

The Bath Business Improvement District will be offering its full support for the devolution deal that has been offered to the region.

Bath BID represents more than 650 businesses in the city and recognises that this is an exciting opportunity for the region to work collaboratively to ensure that we deliver sustainable economic growth.

The proposed regional fund of £30m per year would allow us to amplify our regional strengths and enable us to invest in a strategic programme of housing, skills and education.

This funding is also just the tip of the iceberg – an additional transport budget would also be handed down to our local area, and it would also put us at the forefront of accessing further Government investment.

The BID believes that devolution would give the area the ability to make more decisions at the local level, rather than by officials in Whitehall.

The BID believes that devolution will build on the work already carried out by the West of England Local Enterprise Partnership and its partners and speed up the decision making process. Devolution would mean that LEP and Strategic Leaders Board decisions would not have to go back to the four local authorities for approval.

As a collaborative organisation the BID believes we are stronger working together and feel this opportunity to shape the destiny of businesses in Bath is one we cannot afford to miss and in fact failure to secure the deal will mean a real risk of losing significant future sources of funding and government attention.

Other city regions have already set out ambitious plans for future economic growth and as the fastest growing region outside London, the West of England is perfectly placed to prosper in this new environment.

So far, Sheffield, Manchester, Birmingham, Liverpool, Newcastle and Cardiff have signed deals whilst negotiations are continuing in Nottingham and Leeds.

So if B&NES was not part of this process we may lose out in comparison to other key cities in England and Wales.

We would lose the extra funding on offer and suffer a further loss of credibility with government.

The content of the deal covers transport, housing, planning, skills and business support, key issues that the BID believes a more strategic approach, across the region. It brings in extra resources and extra powers to decide things locally.

The question of structure seems to be the one everyone is focused on. Is a metro-mayor right for the West of England when B&NES recently rejected the idea of an elected mayor?

George Osborne has made it very clear from the start of this process that devolution deals for cities would have to agree to this structure, it's an issue that doesn't appear to be up for debate. So if we want the deal we have to accept the structure.

Looking at the issues that really matter in the West of England and those that need a level of strategic thinking to provide workable solutions, then the BID believes devolution covers the most important areas.

The proposals in the devolution deal are based around a fund to support infrastructure, stronger strategic planning powers and development corporations to overcome barriers to development.

Devolution is not suggesting a county structure with politicians and officers in a massive bureaucracy. What is proposed is one additional politician – the metro-mayor, and some form of supporting infrastructure around a combined authority.

The BID like all supporters of devolution would expect to see robust and accountable governance arrangements to retain the confidence of central government, businesses, potential investors and the public.

Bath Business Improvement District believes that it is essential that B&NES Council agrees tonight to take the West of England Devolution proposal to the next level. If B&NES votes yes tonight then the next level will be a six week consultation process starting on July 4th. Bath BID would urge the full council to support this consultation for the benefit of all businesses and residents in Bath.