

**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND REGIONAL ASSEMBLY
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

Date: 16 December 2005

Subject: **Regional Planning Committee - Chairman's Report of
7 December Meeting**

Report of: Chairman of the Regional Planning Committee

Recommendation:

That the Executive receives the report.

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 To update members of the Executive on key issues and decisions made at the Regional Planning Committee (RPC) on 7 December 2005.

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting and Matters Arising

2.1 The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed and there were no matters arising from the minutes

3. South East Plan

3.1 The meeting had a number of items on its agenda that related to the South East Plan. It began with a debate on the Implementation Plan. This is an important part of the South East Plan as it will map out what needs to be done, by whom and by when in order to enable the growth levels set out in the South East Plan to be delivered. The Committee commented on a first version of the revised draft of the contextual part of the Implementation Plan.

3.2 Members universally expressed a concern that the Assembly has yet to receive a response to the Assembly Chairman's letter to Yvette Cooper inviting the Government to agree a concordat on infrastructure. Members were of the view that this would be important in giving greater confidence that the Government will commit to providing the funds necessary to enable the timely delivery of infrastructure.

3.3 Other comments expressed during the course of the debate included the need for the Implementation Plan to identify the key players and their contribution to the delivery of the South East Plan; the need for the document to be more focused; and the need to be clear about how priorities will be identified within the funding available.

- 3.4 The Committee then moved on to discuss the issue of Gypsies and Travellers. Emerging Government guidance requires the South East Plan to identify the number of pitches required for gypsies and travellers. The Committee expressed the view that this was an issue that need to be address quickly however they accepted that at present the evidence base is not sufficiently well understood to enable figures to be put into the South East Plan. It was agreed that the Assembly should commit to undertake an early review of this policy issue, and that this early review would draw upon the assessment work underway at the local level.
- 3.5 The issue of strategic gaps was one of a small number of policy areas in the South East Plan Part I identified at the Plenary in July as requiring further work. The meeting agreed to include a criteria based policy that would provide the context for local authorities wishing to identify strategic gaps. It was also agreed that this would be separated from the existing policy on green belts.
- 3.6 At its previous meeting the Committee had considered the apportionment of waste exported from London. Following concerns raised by members at that meeting officers had consulted with local authorities on the best way of presenting information on the apportionment. A revised spatial distribution was agreed for inclusion in the South East Plan on the basis that this will now be the subject of testing through the Examination in Public.
- 3.7 The final South East Plan related issue was the sub-regional apportionment of provision for recycled and secondary aggregates. Drawing on advice received from the supporting technical officers group, the meeting agreed a spatial distribution for inclusion in the South East Plan.

4. Inter-Regional Issues

- 4.1 The Committee debated the current draft of the South West Regional Spatial Strategy. This identified a number of linkages between the two regions particularly with regard to transport links and at a sub-regional level. The Committee noted that a number of significant elements of the South West's RSS have yet to be finalised and they resolved to seek a member level meeting with the South West Regional Assembly early in the New Year. This would provide the opportunity to discuss the linkages between the two regions in greater detail and to ensure that these are properly reflected within both documents.
- 4.2 The meeting also debated proposed changes to the London Plan in respect of housing provision and waste and minerals. The Committee noted that the new housing provision target of 31,907 dwellings per annum better reflected the identified need. It was noted that a significant proportion of the provision is identified for the eastern part of London. The proposals in respect of waste puts more flesh on the Mayor's objective of becoming more self sufficient in terms of waste management. While the Committee welcomed the commitment to address this issue, they were keen to press the Mayor to be more challenging in some of his targets and were anxious to have clarity on the extent to which waste is pre-treated.

5. Transport Issues

- 5.1 The publication of the Route Utilisation Strategy for the South West Main Line, followed shortly thereafter by a consultation on the draft Invitation to Tender for the franchise provided the Committee with the opportunity to stress the need for

investment in the rail system in order to support delivery of planned levels of growth. In particular the Committee stressed the need to address strategic bottlenecks, such as Woking Junction and the approach to Waterloo Station. The consultation also provided the opportunity to re-emphasise the importance attached by the region to improving the freight gauge on the Southampton to West Midlands rail corridor.

- 5.2 The Committee received an update on the process for selecting an operator for the new Greater Western franchise. With the announcement of a preferred bidder expected before Christmas the debate provided the Committee with the opportunity to emphasise the importance of securing an enhancement to Reading Station as part of the franchise commitments.

Post meeting note: the DfT announced on Tuesday 13 December that First Group had been selected to run the Greater Western franchise.

- 5.3 Although located within the East of England region, the Committee considered the Masterplan for the expansion of Luton Airport. In particular the Committee highlighted the importance of setting a more challenging target for the use of public transport and the need for improving east-west public transport links.
- 5.4 The Committee was updated on the working arrangements associated with the Regional Transport Board.

6. Items for Information

- 6.1 The meeting received a short presentation on the latest information relating to housing completions within the region. The most recent figures indicated that completions were just under 31,907 for the year. A number of factors were identified as contributing to this increase, including additional investment by the Housing Corporation in affordable housing and the bedding in of previous changes to national planning guidance.
- 6.2 The Committee also received updates on major planning applications, the work of the monitoring sub-group and the East of England Examination in Public.

7. Any Other Business

- 7.1 The Committee received a brief verbal update on the package of announcements made by the Government that Monday as part of the pre-budget statement relating to housing. These will be the subject of a more substantive debate at a joint session of the Executive and Planning Committees to be held on 20 January 2006.

Cllr Christine Field
Chairman of the Regional Planning Committee

12 December 2005