

// Partnerships could become statutory consultees on applications in England's regional cities // Move included in government plan

# LEPs may win formal planning

By Colin Marrs

Council and business-led local enterprise partnerships (LEPs) could be given a formal role in the planning system for the first time by becoming statutory consultees on applications in England's eight largest regional cities outside London, the government has announced.

Last week, deputy prime minister Nick Clegg included the proposal in a menu of powers that could be devolved from central government to England's core cities.

The cities – Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Liverpool, Newcastle, Nottingham, Manchester and Sheffield – will now negotiate individual deals with Whitehall to take on combinations of the powers.

A prospectus published by Clegg says that LEPs could be granted statutory consultee status in order to “ensure better strategic planning across cities and their LEP areas”.

The document also promises “more planning freedoms for cities, including devolving non-planning consents where cities can reduce impact on business”, but contained no further detail on this proposal.

Until now, LEPs have had no formal role in the planning system and the government has refused to prescribe planning roles for the partnerships.

Its local growth white paper, published in November 2010, said that the coalition envisaged LEPs’ planning role as including “making representation on the development of national planning policy and ensuring business is involved in the development and consideration of strategic planning applications”.

A survey carried out by *Planning*

in February found that, at the time, only two LEPs had firm intentions to lead on strategic economic planning (*Planning*, 25 February, p6).

A Royal Town Planning Institute spokesman said: “LEPs should have a role in the planning system and the prospect of statutory status will assist in delivering growth and providing a larger than local view of development. But the real step forward would be allowing them to make plans.”

He said the mechanism of giving a non-corporate body, such as an LEP, statutory status in the planning system would have to be worked out.

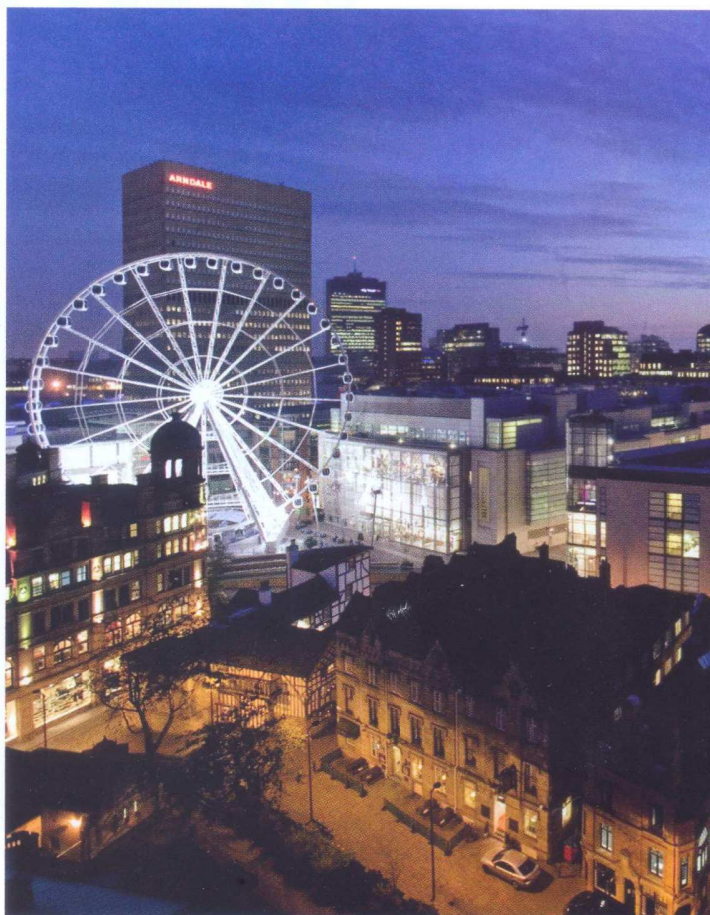
In all, Clegg unveiled a package of 21 funds and powers, which he said would empower cities to make decisions to encourage growth. He said: “Whitehall should not be like an overbearing parent, throwing money at cities but refusing to let them stand on their own two feet.”

Other powers that could be devolved include control over transport spending and commissioning. And cities could also be given one consolidated capital pot, rather than multiple funding streams from different departments.

In addition, cash from the Regional Growth Fund could be used to fund reductions in business rates granted by cities.

Lord Heseltine, chairman of the panel advising the coalition on how the Regional Growth Fund should be spent, and a backer of powerful city mayors, hailed the announcement as “transformational”.

He told *Planning*: “Over half a century, the powers of local politicians have been eroded and this announcement recognises that the



cities are economic powerhouses.”

To win powers, the coalition said that cities must demonstrate “strong, accountable leadership, an ambitious agenda for the economic future of their area, effective decision-making structures and private sector involvement and leadership”.

It said that cities that vote in favour next year of having elected mayors would be “well placed” to meet these tests, but did not rule out devolving

powers to cities where referendum decided against electing a mayor.

Edward Cooke, executive director of membership body the British Council of Shopping Centres, welcomed the powers, but warned that because mayors’ power will be limited to city areas, they will not be contiguous with those of wider LEP areas.

He said: “There is a danger that the political mechanisms become convoluted. One thing we have to

## LEP TIMELINE

How the government  
has boosted LEPs’  
powers

CCC  
MAY  
2010

The coalition agreement announces the intention to replace regional development agencies with a network of LEPs

CCC  
JUNE  
2010

LEPs will have to fund their own day-to-day running costs, the government announces

CCC  
JULY  
2010

LEPs are handed a “lead role” in coordinating funding through the coalition’s planned £1 billion Regional Growth Fund

CCC  
JAN  
2011

The coalition government launches a £4 million fund aimed at boosting the LEPs’ capacity

CCC  
MAR  
2011

Communities secretary Eric Pickles reveals that will play a lead role in deciding the local powers of enterpri



plan to devolve range of powers to core cities

# role in cities



## FIVE NEW POWERS THE CORE CITIES COULD GET

**1** A single consolidated capital pot, rather than multiple funding streams from different Whitehall departments

**2** Power to fund business rate discounts using cash from the Regional Growth Fund

**3** Control over strategic transport decisions through devolved funding

**4** Funding powers and control of land currently held by government housing and regeneration body the Homes & Communities Agency

**5** More planning freedoms, "including devolving non-planning consents where cities can reduce impact on business"

Manchester: one of eight core cities

get our heads around is at what level do the different responsibilities sit? With the mayor, the LEP, city councils or central government? That has to be clearly articulated."

But Heseltine said: "I have no doubt that it will be perfectly possible for the mayor to influence and articulate the interests of the wider area."

Andrew Carter, director of policy and research at think-tank Centre for Cities, said that having an elected

mayor could help bring "kudos" to LEPs if the political relationship between them is clear. But he warned: "The extent of devolution depends on other departments accepting a loss of some of their responsibilities. In the past, this has not always been easy."

Unlocking Growth in Cities can be viewed via [PlanningResource.co.uk/go/referencesection](http://PlanningResource.co.uk/go/referencesection)

See Anthony Fyson, p17

**MAY 2011** The government performs a U-turn and allocates £5 million for LEP start-up costs

**OCT 2011** LEPs are given a role in administering new local infrastructure funds intended to restart work on stalled developments

**DEC 2011** LEPs covering England's core cities could be allowed to bid to become statutory consultees on planning applications

## Row erupts over plans for airport in South East

By Susanna Gillman

A row over locations for a potential new airport in the South East has broken out after the leader of Kent County Council suggested that it could be sited in Essex.

Council leader Paul Carter made the comment following the government signalling in last month's Autumn Statement that it is looking at all options for aviation expansion apart from a third runway at Heathrow.

Proposals have already been put forward by London mayor Boris Johnson for a new airport hub on reclaimed land in the Thames estuary. Meanwhile, architect Lord Foster has unveiled plans to build a terminal on the Isle of Grain in Kent.

Carter told *Planning* he is opposed to the Isle of Grain option as it would severely affect nearby residents. But he mooted a second runway

for Gatwick, with a fast rail link to Heathrow, or a new airport hub on the north side of the Thames near the London Gateway port in Thurrock.

However, his proposal has angered Thurrock Council leader John Kent, who said that Carter was "offensive" to make such a remark without talking to the local authority first, especially as both authorities sit on the South East local enterprise partnership.

But a spokesman for the body said that the issue should not affect the partnership. "There will be times in all partnerships that not everyone has the same view," he said.

"Our initial focus is on securing the growth of our existing airports such as Southend and Manston. Longer term, we have to consider fundamental questions around a new hub airport, particularly its scale and its precise location."

## IN BRIEF

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There will be at least two further rounds of bidding for **Regional Growth Fund** cash following the government's decision to add £1 billion to the £1.4 billion pot, deputy prime minister Nick Clegg has announced. Clegg said the next round would open in February.

Referendums on whether to create **elected mayoralties** will go ahead in England's largest 11 cities outside London on 3 May, decentralisation minister Greg Clark has confirmed. The ballots are now scheduled to be held in Birmingham, Bradford, Bristol, Coventry, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham, Sheffield and Wakefield.

The London Assembly's economy, culture and sport committee has written to the government requesting ongoing funding for the areas hit by **rioting and looting** in the summer. The committee welcomed funding announced by the capital's mayor in response to the riots, but called for long-term support.

Cities in the Greater South East of England outside of London contributed 27 per cent of **UK jobs growth** during the ten years up to the recession, according to new statistics. A report published by the Centre for Cities think-tank says that the group of 15 cities boast strong population growth and above average employment rates.

Proposals to lift restrictions on installing **overhead broadband lines** are being consulted on by ministers. The government said the proposals are intended to reduce the cost of rolling out broadband across the country.