

Matter 8J/South East England Regional Assembly



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Matter 8J: Western Corridor and Blackwater Valley

8Ji Role and Economy

8Ji.1 Bearing in mind its complex spatial and administrative structure what is the rationale for and role of the sub-region? Is it appropriate to combine Western Corridor and Blackwater Valley (Policy WCBV7)?

8Ji.2 Are the economic forecasts realistic and is the provision for employment land adequate in relation to these economic assumptions (Policy WCBV4, paras 2.4.5 and 2.8-2.12)?

8Ji.3 What are the implications of the potential misalignment of houses and jobs?

8Ji.4 Is the policy on Smart Growth sufficiently clear in its aims and realistic in its prospects for delivery (Policy WCBV5)?

8Ji.5 Does the proposed strategy adequately reflect the role of Reading, Basingstoke, Slough and High Wycombe as Regional Hubs (Policy WCBV1)?

1. The process of developing the sub-regional strategies has been undertaken by the 9 principal authorities that make up the Western Corridor and Blackwater Valley sub-region. The Regional Assembly generally supports the approach of those principal authorities involved in developing the sub-regional strategy. Our response therefore concentrates on Matter 8Ji.1.
2. The Assembly's response to matter 2A.4 sets out the background to the development of the sub-regional framework. This makes it clear that sub-regions have only been defined in the Plan where there is a need for a co-ordinated response across administrative boundaries to address a policy deficit, in line with PPS11.
3. The principle for the broad sub-regional area has been established through RPG9's 'Western Policy Area', which includes the Thames Valley and the Blackwater Valley. RPG9 identified a need for the further growth in these areas to minimise the pressures on land and labour resources, and a need for collaborative, cross-boundary working. Building on RPG9, sub-regional studies were undertaken for both the Western Corridor and for the Blackwater Valley in Spring 2004 by the relevant principal authorities with input from district and borough authorities.

4. Both studies identified particular issues and pressures that warranted a specific sub-regional policy approach. In the Western Corridor this included the particular economic role of the area and its proximity to Heathrow, the tight labour and housing markets, and the resultant pressure on environmentally constrained land, and on infrastructure, especially transport. The Blackwater Valley study demonstrated the polycentric nature of the area, complex commuting flows and extensive areas of MoD land.¹
5. The two study areas were combined into one sub-region as a result of these initial sub-regional studies, given the complex and important functional linkages and relationship between the two areas². Three further phases of work were then undertaken to develop and refine the sub-regional strategy and develop the overarching vision for the sub-region set out in Section C of the Plan³.
6. It is clear from this work that there is a need within the sub-region to manage demand on the transport system, and maintain a sustainable balance between economic growth and population/household growth and the provision of services and other infrastructure whilst protecting the attractive environmental quality of the sub-region. The sub-regional strategy therefore provides an overall spatial strategy for development and includes policies to achieve an appropriate balance between economic growth, housing and the environment across the whole sub-region whilst retaining the recognition of the need for integrated planning of the Blackwater Valley within its wider spatial context.
7. The policies within section E6 appropriately address the overall aims for the sub-region, within the wider context of the regional policies. These together set out a coherent and focused framework for the development of Local Development Frameworks and other policy documents. The Assembly supports the work of the principal authorities in developing the strategy, and believes that it provides the most appropriate framework for the development of the sub-region. It provides sufficient detail to enable local authorities to develop coherent and outcome driven local development documents without addressing issues which are more appropriately assessed at the more local level.
8. Whilst this sub-region does cover an unusually complex administrative area, that does not negate the validity of the Western Corridor and Blackwater Valley sub-regional strategy, which provides a policy framework for authorities in the area to work together as necessary to address the sub-region's distinctive needs, through the implementation and monitoring of the sub-regional strategy and sub-regional policies.

¹ http://www.southeast-ra.gov.uk/southeastplan/key/initial_studies.html

² http://www.southeast-ra.gov.uk/meetings/planning/2004/290604/agenda_item_5-sub-regional_studies.pdf

³ http://www.southeast-ra.gov.uk/southeastplan/key/study_areas/western_corridor_blackwater_valley.html

9. The Assembly's response to matter 5A sets out the Assembly's position on economic forecasts and employment land. Our response to matter 1G addresses the issue of alignment between economy/jobs and housing, and smart growth.

8Jii Housing

8Jii.1 Are the housing figures set at the most appropriate level, taking account of the environmental assets and the infrastructure constraints and the economic pressures in the area?(Policies WCBV2, WCBV3 and Table WCBVI)?

8Jii.3 Have all the options for locating housing development been fully explored, including new locations and settlements as well as urban extensions (Policies WCBVI, WCBV2 WCBV3))?

1. The Assembly's response to matters 1H and 4 set out the rationale and reasoning for the overall housing provisions set out in the Plan. The Regional Assembly supports the work of the principal authorities in developing the sub-regional strategy in relation to the district housing figures and their distribution. Given the constraints within the sub-region (including environmental constraints, flood risk and the capacity of transport and waste water treatment infrastructure) and the existing uncertainties about if and when these may be overcome, in the light of current knowledge the amount and distribution of housing development is considered appropriate.

8Jii.2 Is the regional affordability target the most appropriate guidance for this sub-region?

1. The Assembly's response to Matter 4A sets out the Assembly's views relating to the regional target for the provision of affordable housing. Bearing in mind the detailed level of work which has been undertaken by the principal authorities to consider the provision of affordable housing in the sub-region, and assess any need to include a sub-regional target, the Assembly supports the decision to reflect the regional target for the provision of affordable housing in this sub-region.

8Jii.4 Bearing in mind the development pressures does Policy WCBV2 offer sufficient environmental protection?

1. The Assembly supports the inclusion of Policy WCBV2 to ensure that, should urban extensions be required, these be located in sustainable locations that amongst other things ensure the continued protection of the high quality and attractive environment within the sub-region.

8Jiii Infrastructure and Implementation

8Jiii.1 Have the water supply and waste water treatment, flood risk, and transport implications of the growth proposals been adequately considered (Policies WCBV1, WCBV3)?

8Jiii.2 Are the proposals in the Implementation Plan (including for social and green infrastructure) clear, justified and well related to the spatial strategy? What are the priorities (Policies WCBV1, WCBV6)?

1. The Assembly's responses to Matter 1D and Matter 10a set out how infrastructure requirements have been considered and how the proposals in the Implementation Plan are related to the spatial strategy. For the first time at the regional and sub-regional levels the Implementation Plan specifically identifies the roles, responsibilities and actions required by specified organisations and other key stakeholders to deliver the objectives and policies in the core strategy and sub-regional strategies, through a mixture of investment, policy decisions and behavioural change.
2. The Assembly has worked closely with the principal authorities to develop the sub-regional investment frameworks (SRIFs), which identify the sub-regionally significant infrastructure investments required to deliver the spatial strategy. They have been prepared in liaison with the relevant statutory infrastructure providers, including the Environment Agency, energy and water utility companies, the Highways Agency and Network Rail. The SRIFs indicate whether the need for infrastructure is prior to or alongside development set out in the sub-regional strategy.
3. A small number of schemes relating to water infrastructure were identified in the Western Corridor and Blackwater Valley authorities' evidence base but were not included within the Sub-Regional Investment Framework for the sub-region. The details of these are included in Annex 1. The Assembly suggests that these be included in the final Implementation Plan.
4. Priorities are indicated by a combination of identifying the need for infrastructure prior to or alongside development, and the temporal period indicated for that intervention. Individual transport schemes are prioritised through the work of the Regional Transport Board. As a framework, the Implementation Plan provides a context within which detailed proposals for infrastructure requirements at the local level, including consideration of priority and timing, can be prepared through the Local Development Framework process.

Water Resource Plan schemes identified by the sub-region, for inclusion in SRIF

Bray stage II (2008/09)

Maiden Head Chalk Groundwater Phase II (2017/18)

Wey Greensand Groundwater Phase II (2026/27)

Fobney Water Treatment Works (2005-2010)

Further detail about these schemes is included in the sub-region's 9 December 2005 submission on Infrastructure (SEPI9) (http://www.southeast-ra.gov.uk/southeastplan/key/study_areas/dec_05/w_cor_bw_valley/infrastructure.pdf)