



Japan Local Government Centre, London

Monthly Report for February 2010 (England) – Urban Development Corporations

Background

Urban Development Corporations (UDCs) were set up across England during the 1980s under the 1980 Local Government, Planning and Land Act, the most famous of which was the London Docklands Development Corporation. UDCs were unusual in that as well as acting as the economic development agency for their given area, they also possessed planning powers removed from the relevant local authority, which led to some criticism over their democratic legitimacy as they were run by boards appointed by central government. The first UDCs went live in 1981 and several were created after this date but by 2000 all had run their intended lifespan and were wound up. On winding up, their assets and liabilities were transferred to English Partnerships, which also incorporated those of the New Towns when it merged with the Commission for the New Towns. In 2008 English Partnerships merged with the Housing Corporation to form the Homes and Communities Agency.

Following the winding up of the first generation of UDCs, in 2003 the government sought to bring into existence three new UDCs using the 1980 Act. These are in London Thames Gateway (2004-), Thurrock Thames Gateway (2003-) and West Northamptonshire (2006-). The three UDCs were created by Statutory Instrument and have acquired planning powers from the local authorities concerned.

Developments

In January 2010 the Department for Communities and Local Government announced its decisions following a scheduled quinquennial review of the UDCs. The government argues that in light of its Operational Efficiency Programme, regeneration work and partnerships need to be streamlined in order to provide better value for money and use of resources. As such, it announced the following changes:

- Thurrock Thames Gateway Development Corporation to be incorporated into the Homes and Communities Agency (from April 2011)
- London Thames Gateway Development Corporation to remain in its current form until after the 2012 Olympic Games and to concentrate mainly on the regeneration of the Lower Lea Valley (the Olympics site), working with Olympic Delivery Authority(ODA) and Olympic Park Legacy Company (OLPC). Its future will be reviewed once the ODA is wound up after the games.

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- West Northamptonshire Development Corporation to concentrate on the delivery of large scale agreed projects and return most of its planning powers to the local authorities (from April 2011)

Communities and Local Government Minister Shahid Malik MP said:

“The new arrangements will ensure we continue regeneration in these areas during these tough times. These are the right changes to make at the right time and will benefit people living and working in communities throughout the Thames Gateway.

“Not only will the changes improve efficiency they will help us drive forward key regeneration projects such as the Olympic Park, the London Gateway port at Shell Haven and the redevelopment of Purfleet, in the coming years.”

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