

Introduction

We support and welcome the direction of travel and the overall analysis of the West of England economy set out in the SEP. The intention to focus interventions on key sectors and the enterprise areas and the enterprise zone builds on the commitments already made by the LEP, the UAs and central government.

We have taken the opportunity of the consultation to engage more directly with wider elected members and our key stakeholders on the strategy set out in the SEP and have outlined below the areas we wish to see strengthened in order to help sustain jobs and growth in the region.

North Somerset's plan for growth identified the following key outputs which in our view have a direct relevance to the SEP:

- Employment led approach to delivering 9,000 jobs and 6,000 new homes at J21Enterprise Area
- Developers required to provide 1.5 jobs per home
- Link to local need including, apprentices, training, employment, supply chains
- Enabling Infrastructure to accelerate growth
- Indigenous business supported to meet growth potential, this is where majority of new jobs will come with enhanced supply chains

We anticipate 80% of our planned growth to 2026 to take place in and around the J21 EA and Weston-super-Mare. Successfully developing J21EA is central to our growth plans both locally and sub-regionally and we therefore would like to see it feature more strongly within SEP interventions.

Our analyses show that future performance of Financial Services, Advanced Manufacturing, Professional & Technical and Food & Drink manufacturing sectors are crucial to realising our growth ambitions.

Vision and Strategic Objectives

We would recommend the expansion of the vision statement (“Built upon the benefits of its distinctive mix of urban and rural areas”) so that it reflects more explicitly the need to enhance our “natural capital” as part of future developments and ecosystem services so that we improve the resilience of both our rural and urban environments.

In addition we would consider that essential infrastructure as referenced in Strategic Objective 3 should include Broadband.

Leadership and Governance

We support the establishment of a Leaders' Committee to help move joint actions forward with greater pace and to use this as one of the key levers for shaping Government policy and future delivery programmes.

Enhanced transparency through the Leaders' Committee, joint scrutiny arrangements and strengthening of the other joint committee arrangements are positive steps forward.

SEP – Economic Strategy

The overall strategy set out in Figure 3 needs to incorporate more explicitly the “People” and the “Spatial/Place” dimensions. Lack of emphasis is demonstrated by there being no stated interventions that deals with raising the ambition of our young people, raising attainments or some of the long standing regeneration challenges as captured in the Vision for the area.

Characteristics of a place that makes it a “good” place to live and work should also be emphasised and more importantly valued. We would therefore request that one of the stated interventions of the SEP needs to support “*West of England Assets – how they will help secure our future economic prosperity and environmental sustainability*”.

Given the critical role of key sectors a more consistent description of the sectors (section 3) would strengthen the document together with examples of activities that would support growth.

In terms of drivers for growth, experience shows that businesses that innovate and adapt to new markets/changes in demand (new services and products etc) tend to be the ones that grow and are successful (as are more resilient to economic fluctuations). Therefore innovation should be listed under the summary for ‘enterprise business support’ key driver for growth.

We welcome the approach taken to inward investment, however, we would encourage a more targeted approach to this area of work with a clearly defined set of support activities instead of a long list describing the perceived problems with the current situation – (section 4.3.9). Furthermore we would expect Inward Investment activities to be distinct from “visitor marketing”.

Section 4.1 Skills

The SEP should better reflect the critical role FE providers play in securing growth as evidenced in the West of England Skills Plan.

We propose the inclusion of the following interventions:

Law & Professional Services Academy

The establishment of a **Law & Professional Services Academy** by Weston College in partnership with public and private sector organisations to address a gap identified by the legal profession. We will be submitting a project proposal in respect of this and our aim is to commence a pilot programme in Autumn 2014 with the aim of establishing a Legal Services Campus by November 2015.

The West of England Law and Professional Services Academy will be an inspirational learning centre, in a high profile location, serving as a unique flagship enterprise to provide dynamic, motivational teaching and learning, and to promote credible inclusive vocational routes into employment in conjunction with employers, in the following areas:

- Law and Legal Services e.g. Commercial Law, International Law, Family Law, Civil Law, Constitutional & Administration Law, Criminal Law.
- Financial Services e.g. Banking, Investments, Insurance and Pensions.
- Accountancy Services e.g. Accountancy, Audit, Taxation, PAYE.
- Professional Services e.g. Business Consultancy, Planning & Statutory Regulation.
- Justice Services e.g. Ministry of Justice, Crown Prosecution Service, Youth Justice.

The project will incorporate a “business support service” social enterprise model, to provide NEETs and the long term disaffected unemployed, valuable pre-work placement experience in a business setting to improve confidence and opportunities for success.

Two capital build options (Option A and Option B) have been identified for the project. Both options are “shovel ready” from August 2015 with the following build timeline.

Future Technology Centre

The Weston College “Future Technology Centre” project consists of a 1,530 sqm facility designed to offer students the opportunity to acquire “new technology” skills that are impacting the following areas:

- Creative & Digital e.g. Creative & Digital Media & Communication, Software ICT Programming, Game Design, Virtual Technologies, Smart Technologies
- Advanced Engineering & Automated Manufacturing e.g. CAD, CAM, JIT, Robotics, 3D Prototyping, BIT, Micro Electronics, Materials Engineering.
- Low Carbon e.g. Low Carbon Construction, Low Carbon Motor Vehicle

The project will showcase the latest technology complete with state-of-the-art industry linked teaching spaces, workspaces and classrooms with smart technology for both practical and academic learning to ensure that students are both sector and technology competent.

Two capital build options (Option A and Option B) have been identified for the project. Both options are “shovel ready” from August 2015 with the following build timeline.

Higher Education Provision

Weston College makes a strong FE offer and is the driving force behind the establishment of the Enterprise Technical College at J21EA and in partnership with the Council is now pushing forward with the establishment of Higher Education provision in Weston town (In 2012/13 there were 660 full-time equivalent Higher Education students). We would ask that the Skills Capital Investment Plan (4.1.4) makes provision for both the HE and Law & Professional Services Academy campuses.

Section 4.4 SME Business Support

The opening statement “85% of the West of England’s businesses employ less than 10 people” seems somewhat isolated. This is not substantially different from other similar city regions. This needs a follow up statement along the lines of “*within this group there will be businesses that are ready for and capable of substantial growth. Our goal is threefold: identify these businesses.... etc*”. We would once again emphasise the need for innovation to be a strong feature of any business support provision.

Given the above context and the intended goals the interventions outlined are weak and incomplete. Please see attached our “J21 Stepping for Growth – business support” proposal which sets out a comprehensive package of interventions that exploits the growth potential of SMEs in key sectors providing a centre for growth and excellence.

We would ask that a more complete intervention programme is developed (beyond the currently stated SME Growth Fund proposition) to help grow SMEs that align with the focus on Enterprise Areas/Zone and key growth sectors.

Section 5 Interventions

We welcome the approach to interventions, however, would wish to see the following opportunities more explicitly stated and supported by the SEP.

1. Strongly support the inclusion of the proposition for a Food & Enterprise Centre at J21EA focused around research, development and innovation. In addition we request the inclusion of the stepping up for growth proposition at **J21 EA (Stepping up for Growth Business Support)** which sets out a range of activities that are deemed necessary to deliver our jobs and growth targets. There may well be an opportunity to replicate this across all of the Enterprise Areas and we would welcome such a collaborative approach. Alternatively the set of activities contained in the stepping up for growth proposition could be incorporated as part of a targeted support to SMEs in key growth sectors or with potential to achieve high growth.
2. The Superfast Broadband proposition (cross sector) intervention should be applied to J21EA – not clear if this is the case or not.
3. Welcome the proposed “Infrastructure Design and Realisation Fund”. We would however wish to ensure that the fund is also accessible to infrastructure development work within Enterprise Areas and other strategic growth points
4. Skills Capital to provide for the establishment of a **Law & Professional Services Academy** Campus by Weston College and **Future Technology Centre**. We have attached draft project proposals in support and intend to complete these in the next two weeks. We request that the SEP interventions include HE provision in Weston Town Centre.
5. There is a need to continue to invest in infrastructure at J21EA to accelerate growth and this is set out in the attached infrastructure proposal (**J21EA Stepping for Growth – Infrastructure**). We would ask that this be included as part of the “Cross–Sector Interventions”.

6. P50 (5.5) lists 'growing other sectors of our economy.' Food and Drink needs to be added to this sector. It is also a key sector that will benefit from China and export market.
7. The role of the identified strategic transport interventions in reducing car-based congestion but enabling business movements to and around the EZ / EAs, in particular, the role of the M5 as a key corridor connecting four of the Enterprise Areas, the Port and Airport could be explored as an opportunity moving forward.

Asks of government

1. 'Ask' number 6.6. requests that government funding focused on large sites (500 - 1000 dwellings) be extended to cover portfolios of small housing sites. The funding referred to (LIF) is also available to Enterprise Zones, but not currently to Enterprise Areas. NSC asks that **the fund be extended to cover Enterprise Areas and portfolios of employment sites.**
2. In general, HCA infrastructure funding is more difficult to access than affordable housing programmes. The government is asked to enable greater access to the infrastructure programmes, **including for sites not owned by the HCA** and those which do not include housing.

Context

The SEP makes no real mention of neighbouring regions nor investment programmes of national significance (Hinkley Point C). As a leading LEP we need to be not only demonstrating awareness, however, exploit to maximum both the national and local benefits to arise from them.

Other notes

1. The Junction 21 Enterprise Area should be referred to as "J21 EA" throughout.
2. P14 under strengths need to include infrastructure and communications as well as quality of life and diversity of environments.
3. Under advanced manu section (16) add QuEST Global under the list of aerospace companies in the WoE.
4. Under legal and professional services (p17) add Handelsbanken
5. Page 19 – insert reference to North Somerset Enterprise Technical College with a focus on STEM subjects for 14-19 year olds as well as higher apprenticeships and FE provision.
6. Airport section (p36) latest figures for airport released **this week** are: The number of people passing through the terminal in 2013 was up 3.4 per cent compared to the previous year, taking the annual total above six million for the first time since 2008, and only the second time in the Airport's history