

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

Date: 27 September 2006

Subject: **South East Plan – Examination in Public (Update)**

Report of: Planning Strategy Director

Recommendation:

That the Committee note the process proposed by the Panel in the lead up to the Examination in Public.

Purpose of Report:

To update Members on the preparation for the Examination in Public due to start in November 2006 and end in March 2007.

Key Issues:

The Examination in Public (EiP) will provide a forum for testing the robustness of the South East Plan and is a critical part in the plan preparation process. It is therefore important that Members are kept fully informed of progress and made aware of any issues arising in the lead up to, and throughout the EiP.

Although the EiP does not formally start until the 29 November, the independent Panel has asked the Assembly to participate in several data meetings before then to help them and other participants understand some of the evidence underpinning the South East Plan. The Panel has also indicated some areas that they feel will require particular examination, key areas being the process for preparation of the sub-regional strategies, and the options tested on overall growth levels and spatial distribution.

I. Introduction

- 1.1 The Examination in Public (EiP) of the South East Plan is due to start on the 28 November 2006. This will provide an opportunity for discussion and testing in public and in front of an independent Panel, of key selected matters (i.e. not the whole Plan). Tests the Panel will apply include whether the Plan is based on robust technical evidence; whether it has taken into account neighbouring regions and London; whether it adequately reflects national policy; and whether the process by which it has been prepared is sound. The Panel's conclusions and recommendations, having looked at all the evidence and heard participants' views, are expected to be submitted to the Government in July 2007.
- 1.2 The issues the Panel feel require examination were published, together with their suggested timetable and participants (Matters and Participants) at the end of August (attached). These will be subject to consultation until the end of September, with the final list of Matters and Participants due to be published on the 12 October. Assembly Officers were given the opportunity to comment on an early draft of these and many of our views were taken on board by the Panel.
- 1.3 An initial meeting between the Panel and all invited participants (a preliminary meeting) was held on the 7 September. This was used primarily to explain the process and to provide an update on the various areas of research/ government policy that will be used as evidence during the EiP. However, the Panel also took the opportunity to indicate some of the key issues they are likely to pursue throughout the EiP, which are outlined below. A second preliminary meeting is due to take place on the 17 October.

2. Issues arising from the preliminary meeting

- 2.1 Although the Matters and Participants published by the Panel indicate their likely lines of questioning on each matter, the Panel used the first Preliminary Meeting to highlight some of the broader areas of concern which have implications for a number of the discussions throughout the EiP. The three areas indicated are:
- i) **Sub-regional Strategies:** The Panel is concerned that whilst the process underpinning the preparation of the Plan is generally sound (i.e. there are no showstoppers as they put it), the process for the sub-regional strategies seems to have been less rigorous and less transparent. Particular concerns are around the Sustainability Appraisal and consultation processes. The Panel is also concerned about the evidence base for the sub-regional strategies, which in some cases is not obvious.
 - ii) **Spatial Options:** The Panel has a general concern (prompted by the GOSE commissioned Roger Tym report previously considered by the Regional Planning Committee) about the options considered in terms of overall growth levels and the spatial distribution. They will be examining the implications of higher numbers and different distributions during the region-wide EiP sessions in December, as well as the sub-regional sessions, and again at the end of the EiP.

- iii) **Sustainability Assessment/Appropriate Assessment:** The Panel indicated that whilst they have set aside some time under Matter 1 to deal with this specifically, they will be returning to it throughout the regional and sub-regional sessions, particularly in relation to the options considered on growth and spatial distribution.

3. Data Meetings

- 3.1 As part of the EiP process, the Panel has arranged Data Meetings which will be used to explore some of the background data sources and methodologies. These will help to ensure that the EiP sessions are dedicated to examining the implications of the evidence base and policy issues.
- 3.2 So far the Panel has proposed five meetings which will take place on the 16, 17 and 18 October:
- i) Demographic Forecasts (relevant to Matters 1B and 1H)
 - ii) Economic Forecasts (relevant to Matters 1B and 5A)
 - iii) Jobs- Housing Alignment (relevant to Matter 1G)
 - iv) Housing Capacity (relevant to Matter 2A)
 - v) Water (relevant to Matter 1G).

All of the meetings are likely to require considerable input from the Assembly officers but will hopefully ensure that the Panel and all participants have a good understanding of the Assembly's evidence base before we discuss these issues at the EiP. The Panel has not ruled out the possibility of further meetings before the start of the EiP. One possibility is on Infrastructure. Assembly officers have been given the opportunity to comment on early versions of the issues the Panel are keen to explore at these meetings.

- 3.3 The Data Meetings are in addition to the Technical Meetings that have already been set up to deal with the specific issue of the Thames Basin Heaths. Members have been alerted to these already but to remind you, the process is as follows:

- TBH First Technical Meeting – 21, 22 and 23 November 2006
- TBH Second Technical Meeting - 18, 19 and 20 November 2006
- EiP Matter 6 Session (Biodiversity) – 16 January 2007
- TBH Third Technical Meeting – 2 February 2007
- EiP Joint Sub-regional Session for London Fringe and Western Corridor/Blackwater Valley – 22 March 2007

4. Conclusion

- 4.1 Work is now well underway for the preparation of the EiP and although the Panel is requiring a substantial investment in time from Assembly officers prior to the start, this will help to ensure that the limited time available for discussion at the EiP is spent on the critical issues. Officers have welcomed the Panel's openness in terms of the areas they are likely to challenge and in providing early opportunities for the Assembly to comment on Matters and Participants, and details of the proposed Data Meetings.

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