

Friends of the Earth South East
Response to Select Committee Examination of Social Exclusion, SEERA
June 2005

We have a few points to input into this examination which relate to social exclusion and the environment. This covers two areas: transport and access to the countryside/green spaces.

Question 1 – Are the identified priorities of the region’s Social inclusion statement relevant and correctly identified?

1. Transport

Whilst provision of Public transport is mentioned as a priority, we feel that this needs expanding. The SQW paper mentions transport as a driver of exclusion which we support, but it only mentions this in terms of access to jobs and services. We feel that transport issues have a much wider role in exclusion issues and as such policy must focus on this more in terms of promoting inclusion.

Friends of the Earth carried out a project in Bradford to look at transport and social exclusion which identified a number of key issues and we are submitting this report as evidence. See http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/reports/env_justice_bradford.pdf Please do read this report as we have not reproduced the content in full in this note.

Our report points out that as well as the issues of access, road transport has enormous adverse health impacts – particularly on poorer communities. These range from lack of fitness – particularly in children who are driven to school and other activities, pollution related health issues and accidents and deaths. The report points out that poorer people are less likely to cause these problems, yet more likely to suffer from them.

Whilst we welcome the mention of public transport, the need for adequate, safe walking and cycling facilities is conspicuously absent. For many people who cannot afford the rising costs of public transport, their feet or their bikes provide the only option for getting to work, shops, doctors and other services.

It is therefore important for regional and local authorities to be aware of these impacts and formulate policies to address these positively.

- the Social Inclusion statement should acknowledge the health related issues associated with transport.
- the statement should recognise that walking and cycling are of equal importance to public transport and offer greater health benefits.
- SEEDA’s work should assess transport impacts as well as access issues in order to ensure investment is prioritised for those areas suffering most highly.

2. Countryside/Green spaces

The South East’s high quality countryside is seen by many as an important contribution to their quality of life, with more nationally designated landscapes, covering a greater area than in any other region. Therefore providing access to the countryside is essential to allow people to enjoy the countryside and for the physical and mental wellbeing that it provides.

The region's countryside is also important economically, with, for example, the South Downs contributing over £330 million to the regional economy, much of it generated by visitor / recreational spending. This type of contribution to the regional economy is acknowledged in SEEDA's report on the Environmental Economy of the South East.

However, like all popular resources, there are problems around access, particularly through excessive car use and the relative lack of provision of safe and affordable alternatives for walking, cycling, horse riding and public transport. This can disadvantage those without access to a car or with little money.

It is therefore important that:

- SEEDA should recognise the current deficit in providing safe, affordable and sustainable access to green spaces and the wider countryside and the important role this plays in people's quality of life and physical and mental well-being.

Question 2

What has changed since the Social Inclusion Statement was agreed in 2002?

1. The need for integration between the RTS and investment decisions to ensure delivery of social inclusion objectives.

Given our argument about the important role that transport plays in social inclusion and the fact that the Regional Transport Strategy has now been adopted, we would like to see better integration of social inclusion and transport policies at regional and local level. SEEDA can play a major role in supporting particular transport interventions through their regeneration work.

- SEEDA should review all transport investment allocations and decisions in light of how they will contribute to social inclusion.

2. The need for policy and investment integration to deliver better, fairer access to the countryside and green spaces.

The South East Plan is likely to be adopted in the next year or two and there are policies in it which relate to protection and enhancement of the countryside. We would like to see recognition of such policies integrated with work on social inclusion to ensure crossover between the two policy areas.

- SEEDA should review how its investment decisions help to bring about increased quality of life to excluded areas through increasing access to countryside and green spaces.

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