevant to local authorities and to their place-shaping role that I have not identified? If so, what are they and what are their implications.

The Barker Review contains a much wider ranging set of recommendations that will influence planning decisions at a local level by, for example, re focusing scarce planning skills in a more strategic way and adopting a less "one size fits all" approach to development control.

Eddington Transport Study

Background

The Eddington Study was commissioned to examine the long-term links between transport and the UK's economic productivity, growth and stability, within the context of the Government's broader commitment to sustainable development.

The Study's final report makes the following recommendations across its remit:

- To meet the changing needs of the UK economy, Government should focus policy and sustained investment on improving the performance of existing transport networks, in those places that are important for the UK's economic success;
- Over the next 20 years, the three strategic economic priorities for transport policy should be: congested and growing city catchments; key interurban corridors; and the key international gateways that are showing signs of increasing congestion and unreliability;
- Government should adopt a sophisticated policy mix to meet both economic and environmental goals. Policy should get the prices right (especially congestion pricing on the roads and environmental pricing across all modes) and make best use of existing networks;
- The Government, together with the private sector, should deliver sustained and targeted infrastructure investment in those schemes which demonstrate high returns, including smaller schemes tackling pinch points;
- The policy process needs to be rigorous and systematic, to consider the full range of modal options and to ensure that spending is focused on the best policies; and
- Government needs to ensure the delivery system is ready to meet future challenges, including through reform of sub-national governance arrangements, new arrangements for the regulation of the bus sector, and reforming the planning process for major transport projects by introducing a new Independent Planning Commission to take decisions on projects of strategic importance.

The Government has announced that it will be proposing reforms to bus regulation and passenger transport powers in a draft bill later this year.

Implications for local government

The key questions arising from the Eddington Study concern the appropriate spatial level and possible models for sub-national decision-making on transport issues, and the accountability, funding and governance implications of those. The Study sets out principles and considerations for such arrangements, including a concern that they should operate at a geographical scale that covers the functional economic area. However, it does not provide conclusive recommendations, and notes that it has not considered a number of important associated issues including accountability structures, the fit with other bodies, the costs and practicalities of changes and the benefits of aligning transport decision-making with other policy powers.

Governance

4. Can local authorities work effectively in partnership to deliver transport outcomes or are new/reformed institutions necessary?

Yes examples already exist in the Thames Gateway and the Northern Way. The Haven Gateway is establishing a Transport Forum to undertake this role in the sub region.

There are no obstacles to transport plans managed jointly by adjoining local authorities. The greatest problem is funding what is required.

5. What are the key behaviours required of local authorities to work in such partnerships? Would new institutional or contractual arrangements be needed to support them?

There is a need to develop closer working relationships between transport and policy planners to ensure all spatial aspects are addressed.

There needs to be an acceptance that economic activity and the consequential traffic it generates does not recognize local authorities boundaries which requires a shared agenda at a political level.

Authorities can work together within two tier areas or across County boundaries and address issues through the existing mechanisms of SLAs, LAAs and MAAs.

6. Do the issues not considered by Eddington – particularly the potential benefits of aligning transport with other policy powers – alter the best overall design for governance arrangements?

Yes, because of the interrelationships between policy at all levels. As the report says whilst it “has not explored housing and land use policy in any detail, it is very clear that such policies will have important read across to transport interventions and their resulting success.”

7. How could local government make use of any new bus powers in line with its broader role in promoting economic development?

No comment.

Convening

8. How can local authorities make the links between transport and other elements of economic development and quality of life most effectively at the local level?

By recognising the vital role of public transport for the most disadvantaged to allow them to access key public services unless conversely services are taken to them. The conclusions of the Stern Review have brought centre stage the need to use planning powers wherever possible to reduce the overall demand for travel and the need to curb or use the private car in particular by incentives rather than restrictions. As the report says “the location of new housing its transport and other infrastructure requirements all need to be planned together in order to maximise the available benefits.”

To promote economic development local authorities must take greater account of the locational needs of businesses in their plans to ensure that there is an appropriate choice of available sites to meet different needs and the facility for local businesses to expand.

In practice of the sub-regional level the success of achieving Haven Gateway Growth Point status gives renewed focus to both development proposals and the infrastructure (including transport issues) necessary to mitigate/serve new developments. The designation of the growth point area brings with it the potential to unlock additional sources of monies, which would not otherwise be available.

At the district level transport and infrastructure should feature in the Sustainable Community Strategy.

Funding

9. How could current funding arrangements best be reformed to support cost effective and appropriate spending and investment decisions at sub-national level?

The process of ranking and prioritisation of schemes is improving as regional and sub-regional plans are progressed for longer planning time scales, emerging needs are identified and other factors like reliability and the valuation of time savings are taken into account. Given the pressure on resources at all levels it is vital that all levels of government understand how decisions are taken and at what point due consultations take place.

The planning gain proposals being promoted by the government should increase the infrastructure funding “pot” available at a sub-regional and/or local level.

10. What transport funding sources are most appropriately managed by local bodies? What would be the most appropriate incentives to encourage the adoption of demand management options at a local level?

The benefits from the emerging planning gain proposals. Demand management options benefit from “pump-planning” funding to help get them off the ground where their initial viability is questionable and encourage member and public buy-in to what would be regarded as unpopular measures.

11. Local authorities currently retain the revenues from local road pricing schemes. How might further developments in this area affect the use of those revenues?

No comment, since the “further developments” are not identified.

Barker Review of Land Use Planning

Background

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.

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.

It recommends:-

- Ensuring the planning system and plan-making takes better account of the benefits of economic development and job creation
- Streamlining policy and processes through reducing policy guidance, unifying consent regimes and reforming plan-making at the local level
- Greater certainty, by reducing Ministerial call-ins by 50%, speeding up the appeals processes and introducing individually tailored delivery agreements between planning authorities and developers
- Encouraging local authorities to work together, and in the medium term considering how strategic planning powers can be operated at a level which better aligns spillovers with administrative boundaries
- Encouraging planning bodies to review their green belt boundaries
- Considering how fiscal incentives can be provided to local authorities to support appropriate development;
- Introducing a new system for dealing with major infrastructure projects, based around national Statements of Strategic Objectives and an independent Planning Commission to determine applications;
- Considering enhancing fiscal incentives to ensure an efficient use of urban land, in particular by reforming business rate relief for empty property and exploring the options for a charge on vacant and derelict previously developed land

Implications for local government

The key questions arising from the Barker Review concern the appropriate spatial level for different planning decisions, the role of an independent planning commission to make national decisions, and the incentives and funding flexibilities available to local authorities.

Governance

12. What specific measures are needed to ensure that local planning authorities have appropriate flexibility over issues of solely local impact? Are there particular implications from the Review's recommendations on the use of green belt land?

The planning regime seeks to strike a balance between national, regional and local issues. The keys to local flexibility are the nature and extent of any "call-in" powers the government retains for development control and ensuring that Local Development Frameworks add value to the higher level policy context by identifying what matters in terms of preserving and enhancing the local built and natural environment.

The green belt has been one of the most successful and popular post-war planning measures but in reality there are fringe urban areas of low qualitative value which the public pass through on their day to day journeys to work. Any relaxation "in principle" of the protected status of such areas could only be based on a prior assessment and public debate about the benefits to be gained to the public realm generally in terms of greater access and significant landscape improvements.

13. What different approaches could be taken to enable strategic decisions to be taken at an appropriate spatial level? Can local authorities work effectively in partnership across wider areas to do this or are new/reformed institutions necessary?

Non-statutory strategic sub-regional planning arrangements should be encouraged which recognise economic communities of interest and if authorities over a period of time wish to move towards a statutory LDF framework that should be possible.

There is considerable evidence that cross boundary working can deliver more integrated solutions e.g. Haven Gateway. As one of the "key" authorities engaged with the Haven Gateway sub region, close working relations have and will need to continue to be developed. Sub-regional planning is a relatively new experience for the partner organisation involved, which achieves consensus and agreement on some issues and leaves other areas of partnership working still to be addressed.

From this Council's experience of sub-regional work, it is very clear that all local authorities find it extremely difficult to plan for development on a sub-regional basis, where this does not sit comfortably with district interests. For example the issue of employment creation at the sub-regional level is one all authorities can sign up to. However, the distribution and allocation of land can result in local "protectionist" arguments and Planning Inquiries are often the means to resolve such disagreements.

At present the statutory arrangements place the emphasis on district plan making with the associated consultation processes and different plans are at different stages of development / joint decision approved.

However, plan making bodies could be encouraged to bring about a steady convergence process over a number of years based upon a direction of travel that they should recognise and take account of cross boundary issues and consequences.

14. What role should local authorities have in relation to a future independent Planning Commission, and how should they best work with local communities on their concerns and potential benefits?

They would need the opportunity to be consulted on the national policy agenda in terms of what is being proposed but be able to influence detailed plans at a local level. So for example in terms of major port development of which this Council has experience from the Bathside Bay Container Terminal Public Inquiry, the location and need for the port's expansion would not have been part of national spatial planning and would not be matters for local debate but its layout and consequential impact would be issues where the local planning authority would have wanted to express clear views.

Convening

15. How can local authorities link work on planning, housing and transport issues together most effectively?

Via sub-regional joint working as referred to in 13 above.

In preparing for the Haven Gateway Growth Point Bid three supporting documents were commissioned on Employment Land, Regeneration Opportunities and Infrastructure Studies (including transport infrastructure). This has and will be useful for the partner authorities to feed into the preparation of Local Development Schemes via joint working sub-regional retail studies, housing needs assessment and gypsy needs studies have been prepared. Generally this partnership approach to joint working takes place where the piece of technical work lends itself to a joint approach, it is cost efficient to share the funding for the participating authorities and the timetable of the authorities is appropriate.

All of the three factors listed above are very important for shared work to be undertaken. With the introduction of both the Local Development Framework and the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy there are perhaps more opportunities for partnership working with neighbouring authorities to take place. It has historically been the case that very rarely are neighbouring authorities able to share the preparation of technical studies given that more often than not they are working to different timetables. Even within the Haven Gateway sub-regional historically the Suffolk Authorities have had a Structure Plan that looked to 2016 whilst in Essex the period was to 2011.

Funding

16. What would be the most effective and practical means of creating incentives for local authorities to support appropriate growth?

Historically growth has taken place within districts but without the appropriate level of investment being secured to deliver the associate infrastructure burdens. Tendring District is no different to many areas of the country that have deficit infrastructure unable to adequately deal with the demands placed by decades of development.

The current Planning Delivery Grant remains a major tool for Central Government. Not only should this financial incentive remain in place but for future years, it should be shifted to reflect both quality of service and delivery. It can be seen that Central Government has begun this process with the switch away from BVPI 109 that is predominantly a process driven target (which can and does skew the focus on work) to one of implementation.

Equally, investment should be directed to the government's own priority areas, including those which have recently achieved Growth Point Status, not least because there is a willingness from the partner authorities to deliver major housing and employment development.

The final issue to be raised is in relation to capability and capacity. The construction sector has been and continues to be very buoyant, with private consultancy and planning consultants growing significantly over the past decade. As a consequence of this private sector success story many local authorities, Tendring included, have either lost or found it very difficult to recruit planning officers with 5 – 10 years experience. Local Authorities find it difficult to compete for that lost generation (30 – 45 years old) of planning professionals.

Both the Planning Advisory Service and organisations such as the English Partnership ATLAS (major projects team) provide best practice and practical hands on assistance to local authorities. Such support needs to be strengthened and the resources increased. This valuable asset could directly address capability and in turn capacity for a number of hard pressed authorities who lack in-house expertise.

The current LABGI scheme although rewarding local authorities on past performance does not provide the level of financial support necessary to deliver major projects that will deliver the step change in the local economy that may be required.

17. How should the empty property relief in business rates be reformed? How should a charge on vacant and derelict brownfield land be introduced into the existing local land and property tax system? Would any local flexibility on such measures be desirable?

Differential sectoral relief should be considered for empty properties and a charge on relevant or derelict brownfield land but with incentives to remediate contaminated land, taking into local circumstances.

Leitch Review of Skills

Background

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.

The Review's final report, Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills, recommends that:

- Attainment in adult skills across all levels should be increased, measuring success on outcomes not outputs;
- Train to Gain and Learner Accounts should be used to fund adult skills development in a demand-led fashion, making the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) responsible for managing funding and ensuring effective competition;
- The collective voice of employers in the skills system needs to be strengthened by rationalising existing bodies and creating a new Commission for Employment and Skills;
- Employer engagement and investment in skills should be increased through reform of the Sector Skills Councils;
- A new 'Pledge' should be launched for employers to voluntarily commit to train all eligible employees up to Level 2;

- People's aspirations and awareness of the value of skills should be increased through sustained awareness programmes and a new universal adult careers service; and
- A new integrated employment and skills service should be created to increase sustainable employment and progression, and develop a network of employer-led Employment and Skills Boards to influence delivery (ideally at the level of the functional economy)

Implications for local government

The Leitch Review's recommendations propose significant changes to the way in which adult skills should be funded, managed and influenced, with implications for how local authorities can and should engage with skills and employment issues.

The recommendations also raise questions about the planning and management of 14-19 education, responsibility for which is shared between local authorities (14-16) and the LSC (16-19). The Government announced in the recent White Paper on Further Education that it wants "local authorities to play the strategic leadership role, 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". I am interested in the nature of this strategic leadership role and what it means for the relationship between local authorities and the LSC, and how these relationships might develop in the light of the Leitch Review's recommendations. A number of options have been raised, from the status quo to improved partnerships or unifying responsibilities in local authorities or elsewhere.

Governance

- 18. With their new strategic leadership role, how can local authorities relate most effectively to a reformed Learning and Skills Council on 14-19 education issues? What are the merits of the different options for managing the division of these responsibilities?**

Via involving the LSC in the Local Strategic Partnership's implementation of a Sustainable Community Strategy which addresses young people's issues across the whole policy spectrum making the connections between educational aspirations and achievements, the demands of the work place and a culture of skills development and improvement across the whole work force.

Convening

- 19. What links need to be made between employment and skills provision, and other local services and responsibilities?**

The key link is that all partners need to recognise the central role of jobs for the well-being and the skills base of the local work force of the district because of the "trickle down" effect on other parts of the economy in terms of retailing for example and in underpinning the mental health of the population, reducing crime, combating social exclusion, increasing social cohesion etc.

- 20. What role should local authorities play in a new demand-led skills system?**

Through its economic development role encouraging the business community to recognise the threats and opportunities of global competition, making companies aware of the training available and feeding their needs into policy planning in the period up to 2010.

- 21. What role should local authorities play in the proposed Employment and Skills Boards, to ensure skills and employment issues are properly linked to wider work on economic prosperity and development?**

With their multi-functional role including leading Local Strategic Partnerships local authorities are well placed to advise and inform the Boards on the barriers to employment. They are well practiced in partnership working and can provide the local context to delivering the national agenda identified in Leitch.

At a County level the Local Area Agreement arrangements provide the mechanism for ensuring a co-ordinated approach. This will be strengthened even further if the draft Local Govt. Bill proposals regarding LAA are adopted.

Funding

22. What implications for local authority funding do the Leitch recommendations or related proposals have?

The cost of demand-led training need to be subsidised at a level which gets local businesses to commit to in-house training for their workforce, especially for apprentices. Education authorities need to be able to provide high quality facilities with more emphasis on vocational provision where real skills can be learnt by 14-19s in a simulated workplace setting.

The funds must be available to support the new "Pledge" for employers if it is taken up on the scale envisaged to be needed in the report.