

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

Date: 26 July 2006

Subject: **East of England Regional Spatial Strategy – Panel Report**

Report of: Planning Strategy Director

**Recommendation:**

That the Committee note the content of the Examination in Public Panel Report for the East of England Regional Spatial Strategy.

**Purpose of Report:**

To inform the Regional Planning Committee about the key recommendations from the East of England's Examination in Public (EiP) Panel Report, which will be of potential significance in preparing for the South East Plan EiP.

**Key Issues:**

The Panel is broadly supportive of many of the fundamental principles underpinning the policy approach in the East of England RSS. They also set out in detail a range of specific alterations they suggest the Government should consider incorporating when finalising the RSS, and these are highlighted in this report.

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The Panel report from the Examination in Public for the East of England's Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) was published on 22 June, following submission to the Secretary of State. Members will recall that the Assembly responded to the consultation on the Plan last year, and officers from the Assembly attended the EiP earlier this year.
- 1.2 In their report, the Panel sets out in detail a range of specific alterations they suggest the Government should consider incorporating when finalising the RSS. The reaction of the East of England Regional Assembly will be clearer once they have discussed the recommendations at their Plenary on 21 July. In a press release issued by the Assembly in response to the publication of the report, the Assembly calls "upon the Government to recognise the limits of housing growth and to provide the funding for infrastructure necessary to support new housing in the region".
- 1.3 In this report I highlight a number of the Panel's key recommendations on issues that will be of potential significance as we prepare for the EiP on the South East Plan. Further information can be found on the East of England Regional Assembly's website: <http://www.eera.gov.uk/category.asp?cat=120>.

## **2. General Principles**

- 2.1 The Panel is broadly supportive of many of the fundamental principles underpinning the policy approach in the East of England RSS, for example a development focus primarily in urban areas, whilst also responding to the needs of rural areas; an emphasis on use of previously developed land; and the need to balance the different elements that contribute to Sustainable Development.

## **3. Overall Approach**

- 3.1 The Panel has sought to draw the demarcation line between the Regional Spatial Strategy and Local Development Documents (LDDs) as high as possible, and as such they suggest more sparing use of sub-regions and have sought to simplify and reduce sub-regional content, including reduction of locational detail which they say should be determined through the LDD process. In removing some sub-regions, the Panel instead proposes that there be a focus on the distinctive roles of the principal urban centres in those areas ("Key Centres for Development and Change"), a number of which they also identify in the four sub-regions they recommend should remain.

#### **4. Level of Housing Growth**

- 4.1 The Panel recommends that the total housing target for 2001-2021 (the period of the East's RSS) should be increased by 27,500 new homes from 478,000 to 505,500. The Panel emphasises that this is significantly below the rate implied by the most recent Government projections, and that their proposal represents the maximum they believe can be delivered, particularly in the early years of the Plan. They also recommend the inclusion of indicative five-year phasing for the district housing targets.
- 4.2 The Panel suggests there is the possibility of considering higher housing levels starting from 2016 onwards in the first review of the RSS (which they suggest would cover the period 2011-2031), but that there are fundamental issues to be tackled if this is to be achieved in a sustainable way. They also recommend that Government should provide a broader strategic perspective to address national 'north-south' issues.

#### **5. Economic development and level of growth**

- 5.1 The Panel supports the Plan's approach of seeking broad alignment between new housing and job growth, but emphasises there is a limit to the 'sound science' of achieving this alignment.
- 5.2 The Panel endorses the Plan's inclusion of an employment growth target, but recommends that this is increased in line with the housing growth target from 421,500 to 440,000 jobs over the Plan period (2001-2021).

#### **6. Infrastructure and Delivery**

- 6.1 The Panel identifies that there would be practical difficulties with EERA's proposals to regulate the flow of development according to the level of investment in key infrastructure. However recognising the importance of delivering necessary infrastructure, the Panel proposes an alternative of an implementation plan between Government and the region.
- 6.2 They consider that some form of high-level implementation strategy is required, prepared by a regional co-ordinating body with the membership and status to prepare a broad prioritised infrastructure budget, make bids and lobby funders and arbitrate in the case of disputes. The Panel states that the RSS needs to be a high level regional statement setting broad regional requirements and guidance but, below these, empowering the wide range of implementing agencies to meet and provide for those requirements as they deem fit in the light of local circumstances.

## **7. Airports**

- 7.1 The Panel acknowledges the varied views on airport expansion expressed at the EiP, but states their clear view that there is no role for the RSS in determining the rate of air traffic growth or runway provision at the region's airports, and it is instead for Government to take decisions, and resolve any policy conflicts, on these issues.

## **8. Transport**

- 8.1 The Panel broadly accepts the objectives of reducing the need to travel and modal shift away from the private car, but feels policy content needs to be strengthened to deliver this agenda, and notes the need for commitment of significant resources from the Department for Transport to achieve the objectives. The Panel also notes that an 'infrastructure deficit' applies to historic under-investment in rail and urban public transport, as well as road schemes identified in the RSS. The Panel gives greater emphasis to public transport schemes and proposes that priorities should be expressed as outcomes sought rather than specific schemes.

## **9. Developer Proposals**

- 9.1 The Panel comment on complications raised by detailed proposals put forward by developers. For the future, they recommend that the RSS review should be based on a fuller appraisal of options, including consideration of developer proposals at an earlier stage of the RSS process.

## **10. Conclusions**

- 10.1 The EiP Panel report for the East of England RSS is supportive of many elements of the strategy, but as highlighted in this report also identifies a number of areas where it believes the approach could be improved, or in some cases clarified and simplified. Officers at the Assembly will examine the recommendations in more detail in preparing for the South East Plan EiP and assess what implications there may be for our approach.

**Catriona Riddell**  
**Planning Strategy Director**  
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Contact: Nick Woolfenden, Regional Planner  
T: 01483 555224 E: [nickwoolfenden@southeast-ra.gov.uk](mailto:nickwoolfenden@southeast-ra.gov.uk)