

Diversity and the Black Country Study

Report from Gurbux Singh
(1st March 2006)

BLACK COUNTRY CONSORTIUM: THE NEED FOR A DIVERSITY STRATEGY

1. BACKGROUND

I was asked by the Black Country Consortium to review its overall vision and strategy for the urban renaissance of the Black Country sub region with particular emphasis on establishing the extent to which the diverse needs of all its communities had been integrated into its thinking. Specifically, I have been assigned two tasks – firstly to review documentation produced or commissioned by the Consortium and interview a number of key experts; and secondly to equality proof the draft final document prior to submission to the Secretary of State.

I have read all the documentation identified by the consortium, its key partners and the West Midlands Assembly. In addition I have explored relevant Government policy and expectations as they relate to revitalisation of urban areas and economies.

In particular I have focused on the Consortium's key documentations: on the economy, housing market restructuring, the project plan, the choices report, and more technical reports concerned with the centres, land assembly and local area housing strategies. I have also paid attention to those reports concerned with the position of BME communities within the sub region commissioned either by the Consortium or by the Assembly.

2. SUMMARY

This review identifies gaps in the vision and strategy. This should not be viewed as a criticism but rather as a means by which the submission to the Secretary of State can be further enhanced, strengthening the case of the sub region. *The sub-region has little option but to embark on a radical, inspirational and aspirational vision if the sub region's current economic, social, and physical decline is to be arrested. The dangers of fractured communities riven with ethnic tension living in parallel worlds and a society which fails to meet the aspiration and needs of all our communities cannot be entertained.* The Consortium should be congratulated on having produced largely an excellent piece of work.

This paper has considered the Consortium's vision for the sub region: it is both exciting and captivating although there are significant gaps in relation to diversity. Its fundamental weakness is the omission of any reference to the type of society the consortium aspires to see developed in the sub region – *a key objective of any regional spatial plan must be the promotion and creation of an inclusive and cohesive society*

with opportunities for all to work, live and participate in leisure. This is largely absent from the vision.

The study fails to recognise a number of important issues. ***There is an understatement of the role that BME communities have played*** historically in the economy, masking the true extent of the decline within the sub region. In addition it fails to acknowledge the extent to which BME communities have buttressed the housing market and thereby avoiding its potential collapse. ***More importantly it does not adequately recognise the critical role that BME communities, particularly Indian, new migrants from Europe, refugees, and women will play in the new economy over the next few decades.*** The West Midlands region contains the second largest concentration of the Indian population in the UK. This community has over the last two decades played a key role in the economy of Britain and is predicted to play an even greater role in the future.

The challenge for this strategy is two fold: firstly to harness the potential entrepreneurialism and work ethic of these communities; and ***secondly*** to ensure the retention of these communities within the sub- region, avoiding a similar pattern of out migration by the more affluent and mobile professionals.

A key strand of the economic strategy is the development of a more professional and managerial sector within the Black Country – this will require in part the retention of new graduates leaving the regions HE institutions, many of whom will be drawn from the ethnic populations..

The report then identifies areas which need to be addressed to tackle structural inequality. It raises concerns about community relations issues, particularly the potential for inter ethnic conflict. And finally the report raises a number of more general questions. These relate to the economic robustness of the sub region and the need to look at adjacent economic corridors in the hinterland; concerns about the adequacy, capability and capacity in public sector organisations to deliver a radical and challenging vision; and concludes by stressing the important role of the sub region and suggests there is greater scope for BC co-ordination, particularly around strategy development and delivery, accountability and performance management.

3. NEXT STEPS: RECOMMENDATIONS

The sub regional strategy should:

- A. ***Re-visit its vision and redefine along the lines set out in this report.*** In particular the creation of community cohesion as a central plank of the BC vision with a society providing opportunities for all. This process should commence with a ‘visioning’ event of key stakeholders, experts and policy makers.
- B. ***Establish community cohesion and challenges facing BME communities as a separate work stream*** and develop detailed action plan
- C. ***Establish poverty as a key theme,*** conduct poverty gap analysis and develop work stream

- D. ***Conduct a detailed examination of community needs:*** through either an analysis by each community group, identifying key challenges and opportunities or applying a diversity test to each theme of the strategy.
- E. ***Engage with Government to identify good practise*** on poverty and community cohesion and agree ways forward in the Black Country.
- F. ***Commission further work on the advantages of diversity*** and the potential role of BMEs in the revitalisation of the economy.
- G. ***All institutions should audit whether they have necessary capacity and capability*** to deliver the BC vision and community cohesion.
- H. Recognise the vitally ***important role at sub regional level and consider further strengthening its locus***

4. INTRODUCTION

The Black Country Study establishes a clear longer term vision for the area, with an in depth analysis of the factors which have contributed to the current challenges facing the sub region; it then develops macro level strategies required to translate the vision into reality.

The study is particularly clear on:

- The factors contributing to economic decline, particularly the collapse of its manufacturing base
- Inability to secure more knowledge based industries as replacement, leaving low value added industries
- The gradual decline of its retail strategic centres
- The scale of the housing difficulties and the potential for large scale market failure
- The lack of educational attainment and its low skill base
- The poor physical environment and the failure to exploit the Black Country's natural green, heritage
- Outward migration of more affluent households

The documents then set out at macro level strategies for:

- reversing decline, achieving a re-structured economy
- tackling the potential housing crisis
- addressing issues of skill shortage and low educational attainment
- developing a more holistic networked transport strategy
- developing an approach to change fundamentally the physical environment including greening policies ,exploiting its heritage and the use of the canal network as a feature

There are however significant omissions which the consortium should consider if the needs of the BME communities are to be met and the strategy is to be effectively delivered.

5. VISION

There is a good strategic aspirational vision, essential for the future development of the sub-region. Focussed on the key areas – restructuring the economy, up-skilling and developing the work force, raising education attainment, reducing wage level gap, bringing nearer to national levels; attracting higher value added activity, developing technology driven industries; radically improving the physical environment through the use of its natural attributes – water, canals, hills etc; tackling the issue of housing – areas of poor housing at risk of market failure, the absence of inspirational housing and middle and higher value stock.

This is both exciting and captivating. ***However, equally important when setting such a vision is to include within that aspiration a definition of the type of society you wish to see or create – inclusive, equal citizens having a sense of belonging and commitment to the area, all contributing to the social and economic well of the sub region.*** A sub region which is devoid of discrimination, having dismantled the barriers which prevented the maximum utilisation of the talents of all its communities and citizens. A society genuinely inclusive, integrated in residential, economic, social and educational terms. A sub region which brings people together to develop a sense of inclusion and a shared British identity defined by common opportunities, and mutual expectations on all citizens to contribute to that society.

And significantly: no parallel communities.

The benefits of such a society are considerable, and ones which would have a significant impact on creating a new identity for the sub region.

This addition to the vision will be difficult to deliver but one which must be considered central to most English regions, and most certainly critical for the Black Country sub region. ***The need for strategic focus on tackling the challenges which have created parallel communities is of paramount importance. We have such communities in the Black Country.***

There is also a Government driver for this challenge – the Home Office have recently attached significant importance to this issue, and is by leading on the development of Public Service Agreements across Whitehall. In addition all LSPs and LAs have been tasked to promote such initiatives. ***Not only is it essential the vision be very specific about community cohesion and opportunities for all, but there should be a separate action stream within the strategy and implementation plan setting out the actions to be undertaken to remove current barriers.*** Local government, Local Strategic Partnerships and Economic Regeneration Partnerships are all expected to develop strategies to help deliver such a vision. They are expected to develop initiatives to address these issues – identifying and responding to the specific needs of different communities and helping people come together to collectively contribute to society.

I therefore think that whilst the strategic vision set out in the core vision document is both captivating and exciting, this is a gap that it should address – I am not suggesting the

issue has been completely ignored but rather that there is insufficient focus and it is not central to the Black Country vision.

6. DIVERSITY AS AN ADVANTAGE

I recognise the fact that this is primarily a strategic economic development document, attempting to secure revisions to the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy. As such its principal focus must be on the macro economy, its labour market and outline proposals on physical land use; however it is still important that a range of issues concerned with its social make up should also be addressed. A longer term vision for an area cannot avoid the important issues of the ethnic make up of its population and the specific issues facing BME communities; the benefits and opportunities to the economy of a large valuable migrant population with an entrepreneurial spirit, and a spirit of work found in the newly arrived migrants from Eastern Europe and refugees from elsewhere.

Diversity is an advantage – and one which the economic strategy should exploit fully. The second largest concentration of Indians in the UK is located in the West Midland region, of which a significant proportion resides in the Black Country. It is this community, along with the Chinese, which has being most economically successful in the last 20 years and has demonstrated enterprise and entrepreneurialism. The harnessing, exploitation and retention of this economic capacity should be an essential component in the revitalisation of the BC economy. This should be presented as an extremely positive asset.

This issue of ethnic entrepreneurialism and how it can be best supported and developed should be the subject of further work.

Future migration into the UK will be restricted and based on the labour market needs of the economy. Focus on skilled labour will be paramount. However there is a likelihood of further arrivals of migrants into the sub region from Southern and Eastern Europe, both skilled and unskilled, as a result of European expansion. This will be combined with a smaller number of arrivals from the traditional areas of emigration into the UK. Thus the overall ethnic make up of the area will continue to grow and increase as a percentage of the total population. The UK ethnic minority population is expected to double over the course of the next 50 years with many towns and cities having populations of over 50 % BME communities. At least half of the London Boroughs will have majority ethnic minority populations. A similar pattern will occur in the BC authority areas.

This must therefore be presented as a major asset – contributing to the vibrancy of the economy, acting as the engine for revitalisation, enterprise and the growth of new business.

7. POVERTY – AN ISSUE FOR THE BC

Poverty is a key Black Country issue. ***Poverty leads to wasted opportunities and a failure to maximise people's talents.*** It is symptomatic of collective failure and there must be a collective responsibility to secure solutions.

Poor economic performance and a low wage economy are seen as synonymous with poverty. I understand the need for an optimistic and positive presentation for a 30 year vision. ***But it is equally important to set out the levels of deprivation and the scale of the challenges facing the sub region head on. I would therefore be inclined to spell out more directly the evidence of comparative deprivation and the key role that spatial planning plays in ameliorating poverty and under performance.*** Inevitably the delivery of such an exciting vision will require substantial public sector funding – which is still in part allocated on the basis of relative poverty and deprivation scores.

As well as the gap in vision and the need for upfront statements around the benefits of diversity and the challenges of poverty, there are a number of other matters which from the documentation I have read need either to be included as they are omitted or requiring expansion as they seem not to be inadequately addressed:

8. POPULATION GROWTH AND BME ROLE IN THE ECONOMY

There are passing references to BME communities but there is both an inadequate reflection of their importance in the revitalisation of the sub region and a failure to identify and address their specific needs. ***There is little mention of the fundamental role women will play in the sub regional economy*** – a London comparator is that 80% of the new jobs to be created in the London market over the next decade will be serviced by women. I have no figures for the West Midlands Region but I would suspect women will play a similarly important role.

Thus the importance of the value of the growth in the BME population over the last 20 years is understated, a fact significantly masking the true extent of the overall out migration ('white flight'); ***the role that BMEs will play in the sub region's urban renaissance particularly its economy given the age demography of the overall population*** (significant decline in the most economically active age bands within the white male population) and the ***entrepreneurialism of certain sections of the BME communities***; the important role that women will play in the future economy given demography and the anticipated growth in the service sector is given insufficient weighting; and finally that ***future growth will significantly depend on retention of migrant communities as well as attracting new inward migrants from the rest of the UK.***

One key feature of the reconstructed economy is the creation of a significant middle class professional and knowledge based sector, peopled by inward migration from elsewhere within the UK – a balance has to be struck between new inward migrants (is there an assumption that they will be white?) and the retention of newly qualified graduates from HE institutions, who are disproportionately likely to be BMEs and women.

9. HOUSING

It is anticipated that a further 40,000 new households will be formed during the next decade – the vast majority are likely to be BME and yet there is no serious recognition of their housing position over the vision period

There is insufficient understanding of the implications of the future housing needs of the BME communities (including new migrants from Europe and elsewhere). The Jas Bains research is over optimistic. It suggests that all minority communities will over time raise housing aspirations, widening housing choice leading to greater spatial distribution, desegregation of communities through the movement away from traditional settlement areas. It assumes a significant uplift in the economic activities of the Muslim and Caribbean communities in particular - wage and employment levels - for which there is no evidence.

There are three main reasons which prevent the desegregation of communities: the lack of economic success; housing choice - a conscious desire to remain within and close to existing communities and cultural facilities; and a fear of social and physical isolation particularly when a community feels vulnerable.

There is no uniform position for the BME communities against these factors and for the purpose of understanding we need to view them separately.

- **Indian** – the population has been most successful when measured against educational attainment, access to Higher Education, entry into the labour market and economic success more broadly. It has shown the greatest signs of economic integration, with higher rates of economic participation, greater presence in the higher skilled, professional and managerial sectors. As a result it has achieved the greatest levels of housing desegregation from traditional areas of settlement. This is not to say that there is no poverty amongst the Indian population

There is significant evidence of ‘next steps’ movement (but retaining some proximity to culture and religious facilities) as well as extending choice to aspirational housing in suburban outer adjacent areas. The risks with the most economically active section of the Indian population are the possible movement out of the Black Country to outer residential areas, or even movement out of the West Midlands region altogether. Both the Indian and Muslim populations have experience of internal movement within the UK. During the economic recession of the 80s there was some movement to London and the south by Indians and some limited movement to the north and Scotland by the Muslim community.

- **Pakistani and Bangladeshi** – there is clear evidence of further residential intensification over the period of the last two censuses and this is

predicted to continue. The low levels of labour market participation, low wage rates, higher unemployment, and location in the most vulnerable sectors of the economy; reinforced by a greater desire to remain within current ethnic concentration with community and religious facilities prevent significant spatial movement.

Current education attainment suggests limited opportunities for desegregation for newly forming households from existing community concentrations – rather a greater level of intensification causing higher overcrowding in low value housing. Muslim children now do least well in schools (or as poorly as Caribbean and white working class boys) and although participations rates are reasonably high the evidence from the LSC is that it is on low level courses not leading to potential higher level employment. Entry into HE is not at the national average. In terms of future housing choice the evidence from Brendan is most persuasive – the Muslim community will continue to be located in the existing core areas with some expansion into adjacent poor low value housing. There is the further potential of some Muslim households currently located in Birmingham relocating into terraced housing in the southern central core of the Black Country as pressure builds in existing areas.

Social housing appears not a real option, in part by choice but also as a result of limited growth in the sector as focus of public expenditure priorities will be on the improvement of public stock to achieve the decent homes standard.

- ***Caribbean community*** likely to remain significantly within the public sector and the poorer end of owner occupation. There is evidence of a greater degree of desegregations than the Muslim community but population still confined to limited core Black Country areas. Given the higher rates of unemployment, low wage rates, and low educational attainment by boys in school it is highly unlikely that aspirational and higher value housing will be a significant option. There is growing evidence of higher participation rates by the Caribbean female population and increasing entry into the professional and managerial categories. This will have some impact on widening choice.

10. LIKELY TRENDS IF POLICY CHANGES NOT IMPLEMENTED

<p>Indian</p>	<p>Most successful population. Substantial desegregation and spatial distribution. Continued economic success based on high educational attainment and entry rates into labour market. Greatest signs of economic integration, high rates of participation, increasing professionalisation.</p> <p>Widening housing choice into aspirational housing in suburban fringe, next steps housing into higher value. Some risk of outward migration into other English regions particularly London and South. Will still retain a sizeable % of poor located in the traditional central areas. Greater potential for social, economic and residential integration</p>
<p>Chinese</p>	<p>Population smaller than all other groups. Highest educational achievers at key stages 3 and 4, and high rates of entry into HE. Many households engaged in the private sector, often in catering. Increasing evidence of diversification in business activity. Although there are ethnic concentrations they are small outside of London and Liverpool. Housing is therefore desegregated with substantial spatial distribution. Likely to continue</p>
<p>Pakistani and Bangladeshi</p>	<p>Low levels of educational attainment on par with Caribbean and white working class boys. Low levels of economic activity and high levels of unemployment particularly for women. Low wage rates, location in the most vulnerable sectors of the economy.</p> <p>Limited opportunities for desegregation partly by choice (desire to remain within community and close to ethnic facilities) and in part due to economic position – rather greater intensification to continue causing greater levels of overcrowding in low value housing.</p> <p>Location to remain in current areas with some spread into adjacent core locations causing some community tension arising out of competition. Possibility of some movement from existing Birmingham areas into terrace housing in core BC</p> <p>Social housing not an option as social sector continues to decline. Low potential for social, economic and residential integration.</p>
<p>Caribbean</p>	<p>Likely to remain disproportionately in the social sector and the poor end of the private. Greater degree of desegregation than the Muslim community but still located within the core central areas of BC in poor housing. Likely to benefit from the decent homes strategy.</p> <p>Low wages, high rates of unemployment, low educational attainment by boys will mean aspirational and higher value housing will not be an option. Higher participation rates by Caribbean women may have some impact.</p>

New migrants – Europe	Will move into the traditional settlements vacated by more successful earlier migrants. Will buttress the housing areas vulnerable to market failure. Will fulfil roles in the labour market unacceptable to the rest of population.
Poor white	Low educational attainment particularly for boys. High levels of unemployment and low level of economic participation. Where in employment located in the low skilled sectors. Will remain in the central core of the black country in poor, deprived social and private sector housing areas. Likely to be in competition for accommodation with other deprived communities. Very little opportunity for desegregation from existing concentrations. Will benefit from decent homes strategy

11. COMMUNITY RELATIONS

There are serious community relations implications for the Muslim and Caribbean communities in particular, in the Birmingham area (Aston, Handsworth, and Lozelles). If current population rates continue there will be a significant population growth within the Muslim community. This is likely to lead to greater pressure on housing within existing and adjacent areas leading to spread. This spread is likely to create direct competition for housing and community resources within areas currently occupied by the Caribbean population. The tensions which have existed in these areas over the last twenty years are likely to continue with a potential to increase.

Likewise there is no analysis of potential difficulties in the central core areas of the Black Country in the event that there is migration from areas of housing stress by MBE communities, particularly Muslim households. Already there is a significant BNP presence in the central core area.

The purpose of raising this issue is not to create undue alarm – but to suggest *that policy makers in shaping future strategies need to be conscious of potential challenges, enabling them to seek solutions.*

12. COMMUNITY COHESION

As indicated earlier, as well as the need to integrate the objective of community cohesion into the overall vision of the Black Country, it is equally important that the policy work streams in the implementation plan address this issue. There is a need to understand what community cohesion means in a Black Country context, underpinned by a range of policy initiatives which will contribute to the creation of socially and ethnically mixed communities. *A fundamental challenge for all public agencies is how we avoid the difficulties of the past where we have contributed to the social polarisation of BME and poor white communities.*

National government direction provides a partial lead. *However, how we avoid ethnic segregation in the labour market, housing, education and the social sector cannot be left to market forces alone.*

Government thinking takes a dual track. Firstly, greater equal opportunities for all by the dismantlement of the barriers to equal access, levelling the playing field by tackling the structural inequalities in the fields of education, labour and housing markets, health, policing and the criminal justice system; and *secondly*, putting in place measures which create social conditions that help people from all backgrounds to come together and develop a sense of inclusion and shared British identity defined by common opportunities and mutual expectations on all citizens to contribute to society. This requires wide spread social participation, valuing all local cultures, promoting a common sense of belonging, and setting out a vision of a modern Britain.

These above objectives must be central to the vision of the Black Country. *The production of a detailed action plan which addresses these dual objectives is essential.*

13. CREATING EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

The first strand requires public institutions to tackle inequality. The Government has a wide proscription but *I feel the following areas are of greatest concern to the Sub region:*

A). Education

As already indicated some BME groups alongside white working class boys are performing significantly below the national average, particularly African – Caribbean, Pakistani and Bangladeshi children. While it may be the case that each LEA has developed a strategy to tackle under performance, in discussions with a number of stakeholders there is a view that there should be a coherent strategy common across the Black Country, strategically accountable to the Consortium. That strategy should deal with both early years with a focus on early and clear interventions and outcomes related to language acquisition and supporting families and parenting skills; as well as tackling underperformance at key stages 2 and 3 in mainstream school education.

The strategy needs to be aspirational, demonstrating added value, staged and with different strands tackling different aspects of educational failure.

The government has identified the following key areas of focus:

Early years – integrated support for families

Raising attainment in schools

Boosting the number of teacher role models

Increasing participation in higher education

Education champion

Given the importance of the issue for the economy and the revitalisation of the area more generally it is thought that a high profile champion should be found to provide leadership and direction.

The role of the sub region through the Consortium is one of commissioning and accountability and creating a framework of interventions.

16 to 19 Education

A similar approach is required for 16 to 19 education. The LSC is clear that it has a strategy in place to tackle issues of low skills, particularly language and numeracy shortfall. Specific customised programmes for skills enhancement in response to employer needs, developed and delivered in collaboration with employers are seen as an essential way forward. A major concern is to ensure that members of BME communities secure equal access to training provision. An Equality and Diversity Impact Measure has been developed to aid colleges and the LSC to manage performance.

A key concern in 16 to 19 education is that while participation rates remain high for nearly all groups, participation by Muslim children is disproportionately at the lower levels and often not vocationally focused.

B.) Labour Market

It is important to emphasise that there are no uniform patterns in the labour market for all groups. There is significant diversity across the main ethnic groups. Many of the issues in relation to the labour market have already been rehearsed. – higher unemployment rates for the Caribbean population, higher inactivity rates for Pakistani and Bangladeshis; low wage levels and concentration in certain low value industries and activities; lower representation in the professional and managerial sectors.

Government strategy is focused on three themes through the work of the Ethnic Minority Task Force – a cross- departmental ministerial group overseeing the strategy:

Connecting People to Work

- providing guidance for jobseekers and employers
- -piloting new locally led partnerships
- -creating incentives to search for work

Human Capital

- -work force skills development

Equal Opportunities in the Workplace

- use public procurement as significant lever
- -leadership, incentivising business and guidance
- deliver equality targets across public sector

The labour market strategy for the Black Country Consortium should pick up the key areas for activity underpinning the work of the Government Task Force

C.) Health Inequality

The Black Country Consortium recognises that there are issues of health inequality which need to be tackled. ‘*National Standards, Local Action*’ is the performance management framework requiring different needs and inequalities within the local population to be met through a programme of health equity and equality impact assessment.

This will then enable health providers to target action to particular communities.

Particular issues relevant to the sub region are;

- heart disease and the Asian community
- high smoking levels amongst Bangladeshi and Pakistani men
- mental health issues with the Afro –Caribbean
- public perception differences and satisfaction rates amongst ethnic groups

These issues need to be framed into the overall strategy.

D.) Housing

My comments earlier deal with many of the issues which I feel are either missing or need attention. The only additional comments concern equal access to public housing through choice based lettings. Historically social housing has often placed ethnic minorities in the worst, most run down and least attractive public sector estates. Therefore those minorities who remain within social housing will benefit from the *decent homes* strategy.

14. COMMUNITY COHESION

The second strand of government thinking is around the creation of cohesive communities. The action proposed focuses on the following:

- helping young people from different communities grow up together
- embedding citizen education and encouraging active citizens in schools
- faith understanding
- learning and socialising together
- helping migrants to integrate into communities
- helping people from all sections of society understand and celebrate contributions made by other cultures
- increasing opportunities to participate in civic life
- helping ensure racism is unacceptable

15. OTHER MATTERS

There are a number of other concerns arising out of the documentation and the discussion held with stakeholders

A) The Black Country and its economic hinterland

The sub region has a number of cross boundary economic and social inter relationships which must not be ignored. They should particularly be reflected in economic planning. Birmingham is the engine of the West Midlands economy - the second city of the UK. The natural employment patterns and opportunities for some parts of the southern Black Country will be towards the regional capital and some strategically important public services like health in Sandwell are more focused and aligned with the city. Some communities in Dudley may look more naturally for employment and access to retail, leisure and other activity to Birmingham – natural travel to work patterns and therefore housing migration will be into the South west conurbations of the city. Major employment opportunities in corridors to Telford and Cannock could be easily accessible for the residents of Wolverhampton and Walsall.

B) Implementation Plan.

As the Consortium will be seeking substantial sums of public money to deliver major aspects of the strategy it is vitally important that the strategy is underpinned by a robust and deliverable Implementation Plan. It is absolutely necessary to have a vision that is longer term, set over a 30 year period. However for planning purposes there must be staged deliver over the entire period with a very detailed 5 year costed implementation plan to enable securing access to public funding and engaging the private sector. This may be an obvious point but one which I feel necessary to flag at this stage.

C) Public Sector Deliver Capacity and Capability

This is an exciting and embracing vision and strategy – acknowledged by all the experts interviewed. However, the deliver of such a challenging plan not only will require large scale public sector financial investment, but also considerable professional expertise, capability and capacity within public sector organisations- Local Authorities, LSPs, LSC, FE and HE institutions, and Government Office. Expertise around housing clearance, and CPOs, inward investment and the attraction of major private sector high value activity; transportation planning and regeneration; cultural quarter developments and the utilisation of the sub regions natural waters; drafting bids to access European programmes; community consultation and engagement. Much of this expertise will exist within organisations but the *scale* of the expertise required will be extensive. A serious audit of what is required set against what exists is important in managing risk.

D) Sub Regional co-ordination and possible delivery mechanisms

The Consortium has a vital role to play in ensuring coordination, performance management, and holding institutions to account. It will need to be adequately resourced to fulfil such a task. It will need to look very carefully at infrastructural requirements such as programme and performance management and development of new sub regional initiatives; it may be possible to create virtual teams from existing public and private

sector institutions. It is a matter which you need to consider as you secure possible indications from the Government Office. From personal experience I am aware that such matters often get pushed down the agenda, to be regretted later. Another important issue worthy of consideration is more radical – the creation of sub regional delivery vehicles for certain aspects of the delivery plan e.g. housing, land assembly and sites development, and cultural quarters and physical environmental improvements around canals and waterways.

E) Lacking economic drivers particularly from the private sector.

There is a strong view that the sub region lacks a strong private sector capable of driving change and attracting new inward investment. I am not sure how you compensate for this, but it is an issue that has been raised with me.

And finally:

F) Infrastructure of services to support change.

The strategy will need to take into account the need for major infrastructure of services which will be required as the strategy is delivered. The need for schools, social services, youth and other provision will need to be planned for as part of the strategy.

Gurbux Singh
1st March 2006