

# Speculative Urbanism: Redevelopment under Austerity Conditions

Kevin Ward (Geography and [cities@manchester](mailto:cities@manchester),  
University of Manchester)

*Mobilising Regions: Territorial Strategies for Growth, Regional Studies Association  
Winter Conference, November 22 2013, London*

# Restructuring local government (again)

- History of English local government is one of regular waves of “restructuring” punctured by short periods of “stability”
- Its form, its function, its territorial remits have been subject to configuration and reconfiguration
- Particularly pronounced in the 1980s under Thatcherism, and then again in 1990s under Blairism (although both internally variegated “projects”)
- Certainly restlessness – on-going processes of experimentation, innovation and searching

# 2010 and beyond ...

- The best contribution that central government can make is to devolve power, money and knowledge to those best placed to find the best solutions to local needs: elected local representatives, frontline public service professionals, social enterprises, charities, co-ops, community groups, neighbourhoods and individuals.



# ... in the context of a program of austerity

Headline 2010 announced cuts in budgets:

- Freezing of Council Tax/Pushing back of re-evaluation until post 2015 national election
- Capital funding to local government cut by 45%
- Capita funding for schools cut by 60%
- Cut to social housing of 50%

# City Deals

- We have concluded deals with Greater Birmingham and Solihull, Bristol and the West of England, Greater Manchester, Leeds City Region, Liverpool City Region, Nottingham, Newcastle and Sheffield City Region. Across these deals there is an impressive picture of devolved powers and new and innovative ways of doing things that will unlock growth and deliver jobs ... Taken together, these deals provide a suite of new freedoms, powers and tools to help cities go for growth.



According to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, every deal aims to:

- Give cities the powers and tools they need to drive local economic growth;
- Unlock projects or initiatives that will boost their economies; and
- Deliver a step change in the governance arrangements.

## Summary of "Wave 1" City Deals

|                   | Finance & investment | Skills & employment | Transport | Housing | Broadband | Business support | Trade | Low carbon | Sectors                          | Governance                          |
|-------------------|----------------------|---------------------|-----------|---------|-----------|------------------|-------|------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Birmingham</b> | ●                    | ●                   |           | ●       |           |                  |       | ●          | Life sciences                    | LEP                                 |
| <b>Bristol</b>    | ●                    | ●                   | ●         | ●       |           | ●                | ●     |            |                                  | Mayor                               |
| <b>Leeds</b>      | ●                    | ●                   | ●         |         |           |                  | ●     |            |                                  | Combined Authority                  |
| <b>Liverpool</b>  | ●                    | ●                   | ●         | ●       |           |                  | ●     | ●          | Science                          | Mayor                               |
| <b>Manchester</b> | ●                    | ●                   | ●         | ●       |           | ●                | ●     | ●          |                                  | Combined Authority                  |
| <b>Newcastle</b>  | ●                    | ●                   | ●         | ●       | ●         |                  |       | ●          | Energy & marine                  | Working toward a Combined Authority |
| <b>Nottingham</b> | ●                    | ●                   | ●         |         | ●         | ●                |       | ●          | High technology & creative       | LEP                                 |
| <b>Sheffield</b>  | ●                    | ●                   | ●         |         |           |                  |       |            | Advanced manufacturing & nuclear | Combined Authority                  |

According to a survey of the eight core cities conducted by the Centre for Cities, the most significant elements of assembling and producing the City Deals included:

- Increased local control
- Local growth incentives
- New routes to funding investment
- Taking on risks



# Examples

- “Bring together national and local resources in GBS (Greater Birmingham and Solihull) Finance. Local resources could include LA prudential borrowing, CIL and innovative funding mechanisms”
- “The West of England local authorities will pool the business rate growth from these five Enterprise Areas alongside that from the Enterprise Zone, generating a significant financial contribution to the £1bn West of England Economic Development Fund”
- “Use innovative local financial models to enable packages of investment to come forward”

# Speculative Urbanism

- *Anticipation* – calculated, creative, and imaginative reflections and ruminations on a particular future
- *Desire* – craving, longing and wanting a particular futures
- *Preparedness* - set of actions, activities, events and strategies in order to ensure the realisation of a particular future (and as a means of avoiding other, alternate futures)
- *Risk* – the allocation and distribution of consequences (financial or otherwise) of not realising a particular future
- *Territories* - the construction of new alliances and arrangements

# Conclusion

- “Localism” in the context of cuts as part of the Coalition Government’s austerity program
- City Deals embody the various localism “values”
- Notion of “deals” invokes a sense of negotiation, albeit in the context of significant power asymmetries
- Speculative urbanism to capture the broad systemic context for local government (with others)