

*The Independent Voice of Local Business*.....

SOUTHAMPTON & FAREHAM CHAMBER OF COMMERCE & INDUSTRY  
RESPONSE TO SOUTHAMPTON CITY COUNCIL ON  
"PLANNING SOUTHAMPTON TO 2026"  
CORE STRATEGY PREFERRED OPTIONS - October 2006

**Initial Comments**

As these are statements of Core Strategy they are in general terms; specific policies and proposals will follow. Nevertheless it is hard not to make the point on several topics that the generalisation so lacks application that comment is difficult at this stage. This regional Chamber is involved with consultation on several Core Strategies across its membership area and is in a position to wonder at the plethora of Plans and Reports from each local authority area and question the extent to which they illustrate "joined up thinking."

**2 Design and Quality**

The call for higher design standards and a greater respect for the public realm must be recognised and welcomed. It must also be recognised that much of the quality of the public realm lies with the public purse. The plan calls for higher standards everywhere but seems to see the private sector paying for it. Examples of urban management in France, Germany and Holland (just to mention three) all point to high levels of public spending to make town centres liveable.

A further concern is whether the Authority has the skills to be judge and jury in design choice. The planning system should have such skills in house; but it clearly often has not.

**3 Sustainability**

There is an inevitable and welcome call for everything to be more sustainable. Buildings should show a neutral carbon impact and on-site regeneration capacity should show a 20% reduction in traditional CO<sub>2</sub> generation. Developers are urged to address waste disposal measures, which are bio-responsible when, in fact, this has been the City's intent for very many years.

The real concern now is whether there are enough professionals in both the private and public sectors who have any idea what the words mean in practice or how to achieve them. Again, what is sought will need flexible interpretation and some public finance.

**4 Economy and floorspace**

The text plays down the Regional aspiration for the coastal region to grow economically by 3.5%. This paper tells us the floorspace and the house units needed. But it would be useful to know:-

- how the City *population* will change over the period,
- how the increased population and the intended 3.5% growth translates into employment floorspace,
- how the City's floorspace demand divides between office and 'other' which is probably data contained in another Research Paper,
- where the new city centre office space and the non-office employment space will be located.

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Productivity growth, perhaps with a limited increase in working population, will depend substantially on getting more out of the same workforce. Of huge importance, therefore, will be an increase in vocational and skills training. This needs to be largely led by the public purse but steered by employer interests.

Of course much of that lies in the yet-to-emerge specific plans but the devil does rather lie in the detail.

## **5 Housing**

It would be useful to be reminded of the 'expanding population trends' and be told whether the house type mix is out of balance with the need, with reference to the recently announced closure of 4 Southampton schools.

Achievement of 'balanced' communities is, of course, to be welcomed and the private provision of affordable housing is now inevitable. But affordable housing is not appropriate on every site. There used to be some in Ocean Village but this was sold off because the location was inappropriate. Sometimes a developer is achieving some other community benefit and can only hit a limited number of non-commercial targets at once. All rules will need to be applied with flexibility and understanding.

Consideration should be given to expressing density in terms of bed spaces per hectare rather than dwellings. It carries more meaning. Reducing home parking never did stop people from buying cars; it only creates chaos that is hard to sort out at a later date. However, if parking standards are to be relaxed, an interim situation needs to be taken by the Council based on the adopted policy and the proposed new policy, to ensure development is not put on hold or goes to out of town sites.

## **6 Office location**

It is intended that offices should generally be directed at the City Centre. But it is also thought that City fringe 'gateways' could take the form of iconic office developments. The established District Centres are intended to be supported with good infrastructure and sustained as important places of service delivery. There really seems to be no good reason why they should not, therefore, be appropriate locations for significant office development.

Clearly again there needs to be some flexibility in the delivery of policy. In this case concentrating all offices into the City Centre might ensure major take up of public transport; it certainly ensures the maximum of congestion.

## **7 Transport**

It is said that "Southampton is a Regional hub". Does this statement have a practical outcome in transport management terms or is it just an observation? For instance, extension of the Romsey/Southampton rail link to Waterside utilising all the small stations en route with park and ride at each station would also provide a city link to the Airport. The proposed road toll on Bursledon Rd should not apply to cars with high occupancy.

It is good to see that the expanding Port is recognised as needing effective rail and road access. It will be interesting to see what inter-regional improvements will actually be made to rail freight links; and what local road changes will become necessary to feed the Western Docks.

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## **8 Waterfront**

The Waterfront is seen as an essential part of the City Centre and does require the connectivity long sought. But the document is strangely silent on almost anything else in the public realm associated with the waterfront. No doubt it is all in the detail, but there is no mention of the Boat Show, or how Mayflower Park might have a changing role in the future. No mention is made of the delivery of the Town Quay and Royal Pier ambitions, of casinos, or the tourist significance of a City Centre marina for visiting cruising yachts or of the economic benefits of setting out our stall to attract world sailing events. Neither is there mention of ice skating or of conference facilities. The idea of the Royal Pier/Mayflower Park area being developed by the Council as a public project and a regeneration site could bring more progress on a major waterfront amenity than present discussions have done and also secure the permanent home for Southampton's Boat Show.

## **9 Implementation**

The Chamber has already a formal view on the use of the Planning Gain Supplement. See ANNEX A to these comments from which it will be seen that the Chamber's overall comment on Planning Gain Supplement is that all that is wished simply cannot come out of a tax on development. With care, some of the value created by a planning consent might be extracted for community use, although several attempts in the past have not been successful. Too great a tax on that source will make initiatives dry up and have the effect that not only is no development achieved, but the regional growth target of 3.5% is missed. Planning Gain Supplement must be seen as a support to public spending, not a replacement for it.

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