

**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND REGIONAL ASSEMBLY  
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

Date: 13 June 2008

Subject: **Regional Planning Committee 21 May 2008**

Report of: Chairman of the Regional Planning Committee

**Recommendation:**

It is recommended that the Committee:

1. Notes the contents of this report.
2. Endorses the response to the Government's proposals for a Single Regional Strategy (as contained in Agenda Item 6) with proposed amendments (paragraph 2.1 of this report).
3. Endorses the response to the Government's Eco-Town proposals (please see Agenda Item 7) and proposed amendments (paragraph 3.3 of this report).

**Purpose of Report:**

To update the Executive Committee on the meeting of the Regional Planning Committee held on 21 May 2008.

## **1. Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople Partial Review: Pitch Numbers and Distribution Options for Public Consultation**

- 1.1 The Committee was asked to consider revised proposals on the provision and distribution of pitches for Gypsies and Travellers, new proposals for the provision and distribution for Travelling Showpeople, and a proposed approach to transit accommodation. All three will be subject to Assembly approval at the July plenary meeting.
- 1.2 In March the Assembly agreed to postpone a decision on the consultation proposals for Gypsies and Travellers to allow local authorities to revisit their advice, building on emerging methodologies and update if necessary. As a result, two county areas (Kent and Surrey) submitted revised advice and Portsmouth are expected to do so shortly. This has resulted in an overall reduction of 13% in the proposed pitches from the original advice (1,229 down to 1,064 between 2006 and 2016). The proposed four options for distribution remain the same as previously agreed by RPC.
- 1.3 Officers advised that there continues to be issues to be resolved with some of the advice and discussions with the relevant authorities and technical work are ongoing. However, they feel that the advice submitted by local authorities is sufficiently robust to go forward for testing through the public consultation process, before the Assembly will be expected to agree a preferred option (in March 2009).
- 1.4 Members felt that it was important to move on with this process and therefore endorsed the overall provision and distribution options for the purposes of public consultation.
- 1.5 On the issue of Travelling Showpeople, this had not previously been considered by the Committee as it was a late Government requirement for the partial review. Based on advice from the local authorities, a total of 231 pitches are proposed for the purposes of public consultation. This is 75 less than identified by the Showmen's Guild but officers advised that the consultation process will help test this discrepancy. Members agreed the officer's recommendation.
- 1.6 As with Travelling Showpeople, the need to make provision for transit sites was a late requirement for the review. But unlike permanent provision for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople, there is no need to provide a district distribution, only interim policy guidance. Although there was some concern expressed about this potentially being a weak approach, Members accepted that it was too difficult to quantify the need with any certainty and that this was therefore a reasonable approach to take.

## **2. Sub-National Review: Consultation on the Proposals for a Single Regional Strategy**

- 2.1 Members were asked to endorse a draft response to the proposals in the Sub-National Review for a Single Regional Strategy, which could then be incorporated into the Assembly's response to the SNR. Please see Agenda Item 6. We felt that the proposed response covered all the key issues and commend this to the Executive with three minor amendments:
  - Include a reference to providing long term certainty through the Regional Strategy for infrastructure provision.

- Make it clearer that the Assembly feels that sustainable development is about overall quality of life, not just economic growth.
- Ask the Government for clarity around the role of the National Sustainability Framework, as proposed in the SNR document, and how it will fit with the Regional Sustainability Framework when integrated into the Single Regional Strategy.

### **3. Eco-Towns**

- 3.1 The Government is consulting on potential eco-towns until the 30 June. The Committee was asked to agree a response and commend this to the Executive as the Assembly's response to the consultation. Please see Agenda Item 7.
- 3.2 Members were very concerned about both the process, which is bypassing the proper planning process, and two of the locations being proposed in the South East (Ford and Weston Otmoor).
- 3.3 We agreed the proposed response with some amendments to strengthen our opposition and commend this to the Executive. These proposed amendments are:
- Recommendation 1 - make it clear that the principles of environmental sustainability are supported, but these should be a requirement of all new development rather than only proposals with an eco-town label.
  - Recommendation 2 - add reference to the proposed PPS superseding and overriding the planning framework.
  - Recommendation 6 - add reference to the potential diversion of resources for infrastructure away from existing priorities, and to the potential effect of proposals on existing landscape and biodiversity.
  - Recommendation 7 - add reference to the EiP Panel report recommendations about the need for further growth at Bordon-Whitehill (above the 2,500 dwellings the Panel recommends) to be shown to be sustainable.

### **4. Housing Supply and Affordability in the South East**

- 4.1 The Committee considered a report by Professor Christine Whitehead, commissioned by the Assembly. This examined issues around the relationship between planning and house prices, with specific consideration given to the model being used by the National Housing and Planning Advisory Unit (NHPAU) to advise Government on future housing targets.
- 4.2 Professor Whitehead concludes that the range of housing proposed for the South East by NHPAU last October in their response to the Housing Green Paper will have little impact on housing affordability. She also emphasises that the problem could be helped by improving the existing stock and getting a better mix of housing type and size.

- 4.3 Members were asked to note the key messages of the report and draw on this when responding to the Proposed Changes to the South East Plan.

## 5. Other Items

The Committee also agreed the following items:

- 5.1 An Update Report on Proposals for the Homes and Communities Agency
- 5.1.1 Members were briefed on the content of the Housing and Regeneration Bill which proposes the new Homes and Communities Agency (HACA) and were asked to identify the implications for the Assembly in its role as Regional Planning Body (RPB). We agreed to note the report and support the commitment by Government to ensure that regional priorities are reflected in the work of the HACA and expand the scope of the Regional Funding Allocation process with regard to housing investment. We also stressed the importance of early engagement with the Assembly as RPB.
- 5.2 Consultation on Draft Revised National and Regional Guidelines for Aggregates Provision in England 2005-2020
- 5.2.1 The Government is consulting on the overall amount of aggregate provision nationally which has been reduced to reflect a reduction in market demand. Although this is not part of the Assembly's current consultation on the partial review on aggregates, this will impact on the overall amount to be distributed through that process. Members agreed to note the implications of this for the South East and urge the Government to amend the draft guidelines to ensure that the final guidelines apply a further reduction in the amount of land-won sand and gravel that the region is expected to provide for reflecting recent aggregate consumption patterns and past sales trends in the region.
- 5.3 Statutory Consultations on Planning Applications - Annual Report on Performance
- 5.3.1 The Committee agreed the annual report which showed that the Assembly has responded to 100% of planning application consultation requests within the statutory deadline. Officers thanked the RPC sub-group on major applications for their quick turnaround on responses which helped achieve this result. Although it was generally accepted that there was little room for improvement in terms of the process, there was a request for next year's report to provide evidence on how the Assembly's responses are impacting on the final outcome of the applications.

**Cllr Moira Gibson**  
**Chairman of the Regional Planning Committee**

3 June 2008

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