

Localise West Midlands

Newsletter: Oct 2006

Introduction

We started our last newsletter with an invitation to our supporters' meeting in July, at which we were proposing the idea of LWM surviving as a membership-based organisation as a 'safety net' for if further funding could not be found. A lot has happened since then, with LWM securing funding for several new projects: particularly work on sustainable procurement for Birmingham Strategic Partnership, and an energy study for Greenpeace, both of which are outlined later in this newsletter. We are also undertaking smaller pieces of work on evaluation of Sandwell Advice and Money Link for Greets Green Partnership, Sandwell, and on social enterprises. There was some hard work done over the summer while our staffing situation caught up with our workload. Luckily, new associates Sam Hunter and Rosemary Foggitt have now joined us on a part-time basis, particularly on the procurement work, which has made LWM life rather more manageable.

Supporters' meeting

At the supporters' meeting at the Warehouse Café in July, we discussed LWM's general purpose and objectives; a potential supporter subscription structure; our conference plans; and our consultancy service. It was a positive meeting with some new projects brought to LWM's attention and much interest shown in LWM's work. In particular:

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Localisation Conference

LWM originally conceived the idea of a conference for decision-makers and opinion-formers to discuss localisation both in economics and governance. Since then, many responses (both at the supporters' meeting and elsewhere) have also favoured a rather different conference idea, to discuss and teach localisation good practice – a conference for communities, small businesses, activists and so on. We would like to hold both of these conferences, as they have rather different audiences and objectives. There will be more progress to report in our next newsletter.

Join LWM - as a supporter, committee member, associate...

We now offer a basic subscription for supporters for a minimum of £10 in order to cover the costs of our communications to supporters. When we incorporate, we will offer those signing up as supporters the opportunity to become voting members of the company. A subscription form is attached for those not already supporters.

We are also always looking out for new members of our management committee, and new associates to undertake some of the work we are now increasingly being offered. If you might be interested in working with us in any of these ways, there are some options given on our subscription form.

Walsall Endeavours

Accord sustainability manager Paul di Mambro introduced us to a project called Walsall Endeavours, which is a hub for social enterprise in Walsall.

Walsall Endeavours is leading a group of big spenders in Walsall (hospital, Council, PCT, Accord and other RSL's, Walsall College etc) to analyse their current spend with local suppliers and then work together on ways of increasing it and widening access. The group is also looking at developing alignment, so as to be able to 'broker' take-up of contract opportunities by local and social enterprise.

Sustainable Procurement in Birmingham

Birmingham Strategic Partnership recently identified partners' procurement as an area where sustainability could be implemented more strongly. As a result, LWM have been commissioned to produce an action plan for sustainable procurement for BSP partners. In accordance with our mission statement, LWM's emphasis is on local sourcing in order to deliver economic and environmental benefits.

Procurement by local authorities in particular has the capacity to deliver major regeneration and environmental benefits. Northumberland County Council re-invests £1.5 million per year in regional food suppliers by supplying county schools with fresh food; and in Dalarna, Sweden, innovative procurement efforts for school food led to a reduction of lorry journeys by 50%, whilst reducing overall cost and increasing purchasing from local and regional sources.

LWM are particularly interested in the concept of "whole system costs" which takes into account the costs of procurement right across an organisation, rather than just costs to the procuring department. Another area of interest is how the CO2 implications of transporting goods might be taken into account within EU procurement law intended to ensure fair competition.

The work will be completed in April 2007; our steering group includes procurement expertise from Anthony Collins Solicitors, the Regional Centre of Excellence, and hopefully Birmingham City Council and the Environment Agency.

Decentralised Energy

One of Greenpeace's buzz-phrases of 2006 has been "decentralised energy". Their campaigns materials on the subject point out that because we generate electricity in large power stations far from our cities, almost two-thirds of primary energy inputs to the system are wasted – partly from the wires that transmit the electricity around the country, but mostly in the form of waste heat from the power stations themselves. This would be more than enough to meet the entire space and water heating needs of every building in the country.

Decentralised systems involve both local electricity generation (often from renewable sources) and distribution of waste heat. Such systems provide a clear and effective alternative to the centralised, policies currently favoured by central government – which incidentally fit far better with the huge scale of nuclear power generation.

Many cities including Birmingham are taking a lead in moving away from this centralised approach to a much more sustainable one.

Greenpeace Environmental Trust has funded a full study in London and a scoping study in Edinburgh on the feasibility of setting up decentralised energy systems for those cities. Greenpeace has also funded LWM to undertake a scoping study for decentralised energy for Birmingham, with the hope that the scoping study leads to a full feasibility study in the future. In this we have assistance from Birmingham Sustainable Energy Partnership and Hestia Services Ltd; and from some excellent work already carried out by the City Council's urban design team.



'Localists' Gather in Stroud

Some of us attended an informal meeting of 'localists' in Stroud in September, organised by LWM member Pat Conaty. It was very general in purpose, simply an opportunity to share existing ideas and see what new ones might emerge. Organisations represented, as well as LWM, were Stroud Commonwealth, the New Economics Foundation and some community banking organisations; and Land For People.

Land For People are based in Shropshire and Gloucestershire. They work towards sustainable development with an emphasis - as perhaps the name suggests - on affordable homes for local people and on community ownership for community and environmental benefit. For example they promote and work on Community Land Trusts, with one being proposed in Bishops Castle, Shropshire and also investigated in Powys - both in order to provide affordable housing.

There was interest from many participants in getting involved with the 'practitioner' version of LWM's conference and also in nef's social enterprise incubator concept;

There was also recognition of the importance of engaging with RDAs and that rather than creating a formal localisation network for the sake of it, that we should ensure we keep in touch on opportunities to change policy and on any matters of mutual interest.

Prosperity Indicators

Over the summer we have been working on a project on prosperity indicators in light of the Office of National Statistics both becoming strategically independent in the near future, and opening a network of regional offices next spring.

There is now a specific webpage on our website which has been the starting point of our work, which has been facilitated by some financial support from the Joseph

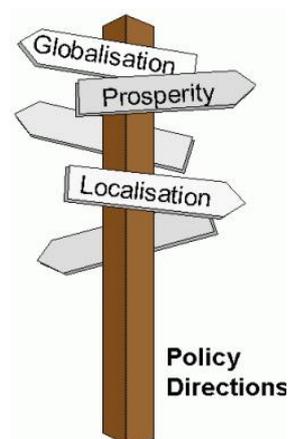
Rowntree Reform Trust. The webpage sets out more graphically our opposition to the official story that we in the UK are about twice as prosperous as we were in 1970.

If we have become so much better off, how come it now usually takes two incomes to run a household that one could run on one income in the sixties and seventies?

We have now assembled a detailed presentation in Powerpoint explaining how the official calculations have been flawed. It details how these calculations are done differently in the US, France and Germany before setting out what benchmarking practices can be borrowed from overseas. It ends by outlining some ways in which the current principle state economic target, Gordon Brown's inflation target could be applied and measured as the starting point for a reassessment of the prosperity of the range of peoples in this country.

Rowntrees were very specific in asking us to develop detailed ideas on alternatives. Consequently we did redirect the work in that way, although it differed from our original plan. This has been fruitful, but at the cost of the lobbying work we had originally intended. However, the material we have produced both in terms of the presentation and some media coverage, should facilitate lobbying in coming weeks.

We had intended to try to get the regional stakeholder organisations to unite behind the issue. When the government began its regionalisation agenda in 1998, it set up what was intended to be only initially an unelected regional assembly. Besides representatives of the local councils, there were groups of representatives of business, and 'others' which were basically "NGOs" including trade unions, the colleges and even environmental sector NGOs. Through involvement in the environmental NGOs some of us had experience of the stakeholder realm at this level. Our hope is



that with backing here, it would be easier to press our hopes on the ONS and the national politicians. These bodies are still in existence and are still supposed to have an authoritative voice both here and with Whitehall.

In the next few weeks we will be in a position to conclude whether we can get that voice, to voice our concerns. Otherwise we will have to refocus our efforts towards Westminster politicians.

Andrew Lydon

City Regions

The latest idea to come out of Westminster on the subject of governance is that of City Regions. This has been much debated in the regional press. For us and many others there are fundamental questions that need to be asked about the accountability of the way the West Midlands is governed, the quality of civic leadership and how it can be improved; its ability to recognise the region's needs and more importantly deliver what needs to be done.

We need to examine how best we can deal with the challenges facing us in relation to climate change, water supply, waste reduction, energy, food, transport, housing, employment, the provision of public services and our quality of life. We need to look at roles and relationships of Westminster, Whitehall, regional and local Government and ask if they are really up to these challenges. Such questions can only really be considered fully if we take into account our position in relation to the devolved government in Scotland and Wales.

This is a big agenda. There is broad agreement that changes are needed, but no consensus on the scale of changes needed or how they could be delivered.

The City Region idea seems to provide no real answer to the big issues we face. In fact there appeared to be a touch of complacency underpinning it given the

arguments which are put to us for radical change. An approach which is based on a view that the existing metropolitan authorities can deliver what is needed if they are given more powers and resources is simply not good enough.

The establishment of a new City Region organisation would simply add to and complicate the plethora of structures that already exists. It would not be democratically accountable or deliver the real transfer of political power and resources from London to the Region. There is little to illustrate how the city region structure would meld with or replace existing regional structures and how the balance of rural and urban needs could be met. There would be a high risk that such a body would be too inward-looking and undermine moves to promote closer links between Birmingham, the Black Country, Coventry and, crucially, the shires with their rural areas and market towns.

The controversy over the name, "Birmingham, Black Country and Coventry" or "Greater Birmingham" is illustrative of the problem: that smaller settlements don't want to be defined as satellites of Birmingham – and yet that concept is at the heart of city region proposals, whatever it would be named.

In fact, the driver locally for a city region seems to come from the idea that the major cities need to have more financial and decision-making clout as part of the UK. From a localist perspective, we see this as an approach that, instead of facilitating community-level governance, would be likely to drive the sort of prestige- and competitiveness-led decision-making that squashes the concerns and needs of real people.

Our existing regional and local structures are far from ideal – with regional development agencies controlling large amounts of funding with very little democratic mandate; vested interests in many local agencies; and a central government determined to squash local government autonomy by ruling with an iron fistful of targets. However, at least the region has a balance of urban and rural

areas, which could form a model scale for effective decision-making and supply chains, if given the opportunity.

We need to find a way of engaging ordinary people as well as the political elite in the regional and local governance debate; how radical reform can be considered without it being blocked by entrenched interests; and what level – national, regional or local – is the most appropriate for governance on different issues.

LWM's policy statement on governance can be found on our website.

Sustainable Communities Bill

The Sustainable Communities Bill – which proposes a mechanism to make national government much more responsive to local needs – was featured in our last newsletter. Unknown to us, at the time some members of Birmingham City Council had proposed a Council motion in support of the Bill – which was passed in June. The motion has committed the Council to asking local MPs to support the Bill in Parliament.

Eastside: the cost of comprehensive redevelopment

The Learning & Leisure Quarter and Technology Park area in Eastside, Birmingham, is currently the subject of a Compulsory Purchase Order on various different plots of land.

Several of these plots are owned by individuals whose homes or businesses add to the existing, locally valued character and economy of the area and there is strong local opposition to their loss. One is the home for the last 40 years of a gentleman named Fred Grove. The house is locally listed and in a conservation area and there are no plans to demolish it. He does not want to move. The CPO is justified by the local authority as being “to enable comprehensive development”. They have given no individual justifications as to why each separate plot is required.

We understand that it may be easier for developers to work with an entirely blank slate. We understand that some land acquisition may be necessary for the general approach that the City Council is taking in Eastside.

However we feel strongly – and it seems every planning organisation in existence agrees with us – that including at least some of the existing businesses, residents and generally human connections within a regeneration area is likely to achieve a more inclusive and sustainable result, and generally reflects the best in current planning philosophy. Indeed, the importance of this is also clearly stated as principles of the Development Framework which LDA were commissioned to produce for the site.

Unlike Advantage West Midlands and Birmingham City Council, we feel strongly that developers have the imagination, the flexibility and, in all probability, the clause in their Corporate Social Responsibility statements, to be able and willing to take an approach different from this clean-sweep comprehensive approach; one that would incorporate those existing owners and buildings which would be compatible with, and would benefit, the new community that can be grown around them. Most crucially, Fred Grove's house and the Grade II listed Moby Dick pub, both of which will remain as buildings and could easily maintain the same uses.

The Eastside Sustainability Advisory Group, currently chaired by LWM, is seeking communication from developers on the subject via planning publications, in the hope that we could then discuss with them how we could help them deliver a more beneficial approach.

Getting Out of Birmingham

You may have noticed that much of our project work recently begun has been Birmingham-based. This is not deliberate: while much of our policy work is region-wide and covers rural as well as urban concerns,

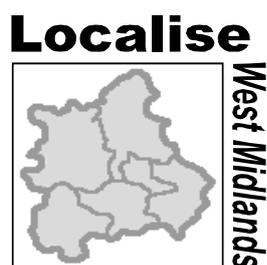
in our project work it is simply down to what opportunities have come our way. We don't want to make a habit of Birmingham-centricity, and if you are based elsewhere in the region and have some ideas for working with us, you're welcome to get in touch and help us expand our boundaries!

Newsletter editor: Karen Leach

Help! Calling IT experts:

LWM seeks a volunteer computer maintenance assistant for our Windows based PC and laptop for occasional help. If you have a little free time, know about computer maintenance, and want to support LWM, please contact Karen at LWM on 0121 685 1155.

We regret our offices are currently not wheelchair accessible.



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 of localisation. Our work fits mainly into the themes of finance, regeneration, local food, energy, retail and housing.

For more information see our website as below.

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