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Philip Craig,  
South East Regional Assembly

28 September 2006

Dear Philip

### **Select Committee on Social Enterprise**

The Oxfordshire Economic Partnership is pleased to be given the opportunity, to respond to the Regional Assembly's Select Committee on SEEDA's impact on Social Enterprise.

The definition of Social Enterprise, in anything but the most general terms, is unnecessary. The DTI's definition is workable and is clearly the one that SEEDA will use if pushed. There is no such thing as a social enterprise in business model definition terms and so therefore it is an abstract concept which is probably best left undefined.

I have not had the opportunity to study the latest draft of the Regional Economic Strategy in detail, however, the strategy is about aspiration and not necessarily about how those are realised in any great detail.

I am unclear who or what organisation would take on a lead role regionally on Social Enterprise if it were not SEEDA.

It is clear to me that business support and other services need to be available and accessible to all business whatever their structure or objectives. It may be that these business support organisations need to promote themselves to the social enterprise sector but I do not feel that for instance, a whole new Business Link needs to be created - just one that is more accessible. As the current, in vogue, model for Business Links is one of brokerage then the access to specialised business support should be easily achieved with the right training and experience of staff within Business Link.

I am unclear as to the benefits of differentiating social enterprises from other enterprises, it seems to me that there are many advantages to social enterprises standing on a strong business footing and not relying on "handouts" or special treatment as a business but rather support to enable them to do the job which they have set out for themselves. For instance support for employing disadvantaged individuals not support for doing their accounts.

The public procurement playing field should be flat. All enterprises need to have an equal opportunity. It may be that social enterprises and indeed others such as the voluntary sector need to be given more support to allow them to take part in the process and indeed it would be a positive

step for "mainstream" companies to be given more support to become more of a "social enterprise".

SEEDA's success or otherwise, needs to be assessed in the same way that it is for other programmes. Appropriate measures of success should be decided so that activity can be successfully measured.

I would like to apologise for the brevity of the response to the select committee and hope that it proves of some use in spite of this.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J Mitchell". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J'.

Dr Jean Mitchell  
Executive Director