

The Independent Voice of Local Business.....

SOUTHAMPTON & FAREHAM CHAMBER OF COMMERCE & INDUSTRY

INFORMAL COMMENTS TO EASTLEIGH BOROUGH COUNCIL PLANNING POLICY DEPARTMENT FOR EASTLEIGH CORE STRATEGY STAGE 1 (ISSUES) - January 2009

Southampton and Fareham Chamber of Commerce is the independent voice for business in the South Hampshire region and the western part of the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire (PUSH) area. As with other local authorities in the Chamber's membership area, Eastleigh Borough Council has a co-opted place on the Chamber's Planning and Transport Committee held by the EBC Economic Development Manager.

The Chamber of Commerce has participated actively in several economic initiatives by Eastleigh in recent years and Chamber representatives have attended various working parties and focus groups for the emerging Action Plans on Eastleigh Town Centre and Eastleigh Riverside, formerly known as SHSEZ - the economic redevelopment zone to the east of the town.

Eastleigh Borough Local Plan in 2002

The Chamber of Commerce made a series of representations on the Eastleigh Borough Local Plan in 2002. These were primarily focused on the need to allocate more land for employment purposes in the short term, other than the land to the northeast of the Airport (Northern Business Park) and at Chickenhall, which was wholly dependent upon the implementation of the Chickenhall Lane Link Road. Eastleigh Council's view was that the scheme would already be implemented by 2008 and so would be bringing forward the required land. The Chamber also argued that an insufficient variety of land was being allocated to meet the needs of different firms and sectors of industry and consequently this also justified additional land releases.

The Local Plan Inquiry Inspector's report July 2005 generally acknowledged that there would be a shortage of employment land within the Borough if the Northern Business Park did not come forward, which is the situation today.

South East Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS)

The Chamber has also been actively involved in the South East Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) and appeared at the Examination in Public January 2007 in support of a stronger and more focused economic strategy, while fully in support of the basic objectives of the RSS, namely to achieve 3.5% economic growth by 2026. The Chamber noted in particular that the Regional Spatial Strategy depended upon the growth of firms already established within the Southampton area and on the growth of those sectors of the economy, which showed potential for expansion. The RSS has identified 6 sectors with such potential. However in the allocation of employment land and floor space

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by the RSS there appears to be no linkage between the sector needs and the floor space / land allocated, nor is this new space related to the needs of existing firms. Neither is the geographical location of the sectors being properly identified, taking as an example the case of the marine industries (see below).

The Chamber of Commerce does not share the view by PUSH that increased housing numbers and economic development should be dependant upon the timing of improved infrastructure provision first. While acknowledging that improved infrastructure (especially transport) is a priority, particularly with regard to the backlog of provision which still currently exists, the Chamber has argued that infrastructure provision to serve planned development should follow from economic growth and cannot be expected to precede it. It is likely that the current economic downturn has now strengthened this view, first expressed when the economy was booming.

Eastleigh Core Strategy Stage 1 (Issues) – January 2009

The Chamber of Commerce found it difficult to respond to the Eastleigh Community Plan/Core Strategy consultation questionnaire last November 2008 which was designed for responses from the community. The Chamber wishes to emphasise the need for the business community to be the centre of the Core Strategy - and indeed to lead it. It is up to the Core Strategy to create the conditions in which local firms can prosper. So it is vital to distinguish between the needs of local residents for employment and the needs of local firms who will supply that employment. Both objectives are valid, but there is an undue focus on the former in the current Core Strategy version.

Consequently, the Chamber of Commerce requests that the Eastleigh Core Strategy:

1. Identifies those sectors within its area with capacity for growth.
2. Identifies firms/clusters in the Borough which are key to the SEEDA/RSS/PUSH economic strategies
3. Provides for the needs of those firms/clusters.

The Eastleigh Riverside regeneration offers the potential to maintain a balance between a mixture of current uses, plus new technology sites with associated opportunity for inward investment and higher value employment and skills which will meet the smarter working criteria set out in SEEDA's Regional Economic Strategy.

The marine sector is the key sector with potential economic growth that has been studied most recently for the Solent Waterfront Strategy (SWS). This Strategy can provide both the research background and draft policies for a sector of the economy, which is already very significant locally and very

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diverse and has a track record of sustained growth. Policies based on the SWS should form a key part of any Core Strategy in South Hampshire.

Besides the Eastleigh Riverside regeneration, the Chamber would urge EBC :

- To look at the release of employment land in the short term
- To establish an evidence base focused on the needs of particular sectors of the local economy, rather than on unemployment
- To work on a joint economic development strategy with neighbouring councils
- In particular to work up proposals for the development of the marine sector in the Eastleigh Borough based on the Solent Waterfront Strategy.

Eastleigh Riverside (SHSEZ)

The Chamber fully supports Eastleigh Council's regeneration objectives for Eastleigh Riverside (SHSEZ), but remains concerned about the timescale for the release of this land, which after 5 years is still dependent on both private and central government funding for very expensive transport infrastructure - the Chickenhall Link. Besides this, the zone is heavily developed now by a large number of firms who are important to the function of the sub-region, particularly transport and service industries such as bus depots, gravel railheads, rail maintenance. Some would need relocation before the strategy can be implemented but no land has been identified for this purpose. The great advantage of this area is its provision of large open areas and relatively low rents. The viability of these existing businesses may be dependant upon this area unless suitable alternatives can be identified.

Finally it would appear that the redevelopment of Eastleigh Riverside is the dominant strategy for the provision of additional employment land within Eastleigh and for much of South Hampshire. This does not provide adequate flexibility for meeting the needs of the PUSH economy at a time when flexibility is likely to be vital to economic recovery from the current recession.



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ABOUT US

Your regional Chamber working for you locally.....

As the independent voice of local business, Southampton and Fareham Chamber of Commerce is able to represent some 2,000 businesses in the South Hampshire region concerning the issues that affect their ability to grow and prosper. Their views are central to the Chamber's lobbying on issues of concern to our members and are the basis of our thinking on the many local, regional and national planning or government policy initiatives on which we are asked for formal comment as a business representative organisation. The volunteer Chamber members on the committees provide expertise and a wide knowledge of specialist topics. This is of great help in formulating the Chamber Viewpoint, which is published monthly in the centre pages of our magazine and on our web site.