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DELIVERING GROWTH? EVALUATING ECONOMIC GOVERNANCE IN ENGLAND'S SOUTH-EAST SUB-REGIONS

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Abstract

The UK Coalition Government's commitment to 'localism' in Planning is in marked contrast to the emphasis on cross-boundary strategic planning initiatives under the previous Labour Government. Against this background the paper examines the implications of evolving economic governance arrangements in three sub-regional 'soft-spaces' in England's South-East region. A distinctive evaluative frame derives a set of criteria for 'good economic governance' as perceived by the stakeholders concerned, and a judgement regarding the 'quality' of economic governance in each case is presented. The conclusion triangulates these results against economic growth outcomes across the respective sub-regions.

Keywords: Governance; Evaluation; Planning for Growth; Localism; Sub-regions; Soft-Spaces

1. Introduction

Since the election of the UK Coalition Government in May 2010 the landscape for sub-national economic development in England has been comprehensively changed (Bristow, 2013; Pugalís and Townsend, 2013). Alongside significant reductions in public spending, previous programmes for local and regional economic development were substantially removed to be replaced with a new set of structures and funding mechanisms, and new local freedoms and responsibilities. In terms of organisational change, sub-regional Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) were introduced in 2011, reflecting particularly Conservative Party criticisms of the regional planning arrangements and Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) that had been introduced under the previous Labour administration. At the same time, the Government's localism agenda has introduced significant changes to the planning system as well as the institutional and policy landscape for economic growth. In Planning, major changes have taken place with the introduction of the Localism Act 2011 and the National Planning Policy Framework, effective from April 2012, as well as the Growth and Infrastructure Act 2013. Additionally, new experiments in urban governance have been introduced through 'City Deals' and 'Growth Deals', and new – or rediscovered – mechanisms have been established including Enterprise Zones (EZs), the Regional Growth Fund (RGF) and the Growing Places Fund.

One outcome of this restructuring has been a question over the status of so-called 'soft' planning spaces, which had been introduced alongside the regional arrangements cultivated under Labour (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2007, 2012; Haughton et al, 2013). 'Soft' planning spaces are informal spatial arrangements which operate alongside formal spaces of planning and are related to such formal spaces in complex ways. Such spaces are highly

variable; writing at the tail-end of the New Labour era, Allmendinger and Haughton (2010: 811-812), for example, differentiated between three distinct types of soft planning space on the basis of their respective motivations and objectives: 'bottom-up functional' spaces, where local actors prepare strategies and plans for functional areas which do not map onto formal regional or local planning territories; 'shadow' spaces which allow speedier and more flexible interpretation of formal, statutory plans; and 'top-down functional' spaces driven directly by central government initiatives. Hybrid forms combining these various characteristics were also evident. Yet despite such diversity, in the congested governance arena for Planning under New Labour it was increasingly these informal, soft-spaces where much strategic planning was actually done (Haughton and Allmendinger, 2008: 143). Indeed, soft-spaces not only introduced novel planning entities, but were also seen as vehicles for overcoming institutional and policy scleroses, introducing innovative thinking, and imagining the future.

Certainly there are senses in which soft spaces represented alternative institutional forms in which to imagine possibilities for future place making and thereby construct a form of spatial imaginary (Haughton and Allmendinger, 2008: 143). However, it is also clear that the 'soft spaces of governance' considered by Haughton and Allmendinger differ from a notion of 'new political spaces' where what is at stake is 'the transformation of the entire political process' (Boudreau, 2007: 2596). For Boudreau, in examining the creation of Toronto as a competitive global city-region, the strategic production of the Toronto region as a political space 'depends on the mobilization of existing spatial imaginaries and the creation of new ones *that resonate with residents and users of the city-region*' (op cit. 2597 *emphasis added*). Here:

Spatial imaginaries are mental maps representing a space to which people relate and with which they identify. They are collectively shared internal worlds of thoughts and beliefs that structure everyday life. They are thus different from spatial discourses in that discourses are ‘moments’ in the social process, they are repeated and uttered punctually, but they do not necessarily alter deeply held beliefs, fantasies, and desires in the long term. When discourses alter social practices and beliefs, they are ‘translated’ from ‘moments’ to ‘permanences’ in the social process (Harvey, 1996). They become, in other words, imaginaries. (Boudreau, 2007: 2596-2597)

By way of contrast, a focus on ‘soft spaces of governance’ directs the focus less towards the construction of a political space open to political interaction and contest, and more towards the construction of new ‘regulatory space’ (Boudreau, 2007: 2601) designed to deliver specific outcomes. Soft spaces, in this sense, are not oriented towards ‘politics proper’ allowing for a genuine politicisation of spatial strategy, but select for largely pre-given strategic objectives within a market-oriented framework for spatial development (Haughton et al, 2013: 222-223). From this rather more prosaic standpoint attention is drawn more directly towards the efficacy of soft spaces in dealing with the practicalities of planning policy and implementation, and in negotiating with the regulatory functions of hard-space forms of governance with regard to finance, statutory powers, and democratic legitimacy (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2010: 812-13).

In this context the focus of the current paper is on evaluating the efficacy of ‘soft regulatory planning spaces’ in the governance of sub-national economic growth. The emergence of soft regulatory planning spaces reflected the proliferation of planning initiatives at various spatial

scales, ostensibly to facilitate cross-boundary working and responsiveness to functional economic areas, but also to usher in significant policy change. Some of these spaces – including the three cases considered here – emerged as sub-regional components of the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) process. In other instances these dovetailed with the enabling and financing of Multi-Area Agreements (MAAs) which were taken up by the most active of sub-regional planning groupings. Elsewhere, broader cross-regional cooperation saw the emergence of supra-regional spatial planning initiatives, such as ‘The Northern Way’ (Goodchild and Hickman, 2006). Arguably, a measure of continuity exists here in the emphasis placed on the ‘Duty to Cooperate’ (<http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/blog/guidance/duty-to-cooperate/>) by the current Government alongside its localism agenda. However, it is evident that the revocation of the RSSs and regional tier bodies such as the RDAs, and the expectations set in train with the introduction of the localism agenda, have left these soft spaces and their fledgling patterns of governance somewhat exposed. A further question therefore arises here concerning the status of soft regulatory planning spaces in the context of the shift to localism.

Against this backdrop the current paper sets out to evaluate the relative effectiveness of three soft regulatory planning spaces in delivering growth in the South-East region of England, namely the areas covered by the ‘Partnership for Urban South Hampshire’ (PUSH), the ‘Gatwick Diamond Initiative’ (GDI), and ‘Science Vale UK’ (SVUK) in south-central Oxfordshire. The cases were selected to facilitate comparison across a variety of spatial scales, leadership forms and governance structures within the context of the growing South-East region and where the emerging RSS (the ‘South East Plan’, SEERA, 2009) was

clearly directing significant housing and economic growth. The research consisted of a detailed review of published documents relating to spatial planning and economic development across the relevant local government and LEP areas, together with 25 semi-structured interviews with officers and elected politicians from local government planning and economic development departments, LEPs, and business, civic and environmental organisations, between June 2013 to January 2014. This builds on previous investigation across two of the case-study areas (PUSH and SVUK) incorporating over 100 interviews during the previous 4 years. In developing our assessment a distinctive evaluative stance identifies a set of criteria against which ‘good economic governance’ can be judged. This framework examines the quality of economic governance *as perceived by stakeholders*, including a variety of considerations: the identity and image of the area; the clarity and detailing of development strategy; the ability to effectively prioritise development and investment; patterns of ‘ownership’ and stakeholder engagement; the clarity of the business agenda; wider political influence and leverage; resourcing; and monitoring/evaluation processes. These criteria derive from previous extensive research in the case study areas, interviews conducted as part of this research, and web-based consultation as detailed further below.

The paper is presented in five further sections. Section 2 introduces the overall question of evaluation in economic governance and establishes our particular approach and distinctive evaluative frame. Section 3 then introduces our three cases and describes the respective governance scales, organisational forms and patterns of leadership that pertain; In Section 4 we examine the evolving status and operation of such new spaces in setting planning policy in the developing context of localism. Section 5 then lays out our judgement on the likely impact of the diverse governance arrangements in delivering growth, highlighting the most

important strengths and weaknesses in each case. Finally, a brief conclusion reflects on the results of the evaluation and provides an indicative triangulation of these results against economic growth outcomes across the respective sub-regions.

2. Evaluating Economic Governance

A long-standing objective of research on sub-national economic development has been to examine the efficacy of economic governance arrangements in delivering growth in particular territories (CfC, 2005; CFPS, 2014; Liou, 2007). However, there are considerable practical and conceptual challenges of undertaking such an evaluation. First, at a conceptual level, the notion both of ‘governance’ *per se* and its novelty has itself been subject to critical examination, not least with regard to questions of basic definition which clearly underpin evaluative work (Imrie and Raco, 1999; Ward, 2000). Bovaird and Loeffler (2003, p.293), for example, define local governance as ‘the way in which local stakeholders interact with each other in order to influence the outcomes of public policies’, focusing on ‘the interplay of structures, processes and other mechanisms which link networks of stakeholders’. This, though, is in contrast to alternative definitions of local governance which have proved problematic from the perspective of empirical analysis:

Rhodes (1997: 53) stipulates that ‘governance refers to self-organizing, interorganizational networks’, which is so general that it is not clear how any evaluation of the quality of governance could be conducted. Kooiman (2003: 4) suggests: ‘governance can be seen as the totality of theoretical conceptions on governing’, where he defines ‘governing’ as ‘the totality of interactions, in which public as well as private

actors participate, aimed at solving societal problems or creating societal opportunities; attending to the institutions as contexts for these governing interactions; and establishing a normative foundation for all those activities'. While Kooiman's concept of 'governing' has strong similarities with our definition of 'governance', it is so all-embracing... that it is difficult to see what boundaries could be drawn around it in empirical research (Bovaird and Loeffler, 2003: 293-294)

These definitional difficulties are not eased in the context of soft regulatory planning spaces, where complex and dynamic interrelations amongst formal and informal arrangements, along with differentiated governance forms militate against any simplistic evaluative strategy. Moreover, such conceptual challenges are reinforced by further practical considerations. For example, while we might seek to uncover the impact of governance arrangements on particular policy outcomes (such as numbers of new houses built, roads improvements delivered or skill-levels raised), there are at least four reasons why such judgement might be problematical. First, these outcomes are often – perhaps typically – very long-term, with large-scale developments and policy programmes often taking place over 5-10 years or longer. A snapshot at any particular time is unlikely to capture overall outcomes, even if (as in two of the cases in this research) the governance arrangements have been in place for a decade. Second, policy outcomes may be profoundly impacted by the wider context of national economic performance and macro-economic policy, as well as broader political and regulatory change. Third, and relatedly, is the question of attributing causality to sub-national economic governance arrangements, given the complexity and dynamism of processes which influence local economic growth. Fourth is the problem of the counterfactual, or capturing the likely outcomes that would have been produced had particular governance arrangements

not been in place. In practice, then, distilling the impact of governance arrangements on policy outcomes is not in any sense straightforward.

In light of this, Bovaird and Loeffler deploy their particular definition to underpin empirical research which focuses on the ‘quality’ of local governance as perceived by the stakeholders concerned. This is necessarily a relative measure, with standards constructed by stakeholders themselves, but this in turn is seen as:

...a strength of the approach, not a weakness, as it means that the assessment is grounded in the values and meanings important to the stakeholders, rather than being imposed or second-guessed by an uninvolved and therefore potentially insensitive or out-of-touch external assessor. (Bovaird and Loeffler, 2003: 294)

In taking forward research on ‘good governance’, Bovaird and Loeffler identify key public governance principles, the assessment of which is based on how far these principles have been honoured in interactions between different stakeholders. These might include, *inter alia*: Democratic decision-making; citizen and stakeholder engagement; transparency and accountability; social inclusion and equality of opportunity for disadvantaged groups; fair and honest treatment of citizens; willingness and capacity to work in partnership; the ability to compete in a global environment; and respect for the rule of law, individual rights and diversity. While it is accepted that this approach clearly involves value-judgments, both in assessing each of the key elements and in aggregating them into a final ‘governance scorecard’, this does not mean, it is argued, that the process is entirely subjective. Rather, it is

a process of ‘structured and explicated subjectivity’, which can be analysed and contested, and which has the potential advantage of practical usefulness having been drawn from the insights of local stakeholders themselves.

This approach resonates strongly with the question of evaluating economic governance, where the ‘quality’ of such arrangements is perceived differently by the range of stakeholders involved. In particular it may help to reveal the *relative* strengths and weaknesses of diverse governance forms, accepting that any cardinal measure of governance quality will be imprecise. Clearly there are limits to any exercise which reduces the relational interplay and complex negotiation of economic governance to a simple scorecard. However, we would argue that this approach may encourage reflection on comparative governance capacities and lays bare important differences of emphasis across cases. Therefore, in order to compare and contrast the efficacy of economic governance arrangements in the three case study spaces here, a set of criteria were constructed against which ‘good economic governance’ might be judged. An initial draft set of criteria was produced based on previous extensive research in the case-study areas, and further opinions were sought as part of the interview process in the current project. Draft criteria were also circulated via four relevant topic groups on the social networking site LinkedIn, eliciting useful responses from 15 planning and other local government practitioners and students.

The evaluative frame (see Table 2 below) focuses on indicators relating to the efficient design of institutions for delivering economic growth, including the construction of a cohesive image/identity, the production of agreed strategy and detailed plans, the ability to prioritise objectives, patterns of ‘ownership’ and political leverage, levels of resourcing and

so on). The indicators were then grouped according to broader headings in order to reinforce comparative considerations. Each of the case study areas has been 'scored' against these criteria and a detailed rationale provided for each score, accepting that 'governance' is by its very nature a complex process based in social and institutional interaction, with all the uncertainties and dynamism that implies. The framework is, however, designed in part to recognise such imperfection by accepting the distinctive perceptions of diverse stakeholders. It was important, also, as an integral part of the evaluative process, that key respondents from each case study area were given a 'right of reply' and an opportunity to comment on the judgements made and rationale offered. A draft report was circulated for review to key local government and business respondents in each case. Additionally, we must recognise that the scoring represents a snapshot only of the relative 'quality' of governance at a particular moment in time (late-2013) and by its nature may be subject to rapid and significant change.

3. Case Studies: Governance scales, organisational forms and patterns of leadership

Table 1 summarises important contrasts between the three study areas in terms of the scale and form of governance. The diversity of the spaces is immediately apparent, ranging from a population of around 1 million covered by the PUSH area, to 60,000 in SVUK. While SVUK is located within a single county and incorporates parts of just two district councils, PUSH includes 11 local authorities. GDI is the sole case which cuts across county council boundaries, incorporating parts of West Sussex County Council and Surrey County Council. PUSH and GDI emerged earliest, in 2003-4, partly in response to the regional planning

agenda under the Labour Government of Tony Blair, while SVUK is a more recent initiative, from 2008. Each of these cases might be interpreted principally as ‘bottom-up functional spaces’ designed by local state or business interests to reflect functional economic areas which do not correspond with formal regional and local planning territories, though they each reference, in different ways, the evolving context of ‘top-down functional’ thinking throughout the New Labour period. We consider the evolution of each governance structure in turn.

Table 1. Key facts for three case study areas

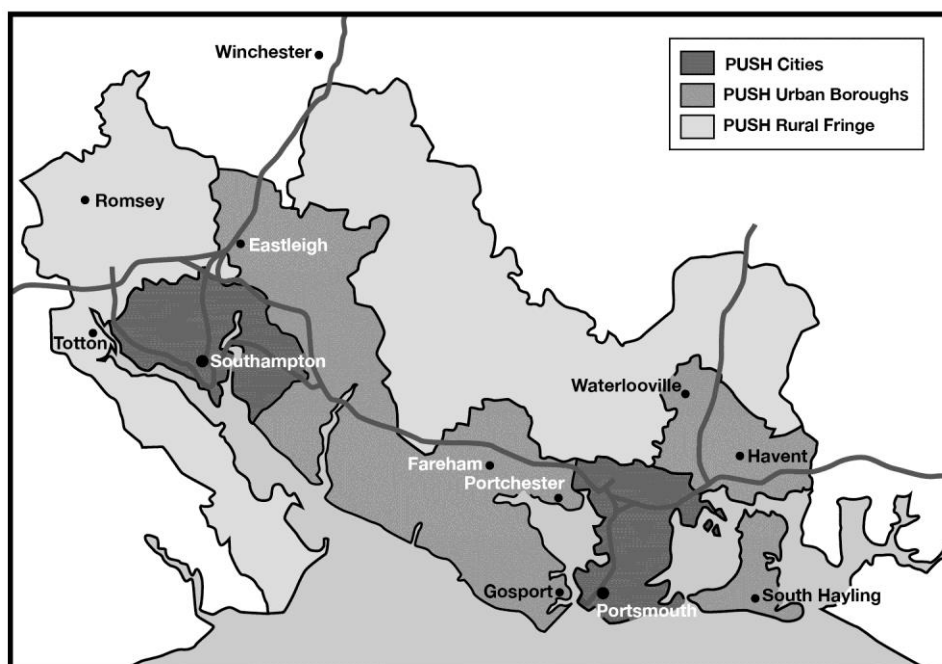
	GDI	SVUK	PUSH
Year introduced	2003-4	2008	2003-4
Population	~600,000	~60,000	~1m
Local authority composition	Two counties, 6 local authorities	Single County, 2 local authorities	Single County, 11 local authorities
Initial objectives	An internationally recognised business location. Higher levels of business development. ‘Skills escalator’ to match skills needs. Enhance new investment in high growth business. Maintain and improve transport accessibility.	Hi-tech employment growth. Housing.	Housing and employment growth; Raise contribution to national GVA. Improve skill levels. Additional employment floorspace.

Partnership for Urban South Hampshire

To begin with, PUSH was a local government initiative, with no significant business involvement. The soft regulatory planning space of ‘urban South Hampshire’ in reality comprises a diverse set of local authorities and settlement types having two cities (Portsmouth and Southampton), a set of semi-urbanised or suburban authorities (such as Eastleigh, Fareham and Havant and Waterlooville) and a rural fringe which includes parts of the remaining authorities (see Figure 1). Across these areas the character of settlement and associated socio-economic complexion and political interests vary considerably.

A South Hampshire sub-regional spatial strategy emerged under the local authority-led grouping from 2003-4. This was presented at the time in terms of the need to plan positively for growth rather than have (for example) housing figures imposed through the RSS process, though there is a strong sense that a growth-oriented strategy would not have been forthcoming had the ‘threat’ of imposition through regional planning not existed. Hence it displays signs of both ‘bottom-up functional’ and ‘top-down functional’ pressures (Phelps 2012).

Figure 1. The PUSH Area



Source DTZ/Oxford Economics (2010, p.2)

For a county with a long history of perceived reluctance to plan positively for population and economic growth the PUSH strategy represented a break in attitudes. The argument presented by local authority leaders, chief executives and chief planning officers was that the sub-region needed to seek growth in productivity to converge on the regional average, in some senses restating a point noted many years ago by Colin Buchanan and Partners (1966) that the area had underperformed in economic terms. Against this backdrop the PUSH objectives were significant: 80,000 new dwellings to 2026 with the majority to be built in Portsmouth and Southampton, but with a significant tranche of 16,000 in two new Strategic Development Areas (SDAs) at Fareham and Eastleigh.

The argument that economic growth would drive the need for additional housing and infrastructure – rather than simply accepting more housing *per se* – was one that PUSH were keen to make in their submission to the emerging South East Plan (SEERA, 2009). At the same time, Hampshire County Council’s ‘Holding out for Hampshire’ campaign represented

the other side to the argument that more housing and population would not be acceptable without supporting infrastructure and economic growth. This reflects the perception locally of a long record of population and employment growth unaccompanied by infrastructure delivery in this sub-region, and the difficulties of ensuring such ‘concurrency’.

The Solent LEP area is broadly coterminous with the PUSH area, with little controversy regarding the definition of the LEP in 2011. Despite its size and the separate spatial planning challenges which have seen the Isle of Wight remain outside of PUSH, the inclusion of the island in the LEP area reflects the several ways it nevertheless forms part of a single economic region along with the mainland local communities in PUSH.

Gatwick Diamond Initiative

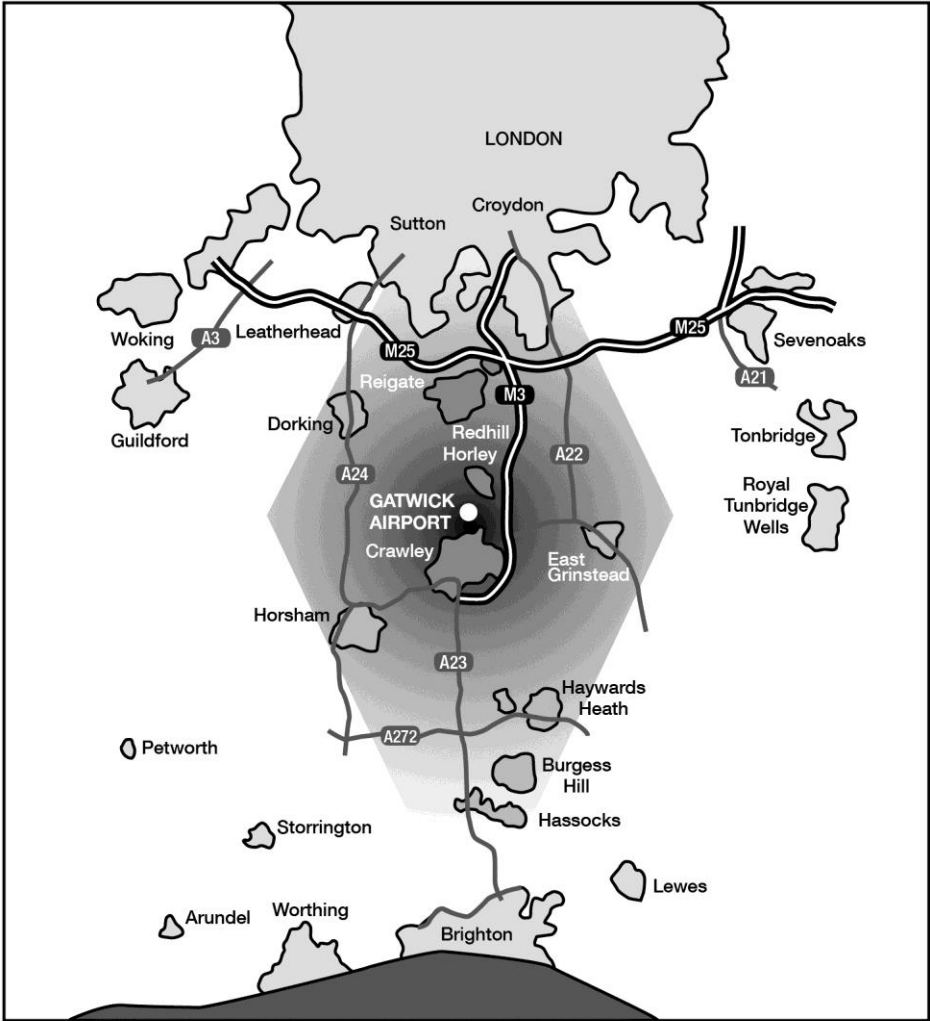
In contrast to PUSH, the GDI was established as a business-led joint venture by the then Surrey and West Sussex Economic Partnerships in 2003 to stimulate and maintain strong economic growth. On the face of it this particular ‘bottom-up functional’ drive would appear to be a major strength of planning for growth in this sub-region given the generalised lack of interest of business representative bodies in local and strategic spatial planning across the South East. However, the private sector initiative here gradually merged with on-going local authority planning efforts under the RSS process to create the public-private partnership that is now GDI, and a Local Strategic Statement (LSS) was produced for the area only relatively recently in 2011.

Gatwick had previously been part of the 'Western Policy Area' in Regional Planning Guidance for the South East (RPG9), which had provided a regional framework for the preparation of local authority development plans. Subsequently the 'Gatwick Sub-Regional Strategy Area' was identified in the SEP, extending north to the edge of Redhill, east to East Grinstead, south to Burgess Hill and Haywards Heath, and west to Horsham with strong functional links with Redhill and Reigate to the north and Southwater to the west. This 'strategy area' makes up most of the current Gatwick Diamond (see figure 2). The GDI does not have formal boundaries but is broadly defined by a diamond-shaped area stretching between London and Brighton and extending west to Horsham and east to East Grinstead. It includes parts of two counties, and incorporates the Boroughs of Crawley, Reigate & Banstead, and large parts of Horsham, Mid Sussex, Mole Valley and Tandridge Districts.

High levels of regional and to some extent national accessibility via road and rail, and international accessibility via the airport, make the GDI area a focus for growth. Surrounding statutory designations including the London green belt and South Downs National Park have effectively channelled growth pressures into the GDI area. Towns such as Horsham have had a long history of municipal entrepreneurialism dating back to the early 1900s, and reinvigorated significantly during the 1980s. Additionally, established large-scale developments such as Gatwick Airport and Crawley New Town have reinforced the growth trajectory, including the build-up of the business community that has driven the GDI itself. As one respondent noted in interview, '... there has always been in this area a general presumption in favour of growth; there has never been any particular negativity' (Private sector representative, 10 July 2013). Indeed, from the point of view of local conservation

interests the desired objective of the business community has been to leverage on such inherent growth pressures to fashion another ‘M4 corridor’ along this axis.

Figure 2. The Gatwick Diamond

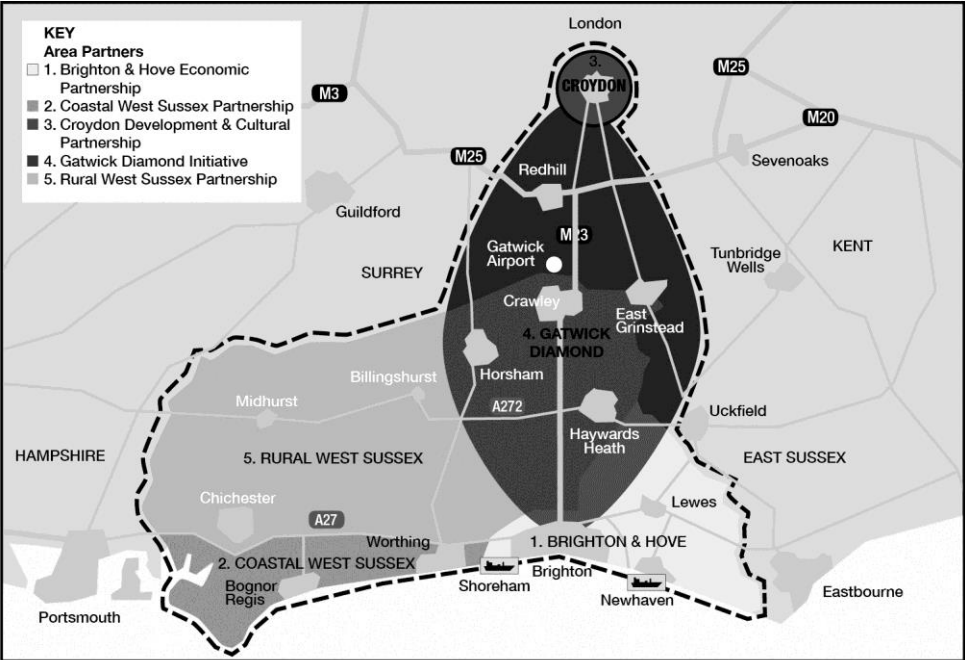


Source: Gatwick Diamond Business Plan, June 2009

Initial attempts to have a LEP designated corresponding to the GDI area evaporated with central government ministries indicating that this would be too small an area for a LEP. Instead the ‘Coast to Capital LEP’ (C2CLEP) that finally emerged (see figure 3) reflects a number of separate bids being put forward for LEPs across this part of the South East. These proto-LEPs represented rather different types of economy from those that are now incorporated into C2CLEP, the diversity of which far exceeds that of the GDI area. This

raises significant questions regarding the extent to which LEP activities dovetail with the growth aspirations of the GDI. For some, the fact that GDI is one among five different C2CLEP sub-regions is unproblematic since there is appropriate representation of each of the distinct economic areas on the LEP board. Others, however, note the challenges of coordinating spatial agendas and priorities across areas as diverse as Croydon, Gatwick, Brighton and rural and coastal areas.

Figure 3. Coast to Capital



Source: <http://www.coast2capital.org.uk/about-us/maps/map-coast-to-capital-area.html>

Science Vale UK

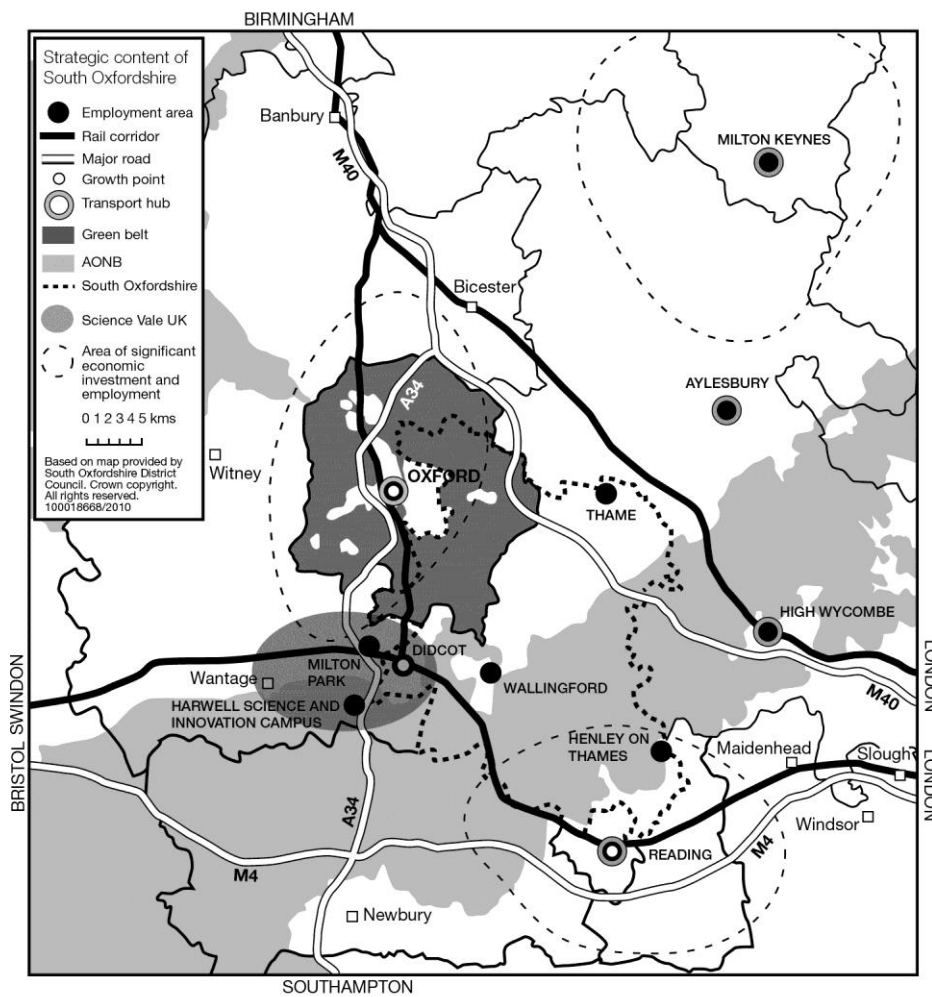
The third case study here is SVUK, a relatively recent innovation (introduced in 2008) encompassing the towns of Didcot, Wantage and Grove, and the employment centres of Harwell Oxford, Milton Park and Culham Science Centre (CSC). The SVUK concept emerged at the tail end of the RSS era and the parallel enabling of cross-boundary agreements across local government districts (MAAs). The agenda nationally at this time was

upon encouraging sub-regional strategies for the delivery of employment and housing growth, with a corresponding recognition that many key growth areas would straddle existing local government boundaries. In this sense the notion of SVUK can be seen as facilitated by ‘top-down functional’ changes, though the initial impulse for the area reflected more parochial ‘bottom-up’ concerns specifically as a mechanism through which the Vale of the White Horse District Council (VOWHDC) might compete more effectively for funding allocations within Oxfordshire. The area was subsequently officially recognised in the SEP in 2009.

Following the introduction of the SVUK concept, moves were undertaken to substantiate the idea and to drive the project forward. SVUK was formalised in organisational terms as a partnership with a management board drawn from the district and county authorities, key landowners the UK Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA), MEPC Plc. (owners of Milton Park), the Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC, located at Harwell), and the South East of England Development Agency (SEEDA), though serviced directly on a very limited basis predominantly by a single employee. A consultants report was commissioned in 2007 to investigate the economic potential of the area, though this served to underline the sense of relative neglect felt in the districts in the south of Oxfordshire since it argued that the competitive position of SVUK – its scale and image – would be constrained without direct reference to the universities and science parks in and around the city of Oxford to the north (SQW Consulting, 2007). In this way the SVUK notion must be seen within the particular context of local politics in Oxfordshire.

It is estimated that SVUK accounts for about 4 per cent of total R&D employment in England and 13 per cent in the South East region. Harwell Oxford has transformed from the former government centre for civil nuclear power research under the UKAEA into a leading centre of science and technology business which now houses the Diamond Synchrotron, the UK's largest investment in science for 40 years and ISIS, the world's largest pulsed neutron source, together with the STFC, the Rutherford Appleton Laboratory, the Medical Research Council and European Space Agency Space Centre amongst others, with more than 4,500 people working in around 150 organisations. Milton Park is one of Europe's largest multi-use business parks, hosting more than 160 companies employing around 6,500 people, with particular strengths in the bio-tech and ICT sectors. CSC hosts the UK's fusion research programme and until recently the world's largest fusion experimental facility, the Joint European Torus. Under RSS the SVUK area was programmed for significant expansion with approximately 12,000 net additional dwellings and 12,000 additional jobs planned by 2026 (OxonCC, 2010: 8), albeit in a dispersed, environmentally sensitive, semi-rural setting.

Figure 4. Strategic context of South Oxfordshire

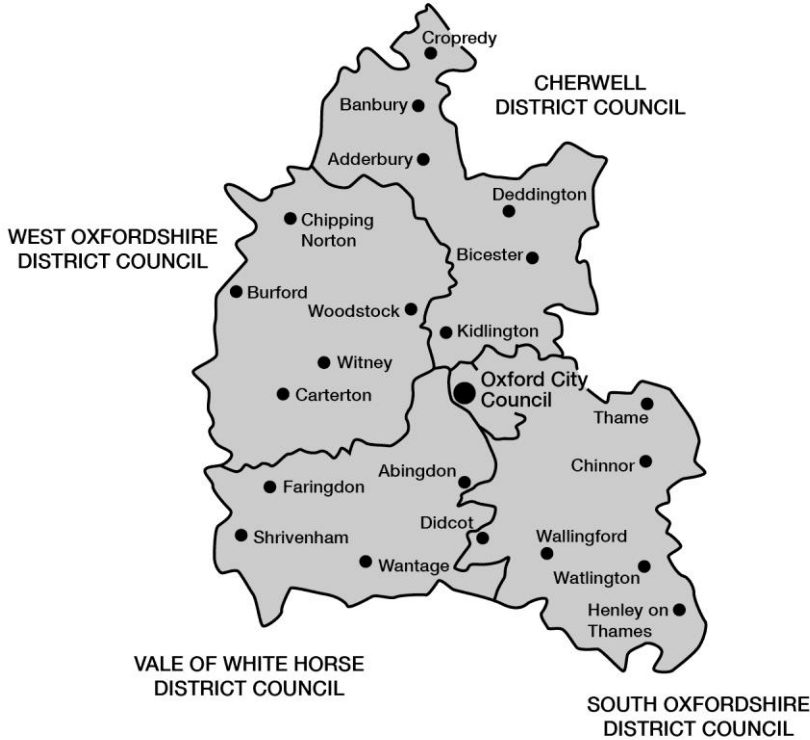


Source: Adapted from South Oxfordshire District Council Proposed Submission Core Strategy, November 2010

The Oxfordshire LEP was launched in March 2011. In contrast to Government guidance, which had directed that new sub-regional LEPs would incorporate ‘groups of upper tier local authorities’ Oxfordshire was accepted as a ‘functional economic area’ *per se*. However, a corollary of this has been a perception that the LEP has been allied most closely with Oxfordshire County Council’s particular agendas in terms of overall economic and spatial strategy, a viewpoint reinforced in the eyes of some interviewees by the County Council’s primary role in supporting and resourcing LEP operations in its early years. The implications for SVUK are not necessarily negative, and indeed development of the SVUK area features prominently in LEP strategic priorities and day-to-day activities, though there remains

residual concern within the SVUK district authorities of undue County Council influence in certain policy areas and a question over the relative prioritisation of investment at SVUK given competing commitments across the County.

Figure 5. Oxfordshire County and Districts



Source: Oxfordshire County Council,
<http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/public-site/direct-access-equipment-map>

To summarise then, South Hampshire represents the largest and most complex of these spatial planning agendas, comprising 11 very varied local authorities. SVUK is the smallest and seemingly least complex of the areas in terms of the planning and LEP authorities involved, yet it is challenged by the specificity, isolation and separation of the three key sites that drive its economic growth, as well as the complex political realities in Oxfordshire. GDI has perhaps the greatest growth pressures resulting from London-related spill-overs, given its excellent road and rail access into London and internationally via Gatwick Airport. Its

situation is something akin to the pressures apparent in the M4 and M11 corridors emanating from London.

4. The status and operation of new spaces in setting policy under localism

After the emergence and gradual consolidation of the 3 soft regulatory planning spaces at sub-regional scale, the introduction of the localism agenda from 2010 suggested considerable uncertainty. The risk being that localism would license popular concerns over proposed housing and population growth, and in some cases prompt a return to an earlier reluctance to plan positively for future development. Indeed, across England contrasting approaches have subsequently been adopted by local authorities within established sub-regions. In time, this may weaken the coherence of such soft regulatory planning spaces and their ability to promote growth and development. To date, however, in each of the three case study areas there has been notable commitment to housing and employment land allocations established under the previous era of regional planning, though with some evidence of attenuation, most clearly in GDI. We describe the respective contexts in turn.

In PUSH, despite some revision to detailed targets and figure work, the sub-regional strategy developed as part of the SEP has remained largely intact. Housing figures have been adjusted, primarily to take account of housing units already built and to reflect the downturn in development activity since 2008. Thus, as the revised South Hampshire Strategy ('SHS', PUSH, 2012: 13) notes the target of 3,700 new homes per annum to 2026 is slightly lower

than the original SHS (2008). One notable change has been the abandonment of the Eastleigh SDA and the absorption of the houses allocated to that site elsewhere within the Borough due to local opposition to housing, and concern over employment land being allocated to a single large site. Overall then, a figure of 80,000 homes for the period 2006-2026 put forward in the PUSH submission to the SEP (2004) has reduced to a figure of 55,600 from 2011 to 2026 in the revision in October 2012, largely reflecting delivery in the intervening years.

Despite some revision, then, the overall strategic direction laid out in the SEP has been largely retained. To a degree the PUSH organisation itself has become somewhat attenuated in the context of localism, and one informed ex-DCLG interviewee argued that 'PUSH is not the beast it was' (Interview, 21 November 2013). Nevertheless, it performs an important function for the exercise of strategic thinking among political leaders, chief executives and planning officers. Alongside the LEP it acts as a vehicle through which the evidence base for sub-regional planning is sustained, thereby providing an important benchmark for demonstrating implementation of the Government's new 'duty to collaborate'. In many senses, therefore, it exhibits ongoing capacity as a soft regulatory planning space.

With regard to GDI, under the previous regional arrangements and the SEP, detailed housing targets and employment objectives were specified for sub-regional growth areas. For the Gatwick Sub-Regional Strategy Area, the RSS (2009) committed to an interim target of 17,400 additional jobs between 2006 and 2016, with further monitoring and analysis required at the local level before targets were established beyond 2016. Net additional dwellings were

set at 36,000 between 2006 and 2026, with clear targets for individual local authority districts and specific housing allocations for particular sites across the sub-region.

In order to understand the implications of the removal of regional planning here it is useful first to outline governance changes which had been underway in the GD area towards the latter stages of the previous Government and in the run-up to the general election of 2010. During this period the business-led organisation that had initiated GDI was merging into a public-private partnership in 2006-7, which itself then went through a further restructuring around 2008-9 to give it a stronger governance structure with an overview group including members from local authorities and a management board. This new governance structure brought forward a growth plan – the LSS – drawn around three strands: i) GROW (spatial planning, housing); ii) CONNECT (transport); iii) INSPIRE (mainly education). According to the senior planner involved in creating the LSS,

That new governance created a much stronger link between business and the local authorities. And arising out of that we started to gain funding out of the GDI to take forward the local strategic planning work as a mechanism to support the drive of the local partnership which had developed. We then started to work on the policy framework including the LSS under the umbrella of the GDI (Interview, GDI, 18 June 2013)

The LSS was adopted in 2011, by all the relevant local authorities except Tandridge District Council. Yet what is absolutely clear is that the LSS was a wholly different document to the previous sub-regional strategy set out in the RSS, as the GDI Senior Planner highlighted:

The local authorities all signed up to the LSS. It post-dates the change in legislation and the turn to localism and so was driven in its latter stages by the emerging duty to cooperate. The very fact that five districts and two counties signed up to a strategic statement which provided a short and medium term direction but also then looked into the longer term future, I view that as a major success. There were differences, there were arguments. Things that might have been in there weren't in there. *It doesn't go into numbers. It doesn't specify locations. It doesn't go into detail.* (emphasis added)

Beyond this loss of detail and specific policy commitment, progress on local plans amongst district/borough councils has been uneven, with documents (at the time of writing) variously adopted (Mole Valley and Tandridge), submitted to the Secretary of State for consideration (Reigate and Banstead), not approved for submission (Crawley), submitted and subsequently withdrawn (Mid-Sussex), or still under development (Horsham). In light of this it is difficult to come to an overall judgement on the implications of localism in this case. Yet there is little doubt that previous specific growth commitments for the area have been called into question and it would be difficult to resist the conclusion that the planning policy foundations for economic growth are less solid. To some degree, therefore, the notion of GDI as an effective soft regulatory planning space has been eroded.

Finally, with regard to SVUK the SEP identified 'Central Oxfordshire' as its sub-regional planning entity in Oxfordshire. Employment growth for the sub-region was seen as 'difficult to predict' but set a guide figure of a minimum 18,000 net new jobs from 2006 to 2016. There would be a need to ensure a balance of jobs and houses at both the sub-regional and

main settlement level to 2026, such that the housing market situation would not worsen. Key housing targets within the SVUK area itself were set at about 8,750 at Didcot and about 3,400 at Wantage and neighbouring Grove by 2026, as part of the overall Central Oxfordshire target of 40,680 net additional dwellings. These figures represented a significant growth agenda in the SVUK area, not least given the semi-rural and village-based environment, and the historic infrastructural shortfall which goes along with this context.

Despite the Government's revocation of RSSs from July 2010 and the ensuing removal of housing allocations by many English local authorities, South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC) voted to retain previous housing growth commitments established under the SEP in the 'submission version' of its Core Strategy, adopted in November 2010. This was despite the rapid emergence of a new oppositional group – the 'Didcot Ring of Parishes' (DROP) – which sought to exploit the opportunities provided by localism and overturn the previous commitments (see *author removed* for a detailed account). In taking this decision, significant pressures in terms of affordable housing and infrastructure provision weighed heavily on SODC, as well as the need to plan for longer-term economic growth in the SVUK area. In addition, there was a clear sense that the Council was seeking to maintain some degree of control over future housing development, given the likelihood of speculative housing applications and a very uncertain legal context. Overall, it would appear that SVUK continues to find significant resonance as a soft-regulatory planning space, at least with regard to the overall growth trajectory established for the area.

However, there is also evidence that localism has given rise to policy divergence between SODC and VOWHDC, as the two neighbouring authorities responded differently to the

new planning context. In part this is a question of timing; while SODC pushed through their Core Strategy in 2010-11, VOWH was later into the policy process and has subsequently faced significant challenges in progressing to submission in draft form in 2014. Also, though, there were emerging differences in strategic approach, which is interesting given the notion of a single 'SVUK' identity. While SODC housing allocations were dominated by growth allocations to Didcot and other towns in the district, for example, VOWHDC actively considered a hybrid strategy, including small and medium-sized allocations to larger villages as well as housing development on the edges of existing towns. This differentiation across the SVUK area poses questions regarding the coherence of the overall planning policy response, and associated patterns of physical and social infrastructure provision.

5. Evaluating Economic Governance: GDI, SVUK and PUSH

Table 2 presents scores for each case study area in terms of a number of indicators of good governance. The scores are on a scale from 1 to 5, with 5 indicating a situation that approaches the best conceivable, while 1 represents a situation that is unlikely to contribute significantly to delivery. We might note that very high scores are rather unlikely, given the negotiative character of economic governance, the range and complexity of criteria under consideration and the inherently subjective nature of judgements being offered by stakeholders. Accepting this, the rationale for the judgements in each case are presented further below, though for reasons of space we focus on the most important identified strengths and weaknesses in each case.

Table 2. Indicative scorecard of governance indicators for the three case study areas

	GDI	SVUK	PUSH
<i>Image:</i>			
Distinct and cohesive identity/image	3	2	1
<i>Strategy:</i>			
Clear and agreed overall agenda/strategy	2	3-4	4
Detailed plans, including spatial commitments	1-2	3	4-5
Ability to prioritise development/investment	2	3-4	2-3
<i>Breadth of ownership:</i>			
Stakeholder engagement	3	2-3	1-2
Clear business agenda	4	3	1-2
Political influence/leverage	3	3	3-4
<i>Resourcing and influencing delivery:</i>			
Resources for spatial planning	1-2	1-2	3
Influencing effective delivery (coterminosity etc)	2	2	3-4
Overcoming identified barriers	2	3	3
<i>Adaptive/reflexive capacity:</i>			
Monitoring/evaluation processes	2	3	4

GDI

Starting with the Gatwick Diamond, it is evident that the simple spatial metaphor that emerged from the business community was effective in establishing a communicable identity

for the sub-region. This was picked up and used elsewhere, for example in SEEDA's "diamonds for growth and investment", though it appears less resonant internationally despite the presence of major international linkages and significant foreign investment. An effective identity also reflected particular strengths in terms of stakeholder engagement, in part through local authority buy-in, but most notably through the involvement of business interests from the very start. However, it is also arguable that some of the initial impetus provided by business has been diluted subsequently as a result of local authority politics and procedure, as GDI gradually evolved into a formalised public-private partnership.

With regard to the overall growth agenda for the GD area there is a widely-shared desire on the part of both business and local government to address the perceived issue of economic under-performance and raising skills levels. However the clarity of the growth agenda has been eroded in the context of localism, given the loss of specificity in planning policy. This is justified with reference to the imposition of top-down housing numbers and detailed allocations under the previous regional arrangements, yet it is difficult to see the context here as anything other than a step backwards from the more specific commitments established by the SEP. The lack of certainty is further compounded by the question of airport expansion at Gatwick where until recently the debate had largely accepted that growth would be driven by Gatwick within its current configuration of a one runway, two terminal airport, alongside associated mitigation measures (GDI, 2012). However, the Airports Commission decision in December 2013 to include a second Gatwick runway as one of its three future options for airport capacity growth in the South East obviously has major implications (Airports Commission, 2013). At present there is little agreement locally regarding the second runway and the prospect is of on-going tension in local governance arrangements as a result of this

issue. This is likely to spill-over into questions regarding future development and investment priorities, which have shown some marked successes in terms of roads/rail improvement in the past, but which is currently in a period of flux given the impact of the recession and the on-going second runway debate.

The lack of specificity in the LSS and the fact that the GDI is one of five areas within the LEP appears likely to represent a major challenge to the GDI itself being able to influence delivery. There is an acknowledgement that the Strategic Economic Plan of the C2CLEP is a balancing act not least due to the scale of the LEP area and the need to retain all interests but also over major investment issues such as the second runway and even housing numbers and their location. Housing and its spatial location is something that the LEP will most likely have to assume a greater role on in the near future. Arguably, however, the ability to draw down funding for concrete projects in the GDI area and indeed the monitoring and evaluation of the institutions that comprise governance arrangements in the GDI is critically exposed by the lack of numeric and spatial detail in the LSS. While C2CLEP has been active in supporting applications and applying for various funding streams and funding for projects under the RGF (round 4) which have been successful, these are not for projects applied for directly by the LEP itself and are not focused on the GD area. Moreover, in a recent comprehensive study of LEPs, C2CLEP's performance in securing funding has been modest (Pike et al, 2013).

Lastly here, the resources devoted to spatial planning work specifically within the GDI area have been modest, consisting of one senior planning officer working part time on the preparation of the LSS but able to draw on input from planners among the signatory local

authorities. This has left GDI with a relatively limited evidence base which is progressing slowly and behind the anticipated schedule due to the voluntary nature of a number of committees or working groups within the GDI umbrella. Additionally, the evidence regarding the extent to which the GDI has mobilised high-level political influence is relatively limited.

PUSH

The context at PUSH is very different. Here, the sub-region lacks a strong spatial metaphor or image around which ownership of a growth agenda can emerge. The ‘Solent’ label assumed by the LEP has not been used in the sub-regional spatial planning work of PUSH due to political sensitivities and is not necessarily one – despite the maritime heritage of the area – that resonates with the different populations that exist across the area. Additionally, the business voice within South Hampshire policymaking has been weak and episodic, with the business community reduced to expressing its passive support from the sidelines while PUSH’s submission to the SEP was prepared (Phelps, 2012).

Yet it is a testament to PUSH that the potentially fragile local authority-dominated governance structure which emerged under the RSS era has remained intact with a revised sub-regional spatial plan which continues to shape the context for local authority core strategies. The strength of planning for and delivering on growth here lies in the agreement obtained over both a ‘cities first’ focus and detailed housing and employment numbers and associated land allocations which has remained intact after the revocation of the SEP. Apart

from the abandonment of the Eastleigh SDA , local authorities have remained signed up to the broad contours of PUSH's submission to the SEP.

In the context of localism's 'duty to cooperate', the level of spatial detail contained in PUSH's spatial plans has provided the glue binding the local authorities together. It also serves as a benchmark against which to judge local authority plans coming forward and provides a strong foundation for monitoring activity. The commitment of some of the rural fringe authorities to housing numbers and housing and employment land allocations under the revised PUSH spatial plan may yet be tested in the local plan preparation process. However, the 'cities first' emphasis from the outset may minimise the likelihood of core strategies failing at Examination in Public on the basis of a duty to cooperate.

In terms of resourcing there is a formal joint committee with delegated powers created by the signatories to PUSH in advance of a special delivery vehicle to take forward developments envisaged in the RSS era. While there is some potential for overlap between PUSH and the Solent LEP, the thought was that PUSH would remain the vehicle for Chief Executive Officers, political leaders and Chief Planning Officers to provide the strategic thinking – including spatial planning – to which the LEP would work. In practice, this appears to have been the case with the LEP exerting a moderating influence rather than being a competing voice. In the era of localism, staffing devoted to sub-regional or specifically PUSH-related spatial planning has inevitably dwindled after being boosted by growth point funding. However, one intriguing aspect of developments in South Hampshire is that the staff built up in anticipation of PUSH assuming a significant oversight and delivery role in spatial planning have redeployed to other emerging organisations such as the

LEP. The former Chief Executive of PUSH is now the Chief Executive of the LEP for example, and there is a series of ‘overlapping directorships’ with local authority politicians and officers crossing PUSH spatial planning and LEP committees, thereby establishing a degree of consistency between the respective agendas.

PUSH continues to enjoy a measure of reputation in central government circles. While the area has had few direct political connections to central government via local MPs holding significant portfolios, PUSH emerged as a model of best practice under the RSS process among civil servants in Whitehall. It was allocated growth point funding to further its work and was clearly regarded as one of the more mature efforts by local government to coordinate spatial planning efforts in the UK, with one of the better evidence bases to draw upon (Phelps, 2012). The fact that the two cities were invited to bid for City-Deal funding also kept PUSH on the radar of government. Additionally, the Solent LEP has been active in securing support for various concrete developments envisaged under PUSH spatial plans. To this end the LEP has been directly and indirectly successful in securing RGF, Growing Places and City Deal funding.

One of the main criticisms of the PUSH growth agenda was a concern over limited levels of public consultation. With the exception of presentations to civic societies and the like, systematic public consultation took place only after the spatial plan had been agreed. However, PUSH had become a less closed organisation by the time of the publication of the SEP, with minutes and agendas published and meetings opened to the public. The detailed planning of the one remaining SDA at North Fareham provides some indication of a greater

stakeholder engagement with a standing conference established to feed in a variety of stakeholder views, for example.

SVUK

As the discussion above indicated, SVUK draws together three dispersed and relatively distinct science and business parks which have grown on the sites of former military bases and UKAEA installations. The area therefore differs radically from the ‘international campus-garden-suburb style’ of suburban technopoles which has come to prominence in high-tech developments throughout the world (Forsyth and Crewe, 2010). In contrast, the three major elements of SVUK are perhaps better regarded as ‘camps’ rather than ‘campuses’ (*author removed*: 2010, 2014) arising from a largely accidental planning history and situated separately against a green, semi-rural background. In turn, they have been lacking historically in terms of coordinated and comprehensive planning, and are characterized by significant infrastructural shortfalls.

In this context the image of SVUK *per se* is evolving, and the overall sense of identity and cohesion amongst the major sites is not fully developed. The spatial metaphor introduced here has clear resonance locally and in the regional and sub-regional context, though the diverse and geographically separated nature of the science/business parks is evident and there remains an underlying question regarding the relationship with the wider image of the science-base in Oxford and Oxfordshire as a whole.

Notwithstanding this the growth agenda at SVUK is generally clear and established. Overall employment and housing targets laid out in the SEP have been largely maintained, and

despite the differences noted above in more detailed housing allocations, forecast levels of housing and employment growth have been robust. Accepting ongoing questions over strategic cohesion, other aspects of detailed planning have moved forward, including the successful development of a Local Development Order at the SVUK EZ based in Harwell and Milton Park.

With regard to development and investment priorities there has been a relatively clear and established set of proposals in place since the SEP era in the late 2000s. Yet the major question here is less one of prioritisation within SVUK, but rather one of delivery. Indeed, a sense of the challenge here might be gauged by the withdrawal of £62 million from the County Council's transportation budget by the Department of Transport in 2010. This removed support for the 'Access to Oxford' project agreed by the Labour Government in 2007, a major package of investment incorporating expansion of Oxford railway station and measures to tackle congestion on the A34 and the city's ring road. The withdrawal of 'the largest sum for transport ever handed to Oxfordshire' (Oxford Mail, 29th October 2010) would have direct and indirect impacts on transportation issues at SVUK. In this context the delivery of sub-regional infrastructure priorities is increasingly reliant on the ability to generate significant planning obligations (Section 106 and CIL monies) and the capacity to influence the priorities of LEP and the County Council in particular. Yet here SVUK faces competing priorities within Oxfordshire, and the overall backdrop of major public sector spending cuts which have already had significant impacts on infrastructure delivery.

'Ownership' of the SVUK project is generally well-developed, with strong buy-in from the relevant district councils and appropriate backing from the County Council and the LEP.

Business interests have been largely supportive, though there is no business representative group for the SVUK area *per se*, and an interesting potential divergence exists between Milton Park and Harwell Oxford which are owned by different commercial interests and operate at least to some degree in opposition. Meanwhile, SVUK has strong but perhaps relatively narrow leverage within central government. Regular visits and interest from Cabinet members clearly reference the perceived importance of the area to ‘UK Plc’ and the central position of science and R&D to the Government’s economic strategy. Yet the translation of such support into significant and transformative investment in infrastructure improvements, for example, is less immediately apparent, particularly in the context of on-going national austerity.

Summary

In some respects the results here are counter-intuitive since the area with the strongest business voice and the strongest identity – GDI – emerges as the weaker case in terms of its likely ability to deliver on growth as part of a sub-regional strategy. Although the area emerged early as a result of initiative from a large and active business community, it exhibits the weakest economic governance structure, particularly in light of the erosion of previous detailed plans, and limitations in terms of strategy-making and delivery. The interesting implication here being that a strong spatial imaginary which resonates with a range of actors and might potentially alter convictions about an area might be less important in the context of soft regulatory planning spaces than a detailed and agreed set of policy commitments with which to negotiate the tensions of practical policy-making and implementation, particularly in the era of localism.

In line with this, PUSH emerges as the strongest area in terms of its governance arrangements. There are a number of contributory factors to this, including: the scale of resources that have been devoted to spatial planning itself and allied generation of an evidence base which in no short measure has derived from local government contributions; the extent to which members have been able to agree to specific spatial commitments to issues such as housing and employment land allocations; the near coterminosity between the PUSH and LEP areas and a strong measure of interlocking directorships which appear likely to ensure a high degree of coordination between public and private sectors. SVUK emerges somewhere in between the two other cases in its capacity to operate as an effective soft regulatory planning space.

6. Conclusion

As we have argued above, there are major challenges in examining the efficacy of economic governance arrangements in delivering growth in particular territories. Hence our adopted focus on criteria for ‘good economic governance’ as perceived by stakeholders concerned. It is possible, however, to provide some indicative triangulation of results, focusing on economic growth outcomes across the respective territories, and secondly on resourcing for economic growth.

Firstly here, the Office for National Statistics has recently reported (ONS, 2015: Table 7) that the average annual growth in GVA per head for LEP areas (2003-2013) saw Solent ranked joint 6th out of 39 (2.9% p.a.), Oxfordshire joint 10th (2.7%), and Coast to Capital 21st (2.6%). These territories do not correspond directly to the boundaries of our respective soft spaces, though the overall pattern here is broadly in line with our assessment. Secondly,

in terms of accessing resources it is difficult to judge the efficacy of governance arrangements *per se*, given that higher levels of support are generally directed to areas of lower productivity and prosperity. Allocations of 2014-2020 European Structural Funds, for example, which significantly outweigh RGF and the Growing Places Fund, equate to £23 per head over 6 years in Solent, £25 in Oxfordshire, and around £30 in Coast to Capital, all substantially lower than areas such as Liverpool City-Region (£126) and the North East LEP area (£239). Accepting this, a recent study of all LEPs reported that Solent LEP compares favourably with others in the South East region (Pike et al, 2013). When totalling all of the various sources of funding under the ‘strategic influence’ of LEPs, Solent LEP ranked 21st, ahead of Coast to Capital at 28th, with Oxfordshire second to last at 38th (reflecting in part the smaller scale of the area).

The contribution of soft regulatory planning spaces in achieving these outcomes is difficult to appraise. However, the detailed evaluation presented in this paper illuminates the views of key stakeholders in each case. It thereby illustrates the perceived strengths and weaknesses of a variety of sub-regional governance forms, and throws into sharp relief the comparative performance of these forms across a wide range of economic governance characteristics. The focus on stakeholder perceptions is valuable in terms of understanding the real-world implications of changing governance arrangements, such as the shift to localism. Although this paper cannot delve fully into the ongoing deliberations of all 22 of the local authorities involved across these sub-regions, it is apparent that the implications of localism are diverse. It is also possible that planning for these soft regulatory planning spaces may be overtaken by other territorial organisations such as LEPs, or even wholly redrawn under a new constitutional settlement in the wake of the Scottish referendum result in September 2014

and the Conservative election victory in May 2015. Certainly debates over city-regionalism, combined local authorities, larger-than-local planning and forms of pan-regionalism have been sharpened in recent times. In this context, there is little sign at present of settled arrangements for sub-regional planning in England.

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