

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

Date: 27 September 2006

Subject: **Items for Information:**

- 1. Major Planning Applications**
- 2. LDD Conformity**
- 3. Appropriate Assessment of the South East Plan**
- 4. Estimating the Cost of Environmental Infrastructure**
- 5. Regional Housing Strategy**

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 July to 31 August 2006, 15 consultation requests were received from local planning authorities on applications of regional significance. As of the end of August, nine of these plus six applications received before 1 July were responded to within 21 days or an alternative deadline agreed in writing between the Assembly and the relevant local planning authority. One consultation was submitted a couple of days after the agreed deadline, although this was still well within the public consultation period. (The delay in sending this response was due to the induction of new sub-group members).
- 1.2 Standard advice was provided on one application where the principles of the development had already been established. All of the other responses were considered and agreed by the member sub-group. Eight were considered to have no material conflict with regional policy, and observations were raised in relation to the remaining seven applications. The five consultations outstanding as of 1 September have either now been dealt with or are still within the statutory period for response.

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14 September 2006

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2. LDD Conformity

- 2.1 Between 1 July and 31 August, Assembly officers provided informal advice on the Preferred Options Core Strategies for Adur, Elmbridge, Dartford, Fareham, Guildford and Slough.
- 2.2 Formal representations, agreed by the member sub-group, have been made on the submitted draft Core Strategies for Surrey County Council (Waste) and Epsom and Ewell Borough Council. These documents 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.
- 2.3 As of 1 September, there were outstanding requests for opinions of general conformity in relation to submitted draft Core Strategies for Waverley, Medway and Tonbridge and Malling and for comments on the Preferred Options for the Core Strategy for Hart.

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3. Appropriate Assessment of the South East Plan

- 3.1 Introduction
 - 3.1.1 The Assembly has commissioned consultancies Scott Wilson and Levett-Therivel to undertake an Appropriate Assessment of the South East Plan.
 - 3.1.2 The EU Habitats Directive (Directive 92/43/EEC) requires that an Appropriate Assessment is undertaken of plans or projects that individually or in combination with other plans or projects, might have a significant effect on Natura 2000 sites. These include Special Protection Areas for birds (SPAs) under the EU Birds Directive, and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) under the Habitats Directive. The Appropriate Assessment of the South East Plan is also assessing the potential effects on Ramsar sites (wetlands of international importance). Where significant negative effects are identified, mitigation measures and, where relevant, alternative options should be examined to avoid any potentially damaging effects.
 - 3.1.3 There are 53 SACs, 21 SPAs, and 17 Ramsar sites in the South East of England. There are also a considerable number of sites close to the boundaries of the region, particularly in the South West and the southern part of the East of England, and impacts on these sites will need to be addressed as part of the AA of the South East Plan.

3.1.4 The need to undertake an appropriate assessment of land use plans, including Regional Spatial Strategies, was only recently clarified following a ruling of the European Court in October 2005. This was followed by guidance from ODPM (as was) in March 2006. This is the first time an appropriate assessment has been undertaken at the regional level on a draft Regional Spatial Strategy, and in order to inform discussion at the forthcoming Examination in Public is being undertaken to a very tight timescale.

3.2 Process

3.2.1 The assessment is being guided by a steering group that includes representatives of English Nature (to be superseded by Natural England) as statutory advisor on nature conservation, the Environment Agency, GOSE and the Wildlife Trusts South East.

3.2.2 The appropriate assessment involves several stages (although there is a degree of iteration and they are not distinctly separate) including:

1. Scoping: This stage has been completed and included a review of existing guidance, agreement of the methodology, identification of Natura 2000 sites within and close to the region, and identification of plans and projects that should be considered in-combination with the Plan.
2. Screening: This stage has been completed and has involved a series of facilitated workshops around the region involving informed stakeholders including local English Nature and Environment Agency staff, representatives from local authorities, RSPB, National Trust and the local Wildlife Trust. The workshops considered:
 - the reasons for the designation of the site - the qualifying features;
 - information on the nature conservation importance of the site;
 - key environmental conditions that support site integrity;
 - possible impacts arising from the plan;
 - possible impacts from other plans, programmes and environmental trends;
 - whether there is a risk of a significant in combination effect on the site.
3. Appropriate Assessment: This will build on the screening exercise and assess in more detail and test the impacts identified in screening and identify whether mitigation can be proposed that removes the impact. This will include additional cross-cutting workshops with technical experts on water quality and resources, and on air quality. The report of the appropriate assessment will identify sites on which, in the view of the consultants and steering group, it is considered that the South East Plan is likely to have a significant effect that cannot be mitigated.

3.3 Timetable

3.1.3 The final report of the appropriate assessment is due to be delivered before the end of September 2006. The output of the appropriate assessment will be presented to the November meeting of this committee. The date of the November meeting has been changed to give members the opportunity to discuss the output before the EiP begins.

3.4 Other Issues

3.4.1 Throughout the process it has been important to ensure that the level of detail addressed in the assessment reflects the level of detail in the draft South East Plan (i.e. that the assessment is proportionate and will focus on information and impacts considered appropriate to the regional level). In many instances, the impacts of the South East Plan on SACs / SPAs will depend on how its policies and proposals are implemented on the ground (e.g. whether new developments include adequate open space and measures to reduce water consumption). Therefore it is important to acknowledge that separate appropriate assessments will also be required to be undertaken for land use plans developed by local planning authorities.

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4. Estimating the Cost of Environmental Infrastructure

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 The Environment Agency has initiated a project titled "Twenty Year Strategy for Management of Environmental Infrastructure in the South East". It has appointed consultants Jacobs Babtie to undertake this which will include an assessment of the need for and costs of environmental infrastructure associated with the South East Plan. This will provide valuable information for use in the ongoing development of the Implementation Plan. The Assembly is therefore making a modest contribution towards the costs of the project and is on the project steering group.

4.1.2 The work is focusing on the following aspects of environmental infrastructure:

- Water Quality
- Water resources
- Food defence
- Waste management
- Biodiversity.

4.1.3 A team of technical experts for each subject from Jacobs Babbie and the Environment Agency are undertaking the assessment of infrastructure requirements, where possible drawing on previous work, for example the modelling on water resources, water quality and waste management, undertaken to inform the South East Plan.

4.2 Objectives and Outputs

4.2.1 The project brief requires the production of an environmental infrastructure strategy for the next 25 years; to meet the following objectives:

- To inform investment decisions designed to lead to the most sustainable form of development
- To assess, in some detail, the investment profile over the next 25 years to secure the necessary environmental infrastructure, provided in a timely fashion so as to prevent environmental damage
- To identify likely funding gaps and suggest how these gaps can be addressed
- To set out an associated influencing strategy.

4.2.2 The work will take account of the current position (existing assets), current funding sources, the pressures and infrastructure requirements over the next 5 and 20 years and cost these requirements over the next 20 years. It will also include an assessment of whether the current funding sources can deliver the required infrastructure over the short and long terms and identify any changes needed to funding mechanisms to ensure delivery of environmental infrastructure.

4.2.3 The assessments are based on the proposals in the South East Plan, and the development of an annual average of 28,900 new dwellings per annum. Sensitivity tests covering higher development rates of 30% and 60% above this level of housing will also be undertaken.

4.3 Timescale

4.3.1 A series of workshops are complementing the technical work. Stage one of the work (a priced programme of work over 5 and 20 years) will be delivered by 30th September 2006. The second phase, including analysis of funding mechanisms and gaps, will be delivered by 28th November, and will be used to inform the discussion at the South East Plan Examination in Public.

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5. Regional Housing Strategy

- 5.1 The Regional Housing Board decided at its last meeting that a review of the Regional Housing Strategy should be undertaken. The context and scope of the review were reported to Regional Planning Committee on 26 July 2006.
- 5.2 The draft timetable for the review of the RHS will be considered by the Board on 6 October and forms an annex to this report.
- 5.3 Consultation arrangements are currently being developed. More detailed information will be available following the RHB meeting on 6 October.

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12 September 2006

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