

**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND REGIONAL ASSEMBLY  
PLENARY MEETING**

Date: 1 March 2006

Subject: **Report of the Chairman of the Regional Planning Committee**

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**1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The focus of the Regional Planning Committee's work at its most recent meetings (7 December and 1 February) has been to debate and agree recommendations on the outstanding issues associated with Part 2 of the South East Plan. The outcome of these debates is presented elsewhere on the agenda.
- 1.2 With that in mind I will focus this report on non-South East Plan issues that were covered by the RPC on 7 December. I will also report back on the outcome of a joint session of the RPC and Executive Committee that was held on 20 January.

**2. Meeting on 7 December 2005**

- 2.1 The meeting received a report on the dialogue that had taken place between the Assembly secretariat and ODPM on how the South East Plan might take on board the requirement to give guidance on meeting the needs of gypsies and travellers. A review of the current state of play regarding the evidence base had identified the lack of available data as a key constraint. Members around the table expressed their concern that this is an issue that needs to be addressed as a matter of some urgency but accepted reluctantly that at present it is not possible to include the necessary policy context within the South East Plan. A commitment has been made to undertake an early partial review of the South East Plan to provide a detailed analysis and full assessment of the needs for gypsies and travellers.
- 2.2 Members considered revised figures for the apportionment of waste exports arising from London. The meeting was keen to emphasise to the Mayor that the figures for the recycling of London's waste in the London Plan should be viewed as a minimum to be exceeded rather than targets to be achieved.
- 2.3 Next on the agenda was consideration of the sub-regional apportionment of recycled and secondary aggregates. The proposal, which had been developed using technical advice from the officer advisory body, was agreed.
- 2.4 The meeting then turned its attention to inter-regional issues. A discussion on the draft of the South West Regional Spatial Strategy highlighted the challenge facing colleagues in the South West region in order to meet their

timetable for submission. A member level liaison meeting with the South West is scheduled to be held on 27 February.

- 2.5 Consideration of the draft alterations to the London Plan was next. The proposed changes to the housing provision targets were broadly welcomed by the meeting. Likewise the proposals in respect of waste and minerals.
- 2.6 Responding to the Government's consultation on the South West Main Line Route Utilisation Strategy, the Committee emphasised the importance of ensuring that the rail network continues to be developed in order to support planned levels of development. The evidence from the Government's own work shows how the pressure on the rail network continues to increase and a failure to invest in addressing identifiable bottlenecks will act as a constraint on future growth. Similar concerns were expressed with regard to the new Greater Western Franchise on which an announcement as to the successful operator (First Group) was subsequently made just after the meeting.
- 2.7 Consideration of transport issues concluded with a short debate on the Luton Airport Masterplan which identified the importance of seeking improved east-west connections.
- 2.8 Finally amongst the items for information, the most important to draw members' attention to was that on housing completions. The results of the survey for 2004/05 showed that completions in the region had increased to 31,907.

### **3. Meeting on 20 January 2006**

- 3.1 This was a joint session of the Executive and Regional Planning Committees convened in order to enable the Assembly's response to the 'post-Barker' announcements by the Government. Specifically it was the opportunity for the members of the committees to agree our response to four consultations on:
  - Planning Policy Statement 3 (PPS3): Housing;
  - Planning Gain Supplement (PGS);
  - Planning Policy Statement 25 (PPS25): Development and Flood Risk;
  - Proposals for Introducing a Code for Sustainable Homes.
- 3.2 The debate on draft PPS3 focused on the Assembly's continued concern at the Government's emphasis on using the Barker approach to housing supply with its focus on supply as a key determinant of affordability. There was deep concern that previous comments made by the Assembly, and many others, in relation to earlier consultations appeared to have no impact on the Government's thinking.
- 3.3 Members highlighted the importance of a more flexible approach to the delivery of affordable housing and pressed the case strongly for a reduction in the thresholds used to identify sites that are required to make a contribution to affordable housing.
- 3.4 Concern was expressed at the emphasis given within the document to the role of sub-regional housing markets. Although the Regional Housing Board

has undertaken some work on this issue, it is still in the early stages of understanding the implications of the approach and the extent to which the existing partnerships cover housing market areas.

- 3.5 A copy of the Assembly's formal response to the consultation will be available at the plenary.
- 3.6 The discussion on the proposed Planning Gain Supplement was extensive. While members acknowledged that the proposal was in part the Government responding to the call for there to be a mechanism by which the public sector might secure a larger contribution from the private sector towards the cost of providing infrastructure, there were a number of serious concerns expressed about the practicality and operation of the proposed supplement.
- 3.7 Chief amongst the concerns was that as the supplement would be collected at a national level there was the distinct possibility of part of it being redistributed to other regions. Members were very clear that there should not be any top slicing of funds raised to support investment in other regions. Members agreed that collecting revenues locally could be one mechanism for ensuring funds are retained within the locality.
- 3.8 While the consultation document indicated that a significant majority of revenues would be recycled locally, members expressed concern at the lack of clarity as to what this would mean in practice. In addition members drew attention to the fact that there remained the issue of allocation of revenues within two-tier areas.
- 3.9 Members were clear that the supplement must be set at a level that did not deter development coming forward. The simple message was "keep it local, keep it low".
- 3.10 Notwithstanding these concerns, the meeting gave a cautious welcome to the proposal, while stressing the need for an ongoing dialogue with planning bodies to iron out practical issues relating to the collection of monies and their recycling within the local community. With that in mind the Assembly offered to work with the ODPM on these issues.
- 3.11 Again a copy of the Assembly's formal response to the consultation will be available at the plenary.
- 3.12 The debate on the Code for Sustainable Homes saw members emphasise that this was a missed opportunity. Welcome though the code was in terms of its intention, the fact that it was only advisory and the standards set out within it were lower than some of the standards currently applied to public sector investment in housing served to highlight the importance of tackling these issues through a revision in the building regulations.
- 3.13 Finally the debate on draft PPS25 led to the Assembly supporting in principle the measures proposed but stressing the need for greater clarity on the proposal for Regional Planning Bodies to undertake regional flood risk assessments.

## **Cllr Christine Field**

## Chairman of the Regional Planning Committee

14 February 2006