

**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND REGIONAL ASSEMBLY
SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL SOUNDING BOARD WORKSHOP
Action Note**

**19 May 2005
Berkeley House, Cross Lanes, Guildford**

Present:

Riki Therival	Chair
Martin Tugwell	South East England Regional Assembly
Joanna Cleasby	South East England Regional Assembly
Wout Janssen	South East England Regional Assembly
Steve Williams	English Heritage
Brian Wyld	RAISE
Peter Midgeley	Environment Agency
Ian Hepburn	Climate Change & Natural Resource Advisory Board
Robert Beasley	Environment Agency
Eike Muller	GOSE
Tony Cook	SERTAB
Christine Drury	SEFS
Claire Kerr	English Nature
Stewart Mitchell	SEERAWP Aggregates Working Party
Alistair Fulton	ERM
Roger Laws	Economic Advisory Board
Harry Rutter	Public Health Observatory

1. Apologies

Graham Tubb	SEEDA
Preetie Bindra	Rural Advisory Board
Trish Haines	Policy Advisory Board
Jackie Spiby	GOSE/South East Public Health Observatory
Chris Kenneford	Housing Advisory Board
Wendy Mesher	Urban Renaissance Advisory Group

2. Matters Arising/Notes of last Meeting

The notes of the last meeting were amended to record that Steve Williams had not been present.

The Terms of Reference and the role of the Group was reiterated by the Assembly at the start of the meeting and how the advice of the Group is fed into the work of the Assembly.

It was suggested that the format of the notes of the meetings could be changed to create a more formal and clear audit trail of actions agreed and suggestions made by the Group to the Assembly.

IH raised a concern with the conclusion in the Key Sustainable Issues paper in respect of the issue of biodiversity. As currently drafted the paper concludes, “it is not clear that biodiversity is under threat at a regional level.” IH expressed his view that evidence is available to show that there is a threat at the regional level.

The Assembly noted that the Key Sustainability Issues paper identified that biodiversity had been identified as a key sustainability issue at the sub-regional level. The issue is therefore whether the evidence is available to identify it as an issue that has region-wide implications.

The Assembly accepted that if the evidence is available then it would be happy to ask ERM to reassess the categorisation of this issue. However it stressed that it is dependent upon the evidence being made available as quickly as possible. One of the key roles for the Sounding Board is to assist the Assembly in identifying data sources. It was unfortunate, given that the draft of the paper has been available since mid-March, that potential additional data sources had not been identified to address any concerns regarding the conclusion on biodiversity.

The Assembly noted a reference made by IH (and identified in the consultation response of the Biodiversity Forum) regarding the Natura 2000 network of sites. The Assembly highlighted the practical difficulty of the appraisal, at this stage, identifying any potential impact until such time as the spatial distribution at the sub-regional was better understood. However it was accepted that it would be appropriate for the second draft of the Sustainability Appraisal Report to make reference to the fact that higher levels of growth would carry a higher risk of potential impact on the Natura 2000 network of sites. The note would also make a reference to the work underway at the sub-regional level as being the mechanism by which the extent to which this risk is realised would be assessed.

The Assembly stressed its concern that extended debate on detailed aspects of the Key Sustainability Issues report would prevent its distribution to those undertaking the work at the sub-regional level. The Assembly sought clarification from the Board that they reaffirmed the view expressed at the previous meeting that they were in broad agreement with the key issues identified as being the appropriate ones to take into consideration as part of the South East Plan. With the caveat that there was a need to review the biodiversity issue, the Board reaffirmed their view.

IH passed on a paper outlining some proposed amendments to the categorisation of impacts and symbology used in the Sustainability Appraisal Report. The Assembly asked ERM to consider the points set out in the paper.

ACTION: It was agreed that:

- a) **With regards to the notes of the meetings, the Sounding Board will agree to a limited number of clear, concise recommendations that we make to the Assembly. We request that the Assembly will explain whether and how these are taken on board.**

- b) **Any information on additional evidence in respect of biodiversity to be sent to the Assembly within one week of the Key Sustainability Issues paper being e-mailed to Ian Hepburn.**
- c) **ERM to consider comments provided by IH on categorisation and symbology used in the appraisal report.**

3. Update on Progress

The Group were provided with an update on the revised timetable for the production of the South East Plan, which had arisen due to the need to provide additional time for the work at the sub-regional level to be completed. The revised timetable that has been agreed by the Assembly (and which is being considered by the Government) is:

13 June 2005 – Regional Planning Committee (to discuss overall strategy, levels of growth and the regional policy framework)

13 July 2005 – Assembly Plenary (to discuss the recommendations arising from the Regional Planning Committee)

9 Dec 2005 – Final advice received from the principal authorities undertaking the sub-regional strategies

1 February 2006 – Regional Planning Committee (to consider the sub-regional proposals in detail)

1 March 2006 – Assembly Plenary (to discuss the recommendations arising from the Regional Planning Committee)

End Mar 2006 – South East Plan is submitted to Government.

A second draft of the Sustainability Appraisal Report is being prepared for the July Plenary. This will take on board additional technical work, any changes to the policy framework arising from the consultation on the draft South East Plan and any specific comments on the SA process arising from the consultation.

The final version of the Sustainability Appraisal Report will be prepared once the advice is received from the sub-regions. This will be submitted to Government along side the South East Plan in March 2006.

ACTION: It was agreed that:

The Group recommends that the Assembly and ERM produce an audit trail of how the RSS has taken into account the SEA/SA findings to date, and that this be updated as the RSS evolves. This will help to fulfil the requirements of the SEA Directive Article 9.1b.

4. Consultation Responses

The Group discussed the summary of consultation responses that had been distributed to them prior to the meeting. There was a concern that the process needs to be more substantial, but it was agreed that it is for the Assembly to determine the mechanism by which the consultation responses are analysed. In reviewing the summary of the consultation responses the Group identified the following common themes:

- Many responses comment on the SA appearing to not cover a number of stages required as part of the Appraisal process, however it was noted that the appraisal is work in progress.
- Many responses raise a question regarding the level of detail included within the appraisal. The Group acknowledged that the level of detail being sought by respondents may not always be possible (or indeed relevant). The Group noted that wherever appropriate the Sustainability Report should explain how it handles this issue.
- Many responses ask for a clear audit trail to show how the appraisal has informed the decision making process.

ACTION: It was agreed that:

- a) **The Group recommended that key clusters of consultation responses are identified (e.g. cumulative impacts, level of detail, links of RSS to SA), and a 1-2 paragraph response to address each cluster is produced. Max 3 pages. This will help to fulfil the requirements of the SEA Directive Annex 1h.**
- b) **It was agreed by the Group that the spreadsheets were for internal use only as they are work in progress.**

5. Cumulative Impact Assessment

Building upon the debate at the previous Sounding Board meeting ERM made a presentation on how this issue might be taken forward. It was noted that both the available guidance and experience to date on addressing this issue is extremely limited.

ACTION: It was agreed that:

By the next meeting of the Sounding Board (21 June), ERM prepare 4-5 existing cumulative impacts (covering a range of social/economic/environmental issues): with the following details, receptors, relevant thresholds/targets and current status, what plans and programmes (inc RSS) have a bearing on this issue. At the next meeting, the Board could then investigate ways of analysing and managing these impacts. This is not expected to be a comprehensive exercise; rather an investigation into how cumulative impacts could be dealt with in a region-wide SEA.

6. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

7. Dates of Next Meeting

21 June 2005 @ 14.00 – 17.00 – Guildford

Key areas for discussion likely to include:

- Consideration of further advice from the principal authorities leading on sub-regional strategies
- Any outstanding issues prior to debate at Assembly Plenary on 13 July

06 October 2005 (Note: meeting previously identified for 22 September rearranged in light of revisions to the timetable for the sub-regional strategies)

Key areas for discussion likely to include:

- Monitoring of work underway at the sub-regional level;
- Further consideration of structure of the final report (i.e. the final report that is submitted to Government with the Plan in early 2006)

12 January 2006

Key areas for discussion likely to include:

- Review treatment of sustainability issues in the final advice from the principal authorities in respect of the sub-regional strategies and “other areas”;
- Final consideration of structure of final report
- Identification of any outstanding issues that may need to be considered by Assembly members.