

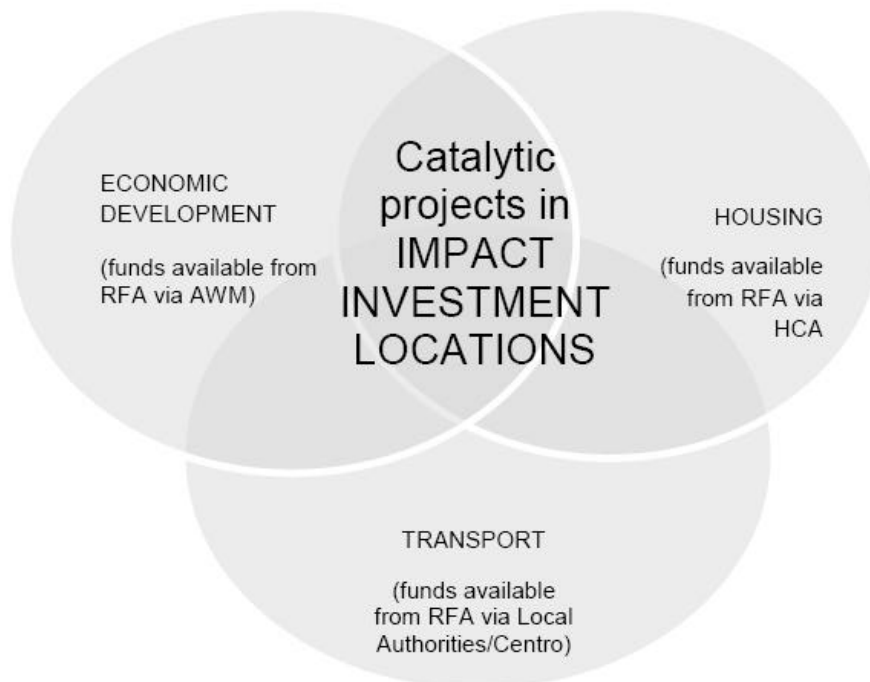
WEST MIDLANDS REGIONAL FUNDING ADVICE – ROUND 2

Briefing Note Four

January 2009

This is the fourth in a series of Briefing Notes on Regional Funding Advice. Government has asked all regions to submit 'Regional Funding Advice' against indicative budgets for economic development, transport and housing and regeneration for the period up to 2018-19. Regional Funding Advice (RFA) will cover public investment in the region of £1bn per year and must be submitted by the end of February 2009 and be no longer than 35 pages.

Following the initial advice of the 'shadow' Joint Strategy and Investment Board [13 November] on the parameters of the RFA document (contained in Briefing Note Two) the JS&IB's meeting on 12 December discussed the emerging approach to the document (contained in briefing Note 3). At its meeting on 16 January the JS&IB were updated by the RFA Advisory Group about the process, via a 'Scrutiny' meeting (09/01/09), of examining projects in key parts of the region - the Impact Investment Locations. Information on these projects will be used in the RFA to demonstrate real, local-level integration between the themes of the RFA. The diagram below indicates the relationships between the three expenditure blocks for RFA and the how catalytic projects in Impact Investment Locations sit within them, demonstrating integration in the RFA:



The JS&IB was pleased with progress and the manner in which all partners are working together to discuss the delivery of projects within the context of the overall Strategic Priorities –and regionwide spending -previously agreed for the RFA.

JS&IB reiterated the point that the process we have embarked upon is to test and accelerate the delivery of projects as these are projects which support our collective strategic objectives. It is therefore not a bidding process or one which entails revisiting the priority of schemes.

JS&IB recognised the real value of the approach now begun, and intend to use it to ensure that good practice - notably in project definition and management – can be identified, understood and shared around the region. This will improve the delivery of major projects throughout the West Midlands. By this means, public resources will be used to best effect, and the optimum conditions for private investment will be secured, particularly looking to the economic upturn.

The JS&IB was advised by the RFA Advisory Group that more information was needed on most projects before final recommendations can be made over which schemes should be promoted in the current round of Regional Funding Advice. Indeed, additional information on transport and LSC capital priorities has only recently been made available to the RFA Advisory Group.

As a result, further information will be collected through consultants [Davis Langdon] from project proposers over the next two weeks, in preparation for a further discussion at the JS&IB on 30 January.

The JS&IB also met the Regional Minister Ian Austin MP on 16 January. Nick Paul and Roger Phillips, with members of the RFA Advisory Group, updated the Minister on the ambitions the region has for RFA, the process being adopted to draw up the submission and the effort being put in by regional partners to give certainty over deliverability. The update concluded with a request for the Minister to consider the following:-

- that the Minister supports us in securing regional flexibility and discretion over RFA funds coming into the region.
- that the RFA include an element of over programming – circa 30 – 40%.
- That Minister considers hosting a meeting in the region with senior civil servants. This would provide the opportunity to discuss our submission and how civil servants could work with us to take forward the programmes, projects and activities we have proposed.

The Minister expressed support for these propositions and his encouragement for the progress on work undertaken to date.

The process of drafting the RFA document is now underway, based upon the advice from the JS&IB meetings in November and December and the outcomes of the Scrutiny session and ongoing consultancy work. Significant high level budget and programme information is obtained from AWM, Regional Housing Partnership and Regional Transport Partnership, and the document must identify integration between them [and skills] where appropriate. The detail of Impact Investment Locations must also be weaved into the document – to demonstrate local project integration as part of the region's comprehensive economic development and regeneration activity.

Finally, an RFA Regional Briefing event was held on Monday 19 January. The briefing was intended to provide an opportunity to share with interested parties the direction of travel for the RFA submission and provided an opportunity for questions and discussion. Led by JS&IB and RFA Advisory group members and attended by over 50 people, it achieved this objective.

Trevor Cornfoot

SNR Transition Team