

SOUTH EAST ENGLAND REGIONAL ASSEMBLY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Date: 15 December 2006

Subject: South East Plan Examination in Public: Update

Report of: Planning Strategy Director

Recommendation:

That Members note the issues that have been considered already at the EiP and the onward timetable for proceedings.

1. Purpose of Report

To update Committee Members on the South East Plan EiP.

2. Examination in Public: The First Week

- 2.1 The Examination in Public (EiP) has now completed its first week of the Woking sessions (the EiP sits from 28 November to 15 December at Woking), with high level discussions on the overall strategy and the links with other regions (Tuesday, Wednesday) and more detailed discussions on climate change (Wednesday), infrastructure (Thursday), water (Thursday) and social, health and culture issues (Friday).
- 2.2 The Assembly Secretariat is preparing daily summaries of the key points from each session which are posted on the Assembly's website (<http://www.southeast-ra.gov.uk/southeastplan/publications/blog/>) the day following each session. In addition, we will be emailing a brief EiP update and links to the daily updates to the Assembly's e-subscriber list weekly. Also available is a website resource pack on the EiP process to help member and partner organisations explain the process to their networks. The pack includes fact sheets, a sample newsletter article, photos of an EiP session and a copy of the Chief Executive's Opening Statement (http://www.southeast-ra.gov.uk/southeastplan/publications/resource_pack.html). All other information related to the EiP, such as the timetable and the list of matters and participants, is available on the EiP Panel's web-site (www.eipsoutheast.co.uk).

- 2.3 There was considerable media interest in the Assembly's views on the start of EiP, particularly from regional media. BBC regional TV featured the story in its 12.30pm, 6.30pm and 10.30pm news programmes on 27 November. Assembly members and officers also achieved extensive radio coverage, recording interviews with 33 groups of regional radio stations. Over the first three days of EiP hearings, some 21 print and online press items appeared in regional and trade press. This last number is artificially low at the time of writing due to a time lag in receiving some press cuttings, particularly from weekly publications.
- 2.4 Unhelpfully, the Government chose the second day of the EiP to publish its long awaited policy advice on housing (PPS3) and in the covering letter, made explicit reference to the need for the Panel to take this into account during the EiP. A report on PPS3 will be considered by the Regional Planning Committee in January. Members may recall that the Assembly had severe reservations about a number of aspects of the draft PPS when they considered it at a joint meeting of the Executive and RPC on 20 January. Many of the concerns that we had with the Draft also apply to the final version of PPS3.
- 2.5 The Panel has already indicated that they will address this when examining the overall level of housing (Matter 1h, Wednesday 6 December) and other Housing policies (Matters 4a and 4b, Wednesday 13 December). An oral update on their views will be provided at the Executive meeting.
- 2.6 The Government Office also informed the Panel that the draft PPS on Climate Change is expected this side of Christmas together with related advice on sustainable homes. Although this will be in draft form, the Panel may wish to consider what the implications of this are for the Plan's policies.
- 2.7 By the time Members consider this report, the first stage in the EiP will be coming to a close. Further issues that will have been examined at Woking include housing, economy, transport, waste and minerals, green belt and the spatial strategy (i.e. sub-regional framework, urban focus, brownfield/Greenfield split). Further information will be made available on these as the EiP progresses.

3. Thames Basin Heaths

- 3.1 Running parallel to the main EiP event is a process to consider the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (TBH SPA) and Natural England's Delivery Plan. The first three days of this were held on 21-23 November with further days programmed throughout December and January. This will lead to a report from the Inspector which will be the focus of discussion at the main EiP in March at a joint session on the Western Corridor/Blackwater Valley and the London Fringe sub-regional strategies.

- 3.1.1 The first session provided an opportunity for Natural England to explain the history of the Delivery Plan, and for the Regional Assembly and DCLG to outline research that has been undertaken to date, including work by LUC for the Assembly on potential mitigation and the DCLG/Assembly sponsored 'Peer Review' of the Delivery Plan. The subsequent sessions then explored in some detail the legal context and requirements, the evidence base for the Delivery Plan, and possible mitigation measures.
- 3.2 Following the discussions at the first Technical Meeting, the Assembly has committed to explore further, with local planning authorities and other stakeholders, what potential alternative recreation land may realistically be available in the short term to act as mitigation.

The next technical meeting (18-20 December) will consider in more detail specific questions relating to those topics outlined above. The Assessor's final report is due for publication on 19 February 2007, and will help inform the EiP Panel's assessment.

4. Onward Process

- 4.1 The next stage of the EiP starts on 15 January in Chichester. Although there will still be some outstanding regional matters to be considered at this point (biodiversity, rural and coastal issues) the focus will turn to the sub-regions with the Sussex Coast and South Hampshire being the first to be considered.

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