

Monitoring the Regional Spatial Strategy Stakeholder Conference

Workshop Feedback Note – Prosperity for All.

High Technology Corridors (HTC)

There was a feeling that not much was happening with these – perhaps a lost opportunity?

The importance of retaining QinetiQ in Malvern was emphasised. Quality of environment/life was an important factor in retaining/attracting staff.

It was recognised that it was unrealistic to expect the A38 corridor to become something similar to the M4 corridor around Reading overnight, given amount of public investment in that area (Aldermaston).

It was suggested that the A38 corridor had been a reaction to the Longbridge situation – a broader-based approach to promoting new technology in the region was needed.

General agreement that there was a need to refresh/reinvigorate the policy.

Logistics

Logistics provision was recognised as a critical issue.

It was questioned whether the requirement for regional logistics sites to have rail access was necessary/realistic. At Hams Hall there was not much connection between the railhead and the RLS – although the situation was different at DIRFT.

It was recognised that there was a chance that sites for an additional RLS would be in the Green Belt.

It was also noted that logistics provision would take place in other locations than the RLS

Offices

There were concerns about the need for a regional balance in employment provision – need for sufficient provision in Shrewsbury/Hereford from a sustainability point of view.

There was also a concern that the quality of the built environment/ listed buildings should not be sacrificed in favour of more office development in town centres.

The impact of homeworking on the need for additional offices was raised – but it was also noted that there were many jobs which could not be undertaken from home.

Agriculture

It was suggested that the RSS gives insufficient emphasis to agriculture which remains a key industry in many parts of the area – and has spin off benefits for other activities such as tourism.

It was also suggested that a positive impact of the credit crunch could be an upturn in the agricultural sector which had been under pressure for several years.

Other Points

The importance of understanding travel to work patterns and how these may change was noted.

It was questioned whether loss of employment land was an issue for the RSS – it is a process that cannot continue for ever, but there does not appear to be a serious problem at present.

It would be important to understand the timelags in bringing forward additional capacity as a result of the credit crunch (e.g. 2 year delay in the housebuilding industry).

Feedback to Plenary Session

The following points were made:

1. HTC's – refresh and re-invigorate the policy
2. Logistics – need for increased provision now a critical issue
3. Office markets – market strong in Birmingham. How can markets be strengthened in the other 27 strategic centres in the region?
4. Loss of employment land to other uses ... not too much of a worry at the moment.
5. Impact of the Credit Crunch .. need to prepare and retain capacity for the rebound.
6. Other thoughts – implications for homeworking. Agriculture – can we anticipate a turn-around in fortunes?