

Well, the last nine years have been quite a journey, for me and for all of us. I know many have been sceptical about the regional agenda, but that makes me all the more proud of what we have achieved together in the South East. Regionalism was never meant for us. John Prescott never envisaged that this region would be at the forefront of his regional agenda. Yet we have impressed everyone, Ministers included, with the alacrity, energy and expertise with which we embraced it, organized ourselves, engaged with partners and the public, created the evidence base, marshaled the thinking, built the alliances and the pressed the case for investment in South East England. We have created the most professional, most innovative, highest profile, and most effective of all regional assemblies. What do I count amongst our top half dozen successes?

- The greatest success has to be the SE Plan. If for no other reason than it was such a vast undertaking, so very well executed. A rigorous technical base, an inclusive approach to policy development that harvested innovation and promoted buy-in, thoroughly debated, contested and in the end owned by members, and the most ambitious public consultation ever carried out on a regional plan. A plan that earned a ringing endorsement from the EiP panel and which I am confident will be shown to have held sway with Ministers.

What else?

- Well second I'd cite the consensus we've built on regional investment priorities, particularly transport and housing. A consensus that has led to action on the ground – schemes now being built that have been on the stocks for decades.
- Third place would go to our ground breaking engagement with new agendas, such as climate change and health. We have demonstrated how important a holistic approach to planning is to addressing sustainability and public health.
- Fourthly I'd point to our constructive approach to scrutiny of SEEDA which has been demonstrably effective without being confrontational – while at the same time creating between us the strongest Assembly/RDA alliance of any region.
- Fifth place would go to the way we have conducted our business – openly and courteously, in a spirit of partnership between localities, between tiers of government, across sectoral and party interests, recognizing we are strongest speaking together as the country's greatest region.
- And finally, and perhaps most importantly, the strength of our communications – with our membership, with our partners and stakeholders, with the public – that has given us more national regional and local media coverage and a level of public awareness greater than any other regional body and any other assembly nationally.

This new regional territory that threatened to marginalize us – to benefit other areas of the country at our expense – we have captured and made our own.

All this is by no means down to me alone of course. I am proud to have played such a central role. But it could not have happened without everyone here:

- politicians, particularly my chairmen over the years, and especially Keith over the last three, a true statesman
- stakeholder representatives, who have brought different, truly enriching perspectives into our work
- colleagues in SEEDA, GOSE, the EA, health and other agencies, who have co-operated so constructively in our agenda
- and of course my colleagues – present and past - within the Assembly team itself.

It has been a privilege to lead that team. They are a wonderfully creative intellectual community, who know how to work hard and to have fun too, how to pull out all the stops to produce excellent work to tough deadlines, and how to build and harness true esprit de corps in the face of an ambivalent and often hostile climate of opinion. A small team with a real diversity of experience and expertise, private sector, voluntary sector, public sector, young and not so young, men and women, Dutch, French, German, Ghanaian, Kiwi, even Scottish... they have worked superbly together and the greatest risk, the worst damage that SNR could wreak would be to lose this collective expertise and knowledge for the region.

So, thank you all for your support over these nine years. Nine years that started with me as employee no 1, a mobile phone and a laptop, camping in GOSE's attic. And has ended, for me at least, with a turnover of £4.5m, 43 staff, and a body of such standing and influence that the Government that created us now has to abolish us.

It's been a great journey. Personally I am sad to go but hungry for change. I want to explore other opportunities before my career comes to a close. I move on with regret but also with satisfaction. My very best wishes to all of you for the continuing and I hope not too turbulent journey ahead.

Thank you.