

# Edinburgh City Region Deal: A Green City Deal?

An Edinburgh “City Region Deal” proposal is currently being prepared for intended agreement by national governments in the autumn of 2016. On 9 June 2016 Councillor Gavin Corbett brought together a range of interest groups to discuss how that proposed City Region Deal could be a “Green City Deal” – i.e. contribute to a low carbon, resource-efficient, circular economy. This note seeks to capture the main themes that were discussed, as a contribution to the evolving prospectus.

## 1. What is the City Region Deal?

The City Deal is, by now, a well-established framework for accelerating regional economic performance and has been deployed in a number of city regions in England and Wales. In Scotland, city deals in Glasgow, Aberdeen and Inverness are all at various stages of evolution.

The overall premise is that, in return for up-front funding from a combination of UK/Scottish/local government, the economic performance of a region will be enhanced to the extent that the increased tax take (and other benefits such as reduced unemployment) will match the up-front funding over time. Typically, City Deals fund significant capital projects and infrastructure. As well as funding, city deals are often characterised by additional powers at the city region level and increased efforts to co-ordinate and plan regionally.

From a sustainable economics point of view, clearly a lot of interest lies in what type of growth results. Is it possible for a City Deal to meet the overall expectation of increased economic performance and to do so in a way that contributes to lower carbon, resource efficient economies? Certainly, there are aspects of existing city deals which are progressive and forward-looking on, say, transport and energy use, but equally there are parts of programmes which might have negative sustainability consequences. A key issue for Edinburgh and the city region is the extent to which the City Region Deal here distils what is best and forward-looking. Can we break new ground in having the greenest city deal so far and how can we do that while still meeting the “uplift” expectations of the City Deal design?

The Edinburgh City Region Deal involves six local authorities – Edinburgh, East Lothian, Midlothian, West Lothian, Fife and Scottish Borders – as well as the business community and the universities. As well as the overall expectation of uplift in economic performance (measured as Gross Value Added or GVA), the partners have agreed that key to their ambitions should be a fair distribution of the fruits of economic uplift with disadvantaged areas and groups benefiting the most.

## 2. Participants in the Green City Deal Round Table

The appendix lists the individuals who took part in the discussion and people who expressed an interest in the event but were unable to attend in person.

It was agreed that the discussion would be conducted in line with “Chatham House” rules: i.e. people were taking part without any view being attributed to them or their organisation.

The report below is the sole responsibility of Green councillor Gavin Corbett<sup>1</sup>. He has sought to reflect as fully and fairly as possible the valuable contributions which were made, but none of it should be read as the policy positions or endorsement of the participants.

## 3. A sustainable city region

In order to understand how a City Deal might be greener it is important to have a sense of what a sustainable city-region economy might look like in 2035/2040 – the time horizon over which the City Deal should impact. As part of the discussion, the following characteristics were highlighted. It should be read as a flavour of the direction of travel, based on a relatively brief discussion, rather than anything more comprehensive.

A sustainable city region might be characterised by:

- Clearer patterns of **new development**, focused on hubs which contain key services, particularly on brownfield sites and existing settlements, with minimisation of urban sprawl.
- Well-managed growth in **housing and transport infrastructure**.
- Focus on the sustainability and economic self-sufficiency of rural settlements within the region with better links to the **natural assets** in their area.
- A much better link between the **food** that is produced and consumed in the region (also applicable, in principle, to other local resources)
- Zero carbon **energy planning** for transport and buildings based on an energy masterplan for both supply and use of energy services.
- Transformative change in use of **public transport and active travel**.
- Much higher quality **public realm** and positive **local place identities** – with a particular focus on people-friendly city and town centres
- **Health promotion** by smart planning and design resulting in a healthier workforce through a healthier population.
- **Zero waste** through a more critical/considered approach to sources and wider recognition of the economic benefits of repair and repurposing.

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<sup>1</sup> As well as the participants in the session big thanks also go to Claire Miller for helping with invitations and set up and Konstanze McLeod for note-taking and editing.

The City Region Deal needs a clearly articulated overall vision in order to allow measurement of progress towards all of those ends: for example, on carbon and on a range of other sustainability indicators.

## 4. Key topics

### 4.1 Transport

A Green City Region Deal might have the following building blocks:

- Putting active travel much more centrally as part of transport planning: with clear benefits in health of workforce, benefits for local retail, and quality of place which makes investment more attractive.
- Transformative cycling infrastructure including the inter local authority cycle superhighway(s), as currently being worked on by SESPLAN and partners
- Enhanced street space for walking and public transport, coupled with fiscal incentives to reduce private vehicle volumes.
- Reduced pollution at point of travel through incentives for electric buses, tram, train electrification, incentives (e.g. charging points) to accelerate uptake of electric vehicles, including delivery vans, given changing patterns on online retail. Also electric bikes in city and town centres.
- Draw together all six active travel action plans to create city region active travel planning, combining what is best from each of them. Look at scope for strengthening city region transport planning more generally.
- Much better integration of transport modes - e.g. City Orbital Bus route with links to train/active travel/lateral bus routes.
- There are a number of potential infrastructure projects which could be taken forward – e.g. South Suburban line in Edinburgh (as a tram-train type project) or train access to Haddington. The key is to come up with a transport project prospectus which is assessed strategically and consistently for long term benefits.
- Development of place strategies (see below) which reduce commuting and supplier journeys; with emphasis on appropriate density in existing settlements.
- Application/emulation of international best practice for a radical reduction of the volume of traffic penetrating / crossing city and town centres.

Much of the discussion was about transport infrastructure but it also covered incentives for increasing public/active travel: quality wi-fi, better shared data on user demand, concessionary schemes for target groups critical to improved economic performance, such as younger people seeking employment/training or parents struggling with childcare.

There is recognised work to do in being able to move beyond well-quantified benefits of active travel on health and well-being to being able to demonstrate (and quantify) positive impacts on economic performance: and since the meeting, participants have forwarded a number of studies which start to build the evidence. These are available on request.

## **4.2 Housing and communities / Quality of place**

The City Deal has an aspiration to develop low carbon communities. What does that mean and how can it apply to the way entire neighbourhoods are designed and/or regenerated?

- On the built form, there is a lot which could be achieved by innovation, pushing well beyond current standards while at the same time creating new opportunities in what is a labour-intensive industry: e.g. harnessing the potential of off-site production, or reaping the jobs and skills benefits of a major retrofit programme of existing buildings (non domestic as well as residential).
- The universities/research sector in the region can play an important role in building innovation (e.g. Institute for Sustainable Construction at Napier University).
- There is also a significant opportunity with the increased need for care homes of various types of care provision. This could both meet demographic demand but also fits well into a programme which is about making best use of gap sites, complementing existing settlement patterns.
- A more up-front approach to unblocking existing allocated sites is needed and if City Deal money is to be utilised this should come with a greater focus on sustainability and place-making. This should involve setting standards for key infrastructure such as waste and water systems; heat networks and on-site supply etc; but also active travel, shops, medical services and a range of other facilities which would help support economic growth and successful communities
- Enhanced economic performance is very strongly linked to strengthened place identities. Place identity should be considered as a key driver of economic growth.
- A more clearly articulated vision for Edinburgh city centre and investment programme in public realm needs to have complementary equal priority to thriving town centres in the city region.
- There is a great deal which can be learned internationally on sustainable place-making: for example, in Sweden where medium density settlement is highly attractive.

## **4.3 Natural resources**

### **4.3.1 Food**

- Food industries have considerable GVA potential, especially if tied into better transport and wholesale infrastructure.
- The City Region Deal dialogue so far appears to have had little focus on the opportunities of the food economy, particularly the way in which that might benefit the more remote parts of the region in Fife or in the Borders. Is there a case for a City Region Food Board?
- Queen Margaret University as a hub with a specialism in food science and economics may have a role and is well placed to develop a clearer focus on sustainable food economy, with benefits to regional producers and markets.

### **4.3.2 Energy**

- There should be a focus on sustainability in relation to energy generation, storage, security and efficiency. This requires holistic modelling, including soft measures (behaviour change) and promotion of renewables schemes that benefit communities directly and indirectly.
- A region-wide energy master-planning is essential.
- Further exploration is needed of the combined impact of energy services companies (ESCOs).
- Energy from flowing and waste water may have greater potential in the future.

## **4.4 Business support**

- A more resilient regional economy needs greater priority placed on supporting SMEs and social enterprise to secure the benefits over the next 20 years; perhaps through joint ventures to achieve scale<sup>2</sup>.
- Changing demands for decentralised and remote working (rather than, say, speculative and heavily-centralised office development) also opens up opportunities for building innovation in local hubs for remote-working.

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<sup>2</sup> Since the meeting was held, we've had a useful note from the Scottish Urban Regeneration Forum about ways it is supporting community organisations to engage with the Glasgow and Clyde Valley City Deal. This is in addition to Edinburgh region support such as Edinburgh Social Enterprise Network.

#### **4.5 Data and information sharing**

- The Edinburgh City Region has a solid foundation as a knowledge economy. The five universities have a key role to drive innovation in the way intelligence is used and shared, and the way progress is measured and evaluated.
- It would be useful if the expertise of the research sector in the region could be used not just in the evaluation of progress and impact, but in developing the tools which are used in evaluation: specifically, does a focus on GVA as a measure properly capture the aspirations of a Green City Region Deal?

### **5. Conclusions**

In a two hour discussion it is difficult to do more than skim the surface of the potential of the City Region Deal.

The discussion largely focused on City Deals as a funding opportunity and the planning and co-ordination challenges which come from that, but it did not, for instance, consider the numerous and complex implications of a transfer of powers to the regional level and to local government (e.g. in relation to revenue raising opportunities<sup>3</sup> and the delivery of employability programmes). So there is merit in assessing the kinds of packages of powers assembled in English and Welsh city deals to make sure the Edinburgh City Region Deal is alert to that potential, as well as ensuring that regional powers remain a subject in the ongoing dialogue with national governments should opportunities or barriers arise.

With that caveat, what is set out above offers a flavour of the kinds of ingredients which could make the Edinburgh City Region Deal a trailblazer, both as the most sustainable City Deal yet seen in the UK and as a model of the low carbon economy on which our most progressive international competitors are already well-advanced.

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<sup>3</sup> The most often cited example is Transient Visitor Levy (TVL) or hotel tax, common in advanced cities across the world, but also private workplace parking levies, one of a number of variants of fiscal incentives to change the balance of pressure of city region roads.

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