

## **Cornwall now looks to the future with a confidence that is the envy of others**

**Western Morning News piece by Carleen Kelemen, 1 February 2008**

We have achieved so much in the short timescale that has included Objective One. I have seen the change in the perception of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly as a place in need of help to one where it is good to do business and confidence is high. We are on a journey of economic rediscovery.

Back in 1999 people looked at Objective One as the panacea for all our ills. At £350 million the Objective One programme was just a tiny fraction of Cornwall's total economy. It was never a quick fix but a catalyst to restructure an economy that had been in long term decline for decades.

Recent economic statistics from both the Office of National Statistics and the European Commission confirm a steady growth in our economy, sometimes more rapid than the centre of the UK's wealth creation, Inner London. Indeed this progress has been such that these figures show that we would no longer qualify for Convergence if the assessment was done today!

So how did Objective One do this for us? What is the legacy and where do we go from here?

Apart from the obvious - some striking and environmentally friendly buildings, such as high quality workspace for new businesses and the Core at the Eden Project, and town regeneration schemes - one of the most important achievements is invisible. When I arrived in Cornwall there was virtually no high speed broadband access at all. The Internet worked on the old dial up system which meant that if someone received a large e mail attachment or wanted to open a detailed website they would have to go and make a cup of tea while they were waiting.

This was unacceptable for businesses needing to offer a fast response, fast turn around and efficient service. Through the actnow project we now have invaluable broadband access across 99% of this region with 10,000 businesses connected.

This now supports all types of businesses, from the creative and new media to fishermen and farmers who can send real time photographs of their catch and crops to buyers to secure orders.

Distance is no longer a barrier to investment. And to keep the gateway to Cornwall open Newquay Cornwall Airport now offers flights to many domestic and international cities. Objective One investment is ensuring it will meet new security and safety standards when the Ministry of Defence



hands it over for civilian use and expansion later in the year. The re-dualling of part of the main train line combined with the recent dualling of the A30 at Goss Moor have given clear signals within and without Cornwall that we are open for business.

Back in 1999 young people had little choice but to leave for higher education or for career opportunities as there was little opportunity for university level education in Cornwall. The Combined Universities in Cornwall give our young people the choice to stay if they want to go on to higher education. And other projects, such as Unlocking Cornish Potential are placing graduates in Cornish businesses which use their talents and access to university research and know-how to move their businesses forward.

The Peninsula College of Dentistry and Medicine, a partner in CUC, provides training for a range of health professionals and incubation units attracting health-related businesses many of which have already expanded in the short time that they have been in residence.

Fifteen Cornwall, the inspirational Jamie Oliver initiative is visible and a symbol of the "new Cornwall". I have heard criticism that the restaurant is expensive and therefore not for the people for Cornwall. But it is for the people of Cornwall. All of its trainees, many of whom have experienced a number of life's difficulties, are recruited from within Cornwall and they are given a life changing opportunity.

And then there are the amazing successes of our local produce and food producers bringing national recognition for the quality and variety of Cornish food and drink. The Cornwall NHS food programme has attracted nationwide acclaim, including from the Duke of Cornwall, as the way to source local produce, cut food miles and ensure hospital patients get tasty, healthy local food. Currently under construction is a multi-million pound Food Production Unit that will supply all Cornwall's health trusts with quality local food and local producers with new markets.

Now, with the Convergence and associated programmes we have the chance to push the boundaries even further and to continue this economic revival because there is still much to be done.

With the statistics now pointing to success we know that the Convergence Programmes will be our final major European investment opportunity. It is vital that we make the most of it.

Through the years of Objective One it became clear that if Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly is to compete in the rapidly changing global economy knowledge is the key. We are not there yet.

We must compete by offering knowledge, added value and high quality. To this end Convergence will be more focussed and selective in its projects and will aim at re-balancing the economy to one more driven by knowledge-based industries.

Each of the Convergence investments must be made to show how they will contribute to the growth of higher value, high growth businesses and therefore contribute to better wages in Cornwall.

And for those still excluded from work or those with little or no qualifications the good news is that the European Social Fund Convergence Programme will offer about twice as much investment as under Objective One. So hopes are high that the most persistent issues in this rural region such as worklessness, isolation, economic exclusion can be tackled and beaten.



The year 1999 seems such a long time ago and today Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly stands proud above the rest of the crowd.

It's a place where working together creates new beginnings and new successes - building connections between people, work, education, living and leisure.

Historical statistics and faceless numbers will never tell the story of what has been achieved by the people and partnerships of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.

**Carleen Kelemen**

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