

Across the great divide

Gary Tittley looks ahead to a series of events taking place as part of Manchester week

Europe is facing a year of great change, it is a year that will see an end to the current mandate of the European parliament, a new set of commissioners and it is the moment at which the EU has to face an unprecedented financial crisis and the subsequent economic fall out. The Lisbon strategy and its objectives for 2010 seem more challenging than ever, but never have they been more relevant. We cannot take our eyes off this prize and everyone must play their role. At the European and national level we will need good policies and wise spending, but it is at the local level, in our towns and cities, that we will realise these goals.

The Manchester city region, which is part of my own constituency, the north-west of England, has taken many steps to mitigate and face the economic shift. Its approach is very closely linked to achieving the Lisbon goals and looks not only at the immediate issues, but takes a long term and strategic approach. Between 16 and 20 March, the Manchester city region will hold a series of events that highlight the Manchester model.

The week will kick-off with a look at how innovative governance is vital for unlocking economic growth. In this context Manchester is the first city region to commission an independent economic review in Europe. The Manchester independent economic review is an independent commission of prominent economists and business leaders. It includes Jonathan Kestenbaum, the CEO of Nesta, Harvard's leading US economic expert Ed Glaeser and Jim O'Neill, the head of global economic research for Goldman Sachs. We are now working with Lyon, Barcelona and Dublin city regions to 'roll out' the benefits of this approach.

During the week a number of issues will be touched on, Brian Simpson MEP will host a meeting on the importance of using transport in cities to drive economic growth. In addition, Manchester's mini-Stern looks at the economic opportunities presented by the need to create a low carbon economy in the city region.

Finally, the week ends with a look at the Manchester city region's cultural boom. The region is rightly proud to be the home of multi-Oscar winning Slumdog Millionaire director, Bury-born Danny Boyle. It will soon see the creation of a massive media city in Salford, that will welcome thousands of staff from BBC television and radio, as well as hundreds of independent commercial companies. We also hope

to be welcoming the Royal opera house and will continue to build on our current strengths – the success of the Hallé under Mark Elder, the ground breaking Manchester international festival of new and original works and much,

much more. Friday's seminar will look at the creation of one of Europe's most high-tech digital arts centres in Europe, the sharp project, and an international music project to develop the musicians of the future, aftershock.

The Manchester city region is the economic engine of the north-west of England, generating over 40 per cent of its growth value added, and is the largest sub-regional economy outside London and the south-east of England.

I would really like to welcome you to learn more about my region and how we are taking an optimistic look at the future, looking squarely at the challenges and making sure that we can meet them. Can we do it, yes we can. ★

The Manchester city region is home to Danny Boyle, the director of the multi-Oscar winning Slumdog Millionaire

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Gary Tittley is the former leader of the European Parliamentary Labour Party