

## **FUTURE OF WEST LAKES RENAISSANCE**

**EXECUTIVE MEMBER:** Cllr M Ashbrook

**LEAD OFFICER:** Mike Tichford

**REPORT AUTHOR:** John Stanforth

**Summary:** This report advises Executive of proposals by the North West Regional Development Agency (NWDA) to merge their Cumbria team with West Lakes Renaissance (WLR), Rural Regeneration Cumbria (RRC), and Cumbria Vision.

<b>Recommendation:</b>	Executive is asked to note the proposals by NWDA, and the action already taken by Council Leaders, and agree that if possible a joint response is made by the three Districts in line with the comments in para 2.1. Executive is also asked to agree that finalisation of the response is delegated to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader and Deputy Leader.
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**Impact on delivering Corporate Plan:** Changes to WLR potentially have a very significant impact on regeneration targets

**Impact on other statutory objectives (e.g. crime & disorder, LA21):** None

**Financial and human resource implications:** The proposed merger could affect the availability of funding currently ring fenced to West Cumbria

**Project & Risk Management:** Changes to WLR could impact on projects particularly in S Whitehaven and in relation to nuclear opportunities

### **Key Decision Status**

- **Financial:** None  
- **Ward:** None

**Other Ward Implications:** See above

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 Attached is a letter and discussion paper from NWDA. It proposes that WLR and RRC are merged into a new company, Cumbria Vision Limited. The NWDA has asked for comments by 3 June.
- 1.2 It was originally discussed at the WLR Board meeting on 10 May, when a very similar report was tabled. It was clear that discussions had already taken place which did not include local authority partners. The impression was also given at the meeting that NWDA wanted the merger to proceed. However it was agreed to have a special board meeting to discuss the proposal further. We were then informed after the meeting that the matter had been put on hold

and a special meeting would not be required. On 16<sup>th</sup> May we received the documents from the NWDA with a very short period for responses. Other stakeholders, including other Districts and Cumbria Strategic Partnership, have also been asked to respond.

- 1.3 The Leaders of Copeland, Allerdale and Barrow have jointly written to Bryan Gray, Chairman of NWDA, objecting to any proposal which would result in the loss of a dedicated Urban Regeneration Company for West Cumbria & Furness, objecting to the way the matter has been handled with a lack of consultation with local authorities and a very short timescale for responses, and asking for a meeting with him.
- 1.4 All of the Districts in Cumbria are meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> May, and this issue has been put on the agenda. It is hoped that a joint response from Copeland, Allerdale and Barrow can be submitted to NWDA, possibly with the support of other Districts.

## **2. SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO PROPOSALS**

- 2.1 As indicated above, it is hoped that a joint response can be submitted to NWDA. It is suggested that key points to include in the response would include:
  - There is a continuing need for a dedicated Urban Regeneration Company (URC) for West Cumbria & Furness which is completely focussed on transforming our local economy. This URC is one of a small number agreed by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister as part of a national initiative which provides special status to our area to assist us deal with the challenges facing West Cumbria including the significant changes to the nuclear industry. Securing this status for our area was a major success which was hard fought for, and therefore we will fight hard to retain it.
  - A company which has a remit for the whole of Cumbria would not have this dedication or focus
  - The Rural Regeneration Company and other initiatives do not have the same ten year commitment provided by the URC or indeed the commitment and input of English Partnerships
  - We therefore object very strongly to any proposals which would see WLR subsumed by a larger organisation or which would see its remit extended to cover other parts of Cumbria
  - We agree that some rationalisation of regeneration agencies would be appropriate and would suggest that the work currently carried out by RRC in West Cumbria & Furness is transferred to WLR. We are also willing to consider whether it would be appropriate for other similar agencies in West Cumbria & Furness to become part of WLR
  - We believe this is an opportunity to review the role of WLR to see whether it could become a delivery vehicle as well as a funding/commissioning agency. There is a lack of capacity in West Cumbria, and probably in Furness, to oversee regeneration projects. We would therefore like to see whether WLR could take direct responsibility for developing and implementing regeneration projects in West Cumbria & Furness.
  - We believe that the driving force behind any changes to existing arrangements must be the more effective delivery of regeneration, particularly in West Cumbria and Furness where the need is greatest. The current proposals appear to be targeted mainly at simplifying arrangements for NWDA and saving overheads. We would therefore like to see a number of options considered, rather than just one,

with each option evaluated in detail in terms of its ability to deliver effective regeneration. We believe that important decisions such as this should not be rushed and that an independent organisation should be commissioned to develop and evaluate options.

- We do not believe that the two other URC's in the North West (East Manchester and Liverpool) are being treated in the same way, and ask NWDA to explain why we have been singled out.
- Very importantly, the role of the West Cumbria Strategic Forum appears to have been ignored by the NWDA. We believe that any proposals to change regeneration delivery arrangements in West Cumbria should be considered by the Forum. We do not believe that the current proposal by NWDA has been "West Cumbria Proofed" as required by the Memorandum of Agreement, to which the NWDA is a signatory.
- We also believe that an enhanced WLR would have an important role in delivering the West Cumbria Strategic Forum's Proposals for the area.

## **List of Appendices**

Appendix A – Letter and proposal from NWDA

## **List of Background Documents:**

## **List of Consultees:**

Cllr Mike Ashbrook  
Corporate Team