

**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND REGIONAL ASSEMBLY  
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

Date: 15 September 2006

Subject: **Regional Planning Committee**

Report of: Chairman of the Regional Planning Committee

**Recommendation:**

It is recommended that the Committee note the report.

**Purpose of Report:**

To update the Executive Committee on the meeting of the Regional Planning Committee held on 26 July 2006.

## **1. Election of Chairman and Vice Chairman**

- 1.1 As the meeting was the first to take place after the Assembly's Annual General Meeting in July the first item of business was the election of Chairman and Vice-Chair. I will endeavour throughout the forthcoming year to repay the support of my colleagues who once again have asked me to act as their Chairman. There were two nominations for Vice Chairman, Ian Hepburn and Jerry Patterson and in the subsequent ballot of members Ian was elected to the role.

## **2. The Roger Tym's Report**

- 2.1 The publication of this report received considerable coverage and the Committee was briefed on its key points. A desk based piece of research commissioned by the Government Office, the report sets out a view on how higher levels of growth, over and above the South East Plan figure of 28,900 dwellings per annum, might be distributed.
- 2.2 Members expressed their concern at the timing of the report and the fact that it concentrates on a trend based analysis only. It lacks the rigour and comprehensive approach followed by the Assembly in developing the South East Plan. In particular it was noted that the Sustainability Appraisal that accompanied the report was cursory in its consideration of the key issues. Notwithstanding the concerns regarding the technical competency of the work some members welcomed the conclusions of the report which served to emphasise the scale of the pressure on infrastructure and the environment that higher levels of growth would give rise to. In this respect it actually supports many of the key concerns articulated by Assembly members.
- 2.3 The committee resolved to note the publication of the research and were content to leave it to the secretariat to respond to any issues arising from it as part of the preparation for the Examination in Public.

## **3. East of England Spatial Strategy – Panel Report**

- 3.1 The publication of the Panel Report is timely as it gives an indication of the way in which some of the key issues for our Plan might be handled by our Panel. Particularly key points to note were the fact that the Panel had not accepted the Government's case for significantly higher housing figures. In addition it had concluded that the Government Growth Area along the London-Stansted- Cambridge corridor did not have a planning justification. Both of these conclusions are highly significant for us as they demonstrate that the proposals set out in Regional Spatial Strategies will be examined on their merit. The South East Plan is underpinned by the best technical evidence available and I believe the Secretariat is in a strong position to present a robust case in support of our Plan.

- 3.2 There are three other points worthy of note. Firstly it is clear that the Panel took the view that the policy framework in the RSS should be set at a high level, avoiding much of the detail that is more appropriately dealt with through the Local Development Framework (LDF) process. Secondly, the Panel recommended that a number of proposed sub-regional strategies be removed from the East of England plan and be replaced by more spatially focused policies relating to urban centres. Thirdly the Panel emphasised the importance of developing a regional implementation plan that is prioritised and realistic.
- 3.3 Members expressed some concern at the way in which aviation policies had been handled by the East of England EiP, however it is important to draw a distinction between the policy context in East of England and that in South East England. While the Government's White Paper identified a second runway at Stansted as a policy commitment, it highlighted a number of unresolved issues associated with the potential of Heathrow (and by implication Gatwick) to accommodate additional growth over current planned levels. With a programme of ongoing work examining these issues in greater detail the national policy context for aviation in the region cannot be considered as definitive as was the case in East of England.

#### **4. South East Plan – Implementation Plan**

- 4.1 The Implementation Plan is an integral element of the South East Plan and a considerable amount of work is underway that will enable a revised version of it to be submitted to the Panel at the EiP.
- 4.2 The Sustainability Appraisal of the South East Plan highlighted the particular challenge facing us to achieve behavioural change in a number of key policy areas. The secretariat is working with stakeholders across the region to identify specific actions that need to be delivered if we are to realise a change in behaviour. It is also seeking further advice from experts in economic regulation on the potential to use the economic regulatory frameworks as a means of reinforcing the need for behavioural change. This advice will also identify the best way of ensuring future pricing regimes enable utility companies to be properly resourced to make the investment in additional infrastructure.
- 4.3 An audit of the advice on infrastructure requirements, identified through the sub-regional strategies, is currently underway. This will enable the information in the Implementation Plan to be presented on a consistent basis, help fill in the remaining gaps in the Plan and improve our collective understanding of how the infrastructure investment contributes to the delivery of agreed outcomes. Work is also continuing on developing the concept of a Regional Infrastructure Fund into a practical proposal. There is an ongoing dialogue with SEEDA and colleagues in the South West on how to take this forward.

- 4.4 A revised version of the Implementation Plan will be considered by the committee at its next meeting. The Assembly will be holding an Infrastructure Summit on 29 September at which the key element of the Implementation Plan will be presented to a wider audience.

## **5. Thames Basing Heaths SPA – Audit of Land**

- 5.1 The Assembly has taken a leading role in trying to resolve the current difficulties in delivering planned growth in parts of the Western Corridor/Blackwater Valley and London Fringe sub-regions. A particular concern has been that the mitigation standards proposed by English Nature are too onerous. As part of our contribution to the debate we commissioned an audit, in partnership with English Nature and DCLG, of land already within public ownership with a view to identifying its potential to provide mitigation for the impact of new development.
- 5.2 The audit primarily looked at land already in use and which could be improved to provide additional land for recreational use. In headline terms it indicates that there is sufficient land already within public ownership that could provide the basis for mitigating the impact of new development. While there remains a considerable amount of work to be done, most notably in terms of developing appropriate delivery mechanisms, it is unlikely that there is a need to review the scale of housing set out in the South East Plan for the Western Corridor/Blackwater Valley and London Fringe sub regions.
- 5.3 Colleagues should be aware that in addition to the Assembly led audit, an additional piece of research has been commissioned by DCLG, with support from the Assembly. This is a peer review of the approach promoted in English Nature's draft delivery plan. Cllr Moira Gibson has been invited to join the steering group for the research in order to provide a local authority perspective.

## **6. South West Regional Spatial Strategy – Consultation Response**

- 6.1 Our colleagues in the South West Regional Assembly have recently submitted their Spatial Strategy to the Government. The Committee had debated an earlier draft of the strategy at a previous meeting and agreed to draw upon the outcome of that debate in formally responding to the South West's submission.
- 6.2 Members expressed their support for the identification in the document of the importance of timely delivery of infrastructure to support growth and emphasised the importance of inter-regional linkages, particularly the relationship between the Swindon area and our own Western Corridor/Blackwater Valley sub-region, and between the South East Dorset area and our own South Hampshire sub-region.

## **7. Gypsies and Travellers: Partial Review Project Plan**

- 7.1 We are required, as Regional Planning Body, to identify the number of pitches required (but not their location) for each local planning authority in the light of the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments currently underway, and provide a strategic view of needs across the region.
- 7.2 The Project Plan is a statutory requirement which must be carried out when a partial review takes place. The objectives of the partial review are set out in the Project Plan, together with details on the process that will be followed in taking forward the work. The Committee agreed the content of the Project Plan for consultation; a process which will begin on 4 September and continue for six weeks.
- 7.3 A brief will be issued later in the year to local authorities outlining the information required on the level and type of provision together with the distribution. The content of this brief will be agreed by the Committee at its next meeting.

## **8. Advice to Casinos Advisory Panel**

- 8.1 The Advisory Panel considering the location of regional scale and large casinos has recently announced its short list of potential sites. The Advisory Panel has subsequently sought the views of the Regional Assembly on the short listed applications in relation to their fit with the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS). Members endorsed a response prepared by the secretariat that reflected the policy framework set out in the South East Plan. In so doing they highlighted concerns that the current policy framework might be insufficient to deal with the issues associated with regional scale or large casinos.

## **9. Transport Issues**

- 9.1 The Committee debated responses to three transport related consultations: the Government's review of the Ports Policy Framework, the Cross Country Franchise and the West Midlands Franchise.
- 9.2 Members emphasised the importance of ensuring that the landside infrastructure required to support efficient port operations is provided. They welcomed the acknowledgement within the consultation document of the role that our international gateways play as a gateway to the rest of the UK and supported the concept of "master plans" for these ports.

- 9.3 The proposed reduction in the capacity of services linking South Hampshire with the north of the country and destinations served by the Cross Country franchise were attacked by the Committee. While the continued delay in implementing the recommendations of the Brighton Main Line Route Utilisation Strategy was viewed as unacceptable if the proposed removal of through services to Brighton was to be confirmed in the franchise.
- 9.4 The specification for the West Midlands franchise was criticised for failing to set out how the additional capacity at Milton Keynes station would be utilised and the importance of potential bidders committing to work with the region in developing the East West rail proposal was emphasised.

**Cllr Christine Field**  
**Chairman of the Regional Planning Committee**

25 August 2006