

We must create a housing offer for the city region that supports economic growth and sustainability

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Wellington E Web, the former mayor of Denver, Colorado, in the IBM report 'A Vision of Smarter Cities' said *"The 19th century was a century of empires, the 20th century was a century of nation states. The 21st century will be a century of cities."*

The establishment of the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, and the devolution deal with government that supports it, presents a real opportunity for Liverpool to shape its future in a way not seen since its heyday as second city of the empire during the 19th century.

Quite rightly, the focus for the Combined Authority will be on economic growth and this will be the key determinant of success or failure. It is not, however, the only measure of success and it is here where housing has a very significant part to play in making the City Region truly sustainable in the 21st century.

The Combined Authority needs to aim high in developing policies that create this sustainable future for the City Region. It needs to create places that support these aspirations in terms of design and economic impact together

with population stabilisation and growth. This will provide the sustainable future spoken of by Web.

The key focus of facilitating and supporting economic growth will also need to be supported by the creation of a housing offer that meets the needs of the economy as it grows and diversifies. The specific policy interventions that would have a major impact of this kind, and should therefore be a priority for the Combined Authority, include:

- ***Facilitating and Supporting Economic Growth.***

- a) Support for inward investment by enabling a holistic approach to development which provides an appropriate balance between industrial, commercial and residential elements, notably through infrastructure improvements that will change the spatial use of land in the City Region – such as through the SuperPort and transport investments;
- b) GVA Growth through significant House Building Activity;
- c) Support to demographic growth and graduate retention within the City Region;
- d) Increasing social mobility into, and within, the City Region; and
- e) Employment growth and skills development by linking the provision of construction skills development to a long term House Building Programme.

- ***Creating a housing offer that supports the needs of the Liverpool City Region Economy as it grows and diversifies.***

- a) Provision of a diverse range of homes at differing values and tenures to meet the needs of individuals and families working in growth areas and across the City Region as a whole;
- b) Provision of sustainable 'bridges' to Home Ownership through the creation of new and innovative housing products;
- c) Driving up standards in the Private Rented Housing Sector to meet the needs of individuals and families. Improvements to include management services, the quality of stock and the effects of fuel poverty; and
- d) Enable the provision of supported accommodation to meet the current and future demands of older residents and the Health and Social Care system.

These aspirations will enthuse and engage residents whilst positioning the Liverpool City Region as the gateway to a successful Northern Powerhouse in a re-balanced UK economy – aim high!!

The momentum for devolution has been building steadily for some time and yet the outcome of the referendum has seen the political and economic landscape change, literally, overnight. Since 23rd June there has been much analysis of the economic and social impacts of Brexit so I do not intend to delve too deeply into that particular ‘crystal ball’, however, the vote in the north of England was clearly the deciding factor.

So we are left with the question *‘Why was much of the north in favour of Brexit?’*

In answering this question it seems clear to me, and it has been apparent for a long time before the 23rd that the lack of investment in the north of England over decades has resulted in a systemic economic imbalance – radical measures are called for but what could they be? What about these for a quick starter:

- Move Parliament, and Government, to the north – not just whilst the Palace of Westminster is refurbished but permanently;
- Provide significant long term subsidy for business to relocate in the north of England; and
- Refocus public spending on infrastructure into the north.

Perhaps I am searching for Utopia, or is it Br-Utopia, but such radical steps might just provide a solution for both the north and the south east. Here’s another radical idea – devolution might just be the way to make this happen!