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## **EAST OF ENGLAND PLAN**

### **1 SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report seeks Members' views on the East of England Plan, the draft revision of the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) for the East of England.

### **2 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The East of England Plan is the draft Spatial Strategy to guide development in the East of England until at least 2021. The new plan is intended to replace two existing strategy documents RPG6 (East Anglia) and RPG9 (South East - the parts relating to Bedfordshire, Luton, Essex, Southend, Thurrock and Hertfordshire).
- 2.2 The plan has been prepared by the East of England Regional Assembly (EERA) and submitted to the Secretary of State (Deputy Prime Minister). Following expiry of the consultation period (18th March 2005), the Plan will be tested at an Examination in Public (EIP) before a Panel appointed by the Secretary of State. The EIP is programmed to commence on 13 September 2005 and it is anticipated that, following modification, the final Plan will be published in late 2006. A copy of the draft Plan has been placed in the Members' Library.

### **3 VISION AND CORE STRATEGY**

- 3.1 The spatial vision for the East of England is "To sustain and improve the quality of life for all people who live in, work, or visit the region, by developing a more sustainable, prosperous and outward-looking region, whilst respecting its diversity and enhancing its assets".
- 3.2 A 'Core Strategy' is now required as a key part of plans to be prepared under the provisions of the new planning system (including this RSS, and also the Local Development Documents (LDDs) prepared by Local Authorities). To assist Members, the sixteen core strategy policies are attached to this report as Appendix One. A short summary of each policy follows:-

#### **SS1 : Achieving Sustainable Development**

Sets out the key principles to be followed to ensure development is sustainable recognising, in particular, the importance of continuing to protect designated areas.

#### **SS2 : Overall Approach to the Spatial Strategy**

Confirms urban areas as the focus for development and redevelopment with particular sub-regions being identified for major development and/or regeneration.

**SS3 : Development in and Adjoining Urban Areas**

Explains that development should be in or adjacent to urban areas although in some instances greenfield land releases will be required.

**SS4 : Use of Previously Developed Land and Buildings**

Reiterates the Government commitment to 60% of new development being on previously developed land or buildings.

**SS5 : Town Centres**

Recognises town centres as being a crucial focus for investment, environmental enhancement and regeneration.

**SS6 : Transport Strategy**

Highlights the importance of transport, infrastructure and improving accessibility and, at the same time, reducing the need to travel.

**SS7 : Green Belt**

Confirms that the broad extent of Green Belt should be maintained, but that reviews must be carried out to identify the most sustainable locations for new development in line with sub-regional strategies, including Thames Gateway South Essex.

**SS8 : Land in the Urban Fringe**

Recognises the importance of a strategy for dealing with the urban fringe.

**SS9 : Development in Rural Areas**

Promotes market towns for development in rural areas, recognising their importance to a thriving rural economy.

**SS10 : The Regional Economy**

Is a broad brush policy seeking to highlight the importance of the regional economy to national, regional and local prosperity.

**SS11 : Priority Areas for Regeneration**

Lists the priority areas for regeneration in the region, including Thames Gateway South Essex.

**SS12 : Health, Education and Social Inclusion**

States EERA's commitment to work with partners on health, education and social exclusion agendas.

**SS13 : Overall Housing Provision**

Provides for an average rate of dwelling completions of 23,900 p.a. over the period 2001-2021, for a total of 478,000 dwellings. At least 30% to be affordable housing, plus key workers' accommodation.

**SS14 : Development and Flood Risk**

Requires Local Development Documents to consider flood risk assessments and appropriate policies to deal with flooding issues.

**SS15 : The Coast**

Seeks to balance the regeneration and growth of coastal towns and facilities against the need to protect environmental assets.

**SS16 : Quality in the Built Environment**

Promotes quality in the built environment balanced against making efficient use of land with development at no less than 30 dwellings per hectare.

**4 SUB-REGIONAL POLICIES AND STRATEGIES**

- 4.1 Following the core strategy policies, the Plan provides a set of policies and proposals for a number of sub-regional areas, where more specific guidance is required to assist the preparation of Local Development Documents or to reflect existing Government priorities, particularly the Sustainable Communities Plan.

**Thames Gateway/South Essex Sub-Region**

- 4.2 The area comprises the five Authorities of Basildon, Castle Point, Rochford, Southend and Thurrock and forms the larger urban area in the region, with a population of over 635,000 - 12% of the regional total.
- 4.3 Seven policies are included in the Plan for South Essex. The policies are attached in Appendix Two to this report and briefly summarised below:-

**Policy TG/SE1 - Zones of Change and Influence**

LDDs to make provision for three regeneration hubs including Southend and Rochford as a cultural and intellectual hub and a higher centre of excellence.

**Policy TG/SE2 - Employment Generating Development**

Seeks 55,000 net additional jobs in the Plan period, including 3,000 in Rochford (2,000 from 2011-2021).

**Policy TG/SE3 - Transport Infrastructure**

Sets out a series of key infrastructure improvements in phased periods - the policy identifies these improvements as a pre-condition for achieving regeneration and additional development.

**Policy TG/SE4 - The Environment and Urban Renaissance**

Specifies a series of projects/areas for improvement and enhancement of the environment, including the Green Grid.

**Policy TG/SE5 - Community Infrastructure**

Recognises the importance of improving health and education.

**Policy TG/SE6 - Dwelling Provision**

Specifies that 43,800 net additional dwellings be provided in the Plan period to 2021. For Rochford the total is 4,600 with 3,000 phased from 2011-2021.

**Policy TG/SE7 - Implementation and Delivery**

Highlights the role of the Thames Gateway South Essex Partnership in the delivery of the policies/proposals.

**5 OTHER IMPORTANT POLICIES**

**Chapter 6 - Economic Development, Retail and Tourism**

- 5.1 Includes a number of policies reflecting these matters. As might be expected, attention is given to making efficient use of existing employment land resources.
- 5.2 The Plan is seeking a job growth target in the East of England of 421,500. This total includes 116,000 jobs in Essex, of which, as previously explained, 55,000 would be in the South Essex sub-region.
- 5.3 The contribution from Regional Airports, as drivers of the economy is recognised, with modest expansion to meet local market demand, in the case of Norwich and Southend.

**Chapter 7 - Housing**

- 5.4 The overall housing requirement of 23,900 net additional dwellings p.a. (478,000) is broken down by area. For Essex, Southend and Thurrock, the annual total is 6,170 units or 123,400 over the Plan period. As explained above, Rochford is expected to provide 4,600 units, that is 230 p.a.
- 5.5 The Plan recognises the importance of the timely delivery of infrastructure and job growth as a pre-requisite to the delivery of the housing numbers.
- 5.6 For affordable housing, a policy provides details of matters to be addressed in LDDs, including the measures to secure an adequate supply of affordable housing and the proportion to be affordable.

**Chapter 8 - Regional Transport Strategy**

- 5.7 The RTS is now included within the RSS document, rather than being presented separately.
- 5.8 A range of policies address transport issues, focusing on improving opportunities for access to jobs, services and leisure/tourist facilities, whilst at the same time reducing the need to travel. A table listing transport improvements is provided, which includes details of the arrangements for implementation.

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**Chapter 9 - Environmental Resources**

- 5.9 A range of policies included here dealing with landscape character, biodiversity, woodlands, the historic environment, air quality, renewable energy, water supply, waste management and minerals.

**Chapter 10 - Culture**

- 5.10 This chapter includes policies on the arts, sporting activities and recreation.

**Chapter 11 - Implementation and Delivery**

- 5.11 The final chapter of the Plan explains the arrangements for implementation. Of particular note is a policy dealing with developer contributions, which recognises the importance of such contributions towards the essential infrastructure required in the Plan period.

**6 DISCUSSION**

- 6.1 Every Plan tends to have a vision and the East of England Plan is no different in this respect. The spatial planning vision is a broad statement that uses the words "quality of life", "sustainability" and "prosperous". Really, this is much as might be expected. The key then is in the detail of the policies and proposals.
- 6.2 Under the provisions of the new planning system, the RSS provides the strategic framework required for Local Authorities to prepare their Local Development Documents. Whilst specific topics are addressed in the Plan in some detail, the most significant parts of the Plan are the core strategy and the sub-region/sub-area policies. The core strategy provides the broad direction and the sub-region/sub-area policies focus on detailed requirements.
- 6.3 Much of the core strategy chapter is not particularly controversial and clearly reflects a focus on sustainability in the use of land, the location of development and the use of resources.
- 6.4 In relation to the Green Belt, there is recognition that boundary reviews will be required as part of an appraisal to identify sustainable locations for new development, but reviews are to be undertaken in specified "general" locations, including Thames Gateway South Essex.
- 6.5 Since only a small part of Rochford is included in the Thames Gateway, it is reasonable to conclude that a review of the whole of the Green Belt in the District would be inappropriate. That having been said, London Southend Airport is in the Gateway and a significant part of the Airport is currently shown as Green Belt. Given that the Airport is recognised in the Plan as having a role in developing the economy of the sub-region, there seems little doubt there will be pressure for the Green Belt boundary to be revised.
- 6.6 The core strategy policy on housing addresses the overall housing figure for the region and provides details of requirements for social rented and key

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worker housing within this overall total. Policy SG13 envisages that at least 30% of housing supply in each Local Authority should be affordable, but that the overall aspiration is to secure at least 40%.

- 6.7 There is little doubt this is a demanding target and will depend as much on the availability of grant from Government to assist, as the willingness of developers to contribute. It must be remembered that developers are currently asked to make a range of contributions, including affordable housing, transport infrastructure, education provision, health care and open space. It is not clear that 30-40% of the Rochford housing allocation will be capable of being delivered as affordable housing.
- 6.8 The broad thrust of the Plan is about sustainability and it is recognised that infrastructure provision and employment generation must come before housing if we are to move away from the housing led plans of the past and to ensure that the new homes specified in the Plan do not worsen existing problems with congestion, health care, etc.
- 6.9 That being the case, there is a challenge for the Government in terms of funding streams to enable the provision of essential infrastructure balanced against the total contributions that can be levered out of development sites for a range of uses. Work will certainly be required to seek to quantify the level of developer contributions for infrastructure, but there is little doubt there will be a substantial gap between these contributions and the overall total of investment required.
- 6.10 Whilst the overall housing allocations for each District are set out in the housing chapter of the Plan, further details, particularly with regard to phasing, are included in the sub-regional/sub-area policies. It is worth reminding Members about the origin of the policies and supporting text that deals with the Thames Gateway/South Essex sub-region.
- 6.11 In fact, this section of the Plan was prepared by the Thames Gateway Authorities and submitted to EERA for inclusion in the Plan. The policies and proposals were drafted following an in depth analysis of the opportunities and capacity of the area to accept new development within the overall regeneration framework set by the Government's sustainable communities strategy.
- 6.12 It is true that EERA made a small change to the housing allocation: the submitted figure was 40,000 across South Essex, whereas the draft Plan requires a total of 43,800. This change is not considered to be significant, although the result for Rochford is an additional allocation of 600 dwelling units.
- 6.13 Aside from the small change in the housing allocation, the section on the South Essex sub-region is largely as drafted by the Thames Gateway

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Authorities and, therefore, it is proposed that this part of the Plan can be endorsed.

- 6.14 There is a wider issue relating to housing and employment figures in Essex as a whole. Members will be aware that the Essex Authorities have been meeting to consider contents of the emerging Plan and the housing and employment figures in particular. Concerns have been expressed about the realism of the job numbers and the case for the Essex housing provision to be more than 110,400. Currently, the draft Plan provides for 13,000 more than the agreed Essex figure.
- 6.15 The view is that both the housing and employment allocations for Essex are unrealistic, since they have not been arrived at as a result of the empirical evidence. Indeed, various studies reinforce the point. However, as explained above, the South Essex component was arrived at following a bottom-up analysis of capacity and deliverability, although here, as across the whole region, there is a significant caveat.
- 6.16 There is absolutely no doubt whatsoever that in order to be able to deliver first the employment figures and then the housing there must be substantial investment in new infrastructure. The simple fact of the matter is that without new infrastructure the jobs will be difficult to create and, without the infrastructure and jobs, there would be no justification for large numbers of new homes. The regeneration of Thames Gateway South Essex cannot be achieved then without investment in infrastructure.

## **7 CONCLUSIONS**

- 7.1 The suite of policies dealing with the Thames Gateway/South Essex sub-region are considered to be realistic in that they reflect the work of the respective Authorities.
- 7.2 However, the provision of new infrastructure is a pre-requisite to generating new jobs and both are required before additional dwellings can be justified. It is proposed that this message be firmly reiterated in Rochford's response.
- 7.3 Looking at Essex as a whole, there is concern about the overall levels of development proposed and it is suggested that this Council expresses similar concerns about not just the situation in Essex, but about the realism of the figures for the sub-region as a whole.
- 7.4 Whilst a positive response regarding the Thames Gateway/South Essex sub-region, subject to infrastructure, might seem slightly at odds with using broader concerns about Essex, it must be borne in mind that the Thames Gateway exists as a national priority for regeneration, notwithstanding any policies or proposals included in the RSS.

**8 RISK IMPLICATIONS**

**8.1 Strategic Risk**

Risk arising from the East of England Plan relates to the arrangements for the preparation of the Rochford Local Development Framework. The timetable for the preparation of the

**9 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 The East of England Plan, when approved, will provide the strategic spatial planning framework for the protection and enhancement of the environment of the region.

**10 RECOMMENDATION**

10.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**

That the East of England Regional Assembly be advised that the Council:

1. supports the planning framework for the Thames Gateway/South Essex sub-region, but that this support is conditional on the provision of new infrastructure to assist employment generation and as a prerequisite to housing development;
2. is concerned about the realism of the overall housing and employment totals for the region and for Essex;
3. broadly supports the Plan's core strategy;
4. is concerned about the proposed level of affordable housing provision, particularly given the need to ensure all new development makes a contribution to infrastructure
5. is convinced that without substantial investment in new infrastructure, including transport, health and education, the East of England Plan will not be capable of delivery.

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**Background Papers:-**

East of England Plan  
Draft revision to the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) for the East of England  
December 2004

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