

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

Date: 20 November 2006

Subject: **Items for Information:**

- 1. Major Planning Applications**
- 2. LDD Conformity**
- 3. Managing Suburban Change**

Report of: See individual item

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the Committee note the contents of this report.

1. Major Planning Applications

- 1.1 In the period from 1 September to 31 October 2006, 14 consultation requests were received from local planning authorities on applications of regional significance. As of the end of October, twelve of these plus five applications received before 1 September were responded to within 21 days or an alternative deadline agreed in writing between the Assembly and the relevant local planning authority. The two consultations outstanding as of 1 November have either now been dealt with or are still within the statutory period for response.
- 1.2 Standard advice was provided on two of the applications where the principles of the development had already been established, and five were found not to be regionally significant. All of the other responses were considered and agreed by the member sub-group. Seven were considered to have no material conflict with regional policy. Two of the applications outstanding from the July-August period were considered to be in material conflict. These related to the proposal for 7,500 new homes at Kennet Valley Park on the West Berkshire/Reading borders.

John Pounder
Planning Manager

6 November 2006

Contact: Sue Janota, Regional Planner
T: 01483 555224 E: suejanota@southeast-ra.gov.uk

2. LDD Conformity

- 2.1 Between 1 September and 31 October, Assembly officers provided informal advice on the Preferred Options Core Strategies for Sevenoaks, South Buckinghamshire and Hart
- 2.2 Formal representations, agreed by the member sub-group, have been made on the submitted draft Core Strategies for West Berkshire, Medway and Tonbridge and Malling. The documents for West Berkshire and Tonbridge and Malling were considered to be in general conformity with RPG9 (as amended) and the draft South East Plan, but a number of alignment issues were raised, including the definition of affordable housing, clarifying the policy approach to transport, management of the urban rural fringe and defining strategic gaps.
- 2.3 An opinion of non-conformity was raised regarding Medway's Core Strategy on the basis of the need for more clarity and certainty in policies relating to the overall housing requirement, affordable housing and provision for minerals and waste. Assembly officers are liaising with the district officers to resolve these issues.
- 2.4 As of 1 November, there were outstanding requests for opinions of general conformity on the submitted Core Strategy for Woking and for comments on the Preferred Options for the Core Strategies for Worthing and Lewes.

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Planning Manager

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3. Managing Suburban Change

- 3.1 Building on work undertaken in 2004, and the inclusion of policies promoting positive planned change in the suburbs in the South East Plan, Assembly officers have been working with CABI and English Heritage to further explore the pressures facing suburbs in the South East today, and the means by which these pressures for change can best be managed.
- 3.2 In summer this year, three workshops were held across the region, in North Camp (Rushmoor), Cressex (Wycombe) and Tovil (Maidstone), to which Heads of Planning, Portfolio Holders for Planning / Environment, and major housebuilders in the South East were invited.

- 3.3 The workshops, which included site visits, facilitated discussions and presentation ‘think-pieces’ by keynote speakers were well attended, and feedback was supportive of the need to further explore this issue. Discussions at the workshops backed up previous research. It was felt that there is a clear need for more proactive planning in the suburbs to overcome problems associated with incremental development and local resistance to change, but that a greater understanding of local area issues is needed, along with strong political and community leadership, and clear national guidance and local planning frameworks. A summary note of the workshop discussions is available on the Assembly website at http://www.southeast-ra.gov.uk/our_work/planning/urban/reports/managing_suburban_change.pdf .
- 3.4 The outcome of these workshops was a policy seminar to discuss how planning policy can address the management of change in the suburbs, which was held on 13 October. The event was chaired by Mark Kleinman, the Director of the DCLG’s Urban Policy Unit, and invitees included government and think tank representatives, academic experts, and other representatives who are working to promote the suburban agenda. The discussion revolved around delegates’ experience of managing or observing change in the suburbs, what the key problems in the suburbs are, whether suburbs require a different policy approach than other ‘urban’ areas, and if so what might be an appropriate policy response at a national level.
- 3.5 A key conclusion of the discussion was that ‘the suburbs’ are inherently diverse and that there is no ‘one size fits all’ solution. However, it was agreed that planning for, and managing change within, the suburbs (especially in the South East and London) is a key issue at a local level, and one that many local authorities are currently facing.
- 3.6 It is therefore reassuring that the South East Plan contains policies that address the need to manage suburban and neighbourhood change in the region. Assembly officers are now considering the outcomes of this informative piece of joint work and how best to take it forward to assist local authorities and other partners to secure maximum benefits for suburban areas within the South East.

John Pounder
Planning Manager

6 November 2006

Contact: Cath Rose, Regional Planner
T: 01483 555235 E: catherinerose@southeast-ra.gov.uk