

Spatial Planning and Economic Development

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Linking spatial planning and economic development

- What we are far from sure about: how strong the link may be, how much we can know about the link.
- “Planning system is a key lever” (PPS4) -?? – scepticism.
- Clearly in the long run there must be all sorts of interrelationships.
- But knowing that does not give any clear guide to policy, incrementally, over the years.

Taking the long view

- Real territories and landscapes built up over time.
- Who could say with confidence which planning policies of a selected decade since say 1950 were good or bad for the local/regional economy?
- Pre industrial revolution, industrial revolution, the last 20-30 years, all have contributed to the reality, the economic context which makes any region attractive and not attractive – assets, congestion, interrelationships...

Theory?

- There being no agreed theory of local/regional economic development..
- This leads to a tendency for policy makers to adopt fashions – productivity drivers, clusters, significance of infrastructure, significance of location for different sorts of business, significance of ICT etc.
- The data base, being tied to no clear theory, is therefore not a neutral creation.
- This will make the following remarks sound rather unadventurous – I do not share confidence in current “knowledge”.

The basics still matter

- The normal equipment of planning for the economy is needed – employment land reviews, employment projections, sector demand and supply, regeneration needs and so on.
- Many “common sense” understandings surely still relevant, however unable we are to prioritise them.
- The following are therefore on my list of “still relevants”, as indicators of how planning and economic development relate.

The “still relevants” (1)

- Infrastructure can determine long term market functioning (so returns to transport modelling for economic development should be high, if acted upon).
- Concentration, growth poles, agglomeration, spatial hierarchies – do make long term sense.
- “Smart growth” not just an idea for the boom areas of the UK; good returns from long term regionally specific work on this.

The “still relevants” (2)

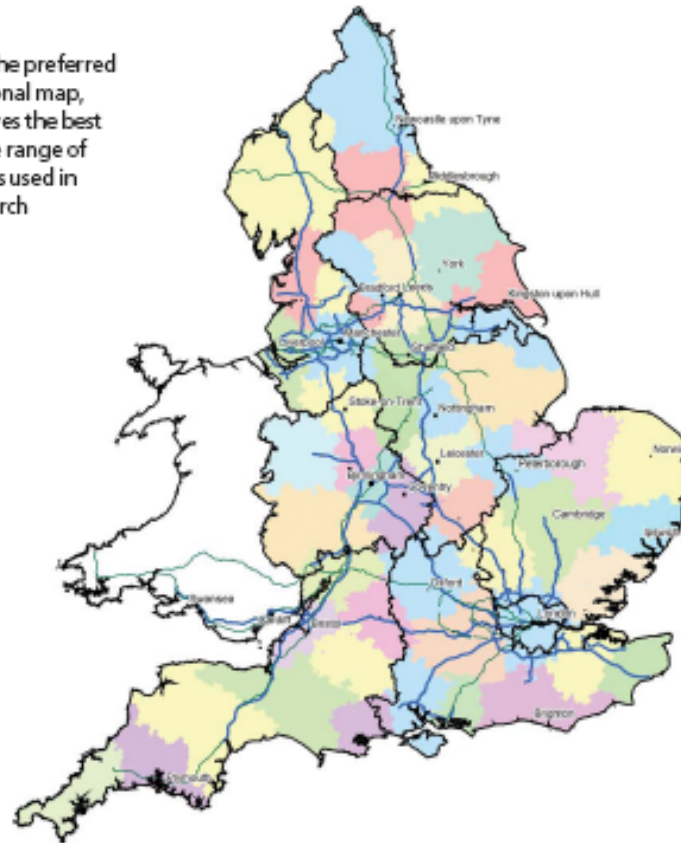
- Safeguarding – another valuable long term instrument, meaning that right sort of futures work can well give returns for long term economic development.
- Public sector economic activity still matters – ideological blind spots to be avoided. Need to influence changes in the regional public sector just as much as the private sector. (Certainly matters massively in prosperous Oxfordshire...).

Process issues

1. National level may take over fully many major infrastructure issues.
 2. Reorganised regional level, but details still being worked out.
 3. Subregional and local also in flux, new economic assessment duty, joint cross subregion working etc.
- These all suggest that linking in process terms of SP and ED by no means home and dry – vertically and horizontally.

LGA preferred sub-regional map

map 1 – the preferred sub-regional map, which gives the best fit for the range of indicators used in our research



Hot issues

- No doubt the approach to these should come out of the overall strategy, but...
- Some crunch issues matter more than others, and worth pushing research resources into these, even if only marginally reduces the conflict and tangles.
- Obvious cases – environment-growth battles (motorways, airports), green belt issues, areas of opportunity versus areas of need...
- But will find some very large zones of judgement remain – uncertainties dog economic planning.
- “Soft” planning approaches – workshops arguing about which data is relevant, and how to interpret it.

Government advice and policy

What to make of this?

- Several documents in last years, and now the new PPS.
- PPS4 draft pushing away from spatial economic planning, overall, but with lots of caveats.
- “Give more weight to market signals” – but what if these imply no investment?
- Then, do we decide to change planning standards, give public sector larger role, or – just wait?

Summing up

- So – given contested theory, process uncertainties, uneven government advice:
- Put resources into the basics, up to date employment land and movement trends, what is being safeguarded where, and consistency across the region. Plus work on hot or controversial issues.
- We can aspire to good economic development and good spatial planning, but should not hope too much for a tightly specified convergence of the two.