

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

Date: 26 July 2006

Subject: **South West Regional Spatial Strategy – Consultation  
Response**

Report of: Planning Strategy Director

**Recommendation:**

That the Committee agrees the comments set out in the annex of the report as the basis for the Assembly's response to the South West Regional Spatial Strategy Statutory Consultation.

**Purpose of Report:**

To set out a brief summary of the South West Regional Assembly's draft Regional Spatial Strategy, and the proposed Assembly response to the formal consultation on this document.

**Key Issues:**

It is recommended that overall, the draft RSS be supported, and that the recognition in the RSS of the important links between the two regions is welcomed.

However, it is suggested that a number of detailed comments relating to policies within the RSS are made in response to the statutory consultation, and that the South East England Assembly's commitment to further joint working with the South West Assembly is reiterated.

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The South West Regional Assembly (SWRA) submitted their Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) to Government on 24 April 2006. The statutory consultation on the RSS will run for 12 weeks from 6 June to 30 August 2006. The draft RSS, and an Executive Summary, are available to view at [http://www.southwest-ra.gov.uk/nqcontent.cfm?a\\_id=836](http://www.southwest-ra.gov.uk/nqcontent.cfm?a_id=836).
- 1.2 The South West's RSS is supported by an Implementation Plan, Pre-Submission Consultation Statement and Strategic Sustainability Assessment.

## **2. Background**

- 2.1 This Committee considered an earlier draft of the South West's RSS in December 2005 and the basis of the Assembly's response to the draft. The overall strategy and approach was supported, but a number of areas were identified where the linkages with the South East could be highlighted or where further work was needed.
- 2.2 Whilst a number of the comments raised have been taken into account in the submitted draft RSS, some have not been picked up. Where appropriate, it is proposed that these comments are reiterated in the Assembly's formal response.

## **3. The South West RSS – Summary of Spatial Strategy**

- 3.1 This section of the report sets out a brief summary of the overall spatial strategy and policy approach.
- 3.2 Overarching Sustainable Development Policies
  - 3.2.1 The SW RSS covers the period 2006-2026. It sets out 4 high level Sustainable Development Policies up front, which it is suggested be applied in an integrated way to all development decisions in the region. These are:
    - Sustainable consumption and production – the stabilisation then reduction of the region's ecological footprint;
    - Climate change - a reduction in greenhouse gases in line with national targets;
    - Protecting natural resources and enhancing the environment; and
    - Creating sustainable communities in a more sustainable region.
- 3.3 Spatial Strategy Statement
  - 3.3.1 The overarching statement of spatial strategy proposes:
    - Significant change at 21 Strategically Significant Cities and Towns (SSCTs) in order to support their economic and service role, and regeneration; and

- Smaller scale change outside of the SSCTs to achieve more self contained, balanced communities and a better local environment.
- 3.3.2 It then includes a number of key development principles for SSCTs, market towns, and small towns and villages.
- 3.4 Strategic Assumptions
- 3.4.1 The strategic assumptions underlying the spatial strategy are:
- Employment growth – a forecast total growth in jobs between 2006 and 2026 of between 365,000 and 465,000 jobs;
  - Population growth – a forecast total growth in population between 2006 and 2026 of 750,000;
  - Economic growth – a target for annual growth in GVA of 2.8% or higher (up to 3.2%);
  - Housing growth – a forecast-based assessment that around 25,000 new dwellings per annum (dpa) would be needed. The overall housing provision figure for the Strategy is set at 23,000 (this compares with the RPG10 figure of 20,200 dpa).
- 3.5 Sub-Regional Strategy
- 3.5.1 Three broad sub-regional areas are identified:
- The north and centre of the region (including Swindon);
  - The south east of the region (South East Dorset); and
  - The western peninsula.
- 3.5.2 These broad sub-regional areas are divided into a number of 'Joint Study Areas' (JSAs). There are two Joint Study Areas that are of particular relevance to South East England, due to their proximity to the regional boundary and their relationship with our sub-regional areas. These are the Swindon and South East Dorset JSAs which have linkages with the Western Corridor and Blackwater Valley and Central Oxfordshire, and South Hampshire sub-regions respectively.
- 3.6 Swindon
- 3.6.1 The Spatial Strategy for Swindon recognises that the town has 'significant potential', but acknowledges that 'realising its economic potential and balancing the provision of housing and jobs will be critical in creating more sustainable development and travel patterns, reducing the overall levels of in-commuting'.
- 3.6.2 Policy SR8 of the strategy sets an annual average figure for housing provision within the JSA of 'about' 1,750 dpa. The primary focus for development will be at Swindon (950 dpa in the Swindon urban area). An additional strategic urban extension of about 12,000 dwellings is proposed to the east of the A419. The policy also sets a target of 'about' 32,000 jobs over the plan period. This represents an acceleration of growth over current levels.

3.6.3 The strategy identifies some of the key infrastructure that will be required to implement the proposals, including the provision of Upper Thames Reservoir in South East England.

### 3.7 South East Dorset

3.7.1 The South East Dorset JSA includes Bournemouth, Poole, Christchurch and the surrounding hinterland. The area is recognised as a key driver in the South West region, but one where there is a need to manage the economic potential and ensure a continued high quality of life and the protection of environmental assets.

3.7.2 The strategy concentrates development within the urban areas. It sets a target for job growth of about 42,000 jobs across the plan period, and seeks provision of an average of between about 1,555 and 1,720 dpa. This represents a continuation of current growth levels. A range of dwelling figures for this JSA is stated to allow flexibility to incorporate the results of further technical work which is currently underway.

### 3.8 Strategic Sustainability Appraisal (SSA)

3.8.1 The SSA states that there is much to welcome in sustainability terms in the draft RSS (which it considers to be an improvement on earlier versions). It does, however, identify a number of weaknesses within the strategy, namely:

- the likely growth in traffic and airport development;
- the likelihood of increased pressure on the environment and character of the region, and increased consumption of natural resources;
- that an emphasis on economic growth may not always benefit those in most need;
- the lack of information on how the emphasis on realising economic potential in many of the sub-regions will be reconciled with the RSS's emphasis on environmental limits; and
- the lack of guidance for some of the more rural areas outside the SSCTs due to the urban focus of the RSS.

## 4. Next Steps

4.1 Members are requested to agree the proposed response set out in the annex as the basis of the Assembly's representations on the submitted SW RSS.

4.2 It is additionally proposed that a covering letter is submitted welcoming the overall approach set out in the South West's RSS and reiterating our support for future joint working with the South West Regional Assembly.

4.3 The EiP for the SW RSS is timetabled for April – June 2007. A joint member meeting is programmed for October 2006, which will provide the opportunity to discuss each Assembly's representations further, in the run up to the two Examinations in Public.

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8 July 2006

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### **Proposed South East England Regional Assembly response to the South West Regional Spatial Strategy**

#### **1. Chapter One**

##### **1.1 Sustainability Principles - Policies SDI-4**

- 1.1.1 The South East England Regional Assembly welcomes the inclusion of these 'high level' policies, which refer to the ecological footprint, climate change, the environment and natural resources, and sustainable communities. These policies broadly reflect the principles underpinning the draft South East Plan, and are supported

#### **2. Chapter Two**

##### **2.1 Linkages with the South East region - Para 2.1.1-2.1.3**

- 2.1.1 The Regional Assembly welcomes the recognition that investment in infrastructure in South East England is of fundamental importance to the South West region, including specifically that:
- Journey resilience and reliability into London and Heathrow will be reliant on enhancement of rail capacity at Reading;
  - That the implications of Crossrail for the region will need to be considered; and
  - That there are significant long term dependencies for Swindon on investment by Thames Water in new water supplies in South East England.

##### **2.2 Backlog of unmet housing need - Paragraph 2.3.13**

- 2.2.1 The RSS does not seem to have addressed the issue of backlog of unmet housing need. It is important that the issue of backlog in the South West region is addressed, particularly given the emphasis in the strategy on meeting housing need, and the need to provide affordable housing. The backlog of unmet housing need should be considered in reaching the final overall level of housing provision for the region, and the extent of the backlog - and how it will be addressed - should also be made clear in the RSS.

##### **2.3 Resources and infrastructure availability - Section 2.4**

- 2.3.1 The South East England Regional Assembly supports the principle that appropriate resources are available to enable key elements of infrastructure to be provided in line with development. This approach reflects the importance placed on timely infrastructure provision in the draft South East Plan (Policy CC5). However, the description of what constitutes

'infrastructure' could usefully be expanded to cover all those types of infrastructure that may be required to enable development to proceed in a successful and sustainable manner.

### 3. Chapter Three

#### 3.1 The overall spatial strategy - Section 3.1

3.1.1 The South East England Regional Assembly welcomes the overall spatial strategy set out in this section. The focus on Strategically Significant Cities and Towns complements the urban focus of the draft South East Plan and is supported.

#### 3.2 Infrastructure for development –Development Policy D

3.2.1 This policy is supported. It advocates joint working between local authorities and regional government and authorities ensure best use of existing infrastructure and secure new infrastructure as required. The recognition of the need to secure the provision of infrastructure and services in step with development reflects the approach being taken in the South East and the priority given to this matter. Links could also usefully be made between this policy and the list of Strategic Priorities for Investment currently included in paragraph 3.9.1 (see below).

#### 3.3 Re-using land - Development Policy H

3.3.1 This policy sets a target for the region of at least 50% of new development on previously developed land, including conversion of existing buildings. This seems un-ambitious, given the 'primary focus for development in the South West' is the Strategically Significant Cities and Towns (Development Policy A) and the drive to increase housing densities within existing urban areas.

#### 3.4 Strategic priorities for investment in transport and other facilities - Section 3.9

3.4.1 The text in bold that follows paragraph 3.9.1 sets out the Region's Priorities for Investment to Support the Spatial Strategy. Clarification is needed as to the status of this text. If these measures are key to the implementation of the RSS, they should be clearly included as a policy within the RSS to give them maximum weight.

3.4.2 The South East England Regional Assembly supports the recognition, in bold, in paragraph 3.9.1 of the need for more resilient and reliable inter-regional transport links with South East England. Maintenance and improvement of transport links to and across the South East from the South West are important, strategically, to both regions, and would support this being recognised in policy (see above). The reference to the Second Strategic Route in this paragraph is consistent with the 'regional spokes' identified in

the adopted Regional Transport Strategy for the South East region and the draft South East Plan.

#### **4. Chapter Four**

##### **4.1 Swindon Spatial Strategy - Para 4.2.25**

4.1.1 The South East England Regional Assembly welcomes the recognition given to realising the economic potential of Swindon and achieving a balance between the provision of housing and jobs. Given the relatively high levels of housing provision being proposed in Swindon, it is important that these are matched by an appropriate level of employment provision in the town to minimise commuting and reduce the need to travel, including between the two regions.

4.1.2 Research undertaken in the South West, and in South East England, demonstrates that commuting links between the two regions in this area are not as strong as might be expected. However, there are physical and economic links between the Swindon sub-region and the Western Corridor and Blackwater Valley sub-region identified in the South East Plan. We would welcome a reference to the important economic and transport linkages between Swindon and the Western Corridor and Blackwater Valley sub-region of the South East Plan, the need to consider these relationships in the implementation of the Swindon sub-regional strategy, and the need for ongoing joint working between the regions to monitor the implementation of the sub-regional strategies.

##### **4.2 Proposed Strategic Urban Extension - Paragraph 4.2.27**

4.2.1 The South East England Regional Assembly recognises that the identification of the strategic urban extension to the East of Swindon is based on previous technical work and consultation with statutory undertakers. There is a need to consider the wider impact of the proposed strategic urban extension, including on communities and infrastructure within the South East region, and a need to engage the South East England Regional Assembly in taking this work forwards.

##### **4.3 Key infrastructure requirements in Swindon - Paragraph 4.2.31 and Implementation Plan**

4.3.1 The reference to the Upper Thames Reservoir as a key piece of infrastructure required for the future development of Swindon is supported, and complements the reference to the reservoir as a strategic water resource in Policy NRM2 of the draft South East Plan Policy.

4.3.2 The South East England Regional Assembly would welcome the incorporation of reference to these key infrastructure requirements into policy SR8, and would also welcome reference in this section to the strategic road and rail network.

#### 4.4 South East Dorset Spatial Strategy – Policy SR26

4.4.1 The South East England Regional Assembly supports the need for balanced growth in the conurbation. A balance of housing and employment growth is required within this sub-region in order to minimise the possibility of longer distance commuting into South Hampshire. The ongoing technical work and final housing figure for the sub-region should focus on how this balance might be realised.

4.4.2 It is important that, where possible, any increased movements along this corridor are accommodated through rail rather than road to minimise disturbance to the New Forest National Park. We propose strengthening this policy to emphasise the need to deliver a sustainable form of development in the sub-region which reduces the need to travel, especially by car.

#### 4.5 South East Dorset - protection of environmental assets - Paragraph 4.3.5 and Policy SR28.

4.5.1 The South East England Regional Assembly welcomes the reference to the New Forest National Park in paragraph 4.3.5. Policy SR28 relates to the need to protect sites covered by the European Habitats Directive, but this policy could usefully be expanded to cover the need to protect nationally designated sites as well.

### 5. Chapter Five

#### 5.1 Reliable connections to UK markets - Section 5.3

5.1.1 The recognition in this section of the importance of strategic transport links to the South West from and through South East England is strongly supported. In particular the South East England Regional Assembly supports paragraph 5.3.3, which recognises that selective investment in strategic transport routes and networks serving the South West (particularly the main links with London and the South East) is needed, and Paragraph 5.3.10, which addresses investment in the Great Western Main Line and the need for improved connections to Heathrow Airport through a direct rail connection.

5.1.2 The South East England Regional Assembly acknowledges that investment in the East England will support the South West region's aspirations - for example Reading Station remodelling, and Crossrail. These proposals are also key infrastructure priorities in the South East.

#### 5.2 Strategic Transport Priorities - Para 5.3.4

5.2.1 The list of strategic transport priorities, including links to and through the South East is welcomed, but could be given more weight through inclusion in policy or by direct reference in the Implementation Plan.

5.2.2 We would also welcome inclusion of a reference to Southampton Airport in this list, as a regional airport that serves not only the South East but parts of the South West region. This would reflect the aims of Policy T9 of the draft South East Plan which encourages the enhancement of Southampton Airport as an airport of regional significance.

5.3 Airports - Para 5.4.13

5.3.1 Southampton Airport and Bournemouth Airport play a complimentary role in providing air services to both the South Hampshire and Bournemouth/Poole conurbations. The role of Southampton Airport in serving the South West region could usefully be mentioned in paragraph 5.4.13.

## **6. Chapter Seven**

6.1 Protected landscapes – Policy ENV3

6.1.1 The final paragraph of this policy states that ‘particular care will be taken to ensure that no development is permitted outside National Parks or AONBs which would damage their natural beauty, character and special qualities or otherwise prejudice the achievement of National Park or AONB purposes. It is recommended that this policy is amended to avoid duplication of national policy and complement the policy approach in Policy C2 of the draft South East Plan, that planning decisions nearby should ‘have regard to their setting’.

6.2 Water resources – Policy RE6

6.2.1 The recognition in paragraph 7.3.12 of the reliance of the east of the South West region on water from the South East region is welcomed. The Upper Thames Reservoir is a key piece of strategic infrastructure necessary to facilitate the planned levels of development at Swindon. Reference should be made to it in Policy RE6 and the supporting text, reflecting and reiterating the reference to the likely need for this reservoir set out in policy NRM2 of the draft South East Plan

6.3 Minerals - Section 7.3

6.3.1 Policy RE10 states that the South West’s contribution to national aggregate requirements should be met. Paragraph 7.3.22 acknowledges that the South West exports a number of minerals which are of national importance, including crushed rock. However, the South East England Regional Assembly would welcome a clearer reference to the dependence of the South East on supplies of crushed rock from the South West.

6.3.2 The acknowledgement in paragraph 7.3.29 that future regional apportionment levels will need to take account of other region’s supply and demand requirements is welcomed, as are the references to the need to use alternative materials such as recycled and secondary aggregates.

## 6.4 Waste Management – Section 7.4

- 6.4.1 Overall the policies relating to waste are welcomed. However, the section should place more emphasis on the need to work towards regional self sufficiency in waste management.
- 6.4.2 Paragraph 7.4.4 acknowledges that there are significant transfers of waste across regional boundaries (research and monitoring work for the South East England Regional Assembly indicates that about 170,000 tonnes of Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) per annum are exported from the South West into Buckinghamshire, and 15,000 tonnes of MSW per annum from Dorset into South East England). However, no clear commitment to plan for a declining amount of exports is made. A commitment to work towards regional self-sufficiency needs to underpin the waste strategy. The South West's aim of including '...a major shift away from current reliance on landfill...' (paragraph 7.4.1) is equally applicable to landfill in adjoining regions.

## 7. Chapter Eight

### 7.1 Economic Activity Zones – Map 8.1

- 7.1.1 Map 8.1 maps the economic activity zones across the South West region. The supporting text should make reference to these zones, how they have been developed, and how they relate to South East England, especially the sub-regions identified in the draft South East Plan.
- 7.1.2 The RSS should recognise that the north and east of the region has many economic characteristics in common with the west of South East England. Section 8.1 should highlight the linkages between Swindon and the Reading/Oxford area, and Dorset / Bournemouth and South Hampshire, and the influence that parts of South East England, such as the Western Corridor and Blackwater Valley have on key employment areas in the South West.

### 7.2 Town Centres - Section 8.4

- 7.2.1 Reference should be made to links with town centres in South East England where appropriate, and to cross (regional) boundary catchments, for example the influence of Oxford and Southampton. Research undertaken for the South East Plan has demonstrated how the secondary and outer catchments of Oxford and Southampton extend into the South West region.
- 7.2.2 We would also welcome the identification of a network or hierarchy of town centres in this section. The draft South East Plan sets out a strategic network of town centres in the South East. Whilst the main retail centres are listed in paragraph 8.4.4, and Strategically Significant Cities and Towns are identified in Development Policy A, the identification of a network or hierarchy would provide the opportunity to identify and explore the linkages with town centres in South East England.

### 7.3 Tourism - Section 8.5

- 7.3.1 There are a number of tourist destinations that lie within South East England that are easily accessible from the South West region – for example the New Forest, the Oxford area and the Cotswolds. We would welcome recognition of these linkages in paragraphs 8.5.1-8.5.4.