England’s main (sub-) Regional Planning: the patchy inheritance of Local Industrial Strategies

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Supported by the RTPI's Small Project Impact Research (SPIRe) Scheme
The bodies involved

- In England, 10 well-funded official Regional Development Agencies “replaced” after 2011 by 38 business-led LEPs
- “[LEPs] are there to serve a purpose. Economic strategy and the politics and applications of grants” (Interviewee)
- Huge variation in scale, 10 employees was the average: under reform
- After ideological softening, a UK “Industrial Strategy” of 11/17
- This played down the spatial element but proposed “Local Industrial Strategies” (LISs) and assigned them, controversially, to LEPs
- A thin advice Prospectus of 10/18
- Six pilots to be agreed by March, 2019(!!); the rest by early 2020
All LEPs were also required to write Strategic Economic Plans (SEPs) in 2014 HH.

Amateurism from government shown by the variety of end-dates (next slide).

One view now is that SEPs were simply bidding documents for Local Growth Funding, otherwise just “Soft Planning”.

They may lack bold experiments in scenario planning.

Will LEPs will simply dust off their SEPs for the new funding purposes?

They may lack bold experiments in scenario planning.

The precedent provides vital lessons for new LISs, of greater importance.
Number of SEPs (out of 38) with stated end date in each year

- In 2020: 9
- In 2021: 7
- In 2022: 2
- In 2023: 1
- In 2024: 2
- In 2025: 5
- In 2026: 1
- In 2027: 0
- In 2028: 0
- In 2029: 0
- In 2030: 5
- In 2031: 1
- No date stated: 0
Securing sub-regional entities was essential from 2010
We supported LEPs *IF ONLY* because they met point
Desk-based review of local growth policy and LEPs
Rigorous content analysis of SEPs
On-line LEP questionnaire survey;
Interviews with LEPs
## Strong barriers to growth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of skilled workforce/human capital</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of suitable housing</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport infrastructure</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadband/Digital infrastructure</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of suitable business sites</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of suitable development sites</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of resources – private</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Airport capacity/connectivity</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recession/downbeat economic climate</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of resources – public</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic planning/cross-border planning</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Strong consideration as growth drivers in 38 SEPs
Enterprise and business development/investment
Number of SEPs which address enterprise and business investment/development themes

- Support SMEs
- New enterprises, start-ups and entrepreneurs
- Business development - innovation
- Business development – trade and export
- Supply chain development
- Inward investment

- Passing reference
- Identified as priority
- Coherent rationale for Intervention
- Robust evidence-based appraisal
Number of SEPs which address skills and learning themes

- Adult/ workforce skills
  - Passing reference: 24
  - Identified as priority: 37
  - Coherent rationale for Intervention: 38
  - Robust evidence-based appraisal: 36

- 14-17 skills
  - Passing reference: 15
  - Identified as priority: 14
  - Coherent rationale for Intervention: 15
  - Robust evidence-based appraisal: 13
## Proposals, recommendations and requests in SEPs directly related to the planning system

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposal</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Changes to Local Plans</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The need for planning permissions</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The need for Strategic Environmental Assessments</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The need for new roads, motorways, junctions (and similar road alignments)</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The addition of new employment sites including science/technology parks</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The deletion of surplus employment sites</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call for new and/or greater flexibilities or planning powers</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Environmental considerations

- **Renewable energy**: 24 mentions
- **Carbon emissions**: 20 mentions
- **Flooding**: 19 mentions
- **Protect green space/natural habitats**: 18 mentions
- **Sustainable construction**: 20 mentions
- **Natural resources**: 20 mentions
- **Waste disposal**: 21 mentions
- **Air pollution**: 25 mentions
- **Water pollution**: 34 mentions
- **Other**: 28 mentions

Legend:
- Not discussed
- Passing reference
- Strong consideration/articulation
# Social considerations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Consideration</th>
<th>Not discussed</th>
<th>Passing reference</th>
<th>Strong consideration/articulation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youth unemployment/NEETs</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deprivation/poverty/inequality</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social enterprise</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to new jobs</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living wage/low wages</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long term unemployed</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social inclusion/exclusion</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community development/community-led...</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and wellbeing</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social housing</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Our evaluation

- The **main feature** of today’s charts is of a great spread of variation between LEPs in any one field of responsibility.
- LEPs continued to operate with an opaque remit and lack firm institutional foundations LEPs’ work is good in parts;
- This field requires the best from RSA members’ past practice of *numerical* work, Proportion of research, planning and strategy staff – from 100% to less than 20%
- Past circulars confused over supporting all business, both “basic” and “non–basic” establishments
- A good proportion of SEPs were regarded as internal documents, rather than broader plans for their area.
- It is valuable that LEPs aim to lead economic growth and job creation within a local area
- But some could form the basis for more robust spatial plans
LEPs found the work positive

There was "wide variation across the 39 plans in the way information was presented, time periods covered, and the evidence bases they used" (para. 2.11)

Additionally, the Department for Business did not define output metrics till after the plans were approved.

LEPs therefore used different definitions to describe the outputs of their planned interventions, such as jobs.

The Department’s assessors reported that they found it challenging to assess the bids consistently".
Any prospect of better strategies from the same sets of people?

- Still little prospect of consistency given the shortness of the delayed “Policy Prospectus”
- Despite its talk of “robust evidence”, there’s nothing on the sources normally used by RSA members and local authority Economic Development Departments even though
- This time there are to be regional workshops with area advisors, leading to agreement of each LIS with government
- This is a pre-requisite for any Growth Funding and the replacement of EU funding streams of the Shared Prosperity Fund post-BREXIT
- There is explicit mention of housing, land use and spatial impacts
- There is a surrounding set of suggestions from think-tanks and endorsement of existing work from a “What Works” centre
Wider implications for spatial arrangements

- The controversial use of LEPs perpetuates a tension with local authorities
- Though that is resolved by placing LISs under the six elected Mayors of Combined Authorities (in some City Regions)
- This use of “soft planning“ sits awkwardly against the slow progress of strategic physical planning under different official initiatives (new minister on inter-authority co-ordination of Housing)
- It ignores the revival of 1980s style community economic development as seen in the Labour Party’s identification with new co-operative policies in Preston
- It mostly lacks recognition of regional priorities or the overall nature of responses to the places most hit by globalisation
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- Final report is available at: