

**Towards City  
Regions in  
Wales**

**DLP BRIEFING NOTE 74**

Prepared by  
**DLP Planning Ltd**

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## Client Briefing Note: Towards City Regions in Wales?

### Welsh Government Announcement

It was reported in both the Planning and the national press this week that the Welsh Government (WG) are beginning to explore the possibility of **using city regions as a tool to encourage economic development.**

The Business and Enterprise Minister Edwina Hart AM (Lab) announced the launch of a study, to be undertaken by a 'Task and Finish Group' chaired by Dr Elizabeth Haywood (Director of the South East Wales Economic Forum) and former director of CBI Wales. The study will:-

- *"consider the evidence for supporting city regions, identifying specific areas that might be appropriate to support in Wales and their characteristics;*
- *establish the likely key economic development opportunities and benefits offered by each of the identified city regions and any potential from working together;*
- *identify the strategic and high-level issues associated with each of the areas as part of a consistent approach to supporting city regions in Wales;*
- *suggest how the proposed city regions might best benefit from opportunities in the short, medium and long-term, such as future EU funding, rail electrification and Local Development Plans;*
- *outline the distinguishing propositions offered by each of the identified city region areas; and*
- *establish whether, and if so what, policy and institutional changes will be required in Wales to deliver an effective approach to supporting city regions."*

At present the members of the group have not been announced, but their findings will be expected in 2012. Planning strategy can be expected to be at the heart of their discussions.

### Existing Sources of Cross-Boundary Planning Advice

Of course, the **Wales Spatial Plan** (WSP) already sets broad strategic directions for different areas; LPAs must have regard to the **WSP** in preparing their Local Development Plan (LDP), although the **WSP is not part of the development plan framework** and nor does there need to be strict conformity between the LDP and WSP. The Tests of Soundness also require the LDP to have regard to other relevant plans, policies and strategies relating to the area or to adjoining areas.

Furthermore *Planning Policy Wales* confirms that "**cross boundary work should be integrated into LDPs where relevant. Collaborative reports of a strategic nature will be important inputs to the LDP evidence base, preparation and examination.**"

An additional existing level of planning is provided by the **South East Wales Strategic Planning Group** (SEWSPG), who have a Memorandum of Understanding on the subject of regional housing apportionment.

### **The Cardiff Local Development Plan**

If a city-region approach is advocated by the Task Group, it is most likely that the two main regions would be based around Cardiff and Swansea. With convenient timing, Cardiff Council this week **revealed that their Local Development Plan would be further delayed**, with Members once again suggesting that cross-border planning should be encouraged (one reason being so that the surrounding authorities can accommodate some of the development that is projected to be required in Cardiff itself). Officers have set out that further work is required on a range of issues to suitably underpin the Preferred Strategy (which had been scheduled to be published in October 2011). This work would be on the following matters: **population and household projections; city-region relationships; Strategic Flood Consequences Assessment; employment and economic development; transportation; brownfield sites; strategic sites; and Gypsy and Traveller needs.**

The Leader of the Council (Liberal Democrat) has been outspoken on the LDP, recently quoted as saying:-

***"If we go ahead now we will be stuck with a concrete jungle, but if we delay and do this work then we can produce an LDP that is to the benefit of the people of Cardiff."***

Earlier in the year the Deputy Leader of the Council (Plaid Cymru) described the Local Development Plan process as "*a complete nonsense.*"

Followers of the saga in Cardiff will be aware that the extant development plan was adopted in 1996 and their first attempt at preparing an LDP was withdrawn following significant issues being raised by Inspectors.

One notable statement from the Council is that the public overwhelmingly so far support a much lower level of growth than the WG projections, and that "*the Council will need to consider whether this is more suitable and, if so, can be justified in evidential terms.*" This could be interpreted as finding evidence to fit a policy, rather than building a policy on the evidence.

The Council have commissioned a report from consultants that considers the WG population and household projections and uses other methods to come up with alternative scenarios. This concludes that:-

***"Current evidence suggests that a growth scenario positioned around the low-medium portion of the spectrum identified above, would be an appropriate 'most likely' scenario to support Cardiff's LDP process."***

It also discusses cross-border implications. However there are a variety of reasons to dispute this report and its findings.

The Council have also commissioned a report on strategic planning for the wider south east Wales region. This takes the starting point that:-

***"one of the fundamental principles of effective governance is that the geographical area for which decisions are made should match the geographical area impacted by the decisions. This same principle goes to the heart of sound, sustainable planning for land use and development:***

- ***planning decisions with merely local consequences should be made locally and reflect local priorities;***
- ***planning decisions with wider than local consequences should be planned at the geographical level of those consequences."***

The report firmly recommends greater cross-boundary planning arrangements and suggests that a city-region approach may be suitable.

Although there is a good case to be made for some kind of sub-regional / city-region planning in Wales, any statutory requirement would surely be several years hence, as it would need to follow the Planning Act, the White Paper for which is expected in 2013.

Although cross-boundary issues are important, the development plan situation in Cardiff is becoming urgent. Notwithstanding this, their Delivery Agreement is now proposed to be amended to allow the Preferred Strategy to be consulted on in autumn 2012, giving an eventual adoption date of October 2015.

DLP Planning have considerable experience in demographic modelling and analysis (at national, regional and local levels) and strategic planning. If you are affected by any of the matters discussed in this Briefing, please contact your local office.

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