

## **Gold, Silver or Bronze for the Midlands**

Given that Team GB came second in the medals table of the Olympics in front of China there are lots of reasons to celebrate. It is hoped that recent change brought in by George Osborne, the former Chancellor, which have now been reviewed by Prime Minister Theresa May who has taken a different slant on things, will still allow the region to prosper.

The Midlands has been known as the workshop of the World and the birth place of the industrial revolution. Birmingham is the second city of the UK which has continued its Cinderella like transformation.

Thus now the regions Councils of Birmingham, Solihull, Walsall, Sandwell, Dudley, Wolverhampton and Coventry have agreed to pool their powers into a “West Midlands Combined Authority” (“WMCA”). The question is really how effective will the WMCA be for the region? Will the WMCA enable regional growth within the Midlands in order to allow the region to be placed on the podium of economic development in front of other parts of the UK?

In conjunction with the WMCA there will also be a post for a directly appointed Mayor. The Mayor will have various powers devolved to him directly as well as being the chairman on the WMCA which relate to economic development, housing and transport. The issue that some see is that given the various councils have pooled their budgets and resources into the WMCA, they too will want a say and have influence over budget allocation in order that they can show benefit to their constituents rather than just to be presided over by the Mayor.

Theresa May wants a small change in direction so that the directly appointed Mayor is not similar to that of London, with sweeping powers, but instead will have the collaborative approach of chairman over the WMCA. This could simply be because the PM feels there is risk that Labour moderates such as Andy Burnham (who is seeking appointment as Manchester Mayor) and Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London), may be given a larger platform to change the policy of the Government.

The Mayor needs to be a person with character and personality such that they can ensure the WMCA speaks with one voice and ensures that it is loud enough to be heard nationally and internationally so that the “Midlands Engine” is as well-known as the “Northern

Powerhouse” in order that the Midlands continues its development of clusters of expertise created similar to the M4 Corridor Silicon roundabout and Silicon Glenn.

If the Mayor achieves this goal they will ensure the Midlands will attain the golden medal for the region and establish the sought after slogan of “Midlands Engine” in peoples psyche.