

Executive – 2 October 2008

REGIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY FOR THE SOUTH WEST - SECRETARY OF STATE'S PROPOSED CHANGES.

Report of the Head of Community Regeneration

Statutory Powers: Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

Financial Implications: None directly, but the development requirements of the RSS have potentially significant resource implications in the medium to long terms.

Links to Priorities: The RSS links to all Council priorities, but particularly CP1 (affordable homes), CP2 (good jobs) and CP3 (retain the district's character).

Purpose

To recommend a response to the proposed changes to the RSS.

Recommendation:

That the Executive RESOLVES to agree the comments set out in paragraph 17 of this report as the Council's response to the Secretary of State's proposed changes to the Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West.

Background

1. The Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) for the South West sets the framework for planning the future of the region up to 2026 and beyond. On 27 July 2006 the Executive approved a response to the draft RSS (Min.no. E19/06). The RSS was subject to public examination over 10 weeks in 2007, and the Panel's recommended changes were published in December. At that stage comments were not invited.
2. The Secretary of State's proposed changes to the RSS were published in late July 2008. The proposed changes are extensive, and the RSS will be a much shorter document if they are carried through. There is a 12 week period for comment which closes on 17 October.

South Hams context

3. The matters with greatest significance for South Hams are settlement policies, new housing numbers, affordable housing policy, provisions for employment, gypsies & travellers and matters related to the Plymouth and Torbay sub regions.
4. As a result of the proposed changes the RSS makes less explicit distinction between the status of the region's largest **cities and towns**. For example, Bristol, Plymouth, Bournemouth and Swindon are no longer referred to as significant employment locations. Rather they are categorised as Strategically Significant Cities and Towns (SSCTs) alongside other smaller centres.

5. In Devon it is proposed that Newton Abbot be designated as an SSCT in recognition of its strengths and potential for significant additional development. This places it alongside Plymouth, Exeter, Torbay and Barnstaple in policy terms. No change is proposed to the status of any South Hams communities.
6. The Secretary of State proposes increasing **housing figures** across the region to 592,460 homes for the period 2006-26, an increase of 29% above the draft RSS figure and 4% above the Panel's recommendation. Increases for different areas range from very little to more than double. South Hams is towards the lower end of this range with an increase on the draft RSS figure of just under 12%. (By way of comparison, increases for adjoining areas are about 35% for Plymouth, 50% for Torbay, 85% for Teignbridge, 16% for West Devon and no change for Dartmoor).
7. For housing provision the whole of South Hams is included in the Plymouth Housing Market Area (HMA). Of the wider HMA figure of at least 55,700 homes, the South Hams allocation is 12,300 homes. This increase of just less than 12% is considered to represent a general affirmation of the Council's established direction in LDF policy. The increased provision includes an allocation of 6,000 new homes at Sherford – an increase for the new community of 500 dwellings. The remainder of the district's allocation (6,300 homes) are to be distributed through the LDF process.
8. The increased scale of the **Sherford** new community to 6,000 dwellings in the period to 2026 represents an increase of just over 9%. It is considered that this increase is not a significant change from the position set out in the adopted AAP and that through increased density and good design the increased housing numbers could be accommodated within the area already proposed for development. The increased scale would be likely to assist the overall viability of the scheme and successful delivery of the required key infrastructure.
9. **Affordable housing** policy is proposed to change by raising the baseline requirement from at least 30% to at least 35% of all housing annually across the region to be affordable, which is a welcome shift towards this Council's 50% strategic target. However, the deletion of the phrase "with authorities specifying rates of up to 60% or higher in areas of greatest need", whilst not preventing progress with the South Hams adopted policies and targets, is to be regretted and could be helpfully reinstated in order to give greater clarity and support for suitably robust affordable housing policies in those areas.
10. The RSS's provisions for **employment growth** are set out in terms of jobs, based on the HMAs and Travel to Work Areas (TTWAs). South Hams lies within the Plymouth HMA, where the Secretary of State makes provision for a total of 52,000 jobs. Of this total, 42,000 (including 150 ha of employment land) are for and within Plymouth. The balance of 10,000 jobs is to be provided in the remainder of the Plymouth HMA (the districts of South Hams, Caradon and West Devon). This is an increased figure to take account of the aspirational nature of the performance anticipated for Plymouth and its TTWA.

11. The eastern part of South Hams is also included in the RSS's proposed provision for about 11,700 jobs in the Torquay and Paignton/Totnes TTWAs (including the provision of about 29 ha of employment land) – of which 10,100 jobs are to be provided within the Torbay HMA, leaving a balance of about 1,600 jobs to find outside the HMA. The distribution of the 10,000 jobs within the Plymouth HMA and the 1,600 jobs within the Torquay and Paignton/Totnes TTWAs will need to be addressed by the sub-regional work and LDF processes.
12. Proposed changes to the housing and employment figures for **Plymouth and Torbay** are to be provided for within their administrative boundaries, although this may bring development closer to the South Hams boundary than might otherwise have been the case.
13. For **Plymouth** the reduced distinction between larger and smaller SSCTs reduces emphasis of its place as the region's second largest city and of the vision for its renaissance. This could have a detrimental impact on the realisation of that vision. The RSS recognises that Plymouth has the potential to accommodate the majority of its development needs within the existing urban area, whilst additional housing and economic development needs that cannot be so accommodated can be provided for early in the plan period at the Sherford new community. Policy HMA8 provides for growth of 33,000 homes and about 42,000 jobs (including about 150 ha of employment land) inside the Plymouth city boundary.
14. The RSS states that the **Torbay** HMA extends little beyond the three towns of Torquay, Paignton and Brixham. The primary location for housing and employment will be within Torbay's urban area, complemented by the development of one or more mixed use urban extensions within its administrative boundary. Policy HMA5 provides for at least 15,000 homes within the Torbay HMA, all within the Torbay local authority area. Of these 15,000 new homes, 7,200 should be within the existing urban area of Torbay and 7,800 at Area of Search 5A to the west of Torbay (by inference outside the existing urban area but within the Torbay boundary). There is provision within the Torbay HMA for the growth of about 10,100 jobs. This is part of the RSS's provision for about 11,700 jobs in the Torquay and Paignton/Totnes TTWAs (including the provision of about 29 ha. of employment land).
15. Provision for **gypsies and travellers and travelling show people** is part of the housing and affordable housing provision provided for in the RSS. Following the separate Examination of this issue in March 2008, the SoS's proposed changes incorporate specific pitch requirements based on HMAS and expressed by local authority area. These provisions for pitches relate only to the period to 2011 and local authorities are required to consider allocating pitches to meet longer term requirements.
16. The provision of pitches in the South Hams has remained the same since the draft proposals. Within the Plymouth HMA the overall requirement is for 109 residential pitches and 30 transit pitches. The South Hams requirement is 51 residential pitches and 5 transit pitches. For Dartmoor National Park the requirement is for 27 transit pitches. The Panel Report recommended 25-28 transit pitches for Dartmoor to be provided on two sites, including one of 20 pitches in the South Brent area. The SoS has removed this detail, but it remains possible that some or all of Dartmoor's requirement will be proposed within the South Hams part of DNP.

Recommended response

17. Many of the Secretary of State's proposed changes to the RSS are considered to add clarity to the document and can be welcomed. However, as set out above there are several points of concern which it is recommended should be raised as comments on the proposed changes, as follows:
- a. The RSS should make the distinction in function between the region's larger and smaller SSCTs clearer in order that key regeneration programmes are supported and not hampered;
 - b. The housing growth figures for the South Hams are acceptable on the basis that, in combination with the adopted South Hams LDF Core Strategy target of 50% affordable housing provision for the district as a whole, they will enable progress towards addressing the urgently pressing need for affordable homes;
 - c. The reference to provision of affordable housing policy "with authorities specifying rates of up to 60% or higher in areas of greatest need" should be reinstated in order to add clarity to the manner in which policy should be applied across the region;
 - d. The increased provision of 500 additional homes at Sherford is noted but the RSS should make it clear that the increase should be delivered without breaching the development principles set out in the adopted Sherford AAP, particularly the built extent of the development;
 - e. The increased provisions for employment growth are noted and the fact that they are based on HMAs and TTWAs will enable sub-regional and LDF work to secure the most appropriate local distribution;
 - f. The RSS should more clearly support the vision for Plymouth's renaissance through the regeneration of its urban area giving full recognition to the sensitive interface with adjoining rural areas including nationally designated landscapes;
 - g. The RSS should continue to similarly promote Torbay's regeneration through development of its urban area giving full recognition to the sensitive interface with adjoining rural areas including nationally designated landscapes;
 - h. The provisions for gypsies and travellers are noted and appropriately expressed at a strategic level so that site locations will be determined locally.

Strategic Risk Assessment

Opportunity	Issues / Obstacles	Benefits
Proactive engagement in the RSS process, and a clear and focussed response, to help shape its content. Once adopted, the RSS will be part of the development plan.	The Council has limited influence, and is one amongst many other smaller (non-strategic) local planning authorities across the region.	Alignment between the RSS and corporate priorities, giving enhanced potential for progress.

Conclusion

18. Many of the Secretary of State's proposed changes to the RSS are considered to add clarity to the document and can be welcomed. However, as set out at paragraph 17 above there are several points of concern which it is recommended should be raised as comments on the proposed changes.

Graham Swiss
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Background Documents:

The Draft Revised Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West incorporating the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes – July 2008.