

**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND REGIONAL ASSEMBLY
ANNUAL MEETING**

Date: 16 July 2008

Subject: **Regional Planning Committee**

Report of: Chairman of the Regional Planning Committee

Recommendation:

That the Assembly notes the contents of this report.

Purpose of Report:

To update the Regional Assembly on the meetings of the Regional Planning Committee held on 19 March 2008 and 21 May 2008 and of the most recent meeting of the Inter-Regional Forum held on 20 June 2008.

I. Meeting of 19 March 2008

I.1 Regional Monitoring Report 2007

I.1.1 The Committee was asked to agree the Regional Monitoring Report (RMR) for 2007. This is the last RMR focusing on the RPG9 indicators and the objectives of the Integrated Regional Framework (IRF). From next year onwards, the RMR will monitor the South East Plan and the Regional Sustainability Framework.

I.1.2 Overall, in terms of the indicators, the report shows that the region is making clear progress. Housing delivery has exceeded RPG9 provision (34,600 p.a. compared to 28,800 p.a.) and has also exceeded the provision set out in the draft South East Plan (28,900 p.a.) and the Panel's recommendation of 32,000 p.a. However, Members noted that whilst annual data is a useful tool for local authorities it does not accurately reflect changes in the housing market. The five year rate of completions provides a more accurate picture as this takes into account peaks and troughs and over the last five years the average completion rate has been much more in line with the draft South East Plan.

I.1.3 The Committee noted a number of serious concerns highlighted in the report, including:

- The longer term impact on the region of high rates of development, particularly on infrastructure and the environment (which have the highest proportion of indicators showing clear deterioration).
- The relatively slow progress in some parts of the region in preparing for climate change.
- The continuing disparities in the region, with the west and north still outperforming the east and coastal areas in GVA. Although expectations for regenerating these areas are long term there are indications that things are getting worse, not better.
- The relatively low level of affordable housing provision. Despite 7,100 affordable homes being completed in 2006/07, completions of affordable homes are running around 30% below the target set out in the South East Plan.

I.1.4 The Committee approved the 2007 RMR for submission to CLG and for publication.

I.2 Community Infrastructure Levy (Update)

I.2.1 In January 2008 CLG published a document that sets out the current Ministerial thinking on how to take forward the provisions within the Planning Bill to empower local authorities to apply the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) to new development. Drawing on the experience of implementation accumulated in the region to date the paper identifies a number of issues that need to be taken into consideration by Government in the preparation of the accompanying regulations.

- 1.2.2 Members expressed some concerns about the operation of CIL and felt that these were not addressed adequately in the analysis presented by officers. We therefore agreed that we would 'note' the analysis rather than 'endorse' this as the basis for engaging with Communities and Local Government during the preparation of the regulations for CIL. The Committee also agreed to consider the draft regulations in detail at a future meeting, following their publication, and that there should be no redistribution of the CIL outside the South East Region.
- 1.3 SNR: Proposals for a Single Regional Strategy
- 1.3.1 This agenda item was included on the assumption that the SNR consultation document had been published. In its absence, the opportunity was taken to provide feedback on the conference that the Assembly jointly sponsored with the Royal Town Planning Institute in London on 12 March. This was considered to be a very successful event and managed to raise awareness of our achievements on the South East Plan, the complete failure of the Government to complete the RSS process nationally, concerns about the loss of skills and experience in regional planning, and the opportunities that might be provided by the proposal to combine Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies in future.

2. Meeting of 21 May 2008

- 2.1 Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople Partial Review: Pitch Numbers and Distribution Options for Public Consultation
- 2.1.1 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 are subject to Assembly approval at this meeting (see Agenda Item 9).
- 2.1.2 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. 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.
- 2.1.3 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).
- 2.1.4 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.

- 2.1.5 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.
- 2.1.6 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.
- 2.2 Sub-National Review: Consultation on the Proposals for a Single Regional Strategy
- 2.2.1 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. We felt that the proposed response covered all the key issues and commended this to the Executive with some minor amendments. The Executive subsequently agreed this as part of the Assembly's formal response to the consultation.
- 2.3 Eco-Towns
- 2.3.1 The Committee was asked to agree a response on proposed eco-towns and commend this to the Executive as the Assembly's response to the Government consultation which ended on 30 June.
- 2.3.2 Members were very concerned about both the process, which is bypassing the proper planning process, and two of the three locations being proposed in the South East - Ford and Weston Otmoor, which are considered to be inconsistent with the South East Plan. A third bid being considered by the Government is Whitehill/Bordon which is proposed by the local authority (East Hampshire) and likely to be consistent with the Plan.
- 2.3.3 We agreed the proposed response with some amendments to strengthen our opposition. The response was subsequently endorsed by the Executive with some minor amendments to further strengthen our recommendation.
- 2.4 Housing Supply and Affordability in the South East
- 2.4.1 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.

- 2.4.2 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.
- 2.4.3 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.

3. Inter-Regional Forum - 20 June 2008

- 3.1 This was the first meeting under chairmanship of the new Deputy Mayor, Richard Barnes. It focused on environmental resources with presentations based on work undertaken to support our position on the South East Plan and from the Environment Agency on the Water Framework Directive. This resulted in a useful discussion on areas of common interest which will help inform future reviews of the three RSSs.
- 3.2 With the change in leadership in London, there is a desire by the new Mayor to work closer with the political leadership in adjoining regions. He is therefore keen to attend the next meeting of the Forum in October for a discussion around future inter-regional engagement beyond SNR.

Cllr Moira Gibson
Chairman of the Regional Planning Committee

24 June 2008