

**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND COUNCILS
ALL-MEMBER MEETING**

Date: 8 November 2012

Subject: **Planning changes and the impact on the South East**
 a) The London Plan - representing South East views to the Mayor
 b) Update on Government proposals, including Growth & Infrastructure Bill
 c) For information: SEEC & SESL response on changes to Section 106 obligations.

Report by: Nick Woolfenden, SEEC Head of Policy Co-ordination

Recommendations:

Members are asked to:

- i) Discuss and agree SEEC views on proposals from the Mayor of London for cross-boundary engagement on strategic planning & growth issues.
- ii) Ask SEEC's Executive Committee to approve the final response to the Mayor to meet the end of year deadline.
- iii) Agree key issues to include in a letter to the Planning & Decentralisation Minister on how government can best help local authorities deliver growth.
- iv) Note the link to SEEC & SESL's joint [response to the Government consultation on renegotiating Section 106 developer funding contributions](#).

1. The London Plan – representing South East views to the Mayor

- 1.1 On behalf of the Mayor of London, the GLA recently wrote to SEEC and a range of local authorities in the South East and East of England inviting comments on options for cross-boundary cooperation on strategic planning and growth. The GLA paper is attached as Annex 1.
- 1.2 The Mayor wants comments by the end of December 2012. To inform SEEC's response, members are invited to debate key issues set out in paragraph 1.5 below. To meet the deadline, members are asked to agree that SEEC's Executive Committee should approve the response, to be drafted by officers following this meeting.
- 1.3 Until 2010 an Inter-regional Forum brought together South East, London and East's regional planning bodies to discuss strategic issues. This ceased with abolition of regional planning. The Mayor is proposing a more informal arrangement, focused on strategic planning, but also providing an opportunity to discuss critical growth issues such as infrastructure.
- 1.4 Government's plans to revoke regional strategies do not apply to London. As such, the Mayor's London Plan controls the scale and broad location of housing and other growth in London. These issues, along with transport and waste, impact both on London and many parts of the South East - for example affecting commuting patterns, business markets and Londoners moving to the South East. The GLA paper offers proposals to support the

Mayor's duty to co-operate with local authorities outside London developing plans, as well as providing light-touch dialogue on broader growth issues.

- 1.5 We invite member comments on the following issues to inform SEEC's response:
- i) What would be the benefits for the South East of strategic engagement with the Mayor of London and East of England - would it add value to delivering economic and other growth objectives?
 - ii) How should this operate - is an informal light touch member-led arrangement the most appropriate way forward, with support from officers as required (the Mayor's proposal focuses more strongly on officer rather than member engagement)?
 - iii) What should be the specific priorities for discussion with London - for example all or some of the following: planning, economic growth, transport, waste, housing, other critical infrastructure such as energy, data sharing?
 - iv) How frequently would members want to meet through such an arrangement - 1 or 2 times a year, with officers taking forward work between meetings?
 - v) How should South East local authorities be represented to ensure the arrangements are inclusive but manageable in size - are existing area-based groupings the best approach (as proposed by the Mayor), subject to ensuring all tiers of local authority and main political parties are represented, or are there alternatives?
 - vi) Should arrangements allow all areas to have views represented, not just those who border London?
 - vii) Should SEEC be directly represented, for example through its Chairman?
 - viii) How should other partners such as LEPs be engaged?
 - ix) How would working arrangements be supported/resourced - SEEC has limited resources; could local authorities offer a small amount of staff time to support work as necessary?
- 1.6 Subject to responses received, the Mayor proposes an initial officer meeting in spring 2013 to take arrangements forward. Subject to SEEC members' views on issues above, we would aim to arrange a member meeting later.
- 2. Update on Government proposals, including Growth & Infrastructure Bill**
- 2.1 The Government has recently announced proposed changes that it hopes will strengthen economic growth. These build on the National Planning Policy Framework and Localism Act.
- 2.2 Growth and Infrastructure Bill proposals announced on 18 October include:
- Delaying business rates revaluation 2 years to 2017 – providing greater certainty for business on their third biggest outgoing, but also impacting on local authority share of business rates.
 - Allowing reconsideration of S106 obligations to un-stall development.
 - Fast track option for major planning applications – where the Planning Inspectorate will decide within 12 months. Local consultation remains.

- Making it easier for councils to sell surplus land for development & greater local discretion over reviewing planning conditions on mineral sites.
- Stopping the misuse of town & village green applications that undermine planned development, but still protecting genuine greens.

2.3 The Bill follows on from earlier announcements which included:

- Legislation to allow the Planning Inspectorate to determine applications if authorities consistently perform poorly.
- Allowing developers extra time to develop sites before planning permission expires.
- Reviewing thresholds, and increasing scope, of the nationally significant infrastructure projects regime.
- Relaxing planning rules for 3 years to allow larger home and business extensions without planning permission.
- Revival of proposals to allow buildings to be switched from office to residential use without planning permission.

2.4 SEEC members are keen to ensure that local government is doing all it can to maximise economic growth. As proposed in Item 3 on the Industrial Strategy, we are suggesting SEEC scopes a paper on what the South East needs to achieve this. In addition, SEEC's Executive Committee has proposed writing to Planning & Decentralisation Minister Nick Boles MP to progress a positive dialogue on constructive measures that would support effective local planning. We will also reiterate important concerns about some proposed planning reforms, including those in SEEC and SESL's joint response to Section 106 consultation.

2.5 Members are invited to suggest key constructive issues to include when writing to the Minister and to agree that SEEC's Chairman be delegated responsibility to approve the letter. Views of specialist local authority officers will also be sought in drafting the letter.

2.6 Members should also note [Government's consultation on the Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Revocation of the South East Regional Strategy: Environmental Report](#). This is required by law to inform the Government's final decision on revoking the South East Plan and the Regional Economic Strategy. The report, which supersedes a previous version from last year, concludes the revocation of the Regional Strategy will have significant positive environmental effects, although these will be largely similar to those if the Regional Strategy were retained. SEEC is not proposing to respond to this consultation. The deadline for comments is 6 December 2012 for member authorities wishing to make individual responses.