

# SOUTH EAST FIRST

## The Newsletter of South East England Councils

February 2019



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### Biodiversity and wider infrastructure both vital for South East

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## News Roundup

### New appointment to Political Steering Group

Cllr Colin Kemp, Deputy Leader of Surrey CC, is to join SEEC's representatives on the Wider South East

Political Steering Group. He was elected from nominations put forward to SEEC's All-Member meeting on 31 January. The Group meets regularly with the London Mayor's office, London Councils and East of England on shared interests around infrastructure, housing and the London Plan.

Cllr Kemp is one of five SEEC representatives along with Cllr Paul Bettison, Bracknell Forest Council; Cllr Nicolas Heslop, Tonbridge & Malling BC; Cllr Tony Page, Reading Council; and Cllr Carole Paternoster, Aylesbury Vale DC.

### London Plan Examination in Public

During February SEEC views on housing have been represented at the London Plan Examination in Public (EiP). Key messages included the importance of London meeting its own housing needs to avoid adding to existing local housing pressures in the South East. The housing sessions are among nine sessions where SEEC has the opportunity to shape the thinking of a panel of three inspectors considering the London Plan.

The EiP began in January and runs until May 2019. SEEC is working jointly with SESL throughout the EiP, also attending three sessions in January and a further three sessions between March and May.

### SEEC March Executive to consider skills

SEEC's next Executive meeting on 29 March will focus on skills and share good practice on how to shape a proactive role in skills for South East local authorities.

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## SEEC Dates

29 March 2019 - SEEC Executive  
27 June 2019 - SEEC AGM  
20 September 2019 - SEEC Executive

## Contacts

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## Four key areas to make Brexit smoother for South East councils

SEEC members have called for [help from Government in four key areas to keep the economy healthy and keep local government services running after Brexit](#).

SEEC's workshop *Brexit: Practical Impacts for the South East* heard from keynote speakers including Chichester's MP Gillian Keegan, the LGA, Oxford University, Port of Southampton, Kent County Council, Government departments and Hampshire's Head of Emergency Planning. A [full report and links to speaker presentations](#) are available online.

Following the workshop and [roundtable debates](#) on what councils need to prepare for Brexit, SEEC members called for:

- More regular updates from Government to help reduce uncertainty surrounding local authorities' planning for Brexit. For example, more detail on national port and freight strategies would help South East councils align their plans with Government.
- Help to address skills gaps where South East businesses and public services rely heavily on EU workers who may chose not to stay after Brexit. For example, greater powers to direct funds for training into sectors such as care, transport and hospitality.
- Help with managing traffic congestion and enforcing no-go areas for freight if a no-deal Brexit leads to large queues of lorries waiting to leave Dover or the Channel Tunnel.
- Clarity as soon as possible on Ministers' plans for replacing EU grants with a UK Shared Prosperity Fund so that South East councils can continue to deliver much-needed infrastructure and other local projects.

SEEC Chairman Cllr Roy Perry said: “The South East’s impressive economic returns are vital for UK plc, so we need to make sure that short term congestion around ports such as Dover and Portsmouth does not disrupt supply chains or hinder councils in delivering local services.”

There was an appetite for councils to play a greater role in targeting funds for training to help fill any gaps in the South East economy caused by loss of EU workers or plans to restrict entry for non-EU workers earning less than £30,000 a year. Sectors in the South East with high levels of lower paid non-UK staff include hospitality (24% non-UK), health and social work (22% non-UK), and transport and storage (21% non-UK).

The workshop heard that many councils are already working well with partners and addressing possible scenarios practically rather than trying to make political capital out of Brexit. But it will be a challenge to manage any disruption – for example around South East ports – without having full information and powers to put local plans into practice.

SEEC members welcomed extra funding from Government but argued that local authorities could do more to help deliver a coordinated approach across the South East if Ministers agreed to share their vision more widely and decentralise more powers and funding decisions to allow councils to respond to local priorities.

## Interim protection for local plans discussed

A group of SEEC members met Housing Minister Kit Malthouse MP in February, making the case for changes to help councils incentivise housebuilding and gather infrastructure contributions.

Members raised concerns about poor quality housing being delivered under Permitted Development Rights (PDR) and the absence of funding from PDR sites for South East infrastructure and affordable housing needs. To help manage PDR, the Minister encouraged councils to explore use of ‘article 4’ exemptions. He also recommended councils should strive for a 10-15 year land supply to make sure local plans are robust and can be used to counter challenges from developers.

The Minister recognised SEEC members’ concerns about some unexpected results from MHCLG’s housing need assessment methodology. His commitment to review the results was welcomed by SEEC members who explained that the results have allocated some South East authorities high housing figures that will be very difficult to achieve - for example in areas with large amounts of protected land. Meanwhile other areas with major growth plans have seen their housing targets reduced.

SEEC members also proposed a period of enhanced protection for submitted local plans that meet objectively assessed need. There can be a significant time lag between submitting a local plan and its examination by the Planning Inspectorate but during this time plans can be vulnerable to planning by appeal. SEEC members advocated the idea of offering an interim period of protection for compliant plans to prevent planning by appeal while the plan is examined by the Planning Inspectorate.

The SEEC delegation also left a [1-page summary with the Minister outlining current South East planning concerns and proposals](#).

## South East challenges misleading view on council spending cuts

SEEC’s leadership has joined forces with SESL to [challenge misleading headlines that suggest the impact of spending cuts has been lower in the South East](#) than in other parts of the country.

South East authorities argue that the highest cuts do not equal the lowest spending, so a joint letter to Local Government Minister Rishi Sunak MP explains that headlines about cuts falling disproportionately on metropolitan areas are misleading.

The letter challenges the skewed picture presented by a report from the Centre for Cities. The reality is that regardless of cuts, many city areas still receive and spend more than neighbouring councils in rural areas.

Another letter [published in Municipal Journal from SEEC Chairman Cllr Roy Perry](#) also makes it clear that all

councils have faced significant cuts over the past eight years but metropolitan areas are still ahead in the funding race. Many metropolitan areas have considerably greater spending power per person and per household than South East authorities.

For example, in two-tier Hampshire, combined county and district spending power ranges from £1,522 per household in Basingstoke to £1,620 in Hart. In contrast, Liverpool's £2,010 per household and Blackburn's £1,994 are more than 20% higher.

South East local authorities are calling on Ministers to adopt a fairer and more transparent approach to local government funding, for example basing more decisions on scale of population. Members have welcomed Government moves towards a more transparent formula and do not want to see these undermined by misleading claims from authorities keen to protect their much higher allocations.

SEEC and SESL have called for all parts of local government to work together to agree a fair, accountable approach to a new funding system that can secure the resources that all areas need.

Copies of both letters have been circulated to South East MPs to raise awareness of misleading media information and to outline the need for a fairer funding system that addresses South East challenges.

## **Biodiversity and wider infrastructure both vital for South East**

SEEC [input to Defra has called for greater co-ordination](#) between Government departments to avoid conflicts over funding better biodiversity or better infrastructure – because both are needed.

SEEC's consultation response on Biodiversity Net Gain Proposals outlines the South East's strong economy and 110,600+ additional homes built in the three years to March 2018. There is real pressure to make sure this growth is sustainable, so protecting the environment is an important issue but better infrastructure is also vital.

The South East has over 1 million acres of protected land, including National Parks, AONBs, SSSIs, SPA and Green Belt. At the same time, the South East also faces an infrastructure funding gap estimated at £15.4bn by 2030, with congestion and overstretched transport already impacting on residents and businesses.

SEEC members support the principle of improving biodiversity but have called for this to be delivered as part of a co-ordinated package of environmental and wider infrastructure investment. There are also concerns that Defra's current centrally-imposed approach could lack the local responsiveness needed to achieve this.

Rather than a rigid centrally-imposed methodology, SEEC recommends Government should provide a tool-kit, which councils could draw upon as required to deliver tailored local improvements.

Echoing last month's input to MHCLG, SEEC's response also raised major concerns about plans to exclude Permitted Development Rights (PDR) and new housing on small sites from making financial contributions to either biodiversity or infrastructure.

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