

Offering companies cash grants and tax incentives to invest in key regions of the UK was a tried and tested formula from the end of the Second War almost to the end of the 20th Century. The areas were essentially those which, through changes in their economic infrastructure, were experiencing higher than average levels of unemployment. Clearly, this strategy was felt to work, or the packages would not have been offered by governments of both political persuasions.

But 'inward investment' incentives can create an economic environment that is as fragile as the one they were meant to assist: when the businesses brought into a region in turn suffered any major setback, the impact on the community seemed to be magnified.

Giving a challenged region the wherewithal to start rebuilding its own economic infrastructure is a more flexible approach; one that is better suited to adapt to further changes as they occur without catastrophic upheavals.

Regional approach

The approach has been critical to a region like Yorkshire and The Humber, whose communities owed much of their prosperity over more than a century to a bedrock of coal-mining and steel production.

As the UK economy started its inexorable shift from extraction and manufacturing to services, the English regions most affected by that process had to evolve new working patterns that could carry them forward into a very different economic era.

Fortunately for the five million people who live in that region – the fifth largest of the nine designated English regions –



A change of business process helps reduce Barnsley's carbon emissions

Joining Carbon Trust Programme gives local authorities an opportunity to re-assess their operations on a broader front.

Whitehall did not impose a one-size-fits-all master plan for regeneration. It was recognised that more localised solutions had to be conceived; tapping the distinctive strengths to be found across the towns and cities and rural communities which make up the region.

Rethinking Barnsley

Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council is one of the authorities within the Yorkshire and Humber region. Architect and Planner Will Alsop created a 30 year vision for the town – Rethinking Barnsley.

Regarded as a leading modernist architect, this winner of the prestigious Stirling Prize for Architecture takes a holistic approach to his urban designs, extending far beyond the bricks and mortar of the buildings to create what are usually regarded as edgy, forward-looking communities.

As the enabler of the long-term regeneration of the borough, and its quarter of a million population, Alsop was a bold but inspired choice and a clear indication that Barnsley was taking change on all fronts seriously.

Rethinking Barnsley is about creating the ideal 21st Century Market Town; a modern community that provides employment,

culture, the arts, accommodation, leisure, retail and a place to relax, all focused in its town centre.

Responding to challenges

An integral part of Barnsley Council's model for change is an understanding of how the authority and the community it serves should respond to the challenges which have a bearing on their future development.

In practice, those are social, cultural, economic and environmental. Central to the last of those categories is climate change and a strategy for ensuring that the local authority takes an active lead in reducing its own carbon emissions and creating the framework in which the other stakeholders in the community – the residents, the business sector, charities and health, for example - can follow suit.

How well the authority monitors and controls its own carbon emissions will be brought closer into view under the microscope in the year ahead.

In line with new rules for the public sector, its buildings will be rated with a Display Energy Certificate, for example, while the Audit Commission will be using its new Comprehensive Area Assessment to ensure that all English councils

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are delivering value for money across the spectrum of their activities. Progress to sustainability forms parts of that scrutiny.

Nottingham Declaration

Along with some 300 other local authorities in England, Barnsley Council made its start down the sustainability route by signing up to the Nottingham Declaration, a statement of intent by each of those authorities to take affirmative action on climate change.

Without contractual obligations, it is nonetheless seen as a stake in the ground which focuses the mindset of the council and its partners in the community on cutting carbon emissions.

The Nottingham Declaration is regarded by many of the councils who have signed up to it as a stepping stone to the Carbon Trust's Local Authority Carbon Management Programme.

This is a ten-month long sequence of commitment, analysis and training designed to help local authorities like Barnsley turn their good intentions into viable programmes of action over the following five years.

Signing up to LACM Programme

Barnsley Metropolitan District Council was one of the 45 local authorities which joined the Programme in April 2007; the fifth annual batch to have done so.

Many of the 250 councils who have joined the Programme in one of its six rounds to date have used the opportunity to re-assess their operations on a broader front. Barnsley was no exception. When it set about consolidating many disparate offices into a new, purpose built council office within the town, the decision was taken to invest in eco-friendly technology and promote environmental responsibility.

It would be difficult to find fault with Barnsley's response to the climate change. Replacing conventional faxes with their electronic counterpart saves energy, paper and emissions. But the way that the Council has integrated the technology into its 'delivery' process means that it has been able to increase both its operational efficiency and effectiveness.

Streamlining business processes

The Council's 11,000 members of staff use some 4,000 PCs, spread over areas such as social services, education and library services. If the underlying business processes could be streamlined, waste of all kinds could be reduced or avoided altogether – without any loss of quality of service.

One obvious example was in the fax technology that the council had seen grow along with its offices. The 50 fax machines spread through the borough were key to the activities of many departments.

But the standalone technology in place at the time was a large user of paper and a notorious generator of ozone and profligate with energy, notwithstanding the need for 'expensive' carbon-based laser toner or printer inks. There was clearly no role for those machines in the new offices and a 'green' alternative had to be sourced.

Replacing conventional fax

Switching to Xerox Multi-Function Devices (MFDs) integrated with the building's communications network achieved some of the Council's objectives on that front: the MFD can scan, copy and print as its name suggests and the fifty original

faxes only had to be replaced by two Xerox devices on each of the six floors. The scanning facility integrates with the Captaris RightFax management system supplied by Avanquest Solutions, while the devices support the MS Exchange 2003 network and SAP business process management tool. By implementing Captaris RightFax with the Xerox MFD all fax documents are now captured electronically on the RightFax Database for easy retrieval if required.

Users either send a fax directly from their Outlook or SAP client, or from the Xerox MFD if a user needs to fax a paper document. The requirement for stand-alone fax machines is therefore saving costs and improving staff efficiency.

RightFax is also integrated into the SAP system, so departments such as Business Support are able to process documents like invoices and purchase orders within SAP and then distribute them electronically using RightFax to third parties.

In line with 'green policy', an electronic post box has also been set up. All mail is centrally scanned and then distributed automatically using the new Electronic Content Management System to departmental areas.

Response to climate change

It would be difficult to find fault with Barnsley's response to the UK Climate Change Programme. The replacement of conventional faxes with their electronic counterpart certainly saves energy and paper on a machine-by-machine level.

But the way that the Council has integrated the technology into its 'delivery' process means that it has been able to increase both its operational efficiency and effectiveness. This is one Council that will no doubt welcome its Comprehensive Area Assessment when the time comes. §

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