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Following the (yellow brick) road to success? ...but can we overcome the wicked witch of the West(minster)?

With Halloween upon us, the Guardian published its list of the [25 best horror films](#) of all-time; and Government followed up with the launch of the [White Paper](#) on local growth.

Like some of the best films of the genre, in the White Paper much of the gore happens off-screen. So the positive upbeat text is accompanied by our knowing that, in the background, Government will be spending as much on winding up the RDAs ([£1.4 billion](#)) as on the whole of the Regional Growth Fund. The crude pre-emptive abolition of Regional Spatial Strategies wiped out up to 300,000 new homes in the planning system, and the Spending Review has reduced the social homes budget by £4.4bn ([Guardian/National Housing Federation](#)). Government's new flagship Local Enterprise Partnerships have no core funding, unclear powers and resources, and proposals have not been approved for huge swathes of the country most in need (see [Local Enterprise Partnerships map](#)).

Some of the Guardian's best films of all time, however, transcend classification. The Wizard of Oz, for instance, appears in science fiction/fantasy; but has strong horror, musical, comedy and action adventure components.

So too does the government's approach to local growth. Alongside the funding and policy splatter-fest, emphasis is placed on a network of elite 'Technology and Innovation Centres' admittedly more than science fiction/fantasy, but the nod to the genre is clear. There is the 'romance' of new couplings in Local Enterprise Partnerships; the 'drama' of moving to directly elected mayors in our 12 largest cities outside London; the 'mystery' of trying to work out what 'Big Society' really means; and the ironic 'political comedy' of Secretary of State Pickles belated conversion to a ['new regionalism'](#) in his championing of a Kent-Greater Essex- East Sussex Local Enterprise Partnership – effectively a region already bigger in population than Northern Ireland, Wales or the North-East

Halloween in the Christian tradition immediately precedes All Hallows Day – a celebration of those who have achieved beatific vision in heaven; and there are similar states of enlightenment in other faiths. Although clearly not a prelude to paradise, there are significant opportunities in the new approach to local growth that can, I believe, give encouragement to local leadership teams.

Local Authorities and their partners in Local Enterprise Partnerships need to consider four 'steps to (relative) heaven' under the new arrangements.

Step one – take the time and put the effort into building a genuine business/civic partnership for a real economic geography based on trust; shared and deep understandings of how the local economy works; and clear, evidenced priorities for development.

Step Two – turn these priorities into some sort of business growth framework and integrated investment programme. Rooted in making the most of existing local assets and resources, the programme should also identify the relevance of new opportunities presented by government – Regional Growth Fund, Tax Incremental Financing, Local Sustainable Transport Fund, Green Investment Bank, "Growth Hubs", and a number of other measures signalled in the White Paper and the National Infrastructure Plan published last week.

Step Three – locate the development programme in a much wider approach to ‘localism’, including the overall central/local debates on place-based budgeting, enhanced local freedoms and flexibilities, and new delivery mechanisms like asset-based public/private partnerships.

Step Four – communicate, communicate, communicate - with government; with business – both local and global; and with local communities. Engage and enthuse them with formulating and implementing the vision for the area; give them a stake in the area’s economic success.

Perhaps after all the Wizard of Oz, with its ability to transcend genres, is a better metaphor than the pure horror classics for the impending journey of the Local Enterprise Partnerships. If we can mobilise the youthful energy of a Dorothy; use our heart and brains with courage; and find a little bit of magic; we can make it to our ‘Emerald City’. And, along the way, we can overcome the ‘Wicked Witch of the West (-minster?)’; and expose the ‘Wizard’ and the ultimately shallow deceptions and trickery by which he maintains central power over the land.

David Marlow

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