

INTERVIEW



Liverpool Princes Dock urban regeneration project



Jim Gill, Commercial
Director of English Partnerships

In May 1999, the national functions of the Urban Regeneration Agency – operating under the English Partnerships name – were combined with the role of the Commission for the New Towns. The regions of the URA were transferred to the Regional Development Agencies on 1 April 1999 with the exception of London, which became part of the LDA on 3 July 2000. The new English Partnerships is now the regeneration and development agency for England, operating in partnership with public, private and voluntary organisations, in particular the RDAs, to take a leading role in major regeneration and development initiatives such as reviving areas affected by pit closures and identifying brownfield sites suitable for new housing.

Locum Destination Review went to meet **Jim Gill**, Commercial Director of English Partnerships, to find out what the future holds for England's premier regeneration agency.

How has English Partnerships' responsibility changed since the establishment of RDAs?

The new English Partnerships has essentially a national focus. That means that we are addressing the regeneration and development agenda at a level which has lessons and funds across all the English regions, and in all of our towns and cities. It doesn't mean that we are not active at regional or local level, because we are.

How can an organisation with a portfolio of over 6,000 hectares of development land be other than involved in and relevant to local economic development?

In all we do we work in partnership with Regional Development Agencies, Local Authorities and the private sector to complement and add value to regional and local regeneration initiatives.

How does the present English Partnerships budget compare with pre-RDAs?

Our programme expenditure in 1999/2000 was about £438m. This embraces expenditure on servicing development land in the former CNT portfolio or that inherited from Urban Development Corporations, across the coalfields, regeneration programmes and the partnership investment programme. We are also delivering major flagship projects such as the creation of new millennium communities on the Greenwich peninsula and at Allerton Bywater in the West Yorkshire coalfields, and we are a key player in the pilot Urban Regeneration Companies in Liverpool, East Manchester and Sheffield.

How does English Partnerships relate to RDAs?

We are working very closely with the RDAs in addressing the priorities set out in their Regional Economic Strategies. The national coalfield programme and the Partnership Investment Programme are both delivered in very close partnership with the RDAs. The RDAs are also partners in the pilot Urban Regeneration Companies. Our land portfolio can also make a direct contribution towards meeting RDA and other regional objectives. For example, in the North West we are bringing forward a major flagship development site at Omega, north of Warrington on the M62. That site is specifically identified as a key strategic site in the North West Development Agency Strategy. In the South East, English Partnerships' extensive land holding, particularly in Milton Keynes and Northampton, will play a crucial role in accommodating the future household growth in the region.

Is English Partnerships still organised on a regional basis?

We are essentially organised on a Directorate basis operating from 4 main offices in Central London, Milton Keynes, Warrington and Gateshead. The delivery directorates are Development (which has a North/South regional breakdown), Urban Regeneration and Planning and Commercial (my own). These work together with the Corporate Strategy and Communications Directorate and the Finance and Administration function.

How can English Partnerships be of assistance to potential developers of tourism/leisure projects?

Our focus is on regeneration and development, not on any particular sector. So the connection will be made where leisure, tourism and cultural projects can make a contribution to the regeneration and development of areas, which is very often the case. English Partnerships has supported a number of strategic regeneration projects featuring tourism and cultural elements. These range from the regeneration of Whitehaven and Maryport in West Cumbria to individual projects such as Vinopolis in London. Perhaps the most spectacular recent example is the new Tate Modern at Bankside where English Partnerships originally invested £12m in the purchase, part refurbishment and decontamination of the building.

How should developers approach English Partnerships?

The creation of Regional Development Agencies in April 1999 means that the first port of call for the promoter of an individual project should be the relevant RDA, and at as early a stage as possible. Project promoters should understand that in order to secure support they will not only have to demonstrate need but also the contribution which their project could make to the identified objectives of the RDA.

Is English Partnerships planning any future measures which will be of interest to developments in the tourism and leisure sectors?

Not specifically. Our emphasis is on identifying and supporting mechanisms to make the regeneration and development processes more effective and in drawing private sector investment into regeneration projects on a large scale and at an earlier stage.

What sets English Partnerships apart from other regeneration bodies?

Many things make English Partnerships unique in England. We are the only national public sector regeneration and development body and this national added value role is an important one which is recognised by our sponsor department (DETR) and by our partners, including the RDAs.



Millenium Village, Greenwich



Glasshoughton Retail village

We are the only body (other than Government) able to promote cross-regional portfolios supported by CPO powers and a major property portfolio worth some £1 billion. We are an unparalleled source of best practice and expertise, particularly through our research programme, the National Land Use Database and Strategic Sites Database. All these things are best done by a national organisation committed to regional and local delivery.

Are we likely to see an elected Assembly in the English regions as with Scotland, Wales and now London to which English Partnerships will become answerable?

Whether or not the current Regional Assemblies develop into elected legislature there will, I believe, continue to be a role for a body like English Partnerships with the experience and expertise to address issues at a national level and to deliver projects of national significance in which Ministers wish to have a direct interest.