

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

Date: 28 November 2007

Subject: **Items for Information**

1. **London Plan: EiP Panel Report**
2. **Further Proposed Changes to the East of England Regional Spatial Strategy**
3. **Housing Completions 2006/7**
4. **Development of River Basin Management Plan**
5. **Thames Basin Heaths Interim Strategic Delivery Plan**
6. **LDD Conformity - Statistics**
7. **Major Planning Applications - Statistics**
8. **National Housing and Planning Advice Unit**

Report of: See individual items

Recommendation:

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

1. London Plan Further Alterations - Panel Report

1.1 In Summer 2007, Assembly officers attended the Examination in Public (EiP) for the Further Alterations on the London Plan in relation to two matters:

- Consistency with adjacent Regional Spatial Strategies.
- Aviation.

Members were provided with an update from the EiP in July 2007.

1.2 The Panel Report for the Further Alterations has now been published, and is available at <http://www.london.gov.uk/london-plan-eip/index.jsp>.

1.3 The Panel found the Further Alterations generally sound, however, made a number of recommendations which may be of interest to this Committee.

1.4 Aviation

1.4.1 Prior to the Examination in Public, the Mayor of London clarified his position in relation to the Air Transport White Paper, and made it clear that he did not support any further increases in runway capacity in the wider South East, including at Heathrow.

1.4.2 The Panel recommended that wording stating the Mayor's opposition to the expansion of Heathrow Airport should be removed on the grounds that this was an issue that would be determined by national policy.

- 1.4.3 However, the Panel also recommended that the sentence supporting future expansion at Stansted and Gatwick should be deleted, (reflecting representations made by this Committee).
- 1.5 Inter-regional Issues
- 1.5.1 The Panel concluded that there are a number of important issues that cross regional boundaries, but that there were problems with consistency across the regional boundaries. They propose that a 'broad inter-regional review' be completed before the end of 2008 - under the auspices of the Inter-regional Forum but carried out by independent consultants - to look at issues such as climate change, housing and employment forecasts, transport, logistics, the roles of town centres, Green Belt and waste.
- 1.5.2 Consultants Robin Thompson Associates and Llewelyn Davies Yeang have recently been engaged by the Inter-Regional Forum to undertake a study into sub-regional geographies across the three regions, inter-regional linkages, and the possible implications for future sub-regional delivery
- 1.5.3 The Inter-regional Forum (IRF), at their last meeting in October, agreed that this study would be a good first step, but that further consideration needed to be given to the potential resource implications and timing of a wider study as proposed by the Panel Report. The IRF will consider this issue in more detail at their meeting in February.
- 1.6 Corridors
- 1.6.1 The Panel recommend that the so-called 'growth corridors' be renamed 'coordination corridors', so as to better reflect the wish for partners across the regions to work together in these areas. They therefore have taken on board the concerns of this Committee that the Wandle Valley to Gatwick corridor should not be identified as a growth corridor.
- 1.7 Next Steps
- 1.7.1 The arrangements for adoption of the London Plan alterations are different to those for a Regional Spatial Strategy. GLA officers will consider the Panel's report and finalise the Further Alterations to the London Plan for submission to the Secretary of State. There is, therefore, no equivalent of the 'Proposed Changes' consultation period. It is expected that the new London Plan will be published in the New Year.

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2 November 2007

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2. East of England Plan - Further Proposed Changes Consultation

2.1 The Government published its Proposed Changes to the East of England Plan in December 2006. This Committee made a number of comments on the Proposed Changes, relating to:

- Inter-regional arrangements for waste management and monitoring.
- The need to protect the Green Belt.
- The inclusion of minimum housing targets.

2.2 Following concerns expressed by some parties over the extent to which the Proposed Changes addressed the requirements of the Habitats Regulations, a further Habitats Regulations Assessment (Appropriate Assessment) was commissioned.

2.3 The Government has now published Further Proposed Changes (FPC) to the East of England Plan. These relate exclusively to the findings of the latest Appropriate Assessment and the protection of sites of European or international nature conservation importance, and propose changes which seek to avoid and / or mitigate any adverse effect of the East of England Plan on these sites.

2.4 In particular, the FPC proposes the inclusion of policy references about the need to avoid impact on European or internationally designated sites in key areas, such as housing and employment development, aviation, renewable energy, water resources and minerals apportionment. It also includes a number of amendments to address the specific protection needs of some individual sites.

2.5 The FPC appears to offer stronger protection of European and internationally designated sites, and on this basis is welcomed. It is not proposed that this Committee submit any further comments to the Government Office for the East of England.

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3. Housing Completions 2006/7

3.1 As part of the process of monitoring the implementation of RPG 9 and now the South East Plan, the Regional Assembly collects data on net housing completions in the South East for each unitary and district. The data, which is provided by the local authorities in the form of a joint return to the Assembly and CLG, is recognised as the most robust and comprehensive source on completions. Data is now available for the year ending 31 March 2007.

- 3.2 The most recent data shows that 34,600 homes were completed in 2006/07. This compares with 33,300 in 2005/06. The planned annual average level of housing provision in RPG 9 was 28,050. The figure in the South East Plan is 28,900, whilst the Panel Report proposes an annual average of 32,000 homes. Because all of these planned rates of housing provision are annual averages, we have also looked at housing provision over the last five years. Since 2001/02, the South East has provided an average of 30,600 additional homes per year.
- 3.3 Although the overall picture is an encouraging one in terms of total housing provision, there are important local variations, as well as a much broader picture in terms of the tenure, type and size of homes being delivered. We will therefore be returning to the completions data when we report to Regional Planning Committee on the Regional Monitoring Report in January.

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4. Development of River Basin Management Plan to meet the requirements of the Water Framework Directive.

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 The broad aim of the Water Framework Directive (WFD) is to protect and improve the water environment. The Environment Agency is leading on the preparation of the River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs) which are designed to address the requirements of the Directive. Within the South East two Plans are under development:

- The South East RBMP which covers the catchments of the rivers on the South East coast.
- The Thames RBMP which covers the catchments of Thames, Medway and Swale and includes London and areas within the East of England region.

4.1.2 The Regional Assembly is engaged in the preparation of both RBMPs through River Basin District Liaison Panels, which oversee and steer the development process.

4.2 What has happened so far?

4.2.1 So far that has been a lot of focus on getting the process right for the development of the Plans. In each River Basin District the following has been undertaken:

- An initial characterisation of the impact of human activity on the water environment.

- Preparation of a 'Working Together' document which was consulted on during the first half of 2007 to provide an understanding of how river basin planning will work and how stakeholders could get involved.
- Identification of Significant Water Management Issues (SWMIs) with consultation until on 24 January 2008. It provides an initial overview of the main pressures and impacts that will have to be addressed in the RBMPs.

4.3 Significant Water Management Issues

4.3.1 The South East Liaison Panel identified the following SWMIs:

- Diffuse pollution from rural areas.
- Diffuse pollution from urban areas and transport.
- Flow problems - due to abstraction and other artificial flow regulation.
- Physical modifications of coastal waters, rivers and lakes.
- Point source pollution.

4.3.2 In addition the Thames Liaison Panel identified:

- Urban development.
- Alien Species.

4.4 Outlook

4.4.1 Draft RBMPs will be published in December 2008 for six months consultation, and in December 2009 the final versions are expected. They will include:

- Environmental objectives for each water body.
- A programme of measures outlining how the objectives should be achieved by 2015.

4.4.2 Regional Spatial Strategies will have to reflect the overarching sustainable water management requirements set out in the RBMPs.

4.4.3 The preparation of the draft RBMPs will require significant engagement of the Liaison Panels between now and summer 2008. We will contribute to the identification of:

- Water bodies that are likely to fail to achieve the environmental objectives.
- Suitable measures to overcome failure.
- Less stringent objectives if achieving the original objectives would technically not be feasible or disproportionately expensive.

4.4.4 Further details about the development process for the RBMPs is available on the Environment Agency website - <http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/subjects/waterquality/955573>

- 4.4.5 A full report will be prepared for the RPC meeting on 19 March 2008. This will provide Committee Members the opportunity to inform the development of the RBMPs at a crucial stage.

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5. Thames Basin Heaths Interim Strategic Delivery Plan

- 5.1 This Committee has discussed the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area on a number of occasions. In July 2007 members were updated on progress that had been made taking forward the recommendations in the Technical Assessor's report into the SPA and Natural England's draft Delivery Plan.
- 5.2 The Thames Basin Heaths Joint Strategic Partnership Board (JSPB) - comprising elected members from authorities affected by the SPA designation and advisory members from other key stakeholder organisations - met for the first time on 16 October 2007.
- 5.3 At their meeting the JSPB endorsed - for consultation purposes - a draft Interim Strategic Delivery Plan (ISDP), which sets out draft proposals that could form the basis of a long-term strategy for the delivery of housing and mitigation within the area affected by the SPA designation. It was noted that this endorsement should not be taken as inferring that individual authorities agreed fully with the content of the document; and that each member of the partnership would be commenting on the proposals as part of the consultation process.
- 5.4 On 19 October, the Assembly's Executive Committee agreed that the consultation on the ISDP should be co-ordinated by the Assembly secretariat, on behalf of those local authorities affected by the SPA.
- 5.5 The consultation on the draft ISDP will run from 19 November 2007 until 15 February 2008. Members of this Committee should have received a hard copy of the document. Alternatively the document and an online questionnaire can be viewed at http://www.southeast-ra.gov.uk/our_work/planning/sust_nat_res/tbh.html. This Committee will have the opportunity to consider a response to the draft ISDP at the next meeting on 30 January 2008.
- 5.6 The results of the consultation will be presented to the JSPB at their meeting on 27 March 2008.

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6. LDD Conformity - Statistics

- 6.1 Between 1 September and 31 October 2007, Assembly officers provided informal advice on the Preferred Options for the Milton Keynes Core Strategy. Opinions of general conformity were issued for 2 SPDs.
- 6.2 As of 1 November 2007, there were outstanding requests for formal comments on the submission draft of the Worthing Core Strategy and for informal comments on the Preferred Options for the Berkshire Minerals and Waste Core Strategy, the Hampshire Minerals DPD and the Crawley Area Action Plan DPD. There were outstanding requests for conformity on 3 SPDs.

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12 November 2007

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7. Major Planning Applications - Statistics

- 7.1 In the period from 1 September to 31 October 2007, 9 consultation requests were received from local planning authorities on applications of regional significance. As of the end of October, 5 of these plus 2 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 4 consultations outstanding as of 1 November 2007 have either now been dealt with or are still within the statutory period for response.
- 7.2 All of the responses were considered and agreed by the member sub-group. Observations were raised in relation to three applications received in the period from 1 September and 31 October concerning affordable housing, density and the demand for employment floorspace.

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8. National Housing and Planning Advice Unit

- 8.1 The response of the National Housing and Planning Advice Unit to the Government's Housing Green Paper was published on 26 October - see <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/supplynewhomes>
- 8.2 The report sets out the NHPAU assessment of the potential impact of the Government's housing supply target of 240,000 homes a year for housing affordability prospects in the owner-occupied sector. Using the model developed by Reading University, the report concludes that the Green Paper target will not improve affordability over the next decade. So, although NHPAU has welcomed the target in the Green Paper, it recommends a higher level of growth of about 270,000 homes a year. The Unit's own modelling indicates that even that level of growth would only stabilise housing affordability nationally. In addition to the national level analysis, the NHPAU report sets out a number of regional level housing supply scenarios. The illustrative range for the South East is from 36,200 homes to 46,000 homes a year to 2016. The resulting affordability ratios would be 9.9 and 9.4 respectively. To stabilise housing affordability in the South East (currently 8.4) would require much larger increases in the numbers of homes delivered across the whole of the south of England.
- 8.3 We will return to the NHPAU analysis when we consider the Government's Proposed Changes to the South East Plan.

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