

Summary Communications and Engagement Strategy for the South East Plan 2004-2005

Introduction

As Regional Planning Body, the South East England Regional Assembly is responsible for preparing the South East Plan, a new regional framework for managing future development in the South East which will replace current planning guidance for the South East (RPG9). As part of the preparation for the South East Plan, the Assembly is engaging with local authorities; representatives of business, community, cultural and environmental sector; other stakeholders and, as far as possible, the general public. This communications and engagement strategy has been prepared to ensure that the process is as effective as possible.

The anticipated timetable for the preparation of the South East Plan is:

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| • September 2003 | Start |
| • March and April 2004 | Workshops with members and stakeholders on scenarios |
| • April/May 2004 | Presentation of scenarios and options |
| • April and May 2004 | Workshops with members and stakeholders |
| • Autumn 2004 | Draft proposals |
| • Late 2004/ early 2005 | Extensive engagement with members, stakeholders and the public |
| • Spring 2005 | Final draft |
| • Summer 2005 | Submission to Government |

This strategy document outlines the strategic and engagement objectives, key messages and methodologies. A separate detailed plan will also be drawn up showing communication team activities month-by-month.

1. Objectives

1.1 Strategic objectives

- Develop a succinct, clear, accessible South East Plan in plain English which reflects an effective engagement process;
- Involve and engage the widest possible number of people in the consultation process to validate the final document and its content;
- Raise awareness of the Assembly and its core business.

1.2 Engagement objectives

- Organise effective and efficient involvement of members, partners and stakeholders to encourage feedback;
- Prioritise target audiences to ensure most effective use of resources;
- Inform the general public and provide opportunities for representative input;
- Ensure wide distribution of the main South East Plan consultation document and supporting documents, available in both print and electronic formats;
- Provide efficient and accessible feedback tools for consultees;
- Demonstrate that the analysis of responses is undertaken carefully and is open-minded;
- Make results widely available, taking account of the views expressed and the reasons for decisions finally taken.

2. Audiences

Key audiences can be divided into a number of main groups:

Group	Audience	Includes
A	Assembly Members and their nominating bodies	Elected representatives/ councillors/ chief executives/ chief officers in relevant disciplines
B	Regional partners	SEEDA, Government Office for the South East , Environment Agency
C1	Stakeholders	Organisations who have existing close relationship with Assembly (eg Countryside Agency, English Heritage, Strategic Rail Authority, Highways Agency)
C2	Stakeholders	Organisations without an existing close relationship with Assembly (eg individual private sector and voluntary/charitable organisations such as disability groups or individual housing associations)
D	Colleagues	Regional Assembly staff. Also staff and members of other regional assemblies and planning bodies
E	Opinion formers	Media, Regional MPs, ministers, government departments
F	Informed public	People involved in organised community groups or residents' associations etc who have existing relationships with local government, the Assembly, stakeholders or partners
G	General public	Residents/ employees/ visitors in South East region
H	European bodies	EU, MEPs, European Commission, partners in ESPACE study, High Speed Train project 4i and Finesse

More detailed breakdown of the audiences above will be assisted by ongoing work in-house to review the stakeholder networks and groups that need to be consulted throughout the preparation of the South East Plan, particularly in respect of the requirements of PPS11.

3. Engagement methodology

To engage effectively the following key communication tools have been identified.

Method of engagement	Groups it will reach
Throughout the preparation of the South East Plan, engagement with members, stakeholders and partners through events and workshops. This includes both Assembly events and presentations at others' events. NB: Requests for presentations at others' events need to be carefully reviewed against priority audiences to ensure effective focusing of limited resources.	A,B,C
Perceptions and opinion research by MORI, including surveys and focus groups, for testing policy to feed into the South East Plan.	E,F,G
Development of accessible South East Plan consultation document including the integration of the supporting documents (both print and electronic).	A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H
Production and wide distribution of information materials to explain the context, process, key issues and propositions of the South East Plan. For example, regular newsletters on progress/process and a short executive summary of the main consultation document.	A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H
Media campaign to raise awareness and involvement among the public and other audiences.	A,B,C,D,E,F,G
Mailing of the main South East Plan consultation document and supporting documents to members, partners and stakeholders. Consideration should be given to providing the document in alternative formats (audio, large print, braille, other languages).	A,B,C,D,E,H
Cascading information to sub-stakeholder groups by members, partners and identified stakeholder networks to inform about the South East Plan.	C,F
Dedicated South East Plan website (closely linked to the corporate site) including feedback option on the South East Plan, scenarios and issues.	A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H
Provide a pack of documentation for minority groups, community groups and young people's groups who wish to hold their own debates on South East Plan issues (available via website or secretariat).	C,F,G
Youth website (closely linked to the corporate site) to engage youth in the preparation of the South East Plan.	C,F,G
Engaging with other regions (London, South West, West and East Midlands, East of England and adjacent regions in the European mainland).	D,E,H
Work to engage national and international politicians and government departments.	E,H
Create easy response form to encourage feedback on consultation draft (eg online version of MORI questionnaire).	A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H

4. Key outputs

Key outputs can be divided into a number of sections:

4.1 Publications

- An electronic and print newsletter (approximately every two months) which will regularly update key audiences about the preparation process and, later, will give feedback to consultees;

- Stakeholder briefing documents to support stakeholder workshops (lay-out will be similar to the Assembly papers);
- South East Plan consultation document with supporting documents;
- Information materials aimed at the general public.

4.2 Events

- Workshops with members and stakeholders to identify a vision, key links and communications tools;
- Workshops with members and stakeholders to discuss scenarios and options;
- Launch events around the region for the South East Plan consultation document;
- Workshops with members and stakeholders to discuss the consultation draft;
- Other events including Executive Committee, Regional Planning Committee and Plenary meetings for members to discuss different aspects of the South East Plan.
- Assembly presence at other organisations' high level events to explain the South East plan process and consultation.
- Production of special South East Plan exhibition panels for use at events.

4.3 Media relations

- A detailed and extensive media relations campaign including press releases, proactive media briefings, interviews, and articles by Assembly staff/members. Key media audiences are:

Media
Regional media (print, broadcast and web-based media)
Local media (weekly print and, possibly)
Trade publications (specialist media in priority areas – eg planning, transport, housing, environment, including web-based publications such as letsrecycle.com)
Trade publications (generic areas – eg third sector magazine)
National media 1: (top 6 specialist correspondents on regional issues)
National media 2: (non specialist/ general news correspondents)

- Work with members/ partners to secure coverage in their newsletters – eg council newspapers

Media coverage will be focused around two main areas:

- Stages of the South East Plan process, eg regional meetings/ presentations, options under debate, workshop results, publication of draft/ final proposals, open/close of consultation, level of response, consultee feedback, submission to government.
- Key issues in the plan – eg housing, transport, waste, sustainability, renewable energy and health.

4.4 Other

- A dedicated micro-site for the South East Plan, including South East Plan Frequently Asked Questions;
- A youth website, including the opportunity for young people to give views on the South East Plan;
- Encourage/ pursue links from member/ stakeholder websites through to the South East Plan micro-site;
- Display and presentation materials for use at events (this includes PowerPoint presentations to be used at events by third parties);
- Digital material (CD, DVD, downloadable) ;
- Consider production of video news release/ use of radio agency to encourage broadcast coverage around launch of public consultation.
- Final reports, and Powerpoint presentations, from each stage of the MORI research project;
- MORI Extranet, a web-based source, managed by MORI for Assembly members and key regional stakeholders, which will track the rolling survey programme for the South East Plan. The site includes a feedback option.

5. Resource issues

Internally, the following issues will have to be taken into account in planning workloads and reviewing outputs.

- As this project is under great time constraints and has limited resources, the Assembly needs the active involvement of its members and stakeholder networks to disseminate information and encourage participation.
- The achievement of much of this strategy depends upon receiving the £1m+ additional Planning Development Grant bid for from ODPM for 2004-05.
- The consultation period needs to allow stakeholder organisations to marshal a full and considered response. This period should be at least 12 weeks, and should not run over holiday periods.
- As the South East is a large region it is expected that many stakeholders, organised interest groups and members of the public will provide many responses. This will require effective organisation of all feedback as it is unknown how great the number of responses will be.
- Once the South East Plan has been produced and submitted to Government, communication efforts will need to be continued to maintain the momentum and dialogue that has been initiated. This is particularly relevant at times of the submission of revisions of the Plan and monitoring reports at the end of each year.
- The Assembly needs to engage and involve stakeholders that have been involved in former programmes and strategies, and other relevant stakeholders such as identified in Annex D and E of PPS11.
- Consultees need to have easy access to documentation (print and electronic).
- Documents need to be clear and concise.
- It is important to provide results of consultation and reasons for decisions to the public.