

Challenges

1. The Overall Task

- 1.1 The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 places a new system of spatial planning on a statutory basis.
- 1.2 Spatial planning goes beyond traditional land use planning to bring together and integrate policies for the development and use of land with other policies and programmes that influence the nature of places and how they relate to people. Much greater emphasis is placed on the importance of implementation.
- 1.3 The South East Plan is the Assembly's term for the formal Regional Spatial Strategy for South East England, which will cover the period to 2026. It provides the statutory regional framework that forms the context within which Local Development Documents and Local Transport Plans need to be prepared, as well as other regional and sub-regional strategies and programmes that have a bearing on land use activities. These include the regional economic and housing strategies as well as strategies and programmes that address air quality, biodiversity, climate change, education, energy, environment, health, and sustainable development.
- 1.4 The Government has formally designated the Regional Assembly as the responsible body charged with undertaking the preparation of the South East Plan and its subsequent submission to Government.
- 1.5 This document represents the Assembly's response to that task.

2 Issues and Challenges

- 2.1 The South East has the largest regional population in the UK – over 8 million people in 2001. Apart from London, it is the most prosperous region but it is also the region with the widest range of social deprivation and economic disparities (again excluding London)(Figure A1 [unchanged]¹). It is an international gateway but parts of its road and rail systems are heavily congested. It has a high quality of landscape, with the highest proportion of land covered by national or international designations of any English region, and the highest proportion of woodland. Its attractiveness, geography and economic success mean that it is subject to substantial development pressures both national and international.

¹ Any maps or diagrams indicated as 'revised' or 'new' see the Annex to this revised version of the Plan. Any maps or diagrams indicated as 'unchanged' see the Draft South East Plan published in January 2005.

Some people contend that the region is 'full up'; others point out that 90% of its land mass remains undeveloped. Despite the conflicting messages, a high proportion of the population considers that they enjoy a high quality of life². (See Figure A2 [new]).

- 2.2 This short summary encapsulates both the challenges and the dilemma for the region. On the one hand economic growth and concomitant development has been a necessary condition for prosperity and social and environmental action. On the other, some consider that the price of that growth, in terms of resource consumption and other impacts, is too high and unsustainable in the long-term. The overall challenge is to try and strike the right balance between these polarised viewpoints: not a 'soggy' balance, but a judicious and clear blend that will ensure, with adaption and amendment, a sustainable change.
- 2.3 In essence, this is the role of the South East Plan: to set a reasoned and reasonable development framework for the period to 2026. The Plan seeks to take a longer-term view of development needs, but in a manner that is consistent with the principles of sustainable development. This is very challenging. It is difficult to try and evolve the right blend for a region as complex and diverse as the South East, but that is the Plan's goal.
- 2.4 To inform and structure the debate on the issues, the Assembly arranged an intensive series of debates in Spring 2004. These discussed a set of 11 Discussion Papers, grouped around 36 strategic issues in Paper 11 of that series. The debates proved lively, constructive and controversial but relatively few new issues and challenges were added to the list in Paper 11. An extract from the paper setting out the issues is therefore reproduced here.

Summary of the Issues (from Paper 11 of Spring Debates Series 2004):

- 1 Futures – the impacts of social/behavioural changes
- 2 Futures – the impacts of technological change
- 3 Forecasts – the merits of the illustrative scales of development
- 4 Forecasts – future patterns and scales of migration
- 5 Forecasts – the robustness of the economic forecasts
- 6 Forecasts – an ageing population and its implications
- 7 Forecasts – the issue of relating housing provision to price as raised by Kate Barker
- 8 Economy – globalisation and its impacts
- 9 Economy – inter-regional economic performance
- 10 Economy – sectoral economic forecasts and their realism
- 11 Economy – changes in working patterns
- 12 Housing – the scale of need and overall supply
- 13 Housing – affordability and how to deliver it more effectively

² Results of 2 Surveys by MORI for the Assembly in 2004

- 14 Housing – how to achieve the right type and quality
- 15 Housing – improving the condition and use of the existing stock
- 16 Housing – possible incentives for local authorities and other initiatives to help deliver housing targets
- 17 Transport – the impact of the growth illustrations, given basic trends in traffic growth
- 18 Transport – investment priorities
- 19 Transport – funding and charges, both capital and revenue
- 20 Transport – accessibility, especially for socially excluded groups
- 21 Transport – changes in lifestyle and their impacts on travel needs and investment
- 22 Social – educational and skills deficits and their resolution
- 23 Social – health in its widest sense
- 24 Social – exclusion and deprivation, and whether any more can be done
- 25 Environmental – natural resource management, and how to manage water resources to meet development need and reduce flood risk
- 26 Environmental – countryside management and the new opportunities created by the CAP reforms, with a particular focus on the urban fringe
- 27 Environmental – biodiversity and the scope to create strategic additions to regional priority habitats
- 28 Environmental – climate change and the scope for mitigation and management measures and the need for new coastal management, air and noise pollution policies will need to be borne in mind in all aspects of the draft Plan. By their nature, they are already familiar themes and therefore they are only briefly stated here, to register their acknowledgement and role in the Plan.
- 29 Sub-regions – the relative priority to be given to regeneration of the coastal towns
- 30 Sub-regions – current imbalances between labour supply, job availability and housing pressures, and the policies to reduce these
- 31 Vision – getting the balance and focus right
- 32 Spatial – the evolving relationship with adjoining regions
- 33 Spatial – the contribution of different forms of development
- 34 Spatial – the emphasis of development pressures on the western side of the region and how that should be handled
- 35 Spatial – the possible role of new strategic development areas
- 36 Spatial – the need to develop more effective delivery and implementation arrangements for whatever development is agreed.

2.5 Another of the Discussion Papers also considered longer term uncertainties and the scope for radical changes in circumstances and behaviour. (Discussion Paper 2 – Futures and Patterns of Change). This set out a range of potential changes and uncertainties and concluded that the most significant impacts on present behaviour and therefore ‘drivers’ of change were likely to be technology, and changes in social attitudes and behaviour. An example of both these factors at work is the prospect of further radical changes in the form of healthcare and

attitudes to health and healthiness. The Assembly's work on futures with Forum for the Future is ongoing but we have incorporated the conclusions of this 'future proofing' in the Plan (see Section B – Context).

3 Cross-Cutting Themes

- 3.1 Analysis of the Spring Debates identified a small number of themes which constantly recur and which will need to be borne in mind in all aspects of the draft Plan. By their nature, they are already familiar themes and therefore they are only briefly stated here, to register their acknowledgement and role in the Plan.
- 3.2 Sustainable Development – There is now a wide understanding that economic, social and environmental issues are inextricably linked, and linked with the overall management and conservation of natural resources. Substantial future development will be needed in the region, but it needs to be undertaken more sensitively and with less resource consumption for each unit of development than in the past. We need to reduce waste, throw away fewer resources and recycle/re-use more. We need to use cleaner and cleverer technology to reduce the impact of both development and its use. Sustainable Development is a central theme of the Plan and is articulated more fully in the Context (Part B) and in the Appraisal section.
- 3.3 Global Competition – The South East is competing on an international stage, a stage where the interaction of the world economy is rapidly increasing. The economic development of Third World countries, most notably China and India, is already having a marked effect on competitiveness and patterns of trade. All the evidence the Assembly has drawn together indicates that these trends will grow. Indeed our recent research work on 'offshoring' of jobs suggests that in some circumstances this may accelerate with significant consequences.
- 3.4 Climate Change – In the past few years a substantial body of evidence has pointed to an acceleration in climate change caused by human influence. The pace and form of that change is rather more open for debate but the significance of the issue is now acknowledged everywhere except in Australia and America. The South East region is sensitive to the effects of climate change.
- 3.5 Over the past century average temperature has risen by 0.5°C and summer rainfall has decreased. Around the region's coastline the sea level is rising, threatening important coastal habitats and increasing the risk of flooding. At the same time, a land tilt of about six millimetres a year in the South East, will also influence the relative rise in sea-level. It is predicted to become warmer all year round with wetter winters and drier summers. Weather extremes – such as the storms that caused the great floods on the eastern coastline in 1953, the storm of 1987 and the unusually warm summer of 1995 – may occur more frequently.

- 3.6 European Perspective – In a number of policy areas, notably waste, water and agriculture, the policies and legislation of the European Union have a growing and significant influence on development in the region. The reform of the Common Agricultural Policy and new demanding directives on waste and water are already having an impact. Over the course of the Plan, it is likely that this influence will grow on other issues such as transport and aviation, and environmental standards. The advent of the accession countries will further reduce the region's already limited access to financial assistance from European programmes for social and economic restructuring.
- 3.7 Resource Use – It is a corollary of our emphasis on sustainable development and concerns about climate change that the Plan must embody a significant emphasis on resource use. Although this particularly applies to resources such as water and waste, it also has a more general application. Similarly, although there will need to be an emphasis on higher standards of efficiency in new development, the same message also needs to be vigorously pursued in respect of existing development. Significant changes in performance will be required and this will also probably need significant changes in public attitude and behaviour. Fortunately, our recent surveys of public opinion suggested that the public agree the need for such changes and show some willingness to adapt³.
- 3.8 Technological Changes –The scale of technological change will be very substantial over the Plan period. The difficulty is to be sure which technologies. Not many people, for example, forecast the revolution caused by mobile phones, while rather more saw the potential of laptop computers. It does, however, seem highly likely that the further development of e-communication and commerce will affect lifestyles, working arrangements, development patterns and communication on a significant scale.
- 3.9 Disparities and Deprivation – It is too little appreciated that, despite the region's overall economic success, it also contains significant and severe areas of deprivation. These are particularly concentrated in the larger urban areas and parts of the coast. They are mostly long-standing and have been subject to a number of continuing programmes and strategies. In many areas, the problems remain stubbornly persistent. Effectively addressing them in the Plan is likely therefore to require a particular concentration of effort and resources.

4 Plan Parameters and Principles

- 4.1 Following the Spring Debates in 2004, the Assembly considered the issues and responses and decided that it would adopt a core set of principles that would underpin and guide development of the South East Plan. In more formal language they can be considered the objectives of the Plan.

³ Wave 2 & 3 MORI Survey – April 2004 and February 2003

- 4.2 These objectives are:
- i) The need for a clear vision supported by challenging targets and which reflects quality of life considerations aligned with and tested against the objectives set in the Integrated Regional Framework.
 - ii) The need to plan positively for a reasonable level of economic growth, with consequent labour supply, physical and social infrastructure implications.
 - iii) The need for further measures to reduce economic and social disparities in the region.
 - iv) The need to plan positively for a reasonable level of housing development.
 - v) The need for a substantial increase in the supply of appropriate affordable housing, and for a package of measures to deliver that goal.
 - vi) The need for timely infrastructure provision that keeps pace with development and greater reassurance on that issue through a dialogue with Government on how to plan for that development.
 - vii) The need to develop clear investment priorities and improve key transport links.
 - viii) The need to improve access via transport and other means, especially for disadvantaged groups.
 - ix) The need to promote new initiatives to tackle skills deficits.
 - x) The need for radical thinking about health provision and access.
 - xi) The need to place increased emphasis on natural resource management and efficiency.
 - xii) The need to incorporate measures for climate change mitigation and adaptation in the Plan.
 - xiii) The need to protect and improve the best of the region's natural environment both for its own sake and to underpin the social and economic development of the region.
 - xiv) The need to promote a sustainable balance between economic prosperity, environmental quality, social well-being and a high quality of life in the South East.
 - xv) At a sub-regional level, the need for a high priority to regenerate the coastal towns.
 - xvi) The need to decide whether any strategic development areas should be proposed.
 - xvii) The need to develop a strategy that creatively balances support for the regeneration and growth areas in the east with a positive response to the economic and housing pressures in the west of the region.
 - xviii) The need to develop the Plan in a manner which recognises uncertainty and incorporates appropriate phasing and flexibility.
 - xix) The need to prepare and advocate much improved delivery and management arrangements to secure implementation of the Plan.
 - xx) The need to set the Plan in a clear inter-regional and European context.
 - xxi) The need to ensure high quality development.

4.3 These objectives are broadly consistent with the Integrated Regional Framework for

sustainable development, referred to later in the Plan, and have been used to evolve and structure the Plan strategy, policies and proposals.

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