

Coast to Capital – Partnership Board meeting

Thursday 29 June

Summary:

There were a number of themes and more specific issues that emerged from the discussion that we will feed in to the work we are doing to develop our SEP.

These were:

- We have a strong and productive economy and we need to ensure the Government's efforts to rebalance the economy don't work against us.
- We need to develop a vision for the region which makes us stand out and builds on our strengths, and isn't seven separate strategies (reflecting our seven priority themes). One idea was how we use our inherent strengths as a region to build resilient communities.
- We need to consider the needs to the different areas of our region, but also build links with other regions, for example through the M23 corridor and links to London.
- The diversity of our region is a real strength. Networks of small towns and cities can be really successful, but we need to consider how we harness the potential of our coastal and rural areas too.
- We should consider the impact of artificial intelligence, advances in technology and the automation of jobs. We need to think about how we should respond so we can make the most of any opportunities and withstand any potential shocks this brings.
- Gatwick is real asset and we can make more of it to benefit the wider region.
- We shouldn't underestimate the impact of Brexit on the skills we need across our workforce.
- We need to bring high value jobs to the region (rather than accepting people will continue to commute to London), including rural areas, and ensure we have the skills and promote the opportunities to take advantage.
- We have real strengths in our cultural offer in some places but we need to do more to help other town centres become more vibrant.
- We need to balance the need to build more houses with the need to protect and grow our industrial space and business parks so we can compete with other regions.
- Sustainability is a theme that needs to run through our Strategic Economic Plan and should underpin all of our work.

Main discussion points – reflections on the Industrial Strategy response

- Good to see destination management included, but we need to consider the synergies with visitor management.

- We have real strengths in our rural and coastal regions that we need to bring out clearly.
- Gatwick is a real asset for the region, but we need to consider how to spread the benefits and opportunities across the region.
- We have a lack of light industrial space in the region and we need to balance housing development with the need to protect and develop commercial space.
- We don't have the business parks that other regions have, other than Manor Royal, so we aren't as resilient or competitive as other regions, particularly the M4 corridor.
- Companies are being pushed out of London, which could be an opportunity for our region.

Main discussion points – themes to consider for our new Strategic Economic Plan

Vision / overall:

- There is a danger that we get seven strategies if we have seven themes, we need to make sure they all link and are coherent. We might need to consider the 'bold trade-offs' we are prepared to make and offer these in our pitch.
- We should hold a future gazing session, looking at the developments in technology and how they all interact and how they could impact on our region.
- We should focus on the region and needs of different areas within the region, but also we shouldn't lose the ability or ambition to work with other regions, for example on the M23 corridor for growth and the links with the London Plan.
- More challenge is likely to come from the Government, particularly on housing and transport.
- We need to make sure our region stands out and the messages resonate with the Government. We could make our pitch about building a resilient community. We have a unique region, with an international airport, coastal, urban and rural communities, and small towns and cities. We should make the most of this unique diversity and build on it.
- We need to ensure we build in sustainability to our SEP.
- We need to consider the long term impact of artificial intelligence and potential automation of many jobs in the future. Can we prepare for this and make the most of any opportunities? Can we separate this from the issue of low productivity in relatively low skilled employment?

Place:

- Larger geographies than LEPs are emerging and we need to consider how we part of a bigger region and are in competition with the Northern Powerhouse and Midlands Engine for funding.

- We need to consider the links with other regions, for example, many people rely heavily on the trains to commute to and from London. We can improve the railway network, but we also want to encourage people to live and work in the region. How do we bring highly paid jobs to the region?
- We already have a strong and productive economy and we need to persuade the Government to continue to invest in successful places. We may need to be more explicit that we support the rebalancing of the economy but this shouldn't be at the expense of strong contributors.
- We need to do more to develop the rural economy – including transport and broadband.
- We should make more of the blue / coastal economy, which is a new area of focus for the Government. For example, we have opportunities for tourism, fishing and deep sea mining.

Destination management:

- Destination management means different things to different people. We need to be clear what we are marketing and to who.
- A network of small towns and cities can be really successful, and we should try to demonstrate that to the Government. However, we should consider how we ensure we have vibrant town centres –which is linked to housing and destination management.
- Brighton is a cultural powerhouse and we should make the most of it.
- We should consider how we empower businesses to pull together BIDs to deliver vibrant places and pulls in cultural activity. This could be crucial as the state withdraws funding.

Skills / people:

- We can do more on apprenticeships and work with families and schools to promote opportunities beyond higher education. There is an appetite for apprenticeships in the region and we need to capitalise on it.
- We need to consider people in the region who are economically inactive, including NEETs and older people.
- We need to understand and seek to address the skills gaps in the region, for example the shortage in construction skills.
- We shouldn't underestimate the impact of Brexit on our workforce. Many industries rely on a 'borrowed workforce' and we need to consider how to fill the gap.

Trade / business:

- We can do more to exploit the potential of Gatwick airport, particularly with the Asian markets that are now opening up.

- We need to ensure business support is there for those who want to grow but are hardest to reach.
- We need to recognise the role of creativity in innovation, e.g. in the games industry.
- We need to be clear about the competitive advantages we have with creativity and work out how best to exploit them.