



Press Release from the Common Futures Network

Embargoed to Monday 1st May 2017

A New Agenda for Action to tackle divisions in society is set out in independent report published today

England needs a new national framework to achieve the vision of uniting the country with a more balanced economic growth across all cities and regions, and to help shape England's post-Brexit economy. This message comes in a new report by the **Common Futures Network**, an independent forum of economists, planners, housing experts, engineers and development interests.

The report, published today, sets out a **Prospectus** for action to prepare a national framework, laying down priorities for development and that our regions are empowered and supported to fulfil their potential and none are given preferential treatment.

Whilst the devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have developed national frameworks, the Report highlights that there is no equivalent for England. In light of last year's Brexit vote, which showed a nation starkly divided by geography and social class, there is now a greater need than ever for a co-ordinated national economic strategy.

The report highlights that such a framework is needed to bring together the industrial strategy, as well as policies on infrastructure, environment, housing and devolution. Action is particularly urgent for the "marginalised" regions of the Midlands and Northern England, many of which voted heavily for Leave in last year's referendum. With areas such as Cornwall, Cumbria and the Tees Valley set to lose out with the end of EU regional development funding, new thinking is needed to bring jobs and prosperity to struggling towns and cities. Similar challenges arise from the need to rethink policies for rural areas with the withdrawal from the EU Common Agricultural Policy.

Key recommendations in the report include:

- A new regional development fund to replace EU structural funds
- A new urban programme, to revive struggling towns and cities
- New arrangements for the management of the megaregion of London and the southeast
- A comprehensive and complementary rural programme, to revive England's countryside communities
- A national strategy to identify new development areas to accommodate a population increase of 9 million by 2040
- A new comprehensive devolution deal for all England's regions, in addition to its cities and city-regions

For further information contact: Vincent Goodstadt vannegoodstadt@btinternet.com (07786 164 270): To read the report in full, and for more information on the Common Futures Network, go to <http://commonfuturesnetwork.org>.

Comments of Prospectus

Ian Wray (former Chief Planner Northwest Development Agency and is currently Visiting Professor at the Liverpool University Heseltine Institute) wray.i@btinternet.com said

“Britain has some of the worst regional disparities in western Europe, alongside a a history of investment decisions which concentrates new development and resources for science, the arts, transport and government in places which are already congested and prosperous. An explicit National development framework would tackle these issues head on’

Jim Steer (Founder and Director of Steer, Davies, Gleave a leading independent transport consultancy) Jim.Steer@sdgworld.net said :

“The Common Futures Network is a response to the very new circumstances in which the nation finds itself. Come Brexit, planning – so long out of fashion – needs to come back in a contemporary form. The Government’s industrial strategy is expected to be ‘place-based’. It needs to be if economic development is to extend beyond the favoured metropolitan centres.

Spatial planning helps to ensure that the benefits of government investment in infrastructure and skills are fully realised and not wasted. It nurtures a positive response from the private sector. Contrary to popular opinion, major private sector investor/developers want to see master plans set at a local and regional scale.

A contemporary form of spatial planning does not mean a return to printed documents lying unused on dusty shelves, out of date by the time they are complete. Instead, I would argue for continuously updated file(s) available in electronic format, with entries permitted from approved and registered organisations. Think of it as a way to increase market knowledge and to accelerate the formation of business agglomerations, the specialist clusters of activity that Britain will need to re-discover in the post-Brexit world.”

Mark Sitch (Senior Partner with Barton Willmore is the UK’s largest independent, integrated planning and design consultancy contact 07808 361362 mark.sitch@bartonwillmore.co.uk said: “Following our work on the need for a national vision in September 2016 we were delighted to join the common futures network to be part of a wider industry group to champion the need for integrated strategic planning at the national level that integrates the goals of Government in a transparent way.

Positive steps have been made in the Industrial Strategy and the work of the National Infrastructure Commission but more still needs to be done. The need for a national strategy is becoming increasingly urgent in an economic environment where the UK needs to perform strongly on the global stage.

This cuts across sectors to set the ambition and take a proactive approach to develop a truly long term spatial framework to ensure that the country maximises its strengths, increases clarity and certainty in the economy, attracting greater national and international investment.

The forthcoming election will provide the opportunity to reset the delivery of housing, economic growth and infrastructure, for a further five years. The immediate period post the election provides a real opportunity for the Government to prioritise this and set a new agenda for England and the wider UK over the next parliament”.

ENDS

Notes to Editors**

1. **Common Futures Network** (CFN) has been established in response to a perceived need for a more explicit understanding of the spatial dimension in setting national priorities, particularly for England, which lacks any form of national development framework.
2. The CFN is independent of political, business or other sectional affiliations and our members include professionals with extensive experience in UK planning practice and consultancy, economic development, regeneration, transport planning, utility planning and academia, across the UK and internationally.
3. The CFN has prepared an Interim Prospectus which sets out eight key propositions for tackling short and longer-term national spatial priorities. Overarching this is the need to create a New Agenda for England and the UK to promote a portfolio of actions based on:
 - The global role of England and London within the UK
 - A new devolved development programme building on sub-national strengths
 - The need to deliver a new urban agenda designed to recognise, support and nurture the inherent growth potential of the networked system of cities outside of London
 - A new rural agenda as a basis for connecting the rural hinterland of England
 - Securing the natural capital of England
 - An integrated infrastructure strategy rebalancing opportunities within England as part of the UK.
4. **CFN Prospectus Report and other responses by the CFN can be found on the following link : <http://commonfuturesnetwork.org/mdocuments-library?mdocs-cat=mdocuments>**

ATTACHMENT - SUMMARY PROPOSITIONS OF COMMON FUTURES NETWORK

Towards a Common Future

There is a need for vision, determination and a plan to drive growth and jobs up and down the country - from rural areas to our great cities. These ambitions require an integrated framework of action, which gives confidence to those who want to invest in the future of the country. The empowerment of local communities through the devolution and localism agenda needs to be strengthened, by providing a clearer context for local decision-making. Business development needs confidence in the longer-term future for investment.

There exist the foundations of such an integrated approach for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, as set out in their respective national development frameworks - but there is no equivalent for England. The Government's initiatives for a National Industrial Strategy and a National Infrastructure Assessment are welcome but these are not sufficient to be successful in delivering this agenda in full.

The Common Futures Network (CFN) has therefore come together to respond to the interlinked challenges of inequality, low productivity, economic imbalance, and social and political cohesion. It seeks to transform rhetoric into action through a consensual, forward-looking and independent *Agenda* for shaping the future of England over the next 50 years.

Opportunities for Change

The following opportunities to rebuild the nation need a national framework of action:

- A more structured and incentivised basis for devolution to all cities and regions, retaining a safety net for vulnerable towns
- A better national balance of investment, research, culture, people and jobs, both urban and rural
- An economic strategy that harnesses the UK's full potential as a global mega-region
- An urban policy which sets out the roles of the major cities and their regions
- Securing the global role and functioning of the Capital Region of London
- Enhanced relationships between devolved administrations
- An infrastructure framework that underpins these, including movement and energy.

These challenges are overlain by the impacts of climate change and the potential implications of BREXIT. They are also hampered by fragmented administrative areas, and short-term outlooks. We need to change the way we do things!

A New Agenda for England and the UK

We need to build on the existing initiatives by harnessing fully the potential opportunities created by England's position as a *global economic region*. A fresh national agenda will help unite the nations of the UK by expressing their separate but interlinked identities, needs and ambitions. A new agenda is needed to translate government objectives into their spatial implications throughout England. Conversely, we need to consider geographical implications much more explicitly than at present when national policy decisions are taken, including those related to mainstream funding.

The immediate actions to tackle the short-term and longer-term national development priorities are therefore set out in the following eight Propositions. These could be informed by an independent body (comparable to the Office of Budget Responsibility).

The Propositions

Proposition 1: Creating a New Agenda for England to promote a portfolio of actions recognising geography based on:

- The global role of the London mega-region within the UK
- A new devolved development programme building on sub-national strengths
- An urban agenda to support the networked systems of cities
- A new rural agenda as a basis for connecting the rural hinterland of England
- Securing the natural capital of England
- 3An integrated infrastructure strategy rebalancing opportunities within England as part of the UK.

Proposition 2: Introducing a Place-based Industrial Strategy to harness the agglomerative capacity of the UK, and England in particular, as a global mega-region, and a refreshed regional development programme reducing peripherality, identifying areas of industrial specialisation, linking research and development, and setting priorities and goals for underperforming parts of the country.

Proposition 3: Integrating Infrastructure to move the agenda beyond re-engineering the nation to rebalancing opportunities within England; also, opening up new development areas required to meet the additional 9m population by 2040.

Proposition 4: Building Networked Systems of Cities: Understanding and maximising functional linkages between cities, building upon, but not confined to, the three existing trans-regional priorities (Northern Powerhouse, Midlands Engine, and the Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford Corridor), and other nationally significant opportunities (e.g. Heathrow-Swindon-Bristol), as well as the HS corridors.

Proposition 5: Securing the Global Role of London: Ensuring action throughout the London Capital Region supports the commercial, labour and housing markets upon which the future of London as a global city depends, through a high level non-statutory public – private forum, and also strengthening London’s relationships with other major UK cities.

Proposition 6: Facilitating Devolution: Reinforcing the potential created by the emerging framework of Combined Authorities through a more structured and incentivised basis for collaborative action, whilst retaining a safety net for vulnerable towns.

Proposition 7: Identifying the Components of a Framework: Based on these propositions identifying the key issues that must be decided at a national level for England in terms of the *National Economic Hubs, Corridors and Networks* in support of the *National Flagship Projects* and the *National Priorities for Collaborative Action*.

Proposition 8 : Linking Devolved National Frameworks through the British Irish Council’s Working Group to provide a common context for cross-border cooperation, creating synergies and identifying cross-boundary and external relationships and nation-wide approaches to increasing self-sufficiency in food, raw materials and energy