

enterprise partnerships (LEPs), saying there needs to be obligation within strategic planning.

‘Our view is, said Mark Prisk, minister for business and enterprise, that where Whitehall engages with local authorities on a particular issue, there might be some funding available through a contractual agreement with central government. As to whether the partnerships would receive any basic funding to help them operate, he added: ‘We have to get away from this idea that economic development is all about funding from Whitehall.’

The Centre for Cities think tank has always recommended that economic priorities should be set at the level of ‘natural economic areas’ – smaller than regions, but bigger than single local authority boundaries. It supports the introduction of LEPs and believes that they could give cities the powers they need to shape their local economy. LEPs are able to bid for part of the new £1bn Regional Growth Fund, and the Government is also pledging funds (£5m in 2011/12, £10m in 2012/13, £15m in 2013/14 and £20 in 2014/15) to deliver ‘open source planning’. This as yet rather undefined concept appears to refer to a series of concepts which involve the abolition of the regional strategies and the creation of new local and neighbourhood plans. But concern remains about the lack of detail concerning models for the ways in which top-down planning would meet neighbourhood planning, and there have been calls for a link to national policy.

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANS

The government’s local growth white paper confirmed that neighbourhood plans will form a tier of planning below the local development plan. The plans will need to respect the overall national presumption in favour of sustainable development as well as other local priorities, such as the positioning of transport links and meeting housing need. The Planning Officers Society noted that urban neighbourhoods in particular may be difficult to define. It stressed the need to consult local people and businesses early in the plan-making process to define neighbourhood boundaries. ‘Nevertheless, neighbourhood plans do have a place in the planning framework,’ said POS spokesman John Silvester.



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Savills head of planning and regeneration, Roger Hepher, said of the plans that ‘a potentially anarchic concept has been tempered by the need to respect local and national strategic priorities’. Town and Country Planning Association chief executive Kate Henderson added: ‘Local and neighbourhood plans will need to have regard to national policy and establish the key strategic framework on infrastructure, as well as other local strategic priorities.’

A survey of local authority intentions, published in October in the planning press, assessed how they intend to handle the new frameworks and the imminent abolition of targets. While less than one quarter of the surveyed sample planned to review housing targets, many more were preparing to revise employment targets, potentially upsetting the carefully worked out balance that the regional strategies aimed for. Many planners, including some who support localism, feel that the current policy vacuum will delay the already geological pace at which many Local Development Frameworks are advancing.

Many placemaking professionals, in the UK and beyond, are wondering whether a localist approach can be relied upon to produce balanced decisions on new development that factor in community need: efficient utilities, green space, mixed use and design quality, and still act in the overall interests of society