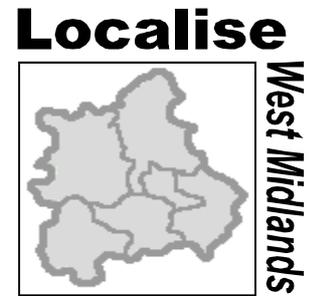


# Localise West Midlands

Newsletter: June 2006



## Invitation: Come and support LWM!

**On Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2006**, LWM will be holding a meeting for all supporters, to which we hope you can come. The meeting will be at the Warehouse Café, Allison Street, Digbeth, starting at 6pm with tea and coffee from 5.30pm.

The aim of the meeting is to bring together people with an interest in localisation and in the work of LWM. It will provide an opportunity to

- hear more about LWM's work
- find ways to get involved
- for us to seek feedback on our activities
- for us to hear of similar work we may be unaware of, and
- to discuss the possibility of a formal membership network.

We wish to get more people actively involved in LWM and in promoting or supporting its message, and we feel that a membership network would help us to achieve that. It also might also provide some money to help support our work. We would also like to seek your opinions on the structure for the membership.

Many people have expressed enthusiasm for the concepts behind LWM and the work that we do, and we feel this is the best way and time to build on this enthusiasm for the good of our progress as an organisation.

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If you would like to attend, please contact Karen on 0121 685 1155 or [karen@localisewestmidlands.org.uk](mailto:karen@localisewestmidlands.org.uk). Feel free to bring any leaflets or info you have about related work, and if you would like a short slot to talk about a localisation project of interest, let me know this too.

If you know others who may like to attend, please put us in touch with them. We look forward to seeing you at a busy and productive meeting!

### Live too far away?

Obviously a Monday evening in Birmingham is not an ideal time or venue for LWM supporters in the further corners of the region. If this applies to you and you think there would be interest in a meeting more local to you, let us know and we will try to arrange it.

## Mapping Localisation in the West Midlands

Work continues on our mapping localisation project, leading on food and energy with some work also on the retail section. The aim is not only to collect good practice together but also to analyse and draw recommendations from these examples, and one early lesson from this is that many of these projects are too new to yet have had any measurable benefits. While the minus side here is a lack of data, the plus sides are that this growing number of additions to the localisation

movement shows a clear shift in mainstream thinking, with a number of feasibility studies drawing the same conclusions we do about the benefits of localisation. Examples of new localisation initiatives are as follows.

#### **Dairies Direct Ltd, Worcestershire**

Ex-dairy farmer David Kaye has piloted a scheme to sell milk from Hayway Farm near Broadway, Worcs, directly to local people and organisations (such as nursing homes) at supermarket prices, while still leaving a good price to the farmer (c1996 level).

The farmer supplying the milk can start by continuing with his existing contract whilst building up this local round. There are now two roundsmen making deliveries: over 700 individual customers plus two leisure centres, five residential homes and running two farm shops.

#### **One Planet Products:**

A bulk buying initiative specifically focused on sourcing sustainable and environmental products and materials for the construction and refurbishment industry, primarily in the residential sector. Product miles are included in their evaluation model, which is based on that of One Planet Living. Member-owned and organised into regional branches. Members are housing associations, private developers and contractors.

One Planet Products is starting in south-east aiming to expand and set up regional and local variations on the supply chain. It should be financially self-sustaining after start-up funding. It is part of the One Planet Living joint initiative between Bioregional and WWF.

#### **Union Street Garage, Bishops Castle**

This small independently run garage and filling station in a rural Shropshire town sells biodiesel from what may be the commercial 100% biodiesel pump in the country.

The biodiesel is produced from waste cooking oil from local schools, at a plant run by a local farmer. Lead organisations in the venture were the Marches Energy Agency, Wasteless Society and Shropshire Partnership. Benefits have included 82 new

customers and financial success for the garage; increased local money circulation; less CO2 from delivery of fuel and from burning it; diversification for local farm; and diversion of waste cooking oil from the waste stream.

While there are limits to the capacity of biofuels to fund our current road fleet within a reasonable environmental footprint, locally sourced waste cooking oil is not as land- and resource-intensive a way of producing biodiesel as local or imported fuel crops, and should be more greatly utilised. In localisation terms the scheme is both satisfyingly self-sufficient and economically viable.

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## **How do we measure prosperity?**

LWM member Andrew Lydon is working on a project proposal to encourage the West Midlands and central government to adopt a more radical range of prosperity and growth statistics.

This comes from widespread concern that the figures and indicators currently used by HM Treasury and the Bank of England for the management of economic and social policy, do not truly reflect the real prosperity or poverty of our population.

Such inaccuracies are partly due to inequalities between areas, ages and individuals, but there is also a lack of reflection of what our money buys us and what it cannot: parents being too busy to spend time with children; children can afford to buy booze at the off-licence or drugs on the street for less than it would cost them to go to the cinema; student loans, house prices, consumer spending, and the need for private pensions combine to give a high level of lifelong personal debt which ensures long working hours are unavoidable.

So as current measurements conceal these disadvantages, they effectively form part of a propaganda exercise that tells us that the current economic model is constantly improving our quality of life.

The 'Redefining Prosperity' project of the Sustainable Development Commission under Jonathon Porritt was intended to address this issue, but has since been side-tracked by the Well-Being Index, which would not displace any of the targets by which our existing order is run.

Since 2003 the Treasury has recognised that regional diversity now requires a systematic development of statistics for the regions, with a commitment from the Office of National Statistics to establishing regional branches for regional work in 2007. This regionalisation of statistics seems to give the greatest chance of a radical revision of the dominant indicators.

If growth, prosperity and inflation targets for the West Midlands can begin to be developed, other regions might follow this example, with gradually many regions establishing credible and authoritative indicators, to influence national targets in a more meaningful direction. Chancellors would set and be accountable to separate targets for young and old, and for the north and south, instead of simply the limited 'national' figures currently used, which represent crude and illogical national averages for growth, incomes and inflation.

*"If everyone in the UK got divorced, and then paid the neighbours on one side for sex and the neighbours on the other side to look after the kids, GDP would go through the roof."*

## LWM Consultancy

Our consultancy proposals have been developing. The aim is to support local people and businesses to develop and build communities and local economies in areas of need; maximising the amount of regeneration funding that stays in the area it is intended to help, by minimising leakage. It will also build on existing strengths and character and enhance diversity; and importantly, targets, outputs and directions would be determined with the leadership of local people rather than parachuted in by project commitments from the start. We

have made initial links with communities in areas of Craven Arms (South Shropshire) and Stratford-on-Avon, to see whether our approach might be feasible there, although these are tentative until we know we have financial backing to deliver on any hopes raised.

If you are interested in our consultancy arm, please contact us for a briefing.

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## Sustainable Communities Bill

### An appeal for your help (Guest article)

Our communities are not sustainable. We all know the problems - loss of local shops causing increased travel, loss of local jobs causing increased commuting, most energy provided by national fossil fuel burning power networks, most waste going to landfill, food and other products being sourced from vast distances, poor public transport and ongoing green space development.

But all too often when local communities and action groups come together to stop the new superstore being built, to save the post office or to demand better public transport they are ignored by local and national government.

### The Sustainable Communities Bill

The Sustainable Communities Bill aims to empower local communities to make their areas sustainable. Drawn up by a coalition of community organisations and environmental groups this radical Bill, if made law, will turn society **upside down**. Active citizens, such as local green groups, will drive the strategies and plans of local government and these plans will then drive the policies of central government. So local people will have more power to start localising their communities.

### This is an important Bill for LWM

Because of this approach local activists will have a much better chance of making their communities more sustainable - e.g. more recycling, local renewable energy; or another bus service; a bureaucratic hurdle removed there; a door opened there; some extra funding for community projects. All ideas that local people could feed into the process to be set up by this Bill.

Government will then be required to assist in promoting local sustainability in ways suggested by councils and communities (NOT dictated by Whitehall). In short, it is central government having a duty to say "tell us what you need from us in order to assist in making your communities greener" rather than "this is what you must do". This Bill is about community participation not the usual "consultation" in which all the final decisions are made centrally.

### Your help needed please

Local Works, the cross-party campaign behind the Bill, already has 62 supporting national organisations, 275 MPs who have signed supportive motions in Parliament and 15,000 individual supporters. Public meetings are being held across the country, with MPs increasingly wanting to be involved, and local groups and societies often being a part of the action.

But it will take a massive grass roots campaign to persuade traditional politicians to agree to turn society upside down in this way. So we are asking for your help:

- **please sign up to the campaign** - joining is free! - you can do so at [www.localworks.org](http://www.localworks.org) or by calling 020 7833 9898 or writing to the campaign office at 94 White Lion St, London N1 9PF
- write to your MP and ask them to sign Early Day Motion 641 in support of the Bill
- write to your council asking them to pass a motion of support for the Bill (contact the campaign for a draft, as above)
- distribute copies of our campaign broadsheets (which we can send you free of charge)

*Stephen Shaw, Local Works*

## Lyons Report and LWM

Sir Michael Lyons' latest report on the future role and function of local government, published in May 06, has a distinctly localist flavour.

The report, entitled *National Prosperity, Local Choice and Civic Engagement*, argues for a system of local government for the 21st century that can manage

increasing pressures on public expenditure, increase satisfaction and build more prosperous communities. Greater local choice, not more central control, is needed to achieve this.

He also argues that local government should be given greater freedom to 'place-shape' - where local government takes responsibility for the well-being of an area and the people who live there, promoting their interests and their future.

Sir Michael sets out a challenge for central government to clear the space for effective 'place-shaping' by setting fewer and better-focused targets and reducing supervision of local government by central government. It should also clarify the roles of central and local government, based on a realistic assessment of who is best placed to do what, and allow greater local influence over public services.

Further work will also examine the links between funding, function and place-shaping. The Report is accessible from <http://www.lyonsinquiry.org.uk>

LWM welcomes Lyons' conclusion that Government in England/West Midlands is far too centrally controlled and that there is a need to move to a more local approach. The big challenge facing Lyons in deciding what action is required is, as he says, the need for a very big change in the attitudes of London-based Government and its regional and sub-regional agencies.

An earlier Lyons report proposed the movement of civil service jobs out of London to the Regions, but little has in fact been done to implement it and the proposals have been overtaken by more recent massive cuts in what jobs existed in the regions.

Hopefully the principles set out in the report will inform the Government's thinking about the future of Central, Local and Regional Government functions and relations. Lyons emphasises rightly the importance of strengthening the capacity and independence of local government. However there is a need to look at the shape of local government, how local it is, how it is accountable to local communities,

and its and the centre's relations with the administrative and democratically unaccountable regional tier of government.

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## **New Eastside Community Group**

As part of our work with the Eastside Sustainability Advisory Group, LWM has been instrumental in setting up a community group for Eastside, Birmingham. Local and regional bodies have long held that there is no existing community in the "Eastside" area. The group of 50 people who turned up to ESAG's public meeting at the local Polish Centre in April were emphatic in rebutting this suggestion, and the Eastside Community Group was formed.

The group is now working on establishing their right to be involved in plans for the area and are resisting a compulsory purchase order on the beautiful canalside home of one of its older members. This member's continued residence in Eastside is apparently adding to what is known to decision-makers as "*the problem of fragmented land ownership*" but which we would rather describe as "*the diverse and sustainable local community, which as it creates the existing character for the area should be built on rather than destroyed*".

Meanwhile there are also proposals to widen the sustainability focus from Eastside to the Regeneration Zone with a Zone sustainability group in which LWM would hope to take part, and which hopefully would take a more responsible stance on the community and social fabric aspects of sustainability than we have seen in Eastside.

*"Start with what we already have. Resist "blank slate" approaches that erase existing complexity with a rigidly simplistic scheme. Invest more in researching existing natural and human assets, and build on them."*

Building Magazine (UK) , 7 Apr 2006

## **Localisation to assist community cohesion**

**If you think localism isn't really a top priority for Britain read on...**

Many people were disturbed by the success of the British National Party (BNP) in the recent local elections. The rise of the BNP is a classic case of people being persuaded to pick the wrong target as the cause of their problems, aided by the scape-goating tactics of the mainstream media and often by bad policymaking.

Housing pressure is a good example. Put simply, the Government's refusal to implement measures to spread growth more evenly amongst the regions increases housing pressure in the south-east, and the nation's policy of 'right to buy' means that there are shortages of available council housing; but immigrants are blamed for the problem. Economic policy and corporate behaviour also causes immense pressures on employment, and again, immigrant labour is not to blame but is an easy target for those who wish to incite racial disharmony.

At its heart one answer to the immigration question and the way the BNP has been able to take advantage of it, is to provide economic security and adequate services at a local level and in doing so rebuild community cohesion.

Trevor Phillips in a post-election Observer article pointed to what has happened in Oldham in response to local BNP gains 3 years ago: a resolute campaign by decision-makers, voluntary groups, media and local businesses to build up community cohesion and social integration and to remind people what they have in common.

What is needed is an approach to economics and society that builds on this social cohesion to ensure that it is built on a solid foundation of local economic activity: an area full of people with interlinked livelihoods creates a healthier society as well as economic stability.

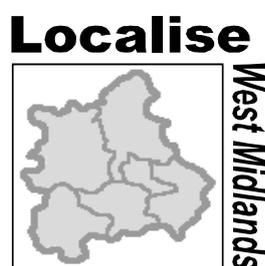
To take this further, the same approach – of course – is also of benefit in the countries of

immigrant origin, where the killing off of local economic opportunities by the corporate crushing of local competition (and trade policies that allow this) has massive consequences for local people, their own social cohesion, economic wellbeing and family relations. The separation of families is a problem so well known that, for example, Latvian families of mushroom pickers in Ireland are known widely as "mushroom orphans". Clearly some cross-border commerce and migration can aid wealth generation through foreign worker remittances but the reality is that in many situations people simply feel they have no 'choice' but to travel thousands of miles for

work. So again, an approach with a basis of local economic activity and using surplus trading capacity and fairer trade laws for redistribution would be preferential.

As a final note, the Green Party, which uses many of these economic and social arguments and is the only one of the 5 major parties to give adequate weight to localisation of economics, also met with one of their greatest ever success rates in local elections. Perhaps other parties should take notice.

*Karen Leach*



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## About LWM

LWM aims to promote the strengthening of local economies for social, environmental and economic benefits. We aim to gather information on and raise awareness of the benefits of local sourcing and local money flow, amongst decision-makers and the general public.

LWM was set up in 2002 by a group of individuals who were keen to propose solutions, as a positive response to what is currently going wrong in economics.

Our West Midlands focus is intended to make use the region's geographical balance of urban and rural; and also to encourage democratic accountability and a people-centred approach amongst regional bodies.

However we also look beyond the region, seeking to catalyse ideas across the UK and to make links with organisations all over the world working on a similar agenda.

Our current activities include: regional mapping of localisation activity; production of policy statements, developing our consultancy, and general promotion. Our work fits mainly into the themes of finance, regeneration, local food, energy, retail and housing.

For more information see our website as below.

**Localise West Midlands, 54 – 57 Allison Street, Digbeth, Birmingham B5 5TH**

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[www.localisewestmidlands.org.uk](http://www.localisewestmidlands.org.uk)

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