

## County Durham Economic Partnership

Senior Advisory Panel  
17 May 2007, 6:30pm  
St Hild and St Bede College

### MINUTES

#### Attendees

Bob Hope (Chair)	Wear Valley District Council
Zoë Thirlaway	County Durham Economic Partnership
Bob Ward	County Durham Economic Partnership
Linda Edworthy	Durham County Council
Richard Prisk	District of Easington Council
Stewart Watkins	County Durham Development Company
Martin Walker	Chester-le-Street District Council
Elaine Richardson	JobCentre Plus
James Usher	Teesdale District Council
John Pearson	Derwentside District Council
Paul Ryan	City of Durham Council
Rachel Spence	North East Chamber of Commerce
Joanna Tait	FE Colleges Representative
Sue Parkinson	Business & Enterprise Working Group
Peter Coe	District of Easington Council
Gordon Jackson	One NorthEast
Nick James	Learning and Skills Council
Lee Shostak	Shared Intelligence
Chris Duffill	Shared Intelligence
John McCreadie	EKOS

#### 1. Apologies

Dave Peebles	JobCentre Plus
Andy Palmer	Sedgefield Borough Council
Dorothy Kelly	One NorthEast
John Anstee	County Durham Development Company
Nick Muse	One NorthEast
Melanie Sensicle	County Durham Tourism Partnership

#### 2. Declarations of interest

None declared.

The panel were reminded of the remit of the group, which was as a forum for discussing topics to advise the Board and assist in their decision making.

### **3. Minutes of the Last Meeting**

Richard Prisk highlighted that he was from the District of Easington Council not Sedgfield Borough Council.

It was requested that the Image and Reputation programme come back to the SAP as it has not been clear what exactly was being proposed at this stage.

**Agreed Action: Secretariat**

The minutes were agreed as a true record.

### **4. County Durham Economic Strategy**

John McCreadie provided a presentation on the current draft of the County Durham Economic Strategy (CDES) explaining the changes which had been made, following consultation with strategic stakeholders, and the rationale behind those changes.

The following points came out of the discussion.

- The corridor approach had been removed because the RES Action Plan was only focusing on a smaller number of bigger impact projects, which ONE felt was the best way to strengthen the regions economy. As such the corridors covered too much of the County and was not focused enough.
- It was highlighted that the 'priority places' would not be the only places in County Durham which would be invested in. In order to meet the needs of the other economic priorities, such as manufacturing for example, there would need to be investment in the key industrial sites.
- A new cross cutting theme was the ambition to become a carbon neutral county. It was felt that everyone was looking at this agenda and County Durham would have to decide if they meant this, whether it would give the County an advantage or if it was more of a social requirement.
- Concerns were raised that the document was very insular, very inward looking and didn't make enough reference to the city, regional or national agendas. It was not felt to be visionary and it was not clear from the document where the County wanted to be in the next 20 years and what contribution it would make to the Region.
- It was felt that there needed to be a stronger evidence base as it was not clear in the current document that there was sufficient evidence behind the priorities which had been chosen. The document needed to be visionary and ambitious but with an understanding that this may involve a long term (10 yrs +) timescale.

- It was highlighted that this document was a product of all of the Partners. If it wasn't visionary then that was a reflection on the Partnership not the consultants. It was also highlighted that this was only the summary document and that there was a full 80 page strategy document which provided a greater detail of information, the evidence base and the story behind the key actions.
- It was felt that a lot of emphasis was being placed on housing but that there wasn't the economic justification to back this up.
- Lee Shostak emphasised the enormity of the proposed challenges, he knew of no other place which was looking to 'eradicate' NEETS, provide the best support from the public sector to 'every' manufacturing company in the County or ensure that such a number of small places be 'made great'. He felt that there was real ambition in this.
- The national employment aspiration was 80%, it was suggested that County Durham could aspire to a level even higher than this to give it an edge.
- There was concern voiced over how the success of the CDES could be measured and how the targets and benchmarks should be set. It was highlighted that not all of the achievements would be reached though Partnership funds.
- It was felt that the overall tone of the document was not positive enough. It was also felt that the County should be more audacious and daring in their outlook. (Chutzpah) It was suggested that there should be a clear positive statement of the Partnership's ambition drawn out at the beginning of the document.
- It was suggested that all references to coal mines should be removed.
- It was highlighted that with such a disperse settlement pattern in the County all towns and villages could not be developed all at once. If the Partnership was going to concentrate on the 'priority places' then consequently other settlements have to remain static or even potentially slightly decline. The Partnership would have to be honest and accept that scenario. The various scenarios had been looked at in more detail in the main document.
- It was felt that there was a danger that the Partnership would decide what it wanted to do and then try to justify it. It was felt that the Partnership should be more ambitious than that.
- It was seen as disappointing that the Director of International Standing had been removed from the ambitions of the County. It was highlighted that this could be particularly difficult during LGR, although there were views that this post would transcend this. It was also

highlighted by Lee Shostak that there were few places who had actually managed to either attract or retain a Director of International Standing as there was a distinct lack of suitable candidates. He felt that the Director often masked the ability of the Partnership to work together and as such the Partnership should concentrate on being leaders in their own right.

- It was felt that if the Partnership were going to adopt the commitment to NEETS then it needed to be reflected more on the front summary page and would need more emphasis in the rest of the document. It was felt that the current ambition detailed in the document was not great enough, it was just what partners already did, the challenge would be to eradicate NEETS.
- It was felt that Countywide WiFi was not a big idea in itself but the challenge would be getting everyone to use that broadband for the economic benefit of the County.
- It was requested that in the covering section the references to delivery through LEGI and BLNE should be removed as it was not certain how delivery would be managed in the future.
- It was suggested that the support of all manufacturing companies should actually be 'targeted' manufacturing companies.
- If lead agencies were to be detailed in the tables then it should only be one – not the world and his wife.
- It was felt that having 5 or 6 big ideas was important.
- It was suggested that the Partnership should not be unduly concerned with ONE's priorities until the Action Plan stage when allocating resources. ONE's view needed to be changed if necessary. ONE highlighted the fewer, bigger, better message and emphasised that the RES had been through a rigorous consultation process and that the Partnership should be looking at how to add value to the RES.
- It was felt that this strategy should be the opportunity to throw a real challenge to Durham University. It was hoped that with the arrival of Chris Higgins there would be new possibilities but it would involve 1-1 discussions as soon as possible. The University should be embedded in the Strategy.
- It was felt that the section on Economic Challenges did not flow clearly into the actions required.
- It was summarised that the Partnership wanted solid core logic in 6 or so core ideas which the strategy would flow from. The Partnership needed to decide what the core logic and core ideas were. A definition

needed to be agreed on or the discussion would keep going round in circles. It was felt that the group could be too large to come to any decisions, but it was also highlighted that this wasn't a decision making group and that the strategy could go to the Board with a list of the Partner's concerns. It was agreed that the group's remit however was to make the decisions of the Board easier. It was highlighted that there was a special Board meeting planned on the 18 June and that papers would need to go out 10 days in advance.

- It was felt that the core business items could be signed up to but that there needed to be some clarification on the new items such as carbon neutrality. It was explained that Carbon Neutrality was partly in relation to the brand issues for the County. It was felt that the County shouldn't miss out on this agenda. As a semi rural County there were a number of things the County should be doing. This could include things like organic food production and growing fuel for school buses. The activities might not all have economic benefits but this was the biggest issue facing the world currently. It was felt that further work should be carried out on carbon neutrality to identify the economic opportunities.
- It was felt that there needed to be further debate on whether the priority places would ensure the Partnership achieved the goals and ambitions of the strategy.
- It was felt that the strategy was lacking a transport strand which would link together a number of the key priorities and the City Regions.
- Within the environment strand there were two issues. 1. The environment as an asset which was not fully exploited, this included quality of life issues and 2. Consideration of what the Partnership do and what the environmental impact of that activity would be. It was questioned whether this should be one of the six big things. It was felt that it might need some more work but that it should be.
- It was suggested that 'vibrant towns and villages' could be listed as an overall objective with the priority places underneath that.
- Lee Shostak summarised by saying that;
  1. The Partnership were right to ask for the economic rational for these priorities,
  2. There would be physical investment in other places such as where there were manufacturing or tourism priorities,
  3. The 'vibrant towns and villages' would need to be prioritised,
  4. If the Partnership were looking forward 20 years then they would need to look at the road charging agenda as that could have a severe impact on a County such as Durham with such a dispersed settlement pattern. A spatial plan would end up with corridors, transport links and housing however the place for that debate was in the RSS and LDF.

- The group debated the removal of the corridors at length. Agreement could not be reached on the inclusion or exclusion of the corridors or the methodology behind defining them. However it was agreed that the document needed to describe the different economic circumstances and roles of the different parts of the County using the stabilisation, revitalisation and transformational framework. It was agreed that John McCreadie would speak to all of the districts to establish this spatial dimension.
- There was a note of caution that housing lead regeneration could not be guaranteed due to the RSS.
- The Economic Regeneration Working Group had looked at the Experian report on Housing Lead Growth and Disposable Income Study. Although it was inconclusive at this point it would be worth seeing the outcome of the repeat study in two years time as it would potentially form a good evidence base for the 'vibrant towns and villages' work.

### **Next Steps**

It was suggested that the full revised strategy together with a list of unresolved comments from the SAP should go to the Board on the 18<sup>th</sup> of June. Between this meeting and the Board papers being circulated, on the 8<sup>th</sup> of June, a small group would come together to ensure that all the points discussed at the SAP had been incorporated where appropriate. However, it was accepted that due to the time constraints this might have to be done via correspondence. Once the strategy had been to the Board a full consultation process would begin and stakeholders would have a further opportunity for comment.

### **5 Any Other Business**

None.

### **6. Forward programme of meetings - all meetings start at 9:30 unless specified**

- 21 May, Skills and Enterprise Special, St Hild and St Bede College
- 20 June, Committee Room 1b, County Hall
- 20 September, Committee Room 1b, County Hall