Counties: Driving Economic Growth

CCN

COUNTY COUNCILS NETWORK

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Foreword

Robert Gordon, CBE DL
Chairman, CCN

I am really pleased to introduce **Counties: Driving Economic Growth**, a County Councils Network (CCN) publication looking at the opportunities for driving economic growth outside London and the big cities and highlighting examples of the work already being undertaken by CCN member councils.

Counties have always been important drivers of growth, and in March we used a special edition of our good practice magazine, County Beacon, to look at action being taken by CCN members and their partners to support growth in local areas. We were overwhelmed with responses when we invited contributions for that magazine, showing the extremely high priority that our member authorities place on driving economic growth.

As our County Beacon, and further examples of best practice in this publication, demonstrate Counties are successfully supporting and driving economic growth through a number of means – faster broadband, particularly in rural areas; improved transport links; strategic planning and delivery of skills; business advice and support; intelligent use of procurement; appropriate channelling of EU and national funds; showing that a sense of place and spatial awareness are vital to delivering local growth.

However, it is now imperative that we lift our gaze beyond the important actions being taken by our individual members, and look at the national picture, and the measures which can be taken to align government at every level with the needs of the economy.

CCN welcomed the principles behind the 'City Deals' and we were one of the first voices to speak up in support of extending these as 'local growth deals' to Shire areas. We voiced our concerns that, through a focus on purely urban areas, large swathes of the country would miss out on the freedoms which would enable further focus on growth for the benefit of UK plc.

Three weeks ago the Government announced 20 invitations for "Wave 2" of City Deals based around existing LEP geography and focusing on the next 14 biggest city regions and next 6 fastest growing city regions – outside of London. Whilst these are again focused on Cities we take some comfort from the fact that a number of counties will be integral to developing bids.

We agree with the Deputy Prime Minister, who in announcing Wave 2 indicated that there is "no reason this should be an urban phenomenon" and that "we mustn't end up with two tier decentralisation, where urban areas flourish and rural communities are left behind". He also urged "other areas to… keep up pressure on the government machine".

This is just what CCN and our member councils intend to do. But we haven't got time to wait for several further rounds – a timetable which seems more closely tied to the capacity in Whitehall to 'manage' a bidding process.

CCN believes that extending the freedoms associated with City Deal status doesn't require 'managing' and that UK Plc doesn't have time to waste. There is an obvious imperative for counties and their partners to be freed up to further deliver growth across all areas of the country. In some areas, this may mean County Deals, in others, LEP deals. In still others, a more bespoke arrangement may be appropriate.

Whichever is the case, the key point is that growth is not seen as solely an urban phenomenon, and that flexibility and levers are not denied to willing and able local authorities merely on the grounds of their spatial geography. Rural areas, market towns and county towns will have their part to play as active contributors to the national economy, not merely as dormitories for city workers or recreational facilities for cities.

This pamphlet builds on these principles and draws on a range of contributors, from think tanks, pressure groups, experts on rural communities and leading Members and Officers in County Councils who are implementing ambitious plans to drive economic growth in their localities. Not everything in the publication should be taken as a position endorsed by the CCN, but I hope that the articles form a useful contribution to the wider debates on growth issues and, more importantly, the document as a whole serves as a call to action.

Robert Gordon, CBE DL
Chairman, CCN

Mark Lloyd
Chairman - Association of County Chief Executives

Promoting economic growth is the Association of County Chief Executives' top priority and it welcomes the opportunities and possibilities emerging through the City Deals agenda.

The size, scale and financial muscle of county councils, along with their strategic responsibilities, gives them a critical role in creating the right conditions for local economic growth. County area authorities up and down the country are helping to foster development and create new jobs by:

- Coordinating services which provide local people with the skills and training they need to compete for jobs;
- Investing in integrated local transport systems and infrastructure to create the right conditions for local economic growth; and
- Managing local infrastructure funds and longer-term investment programmes to lever in private sector finance.

The first wave of City Deals received a fanfare in local government. An impending second wave poses some interesting and exciting questions for county councils. Government has demonstrated a willingness to put anything 'on the table' for a city deal, as long as there is a sufficiently strong local case. As leaders of local areas, this allows us to think creatively about what more we need to help us to get our economies moving again.

There is a continuing debate about the precise geography that a "deal" should cover, with different areas coming up with compelling arguments for different geographies. However, at the heart of idea is a recognition that, given the right conditions, local areas are best placed to support growth and drive the success of local economies. The Association of County Chief Executives is in full agreement with Government on this point, and believes that it is this local leadership which holds the key to national economic recovery.

Peter Martin, Leader, Essex County Council

City Limits

The second wave of 'City Deals', announced on 29th October, will see twenty cities compete for devolved powers and to take on responsibility for delivering local growth. As city-deals extend beyond England's core-cities, we believe there is a need – and an opportunity – for counties to explore how the city deal concept might extend to non-urban and two-tier areas.

We in Essex have long argued for economic devolution. In our *City Limits* pamphlet, re-issued in September 2012, we endorsed the government's commitment to devolving economic powers and responsibilities. Devolution allows decision-making to better reflect local circumstances and needs; it can improve democratic accountability; it can help overcome risk-aversion at the centre and it can promote innovation.

We have, however, questioned the logic of restricting devolution to English cities. The data shows that, on almost any objective criteria, counties are as well placed to deliver economic growth as metropolitan England. To deny county areas the same powers and freedoms would be to significantly limit the potential for national growth.

We therefore welcome the comments of the Deputy Prime Minister who, in announcing the second wave of Deals, made clear that Government will not accept two-speed model of devolution – one where cities flourish and other communities are left behind. County Council Leaders will not accept this either. It is vital, therefore, that we work with our partners and the business community to develop our own growth propositions.

Public sector partners across Essex share a commitment to growth. We do, however face a substantial economic challenge. Since employment peaked in 2008, there are now 22,600 fewer people employed in Essex. Current estimates suggest that for some parts of our county – including recognised key growth locations – it will take another 20 years before we recover to 2008 levels. Productivity in Essex is lower than it should be – if our per capita output mirrored that of our peers, we could add some £6billion to the value of our economy.

Clearly, economic growth is driven by business. It is the private sector who will identify opportunities, develop new markers and provide employment opportunities. The role of the public sector in supporting business is twofold. It is to provide infrastructure that is fit for purpose, and to ensure that businesses have access to an appropriately skilled and employment-ready workforce. Through Essex's 'Whole Place Community Budget' pilot, public sector partners have developed proposals that will enhance their ability to fulfil this twofold role. We are determined to use these proposals to broker with government a unique *Deal for Growth* in Essex.

To enhance our ability to support business and unlock growth, Essex partners propose to work with government to:

- Simplify governance across two tier Essex. Partners have agreed, in principle, to review governance arrangements for growth over the next 18 months. We are looking to rationalise structures and introduce simpler and more transparent mechanisms for decision-making;
- Create a £1bn revolving infrastructure fund. Deployed over 20 years, such a fund would lever private sector investment into major enabling infrastructure. This fund would be supported by a single 'Infrastructure Gateway' bringing together all public agencies who invest in infrastructure;
- Accelerate employment growth in key locations. We want to halve the projected recovery time of those areas by returning to 2008 employment levels within 10 years;
- Reinvest the proceeds of growth, including the reinvestment of a proportion of localised NNDR growth across Essex, and the retention of 100% of NNDR growth in key locations;
- Boost local housing demand by exploring partners' role in supporting mortgage deposits, making equity investments and supporting the private rental market;
- Redesign the 16-24 skills system, making it employer driven and developing a payment by results model for providers. An employer-led Employment and Skills Board will ensure that local courses are attuned to local employers' needs; and
- Launch a Local Innovation Board which will strengthen productive relationships between local authorities, business and universities, ensuring that innovation is increased across Essex and that GVA increases.

We believe that, if these proposals were put into practice, we could accelerate the delivery of 60,000 new jobs and some 25,500 new homes.

We are confident that our Whole Place Community Budget Pilot will help us initiate a dialogue with HM Government. Over the coming weeks and months we will be looking to Ministers and Officials to enter into serious negotiations about our proposals. Both local and national government believe that growth is a prize worth pursuing and local partners have high hopes for this process.

I for one am determined that all parties do whatever it takes to sustain the economic recovery in Essex and beyond.

NEW LOCAL GOVERNMENT NETWORK

Simon Parker, Director, NLGN

County councils are abuzz with the idea that they might be able to gain some of the new economic freedoms on offer to cities. The concept of a county deal came a small step closer in October as Nick Clegg unveiled the next wave of cities that will negotiate for greater economic freedom with the government.

A handful of county councils are already rolled into the process: Staffordshire and Stoke-On-Trent will negotiate their city deal together, as will Warwickshire, Lancashire and several others. The Deputy Prime Minister clearly suggested that other might follow – areas like Cornwall might even be able to negotiate in their own right.

The government is surely right to bring counties into the fold. As Essex recently showed, there are parts of the country that do not have a city identity, but nonetheless make a similar sort of contribution to the English economy.

But that does not mean it is full steam ahead for the shires. There are at least two problems they have to confront before they can be sure of opening up the city deal process.

The first is city deals are still focused on, well, cities. No county has been able to win a deal in its own right – instead, they are focused on cities like Plymouth and Leicester, suggesting that counties might only be cut in when they control important parts of the hinterland surrounding growth points like Swindon. This is probably the right approach for those parts of the country that have a major economic centre, but it risks leaving others behind.

The second is that ministers are increasingly clear that they want to see governance reform as part of the city deal package. Look across the core cities and it becomes clear that those who adopted mayors – Liverpool and Bristol – or combined authorities – Sheffield, West Yorkshire and Manchester – got significantly more devolution than places like Nottingham. Some government officials worry that the first round of city deals were more of a Whitehall giveaway than a grand bargain.

Governance reform will be relatively straightforward for unitary counties such as Cornwall, but it is really challenging for two tier areas, and especially for those like Kent with LEPs that span more than one county. Which is the right unit for governance reform? The city region, county or LEP?

It is easy to imagine ministers using a county deal process to accelerate enhanced two-tier working – for instance by encouraging counties and districts to pool some of their money into revolving infrastructure funds to unlock Whitehall investment. A county that offered to create a full combined authority with its districts would probably get a good hearing in CLG, the Treasury and the Cabinet Office.

More broadly, ministers are clearly looking for more ambition and innovation in future city deals. The first wave failed to generate many headline-grabbing ideas – the NewcastleGateshead TIF and Greater Manchester tax earn-back schemes being the tallest poppies in a field of useful but smaller ideas around skills and transport. New ideas will need to be clearly grounded in the economic circumstances of each area.

Shires have rightly got a piece of the action this time round. The key to getting more is being prepared to embrace innovation, pool sovereignty and make the case based on the way your own unique economic circumstances contribute to the UK's wider prosperity. The challenge is to make Whitehall an offer it can't refuse.

Philip Atkins, Leader of Staffordshire County Council

Cities are Populous; Shires are Productive; Together we Prosper

The drive for economic prosperity is a top priority at Staffordshire County Council. It not only helps the health, happiness and wellbeing of our population, it is vital for the growth and future prospects of UK plc. By increasing the prosperity of our residents, we enable them to become financially independent and to support their families, so in future our scarce resources can be put to support those who genuinely cannot support themselves.

Local partners who work with us already know that Staffordshire has a proud working heritage based on what used to be strong, traditional manufacturing industries. We have a superb location - 90% of the UK population can be reached within 4 hours or less from our door. We have land available at over 70 sites to suit every type of business you can imagine with some of the most stunning countryside and thriving outdoor leisure in the country. However, we cannot rely on past heritage and natural advantages alone to transform our economy.

Through truly innovative thinking and bold leadership we are focusing on offering solutions that business tell us they really want: low cost of goods (cheap, sustainable energy and other input materials); skilled labour; close, quality access to innovation and creativity; ease of communication, connectivity and export; plus great places for the families who work for them to live in. Staffordshire can offer tremendous opportunities for economic growth over the next 10 years. This will be achieved with well-targeted investment – which is why we need to start thinking very differently about how we fund some of the infrastructure needed to support such initiatives. Any government policy focused solely on cities will miss a major opportunity to make a truly sustainable economy.

We are putting this approach into action, asking local planning authorities to consider all of the elements that drive job creation when formulating their strategic planning documents. This success is already evident as Staffordshire is consistently among the top performing areas in terms of inward investment.

The Staffordshire Prosperity Wheel

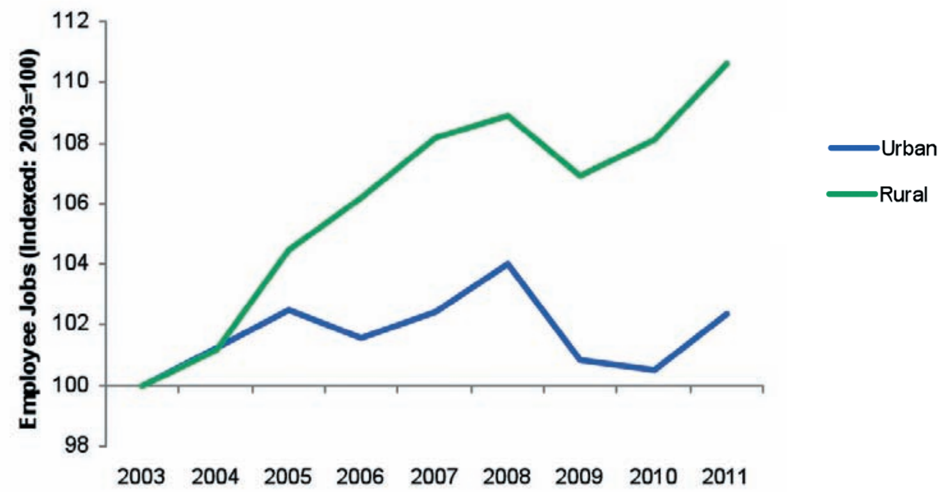
The Government has acknowledged that the UK economy has become unbalanced. As a country we have become over reliant in the recent past on one sector, financial services, and one region the South East, leaving us vulnerable to economic shocks. We have to diversify, spread the risks and strengthen performance across a range of sectors spread across the nation, to help achieve the Government's aim of rebalancing the UK economy.

After the Government's focus on core cities as England's primary economic drivers, as shown by the first wave of 'City Deals', Staffordshire can demonstrate that areas outside the core cities can not only keep pace on economic growth, but overtake and outperform urban areas. National publications including Financial Times supplement fDi[1] and Breeze Strategy's UK Projects Database 2011/12[2] – have highlighted that the Stoke-on-Trent & Staffordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) area is performing within the top three areas nationally for attracting inward investment.

Far from all inward investors choose to locate in cities, finding instead that peri-urban locations - outside urban areas but influenced by close proximity to them - offer wider benefits. Staffordshire's central location between Birmingham, Manchester, Nottingham, Derby and Liverpool put us in the frame. That is why, in partnership with Stoke-on-Trent City Council, we are supporting the LEP to bid for new powers and finance from Government, potentially in the form of a 'City Deal.'

It should come as no surprise that areas enjoying rural characteristics are so attractive to business. Indeed, the shift of economic activity to rural areas is something economists have been discussing since the 1970s. David Keeble, a retired lecturer at the University of Cambridge, has written extensively about the movement of firms, and the shift of employment, from urban to rural areas. Regular themes include the increase in the number and remuneration of professional occupations, making commuting an ever more attractive economic option. Entrepreneurs and potential entrepreneurs are more likely to live in desirable rural areas. This in turn can generate a population with a stronger skills base. When you add improvements in infrastructure, from better roads to superfast broadband, it is clear how rural sites are an attractive proposition for companies seeking new locations. In turn, these combined factors have seen rural parts of the country outpace urban areas in job creation for a number of years.

Change in the number of employee jobs in urban and rural parts of England (DEFRA Lower Super Output Area Definition)



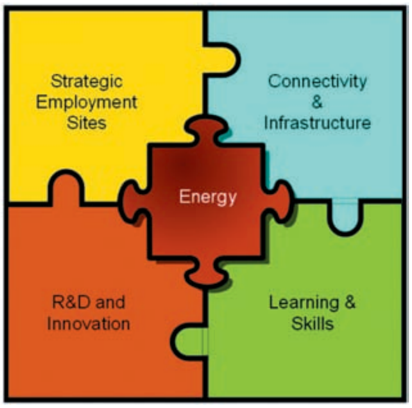
Source: ONS Annual Business Inquiry and Business Register & Employment Survey

1 www.fdiintelligence.com/Locations/Europe/United-Kingdom/How-are-the-UK-s-LEPs-faring-An-fDi-report?ct=true

2 www.breeze-strategy.com/publications.html

The availability of natural resources has historically driven much of Staffordshire's development and shaped its economy as we know it today. Coalfields in the south of the county fuelled the industrial revolution, the availability of clay in the north fed the Potteries conurbation, and fine-quality water turned Burton upon Trent into the brewing capital of England.

While our coal mines are long since closed, the mining of yesteryear can now provide Staffordshire with a promise of prosperity for the future. Using our redundant mines, our waste-to-resource infrastructure and our biomass installations, we aim to provide cheap, sustainable, locally produced energy for businesses in our energy intensive target sectors: advanced manufacturing and advanced materials. Energy from resources can once again provide the pivot point around which real economic growth can be driven.



Local expertise in traditional industry provides us with significant advantages over other regions in advanced manufacturing. Since 2006, employment within the advanced manufacturing sector[3] has grown by around a quarter in Staffordshire, compared to a 12 percent reduction in the UK[4]. The Government has repeatedly stressed the future importance of the advanced manufacturing sector[5]. Areas such as Staffordshire, where manufacturing is in the blood, will be best placed to push this sector forward. We are already home to significant automotive industries, a burgeoning aerospace cluster, a significant number of major ICT employers and an emerging medical technologies cluster with close links to the University of Keele.

Similarly, there is a 250-year heritage in ceramics and advanced materials. We are home to a cluster of around 300 materials-based companies, including renowned international brands such as Wedgwood, Steelite, Biocomposites, Ceram, Emma Bridgewater, Endeka, Foseco Ltd (Vesuvius), Johnson Matthey Colour Technologies and Dudson. Advanced materials employers are spread across the county and we intend to use our strength within this sector to take full advantage of emerging opportunities.

And there is more to Staffordshire than manufacturing. We boast some of the UK's best natural assets, such as the National Forest and the Peak District. The county is home to UK and world famous tourist attractions including Alton Towers, Drayton Manor Theme Park, the National Memorial Arboretum and the newly-opened National FA Centre at St George's Park.

We have all of the ingredients to be a major tourism destination. There are currently more than 21,000 tourism and leisure jobs in Staffordshire, more than in any of the core cities, and the sector contributes around £1.6 billion to the local and national

3 Eurostat high-technology manufacturing definition
4 Source: Annual Business Inquiry and Business Register & Employment Survey, Office for National Statistics
5 For example, advanced manufacturing is highlighted as one of the key sectors within The Plan for Growth, HM Treasury and BIS, March 2011, http://cdn.hm-treasury.gov.uk/2011budget_growth.pdf

economy. We fully intend to utilise our rural location to drive the economy in its own right. Where cities can provide indoor sporting spaces, we have the potential to develop outdoor sports to a new level nationally, focusing on the development of equine sports, water sports, cycling and running/climbing in the offer that we will call "Sportshire". This, in turn, will lead to the further development spin off sectors in, for example, sports medicine, hospitality and advanced materials sports prosthetics.

We believe that economic transformation will be achieved by concentrating all of our efforts on creating the right environment to encourage employment growth. This means focusing on all of the key drivers of prosperity, across as broad an agenda as possible. Specifically, we are directing our schemes for employment land, connectivity, and sustainable energy, and our inward investment efforts, at those sectors in which we have the advantage; advanced manufacturing, advanced materials and Sportshire. In addition we are making sure that the supply of homes, the skills of our residents and our cultural base are all aligned to these sectors. This will not only attract new employers but also create the right environment to foster business start-ups.

Strong and clear leadership from local politicians and senior council officers is required to drive this holistic approach, which we believe will greatly accelerate our economic transformation. They ensure that all aspects of the County Council's service delivery, in partnership with the Stoke-on-Trent & Staffordshire Local Enterprise Partnership, is focused on job creation.

Inward investment created over 2,000 jobs in Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire in 2011/12, and we are on track to repeat that again this year. Our ability to bring a new Jaguar Land Rover (JLR) engine plant to the area was achieved by our commitment to roll out the red carpet to new businesses. To clinch the deal, we were willing to invest over £36m - in partnership with Wolverhampton City Council and South Staffordshire Council - in a new motorway junction at the i54 South Staffordshire site. We knew that it would not only create a large number of advanced manufacturing jobs with JLR, but also offer significant supply chain opportunities which will continue to expand this important cluster, creating more jobs for local people.

In fact in the last three years, we have invested over £200m in schemes designed to drive prosperity, including £45m in town centre schemes. The new Staffordshire County Council headquarters have brought a 15% increase in footfall in Stafford town centre. We are investing an extra £50m in our roads over five years to support business and keep residents on the move, and we are investing £7.44m to leverage £100m for high speed broadband.

With a clear focus on our ambitions, and yet in a climate of cost constraint, it is imperative that we find new ways of funding the developments and infrastructure we need. That is why we are working together with our partners through the LEP to negotiate with Government for freedoms, flexibilities and investment that will help us to accelerate economic growth. We know that investments that create jobs will yield a return to the Treasury not simply in terms of increased corporation and personal taxes, but also in terms of a decreased NHS and DWP bill. We believe it is right that some of that return should be used to pay back investments –and we have commercial partners who are willing to work with us to develop new methods of funding and payback that could really accelerate the delivery of prosperity in Staffordshire.

Our willingness to invest and focus on job creation sets Staffordshire apart. Inspired by our past but driven by innovative, ambitious leaders with a clear plan for future prosperity, we now need to work with Government and our commercial partners to develop the tools we need to accelerate the transformation of our economy.

Alex Thomson
Chief Executive, Localis

Winter is coming. And in municipal offices up and down the land, budget planning for the forthcoming year is well underway – and there's certainly no shortage of financial woe on the horizon. So far, so gloomy. But in the medium term, could there be a silver lining to the massed ranks of gathering storm clouds?

Local government has unquestionably taken its fair share of the economic pain – and more – so far, and there is plenty more from the current spending review period to still filter through. While we should not forget, nor let others forget, just how challenging the current round of cuts have been, the fact remains that many in the sector are anticipating that the next spending review will contain yet more red numbers for councils.

But even if we are positive and assume that a radical funding solution can be found to prevent social care costs from consuming the vast majority of councils' budgets, still yet more horrors hang over local government, in particular the spectre of additional in-year cuts. The broader economic climate remains challenging, notwithstanding the latest GDP figures, so should there be a significant shortfall elsewhere (for example in tax receipts) the Government has already made it clear that other services would have to accept further spending reductions.

So much for the clouds, what of the lining? Well it comes in three parts. Firstly local government has an enviable record in efficiently dealing with tricky problems. Secondly, for the foreseeable future, there will be a strong appetite in the Treasury to do what they can to help spark and support economic growth. And thirdly, this is a Government determined to localise, pushing functions, powers and responsibilities away from Whitehall and down to local government. Plait these three strands together and you arrive at something potentially very powerful, and locally empowering.

On tricky problems, our recent report 'Catalyst Councils' looked at how councils are responding to the manifold challenges they face. And we found that many county councils are already leading the way in developing the new relationships and cross-sector partnerships that we argued will be essential if local government is to be in a fit state to tackle the difficulties it will be presented with. From addressing the rising demands associated with inexorable demographic changes, to responding to changing customer expectations brought about by the explosion of new forms of digital technology, county councils have been at the forefront in exploring innovative new models of service delivery that aim to deliver efficient, value for money public services.

So, given this track record, we know that local government is more than capable of playing a role in stimulating economic growth. And we know that a central thread of the Government's approach to devolution is the freedom to innovate, to do things differently, to devise and implement tailored and locally-responsive solutions, and nowhere is this more important than in seeking to support and strengthen local economies.

So, whilst central government can set the macro-economic framework to encourage a private-sector led economic recovery, it cannot mandate and drive economic growth by Whitehall diktat. What it can do is get out of the way, devolving decisions over governance arrangements, operational delivery and investment funding mechanisms to the local level, thus freeing up council leaders to work with the private sector to fashion locally appropriate solutions that create optimum conditions to nurture local economic development. This has already happened in some areas, such as London, with its citywide governance and swathe of devolved powers over transport, housing and economic development, as well as the Greater Manchester conurbation, already benefiting from new freedoms and finances through the statutory city-regional architecture of the Combined Authority.

As these examples illustrate, while a commitment to localism and greater devolution of power and responsibility to local structures has been a key feature of the first few years of the Coalition Government, since the abolition of the Regional Development Agencies, and with a greater leadership role for the local private sector alongside councils on Local Economic Partnerships, cities have been the focus of Government activity in this area. Of course, England's largest cities are home to a significant proportion of the country's population and jobs, as well as benefiting from the advantages of scale and clustering that are associated with urban economies, so it is understandable that Government has been pushing the cities agenda.

It is also the case that many of these cities have a long history of both local inter-council co-operation and collaboration on a city-regional basis, as illustrated most recently in the creation of Combined Authorities, and have also coalesced into a powerful lobbying bloc. Through the core cities group (comprising Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham, Sheffield), England's 'premier league' of the largest city economies outside the capital have fifteen years of experience of joint working to advance their case for greater influence and responsibility over both public policy and the drivers of economic growth.

This focus on growing the city economies has led to the first wave of City Deals agreed between Government and the core cities, which aim to unlock growth, investment and employment opportunities and which, it has been estimated, will create 175,000 jobs and 37,000 new apprenticeships over the next 20 years, alongside a host of transport and infrastructure provision. A second wave of city deals is in the pipeline, and though this may involve by geographical necessity some tangential input from some county councils, for many this does not go far enough.

As Localis, along with CCN, Kent, Essex, Cornwall and a number of other county councils have argued, deals for growth should not be limited to the cities and their metropolitan hinterlands. Such a city-centric approach will, we believe, only serve to limit the potential for regional and hence national growth, by leaving local civic leaders unable to exert the control needed to help their localities realise their economic potential. As Essex County Council's recent 'City Limits' pamphlet showed, there are plenty of economic hot-spots not in major urban areas – indeed many non-metropolitan county economies make a larger contribution to national output than the core city areas, as well as having higher levels of productivity.

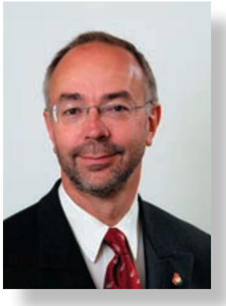
However, pragmatism must be the order of the day. With civil servants focused on negotiating the second wave of city deals, it seems likely that the best route towards county deals may be oblique. By using the freedoms and flexibilities currently available to them, county councils will be able to strengthen their case to Government for greater devolution. In particular, as the Community Budgets pilot business cases are published and agreements reached, to be followed by the 'cookbooks' requested by Oliver Letwin that show how the combined ingredients of public sector spending and programmes can be replicated across the country, county councils need to be thinking about how they can work with their local partners to ensure that they are able to move swiftly to benefit from this aspect of localism, rather than simply pinning hopes on an imminent extension of the city deals agenda to the counties.

Local pan-public sector co-operation via the pooling of budgets and decision making, such as through Cheshire West and Chester's proposed joint Strategy Board, indicates how this approach may play out, although numerous barriers exist to successful implementation of such arrangements. It's through these deals and arrangements that local leaders can truly lead.

This leadership is needed across a whole variety of policy areas, for example, on skills, whereby local authorities can help facilitate a shift from demand-led to employer-need-based provision. Or, in health, where local commissioning groups are forming alongside the transfer of public health to local authorities and an increasing drive towards integrated health and social care. So too on welfare, where local authorities, through such arrangements, could have an increasingly influential role in reducing duplication and waste, helping to develop truly better public services while saving cash at the same time. In fact, there are a whole host of policy areas that start to come together under this leadership: policing and crime, regeneration, the links between transport and health, etc.

And all of these policy areas are fundamentally linked to growth. Vital for the prosperity of the nation and the viability of the public sector alongside it, never before have local authorities had a better opportunity to show local leadership to stimulate growth. Lord Michael Howard in his recent Bruce-Lockhart Lecture (published on the Localis website) described the present confluence of circumstances in the sector as a 'perfect storm', and suggested that it offered a unique opportunity for a new kind of local leadership. County deals are part of the solution, but by no means all of it. It's not just about local authority services, it's about showing leadership across the public sector.

And if we can get it right, the silver lining may prove to be far more important than the clouds, numerous though they currently appear.



Martin Tett, Leader, Buckinghamshire County Council

County Deals?

Counties make a vital contribution to the UK economy. They are the location of 38 per cent of all jobs in England, the home of 45 per cent of all businesses and they contribute 36 per cent of England's Gross Value Added (GVA).

Since 2000, GVA in counties increased by 44 per cent, behind the 62.3 per cent of London, but ahead of the 39 per cent recorded for the rest of England and the Core Cities[6]. Since the Localism White paper set out the Government's economic ambition to "create a fairer and more balanced economy" and where "all parts of the country benefit from sustainable economic growth", the whole of England has been covered by Local Enterprise Partnerships. These offer welcome local autonomy in bringing forward new development through the Growing Places Fund.

However, *Unlocking Growth in Cities* then set out the Government's ambitions to go "much further in empowering cities to drive forward growth". This included

- access to an additional £1bn Regional Growth Fund;
- the powers for cities to offer business rate discounts, despite all eight core cities having already been awarded Enterprise Zones;
- creating a city skills fund and city apprenticeship hubs to tailor the provision of skills for local employers, despite 34 per cent of all England's unqualified residents living in county council areas; and
- the provision of a £100m capital bids for broadband infrastructure, despite rural areas being the least likely to benefit from BDUK's national investment.

Despite this apparent lack of support, almost half of all new firms in England outside London from 2011 to 2012, were formed in counties. Counties also saw claimant counts fall by 6,000 in the year to August 2012 while the rest of England outside London saw a rise of 14,000. Furthermore, almost half of all population increase between the 2001 and 2011 Censuses in England excluding London was in county council areas, testament to the attractiveness of our rural areas and their ability to attract workers "free to locate where they want"[7].

While investment in cities to spatially rebalance the economy, as set out in the Plan for Growth, is a laudable aim, it is already taking place through the Regional Growth Fund and Enterprise Zones. City Deals are born of a belief that "cities are the engines of growth" with the purpose of restoring "health to the public finances and confidence in the economy". The Core Cities initiative rightly acknowledges growth "will be created in individual places where people and businesses work, trade and innovate", but perversely concludes that "the most economically important of these places are cities and their wider economic areas". However, it must also be recognised that county council areas outperform cities across a raft of indicators, have potential for further growth and, as large administrative areas, possess the strong and decisive leadership demanded of City Deal areas without the need for new institutional arrangements.

6 Defined by NUTS3
7 HM Government (2011, 15) Unlocking Growth in Cities

Wendover Woods

Like City Deal areas, counties rather than Government departments are best placed to understand the economic opportunities and challenges they face. By introducing County Deals, government can pass the levers to support economic growth to these productive places. This could allow counties to wield new powers to improve their competitiveness, such as over business rates, or run innovative projects to tackle specific local challenges, perhaps in skills or access to finance, and crucially extend the freedom to "experiment with new powers or projects as they see fit".

For example, in Buckinghamshire, localised youth contracts would allow better support for young people currently not in education, employment or training, where many are currently excluded from the national programme due to having a GCSE at grade C. Similarly, a County Deal could allow Buckinghamshire to establish apprenticeship hubs and incentive schemes for small businesses to take on apprentices or to establish a local skills funding model, giving more local control over how Skills Funding Agency resources are allocated and spent by our providers to deliver an increase in intermediate technical skills training.

Counties have the economic potential to play their part in helping the UK return to sustainable economic growth, to rebalance the economy and often operate over acknowledged functional economic areas as Local Enterprise Partnerships. County Deals will enable us to make our full and deserved contribution to growing the UK's economy.

Andrew Carter, Deputy Chief Executive / Director of Policy & Research
The Centre for Cities

Local growth beyond the Core Cities

The Government's urban policy has progressed rapidly over the past year. As the focus of economic policy shifted from deficit reduction to growth stimulation, Greg Clark was appointed to the new post of Minister for Cities and launched a new devolution initiative, City Deals.

City Deals was a recognition that the UK economy will not return to growth if cities do not maximise their potential; that this cannot be achieved without greater local control over the drivers and levers of local growth; and, that the Government will contemplate limited devolution to enable local growth.

A year after the City Deals process began, we are finally in a position to understand what is on offer to cities outside the Core Cities group. 'Wave 2 Cities' is an unfortunate piece of Whitehall terminology, which makes the places in question sound like second choices. In fact, there are compelling reasons to suggest otherwise. Whilst the Core Cities are the largest city economies in England, and their aggregate contribution to the economy is significant and important – contributing 27% of the nation's GVA – individually their performance is variable. Only Bristol and Leeds feature in the top 20 UK cities on GVA. By contrast many of the best performing economies in the country are smaller cities, places like Cambridge, Milton Keynes and Reading. These are the cities where the City Deals process can help accelerate local growth and job creation.

In addition to supporting strong economy cities to do more City Deals also has to help strengthen weaker economy cities so they can improve their longer-term prospects, and thus make a bigger contribution to the national economy. It is therefore right that Wave 2 deals should also be available to medium-sized cities such as Hull, Middlesbrough, or Stoke-on-Trent, where economic rebuilding will require commitment beyond the usual political and funding cycles.

Now that the Wave 2 City Deal process is underway, cities need to be clear about what they want to achieve through the City Deal process. The lessons from the Wave 1 process show that successful Wave 2 City Deals will need to:

- cover the right scale: proposals should bring together the optimum economic geography for their area. This means that councils must work together to cover the real, functional economic area for their city. In some cases this is will be the LEP area, but not everywhere;
- require Government intervention to make them happen: if cities have the powers to undertake a policy initiative - and the General Power of Competence means that they often do - they should not wait for the Government to give permission;
- be suited to their place: devolution is based on the principle that local circumstances require local decisions, so solutions must be based on a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of a city;

- be innovative: this is a chance to use new approaches, with Government backing, to solve intractable problems; and
- invest in the solutions: it is clear that Government money will only be made available if cities commit their own resources in delivering too.

It also requires cities to be clear as to whether a City Deal is the best way to address their priorities. There is a real risk for the Government that both Whitehall and cities focus exclusively on City Deals, rather than thinking about other, less high profile ways they can make a difference to local economies. In particular, there is a need to:

- Offer all local authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships the opportunity to access policies from a 'localism menu', provided localities satisfy certain criteria;
- Encourage cities to group together, whether on their own or via other organisations, to identify where there are barriers to growth that could make a difference to multiple areas; and
- Ask civil servants across Whitehall who are presenting Ministers with policy proposals to answer the question, 'what does this mean for places?'

Whilst the wait for the City Deals Wave 2 announcement has been frustrating the delay should ultimately make for a more efficient and effective process. Wave 2 cities will be much better informed than their predecessors about what to expect, what to ask for, and how to get it. The Government's concept of what the process can achieve is much clearer than a year ago. The Wave 2 competition shows that Greg Clark knows what he would like to see from a City Deal, and only the submissions that fit the criteria will succeed. This gives cities that have not so far been closely engaged with the Cities Team, or give much thought to a City Deal, the chance to make their case.

The competition, if it works, will generate bold and innovative proposals, and show Government that cities have both the local knowledge and the initiative to design policies that work better for them than the central policies currently on offer. There is real potential for cities to redefine their role on skills provision, infrastructure upgrades, development, business support and promotion. Where cities have long-term complaints and criticisms of government, the City Deal submission is a chance to show how it could be done better.

However, it is important to remember that City Deals have emerged as a key policy issue at a time when local government is under severe financial pressure and is having to make some tough choices between public services and budgets. The Leader of Birmingham City Council recently declared "the end of local government as we know it". This means that whilst we should be optimistic about the City Deals process and what it might achieve this needs to be tempered by the tough financial challenges that many cities face.

If City Deals are successful they could provide the foundations for achieving local growth and jobs which are based on local decisions appropriate to particular cities. They might enable cities to better respond to the consequences of future economic downturns, as well as benefit more during the good times. Cities that control their own destiny, and at least some of the funding that will pay for it, will be the successful cities of the future. It is up to cities now, to show that devolution can work.

Nick Clarke, Leader, Cambridgeshire County Council

City deals: an opportunity too good to miss?

The city deals agenda offers real opportunities for local areas to take greater control of their own economic destiny. In a county like Cambridgeshire, home to one of the country's top five 'cities to watch' for economic growth potential, city deals have excited much interest.

The precedent set by the first wave is one of significant devolution to city-regions, with deals specifically tailored to each individual economy. This has allowed them to build on their strengths and overcome barriers. Examples of the devolution we have seen in "Wave One" include the establishment of revolving investment funds with elements of future hypothecation of tax revenues, greater freedoms over skills budgets and devolved transport powers and funding.

The first wave clearly shows that a 'one size fits all' approach is not appropriate, rather this is about local deals for local circumstances. For a second wave, Government should be thinking about functional economic areas.

We should recognise that this will not always be easy. Other than in large unitary authorities, a focus on the functional economic area will necessitate working across local authority boundaries. Effective integration is as important an element within a good City Deal as is effective devolution, and it is vital that the maximum possible use is made of both of these tools if any area is to truly effectively drive local economic growth. Similarly, city deals need to encompass genuine radicalism about devolution and integration around funding if they are to achieve their potential.

It is becoming increasingly clear that Government is coming to the table with an open mind, an opportunity for us that is too good to miss. What city-region A needs will differ from what city-region B needs – probably to quite a large degree.

A city-region like Cambridge has some unique characteristics. It boasts the best university in the world, a world-leading high-tech industry, and the lowest unemployment levels in the UK, despite being in the fastest growing county of the last decade. But, it also has an acute need for additional and affordable housing and infrastructure to match its growth demands. A city deal provides an opportunity to tell Government what is really needed and, assuming this is well-evidenced, Government appears minded to respond positively.

Of particular interest to an area with the growth potential of the Cambridge city-region is the possibility of earning back a proportion of future tax revenues. As part of the first wave of city deals Manchester is trailblazing a scheme which allows them (in partnership with Government) to invest in major growth infrastructure projects, and to "earn back" a proportion of the tax income generated by such investment, which can in turn support further borrowing for capital schemes. Through this arrangement, Manchester will be able to earn back up £30m per annum of the additional tax revenue it generates.

Various types of tax hypothecation – which Manchester is an example of – are already in play in other countries, and many of the stronger local economies internationally have considerably greater levels of freedom and responsibility than their British counterparts. Whilst such arrangements may not be appropriate everywhere, the city deal agenda provides an excellent opportunity for the UK to explore those circumstances where it can work well, and so better equip some of our key city-regions to compete in the global market.

The 'if I won the lottery' fantasising that the prospect of city deals may have brought on in some of us does need to be balanced with a dose of realism. While city-deals are being advertised as "nothing is off the table", it is clear that government will not (nor should not) blindly agree to all proposals.

There is a risk that, while a city deal could grant an area much greater control over its own economic destiny, it will not do so to as great an extent as the local area may wish. UK cities are unlikely to be able to drive their own economies to quite the same extent as a US city, for example, where the federal structure tends to invert the basic power structures between central and local. City deals may offer significant new opportunities but these are working in the context of an existing highly centralised UK system, particularly in relation to taxation. This may one day change, but not in the foreseeable future.

Notwithstanding the above, it is clear that city deals can offer an exciting opportunity for a functional economic area to take greater control of its own economic destiny, and the potential for benefits to be delivered locally through a deal is considerable. County councils with their partners should therefore at least consider pursuing this opportunity with Government – are there any areas that are so free of constraints that they can really afford to pass up this opportunity?

While the potential of a city deal needs to be taken with a pinch of salt, it is clear that the opportunity is too good to miss.

Matthew Taylor, Baron Taylor of Goss Moor

An opportunity for something better

Back in 2010, when the coalition Government was 'brave and new', a very different kind of coalition launched a document called 'The Rural Challenge'. The Rural coalition comprises today 14 national organisations with an interest in rural sustainable development, or what I call encouraging 'living working communities'. CCN is one of those organisations.

In 'The Rural Challenge' we sought to set out how Government might help rural communities thrive in an era of cuts. How localism and the 'big society' has always been a way of life in rural communities (perhaps we should have called this our 'little society' idea?). We ranged across a number of core ideas:

- That assessing the sustainability of proposals for developments in small communities should be about how they may sustain or enhance the sustainability of the village; not ruling out development that might save the shop or school because the community is deemed 'unsustainable' already;
- That we shouldn't regard only some kinds of business as acceptably 'rural' and so allowed to grow in rural locations; that all kinds of business can and should be fostered in rural communities, subject to appropriate scale and impact, not type;
- That parishes should be able to enable small scale community housing to meet local needs themselves, without planning authorities countermanding them;
- and that cutting government spending should not disproportionately hit rural communities as government centralises services in the name of efficiencies, but instead costs can be saved and services improved through supporting innovative ways of enabling small communities to deliver services themselves at lower cost and increased quality.

The first three of these have certainly featured in the agenda of government. The last much less so, though there are occasional glimmers.

But there was one other idea. And that is the one I want to focus on here. How to address the need for a lot more homes in this country, particularly the pressure on attractive rural market towns across southern England, without ruining our historic towns and cities.

No doubt many might hope that 'localism' means the chance to avoid this over-development by cutting back 'nationally imposed' housing numbers to the minimum required to meet genuine local need. There is a view currently about that localism means that councils are empowered to ignore any government's wish for 'sustainable development' and, in particular, to resist housing development on the scale previously threatened. But if that is how localism is expected to operate, a great many communities had better wake up and smell the coffee.

Certainly, since the Coalition Government's formation 'localism' has been a key element of its response to the public opposition to 'top-down' requirements for housing numbers. But there is confusion about what this actually means, fostered by a number of local authorities swiftly cutting back their housing plans as soon as it was announced regional plans were to be abolished.

True, by stripping out regional-level housing numbers, the Government's 'localism' approach asks for need to be identified and understood at a local level: figures will not be handed down from on high. However, the evidence needs to be sound – the local authority is the driving force, but it has to evidence its numbers against local needs, and according to the NPPF that requirement cannot be ducked. Even more fundamentally, localism asks for urgent delivery to meet this need.

So local authorities are empowered to find their own solutions on the basis of locally evidenced need, but they cannot wish the issues of housing need and economic development away away. If they do fail to provide the evidence or fail to identify the means to deliver against housing need, then the presumption in favour of sustainable development kicks in. Localism provides the opportunity for communities to decide how to tackle local needs – but it does not allow them to ignore local needs.

And let's not kid ourselves what this duty to meet evidenced needs means. Across the country we are now building 110,000 homes a year. Yet new households are forming at a rate of 280,000 a year. Not primarily because of immigration, but changing demographics: We are living longer, so the next generation can't inherit their parent's homes. We are living separately longer – marrying later, divorcing more. That means a lot more homes are needed – or many more children relying on 'hotel mum and dad' well into their adult lives. People in need of care these days are not forced into institutions or care homes (and many can't afford them either) so many of those who used to be in care now stay in their own homes. Provided they get the support they need that's a huge advance – but it also means a need for a huge number more homes. This disparity between the growth in the need for homes, and the failure to deliver them, has created a record breaking shortage of homes. That is forcing up prices to the level that working people on low incomes can't afford a place of their own.

Even the recession has not markedly increased housing affordability – in fact it has continued to worsen in London and much of the south east and south west. In popular communities, the next generation of the people who serve us in the shops and pubs, the nurses and teachers, the plumbers and builders, are being forced away.

So as the NPPF takes over from the old regional plans, the requirement to meet locally evidenced need won't cut the plans for housing – if the national statistics about household formation are true it will mean tripling the levels of housing development we currently see.

So the idea I want to focus on here, the 'fifth plank' of the Rural Challenge', is to consider how we protect the landscapes and market towns that are dearest to many of us, from being ringed by ever more bland unattractive housing estates and business and retail parks, whilst still delivering the housing and economic growth the country desperately needs and the NPPF requires.

How? By switching from an endless but till now ever losing fight over each new small housing development on the green spaces on the edge of our historic towns – most of which seem to end up being exactly what people feared in exactly the spaces most valuable to most people. Not because we simply accept the perceived wisdom that this is inevitable and unavoidable. Rather, by agreeing instead a far smaller number of larger-scale developments designed to create attractive new neighbourhoods and communities that are genuinely more sustainable than the endless, bland edge-of-town estates that have been the 'solution' to development until today. Agreeing to create great new places not least to protect the great historic places that already exist but which for several decades we have been ruining.

In the NPPF local authorities are invited to examine 'larger scale development[s]. that follow the principles of Garden Cities' as an option for delivery to meet local housing needs. This concept, these 'garden city principles', are all about attractive, well-planned and integrated new communities to deliver the housing and economic development we need in ways that are far more attractive and sustainable than endless new housing estates around every market town. Sure, there will be opposition to any such development proposal – but I am convinced that they offer a better long term option than imposing on all our historic communities a 1,001 small but hopeless housing developments each of which destroy someone's backyard and which collectively amount to an ill planned sprawling complex of estates without local shops, pubs, workplaces or attractive community centres.

Of course there are big questions to be answered. We now await the Government's 'Prospectus' on large-scale new communities, currently being compiled by DCLG for release in the autumn. This document will need to define proposals for their support and delivery. But the main question about this 'Garden Cities' approach is: what will ensure that it is different and more successful in delivery than that experienced in the past?

As a key proponent of the St Austell Eco-Communities, I am only too well aware of the problems of the eco-towns competition. A lot of money was invested in promoting a great many schemes, only for just a handful to 'make the grade' and leave the rest to be publicly damned by association and rejection. In only a tiny handful of cases did public opinion back the plans for a new community, not least because it was seen to be an imposition from central government. Moreover, even those that went forward now find themselves potentially seen as part of an 'out of date' agenda. Large schemes can take more than a decade to bring forward, and require great deal of investment. Those promoting them (both local authorities and the private sector) need confidence that they will have ongoing long term national policy support – but equally that localism does mean they will need to be genuinely locally shaped.

My advice is that the scarring from the well-meaning but under-achieving eco-towns process is still far too fresh to ignore. In this economy, central government support for exemplary schemes needs to be available, but not an imposition.

There is now a big opportunity for local authorities, long-term investors, house builders, landowners and housing associations to put forward thoughts and suggestions for major new community locations, approaches and opportunities, built on local engagement and support, with local planning authorities supporting these solutions to their housing delivery and infrastructure and economic needs.

We have the chance to deliver something genuinely better than 'doughnutting' every historic town with endless miserable estates. To genuinely make a big step forward for housing delivery and sustainable development, it will take both courage and imagination – but the alternative is just too awful to allow. I hope all those with a stake and a belief in this will seize the opportunity.

Matthew Taylor, Baron Taylor of Goss Moor, was author of the Taylor Review of Rural Economy and Affordable Housing, and is Chair of the St Austell Eco-Town Strategic Partnership and the National Housing Federation, and was, until recently, Chair of the Rural Coalition.

East Sussex County Council

Driving economic growth is our highest priority in East Sussex. There are three areas where the Council can make a difference - by creating the physical environment business needs, using the Council's finances to support the local economy and ensuring local people have the skills they need to take advantage of the opportunities available. We aim to use our Capital Programme, not only to create jobs in the short term by spending money locally, but for the long term, by creating the infrastructure business needs to grow and thrive. We are also helping to develop the local businesses and skills, which meet our service needs. We do this by providing market intelligence, advice and training – helping to keep the money the Council spends in the local economy.

Our £491m Capital Programme for 2012-16 aims to improve the county's economic competitiveness and increase private sector job creation. A study by GENECON, a specialist management consultancy supporting Government, local authorities, Local Enterprise Partnerships and the private sector in delivering local economic growth, assessed the impact of the programme on the local economy. The study found that:

- **The capital programme has the potential to add an additional £1.68bn of Gross Value Added to the East Sussex Economy over the next 25 years; and**
- **Every £1 we spend through the Capital Programme has the potential to generate around £3.50 of additional value in the East Sussex economy.**

The Programme will generate substantial construction activity in the county both directly through County Council spending and indirectly through levered private sector investment. Up to **£900m will be invested in construction activity** in East Sussex over the next 25 years as a result of the Programme. This is expected to generate 1,250 construction job years within the County and a further 3,200 could be generated through linked private investment. Assuming 10 Job Years equals a full time job this **could generate the equivalent of around 450 new construction jobs**.

The most significant economic impacts, will come from key projects to unlock private investment in new business space and housing, notably through the Bexhill & Hastings Link Road and the Newhaven Port Access Road. The indirect employment impact of the Programme will be in the order of **3,500 new jobs in East Sussex**.

Major investments in new and improved highways can improve the efficiency of local business and improve the attractiveness of the county for inward investment. It is estimated that the highway structural improvement programme could generate **£43m of additional Gross Value Added in the county economy** over the next 5 years through efficiency gains to local businesses.

Improved broadband infrastructure has the potential for a very positive impact on the operational competitiveness of existing East Sussex businesses, and will also help attract inward investment to the county. The roll-out of super-fast broadband across East Sussex is a key project in the Programme and will ensure that businesses have access to high levels of digital connectivity. As local businesses take up the new services and benefit from improved operational efficiencies, it is estimated that **£294m of Gross Value Added could be generated in the county economy over the next 10 years**.

Major construction projects are procured using the ESCC led Sussex Cluster Contractors' Framework in which the contractors are required to spend as much of the contract value with locally based businesses as is practical. Monitoring of this reveals that currently 63% of the value is spent with local businesses within 30 miles of the project with a further 25% spent within a 60 mile radius.

We have the largest proportion of older people of any County in the Country and developing a responsive local social care market is key to meeting the needs of an ageing population. We provide information to the help the sector through market position statements, which provide key messages about demand and supply to any business or organisation interested in providing social care and support services locally. We are keen to attract new and existing micro businesses (five or fewer paid staff) into the social care market. These services are valuable because they can offer personalised and flexible support and are based in the communities they serve. We help them by providing:

- free market intelligence, based on what service users and Adult Social Care commissioners are telling us they want;
- free advice and support to develop the business;
- training and initial Criminal Records Bureau checks;
- funding advice and details of local funding opportunities;
- promoting your business, service or activity through events and the Support with Confidence scheme; and
- networking opportunities with other local 'micro' providers.

Sevenoaks Town Council – Working with Kent County Council

Kent County Council has been a key partner to a number of Sevenoaks Town Council's recent initiatives and subsequent successes.

For the past four years Sevenoaks Town Council has undertaken positive and quantifiable steps to develop its local economy, with the emphasis on establishing Sevenoaks as one of Kent's foremost towns to visit and enjoy. This process takes place in many different forms including a creation of a job club and a major project taking over of the Stag Theatre and Cinema leisure venue, a project that has attracted up to 25,000 visitors per month – who used to go elsewhere.

Last year, 2011, the creation of the Sevenoaks Town Partnership brought together key individuals and business representatives in the town, people keen to work together, share resources and develop ideas and initiatives. To date these include a town wide website, listing and promoting all businesses and local venues / attractions, and the installation of digital promotional screens in large footfall areas.

During 2012, Kent County Council and Michael Fallon MP supported the Town Partnership's bid to DCLG for Portas funding. Sevenoaks Town Partnership was successful in becoming recognised as a Town Team and received a £10,000 grant. The grant will be used towards the provision of a vintage bus operating during the summer on a circular route moving tourists through the town to and from Knole House, the National Trust property just outside the town centre. At present many of the 100,000 tourists per year do not visit the town's shops and facilities.

In July 2012, Sevenoaks Town Council opened a youth café – HOUSE in the Basement Youth Café in the centre of the town, using a grant of £150,000 from Ibstock Cory Environmental Trust.

This was done with the support and financial assistance (both revenue and capital) of £37,500 from the Kent County Council's Public Health Directorate. This youth provision was particularly important, as the District Council is no longer providing youth services in the area.

The youth café has many benefits – it is a great place for young people, it is open after school, weekends and during the school holidays. Since the opening we have had positive comments from local residents that the incidents of anti-social behaviour have reduced considerably. In addition – and of real benefit for the local economy – parents and carers can shop, eat out, go to a show or the cinema without paying for a babysitter.

The youth café is also being used for a young person's job club (via Connexions) and as a venue for monthly networking meetings for charities and third sector organisations where free legal advice is supplied by local lawyers.

Quote from Cllr Richard Parry, Town Mayor and Kent County Councillor:-

"Over the past town years the very positive relationship between Sevenoaks Town Council and Kent County Council has moved from 'green shoots' to delivering positive outcomes for the local economy, residents and general well-being of Sevenoaks town and the surrounding area.

"The readiness of Kent County Council to become involved and help and realise the ambitions of the Town Council to deliver excellent and progressive services and facilities to the community has been outstanding and very welcome."

Quote from Paul Carter, Leader of Kent County Council:-

"Kent County Council is delighted to have worked with such an innovative and creative Town Council. Many good projects have developed that will be of enormous benefit to the Sevenoaks community and business economy".

Counties: Driving Economic Growth – Case Studies

Somerset County Council

Economic Growth Potential - Hinkley Point C Power Station Development

The proposed development by EDF Energy (EDFE) to build a new nuclear reactor at Hinkley Point presents huge opportunities for the Somerset growth agenda.

Somerset County Council (SCC) in partnership with our district councils is and will continue to work closely with EDFE and key partners to maximise the opportunities for Somerset businesses and the local economy and to manage and mitigate any negative impacts of the development.

Over the 10 year construction period of Hinkley, thousands of direct and indirect jobs will be created to support the development of the nuclear reactor island and associated construction and civil engineering works as well as aligned activity such as business services.

SCC has used its influence, particularly during the planning process, to ensure that the whole of Somerset receives the best value and economic benefit from the construction of the power station; and is working in partnership with the district councils and key partners to ensure that local people and businesses are aware of the potential opportunities and are able to access the necessary support and development needed to either secure employment or win contracts with the Tier 1 contractors.

The following are some of the activities that are in place to support the development of a Somerset supply chain for the nuclear industry.

Supply Chain Engagement:

As part of its procurement strategy, EDFE has partnered with the Somerset Chamber of Commerce (the Chamber) to identify, engage and support local businesses to become part of the supply chain. The Chamber manages a website to support the engagement of businesses and allows them to:

- Register an interest in supplying the project by completing a short online form detailing their capabilities that will be made available to EDFE and interested Tier 1 contractors.
- Update their company details as they develop their capabilities and standards.
- Keep abreast of the latest developments including build schedules and contracts out for tender via regular e-updates.
- Access a library of reference material and training documents.
- Engage with others on technical and business training events and information days designed by the Chamber and its partners to help local businesses get ready for the opportunities.
- Meet one-to-one with Tier 1 contractors for Hinkley through a series of Meet the Buyer days.
- Supporting Inward Investment to grow Somerset's supply chain.

Into Somerset, the inward investment delivery vehicle for SCC in partnership with our district councils, has a dedicated Hinkley supply chain development strand; and works closely with EDFE to provide advice and assistance to help potential supply chain businesses that want to relocate to Somerset to secure a place on invitation to tender lists and develop successful bids.

South West Low Carbon Energy Innovation and Collaboration Programme

SCC has also just submitted a bid to secure European funding to deliver a Low Carbon Energy Innovation and Collaboration Programme to support the growth of a local supply chain cluster/hub for Hinkley; and to support the development of businesses that cross into the supply chains of other low carbon energy technologies. If successful, the innovation and collaboration programme will include:

- Education and training provision.
- Workforce development and engagement.
- Local and national supply chain development activity.

Artist's impression of a potential supply chain hub:

LKM/SCC/Hinkley/23.10.12

Essex County Council

Skills and Employability

A particular area of focus in recent years has been to encourage increased take up of apprenticeships in Essex. Historically, take-up has been low, and a majority in low value jobs (e.g. one in 6 in hairdressing), and not necessarily linked to the economic aspirations of more high value jobs. This in part was due to the lack of awareness of opportunities and the outdated perception of what an apprenticeship involved.

The Essex Apprentice scheme

In 2009, ECC pledged to support 1,250 additional apprenticeship places across the public and private sectors over a 3 year period. The pioneering Essex Apprenticeship scheme worked with industry by providing wage subsidies (50%) to employers to incentivise them to take on an apprentice. The scheme focused particularly on:

- Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction, especially in subsectors including Heating and Ventilation, IT, Marine, Creative Industries, Cultural Vocations, Windscreen Maintenance, Aviation, Sports & Leisure and Ports & Logistics.
- Specific Districts, targeted specifically at areas with highest numbers of people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET).
- The Public Sector – 300 places in the public sector, including a number in ECC.
- In 2010, additional focus was added to deliver an apprenticeship programme targeted specifically at vulnerable and disadvantaged young people including youth offenders, young people leaving care and long term NEET.

Results:

- The target of delivering 1,250 apprenticeship places was exceeded by more than 10%, with almost 80% of those starting the programme having either successfully completed or still in progress.
- An 83% increase in the numbers of 16-18 year olds commencing an apprenticeship in Essex over the last 2 years. In comparison increases nationally, regionally and for our statistical neighbours were 32%, 41% and 21% respectively.
- Enabled businesses to take on an apprentice who otherwise could not have engaged, and local employers, particularly those in Engineering and Marine sectors benefited from a new generation of young people entering their industry.
- Businesses, teachers and students are more aware of what an apprenticeship is and how to access them.

The current Phase 2 programme continues to be driven by employment opportunities and the needs of the economy, built upon robust industry intelligence and developed in collaboration with business and its representative bodies, sector skills councils, industry training boards, Job Centre Plus and variety of other partners.

The programme will support approximately 1,200 new and additional apprenticeships over the next 2 years, particularly concentrating on STEM related sectors (most notably Engineering and the Energy sector, which is forecast to be creating and additional 80,000-100,000 new jobs within the UK over the next decade, many on our doorstep), and social care (in which there will also be significant employment opportunities in the future).

Recognising that the expectations of an apprenticeship are too great for a number of our more disadvantaged young people, we are also working in collaboration with the voluntary sector to support 6 month paid work experience placements for around 100 young people as a precursor to an apprenticeship, job or training. 94 have already commenced and the remainder are in the process of being recruited. An additional 68 paid work experience opportunities in the private sector, in and around Tendring, Harlow and Basildon are also being recruited.

We are facilitating a new industry/school programme to generate and increase interest amongst school children in STEM related apprenticeships/careers. The initial 2-year programme focuses on creating a sustainable programme with schools in Basildon, Harwich and Maldon with the automotive aerospace, engineering design, satellite technology and pharmaceutical industries. It is hoped that this will create opportunities within one of the largest concentrations of engineering and technology businesses in the South East.

Results:

- Secured a joint Coastal Communities Funding bid with Suffolk and Norfolk County Councils to support 200 new apprentices into the energy sector, plus an awareness raising campaign to ensure local people can train appropriately to secure jobs.

- Submitted a joint bid with Suffolk and Norfolk to the Regional Growth Fund to support 1,000 apprenticeships and graduates into the energy supply chain to ensure that there is a sufficient pool of skilled workers created to support developments including offshore wind farms and Sizewell C nuclear & port expansion. It will also support local companies to up-skill, better ensuring their ability to diversify and potentially win new business and replenish staff as they're retiring.
- Agreed targets with the SELEP Skills Working Group to see an additional 3,000 young people start an apprenticeship over and above the current numbers.
- Working with the private sector in the construction, energy and creative industries in order to develop potential Group Training Agency models that can stimulate new apprenticeships by removing some of the barriers both employers and would-be apprentices face in these sectors.

Cheshire East Council

Case Study 1 - Waters Corporation, Wilmslow

Background:
While major national manufacturers like Bentley & Vauxhall possibly spring to mind in the business context as regards Cheshire, in terms of number of companies the Professional, Scientific and Technical sector leads the way in the county. A major boost to Cheshire East was announced in January 2011 with an agreement for Waters Corporation to build a state of the art facility in Wilmslow that will bring a minimum of 450 new jobs when fully occupied.

Waters make mass spectrometry equipment used in the analysis of substances at the molecular level, a technique with applications in medical science, food testing, environmental protection and many others. A major player in its market Waters had a turnover of nearly $1.9 billion in 2011, with 5,700 employees worldwide.

Location choice:
The site occupies 37 acres (15 hectares) on the A538 Wilmslow- Altrincham Road just 3 miles south of Manchester Airport, and when complete in 2014 will provide research and development facilities, laboratories where customers will be able to view equipment in use, and additional manufacturing capacity for the company. In total the investment will amount to £60 million, encompassing softer elements like a gym and staff restaurant.

Cheshire East Council's regeneration service has worked closely with the company throughout, providing a single point of contact to support through the decision-making and planning process, up front advice on the risks and issues and a letter of comfort from Officers on the planning issues involved.

The former Ciba-Geigy site sits within the Green belt, and there has been an unusual environmental issue to deal with as part of the deal – rehousing bats living in the decaying Stamford Lodge building prior to the demolition of that structure, constructing a custom-designed new home for them onsite. Sustainability issues have also been addressed in the plans, for example with a footpath linking the site to Wilmslow, and a requirement that a full ecological and landscape management plan be produced covering the first 15 years of the site's use. Waters are also contributing £16,000 towards a National Trust footbridge over the River Bollin to Styal Country Park.

Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne attended the ground breaking ceremony on June 15 2012 observing: "Waters Corporation's decision to make this major investment in Wilmslow is a vote of confidence in the Cheshire economy and the British economy."

Waters Corporation VP Brian Smith said:"We are very excited that we now have the ability to move our high technology business forward and provide a world class centre for innovation in mass spectrometry (MS). The new Waters MS Headquarters will be designed to accelerate the rate of innovation with increased access for the world's scientific thought-leaders".
Cheshire East continues to support the company through it Business Engagement Framework commitment with ongoing discussions and advice on business rates and recruitment support.

Case Study 2 - Expert Logistics, Crewe

Background:
Expert Logistics are specialists in the delivery of white and large brown goods to the domestic market working with a healthy client list including John Lewis, Electrolux, Bosch, LG, Glen Dimplex Home Appliances, Hoover Candy and Beko. In 2009 they were acquired by DRL Limited the largest UK online kitchen appliance retailer. DRL is an e-commerce company, which as well as selling kitchen appliances online through its own websites, also provides white label kitchen appliance websites for its big brand clients such as Sainsbury's, Boots, Marks and Spencer, Next, House of Fraser, Debenhams, Screw Fix, Empire Direct, Argos and B&Q including supply, distribution and customer care. DRL made the acquisition to ensure quality control over the delivery of items (over 20,000 appliances per week).

Location choice:
Located within easy striking distance of the major North Western conurbations and the West Midlands, and benefitting from a prime position on the motorway network, Cheshire East has become something of a magnet for logistics companies. In February 2012 the UK's leading white goods delivery service Expert Logistics opened its new HQ and distribution centre in Crewe.

MD David Ashwell said that initially they sought a site near their existing base but quickly found that there was nothing of the sort and size required. "We needed a site of around 40,000 sq ft near to motorways and somewhere in the North West, so we ended up doing a dull search. We had a shortlist, went to see lots of site and ended up believing this was the best one for us. At first we were attracted by the physical sites but when we looked into Crewe we realised it had a good labour market and felt it would be a good place for us to come."

The process from decision to moving in was relatively easy: "We met the council pretty early, developed a very good relationship with them, also met the people at Job Centre Plus and developed a good relationship with them and the process of getting actually physically into here was really smooth" says Mr Ashwell.

One of the draws for Expert was the further and higher education provision. "South Cheshire College were commissioned to do some original art for us using their graphics team and students. That's all on display in our offices and we asked them to do a video for us talking about the relationship we developed in the local community. We are also operating an academy system with Reaseheath College where they are putting out people through NVQ's and they have created an academy to get self employed driver trained up so we can use them. We're still active with both" he says.

Cheshire East Council worked with local providers and government agencies to put together tailored awareness sessions and workshops on self employment to ensure that self employed drivers were supported throughout the process and felt empowered to take on the role. Through this work, over 70% of the new jobs created have been secured by Cheshire East residents who were previously registered unemployed.

Mr Ashwell commented "My team and I have found Cheshire East Council to be a very proactive authority with a genuine business focus. We have had immediate access to the decision makers who have helped to make our relocation as smooth as possible".

Future plans:
Expert has already delivered more jobs than was originally estimated to be the case and Mr Ashwell has a continuing positive view of the future in Crewe: "We got this site to expand into. At the moment we are not utilising anywhere near the amount of space we've got, but we're forecasting growth, are in a growing part of the market and internet business is growing as a percentage of the overall market. We are optimistic that we will grow into the space over the next couple of years."

Case Study 3: Ours Sanitary Ware Limited, Middlewich

Background:
Ideal Standard International, the Belgian-based privately-owned (Bain Capital Europe) parent company of Ideal Standard UK, announced plans to rationalise its UK and French operations in January 2011. The plans included the closure of Middlewich, which employed 247 people, and two factories in France. The Middlewich plant closed in June 2011. The site was acquired by Ours Sanitary Ware in October 2011. Brian was formerly Operations Director for Ideal Standard UK.

Falling demand for sanitary ware, partly the result of cutbacks in Government spending, triggered the decision to rationalise Ideal Standard UK's operations. Closure of Middlewich saw production transferred to Rugeley – a highly automated, productive plant – and the Czech Republic. The development centre based in Middlewich transferred to Rugeley. UK HQ is in Hull.

Ours Sanitary Ware Ltd is a subsidiary of Imperial Bathroom Products Group, which is part of HKR International, a diverse conglomerate based in Hong Kong. Imperial Bathroom Products manufactures premium bathroom products marketed under the Imperial and Impulse brands. The company's manufacturing facility is in Guangdong, China, and it has marketing and distribution subsidiaries in Australia (second place in the market), China and the UK. It also exports to selected markets in the US, Asia, Europe and the Middle East. Products are marketed and distributed in the UK under the Impulse brand through Impulse Bathroom Products, based in Erdington, Birmingham.

Imperial Bathroom Products had been looking to establish a manufacturing facility in the UK for a number of reasons:

- rising labour and energy costs in China;
- increasing transport/shipping costs;
- occasional difficulties in ensuring continuity of supply;
- to support and develop the market presence in the USA, Europe, UK;
- The Middlewich factory fitted in well with the company's plans and negotiations with Ideal Standard were concluded quickly. It is intended that Middlewich will manufacture products for the UK, Irish and US markets, with employment growing to c150 staff by mid-2012.

Overall progress to date has been very good:

- Middlewich plant specialists have been to Guangdong to gain experience (As an aside, the Guangdong plant was originally set up by two staff from Middlewich);
- case moulds have been shipped in from China and installed;
- production is now under way (1,000+ pieces produced);
- 70 staff recruited to date and on target to recruit c150 by mid-year;
- office refurbishment, to provide HQ and showroom space, is in progress;
- discussions/negotiations have been opened with a number of potential customers, including some based in the US. A group of potential US customers has already agreed to visit Middlewich.

Location choice:
Acquiring the Middlewich site has enabled Ours Sanitary Ware to take advantage of a number of factors enabling a smooth start-up:

- opportunity to draw on the locally-based industry knowledge and experience;
- ability to recruit skilled workers locally. There were 450 applicants for 100 jobs; 90% of recruits have worked previously in either the factory at Middlewich or in the Twyford plant in Alsager, which closed also in 2011. No difficulties are anticipated in recruiting additional, suitably qualified staff from the local area as the company expands;
- opportunity to acquire a recently working plant with a reputation for producing high quality sanitary ware; but note high cost of re-connecting utilities, especially gas supply;
- access to established supply chain for raw materials, other products and services (suppliers in Chelford, Cornwall, Newton Abbott, Norway, for example);
- active support and assistance from Unity Trade Union, Fiona Bruce MP and Cheshire East Council.

Cheshire East Council provided proactive support throughout the deal. Conscious that recent factory closures in the sanitary ware sector had left a legacy of factory space, production equipment and a highly skilled niche workforce in the local area, the council worked actively with Ours Sanitaryware to promote Middlewich as the best location. Cheshire East advised on business rates, helping to secure partial occupation whilst production was built up and liaised with government agencies on environmental, immigration and tax issues on behalf of the company's Hong Kong management team.

Future plans:
The company believes that having a manufacturing presence in the UK will enable it to develop overseas and local opportunities with wholesalers, installers and specifiers of specialised equipment and, potentially, with other sanitaryware producers/suppliers. The UK will be the base for supplying the US market - production of pieces for the US will begin in March.

Further investment in the site is planned over the next 2 years based on a successful start up and operation. Regional Growth Fund application has been made.

Worcestershire County Council

Case Study 1 - Cyber Security

Worcestershire County Council has recognised the next opportunity for business growth within the County. Cyber Security is the new hot topic throughout the business world with many companies under pressure to protect themselves from the threat of cyber attacks. With it's excellent reputation and strong business base in the technology field, the county council believes Worcestershire can lead the way in this growing UK industry.

Worcestershire has a rich history in the defence and technology sector, renowned for the invention of RADAR, the microwave and touch screen technology. With prevalent companies such as QinetiQ based in the County, it has encouraged further growth for the sector through similar spin off businesses such as Borwell Ltd, Key-IQ and First Solution Technologies. With a cluster emerging, it is clear that Worcestershire is becoming a 'hub' for all things cyber. Worcestershire County Council have recently funded a research project on the sector to find out the growth potential in order to meet the growing need. This research has shown there is clear demand for investment and growth in the cyber security sector and the Council feels that the County of Worcestershire can play a key part in its development. This will bring wealth to the County as well as creating many job opportunities.

Online threats are currently estimated to cost the country £27bn a year. With the rise in threats from the Internet such as hacking and loss or corruption of key data, there is an increasing need for businesses to be pro-active in their approach to cyber security. This can be incredibly difficult for smaller companies who are also under pressure to provide a safer online presence with very limited resources.

As part of the commitment to being 'Open for Business' and in line with the Cyber Security Strategy published in November 2011, Worcestershire County Council and the Worcestershire LEP have been working closely with the Malvern Cyber Security Network to develop Worcestershire's own Cyber Security Strategy. The network consists of many of the local technology and cyber security companies and was formed to help grow Worcestershire's cyber security businesses and improve the cyber security of local enterprises. The strategy will include action and investment plans to further develop growth for the cyber security sector in the county. Worcestershire County Council recently sponsored a free seminar in association with the Malvern Cyber Security Network and the University of Worcester to give local businesses an insight in to the key issues surrounding cyber security and how to tackle them in a timely and cost effective way.

The event saw over 50 representatives from SMEs in attendance to listen to useful advice and guidance from sector experts. Attendees were also informed of the new national independent scheme IASME (Information Assurance for SME) developed locally by the University of Worcester and supported by the Technology Strategy Board. The IASME Consortium has launched an affordable cyber-security information assurance standard that is suitable and relevant for all SMEs. It was developed by and for small businesses and delivers quality assured standards. Clients are offered highly skilled and experienced trainers and assessors to help all SMEs assess the risk factors for their business and identify and implement suitable solutions. The clients will then receive a certificate to show they are compliant with security management standards.

Worcestershire County Council's key priority is to support the growth and prosperity of the local economy. The county has been visited by four different ministers in the context of Cyber Security including Francis Maud, Vince Cable, Pauline Neville-Jones and Mark Prisk. The growth of the Malvern Hills science park and the skill-set, knowledge and expertise available throughout the County puts Worcestershire on the map for the Cyber Security Sector and promises a long and prosperous future.

Photo[8] : From left, Richard Henson, of the University of Worcester; Ian Whiting, of Titania; Robin Walker, MP for Worcester; Nigel Church, of First Solution technologies; and Steve Borwell-Fox, of Malvern Security Group.

8 The photographer is Geoff Robinson of www.2020zoom.com

Case Study 2 - Worcestershire hosts the Governor of the Bank of England at one of its flagship business networking events

Worcestershire County Council's business networking initiative – Finditinworcestershire.com – hosted the Governor of the Bank of England at a recent event for business leaders.

Finditinworcestershire is a key part of Worcestershire County Council's work to support businesses to do more trade locally. Worcestershire County Council recognises that a strong economy helps keeps jobs in the county and improves the quality of life of its residents.

Part of the process in delivering appropriate support is listening to businesses and their needs. During the downturn many businesses expressed the desire to do more business locally. Companies wanted to be able to find more customers and suppliers amongst other local firms – and be able to meet and network with them more easily. Searching for tenders was another issue which was raised – due to the time involved in exploring multiple websites. They ideally wanted to see tenders from a range of organisations in one place – and even be alerted when relevant tenders were released.

Worcestershire County Council developed Finditinworcestershire as a solution to these needs. The initiative acts as a match making service between buyers and suppliers. A website and series of networking meetings are offered to help local companies grow, get new business and in the process strengthen the local supply chain. The website lists local suppliers, tenders, news and business support events. The monthly networking breakfasts attract 120 people on average – with each meeting having a theme from digital marketing to accessing finance.

To further benefit the local business community – membership is free and there is no charge for attending the monthly networking breakfasts. Since launching 18 months ago the initiative has exceeded expectations. There are over 3,000 members and more than 500 supply opportunities worth in excess of £30 million have been promoted through the website.

This summer saw Finditinworcestershire host two high profile events.

The Governor of the Bank of England, Sir Mervyn King, joined business leaders at a special event in July. The invitation-only event was attended by 100 of the county's leading business representatives who were invited to hear from the country's leading central banker, who also answered a broad range of questions.

"We are delighted to welcome Sir Mervyn to Worcester and explain the Finditinworcestershire project to him," said Kathryn Wagstaff, project manager of Finditinworcestershire. "We have been able to show him how it is benefiting local business and strengthening the local supply chain. Sir Mervyn had a chance to listen to local businesses and to speak about the economy. It is extremely rewarding to have our work recognised, not just outside the county but by the country's top banker."

In August Finditinworcestershire members met at Worcestershire County Cricket Club for a "meet the buyer" event. Work is due to commence on a £10 milion redevelopment of the cricket club site – with a new reception area and conference facilities, alongside a new Premier Inn hotel. Cricket club officials met local businesses that could potentially supply goods and services to fit out their new facilities.

After the meeting Kathryn Wagstaff noted "this meeting was an excellent example of how Finditinworcestershire brings local buyers and suppliers together. We're very grateful to Worcestershire County Cricket Club for opening its doors to our members and giving them a head start towards winning contracts. I hope to see many of our members contributing to the first class facilities being developed at New Road."

From Left: Sir Mervyn King, Bank of England and Kathryn Wagstaff, Project Manager Finditinworcestershire

Case Study 3 - Worcestershire Jobs Fair

Worcestershire County Council is committed and working with partners to address unemployment using different approaches and mechanisms to reach as many people as possible. Over the last few months major opportunities had been provided to local residents to find jobs including apprenticeships.

Worcestershire Jobs Fair

A jobs fair was held at Worcester Guildhall on 12th September organised by Worcestershire County Council in partnership with Job Centre Plus and the Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership. The fair saw more than 35 employers from across the County offering in excess of 500 roles, of all kinds, including part-time and full-time work, seasonal and weekend jobs. A range of roles were showcased during the day, ranging from retail and social care to drivers, admin staff, designers, team leaders and engineers.

The event has been hailed as a huge success after people queued up outside the Guildhall even before it had started. More than 2,000 aspiring candidates visited the fair and enquired about the available vacancies from the exhibitors.

Cllr Simon Geraghty, Worcestershire County Council's Cabinet Member for Economy and Infrastructure, said: "I was delighted to see such a great turnout from residents looking for work from across Worcestershire. It was clear that there was a genuine buzz about the day with those attending being presented with a fantastic mixture of opportunities from a wide range of business sectors.

People queued up for the jobs fair organised by the County Council

The Real Apprenticeship Event

During the last two years partners in Worcestershire have been working together to raise the profile of Apprenticeship scheme amongst young people and employers. Following the huge success of "The Real Apprentice" showcase events held over the last two years, second event of the year was held at Perdiswell Young People Leisure Centre on 3rd October. This event was specially focused on year 11 students their parents and guardians to further boost the interest in Apprenticeships and work-based learning opportunities. This was again a partnership effort jointly organised by Worcestershire County Council, National Apprenticeship Service and Worcestershire Training Providers Association but more importantly sponsored by five local employers – Mazak, Sanctuary Housing, The Community Housing Group, Vestia and Parallel Lines.

The event attracted 372 young people and in total more than 700 people including parents and/or guardians of young people walked through the door. The event provided potential apprentices and their parents and/or guardians an opportunity to visit 30 exhibitors including Training Providers and Colleges and Local Employers to find about the available apprenticeships vacancies and learning opportunities.

Worcestershire County Council sees apprenticeships as a growth area and is working with partners and local employers aiming to create more apprenticeship vacancies in the County. Worcestershire Employment & Skills Board – a policy board of Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership – has identified apprenticeships as one of the main priorities within Employment and Skills Strategy of the County and targeting to create 10,000 additional apprenticeship vacancies in Worcestershire by 2016. The last year's figures show a growth of 33% apprenticeships starts in comparison to previous year.

This progress could only be achieved by the joint efforts of partners including National Apprenticeship Service and Training Providers Association.

"Someone from Economic Development": "We are delighted with the turnout of Apprenticeship Event held on 3rd October for the young people. Apprenticeships offer an excellent way for young people to continue training and developing skills while earning a wage and beginning a successful career.

"Not only young people benefit from a thriving apprenticeship programme but also the county's economic future depends on highly skilled new employees, particularly in emerging technology sectors. These skills are often better acquired through tailored on the job training rather than through none specific college training.

"It is also vital that businesses in the County are able to access the right skills and that opportunities are available for everyone to realise their potential".

The real apprentice event

Cumbria County Council

Cumbria – Supporting Local Growth Projects

In 2009, Cumbria Fells and Dales and Solway, Border and Eden Local Action Groups were allocated £12m to support local projects through the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE). Consultations with a wide variety of Cumbrian organisations and businesses resulted in a clear framework of socio-economic priorities for delivery. Cumbria County Council, being well versed in delivering economic development having been involved in managing and supporting Rural European programmes for the past 20 years, took on the role of employing the Local Action Group teams and programme administration staff and facilitating the delivery.

The LEADER Programmes are focused on encouraging innovation, increasing competitiveness and building knowledge and skills in the forestry and farming sectors as well as rural businesses and community projects.

Innovative approaches are necessary, like the Cumbria Woodlands free advisory service which supports owners of unmanaged woodland in Cumbria. It aims to raise awareness of the potential of woodlands for everything from reducing heating bills by burning wood, through to helping to offset the effects of climate change and improving wildlife habitats.

Increasing competitiveness is a common theme, as in the case of the 4x4 log collector which can delve deeper into delicate woodlands which would otherwise be damaged by standard, larger forestry equipment. A grant of £20,560 allowed Clark Mactavish and Skogs Logs to purchase their specialist 'mini forwarder'.

The joint venture then found themselves scaling previously unimaginably steep banks and crossing damp ground which would have simply swallowed their machinery up before. That, in a nutshell, is what RDPE delivers – a helping hand against the forces which can drag rural businesses down.

The axes of the RDPE

(Cumbria County Council delivers axes 1 and 3 via axis 4):

Axis 1: Improving the competitiveness of the farming and forestry sectors:

Encourages the modernisation of farms and improving the value of forestry businesses including adding value to primary produce. It highlights the importance of sustainable growth by promoting efficiency of resource use, such as energy, water and nutrients. It fosters the development of new markets for products such as wood fuel and biomass. It promotes improved skills access and employment within the farming and forestry sectors.

Axis 2: Improving the environment and countryside

Axis 3: Rural quality of life and diversification of the rural economy:

Encourages entrepreneurial and socio-economic activity, develops micro-businesses and supports rural service provision. It also promotes farm diversification, rural tourism and support for community groups.

Axis 4 – the Leader approach:

The Leader approach is a delivery mechanism. It enables a "bottom up", community led approach to the delivery of RDPE funding in rural areas through Cumbria's two Local Action Groups (LAGs).

Building knowledge and skills by promoting and training people in traditional heritage skills such as blacksmithing, dry stone walling and limewash painting through NECT's Heritage Skills Initiative or turning around the fortunes of the 'Blue Grey' – a traditional Borders cattle breed. A grant of £42,309 has allowed existing breeders to promote at agricultural shows the fact that Blue Grey suckler herds can attract an additional £300 per head, leading to a marked upturn in new farmers investing in the breed.

Promoting sustainable tourism through schemes such as A Green Eden and Cycling Eden delivered by Nurture Eden and South Copeland Tourism Development – a group of tourism related businesses and community groups.

RDPE also proved to be an invaluable source of funding to help farmers after the devastating Cumbrian floods of November 2009. The deluge left farms struggling with destroyed livestock and landscapes. Whole river courses changed overnight, with thousands of tonnes of gravel deposited on fields and farmland. The county was in emergency mode and DEFRA agreed that the RDPE was an appropriate means of offering emergency support to ensure longer term economic sustainability. Grants of up to £6,800 were made available to farmers to hire equipment or specialist contractors to remove debris and gravel from their fields. In the first six months after the floods, 91 farmers received grants amounting to £393,780.

RDPE has been operating, of course, in one of the worst economic downturns the country has ever experienced. This has meant that many smaller ventures have struggled to deliver their side of the 60/40 match funding needed under the programme's criteria. Even though their ideas have been deemed eligible for support by one of Cumbria's two Local Action Groups (LAGs) which approve and administer the grants, the funding has remained frustratingly out of reach for some who cannot get their banks to display a similar foresight and faith in their proposals. Schemes also need to deliver their outcomes before claiming retrospectively from the LAG – meaning access to capital can remain even more frustratingly out of reach.

RDPE is a scheme funded by the EU, controlled by a central Government department (DEFRA), initially involving Regional Development Agencies (until their demise), with a local authority (Cumbria County Council) acting as accountable body for Cumbria's two Local Action Groups (the Cumbria Fells and Dales LAG covering the mid and south county area and the Cumbria Solway, Border & Eden LAG covering the north). With that multi-layered approach come lots of rules, lots of restrictions and lots of red tape.

Those delivering the scheme in Cumbria have worked hard to try to minimise the hurdles. The LAGs work on a 'bottom-up' approach, with the decisions about development themes, priorities and the allocation of funds devolved to community and business representatives from the eligible rural area, with key statutory bodies including county and district councils, Lake District National Park Authority and the Forestry Commission also LAG members. The staff members are employed by Cumbria County Council.

Adrian Banford, Programme Manager of the Cumbria Fells and Dales LAG, says:

"Working with clients, in the 'bottom up' LEADER method is a real pleasure and a privilege. Meeting real rural innovators, working with professionals from business, charities and the wider community gives me real job satisfaction.

"Seeing change happening in businesses and in communities around the county makes some of the administration bearable. The amount of process and paperwork we ask for is sometimes seen as overbearing by some clients, but we must ensure that public money is spent properly and in the best places in these times of austerity."

Local Action Groups key achievements

- Cumbria Fells and Dales LAG:
- Total Project Spend to 31 March 2012: £2.96m
- Total Project Commitment to 31 March 2012: £5m
- Total Number of Expression of Interest Received 2011/12: 125
- Total Number of Applications Submitted 2011/12: 24
- Total Number of Approvals 2011/12: 18
- Total Number of Live Projects: 53
- Total Number of Completed Projects: 110
- Solway, Border & Eden LAG:
- Total Project Spend to 31 March 2012: £3.06m
- Total Project Commitment to 31 March 2012: £5.61m (attracting a further £6.7m in match funding)
- Total Number of business supported: 385
- Total Number of jobs created: 148
- Total Number of training days contracted: 7035
- Total Number of Live Projects: 53
- Total Number of Completed Projects: 110

The efforts of the teams to minimise the negatives and maximise the opportunities despite the recession has helped to ensure that the LEADER Programmes have committed almost all available funding to projects and are contracted to achieve or over achieve on the majority of their output targets.

The current RDPE scheme ends soon, with the last grant payments scheduled for August 2013 and the grant commitment window closing at the end of 2012. In considering its replacement, thought needs to be given on how to reduce that administrative burden so that the rates of actual grant spend versus grants committed can be quicker.

Both nationally and locally, the new scheme which will be consulted on in Spring 2013 needs to be very clearly underpinned by two key principles: it needs to be simpler, with the focus on outcomes rather than process.

The need for support from rural businesses is undoubtedly there. When Cumbria formally launched its two LAGs in early 2009 and asked for applicants, there was a stampede: 410 applications in the first two months for the two LAGs, which would normally expect to process around 100 applications a year each. No doubt the thirst for support in the current economic climate will be even greater next time around, but only if the Programmes can be innovative and flexible enough to meet changing local needs.

Cumbria is confident that, having delivered on RDPE within the confines of the current round, it will be able to do even more next time round.

Case study of supported project: Active for Life Village Agents

Peta Leigh, Project Manager, says:
"The Active for Life project is aimed at reducing social isolation by enabling older people to become involved in community activities and opportunities including volunteering.
"Social isolation is known to have as big an impact on health and well-being as smoking and so the importance of work aimed at reducing it is being recognised and valued.
"The project is using the £30,000 grant that we received from the Solway, Border & Eden LAG to employ three local village agents (Active for Life Assistants) that will each work in a parish zone, and to pay for associated support costs. The Big Lottery is providing funding for the additional two village agents.
"The work of the Active for Life project has been enhanced by the Village Agents in a variety of ways. Village Agents enable us to widen and increase the number of opportunities for older people in North Allerdale to engage in community activity and so reduce social isolation.
"Being based in the communities they serve enables Village Agents to build up closer relationships with older people in their locality than if they were based in a distant office. They are there as a conduit for information, keeping older people in touch with services and activities which support them to live independent and active lives.
"They have built up knowledge and contacts which can be easily accessed via the project. The Village Agents also help to set up or facilitate community activities such as the very successful men's group in Thursby, IT sessions in Silloth library, seated NIA (Non-Impact Aerobics), poetry group and the very popular walking groups.
"Many older people enjoy walking but do not want to walk on their own. Having a group to walk with and a trained walk group leader is very important. Without the Village Agents undergoing this training and supporting volunteers, this would not be possible to sustain."

Feedback from Mrs G, 85 year old resident of Kirkbride: "Before (the Active for Life Village Agents project), I would just stay in my house, staring at the four walls. Now my daughter has said that now I am out of the house so much that she has to arrange an appointment to ring me!"

What does RPDE fund?

Grants for farming and forestry activities:

- Training and information provision.
- Forestry advisory services.
- Setting up of management, relief and advisory services for farm and forestry businesses.
- Modernisation of agricultural holdings.
- Improvement of the economic value of forests.
- Adding value to agricultural and forestry products.
- Cooperation for development of new products, processes and technologies.
- Investment in small scale renewable energy.
- Grants for rural businesses and community projects.
- Farm diversification into non-agricultural activities.
- Business creation and development targeted at micro-businesses with less than ten employees.
- Encouragement of certain tourism activity such as eco-tourism, high value/low impact tourism or the creation of tourism networks.
- Basic services for the rural population.
- Conservation and upgrading of the rural heritage.
- Training and information for non farm and forestry businesses.
- Support for local development strategies.
- Investment in small scale renewable energy.

CCN Member Authorities

Buckinghamshire County Council
Cambridgeshire County Council
Central Bedfordshire Council
Cheshire East Council
Cheshire West and Chester Council
Cornwall Council
Cumbria County Council
Derbyshire County Council
Devon County Council
Dorset County Council
Durham County Council
East Sussex County Council
Essex County Council
Gloucestershire County Council
Hampshire County Council
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Surrey County Council
Warwickshire County Council
West Sussex County Council
Wiltshire Council
Worcestershire County Council

Counties: Driving Economic Growth

CCN
COUNTY COUNCILS NETWORK

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