

## MAKING OUR VOICE HEARD

The Chamber's Planning & Transport Committee members have been working on the preparation of a Statement on behalf of business to inform debate on the subject of "Infrastructure and Implementation" of the South East Plan - a plan to encourage economic growth in the South East region over the next twenty years. Many debates have taken place since late November and meetings will continue in January 2007 throughout the South East Region for the Examination in Public of the South East Plan, which is being held to examine the contentious issues and test the policies put forward in it.

The Plan has been shaped by widespread consultation over the past two years and the representational work done by the Southampton & Fareham Chamber of Commerce has led to it being the only Chamber of Commerce invited by the Panel to the Examination of the South East Plan. We will be attending the Examination meeting about "Infrastructure and Implementation" in Chichester on 25 January representing the voice of business in the South Hampshire Sub-region. You can read our full Statement on our new web site at [www.soton-chamber.co.uk](http://www.soton-chamber.co.uk) under "Chamber Viewpoint" and if you have the time, there is very much more to read on the Panel's web site at [www.eipsoutheast.co.uk](http://www.eipsoutheast.co.uk).

The Regional Spatial Strategy contains the physical components of the Plan, which will be largely economy led with a target increase in the annual growth to 3.5% by 2026 and an annual average growth of 3.1% over the 20-year period. The Chamber welcomes this objective on behalf of its members and on whom the strategy is relying to deliver this growth. But SEEDA's Regional Economic Strategy, which supports SEERA's Regional Spatial Strategy, is not specific as to the sectors of the economy to be targeted for growth.

When considering the necessary factors to provide economic growth, our Statement argues the case for employment land to be included as an essential infrastructure requirement and not to be regarded as a taxable commodity produced by the planning system. Also the first phase of growth should not rely on immigration into South Hampshire, but upon increased economic activity of the existing workforce, for which the enhancement of skills is as important as improvements to the physical infrastructure and such up-skilling needs to be encouraged with fiscal measures directed at employers.

The Chamber has made constant representations over many years to the local authorities to release additional employment land, if only to replace that lost to housing and overcome this serious barrier to economic growth which cannot be in line with the policy of achieving the targeted economic growth. However, the recent proposal for South Hants Strategic Employment Zone, lying east of Eastleigh and north of Southampton International Airport, is the one major site with real potential for economic growth if access problems can be solved.

The Chamber of Commerce Statement maintains that the transport implications of the Regional Spatial Strategy have not been adequately considered. Transport is a major existing problem and the Chamber has constantly drawn attention to existing levels of congestion and, specifically, lack of adequate provision for Southampton Port access

and long distance rail freight links. The Chamber is of the view that the Regional Spatial Strategy must identify and pre-fund the critical infrastructure hot-spots if the Regional Strategy is to be led by the economy. The Chamber strongly supports South East Plan Policy T13 concerning the development of existing and future inter-modal interchanges which could be very significant to transport improvements contributing to the economic growth target. However, it is the Chamber's view that transport infrastructure improvement needed for planned new development is but a drop in the ocean compared to the present infrastructure back log from which business is suffering.

The Chamber supports the view that there should be only one Implementation Plan, rather than a Regional Assembly version and a Regional Development Agency version. With regard to SEERA's Implementation Plan for the South East Plan, at present it is constructed on the expectation that new private sector development will fund shortfalls in all the infrastructure programs. This approach is clearly impractical. New development should not be expected to fund historic shortfalls. If planning gain tariffs are introduced, they should support, not replace, government funding and should not be at a level which discourages the very growth that is sought by SEERA's Regional Spatial Strategy.

The Chamber considers the proposals in the Implementation Plan are not well related to the Spatial Strategy and the following issues are not adequately addressed in it:

- Pump priming funds must be available up-front before commitments are made to a tariff arrangement on
- Critical infrastructure investment 'hot spots' must be identified now
- Current infrastructure weaknesses need identifying and resolving now
- New industrial land seen as part of the infrastructure demand
- Enhanced vocational training as essential for growth stimulation.

Besides major regional consultations like the South East Plan, which are handled by the specialist Chamber members on our committees, our staff are working for you formally and informally throughout all our activities by listening to all sizes and types of business, understanding your concerns and aspirations and then moving them forward on to the agendas of local, regional and national decision makers to effect positive change.

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