

A CASE STUDY FROM THE SW OF LNPs ADDING VALUE TO THEIR LEP

Summary: The LNPs from Devon, Somerset, and Plymouth recently joined forces to work closely with the Heart of the South West LEP to draw up the Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) for Devon and Somerset. Environmental opportunities and threats to future economic growth were identified with the LEP and five priority work streams will now be jointly taken forward. These are water; natural infrastructure; sustainable food production; low carbon; and enterprises reliant on a high quality environment.

The SEP states: “Our environment is a key economic asset; therefore growth needs to be responsible. Our environmental assets support our traditional industries and provide opportunities for ‘green growth’.” The LNPs are committed to work with the HoTSW LEP to deliver responsible growth for Devon and Somerset.

1. Water

“Protecting our communities, businesses and infrastructure from flooding is a **pre-condition for growth**” (SEP). Environment Agency data shows that across the Heart of the SW, there are 27,850 residential and 13,720 Commercial properties at significant risk of flooding by rivers or sea¹. Infrastructure is also at risk, including vital road and rail links and community assets. The LNPs will work closely with the HotSW LEP to reduce the impact of flooding, for example, by restoring the natural capacity of river catchments to cope with floods via wetlands, floodplains and riverbank woodlands.

2. ‘Natural’ infrastructure

“We put forward our balanced approach, which recognisesthe challenge to stimulate growth in both rural and urban areas whilst protecting and enhancing our outstanding natural environment” (SEP). The LNP will work closely with the LEP to develop natural assets as part of the infrastructure in and around growth areas (e.g. Exeter and East Devon Growth Point, Plymouth), which enable cities to grow sustainably. Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) are cost-effective ways to reduce flood risk². LNPs will use their valuable expertise in developing SUDS and natural assets for maximum economic, environmental and community (including workforce) benefit (e.g. time ‘in nature’ promotes recovery from stress and attention fatigue, and has positive effects on mood, concentration and self-discipline³).

3. Sustainable food production

“Devon’s food economy is larger in relative terms than the food economy of most other English counties, accounting for 13% of GVA in the county compared to 7.6% for Great Britain”⁴ and is “one of the bedrock sectors” (SEP). Over 70% of Devon’s land area is farmed - of which three quarters is grassland. Over 18,500 people work directly in over 8,000 commercial farm businesses.⁵ An estimated 15% of land in Devon is HNV (High Nature Value) farming, which provides important environmental (e.g. carbon sequestration, flood mitigation, biodiversity) and cultural goods and services (maintenance of cultural historic landscape, husbandry skills, field boundaries, buildings, etc.).^{6,7} The LNPs will advocate the promotion of high quality artisan food producing businesses, and the application of research and skills development in sustainable land use practices.

4. Low carbon

“Our wider low carbon sector continues to blossom, with employment in the renewable energy sector expected to grow by an additional 1,300 jobs by 2020⁸” (SEP) The LNPs will support the use of natural assets for energy generation, including hydro, marine renewables, wood fuel and other biomass. For example, the wood fuel economy has the potential to generate an additional £4million GVA and 74 jobs.⁹ 11.5% of Devon is woodland, covering 77,000 hectares and 88% of this is in private ownership. However, 60% of Devon’s woodlands are under managed. Innovation in this sector could increase local employment and bring multiple benefits, by encouraging co-operative action by groups of farmers and owners of small woodlands to bring their woodlands into sustainable management, and to promote the use of home-grown wood as a source of renewable energy.

5. Enterprises reliant on high quality environment

“Whilst much of our employment/housing growth is anticipated to be in *strategic urban sites* that can bring together the ingredients for growth at scale, we must also look to how place based opportunities can support rural growth. This is where our work to pilot *rural workspace*, alongside superfast broadband infrastructure will be particularly beneficial. *Enhancing our environmental assets*, which

already act as a magnet for visitors, residents and investment has the potential to benefit both urban and rural communities and create jobs” (SEP). The LNPs will support investment in specific rural areas which have high value natural assets and potential for economic growth by attracting enterprises that rely on the high quality of the natural environment. Investment in innovative projects creates additional employment in a range of different businesses, provide skills development, and diversification opportunities for farmers.

References:

¹ Environment Agency – National Flood Risk Assessment (NaFRA), Data 2014

² Duffy, A, Jefferies, C, Waddell, G, Shanks, G, Blackwood, D & Watkins, A , 2008. A cost comparison of traditional drainage and SUDS in Scotland. *Water Science & Technology*, 57, 1451-1459

³ Health Council of the Netherlands 2004.

⁴ Loble, M, Trail Thomson, J, Barr, D, Review of Devon’s Food Economy, CRPR Research paper No 34. 2012

⁵ NFU

⁶ Cumulus Consultants, High Nature Value farmland in Rural Development policy Culm Grasslands Case Study, 2011

⁷ European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism, High Nature Value Farmland in Devon Overview of main findings, draft 24/03/11

⁸ Regen SW- personal communication

⁹ Derived from national estimates by the Forestry Commission

<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/newsrele.nsf/WebPressReleases/071D85E331BEDA69802576E0005083AE>