THE CASE FOR WESSEX

A joint response to the White Paper on regional governance by the Wessex Constitutional Convention, Wessex Society and the Wessex Regionalists

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SUMMARY

This report contends that the regional geography of southern England is not adequately reflected in the boundaries of the official Government Office regions, and that this is partially responsible for the relatively low levels of support for regional government. It proposes an alternative model of geographically and culturally cohesive regions which could, given government support, provide a solution to this problem.

The changes are summarised as follows: Buckinghamshire to be transferred to the East of England region; Cornwall to be given its own assembly, as demanded by its people; Hampshire, Berkshire and Oxfordshire to be transferred to the South West region, which should then be renamed Wessex. The rest of this study focuses upon the new Wessex region.

Chapter 1 gives a statistical and geographical overview of the new region.

Chapter 2 focuses on planning issues, and the difficulties which are caused by the present boundary between the South West and South East regions.

Chapter 3 concentrates on economic arguments for the redrawing of the boundaries.

Chapter 4 provides evidence of latent popular identity with Wessex and shows the essential cultural unity of the Wessex region.

Chapter 5 illustrates the preference for a Wessex region among the region's politicians.

Finally, Appendices review the different regional boundaries that have already existed within southern England, including examples of many organisations with Wessex regions.

FOREWORD

Ten years ago, there was no such region as the North East. It was, and had been for nearly half a century, part of something else: the Northern region. That grouping of five counties, including Cumbria, was so well-entrenched that it seemed to be taken for granted among regional enthusiasts that any future assembly would cover the whole of the Northern region.

Today, as the White Paper, *Your Region, Your Choice*, is quick to acknowledge, the North East is at the head of the queue for an elected regional assembly.
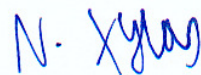
Similarly dramatic reversals of fortune can be expected elsewhere. Already, there is a growing realisation that the special requirements of Cornwall cannot be accommodated within the South West region as the White Paper envisages it. The history of administrative regionalism should certainly act as a warning against placing the current map beyond criticism. The south of England has been divided into regions that are neither popular nor practical. Among Ministers in particular there is recognition that the existing arrangements present many problems.

It is the purpose of this report to spell out what those problems are and to propose an alternative: a Wessex region stretching from Devon to Berkshire, neighbouring Cornwall to the west and the true 'South-Eastern' counties to the east.
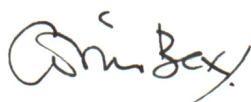
'Wessex' is a name from the past but it is very much a name with a future. The oldest of the three organisations presenting this joint response has for over a quarter of a century sought the establishment of a Wessex regional government. All are pleased at the growth in public consciousness of Wessex that has taken place over that period and which continues apace. The process is not one that politicians in power have led. It is not one that they can hinder. But it is very much one that they can assist.

David Robins
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Nick Xylas
Chairman, Wessex Society

Colin Bex
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INTRODUCTION

"The Bishop of Exeter speaking on the *Today* programme last Thursday about the forthcoming conference on a Regional Assembly for the south west drew attention to the total lack of democracy in the present arrangements for regional government. There is an even greater lack of democracy in the way the present regions were devised. Here in Hampshire we have always been part of South West England (or Wessex). Before the 1939/45 war BBC West Region had a station in Southampton. We were part of the Post Office South West Region and the Western Legal Circuit. During the war Hampshire soldiers formed part of the 43rd Wessex Division. After the war our health services were provided first by the Wessex Regional Health Authority then by the South and West Regional Health Authority. Now arbitrarily Hampshire has been put in a South East Region where we have no historic or cultural affinity and progressively the Health Authority, English Heritage, NFU, the National Trust, the Territorial Army are all adjusting their boundaries to come into line. If the Prime Minister now wants the issue discussed perhaps we could go back to the first principles – what regions?"

- Letter from Jack Sturgess of Lyndhurst, Hants. to *The Times*, May 2001

This report represents the joint response of the three organisations which comprise the Wessex movement to the White Paper on regional governance, *Your Region, Your Choice: Revitalising the English Regions,* which was published on 9th May 2002.

Whilst we welcome the general thrust of the White Paper, we have for some time been critical of the boundaries of the current NUTS-1[1] regions, and note with dismay the White Paper's inflexible attachment to them. The boundaries of these regions are unimaginative, driven more by a desire for regions of equal size – something that is actually quite untypical of European practice – than by a desire for regions that are economically, culturally, or even geographically, cohesive. We note with particular concern the partition of Wessex between the South West and South East regions, and it is the boundary between these regions that we propose to address in this report.

The three organisations sponsoring this report are as follows:

- The **Wessex Regionalists**, founded in 1974 by Alexander Thynne (now Lord Bath), are the oldest regionalist political party in England, and were advocating regional devolution for Wessex long before English regionalism entered mainstream political consciousness. Their discussion document, *The Statute of Wessex* (1982) suggested a Wessex region comprising historic Berkshire, Devon, Dorset, Hampshire, Somerset and Wiltshire, with provision for adjacent territories to join.

- **Wessex Society** is a cultural society set up in 1999 to promote regional identity. It is officially neutral on the issue of regional self-government, but has noted the extent to which unsympathetic, centrally-imposed boundaries have hampered its work, particularly through the creation of the Regional Cultural Consortia. Its main contribution to this work is towards Chapter 4, *The Cultural Dimension.* The society's definition of Wessex is more explicit than the Wessex Regionalist definition, extending northwards to include Gloucestershire, Herefordshire and Oxfordshire. This definition reflects its specialist interests in history and dialect matters.

- The **Wessex Constitutional Convention** was launched on 19th May 2001, and is an all-party pressure group seeking to achieve the broadest consensus on the form of self-government appropriate for Wessex. Its region, though smaller than the Wessex Society

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[1] Nomenclature of Units for Territorial Statistics, the standard EU hierarchy of administrative units, with NUTS-0 being member states. In the UK, NUTS-1 equates to Government Office regions, NUTS-2 to sub-regions, NUTS-3 to counties, NUTS-4 to districts or boroughs and NUTS-5 to electoral wards. Unitary authorities combine NUTS-3 and 4 status.

definition, as it excludes Herefordshire (though with the proviso that all regional boundaries should be subject to popular will), is the one that enjoys the widest measure of support within the Wessex movement. Except as otherwise indicated, the Wessex Constitutional Convention's definition is the one used in this report**.**

As will be seen from the foregoing, and from the maps at Appendix A, many different definitions of Wessex are in use. While at face value this might seem a weakness, compared with the precision of the existing official boundaries, it is in fact a strength. A variety of boundaries is a consequence of the varying needs of the organisations that use them. What is significant is that a choice has been made to use the name of Wessex. It is also clearly evident that, however deep the zones of transition may be, there is a substantial Wessex heartland that is of regional scale. Wessex should never be abused as simply an alternative name for Dorset.

The definition adopted for this report is one that is widely respected. At its core are Dorset and Wiltshire, common to every county-based definition of Wessex in Appendix A. Many other definitions then add either Somerset or Hampshire. The Wessex Tourism Association recognises the validity of drawing in both. To these four shires, Devon and Berkshire are added, making the Wessex of Thomas Hardy's novels and – in terms of its core network – the area proposed for the Wessex Trains passenger rail franchise. The Cotswold shires – Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire – have more ambiguous loyalties but an affinity with Wessex is manifested in many ways described below. The eight shires thus encompassed – including the modern administrative counties of Bristol and the Isle of Wight – are the Wessex of this report.

While it would certainly be possible to argue for a smaller, or indeed a larger, Wessex region, there are reasons of cohesion that point to the eight-shire region as a sensible area. The nucleus of an administrative Wessex already exists in the form of the South West region, whose fatal flaw however, in terms of popular acceptance, is its inclusion of Cornwall. In losing Cornwall, the South West can move one county-width eastwards to include those shires which, even during the 20th century, were still regarded as south-western but which are now grouped with the South East. The resultant region should then be renamed Wessex.

As the case for a separate Cornish assembly has been well documented elsewhere[2], *The Case for Wessex* will focus on the South West/South East boundary, which is another way of saying that the key problems lie with the definition of the South East. Not only Wessex will benefit from the redrawing of boundaries proposed here. So will the South East: the 'real South East' of Surrey, Sussex and Kent. In the shires of eastern Wessex there is much resentment at inclusion in a South East region. Views in the real South East are likely to echo this: the inclusion of the Wessex shires serves only to dilute an otherwise geographically-coherent region, generating confusion and hostility.[3] We also argue for the transfer of Buckingham-shire to the East of England region, recognising that the present boundaries disadvantage its largest settlement, the growing new town of Milton Keynes. In a recent BBC poll[4], the South East was the only English region not to register a majority in favour of an elected regional assembly. It takes only a glance at its shape on the map to understand why.

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[2] See http://www.senedhkernow.freeuk.com/
[3] The National Trust Members' Handbook prefers to use the term 'South & South East England' to describe the Government Office region, while the new regional arts council for the area is named 'Southern & South East Arts'.
[4] See http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/uk_politics/newsid_1883000/1883944.stm

CHAPTER 1: WESSEX FACTS AND FIGURES

"In recent years a trend towards regionalism, as a reaction to overmuch centralisation, has revived the concept of Wessex. While some of the suggested new regions have had little logical basis in either history or geography Wessex, based on its historical extent, would have an immense potential and would be at least as homogenous as Wales or Ulster."

- Ralph Whitlock, *Whitlock's Wessex*, 1975

Geography

Wessex, as defined in this report, is an area comprising the traditional shires of Berkshire[5], Devon, Dorset, Gloucestershire (including Bristol), Hampshire (including the Isle of Wight), Oxfordshire, Somerset and Wiltshire. This area covers 10,926 square miles (28,296 sq.km.) and has a population of 7,343,000. At its greatest extent, it measures roughly 160 miles (260 km.) from east to west and 130 miles (210 km.) from north to south (excluding the Isle of Wight). For other regions broadly comparable in terms of area and population, see Table 1 below.

Table 1: Selected regions for comparison

NAME	COUNTRY	AREA (sq. mile/sq. km.)	POPULATION	NOTES
Cataluña	Spain	12,328/31,930	6,090,000	NUTS-2 region, part of Este (East) NUTS-1 region; former local government & regions minister Alan Whitehead described in Roth's *Parliamentary Profiles* as believing in "Catalonia-style regionalism".
Lombardia	Italy	9,211/23,856	8,989,000	Combines NUTS-1 and NUTS-2 status. This is fairly common in the EU: 7 regions – Åland, Attica, Azores, Brussels, Hamburg, Madeira and Madrid – combine NUTS-1,2 and 3 status, much as Cornwall seeks to do. Luxembourg combines NUTS-0,1,2 and 3 status.
Maryland	USA	12,198/31,600	5,135,000	The capital, Annapolis, has roughly the same population as Winchester, historic capital of Wessex.
Niedersachsen	Germany	18,381/47,606	7,832,000	The regional capital, Hannover, is twinned with Bristol, Wessex's largest city.
WESSEX	***UK***	***10,926/28,296***	***7,343,000***	

In passing, it can be noted that all of these regions have a historical/cultural identity and are not defined simply for administrative or economic convenience.

Wessex is larger than Wales but only one-third the size of Scotland. At 28,296 sq.km.,

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[5] This report recognises the value of traditional shire loyalties and so in excluding Buckinghamshire from its definition of Wessex it also excludes Slough, which was removed for all administrative purposes from Buckinghamshire to Berkshire by the 1972 Local Government Act.

Wessex is also larger than the South West (23,289 sq.km.) but is appreciably more compact. From west to east, it measures 260 km., while the South West mainland, from west Cornwall to north-east Gloucestershire, measures 350 km., greater than the distance from Gloucestershire to the Scottish border. The difference becomes even more marked when it is borne in mind that the South West also includes the Isles of Scilly, 40 km. west of Land's End. In fact, Cornwall, with the Isles of Scilly, accounts for over a third of the South West's total length. Wessex is only two-thirds as long as the South West, notwithstanding the addition of Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Hampshire. It strikes a balance between treating as one region the corridors of movement west of London and forming a region where internal distances are short enough to enable that region to function effectively as a political unit.

Representation

Wessex is administered by 7 county councils with a total of 28 district, 13 borough and 4 city councils; 16 unitary district authorities (including 7 boroughs and 4 cities); one unitary county (Isle of Wight) and 2,244 parish councils.

Wessex has 77 parliamentary constituencies. It has 38 Conservative MP's, 22 Labour and 17 Liberal Democrats. At the 2001 General Election, the Conservatives lost two seats to the Liberal Democrats and one to Labour whilst the Lib Dems lost two seats to the Conservatives. The overall parliamentary make-up of Wessex therefore remains unchanged apart from the Labour gain of Dorset South from the Conservatives.

The division of Wessex between the South West and South East means that it is not possible to identify Wessex MEP's as such. The combined representation of these two regions in the European Parliament is – Conservatives: 9, Greens: 1, Labour: 3, Liberal Democrats: 3, UK Independence: 2.

Resources

Wessex's total[6] Gross Domestic Product in 1998 was £98,327,000,000, giving a per head GDP of £13,390, compared to £13,731 for the South East Government Office region and £11,447 for the South West. A smaller South East region comprising Kent, Surrey and Sussex would have a total GDP of £51,870,000,000 and a per head GDP of £12,409. UK GDP per head for the same year was £12,548. This means that the GDP per head index for Wessex (where UK figure=100) equals 108, compared to 109 for the South East region and 91 for the South West, the latter being the poorest English region south of the Humber. The GDP per head index for the Kent/Surrey/Sussex region would be 99.

The significance of these figures is that if GDP per head is taken as an indicator of economic health and taxation capacity, then Wessex is much more capable of fiscal self-sufficiency than the South West, while the reduced South East would still be closer to the national average than the existing South West region.

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[6] Because GDP figures are not available below NUTS-3 (county) level, the Wessex total incorporates a figure for Berkshire that includes Slough

CHAPTER 2: THE PLANNING DIMENSION

"Only in a few regions do boundaries satisfactorily reflect organic regions, and it is on the cards that some referenda could be lost not because people do not want regionalism but because they do not want the region they are offered. The likelihood of success in the South East or the South West, for example, must be seen as low by this criterion."

- Dr. Alan Whitehead MP, *The New Regional Agenda*, 1999

Regional planning today

Regional planning in central southern England is divided between the South West and South East. The two regions have their own regional planning bodies: the South West Regional Assembly (SWRA) and the South East England Regional Assembly (SEERA). Two separate regional planning documents result: Regional Planning Guidance for the South West (RPG10) and Regional Planning Guidance for the South East (RPG9).

The boundary between these regions reflects early post-war administrative arrangements. It is becoming increasingly problematic as the economy of central southern England grows in scale and complexity. The 'Spatial Strategy Diagram' of RPG10 shows five key inter-regional linkages: three are with the South East. This chapter discusses some of the principal cross-boundary issues.

The Cotswolds

The Cotswolds is England's largest Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (2,038 sq.km.). The AONB is divided by the Government's preferred regional boundary, whereas it would be almost wholly enclosed within Wessex, overlapping slightly into Warwickshire and Worcestershire in the West Midlands region.

Regional planning arrangements in Gloucestershire are uniquely complex. The county shares a boundary with only two other South West strategic planning authorities: Wiltshire and the unitary district of South Gloucestershire. Its other boundaries are with Wales and the English West Midlands and South East regions. A Wessex planning region would simplify these arrangements.

The M4 corridor

Information on the M4 corridor between London and Bristol is not difficult to come by, as the area is studied as part of the GCSE Geography syllabus. *The Guardian* newspaper's educational website[7] summarises the advantages of the M4 as a business location as follows:

- office and factory space is cheaper than in London

- the availability of labour in the M4 corridor urban areas

- a skilled labour force due to the proximity of universities and research institutes

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[7]See http://www.learn.co.uk

- space for building on 'greenfield' sites and attractively-planned business parks

- easy access to the whole country via the motorway network

- good rail access along the M4 corridor

- good access to Heathrow airport and the ports of Bristol and Southampton

- a high quality of life and attractive countryside that helps to recruit and retain staff

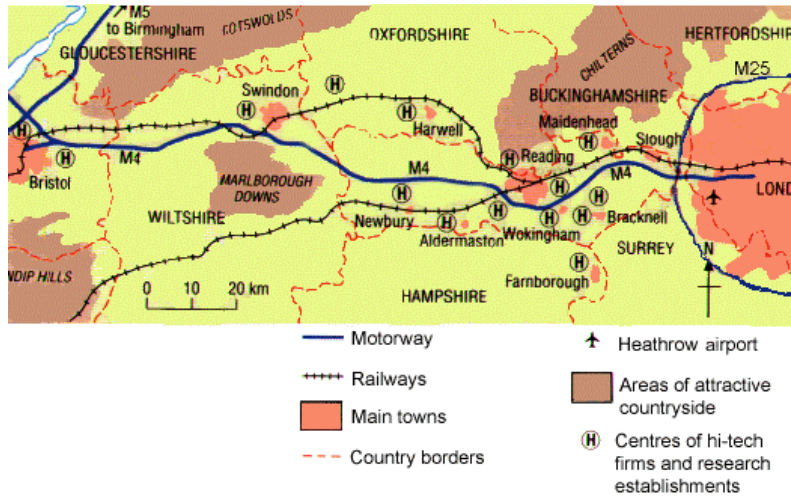- easy access to banks and financial organisations in London.

Figure 2.1: Map of the M4 corridor, from www.learn.co.uk

It may seem odd that "attractive countryside" should feature so prominently as a selling point of the M4 corridor, but it shows that even those working in hi-tech industries are not immune to Wessex's more traditional charms. After all, the stereotype of people who drink real ale and listen to folk music is that they work as computer programmers. This fusion of old and new lies at the heart of Wessex's identity.

The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, designated in 1972, is England's third largest (1,730 sq.km.), and one of the most complex administratively, being in four counties. It is bisected by the Government's line that partitions Wessex but would be united within a Wessex planning region.

Swindon, located between the Cotswolds and the Marlborough Downs, is as likely to view itself as part of the South East as of the South West, being closer to Oxford than to Gloucester and the same distance from Reading as from Bristol. The town is generally included with the Thames Valley by recruitment consultants and in the Reward Group's series of regional salary surveys. It also forms part of the Environment Agency's Thames region.

The South Coast Metropole

The South Coast Metropole is the name given to a cluster of southern local authority areas stretching from Poole to Portsmouth. The South Coast Metropole Partnership was formed in 1993 between the local authorities of Poole, Bournemouth, Southampton and Portsmouth to promote their common interests. The Isle of Wight joined in 1996.

In March 1997, the Partnership published a report prepared by Bournemouth University entitled *The Case for a Central Southern Region*. The report argued that the present regional boundaries do not reflect the economic realities of the M27/A31 corridor and pressed for a South Central region along the lines of the Wessex region proposed in C.B. Fawcett's *The Provinces of England* (1919), possibly as a sub-region of the South East. Whilst their conclusions differ somewhat from ours, the authors of the report have undertaken some valuable work in questioning representatives of 65 organisations within the region. The interviews, 15 of which were in-depth, found a general consensus of opinion that, if regional government were to become a reality,

"any urban complex which straddles regional government borders will be at a disadvantage and unable to take advantage of its synergy in attracting internal investment and new business"

this being due to duplication of efforts in dealing with two regional governments and the dilution of effective partnerships.

Dorset is represented along with the South East at EU level and was listed on the South East group of TEC's[8] in the South Coast Metropole report. Road and rail communications with south-east Dorset run predominantly east-west, emphasising its links to the Solent area, while other parts of Dorset have greater affinity with the South West.[9] The dilemma of where to place the Bournemouth/Poole conurbation is nothing new. The designers of boundaries for civil service use have never known what to make of it, as Appendix C reveals. Today, the growth of this sub-region places huge pressures on the environment of the adjoining rural areas:

"Without net in-migration, there would be no need to provide additional housing in Dorset. This is because of our relatively elderly age structure, which means that more houses are released through the death of elderly people than are required through indigenous population growth. However, Dorset is a very popular place in which to live, and many more people move into the County each year than move out. The vast majority of these people come from the South East. At the same time, in terms of the extent of international and national nature conservation and landscape designations, Dorset comes second in the national league. So accommodating development pressures while conserving the environment is very difficult."[10]

Moreover, concerning the relationship of Bournemouth/Poole to south Hampshire:

"There is a considerable amount of economic and social linkage between the two areas. Further, monitoring of the Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole Structure Plan suggested that Dorset was rapidly becoming a dormitory for commuters working outside the County. We assume that a significant amount of commuting is to south Hampshire. Recognising these inter-linkages, the South West Regional Planning Conference proposed in draft RPG10 (Regional Planning Guidance for the South West) that there should be a separate study covering this sub-region. This suggestion was strongly opposed by the Government Office for the South West, and deleted from the final version of RPG10. Nor did it appear in RPG9 (Regional Planning Guidance for the South East). Nevertheless, the study is proceeding, since the Dorset authorities recognise the significance of the linkages, and the additional

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[8] Training and Enterprise Councils
[9] For example, the county is partitioned for tourist board purposes between South West Tourism and the Southern Tourist Board
[10] Letter from Don Gobbett, County, Regional & European Strategy Manager, Dorset County Council, 9th August 2002

pressures that are being put on the County."[11]

The South West Hampshire/South East Dorset Green Belt was recently revised in order to exclude the New Forest, due to the latter's impending upgrade to National Park status. The Hampshire portion of the Green Belt now extends from Ringwood to surround the New Forest. Planning decisions are the responsibility of East Dorset and New Forest district councils, within the context of the Dorset and Hampshire structure plans and, ultimately, of the two separate Regional Planning Guidance documents.

The issue of affordable housing is a very significant one for Dorset, made worse by its position in relation to the regional boundary:

"House prices are well above the national average, not least because of the pressure of demand from migrants from the South East. Wage levels, however, are well below national average. This makes it increasingly difficult for local people to enter the housing market. The Deputy Prime Minister's latest announcements on measures to alleviate the affordable housing problem focus on London and the South East. Once again, therefore, Dorset is a casualty of regional boundaries."[12]

Criticism of regional boundaries surfaced during the Public Examination into draft RPG9. The Panel Report (known as the Crow Report, after the chairman, Professor Stephen Crow) noted, in its discussion of south Hampshire and the Solent cities, the main arguments for change:

"We are attracted to the view that the area is an economic and social entity in its own right, has a distinctive identity and alone within the South East does not look to London for its city functions. It has its own economy and relates to other UK regions as much as to RoSE[13] *– especially to the South West region through the Bournemouth/Poole area. The importance of north-south links via the M3/A34 corridor to Newbury, Oxford and the Midlands, avoiding London, can be strongly emphasised as can the less direct north-south rail connection following a roughly similar route. We have some sympathy also with the view that the regional boundary somewhat arbitrarily and artificially divides a city region extending from Portsmouth in the east in a westward arc to Bournemouth and Poole – albeit with a substantial gap in the New Forest. This was a point echoed in a slightly different way by the area's local authorities who see it being at the centre of a distinctive 'Central South' region which has national importance in its own right."* [14]

The future needs of regional planning

The Government's current proposals for reform of the planning system[15] envisage the replacement of Regional Planning Guidance and county structure plans by Regional Spatial Strategies. Given the added importance now being placed on the regional tier, it is more important than ever that regional boundaries should make sense. The Government has argued for the abolition of structure plans on the grounds that county boundaries no longer make sensible areas for strategic planning purposes. In southern England, the same criticism can

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[11] Letter from Don Gobbett, County, Regional & European Strategy Manager, Dorset County Council, 9th August 2002

[12] Letter from Don Gobbett, County, Regional & European Strategy Manager, Dorset County Council, 9th August 2002

[13] 'Rest of South East' – the parts of the former, wider South East region other than Greater London

[14] *Regional Planning Guidance for the South East of England: Public Examination May-June 1999: Report of the Panel,* 1999, paras. 12.37-12.38

[15] *Sustainable Communities – Delivering through Planning*, July 2002

currently be levelled at the regional boundaries.

Regional planning arrangements throughout southern England are heavily influenced by the economic and social pull of London. It might therefore seem that all areas within London's orbit should be planned as a whole. Indeed, the boundaries of the 1965-1994 South East region did ensure that Greater London and all counties bordering it were placed in the same region. That principle has now been abandoned: Greater London is an administrative region in its own right, while the remainder of the old South East has been divided between the new South East and East of England regions. Further division, separating eastern Wessex from the South East, would appear to exacerbate this process of fragmentation.

The reality is more complex. Once the planning of the 'greater South East' is divided between three regional planning bodies, as now, arrangements for joint working become essential. The need for those arrangements is not altered by increasing the number of regions to four. Indeed, in some respects, arrangements are thereby simplified, for the following reasons.

Firstly, a Wessex planning region would be responsible for all regional planning matters in the area broadly to the west of London, whereas today an artificial divide is imposed corresponding to the eastern boundaries of Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and Dorset. Clearly, commuter flows do not respect these boundaries, and the discussion above highlights the need for a corridor approach. The next chapter expands on the transport aspects of this. The eastern fringes of the South West have long been, *de facto*, part of the planning of the South East, whether or not the boundaries at the time have recognised this. A Wessex planning region would provide a lasting solution to the recurrent dilemma of whether the growth of Swindon and south-east Dorset, to give just the most pressing examples, should be planned as part of a region including Bristol and Salisbury or one including Reading and Southampton.

Secondly, as a consequence, a Wessex planning region would recognise that London's influence does not end abruptly but diminishes with distance. The decisive factor is not actual distance but the distance that people are willing to travel, something that is a complex and shifting relationship of house prices, job opportunities and journey times. Journey times in turn are influenced by investment in road and rail infrastructure and these are matters at the very heart of regional planning. The question of 'how to spread prosperity westwards' is a difficult one to answer if the shires of eastern Wessex are in a different region to the western ones. An effective planning region must be one that is capable of delivering the regional strategy through its influence on public expenditure priorities and an element of regionally-based taxation. 'Hot spots' and 'cool spots' need to be under the same roof if they are to assist in relieving each other's problems.

The Wessex alternative assessed

Hampshire's Assistant County Planning Officer has advised this report's authors that:

"when deciding boundaries for a regional authority to serve the 21st century it must be right to consider the existing and likely future social and economic geography of a wider area. The scale and nature of the movements and activities across the SE/SW boundary might indicate that the present boundary is wrong. But then no boundary is perfect." [16]

This last challenge is accepted to be an important issue. It may indeed be argued that a

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[16] Letter from Roger Lawes, Assistant County Planning Officer, Hampshire County Council, 2nd August 2002

regional boundary drawn further east would create as many, if not more, anomalies than the existing one. However, there are good grounds to disagree.

Mid-Wessex is growing, and growing fast. It needs a co-ordinated approach, which it will not get so long as Wessex remains partitioned. In contrast, much of the length of the eastern boundaries of Berkshire and Hampshire passes through or along the edge of the Metropolitan Green Belt, which is protected from major development. Responsibility for this at the regional level of planning is already divided, as is responsibility for the South West Hampshire/South East Dorset Green Belt, but a Wessex planning region at least has the advantage of uniting the latter.

The existing boundary divides one Community Forest project – Great Western, around Swindon. The proposed boundary divides none.

The creation of a Wessex region would also unite the proposed New Forest National Park, whose draft boundaries extend from Hampshire into both Wiltshire and Dorset, but it would at the same time require a regional boundary to be drawn through the proposed South Downs National Park. This, we argue, is the lesser evil, since the pressures on the New Forest from the conurbations that flank it require greater consistency of policy than the more rural area through which the Hampshire/Sussex boundary runs. Moreover, the proposed South Downs National Park is not, geologically or geographically, a natural entity. Its area is presently divided between the East Hampshire AONB, which forms part of the Hampshire Basin, and the Sussex Downs AONB, which forms part of the Wealden massif. It is a matter of concern that the distinction, hitherto carefully respected, is under this Government being ignored.

The South Coast Metropole Partnership's report (see above) demonstrates that Sussex functions very much as a whole, with comparatively weak links between West Sussex and Hampshire and a much stronger Brighton-Crawley-Gatwick axis. This corridor was cited as one of the main reasons why the local TEC is located at Haywards Heath.

The existing regional boundary divides three Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (Cotswolds, North Wessex Downs and Cranborne Chase & West Wiltshire Downs). The boundary proposed in this report would, leaving aside the AONB's to be superseded by the proposed South Downs National Park, divide two: Chichester Harbour (the third smallest) and the Chilterns. But the Chilterns is already divided between the South East and the East of England. Our proposals would not alter the fact of division but they would make for a simpler line of division – along the Oxfordshire-Buckinghamshire boundary – rather than, as now, two quite separate lines of division as the Chilterns cross the Tring salient of Hertfordshire into Buckinghamshire.

Buckinghamshire currently forms part of the Thames Valley NUTS-2 region alongside Berkshire and Oxfordshire, although this identification only really applies to the South Bucks District Council area associated with the M40. Under our proposals, Buckinghamshire would be separated from the other shires. We believe that the county's links are with the East of England rather than with Wessex (for example, it is served by BBC East, not BBC South). The largest town in Buckinghamshire is Milton Keynes, developed from 1967 onwards as part of a sub-regional cluster[17] that continues to grow rapidly:

"The sub-region, which the new city dominates, extends across regional and county boundaries into Northamptonshire[18], to Northampton and into Bedfordshire[19], to Bedford… The plan [for further growth] *should not be constrained by administrative boundaries but it*

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[17] First proposed in the South East Economic Planning Council's *Strategy for the South East*, 1967
[18] In the East Midlands region
[19] In the East of England region

should encompass the sub-region… What is important at this stage is for the three counties, their constituent district councils and the three Government Offices to work together…"[20]

Milton Keynes also lies astride the key lines of communication from London to the Midlands – the M1, the A5, the West Coast Main Line and the Grand Union Canal. It forms part of a communications corridor as significant in its own context as the M4/A4/Great Western corridor within Wessex; both need to be looked at in a less disjointed way than current regional boundaries permit.

The location of what is now Milton Keynes – equidistant from Oxford and Cambridge – was crucial to the choice of Bletchley Park as a base for wartime cryptography work. It would be a strange twist of fate if the area's good government were now to be thwarted by regional boundaries laid down in that very same era.[21]

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[20] *Regional Planning Guidance for the South East of England: Public Examination May-June 1999: Report of the Panel,* 1999, paras. 12.3, 12.13
[21] See Appendix C

CHAPTER 3: THE BUSINESS DIMENSION

"Wessex is a name that is widely known and one that conjures up strong positive images. It is used by companies and organisations in many fields."

- Wessex Tourism Association, *Business Plan 2002 to 2005*, 2002

Economy

That there is no definitive analysis of 'the Wessex economy' does not mean that such a dynamic does not exist. Thirty years ago it was still being argued, and with much greater justification, that no such thing as the Welsh economy existed either. As an economic region Wessex is much more coherent than Wales, its transport infrastructure tending to unite rather than divide. Already, there is a Wessex Association of Chambers of Commerce[22], based in Trowbridge, with members in 11 mid-Wessex towns. There are now over 400 businesses and other organisations using the name 'Wessex', as Table 2 demonstrates. Over 90% of these are based within Wessex, as defined in this report.

Table 2: 'Wessex' subscribers listed in telephone directories (derived from the BT phone disc)

SHIRE[23]	NUMBER OF ENTRIES
Berkshire	10
Devon	17
Dorset	138
Gloucestershire	9
Hampshire (including Isle of Wight)	98
Oxfordshire	3
Somerset	71
Wiltshire	46
Rest of UK	37
No address given	2
Total Wessex	**392**
Total UK	**431**

Agriculture remains the principal land use and, while it employs few people, it underpins many more jobs in food processing. The annual Bath & West Show at Shepton Mallet is organised by the Royal Bath & West of England Society, whose former name in full, the Royal Bath & West of England & Southern Counties Agricultural Society, illustrates the long-standing regional unity of Wessex as far as agricultural interests are concerned. Tourism is also a vital industry, contributing an estimated £4 billion per year to the economy, and now one of increasing importance to rural areas as well as to the traditional resorts.

The geopolitical location of Wessex has for centuries ensured that defence spending is a key influence on the economy. The growth, and recent decline, of aerospace in Wessex owes much to military trends as, to a perhaps surprising extent, does the region's leading role in environmental science. Both the Hydrographic Office (in Taunton) and the Ordnance Survey (in Southampton) are based in Wessex, along with the Met. Office (currently re-locating from Bracknell to Exeter). All three have their origins in the needs of the armed services. Other hi-tech businesses have flourished in Wessex, particularly electronics and telecommunications, and the region has an important stake in the motor industry, Colt at

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[22] See http://www.wessexchambers.org.uk/
[23] Post-1974 boundaries; the former Avon is divided between Gloucestershire and Somerset

Cirencester, Honda at Swindon and MG at Oxford being among the companies with a presence. The ports of Bristol and Southampton are also major car-importers.

Education

Wessex has 11 universities, ranging in age from mediaeval Oxford to former polytechnics upgraded in 1992. Those in between include Bristol, which as far back as 1908 – even before it was chartered – was being described as the university for "the great Province of Wessex"[24], and Southampton, home to the Wessex International Summer School and a student magazine called *Wessex Scene*. The Wessex Summer School theme has also been taken up by Bournemouth University. The universities make an important contribution to the regional economy, in terms of training and research, and have no regard to the partition of Wessex between the South West and South East: Oxford Brookes University has a campus in Swindon while Bournemouth University has one on the Isle of Wight.

Transport

Transport policy already recognises Wessex as a reality. The Government's recently published SWARMMS (South West Area Multi-Modal Study) focuses on four main corridors: M3/M25-Exeter; M4/M25-Bristol; Bristol-Exeter and Exeter-Penzance, the first two of which cross the South East/South West divide (the area within the M25 is covered by a separate London multi-modal study). The steering committee for the report included representatives from the Government Office for the South East, Government Office for the South West, South East England Development Agency, South West of England Regional Development Agency, South East England Regional Assembly and South West Regional Assembly. This gives some indication of the amount of doubling-up involved in planning a coherent transport strategy for a unified region which is cut in half by ill-considered boundaries.

Wessex can be seen as the 'brand' of a linear economy, strung out along its spine routes such as the M4/M5, the M3/A303 and the Great Western and South Western main lines. But it would be a mistake to see the Wessex transport system solely as a series of routes leading to London. The M5 north of Bristol and the A34 corridor are transport axes quite independent of London, while connections between Bristol and Southampton are also vitally important; the rail route linking these cities is actually referred to as the Wessex main line.[25] Meanwhile, the winning entry in a competition to find a suitable name for the Bristol to Weymouth railway line resulted in it being called the Heart of Wessex Line.

Also on the railways, a Wessex passenger franchise has recently been created, resulting in the appearance of the 'Wessex Trains' brand. The original plans included the transfer of Reading-Brighton and Exeter-Waterloo services to the new franchise, enabling valuable operational economies. These plans – and the future of the franchise itself – have been placed in jeopardy by the Strategic Rail Authority in a further planned re-organisation designed, allegedly, to improve operational flexibility at Waterloo, notwithstanding the effects on intra-regional travel within Wessex. The retention of the Wessex franchise is supported almost unanimously by county and district councils in the South West. The extension of the franchise area as originally planned would undoubtedly help to consolidate the emergence of Wessex as a transport region.

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[24] Basil Cottle and J.W. Sherborne, *The Life of a University*, 1951
[25] Rail Passengers' Committee Western England, *Starting from here…*, 2002

Transport provides many examples of expanded 'south west' regional divisions that ignore the Government Office/RDA definitions of 'South West' and 'South East'. The Government's own Western Traffic Area – the office responsible for road transport licensing – corresponds broadly to Wessex plus Cornwall, though there are plans to re-organise on Government Office/RDA boundaries. Moving the other way is the national Traveline public transport information system,[26] which earlier this year added Hampshire to its South West region, reflecting the economic and social reality of the South Coast Metropole. The South West region of the Transport & General Workers Union[27] takes in Berkshire and Hampshire. The South West Region of distribution chain the Co-operative Group also includes Hampshire and extends into Berkshire.

The Kennet & Avon Canal, aptly described as the 'Wessex waterway'[28] is wholly contained within Wessex but is divided between the Government's South West and South East.

Air travel too, is affected by the partition of Wessex:

"Bournemouth (Hurn) Airport is in the South West Region in the recently published DoT consultation document on the Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom although it is quite clear that its main links are eastwards towards Southampton and London. Indeed, in the series of airport studies that Hampshire has commissioned over the years, Bournemouth has always featured in the surveys and analysis."[29]

Tourism

The region's tourism industry is also keen on promoting Wessex as a 'brand'. The Wessex Tourism Association was formed in December 2001.[30] Although its area only encompasses Somerset, Wiltshire, Dorset and parts of Hampshire and Berkshire, the final form that the association takes is still under debate. Its aims include working with partners to:

"rebuild the Wessex identity and pride in the area and its way of life".

The research report underpinning its work, *Wessex – building a heritage destination*[31], notes:

"Wessex is widely used within Britain and abroad as a brand name for promoting products and services. As is evident from a glance in phone directories, it is very widely used within Wessex itself. Yet it is little used for promoting travel… to succeed overseas, the area needs an identity, a brand of its own. It needs to make itself a destination that is known widely, as widely, for instance, as the Lake District or Cornwall… Based on the responses, it does seem that the industry agrees that Wessex can be marketed and that this needs to be done to help seasonality and business levels. There is, however, concern that efforts to market Wessex could prove difficult, unless co-operation throughout the region was better."

Among the key weaknesses to be addressed the report identifies the following:

- The number of overseas visitors is below the UK average and well below what the

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[26] See http://www.traveline.org.uk
[27] See http://www.tgwu.org.uk/regions/ContactInfo.htm
[28] Kenneth R. Clew, *Wessex Waterway*, Moonraker Press, 1978
[29] Letter from Roger Lawes, Assistant County Planning Officer, Hampshire County Council, 2nd August 2002
[30] See http://www.wessextourism.org.uk
[31] Part of the 'Co-operation in the field of heritage tourism' project undertaken by Somerset County Council and the Comité Régional du Tourisme des Pays de la Loire

attractions of Wessex suggest should be achievable.

- The South West region's image and promotion is that of a seaside holiday destination for the domestic market.

- Tourism development is hampered by boundary divisions and under-funding.

There is also an Association of Wessex Tourist Guides, formed as long ago as the early 1970's.

English Heritage, whilst following the Government Office regions for its internal organisation, has produced promotional material advertising Wessex as a heritage destination,[32] as does the National Trust. The Wessex Top Ten (a consortium of major attractions) also markets the region.

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[32] For example, its current leaflet, *Historic Wessex: Ancient peoples & magical settings*

CHAPTER 4: THE CULTURAL DIMENSION

"I find that the name *Wessex* is getting taken up everywhere and it would be a pity for us to lose the right to it for want of asserting it."

- Thomas Hardy

We make no apologies for the fact that this chapter is more subjective and less analytical in tone than the rest of this report. Culture, after all, consists precisely of those things which cannot be analysed, quantified or tabulated. As Brian Eno (quoted in the South West Cultural Consortium's strategy document, the bizarrely-titled *In Search of Chunky Dunsters*) puts it,

"Culture is everything you don't have to do."

But there is a reason why even the most hard-headed of politicians should take notice. Wessex's regional identity is a sleeping giant which, if aroused, could prove to be the secret weapon in delivering a winnable referendum on regional government. Moreover, a region with an identity provides a stronger basis for continuing interest in future regional elections. This chapter will demonstrate that Wessex has a cultural vibrancy that the official regions lack. This is particularly true of the South East. Even the South East Cultural Consortium appears to have given up trying to locate the *genius loci* of that sprawling L-shaped region. Its strategy document, *The Cultural Cornerstone*, frankly admits that:

"The Consortium has been set a major challenge by the nature of the region it serves. Of all of the English regions it appears to be the one most explicitly born of administrative convenience".

The role of Wessex Society

Wessex Society[33] aims to do for Wessex what the Celtic revivalists of the 18th and 19th centuries did for the nations of the Celtic fringe – promote the history and folklore of their areas and revive ancient traditions, using their own imagination to fill in gaps where the historical record is sketchy. It is surely no coincidence that the first parts of mainland Britain to obtain devolved government were Scotland and Wales, whose strong cultural identity owes much to the revival (and invention) of tradition by such Romantics as Sir Walter Scott and Iolo Morgannwg.

The relevance of history

Since the purpose of this report is to emphasise future potential rather than to dwell upon past achievements, it might be thought that the history of Wessex is not relevant. Not so! A consciousness of Wessex as a region with a distinctive history is evidence of that region's contemporary vitality and self-awareness. What matters in this context is not so much how the raw material of history is edited – which is always a matter of selection – but that so many choose to use Wessex as a timeless 'window' through which to view their own history.

There is indeed a Wessex tradition of historiography, associated in recent decades with Bristol University's Dr. J.H. Bettey. His books, *Rural Life in Wessex 1500-1900* (1977) and *Wessex*

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[33] See http://www.zyworld.com/wessexsociety

from AD 1000 (1986), take for granted that Wessex is a geographical region with a story that is better told in regional terms than in any other way. Such books display no reticence at the supposed anachronism of describing post-Conquest events as occurring in Wessex. The longer books associated with academic scholarship have since been joined by a range of short, popular histories, such as *Wessex – A journey through Two Thousand Years*.[34] Wessex has seen a succession of small publishers devoted to the production of books about Wessex, from Moonraker Press in the 1970's to Wessex Books[35] today.

'Wessex', a creation of the centuries between the departure of the Roman legions and the arrival of the Norman conquerors, has proven to be a highly flexible concept that is by no means limited in time. It is as applicable to the prehistoric 'Wessex culture' centred on the chalk downlands as it is to the 19th century world of Hardy's novels and the modern identity to whose creation they have in turn contributed. Archaeologists appear comfortable with the concept: viewers of Channel 4's *Time Team* will be familiar with Wessex Archaeology, one of whose field archaeologists, Phil Harding, is a regular on the programme, and known to refer to "my beloved Wessex".

Anglo-Saxon Wessex

Wessex is the name of the kingdom that arose in central southern England in the 6th century AD. According to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, the first king of Wessex was named Cerdic and arrived with his son Cynric, landing at Southampton in 495AD with five ships and defeating a native British king at Portchester. This account (fictionalised by Alfred Duggan in his recently re-issued novel, *The Conscience of the King*) is now widely disputed. Modern academics have noted the striking similarities to other Germanic origin myths in which a pair of kinsmen arrive with a few ships and take the kingdom.

It is now more generally accepted that Wessex was created by the royal house of the Gewisse, over the initial area of Saxon settlement and influence in the Upper Thames valley centred on Dorchester-on-Thames, around 570-600 AD. The first West Saxon bishopric was established at Dorchester-on-Thames in 635 on the conversion of the people to Christianity. It was the military conquests of the Gewissan kings which brought political unity and a common institutional framework to Wessex as it expanded southwards and westwards in the 7th century, the royal house itself adopting the epithet West Saxon in 686. It was this kingdom which alone survived the onslaught of the Vikings in the 9th century and which, despite arising to become the focus of revival and the dominant force in the unification of England in 973, retained a certain distinctiveness because of its unique administrative organisation and the patronage of the royal house.[36]

However, when Canute became king in 1016, he revived the names of the former English kingdoms and applied them to the newly-created office of Earl. Canute originally kept the Earldom of Wessex for himself, but later awarded it to Godwin, a relative by marriage, who as a result became the most powerful private citizen in England. He was succeeded by his son, Harold Godwinson, later to become King Harold II of England. When the Normans invaded in 1066, one of their first acts was to abolish the Earldoms in favour of the more manageable shires as the largest units of sub-national government, fearful of the threat that powerful regional government posed to their centralising authority. The office of Earl of Wessex remained dormant until our own time.

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[34] Roger Crisp, Wessex Books, 1999
[35] See http://www.wessexbooks.co.uk
[36] The main sources for this account are Barbara Yorke's *Wessex in the Early Middle Ages*, Leicester University Press, 1995 and John Blair's *Anglo Saxon Oxfordshire*, Sutton Publishing, 1994

The revival of Wessex identity

It is virtually impossible to say whether, during the centuries after the Norman Conquest, Wessex remained in the region's folk memory, and if so, for how long. This is not the kind of information with which records of that period are concerned. What is certain is that when antiquarians began to reconstruct a regional identity there was a wealth of folk material from which to do so. The Saxon-minded poet and philologist William Barnes (1801-1886) was partly responsible for reviving Wessex in the public mind. He wrote poetry in, and two grammars of, the Dorset dialect, which he regarded as a direct descendant of the West Saxon dialect of Old English. But it was Barnes's protege, Thomas Hardy (1840-1928), who really popularised Wessex, beginning with his 1874 novel *Far from the Madding Crowd*. In the Preface to the 1902 edition of his novel, Hardy wrote that:

"the appellation which I had thought to reserve to the horizons and landscapes of a partly real, partly dream-country, has become more and more popular as a practical provincial definition; and the dream-country has, by degrees, solidified into a utilitarian region which people can go to, take a house in, and write to the papers from."

This solidification continued in 1908 when the army formed the 43rd Wessex Brigade ("the Fighting Wessex Wyverns"), which was expanded to Divisional status for both World Wars, and which is still operating today. A Wessex Regiment was also founded in 1967. Other military organisations that have used the name include the Royal Wessex Yeomanry and the 1st to 4th Wessex Brigades, Royal Field Artillery.

In 1974, 100 years after *Far from the Madding Crowd* was published, Alexander Thynne (now Lord Bath) founded the Wessex Regionalist Party. It has contested seats in five Westminster general elections and two European elections. The party's influence has had an effect which extends far beyond its admittedly small voter base. When the party first started campaigning, there were virtually no businesses with the word 'Wessex' in their name; now there are nearly 400 in the Wessex region, spread throughout its area (see Table 2), whilst a search on Amazon books[37] revealed 267 books featuring the word 'Wessex'.

Several national bodies have, or had, Wessex regions. Some have been dismantled very recently as the *Modernising Government* White Paper seeks to impose the standard NUTS-1 regions on all public bodies by 2005, but Appendix A shows a selection of those Wessex regions that still exist, plus some from the days when organisations were allowed to choose the regional boundaries that suited them.

Aspects of Wessex culture

The flag

The wyvern flag of Wessex is one of the oldest flags in Europe, possibly originating in cavalry standards used by the Roman army. Henry of Huntingdon, writing in the 12th century, mentions it twice, as having been flown at the battles of Burford (752) and Ashingdon (1016), and it also appears in the depiction of the Battle of Hastings on the Bayeux tapestry. For a time, it became the flag of England, until the returning Crusaders decided to appropriate the flag of Jerusalem, the cross of St. George, for themselves. The wyvern appears in various forms in the emblems of several Wessex counties and districts, and of the Wessex Regiment and Brigade. In the early 1970's, William Crampton of the Flag Institute proposed a standardised design, reproduced on the front cover of this report, which is the basis of the Wessex flags currently available for sale, and which is also starting to appear on T-shirts, car

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[37] See http://www.amazon.com

stickers, etc.

As the recent outbreak of English flags that appeared on shops, houses, and even painted on people's faces, at the time of the World Cup shows, there are few things more guaranteed to bring people together than a shared flag.

Wessex dialect

As any anthropologist or philologist knows, language is the foundation-stone of culture and while experts may argue over what is a language and what is a dialect, there is no disputing the distinctive sound of western speech. The most distinguishing feature of Wessex English is its rhotic 'r' sound, that is, the pronunciation of the letter 'r' in such words as 'arm'. As good a definition of a Wessaxen as any is someone who doesn't regard the words 'source' and 'sauce' as homophones!

Wessex dialect has been the subject of a specific study by Norman Rogers[38], while Peter Trudgill's book *The Dialects of England* identifies a South West dialect region that is fairly congruent with our definition of Wessex.

Wessex dialect is normally heard coming from the mouths of humorous performers such as The Wurzels, Benny Hill or Pam Ayres, or from ignorant country bumpkins in comedy routines. (One comedian, mocking the trip-hop star Tricky's accent, recently described Bristol as "the only place where even the black people don't sound cool".) The roots of this can be traced back to the Norman Conquest, the invaders regarding their conquered subjects as "rudes et idiotes", and the English language as the grunting of ignorant savages. Given that the West Saxon form of English was that of the dispossessed rulers of England, it stands to reason that speakers of this, the purest form of English, would be regarded with particular contempt. As Fr. Andrew Phillips put it in his book, *The Rebirth of England and English: The Vision of William Barnes:*

"BBC English, the English of the upper class, is merely a Norman accent, that of invaders who could not speak English properly and then, ironically, passed on their accent to succeeding generations as a status symbol, the sign of their superiority and prestige of the English peasantry."

Food and drink

Cider is not, of course, unique to the Wessex region, but it is strongly associated with it. Both the 'big two' UK cider manufacturers are located in Wessex Society's 'wider Wessex' region (Matthew Clark in Bristol and Bulmers in Hereford), as are a host of smaller cider makers and the National Cider Museum. Books of local recipes show that cider also features heavily as an ingredient in Wessex cookery. The potential for regionally-based marketing of food and drink has yet to be fully realised.

Music

Bristol's West Indian community – whose roots go back to the city's 18th century involvement with the slave trade – is one of Britain's longest-established and it continues to have a huge impact on cultural life. The so-called Bristol Sound is the result of the strong degree of integration between black and white Bristolians, with influences being pulled in from a variety of sources, including Jamaican dub reggae, American hip-hop, southern African jazz and home-grown punk rock. Nor is this sound confined to Bristol. The *Dub Out West* series

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[38] Norman Rogers, *Wessex Dialect*, Moonraker Press, 1979

of albums features acts from all over Wessex, from Newbury to Gloucester to Devon. The sound is generally a more 'purist' Jamaican form of dub reggae – not having had the violent upheaval of the St. Paul's riots as a catalyst for ultimately bringing communities together – but there is enough evidence of other influences to suggest that the Bristol Sound could well be re-named the Wessex Sound.

Ceremonial aspects

The Monarchy has adapted to devolution by giving younger members of the Royal Family geographical areas within which they can act, in effect, as regional figureheads. The role of the heir to the throne as Prince of Wales and Duke of Cornwall has established a long-standing relationship with the Principality and the Duchy. The Princess Royal is now seen to be developing a similar role in relation to Scotland, as is the Duke of York in relation to Northern Ireland and the north of England. The division of responsibility for the Millennium celebrations is an illustration of this.[39]

A similar role for the Earl and Countess of Wessex in relation to Wessex has already been established. One of the couple's earliest public engagements was the Millennium Service at Winchester Cathedral on 2nd January 2000. It is difficult to envisage this role being seen as equally fitting with regard to 'the South West', especially if Cornwall is included.

The history and culture of Wessex provide a sound basis for the development of regional ceremonial that has no equal among purely administrative regions, whose identity is necessarily synthetic.

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[39] See http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/587973.stm

CHAPTER 5: THE POLITICAL DIMENSION

"Wessex has grown into England, England into the United Kingdom, the United Kingdom into the British Empire. Every prince who has ruled England before and since the eleventh century has had the blood of Cerdic the West-Saxon in his veins."

- E. A. Freeman, *History of the Norman Conquest*, 1867

Support for Wessex among the region's MP's is well-evidenced. A survey carried out by the Wessex Regionalists in March 2001 (and published jointly with the Wessex Constitutional Convention and Wessex Society)[40] invited views from 262 prospective Parliamentary candidates, representing the Conservatives, Greens, Labour and Liberal Democrats. The survey posed the question:

"Irrespective of your views on regional government in principle, do you favour a Wessex region (however defined) in preference to 'The South-West' and 'The South-East'?"

The responses include those of 15 out of the 77 MP's returned in June 2001. Relevant extracts from their replies are given in Table 3. <u>Not one</u> of the respondents (45 in total) defended the existing regional boundaries.

Table 3: Views of Members of Parliament

NAME, PARTY AND CONSTITUENCY	COMMENTS
Annette Brooke *(Lib. Dem., Dorset Mid & Poole North)*	I have just read through your material very quickly and it occurs to me that one of my long standing positions has a degree of compatibility with your objectives. Along with many Lib Dem Poole Councillors I am in favour of a South Central Region. We have the Metropole grouping which includes Poole, Bournemouth, Southampton and Portsmouth. Poole does not relate well to much of the south west region. In addition I think the boundaries have no real meaning which divide the SE and the SW. Poole Councillors have participated in the present regional arrangements because we believe in regional government (preferably elected!) and we must do what is best for Poole at the time. However, we constantly argue that the definition of the regions should be examined, something the Labour Government has not been prepared to do. Incidentally, I have always argued that Bournemouth University (largely located in Poole) should have been named Wessex University.
Christopher Chope *(Con., Christchurch)*	I do not favour regional government but I am absolutely opposed to the present ludicrous boundaries which make an artificial distinction between the South East and the South West thereby creating peripherality to my own constituency of Christchurch. The demise of the Wessex Regional Health Authority is the latest blow that we have suffered with immediate adverse consequences for our Health workers.
Brian Cotter *(Lib. Dem., Weston-super-Mare)*	I strongly support the principle of regional government and I do not personally have very fixed views about the precise regional boundaries. I am certainly sympathetic to the idea that there could be a Wessex region. As and when the government's agenda fore regional government advances I would want to see the views of people across the various parts of the UK reflected in the final settlement. It should not be for government to impose "neat" solutions such as the South West or South East as the only model for regionalism.
Valerie Davey *(Lab., Bristol West)*	I am firmly committed to regional govt. having served on the Assoc. of European Regions, but am not a Wessex Regionalist.

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[40] *Views of Wessex*, May 2001

Julia Drown *(Lab., Swindon South)*	I appreciate the historical connections of Wessex and was interested in your proposals. I have to say that this issue is rarely raised with me by my constituents. I can't recall anyone suggesting Wessex as a regional name or identity but I would certainly be keen to talk to constituents who felt strongly about this issue. I do feel the priority is to get Government and our existing regional structures working for the people I represent. So whilst wanting to be kept informed of your work I would not at this stage say I supported Wessex over the South West. However whether or not we are in the same region I think it is important to have good relations with all out neighbouring counties. And there may be a number of issues where we could work more effectively with the Wessex Counties e.g. on Paddington/Swindon/M4 corridor issues and I would be keen to support this. This could in time develop into a stronger Wessex identity.
Sandra Gidley *(Lib. Dem., Romsey)*	As a Hampshire MP who feels we do not instinctively belong in the South East Region I am broadly in support of your aims. I might perhaps question the inclusion of Devon – but even so I believe this is preferable to the existing set-up.
Andrew Hunter *(Con., Basingstoke)*	I can answer your question simply and directly. I strongly favour a Wessex region (however defined) in preference to 'The South-West' and 'The South-East'. The latter are wholly artificial creations, designed to pave the way for regional government within a European super state. The entity of Wessex, however, can be justified geographically, economically and – to a lesser extent – socially, quite apart from its proud history.
Robert Key *(Con., Salisbury)*	Unlike most Members of Parliament and candidates, I am extremely fortunate to represent my genuine home. I was born in Plymouth in 1945 – and my parents moved to Salisbury in 1947. Since then I have spent the majority of my life in Salisbury – or the villages outside it. I went to school in Salisbury and then in Sherborne. Throughout my life Wessex has been a reality as far as I am concerned. I count myself a man of Wessex. I think the old, socialist, economic planning regions are arbitrary. What on earth do the Forest of Dean and the Isles of Scilly and Salisbury have in common? Yet we are all within the boundaries of the Government Office of the South West. If the Labour Party imposes regional government, Wessex will be split up in different and meaningless ways. The answer to your question is easy. Of course I favour a Wessex region in preference to 'the South West' and 'the South East'. I do not favour regional government – frankly England is too small for that. However, historically and culturally Cornwall is quite distinct, as is the territory I am proud to call Wessex.
Oliver Letwin *(Con., Dorset West)*	I am in principle opposed to regional government in England. As I say, and to make matters absolutely clear, I do *not* favour any form of regional government whatsoever. However, if we were forced at any time to accede to regional government due to an Act of Parliament, I would certainly prefer to see a Wessex region rather than a meaningless "south west" region.
Dr. Andrew Murrison *(Con., Westbury)*	I would agree with you that traditional names, such as Wessex, are preferable for an established region to such modern constructs as 'The South West'. It is clear that the boundaries of the South-West Region currently on offer from the EU, via the LibDems and Labour, bears little relation to historic Wessex.
David Rendel *(Lib. Dem., Newbury)*	Liberal Democrats have an old and strong commitment to regional self-government. The principle of democratic self-government demands that jurisdictional boundaries reflect people's identification with and understanding of where they live. It follows that these boundaries should be drawn up only in close consultation with the communities involved. I do not believe that it is appropriate for politicians to advocate precise boundaries for any region. As a Liberal, I do not believe that politicians can or should legislate to define people's identities. I support the principle of regional self-government and of local determination of regional boundaries.
Andrew Turner *(Con., Isle of Wight)*	If we were to have regional government (and I am against it) I would prefer Wessex to either South East or South West.

Peter Viggers (Con., Gosport)	My personal view is that Gosport and Hampshire fit more naturally into the Wessex area than the South East of England which is where we have been allocated by the present Government. I wish you well in promoting the interests of Wessex, though I have to say my own views fall well short of the proposed structure for Wessex which you are suggesting.
Robert Walter (Con., Dorset North)	I think the South West Region and more particularly in the South East are totally artificial. My constituents have nothing in common with the citizens of either Truro or Tewkesbury.
Sir George Young, Bt. (Con., Hampshire NW)	I see real difficulties in seeking to promote a Wessex Region that includes Devon, which is very much part of the South West. Putting Devon in your Wessex Region leaves Cornwall very much on its own! While I was delighted that Prince Edward choose Wessex for his title, I have to say that I am not in favour of regional self government for Wessex, or indeed for any other region in England. With Parishes, Districts, Counties, Westminster and Europe, my view is that there are already enough layers of Government.

Wessex has also been the subject of three speeches made by the present Lord Bath in the House of Lords, between 1997 and 1999.[41]

Wessex was also mentioned in a series of Parliamentary questions tabled by Andrew Turner, MP for the Isle of Wight, in July 2001. The following are of particular relevance:

- [5079] To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what requests he has received that Wessex should not be partitioned between the South-East and South-West regions.

  The Government's response stated "We have no record of any formal representations to the effect that Wessex should not be 'partitioned' between the South-East and South-West regions." (This should be no surprise, given that no opportunity to make formal representations had been offered. A number of representations have been made since, both before and after the publication of the White Paper.)

- [5080] To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what considerations he has given to the creation of a Wessex (a) region and (b) regional assembly?

  The response given was non-committal pending the publication of the White Paper.

- [5099] To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the Government purposes for which, at 31st May 1997, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight were included with (a) Dorset and Wiltshire, (b) Sussex and Surrey and (c) Berkshire, with or without other counties in each case.

  The response given was that at 31st May 1997, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight were part of the South West and Wessex Regional Health Authority, which also included the counties of Dorset and Wiltshire. This changed in April 1999, when Hampshire and the Isle of Wight were aligned with the South East Regional Health Authority. On 31st May 1997, the Environment Agency's South and West region, based largely on the GO South West region, included a small part of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight; this was stated to remain the case. For all other Government purposes, as far as could be ascertained, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight were, on 31st May 1997, included in the GO South East region.

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[41] See http://www.lordbath.co.uk/speeches/sp_frame.htm

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

"I think the single most important thing is to get across that politics is a process whereby if you start campaigning about something you can deliver a result."

- Charles Clarke MP, Labour Party Chairman and Minister without Portfolio, 2002

The existing pattern of regions in southern England is neither popular nor practical. The problems identified are real and no amount of money spent on promoting these regions will make them any more loved or effective. On the contrary, it is likely to generate hostility towards the Government's plans even among those who are well-disposed in principle to regional devolution.

Section 25 of the Regional Development Agencies Act 1998 gives the Secretary of State the power to alter regional boundaries by means of Statutory Instrument, subject to consultation with the regional and local government bodies affected by the change, though bizarrely the power does not allow the number of regions to be increased or reduced. The White Paper rejects immediate changes but leaves open the possibility of change in the longer term.

We urge that changes be made, and made at the earliest opportunity. Our recommendations are as follows:

1.   That the power to alter boundaries should be extended to allow additional regions to be created.

2.   That Cornwall (with the Isles of Scilly) forms a separate region, as advocated by the Cornish Constitutional Convention and supported by the 50,000 signatories of its petition calling for the same.

3.   That the South East region be divided three ways: Buckinghamshire to the East of England; Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight to the South West; the remaining counties to form a continuing South East region.

4.   That the enlarged South West be renamed Wessex.

5.   That, if these boundary changes are delayed, enabling legislation on the establishment of regional assemblies is drafted in such a way as to maintain the maximum flexibility on boundaries until such time as a referendum is held in the areas concerned.

Table 4: Regional comparisons within the United Kingdom

NAME (regions proposed to be superseded are in *italic*; regions proposed to be created are in **bold italic**)	AREA (sq.km.)	POPULATION	PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES
Northern Ireland	14,144	1,577,836	18
Scotland	78,789	4,998,567	72
North East	8,592	2,581,300	30
North West	8,851	6,880,500	76
Yorkshire & the Humber	15,400	5,047,000	56
Wales	20,758	2,835,073	40
West Midlands	13,004	5,335,600	59
East Midlands	15,627	4,191,200	44
East of England	*19,120*	*5,418,900*	*55*
East of England [with Bucks.][42]	***20,997***	***6,213,100***	***63***
London	15,080	7,285,000	74
South East	*19,096*	*8,077,600*	*83*
South East [Kent/Surrey/Sussex]	***9,195***	***4,135,000***	***40***
Wessex	***28,296***	***7,343,000***	***77***
South West	*23,289*	*4,935,700*	*51*
Cornwall[43]	***3,559***	***493,900***	***5***

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[42] Including Slough
[43] Including Isles of Scilly

APPENDIX A: WESSEX REGIONS
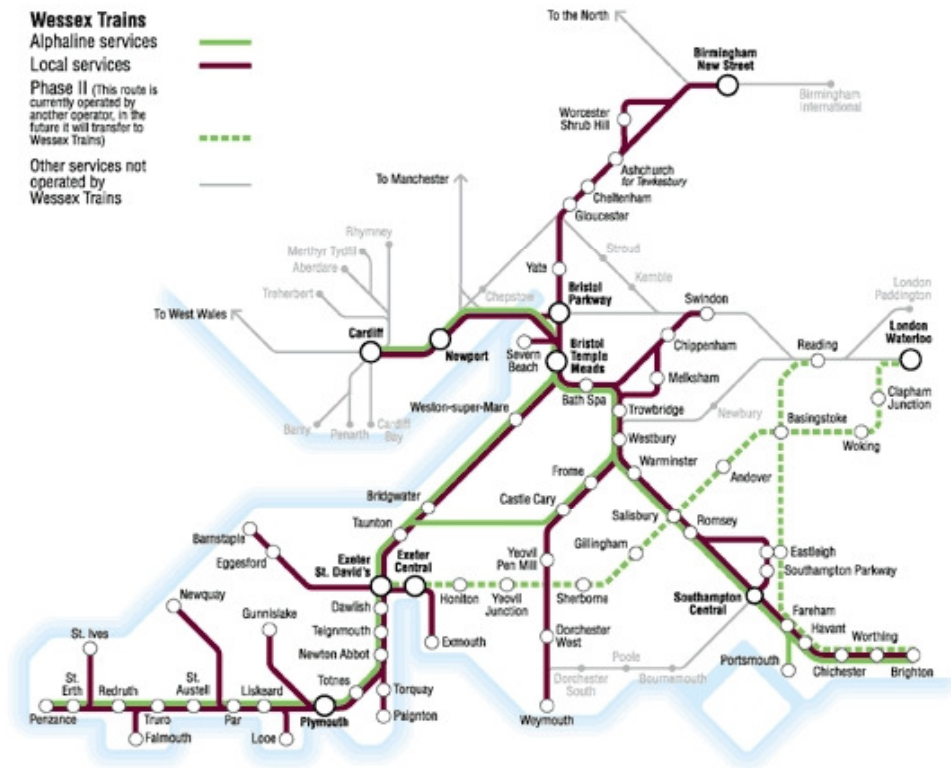
Figure A1: Wessex Trains network
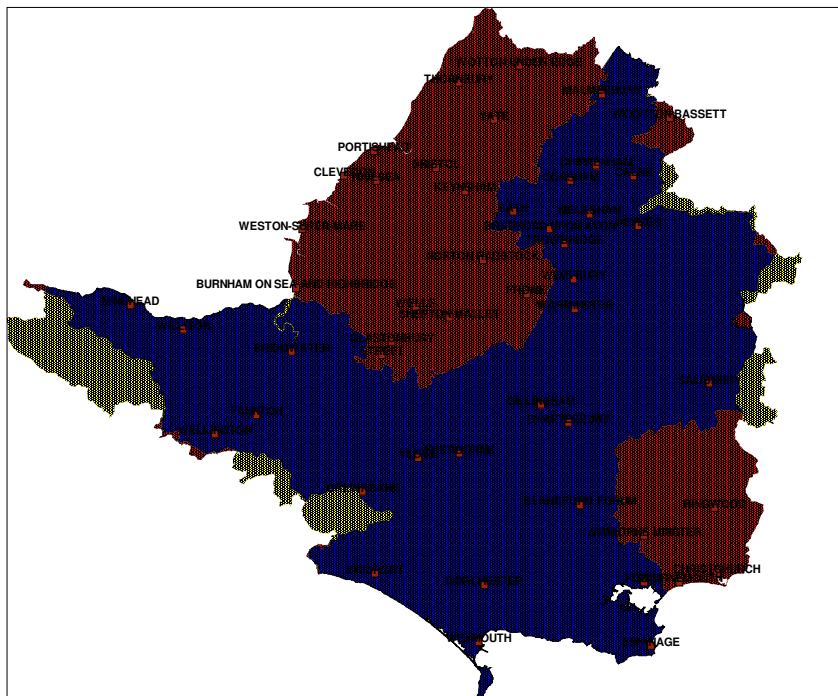
Figure A2: Wessex Water operating region (showing sewerage and water undertakings)
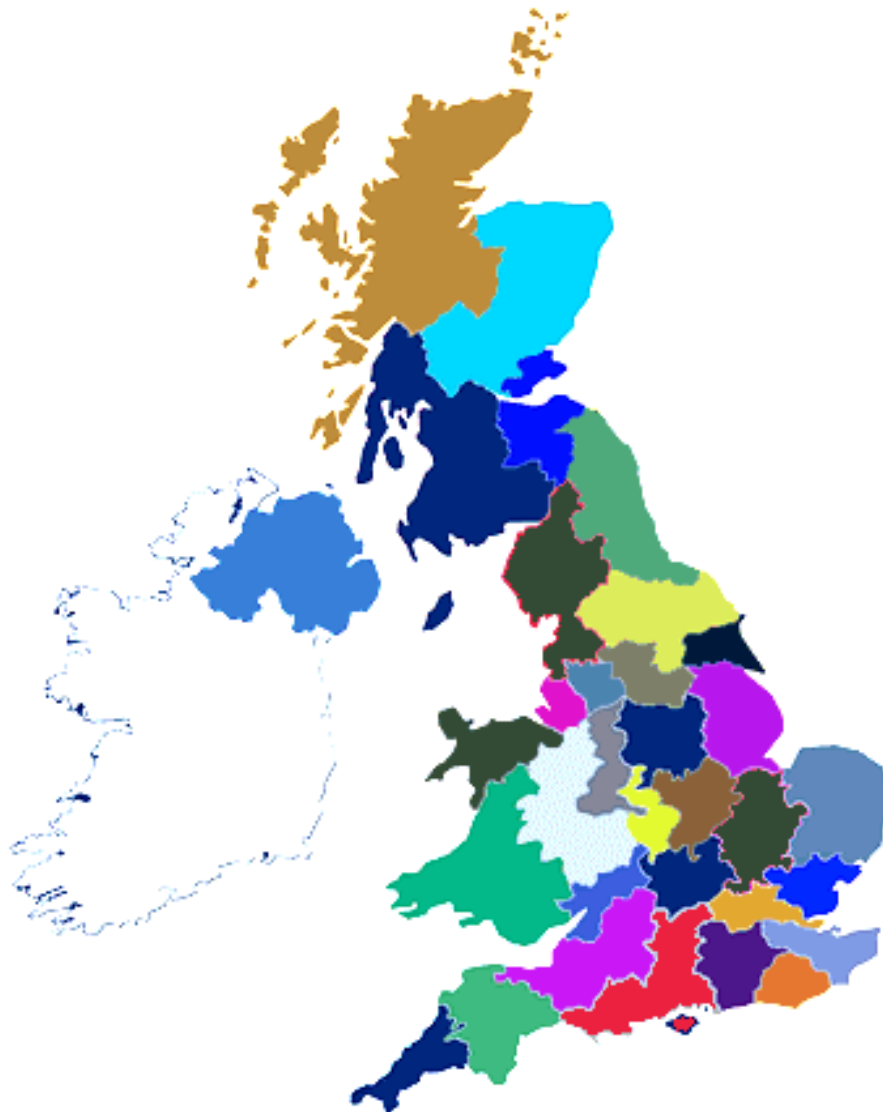
Figure A3: Federation of Small Businesses regional map (Wessex region highlighted in red)

COUNTRIES AND PROVINCES OF THE FEDERATION

SCOTLAND

HIGHLAND

FORTH

Edinburgh

IRELAND

STRATHCLYDE

NORTHUMBRIA

ENGLAND

ULSTER

ISLE OF MAN

Federal Capital

YORK

Dublin

ATLANTIC

LEINSTER

WEST PENNINES

MERCIA

WASH

CAMBRIA

WALES

GLAMORGAN

Cardiff

London

LONDON
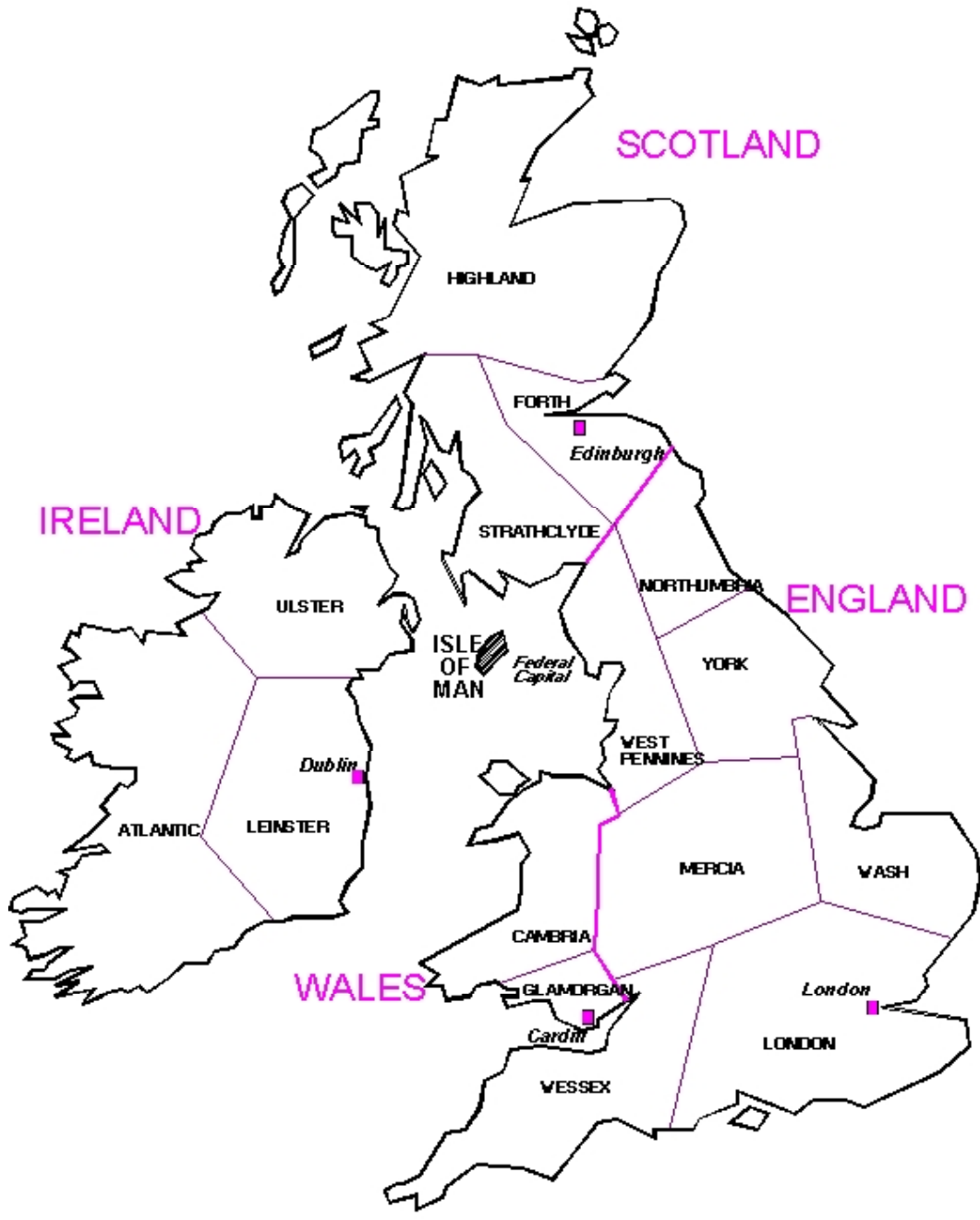
WESSEX

Figure A4: Map of bioregions produced by ECO, the Campaign for Political Ecology

Figure A5: Map of regions based upon C.B. Fawcett's *The Provinces of England* **(1919)**
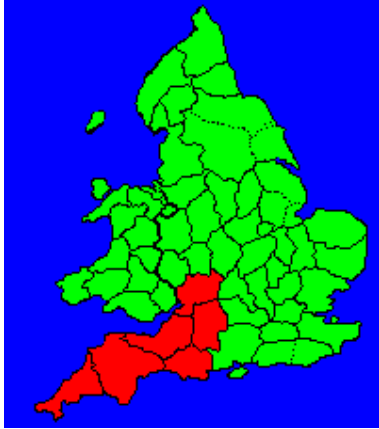
Figure A6: Region currently covered by 43rd Wessex Brigade
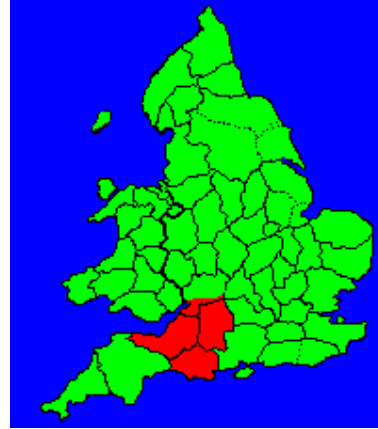
Figure A9: Former MAFF Wessex Region
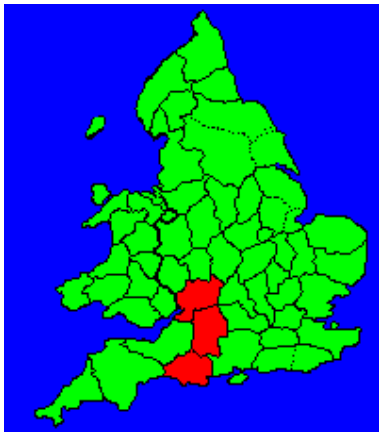
Figure A7: Countryside Alliance Wessex Region
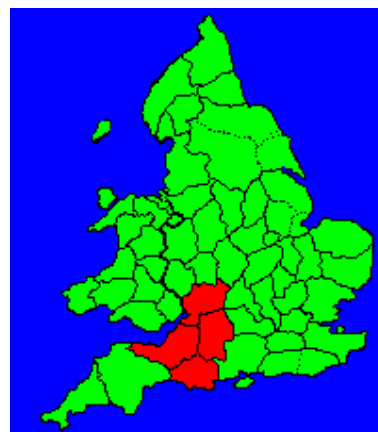
Figure A10: National Trust Wessex Region
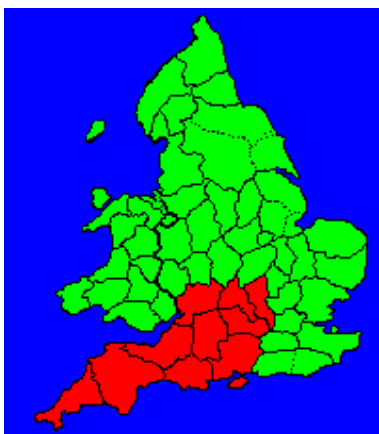
Figure A8: Territorial Army Wessex region
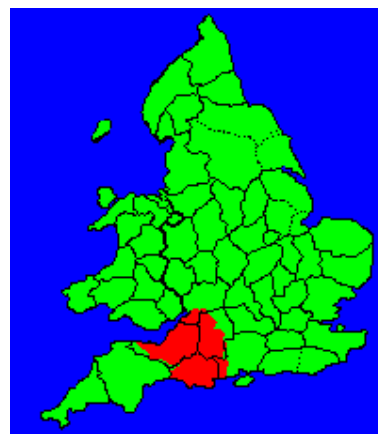
Figure A11: Environment Agency North Wessex / South Wessex areas
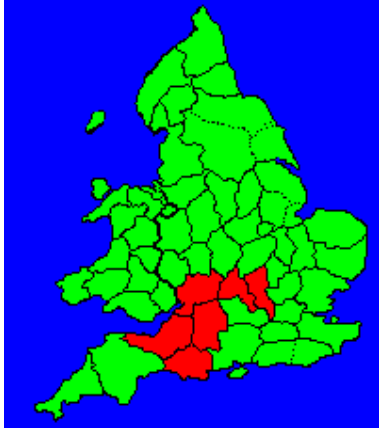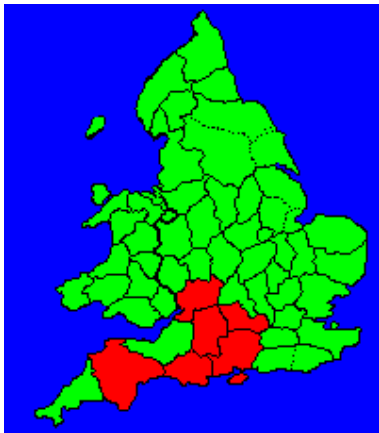
Figure A12: Tenant Farmers Association Wessex region

Figure A13: Former Wessex NHS authority

Figure A14: Area covered by former Wessex Regiment (note: Somerset was covered by the Somerset and Cornwall Light Infantry)

Figure A15: Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors Wessex region

Figure A16: Railtrack Wessex region
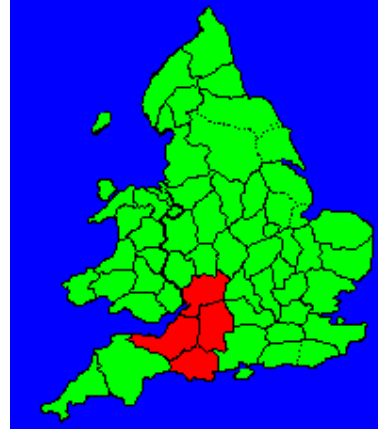
Figure A17: Pagan Federation Wessex district

APPENDIX B: OTHER 'SOUTH WEST' REGIONS
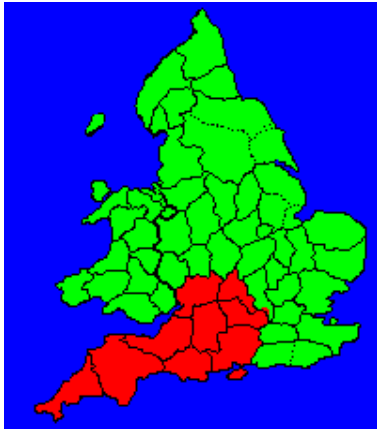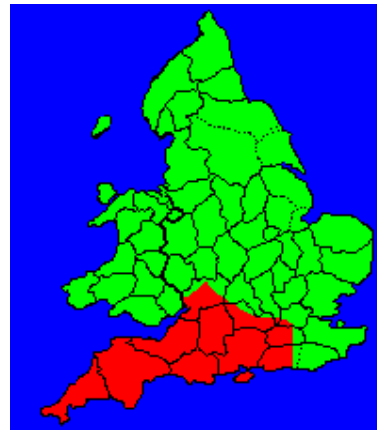

Figure B1: Western Traffic Area

Figure B3: Transport & General Workers Union Region 2 – South West England and the Channel Islands
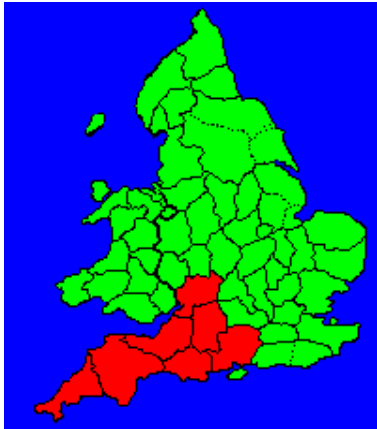

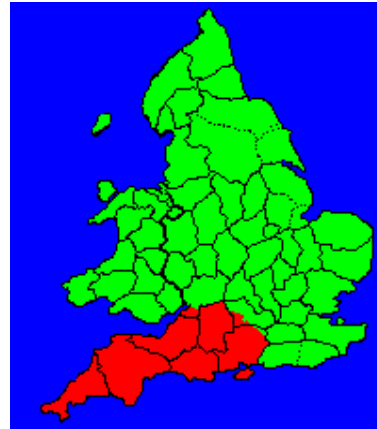**Figure B2: Traveline South West**

Figure B4: Co-operative Group South West Region

APPENDIX C: REGIONAL BOUNDARIES SINCE 1945

An argument occasionally deployed against Wessex is that the concept is one from the past, unsuited to modern conditions. In fact, this argument is much more appropriately directed at the existing regional boundaries, whose origins lie in 1930's civil defence planning.

From 1938, Great Britain was divided into regions, each with a divisional commander (later Regional Commissioner) assisted by regional officers of the main Government departments. These were the first fully operative multi-purpose regional administrations. (Individual services, notably the Post Office, had regions of their own before this, but links at regional level between different services were limited.) In the event of invasion, the Commissioner was expected to assume all civil authority in his region.

The south coast was divided between three regions: Cornwall and Devon to the South West; Dorset, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight to the South; Sussex and Kent to the South East. These three regions ran well inland to regional capitals – Bristol, Reading and Tunbridge Wells – that were, so far as possible, clear of any immediate threat of being overrun, yet with good transport links to London.

The influence of this era continues today. The Government Office for the South West is still based in Bristol, at the north end of its region. It is only since the formation of the South West RDA and its accompanying Regional Chamber (now the South West Regional Assembly) in 1998 that Exeter has come into its own as a putative regional 'capital'.

The continuation of wartime controls post-1945 necessitated retention of a regional structure and in 1946 a standard map of regions was issued by the Treasury. This was heavily influenced by wartime boundaries, the biggest change being to merge the South East with London.

Wessex therefore entered the 1950's as part of two regions: the South West covering Cornwall, Devon, Somerset, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire; the Southern region covering Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Hampshire, the Isle of Wight and Dorset. The last-named of these was transferred to the South West in 1958, minus the municipal borough of Poole, which, for regional purposes only, remained in the Southern region.

When the regional boundaries were re-drawn in 1965, the Southern region vanished, merged into a greater South East encompassing all the counties around London and a few – such as Hampshire and Oxfordshire – that lie further afield.   Poole was included in the South East along with Bournemouth, which at that date was classed as a Hampshire county borough, and Christchurch, a Hampshire municipal borough.

The regional map of southern England needed just one adjustment as a result of the 1972 Local Government Act. Poole, Bournemouth and Christchurch moved west in April 1974 as part of the expanded Dorset. The South West then took on the shape it has today.

The South East did not obtain its present boundaries until 1994, when the Government Offices for the Regions were created by William Waldegrave. The greater South East was divided into three – the present South East, Greater London and the East of England (which also incorporates the former East Anglia region).
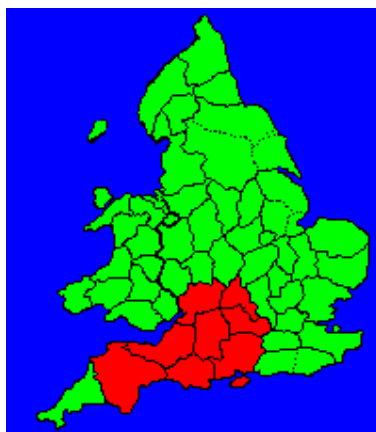
All these regions were intended as technical divisions; none was designed for the explicit purpose of reflecting or becoming a political community. They take their shape from what is expedient from the perspective of the centre, not necessarily from where people on the ground

feel they belong, or would want to belong if regions were democratic entities. Uniformity of scale has resulted from the need to fit regions into administrative hierarchies, with comparable career opportunities, pay structures and caseload responsibilities. Once regions are defined in terms of structures accountable to autonomous assemblies pursuing innovative and divergent priorities, this need for uniformity of scale will disappear.

In Scotland and Wales, identity shaped the administrative units. Given a blank map, they might not have been obvious as administrative areas. In England, massive efforts are underway to make the administrative structures shape identity. The introduction of elected regional assemblies will actually be made much easier if this project is now abandoned and the identities are allowed to shape the structures instead. The United Kingdom has already changed its administrative boundaries more often than any other EU member state. One more time will not hurt if it proves to be the means of achieving boundaries that will actually last.

Throughout the 20th century, official regionalism in England has also been supremely anglo-centric, revolving around the question, 'How do we best organise England?', not 'How does our geography fit into the emerging Europe of the 21st century?' The great advantage of a name like Wessex over 'the South West Region of England' is that it sits there as an equal alongside Wales, Brittany, Picardy, Tuscany, Flanders and all the rest. It is a region in its own right, not just an arbitrary piece of something else.

This report argues that the boundaries of the Government Office regions which are the basis of the proposals for regional devolution set out in the government's White Paper *Your Region, Your Choice* do not adequately reflect the real regional geography of Southern England. It illustrates the effects of this on different groups of stakeholders in the region and argues for a Wessex region which would be both geographically cohesive and historically rooted, unlike the present South West and South East regions, which are neither popular nor practical.

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