

The New World of Joint Strategic Plans

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The journey back to effective strategic planning

2016

Government Technical Consultation highlights *“the advantages of strong strategic plan-making across local planning authority boundaries, in particular in addressing housing need across housing market areas”*. **Local Plan Expert Group** identifies challenges around strategic planning as key barrier to local plan preparation and growth and recommends changes to provide ‘more teeth’ to the Duty to Cooperate, most of which have subsequently been taken forward by Government

Government set out initial proposals for planning reform in **Housing White Paper** - new ‘strategic’ local plan option preferably with *“...more and more local authorities working together to produce a strategic plan over a wider area on the functional economic geography that is right for their part of the world...”*; more robust approach to be introduced to Duty to Cooperate through mandatory ‘statements of common ground’ (to include county councils) and new examination ‘tests of soundness’. Further details set out in the later **Right Homes in Right Places** consultation.

2017

Neighbourhood Planning Act 2017 provides statutory requirement to set out ‘strategic priorities’ through planning ‘portfolio’, more LP intervention powers and new powers to allow the Secretary of State to direct the preparation of a joint local plan where this would *“facilitate the more effective planning of the development and use of land in the area”*.

Joint working over strategic areas key criterion on Government decisions on **Housing Infrastructure Fund** and **Planning Delivery Fund** aimed at supporting *“greater collaboration between councils, a more strategic approach to planning, housing and infrastructure...”*

SoS LP intervention process initiated for first 15 LPAs- SoS decisions to be *“informed by the wider planning context in each area (specifically the extent to which authorities are working cooperatively to put strategic plans in place)”*.

Need for more effective strategic and infrastructure planning emphasised in wider Government announcements with **Budget 2017** endorsing Cam-MK-Ox Corridor and proposals for new ‘strategic infrastructure tariff’ (SIT) and 5 new towns in South East; and **Industrial Strategy White Paper** emphasising support for *“greater collaboration between councils, a more strategic approach to planning housing and infrastructure...”*

2018

First new style **Joint Strategic Plan submitted for examination** (West of England) with four others being prepared. Other LAs considering a move to the new strategic plans on joint basis.

Revised NPPF published July 2018 confirming support for joint plans and development plan ‘portfolio’

In September, Kit Malthouse emphasises the importance of strategic planning in government funding decisions

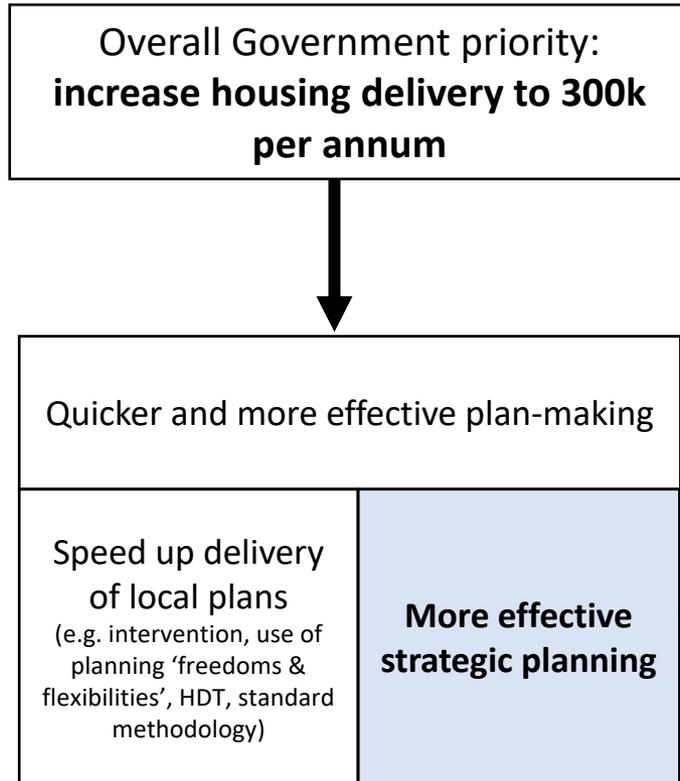
Strategic planning 2019

"Our general thrust is for groups of local authorities to come together to form a kind of strategic partnership and vision for a particular region or area, fundamentally so that we can fund the infrastructure that's related to it."

"We are unable to put the infrastructure that's required through the [Housing Infrastructure Fund] against proposals unless they have that kind of pan-regional or cross-area coordination."

Kit Malthouse, Minister for Housing, September 2018

Strategic planning 2019



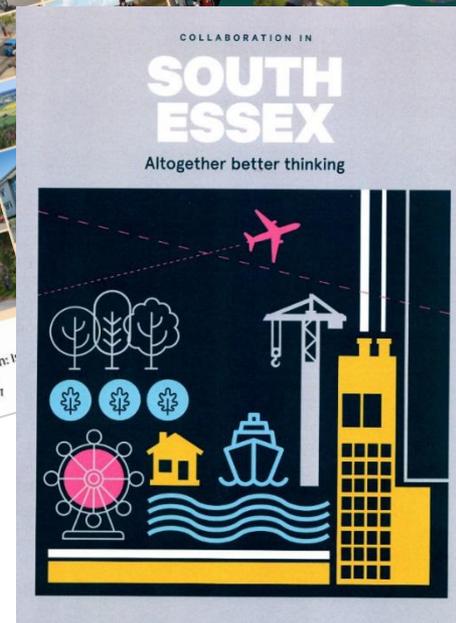
- New **local plan 'portfolio'** approach introduced with emphasis on **joint planning**
- Duty to Cooperate strengthened through **Statement of Common Ground** and **new tests of soundness** to ensure DtC is 'duty to agree' - Strategic policies to be *"informed by agreements with other authorities"* and *"based on effective joint working on cross-boundary strategic matters that have been dealt with rather than deferred, as evidenced by the statement of common ground"*.
- **Strategic Infrastructure Tariff** to be introduced - but can only be levied by combined authorities or through statutory joint local plan committee (as currently proposed).
- Increasing number of **housing and growth deals** with more effective joint planning a key part.
- **Fiscal incentives** offered for more effective strategic planning through government infrastructure & capacity funding.
- Strategic planning **key factor in government agency priorities** e.g. Highways/ Homes England.
- Strategic approach to transport beginning to emerge **through Sub-national transport bodies**
- Strong influence beginning to emerge from **Local Industrial Strategies** that will set out 20 year strategies, including some spatial priorities
- **National spatial priorities** begin to emerge from Government e.g. CAMKOX Corridor, Thames Estuary, Northern Powerhouse, new towns (in South East)

Joint Strategic Plans

Current practice

Joint Strategic Plans 2019

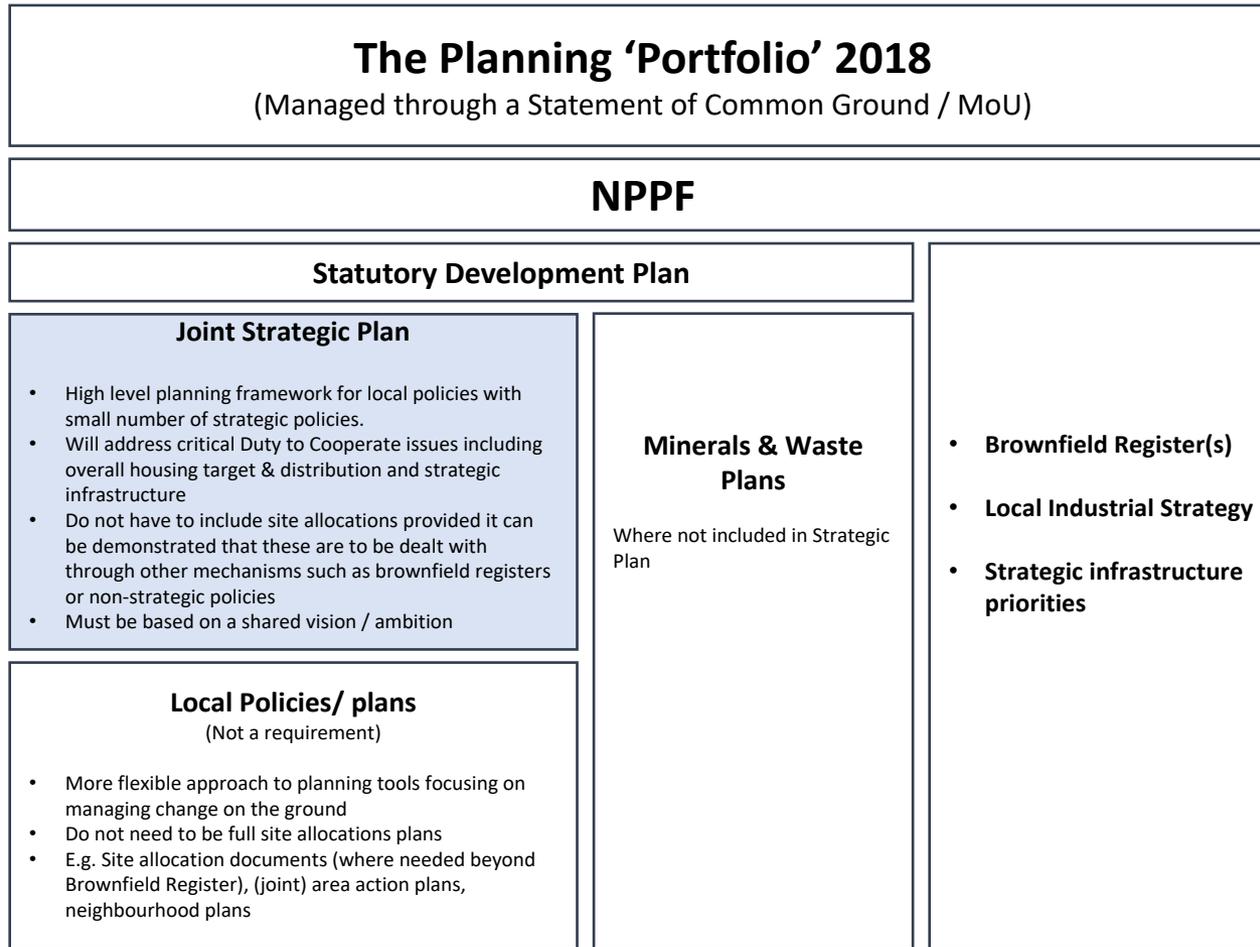
- Five groups of authorities preparing new style Joint Strategic Plans: Greater Exeter, Oxfordshire, South Essex, South West Herts, West of England
- Long term strategic investment strategies with statutory status being prepared within wider growth ambitions.
- All are changing the spatial strategy over the long term (in most cases to 2050)
- All are S28 joint plans but with no joint decision-making (S29 committee) therefore decisions are made by individual LPAs. In two-tier areas county councils are part of governance but have no decision-making responsibility.



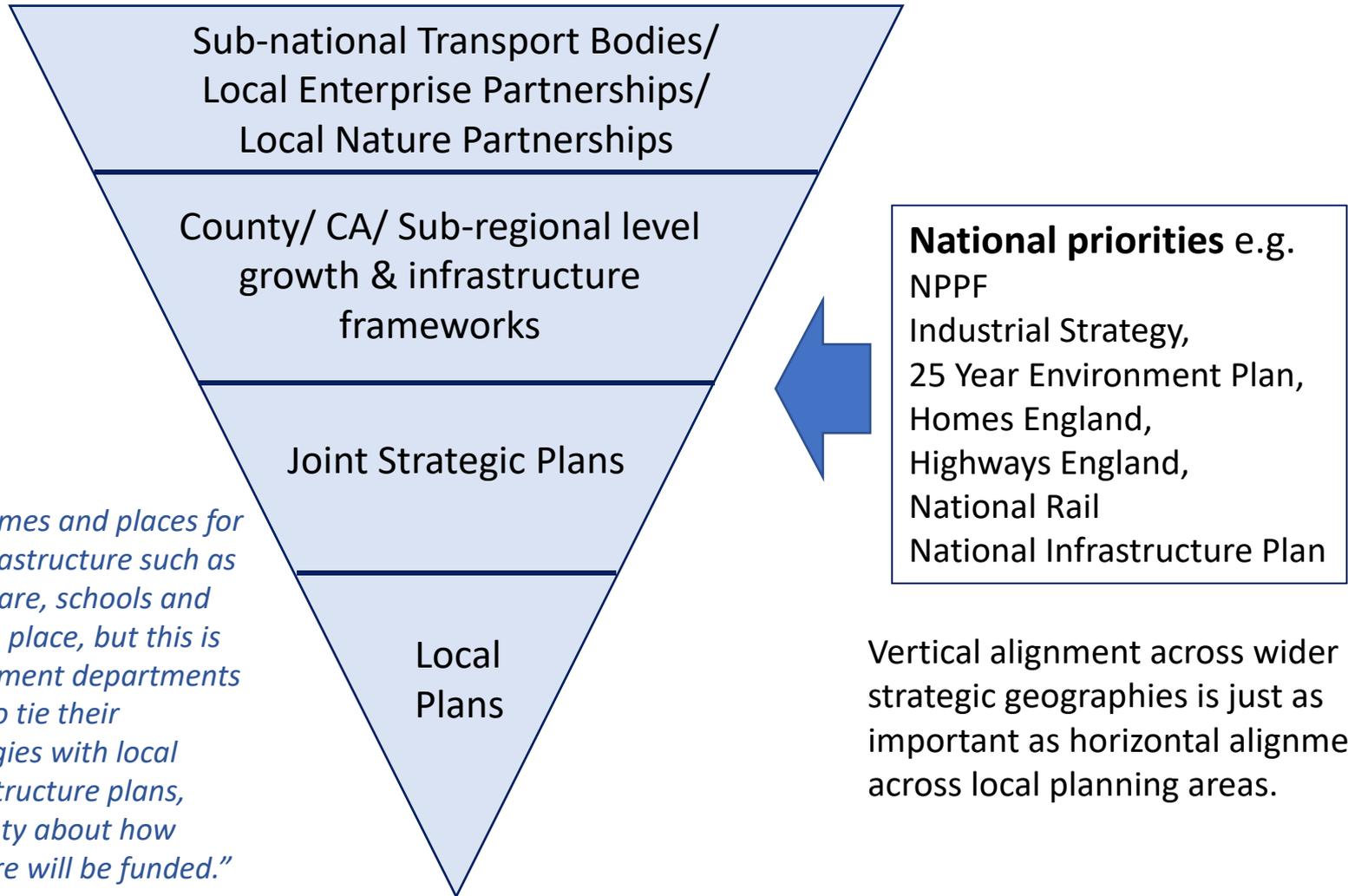
The incentives for Joint strategic plans

- A more **coordinated and focused approach to investment** and supporting growth, with priority given to strategic solutions, for example, transport growth corridors and new communities
- Considered to be **only way of getting over very high Duty to Cooperate hurdle** provided by Government's new approach to strategic planning.
- To provide more opportunities - **bigger spatial canvas**- for effective place-shaping and deliver sound and legally compliant planning frameworks – many areas facing significantly increased challenges around housing provision since 2012 therefore different spatial options now needed (some prompted by DtC failures).
- A **move back to 'place' and away from 'planning by numbers'**, recognising that long term spatial priorities must be fully aligned with infrastructure, economic priorities (and other priorities e.g. health, environment).
- Opportunities to **maximise investment and funding** across sub-regional areas (follow the money) – e.g. through government devolution and growth deals, government infrastructure and capacity funding bids, and making more effective/ efficient use of local infrastructure funding through pooling. Clear winners where statutory joint plans being prepared.
- Challenges around the **long term sustainable growth of cities**, particularly where the administrative boundaries are tightly bound and there is a need to rely on the support of neighbouring areas.
- Delivery of **immediate and potentially significant cost savings** as a result of a combined plan-making process (e.g. examinations; public consultation and stakeholder engagement; evidence-base) and a more efficient and effective use of staff resources and expertise.

Joint Strategic Plans 2019



Joint Strategic Plans: Ensuring integration



"To create new homes and places for people to live, infrastructure such as transport, healthcare, schools and utilities must be in place, but this is difficult as government departments are not required to tie their investment strategies with local authorities' infrastructure plans, creating uncertainty about how some infrastructure will be funded."

Vertical alignment across wider strategic geographies is just as important as horizontal alignment across local planning areas.

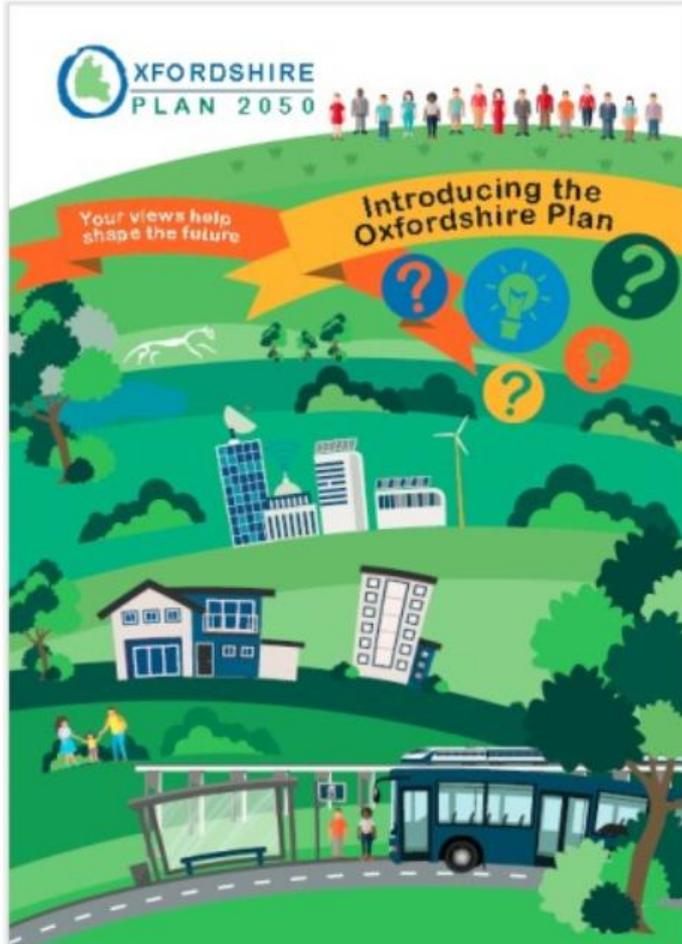
West of England Joint Spatial Plan



<https://www.jointplanningwofe.org.uk/consult.ti>

- In 2013 recognition that ‘effective strategic planning mechanism’ was joint plan
- 4 LPAs (all UAs) working within ‘voluntary’ governance arrangements - final decision-making remains with individual LAs
- Strategic focus & planning scope – only 7 policies, key diagram with no site allocations
- Sets general extent of Green Belt and identifies areas where detailed boundary need to be reviewed to accommodate strategic growth.
- Supported by more detailed DPDs prepared in parallel (but one stage behind to reflect JSP)
- Joint transport strategy prepared alongside JSP
- Will be first to be tested at Examination (Hearings due to start in May 2019).
- First phase housing deal agreed with Government to secure delivery of infrastructure and strategic site & includes £3m to establish strategic delivery team.

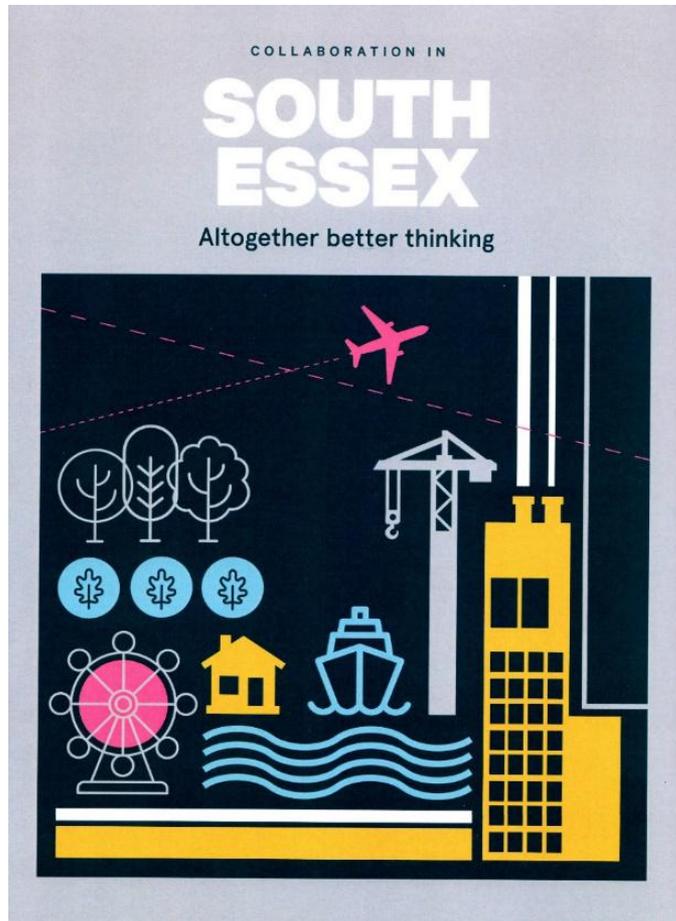
Oxfordshire Joint Strategic Spatial Plan



<https://oxfordshireplan.org/>

- Oxfordshire Authorities (5 districts and 1 county) have been working closely for a number of years to manage strategic infrastructure investment and the growth of Oxford City.
- Oxfordshire Growth Board (formal joint committee) established to facilitate joint working on economic development, strategic planning and growth. Board also includes strategic stakeholders as co-opted, non-voting members.
- Board oversees the delivery of projects that the councils of Oxfordshire are seeking to deliver collaboratively, such as the growth deals agreed with Government.
- Oxfordshire is part of the NIC's Cambridge-Milton Keynes- Oxford growth corridor which aims to provide 1m new homes by 2050.
- Joint work started with SHMA and strategic infrastructure framework – small steps
- Strategic collaboration paying dividends with recent growth deal agreed to secure 100k new homes (to 2031) with £230m for first 5 years to support infrastructure and affordable housing delivery.
- Joint strategic plan agreed as part of the deal, including 'planning freedoms and flexibilities' & £5m capacity funding.
- First stage (pre-Reg 18) consultation document just published highlighting significant issues that will need to be addressed through plan process.

South Essex Joint Strategic Plan



<https://www.castlepoint.gov.uk/news/south-essex-councils-set-out-vision-for-regions-growth-2015/>

- Significant challenges across the area (high proportion of GB, high housing need, poor delivery – former growth area)
- Catalysts for joint working – DtC failure of Castle Point in 2017 & recognition that need to be in control of own destiny.
- 4 districts, 2 UAs and 1 county council involved in joint arrangements with decisions made by individual LPAs
- All work done on ‘South Essex’ basis with no LA boundaries.
- JSP being developed within wider ‘South Essex 2050’ place ambition developed by Leaders (supported by EELGA) through Association of South Essex Local Authorities (ASELA) - 3 main workstreams being implemented covering strategic planning (joint plan), infrastructure and local industrial strategy.
- New governance structures & working arrangements being implemented, including shared office.
- Successful bid to Government’s PDF - £900k
- Current challenges around SoS intervention impacting on 3 LPs, transition management & Thames Estuary Commission suggesting significant increase in housing delivery over current target of 90k for next 20 years.
- Strategic planning coverage for all Essex now beginning to emerge but different approaches being adopted (e.g. North Essex Aligned Strategy).

Joint Strategic Plans - some lessons so far

- **There is no rule book yet** –this is new to everyone. Learning from each other but many issues to be tested through WoE plan in May.
- **The purpose of JSPs is different from traditional local plans** - JSPs should be considered as long term strategic investment plans steering growth which is delivered over 10, 20 and 30 year periods, with clear and focused scope on critical issues that will support growth. But there are challenges around the fact that they are also statutory plans and therefore have to be legally and policy compliant.
- **JSP should set out a clear narrative around ‘place’** – it is not all about housing numbers.
- **Partnership working is always challenging but strategic planners have key ringmaster role to play within clear governance structures.** Leadership will need to be robust to drive the JSP through politically challenging process, especially where changing politics as result of elections. Governance structures therefore need to be robust.
- **Stakeholder engagement and communications strategy is critical** - ALL councillors need to be on board with JSP and understand what it is (and what it isn't i.e. a local plan) before being asked to make decisions. Also important to have buy-in from key stakeholders especially if they are to play a role in delivery, and local MPs. Regular and consistent briefings needed.
- **LEPs and Sub-national Transport Bodies will be key players in delivery** – Major funding streams will be delivered through these bodies therefore priorities need to be aligned. Local Industrial Strategies will have a clear narrative around what the industrial / sector priorities are and how (and where) these will be delivered over 20 years.
- **More creative and innovative funding solutions** need to be developed with interventions needed to deliver overall strategy clearly identified. Also need to be clear about the critical path to delivery and what stakeholders are essential to this e.g. Highways England.

Joint Strategic Plans - some lessons so far

- **JSPs are integral to local planning** and need to be treated as part of the day job by all involved and right level of officers involved to make decisions about priorities and resources. Process is proving useful in terms of addressing skills/ capacity issues.
- **Managing the transition is challenging where LPs are not in same place** - particularly where some LPs progressing faster than JSP (or are subject to intervention). Need to have clear phasing periods which LPs can reflect with more certainty in first 5-10 yrs and more flexibility in longer term to deliver JSP spatial strategy (which is likely to be very different).
- **There needs to be flexibility in the timetables** to reflect changes as the plans are prepared – most partnerships include more than 5 LAs with most having annual elections and potential political changes. This needs to be factored in to any potential approaches to Government for a growth deal.
- **There is no perfect strategic geography** – often more than one HMA included. JSP cover larger area than earlier joint plans, some on whole county basis. Larger scale provides more strategic approach but more than 5-6 LPAs involved will add (potentially significant) time to preparation process due to individual decision-making needed.
- **Budget & Resources** – Although JSPs will provide significant efficiency savings e.g. through shared evidence base, overall budget will be approximately £2-3m, PDF award has been essential. Other savings though through joint working/ sharing knowledge and skills. long term investment needed both in terms of finance and staffing. Need to rebuild capacity in strategic planning and in delivery skills and expertise
- **Keeping things strategic – Scope! Scope! Scope!** JSPs are focused plans with a small number of strategic policies and generally no site allocations – maintaining a strategic approach has been challenging especially keeping the evidence base focused. No allocations approach will be tested in WoE examination.

Thank you!

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