

Thought for the Future

Danny Dorling asserts that Yorkshire has been neglected, as government financial support has been centred around London.

The Centre for Cities recently released its 2010 league table of urban 'performance'. In which regions are the five cities that the analysts said would prosper? These were said to be cities with: "the right ingredients to succeed after the recession has passed. They have strong private sectors, high levels of entrepreneurship, highly educated workforces and large shares of knowledge-intensive jobs".

Similarly, which regions are home to the five cities it was suggested by the report would have more uncertain futures? These cities, "with their weaker business base, have a much tougher outlook. These cities all lost private sector jobs over the pre-recession decade. Their rate of business start ups is low and many of their residents have no qualifications".

Those five with the ingredients of sugar and spice and all things nice were listed as: Brighton, Milton Keynes, Reading, Cambridge and Edinburgh. The cities are all located in a ring around London, or a short executive jet 'hop' from city airport (26 flights a day).

http://www.londoncityairport.com/downloads/destination_spider_underground.pdf

What was special about them was travel

time to the Capital, and the banking bail out having kept the finance system they orbited around afloat. In contrast to the geography of the bail out today, in 1934 a Special Areas Act was passed by government to initiate regional reconstruction to cope with the crash of 1929 and its repercussions. Seventy five years later the vast bulk of government spending to mitigate the latest crash has been spent on the South, and regional development agency budgets were cut last year to pay out the largely southern based housing market rescue package.

And which are the cities said to have the ingredients which were the economic equivalent of slugs and snails and puppy dog tails? It is Stoke, Burnley, Barnsley, Newport and Doncaster which were the five selected out of 64 cities nationally, said to be heading for hard times. The West Midlands, North West and Wales get one each. Yorkshire has two. The list was drawn up in London. <http://www.centreforcities.org/index.php?id=1060>.

What was most special about the five facing a tough outlook was not their weak businesses, feeble entrepreneurs, or the meagre certificates and brains of



Danny Dorling

their workforces. Nor was it the public sector job base or supposed lack of get-up-and-go or imagination of those in the losing cities that most had in common. What they had in common was being at least a further hour out of London as compared to the predicted winners. What they had in common was that, unlike in 1934, they could be taken for granted. They were no longer seen as vital, not as vital as the real homes of banks.

Of course, the future need not be as the Centre for Cities forecasts, but to avoid that future we will need to review our national priorities.

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(Danny Dorling is writing in a personal capacity).



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