

a clear vision FOR THE SOUTH EAST

UPDATE ON THE SOUTH EAST PLAN

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Inspectors' Report on South East Plan

The **South East Plan** sets out how we can make best use of space and resources in the region so that it continues to be economically successful and an attractive place to live. The Plan covers the period to 2026.

Further information about the South East Plan is available on the South East Plan website:
(www.southeast-ra.gov.uk/southeastplan)

Inspectors' report

The report of an independent panel of inspectors on the South East Plan was published on 29 August by the Government Office for the South East. The report follows an Examination-in-Public (EiP), which ran from November 2006 to March 2007, where nearly 1,000 people from a wide-range of organisations gave their views on the Plan.

The inspectors give the Assembly a clean bill of health in 11 of the 12 tests of soundness in Government's Planning Policy Statement 11, including consistency, community involvement, partnership working, strong credible evidence and spatial planning.

Housing

The inspectors disagree with the Plan's numbers for housing growth, as they believe the Plan gives too much weight to consultation results and not enough to population and economic factors. They recommend the overall level of house building in the South East should increase from 28,900 to 32,000 per year. This is a 10% increase, or an additional 62,000 homes during the plan period 2006-2026.

Nearly half the 10% increase comes from Assembly member councils, who offered to accommodate more housing within their boundaries at the EiP.

London Fringe, Central Oxfordshire and the Western Corridor/Blackwater Valley are the focus for most of the additional homes proposed by the inspectors.

The inspectors agree with the Assembly that building more homes will not reduce house prices. They make clear that the size and type of housing built is as important as providing affordable homes. They therefore

recommend strengthening the policies dealing with these areas.

There should be monitoring indicators for the size and type of affordable housing being built to ensure homes meet the needs of both large and small families. They also recommend replacing the Plan's affordable housing definition with the one in Government's planning policy statement three.

Infrastructure

The Assembly's pioneering work to identify and cost new infrastructure needed in the region is applauded. The inspectors agree with the Assembly's "manage and invest" approach to infrastructure, but disagree that housing levels should be dependent on particular infrastructure being in place.

To help finance infrastructure projects that are required before development can take place, the inspectors believe the Assembly should progress proposals for an innovative Regional Infrastructure Fund. The cost of the projects could then be recouped from developers later.

In terms of transport the inspectors see improvements to infrastructure and behavioural change as key to alleviating traffic congestion, but see a reduction in car-use during the lifetime of the plan as unrealistic. The inspectors also believe congestion will be helped by focussing development in urban areas.

They share the Assembly's frustration that there is no regional freight strategy, but feel the need to move freight from road to rail should be given more prominence in the Plan.

More focus on specific locations

Inspectors recommend the Plan is strengthened by being more location specific. In particular, the inspectors propose six 'strategic development areas' each containing 4-5,000 homes or more. Two are already identified in the Plan at Fareham and north/north east of Hedge End in South Hampshire. Another two are in South West and South East Milton Keynes, endorsing the Assembly's work for MK2031, a strategic view for the sub-region from 2001



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to 2031. The inspectors also put forward two new areas in south Oxfordshire and south Reading. In addition, the inspectors identify areas where selective greenbelt reviews should take place.

They also believe the sub-regions outlined in the Plan, where a majority of development will be concentrated, should be explicitly identified as areas of growth or regeneration. The inspectors recommend the Isle of Wight should be made a sub-region due to its need for regeneration.

Environment

The inspectors want to see the Assembly strengthen its position on climate change by making references to the issue more explicit in various policies through out the Plan. They also recommend a new cross-cutting policy on green infrastructure, which stresses the importance of open space such as parks, canals, pathways and historic sites.

They recommend a specific policy for the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA). Although they recommend that 6,000 more homes are built within 5km of the SPA, this should be accommodated in a few large schemes where alternative green space can be provided, to alleviate pressure on the environmentally sensitive SPA.

The Assembly is praised for its work on climate change, with the inspectors acknowledging that it is important the Assembly should take the lead in planning action. Partnership working between the Assembly and the Environment Agency on water resources is also praised.

The Plan and the RES

Although the Inspectors note that there has been an attempt to bring together the Plan and Regional Economic Strategy (RES) priorities, they argue closer alignment could be achieved through increasing housing provision and directing more development to support the more economically successful areas of the region. The inspectors believe that 32,000 homes a year is sufficient for the South East to meet its economic objectives.

The other area where the Plan and the RES differ is the expansion of Gatwick Airport, which the inspectors leave as an open issue, requiring only that land needed for a possible extra runway after 2019 is safeguarded.

The inspectors also recommend an early review of South East Plan policies on employment land.

Inspectors' call for long lasting Plan

The inspectors want to see a strong Plan that will not need early review. They believe their recommendations to strengthen the Plan on housing, reviewing

employment land and being location specific will ensure this can be delivered.

They also recommend the Plan's vision should be clearer and have amended it to:

"The Plan's vision for 2026 is for a healthier region for its citizens and of the environment, a more sustainable pattern of development and a dynamic and robust economy, the benefits of which are more widely shared."

Chairman's response

Assembly Chairman Cllr Keith Mitchell CBE said: "The South East is committed to maintaining its position as the UK's economic powerhouse and this report backs the great majority of our work to maximise the region's potential.

"The report sees 32,000 as a realistic figure for our region and it clearly rejects bids for higher numbers as unnecessary for a successful economy and unsustainable for the environment. It also reinforces our argument that new homes must be supported by increased Government investment in transport, schools, hospitals, parks and water supplies to deliver a sustainable South East.

"We do recognise the world has moved on since we prepared our figures three years ago and around half the inspectors' increase comes from Assembly member councils, who have offered to accommodate more housing.

"The inspectors speak highly of the strong evidence we gathered and the quality of the Plan overall.

"Also the report praises our work to consider how planning affects social issues as well as culture and health. This is thanks to the contributions from Assembly members who represent such a wide range of interests across the region."

Next steps

The Secretary of State will now consider the inspectors' recommendations before deciding whether to take on the suggested changes. The Government aims to publish proposed changes to the South East Plan for a 12 week period of public consultation towards the end of 2007.

The final Plan is expected to be published – and therefore become a statutory document - in autumn 2008.

For more information on the report visit http://www.southeast-ra.gov.uk/southeastplan/plan/inspectors_report.html.

