



The countryside charity Bedfordshire

Briefing Document - Development Corporations

An expressway for economic growth and housing or a bypass around local democracy?

The recent government policy paper, 'Planning for the Future', signaled their intention to examine and develop the case for up to four new development corporations in the Ox-Cam Arc, in or around Bedford, St Neots / Sandy, Cambourne and Cambridge.

CPRE Bedfordshire have been looking at the opportunities and threats posed by these quangos and who they really help.

In October 2019 Robert Jenrick MP, Minister for Housing, Communities and Local Government, announced a 'technical' consultation inviting views on how to deliver reform legislation to ensure development corporations have the up-to-date powers they need.

The consultation document, Development Corporation Reform, <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/development-corporation-reform-technical-consultation> focusses on three main areas of potential change:

- attracting more investment and the greater private sector involvement in the leadership of development corporations
- broadening the scope of development corporations to enable them to operate across multi planning authority areas to deliver new settlements and/or regeneration
- extending the powers of all development corporations to enable them to exercise the full range of powers of a planning authority, both plan-making and development management

Development corporations are seen as a means to streamline the delivery of large-scale development, including urban extensions and new settlements. Although one of the new models aims to provide a stronger role for local leadership, the new style development corporations will be expected to find ways of overcoming resistance of some local councils where multi authority cooperation is required.

Last autumn the Minister launched a development corporation competition offering £10m of seed funding to help councils create up to 10 development corporations across England.

The criteria for the competition encourages bids that can demonstrate a greater role for the private sector and private funding streams.

Sir George Iacobescu, chief executive of Canary Wharf Group, will advise the housing secretary on which projects should be awarded funding as part of the new plan.

One programme highlighted in planning journals as potentially benefiting from the new approach is the Oxford, Milton Keynes and Cambridge Arc, promoted by the government, in which an anticipated one million new homes could be built – equivalent to 20 cities the size of Cambridge.

Development Corporations could provide a way to overcome perceived obstacles where not all local councils buy in to the government's vision.

Whilst CPRE Bedfordshire recognises the need for urgent action to address economic inequalities and housing shortages, we are very concerned that this is another example where the government's fixation on bold gestures, big numbers and market-led solutions belies their failure to get to grips with the real nature of the critical issues that need to be addressed.

There is a very great danger that these new style development corporations will focus government attention on the wrong priorities and, by seeking to maximise the contributions of private investors and to restrain the proper role of democratically elected bodies, fail to provide jobs and housing where they are needed most.

Published 08/06/2020