

**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND REGIONAL ASSEMBLY
REGIONAL PLANNING COMMITTEE**

Date: 23 June 2005

Subject: **Sustainability Appraisal**

Report of: Head of Regional Transport and Planning

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the Committee agree the contents of the report.

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 To advise the Committee on the application of the Sustainability Appraisal to the sub-regional strategies.

2. Key Sustainability Issues

2.1 At its meeting on 13 June the Committee was advised that as a result of the work undertaken to date, the following have been identified as the most critically important sustainability issues/constraints that the South East currently faces at the regional level in preparing the South East Plan:

- i) Housing supply, particularly a shortage of affordable housing which prevents “key workers” and the low paid from living/working within many parts of the region;
- ii) Access and transport, addressing problems of access without placing further pressure on the region’s stressed transport infrastructure;
- iii) Resource consumption and associated problems, particularly in relation to:
 - Climate change and energy use, achieving targets for green house gas reductions;
 - Waste management
- iv) Water usage and resources, ensuring that increasing demand for water can be controlled and provided for, and that increasing demand for controlling waste water is addressed.

2.2 In addition to the above issues, the following have been identified as potentially critical sustainability issues/constraints at the sub-regional level:

- i) Flooding and flood zones;
- ii) Poverty and social exclusion, and regeneration

- iii) Land use, providing new houses and employment land on derelict and vacant land in urban areas, rather than using green field sites
- iv) Biodiversity
- v) Countryside and the historic environment.

2.3 It is important to bear in mind that the identification of a topic as a key sustainability issue does not necessarily mean that it is a barrier to future development. Rather it is an indication of the need for consideration to be given of the potential to mitigate any adverse impact. It may also be an indication of where opportunities exist to effect a change through the South East Plan.

3. Applying the Appraisal to the Sub-Regional Strategies

3.1 The key planning issues to be addressed by the sub-regional strategies have been identified in the planning briefs agreed by the Assembly. The range of issues being considered through the sub-regional strategies are therefore more focused and limited in scope than that considered in preparing the regional policy framework.

3.2 Guidance on how the sub-regional strategies should take into account sustainability issues was distributed to the principal authorities in September 2004. Paragraphs 2.2 and 2.3 provide a framework for the sub-regional strategy groups in identifying the key sustainability issues. However this does not preclude the groups identifying additional key sustainability issues, providing they relate to planning issues identified in the planning brief.

3.3 Ultimately what is required is for each sub-regional strategy group to ensure they have clearly identified the key sustainability issues that relate to or arise from the key planning issues identified in the planning brief.

3.4 The majority of the sub-regional strategy groups have provided information on how they have taken into account sustainability issues in the development of their advice to date. The Assembly's consultants are reviewing this information and any issue that needs to be taken into consideration when discussing the distribution of growth will be reported verbally to the Committee.

4. Next Steps

4.1 The primary purpose of the Sustainability Appraisal process is to ensure that decision makers take into account the implications, from a sustainability perspective, of the choices they make. For the sub-regional strategies the next critical decision point will be at the July Plenary when the Assembly is scheduled to consider the issue of the overall scale of growth, including its distribution.

4.2 The July Plenary will not be asked to take a decision on the content of the detailed policies for the sub-regional areas; these will be debated early next year, when the results of the more detailed work by the sub-region is available. Accordingly the aspect

of the appraisal process that needs to be considered at this stage is any issue identified at the sub-regional level as having an impact on the distribution of growth across the region.

- 4.3 The final version of the Sustainability Appraisal Report will be prepared once the final detailed advice from the principal authorities in respect of the sub-regional strategies has been received in December 2005.

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